

The birth of the Empire

On 18 January 1871 the final act in a long-running and complex European drama was played against the magnificent backdrop of the Versailles Palace near Paris. Before an audience of assorted German princes and State dignitaries the King of Prussia, William I, accepted the Crown of the new united German Empire. Otto Von Bismarck, William's Chief Minister and a prime mover in the unification process, delivered the proclamation:

We William, by the Grace of God, King of Prussia, and after the German Princes and free cities have unanimously appealed to us to renew the Imperial dignity, which has been in abeyance for more than sixty years, hereby inform you that we regard it as our duty to the whole Fatherland to respond to this summons of the allied German Princes and free cities to assume the German Imperial title.

The announcement of the new German Empire was unquestionably significant. With it disappeared a Central European map of bewildering complexity. The dozens of independent and semi-independent states, which had filled the space loosely termed 'Germany' since the Middle Ages, were finally replaced by a single nation with a common name and an Emperor whose authority applied to some 41 million people. After 1890 the impact of this creation was to be felt on a global scale, a fact which renders the emergence of Germany one of the most important developments of the Nineteenth Century.



OTTO VON BISMARCK

EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

How was unity achieved?

The process by which Germany came to be unified has been an area of constant debate amongst historians of the period. The following sources will provide you with an introduction to some of the main issues surrounding the achievement of German unification.

Source A

Germany doesn't look to Prussia's liberalism, but to its power: Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden can indulge in liberalism, but no one will expect them to undertake Prussia's role; Prussia must gather and consolidate her strength in readiness for the favourable moment, which has already been missed several times; Prussia's boundaries according to the Vienna treaties are not favourable to a healthy political life; not by means of speeches and majority verdicts will the great decisions of the time be made – that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but by iron and blood...

Otto Von Bismarck in a speech to the budget commission of the Prussian Landtag (September 1862)

Source B

The German Empire was created more by coal and iron than by blood and iron.

JM Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919)

Source C

When the army has been brought to such a state as to command respect, then I shall take the first opportunity to declare war with Austria, burst asunder the German Confederation, bring the middle and smaller states into subjection and give Germany a national union under the leadership of Prussia.

Bismarck to Disraeli in 1862, quoted in *William Carr, Germany 1815–45* (1969)

Source D

In later life he [Bismarck] gave out that he had always intended to fight Austria and to unify Germany; and this version was generally accepted by his admirers and by most historians. In reality, Bismarck's greatness lay not in mastering events, but in going with events so as to seem to master them.

AJP Taylor, *The Course of German History* (1945)

Source E

Bismarck owed his success to the disunion and lack of will of his opponents. A coalition, or even a prolonged war, would have ruined him.

AJP Taylor, as above

- 1 What does Bismarck's phrase 'iron and blood' (Source A) suggest about the method by which he expected Germany's future to be settled?
- 2 How do Sources B and E account for the establishment of a united German Empire?
- 3 Bismarck's ideas about unity had little to do with German nationalism; he was more interested in the Prussian conquest of the other German states. How do Sources A and C support this view?
- 4 The role of Bismarck in the unification process is an area of intense debate. Some regard him as a master-planner, others as an opportunist. Which of these descriptions best fits the content of Sources C, D and E?
- 5 '...Bismarck was an expert at the well-chosen phrase that was intended not only for his audience but also, in part at least, for posterity.' (Cowie and Wolfson, *Years of Nationalism* (1985)) Assess the value of Source C in the light of this information.
- 6 In isolation, are any of these sources likely to provide the definitive explanation of German unification? How useful are such sources to the historian?

The barriers to unity

Bismarck's claim that it had always been his intention to fight Austria and to unite the German states under Prussian leadership carried the suggestion that unification was merely the inevitable consequence of strong leadership and war. However, there was almost certainly nothing inevitable about the emergence of a united German Empire. For the first half of the Nineteenth Century at least, nothing could have been further from the minds of those who determined the fortunes of Germany's leading states.

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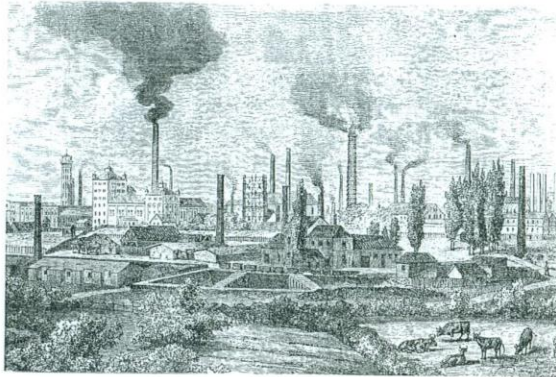
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The Prussian economy

The failure of the 1848 revolutions, the collapse of the Erfurt Union, the ascendancy of Austria; in 1851 the prospect of a national solution to the German problem seemed as remote as ever. It was true that the idea of a unified state persisted in the hearts and minds of German liberals and nationalists, but as the historian E.J. Feuchtwanger pointed out, '1848 demonstrated crushingly the impotence of ideas without power...' This was a lesson well learned by Bismarck who, in his 'blood and iron' speech of 1862, signposted the way to eventual unification: 'Germany doesn't look to Prussia's liberalism but to its power.'

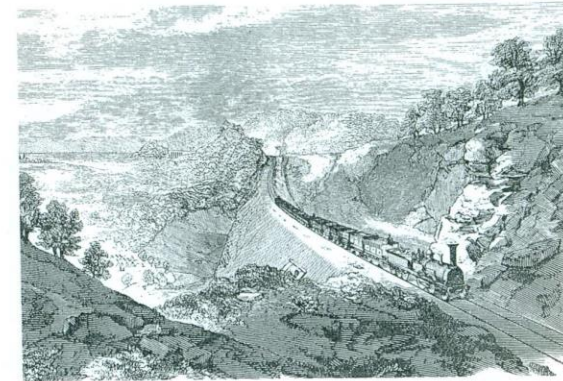
The basis of Prussian power was, to a large extent, economic. Domination of the Zollverein was important but perhaps equally significant was the period of rapid industrialization which occurred after 1850. As it came to be acknowledged by men like Bismarck that Prussia would probably have to fight Austria, the ability to do so became the responsibility not so much of the Prussian generals as of the captains of Prussian industry.

Prussia's industrial resources were unrivalled on the Continent. In the Ruhr, the Saar and Silesia, deposits of coal and iron were abundant. It was in these regions, with their mines, steel works and blast furnaces, that Prussian power was forged.



KRUPP'S FACTORIES AT ESSEN

It was certainly significant that at the Great Exhibition of 1851, one of the proudest exhibits of the industrialist Alfred Krupp was a superbly-made field-gun with a cast-steel barrel. During the coming decades, Krupp's foundries in the Ruhr displayed, with equal pride, an ever increasing capacity for the production of high-quality armaments. Financially, Prussia was in a very healthy condition. Money was raised from a wide selection of sources including trading revenues from the Zollverein and interest from railway investment.



RAILWAYS BEGIN TO BIND THE GERMAN STATES TOGETHER. THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE PADERBORN-MARBURG LINE IN 1855

The railways were also significant in their own right. In 1845 there had been some 3280 km of track in Germany. By 1860 11,633 km had been completed. The railways acted as a binding agent, bringing together the scattered territories of Germany. Prussian military chiefs were quick to see their potential for the rapid mobilization of troops and equipment. As a result, the railways were constructed to a strategic plan determined by the needs of the army.

Since Prussia's challenge to Austria would ultimately come on the battlefield, it was essential she should possess the financial and physical resources to deploy well-equipped troops quickly to the place of need. Prussia's industrial revolution provided this capacity.

Unification by force (1864-71)

For half a century German liberals and nationalists had chased after an illusive prize: a united German state. For the greater part of that time the quarry had remained hidden from sight and in 1848, after a brief period of capture, was released by Europe's gamekeepers, the conservative ruling class. Unification was not to be the product of discussion and consensus and it could not be maintained by liberal principles and parliaments. Unification was the immediate result of war. Prussian soldiers on foot and on horseback, with rifles and with cannon, made Germany a reality by force. In three short wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870-71), Prussian power subdued the resistance of the minor German states and excluded Austria from a Prussian-dominated German Empire.

However, the apparent simplicity of the unification process during these seven years is enormously deceiving. The period has provided exceptionally fertile ground for discussion and debate amongst historians. The key issues centre around three important questions:

- Did Bismarck possess a blueprint for unification; an overall plan which he followed step by step to its inevitable and predicted outcome?
 - Did Bismarck owe his success to a coincidental gathering of favourable international and domestic circumstances?
 - Was Bismarck merely an opportunist, cleverly exploiting the mistakes of his adversaries and taking calculated risks which happened to be successful?
- The remainder of this chapter will consider these questions.

The Polish Revolt (1863)

Events In 1863 disturbances occurred in Russian Poland. The great European Powers sympathized with the Poles but Bismarck did not. He dispatched an envoy to Russia where discussions produced an agreement known as the Alvensleben Convention. This allowed for co-operation in the suppression of the rising. Prussia was condemned by the other European Powers but succeeded in securing the gratitude of an otherwise isolated Russia.



POLISH REBELS ON THE MARCH

The Bismarckian interpretation According to the Bismarck blueprint, this event offered the opportunity to secure Russian neutrality in the forthcoming clash with Austria. Bismarck had to be certain that the Holy Alliance was truly dead since he could not risk engaging Russia as well as Austria on the battlefield. This, then, was the first stage in the process of unification.

Commentary In a letter to his sister in 1861, Bismarck revealed his feelings towards the Poles:

Strike the Poles so that they despair for their lives. I have every sympathy for their plight, but if we want to survive we cannot but exterminate them.

Bismarck disliked the Poles for their Catholic faith and feared them for their radical tradition. The Alvensleben Convention was in all probability an attempt to gain security against possible disturbances in Prussia's Polish territories. Bismarck was concerned that Tsar Alexander II might pursue a more liberal policy towards Poland and thus encourage demands for similar treatment amongst Prussian Poles. Above all, a more relaxed Russian policy might lead to the realization of Bismarck's greatest fear: a Franco-Russian friendship.

Bismarck's interpretation of the Polish Revolt (as the first stage of a calculated plan to wage war on Austria and unite the remaining German states under Prussian leadership) must be challenged. At the time of the revolt the Prussian accord with Russia led to international hostility as Britain and France unreservedly attacked Bismarck's actions. William I lost confidence in his chief minister and Bismarck was forced to belittle publicly the importance of Alvensleben. His elevated position in Prussian affairs was placed in considerable jeopardy by the Polish episode. The outcome of these events was favourable. Bismarck *did* manage to secure the friendship of Russia which was to be useful in the war of 1866. However, it seems most unlikely that he actually planned to arrive at this destination via such a potentially dangerous path.

Schleswig-Holstein (1864)

Events The Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein had traditionally been ruled by Denmark. However, since Holstein was mainly German-speaking and Schleswig too had a German element, they had become the focus for German nationalist ambitions. In 1863 the King of Denmark, Frederick VII, died without an heir. By prior international arrangement, the vacant throne was to pass to Christian of Glücksburg. However, in the event his claim was challenged by the German Prince of Augustenburg, a move passionately supported by German nationalists. A war to settle the issue seemed imminent. Bismarck's attitude to Augustenburg's claim was clear:

...I cannot regard it as in the interest of Prussia to wage a war in order, as the most favourable result, to install in Schleswig-Holstein a new Grand Duke, who in fear of Prussian lust for annexation, will vote against us in the Diet and whose government, in spite of the gratitude due to Prussia for its installation, will be a ready object of Austrian machination...

1 What were Bismarck's reasons for not supporting the claim of Augustenburg?

2 Does Bismarck's conduct over this issue lend support to the criticism that he had no real interest in German nationalism?



Bismarck wanted the territories for Prussia and successfully enrolled Austrian assistance in achieving his goal. Austria, aware of the intense nationalist feeling aroused by the issue, was unable to resist Prussia's invitation to join in settling the argument by force. Early in 1864, Prussian and Austrian troops moved into the Duchies. Denmark failed to obtain the support of any Great Power and was soon defeated. The Duchies were then placed in the joint custody of Prussia and Austria although the question of their long-term fate became a source of acute tension between the two Powers. The situation was resolved in August 1865 with the Convention of Gastein, which gave Austria responsibility for Holstein and Prussia the right to administer Schleswig.

The Bismarckian interpretation Having decided upon the necessity of fighting Austria, Bismarck required a pretext upon which to go to war. In later years he claimed to have deliberately provoked Austria over the Schleswig-Holstein affair in order to draw her onto the battlefield.

Commentary In one sense at least, Bismarck's interpretation of the Schleswig-Holstein issue, and its role in the process of unification, is accurate. When war between Austria and Prussia broke out in June 1866, it was the question of the future of the Duchies which provided the immediate cause. However, it must be considered doubtful whether this had been Bismarck's deliberate intention all along. Bismarck's only clear policy was his determination to prevent any attempt by the Austrians to reassert their leadership of the German states. Bismarck certainly entertained the idea of

a united 'Kleindeutschland' under Prussian domination, but he was not committed to fighting a war to make this possible; a diplomatic solution would have been quite acceptable. It seems likely that Bismarck was not following a set plan but pursuing a 'wait-and-see' policy:

'I think it more useful to continue for a while the present marriage despite small domestic quarrels, and if a divorce becomes necessary, to take the prospects as they then prevail rather than to cut the bond now...'

Bismarck in 1865 on the Austro-Prussian alliance

When Bismarck agreed to the Convention of Gastein he was keeping his options open. The Gastein proposals originated from Austria and were viewed by Bismarck as being something of a concession. By delaying the final decision over the future of the German states, he hoped to extract further concessions; perhaps Austria would even give up the states of the north without a fight. The historian AJP Taylor sums up Bismarck's 'policy':

'Bismarck was a diplomatic genius, inexperienced in war and disliking its risks. He may well have hoped to manoeuvre Austria out of the duchies, perhaps even out of the headship of Germany, by diplomatic strokes; marvels of this sort were not beyond him in later life. His diplomacy in this period seems rather calculated to frighten Austria than to prepare for war.'

AJP Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (1954)

It was not until 28 February 1866, at a meeting of the Prussian Crown Council, that war with Austria was acknowledged to be inevitable; but even as late as May 1866, Bismarck was prepared to consider a proposal to settle the issue diplomatically. The suggestion made by Anton von Gablenz to partition the German states foundered because Austria required Bismarck to guarantee the position of the Habsburgs in Venetia, something Bismarck felt unable to undertake.

War with Austria (1866)

Events Bismarck was aware that if a war with Austria became necessary, then the attitude of the French would be important in deciding the outcome. In October 1865 he made an informal visit to Biarritz and met with the French leader, Napoleon III. No binding arrangements were made at Biarritz, but in sounding out the French Emperor, Bismarck was able to convince himself that if Venetia could be secured for Italy then Napoleon was unlikely to intervene on behalf of Austria. On 8 April 1866, Bismarck arranged an alliance with Italy to remain in force for three months. Italy was to support Prussia if war broke out during that time, and in return Italy would be allowed to absorb Venetia into her territories. Bismarck's actions alarmed the Habsburgs who were forced to begin mobilizing their troops. In this way Bismarck was able to claim that Austria had acted as the aggressor.

On 1 June 1866, Austria appealed to the Confederation to settle the question of the Duchies. This broke with the terms of the Convention of Gastein and Bismarck responded by occupying Holstein. Austria made an appeal to the Diet for assistance. This was granted and the states of the Confederation were ordered to begin mobilizing against Prussia. Bismarck

reacted by declaring the Confederation dissolved and sent troops to occupy the northern states of Hesse-Cassel, Saxony and Hanover. The major engagement between Prussian and Austrian troops came on 3 July at Königgrätz (Sadowa) and resulted in defeat for the Habsburgs. Bismarck insisted on bringing hostilities to an end at this point and concluded a moderate peace with Austria. By the Treaty of Prague (August 1866) Austria was forced to give up Venetia to Italy, to agree to the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein by Prussia, and to acknowledge the ending of the German Confederation. This was partially replaced by a North German Confederation which comprised all the German states north of the River Main in a union dominated by Prussia.



KING WILLIAM I (CENTRE) AT THE BATTLE OF KÖNIGGRÄTZ

The Bismarckian interpretation According to Bismarck's calculations, a successful war with Austria was only possible if the French could be persuaded not to intervene. This he claimed to have achieved at Biarritz. Then, as part of his pre-planned scheme, it would be essential to treat Austria moderately after she had been defeated:

'We had to avoid wounding Austria too severely; we had to avoid leaving behind in her unnecessary bitterness of feeling or desire for revenge; we ought rather to reserve the possibility of becoming friends again with our adversary of the moment, and in any case to regard the Austrian state as a piece on the European chessboard and the renewal of friendly relations with her as a move open to us. If Austria were severely injured, she would become the ally of France and of every opponent of ours...'

Bismarck, *Reflections and Reminiscences* (1898)

1 What were Bismarck's reasons for arranging a non-punitive peace with Austria?

2 If Bismarck could achieve a restoration of friendly relations with Austria, how might this help in the final war of unification which he claimed to have been planning against France?

Commentary When Bismarck went to war with Austria, he was taking advantage of an exceptionally favourable international situation. He was indeed fortunate that:

'Both Russia and Great Britain had virtually eliminated themselves from the European balance; this gave the years between 1864 and 1866 a character unique in recent history.'

AJP Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (1954)

In Bismarck's bid to advance Prussia's position in Germany, he was able to count on Russia remaining neutral. Alexander II was appreciative of the support given during the Polish Revolt of 1863, but more important, the old Austro-Russian partnership had been acrimoniously dissolved during the Crimean War; a development over which Bismarck had no control but which he was able to exploit skilfully. Russia never forgave the Habsburgs for their anti-Russian stance during the war, and welcomed any opportunity to see them humiliated.

British observers failed to detect any significant danger in the Prussian bid for power. The real threats to a stable Europe came, according to British opinion, from Russia and France; a strong Central European Power offered the prospect of a counterbalance to the ambitions of these traditional rivals.

Contrary to Bismarck's later version of events, the meeting at Biarritz did not guarantee the neutrality of the French in a forthcoming war with Austria. Bismarck believed that he had temporarily bought the neutrality of France with the promise of Venetia for Italy, but he could not be certain how long this would last. Indeed, on 12 June 1866 Napoleon signed a secret agreement with Austria in which he was offered territory in the Prussian Rhineland if Austria were victorious. In the war with Austria Bismarck was taking a considerable chance. He could not accurately predict a rapid victory and therefore ran the risk of the international situation changing. This was probably the real reason why he fought so hard to bring the war to an end after Königgrätz and insisted on a moderate peace. In a letter to his wife in July he wrote:

'If we are not excessive in our demands and do not believe that we have conquered the world, we will attain a peace that is worth our effort. But we are just as quickly intoxicated as we are plunged into dejection, and I have the thankless task of pouring water into the bubbling wine and making it clear that we do not live alone in Europe but with three other Powers that hate and envy us.'

Bismarck, quoted in Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (1978)

Bismarck wanted to end the war before the other Powers intervened to reverse the victory of Königgrätz. It seems highly unlikely that he was looking ahead to a war with France to complete the unification of Germany.

The final stage: war with France

The Peace of Prague brought considerable gains to Prussia and concluded the first major political unification of the German states north of the River Main. For the time being Bismarck was content to allow the states of the south to remain independent. Despite this there were strong forces in

existence which appeared to suggest that this arrangements would not last for long. Pressure was mounting on Bismarck from nationalists and liberals within Prussia to finish the job. Bismarck had certainly not given up all influence in the south; even before the Treaty of Prague was signed, he had arranged secret military alliances with the southern states which committed them to fight with Prussia if she were attacked. In 1867, the south was incorporated into the new Zollparlament, an extension of the Zollverein which, it was hoped, would encourage the idea of close co-operation between north and south.

For France, the outcome of the Prussian victory was disturbing. She gained nothing from the peace settlement and found that she now had a powerful and ambitious Protestant neighbour. French public opinion was humiliated and demanded territorial compensation. However, Napoleon's attempts to gain land (first in Belgium and later Luxembourg) were rejected by Bismarck. He understood that a war with France was a real possibility, and that its appeal to German nationalism could bring the south German states into a German Empire. However, there is little to suggest that he was planning to go to war with France in order to conclude the unification process.

The Hohenzollern candidature The episode which provoked the war between France and Prussia began in 1868 in Spain. Here, a revolution had deposed the monarch, Isabella II. A new king was sought to head a constitutional government, and a request was made to Prince Leopold, a member of the same Hohenzollern family as William I of Prussia. Bismarck was a keen supporter of the candidature:

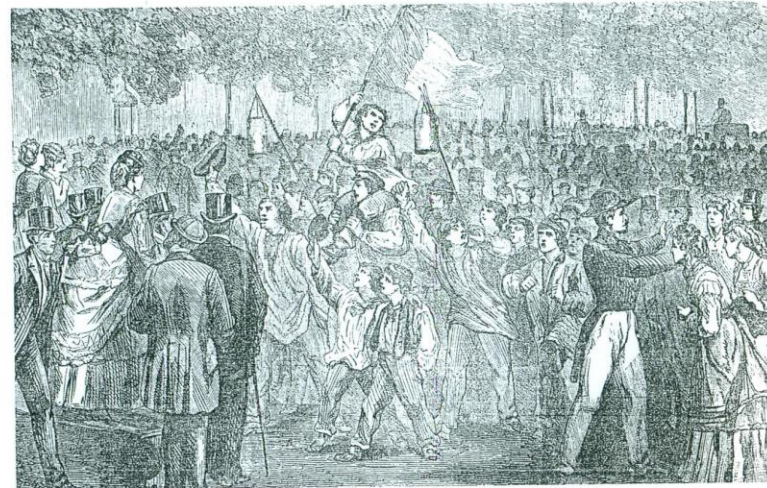
'Acceptance of the Spanish Royal Crown by a Prince of Your Majesty's illustrious House would strengthen existing sympathies between two nations...The Spaniards would have a feeling of gratitude towards Germany...For Germany it is desirable to have on the other side of France a country on whose sympathies we can rely...French peaceableness towards Germany will always wax or wane in proportion to the dangers of war with Germany. We have in the long run to look for the preservation of peace not to the goodwill of France but to the impression created by our position of strength...The prosperity of Spain and German trade with her would receive a powerful impetus under Hohenzollern rule...In the event of a rejection, the wishes of the Spaniards would probably turn to Bavaria...Spain would have a ruling house which looked for support to France and Rome, maintaining contact with anti-national elements in Germany and affording them a secure if remote rallying point...'

Bismarck to William I (9 March 1870)

The French found the candidature of Leopold completely unacceptable, fearing that it would place a Prussian puppet on the throne of their southern neighbour. War-fever gripped the popular imagination and Napoleon found himself compelled to demand assurances that Prussia would detach herself permanently from Spanish affairs. When Bismarck doctored the Ems Telegram which contained William I's reply (see *Examining the Evidence* opposite), Napoleon could only follow the outraged demands of his people and declare war on Prussia.



PRINCE LEOPOLD



PARISIANS CELEBRATE THE DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST PRUSSIA

1 What were Bismarck's reasons for supporting the Hohenzollern candidature?

2 Bismarck was concerned to show Prussia in a position of strength in order to dissuade France from contemplating war. Why did he believe a war with France might be likely?

3 What is your opinion of the suggestion that Bismarck supported Leopold in order to provoke a war with France by which he could complete the unification of Germany?

EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Did Bismarck plan the Franco-Prussian War?

Source A

Do not believe that I love war. I have seen enough of war to abhor it profoundly. The terrible scenes I have witnessed, will never cease to haunt my mind. I shall never consent to a war that is avoidable, much less seek it. But this war with France will surely come. It will be clearly forced upon us by the French Emperor. I see that clearly.

Bismarck (1867)

Source B

That German unity could be promoted by actions involving force I think is self-evident. But there is a quite different question, and that has to do with the precipitation of a powerful catastrophe and the responsibility of choosing the time for it. A voluntary intervention in the evolution of history, which is determined by purely subjective factors, results only in the shaking down of unripe fruit, and that Germany unity is no ripe fruit at this time leaps, in my opinion, to the eye. If the time that lies ahead works in the interest of unity as much as the period since the accession of Frederick the Great has done...then we can look to the future calmly and leave the rest to our successors.

Bismarck to the Prussian envoy in Munich (February 1869)

Source C

His Majesty writes to me: 'Count Benedetti spoke to me on the promenade, in order to demand from me, finally in a very importunate manner, that I should authorise him to telegraph at once that I bound myself for all future time never again to give my consent if the Hohenzollerns should renew their candidature. I refused at last somewhat sternly, as it is neither right nor possible to undertake engagements of this kind *à tout jamais*. Naturally I told him that I had as yet received no news, and as he was earlier informed about Paris and Madrid than myself, he could clearly see that my government once more had no hand in the matter.' His Majesty has since received a letter from the Prince. His Majesty having told Count Benedetti that he was awaiting news from the Prince, has decided, with reference to the above demand, upon the representation of Count Eulenburg and myself, not to receive Count Benedetti again, but only to let him be informed through an aide-de-camp: That his Majesty had now received from the Prince confirmation of the news which Benedetti had already received from Paris, and had nothing further to say to the ambassador. His Majesty leaves it to your Excellency whether Benedetti's fresh demand and its rejection should not be at once communicated both to our ambassadors and to the press.

Original text of the Ems Telegraph, from Heinrich Abeken to Bismarck (13 July 1870)

Source D

After the news of the renunciation of the hereditary Prince of Hohenzollern had been officially communicated to the Imperial government of France by the Royal government of Spain, the French ambassador further demanded of his Majesty, the King, at Ems, that he would authorise him to telegraph to Paris that his Majesty, the King, bound himself for all time never again to give his consent, should the Hohenzollerns renew their candidature. His Majesty, the King, thereupon decided not to receive the French ambassador again, and sent the aide-de-camp on duty to tell him that his Majesty had nothing further to communicate to the ambassador.

Bismarck's text of the Ems Telegram edited for publication

Source E

I went on to explain: 'If in execution of His Majesty's order, I at once communicate this text...not only to the newspapers but by telegraph to all our embassies it will be known in Paris before midnight...and will have the effect of a red rag on the French bull...Success, however, depends essentially upon the impression which the origination of the war makes upon us and others: it is important that we should be the ones attacked.'

Bismarck, *Reflections and Reminiscences* (1898)

- 1 What evidence is contained in Source B to suggest that Bismarck was not planning a war to complete the process of German unification?
- 2 Examine Source C carefully, then arrange the following events in the correct chronological sequence.



WILLIAM I AND BENEDETTI AT EMS

TALKING POINT

Unification: Variations on a theme

For Bismarck and the German liberals the concept of unification had different meanings. Consider the chart below and decide which interpretation was most appropriate to the German state which emerged in 1871.

Bismarck

Exclusion of Austria from German affairs and the establishment of a *Kleindeutschland*.
Prussian absorption of lesser German states.
Universal adoption of Prussian system of government – authoritarian monarchy.

Liberals

Exclusion of Austria (but some supported a *Grossdeutsch* solution).
Voluntary surrender of regional sovereignty.
Adoption of constitutional parliamentary government – development of liberal institutions.

- William I informed of Hohenzollern decision not to accept the Spanish throne.
 - Benedetti asks William I for permission to send a telegram to Paris containing an undertaking on behalf of William not to consent to any future Hohenzollern candidature.
 - Benedetti informed by Paris of Hohenzollern decision not to accept the Spanish throne.
 - William I communicates to Benedetti his intention to say nothing more about the Hohenzollern candidature.
 - William I refuses to give permission for telegram to be sent by Benedetti to Paris in the absence of any direct information on the Hohenzollern decision.
- 3 (a) Attempt a similar sequencing exercise using the information in Source D.
(b) Which specific stages of the Ems negotiations does Bismarck omit from his version of events?
(c) What effect do these omissions have on the tone of the Ems Telegram?
(d) Suggest what effect this might have had on French public opinion?
 - 4 Does the fact that Bismarck amended the Ems Telegram provide conclusive proof that he alone was responsible for causing the Franco-Prussian War?
 - 5 Using your conclusions to questions 2 and 3 and the information in Source E, present a counter-argument to Bismarck's statements in Source A.
 - 6 In Source E Bismarck appears to be keen to take responsibility for engineering the French declaration of war on Prussia. Given the source and date of this extract explain:
(a) why Bismarck assumes this responsibility;
(b) how reliable you believe this extract to be when determining Bismarck's role in provoking the Franco-Prussian War.

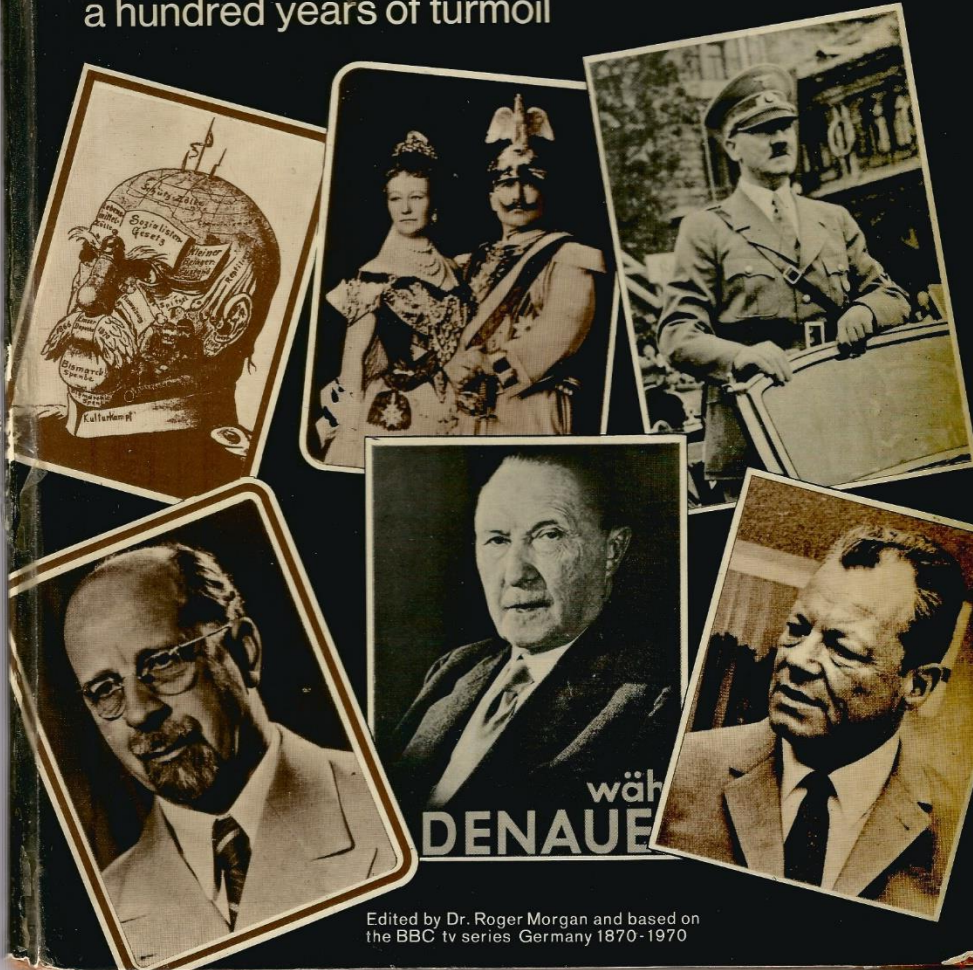
The Franco-Prussian War (1870–71)

As Bismarck had hoped, nationalist feeling led the south German states to fight alongside Prussia against France. The French, facing a better organized and better equipped army, quickly sustained a number of defeats. The decisive Prussian victory was won at Sedan in September 1870. Paris fell in January 1871 and a preliminary peace was arranged. The terms of this settlement were ratified by the Treaty of Frankfurt in May. The French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were annexed by Prussia, and France was forced to pay an indemnity of 5000 million francs. An army of occupation was to remain for four years until the indemnity was paid.

Four months before the signing of the Frankfurt Treaty the German Empire was proclaimed at Versailles. The southern states, fuelled by nationalist passions and aware that their only chance of lasting security lay with Prussia, finally gave up their independence and joined with the states of the north to complete the process of German unification.

Germany 1870-1970

a hundred years of turmoil



Edited by Dr. Roger Morgan and based on
the BBC tv series Germany 1870-1970

Chapter 2

Machine Power

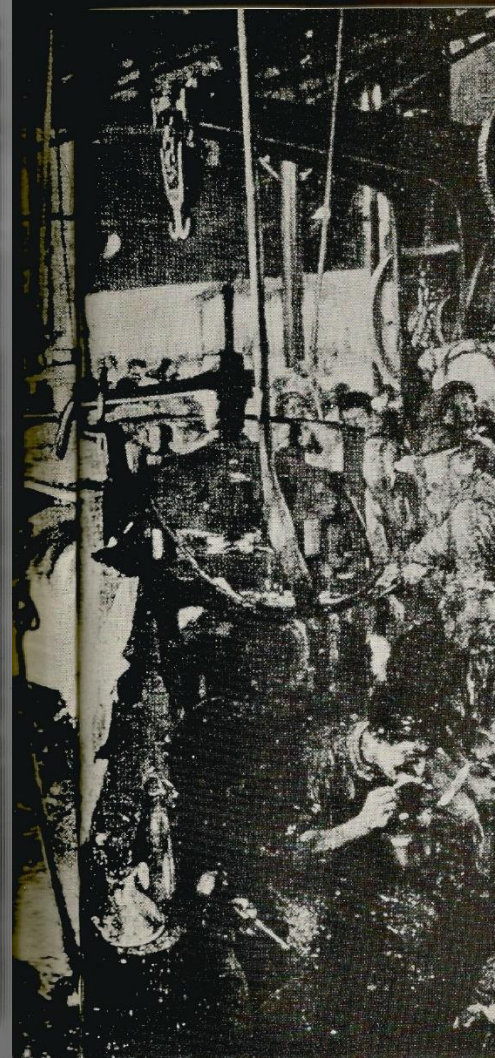
'The German Empire was built more truly on coal and iron than on blood and iron.' *Maynard Keynes.*

In the middle of the last century, the annual coal consumption of the city of London alone was greater than the total annual production of all the mines in Prussia, and the British gas works in Berlin symbolised the dominance of British patents and products. But within a generation, a united Germany was competing vigorously in British markets and had joined Britain and America as one of the most considerable of the modern industrial powers.

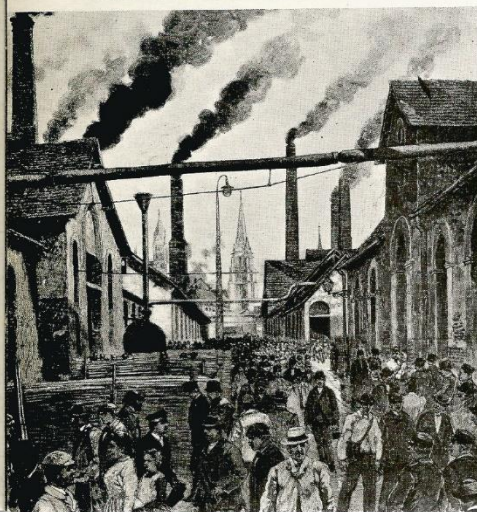
Germany's industrial 'take-off' did not occur until 1840, almost a century later than Britain's. There were several causes for this late start. Geographically, Britain was closer to overseas markets than Germany, and had been enjoying peace and order for many years, while Germany had, for centuries, been torn by wars. During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, and the Seven Years' War in the 18th century, German lands were a convenient battle-ground for the European powers. In the early part of the 19th century, when Britain was speeding her economic development, the Napoleonic Wars disrupted the German states.

Germany also lacked the advantages of Britain's long-established economic and political unity. For centuries it had been divided into a large number of small states, often with separate currencies and different trade tariffs. The formation of the *Zollverein*, or Customs Union, in 1829, began to solve this problem of disunity, but real economic development did not begin until political unity came to the German states, in 1871. As many new iron-works and blast furnaces sprang up in Germany in the three years after the unification as had appeared in all the seventy years before it.

Alfred Krupp was born in the still largely medieval town of Essen in 1812. His father, Frederick Krupp, the founder of the steel firm, had spent his life teetering between expansion and bankruptcy. When he died, Alfred took over, and by 1835 the steel factory employed seventy workers. By the early 1850s, the great expansion of Krupp power and Prussian power was well on its way, and the Krupps had increased their work force to 300 people. Fifty



Left: Germany forges into the industrial age—a painting of an ironworks celebrates growing prosperity in the 1870s



years later, the Krupps had a work force of 83,000 people, and Germany was already one of the world's leading industrial powers.

Alfred Krupp died one of the richest men in Europe, with 21,000 people on the payroll. He was the first person in Europe to operate a steel plant using the Bessemer process—a British invention which revolutionised steel-making in the second half of the 19th century. Krupp also played an important part in the forging of German unity. His guns were used by both sides—Austria and Prussia—in the 1866 war. Krupp also exported tons of railway equipment to help in the conquest of the American West.

Werner von Siemens, another famous industrial entrepreneur, was four years younger than Alfred Krupp. The foundations of his electrical industry were laid in Berlin where, in 1847, he started a repair shop for telegraphy apparatus. The first telegraph line, between Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Main was laid by him. 16th May 1881 saw the inauguration of the world's first electrically-powered tram—designed and built by Werner von Siemens. By 1910, every city in Germany was committed to electricity, and Siemens's equipment was world-famous.

The first major challenge to electric traction came from the petrol engine. The inventor, who worked from a small shop in Canstatt, was Gottlieb Daimler. He had first put his engine to work on a bicycle in 1885. In 1886, the first Daimler car made its appearance, and it too was a successful experiment. Karl Benz, who patented the motor tricycle in 1886, realised the potential of the new 'horseless carriages' and put his men to work designing motor cars that even women might drive. Daimler's and Benz's new inventions were enthusiastically received all over Europe, and advertisements for their automobiles appeared in the British press, boosting German exports.

Although Germany started to industrialise much later than Britain, she began to catch up astonishingly fast. In 1900, Britain was still richer both in terms of national income and income per head of the population. But the export picture is very different. Britain's exports in the years between 1880 and the First World War grew steadily, but her share of world trade during this period was falling, while Germany's share was rising.

Education played an important part in the formation of these trends. At the end of the 1860s, Matthew Arnold wrote: 'In the public high schools of Prussia and France,

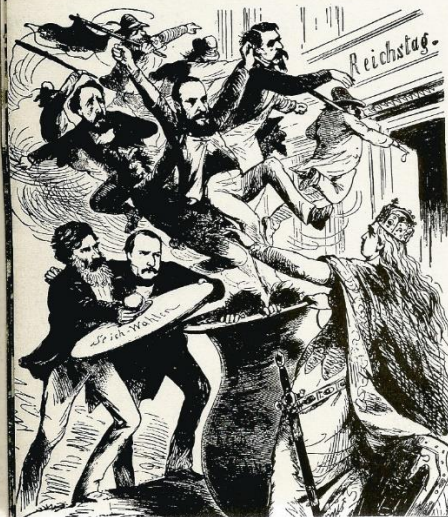
Above left: Eager workers clocking in—two minutes early, 1889. *Below left:* The changing face of Germany—factory chimneys blot out the medieval skyline of church spires. *Above right:* The Zollverein stand at the Great Exhibition, 1851; the world still saw Germany as rural and peaceful. *Below right:* Thirty years later, the metal industries' trade newspaper had an extensive circulation. *Overleaf:* 'Fritz'—the largest hammer in the world—constructed at one of the Krupp factories in 1861



Organ für die Interessen der Metallarbeiter.

Organ der Allg. Kranken- und Sterbekasse der Metallarbeiter und der Jugendvereine der Metallarbeiter Deutschlands.

Inferate die dreispaltige Seite 29 St., Kaffee und Sammlungskontingente, vom 1. März 1900 bis 1. März 1901. Expedition: Kaffee, Weigenstraße 12.



65,000 of the youth of the upper and middle classes are brought up; in the public higher schools of England, only some 15,000. Has this state of affairs no bad effect on us? Inside German classrooms, the curriculum seemed more fitted to the needs of an industrialising society. France, Germany, and Switzerland possessed good systems of industrial education and England possessed none.

German universities, by the middle of the 19th century, had adapted themselves well to the scientific age, and led the world in research. The number of students in attendance at German universities, by the middle of the 19th century, was about one in 2,600 of the population, while in Britain the proportion was under half that figure.

Germany was, like the United States, rich in the raw materials of industrial revolution. Prussia, the state which steamrollered the other states into unity, possessed the vast coal and iron-ore deposits of the Ruhr and, at the eastern extremity, at the point where three empires met, the vast coal deposits of Silesia. The addition of Alsace-Lorraine, in 1871, brought another great source of coal and iron to the new empire.

Germany's swift industrial development in the second half of the 19th century was closely linked to the development of her communications. In the first decades of the century, the speed of travel across Europe had not changed much in 1,000 years. By the mid-1880s, cars and electric trams had begun to appear, and 40,000 miles of rail track spread out across the Empire, hastening political unity and industrial change. The Kiel Canal, built in the 1890s, represented another important link in the new network of communications. The Baltic ports, which had previously been cut off from the main shipping routes, now had easier access to them. Communications by telephone were also expanding rapidly. In telephone work, Germany was the pioneer in Europe.

Britain had dominated in the 'older industries' like textiles and iron, but Germany took the lead in pioneering and expanding new industries such as telecommunications and chemicals. The Hoechst chemicals factory, with a small boiler, a 3 hp steam engine, five workers, an accountant, and one chemist, grew in less than forty years into a world concern. Hoechst founded his industry in 1863, at a time when England and France shared the world production of dye-stuffs. But by 1913, he had all but cornered the market.

Germany's peculiar genius in the second half of the 19th century, was the ability to weld industrial development on to the firm base of scientific research and education. According to the scientific writer, Magnus Pyke, the sons of British industrialists 'were educated to rule workmen, not to understand natural science, whereas in Germany,

Above left: Alfred Krupp, the industrial genius who built up a massive armaments empire. **Below left:** Pandora's ballot-box releases the evils of Social Democracy on an unsuspecting world. By 1877 the Social Democrats had nearly 500,000 votes

22

almost every head of a major industrial enterprise was a *Herr Doctor*'.

Another reason for Germany's swift development was political. Members of the Imperial Parliament—the *Reichstag*—were not able to become ministers, and there was thus less incentive for clever men to enter politics. The way to political power lay through service to the Emperor. Officials serving the Emperor, however, were expected to be conservatives, so that clever men of progressive views went into business instead. Since Germany had comparatively few colonies to govern, business and industry got her best brains. Germany's lack of colonial responsibility also affected her investments. Between 1880 and 1914 about 40 per cent of British investments were made abroad, while 60 per cent were spent on extending home industry. Germany invested only 12 per cent overseas, and all the rest of her resources were used to develop home industry. Britain reduced her costs by ensuring her source of raw materials. Germany reduced hers by improving manufacturing methods.

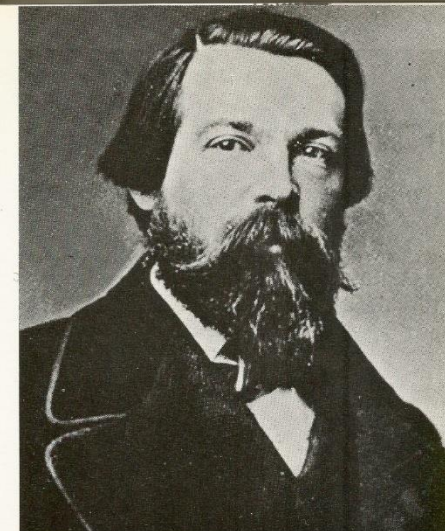
The development of industry initiated far-reaching changes not only in the social and economic structure of Germany, but in her physical aspects as well. Contemporary pictures show that by the 1850s, the unspoiled countryside was losing ground steadily in the face of industrial and urban expansion.

The speed of industrial development in Germany heightened the squalor and confusion of living and working. The reaction against this fostered a new kind of political awareness among the working class, and provided Karl Marx with fertile ground for his socialist theories—as a result of which he was later obliged to leave Germany. Ferdinand Lassalle was another leading exponent of socialist ideas, but was killed in a duel over a woman in 1864. The followers of Marx and Lassalle met at Gotha in 1875, and agreed to work together. This was the beginning of the Social Democrat Party, or SPD.

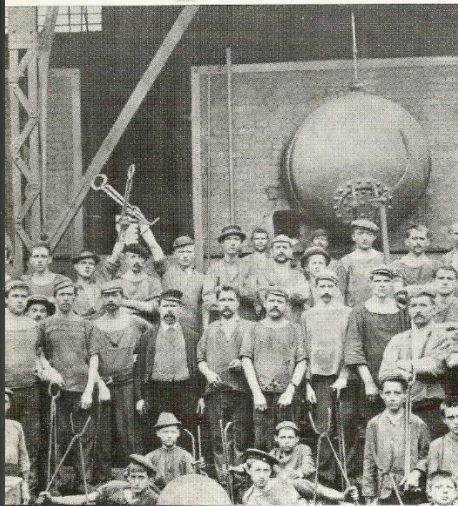
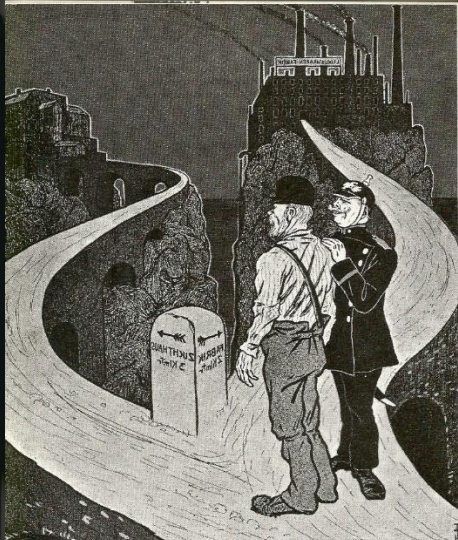
The Social Democrats terrified all respectable Germans, who regarded them as atheist revolutionaries, out to overturn both Church and State. The Iron Chancellor, Bismarck, and the Cannon King, Krupp (who was, incidentally, only three years younger than Bismarck), had equal distaste for socialism and trade unionism. Their view was essentially feudal. The lower classes should know their place in society, they thought. If the worker did 'know his place', he achieved a certain nobility of his own—a nobility won by hard work and submissiveness.

The worker, however, increasingly did not know his place. The two-year-old Social Democrat Party won 500,000 votes in 1877. Just as Krupp was selling arms and

Above right: Friedrich Engels, a founder of German socialism. **Below right:** Social Democrats turn respectable—leaders of the party in the Reichstag. Bebel is seated in the centre with Wilhelm Liebknecht behind him



23



railway plant internationally, so working men were beginning to co-operate internationally, with strong support from Karl Marx.

In 1878, two attempts were made to assassinate the Emperor. Bismarck, taking with advantage of the situation, passed severe laws against socialist activities. Bismarck, however, realised that negative means were not enough. In the 1880s, he passed a series of laws which set an example later followed by many other countries, including Britain. These laws provided, in 1883, sickness insurance for workers, and later, in 1888, old-age pensions. As Bismarck shrewdly remarked: 'Whoever has a pension for his old age, is far more content and far easier to handle than one who has no such prospect.'

The Krupps had started a social welfare scheme in the 1830s, with a workers' sickness and burial fund. Later, Krupp pioneered the building of workers' houses. By the time of Alfred's death in 1887, one in three Krupp workers was tenting accommodation from the firm. If the worker left Krupp's employ, however, he forfeited immediately all the benefits: house, pension, insurance—everything.

Despite Krupp's and Bismarck's attempts to buy the loyalty of the worker, the socialist movement grew. In 1887 the Socialists won more votes than any other party. In the 1912 elections they won 110 seats, thus becoming the strongest party in the Reichstag. However, the political power of these 110 seats was largely illusory, because the Reichstag itself possessed such a limited political power.

Many workers, faced with political powerlessness and repression, chose to emigrate. In the 1880s, over 300,000 people left Germany in one year—mainly for the United States. Those who stayed behind gradually began to grow better off. The German workers were beginning to acquire a stake in the country, and revolution no longer seemed so attractive. Some of the leaders began to suggest that the socialist state would be brought about by reform rather than revolution.

The Social Democrat Party remained revolutionary in theory, but grew more and more respectable in practice. Revolutionary doctrine alienated much of the middle class, who were frightened of working class militancy. The trade unions themselves had been particularly radical and militant organisations, but as the workers were converted to Bismarck's policies, the trade union movement lost its air of militancy.

Above left: Painting by Käthe Kollwitz of the hardship caused by a weavers' strike early in the 19th century. Below left: Strike-breakers called in by employers in an attempt to destroy early unions. Above right: A cartoon shows the choice facing the German worker—one road leads to the factory, the other to prison. Below right: Workers assembled to oppose a 'benevolent' management—both the houses they lived in and the stores they shopped at were privately owned by their employers.



Questions on German History

Paths to Parliamentary Democracy

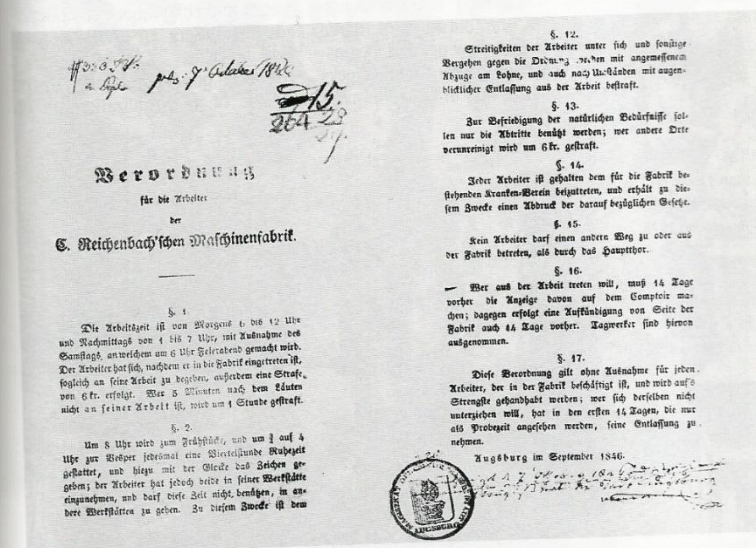
III. The industrial revolution and the founding of the Empire

2. New social structures and political theories

A further consequence of the years of rapid economic growth between 1850 and 1870 was the transformation of the agricultural and artisanal working class of the Pre-March period into an industrial proletariat. This period also witnessed the beginning of urbanization. Journeymen who could no longer hope to find a secure livelihood in their trades; master-craftsmen who could no longer cope with increasing industrial competition; and day-labourers increasingly sought jobs in the factories. The social misery of the working class was unspeakable. Charity organizations were set up to alleviate the most extreme social hardship. At the same time, new socialist theories propagating the destruction of capitalism as the only way to liberate the working class began to gain ground.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the growing industrial towns and cities drew in labour from the immediately surrounding regions. At the same time, a massive wave of migration from east to west set in. Agricultural workers from east of the river Elbe increasingly became a reservoir of labour for industry in the Rhineland and Westphalia. The German population grew from 35 million in 1850 to 42 million in 1871. In 1860, some 2.6 million people lived in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Factory buildings altered the face of towns and cities, and the Ruhr region in particular developed an industrial landscape. Nevertheless, in 1873, two thirds of the German population still lived on the land. The favourable economic climate did nothing to ameliorate the plight of the industrial working class.

III/124
First and last pages of a set of labour regulations from the time of the industrial revolution

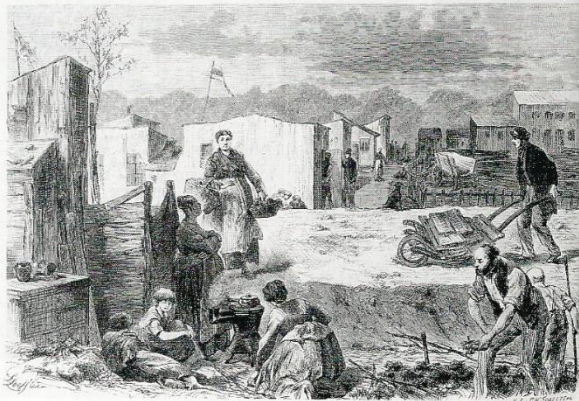




III/125
A week-day market
on Alexanderplatz
in Berlin around
1860

These workers, who were now pouring into the town and cities, lived in appalling housing conditions. On the outskirts of Berlin shanty towns grew up, and increasing numbers of tenement blocks were built where, in 1867, on aver-

age 6-7 people lived in one room. An 18-hour working day, breadline wages and child labour compounded the misery of the industrial working class. The social groups threatened by the process of industrialization set up



III/126
A shanty town on
the outskirts of
Berlin around 1875

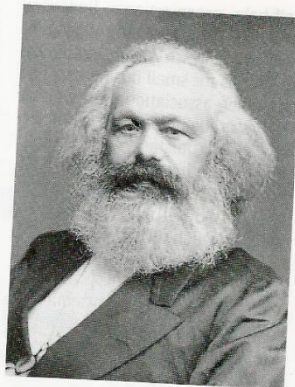
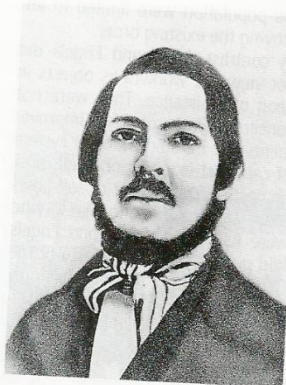
self-help organizations: Raiffeisen founded rural loan societies; Schulze-Delitzsch set up credit associations for small businesses; and consumer associations, as well as the first trade unions, came into being. The Protestant and Catholic churches both ran charitable institutions for tradesmen and workers. Kolping and Ketteler, Wichern and Bodelschwingh all sought to find in Christianity a remedy for the social ills of the time. All these attempts to alleviate the social consequences of industrialization and capitalist economics for certain sections of

the population were limited to improving the existing order. By contrast, Marx and Engels did not view the workers as objects in need of assistance. They were not concerned with reformist improvements but insisted that the system of capitalist exploitation itself must be destroyed in an act of self-liberation by the working class, who were its victims. Marx and Engels had published the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1848, but only now did it acquire any genuine significance. The Manifesto ended with the words: "Workers have

III/127
A public kitchen in
Berlin



III/128, 129, 130
Karl Marx and
Friedrich Engels, the
authors of the Com-
munist Manifesto



nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to gain. Workers of the world unite." In the 1850s and 1860s Marx began to research the laws and trends underlying the capitalist mode of production in an effort to prove that the revolution

of the proletariat was not merely a subjective goal but an objective historical necessity. He published these fundamental studies in his uncompleted work *Das Kapital*, the first volume of which appeared in 1867.

Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei.

Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa—das Gespenst des Kommunismus. Alle Mächte des alten Europa haben sich zu einer heiligen Heiligschlacht gegen dieses Gespenst verbündet, der Papst und der Czar, Metternich und Guizot, französische Radikale und deutsche Polyzisten.

Wo ist die Oppositionspartei, die nicht von ihren regierenden Gegnern als kommunistisch verschrien worden wäre, wo die Oppositionspartei, die den fortgeschrittenen Oppositionsleuten sowohl, wie ihren reaktionären Gegnern den brandmarkenden Vorwurf des Kommunismus nicht zurückgeschleudert hätte? Zweierlei geht aus dieser Thatsache hervor.

Der Kommunismus wird bereits von allen europäischen Mächten als eine Macht anerkannt.

Es ist hohe Zeit daß die Kommunisten ihre Anschauungsweise, ihre Zwecke, ihre Tendenzen vor der ganzen Welt offen darlegen, und den Mährchen vom Gespenst des Kommunismus ein Manifest der Partei selbst entgegenstellen.

Zu diesem Zweck haben sich Kommunisten der verschiedensten Nationalität in London versammelt und das folgende Manifest entworfen, das in englischer, französischer, deutscher, italienischer, flämischer und dänischer Sprache veröffentlicht wird.

3. Parties and associations

By transforming the face of society, the industrial revolution also radically altered the political landscape. Existing political groupings sought to adapt to the new conditions and to develop programmes which, each proceeding from its specific political viewpoint, offered solutions to the problems of a nascent industrial society. As social, religious and national tensions grew, new parties also emerged. They competed with the existing parties and groupings, and shaped the political system in subsequent decades. Despite the many mergers, rifts and name changes, especially in the liberal camp, the party system which evolved in the decade before the founding of the Empire remained largely intact until the Empire's collapse in 1918.



III/131, 132
Ferdinand Lassalle
and the statute of
the General German
Workers' Association
of 1863

The origins of social democracy

The industrial proletariat, whose ranks swelled as industrialization progressed, soon began to form independent organizations and to articulate its political interests. The first workers' associations, formed in the wake of the Revolution of 1848, were suppressed during the reactionary backlash. Nevertheless, the founding of trade unions and parties continued. In 1863, Ferdinand Lassalle founded the General German Workers' Association. He called for universal suffrage and the setting up of state-assisted production cooperatives. In 1869, a more strongly marxist-oriented workers' party, the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP), was set up by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. These two parties merged in Gotha in 1875 to form a unified German workers' party. At first glance, it appeared that the more radical "Marxists" had

Statut des Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitervereins.

§. 1.

Unter dem Namen

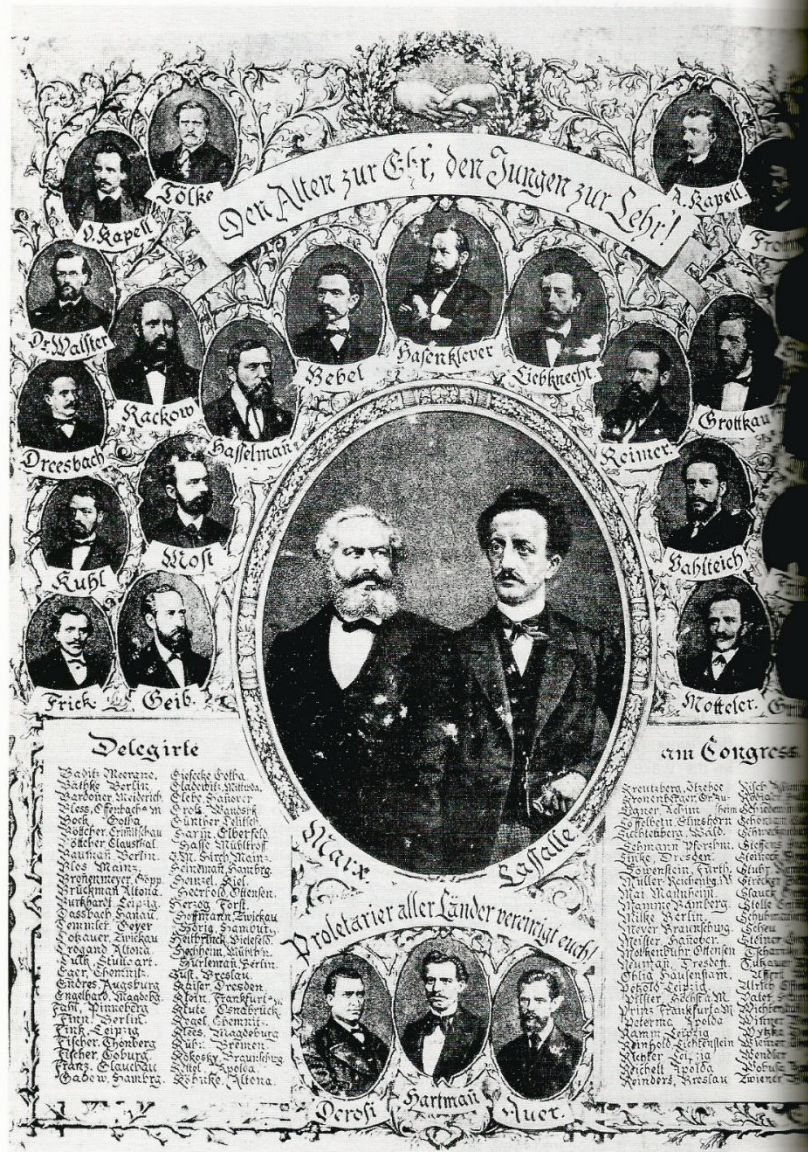
„Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein“

begründen die Unterzeichneten für die Deutschen Bundesstaaten einen Verein, welcher, von der Ueberzeugung ausgehend, daß nur durch das allgemeine gleiche und direkte Wahlrecht eine genügende Vertretung der sozialen Interessen des Deutschen Arbeiterlandes und eine wahrhafte Befestigung der Klassengegenstände in der Gesellschaft herbeigeführt werden kann, den Zweck verfolgt,

auf friedlichem und legalen Wege, insbesondere durch das Gewinnen der öffentlichen Ueberzeugung, für die Herstellung des allgemeinen gleichen und direkten Wahlrechts zu wirken.

§. 2.

Jeder Deutsche Arbeiter wird durch einfache Beitrittserklärung Mitglied des Vereins mit vollem gleichem Stimmrecht und kann jeder Zeit austreten.



gained the upper hand in the party. However, its "Gotha Programme" revealed that a whole range of "Lassallean" ideas had remained intact. The programme was therefore sharply criticized by Marx.

The conservatives

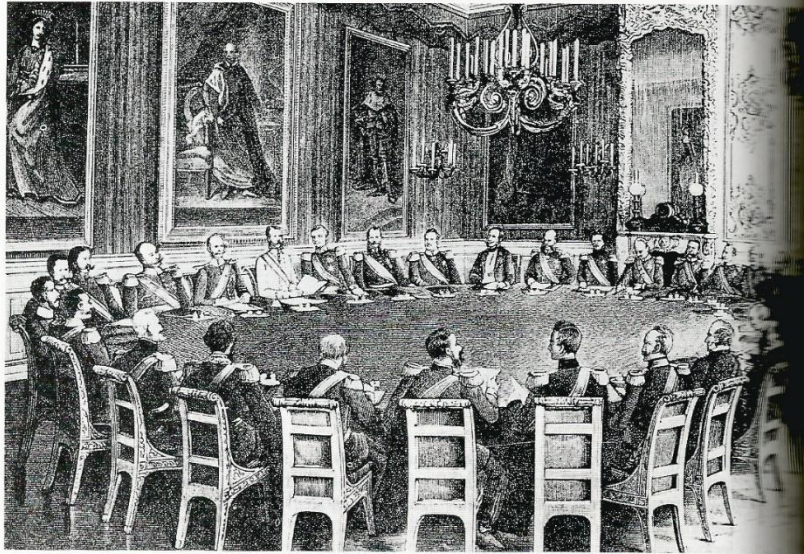
The conservatives fought against the social impact of the industrial revolution from a very different angle. They feared the dissolution of the existing political and social order and therefore aimed to establish a political system which was both patriarchal and welfarist and based on a hierarchy of social groups. The conservatives fought

against "progress" which they viewed as an attack on the natural God-given order of human life. Their struggle against liberalism was at the same time a struggle for the preservation of the old order, which they saw threatened by the burgeoning power of the industrial middle class. It was precisely those groups whose political and economic privileges were guaranteed by the allegedly God-given order who fought hardest to defend it: aristocratic large landowners and supporters of the Crown. They fought against universal suffrage and the removal of class barriers, and for the restoration of the rights of estate owners and the nobility. Contemporary cartoons lampoon-

III/134
Declaration of the
House of Hohen-
zollern for the
Prussian people



III. The industrial revolution and the founding of the Empire



III/142

The conference of
princes in Frankfurt
in 1863

rats set up the German Progressive Party, which advocated a resolute struggle for a parliamentary constitutional state and a new social order. For the first time, a Prussian party also included a call for national unity in its programme.

A drift to the left among the Prussian middle class became evident at the elections to the lower house of parliament in 1861: while the conservative grouping gained only 14 seats, the Progressive Party won 109.

Following the refusal by this liberal majority in the lower house to approve the funds needed for the reorganization of the Prussian army, the conflict over military reform became a conflict over the constitution as the government and the monarch refused to alter their stance: they wanted the practical dissolution of the *Landwehr*, a reserve militia set up as part of the army reform introduced by the

Prussian war minister von Boyen and very popular with the liberals, and a mandatory three-year period of military service followed by four or five years of service in the reserve. In line with the Prussian state's absolutist tradition, their ultimate aim was transform the army into an instrument unconditionally obedient to the Crown.

Bismark's hour came in the course of this conflict: at the time Prussia's envoy to Paris, he was appointed prime minister, and, as a staunch defender of the monarchist government, used his superior political skills to counter the demands of the Progressive Party.

Before the lower house he declared: "The Prussian Kingdom has not yet completed its mission. It is not yet ready to become a mere ornament for your constitutional structure, nor is it yet ready to become a simple cog in your parliamentary machine."

IAN R. MITCHELL

Bismarck

...and the
Development of
Germany

Holmes McDougall



Chapter 9 Bismarck and the Liberals

The German Empire which was proclaimed in 1871 was enthusiastically supported by the majority of German Liberals, since it went some way to meeting their political aims. A strong, unified state of 40 million Germans had been created in central Europe, in an area where, as recently as 1848, over thirty separate states had existed. Bismarck's achievement of unification had gone a long way towards turning the Liberals from being his fiercest enemies – as they had been in the 'constitutional crisis' of 1861–63 – to being his firmest allies. On the one hand, as the Chancellor's policies became increasingly successful, the Liberals found it dangerous for their own popularity to oppose him. On the other hand, many were now convinced that his 'blood and iron' solution had been, after all, the only way to unify Germany.

The bulk of the Liberals took this as far as to indemnify Bismarck for all his violations of the Constitution of Prussia during the struggle for the re-organization of the Army; the Chancellor was thus absolved of blame for his illegal acts at that period. As early as 1867, the majority of German liberals had shown that their liberalism was weaker than their nationalism, and indeed those who indemnified Bismarck adopted the title of 'National Liberals' to distinguish themselves from the minority, like Rudolf Virchow and the rump of the old Progressive Party, who refused to forgive the Chancellor for his violations of the Constitution. Heinrich von Sybel, an historian and National Liberal, described the attitude of Virchow over the indemnity bill in the Reichstag.

Virchow explained that he and his friends had known a better way of leading to German unity than Bismarck's, namely, the way of freedom. But as things now stood, he

said, they were willing to sacrifice their wishes to Bismarck, and were willing to support his foreign policy, but must so much the more energetically defend constitutional rights. As if Benedeck⁽¹⁾ in June would have allowed himself to be deterred from marching upon Berlin by the fiery enthusiasm of the Party of Progress for freedom!

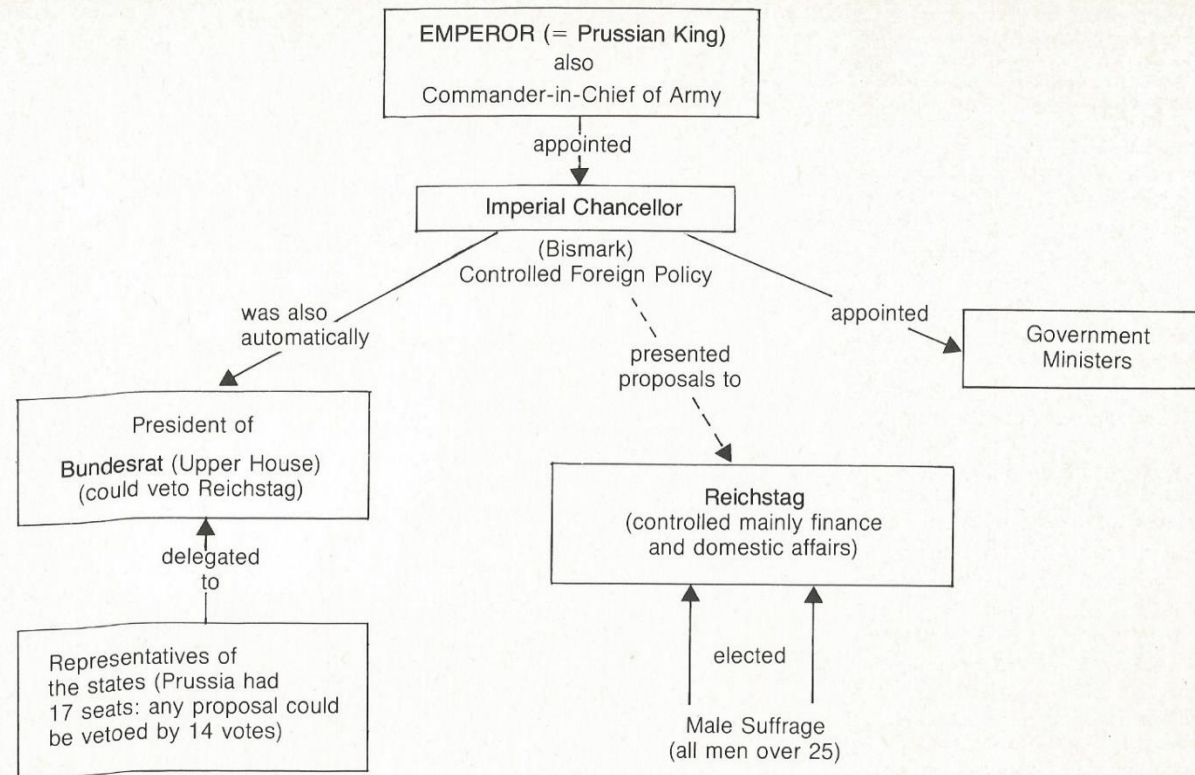
Hamerow: *The Age of Bismarck* p. 84.

But even the Progressives accepted the annexations of 1867 and 1871, and were capable, on occasions, of co-operating with the Chancellor. After the foundation of the Empire, co-operation between Bismarck and the National Liberals grew to such an extent that the period up to 1878 was known as the 'Liberal Era'. Bismarck needed the Liberals, who were the dominant party in the Reichstag, and he particularly wanted their support to pass the legislation required for his struggles with the Catholic Church and the socialists (see Chapters 7 and 8). In addition, their emphasis on national unity fitted in well with his own aims at this period. The new Empire was beset by internal and external foes, and patriotism was a much prized quality. The Liberals, in turn, warmed to the Chancellor, who had achieved unification, who singled them out in the Reichstag as his own party, and who more and more appeared to be identifying with Liberal values. 'My main aim was to make the Germans a nation', he was fond of repeating at this time, and many Liberals took this, and other actions, at their face value.

During the 'Liberal Era' Bismarck granted the middle classes, in addition to unification, another slice of their

⁽¹⁾ The Austrian Commander.

Constitution of the German Empire (est. 1871)



In addition, each separate state had some degree of control over local affairs. In some states the local parliaments were more democratic, but in Prussia itself the '3-class' voting system continued.

This diagram should be studied in conjunction with the extracts from the constitution of the Empire on p. 90.

programme, that is, economic unification. Bismarck himself was never very interested in economic matters. One story tells how he entered a room in the Reichstag where a committee was discussing a reform of weights and measures or some similar issue. He went out shaking his head, and commented that he failed to understand how intelligent men could get heated about such a topic. But the Chancellor realized that to solidify his alliance with the Liberals, he had to put into operation economic measures which found acceptance with them, and with their leaders. A unified national currency was established for the German Empire, making trade much easier inside Germany, and all internal tariffs were abolished. A unified commercial law was introduced to cover the whole country. Common postal, telegraph and communications services replaced the multiplicity of systems which had existed before 1867. All vestiges of guild control over industry and restrictions on apprenticeship or the mobility of labour were abolished. Finally, a national bank was established, and Germany was put on the gold standard, partly thanks to the inflow of gold associated with the French reparations.

Bismarck clearly hoped that, given national unification and economic liberalization, the middle classes would rest satisfied, despite the fact that the constitution of the German State was far from 'democratic' in the Liberal sense. The Chancellor was the main inspiration behind the constitution of the German Empire, as he was of the short-lived, earlier, North German Confederation's constitution, which was very similar. The constitution of Germany has been accused of covering absolutism with a democratic fig leaf, but it is important to look at it in context. In 1867 no country in Europe had universal suffrage, and Britain was the only one with a system of parliamentary control over government ministers.

The constitution of the German Empire established a Reichstag, or parliament, elected by universal male suffrage (the lower age limit was twenty-five). The Reichstag had control over domestic matters, and its main source of power was its ability to determine national taxation. Thus it could,

in theory, establish a stranglehold over the government by refusing to pass the budget. Although the events of 1861–63 had shown that this was not a perfect safeguard, the Reichstag did exert real power in the German Empire, and on several occasions it threw out government proposals, or forced them to be amended.

In addition to the Reichstag, there was a second chamber, the *Bundesrat*, to which were sent representatives of the various states, roughly in proportion to their population. Out of a total of fifty-six Bundesrat members, Prussia had seventeen, and since any measure could be vetoed by fourteen Bundesrat members, it was clear that Prussia was in real control. Domination of the Bundesrat was essential for Bismarck, since for any law to be passed the consent of both Reichstag and Bundesrat was essential. Bundesrat members were nominated by their respective State governments, and since the President of the Bundesrat was also the Imperial Chancellor, (that is, Bismarck), it is clear that the latter could prevent any Reichstag proposal he disapproved of ever becoming law.

To compensate for their domination by Prussia at the national level, each of the former States retained a large degree of control over local affairs, for example education. This went furthest in Bavaria, which was allowed to have its own postal service, and even control over its own armed forces . . . in peacetime only.

The head of the German government was the Imperial Chancellor – a combination of Prime Minister, Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary. In contrast to the system in Britain, he was not chosen from the party which gained a majority of members of parliament in an election: on the contrary, he was *appointed* by the German Emperor, who was automatically the King of Prussia. The Emperor also had a large degree of power, which removed his actions from parliamentary influence. He was in charge of foreign policy, such as the making of treaties, declaring war and so on; and in addition he was commander in chief of the armed forces, which were outside

Reichs-Gesetzblatt.

N^o 34.

Inhalt: Gesetz gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie. S. 351.

(Nr. 1271.) Gesetz gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie. Vom 21. Oktober 1878.

Wir Wilhelm, von Gottes Gnaden Deutscher Kaiser, König von Preußen etc.

verordnen im Namen des Reichs, nach erfolgter Zustimmung des Bundesraths und des Reichstags, was folgt:

§. 1.

Bereine, welche durch sozialdemokratische, sozialistische oder kommunistische Bestrebungen den Umsturz der bestehenden Staats- oder Gesellschaftsordnung bezwecken, sind zu verbieten.

Dasselbe gilt von Vereinen, in welchen sozialdemokratische, sozialistische oder kommunistische auf den Umsturz der bestehenden Staats- oder Gesellschaftsordnung gerichtete Bestrebungen in einer den öffentlichen Frieden, insbesondere die Eintracht der Bevölkerungsklassen gefährdenden Weise zu Tage treten.

Den Vereinen stehen gleich Verbindungen jeder Art.

§. 2.

Auf eingetragene Genossenschaften findet im Falle des §. 1 Abs. 2 der §. 35 des Gesetzes vom 4. Juli 1868, betreffend die privatrechtliche Stellung der Erwerbs- und Wirtschaftsgenossenschaften, (Bundes-Gesetzbl. S. 415 ff.) Anwendung.

Auf eingeschriebene Hülfsklassen findet im Falle des §. 29 des Gesetzes über die eingeschriebenen Hülfsklassen vom 1. März 1878 (Reichs-Gesetzbl. S. 125 ff.) Anwendung.

Selbständige Rassenvereine
tuten die gegenseitige Unterstützungen
Reichs-Gesetzbl. 1878.

Ausgegeben zu Berlin den 22. October 1878.



Reichstag control. With a Prussian Emperor, a Prussian Chancellor and a Prussian-dominated Bundesrat, Germany was in many ways 'prussified', rather than unified.

The German Constitution of 1871 earned the strong criticism of orthodox British liberal, Bertrand Russell, who, in 1896, described it as follows:

When I add that the Ministers, in fact as in theory, are directly appointed by the Crown, that they are always Conservative, whether they have a majority to back them or not, and that there is thus no connecting link between the popular assembly and the administration, it will be seen that the powers of the people are reduced to a minimum. . . .

The danger of war, the army, and the police, make this constitution absolutely rigid and unalterable: there seems no hope of amelioration, as some of the socialists themselves assert, except from a second Jena. . . .⁽²⁾ It must be remembered also that trial by jury, the right of coalition, freedom of speech and of the press, exists only in a very limited degree.

Bertrand Russell: *German Social Democracy* p. 87.

Germany was in no way a parliamentary democracy after 1871. But the power the Reichstag exerted through its control

A facsimile of the anti-socialist law, in the Gothic script used in Germany till quite recently. The cartoon shows Bismarck offering some Liberal politicians a choice.

1. What 'choice' is being offered to them?
2. Has the cartoonist caught the relationship between Bismarck and the Liberals?

⁽²⁾ A great Prussian defeat in the Napoleonic Wars

of the purse strings, and its ability to *block* legislation, meant that it was a more important force in German politics than many writers have argued. The extraordinary lengths Bismarck went to in order to secure Reichstags with a pro-government majority illustrates this.

If the Liberals were to democratize Germany, as well as see her unified, they needed to be resolute and consistent. A Liberal majority in the Reichstag, fighting for democratic principles, and particularly for parliamentary control over the Army and ministerial appointment would have forced the Iron Chancellor to choose between dictatorship and liberal democracy. But few liberals were keen on such a conflict, and felt rather that they would gradually extend democratic principles, through a piecemeal struggle.

The bourgeoisie was already the most powerful class economically, and the Government had to defer to its economic interests. The revolution of 1848 had transformed the state into an outwardly constitutional form in which the bourgeoisie could establish and extend its political domination. Despite this, the bourgeoisie was still far from exercising real political power . . . the executive power was, at most, dependent on them very indirectly . . . they could neither appoint nor dismiss ministers, nor control the army. . . . What was certain however, was that they had gradually to destroy the Junkers economically and that they were the only section of the propertied classes who had any hope of a future.

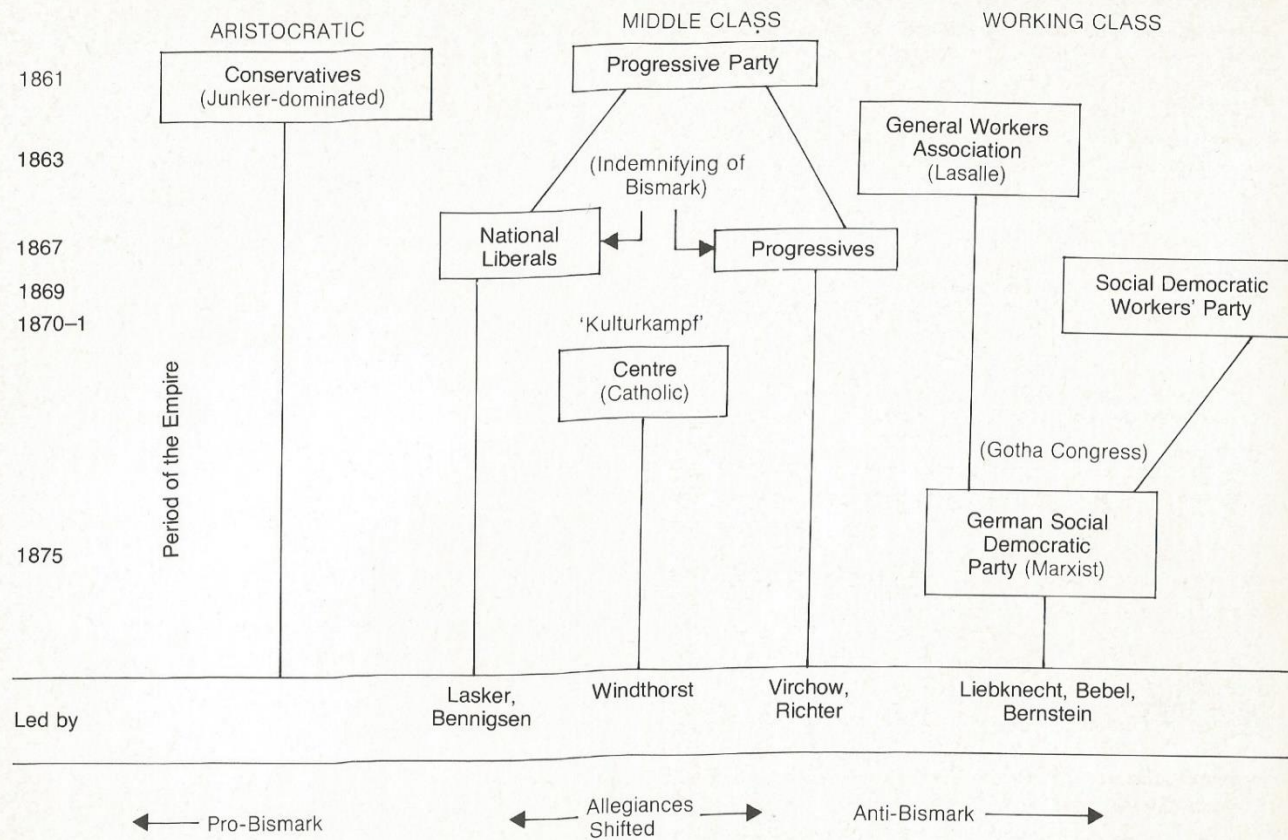
Engels: *The Role of Force in History*, p. 92.

Despite the optimistic hope of most Liberals (and of their socialist opponent Engels), that they would gradually overturn the old order in Germany, this was not to be. The story of the so-called 'Liberal Era' is one of how Bismarck used the Liberals for his own ends, avoided a confrontation until he himself desired one, and in general kept all the German political

parties at one another's throats, stimulating their mutual fears and suspicions. He had once said that people should be stuffed with parliaments, like children are stuffed with sweets, till they are sick of them. The next few years showed that he knew how to force-feed the German public, until gradually they sickened of parliamentary wrangling, and the Liberals in particular declined in the public estimation.

Unlike Britain, where there were two parties, in Germany there were several, from the extreme left to the far right. On the right stood the Conservatives, who were Junker-dominated. They drew their electoral support from the population east of the Elbe, the area of the great Junker estates. They had originally opposed Bismarck's schemes for a united Germany, identifying this with the liberalism they abhorred. But in the period after 1871, they generally supported the Chancellor. To their left stood the Centre Party (Zentrum) founded in 1870 to defend the interest of Germany's Catholic minority; this party, initially the most anti-Bismarck, eventually arrived at a reconciliation with him (see Chapter 7). Then came the National Liberals, the party of the bourgeoisie, or the upper-middle classes, prepared to modify its liberalism in pursuit of immediate ends, and led by politicians like Lasker and Bennigsen. To the left of the National Liberals, stood the Progressives, led by Virchow and Richter; this was a more resolute liberal grouping, which drew its support from the professional classes, like lawyers and scientists, as well as from the lower-middle class. On the far left glowered the two Socialist Parties, the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers, whose hostility to the German Empire brought down upon them Bismarck's wrath. They were finally to unite in 1875 (see Chapter 8). To complicate the matter still further there was a sprinkling of Reichstag members representing the Poles, Danes and Alsace-Lorrainers, who had been violently incorporated into the new Reich, and these were generally anti-government. But in the 1870s the centre of the political stage was held by the National Liberals, who were by far the largest party in the Reichstag, who enjoyed the favour of the

Political Parties in Germany



Chancellor, and who were confident that the future was theirs. But Bismarck was aware of the weakness and irresolution of the Liberals, and was able to outmanoeuvre them skilfully on most occasions.

To pass the legislation necessary to wage the Kulturkampf, the anti-Catholic struggle of the early 1870s, Bismarck needed the support of the German liberal politicians, and this they enthusiastically gave. Not only the National Liberals, but also the Progressive Party, supported the fight against the Catholic Church. Indeed, it was one of the most admirable of the old liberals, Rudolf Virchow, who coined the term 'Kulturkampf', signifying that he thought Bismarck's struggle was one to defend the basis of civilization. But here the Liberals showed regrettable short-sightedness. Though all liberals opposed clericalism in politics, and the extravagant claims of the Catholic Church, liberal beliefs emphasized rational argument and peaceful persuasion. To support the use of State power to uproot the Catholics should have been unacceptable to them. And few Liberals realized that Bismarck's motives in the struggle were quite different from their own; this only became clear later, when he made a deal with the Papacy to end it. Bismarck was no more a believer in modern civilization and its liberal-scientific values than the Pope himself was. The Liberals failed to realize that Bismarck *himself* was a far more powerful enemy to the advance of liberal ideals in Germany than was the Roman Catholic Church. There might have been some excuse for the Liberals, had they used their support in the Kulturkampf as a lever to force concessions from Bismarck, for example, in limiting the power of the Bundesrat, or making ministers more responsible to the Reichstag. But they did none of this. They simply gave Bismarck their enthusiastic and misguided support in this struggle, without strings, and without gaining anything for liberalism except the unwelcome opprobrium of having participated in a political and religious witch-hunt.

Soon there arose another issue over which the Liberals had a chance to fight for a more democratic Germany, but here again



The Cook is saying to the Kitchen-maid 'You can't make omelettes without breaking eggs'.

1. What does the cartoon insinuate about the relationship between Bismarck and William I?
2. How successfully and on what occasion did Bismarck use his powers to 'break eggs'?

they bungled it. Bismarck and the Army chiefs wanted to fix the military budget once and for all, to avoid the inconvenience of coming to the Reichstag for yearly approval of military expenditure. The Liberals saw this as a threat to the power of the Reichstag and refused to pass the bill. In response Bismarck was able to manipulate national fears by using the press to orchestrate the so-called 'War in Sight' crisis (p. 93). Feeling themselves out of favour with public opinion, and confronted by Bismarck's threat that he might repeat the tactics of 1861–63, the National Liberals climbed down, and agreed to a 'compromise' formula that fixed the military budget for a period of seven years. This was quite long enough to take the question of Army finances out of all parliamentary control. The Progressives refused to vote for this 'compromise', which they denounced as a capitulation to militarism, and struck a blow, although an ineffective one, for liberalism.

Bismarck was angered however, at the Liberals' initial refusal, rather than pleased at their eventual acceptance of his proposals. Further squabbles followed which convinced him that a new balance of forces was needed on the domestic scene. In 1876, worried at the growth of socialism, Bismarck had proposed to the Reichstag a bill giving the government wide powers against 'treasonable' organizations and activities. Since the bill was very loosely worded, the National Liberals felt that they themselves might be subject to its provisions, and they threw it out. However, this move only succeeded in further alienating the Chancellor, without gaining the initiative in the struggle for further reforms of a liberal nature. Later, in 1878, the National Liberals again rejected Bismarck's initial attempts to pass an anti-socialist law. It was not that they approved of socialism, far from it; but they felt, in true Liberal fashion that rational argument, and the futility of socialist activity, would discredit the movement more effectively. Bismarck was furious at this new insubordination. His chance to punish them came with the attempts on the Kaiser's life in 1878. After the second of these – which Bismarck blamed on the socialists – he exclaimed 'Now I've got those rascals'!

When asked if he meant the socialists, he replied, 'No, the National Liberals'. Bismarck then called an election over the issue, which resulted in a defeat for the liberal parties. In their weakened state, the National Liberals voted for the second anti-socialist law, but insisted that it run for a fixed period, and not indefinitely. Only the Progressives refused to support the government, though, in the Reichstag, Virchow made clear his opposition to socialism:

The Social Democrat who purposively pursues his aims is our enemy. . . . We must be independent of the government above, and the masses below who threaten society.

G. Roth: *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* p. 144.

Nevertheless, the Liberals were achieving little, and at the same time discrediting themselves by complicity in Bismarck's schemes.

The Liberals' real chance for progress had already passed, the previous year. Bismarck had wanted to introduce various financial changes, and tried to strike a bargain with the National Liberals, whose support he needed. In return for agreement on the financial reforms, he offered a cabinet post to Bennigsen, a prominent National Liberal, who would thus have become the first Minister to be chosen from the dominant Reichstag party. A vital precedent would thus have been established. The catch was that this offer was conditional on the National Liberals voting to increase indirect taxation (taxes on goods) which was in the hands of the Reichstag, but which then became law, and was *not* voted on every year. The National Liberals overplayed their hand, and announced that in return for three cabinet seats, they would grant an increase in indirect taxation. They felt that this would guarantee that Bismarck was not just using them to gain his own ends. Bismarck rejected their demands, and commented in 1879, after his split with them:

And then the National Liberals were no politicians in the

autumn of 1877 . . . I am represented as having disowned them, while it was they who turned from me because I could not be as liberal as they were. If their leaders had been real politicians, they might have secured a great deal from me then, and still more in the course of time. But the maintainance of the party was of greater importance to them than the prospect of practical benefit. . . . I am opposed in the Reichstag on all questions – obviously – to prove that I require the support of these gentlemen – in connection with the tobacco monopoly . . . and the anti-socialist laws.

Busch: *Secret Pages* p. 355.

There were additional reasons prompting the Chancellor to search for a political re-alignment in the later 1870s. He was wearying of the Kulturkampf, which was popular with the Liberals, and sought reconciliation with the Centre Party. He had decided, too, that the time was ripe to move Germany on a course towards protectionism in economic affairs. His conversion to *laissez-faire* economics had been rooted in his desire for alliance with the Liberals rather than in conviction, and it was short-lived. When the economic slump, which hit Europe in 1873, led to severe depression in the German heavy industries and agriculture, there were urgent calls for the protection of German industry by import duties. Bismarck knew that protection would be popular with the upper classes, but his main motive for wishing to introduce import duties was political. He realized that it would provide an important source of revenue for the government, outside Reichstag control. But the introduction of import duties would be against all the cherished beliefs of the Liberals, and would mean that the Chancellor would have to break with them.

However, a solution lay at hand. In the Reichstag elected in 1878, the Conservatives were much stronger, as was the Centre Party; both parties were in favour of protection and against ideas of free trade. In 1879, Bismarck introduced proposals to raise import duties to a higher level than

protectionists were demanding, and on a wider range of goods, that is, a general rather than a specific tariff. These proposals helped to swing many of the formerly liberal captains of heavy industry behind Bismarck, and behind the Conservative Party, which henceforth became the vehicle in Germany, of the 'political alliance of agrarians with the industrialists', in Erich Eyck's apt phrase. The National Liberals were themselves divided over the issue, but enough voted with Bismarck for the tariffs to pass the Reichstag. Bismarck once again showed how he could steal the thunder of nationalism. Just as he had portrayed the national Liberals as 'unpatriotic' for their initial refusal to vote for a permanent Army budget in 1875, he could do so again over their unwillingness to provide protection for German industry in 1879. The tariff issue signified the final break with the 'Liberal Era', and the beginning of Bismarck's period of reliance upon the Conservatives, which became known as the 'Puttkammer Era', taking the name of a prominent right-wing politician. Henceforth Bismarck was to hound the remainder of the Liberals as 'enemies of the Reich'.

The National Liberals themselves were split by differing attitudes towards the waning Kulturkampf, the anti-socialist laws and the issue of protectionism. The more progressive left wing broke away, feeling that the National Liberals had betrayed their ideals, and, in 1880, combined with the Progressives to form the 'Freisinnig' or Independent Party. But the majority of German liberals felt that the attempt to combine liberalism with support for Bismarck had failed, and that it was folly to hope to defeat or outwit the 'Iron Chancellor'. Henceforth they made little effort to defend liberal ideals, and continued on their path of abandoning these in pursuit of the national interest, as defined by Bismarck himself. Of all the campaigns waged against his internal enemies, that waged by Bismarck against the Liberals was his most successful. It ensured that the German Empire was no more democratic in 1890 than it had been in 1870.

Exercises

1 Document Exercise

The following are extracts from the Constitution of the German Empire, of 16 April, 1871. Read them, and answer the questions set.

Constitution of the German Empire (Extracts)

ARTICLE 5 The Imperial legislative power shall be exercised by the Bundesrat and the Reichstag. The agreement of the majority votes of both bodies is necessary and sufficient for an Imperial statute.

ARTICLE 6 The Bundesrat is composed of the representatives of the members of the Federation, and the voting procedure shall be as follows: Prussia – 17 votes; Bavaria – 6 . . . Total 58 votes . . . all delegations must cast their votes as a unit.

ARTICLE 7 The Bundesrat shall decide upon: 1. Proposals made by the Reichstag and decisions made by it. . . .

ARTICLE 8 The Bundesrat shall organize from its membership permanent committees for (1) the Army and its citadels (2) the Navy . . . (6) the judiciary. . . .

ARTICLE 11 The Presiding Officer of the Federation shall be the King of Prussia, who shall bear the name of German Emperor. The Emperor shall represent the Empire . . . to declare war and conclude peace . . . to enter into alliances and other treaties with foreign states.

ARTICLE 15 The presiding chair in the Bundesrat and the conduct of business appertain to the Imperial Chancellor, who is to be appointed by the Emperor. . . .

ARTICLE 20 The Reichstag shall proceed from universal and direct elections with secret voting. . . .

ARTICLE 24 For the dissolution of the Reichstag . . . a resolution of the Bundesrat with the concurrence of the Emperor is required. . . .

ARTICLE 78 Amendments of the Constitution are made by way of legislation. They shall be considered rejected if they have fourteen votes against them in the Bundesrat. . . .

Docs. of Germ. Pol. and Hist. Vol. I pp. 201–8, 227.

1. What evidence is there in this document that Germany was 'Prussified' rather than unified? (6)
 2. Which aspects of this Constitution would liberals have found disturbing, and why? (9)
 3. What were Bismarck's motives in devising this Constitution? (5)
 4. Was the German Reichstag simply a 'fig leaf' for absolute monarchy? (5)
- (25)

2 Essay (500–750 words)

Why did Bismarck manage to inflict such a crushing defeat on German liberalism between 1864 and 1879?

(30 marks)

A History of Germany 1815-1990, William Carr, pp 140-145 (The end of Bismarck)

Kartell, the electoral alliance of Conservatives and National Liberals, could be relied upon to save the peace, and patriotic Germans should support it. Cynical and irresponsible exploitation of national feeling on this scale could not but retard the political education of the German people, and for that Bismarck bears a heavy responsibility. In terms of the Reichstag the strategem succeeded; the Conservatives gained fifteen seats, the National Liberals forty-eight and his great enemies the Radicals were drastically cut back to thirty-two. Bismarck's dependence on the Centre was over at last; the *Kartell* had an absolute majority and the Septennates were passed. It was a sign of changing times that the Centre merely abstained during this vote. However, it is important to realise that Bismarck's success was much less complete in terms of the total poll. Government parties polled three-and-a-half million votes, opposition parties four million votes on an increased poll. Only the electoral device of the *Kartell*, plus the fact that the distribution of seats did not reflect the changing pattern of the population, gave Bismarck his victory.¹¹ Bismarck had not destroyed the grassroots of the German opposition; all he had done was obscure the tensions in German society temporarily by reshuffling seats in the Reichstag.

In March 1888 Emperor William died in his ninety-first year, and Crown Prince Frederick, the toast of the liberals, ascended the throne. The new era of liberal reform which might have swept Bismarck from office did not take place. Emperor Frederick was mortally ill and quite unable to resist Bismarck's determined efforts to isolate him from his Radical friends. The only change was the dismissal of Puttkamer whose name was a byword for reaction in progressive circles. Only on one occasion did the palace pursue an independent line, and that was in connexion with the Battenberg marriage. The empress set her heart on marrying her daughter Victoria to Alexander of Battenberg, the ex-prince of Bulgaria. Bismarck opposed the marriage on the grounds that it would prejudice relations with Russia, Alexander being *persona non grata* in St. Petersburg. Possibly Bismarck feared that the empress was grooming Alexander to fill his place one day. At any rate he had his National-Liberal allies launch a bitter press campaign against the empress, and he worked assiduously to turn Crown Prince William against his mother, with some success. In the end the project was abandoned, and Alexander settled for a German opera-singer from Darmstadt. The episode revealed only too clearly the vindictive streak in Bismarck's character, as well as the limits to his professions of loyalty to the Hohenzollerns. Frederick reigned only ninety-nine days and

¹¹ The Radicals lost only 30,000 votes but this cost them forty-two seats. The Centre gained 200,000 votes and lost one seat. Most striking anomaly of all, the Socialists gained 200,000 votes and actually lost thirteen seats.

died in June 1888. Historians have often felt that his death was a tragedy which robbed German liberalism of its one real chance to influence events decisively. No one can say what would have happened had Frederick lived, but it should be remembered that, although kindly and humane in outlook, the emperor was a somewhat indecisive individual, less committed to liberalism than friends thought, and most certainly a firm believer in the dignity and power of the monarchy.

When Crown Prince William ascended the throne, superficially Bismarck's position seemed secure again. He had cultivated the young prince's friendship, and William returned the compliment by expressing his admiration for the old man. Yet within two years it was all over; chancellor and emperor parted company for ever.

It was not possible to create the intimate friendship which bound William's grandfather to the chancellor for over a quarter of a century. A great psychological gulf separated the cantankerous old autocrat from the young prince of twenty-nine. As an impressionable boy of eleven, William trotted on his pony through the Brandenburg Gate when his grandfather returned as emperor from France. He had grown up in a noisy, ebullient and expanding Germany and was anxious to obtain for his country her rightful place in the sun. A man of great charm and with a quick mind and wide-ranging interests, a brilliant conversationalist and amiable companion, William was also a highly impatient and unstable personality. A restless individual with an insatiable appetite for activity, he played many parts with consummate skill; sometimes the soldier and lover of military pageantry, passionately devoted to his army; at times the modern ruler, interested in social problems; at times the intellectual, proud founder of the Emperor William Society for the Encouragement of Scientific Research. Unlike his grandfather, William would not stay in the background; he interfered in affairs of state, expressing his opinions in frequent after-dinner speeches much to the alarm of officials, whom he rarely consulted. Firmly convinced of his own infallibility, William threw caution to the winds on these occasions, declaring his intention of leading his people to a glorious future. Finally, he was a born autocrat with an exalted notion of his vocation and a contempt for the constitution, which he boasted he had never read – in short, a ruler unlikely to tolerate Bismarck's monopoly of political power for long. He had, in fact, resolved to dispense with the senile elder statesman as soon as decently possible.

The emperor was encouraged in his design by close friends like General Waldersee, whom he appointed chief of the German general staff on the retirement of Moltke in 1888. Waldersee was a prominent member of an influential group of extreme Conservatives which included Stöcker, the court chaplain. These men were seeking to capture the mind of the young ruler and overthrow Bismarck. Bismarck had not scrupled in the past to use intermediaries to turn William against his parents; the intermediaries

now turned the emperor against his chancellor, and as he spent most of his time on his estate at Friedrichsruh near Hamburg, he could do little to fight back.

The open breach between emperor and chancellor began over social policy. In 1889 William intervened dramatically in the Ruhr miners' strike and settled the dispute by lecturing the employers on their responsibilities. With romantic visions of himself as a latter-day '*roi des gueux*', William confidently believed that he could win over the working class by a modest extension of the social welfare system. Bismarck disagreed; he was deeply pessimistic about the future, had little faith in state socialism and believed that the forces of social anarchy could be kept at bay only by further repression. With this end in view, he proposed in 1889 to make the anti-socialist law permanent, including the clause which empowered municipal authorities to expel agitators from the towns. William was not against renewal for he, too, feared socialism. But he asked Bismarck to delete the expulsion clause, feeling that this was an unnecessarily harsh measure. Bismarck refused. In the end the Reichstag let him down. The *Kartell* was divided over the clause; some Conservatives supported it, while National Liberals and Free Conservatives favoured deletion. As Bismarck stubbornly refused to make any concessions to the parliamentary majority, the entire bill was rejected by the Reichstag in January 1890, an ominous sign that the chancellor's political power was crumbling away.

Early in February 1890, when the Reichstag elections were under way, William issued a proclamation promising new social legislation and announcing the calling of an international conference to discuss social questions. The absence of Bismarck's counter-signature from the proclamation caused a sensation. When his delaying tactics failed, Bismarck had bluntly refused to sign, and actually intrigued with foreign diplomats to frustrate the conference. Contemporaries sensed that the chancellor's days were numbered. The election results confirmed them in this belief. The *Kartell* of 1887 went down to an ignominious defeat; the Conservatives and National Liberals lost eighty-five seats between them; the Radicals gained forty-six seats and, most dramatic change of all, the Socialists won twenty-four seats; although still only the fifth party in terms of Reichstag seats, the Socialists polled more votes than any other party.¹² The electorate had in effect passed a massive vote of no-confidence in the chancellor and the opposition was once again in control of the Reichstag.

At long last Bismarck was trapped between an emperor bent on having his own way and a hostile Reichstag. He could not accept defeat gracefully but clung desperately to office. At first he thought of a *coup d'état*; he planned to put an anti-socialist bill and new military estimates before the Reichstag, certain that one or both measures would be rejected; the

Reichstag would be repeatedly dissolved to bring it to heel; as a last resort he would summon a congress of princes to remake the constitution, drastically reducing the powers of the Reichstag. William, alarmed by the increased Socialist vote, readily agreed. Then, characteristically, he quickly changed his mind and ordered Bismarck not to renew the anti-socialist legislation.

In a last desperate attempt to stay in office, Bismarck revived an obsolete Prussian cabinet order of 1852 which required all Prussian ministers to consult their minister-president before communicating with the king. William demanded the repeal of an order which clearly restricted the exercise of his authority. Simultaneously Bismarck was busy in the Reichstag trying to create a fantastic new *Kartell* of Conservatives, Centrists, Poles, Guelfs and Danes. Windthorst, after discussions with Bismarck, commented sadly that he had just left the death-bed of a great man. The Conservatives bluntly refused even to discuss the matter. When Bismarck met William II on 15 March, they quarrelled violently. William disputed Bismarck's right to receive Windthorst and accused his chancellor of consorting with Jews and Jesuits.¹³ The emperor insisted on repeal of the 1852 order; he reaffirmed his decision not to allow any dissolution of the Reichstag and ordered Bismarck to reduce the military estimates. Bismarck knew the sands had run out. Next day William demanded the instant repeal of the 1852 order, failing that, the chancellor's resignation. Bismarck was reluctant to resign over a triviality. Fate spared him this final humiliation. The emperor chanced to read a routine report referring to 'ominous' Russian troop movements in the Balkans. At once William accused Bismarck of gross dereliction of duty in failing to warn him in time to alert the Austrians. Bismarck now had his excuse for resigning over foreign policy, where he was undisputed master, rather than over domestic matters, where he was behaving like a petty tyrant. Bismarck's resignation letter of 17 March 1890 ignored the serious differences over domestic policy, merely remarking that the 1852 order was indispensable for good government; the real issue, he maintained, was the emperor's pursuit of an anti-Russian policy of which he could not approve. The resignation was accepted and his long reign was over. Only his son Herbert resigned with him. All the other ministers, his creatures, stayed on, feeling no gratitude to the old man, merely relief that the ogre had departed.

Bismarck retired to Friedrichsruh until his death in 1898. He could not break the habits of a lifetime and leave affairs of state alone. He resented his dismissal and was especially embittered by the emperor's refusal to install Herbert as chancellor. He remained a persistent and querulous critic of the regime, giving interviews to journalists, writing innumerable articles and dictating the notoriously unreliable *Reminiscences*.¹⁴ Oddly enough,

¹² 1,427,298.

¹³ A reference to Bleichröder, Bismarck's Jewish banker friend.

¹⁴ *Gedanken und Erinnerungen*, 6 vols., Stuttgart, 1898–1907.

he was more popular with the general public than in the past. But he failed completely to exert any influence on high policy, so that his last years were a bitter disappointment and a pathetic epitaph to a great career.

In Anglo-Saxon lands the propaganda of two world wars has made Bismarck a sinister figure; a direct line of descent is often traced from Bismarck through William II to Hitler. What can a historian writing in the last quarter of the twentieth century say of Bismarck? That he was a great man is undeniable. He towered above contemporaries, a veritable giant amongst pigmies. No other German exerted so profound an influence on German history in the nineteenth century. When he came to power in 1862, Germany was a confederation of independent states fossilised in the mould of 1815; when he left office, Germany was a state of great stature, feared and respected by the Great Powers. Of course, once Germany became an industrial nation some form of unification was probably inevitable. But this in no way detracts from his historical significance as the executant of a historical process. In his own lifetime and long after his death, Bismarck was idolised by millions of his fellow-countrymen who saw in him the embodiment of Germany's will to be a nation. Nor did his services to Germany end in 1871. As chancellor he helped shape the destinies of the new Empire for two decades, in fact nearly half its lifetime. He undoubtedly committed monumental blunders in his handling of the Church and the working class; and he was tenacious in defence of the class interests of the Junkers to whom he belonged. Yet, on the other hand, he helped to promote the modernisation of Germany and was responsible for a social welfare system which, though it disappointed its creator and did no more than file some of the rough edges off the system, did in the long run give working people some limited stake in the survival of the Empire.

Like all great men he had serious defects and limitations. He was petty, vindictive and ruthless in his treatment of those who stood in his way. His tyrannical methods, intolerance of independence of mind in others and his lust for power left their mark on the whole apparatus of government, infecting subordinates with the corruption of manners inevitable under a personal dictatorship. His most serious limitation was that he was cast in the mould of the eighteenth century. To him government was essentially a function of rulers and officials, not of peoples. Most certainly he had some understanding of the dynamic political and social implications of an industrial society. But his 'Bonapartist' methods - seeking to satisfy the material interests of aristocracy, middle class and (to some extent) working class whilst barring the way to more responsible government - seriously retarded Germany's political growth. The idea that the Reichstag might one day become an instrument for articulating the will of the people and effecting political and social change was quite outside his understanding. At best he treated the Reichstag with condescension. When it refused to do his will, he turned on it with primitive fury, fighting hostile parties as if

they were hostile foreign powers. It was no accident that the best minds stayed out of politics, leaving the Reichstag, with some honourable exceptions, in the hands of mediocre bureaucrats incapable of broad vision. Nor does the Empire seem to have had any cosmic significance for Bismarck. Power was an end in itself. He could not envisage Germany after his day and made no attempt to train up any political class capable of steering Germany through the rapids of the twentieth century.

The sociologist Max Weber, writing in 1917, summarised these negative aspects of Bismarck's heritage succinctly and accurately:

'Bismarck left behind him as his political heritage a nation without any political education, far below the level which, in this respect, it had reached twenty years earlier. Above all, he left behind a nation without any political will, accustomed to allow the great statesman at its head to look after its policy for it. Moreover, as a consequence of his misuse of the monarchy as a cover for his own interests in the struggle of political parties, he left a nation accustomed to submit, under the label of constitutional monarchy, to anything which was decided for it, without criticising the political qualifications of those who now occupied Bismarck's empty place and who with incredible ingenuousness now took the reins of power into their hands.'