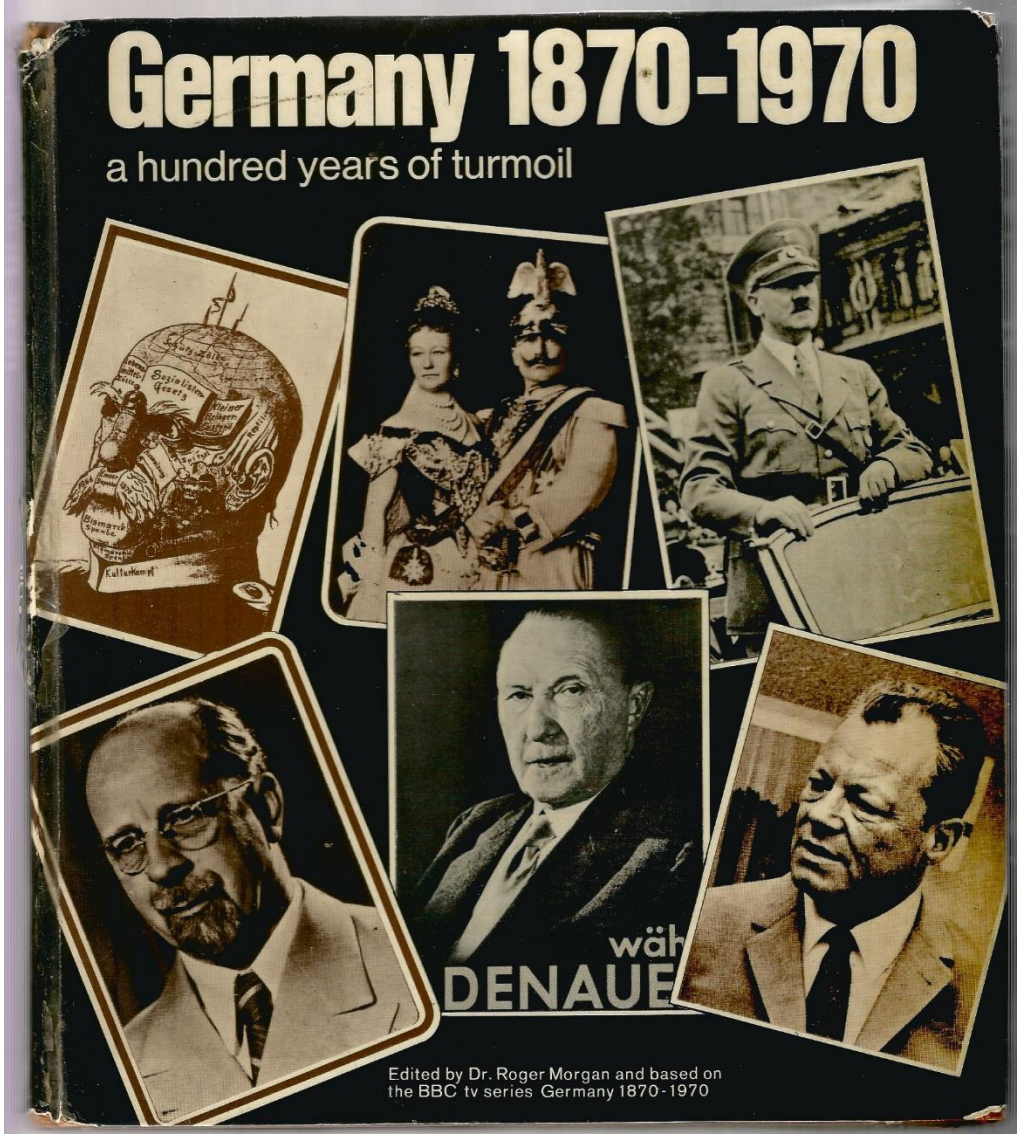
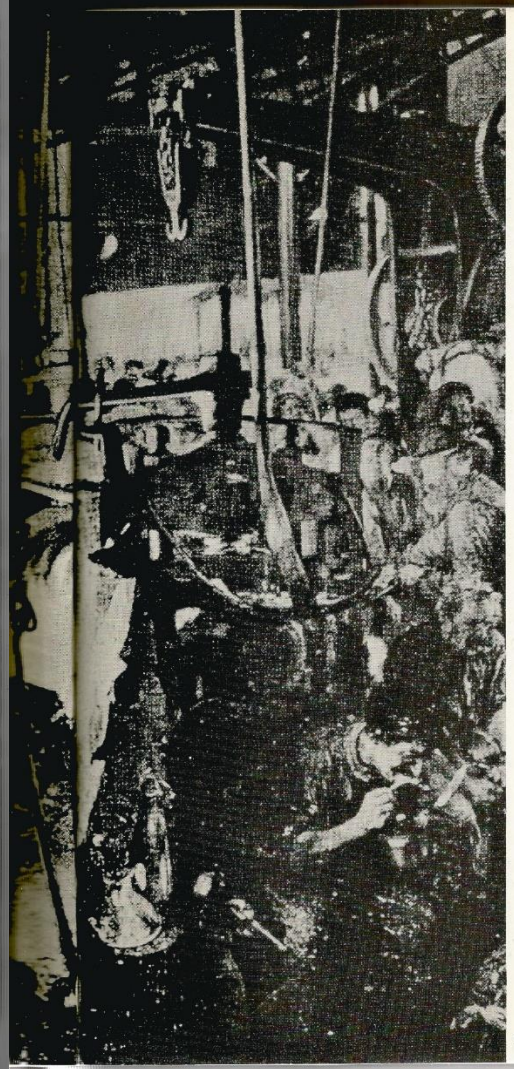
Germany 1870-1970

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.*

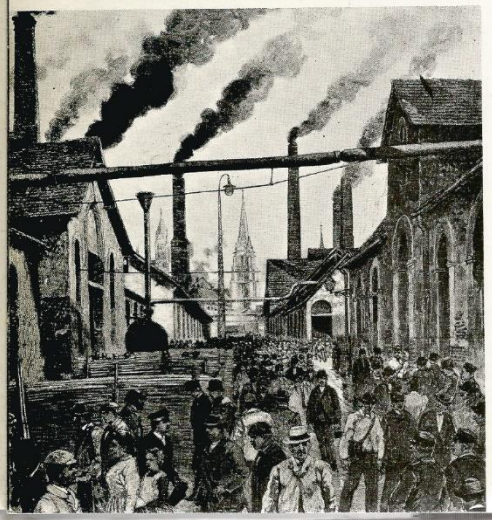
In the middle of the last century, the annual coal consumption of the city of London alone was greater than the total annual production of all the mines in Prussia, and the British gas works in Berlin symbolised the dominance of British patents and products. But within a generation, a united Germany 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.

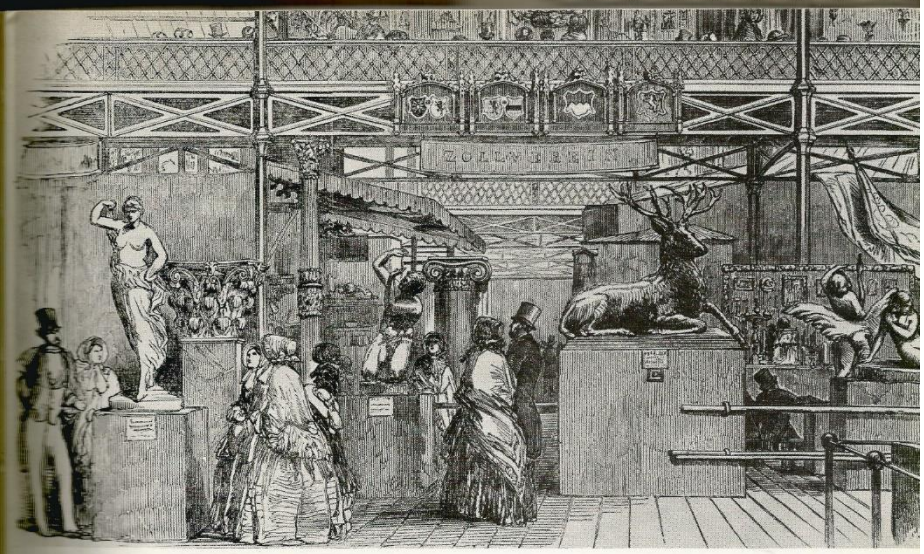
Werner von Siemens, another famous industrial entrepreneur, was four years younger than Alfred Krupp. The foundations of his electrical industry were laid in Berlin where, in 1847, he started a repair shop for telegraphy apparatus. The first telegraph line, between Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Main was laid 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.

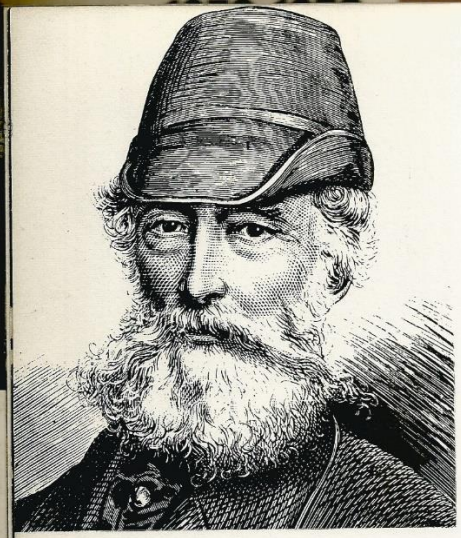
Education played an important part in the formation of these trends. At the end of the 1860s, Matthew Arnold wrote: 'In the public high schools of Prussia and France,

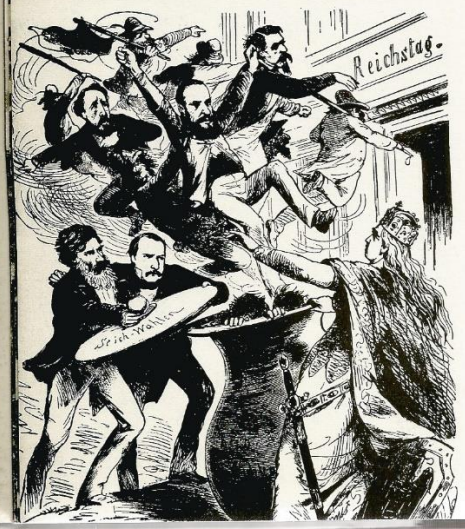
***Above left**: Eager workers clocking in—two minutes early, 1889. **Below left**: The changing face of Germany—factory chimneys blot out the medieval skyline of church spires. **Above right**: The Zollverein stand at the Great Exhibition, 1851; the world still saw Germany as rural and peaceful. **Below 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 Fachvereine der Metallarbeiter Deutschlands.





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*

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

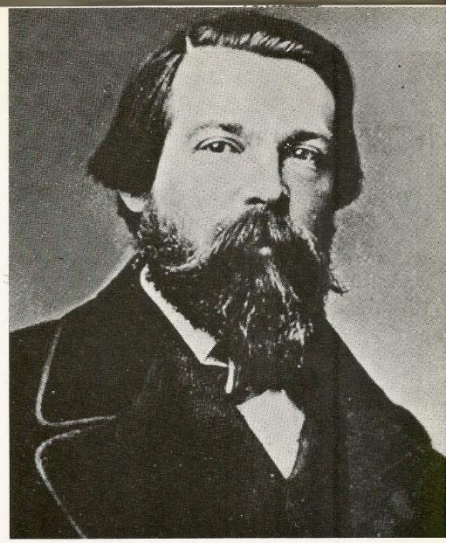
Another reason for Germany's swift development was political. Members of the Imperial Parliament—the *Reichstag*—were not able to become ministers, and there was thus less incentive for clever men to enter politics. The way to political power lay through service to the Emperor. Officials serving the 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 unspoilt 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*

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 swift 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 renting 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 200,000 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:** Strikebreakers 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 support a 'benevolent' management—both the houses they lived in and the stores they shopped at were probably owned by their employers

Questions on German History

Paths to Parliamentary Democracy

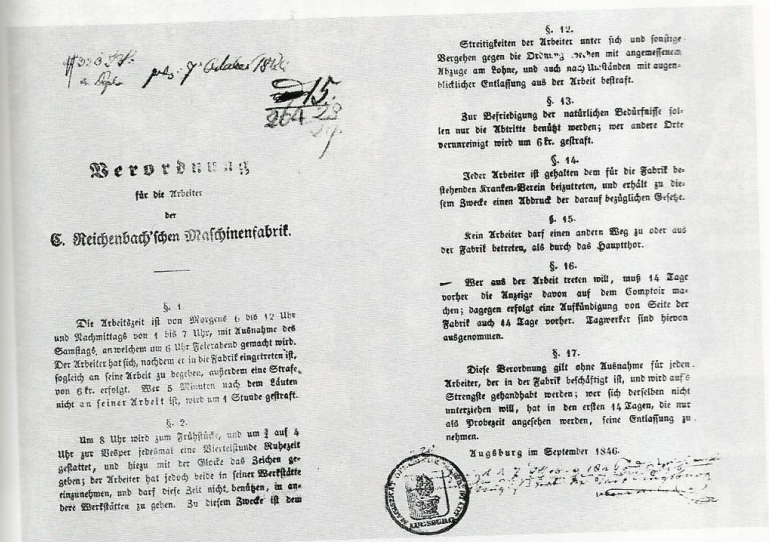
2. New social structures and political theories

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



Verordnung

für die Arbeiter

der

C. Reichenbach'schen Maschinenfabrik.

§. 1

Die Arbeitszeit ist von Morgens 6 bis 12 Uhr und Nachmittags von 1 bis 7 Uhr, mit Ausnahme des Samstags, an welchem um 6 Uhr Feierabend gemacht wird. Der Arbeiter hat sich, nachdem er in die Fabrik eingetreten ist, sogleich an seine Arbeit zu begeben, ausserdem eine Strafe von 6 kr. erfolgt. War 5 Minuten nach dem Läuten nicht an seiner Arbeit ist, wird um 1 Stunde gestraft.

§. 2.

Um 8 Uhr wird zum Frühstück, und um ½ auf 4 Uhr zur Vesper jedesmal eine Viertelstunde Ruhezeit gestattet, und hiezu mit der Glocke das Zeichen gegeben; der Arbeiter hat jedoch beide in seiner Werkstätte einzunehmen, und darf diese Zeit nicht benützen, in andere Werkstätten zu gehen. Zu diesem Zwecke ist dem

§. 12.

Streitigkeiten der Arbeiter unter sich und sonstige Vergehen gegen die Ordnung werden mit angemessenen Abzuge am Lohne, und auch nach Umständen mit augenblicklicher Entlassung aus der Arbeit bestraft.

§. 13.

Zur Befriedigung der natürlichen Bedürfnisse sollen nur die Abtritte benützt werden; wer andere Orte verunreinigt wird um 6 kr. gestraft.

§. 14.

Jeder Arbeiter ist gehalten dem für die Fabrik bestehenden Kranken-Verein beizutreten, und erhält zu diesem Zwecke einen Abdruck der darauf bezüglichen Gesetze.

§. 15.

Kein Arbeiter darf einen andern Weg zu oder aus der Fabrik betreten, als durch das Hauptthor.

§. 16.

Wer aus der Arbeit treten will, muß 14 Tage vorher die Anzeige davon auf dem Comptoir machen; dagegen erfolgt eine Aufkündigung von Seite der Fabrik auch 14 Tage vorher. Tagwerker sind hievon ausgenommen.

§. 17.

Diese Verordnung gilt ohne Ausnahme für jeden Arbeiter, der in der Fabrik beschäftigt ist, und wird auf's Strengste gehandhabt werden; wer sich derselben nicht unterziehen will, hat in den ersten 14 Tagen, die nur als Probezeit angesehen werden, seine Entlassung zu nehmen.

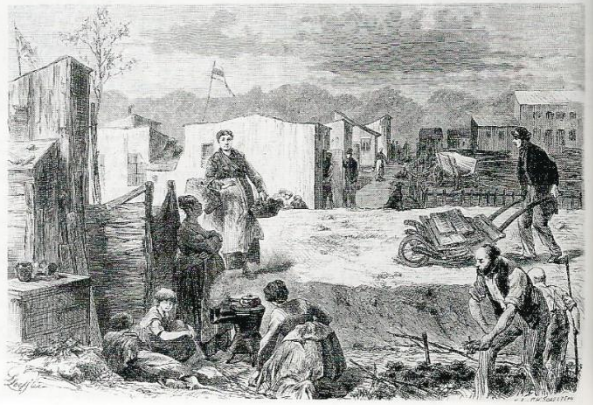
Augsburg im September 1846.

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 appaling housing conditions. On the outskirts of Berlin shanty towns grew up, and increasing numbers of tenement blocks were built where, in 1867, on average 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

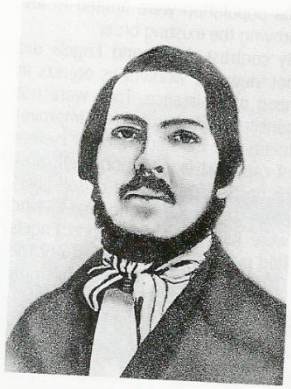
III/126
A shanty town on the outskirts of Berlin around 1875

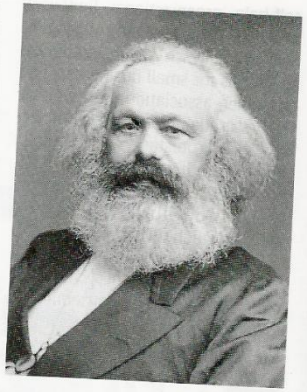


self-help organizations: Raiffeisen founded rural loan societies; Schulze-Delitzsch set up credit associations for small businesses; and consumer associations, as well as the first trade unions, came into being. The Protestant and Catholic churches both ran charitable institutions for tradesmen and workers. 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 Communist 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 Hetzjagd gegen dies Geſpenſt verbündet, der Papſt und der Czar, Metternich nnd Guizot, franzöſiſche Radikale und deutſche Poliziſten.

Wo iſt die Oppoſitionspartei, die nicht von ihren regierenden Gegnern als kommuniſtiſch verſchrieen worden wäre, wo die Oppoſitionspartei, die den fortgeſchritteneren 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, flämmiſcher 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

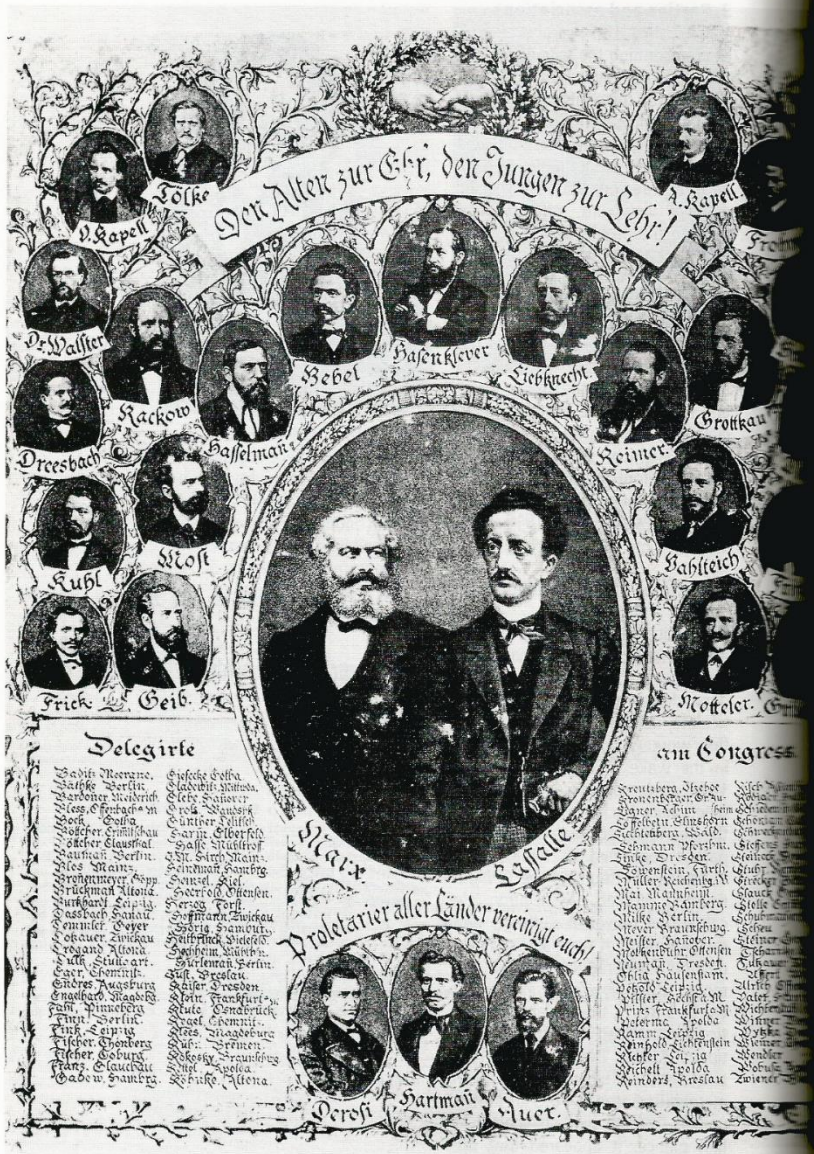
„Allgemeiner Deutſcher Arbeiterverein"

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 Arbeiterſtandes und eine wahrhafte Beſeitigung der Klaſſengegenſätze in der Geſellſchaft herbeigeführt werden kann, den Zweck verfolgt,

auf friedlichem und legalem 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 gleichen Stimmrecht und kann jeder Zeit austreten.

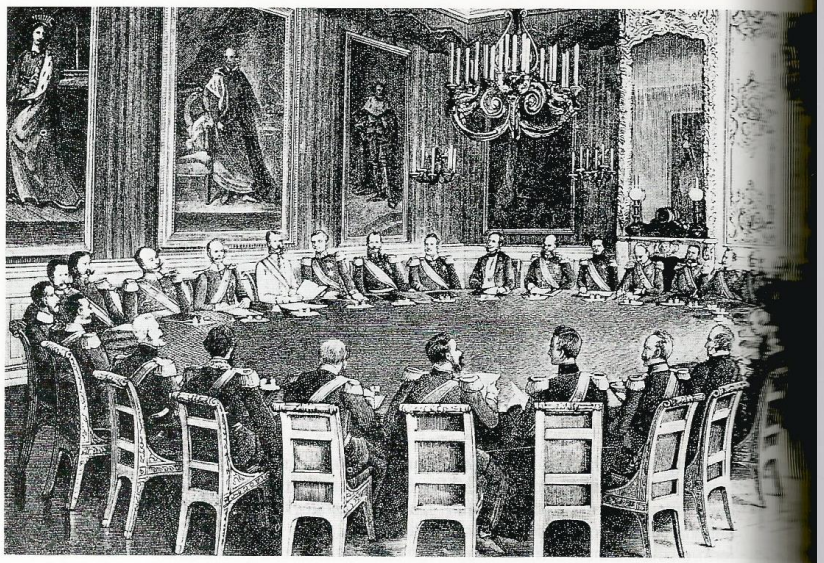


gained the upper hand in the party. However, its "Gotha Programme" revealed that a whole range of "Lassallean" ideas had remained intact. The programme was therefore sharply criticized by Marx.

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 Hohenzollern for the Prussian people



III/142
The conference of princes in Frankfurt in 1863

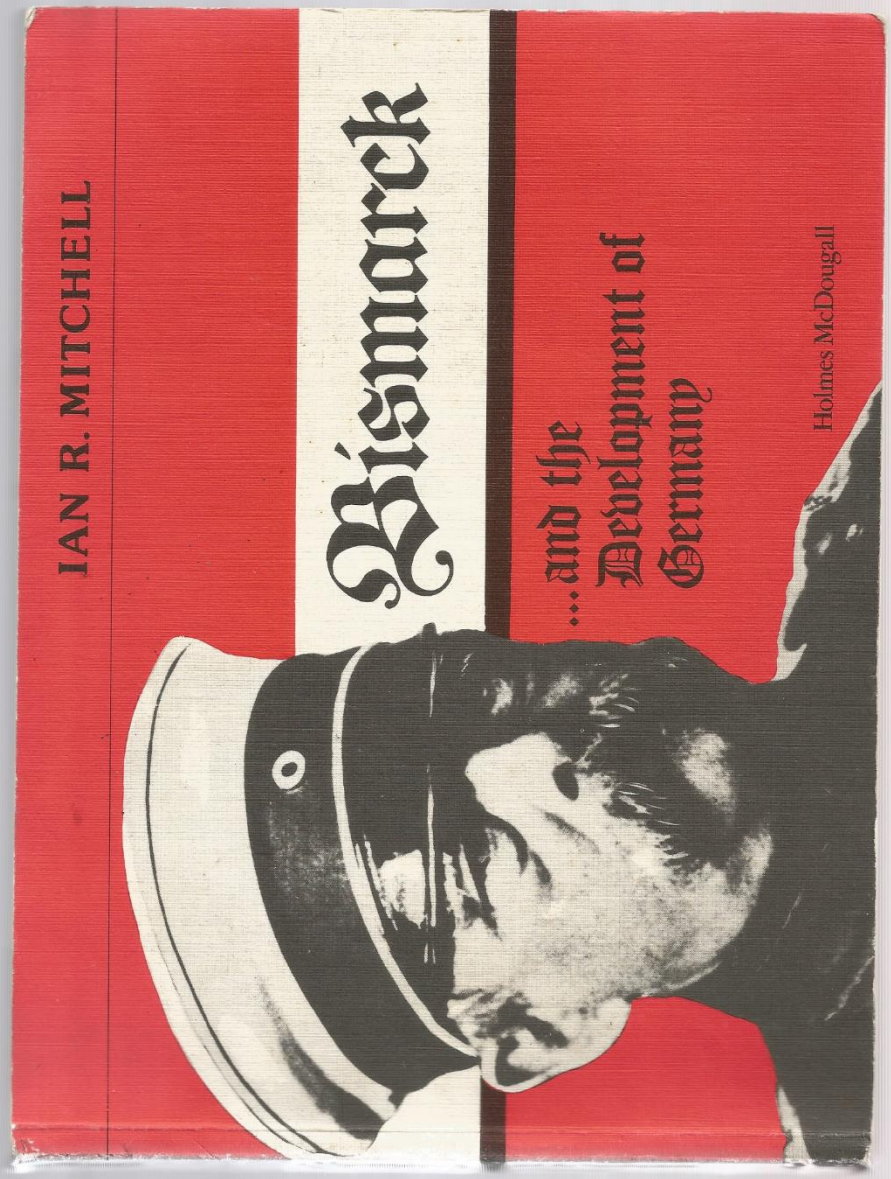
rats set up the German Progressive Party, which advocated a resolute struggle for a parliamentary constitutional state and a new social order. For the first time, a Prussian party also included a call for national unity in its programme.

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."



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.

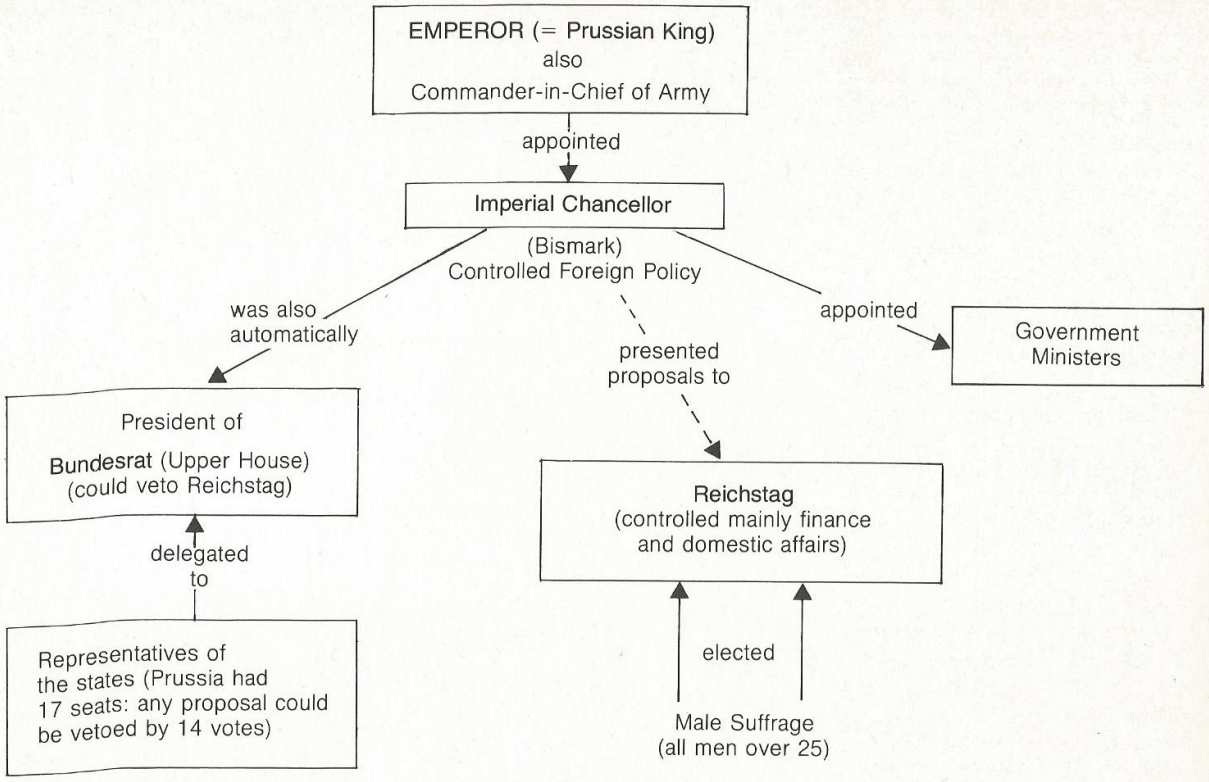
> Virchow explained that he and his friends had known a better way of leading to German unity than Bismarck's, namely, the way of freedom. But as things now stood, he said, they were willing to sacrifice their wishes to Bismarck, and were willing to support his foreign policy, but must so much the more 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.

№ 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 ꝛc.

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

§. 1.

Vereine, 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 Wirthschaftsgenossenschaften, (Bundes-Gesetzbl. S. 415 ff.) Anwendung.

Auf eingeschriebene Hülfskassen findet im gl[eichen] Fa[lle] der §. 29 des Gesetzes über die eingeschriebenen Hülfskassen vom [...] (Reichs-Ges[etzbl.] S. 125 ff.) Anwendung.

Selbständige Kassenvereine, welche [...] nach ihren Statuten die gegenseitige Unterstützu[ng]

Reichs-Gesetzbl. 1878.

Ausgegeben zu Berlin den 22. O[ktober]

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.

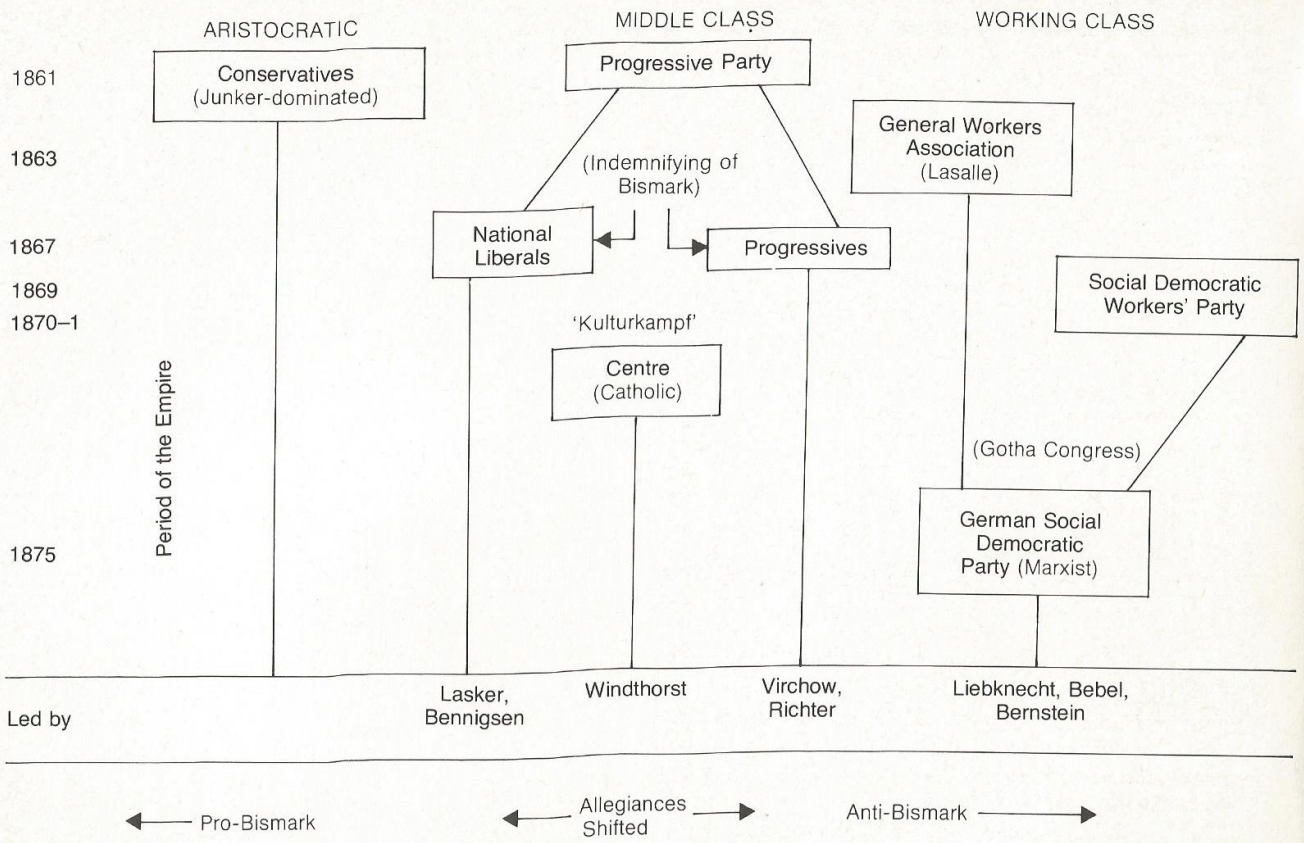
If the Liberals were to democratize Germany, as well as see her unified, they needed to be resolute and consistent. A Liberal majority in the Reichstag, fighting for democratic principles, and particularly for parliamentary control over the Army and ministerial appointment would have forced the Iron 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 responsiblity. 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

[12] 1,427,298.

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,

[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.'