The Establishment of the Post-War Consensus, 1954-64

By Andrew Boxer | Published in History Review 2010
Political 20th Century Britain
Andrew Boxer explains why party political strife lacked real substance in the period after 1945.

In February 1954 *The Economist* invented a new word – 'Butskellism'. The magazine thought that the policies of Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day, the Conservative R.A. Butler, were so similar to those of his Labour predecessor, Hugh Gaitskell, that they had been devised by a 'Mr Butskell'. The name caught on – there really did seem to be no difference between the economic policies of the two main parties. 'Butskellism' outlived both Butler and Gaitskell because successive Conservative and Labour governments appeared, not only to tackle Britain's economic problems in the same ways, but to share a wide range of policies and attitudes. Most historians today accept this view and argue that, for 30 years after the Second World War, there was a widespread agreement among the British people and their political leaders about the policies and style of their government. This is known as 'the post-war consensus' – and, it is claimed, it remained in place until it was dismantled by Mrs Thatcher's governments of the 1980s.

Consensus did not mean that the political parties abandoned their ideological labels, and they certainly continued to argue with one another. But, once in government, political leaders seemed to accept that their role was to manage the nation's resources, arbitrating between the important and powerful sectors of British society to achieve an agreed set of goals, rather than imposing doctrinaire, ideological policies. This post-war consensus covered four principal areas: the maintenance of a mixed economy, pursuing the goal of full employment, maintaining a comprehensive welfare system and, finally, adjusting foreign and imperial policy to Britain's place in the post-war world.

Impact of the Second World War

The experience of the Second World War was crucially important in determining the nature of the post-war consensus. National unity is essential in wartime and Churchill, Prime Minister from 1940 until 1945, recognised this. Although a Conservative, he brought members of the other two main parties into his government. Clement Attlee, the Labour leader, became Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert Morrison Home Secretary and Ernest Bevin, the leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Minister of Labour. The Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, became Air Minister. There was also an electoral truce. In contrast to the United States, there was no general election during the war. Furthermore, at byelections, the major parties agreed not to field candidates in seats they did not already hold.

This spirit of unity extended to the nation at large. Although the propaganda image of a nation fully united behind the war effort and pluckily defying Hitler's bombs was an exaggeration, it was not entirely bogus. The war did create a sense of common purpose, even if there was plenty of grumbling about how fairly the privations of war were being shared. The war required the mobilisation of all the nation's resources and manpower, so it gave almost everyone a role to play in the war effort. As a result, there were opportunities for talented people to thrive, and promotion in wartime depended on ability, not class. The war did not radically alter Britain's social structure but it did generate a widespread desire to see a better world built once the conflict was over.

Demand for Welfare Reform

This aspiration explains why a dry government report of 1942, the Beveridge Report, was enormously popular and sold over 600,000 copies. Beveridge identified five targets for government action: poverty, disease, unemployment, ignorance and inadequate housing. The report recommended the creation of a national health service, the maintenance of full employment and a comprehensive welfare scheme to provide coverage for everyone 'from the cradle to the grave'. An opinion poll showed that 86 per cent of

the British people were in favour of its implementation. Beveridge's proposals became an important part of the post-war consensus in part because the war had made them necessary. The scale of German bombing in the Blitz had exposed the inadequacy of Britain's hospital provision. The wartime government created a statefunded Emergency Hospital Service in which doctors and nurses were paid by the government, so that patients were not charged. In 1941 the Minister of Health announced that, after the war, 'a comprehensive hospital service' would be created which would make treatment 'available to every person in need of it'.

War and the Economy

The war radically changed accepted views about the part that governments could, and should, play in managing the nation's economy. During the 1930s Treasury officials had believed that government attempts to regulate the economy would not work. But in wartime there was no alternative: resources, investment and manpower had to be directed to ensure that war production had priority. Rationing was introduced so that scarce food supplies could be shared fairly. Major sectors of the economy, such as coal mines and railways, were brought under government control and manpower was supervised by Bevin's ministry to give priority to war industries and production. The result of these policies was that unemployment (which, between the wars, had never fallen below a million, and had reached three million in the early 1930s) virtually disappeared. The government's wartime economic measures could not be successfully implemented without the co-operation of the trade unions. This enhanced the unions' status and made them virtually equal partners with government and business in the management of the economy.

Cambridge economist John Maynard Keynes had argued for some time that the problems of the inter-war years, in particular high unemployment, could be eliminated by government economic management. Not surprisingly, by the end of the war, Keynes's ideas of demand management became the new economic orthodoxy. Furthermore, the wartime spirit of national unity reinforced the notion that the government could and should run important sectors of the economy. This applied particularly to the services that everyone needed, such as gas, electricity, telephones and public transport. The collective spirit engendered by the war helped to make the idea of nationalising these utilities – bringing them permanently under the control of the state – not only acceptable but desirable.

The 1945 General Election

Because the war had changed the mood and expectations of the British people, the 1945 election manifestos of the two main political parties did not differ very much. Both parties committed themselves to the maintenance of full employment and, influenced by the Beveridge Report, both promised to create an extensive social security and health system. The result of the election, however, was a surprise to most people at the time. Despite Churchill's personal popularity, the Labour Party won in a landslide, gaining an overall majority of 146 seats. The Conservatives were blamed for the failures of the 1930s – high unemployment and the appeasement of Hitler – and the electorate believed that the Labour Party was more committed to building the new Britain that the wartime mood demanded.

Shocked by the scale of their defeat, the Conservative Party leaders decided to rethink their ideology and policies. RA Butler was one of the key figures in this process, and he explained in his memoirs the purpose of the Conservatives' 1947 policy document, *The Industrial Charter*:

Our first purpose was to counter the charge and the fear that ... full employment and the Welfare State were not safe in our hands ... The Charter was ... first and foremost an assurance that, in the interests of efficiency, full employment and social security, modern Conservatism would maintain strong central guidance over the operation of the economy.

This explains why there was so little Conservative opposition to the reform measures introduced by the Labour Government.

Establishing a Mixed Economy

The Labour Governments of 1945-51 brought some important sectors of the economy directly under state control in a process known as nationalisation. These sectors included the Bank of England, coal mining, transport, telecommunications, electricity, gas and the production of iron and steel. For many in the Labour Party, nationalisation of key sectors of the economy was part of their programme of making Britain 'socialist'. As the Party's 1945 election manifesto proclaimed, 'The Labour Party is a Socialist Party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain – free, democratic, efficient, public-spirited, its material resources organised in the service of the British people.' And yet, despite the Conservatives' ideological faith in free market economics and intense dislike of socialism, they offered only token resistance to the majority of Labour's reforms. This was because, not only had Keynes's views been accepted by both main parties, but there was a consensus that many of these industries (in particular, coal and transport) needed levels of investment that only the government could provide. Furthermore, both parties accepted that some nationalised industries, such as gas and electricity, produced services that ought to be available to everyone wherever they lived. This meant that they needed to be planned and managed in the interests of the community rather than run purely for the profit of shareholders. Indeed, it was the Conservative-dominated governments of the inter-war years that had begun this process by extending government control over, and investment in, the coal industry, civil aviation, telecommunications, and transport in London. The generation of electricity had been in public hands since 1926 when a Conservative Government had created the National Grid; and most gas distribution was already run by municipal authorities. Nationalising these industries offered the most efficient way of providing vital services to the whole country. The Conservative governments of 1951-64 made no attempt to return any of these industries and services to private ownership, with the exception of iron and steel.

There was a furious row within the Labour Party when, in 1959-60, the leader Hugh Gaitskell tried unsuccessfully to remove the openended commitment to nationalisation from the Party's constitution. But this was a debate about symbols rather than substance. Only the left-wing of the Labour Party wanted nationalisation greatly extended. As Gaitskell realised, they were out of touch with the national consensus that Britain needed a 'mixed economy': the industries nationalised by the 1945-51 Labour Government should remain under the control of the state, everything else would remain in private hands.

The Goal of Full Employment

In 1944 Winston Churchill's wartime coalition government issued a White Paper (an official set of proposals) which stated: 'the Government accepts as one of its primary aims the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment'. This assumed, for the first time, that full employment was something that governments could, and should, try to achieve. That this commitment should have been made by a Conservative-dominated wartime coalition shows how much the Second World War had destroyed the economic thinking of the 1930s, when Treasury officials had assumed that it was neither desirable, nor possible, for governments to manage employment levels in this way.

The Conservatives also accepted the need to treat the trade unions as part of the political establishment and as legitimate partners in the shaping of economic, especially industrial, policy. When Churchill returned to Downing Street in 1951, he was determined to preserve industrial peace, even if it meant giving in to potentially inflationary wage demands. He instructed his Minister of Labour to avoid conflict with the unions. Two rail strikes, in 1953 and 1954, were averted by capitulation to the men's terms and, although the government was prepared to use existing law to deal with unofficial strikes that threatened

vital services, any new legislation that risked confrontation with the Trades Union Congress was ruled out. This was because, as the Minister warned in 1955, 'any government initiative in the field of industrial relations should carry the greatest possible measure of TUC approval and concurrence. Unless we carry with us the responsible elements, who are at present in a majority, we run the risk of uniting the whole movement against us.'

The Welfare State

The Labour Government encountered some opposition from the Tories in parliament when it set about creating a national health service. Although the Conservative Party had accepted the principles of the Beveridge Report they were worried about the cost. But the principal opposition came from the medical profession which feared that, in a government-run medical service, politics and money – rather than medical need – would determine policy. Also, most family doctors, who ran their practices as privately-owned businesses, did not want them taken over by the state. The Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan, overcame their resistance by making some key concessions. He allowed the NHS hospitals to accept private patients and ensured that GPs received a generous fee for every patient on their books. Bevan's success in creating the National Health Service has proved to be the most lasting achievement of the post-war Labour Government. The NHS made medical services available to everyone and, initially at least, these were all free.

In opposition, the Conservatives had criticised supposedly wasteful expenditure on the administration of the welfare system, but in government they treated it with reverence. Pensions and national assistance benefits continued to rise, and it is an indication of the uncontroversial nature of the NHS during this period that the Minister of Health did not sit in the Cabinet between 1952 and 1962.

Imperial Policy

Britain was still a major imperial power in 1945 but the bulk of the Empire had been dismantled by 1964. This, too, was a development on which there was surprisingly little disagreement in Britain. The post-war Labour Government granted independence to India and Pakistan, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma and Palestine between 1947 and 1948. Only a few die-hard Tories grumbled ineffectively about this and it is probable that, had a Conservative government been elected in 1945, these countries would still have been given their freedom. This was for two reasons. Britain, virtually bankrupt after the Second World War, could not afford to retain them. Nor could it resist the powerful demands for independence from within the countries themselves. Britain's problems in India were summed up succinctly by Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his diary entry for 24th February 1947: 'If you are in a place where you are not wanted, and where you have not got the force, or perhaps the will, to squash those who don't want you, the only thing to do is to come out.'

However, for about 15 years after the war the leaders of both main parties believed that Britain's African, Caribbean and Far Eastern colonies were not ready for independence. Britain had a duty, it was thought, to build democratic political, administrative, legal, economic and educational institutions in their colonies before independence could be granted. These high-minded objectives were, in the minds of British politicians, reconcilable with exploiting the resources of the colonies to help overcome Britain's economic problems.

Yet by the mid-1950s a number of factors had combined to disrupt these aims, and the rapid withdrawal from the bulk of Britain's remaining imperial possessions became irresistible. The policy of simultaneously exploiting the colonies economically while attempting to develop their capacity for self-government merely fostered the kind of nationalist resentment against British rule that Dalton had observed in India. At the

same time, Britain and other Western European imperial powers could hardly claim to stand for 'freedom' against Soviet 'tyranny and oppression' in the Cold War while denying independence to their colonies.

When Macmillan became Prime Minister in January 1957, following the disastrous failure of Britain's forceful attempt to reassert its control over the Suez Canal in Egypt, he immediately called for a review of Britain's imperial possessions. He wanted to know 'which territories are likely to become ripe for independence over the next few years – or, even if they are not ready for it, will demand it so insistently that their claims cannot be denied'. Macmillan was the prime minister who presided over Britain's rapid withdrawal from the bulk of its African empire and from major possessions in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the Far East. This imperial retreat encountered some domestic opposition. The right-wing of the Tory Party felt that the white settlers of Kenya and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) were being abandoned, and there was left-wing criticism of some of the heavy-handed policing of nationalist protest in the colonies. But the principle that Britain's imperial days were over was widely accepted, and the public at large was mostly indifferent to the loss of the colonies.

Foreign Policy

No British government, whether Labour or Conservative, has liked to admit that, despite the loss of empire, Britain is anything other than a major power. This explains why there was a consensus, among the leaders of the main parties at least, that Britain should retain its independent nuclear capability. The initial decision to build a British nuclear bomb made sound strategic sense. In 1946 the US Congress passed the McMahon Act forbidding the sharing of American nuclear information and research with any other power, thereby ending the wartime Anglo-American co-operation in the development of the first nuclear bomb. The Labour Government was fearful that, if any future US government returned to America's pre-war isolationism, Western Europe might have to face the growing Russian threat alone. Although this fear receded once the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was created in 1949, British governments continued to invest in nuclear weapons technology and Britain tested its first atomic bomb in 1948 and its first hydrogen bomb in 1955.

In February 1960 Macmillan had an opportunity to scrap the British bomb when his government decided to cancel Blue Streak, the independent British medium-range missile system, because it was too expensive and vulnerable to an enemy pre-emptive strike. Instead, Macmillan decided to purchase a US delivery system, first the Skybolt missile and then the Polaris submarinelaunched missile. It is possible to argue that this reliance on the US makes nonsense of any British claim to nuclear independence. However, no British government has been prepared to renounce the status that membership of the nuclear 'club' confers.

Britain's membership of NATO is another issue on which there is consensus. This means that Britain's close identification with the USA during the Cold War was widely accepted. Significantly, the one occasion on which British foreign policy became highly controversial was in 1956 when Prime Minister Anthony Eden acted in defiance of the USA by using force to attempt to recover control of the Suez Canal.

Limits of Consensus

Despite the consensus, there was still plenty of dispute, disagreement and debate. Political rhetoric continued to be fierce. Aneurin Bevan in 1948 famously described the Tories as 'lower than vermin' and, throughout the period, the Conservatives referred to their Labour opponents as 'socialists' in order to suggest that there was an important ideological difference between the two parties. Some issues aroused strong passions both in Westminster and the country at large. Capital punishment, the police crackdown on homosexuals in the early 1950s (male homosexual acts had been illegal since 1885) and what to do about the growing numbers of Commonwealth immigrants all divided opinion so starkly that governments were reluctant to contemplate reform.

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There was also significant division over how Britain should react to growing European unity. Having stood aside in 1958 when six Western European nations formed a trading bloc known as 'the Common Market' (the forerunner of the European Union), Britain's decision to apply for membership in 1961 proved controversial. The French president, Charles de Gaulle, vetoed the application in 1963 but this did not end the argument in Britain over attitudes to Europe.

It is also clear that the consensus itself came under increasing strain towards the end of the 1950s. The future of secondary school education is a good example of this. The 1944 Education Act was broadly welcomed at the time but its provision of a competitive examination (taken at the age of 11) which determined whether children went to academic 'grammar' schools or vocational 'modern' schools came under increasing attack during the 1950s. Its critics claimed that the '11 plus' exam was inefficient and discriminatory: too many of the nation's children, it was argued, were being condemned to a second-class education on the basis of a single exam taken too early in life.

Finally, one of the main planks of the consensus – the government's management of the economy – also became a matter of fierce dispute. Britain's failure to keep pace with the economic development of its European rivals caused the breakdown of the relationship between government and trade unions. Communist control of the Electricians Union became a *cause célèbre* and contributed to the increasingly hostile public perception of trade unions. Strikes increased in frequency. The number of working days lost to industrial action rose from 1.7 million in 1951 to 5.7 in 1962. TUC opposition to wage-restraint clashed with the government's attempts to control inflation by an incomes policy. By the early 1960s confidence that Keynesian demand management could maintain full employment and low inflation had been eroded.

Distinctiveness of Mr Butskell

It would be wrong to suggest that the post-war period was the only period of British history when there was a consensus. A set of shared values about national traditions, free speech, the rule of law and the legitimacy of elected governments is vital to the successful functioning of democracy. In this sense Britain has long enjoyed consensus. But the post-war period was distinctive in the degree to which it was assumed that governments could, and should, take responsibility for the management of national affairs for the public good. Confidence in Mr Butskell stemmed from the shared experience of wartime, but he was beginning to lose his gloss by the early 1960 – long before Mrs Thatcher's frontal assault on him in the 1980s. Even in his heyday Mr Butskell was not universally admired (least of all by *The Economist* article which coined his name), but he does symbolise the mood of the post-war period.

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Tasks

A. Answer the questions in full sentences and use any further research to help you give detailed answers.

1. What are the four main principles of Post-War consensus?
2. How did Churchill run the country during the War? Provide specific examples
3. What impact did this change in system have on Britain's social structure?
4. What were the 5 areas identified in the Beveridge report?
5. What did the Minister for Health announce in 1941?
6. What does nationalisation mean?
7. Why did Labour win the 1945 election?
8. What was the benefit of nationalisation?
9. Why did Churchill want to work alongside and with the unions?
10. What is a welfare state?
11. Why did Britain not grant independence to all of its colonies?
12. Why did Britain need nuclear power?
13. What success did Britain have with nuclear power?
14. How important were Keynes and Beveridge in forging a consensus in Britain?
15. On which issues was consensus strongest and on which was it weakest in 1945-64?
16. Had consensus broken down by 1964?

B. Complete the keyword definition list
C. You must complete the timeline and fill it with political, economic, social and foreign events. Make sure you have a key and at least 10 example for each factor for the time period. (If possible print the timeline out on A3-the timeline cannot be edited so create your own if using the computer)
D. Make a list of Prime ministers, Chancellor of the Exchequer's and Home Sectaries since 1945-1979 include what party they are.

TEXTBOOK for the course

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Oxford-AQA-History-Level-1951-2007/dp/0198354649/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3EHFHVVH66A1C&dchild=1&keywords=making+of+modern+britain+textbook&qid=1586165916&sprefix=making+of+modern%2Caps%2C172&sr=8-1
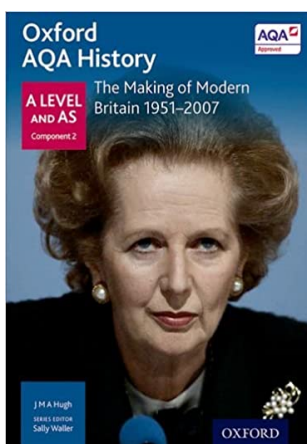
MAKE SURE YOU DON'T JUST PURCHASE THE REVISION GUIDE

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Keywords: Not enough to just copy a definition also put the word into use. Create an example.

Imperial	
Mixed economy	
Free market	
Keynesian	
Welfare state	
Conservative party	
Labour party	
Liberal party	

Radical	
Extreme	
Invaluable	
Ideology	
Socialism	
Consensus	
Deference	

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1963 1964 1965 1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 197

1945 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 196

| Task 2: Add a title for each paragraph.	Task 1: Read each paragraph on the: # Background to the German Empire of 1871 Underline the key information. Be selective.	Task 3: Summarise each paragraph in two or three points.

There was no single **state** called Germany before 1871. Until the early 1800s, the area we now think of as Germany had been made up over 100 different German states all loosely grouped together in the '**Holy Roman Empire**.' This is also known as the **First Reich**. This had been destroyed by the French Emperor Napoleon in 1806. Following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the Emperor of Austria invited representatives from countries in Europe to a Congress (meeting) at Vienna to settle the borders of the continent. The **Congress of Vienna** established 39 separate German states, in an attempt to create stability in the area.

Wilhelm

There was rivalry for influence over these states between **Prussia**, the largest of the states, and Austria, a German-speaking neighbour. Prussia had played a big part in the defeat of the French and had gained new land in the Rhineland, an important industrial area, at the Vienna Congress. **King Wilhelm** of Prussia following the direction of **Otto von Bismarck**, his Minister-President (chief minister), took Prussia to war against Austria in 1866. A year later the new '**North German Confederation**' was formed. This united northern states under the control of Prussia. Berlin was its capital and King Wilhelm of Prussia was its President. Bismarck became its Chancellor (chief minister) and created a **constitution** that served as a model for the German Empire, formed in 1871.
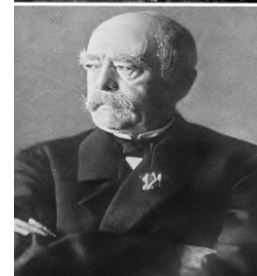
Following a further war against the French, the **Franco-Prussian War** of 1870-1871, this Confederation was extended to include the southern states of Germany. Therefore, on 18 January 1871, Wilhelm was proclaimed German **Kaiser** (Emperor) in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, near Paris, in France. The newly united German Empire was known as the **Second Reich**.

Bismarck

Kaiser Wilhelm ruled over 25 separate states, including Prussia, which was by far the largest. Prussia made up two-thirds of the **Reich** (Empire). **Bavaria** was the next largest state. The Reich also included the largely French-speaking Alsace-Loraine in the west, a Danish minority in the north, and Polish-speaking areas in East Prussia.

Since the Second Reich had 'officially' been formed by voluntary agreement of the different states, it was accepted these states would keep their own sovereignty (right of self-government) over internal affairs. This made the new Germany a **federal** state. 22 of these member states (or **Länder**), including Bavaria, kept their own monarchies. Indeed, the state of Bavaria negotiated a considerable degree of autonomy (independence), including the right to maintain its own army. However, a new constitution was essential in order to define the way the newly united Reich would be governed.

Map of Germany in 1871

KEY TERMS:

Constitution: Set of rules for how a state, or country, is governed.
Federal: System of government in which different states keep independence in internal affairs (e.g. education, health and local government), but accept central government for matters of common importance (e.g. defence and trade).
State: An area, for example a country, controlled by one government.

Holy Roman Empire: Empire from 800-1806 in western and central Europe, including the area we now think of as Germany. It was ruled over by the Holy Roman Emperor, although the individual states in the Empire had their own rulers and government.
Second Reich: 'Reich' means Empire. Founded in 1871 it was known as the Second Reich to distinguish it from the First Reich of the Holy Roman Empire.

Task 2: Add a title for each paragraph.	Task 1: Read each paragraph. Underline the key information. Be selective.	Task 3: Summarise each paragraph in two or three points.
	Since the early 1990s, German **liberals**, like those elsewhere in Europe, had been calling for a '**democratic constitution**.' By this they meant a political system in which power of the ruler and his minsters was limited and that gave the people some control over their own government. The German liberals wanted Germany to have an elected parliament, chosen by 'the people' or at least the wealthiest in society. The liberals believed that this was the only way to protect people's freedom. An elected parliament would represent the people's views, question minister's policies, and ensure that taxes were properly spent. Indeed, the liberals had supported Bismarck's unification on the understanding that such a constitution would be the result. However, **Bismarck** who in 1871 became the **Chancellor** (chief minister of the Reich government) was no liberal. He came from the traditional and aristocratic landowner *Jünker* class of Prussia. He was conservative and committed to the Prussian tradition of autocratic rule. He was deeply suspicious of 'people power', although he claimed to support constitutions and appeared to agree with liberals. This was largely to gain their support in his pursuit of a strong, united Germany.	

KEY TERMS:

Conservative: Person averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values. They support autocracy.

Liberal: Person who favours reform, is not bound by traditional thinking, and is tolerant of the ideas and behaviour of others. They support democracy.

Autocratic: A political system where a single person or small group has complete power. E.g. a hereditary monarch or emperor with ultimate authority.

Democratic: A political system that supports people's freedom with power held by elected representatives. E.g. people have the freedom to vote in elections for a parliament that is made up of different political parties.

Task 4: Answer the questions to check your understanding so far.

a) In what ways did Prussia dominate the newly united German Empire? (Give <u>three</u> examples).

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b) How far was the German Empire united in 1871? (**Tip:** Consider how far there was political and national unity).

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Task 6: Add a title for each paragraph.	Task 5: Read each paragraph on the: # 1871 Constitution Underline the key information. Be selective.	Task 7: Summarise each paragraph in two or three points.
	The **constitution** of 1871 set out the way in which the newly united German Empire would be governed. The **Kaiser** (Emperor) of Germany was the hereditary monarch and always the King of Prussia. He had the power to appoint and dismiss the Chancellor. The Kaiser also had the power to summon and dissolve (shut down) the Reichstag. He controlled foreign policy, could make treaties and alliances with other countries, commanded the army and could declare war and make peace. The Kaiser gave his agreement to all laws. He had the final say in any dispute over the constitution. The national **government** was made up of the **Chancellor** and other **ministers**. The Chancellor was the chief minister of the government. He was responsible to the Emperor, not the Reichstag. The Chancellor appointed and dismissed the other ministers in government. He could ignore the views of the Reichstag. The government put forward **bills** (formal statements of a proposed new law) to the Reichstag. Bismarck had designed the constitution to suit his relationship with the Kaiser. Wilhelm, already aged 74 when he became Emperor, was generally happy to have a passive role and leave the task of governing Germany to Bismarck. The **Reichstag** (national Parliament) was made up of representatives from political parties. The parties in the Reichstag were <u>not</u> part of the government. Reichstag deputies were unpaid and elected every five years, unless the Reichstag was dissolved by the Kaiser. All men over 25 years of age had the right to vote in elections, which is known as **universal male suffrage**. The Reichstag had the power to approve or reject budgets, which assessed the raising and spending of taxes. It also had the power to approve bills, put forward by the government, to make them laws. Although the Reichstag could question and reject potential laws, it had no real power to initiate or change laws. It also did not have the power to demand the dismissal of the Chancellor or any other minister.	

Task 8: Using two different colours, highlight examples of how the **1871 Constitution** was ☐ autocratic and ☐ democratic.

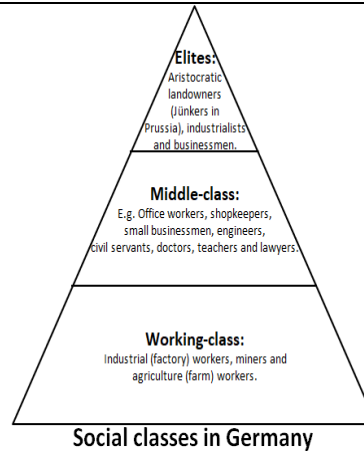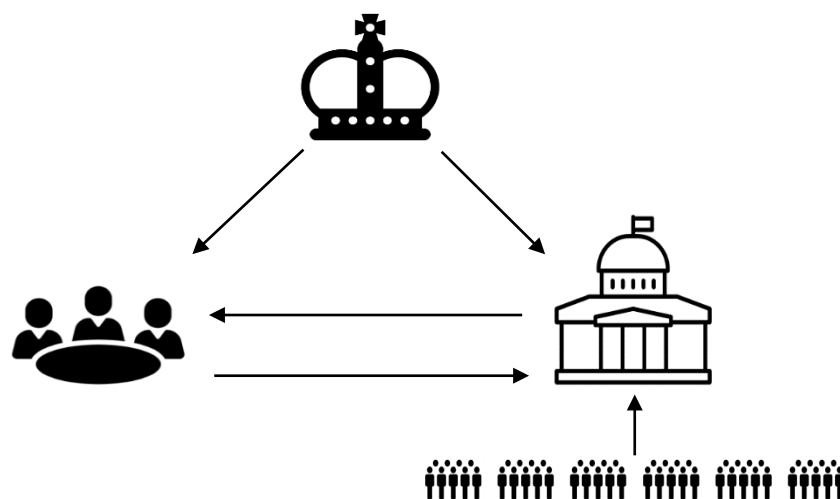| **Task 10**: Add a title for each paragraph.	**Task 9:** Read each paragraph on the: # Political Parties Underline the key information. Be selective.	**Task 11:** Summarise each paragraph in two or three points.
	The **political parties** that competed in the 1871 Reichstag elections were different from modern parties. They were not competing for the right to form government and rule the country. They were more like pressure groups, representing and promoting the interests of different classes and groups in society. On the right-wing were two major groups, the **German Conservative Party** and **Imperial Party**. The German Conservatives had its strength in Prussia itself, amongst Protestant, aristocratic landowners (**Jünkers**). It was the most right-wing of the parties and detested the Reichstag because it was elected by universal male suffrage. The Imperial Party appealed more broadly to the elites across Germany. **Elites:** Aristocratic landowners (Jünkers in Prussia), industrialists and businessmen. **Middle-class:** E.g. Office workers, shopkeepers, small businessmen, engineers, civil servants, doctors, teachers and lawyers. **Working-class:** Industrial (factory) workers, miners and agriculture (farm) workers. **Social classes in Germany** The **Centre Party** (*Zentrum*) represented German Catholics from all social classes. The party was strong in the southern German states, particularly Bavaria, and also in the Rhineland. The Catholic population was greater in these areas. The *Zentrum* was determined to preserve the position of the Catholic Church, especially in education. It was conservative and favoured greater decentralisation (moving power away from the central government), but it was quite liberal in its attitude to social reform. The liberal parties represented the Protestant middle-class. The **National Liberal Party** supported Bismarck in a unified Germany and central government, although at odds with him in their support of a democratic constitution. To their left was the **Progress Party**. Progressives believed in a democratic constitution. They also disliked central government and militarism so less supportive of Bismarck. Progressives wanted to extend the powers of the Reichstag. There were also socialist groups in 1871, but the **Social Democratic Party** was not founded until 1875. This party represented the industrial working-class. It supported a reduction in the power of the wealthy and the extension of welfare reforms. On the extreme left, members of the party wanted a total overthrow of the constitution and a **republic**. However, most Social Democrats were prepared to work within the existing political system, in order to bring about better conditions for the working class.	
KEY TERM→	**Republic:** A country where power is held by the people or the representatives they elect, rather than a monarch or Emperor.	

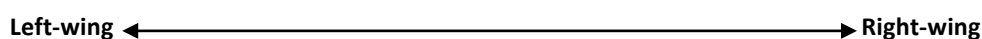|	**Task 12:** Using the reading on the **1871 Constitution**, label the diagram. Include all the **key words** (see right).	**Key words:** • Appoints • Chancellor • Dismisses • Dissolves • Elects • Electorate (men over 25) • Government • Introduces bills • Kaiser (Emperor) • Other ministers • Passes or rejects bills • Political parties • Reichstag • Summons.

Election results in 1871:

Party	Seats
National Liberal Party	125
Centre Party	63
German Conservative Party	57
Progress Party	46
Imperial Party	37
Socialist groups	2
Others	52
Total	382

Task 13: Using the reading on **Political Parties**, label where the parties fit on the political line. Include <u>all</u> the **political parties**. Left-wing ←————————————————→ Right-wing	**Political parties:** • Centre Party • German Conservative Party • Imperial Party • National Liberal Party • Social Democratic Party.

Source A Painting of *The Proclamation of the German Empire* by Anton von Werner, made in 1885 for Bismarck's 70th birthday. It shows the ceremony of 18 January 1871 in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, near Paris, in France. The painting shows **Kaiser Wilhelm** surrounded by **other German princes** on the stage. **Army officers** from the North German Confederation and the southern German states stand opposite them. In the middle of this crowd **Bismarck** is shown in a white uniform. He did not actually where this uniform at the ceremony. Bismarck is holding the **proclamation** (public announcement) of the German Empire, which he did read out. There were no **civilians** (anyone who is not a member of the armed forces) at the ceremony.

Task 15: What does it suggest?

> **Task 14:** What do you see?
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Task 16: Study **Source A.** What does the painting suggest about the newly united German Empire?

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Tips: Think about…
- Who (or who did not) attend the ceremony?
- What it suggests about the people with power?
- When the ceremony took place?
- Where it took place?
- Why did it not take place in Germany?

Extract B Adapted from *Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire* (2021) by historian Katja Hoyer.

The political system that underpinned the Reich was an extremely fragile balancing act that tried to appease (satisfy) all interest groups. Naturally, Germany had to be set up as a federal state with significant powers for the 25 individual states, called *Länder*. However, Bismarck was also keen to preserve the central status of Prussia in the process, as he had promised Wilhelm. Another compromise had to be found between democracy and dynastic power. The ceremony at Versailles was intentionally set up as a show of the latter. Democracy was embodied in the Reichstag where elected representatives of the public took their seats. Bismarck was careful not to give the Reichstag too much power as he was cautious to avoid mob rule, as most of the elites still saw it. Most of the weaknesses of this set-up came from the inherent paradoxes (inconsistencies) of the German Empire. Was it possible to keep all 25 states in the union without sacrificing Prussian power? How can there be a democracy without a threat to the elites' monopoly (hold) on decision making? These were difficult balancing acts that were skilfully managed by Bismarck. Differences of regional loyalties, culture, dialect, religion, history and (increasingly) social status would eventually fade and be replaced by a carefully managed concept of German national identity.

Task 17:
Read **Extract B**. Underline three key phrases that are arguments (opinions) not facts. Underline no more than five words for each.

Task 18: What is Hoyer's overall argument on how far the German Empire was united in 1871? Summarise this in two sentences.

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Textbook for the A-level: Sally Waller, *Oxford AQA History. The Quest for Political Stability: Germany 1871-1991*, (Oxford University Press, 2015) **ISBN-10:** 0198354681

Recommended summer reading: Katja Hoyer, *Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire, 1871-1918*, (The History Press, 2021) **ISBN-10**: 0750996226