

The early years of Prussian rule in Sleswick were a period of transition; the final destiny of the Duchy was still undecided. Bismarck was chiefly occupied in thwarting the hopes of the 'Schleswig-Holstein' party; and during 1865 the rule of the Prussian police over North Sleswick was comparatively mild. Bismarck carried his policy of favouring the Danish population to such a point that he caused the local official gazette to publish the following declaration:—

The oppression of the Danish nationality in North Sleswick would be not only unjust, but also extremely impolitic, because it would produce a constant agitation among the inhabitants, and would have the necessary result of causing the North Sleswickers to turn their gaze continually towards the north; they would lose their sympathy with the Duchies, and would maintain their friendly feeling towards Denmark.

In fact, the 'Schleswig-Holsteiners' were told that they would only frustrate their cherished hopes if they endeavoured to germanize their Danish fellow citizens. Very different was the tone which Prussia adopted when both elements in Sleswick, the Danish and the German, had definitely been brought under her rule.

While the 'Schleswig-Holsteiners' saw their last hopes fade with the Austrian defeat in 1866, the Danes gained a definite promise in the Treaty of Prague, 1866, a promise which, though never carried out and cancelled in 1878, still forms the Magna Charta of the Danes in North Sleswick.

By the fifth article of this treaty, inserted on the suggestion of Napoleon III, the population of the northern districts of Sleswick should be ceded to Denmark, when it expressed the desire of a union with Denmark by means of a free vote.