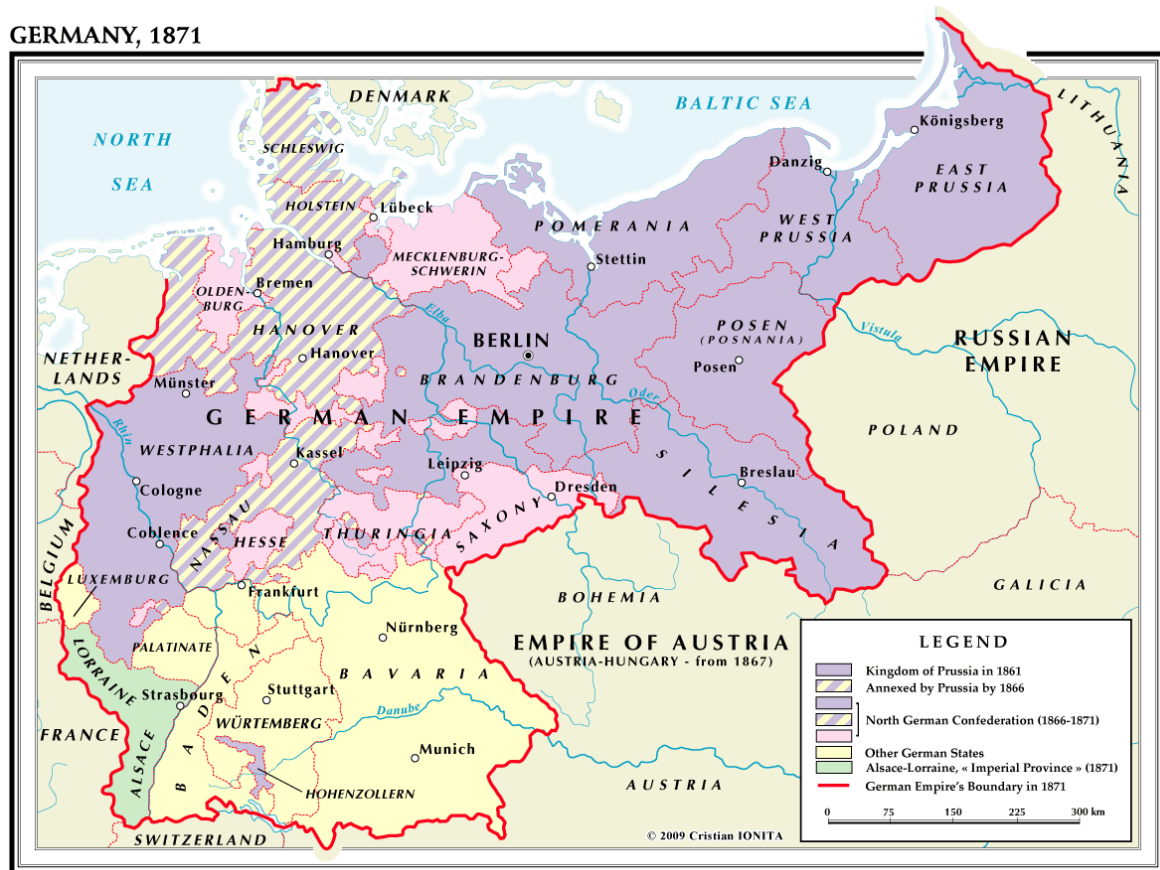


The Kaiserreich, 1871–1914

GERMANY, 1871



Prussia and Germany

- No single country called Germany until 1871.
- Before = large number of small, independent states, loosely allied in the German Confederation
- Creation of Germany was the work of Prussia's chief minister, Otto von Bismarck
- King of Prussia, Wilhelm I became the first German Kaiser (Emperor)
- Created in 1871, Germany consisted of the Kingdom of Prussia and 24 lesser states: three smaller kingdoms, 18 principalities and three free cities
- 'Prussification' is a better description of what happened in 1871 as Prussia dominated the German Empire in every way
- After 1871 Prussia ceased to be an independent country and in her place Germany became one of the most powerful countries in Europe.

The constitution of the Second Reich- Kaiser, Chancellor and Reichstag

- Of Prussian origin, Bismarck sought to protect the power of Prussia and the Prussian ruling elite in his constitution, while allowing an element of popular democracy.
- Under constitution, component states kept their own governments but military matters were controlled by the King of Prussia
- There was to be a central law-making body with limited powers
- To outward appearance the German Empire was not a straightforwardly autocratic state like its neighbour to the east, Tsarist Russia:
- Germany had its Kaiser and also had a high-profile imperial parliament (the Reichstag) which was elected on the basis of universal suffrage
- The power of the Reichstag was LIMITED. It COULD NOT INITIATE LEGISLATION; it could only reject or amend proposals which were handed down to it by the Bundesrat
- The Bundesrat was controlled by the Kaiser
- Government ministers, chief of whom was the Imperial Chancellor (Prime Minister), were not in any way accountable to the Reichstag. They were appointed by the Kaiser and kept office as long as they retained his confidence.

The Constitution (summary)

Kaiser (Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia)

- Hereditary monarch (King of Prussia)
- Appointed/dismissed government
- Could dissolve the Reichstag (Parliament)
- Gave assent to all laws (with the Chancellor)
- Controlled foreign policy and armed forces

Chancellor and Government Ministers

- Appointed/ dismissed by Kaiser
- Proposed new laws to the Reichstag
- Gave assent to all laws (with the Kaiser)
- Not dependent upon support in the Reichstag to stay in office

Bundesrat (Upper House of Parliament)

- Presided over by the Chancellor
- Could initiate new laws
- Had to approve new laws (along with the Reichstag, Kaiser and Chancellor)
- Could veto laws passed by the Reichstag

Reichstag (Lower House of Parliament)

- Members (called deputies) elected
 - Men over 25 voted in Reichstag elections every three years
 - Gave consent to all laws
 - Could question, debate, agree to or reject a law proposed by the chancellors
 - Could not amend a law
 - Could not demand the dismissal of the chancellor or any other ministers
-

Political parties

- Conservatives
- National Liberals (moderate conservatives)
- Progressive (Liberals)
- Socialists
- Zentrum or Centre (representing the interests of Catholics)

The constitution of Imperial Germany

Brainchild of Otto von Bismarck and designed to ENSURE THE DOMINANCE BY PRUSSIA OF THE NEW GERMAN REICH

The Key features...

- The Kaiser; the king of the largest state, Prussia, was also Kaiser of Germany. He had the power to appoint and dismiss the Chancellor and government ministers. He had the power to dissolve the Reichstag.
- Wilhelm II came to the throne in 1888 aged 29. He believed it was the Kaiser's responsibility to rule rather than to share power with the Reichstag. He was a poor decision maker and relied heavily on the military for advice. He had little regard for the Reichstag or democracy.
- The Chancellor; directly responsible to the Kaiser and in charge of the appointments of ministers. Could ignore the resolutions passed by the Reichstag. His success depended on his political ability, the character of the Kaiser and the composition of the Reichstag.

- The Bundesrat (UPPER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT); the German Reich was composed of 25 sovereign states. The Bundesrat contained 58 representatives from state governments. Prussia had 17 representatives in the Bundesrat. Decisions decided by a majority vote needed a majority of 14.
- The Reichstag (LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT); Deputies to the Reichstag were elected by universal male suffrage. The government was not accountable to the Reichstag. Limited powers to initiate legislation. A majority in the Reichstag could do nothing against the Chancellor; if they voted against him, he did not resign, but dissolved the Reichstag.
- The Government; the government and ministers were appointed and dismissed by the Kaiser. It proposed new laws to the Reichstag.
- The Army; very important role in state as creation of unification. Not accountable to Reichstag – directly accountable to the Kaiser. Swore an oath of allegiance to the Kaiser. Army could declare martial law (army rule) and the elite in the army had little respect for democracy – many came from Junkers (Prussian landed class).

Bismarck's Reich was designed to give Germany stability and peace; but ultimately it doomed Germany to upheaval and war.

Political tensions

- The Kaiser's regime was backed by a number of powerful elites in Germany society.
 - Prussian landed class – the Junkers.
 - Senior officers of the German Army.
 - Bureaucrats and financiers who rose to prominence on the back of rapid economic growth in the 1880s.
- The main threat to the Kaiser's regime, SDP – Social Democratic Party – this was nominally Marxist but in practice the party for the most part was reformist and moderate. It sought to advance the socialist cause by lawful methods.
 - By 1912 it was the largest party in the Reichstag and that for a Germany committed to a monarchical ruling was worrying.

Religious divisions

- German society was divided by religion as well as by social class. Largely protestant in the North and central parts of the country but the southern states were strongly Catholic (20 million).
- In the 1870s, the Catholics formed their own political party in the Zentrum.
- Bismarck, fearing that Zentrum would become a standard bearer for all opponents of Prussian dominance, responded with a *Kulturkampf* (cultural struggle) designed to intimidate and weaken the Catholic Church.
- Although this was abandoned in the 1880s it left a legacy of bitterness behind.

STRENGTHS OF CONSTITUTION

- The regime was backed by the key elites in Germany
- Full universal male suffrage
- Autocratic nature was efficient.

WEAKNESSES OF CONSTITUTION

- Despite a national currency (*Reichsmark*) based on the gold standard, and national criminal and civil law codes, there was an underdeveloped sense of national identity – no flag.
- The Chancellor was more powerful than the elected Reichstag.
- There was continued Prussian dominance, both in the Bundesrat and within the administration of government. There was considerable resentment from other states at this central role for Prussia.
- The constitution created a political structure that was not clear, that was fragmented and that was dominated by the conservative elites, especially those of Prussia.

How influential was the army in Germany?

- Power of the Prussian military machine enabled Bismarck to forge German unification out of three wars, 1864-1871.
- All-important role the army had played in the unification process helped to raise out of all proportion the status of its members in the Kaiserreich society.

Therefore, the German army was to be found at the centre of the political and social life of Imperial Germany:

- The oath of loyalty signed by German officers was to the military leader, the Emperor; not the state and so the military elite enjoyed great social status.
- The system of conscription for two to three years helped to instil its military values throughout the country.
- The army was virtually independent of the Reichstag and was not constrained by annual approval, since the military budget had a five-year grant.
- Within society the prestige of the army was high e.g. civilians got out of the way of officers on the pavement.
- The majority of the army officers were conservative and unsympathetic to democracy.

CHANCELLORS AFTER BISMARCK (1871-1890)

- CAPRIVI (1890-1894)

- HOHENLOHE (1894-1900)

- BÜLOW (1900-1909)

- BETHMANN-HOLLWEG (1909-1917)

Economic developments:

Before 1850 Germany lagged far behind the leaders in industrial development, Britain, France and Belgium.

German states were catching up, and by 1900 Germany was a world leader in industrialization, along with Britain and the United States.

Economic growth:

- Germany's economic growth was exceptional between 1890 and 1914.
- On average economy expanded by 4.5% a year.
- Coal and iron production almost doubled in these years.
- By 1914, Germany's share of world trade was equal to that of Britain.
- Germany's steel industry (dominated by the massive Krupp Corporation) was particularly strong
- Steel production exceeded Britain by 1900 and this fuelled the expansion of other industries e.g. armaments and the railways.

New industries:

- Germany excelled in industries that used new and innovative technologies, such as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electrics and motor manufacture.
- Daimler and Diesel developed cars, while AEG and Siemens became huge electrical businesses
- By 1913 Germany produced around 50% of the world's electrical goods.
- In chemicals, Germany led the world in the production of synthetic dyes and pharmaceuticals and in precision engineering.

An industrial economy:

- These economic developments resulted in a growing proportion of the population working in the industrial and service sectors of the economy.
- Industry contribution to GNP rose from around 33% to 45%.

Improved transport infrastructure:

- Germany's transport network also developed with trains, tramways and trolley buses constructed to facilitate travel and industrial development.

Social consequences**Urbanisation:**

- Population boom and new jobs in industry stimulated urbanisation.
- By 1910, 60% of the population lived in urban areas, the highest rate in Europe.
- The populations of Breslau, Cologne, Hamburg and Munich all exceeded half a million by 1910, while Berlin had in excess of 2 million inhabitants.
- The growth of the urban working class led to the emergence of trade unions and the SPD. To the traditional elites (e.g. the Kaiser and Junkers) this represented a serious challenge to their authority.
- Peasants suffered during the social and economic changes of these years; thousands of peasants left the land in search of work in the new industrial towns and cities. The percentage of the population employed in agriculture fell from 50% in 1871 to 35% in 1907.
- the middle class expanded significantly in size during this period. White collar workers in industry, business and administration all became more numerous.
- the landowning Junker class came under more pressure in this period as incomes from agriculture fell. Some landowners were forced to sell their estates to the newly rich upper middle class families from the cities.