

## How Successful was Bismarck's rule of Germany 1871-1890?

It's hard to argue that Bismarck was not highly successful in his rule of Germany. He was a major factor in making Germany a serious power in Europe, as well as uniting Germany and placing all power in the hands of Prussia. Unlike most other leaders, Bismarck understood the need for the balance of power and that he should not attempt to extend Germany's control too far. Examples of his successes were the cultivation of the economy, the unification of Germany, his foreign policy and placing all of the power with Prussia. However he did have a number of flaws in his internal policies, for example in his dealing with the Socialist's and Catholics in Germany.

Before Bismarck even became Chancellor he had major successes in unifying Germany. In 1862 he was appointed Prime Minister of Prussia by Wilhelm I. At the time Germany consisted of 39 states and was called the German Confederation. Prussia and Austria were 2 of the largest states, Bismarck wished to unify all of these states, excluding Austria in order to place Prussia in a position of power. He did so through 3 successful wars, Denmark 1864, Austria 1866 and France 1870-1871. Following the wars in Denmark and Russia a North German Confederation was formed. Southern states such as Bavaria and Hesse-Darmstadt were reluctant to join until faced with the threat of war with France. Bismarck had skillfully orchestrated these events to ensure unification. During the war Bismarck opened communications with the south and managed to convince them to join a unified Germany. Bismarck was hugely skillful and successful in this campaign of unification. he achieved all of his desires, but at the same time he made an enemy of France with the humiliating Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, as well as Wilhelm I's coronation in the Palace of Versailles. This would go on to effect German foreign policy for the next 20 years.

Bismarck was also very successful in his aim of maintaining Prussian power in Germany with the new German constitution. Under the constitution of the new German Empire, the Second Reich, the king of Prussia became Kaiser and had total power. Wilhelm I was happy to delegate most responsibilities of everyday running of the country to his Chancellor, Bismarck. The Chancellor then had power to appoint ministers. As well as this there was the Bundesrat and the Reichstag which were elected by the people. All men over the age of 25 were allowed to vote. The Bundesrat or Federal Council consisted of 58 members (17 of which were Prussian). As Prussia had a quarter of the seats they had the power to veto any decisions. The Reichstag consisted of 397 seats, again a large amount of these going to Prussia, over half.

However the Reichstag had almost no power. Under the system laid out by Bismarck they could only discuss issues presented to them by ministers. Therefore all power was concentrated between Wilhelm I, Bismarck and his chosen ministers. Even within the Bundesrat and Reichstag Prussia had control. Bismarck had been successful in creating his ideal situation. It did however create a situation which gave total power to the Kaiser, which suited while Wilhelm I and Bismarck were in power but would not always be the case as would be seen in later years.

An area where Bismarck was remarkably successful was in his cultivation of the economy, German industry expanded rapidly during his rule. A variety of factors contribute to this, one of which was the rise in population. Medical advances and an abundance of food led to this, as well as the arrival of 300,000 immigrants each year. Germany possessed plenty of raw materials including iron and potash in Alsace and Lorraine. Another major reason was the strong link between schools and industry and the emphasis on science and technology in schools. This caused Germany to become the leading producer of electronic goods in Europe, The organisation of industry into cartels ensured the consistent high standard of goods, gaining them a good reputation abroad. The excellent railways, roads and the Rhine also contributed, serving as a transport system for products. Finally Bismarck's decision to take up protectionism in the place of free trade, bringing in the Tariff Law in 1879, placing taxes on foreign goods, helped boost the economy. Bismarck was essential in this area particularly as he saw the importance of working to create a powerful technology industry and introduced protectionism. Germany was already fortunate enough to have a good transport system, but regardless Bismarck was very successful in this area. However it also had a negative by product in the form of the socialist movement.

Socialism was one of the areas in which Bismarck had less success than others. Living and working conditions were appalling in Germany at the time. Many families lived in a single room and took in lodgers also. These poor housing conditions and low wages led to social tensions. In 1875 the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was formed which aimed to end capitalism through peaceful means. Bismarck didn't like the socialists as he himself was a wealthy German and he felt that socialists could not be real German patriots. In 1878 anarchists tried to assassinate Wilhelm I. Despite having nothing to do with it Bismarck blamed the SPD for this and used it as an excuse to start his campaign against them. In 1870 the Reichstag passed the Exceptional Law which outlawed all Socialist organisations and publications. However alongside these harsh measures Bismarck instituted a programme of social security. The 1883 Sickness Insurance act provided cover for workers who fell ill. The 1884 Accident Insurance act made employers liable to pay compensation to workers who had accidents at work. However neither of these changes succeeded in meeting Bismarck's aim of eradicating the Socialist movement. Votes for the SPD went from

763,000 in 1887 to 1.43 million in 1890. Its seats in the Reichstag increased from 9 in 1878 to 35 in 1890. Clearly Bismarck was considerably less successful here in his aims of squashing the socialist movement. He was clever in his approach of introducing social welfare measures alongside the banning of socialist organisations. However the few small measures he brought in were nothing like that which the SPD had hoped for and failed to make a satisfactory difference in their eyes. The movement gained further strength and so overall Bismarck failed in this area.

Another area in which Bismarck had little success was the Kulturkampf. This was his attempt to reduce the power of the Catholic Church within Germany. He feared that the Pope would use papal infallibility for political purpose. Facing religious and political discrimination, German Catholics formed the Catholic Centre Party in 1870. Bismarck feared that they would encourage the Catholic areas of Germany to seek independence. He also depended heavily on the Protestant National Liberal Party for support. In 1872 Germany cut relations with the Vatican and expelled the Jesuits. In the same year a series of May Laws were introduced by Prussian minister Adalbert Falk. According to these laws all priests had to have graduated from German universities and a royal court was established to dismiss priests deemed disloyal to the German state, among other things. By 1878 half of Catholic Germany's bishops had been dismissed. However a group of Protestant families saw the May Laws as an attack on Christianity in general. In 1876 100 Protestant families in Prussia took out a newspaper advert denouncing the Kulturkampf. After this it essentially ended overnight with a promise that the German government would be informed of all papal appointments in Germany. Falk was dismissed in 1879, having been used as a scapegoat. All in all the Kulturkampf was fairly disastrous for Bismarck. He completely failed in his aims to strengthen support for the Second Reich and instead angered large sections of the population. Interest in the Catholic Centre Party only increased during the Kulturkampf. Bismarck basically had to back down and apologise. However the ending of the Kulturkampf was not altogether against his interests. At the time he had begun to seek support from the Catholic groups such as the Catholic Centre Party and Austria. It also gave him greater control over Church schools.

Finally the area in which Bismarck's real genius was shown, a balancing act which he kept up highly successfully for his entire rule, his foreign policy. Bismarck, when he came into office in 1871, wished to maintain the current balance of power. Germany had just emerged as a major power in Europe, in possession of large areas of France, Poland and Denmark. Bismarck then instituted a policy of Realpolitik 'realistic politics'. He saw that if Germany attempted to take over any further countries, the other countries in Europe would take action. Instead he tried to keep peace in Europe, in order to prevent a French attack. He did this by forming the Dreikaiserbund in 1872, joining an alliance with Russia and Austria-Hungary.

However the Dreikaiserbund fell apart in 1878 over conflict in the Balkans between Russia and A-H. Bismarck then formed a Dual Alliance with A-H in 1879. The Dreikaiserbund was renewed in 1881 when a new tsar, Tsar Alexander III came into power in Russia. It ended again in 1887 as A-H and Russia were once again in competition over the Balkans. In the same year Bismarck signed a Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. By doing so Bismarck made sure that Germany was allied with at least 2 major powers at any given time. While not necessarily meaning that these countries would fight with Germany in the event of a war, but ensured that they would remain neutral. In this way Bismarck was successful in discouraging France from ever attacking Germany, maintaining peace and the balance of power in Europe.

In conclusion in my opinion Bismarck was very successful in his rule of Germany. While he had some failures, most notably the Kulturkampf and his aims with the Socialists. But overall due to him Germany emerged as a major power in Europe, which was very wealthy. He was successful in his aim of bestowing most of the power on Prussia and unifying Germany. However the main flaw in his rule was his lack of foresight. He did not account for when Wilhelm I was replaced and another person came into power.