

The significance of nationalism and liberalism history essay



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It can be debated as to when the sense of nationalism and liberalism arise in Germany. Historians like Andrina Stiles have turned the focus onto the War of Liberation against Napoleon I, where collective German states participated in driving Napoleon from Central Europe. After the Battle of Leipzig, a large number of young middle and upper class Germans hoped for a united Germany. However, the resistance never became a national uprising, and German seemed divided afterwards. The North tended to look to Prussian for political leadership whilst the South look towards Austria. With these two powerful states, the future and unification of Germany depended greatly upon their interests. The revolutions of 1848 were also another focal point in the rise of nationalism and liberalism. The constitutional changes from the revolt indicated the ability of the groups, where they were able to overthrow their monarchs and establish a liberal parliament. The introduction of the Frankfurt Parliament was also a success as a liberal parliament was introduced and all of the states contributed, sparking an achievement for nationalists to unite German states. These victories did not last long, as Prussian and Austrian counter-revolutions forced parliaments to dissolve and re-establish the old system. Yet, the ideology and force of these two groups are significant in the unification of Germany as they brought the sense of unity and freedom to the people at times of crisis or unrest.

Nationalism arose in Germany due to the resentment of French rule, which quickly declined after their occupation. From the view of Stiles point, the strength of nationalism remained positive as middle classes displayed their sense from cultural similarities. There were a remarkable number of festivals and associations portraying a sense of German identity. However, these

groups are a small sector of the German Confederation. Nationalism had little support at the time, and unification of Germany seemed impossible. In 1830s, a number of republican groups planned for German unification. Metternich was certainly thrown into panic and soon the Diet passed the Six articles. This help establish the young Germany movement dedicating to establishing a united Germany. From these developments, nationalism was seen progressing from a small group with wild ideas to a force that can unsettle monarchs in states like Prussia and Austria. From these events, there is a clear indication of liberalism and nationalism gaining supports and achieving some of their aims. The formation of Zollverein provided Prussia to lead other states economically. However, it was also a significant focus point for nationalism. The economic unity triggered nationalists to push for political unity. With Prussian dominance of the organisation, the members agreed that Prussia would be a natural leader if there were a unified Germany. In the 1848 revolutions, nationalism supported the Frankfurt Parliament as it unified Germany politically. However, the failure of the Parliament was due to the division of the liberals and the lack of support for them when the counter-revolutions happened. This is significant in the unification of Germany, as it showed a unified Germany was possible, but lacking the support from the people to stop the counter-revolutions. This lack of support was soon solved when the relations with France worsened, and nationalism rallied the people to fight as a single Germany against their old enemy.

Liberalism is the belief in liberty and equal rights, but with the majority of states consisted of rulers holding onto absolute power, they would certainly

refuse the idea of liberalism. Metternich of Austria opposed the constitutional reforms proposed in 1819, which included the freedom of speech, press and allowing the formation of political parties. From this situation, it was clear that liberalism was unable to progress as the fixed constitutional system gave them little influential power. The results in Prussia were the same. However, in 1830, the July Revolution in Paris sparked an indication across Europe that liberal ideas can be achieved through force. This led to movements to force grants of a liberal constitution in states like Saxony. Many monarchs simply gave in to the demands, fearing the same fate as King Charles X of France. This gradual growth of liberal support suggests people agree to the idea of freedom. These certainly appealed to the middle classes, but alarmed the aristocrats as their influential powers have declined. The initial success of the 1848 revolutions in Austria, Prussia and other German states made possible an attempt to win German unity through one central representative body, which met in May 1848, was known as the Frankfurt Parliament. Elected respectively from the German states by universal manhood suffrage, the eight hundred-odd delegates included mostly middle class and professional elements. They wanted to establish, through discussions and recommendations, a liberal, constitutional, federal and united German State. In fact, they did not possess any executive authority, as they could not give order to any of the German rulers. Apart from this major weakness, they were split on two main programs of German unity. The decision of including Austria in the proposed new Germany (Grossdeutschland and Kleindeutschland) split the members. While the Frankfurt Assembly was debating and arguing, Austria and Prussia had gradually won the upper hand against revolutions. As conservative counter-

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revolution advanced, the days of the Parliament were numbered. This attempt to unify Germany and form a constitutional parliament ended, but remained a thought in people's mind.

In conclusion, liberalism and nationalism was a significant factor in the unification of Germany by giving the people a sense of national identity and pride.