



Volume 3. From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866
Johann August Wirth at the Hambach Festival (May 1832)

In the south German states, political unrest in the wake of the Paris Revolution of 1830, restrictive measures against political expression, and increased tax burdens and tariffs led to large political demonstrations, such as the Hambach Festival of May 27-30, 1832, in which 30,000 people took part. In his speech, the radical democratic journalist Johann August Wirth (1798-1848) calls for the overthrow of the monarchies in Germany and for the establishment of democracy nationwide; he hopes that this will be followed by the democratization of all of Europe and close cooperation between the new democratic nations.

Speech by Wirth

The country that speaks our language, the country where our hope resides, where our love delights, where our joys thrive, where the secret of all our sympathies and all our longing rests, this beautiful land is being ravaged and plundered, torn and enervated, gagged and disgraced. Rich in all the resources of nature, it should be the home of joy and contentment for all its children; yet, its blood sucked by 34 kings, it is the domicile of hunger, misery, and poverty for the majority of its residents. Germany, great, rich, powerful Germany, should assume first place in the society of European states, yet robbed by traitorous families of aristocrats, it has been struck from the list of European realms and abandoned to mockery from abroad. Appointed by nature to be the guardian of light, liberty, and international legal order in Europe, German energy is actually being used for the very opposite purpose of suppressing the liberty of every people* and founding an eternal empire of darkness, slavery, and raw force. Thus the poverty of our fatherland is simultaneously the curse for all of Europe. Spain, Italy, Hungary, and Poland are witnesses to this. Spain has been robbed by the Holy Alliance – which had its support exclusively in Germany – of a governmental constitution built on enlightenment, humanity, and reason, as well as of its patriotic Cortes, and has been taken back under the blade of fanatic priests and aristocrats and, indeed, of nonsense and cruelty. Hungary and Italy are being robbed of their nationality by Austria with help from German forces and kept in slavery and darkness. Poland has been repeatedly betrayed by German powers, and now also owes the loss of [its] freedom and fatherland in our time to a German king. The cause of the unspeakable suffering of the European nations lies entirely in the fact that the dukes of Austria and the electors of Brandenburg have seized the greater part of Germany for themselves and, under the titles Emperor of Austria and King of Prussia, not only rule their own countries – acquired

* Note: the word "Volk" (plural "Völker") in this document is sometimes translated as "people" and sometimes as "nation" (plural "nations") – trans.

through the methodical plundering of Germany – in an oriental manner and use their powers to suppress the freedom and the popular sovereignty of European nations, but also use their predominance over the smaller countries of Germany to make the powers of those countries serve the system of princely autocracy and despotic force. Every time there is a movement of a people aiming at the achievement of liberty and a reasonable governmental institution, the kings of Prussia and Austria are attached to Russia by a similarity of aims, convictions, and interests, and so arises that fearful alliance that has always found a way to kill the liberty of the peoples. The major power in this dark alliance always consists of German forces, since Russia would be powerless without the alliance with Prussia and Austria, and would fall to ruin from domestic disruption. As gigantic, therefore, as the power of the absolutist alliance may be, its end will come at the moment in Germany when reason has also attained political victory, i.e. at the moment when public affairs are no longer managed according to the despotic will of an individual, no longer according to the interests of an extended aristocratic family branching out all over Europe, but rather according to the will of society itself and according to the needs of the people. At the moment when German popular sovereignty is assigned its proper right, at that moment the most heartfelt confederation of nations [peoples] is formed, for the people loves, while kings hate, the people defends, where kings persecute, the people grants what it aspires to achieve itself wholeheartedly, and what it holds most dear are freedom, enlightenment, nationality, and popular sovereignty, for a fraternal nation as well: the German people therefore also grants these great, invaluable goods to its brethren in Poland, Hungary, Italy, and Spain. When, therefore, German money and German blood no longer submits to orders from the dukes of Austria and the electors of Brandenburg, but rather to the decree of the people, then Poland, Hungary, and Italy will be free, because Russia will then have lapsed into powerlessness, and no other power will be around that could be used for crusades against the liberty of the peoples. Restoration of the old, powerful Poland, of wealthy Hungary, and of a flourishing Italy would have to be followed of its own accord by the liberation of Spain and Portugal and the overthrow of the unnatural preponderance of the English. Freedom of world trade is the exquisite material fruit and unstoppable advance of civilization[,] the incalculable spiritual gain of such a global event. The wealthy countries of European Turkey will then no longer be left to the enemies of all culture because the jealousy of an idiotic and small-minded policy does not grant a civilized people these marvelous provinces. Instead, one will return them to civilization, transform Constantinople, recreated into a free city and free port, into an all-powerful lever of European trade, open up the resources of Africa for Europe, and then guarantee trade, the best of all of philanthropists, so that it may pour out its endless gifts and inexhaustible treasures over the peoples of Europe and, at the same time, encourage all nations to ever newer advances in civilization. Immense are the consequences of Europe's liberation, immense already in anticipation of the elevation and even distribution of welfare, and immense altogether in anticipation of intellectual [spiritual] advances. And should all these endless triumphs of the human race, all these unexpected blessings be withheld from the peoples of Europe simply so that a couple of ignorant lads can continue to inherit the role of king? Truly, I tell you, if there is a certain traitor against the nations and against the entire human race, if there is a certain traitor guilty of high treason, then it would be the kings who – on account of vanity,

compulsion to domination, and lust – make an entire portion of the globe miserable and prevent the same, by outrageous suppression for decades, from rising to the condition of material welfare and spiritual [intellectual] fulfillment determined by nature. A curse, therefore, an eternal curse on all such traitors!

Source: Johann Georg August Wirth, *Das Nationalfest der Deutschen zu Hambach* [*The National Festival of the Germans at Hambach*], Neustadt: Philipp Christmann, 1832; reprint, Neustadt: Meininger, 1981, pp. 41-43.

Translator: Jeremiah Riemer