

BISMARCK AND THE CZECHS IN 1866

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In 1866, Bismarck did not hesitate to mobilize in the anti-Habsburg struggle the forces of nationalism which since 1848 had threatened the existence of the monarchy. How he came to terms with the Italians, Magyars and Serbs has been known for some time; his links with a Czech separatist movement are analyzed for the first time in this study, which already appeared in 1936, on the basis of previously unutilized sources. After the Battle of Königgrätz, the Prussian High Command placarded an appeal to the „inhabitants of the glorious Kingdom of Bohemia“ which spoke of the „just aspirations to autonomy and free national development“. Bismarck had in mind a further national-federative dissolution of Austria in the event that he was unable to

achieve a peace treaty that was acceptable to him. The background of his activity were discussions held in Berlin with Czech journalists (Kotík, Frič, and Prince Thurn und Taxis) and a propaganda brochure which they printed in Berlin and which was also disseminated by Prussian organs. The early peace settlement prevented this campaign from gaining any deeper impact. But in any event, the conservative Czech forces, under the still unchallenged leadership of the realistic Palacký, would presumably have sided with the Habsburg monarchy, which in their eyes still represented the bulwark against *grossdeutsch* and Russian-led Pan-Slav endeavours. The still powerful nobility of the land would likewise not have been willing to revolt against Austria. The people as a whole were probably also aware of the ambivalence of the campaign, which left open the whole question of the Germans in Bohemia. By and large, the will to an independent state was, in contrast to the Magyars, still insufficiently developed. The policy of Bismarck and of the Czechs in 1866 offers an instructive example of the durability of the Habsburg Empire even in the critical situation which it faced before the final collapse in the year 1918.