



History of the *Deutschlandlied*



Composer: Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)



Lyrics: August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874)

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1. The chequered history of the *Deutschlandlied*

An anthem is a song for special occasions. In bygone days, a national anthem was used to celebrate the ruling regents – at least in the 18th century when national anthems first became fashionable. Later most of the anthems still sung today were established following a revolution or national liberation struggles, for example in France, Poland and the United States. The anthems were therefore highly symbolic for their respective citizens. This is why the popular songs therefore reflect an unbroken, self-confident national tradition.

The situation in Germany after the last World War was quite different. The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany promulgated in 1949 did not lay down a national anthem. Although the intentions had been quite different when it was written, parts of the *Deutschlandlied* which had been used up until that time including "Germany over everything" – at least between the Meuse, the Neman, the Adige and the Belt – were no longer fitting for a German national anthem.

2. The history of the lyrics and the melody

The poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874) was a professor of literature. As a radical democrat and follower of the so-called *Freisinnige*, a movement which developed into liberalism in Germany, he later lost his chair in literature and linguistics at the Silesian Friedrich Wilhelms University in Wrocław due to comments in the *Unpolitische Lieder* in 1842.

He wrote the *Deutschlandlied* while on holiday on Heligoland, back then under English rule, in August 1841. Soon afterwards, on 4 September, the publisher Friedrich Campe in Hamburg published the first copies. The melody was Joseph Haydn's "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser, Unsern guten Kaiser Franz!" ("God preserve Francis the Emperor").

So at least as far as the melody is concerned, the German national anthem was originally written to celebrate a monarch. Haydn (1732-1809) composed the piece in 1796. On 12 February 1797, the piece was performed for the first time at the birthday of the Austrian Regent Franz II as the *Kaiserhymne* (Emperor's Hymn).

Later, Haydn developed the melody of the *Kaiserhymne* further in the second movement of the string quartet Op. 76,3 which is known as the *Kaiserquartett* (Emperor Quartet).

With his lyrics, Hoffmann von Fallersleben was pointing to the utopian idea of a united German nation. Since 1815, the area in which German was mainly spoken had after all been made up of 39 individual states (one empire, five kingdoms, one electorate, seven grand duchies, ten duchies, eleven principalities and four towns subordinate directly to the Kaiser) which formed the German Federation at the Vienna Congress. There was no head of state, no national administration or legislation, customs or trade area or army.

It was above all the critical intellectuals who publicly demanded an end to all these small states and princely rulers and the founding of a German nation-state.

The song was played for the first time on 5 October 1841 during a torchlight procession in Hamburg.

3. How the *Deutschlandlied* became the national anthem

It was not until Bismarck founded the Empire in 1871 that "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" was really anchored amongst the population. Yet it still was not enough to make it the national anthem. The "Wacht am Rhein" was replaced by "Heil dir im Siegerkranz, Herrscher

des Vaterlands!". Even back then, there was no lack of critics for whom the first verse went too far. After all, the Meuse flowed largely through France and Belgium and the Adige in Italy. The Belt was in Denmark and the Neman today flows through Lithuania.

The *Deutschlandlied* was first sung in public in 1890 in Heligoland which was returned to Germany in exchange for Zanzibar.

On 11 August 1922, exactly 81 years after completion, the first Social Democratic Government made the *Deutschlandlied* into the national anthem. But interestingly, the term "national anthem" was not used. President Ebert put it thus in his address "Unity and right and freedom! This trinity from the poet's song expressed the yearning of all Germans in times of inner division and oppression; now it is to accompany us on our difficult road to a better future...". In the Weimar period, the song was even given a fourth verse but this was soon forgotten.

Yet it can only be seen as a bitter twist of fate that the Social Democrats thereby gave Hitler the national anthem including the first verse which was disastrously abused. Only a few weeks after coming to power, the National Socialist leadership ruled it be sung in conjunction with a SA song. From then on, the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* was played after the first verse of the *Deutschlandlied* (the other two being banned).

With the downfall of the Reich, the *Deutschlandlied* was therefore banned. The Allies made singing it a punishable offence. It was played for the first time illegally in 1948 at a rally of the Deutsche Reichspartei in Wolfsburg. Politicians and the occupying forces alike had obviously underestimated the determination of the Germans, as Theodor Heuss, the first Federal President, later admitted. Therefore, members of several parties put forward a motion shortly after the founding of the Federal Republic to declare all three verses as the national anthem.

But Heuss wanted to underline the democratic new start also with a new anthem. So he replaced the *Deutschlandlied* with the melody "*Ich hab' mich ergeben*" in August 1950. At the same time, he commissioned the poet Rudolf Alexander Schröder and the composer Carl Orff to write a new anthem for the Germans. When Orff declined, Hermann Reutter took his place and created the new national anthem "*Land des Glaubens, deutsches Land*", premiered on New Year's Eve in 1950. Yet the anthem was not well received by the public. What is more, in a survey conducted in autumn 1951, three-quarters of all West Germans said they

were in favour of keeping the *Deutschlandlied*. Furthermore, about a third of these supporters advocated singing the third rather than the first verse. Yet the Allied ruling banned the *Deutschlandlied* in its entirety.

Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer experienced this at first hand in April when he made a point at starting to sing the old anthem in Parliament – and swiftly caused a political stir. Even when many of the singing parliamentarians got to the third verse, the High Commissioners of the Allies were jumping up in annoyance. This melody had too many associations of National Socialist racial insanity and aspirations of global domination. At a party for his 75th birthday in early 1951, Adenauer tried to encourage his guests to sing the third verse with him on the steps of Bonn City Hall. Yet the band thwarted his plans, because the old anthem was not on the programme. Nevertheless, Adenauer got his own way. The Karlsruhe CDU party conference in October 1951 voted unanimously to ask Federal President Heuss to lift the ban on the *Deutschlandlied*. At least the third verse was to reflect German traditions. In a Federal Government bulletin, Adenauer pointed out shortly afterwards that no other song was so rooted in German hearts as this one.

In May, he attained his goal in correspondence with Heuss. The third verse by Hoffmann von Fallersleben was to be sung once more on all state occasions. Whether this meant only this verse had become the national anthem or indeed the whole *Deutschlandlied* was a source of unresolved wrangling between legal scholars for 38 years. Only in March 1990 did the Federal Constitutional Court resolve that only the third verse was granted protection under criminal law.

Yet there is still no formal law on the national anthem of the Federal Republic of Germany.

It was former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker who agreed in correspondence with Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl in November 1991 – mirroring the historical correspondence between Heuss and Adenauer 40 years earlier – that the third verse of the *Deutschlandlied* again be declared the national anthem of the reunited Germany.

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