

A Casual Conversation: Caricature of Political Debates during the Revolution of 1848–49 (1849)

Abstract

The Revolution of 1848–49 saw the emergence of new opportunities for public discussion, for example in political associations that addressed the entire populace. This 1849 caricature entitled “Gemüthliche Unterhaltung” [“A Casual Conversation”] mocked such discussions, specifically their potential to lead to scenarios involving the loss of male control: the speaker bends over the table, swinging his fist and his newspaper in his opponent’s face; his chair falls backwards, bottles topple over. The more composed figure stands upright, calmly refers to the text in his hand, and does not speak. Controlled masculinity was considered both the ideal and the antithesis of public debate.

Source



A Casual Conversation

The upheaval that has set everything in motion in the political organization of our circumstances for the past year is also making itself felt in the civil and social relationships of all individuals. Certainly, everyone who has a heart for the general has noticed with pleasure how the separation, which was usually caused by differences in class and profession, has diminished to a significant degree; in particular, the comradely relationship in the citizens’ militias has contributed a great deal to this; – yet there also is a dark side that becomes increasingly evident. More and more, even among close acquaintances and friends, a fierce tone has emerged in the exchange of views, however – as a rule, the weaker the reasons the speaker can give for himself and his opinion, the fiercer it is; – there is a

veritable thunderclap of buzzwords, shouting, jumping up, and if one asks what it is about? – Nothing! – A newspaper article! – If you ask, “Did you quarrel?” the answer is: “Oh, no, it’s just a casual conversation.” We see such a scene here in our 9th sketch of contemporary life, completely drawn from life. – – This must now also be dealt with. Time will probably know how to bring forth positive results from this, too. People are already increasingly inclined to agree with those who defend their views with calmness, – already, people are ceasing to be amused by the screamers, – it won’t be long now until calmness and manliness will once again be at home in our wider circles, even in the inns and guardrooms, and raving, as a sign of immaturity, will be laughed at, ridiculed, and finally no longer be paid attention to.

Source: *Gemeindeblatt und Volksorgan für das Großherzogthum Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach*. 1849. No. 9.

Source: “Gemüthliche Unterhaltung” [“A Casual Conversation”], caricature by unknown artist, 1849. *Gemeindeblatt und Volksorgan für das Großherzogtum Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach*, 1849, No. 9; reprinted in Werner Greiling, “Revolution und Öffentlichkeit,” in Klaus Ries, ed., *Revolution an der Grenze. 1848/49 als nationales und regionales Ereignis*. St. Ingbert: Röhrig Verlag, 1999, p. 62.

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