# CONCLUSION

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Until the 1990s, the period between 1848 and the early 1860s remained relatively neglected in the historiography of nineteenth-century Germany. Most historical narratives tended to focus on the Revolutions of 1848/49, dismissing much of the 1850s as a "period of reaction" before rushing on to the New Era and the Prussian constitutional crisis. Even the latter were generally portrayed as preludes to the ascendancy of Otto von Bismarck and his wars of German unification. More recently, Andreas Biefang, Christian Jansen, Anna Ross, and a small number of other scholars have challenged this view of the 1850s and 1860s: they portray the years between revolution and unification as a vitally important transitional phase of political accommodation between moderate democrats, liberals, and conservative officials—albeit still with a marked emphasis on Prussia.[1]

Conservatives such as Minister President Otto von Manteuffel resisted reactionaries' calls after 1851 to reverse all the gains of the revolutions. Manteuffel, representing reformist conservatives in Central Europe, understood that limited economic and political concessions to moderates would win support and legitimacy for the post-revolutionary monarchical state. Moderate liberals, for their part, wanted to preserve the new constitution, influence government policymaking, and, ultimately, establish a *kleindeutsch* nation-state under the Prussian monarchy. Within the network of political friends that I have focused on, liberals of varying political hues hoped that their proposals, reflecting myriad strategies and tactics, would achieve both liberal reform at home and national unification without summoning the specter of republican revolution. They were not unusual among European liberals of the time in their dependence on monarchical power to realize domestic reform and maintain social order. Nor was their insistence on constitutionalism, national unity, and basic civil rights exceptional. Like most European liberals, these political friends rejected democracy in favor of royal government guided by the counsel of propertied and educated men—by *their* counsel.

Analyzing the debates and actions of this network of otherwise neglected or forgotten historical figures through a series of granular episodes has allowed me to modify the findings of scholars such as Andreas Biefang and Christian Jansen on liberals' turn to realpolitik and political accommodation in the 1850s.[2]

German liberals "thought with their friends."[3] Why? To reconcile liberalism's ideals with everyday personal, professional, and political realities over decades of government repression, war, and political crisis. We must, therefore, not only consider the churn of political activity and decision-making in the 1850s but also look back to the 1840s and forward into the 1860s. In each of these three decades, we must consider the changing role of political friendship.

The individual political friends were initially bound together by the still vague concepts of liberalism and nationalism of the 1840s.[4] They achieved greater degrees of cohesion and consensus during the Revolutions of 1848/49 and the First Schleswig War (1848–51), in a network that remained relatively diverse and informal. In the 1850s, they weathered post-revolutionary state repression by drawing on the shared professional and emotional resources of their network while trying to reach consensus on questions of political tactics. In this spirit, they made their earliest accommodations with state power by incorporating into the network minor monarchs from Coburg and Baden. They then courted the *Wochenblatt* party of moderate liberal officials around Prince Wilhelm of Prussia while he resided in Koblenz, and they sought limited concessions from an often recalcitrant and combative government in Berlin.

Some members of the network used these connections to enter Prussian government service at the dawn of the New Era in 1858. Having "passed into the structures of authority,"[5] members such as Max Duncker were then forced to balance the common political outlooks that he and his friends had fostered in the 1850s with the legislative demands of an increasingly conservative Prussian monarch. In the meantime, other members produced detailed plans for achieving a liberal, *kleindeutsch* unification of Germany based on a collective national monarchy. Such plans included Franz von Roggenbach's comprehensive reforms drafted for Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden, the Coburg military convention initiated by Duke Ernst, and the arguments of network princes at the Frankfurt Fürstentag of 1863. These proposals found little reception outside liberal circles. Members of the network began implicitly to ask whether core tenants of liberalism, such as constitutionalism and the rule of law, should be sacrificed for national unification under Prussian hegemony. After these challenges were exacerbated by the Prussian constitutional crisis and the 1864 war against Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein, the network dissolved in 1866.

Vanessa Rampton has argued in the context of Russian liberalism that studying a failed movement showcases the "inherent complexity and multifaceted quality" of political ideals and their practitioners.[6] In the context of the German Confederation, we have seen that the members of this network of political friends tried and largely failed to steer high politics. Simply because the political friends failed to make an *indelible* impact on high politics does not mean that political friendship was irrelevant to German political culture. Having examined an influential network of political friends through multiple lenses, we have

discovered how individuals approached political accommodations at midcentury within complex and dynamic social and political environments. We have also learned how and why many German liberals were willing by 1866 to abandon political principles and old friends in pursuit of the nation-state.

The German Confederation (1815–66) lacked many of the overarching institutions associated with nation-states, such as a single military authority or a national school system. Friendship was thus a crucial means of self-organization among liberal nationalists in Germany. It simultaneously addressed their need for emotional support, professional favors, and political discussion. Letters served as the main means of communication between individuals scattered across the Confederation's thirty-odd states. Letters had become a multivalent genre since the eighteenth century: correspondents rarely separated detailed political thought, gossip, professional issues, and emotional declarations. The relationships that constituted the network rested on a cult of epistolary friendship, a form of written sociability and intellectual exchange inherited from the eighteenth-century "republic of letters" that had supported the development of Sentimentalism and the Enlightenment.[7]

This heritage facilitated the formation of the liberal network in the 1840s and early 1850s as future members met at university and in their early careers as writers, academics, and administrators. Their family and educational backgrounds provided them with a shared vocabulary for political discussion and emotional intimacy. They became political friends, sharing lasting personal affinities, professional resources, and political beliefs. These moderate liberals wove the disparate bonds between them to fashion an informal network of political friendship. Under the threat of print confiscations, professional harassment, arrest, and exile, these liberals favored vague political agreement to avoid jeopardizing their access to the emotional and professional resources that the network provided. Emotional bonds helped these liberals solidify and expand their network, weathering state repression and advancing their careers in academia, the arts, business, and government. Political friendship was thus essential to moderate liberals and liberalism in the 1840s and 1850s. Nevertheless, network members also perpetuated an exclusive liberalism in their dismissive attitude toward women, including Charlotte Duncker, their incomprehension of Berthold Auerbach as a Jew, and their derision of democrats.

Network members' re-entry into post-revolutionary political activity began in earnest with the Crimean War (1853–56). Liberals sought to achieve national unification through the existing monarchies of the Confederation to avoid the violent revolution they had glimpsed in 1848–49. But this accommodation was difficult. The Prussian government had determined to harass these liberal academics, artists, and administrators, suggesting a discrepancy between the state's treatment of *Besitzbürger* and *Bildungsbürger*—between those who could grow

the post-revolutionary economy and those who could not.[8] The Prussian state used professional and police harassment, developed in the *Vormärz*, to batter liberals into accepting economic and political accommodation on the state's terms. Our close examination of the ways such acceptance was generated suggests that we should accept with a grain of salt the argument that the 1850s in the German Confederation represented a total "revolution in government" or the implication that Prussian conservatives acted like progressives in their expansion of state power.[9] For every Manteuffel open to reform, there was also a Hinckeldey bent on repression.

We have also seen that *kleindeutsch* liberals struck their first bargains with state power not in Berlin, but in Coburg and Karlsruhe. It was from among the network of political friends that liberals made their initial post-revolutionary accommodations with the embodiments of power in Germany—monarchs. Importantly, these accommodations began earlier than Christian Jansen has argued.[10] To develop the theory of post-revolutionary accommodation, we must therefore expand our scope to include more of the smaller German states. After 1851, core members of the network befriended monarchs, served in government, and intrigued at court—political arenas in which conservative opponents had long excelled.[11] Non-princely members of the network entered the service of self-styled liberal princes, most notably Duke Ernst II of Coburg and Grand Duke Friedrich I of Baden. Princely and non-princely liberals collaborated as political friends in supporting, for example, the Literary Association and its publications, which advocated liberal reform and national unification.

Yet, the interactions between princely and non-princely members remained a frequent source of tension in the network. The German monarchs involved sought meaningful emotional relationships based on Enlightenment notions of the equalizing, morally transformative power of friendship. At the same time, they demanded political deference from non-princely friends, as the relationship between Duke Ernst of Coburg and Gustav Freytag revealed. The place of princes among the political friends confirms that even the most liberal German princes cherished a far more authoritarian interpretation of liberalism than their bourgeois counterparts appreciated.[12] Cross-status political friendship was possible, but the bonds of friendship were fragile: personal affinities often obscured fundamental differences of political opinion. In this case, those differences concerned the role of monarchy in the future German nation-state.

The opening of German political society around 1860, with the Prussian New Era and the appointment of a moderate Austrian cabinet, offered political friends the opportunity to negotiate—or reject—individual accommodations with conservative power. The friends gained welcome but ultimately insecure political space to air their specific views and advance their goals outside the network: through civic organizations, state legislatures, and government office. Although they never questioned the merits of forming a unified *Kleindeutschland*, members

of the network did differ on *how* to reach this aim, and at what cost. Because the type of political friendship that they had cultivated in the 1840s and 1850s led them to equate political conformity with emotional well-being and professional advancement, their debates became increasingly adversarial. Put simply: the form of political friendship they had adopted could no longer sustain a network during the years of political crisis in the 1860s. This finding extends Sarah Horowitz's thesis about France—that friendship acted as a stabilizing organizational force in post-Napoleonic French politics only so long as civil society and party politics remained limited—to Germany.[13]

The central points of disagreement within the network in the 1860s were the Prussian constitutional crisis and the question of Schleswig-Holstein. The dispute over whether the Prussian Landtag or the king held the right to determine line items in the military budget grew by 1861 into a major constitutional crisis. The conflict was the first test of the network's liberal solidarity. Max Duncker ultimately made one of the earliest accommodations with conservative state power in his support for the Prussian king and Bismarck, against his political friend Heinrich von Sybel, who, after all, led the opposition in the Landtag as head of the Progressive Party. Duncker and his supporters in the network argued that an expanded Prussian military under the firm command of the king was the best means to achieve domestic liberal reform and German unification—by force, if necessary. Many other core members, by contrast, refused to sacrifice the constitutional rights of the Landtag or risk a fratricidal war for an undefined nation-state in the future. Conflict among network members reached its peak in the summer of 1863 with the "Danzig Affair." Here, the network used its connections to the international press and at monarchical courts in a campaign to punish Max Duncker for his political "apostasy." In the process, however, they unwittingly ignited a crisis within the Hohenzollern dynasty that raised fundamental questions about the role of the Prussian royal family in a future German nation-state.

It was in this complex and highly charged political environment that network liberals sought to reconcile their principles of liberalism and constitutional monarchy with the realities of Prussian-led unification. Paradoxically, Schleswig-Holstein served as both a rallying cry and a point of contention between network members. We therefore need to extend forward in time—into the 1860s—Brian Vick's argument that Schleswig-Holstein in 1848–49 played an essential role in liberals' understanding of the future of the German nation-state.[14] Most core members of the network had fought in, worked for, or reported from the Elbe duchies during the first conflict. From the winter of 1863 until the Gastein Convention of 1865, network members failed to reach consensus on the path forward, disagreeing over whether to support Augustenburg and his promises of parliamentary monarchy in Kiel or to advance the annexation of the duchies under an anti-constitutional Prussian Crown. As early as 1864, then, many

members of the network were willing to sacrifice liberal principles if doing so led to *kleindeutsch* unification.

As the shared idea of a collective national monarchy behind their reform proposals became more problematic during the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, the network members close to Duke Ernst of Coburg and Karl Samwer—like Progressives in the Landtag—insisted on the rights of the Augustenburg claimant and on the illegality of the Prussian government's actions. Other members, including the Dunckers, Rudolf Haym, and Karl Mathy, turned to Bismarck and his realpolitik. To use Christian Jansen's terms, they chose monarchical "*Macht*" at the expense of political "*Freiheit*" as they pursued what had become their overriding goal: national "*Einheit*."[15] The network of liberal political friends had been negotiating this very accommodation among themselves since the 1840s—first as persecuted political dissidents, then as government officials and courtiers. However slow, painful, and halting this process was, by the end of 1866, both sides of the crumbling network had endorsed Bismarck's North German Confederation and accepted the Indemnity Act. They had bought into the system of power, largely on terms favored by conservative monarchs and state ministers. Accommodation favored the powerful.

This period of German history proved so pivotal to their political experience that members of the former network continued for decades to (re)assess its meaning through their auto/biographical writings. The emotional bonds they had forged in a bygone era provided the voice with which they narrated the journey toward unification taken by their political friends—and themselves. Through the process of "affective characterization," members of the former network emphasized their faith in Prussia and a commitment to loyal opposition during the pre-unification era. They also used their biographical texts to settle old scores with network rivals and to explain the benefits and the dangers that political friendship presented along the road to the nation-state. Their resulting works reflected not historical reality but rather the tension between memory and narration: they were, after all, rewriting the past to serve contemporary political goals and personal desires.

Overall, this study of the network of political friends in the middle years of the nineteenth century suggests that German liberals maintained a limited capacity for personal connection, professional cooperation, and political organization across gender, religious, and status lines. Considering these individuals as a network—and vice versa—has allowed us to account for changes in the actual practice of German liberalism: neither personal motivations nor group solidarities can be understood without considering the points at which liberals' social, professional, and political lives met. Political friendship was key not only for these network members but also for thousands of other politically active Germans because it was dynamic and mutable, its boundaries unclear and accommodating.

Members of the network insisted on this convenient ambiguity into the 1860s—for too long. The initial forms of political friendship forged in the *Vormärz* could no longer bear the weight of incipient mass politics and a rapidly expanding public sphere. Network liberals doggedly pursued national unification through extra-parliamentary avenues, believing that minor monarchs would seek and implement their counsel. In the end, the national future that the friends had envisioned together for decades was realized in another form by Bismarck. Nevertheless, in their many failures and spare successes, this liberal network demonstrated the importance of political friendship to German political culture in an era marked by rapid change and rolling crises.

# Notes

1. See Biefang, *Politisches Bürgertum*; Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit*; Ross, *Beyond the Barricade*s. See also Brophy, "Political Calculus of Capital," 149–76; Barclay, *Frederick William IV*, 221; Berdahl, *Politics of the Prussian Nobility*, 5–6, 11; Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 164–65.
2. See also Biermann, *Ideologie statt Realpolitik*; Lees, *Revolution and Reflection*. Lothar Gall has argued that liberals' turn to Bismarckian realpolitik was simply cover for their "helplessness" in the face of rapid societal and economic change. See Gall, "Liberalismus und 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft,'" 354–55.
3. See Arendt, *Life of the Mind*; Leonhard, *Liberalismus*, 30.
4. Sheehan, *German Liberalism* 5; Langewiesche, *Liberalismus in Deutschland*, 13–15.
5. The phrase comes from Clark, "After 1848," 194.
6. Rampton, *Liberal Ideas in Tsarist Russia*, 187.
7. Hoffmann, "Freundschaft als Passion," 84–85; Garrioch, "From Christian Friendship to Secular Sentimentality," 16; Koschorke, *Körperströme,* 100; Mosse, "Friendship and Nationhood," 355, 360; Habermas, *Frauen und Männner*, 247–49.
8. Brophy, "Political Calculus of Capital," 152–53. See also Clark, "After 1848," 174; Ross, *Beyond the Barricades*, 13–14; Mulholland, *Bourgeois Liberty and the Politics of Fear*, 3–5; Kocka, *Industrial Culture and Bourgeois Society*, 192–93.
9. See Clark, "After 1848," 173; Ross, *Beyond the Barricades*, 198.
10. Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit*, 261, 265, 616.
11. Ross, *Beyond the Barricades*, 10.
12. Frank Lorenz Müller has argued this in the case of Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm (later Emperor Friedrich III); see Müller, *Our Fritz*, 10, 63–64.
13. See Horowitz, *Friendship and Politics*, 156, 158–59.
14. Vick, *Defining Germany*, 142–43, 177.
15. Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit*, 261.