

Answering structured questions. Question, student answer, examiner's comments

The Unification of Germany

Russell Williams. Formerly University of Gloucestershire and AS/A Chief Examiner

THE QUESTION FOLLOWS THE OCR SPECIFIC AS-Level examination papers on period studies of European History.

Question: Compare the importance of 'coal and iron' and 'blood and iron' in explaining German unification.

John's answer

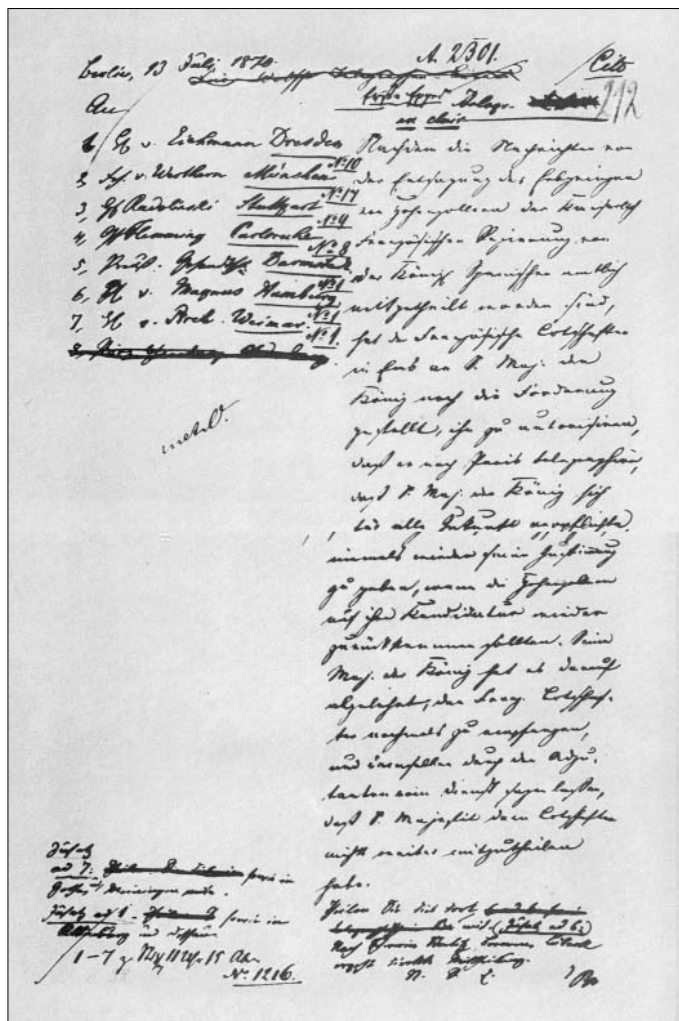
German unification took place under Bismarck from 1862 to 1871. Each of the three major stages that led to a unified Germany involved war. The first war was with Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, the second was with Austria in 1866, which led to the exclusion of Austria from German affairs and the establishment of the North German Confederation, and the third was with France in 1870, after which the southern states and Alsace-Lorraine were incorporated into the new German Empire. Therefore, it would seem that 'blood and iron' was the most important reason for Bismarck's success. However, he could not have unified Germany if Prussia had not been so important in the German economy. 'Coal and iron' formed the foundation of his work.

Bismarck became Minister-President in 1862 because of the opposition of the Liberals to an increase in taxes to fund the Army. He solved the problem by ignoring the Prussian Parliament and built up the Army to a point where it could lead German unification. This did not mean that victory was easy. He needed Austria as an ally to defeat Denmark and then did not go to war with Austria until he was sure that other countries would not support Austria. Russia was friendly because Bismarck had given support against the Polish rebels. Napoleon III of France was persuaded to be neutral by vague promises of territorial gains and because of his domestic problems. Britain was very unlikely to intervene in a continental quarrel.

After the victory of 1866, Bismarck treated Austria quite leniently to avoid creating a dangerous enemy in the long term. Napoleon III acted unwisely before the Franco-Prussian War, when it seemed as if France, nor Prussia, was the aggressor. Therefore, Bismarck had again isolated an enemy, which helped the Prussian army to win another decisive victory at Sedan.

Moltke and Roon, the Minister of War, assisted Bismarck in his work. Their planning was vital in strengthening the Prussian army and this supported Bismarck's diplomacy.

However, some people have exaggerated the superiority of the Prussian army. At the battle of Sadowa, the Austrian army was larger than the Prussian and it had good artillery. The Prussians' needle gun became decisive but the outcome of the battle was in doubt for some time. Moltke realised that it was necessary to reform the Prussian army in spite of this victory. The French had better rifles



Bismarck's draft of the Ems telegram, 1870

than the Prussians at Sedan but their army was badly led and their rifles were less effective than the new Prussian artillery. Perhaps the most important factor was that the Prussian officers were more skilful than their enemies and the campaigns were carefully planned. Railways were used to transport soldiers quickly over large distances. Bismarck did not go to war until he believed that the Army was ready and that it had clear plans of action.

The importance of the Army to Bismarck was a contrast to the events of 1848. One of the reasons why the revolutionaries had failed to unify Germany in 1848 was that they lacked a powerful army that could defeat Austria. They depended on Prussian leadership but Frederick William IV withdrew his support and he used the Prussian army to crush the Liberals in the Frankfurt Parliament. Therefore, 'blood and iron' helped to prevent German unification at one point and achieve it at another.

Bismarck wanted to make Prussia the most important

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