

Italian and German Unification Secondary Sources

SOURCE 1:*

Excerpt from Raymond Grew, *A Sterner Plan for Italian Unity*, 1963, pp. 465-466

During the first half of the nineteenth century, nationalism was most often connected to liberalism. After the revolutions of 1848 there were increasing ties between nationalism and conservatism, particularly in the movements for national unification. In the following selection Raymond Grew, an advocate of comparative history from the University of Michigan, analyzes the relationships among nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism in a comparative context.

CONSIDER: *How nationalism could appeal to both liberals and conservatives; why, during the second half of the nineteenth century, liberal ideals were often sacrificed in the name of nationalism.*

Insofar as politics was the public battle of ideas and interests, then nationalism was a denial of politics. For in stressing the values of unity, loyalty, and duty, nationalism saw political dispute as a source of weakness. It denied that there was conflict in the true interests of classes, groups or regions. The effects of nationalism was therefore inherently conservative in that it provided reason for supporting anyone thought to wield the power of the state effectively in behalf of national unity and strength, Disraeli or Gladstone, Napoleon III or Bismarck. Since order and unity, the cry of the political conservative, are essential to a strong state, and since, to the nationalist, most worthy ends required that strength, the nationalist was always tempted under pressure to move toward the political right, to sacrifice liberty to unity, discussion to authority, ends to means.

Yet the origins of nationalism were usually liberal and reformist; for everywhere it was a demand for change, the doctrine of the modernizers who, while they had too much to lose to want a social revolution, were self-consciously aware that theirs was an “underdeveloped” country. Nationalism could make its denial of politics effective because its ends were so clear, so easily defined in the model of the modern state. For the French that model had been England; for the Italians it was England and France. Italian nationalists were usually liberals, but their liberalism was primarily an admiration for the achievements of the liberal state. Because their model already existed, they looked directly to it, anxious to achieve an efficient

bureaucracy, a responsible government, a progressive economic structure, all based on accepted and universally applied laws. Nationalism was a program to attain these things quickly, not to evolve toward them but, if necessary, to superimpose them. The hurry to achieve these goals where nationalism itself was seriously opposed made a doctrinaire concern for means appear pedantic and unrealistic. Italian nationalists needed nothing so brutal as cynicism to justify “postponement” of controversy or the choice of practical means, though often this meant whittling away at the practices necessary to viable liberalism.

SOURCE 2:*

Excerpt from David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918*, 1998, p. 247-248

As in the case of Italy, nationalism in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century was closely connected to liberalism. This was particularly so in the early stages of the revolutions of 1848. But with the failure of liberal nationalists to gain the concrete changes they strove for, steps toward unification over the next two decades followed a path blazed by Bismarck and the conservatives, who used three wars to help achieve unity in 1871. In the following selection, David Blackbourn analyzes the international environment that allowed the drive for German unification to succeed.

CONSIDER: *Why the great powers allowed Prussia to unify Germany without intervening; why Russia and Great Britain were “distracted”; what the other powers might have done to counter Prussia.*

Germany was unified as a result of three wars that created a new power in the centre of Europe. Why did the other great powers allow this to come about? An important part of the answer is obviously the success of Prussian arms when put to the test. It cannot be emphasized too much that unification was, in the last resort, achieved on the battlefield. But other elements smoothed the Prussian path to success. Russia had suffered military humiliation in the Crimean war, and was absorbed during the 1860s in a bout of internal reforms. Early Russian industrialization also depended on Russo-German trade, and placed a premium on good relations with the emerging German power.... Britain had pressing colonial problems; it was primarily suspicious of French ambitions on the Continent, and viewed the emerging Germany as a power that neither threatened fundamental British interests nor possessed a significant navy. Add to this the general British

* Sources 1 and 2 with the italicized commentary come from Dennis Sherman, *Western Civilization: Sources, Images and Interpretations*, 4th edition / From the Renaissance to the Present, 2004, pp. 175-176.

approval of national self-determination (as in Italy), the high regard for German culture, and Gladstone's concern with domestic issues, and it is clear why British sympathizers comfortably outnumbered those suspicious of Prussian 'militarism.' If we turn to the two powers directly defeated by Prussia on the road to unification, it is their weakness rather than their benevolent neutrality that requires emphasis. Austria was desperately isolated in this period. Vienna had failed to repair the alliance with Russia, broken by the Crimean war; and the great irony of the Austrian position, as well as the central weakness, was the fact

that its principal ally, Prussia, was also its archrival in German affairs. Compounding these problems were the perpetual difficulties created by the subject nationalities of the far-flung Habsburg monarchy, Hungarians, Italians, and Slavs. This was an important part of the background to 1866; then, during the Franco-Prussian war, the restlessness of the Czechs and Poles pushed Vienna into a more pro-'German' stance. Last, but not least, France under Napoleon III was the loose cannon in European affairs, an adventurist power that excited universal suspicion and found none to mourn its fate in 1870.