

# Decades of Reconstruction

*Postwar Societies, State-Building,  
and International Relations from the  
Seven Years' War to the Cold War*

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After the “German Civil War” of 1866  
*Building the State, Embracing the Nation*

James Retallack

The dubiously accused almost always disappoint, once their full stories are told . . . Remove the stain of guilt, or at least of strong complicity, and what’s left? One more casualty, and casualties don’t command interest. They spread unease.

Sam Tanenhaus<sup>1</sup>

I may observe that Count Bismarck has passed through with wonderful success one phase of his ambitious undertaking – namely, that of “Demolition.” The second phase is about to commence – namely, the work of Reconstruction. In carrying out this latter phase, Count Bismarck will encounter great difficulties – difficulties, however, which his energy and iron will may succeed in overcoming.

Lord Augustus Loftus, British Ambassador to Prussia, August 4, 1866.<sup>2</sup>

How did the Wettin dynasty so narrowly avoid extinction in 1866 – not only in the crucible of war but under duress from rapacious occupiers and unforgiving peace-makers? When Saxony’s ruling house escaped the

Somewhat longer versions of this chapter, with different interpretive emphases, appeared in Philip Mansel and Torsten Rott, eds., *Monarchy and Exile: The Politics of Legitimacy from Marie de Médicis to Wilhelm II* (Basingstoke, 2011), 279–304, and in James Retallack, *Germany’s Second Reich: Portraits and Pathways* (Toronto, 2015), 107–137. I am grateful to Palgrave Macmillan and the University of Toronto Press for permission to publish a condensed text here. For research funding, I am indebted to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, and the Killam Program at the Canada Council for the Arts.

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times Book Review*, May 26, 2013, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Loftus, Berlin, to British Foreign Secretary Lord Stanley, London, in Augustus Loftus, *The Diplomatic Reminiscences of Lord Augustus Loftus, 1862–1879*, Second Series, 2 vols. (London, 1894), 1:107.

worst, did it rise from the ashes of war as a phoenix, "reborn" as a loyal member of the emerging Reich? Or was it now a timid, domesticated breed – one that paid homage to the ascendant Prussian eagle with transparently artificial displays of power? To Saxon King Johann and his court in exile, these open questions required the creation of new myths. In the struggle to define who was a "loyal liegeman," a "true Saxon," and a "good German," Johann and his courtiers were not idle bystanders. Distinctions between "patriots" and "turncoats" lay very much in the eye of the beholder.

We may be thankful that Saxon kings left many tasks undone and intervened rarely in policy-making. Affairs of state in Saxony were subject to "no court camarilla, no *éminences grises*, no shadow cabinet behind the scenes, no circle of favorites."<sup>3</sup> This created political space that did not exist in Prussia, and it was filled by a larger-than-life diplomat, Count Friedrich Ferdinand von Beust. Beust was de facto government leader from 1849 to 1866. As would-be leader of the "third Germany," he was also Bismarck's arch-rival. Suppression of civil liberties, the partial emasculation of Saxony's Landtag, economic prosperity at home, a *großdeutsch* (Greater German) policy abroad – these issues were inseparable in Beust's attempt to rally support in 1866 for a war against Prussia.<sup>4</sup> By June 15, Prussian troops were streaming across the Saxon border, and less than three weeks after that, on July 3, 1866, the German question was decided at the Battle of Königgrätz when Prussian forces routed the Austrian and Saxon armies.

However, the task of bringing Saxony into Prussia's orbit and embedding it within an emerging Germany was not decided on the field of battle or dispatched in a single day. Even after Königgrätz it required hard-nosed diplomatic negotiations, an odious Prussian occupation, and the appointment of a new ministry of state to determine whether Saxony would survive at all. The twin tasks of preserving Saxon sovereignty while building the North German Confederation demanded a diplomatic embrace between two states that was almost as painful for one as for the other.

<sup>3</sup> Karlheinz Blaschke, "Das Königreich Sachsen 1815–1918," in Klaus Schwabe, ed., *Die Regierungen der deutschen Mittel- und Kleinstaaten 1815–1933* (Boppard a.R., 1983), 81–102, here 101.

<sup>4</sup> Jonas Flöter, *Beust und die Reform des Deutschen Bundes 1850–1866* (Cologne, 2001), 466–467; Andreas Neemann, *Landtag und Politik in der Reaktionszeit. Sachsen 1849/50–1866* (Düsseldorf, 2000), 430–487.

## SAXONY'S OCCUPATION

Late in the evening of Friday, June 15, the British ambassador to Prussia, Lord Augustus Loftus, was sitting with Otto von Bismarck in his garden in Berlin when the midnight hour struck. To Loftus's astonishment, the Prussian minister president took out his pocket watch and said, in French, "At this moment our troops have entered Hanover, Saxony, and Hesse-Cassel." Bismarck added, "The struggle will be severe. Prussia may lose, but she will, at all events, have fought bravely and honorably." In Dresden, Beust also knew that war could no longer be avoided: "*Le vin est tiré, il faut le boire.*"<sup>5</sup>

By twentieth-century standards, the Saxon population suffered relatively little during the "German Civil War" of 1866. (Although contemporaries on occasion referred to this conflict as a fratricidal war – *Bruderkrieg* – they more often called it a *Bürgerkrieg* or simply, as Theodor Fontane titled his two-volume account, *Der Deutsche Krieg*. The use of quotation marks around "German Civil War" provides a reminder that German states had fought each other in the Thirty Years' War and the Seven Years' War too.) No fighting occurred on Saxon soil after war was declared on June 15, when the movement of Saxon troops southward into Bohemia began. The Saxon army received deserved praise for its courageous fight in a lost cause at the Battle of Königgrätz on July 3. The preliminary peace accord agreed at Nikolsburg on July 26 promised to respect Saxony's geographical integrity (although the question lay in doubt for three more months).<sup>6</sup> And the final peace treaty between Prussia and Saxony, signed on October 21, allowed King Johann to return to Dresden in November and reclaim the Saxon throne. Although Saxony was forced to enter the North German Confederation under Prussian domination and to amalgamate its military with the new federal army under Prussian command, these peace terms were considered relatively lenient and, thus, auspicious for Germany's progress toward unity.

This picture, however, takes on a different hue when we consider how Saxons reacted to the combined psychological blows of military defeat,

<sup>5</sup> Loftus, *Diplomatic Reminiscences*, 1:60, 69. See also Heinrich von Poschinger, *Fürst Bismarck und die Diplomaten 1852–1890* (Hamburg, 1900), 209–211.

<sup>6</sup> [Prussian General Staff], *Campaign of 1866 in Germany. The War With Austria*, trans. Colonel von Wright and Captain Henry M. Hozier (orig. London, 1872; reprint Nashville, 1994), 382–383; Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 4 vols., vol. 2, *Deutsche Verfassungsdokumente 1851–1900*, 3rd rev. ed. (Stuttgart, 1986), 247–249.



foreign occupation, escalating political conflict, and – influencing each of these developments – intrigues ascribed to King Johann’s court.<sup>7</sup> The unwillingness of Austria to support even token resistance in Saxony had an enormous moral effect on both Saxon and international opinion, exactly as Prussian Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke had hoped. According to Moltke’s prewar calculations, a quick occupation of the kingdom by Prussia’s Army of the Elbe – numbering about 46,000 men – would prevent the Austrians from using Saxony to impede the Prussian advance southwards, as they had against Frederick the Great in the Seven Years’ War. It would also encourage Bavaria and other south German states allied with Austria to rethink their commitment to move their own troops against Prussia. “If we could occupy Dresden before the Austrians and establish ourselves there,” wrote Moltke, “we could compel the Saxons to go with us. If that didn’t work, then the Saxon army would have either to withdraw to Bohemia or to barricade itself in a secure position at Pirna. In either case, we would make ourselves masters of the rich resources of the country.”<sup>8</sup> Austria’s slow mobilization, the tactical difficulty of defending Dresden, and Saxony’s determination to keep its fighting force intact for a showdown in Bohemia aided this plan.

But Moltke was not the only one who was unsure what military role the Saxons would play. At a diplomatic *soirée* in London hosted by the Prince of Wales, the Saxon envoy to Britain was ridiculed by an English general and other guests. Handing the Saxon envoy a clutch of telegrams reporting that the Prussians had taken Dresden, the Prince of Wales exclaimed,

<sup>7</sup> For official chronicles, see *Der Antheil des Königlich Sächsischen Armeecorps am Feldzuge 1866 in Oesterreich. Bearbeitet nach den Feldakten des Generalstabes*, 2nd ed. (Dresden, 1869); [Prussian General Staff], *Campaign*; Theodor Fontane, *Der deutsche Krieg von 1866*, 2 vols. (original Berlin, 1870–1871, reprint Cologne, 1979), vol. 1, *Der Feldzug in Böhmen und Mähren*; Gordon A. Craig, *The Battle of Königgrätz: Prussia’s Victory Over Austria, 1866* (Philadelphia, PA, 1964). Especially important on the occupation is Richard Dietrich, “Preußen als Besatzungsmacht im Königreich Sachsen 1866–1868,” *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 5 (1956), 273–293; Richard von Friesen, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1880–1910), 2:153–358. On peace talks, Richard Dietrich, “Der Preußisch-sächsischer Friedensschluß vom 21. Oktober 1866,” *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 4 (1955), 109–156; and Fritz Dickmann, *Militärpolitische Beziehungen zwischen Preußen und Sachsen 1866 bis 1870* (Munich, 1929).

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Craig, *The Battle of Königgrätz*, 28–29. See also Dennis Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London, 2004), 143; [Prussian General Staff], *Campaign*, 29–30, 59–61; and the report of the British envoy in Dresden, Charles A. Murray, to the British Foreign Office, June 28, 1866, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 68/142.

“Read it for yourself. You’re no longer a minister!”<sup>9</sup> The envoy politely replied that he had not yet been recalled by his government. He added that Saxon troops were holding the mountain passes between Saxony and Austria (they were not). But later he remarked acidly that the British “are not very talented when it comes to German geography.” Because they had expected the Austrians to be in Berlin within a week, “it has to make a bad impression when they read in the newspapers that the Prussians have conquered two kingdoms in two days.”

This brings us to the strange survival of royal Saxony. Early on the morning of June 18, Beust was summoned from his bed to a royal audience in the Dresden palace. Because the Saxons had temporarily slowed the Prussian advance from the north by destroying the Elbe bridges at Riesa and Meißen, King Johann had unexpectedly been able to spend one more night in the royal bedchamber. But he had slept little, he told Beust, and had “thought everything through again.” He hoped Saxony’s army would prove victorious; in that case, he might have to consider whether Saxony should repossess the significant territories the Prussians had taken from it in 1815 (*unser altes Land*). “But I do not wish it,” the king told Beust. “It would revive and perpetuate old animosities, giving us only disaffected subjects in return.” In his reply, Beust saw no reason to upset the king’s “calm and easy conscience” by telling him that the impending military showdown could very possibly have a different outcome (by this point, the Saxons were already aware of the Austrians’ slow and disorganized military mobilization). As Beust put it laconically, “What I thought privately to myself was that it would not be anytime soon before this matter would again force me to get up so early!”<sup>10</sup>

The Saxon population, likewise expecting an Austrian victory, was initially more intrigued than enraged by the Prussian occupiers. The British envoy stationed in Dresden emphasized how congenial the whole affair seemed when the Prussians entered the Saxon capital shortly after noon on June 18.<sup>11</sup> This event was captured on a large canvas by Carl von Behrenberg that now hangs in Dresden’s Stadtmuseum. It depicts Prussian soldiers marching through Dresden’s Postplatz. Curious civilians are

<sup>9</sup> Letter of June 19, 1866, in Karl Friedrich Vitzthum von Eckstädt, *London, Gastein und Sadowa, 1864–1866. Denkwürdigkeiten* (Stuttgart, 1889), 218–219.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Ferdinand Graf von Beust, *Memoirs, Written by Himself*, 2 vols. (London, 1887), 1:300.

<sup>11</sup> See Charles Murray (June 19, 1866) and Charles Eden (July 12, 1866) to British FO, TNA, FO 68/142; [Prussian General Staff], *Campaign*, 60.

running to catch a glimpse of them.<sup>12</sup> Some, it is true, have turned their backs on the martial display; they are reading the first flyer distributed by the Prussians, which proclaims no animosity toward the Saxon people and calls for calm.<sup>13</sup> A few children hide fearfully behind their mothers’ skirts, but the overall impression is one of ambivalent edginess. As one eyewitness observed a few days later, Dresdeners were “down-hearted and excited” at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

By the night of June 18, King Johann and Crown Prince Albert had led the Saxon army – about 28,000 active soldiers – across the border into Bohemia.<sup>15</sup> Five days later, the Prussian Army of the Elbe crossed the same border in pursuit. In the process, the Prussians outstripped their supply lines, so by the time they debouched from the mountain passes on the Austrian side of the Erzgebirge (Ore Mountains) they were already desperate for whatever provisions could be requisitioned in occupied Saxony and sent on to them. Trouble began in Dresden on June 20. Rumors had it that advance units of the Austrian army were on the outskirts of Dresden and were about to bombard it: “The alarm of an immediate attack was spread through the town, and the panic thereby occasioned was increased by the preparations made by the Prussians who commenced cutting down shrubs and trees in the public gardens, digging trenches, and turning all the lodgers and proprietors out of their houses.”<sup>16</sup>

Soon the Prussian occupiers were engaged in a battle of wits with a Provisional Government (*Landeskommission*) headed by Saxony’s finance minister and Beust’s eventual successor as government leader (1866–1876), Baron Richard von Friesen. The transition from Beust to Friesen can be characterized as the triumph of probity over panache. Karl von Weber, a senior civil servant and secretary to the Provisional Government, joined others in making sport of Friesen’s celibate lifestyle

<sup>12</sup> Carl von Behrenberg, *Einmarsch preußischer Truppen in Dresden am 18. Juni 1866* (n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Richard von Friesen, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, 3 vols. (Dresden, 1880–1910), 2:199.

<sup>14</sup> Baron Anton von Gablenz to Otto von Bismarck, June 25, 1866, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (hereafter GStAB), III. Haupt-Abteilung, 2.4.1. I, Ministerium des Auswärtigen Angelegenheiten (hereafter HA III MdAA), Nr. 765. For much of the following, *ibid.* Nrn. 766–768. See other letters from Dresden, June 23 and July 26, 1866, in Vitzthum von Eckstädt, *London*, 225–227, 253.

<sup>15</sup> See Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (hereafter SHStAD), Hausarchiv Albert, König, Nr. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Murray to British FO, June 23, 1866, TNA, FO 68/142; *Constitutionelle Zeitung*, June 21, 1866.

and ascetic devotion to duty. He likened Friesen's bald spot to a tonsure and described him as a "helpless cleric."<sup>17</sup> In any case, members of this Provisional Government remained in Dresden to ensure that a kernel of Saxony's sovereignty would survive the occupation intact. On June 18, they opened negotiations with the Prussian commander, General Karl Herwarth von Bittenfeld, who headed a military *Generalgouvernement*. But within a few days, Bittenfeld had departed for Bohemia, beginning a succession of Prussian generals in the same post. The Provisional Government dealt mainly with Civil Commissar Lothar von Wurmb, a forty-two-year-old Prussian civil servant (and army major) who knew Saxony well and who served as Berlin's police president from 1867 to 1872.<sup>18</sup>

When they met for the first time on June 19, Wurmb opened the "negotiations" with Friesen and his colleagues by telling them that they would be summarily shot if they did not provide him with reliable information or fulfill their promises to cooperate. This grotesque situation was quickly defused with a little Saxon humor, but Wurmb's demands during the next three months made little distinction between military and political objectives. They included the provisioning and quartering of Prussian troops, dismissal of Dresden's police director (Beust's "creature" and "*persona ingratisissima*" in Berlin), tight control of travel into and out of the city, shutting down or censorship of anti-Prussian newspapers, and – most egregious of all – the erection of massive defensive earthworks in and around Dresden.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the subsequent summer, these fortifications enraged the Dresden population. They appeared frequently in Leipzig's *Illustrierte Zeitung* and were cited in complaints from the Provisional Government and Dresden's own Committee of Emergency.<sup>20</sup> The fortifications were allegedly necessary to defend Dresden against a Bavarian attack, but the Bavarians' unwillingness to leave their native soil made it clear that the fortifications were maintained to intimidate and demoralize Dresdeners

<sup>17</sup> Diary entry of June 18, 1861 (and others), SHStAD, Nachlaß Karl von Weber, Bde. III–IV.

<sup>18</sup> Wurmb later sat in the Reichstag and both houses of the Prussian Landtag.

<sup>19</sup> Dresden Police Director (later Police President) Karl August Schwauf served from 1863 to 1893; further details in GStAB, HA III MdAA 3.6. Nr. 9156; Wurmb to Bismarck (drafts), June 21 and July 2, 1866; Wurmb to Landeskommision, June 28, 1866. See also other correspondence in GStAB, HA III MdAA, Nr. 766 and in SHStAD, Landeskommision 1866: the latter contains (Nrn. 14–16) a daily register of the Provisional Government's activity. I am grateful to Gavin Wiens for scanning these documents for me in March 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Stadtarchiv Dresden, 2.1.6., G.XXXII, Nr. 128.

until a peace treaty was signed.<sup>21</sup> Asserting that the Prussian king had personally ordered the construction of the fortifications, Wurmb claimed that Dresdeners were meant to see what misery the policies of King Johann had brought them. If the tide of war turned and if the Saxon king, with foreign help, were to try to retake his capital, he would realize "that every Saxon bullet fired at the earthworks must strike his own city of Dresden and bring ruin to its inhabitants."<sup>22</sup>

In his role as finance minister, Friesen implemented an elaborate series of measures to make sure that Saxony would not suffer financial collapse when the Prussians invaded. In June, he and Beust ensured that the Landtag approved a massive war credits bill in its extraordinary session that ended the day before war was declared. Friesen also arranged for all state debts and the king's civil list to be paid off and ensured that monies owed to Saxony's towns and cities was disbursed. In a cloak-and-dagger operation, he arranged for about 35 million thaler in banknotes to be dispatched to safety to Munich, while another 450,000 thaler in silver was secured in the Königstein fortress southeast of Dresden.<sup>23</sup> After the Prussians spent much of their time from June 15 to 21 marching into city halls across Saxony and confiscating municipal treasuries, Friesen agreed to Wurmb's proposal, which was approved by Bismarck, that Saxony pay Prussian authorities 10,000 thaler – half in silver, half in paper notes – every day the occupation lasted (the Prussians demanded and received three retroactive payments to cover June 18–20).<sup>24</sup> When the peace was finally signed in October, the Prussians refused to deduct from the Saxon indemnity of 10 million thaler either this sum, which by then amounted to 1.25 million thaler, or the value – double that amount – of material and services requisitioned during the occupation.

Little was Friesen to know that Gerson Bleichröder, Bismarck's Jewish banker, would use these daily payments to recruit and pay the leaders of a Hungarian legion, which Bismarck hoped would foment subversion or revolution in the Habsburg empire and undermine Austria's war effort.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> [Prussian General Staff], *Campaign*, 60–61; reports of August 27 and September 8, 1866, SHStAD, MdAA, Nr. 1012.

<sup>22</sup> Wurmb cited (n.d.) in Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:202.

<sup>23</sup> See Konrad Sturmhoefel, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Albertinischen Sachsen. Von 1815 bis 1904* (Leipzig, n.d.), 375–377; Dietrich, "Friedensschluß," 126.

<sup>24</sup> Wurmb to Bismarck, June 21, 1866, GStAB, HA III MdAA, Nr. 766; Fricke, *Aus dem Feldzuge 1866*, 9–14.

<sup>25</sup> Bleichröder to Bismarck, July 8, 1866, cited in Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York, 1977), 90.

Closer to home, the Prussians disbursed 2,998 thaler during the summer and early autumn of 1866 to pro-annexationist National Liberal editors such as Karl Biedermann in Leipzig; these funds were used for “press and political purposes” and “without receipts.”<sup>26</sup> From Friesen’s perspective, even this arrangement had distinct advantages. It put an end to the lawless confiscation of state funds that had led to such unpleasantness in the first week of the occupation. It restored a measure of predictability to Saxony’s overall financial outlook during the war and after. Most important of all, it preserved the autonomy of Saxony’s finances and, hence, a measure of its political sovereignty.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE DYNASTY IN JEOPARDY

Between August and October 1866, Friesen spent much of his time in Berlin negotiating the final peace treaty between Saxony and Prussia. He also attended preliminary talks on the military convention that was finally signed in February 1867.<sup>28</sup> These on-again, off-again negotiations proceeded at a pace guaranteed to cause mounting anxiety, not least because treaties with Austria and other German states were concluded by the end of August and because Bismarck departed for Putbus (Pomerania) at the end of September to recover his nerves. Brochures and petitions advocating the complete absorption of Saxony into Prussia began to appear in Saxony and raised the stakes on both sides.<sup>29</sup> Prussian King Wilhelm I, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, and some of their influential advisors were allegedly outraged that Bismarck had guaranteed the integrity of Saxon territory at Nikolsburg. They were soon working toward the *de facto* annexation of Saxony through indirect means. One such scheme advocated treaty stipulations so draconian that the Saxon king would be induced to abdicate voluntarily and relinquish his kingdom to his fellow monarch Wilhelm. In another variation, Saxony would be ceded to the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, whose family was tied by blood to the

<sup>26</sup> [Wirkl. Geheimrat Hermann] von Thile, MdAA, to King Wilhelm I, June 11, 1868, and reply (copy), June 17, 1868, GStAB, HA I, Rep. 89, Nr. 13189.

<sup>27</sup> See materials in GStAB, HA III MdAA, Nr. 768, and Wurmb to Bismarck (draft), November 29, 1866, GStAB, HA III MdAA, Nr. 767.

<sup>28</sup> SHStAD, MdAA, Nr. 1014; SHStAD, HA Albert, Nr. 19. See also SHStAD, Gesamtministerium, Loc. 17, Nrn. 6–8.

<sup>29</sup> Savigny to Wurmb, August 29, 1866, GStAB, HA III MdAA, Nr. 767; Falkenstein to Friesen, September 13, 1866, in Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:277–278; Friesen to King Johann, September 18 and October 4, 1866, SHStAD, MdAA, Nr. 1014.

Hohenzollerns. Either solution would have put to rest Wilhelm's conviction that Saxony was about to become "a nest of enemy intrigues."<sup>30</sup> Still another possibility was floated by Napoleon III: "Wouldn't it be better," the French emperor wrote, "for Prussia to annex Saxony, a Protestant country, and put the king of Saxony [a Catholic] on the left bank of the Rhine, a Catholic country?"<sup>31</sup>

Another tactic recognized that after Nikolsburg, the Prussians could not demand territory from Saxony. This was technically true. France and Austria had lobbied not merely for Saxony's continued "existence" but for the "present territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Saxony in its existing dimensions," and this clause had been accepted. By September, some Prussians in Berlin were suggesting that the Saxons would demonstrate good judgment if they *offered* some territory to the Prussians in return for a more conciliatory stance on other fronts. The Prussian negotiator, Karl von Savigny, who had previously served as Prussian envoy in Dresden, stated flatly that this arrangement might reduce Saxony's indemnity. Savigny raised this point quite literally at the eleventh hour, but the Saxon negotiators refused and the peace treaty was signed shortly before midnight on October 21, 1866.<sup>32</sup>

The expectation that Saxony would forfeit its statehood in the autumn of 1866 was very real. In the first week of the occupation, Leipzigers were told their city would be spared onerous billeting requirements if the occupiers encountered no resistance. Based on the premise that the Prussians wanted to incorporate a prosperous city rather than one drained by rapacious occupiers, pro-Prussian Leipzigers willingly believed that the Prussians planned to seize the prize that had been denied them at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.<sup>33</sup> In both the Prussian court and Saxon political society, other voices suggested that the most obvious course of action was for Prussia to swallow the Saxon kingdom whole, as it had the Kingdom of Hanover. On the day the Nikolsburg accord was signed, King Johann wrote to his wife that "Prussia appears to have a good appetite for the north of Germany. The king [Wilhelm I] was absolutely set on having

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Frank Zimmer, *Bismarcks Kampf gegen Kaiser Franz Joseph* (Graz, 1996), 155.

<sup>31</sup> Napoleon III's handwritten letter, August 26, 1866, cited in Vitzthum von Eckstädt, *London*, 288.

<sup>32</sup> Friesen, *Erinnerungen*, 2:324–326; Willy Real, *Karl Friedrich von Savigny 1814–1875* (Berlin, 1990), 210–219, 232.

<sup>33</sup> Moritz Busch, Appendix: "Die Kriegswochen von 1866 in Leipzig," *Tagebuchblätter*, 3 vols., rev. ed. (Leipzig, 1892), 3:452–558, here 462, 464 (entries for June 19 and 20, 1866).

the district of Leipzig and Lusatia; *qu'est ce que nous serait resté?* But on this Austria was firm and Bismarck accommodating. In the meantime one will have to wade in and swim."<sup>34</sup>

In subsequent negotiations, whenever the Saxons dug in their heels, Prussian negotiators claimed that King Wilhelm was about to revert to his demand for Saxon territory or a change of dynasty. It is not clear to what extent the Saxon negotiators actually believed these bluffs. The Saxon envoy in Berlin, Count Adolf von Hohenthal, observed at one point that, after all, "the Saxon king could not return to his monarchy as a kind of Prussian mayor."<sup>35</sup> On another occasion, Hohenthal wrote that Bismarck and Wilhelm were playing a "put-up job with assigned roles."<sup>36</sup> For his part, another leading National Liberal in Leipzig, Gustav Freytag, editor of the influential *Grenzboten*, was appalled that Bismarck's "improvised" war was followed by such "impromptu" peace negotiations: "The arbitrary moods of the king, a small predilection on Bismarck's part – these things can now impose a cost of millions onto the people and make so many square miles part of Prussia or part of Oldenburg."<sup>37</sup>

It is true that the Prussians preferred to open each phase of negotiations with threats and bombast. The king, the crown prince, and their military advisors were also susceptible to fits of pique, for instance when they heard that the Saxon army had paraded through the streets of Vienna. They resented the fact that Saxony continued to seek French and Austrian intervention, and they believed rumors that Beust and Johann had set up a pro-Austrian "closet government" behind the back of the Provisional Government. Unfortunately, we know less than we would like about Johann's peregrinations after Königgrätz. Those travels took him to Vienna and then back to Saxony by way of Prague and Teplitz. We are also poorly informed about how closely he kept in touch with leading politicians of the day. But there is no reason to doubt the veracity of

<sup>34</sup> Johann Georg, Herzog zu Sachsen, "König Johann von Sachsen im Jahre 1866," *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte* 47 (1926), 295–328, especially 314 and 318 for King Johann to King Wilhelm I, August 2, 1866.

<sup>35</sup> Reinhard Freiherr Dalwigk zu Lichtenfels, *Die Tagebücher des Freiherrn Reinhard v. Dalwigk zu Lichtenfels aus den Jahren 1860–71*, ed. Wilhelm Schüßler (Osnabrück, 1967), 263 (entry for September 4, 1866).

<sup>36</sup> Vitzthum von Eckstädt, *London*, 324, 339.

<sup>37</sup> Freytag to Count and Countess Baudissen, September 13–14, 1866, cited in Peter Sprengel, "Der Liberalismus auf dem Weg ins 'neue Reich': Gustav Freytag und die Seinen 1866–1871," in Klaus Amann and Karl Wagner, eds., *Literatur und Nation* (Cologne, 1996), 153–181, here 163.



Wurmb's assessments that were sent from Dresden to Berlin during that summer of discontent.

In those reports Wurmb chronicled the many signs of a particularist resurgence in Saxony. For example, Wurmb had heard that the leader of the rabidly anti-Prussian Conservatives, Ludwig von Zehmen, was being considered as Saxony's next minister of the interior. Bismarck's reactions to these reports demonstrate that partial annexation was still an option. When Bismarck read that another leading Conservative had traveled to Vienna to warn King Johann that public opinion at home was growing uncertain, he wrote in the margin of one report: "If Prussia were to get Lusatia and Leipzig, *then* we could relax our demands in military matters."<sup>38</sup> The next time Wurmb wrote, on September 23, he warned Bismarck not to consider *any* concession to the Saxons. In doing so, he documented not only his own and other Prussian authorities' failure to sway (or even fully understand) the public mood in Saxony, but also the inability of pro-Prussian liberal nationalists to establish a political base there. Wurmb's assessment was dramatic and candid:

It could be that King Johann and the crown prince, after their recent experiences with Austria, actually want and will strive toward an honorable and genuine cooperation with Prussia; their ministers may, from their understanding of clever statecraft, pretend for a time to want to maintain friendship with Prussia; however, for all the other numerous officials in the Saxon civil service, from the regional governor down to the assistant gendarme, one finds not a trace of sympathy, but rather only fundamental, deep hatred of Prussia. As soon as these officials have power once again in their hands, neither the king nor his state ministry will be able to prevent the mistreatment of Prussians living in Saxony or even of Saxons sympathetic to Prussia.

Wurmb then described the phases through which Saxon public opinion had moved since the Prussian invasion in June:

At the beginning of the Prussian occupation, a period of terror set in, where everything that was demanded happened out of fear; after Königgrätz an oppressive disappointment invaded the public mood; but then, as soon as Saxony's integrity was declared in the Nikolsburg peace negotiations – which were reported with curious speed throughout the country – suddenly Saxon particularism reappeared and grew. It was cultivated by the mild occupation policy of [Prussia's General-gouverneur] General von Schack, especially in the most recent period, when the most fantastic rumors about the terms of the peace

<sup>38</sup> For this and the following, see Wurmb to Bismarck, August 13, August 25, September 23, and October 7, 1866; General von Schack to Bismarck, July 19, August 27, and September 8, 1866; GStAB, HA III MdAA Nr. 765.

agreement (which was allegedly already concluded) are being spread from Vienna directly through the organs of the court with such demonstrativeness that one might actually believe oneself to be living in the capital city of the victors and not of the defeated. Addresses of loyalty, telegrams of congratulation, deputations – these are all being sent to the king in Vienna; patriotic articles and poems are appearing in the newspapers, especially the local government organs; and a semi-official brochure, *Saxony and the North German Confederation*, currently represents the political creed of all Saxon patriots: in a Jesuitical manner it turns history around, not only completely to excuse Saxon policy but to vindicate its actions as far as possible and to suggest that it has more privileged status than the other states allied with Prussia in the North German Confederation.<sup>39</sup>

As to Prussia's future course in Saxony, Wurmb was not reticent in advocating a dramatic change of policy. "Prussia had three paths to accomplish its goals in Saxony," he wrote, in order to prevent a return to Beust's policy. "It could have created the necessary safeguards by strengthening and fostering the liberal democratic party, which is overwhelmingly German-Prussian in orientation . . . Or Prussia could have thrown Saxony out of the Customs Union and thereby established a following in the land that the Saxon government would not be able to resist even for a year." Wurmb outlined Prussia's third option in the present tense: "It can use the lengthy stationing of a strong Prussian garrison in the 8 or 10 largest cities, particularly in Dresden, to maintain such control over Saxony that it would not be in a position to follow an independent, anti-Prussian policy." Wurmb continued:

The first two paths were not chosen, and both entailed serious problems anyway. The third path, however, is still open in so far as it offers a means to realize a good part of those safeguards that Prussia actually requires if it is not, despite its victory, to become the laughing stock of the Saxon court nobility and if it is not completely to lose the influence over the Saxon government that it requires as the hegemonic state in northern Germany. I therefore humbly entreat Your Excellency [Bismarck] to use your influence to persuade His Majesty [Prussian King Wilhelm I] not to be too merciful in the peace negotiations, for, if he is, he will receive no real thanks here.

Wurmb's appraisals contributed to the Prussians' determination to protect Prussian sympathizers in the peace accord of October 21, 1866. Article 19 of the treaty was transparent on this score. The same article also included a clause that protected Saxon civil servants and the authors

<sup>39</sup> For the brochure in question, Anon. [Cäsar Dietrich von Witzleben], *Sachsen und der norddeutsche Bund* (Leipzig, 1866).

of brochures that might have slandered Prussia or its monarch. Thus, the Saxons were able to protect their own local administrators and police directors who had been disciplined, imprisoned, or banished by the Prussians. These actions confirmed the fears voiced by Wurmb on September 23. They also revealed that the pro-Prussian historian Heinrich von Treitschke – the son of a Saxon general but now a fierce partisan of Prussian hegemony in Germany – had hit the mark in a pamphlet, published in late July, warning Prussia that it must annex the middle-German states. “The Saxon court will return,” Treitschke had written, “with its heart full of hatred and revenge; it will politely accommodate itself to the current situation and quietly begin to spin its fine web toward the Hofburg in Vienna.”<sup>40</sup>

Despite evidence that Johann would be unable to wring a “loyal” policy vis-à-vis Prussia from his own civil servants, the Prussians dreaded the thought of Johann’s abdication. They feared they would take the blame for driving a respected monarch from his throne.<sup>41</sup> This appraisal hit the mark. So did the comments of insiders who ascribed pro-Saxon influence to Prussian King Wilhelm’s wife, Queen Augusta. This Saxon princess allegedly did not want to be “declassed” by the extirpation of her native land.<sup>42</sup> But other factors were more important in Bismarck’s calculations. He knew that either full or partial annexation of Saxony might result in the enmity of Austria in the long term, of the southern German states in the medium term, and of France in the short term (because Napoleon III had hinted that agreeing to Saxony’s annexation would require “compensation” for France in the form of Prussia’s Rhine province or the city of Mainz). These speculations were hardly confined to the sphere of high politics. Leipzig schoolboys were convinced that the French emperor would save their kingdom: clandestine poems said so. Prussian troops from the Rhineland, who constituted a large part of the army occupying Dresden, allegedly had “no heart or enthusiasm” for a German civil war because they believed that “their own native provinces would be given up to France.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke, *Die Zukunft der norddeutsche Mittelstaaten*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1866), 22–23.

<sup>41</sup> Friesen’s and Fabrice’s reports to King Johann during the negotiations in SHStAD, MdAA, Nr. 1014.

<sup>42</sup> Albrecht von Stosch to Freytag, October 29, 1866, and reply, November 1, 1866, in Gustav Freytag, *Gustav Freytags Briefe an die Verlegerfamilie Hirzel*, eds. Margarete Galler and Jürgen Matoni (Berlin, 1994), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Murray to British FO, June 19, 1866, TNA, FO 68/142.

## THE NATIONAL IDEA

Upon signing of the peace treaty between Prussia and Saxony in October 1866, foreigners observed that Saxony had retained only the appearance of a sovereign state. On the day before the treaty was signed, the British envoy wrote that “it is not to be presumed that the sovereignty of Saxony will be left sufficiently intact, to suffer her in any way to become an obstacle in the gradual transformation of the new *Staaten-Bund* [confederation of states] into a *Bundes-Staat* [federal state].” The US ambassador in Berlin had already reported that Prussia would compel the Saxon army corps to swear the usual military oath of allegiance to the king of Prussia, that it would take possession of Saxony’s military forts, and that it would disband all regiments that had fought under Austrian colors at Königgrätz. “Saxony may be ruled for a few years” by King Johann “as a temporary Governor without authority or power.” But this anomalous situation would soon pass and “the ancient Saxon will become a part of the Prussian Empire.” A few days after the peace treaty was signed, both diplomats were more blunt. “The independence left to Saxony is the shadow of a shadow,” wrote Britain’s representative in Dresden. “There are very few . . . who believe in the restoration of the Saxon monarchy to independence,” wrote the British consul in Leipzig, Joseph Archer Crowe. The US ambassador in Berlin concurred: “The Nationality and Sovereignty [*sic*] of Saxony in the future exist only in name.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, in the fullness of time it became clear to Saxons, as it has to historians, that Saxony’s forced entry into the North German Confederation was not incompatible with its continued existence as a semi-autonomous kingdom.

What did the Saxon people think about all this? Did they believe that King Johann had gambled his sovereignty in war and lost? And if it had been lost, even in a formal sense, what did this imply for the survival of a distinctive Saxon identity? Here we can draw upon the reports of the British envoys to Saxony who did not flee with the Saxon court to Vienna and Prague. Charles A. Murray and his successor, Charles Eden, realized that region-building and nation-building were not a zero-sum game. Reporting from war-torn Dresden, these envoys displayed remarkable sympathy for the common people embroiled in a civil war they had not wanted, for the lesser German dynasties, and for populations experiencing

<sup>44</sup> Charles Eden to British FO, October 20 and 26, 1866, TNA, FO 68/142; Joseph Archer Crowe to British FO, November 5, 1866, TNA, FO 68/144; Joseph Wright to U.S. State Department, September 3 and November 1, 1866, US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, Record Group 59, M44, reel 13.

the disorienting effects of a national election campaign being waged while their territories were still under military occupation.<sup>45</sup>

One such report, written shortly before the Battle of Königgrätz, distinguished among the many strands of the German question. On June 28, Charles Eden reported to London:

English readers of the *Times* will of course believe that the Prussians are welcomed here as brothers, and that the Saxons wish no better and could do no better than to become incorporated with Prussia; that the population received the occupying army in a friendly way is perfectly true, for what other course was open to them? Unavailing opposition would only have produced more cruel exaction, and moreover, as regards the individuals composing the mass of the population and the soldiery, there was no hostile feeling, they felt that they were speaking the same language and formed part of the same German People, and scores of the soldiers openly avowed that they abhorred the war and the authors of it; but toward the Prussian Govt. and the military authorities who represent it here it is impossible but that the poor Saxons should feel the most intense hatred.<sup>46</sup>

How did things stand four months later? Eden reported that “many eyes were wet with tears” when close to 2,000 Saxon subjects greeted King Johann upon his return to his riverside palace at Pillnitz on October 26.<sup>47</sup> Eden concluded that the king’s promise of loyalty to the new North German Confederation represented a watershed of profound importance: “With the scene of yesterday evening at Pilnitz [*sic*] the old order of things was closed and Saxony must from today look cheerfully forward to the new.” Nevertheless – and this is the more important point – it was not necessary for either the king or his subjects to abandon their mistrust of Prussia or their pride as Saxons on the way to becoming loyal Germans: “Although there exists no doubt a party in favor of incorporation with Prussia in the large industrial centres, I believe the mass of the rural population to be true Saxons and faithful liegemen.”

The acrimonious mood generated by the upcoming Reichstag elections nevertheless reflected the inner turmoil of the Saxon people. Faced with clear but uncomfortable choices between pro- and anti-Prussian Reichstag candidates, they were being asked to decide how local, regional, and national allegiances could be reconciled – with each other, but also with the need to protect personal interests, livelihoods, and reputations. Thus a darker tone intruded as the envoy reported that Saxons were compelled

<sup>45</sup> Elections to the Reichstag of the North German Confederation were held on February 12, 1867; campaigning began the previous autumn.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Eden to British FO, June 28, 1866, TNA, FO 68/142.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Eden to British FO, September 4, October 27, and November 2, 1866. *Ibid.*

to engage in the “convenient” act of forgetting when they celebrated their king’s return from exile. A few days before the king’s entry into Dresden, scheduled for November 3, Eden reported that the city “is already a blaze of colours from the countless Saxon and German flags; but the only Prussian banners I have been able to detect are those which still flutter ominously above the earthworks of Prussian creation.” One day before the event, the envoy returned to the question of how Saxons might reconcile older “feelings” and newer “interests.” On one level, such conflicts could now be more easily accommodated than they had been during the most onerous and uncertain phase of the occupation. The celebrations expected to take place the following day, Eden wrote, would “without doubt give rise to the most enthusiastic demonstrations of loyalty, for even those few inhabitants of Dresden who forgot for a time their devotion to the royal family under the pressure of the billeting system, find now once more their feelings and their interests in happy and convenient harmony.” If we read this report against the grain, though, we sense that the quality of neither loyalty nor harmony – let alone mercy – was unstrained.<sup>48</sup>

The Saxon denouement of Germany’s civil war of 1866 was a long one. It included a royal visit to Berlin by King Johann and Crown Prince Albert in mid-December 1866 to show their loyalty to their new partner and a return visit to Dresden by King Wilhelm in February 1867. It also included Saxony’s good fortune – after the calamitous defeats and occupations of 1756, 1813, and 1866 – in finally choosing the winning side in the summer of 1870 in the war against France. With increasing confidence from the mid-1880s onward, the British envoy in Dresden could claim that Saxon particularism was dead.<sup>49</sup>

Yet a more fitting conclusion to this chapter is provided by the retrospective observation of King Albert, who succeeded Johann on the Saxon throne in 1873. As crown prince, Albert had led the Saxon forces at Königgrätz; he distinguished himself again on the battlefield in 1870, and as king, he followed his father’s lead in demonstrating his loyalty to the Second Reich. One year after coming to the Saxon throne, King Albert spoke about the strange survival of royal Saxony during those anxious months in 1866. His remarks were made in 1874 to the British envoy

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Crowe to British FO, October 29, 1866, TNA, FO 68/144, and Loftus to British FO, November 17, 1866, in Historische Reichskommission et al., ed., *Die auswärtige Politik Preußens 1858–1871. Diplomatische Aktenstücke*, 10 vols. (Oldenburg, 1933), 8:147–148.

<sup>49</sup> George Strachey to British FO, January 1, 1885 (draft), July 2, 1888, and September 3, 1895, TNA, FO 215/37, FO 68/173, and FO 68/180, respectively.

George Strachey, who reported them to London in the form of a “He said, I said” account:

The King [Albert] – . . . for me, I am of course very far from being one of those who worship [Bismarck]. But I must say he is the Prussian I like best. In fact I have every personal reason for being grateful to him. *In 1866 we Saxons were within an inch of being swallowed up*. Bismarck was doubtfully inclined at first, but having once sided with us he stuck to us. It is his great merit that he is a man of his word . . . You see Bismarck is not so *Prussian* as most of them!

. . . Myself [Strachey]. Y[our] M[ajesty] concludes that he has got some sincere *German* fibres. –

The K[ing] – Exactly. That is one of his great merits. We are all comparatively safe with him.<sup>50</sup>

The kings of Saxony continued to provide adornment to the flock of German princes who claimed that the sovereignty of the Second Reich lay with them, not with Prussian victors or the German people. But as domesticated German monarchs in a world they barely understood, after 1866 they were playing it safe – just as they had during that fateful year itself.

<sup>50</sup> Strachey to British FO, January 20, 1874 (draft), TNA, FO 215/34; original emphasis.