

The Degree of Growth of German Nationalism

An assessment up to 1850

The belief that people with a common culture, language and history should constitute an independent nation free of foreign domination

Main Factors

- Supporters of nationalism
- Opponents of nationalism
- Attitudes of the peasants
- Political turmoil of the 1840s
- The Frankfurt Parliament
- The collapse of the 1848 revolutions

Supporters of Nationalism

- University intellectuals promoting nationalism were the new middle class and their protests relied on the support of a middle class audience
- The upper classes were more interested in conserving their individual powers
- The Romantic Movement only reached a literate audience

Attitudes of the Peasants

- Majority of the German population was illiterate peasantry leading traditional lives in farming communities
- Those in Eastern states had the status of serfs, bound to their landowners
- Unable to participate in the cultural life of the middle classes they made no contribution to the rise of nationalism
- However they were an untapped 'potential' if their national consciousness could be awakened
- 19th century progression meant the movement of the peasantry from the countryside to the new industrial towns, as a result of technological changes such as commercial farming, unlocked the realisation that they had power in numbers and could instigate political unrest

Opponents of Nationalism

- At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the main European powers ensured no individual or state could exercise too much power
- The German Confederation (Bund) was created to maintain the status quo and return many of the old 39 rulers to power
- The Austrian Chancellor, Prince Metternich, was a staunch conservative firmly opposed to any ideas of nationalism to maintain both his and Austria's wealth
- Metternich introduced the Carlsbad Decrees in 1819 to curb the threat of nationalism
 - banned the Burschenschaften (student societies)
 - sacked university professors who promoted nationalism
 - increased press censorship

Political Turmoil in the 1840s

- The increasing urban populations were unhappy with their low pay and working conditions
- There was discontent too in the countryside at the increased rents of landowners and the development of new technology replacing manual labour
- An awakened sense of political power combined with a succession of bad harvests in 1846 and 1847 galvanised the working classes
- Debate exists over whether the protests were linked to nationalism or simply an example of people power unhappy with their lot but they did realise the potential of people power
- Ideas of revolution and nationalism rode on a wave of political unrest across mainland Europe

The Frankfurt Parliament

- Following political unrest across the German states, the call for a 'German Parliament' was led by Prussia.
- 574 delegates met in Frankfurt to try to establish a National Assembly for Germany to create a constitution for a united Germany
- Too many intellectuals led to extended debate and disagreements (9 months to agree on rights for German citizens)
- Despite its good intentions, the Frankfurt Parliament collapsed because of indecision

The Collapse of Revolutionary Germany

- Grossdeutschland Vs Kleindeutschland
- Grossdeutschland favoured by the southern catholic states who viewed Austria as their protector
- Austria not keen as they would lose their political power and were concerned about Prussian dominance
- Kleindeutschland favoured by the northern protestant states particularly Prussia
- Frankfurt Parliament chose the latter and offered the crown to Prussia's King Frederick William IV who refused
- Without an army to support its laws and lack of support from King Frederick
- Indecision led to collapse of the movement
 - working class wanted social change
 - middle class wanted political change