



Volume 3. From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815-1866

Clemens Prince von Metternich to Friedrich Gentz in Perugia (June 17, 1819); Metternich's Reply to Gentz's Letter of June 3, 1819

In the following letter of June 17, 1819, Austrian Chancellor Clemens Prince von Metternich (1773-1859) responds to a letter written by his personal secretary, Friedrich Gentz, on June 3, 1819. Gentz's letter had reported on efforts to put constitutional limitations on the authoritarian rule of the European monarchies. Metternich decisively rejected these efforts and spoke out in favor of a coordinated effort on the part of European monarchies to strengthen their power.

I thank you for your very interesting report from the third of this month. I share entirely the views of Adam Müller, and as I share these, I find myself encouraged about the course I have taken.

I am not surprised that the student nonsense is on the decline or has turned against something other than politics. That is in the nature of things. In and of himself, the fraternity boy* is a child, and the fraternity [*Burschenschaft*] an impractical puppet show. And I have never – to this you are a witness – talked about students, but have focused my attention entirely on the professors. Now, there can hardly be a more ill-suited conspirator than a professor, either alone or as part of a group. One only conspires substantially against things and not sentences. Admittedly, the latter can grow powerful, but this will never be the case when they leave the sphere of theology. Wherever they are political, they have to be backed by deeds, and a deed means overthrowing established institutions and carrying out "ôtez vous de là que me m'y mette."** This business is something that scholars and professors do not know how to conduct, and lawyers as a class are better at doing it. I am acquainted with almost no scholar who knows the value of property, whereas the lawyer caste is constantly meddling in the property of others. Besides, professors are almost without exception theoreticians, while there is nothing more practical than lawyers.

That the revolution might therefore be begotten at the universities is something I have never feared, but I am certain that an entire generation of revolutionaries would develop there if no limits were placed on the malady. I hope that the worst symptoms of the university malady will be prevented, and perhaps governments' disciplinary measures will contribute less fully toward this end than the fatigue of the students, the dottiness of the professors, and the different direction that studies will take – and all this of its own accord. This feeling, however, will never

* Bursche: literally, a "lad" – but also the member of a "Burschenschaft" or student fraternity, a center of German nationalist, and at the time also liberal or anti-authoritarian, agitation – trans.

** "Get out of there so I can take your place" – a cynical evaluation of the motive of revolutionaries – trans.

stop me from the progress I am making from above, and the only disciplinary measures that strike me as possible have [already] been taken.

When we get together, I can give you much reassuring information about the course of affairs, which I cannot share with you at a distance without an immense correspondence, and which even under these circumstances would have to remain extremely shallow and incomplete.

The greatest, and therefore the most urgent, malady today is the press. I am all the more pleased to tell you about the corresponding disciplinary measures that I am thinking of proposing to the Carlsbad Congress, as I wish to have your unreserved opinion about my fundamental ideas, and for you to put yourself in a position to lend me an active hand in Carlsbad, where the business must begin without delay in order to be carried out immediately.

My proposals, briefly, are the following:

All German [princely] courts shall agree on disciplinary measures that strike them as necessary in order to maintain public peace and, in the purest sense, the mutual support that is the foundation of the German Confederation.

They proceed from the basic concept of the confederal system, namely that Germany consists of sovereign states that have reached an understanding about mutual protection and assistance and, although among themselves they are separate with respect to administration, appear abroad as an aggregate power.

The domestic peace of the Confederation can be endangered and even broken by material interventions of one German state into the sovereign rights of another. But this can also happen by way of the moral impact of one government on others, or by the machinations of some party. If this party is supported by a German state – or even if it only finds refuge from one of the same – it may find the means, under cover of this refuge, to apply rebellious pressure against [other] neighboring states from within that one neighboring state, and thus the domestic peace of the Confederation is disturbed, and the prince who allows this mischief in his country makes himself guilty of a felony against the Confederation.

All German governments have come to the conclusion that the press today serves a party that undermines all existing governments. The spirit of nationalism that has spread all across Germany means that it does not rest within the power of individual states to protect their borders from the malady; if this truth holds for individual governments, it holds no less for all German governments, inasmuch as a Single German state – even the smallest among them – might want to exclude itself from taking joint disciplinary measures for the maintenance of general peace.

The Confederation has the right to call on each individual part to fulfill joint obligations. In case [each part] should not find itself prepared to [do] this, the Confederation has the right to force it to do so.

It follows, moreover, from the confederal system that everything that is possible in individual sovereign and European states cannot always be possible in the sovereign German confederal states.

Thus, e.g., France and England can certainly permit freedom of the press and even establish the principle that this freedom constitutes an indispensable condition for a purely representative system.

In France and in England, laws can be made that restrict the abuse of the press in relationship to the constitution of both states.

Yet I doubt that the one or the other of these states would view it as a basic tenet of freedom of the press to tolerate all works that might be systematically forged and distributed up to the point of generating a rebellion in the one or the other [state] by a party opposed to the constitution. In this case, the English government would surely lodge a complaint with the French (and vice versa) for tolerating foreign agitators against a friendly state; should the government that is the object of the complaint not provide assistance, then the one lodging the complaint would have the unconditional right to declare war against it and, accordingly, obtain assistance and justice for itself, or at least suspend contact between the two states.

These means of assistance, which are grounded in international law, are not applicable in Germany. Accordingly, those issues that can be addressed by the European powers by way of force and that can remain subject to them must be regulated by preventative laws in the German Confederation.

[. . .]

Source: Clemens Wentzel Lothar von Metternich, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papieren* [*From Metternich's Private Papers*], ed. Richard von Metternich-Winneburg. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1880-84, vol. 3, pp. 250-53.

Translation: Jeremiah Riemer