

THE 1848 REVOLUTIONS

The Frankfurt Parliament

- The Frankfurt Parliament was the result of the Vorparlament, which gathered in Frankfurt in March 1848.
- The Parliament aimed to draft a constitution for a unified Germany and was composed of elected representatives from different German states.
- It convened on May 18, 1848, in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt.
- The Parliament faced challenges from the beginning, including disagreements over the nature of the German state and the role of Austria.
- There were debates between those who advocated for a greater Germany that included Austria and those who supported a smaller Germany without Austria.
- The Parliament initially elected Archduke Johann of Austria as regent, but he declined the offer, leading to a search for a suitable monarch.
- Eventually, the Parliament offered the crown of a constitutional monarchy to King Frederick William IV of Prussia, but he rejected it, citing divine right and a lack of support from other German rulers.
- The Frankfurt Parliament faced increasing opposition and pressure from conservative forces, including the aristocracy and the military.
- The failure to secure a monarch and the lack of support from the ruling elites led to disillusionment among the members of the Parliament.
- The Parliament's attempts to assert its authority were undermined, and it gradually lost support and influence.
- The Frankfurt Parliament dissolved in May 1849, and its failure marked a setback for the aspirations of a unified and democratic Germany.
- The Frankfurt Parliament's legacy lies in its symbolic significance as an early attempt at German unification and its role in shaping the subsequent political developments in Germany.

The Frankfurt Parliament and the Drafting of the Constitution

- The Frankfurt Parliament faced significant challenges in drafting a constitution that could satisfy the diverse interests and aspirations of the German states.
- The parliamentarians debated various issues, including the nature of the German state, the balance of power between the central government and the individual states, and the role of different social groups.
- There were disagreements between liberals, conservatives, and more radical factions within the parliament.
- The liberal factions generally sought a constitutional monarchy with a strong central government and guarantees for civil liberties and individual rights.
- The conservatives, on the other hand, advocated for a more decentralized system with greater autonomy for the individual states and a limited role for the central government.
- The drafting of the constitution was a complex process that required compromises and negotiations among the parliamentarians.
- The parliament established several committees to work on different aspects of the constitution, such as the structure of government, civil rights, and the relationship between the central government and the states.
- The debates and discussions in the Frankfurt Parliament reflected the broader political and ideological divisions within German society.
- The parliamentarians faced challenges in finding common ground and reconciling the interests of different groups and regions.
- Despite these challenges, the Frankfurt Parliament managed to draft a constitution, known as the Frankfurt Constitution or

Paulskirchenverfassung.

- The constitution proposed a constitutional monarchy, a two-house parliament, and guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms.
- However, the Frankfurt Constitution faced significant opposition from conservative forces, including the rulers of many German states who were resistant to ceding power to a central authority.
- Ultimately, the Frankfurt Constitution was not implemented as it lacked the necessary support and legitimacy from the ruling elites and the broader population.
- The failure of the Frankfurt Parliament and the Frankfurt Constitution marked a setback for the aspirations of a unified and democratic Germany, and it highlighted the challenges of achieving consensus and political stability in a fragmented and diverse society.

The failure of the Frankfurt Parliament can be attributed to several factors:

- **Lack of popular support:** The Frankfurt Parliament failed to resonate with the working class and artisans who were looking for more radical social and economic reforms. The parliament's focus on liberal ideals and its rejection of certain demands from the workers led to a loss of faith and support among these groups.
- **Internal divides:** The parliament was divided between radical, liberal, and conservative factions. The lack of consensus and the presence of politically uncommitted individuals made it difficult to make progress and achieve unity. **Weak leadership and decision-making:** The choice of Heinrich Gagern as the leader of the parliament proved to be a poor decision. Gagern lacked the necessary assertiveness and management skills to effectively lead the assembly. The parliament's inability to make decisive decisions and effectively address challenges hindered its progress.
- **Lack of military power:** The Frankfurt Parliament had no army of its own and relied on the support of Prussia. However, Prussia was hesitant to commit its military resources to the parliament's cause, leading to a lack of military strength and influence.
- **Opposition from Austrian and Prussian authorities:** Austria and Prussia, the two most powerful states in Germany, were not supportive of the Frankfurt Parliament's goals. Austria aimed to maintain its own authority and prevent a strong unified Germany, while Prussia was sceptical of the parliament's intentions and reluctant to cede power to a central authority.
- **National conflicts and divisions:** The question of defining the boundaries of Germany and determining the inclusion or exclusion of certain regions, such as Austria and parts of Prussia, caused divisions and disagreements within the parliament. The Frankfurt Parliament struggled to address the complex national and regional dynamics within Germany.
- **Lack of decisiveness and cooperation:** The parliament's indecisiveness and willingness to cooperate with traditional authority figures and existing power structures limited its ability to bring about significant change and establish a unified Germany.

In the end, the Frankfurt Parliament failed to achieve its goals of creating a unified and democratic Germany. Its lack of popular support, internal divisions, weak leadership, opposition from Austrian and Prussian authorities, and the complexities of national dynamics contributed to its ultimate irrelevance and embarrassment.

The German revolutions of 1848-1849, including the events in Prussia and Berlin, ultimately failed for several reasons:

- **Frederick William IV's wavering stance:** Prussian King Frederick William IV initially appeared to be a potential ally of the Frankfurt Parliament and the revolution. He made concessions, agreed to a new constitution, and showed some liberal tendencies. However, his commitment to divine right authority and his attachment to the privileges of kingship led him to change his position and resist further reforms.
- **Lack of popular support:** The revolutions faced limited support from the rural population, which remained apathetic and disconnected from the urban uprisings. Many peasants and rural inhabitants were primarily interested in the removal of feudal powers and did not strongly identify with the broader revolutionary goals.
- **Internal divisions:** The revolutionary movement in Germany was characterized by divisions and tensions between liberals and radicals, proponents of Grossdeutschland (including Austria) and Kleindeutschland (excluding Austria), and conflicts between the middle class and working-class groups. These divisions weakened the unity and effectiveness of the revolution.
- **Conservative resistance:** Monarchs and conservative forces across Germany were determined to preserve their authority and resisted the revolutionary changes. They had strong armies at their disposal and were able to suppress uprisings, revoke constitutional changes, and restore their control. **The conservative backlash undermined the progress made by the revolutionaries. Loss of momentum and disillusionment:** Over time, enthusiasm for the revolution waned, and support for

radical change diminished. The failure of the Frankfurt Parliament, internal divisions, and the resurgence of conservative power eroded public trust in the revolutionary cause. Many people became disillusioned, and the old monarchs regained dominance.

- Lack of a unified and coordinated movement: The German revolutions lacked a unified and coordinated approach. Demonstrations and uprisings were scattered and localized, with different methods and demands. The absence of a cohesive and widespread people's movement hindered the revolution's ability to bring about significant change.
- Conservative strength and military power: The monarchs, particularly in Prussia and Austria, had strong armies and the means to enforce their authority. They were able to suppress uprisings, dissolve revolutionary assemblies, and assert their control over the state. The revolutionaries lacked the military power to challenge the conservative forces effectively.

Overall, a combination of factors, including the wavering stance of Frederick William IV, divisions within the revolutionary movement, conservative resistance, loss of popular support, and lack of military strength, contributed to the failure of the German revolutions of 1848-1849.