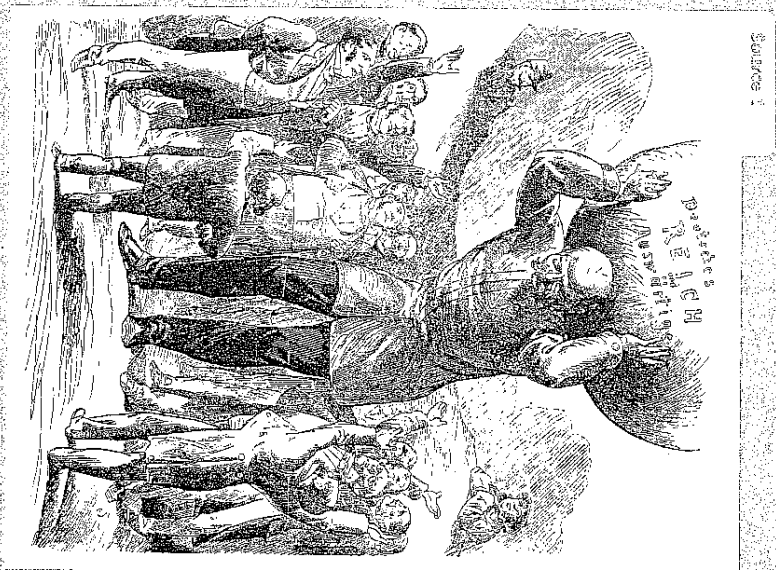


# Chapter



Source 1

Although his body was laid to rest, Bismarck's spirit has continued to haunt German history. Historians have argued over his achievements and his reputation, his motives and his methods. For most historians the unification of Germany has meant Bismarck. Innumerable books have been written about him. By 1895, five years after his resignation, there were already 650 biographies available. Twenty years later there were 3500 and the number has gone on increasing ever since.

Stiles, *The Unification of Germany 1815-90*, 1986

## OGAIN EXERCISE

1 How was Bismarck regarded by the German people, according to Source 1?

2 Look carefully at the figures in Source 1. Do you think this cartoon is meant to represent the view of all German people?

## Introduction

In 1871 Germany became an Empire. In charge of this new Empire was Otto von Bismarck, Minister-President of Prussia and now Chancellor of Germany, a title he held until his resignation in 1890. Bismarck had already established a formidable reputation in Prussia. During the nineteen years as Chancellor, he asserted his own wishes and own particular methods just as completely over the new Empire. He was generally regarded as one of Europe's greatest statesmen by 1890. At home, he was less popular and few mourned his resignation. Nevertheless, he had achieved many of his aims. He had kept Germany out of war and had avoided unfavourable alliances being made against her. He had encouraged Germany to continue her industrial expansion and kept political power firmly in the hands of the Kaiser and the aristocracy. Not all of these seem like achievements to us now, however. Indeed, Bismarck's legacy has been debated at length by historians ever since the end of the Second World War. The chief question which has been asked is to what extent did Bismarck make Hitler's regime possible?

In this chapter, however, we concentrate on Bismarck's achievements and failures in his own time.

## Key questions

- How was the German Empire governed?
- What were Bismarck's aims in his domestic and foreign policy?
- How was Germany changing?
- Who opposed Bismarck and why?
- What were Bismarck's methods in his domestic and foreign policy?
- How successful was Bismarck?
- What was Bismarck's legacy?

## A united Germany?

### The unification of 1871

On 18 January 1871, King Wilhelm of Prussia became Kaiser Wilhelm I of a united Germany. The ceremony took place at the grand palace of Versailles. The German Empire consisted of 25 states and one administrative territory (the newly acquired Alsace-Lorraine). It was a joining together of the North German Confederation and four southern German states.

To what extent did the ceremony at Versailles reflect a sense of pride and unity across those states which now shared a common name? Despite a common language and culture, Germany could hardly be described in 1871 as a country already 'united'. There was no national flag until 1892 nor a national anthem until 1919. Such was the lack of common national figures that artists generally had to carve statues of Bismarck for the country's monuments. Furthermore, there were important religious, ethnic and economic differences between the individual states. Protestantism, the most popular religion, was dominant in the north, whilst Catholicism was mainly found in the rural areas of the southwest and the Rhineland. Industrialization was most widespread in the north and west, whilst the economy of the south and east remained more agricultural. The Empire excluded German speakers (for example in Austria) and included non-German speakers (such as Poles and Danes). When Germany united in 1871 it was more the result of Prussian power than an expression of popular nationalism.

**The Constitution of the Empire**

The Constitution of the German Empire was modelled on that of the North German Confederation (see page 21). The differences were relatively minor and were designed to reassure the previously independent states, who feared a loss of their rights. The Bundesrat (Federal Council) which represented the different states) now had greater authority. War could only be declared with its approval, rather than, as previously, under the sole authority of the King of Prussia. In addition, constitutional changes could be vetoed in the Bundesrat by 14 out of a total of 58 votes, rather than by two-thirds of the total votes as previously. This enabled the southern states to form a common front.

Individual states retained significant powers. They kept their own rulers, governments and parliaments and controlled the education, health and civil rights of their populations. Bavaria and Wurttemberg, amongst the last states to be included in a united Germany, were allowed to keep their own armies, even in peacetime. Germany was certainly a federal state.

**Source 5**

The constitutional position of the Federal Council (Bundesrat) in the North German Confederation, as well as in the German Empire, derives its peculiar character from the fact that its members are bound by the instructions issued to them by their governments and therefore do not, like the deputies in the Reichstag, represent the whole but only the state which nominated them.

Extract from a report by Bismarck to Wilhelm I, March 1871

Why were the individual German states given such important powers? Firstly, it was a way of reassuring the reluctant southern states and, therefore, of smoothing the transition to a united Germany. Secondly, it enabled Prussia, by far the largest and most powerful state, to assert its own wishes more effectively.

Without doubt, Prussia dominated the German Empire. The King of Prussia was also the German Kaiser, the Prussian Prime Minister was also the German Chancellor and the Prussian army was effectively the German army. In the Bundesrat, Prussia commanded seventeen out of fifty-eight votes and could, therefore, block changes to the Constitution single-handedly. With almost 30% of the votes, Prussia was rarely outvoted.

In Prussia, the parliament was elected under a three-class voting system, giving property-owners the greatest say. Members of the government, diplomats and army leaders were generally drawn from the Prussian landed classes (Junkers). Bismarck's own dislike of democracy is well documented. In 1862 he urged King Wilhelm to avoid parliamentary rule at all costs. Given Prussia's dominance over Germany, it was not surprising that the authoritarian model of Prussian government was adopted for the whole Empire. Whilst the German Constitution created, in theory, a constitutional monarchy, in practice it was extremely authoritarian.

- The Prussian elites dominated the imperial government and army just as they did in the state of Prussia.
- The Kaiser himself had extensive powers including the control of foreign policy and the authority to appoint and dismiss ministers, including the Chancellor.
- The Bundesrat represented the states but could hardly be held to represent the people as a whole.

President Ulysses S. Grant of the USA sent a telegram to Bismarck congratulating Germany on its decision to be a federal state, just like America!

**Think about**

- ▶ How did the role of members of the Bundesrat and the Reichstag differ? (Note: see the diagram on p.21 if you are unsure about the meaning of these terms).
- ▶ Do you think a powerful Bundesrat made Germany more or less united?

**Parliamentary rule**  
Where parliament holds the balance of power and dictates the actions of the ruler.

**Absolutism**  
Keeping political power in the hands of the ruler and denying greater power to the people.

**Constitutional monarchy**  
Where the ruler shares power with parliament according to principles laid down in the Constitution.

Bismarck was hugely important in the Empire. He held three important posts simultaneously: German Chancellor, Prime Minister of Prussia and Minister-President of Prussia.

See pages 14-15 for more information about Prussia's industrialization.

The typical working day for industrial workers was 12 hours, six days a week. After 1873 many workers became unemployed or suffered a drop in wages. Politics and bread became the basic diet as few could afford meat.

**Source 4**  
The percentage distribution of workers in Germany, 1843-1907



**German society**

The historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler claimed in 1973 that Germany had not modernized either politically or socially, despite the economic changes outlined above. Certainly, the power of the elites, both landed and industrial, remained formidable. Furthermore, social mobility – movement from one social class to another – was in theory possible but in practice rare.

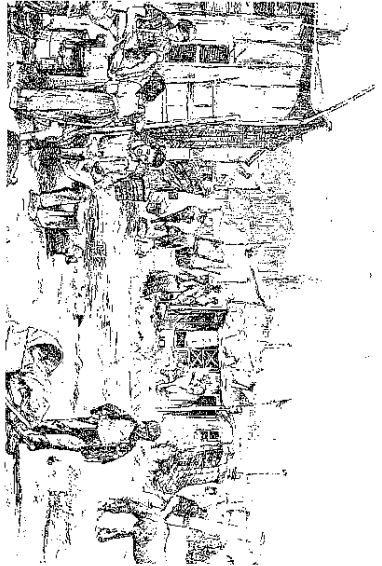
Two groups which expanded due to industrialization were the working and middle classes. The working classes, who provided the manpower for industrial production, often worked in appalling conditions which could leave them ill or deformed. Their living conditions were no better – overcrowded, unhygienic and a haven for deadly bacteria.

- The Chancellor, who directed the day to day affairs of the Empire, was responsible only to the Kaiser. If the Reichstag disapproved of the Chancellor there was nothing it could do. The members of the government did not reflect the political composition of the Reichstag.

It was, therefore, surprising that Bismarck approved the introduction of universal male suffrage for Reichstag elections. In fact, the apparent power held by the Reichstag seemed at odds with Bismarck's dislike of democracy. The Reichstag had the power to veto new laws, including the budget (though not necessarily the army budget). However, in practice, the power of the Reichstag was limited. It could not propose new laws itself, it had no control over who was appointed Chancellor and its control over the budget was minimal. Even the apparently democratic gesture of universal male suffrage had its weaknesses. Reichstag deputies received no salary and therefore needed private sources of income. It was consequently rare to find 'ordinary' Germans standing in Reichstag elections.

**Was Germany a 'modern' state in 1871?**

**Germany's economy**  
Germany's economy underwent a fundamental change during the second half of the nineteenth century. An agrarian (farming) revolution which involved the purchase of new machinery to replace farmworkers, led thousands to seek employment in the towns. German (and most particularly, Prussian) industry grew rapidly and by 1900 challenged Britain. It can certainly be claimed that Germany, in 1871, had an increasingly modern, industrial economy.



Workers' housing in Berlin in 1872, with new factories in the background.

The middle classes fared much better. Businessmen acquired wealth and status, though were still denied greater political influence. For Wehler, this was evidence that social structures had not modernized but tended to support the status quo. More recently, however, historians have argued that the middle classes were becoming more dynamic and involved in politics locally. They did not, however, gain greater political power at a state level, partly because they lacked unity.

### Germany's political system

Economic development had not been matched by political change. Other industrial nations, such as Britain and France, had made changes to their political systems. As the working and middle classes became more economically important and politically demanding, more opportunities were provided for them to have a bigger say in how the country was run. In other words, industrialization led to greater democracy. In Germany, however, there were no moves towards real democracy and power remained largely in the hands of the unelected elites.

#### Source 6

The political system was, in fact, an autocratic, semi-absolutist sham... because the real power relationships had not undergone any decisive alteration.

Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918*, 1985

What did this mean for the future of Germany? Although the *Sonderweg* theory (see margin) is less popular than it was, it is generally agreed that the combination of an economically modern but politically backward state had serious repercussions on Germany. Bismarck spent a great deal of time trying to play different groups off against each other in order to isolate them. It has also been argued that he pursued a policy of colonial expansion as a means of uniting the people and diverting their attention away from political demands. This tactic was used increasingly after Bismarck's resignation and, it has been argued, was a factor in the outbreak of the First World War.

#### Think Like a Historian

- 1 Which parties were likely to support change?
- 2 Which parties wanted Germany to remain as it was?
- 3 Which parties could have worked together?
- 4 Which parties would have opposed each other?
- 5 From what you already know about Bismarck (see Chapter 1) which parties were most likely to offer him support?

#### The Sonderweg

The author of Source 6, Hans Ulrich Wehler, argued that Germany had followed a *'Sonderweg'* or 'special path' from 1806 and that this helped to explain the rise of Hitler in the 1920s. The middle classes, despite growing in wealth and economic importance, did not gain more political power. The Prussian landed elites continued to dominate the key positions in the army, civil service and government and did all they could to protect their privileged position, aided and abetted by Bismarck, himself a Prussian aristocrat and opponent of democracy. After the collapse of the monarchy in 1918, the elites became more and more desperate to resist democracy and keep power far themselves, which, it has been argued, paved the way for Hitler's rise.

The matter of the military budget was a constant source of tension between the liberals and Bismarck. Given that military spending formed a large part of the Empire's budget, the liberals wanted the army's budget to be controlled by the Reichstag. Bismarck, however, attempted to minimize any control the Reichstag might have.

## Bismarck and the Liberals 1871-1879

### Political parties

On 21 March 1871 the new Imperial Reichstag met for the first time. The deputies were divided into six main groups which are summarized below:

- The most right-wing party was the **German Conservative Party**. Its supporters were mainly aristocrats, and in particular Junkers, the landed elite of Prussia. Its main aim was to protect the status quo and the interests of its supporters. The Prussian aristocracy had had a privileged and powerful position in Prussia and it did not want this to change.
- Another right-wing party was the **Free Conservatives**, whose support came from both landed and industrial elites. This party usually offered Bismarck strong backing.
- The **Centre Party** was founded in 1870 to represent the interests of German Catholics. Supporters came from a range of backgrounds. Its aims were quite conservative and traditional. It wanted to protect the rights of individual states and, of course, the Catholic Church.
- There were two liberal parties and the more right wing of these was the **National Liberal Party**. Its support came from educated and wealthy members of the middle classes. Their main aims were national unity, free trade and constitutional (rather than authoritarian) government. They were opposed to the idea of the Church having any power and influence over state affairs and they defended individual liberties.
- The **Progressive Party** was also liberal, but slightly to the left of the National Liberals. They shared many of the same aims but were in favour of giving parliament more power and were very suspicious of the army.
- The **Social Democratic Party** was founded in 1875. It drew its support from the industrial working classes. Its aims were greater democracy and equality for all. Specifically it wanted to improve the lives of the working classes.

### The support of the liberals

The National Liberals won 155 out of total of 399 seats in the first Reichstag elections of the Empire. Together with the Progressive Liberals and the Free Conservatives, they provided Bismarck with a comfortable majority. Until 1878, Bismarck could count on the support of the liberals. They strongly supported unification and backed policies aimed at reducing the differences between the individual states. This came at a cost however. Bismarck was not a liberal; his policies were motivated by circumstances rather than ideological conviction. For much of the 1870s it was useful to keep liberal support and for the most part, their aims and his coincided. Where they did not, the liberals tended to give way. In 1874, for example, they agreed to a septennial (seven year) rather than an annual army budget and even failed to block a Pruss Law which increased government censorship. This latter measure went totally against liberal ideas of individual rights such as free speech. The relationship between Bismarck and the liberals was one of compromise, but Bismarck never intended to let it control his policies.

### Economic crisis

The economy of the Empire flourished following unification. The French paid their war indemnity punctually and this boosted government projects and military expansion. In addition, currency reform in 1871 added to the amount of money in circulation. All this led to much greater speculation. People took risks and invested money in newly founded companies which were promising

rich profits. As one observer at the time put it, 'A shower of gold rained down on the drunken city'. It was creating a bubble that could be burst at the first sign of a loss of confidence.

The collapse of the Austrian stock market and a financial crisis in America in 1873 were enough to provoke a crisis. Bankruptcies followed in Germany and an economic depression set in. Economic growth did not recover fully until 1895. How did the depression affect Germany?

Although weakened, the German economy was strong enough to withstand the depression. Large banks and businesses survived and swallowed up smaller bankrupted enterprises. The average rate of economic growth by the 1880s was 2.5 per cent a year, a healthy figure. Industrialization and urbanization both continued to increase.

The depression led to increased pressure on the government for a protectionist economic policy. Many believed that only tariffs on imports would protect and secure a home market by pitching foreign competition more highly. The first pressure group campaigning to end free trade (the so-called Long-Nines Society) was founded in 1871, but it was only after 1873 that more notice was taken of it. Bismarck knew that abolishing free trade could cost him the support of the liberals. He also knew, however, that tariffs would provide a welcome increase in revenue. Perhaps this was the time for Bismarck to break with the liberals.

The campaign for protectionism led to an alliance between agricultural and industrial elites in 1877. German agriculture was beginning to suffer from foreign competition. American grain, for example, was robbing German producers of both foreign and home markets. Higher tariffs on foreign grain coming into Germany would encourage people to buy more local produce. Anti-Semitism increased as Jews were used as scapegoats for the economic problems. Their high profile in the stock market and banks made them vulnerable to the attack. For the first time, anti-Semitism became a political movement.

Support for working-class associations grew after the crisis due to fear of unemployment and lower wages. In 1875, the Social Democratic Party was formed.

### The Kulturkampf

Bismarck claimed that his primary aim as Chancellor was 'the creation and consolidation of Germany'. However, his domestic policies included attacks on a number of internal 'enemies of the state'. These so-called enemies included substantial minority groups such as Poles, Jews and socialists. The biggest group of all, however, was the Catholic Church in Germany. The attack on the Catholics became known as the *Kulturkampf* which translates as a 'struggle of civilizations' but was simply an attempt to discriminate against a single religious group.

Bismarck made clear his opposition to the newly formed Centre Party (which represented the Catholics - see page 53) as early as 1871. The appointment of Adolph Falk to the post of Minister of Culture in Prussia signalled a more aggressive attack and the central element of the *Kulturkampf* was the Falk Laws of 1873 (commonly known as the May Laws). Under these laws, the Catholic Church became more closely controlled by the state. Under the measures brought in between 1873 and 1876, Jesuits were forced to leave Germany, Catholic schools were supervised by the state and civil wedding ceremonies were made compulsory.

The territories of Alsace-Lorraine, which the Germans took from France as part of the Treaty of Frankfurt, contained rich mineral deposits. This was a further boost to economic growth.

When countries raise the duties on imports to encourage people to buy home-produced products.

What fight, if any, does France 7 throw on Bismarck's moves for attacking the Catholics?

Year	Number of Centre Party deputies in the Reichstag, 1871-1890
1871	63
1874	91
1877	93
1878	94
1881	100
1884	99
1887	98
1890	106

Members of a particularly zealous order of Roman Catholic priests founded in 1534.

But why were the German Catholics identified as enemies? Firstly, Catholics were caught between two sources of authority, the German Kaiser and the Pope. In 1870, the Pope issued a proclamation declaring 'papal infallibility'. This meant that any statements he made on issues connected to Catholicism were beyond question. Catholics were not allowed to disobey the Pope even if that meant disobeying their King. The idea of a German owing allegiance to someone other than the Kaiser was difficult for Bismarck to accept. His fears were made worse by the fact that most Catholics lived in the south, an area least attracted by Germany unity and still a potential ally of Austria. He was not convinced that he could count on their support for the new Empire.

Bismarck's actions were not solely defensive, however. The liberals also led the Centre Party partly because of its lack of enthusiasm for national unity and also because they were opposed to any Church control over what they regarded as State matters. By attacking Catholicism, Bismarck hoped to secure stronger support from the liberals and in this he was right. However, by 1878 he was looking to the Centre Party for support in order to push through a new economic policy. Bismarck was, therefore, also playing political games.

The question that confronts us becomes, in my opinion, distorted... if it is looked on as a confessional or religious one. It is essentially political. It is not a matter of an attack by a Protestant dynasty upon the Catholic Church, as our Catholic fellow-citizens are being told; it is not a matter of a struggle between faith and unbelief; what we have here is the age-old struggle for power, as old as the human race itself, between kingship and the priest, a struggle for power that goes back far beyond the coming of Our saviour to this world... Bismarck speaking to the Prussian Chamber of Peers, March 1873

In the end, the *Kulturkampf* failed. If Bismarck was trying to weaken Catholicism, his policies had the opposite effect. Many Catholics made their feelings clear by refusing to celebrate national events or by flying the papal flag. Windthorst, the leader of the Centre Party, appealed to his fellow Catholics to express their opposition in elections. His appeal was successful as the figures in the margin demonstrate. The Centre Party had become the biggest party in the Reichstag by 1884.

By 1878, Bismarck was contemplating a change of economic policy which could lose him liberal support. In itself, this removed one of the reasons behind the *Kulturkampf* as the support of the liberals was no longer influencing Bismarck's policies. The growth of the Centre Party in the Reichstag also made the *Kulturkampf* politically unwise. The Centre Party was likely to support the new economic policy and this was too tempting for Bismarck. A new Pope in 1878, who held out an offer of friendship in exchange for an end to discrimination, provided Bismarck with a way out. In 1879 Falk was dismissed and his laws were abandoned with one or two exceptions. However, the *Kulturkampf*, which only ended completely in 1887, had a lasting impact on Bismarck's relations with the Centre Party. He could never rely on its support.

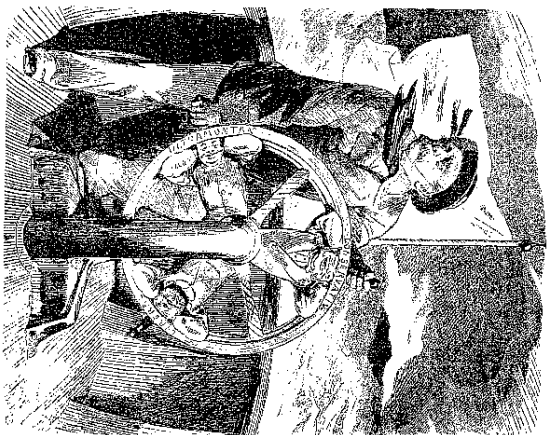
## The era of conservatism 1879-1890

### The break with the liberals

As we have already seen, there was pressure on Bismarck to adopt a more protectionist economic policy. In 1878, Bismarck announced a bill in the Reichstag signalling an end to free trade. Not surprisingly, the liberals rejected the bill and it was defeated. Bismarck's only hope was to dissolve (close down) the Reichstag and hope that fresh elections would return a more supportive majority. There followed a stroke of good luck for Bismarck. Two assassination attempts on the Kaiser, both blamed incorrectly on the socialists, enabled Bismarck to appeal to national sentiments. Not surprisingly, the socialists lost seats in the election. More crucially, so did the liberals. The conservatives and the Centre Party were the main beneficiaries.

The National Liberals were at this point afraid of losing all influence over the government. Many went as far as supporting an Anti-Socialist Law which went against their liberal principles and also divided the party. Such was the division within the party that fifteen rebel members even voted in favour of protectionism. In the event, however, the bill ending free trade was passed by a majority consisting of Conservatives and the Centre Party. This was Bismarck's break with the liberals. It did not, however, ease Bismarck's relations with the Reichstag. The *Kulturkampf*, although now being dismantled, had made consistently good relations between the Centre Party and Bismarck unlikely. In addition, the division of the National Liberals had provided fewer right-wing liberals prepared to support Bismarck than he had hoped. Consequently, it was not until 1887 that Bismarck regained a clear majority in the Reichstag.

Meanwhile, Bismarck had to build on support from the Conservatives. The result was a move towards greater authoritarian and conservative policies. But socialist support was increasing at the same time. How could Bismarck contain forces demanding political change while attempting to defend traditional rights and privileges?



The Centre Party is known as Ultramontane in this cartoon. Ultramontanes believed that the Pope had supreme authority in matters of faith.

#### Source 4

A cartoon from a German liberal magazine in 1879. Bismarck is at the wheel of the ship and the liberal spoke is saying to the smiling conservative and Centre Party spokes: 'Don't get cocky. When the wind shifts, I will be on top again.'

#### Think about

- ▶ How accurate is Source 8 as an interpretation of Bismarck's domestic policy?

## The attack on socialism

As he got older, Bismarck apparently became more and more difficult. One contemporary said of him: 'It was always: *Mei Mei Mal*. And when that did not work, complaints about ingratiate and tears of North German sentimentality.'

#### Number of Socialist deputies in the Reichstag 1871-1890

1871	2
1874	9
1877	12
1878	9
1881	12
1884	24
1887	11
1890	35

#### Think about

- ▶ On what grounds is Bismarck opposing the socialists here?
- ▶ From what you know of Bismarck's views, do you think that this was the main reason for Bismarck's opposition?

The elections of 1881 were effectively a defeat for Bismarck. He could by now only rely on the support of the German Conservatives and Free Conservatives, who only controlled 85 seats between them in the new Reichstag. Over three-quarters of the new deputies opposed the government. The National Liberals by this time had divided. The Secessionists, who represented the left wing of the party and were more fiercely opposed to Bismarck, won almost as many seats as the remaining National Liberals. Meanwhile, the National Liberals themselves were drifting further to the right and supported co-operation with the conservatives.

Bismarck also had to face a challenge from a different front: the socialists. The Social Democratic Party was formed in 1875 and represented the interests of the working classes. It stood for democracy and equality, neither of which Bismarck had any sympathy for. In the eyes of Bismarck, it also posed a possible international threat because socialism, like Catholicism, was an international movement. He was therefore alarmed at the growing power of the socialists in the Reichstag which reflected a widening of popular support. Bismarck used two assassination attempts on the Kaiser to push through an Anti-Socialist Law in 1878 banning all socialist meetings and publications. The Social Democratic Party, however, was still allowed to stand in Reichstag elections.

#### Source 9

For eleven years we have had the advantage of associating here with Social Democrats, and do you remember, gentlemen, of hearing amid all the long speeches delivered in this place by socialists, a single one in which it was possible to discover the slightest shadow of a concrete idea or of a project for further action indicating what they actually intend to do when they shall have made a breach... In the existing social system I recall nothing of the sort, and I believe I know the reason why these gentlemen are so carefully silent about the manner in which they intend to refashion the world when they are masters. It is because they do not know themselves. They can never keep the promises with which they have misled the people.

Bismarck in 1878

The Anti-Socialist Law lasted for 12 years and was as unsuccessful as the *Kulturkampf* in weakening Bismarck's 'enemies of the state'. The socialists grew in strength during the 1880s. Almost twice as many people voted for them in 1887 as in 1878. By 1890 there were 35 socialist deputies.

## State socialism

Bismarck's social welfare programme stands out as his only positive response to social change. It provided sickness and accident insurance for the lowest paid workers and pensions for the over-seventies and the permanently disabled. In fact, it was Bismarck's only enduring contribution to Germany, although he did not regard it so highly and made no mention of it in his memoirs. So what motivated Bismarck? It was possible that Bismarck did feel a genuine desire to help those in need, but as ever, political considerations were foremost in his mind. The measures were intended to win support from the working classes and discourage their demands for greater political power. They were also a way of robbing the Social Democratic Party of support by providing for the working classes at state level.

The socialists were unsure about how to react. Although they approved the measures, they were loath to support a regime which was trying to destroy them. In the end they approved the ideas behind the measures but rejected the actual bills unless amendments were made. Nevertheless, three laws were passed successfully. In 1883 a Health Insurance Law was brought in, followed by an Accident Insurance Law in 1884. In 1889 an old age pension scheme was introduced.

### Germanization

Catholics and socialists were not the only groups identified as enemies of the state. Poles and Jews were also targeted by Bismarck, who embarked on a policy of 'Germanization'. He was, in part, responding to the demands of conservatives and knew that his policies would meet with their approval. In 1886 a Settlement Law encouraged German peasants to settle in the eastern Prussian provinces from which 16,000 Poles and Jews (with Russian citizenship) had been forced to leave. By 1895, more than 32,000 had left. Those Poles who remained suffered discrimination. Polish, for example, was no longer taught in schools. Similarly, French-speakers living in Alsace-Lorraine had to be taught in German and the Danes of Schleswig-Holstein suffered in similar ways.

### Bismarck and the Reichstag

One of Bismarck's reactions to the hostile Reichstag of 1881 was to attempt to reduce its power. Its authority over the military was reduced but generally Bismarck was unsuccessful, despite threats to change the Constitution. Instead he focused on protecting the dominance of the Prussian conservative elites within the civil service and the army.

A sympathetic majority in the Reichstag only came as a result of tensions abroad. Bismarck exploited the Bulgarian Crisis (see p. 43) to create a war scare. In the elections of 1887, the Kautel (German Conservatives, Free Conservatives and National Liberals) won 220 seats whilst the socialists and new Freisinnige Party (made up of left-wing liberals) lost seats. Bismarck was able to push through a new septennial (seven year) military budget. His problems were not over, however. In March 1888 Kaiser Wilhelm I died and his eventual successor did not see eye to eye with the 'Iron Chancellor'.

### Document exercise: Bismarck's domestic policy

#### Source A

#### Bismarck's political principles

I have often acted hastily and without reflection, but when I had time to think I have always asked: what is useful, effective, right, for my fatherland, for my dynasty... I have never been a doctrinaire liberal, reactionary, conservative - those I confess seem to me luxuries... Yes, I've no fixed opinions, make proposals, and you won't meet any objections of principle from me... My aim from the first moment of my public activity has been the creation and consolidation of Germany, and if you can show a single moment when I deviated from that magnetic needle, you may perhaps prove that I went wrong, but never that I lost sight of the national aim for a moment.

Bismarck to the Reichstag, 1881

38

#### Source B

#### Bismarck deals with the liberals and the socialists



A cartoon from 1878 showing Bismarck dealing with the liberals and socialists, who are portrayed as pests.

#### Source C

#### Extracts from The Anti-Socialist Law, October, 1878

Associations which further social-democratic, socialist or communist aims and thus threaten to overthrow the existing state and social structure are banned... Meetings in which social-democratic, socialist or communist tendencies make their appearance are to be dissolved (closed down)... All printed matter in which social-democratic, socialist or communist tendencies appear... is to be forbidden.

#### Source D

#### Arguments in favour of State socialism

Anybody who has before him the prospect of a pension, be it ever so small, in old age or infirmity (illness) is much happier and more content with his lot... The state must take the matter into its own hands... as the right that men have to be taken care of when, with the best will imaginable, they become unfit for work. Why should the regular soldier, disabled by war, or the official, have a right to be pensioned in his old age, and not the soldier of labour? This thing will make its own way, it has a future.

Private conversation between Bismarck and his close friend, Moritz Busch

#### Source E

#### The limited success of State socialism

The system of social insurance which he [Bismarck] established was too little and too late. The lower classes wanted more than protection against out-and-out starvation. They wanted respect, equality and freedom... The defect which the Chancellor suffered in the campaign against the socialists was all the more galling... because he had planned it with such care. He had sought to avoid the mistakes of the *Kulturkampf*. He had not relied on force exclusively, but had tried to win over the moderates in the opposing camp. And yet it had all been in vain... The ageing statesman now began to experience a recurrent mood of pessimism.

Hamerow, *The Age of Bismarck*, 1973

### Examination-style questions

- 1 Comprehension in context**  
Using Source E and your own knowledge, explain what Hamerow means by the mistakes of the *Kulturkampf*.
- 2 Comparing the sources**  
To what extent do Sources A and B offer similar interpretations of how Bismarck conducted his domestic policy?
- 3 Assessing the sources**  
How valuable is Source D in assessing the motives behind Bismarck's social welfare programme? Use both the source and your own knowledge in your answer.
- 4 Making judgements**  
Bismarck's domestic policies failed to tackle the real issues facing Germany at that time. How far do you agree with this statement?

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### Bismarck's foreign policy

The unification of Germany had a profound effect on the balance of power in Europe. The British politician, Benjamin Disraeli, declared in a speech to the House of Commons in February 1871 'You have a new world, new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers with which to cope... The balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most... is England! Britain feared that Germany would renew hostilities against both Austria and France to gain more power. In fact, Bismarck's primary aim for the next nineteen years was to avoid war at all costs. He wanted Germany to concentrate its efforts on strengthening its economy and functioning as a united state. He had no wish to gain greater territory. In 1888 he said:

Source 10

What territory could she [Germany] think of annexing? She has enough of Poland already. By seeking fresh conquests, the German Empire would only be exposing itself to perpetual warfare with Russia and France, who is simply waiting for an opportunity for avenging Alsace and Lorraine. Under these circumstances warlike proposals... would not fit in with my programme.

Bismarck's intention to avoid war, however, was no guarantee that other states would avoid war with Germany. France, although weakened by the Franco-Prussian War, would soon recover and its desire for revenge on Germany would remain. At the heart of Bismarck's foreign policy until 1890 lay a determination to isolate France and prevent the unthinkable: an alliance between France and Russia (or even Austria) which would leave Germany exposed to the threat of a war on two fronts. The ideal solution was to conclude alliances with both Austria and Russia which would prevent such a nightmare from happening. The difficulty, however, lay in the hostility between Russia and Austria, making it difficult for Germany to establish good relations with both. Bismarck showed considerable diplomatic skill in addressing this issue, but his policies could not solve this basic problem.

### The Three Emperors League

In 1873 Germany, Russia and Austria formed the Three Emperors' League (*Dreikaiserbund*). Although this seemed to be the answer to all of Bismarck's problems, the League was little more than a sign of good intent. The three powers agreed to consult each other in the event of war and emphasized their desire for peace. Only two years later, however, the limitations of the League were apparent. Bismarck, alarmed by France's quick recovery and von Moltke's (mistaken) belief that France could overpower German forces, made threatening gestures to France. He used the press to imply that an attack on France was imminent. 'Is war in sight?' was the headline of one article. Bismarck hoped that Britain, alarmed at the prospect of another war, would pressure France into slowing down her rearmament programme. He was mistaken. Not only did Britain fail to respond in such a way, but the Russian Emperor visited the Kaiser in person to voice his concerns and Austria was no less unsympathetic. Bismarck was forced to stop his campaign.

**Balance of power**  
Ensuring that no single state in Europe dominated the others.

See the map of Europe on page 26 for a sense of how Germany could become 'sandwiched' by enemies.

**The Ottoman Empire**  
Began as a small Turkish principality at the beginning of the thirteenth century, reached the height of its power and extent by the sixteenth century. Was in decline by the end of the eighteenth century and became known as the 'sick man of Europe'. In 1923 the empire was reduced to present day Turkey and became a republic.

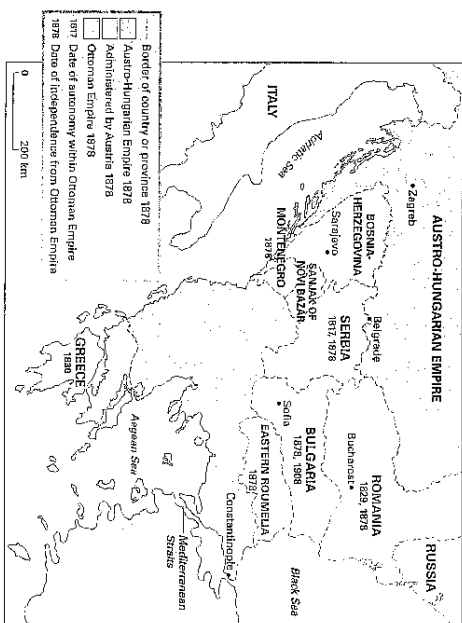
Bismarck's main in-ford was regarded with astonishment by the participants of the Berlin Congress. He apparently ate cherries and shipjaps at the same time.

**Source 11**  
The Berlin settlement

### Crisis in the Balkans, 1875-1878

The situation in the Balkans was very unstable. The Ottoman Empire which ruled the Balkans had been in decline since the end of the previous century. Meanwhile, the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century had made the Balkan states hungry for independence. It was not, however, as simple a matter as the Ottoman Empire versus the Balkan states. The Great Powers also had vested interests in the area. Russia regarded itself as a defender of the Slav people. It also wanted to protect its own interests in the region by ensuring that its ships had clear access through the Mediterranean Straits (the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmara and Bosphorus) while access to potentially hostile powers was denied. One of these potentially hostile powers was Austria, which wanted to increase its own control over the region. This was partly a defensive measure to prevent nationalist groups in the Balkans from threatening the Austro-Hungarian Empire which itself consisted of many different ethnic groups.

In 1875 there were uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the Ottomans had been forced to withdraw, Russia and Austria would have battled for power over the region. This would have put Germany into the impossible position of having to choose sides even though it needed to keep the support of both. Bismarck worked hard at a diplomatic solution to the crisis and in 1876 Austria and Russia drew up a plan to divide the Balkans in the event of a Turkish defeat. The Turks were not defeated, however, and Russia invaded Turkey in April 1877. This was despite the absence of any offer of support from Germany, much to Russia's irritation. Both Austria and Britain were alarmed at Russia's actions and the threat of war loomed over Europe. Bismarck once again attempted to settle the issue through diplomacy. In 1878 a congress was held in Berlin and Bismarck was in command. A settlement was reached which created lasting tensions. Russia gained land which it had lost in 1856 but the other decisions were less to its liking. Austria gained control over Bosnia-Herzegovina, Britain gained control over Cyprus while Bulgaria was partitioned (divided). Russia felt robbed by foreign powers which had not even fought in the recent conflict.







### Bismarck's Imperial policy

According to a report written by the British Ambassador to Berlin in 1871, Bismarck had made it clear in a conversation that he did not want Germany to acquire colonies, nor did he want to build a bigger navy. In 1884, however, Bismarck embarked on a policy of colonial expansion that was to see German territory increase significantly. Why did Bismarck change his mind so dramatically?

#### Historical debate

Historians have debated the reasons behind Bismarck's colonial policy at length. The main arguments that have so far been advanced can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Bismarck believed that time was running out for Germany because other powers were claiming all the available colonies for themselves.
- 2 Bismarck pursued colonial expansion as a way of diverting attention away from social tensions at home, leading to what is termed 'social imperialism'. Others argue that this policy only originated after Bismarck's resignation.
- 3 Bismarck was eager to please his conservative alliance and also saw colonial expansion as a way of retaining the National Liberals around a common cause and encouraging their support of his policies.
- 4 Bismarck was pressured by those who claimed that Germany needed new markets for her products.
- 5 Bismarck had long-term plans for an empire but had been waiting for the right time.
- 6 Bismarck stumbled into colonial expansion just as he stumbled into everything else.
- 7 Bismarck believed that colonial expansion would demonstrate Germany's strength to others. It would also alienate Britain which could in turn help build a friendship with France.

It is likely that Bismarck pursued colonial expansion for a combination of reasons. The argument of social imperialism, first advanced by Wehler, as the sole reason for Bismarck's colonial policies now seems unlikely. Colonial expansion only generated real enthusiasm amongst those who stood potentially to profit from it and that excluded many of the people that Wehler claimed Bismarck was trying to woo through increased nationalism. It is likely, however, that domestic considerations were a significant factor in Bismarck's decision. The increased nationalism of the 1884 elections was to Bismarck's advantage.

Most German expansion was in Africa. A number of protectorates were established there including Cameroon, Togo and German East Africa and German South West Africa. Many of these gains led to clashes with Britain but not to a closer relationship with France which regarded German activity in Africa with suspicion. Britain eventually recognized most of Germany's African possessions, as she was distracted by threats elsewhere in her Empire. However, German success in her new colonies was not great. Bismarck had hoped to adopt a hands off policy by allowing chartered companies to run the new territories, but this proved impossible. The cost of quelling local

#### OPTIONAL

Your map of Africa is very fine, but my map of Africa is here in Europe. Here is Russia and here is France and here we are in the middle. That is my map of Africa.

Bismarck

#### The scramble for Africa

This is the term used to describe the frantic efforts by European states to claim what was left of Africa by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

#### Protectorate

A state that is controlled and literally 'protected' by another state.

opposition in East Africa alone cost nine million Reichsmarks and took two years. All in all, therefore, the colonies were both a political and economic disappointment. It was not surprising that Bismarck abandoned colonial expansion in 1888.

### Document exercise: Bismarck's foreign policy

#### Source A

##### Bismarck's aims in his own words

Our main policy is and remains a policy of peace. We have no reason to want a war, and I do not see what we should have to gain by one... The pivot of our position, and with that of our whole policy, the point on which things turn, is our relationship with Russia. The French will only attack us if we let ourselves get embroiled [involved] with Russia, but then are certain to do so. As for the English, they have no reason at all for attacking us, even if they are beginning to envy our industrial and commercial progress... The ticklish factor in our connections with Russia is of course Austria. We cannot let Austria be overrun and shattered. But just as little must we let ourselves be dragged into war by her. To manoeuvre between these two crags is a matter of skill and a clear head, much the same qualities as are necessary to prevent two trains meeting in a head-on crash.

#### Source B

##### Friendship between Germany and Austria

If, contrary to expectations and against the sincere desire of both the High Contracting Parties [i.e. Germany and Austria], one of the two Empires shall be attacked on the part of Russia, the High Contracting Parties are bound to assist each other with the whole of the military power of their Empire, and consequently only to conclude peace conjointly and by agreement.

Extract from the Dual Alliance, 1879

#### Source C

##### Friendship between Germany and Russia

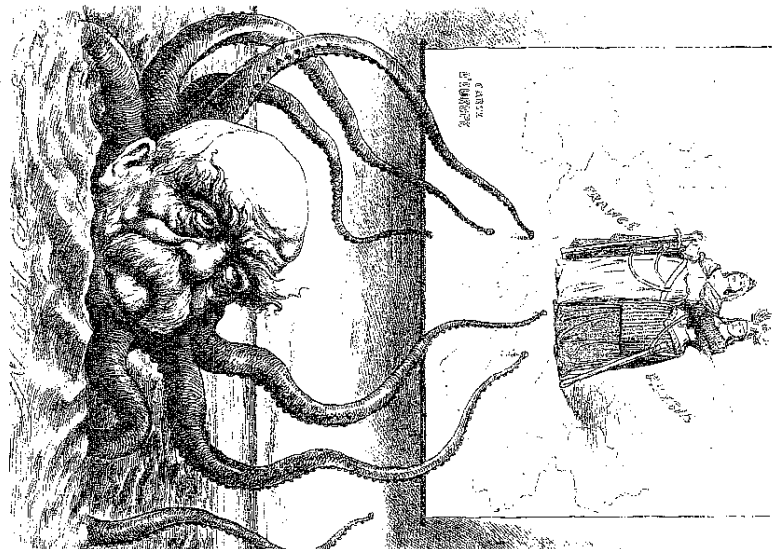
Article 1: In case one of the High Contracting Parties [i.e. Germany and Russia] should find itself at war with a third Great Power, the other would maintain a benevolent neutrality towards it, and would devote its efforts to the localization of the conflict. This provision would not apply to a war against Austria or France in case this war should result from an attack directed against one of these two latter Powers by one of the High Contracting Parties.

Article 2: Germany recognizes the rights historically acquired by Russia in the Balkan Peninsula, and particularly the legitimacy [right] of her dominant and decisive influence in Bulgaria...

Extract from the Reinsurance Treaty, 1887

### Source D

#### A friendship between France and Russia is broken up



A French cartoon from 1890 about Bismarck's attempts to disrupt Franco-Russian relations.

#### Examination-style questions

- 1 Comprehending in context**  
Using Source A and your own knowledge, explain why Bismarck wanted to follow a policy of peace after 1871.
- 2 Comparing the sources**  
To what extent and why do Sources A and B offer different perspectives on who was Germany's most important ally?
- 3 Assessing the sources**  
How valuable is Source D in understanding the state of European diplomacy in 1887?
- 4 Making judgements**  
How far do you agree with the view that Bismarck was a diplomatic genius?

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### Source E

#### A historian's assessment

It was in foreign affairs that Bismarck was most competent and his achievements most impressive. The empire he had created was secure by 1890. In the previous twenty years he had won the respect of virtually everyone, but the trust of few... For nearly two decades his policy was reasonably peaceful, but it was also unsteady. He was acutely aware of the precarious situation of Germany in foreign affairs. He was ever on the alert for any threatening intrigue or even the suggestion of such. This made others wary of him in a period when he should have tried to win international confidence in his country.

Walter, *Bismarck*, 1985

#### Activity

Using the timeline at the end of this chapter to help you, summarize Bismarck's foreign policy. Take each event included in the timeline and note down Bismarck's aims/motives and the outcome. You may wish to put this into a summary chart like the one below.

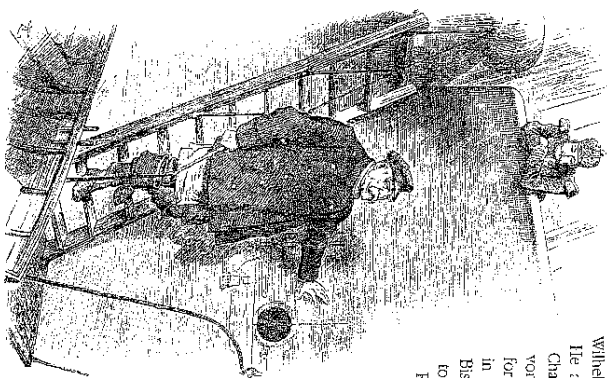
Event	Bismarck's aims or motives	Outcome

- 1** How successful do you think Bismarck's foreign policy was overall?
- 2** Was Germany in a strong position by 1890?
- 3** What problems remained?
- 4** How could these problems have been solved?

## The fall of Bismarck

In 1888, the wife of the British Ambassador in Berlin declared that the Emperor... has allowed Prince Bismarck to have his own way in everything. Certainly, Bismarck and Wilhelm I had their ups and downs and Bismarck often resorted to resignation threats and outbursts of tears to get his own way. But the relationship worked because the Kaiser had generally allowed Bismarck to make his own decisions. The death of Wilhelm I in 1888 was therefore a blow to Bismarck. The new king, Friedrich, reigned for just three months. After his death, his son (Wilhelm I's grandson) assumed the crown. Wilhelm II was 29 years old and a different character entirely from his grandfather. He was determined to make his mark and to rule Germany himself. Bismarck, now 73, certainly underestimated the new monarch.

A clash of personalities was not the only cause of poor relations, however. Bismarck and the new Kaiser disagreed over matters of policy. In particular, their views diverged over the issue of socialism. Wilhelm II favoured a policy of more social reform which would, he hoped, woo the working classes away from the Social Democratic Party. Bismarck, on the other hand, wanted to confront the Social Democrats by introducing a more aggressive anti-socialist bill which proposed to expel from their homes anyone under suspicion of socialist agitation. The bill was defeated and in the elections which followed, the left wing and Centre Party increased their seats at the expense of the conservatives. Most worryingly for Bismarck, the Social Democratic Party now had 35 deputies. Bismarck wanted to use the new Reichstag's refusal to support measures concerning the army and anti-socialism as an excuse to redefeat the Constitution and substantially reduce the Reichstag's powers. In other words, Bismarck was planning a coup.



Wilhelm II opposed such a plan. He already had an alternative Chancellor in mind, General von Caprivi, and he waited for the right moment. It came in March 1890 when Bismarck, desperately trying to gain support in the Reichstag, was even denied the support of the conservatives. Wilhelm gave Bismarck an ultimatum and Bismarck finally resigned on 29 March 1890. He left Berlin feeling very bitter. His attack on Wilhelm in his memoirs was so vicious that an agreement was made by his descendants to withhold publication of the worst chapters until after Wilhelm's death.

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### Bismarck's legacy

#### Historical debate

German historians initially regarded Bismarck as a hero and created a myth that the German Empire had a profound product of inevitable and natural forces. However, the rise of Hitler and the Second World War had a profound impact on historians' assessment of Bismarck. As early as 1950, connections were being made between Bismarck and Hitler. Historians began to question whether there was something more sinister behind Bismarck's rule and German unification which paved the way for the horrors of the Third Reich. Was Bismarck guilty of stirring up a kind of nationalism which sought territorial expansion and increased anti-Semitism? Did his use of force against Austria and France in the 1860s signal to others that conflict and war was the way forward for Germany? Did his dislike of democracy and refusal to give greater political power to the expanding middle and working classes create tensions that inevitably led to the rise of Nazism?

More recent historians do not deny that Bismarck had a profound effect on the later development of Germany and even the rise of Hitler. But they have challenged the degree to which Bismarck made it inevitable. They have challenged the view that Germany under Bismarck was unlike anywhere else. They have challenged the view that the middle classes simply supported Bismarck and remained powerless although they accept that political power largely remained in the hands of the elite. And they have challenged the view that unification was inevitable and the result of sinister forces which ultimately led to Hitler.

Perhaps the best way for you to assess Bismarck is to try and evaluate what he did or did not achieve in his own lifetime and in what state he left Germany. You may decide that he made many mistakes and left behind problems. But you may also decide that he also had some great achievements. Certainly, people in Germany in the decade after his resignation, thought he had achieved a great deal. In an opinion poll in 1899 most people answered Bismarck to the question 'Who is the greatest statesman of the century?', and the majority considered 1871-1890 to be the happiest period in the century.

#### Source 16

...the staggering course of the First World War and still more the Second World War makes it impossible to pass over in silence the query whether the germs of the later evil lie. Hitlered were not really implanted in Bismarck's work from the outset... One then breathes the atmosphere of the tragedy of history, of human and historical greatness, and also the problematical uncertainty which will ever hover around Bismarck and his work - while Hitler's work must be reckoned as the eruption of the static principle in world history.

Meincke, *The German Catastrophe*, 1964

#### Source 17

The complexity of the structure of alliances which he erected was... a source of weakness as well as strength. It achieved the fundamental objective sought by the Chancellor, the maintenance of stability. But it also made that stability depend on a man of genius who was imitable [uniquel] and irreplaceable.

Hamerow, *The Age of Bismarck*, 1973

#### Source 18

My entire life was spent gambling for high stakes with other people's money. I could never foresee exactly whether my plans would succeed... Politics is a thankless job, chiefly because everything depends on chance and conjecture. One has to reckon with a series of probabilities and improbabilities and base one's plans upon this reckoning... As long as he lives the statesman is always unappreciated.

Bismarck, *The Men and the Statesmen*, 1893

#### Source 19

Once political and economic unification had been achieved, authoritarian and discretionary strategies were implemented to fend off the inevitable challenge of... modernizing forces. Parliament had been treated like an inconvenience... All this, achieved, however, was a temporary lull. Problems were swept under the carpet and social tensions were left to smoulder. By 1890 it was clear that the Bismarckian approach to domestic policy was no longer practicable, and his departure left his successors with a legacy of unresolved problems.

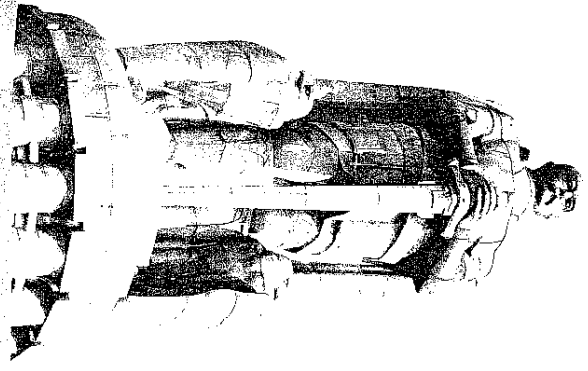
Abrams, *Bismarck and the German Empire 1871-1918*, 1995

#### Source 20

Most of what Bismarck created disappeared within fifty years of his death. The country he united was divided after 1945... Prussia's eastern provinces, whose potential loss so concerned Bismarck, belong to Poland and Russia, and Prussia herself, has disappeared from the map... The constitution Bismarck drafted for a united Germany disappeared under the impact of the First World War... The monarchical order that he believed vital to the internal stability of the three central and east European empires has disappeared, and likewise the aristocratic hierarchy handed estates that were its economic and social backbone... Bismarck would find little that is familiar in contemporary Germany - with one exception. The social insurance system... And yet, ironically, this was an achievement on which Bismarck placed little store...

Planze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany* Vol. III, 1980

#### Source 21



#### Source 22

The supreme quality of Bismarck's statesmanship was his recognition that no policy could be pursued beyond a certain danger limit, and that it was essential to have alternatives ready for dignified retreat... Few politicians in Germany or in other lands, have possessed such suppleness of mind... There was no causal chain linking Bismarck's technique of power politics and the... resort to world conquest in the Nazi era. Bismarck's laudatory champions... have stressed the extent to which Hitler's policies ran directly counter [oppositional] to all his precepts. Rightly they emphasise the limited character of Bismarck's ambitions for Germany...

Palmer, *Bismarck*, 1976

#### Source 23

The Empire Bismarck created survived for 47 years, slightly longer than Germany was divided after the Second World War... Bismarck's 'lesser German' unification i.e. excluding Austria was successful in achieving a national legitimacy [fight] which it was beyond the capacity of two world wars and 40 years of division to extinguish.

Lerman 'Bismarckian Germany and the Structure of the German Empire' in Fulbrook (ed.), *German History since 1800*, 1997

#### Source 24

Under Bismarck's leadership the German nation had become united, strong and powerful. But the sense of freedom and individual independence of justice and humanity, had been lamentably [regrettably] weakened... It is therefore no mere chance that his work did not last, and that the Prussian crown and the Hohenzollern Prussian royal family dynasty... ceased to exist twenty years after his death.

Eck, *Bismarck and the German Empire*, 1988

See the next page for the activity which goes with this spotlight.

**Activity**

1 Draw up a balance sheet of Bismarck's achievements and failures using the tables below.

Start by using the sources on pages 48 and 49. If you have trouble finding evidence to back up the points made by the different historians then this might encourage you to reject their claims.

Then add to the tables using your own knowledge. It is very important that you are able to support your own points with evidence! The timeline opposite might help you.

Bismarck's Achievements	Evidence
Bismarck's Failures	Evidence

2 Get into small groups. Each group member should write an obituary of Bismarck (written as if the year was 1898) from a different point of view. Choose from the list below:

- A Social Democrat
- A Catholic
- A Prussian aristocrat
- A German nationalist
- A French diplomat

3 Now write your own assessment of Bismarck's legacy. Structure your assessment around the following question: 'Was Bismarck good for Germany?' *Note:* For inclusion in your key skills portfolio, this assessment must be an extended piece of writing (e.g. 3 pages or more) and should include at least one image (e.g. a picture downloaded from the Internet, a chart or a table). When you have finished, compare your interpretation of Bismarck with the other members of the class. How far do you agree or disagree with each other?

**Conclusions**

It will be clear that Bismarck remains a controversial character. Although in many ways he achieved his aims both in his domestic and foreign policy, historians have questioned to what extent these aims were valid. By refusing to allow a move towards democracy, was Bismarck simply creating tensions that would explode after his lifetime? Did he ignore the ways in which Germany was changing and try to hold the clock back? On the other hand, his social welfare legislation was much more forward-looking and has outlived everything else he left behind. Abroad he steadfastly pursued a policy of peace. He did not yearn to make Germany bigger like later German leaders. Instead he sought to strengthen the Germany that existed. Yet even in this respect his legacy was unstable. The fundamental problems in Europe remained and Bismarck left no one in his wake who possessed the skill to solve them. Yet for all his failures, it is perhaps too harsh to judge him by the developments which came later in Germany. Nothing was inevitable after Bismarck.



**YEAR DOMESTIC POLICY**

**FOREIGN POLICY**

1870	Pope proclaims papal infallibility Centre Party formed	
1871	Unification of Germany National Liberals win 155 seats in Reichstag elections	
1873	Economic depression begins Kulturkampf begins with the Palk (May) Laws	Three Emperors' League between Germany, Austria and Russia
1876	Liberals agree to a new Septennat Press Law increases censorship	'War in sight' scare Uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina
1875	Social Democratic Party formed	
1876		Austria and Russia agree to divide the Balkans between them in the case of a Turkish defeat
1877	Alliance between landed and industrial elites in favour of protectionism	Russia invades Turkey
1878	Bismarck announces a bill which signals an end to free trade Two assassination attempts on the Kaiser Socialists and liberals lose seats in the Reichstag elections Anti-socialist Law	Berlin Congress
1879	Palk Laws largely abolished Bismarck chooses the support of the Centre Party instead of the liberals	Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria
1881	Reichstag elections a disaster for Bismarck. Can only rely on the support of 85 out of 397 deputies	Three Emperors' Alliance between Germany, Austria and Russia
1882		Italy joins Germany and Austria in a Triple Alliance
1883	Health Insurance Law	
1884	Centre Party becomes the largest party in the Reichstag and conservatives also do well	Germany begins a programme of colonial expansion
1885		War breaks out between Bulgaria and Serbia
1885	Settlement Law encourages German peasants to settle in the eastern Prussian provinces	Appointment of Boulenger as the French Minister of War
1887	Bismarck's supporters gain seats in the Reichstag elections	Reinsurance Treaty between Germany and Russia German leaves withdrawal from Russia
1888	Death of Kaiser Wilhelm I His grandson becomes Kaiser Wilhelm II	Colonial expansion abandoned
1889	Old age pension scheme introduced	
1890	Socialists gain 35 seats in Reichstag elections Bismarck plans a coup against the Reichstag Bismarck resigns	

