

Workers' Party (otherwise known as the Nazis) saw their votes increase as many Germans turned to the political extremes for answers. The German establishment, led by President von Hindenburg, misused the constitution to undermine the German parliament, the Reichstag. In January 1933, von Hindenburg made one of the most significant appointments in the history of Germany and the world when he asked the leader of the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, to become German Chancellor.

During 1933 the Nazis removed many of the obstacles to the creation of a dictatorship. Over the course of the next six years the regime consolidated power. There is little debate over the fact that there was considerable support for the Nazi regime in the years running up to the Second World War. However, there is controversy about the reasons for support: why did so many Germans actively and willingly go along with the Nazi State? It is also important to try and understand the nature and extent of opposition before the war.

At the heart of Hitler's world view was a desire to build a new Germany based on racial lines. At the top of the racial pile, according to Nazi theory, were the Aryans. At the bottom of the pile were the Jews. Hitler also promised to destroy the Treaty of Versailles as part of his wider aim to create living space, *Lebensraum*, for Germany in the east. This aim very much fitted in with his hatred of communism and his determination to destroy Bolshevism in the Soviet Union. From 1934 the Nazi regime followed a foreign policy which challenged Versailles. By 1939, the leaders of Britain and France had come to the conclusion that war was the only way to contain German expansionism.

The Second World War was to change Germany fundamentally. Despite initial success, the war was to place an increasing burden on the German people. As the levels of bombing increased and the course of the war turned against Germany, so many Germans became more critical of the Nazi regime. But the home front and German economy stood up well until close to the bitter end in April 1945.

Perhaps the most important question posed in this book is how the government of Germany, which is one of the most civilised and cultured countries in the world, could be responsible for the systematic murder of six million Jews and millions of others who were considered 'undesirable'. The 'Final Solution', as it became known, was the darkest moment in German – and in European – history.

## UNIT

# 1 What were the main issues in the Second Reich 1900–14?

## What is this unit about?

This unit focuses on the **Second Reich** in Germany from 1900 to 1914. It explains the unique nature of the constitution and the relative powers of the Kaiser, the Chancellor and the Reichstag. It explores the tensions in the relationship between these institutions in the run-up to war. The unit looks at the different political parties in Germany and what they stood for. It considers economic growth and social change and the impact that these had on the political landscape. The unit considers important events during the period, notably the Zabern Affair in 1913.

You will:

- consider the structures of the German state in the period 1900–14
- discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the political system in the run-up to war.

## Key questions

- What were the relative powers of the Kaiser, the Chancellor and the Reichstag and how did the Second Reich operate between 1900 and 1914?
- How did the economic and social changes impact on the political system?

## Timeline

1900	June	Second German Naval Law introduced
	October	Count Bernhard von Bülow becomes Chancellor
1902	December	Tariff Law introduced
1903		Sickness Insurance Law gives greater help to sick workers
1904		Herero uprising begins in German South West Africa
1906	December	Parliamentary crisis leads to election
1907	January	Reichstag elections see Socialist SPD lose votes
1908	December	Law passed restricting hours of factory work
1909	July	Bülow resigns; Dr von Bethmann-Hollweg becomes Chancellor
1911	May	Reform of Alsace Lorraine constitution
1912	January	Reichstag elections; SPD become largest party
1913	June	Reichstag passes Army and Finance Bills increasing size of the armed forces
	December	The Zabern Affair

## Definition

### Second Reich

Reich is German for the word state. The First Reich was the Holy Roman Empire. The Second Reich was established in 1871 and lasted until 1918.



## SKILLS BUILDER

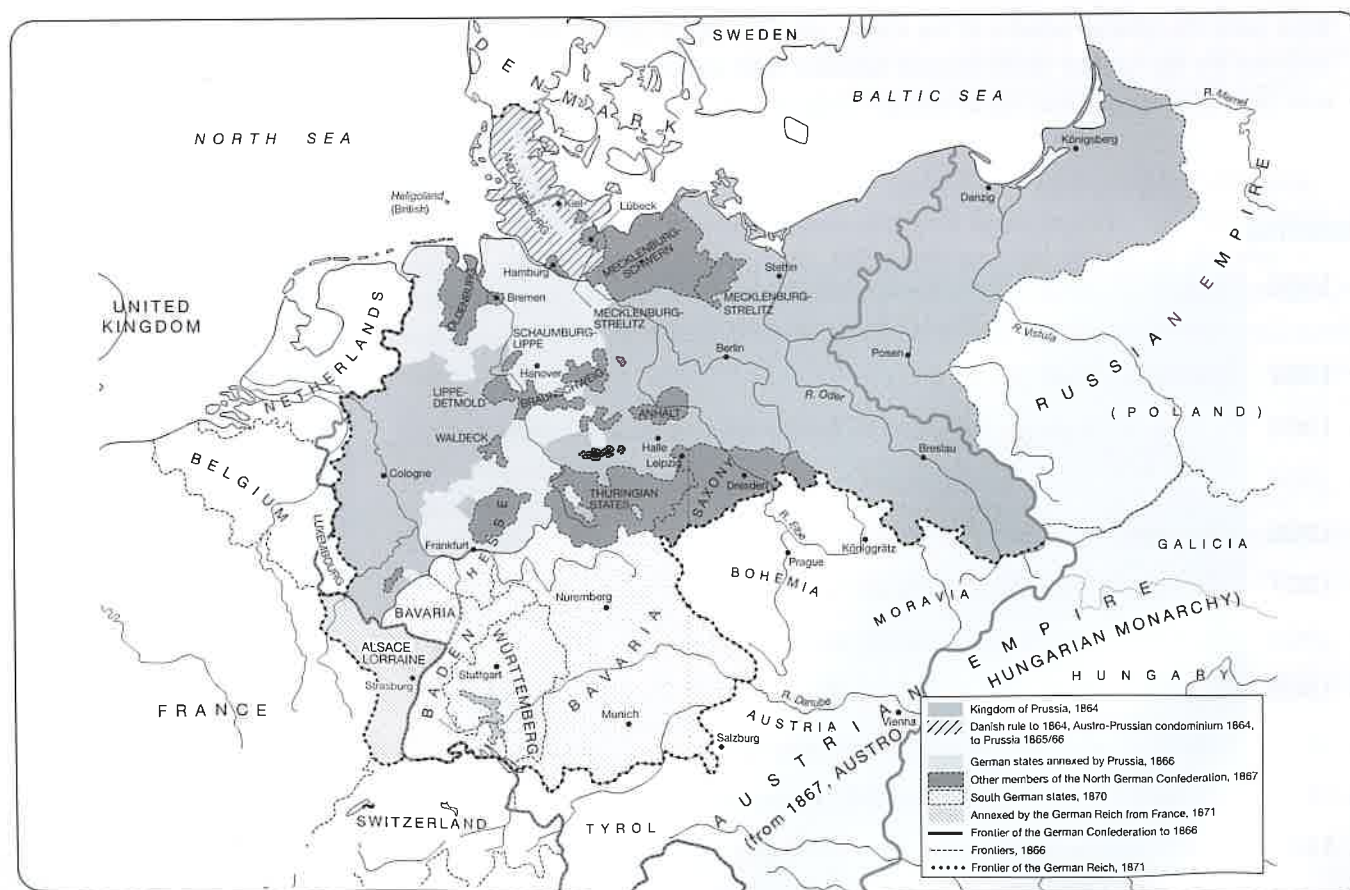
Study this picture closely. What impression does it give you of the founding of the new German state?



1.1 The German Empire is proclaimed, Versailles, 18 January 1871

## SKILLS BUILDER

Before 1871, Germany was not a unified country. What does this map tell you about the process of German unification?



1.2 Germany in 1861–71

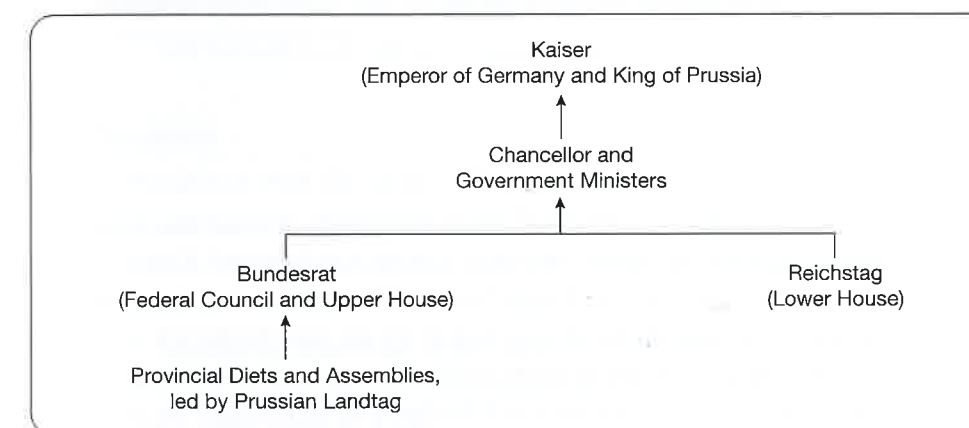
## The constitution

As you have seen in the picture, Wilhelm I was proclaimed Emperor or Kaiser of a new German state in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles outside Paris. This new empire was born out of victory on the battlefield over a period of years but most recently over the French army at the Battle of Sedan in September 1870. War against France had been fought by a number of German states in alliance including the states of Prussia and Bavaria. The Prussians had led the army of the North German Confederation, which had been formed in 1867. The North German Confederation was defined by a **constitution** in which the component states kept their own governments but military matters were controlled by the King of Prussia. Under this constitution, there was to be a central law-making body with limited powers. Victory against France in 1871 led to the unification of the states of the North German Confederation with southern kingdoms, including Bavaria and Württemberg. The unification, however, was on Prussia's terms and the constitution adopted was a refinement of the constitution of the North German Confederation. The main aim of the author of the constitution and Germany's first Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, was to preserve the power of the élite.

## Definition

### Constitution

The set of rules by which a country is run. It is, at least in theory, supposed to reflect the values and traditions of that country. Sometimes a constitution is written; sometimes it is a collection of accepted traditions that are not written down.



1.3 The constitution of the German Second Reich

## Main features of the constitution

### A federal state

The new German Reich included 25 states – four kingdoms (Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg), six grand duchies, 12 duchies and principalities, three free cities (Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck) – plus the territory of Alsace-Lorraine, which had been seized from France in 1871 and was to be ruled by a governor on behalf of all of the German states.

- The states retained their own governments and had different constitutions. Some allowed universal suffrage; others, such as the grand duchies Schwerin and Strelitz, retained seventeenth century style constitutions with near absolutist rulers.

## Biography

### Otto von Bismarck

Bismarck was Minister-President of Prussia from 1862 to 1890 and Chancellor of Germany from 1871 to 1890. He was fiercely conservative and had little regard for any form of parliamentary democracy.

## Definition

### Federal state

A state that is made up of individual states that have control over certain aspects of internal affairs but are also part of a central state.



- The constitution granted the states fairly wide-ranging powers, which included responsibility for education, police, justice and health care. Therefore, much of what one might consider 'domestic affairs' were in the hands of the state governments rather than the federal government.

The Kaiser

By the terms of the constitution the Kaiser held considerable powers, which made the personality of the Kaiser of paramount importance.

- The Kaiser was always to be the Prussian king, which reinforced Prussia's dominant position in the new state.
- The Kaiser held full control over foreign and diplomatic policy. He therefore had the power to make alliances, sign treaties, wage war and sue for peace. In times of war, he was commander in chief of the armed forces of all of Germany's states.
- The Kaiser's influence over the government of the country was considerable. He appointed and dismissed the Chancellor and had the power to dissolve the Reichstag.
- It was the Kaiser's responsibility to publish and oversee the implementation of federal law (law made by the central parliament).
- Last, but by no means least, the Kaiser was the guardian of the constitution.

Kaiser Wilhelm II

These were considerable powers to place in the hands of even the most sensible and competent of rulers. Wilhelm I, who had become King of Prussia in 1861 and had ruled as Kaiser from 1871 until his death in 1888, was such a ruler. He was succeeded as Kaiser by his son Frederick and then his grandson Wilhelm II. Wilhelm came to the throne aged 29. His childhood had been unhappy, in part because his left arm and an ear had been damaged at birth. Wilhelm II believed that it was the Kaiser's responsibility to rule rather than share power with the Reichstag. In May 1891 he stated: 'There is only one man in charge of the Reich and I will not tolerate another.' The problem was that Wilhelm was a poor decision maker, his attention span was short and he did not work hard. Wilhelm was happiest when surrounded by members of the military, and it was to them that he turned for advice. He had a poor opinion of democracy and the Reichstag.

The Chancellor

- The Chancellor was directly responsible to the Kaiser as chief minister of the Reich. He was also in charge of the appointment and dismissal of the state secretaries who oversaw the running of the government ministries.
- As well as being Chancellor of the **federal state**, he was Minister-President of Prussia.
- The Chancellor could ignore the resolutions passed by the Reichstag.

Bismarck gave the position of Chancellor considerable powers to manipulate both the Kaiser and the Reichstag. However, the success of the Chancellor in part depended on his political ability, the character of the Kaiser and the composition of the Reichstag. Even though the Chancellor could ignore Reichstag resolutions, he needed to be able to negotiate legislation through the Reichstag. This meant that he had to be able to strike deals and effectively manage leading politicians. The constitution and the role of Chancellor worked well for Bismarck because he had the necessary political skills; he worked well with Wilhelm I, and for a fair amount of his time in office, the Reichstag was docile and obedient. His successors were not to be so lucky. Both Caprivi and Hohenlohe found it very difficult to make headway with policy because they each had a difficult working relationship with the Kaiser.

Table 1.1 German Chancellors 1871–1917

1871 to 18 March 1890	Prince Otto von Bismarck
1890 to 26 October 1894	General Georg Leo von Caprivi
1894 to 16 October 1900	Prince Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst
1900 to 13 July 1909	Prince Bernhard von Bülow
1909 to 14 July 1917	Dr Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg

The Bundesrat

- The Bundesrat was the upper house of the federal parliament.
- It consisted of 58 members nominated by the states' assemblies. It was part of the law-making process and was, in theory, able to change the constitution.
- It was created by Bismarck to act as a possible barrier to radical legislation. The Bundesrat could veto legislation if 14 or more of its members voted against a bill.

The dominance of Prussia was assured by the fact that it held 17 of the 58 seats in the Bundesrat, thereby ensuring that no legislation could be passed without the consent of the Prussian Chamber of Deputies. The catch in this arrangement was that the electorate for the Prussian Chamber of Deputies was divided by what was known as a 'three class franchise':

- Voters were categorised into one of three bands.
- The votes of those who paid more tax counted for more than the votes of those who paid less.
- The lowest group of voters was made up of around 92 per cent of the electorate.

As a result, the Prussian Chamber of Deputies was always dominated by Conservatives (see page 8); in the 1908 election in Prussia, 418,000 voters translated into 212 Conservative seats whereas 600,000 votes (mostly from the third tier) were rewarded with six Social Democrat (Socialist) seats.

**Definition****Legislative power**

The power to make laws.

*The Reichstag*

- The lower house of the federal parliament, the Reichstag, held joint **legislative power** with the Bundesrat. In that capacity it had influence over such areas as financial affairs and the banking system.
- The most significant power held by the Reichstag was its control over the defence budget. This was to become by far and away the most significant federal government expenditure. In the early 1870s the annual defence budget stood at 100 million marks; by 1913 it stood at 2,405 million marks. However, Bismarck recognised the potential political lever that this might give the Reichstag, and in 1874 he persuaded them to vote through the Septennial Act, with the result that the Reichstag voted on the military budget only once every seven years. This was changed to once every five years in 1893, but this was still not enough to give the Reichstag real control.
- Another of the Reichstag's most significant powers was to pass an annual budget. However, this power was reduced by Bismarck; his switch to protectionism in 1879 brought the federal government increased income and some financial independence from the Reichstag.
- Even though the Reichstag could be dissolved by the Kaiser, it could not be dismissed indefinitely and it had the right to hold elections soon after dissolution.

The Reichstag was elected on a system of universal male suffrage of men over the age of 25. Its members represented constituencies that were arranged in the 1870s. However, the powers of the Reichstag were limited:

- The Reichstag had limited powers to initiate legislation; its primary function was to debate and to accept or reject legislation that was placed in front of it.
- Reichstag members could not become members of the government. If they wished to do so, they had to resign their seats.
- The Chancellor was not accountable to the Reichstag and did not even have to answer its questions. That said, the Reichstag could make trouble for a Chancellor, as Bülow found out in 1909 (see pages 19–20).
- Likewise the military was not in any sense accountable to the Reichstag.
- In order to ensure that only a certain class of person stood for election to the Reichstag, Bismarck included the stipulation that members would not be paid.

*The army*

The army lay outside the formal constitution because Bismarck did not want to tie its hands by defining its role. But the army was of huge significance in this new state. Its importance in part stemmed from the fact that the German state had been founded on the back of the victories of its army on the battlefield in the 1860s and 1870. As a result, Bismarck did not make the army accountable in law to the Reichstag; instead he made it directly responsible to the Kaiser.

- On the advice of senior military figures, the Kaiser appointed the Military Cabinet (made up of senior military figures).
- The Military Cabinet advised and chose the General Staff.
- The General Staff organised all military affairs from planning to court bodyguard duties.
- The War Minister was a member of the General Staff and was accountable only to the Kaiser and the Military Cabinet.
- The army swore an oath of allegiance to the Kaiser and not to the state.

The army had the right to declare martial law (army rule), which it did from time to time. In terms of social background, the officer class were split; positions in élite regiments such as the cavalry or the guards were held by the Prussian nobility known as Junkers. A sizeable minority, around 44 per cent of officer posts in the army in the period 1898 to 1918, were held by professional soldiers. The point to make is that, whatever the social background, there were few officers in the army who had any respect for democracy. In a sense, therefore, Bismarck had ensured that the army was a 'state within a state'. This means that it ran itself with little or no outside interference beyond that of the Kaiser. This system worked for Bismarck because he was able to manage it. Chancellors who followed Bismarck found it more difficult to cope with.

*The bureaucracy*

As with the army, the role of the bureaucracy was not identified by the constitution. However, that did not mean that the bureaucrats – the civil servants – did not have an important role to play in the development of policy. Perhaps the best example of their role was that played by Friedrich von Holstein, who was, from 1890 until 1906, the Kaiser's Chief Adviser on Foreign Affairs. His impact on policy decisions and events, therefore, was considerable.

*Conclusions*

- The constitution created a political structure that was not clear, that was fragmented and that was dominated by the conservative élites.
- Enshrined in the constitution was the dominance and veto of Prussia.

Other conclusions should be drawn out in your discussions as suggested in the discussion point box.

**Political organisations**

Despite the restrictions on the power of the Reichstag, mass political parties flourished, in part because of the introduction of universal male suffrage. However, because of the limits on the power of the Reichstag, other types of political organisations, which represented different interests, developed.

**Discussion points**

Discuss the following points in groups:

- 1 Why might the Prussian voting system provoke protest and who from?
- 2 After reading through the terms of the constitution, where does real power lie? Reichstag? Army? Bundesrat? Kaiser?

**SKILLS BUILDER**

In fewer than 300 words, write a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the German constitution.



These were the main political parties in Germany from 1890 to 1914.

### Political parties from 1890 to 1914

#### Conservative parties

##### Conservatives

Groups representing: Junkers, landed interests, especially in Prussia.

Views: Supported the Kaiser, discipline and authority; in favour of a nationalist foreign policy.

##### Free Conservatives

Groups representing: Commercial, industrial and wealthier professional classes from across Germany.

Views: Similar to the Conservatives; strong supporters of Bismarck and protectionism (i.e. the state should protect German business with tariffs).

#### Liberal parties

##### National Liberals

Groups representing: Industrial middle class, Protestant middle class.

Views: Nationalist; believed in a strong nation state and encouragement of a state with a liberal constitution; supported Bismarck's attack on the Catholic Church, the *Kulturkampf*; political allies of the Conservative parties.

##### Liberal Progressives

Groups representing: Middle classes.

Views: Very much in favour of the development of parliamentary government; not so keen on Bismarck's idea of the power of the nation state; views closely shared by the German People's Party.

##### Centre Party

Groups representing: The Catholic Church and its members, essentially based in the south; also support from non-socialist working class and middle and lower middle class interests.

Views: Opposed Bismarck's attack on the Catholic Church, the *Kulturkampf*; feared rise of socialism; anti-Prussia.

##### Social Democratic Party (SPD)

Groups representing: Working classes after Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws lapsed in 1890.

Views: Split: Marxists argued for revolution and non-cooperation with the political system; Reformists argued that the party should work within the political system to achieve social reform.

#### Definition

##### *Kulturkampf*

An attack on the Catholic Church from 1871 to 1878. It included the abolition of religious orders and the expulsion of the Jesuits.

Table 1.2 Seats won in the Reichstag 1898–1912

Party	1898	1903	1907	1912
Conservatives	56	54	60	43
Free Conservatives	23	21	24	14
National Liberals	46	51	54	45
Liberal Progressives	41	31	42	42
Centre Party	102	100	105	91
Social Democrats	56	81	43	110
Others	82	63	69	52

### SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 Use Table 1.2 to explain developments in voting and the fortunes of political parties from 1898 to 1912. You might choose to plot this information on to a graph.
- 2 What impact would these changes have on German politics, given the fact that the Reichstag had an important role in confirming legislation?

### What was the extent of German economic growth?

The industries of the first **Industrial Revolution** were heavy – cotton, coal and iron – and up until the middle of the nineteenth century Britain dominated these industries. The extent of German economic growth in the period between unification and the outbreak of the First World War is therefore best illustrated by a comparison with British growth.

Table 1.3 Coal and pig iron production 1870/71 to 1914 in Germany and Great Britain (in thousands of metric tonnes)

Year	Coal (Germany)	Coal (Britain)	Year	Iron (Germany)	Iron (Britain)
1871	37,900	118,000	1870	1,391	6,060
1900	149,000	228,000	1900	7,549	9,003
1914	279,000	292,000	1910	14,793	10,380

By 1914 Germany had become the economic powerhouse of continental Europe, and it was not just in the old industries that Germany excelled. From the 1880s there had been a technological revolution in the new industries of steel, engineering and chemicals that was fuelled and closely linked to the new sources of energy: electricity and petroleum. It was Germany that led the way in many of these new industries.

#### Definition

##### Industrial Revolution

Involved the transition to factory based manufacturing and was the most significant economic change of the nineteenth century.

### Steel

**Table 1.4** Steel production 1870 to 1910 in Germany and Great Britain (in thousands of metric tonnes)

Year	Germany	Britain
1870	169	286
1900	6,645	5,130
1910	13,698	6,374

In 1879 a new method of manufacturing steel, the Thomas-Gilchrist process, made possible the use of phosphoric ores (which were found in abundance in the newly acquired territory of Lorraine) in the manufacture of steel. While manufacturers in Britain were slow to take advantage of this new method, those in Germany most definitely were not: firms such as Krupp of Essen increased production rapidly in the pre-war period. German advantage over Britain in steel was also gained through the size of her companies: only one British firm in 1900 had an annual capacity to produce over 300,000 tons, whereas in Germany there were ten such companies.

Growth in steel production fuelled the expansion of other industries, including armaments and the railways. The Prussian railways expanded from 5,000 kilometres in 1878 to 37,000 kilometres in 1914.

### Chemicals

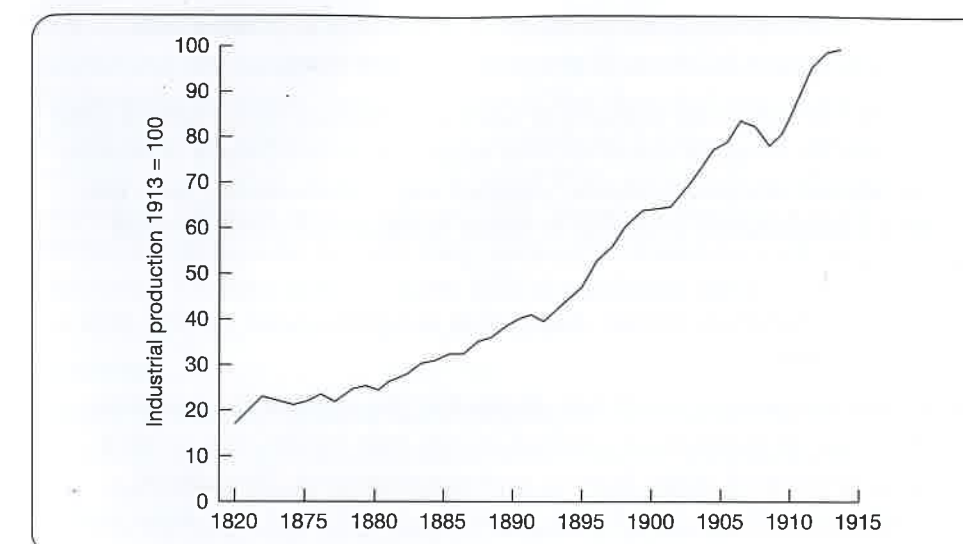
The German chemicals industry was stimulated by the demand for explosives from the military and dyes from textile manufacturers. It was also stimulated by investment in research and training, which meant that on the eve of the First World War there were 58,000 full-time students in advanced commercial and technical training in Germany, whereas in Britain there were only 9,000.

- By 1900 German companies such as Badische Anilin und Soda Fabrik (BASF), which was based at Ludwigshafen, held a virtual worldwide monopoly over the manufacture of artificial dyes.
- In 1914 Great Britain imported around 80 per cent of its chemical dyes, mainly from Germany. When British troops marched off to war in the autumn of that year they were wearing uniforms dyed with German dyestuffs.
- Germany led the way in pharmaceuticals; in 1900 BASF employed a workforce of 6,300 workers and 233 research chemists.
- The film company AGFA produced a million metres of film a year from a factory in Saxony in 1908.

### Other industries

It was not just in the chemical industry that Germany led the way. A number of Germans helped pioneer technological change that was to have a huge impact on modern life. In 1897 Rudolf Diesel perfected an oil-based engine; in 1886 Gottlieb Daimler had perfected the high-speed petrol engine. In air transport, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin launched the first rigid airship in 1900, although the first non-prototype model did not fly until 1908.

Perhaps the most significant of the new industries was the electricity industry, and Germany played a leading part in the development of this



**1.4** Index of German industrial production

new source of power, too. By 1907, 107,000 Germans worked as electrical workers, with just under half being employed by two large companies, AEG and Siemens & Halske. By the eve of the First World War, around half of Europe's electrical business was being undertaken by German companies.

### Urbanisation

The rapid growth of industries old and new helped stimulate a population boom and changed the structure of German society. The migration from rural to urban life and the rapid expansion of Germany's towns and cities constituted a demographic revolution.

- Such change did not come without its downsides: there was overcrowding in many cities, and poor sanitary conditions and the lack of a clean water supply led to the outbreak of disease. In Hamburg in 1892, 8,600 people died from cholera over a ten-week period. But the outbreak was not met with complacency; it spurred on the city authorities to build a sewerage system, a filtering plant for drinking water and a waste incinerator.
- Better hygiene and medicine improved rates of infant mortality. The introduction of a diphtheria serum in the 1890s cut the number of young children dying of the disease by half.
- The building of tramways meant that people could escape the slum conditions by living in the suburbs and travelling cheaply into town to work.
- Trolley buses, which ran on pneumatic wheels rather than rails, were especially popular in Germany after 1901.
- For those in the urban workforce after 1896, real wages increased because money wages went up more than prices. Another indicator of the rising standard of living was that between 1896 and 1912

### Discussion point

Discuss the following in groups of three or four.

German industrial production was fantastic. But why was it significant? Work out five reasons for it being significant. Think outside Germany. Then share your ideas with other groups. Can you arrive at five reasons about which you all agree?



the proportion of taxpayers in Prussia assessed on incomes under 900 marks a year fell from 75 per cent to 52 per cent.

The number of industrial workers in Germany doubled in the period 1882 to 1907, and for many of them life was tough. Overcrowding in insanitary accommodation was one problem. Another was homelessness, with not enough accommodation available to house Germany's booming urban population.

- The Berlin Homeless Shelter Association accommodated 200,000 men a year after 1900.
- The cycle of unemployment was dictated by the cycle of the economy, and perhaps one in every three workers in any year in the 1900 to 1914 period experienced some form of underemployment. The official unemployment figure rose from 1.35 million in 1882 to 3.45 million in 1907.
- However, the unemployed tended to come mainly from the unskilled working class.
- Another consequence of the modernisation of the economy was the increase in the number of lower middle class 'white collar workers' to around 3.3 million by 1907.

**Table 1.5** Population statistics, 1870 to 1910

	1871	1900	1910
Total population	41.1 million	56.4 million	64.9 million
Berlin	774,498	1,888,313	2,071,907
Essen	99,887	290,208	410,392
Leipzig	117,818	519,726	644,644

**Table 1.6** Population trends from rural to urban, 1870 to 1910 (figures in percentages)

	1871	1900	1910
Rural	63.9	45.6	40.0
Urban	36.1	54.4	60.0

### Agriculture

While industry boomed, the fortunes of Germany agriculture fluctuated. There were strengths and weaknesses within the agricultural system.

### Strengths

Bismarck's Tariff Law of 1879 had been introduced to protect German farmers and was, to a point, successful in doing so. The Junkers certainly benefitted from high prices for their rye, but the peasantry were also protected: the tariff applied to barley, oats and wheat as well as to rye. Perhaps the most significant factor for German farmers in this period was the rapid increase in the domestic population, e.g. 56.4 million in 1900 to

64.9 million in 1910, which created significant extra demand for agricultural products and led to a growth in agricultural prices at start of the twentieth century. Improvements in the chemical industries provided phosphates and nitrates to be used as artificial fertiliser; the result was an increase in yields in crops such as sugar beet. Industrial production helped mechanise German agriculture: in 1882, threshing machines were found on 374,000 holdings, and by 1907 they were to be found on 1,436,000 holdings. This made German farming more efficient and less labour intensive.

### Weaknesses

Despite protection, farmers faced challenges that threatened to undermine their livelihoods. Refrigerated ships made possible the importation of meat from the United States, which was cheaper than German meat despite the distance travelled and tariff paid. It became ever harder to make large estates pay. Debt increased, and, as a result, estates were bought and sold more frequently in the 1896–1912 period than before. The growth of the cities (see above) and the promise of better standards of living as an industrial worker rather than as an agricultural hand meant significant migration. As a result, landlords recruited foreign labour from the regions that lay on Germany's borders; on the eve of the First World War there were nearly half a million foreign nationals working in German agriculture, the majority being Poles.

### Consequences

The result of these changes was to provide pressures that the political system had to deal with. It is wrong to suggest that the pressures were too much for the system, as some historians have indicated. However:

- There was a contradiction between economic modernisation, which saw Germany's industry flourish and cities grow, and the lack of political reform and the restricted spread of democracy.
- Frustrations were caused as a result of uneven economic growth, which meant rising prices and rising unemployment from 1912 to 1914. The period saw clashes between workers and strikers, notably in the Ruhr.
- Perhaps the greatest manifestation of these pressures was the explosion of participation in politics in Germany in the run-up to the First World War. The challenge for the governing classes was to channel and control the impact of such pressure.

### Socialist movement

Perhaps the most significant impact on industrialisation was the growth of the socialist movement. The **Anti-Socialist Laws** of 1878–90 did little to dampen the working class's enthusiasm for political action – indeed, quite the opposite. As has already been indicated, there were elements within the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that were more revolutionary in their politics. This did not mean that the whole socialist movement was revolutionary, far from it. However, the political

## SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 What were the strengths and weaknesses of German agriculture in this period?
- 2 Given the strengths and weaknesses of German agriculture, what demands were German landlords likely to be making of German governments in the 1900–14 period?

### Biography

#### August Bebel

One of the founder members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Bebel was an active socialist and a member of the Reichstag from 1883 until his death in 1913.

### Definition

#### Anti-Socialist Laws

Introduced in 1878. The laws banned socialist groups, meetings and publications. They were upheld by police surveillance and powers given to local authorities.

## SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 Using Tables 1.5 and 1.6, summarise population changes in Germany between 1870 and 1910. You might choose to put this on a graph before you answer the next question.
- 2 What pressures might such changes place on the German state?

establishment's perception of the socialist movement was what was important and was what made the rise of socialism such an issue.

By the eve of the war, around 2.5 million German workers were members of trade unions, and 400,000 of them went out on strike at some point in 1913 for better working conditions. In 1910 the SPD had 720,000 members which made it by far and away the largest socialist political party in Europe. The party's membership was predominantly Protestant and working class. By the eve of the war, the SPD was winning 75 per cent of the popular vote in elections in Berlin. The 1912 election, as we will see later in this unit, saw the SPD become the strongest party in the Reichstag with 110 seats. But how much of a threat were the socialists? In 1891 at Erfurt, the SPD party under the leadership of August Bebel committed to a revolutionary Marxist programme. He said that the party:

- would work legally to achieve worker ownership of the means of production
- rejected collaboration with 'bourgeois parties'
- believed that revolution was inevitable.

However, by 1900 many members of the socialist movement agreed more with the 'revisionist' ideas of Eduard Bernstein. In his work *The Presuppositions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* (1898) he argued that:

- there was not a crisis of capitalism as the father of communism, Karl Marx, had predicted
- socialists should look for gradual improvement through parliamentary reform
- the SPD should collaborate with other parties when appropriate.

At the Lübeck Conference in 1901, Bernstein was denounced by those on the left of the party, including a revolutionary socialist called Rosa Luxemburg, of whom we will hear much more later. She and her comrades, such as Karl Liebknecht, argued that:

- revolution should be considered
- the movement should use the general strike as a tactic.

The party leadership tended to steer a middle ground but after 1907 steered more towards reformism. However, to the élites, it was their perception of the SPD as revolutionary that stuck.

### Pressure groups

Another of the consequences of the economic and social changes was the emergence of pressure groups. These groups were often focused on single issues, but they highlighted the tensions and divisions in Germany.

#### Nationalist pressure groups

There were three main groups that pressurised for German colonial expansion and the assertion of German interests. They were to have an important impact on the development of policy.

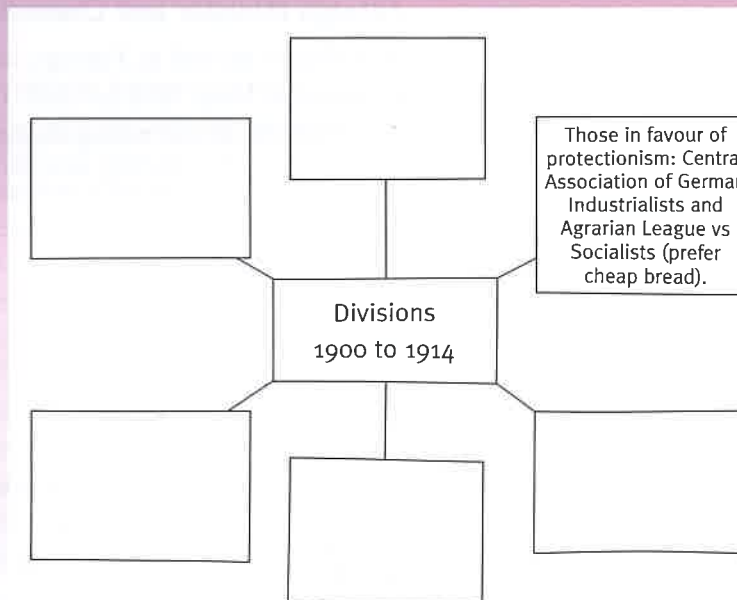
- The *German Colonial League* was founded in 1882 and was concerned with the acquisition of German colonies. It also played a part in ruling various parts of the far-flung Empire; for example in 1884 the Colonial League took control of German South West Africa.
- The *Pan German League* was founded in 1890. It too was committed to the acquisition of colonies but also to German dominance in Europe. The League had strong support from the political establishment, some 60 members of the Reichstag (mostly National Liberals) being members of the organisation in 1914.
- The *Navy League* was founded in 1898 and became highly popular, with a membership of around 1 million. The League played an important role in the successful campaign in and outside the Reichstag to promote naval expansion.

#### Economic pressure groups

- The *Central Association of German Industrialists* was created in 1886 to protect industrial interests, and from 1878 onwards that meant the implementation of tariffs. In the 1912 election the organisation funded 120 candidates from the conservative and liberal parties, at a cost of 1 million marks. Not surprisingly, it was considered to be the most powerful pressure group in Germany.
- The *Agrarian League* was founded in 1893 to protect agrarian interests. Although Junker-led, it gained widespread support from the peasantry and had a third of a million members by 1914. It pushed for protectionism and subsidies for agriculture.

## SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 There were a number of political parties and pressure groups in Germany. It is important to try and understand where they stood in relation to each other. Plot the groups on a chart going from left wing (on the left) to right wing (on the right). Where you can, draw links between each group and explain the link.
- 2 What are the divisions in Germany? On a spider chart such as the one shown, and using what you have read so far, plot the divisions in Germany in the period 1900 to 1914. Keep the spider chart because you will be finishing it off at the end of this unit.





### Political developments

The main aim of successive German Chancellors was to protect the position of the ruling élites. There were three discernable challenges to the political establishment.

- 1 *Aggressive foreign policy.* As you have already seen, one significant challenge was from those who wished for a more aggressive foreign policy, the development of which will be dealt with in the next unit.
- 2 *The demand for constitutional reform.* Another was from the liberals who wished for constitutional reform and a strengthening of the power of the Reichstag. Bismarck had dealt with the liberal challenge by using the tactic of divide and rule. In the 1860s and 1870 he used war and conquest to split the more nationalist minded liberals from those who prioritised constitutional reform. In July 1879 he introduced the Tariff Law which ushered in protection for agriculture, therefore pleasing the Conservatives and the National Liberals but not the Liberal Progressives. While the liberals remained divided, the demands for more power for the Reichstag remained muted. Successive Chancellors were to deal relatively well with the challenge from liberals (and later also socialists) for reform.
- 3 *The demand for social reform.* Socialists demanded social reform. In October 1878, Bismarck persuaded the Reichstag to pass the Anti-Socialist Law, which banned the SPD and drove all socialist organisations underground. In 1890, the Reichstag, with the Kaiser's backing (and to Bismarck's fury) refused to confirm the legislation, and it was dropped. From then to the outbreak of war, only limited and piecemeal social reform was granted.

### Foreign Minister and Chancellor von Bülow

Von Bülow served as Foreign Minister from 1897 to 1900 and then as Chancellor from 1900 to 1909. In that time he devised strategies to protect the interests of the ruling classes.

*Sammlungspolitik* literally means the politics of concentration. It was von Bülow's aim to build an alliance of conservative interests in the Reich, between conservatives and liberals, Junker and industrialist, which would present a broad front against the threat of socialism. The means by which this would be done would be the creation of a policy of protectionism and the rallying of Germans from all sections of society through the following of a nationalist foreign and colonial policy, *Weltpolitik*, which means world politics. As von Bülow himself explained, 'I am putting the main emphasis on foreign policy, only a successful foreign policy can help to reconcile, pacify, rally, unite.' Integral to the policy of *Weltpolitik* was the building-up of German armed forces. With the Secretary to the Navy, Alfred von Tirpitz, von Bülow encouraged the development of a *Flottenpolitik*, the building of a navy to rival that of Britain.

### Flottenpolitik

In 1898, von Tirpitz steered his first Navy Law through the Reichstag. Supporters of the law were able to argue that a larger fleet was necessary for the protection of Germany's growing number of colonies and for Germany to be taken seriously as a 'Great Power'. It was unrealistic to aim to build a fleet to match the Royal Navy; in 1896 the Royal Navy had 33 battleships, the German navy just six. However, it was Tirpitz's strategy, his 'risk theory', to build a navy of such strength that it would make any other naval power think twice before attacking it. The momentum for *Flottenpolitik* was maintained by the Naval League, which held countless meetings and demonstrations to support Germany's right to build a navy. This was an excellent example of the **synthesis** of popular pressure and government policy.

- In 1900 a second Navy Law sailed through the Reichstag with the proposal to build 38 battleships over the next 20 years. This building programme was one of the main reasons for the leap in production in steel. It brought delight to the members of the Naval League and to industrialists who profited from the commissioning of so many new ships.
- In response to the launch by the Royal Navy of HMS *Dreadnought*, in May 1906 the Reichstag passed the third Navy Law, which added six battle-cruisers to the building programme and widened the Kiel canal to allow the passage of dreadnought-type ships from Germany's main naval bases to the North Sea.

Through this process the navy had become a focus for popular patriotism and nationalism, which in some ways soaked up the pressure and tensions that existed in Germany in this period.

### Reforms

Von Bülow's strengths and interests lay primarily in foreign policy. However, in Count Arthur von Posadowsky he had an able and relatively energetic Interior Minister. A series of reforms was introduced to placate both protectionist liberals and socialists.

- The Old Age and Invalidity Law had been amended in June 1899 to increase old age pensions and to extend compulsory insurance to various new groups. In 1900 accident insurance was also extended to new occupations.
- In December 1902 a new Tariff Law was introduced because Caprivi's treaties of the mid-1890s had expired. As a sign of the impact of the influence of the Agrarian League, the Tariff Law restored a higher duty on imported agricultural products, which resulted in higher food prices. The subsequent general election in 1903, however, saw a shift towards the Social Democrats, who strongly opposed the new tariffs and gave the balance of power to the Centre Party.

### Definition

#### Synthesis

Coming together of ideas.

- In April 1903 the Sickness Insurance Law was amended to give longer and more generous help to workers in ill health, 26 weeks rather than the previous 13 weeks.
- Late in 1908 a law was passed that restricted the hours of factory work carried out by young people and children (no children under 13 to be employed, a six-hour day for children aged 13–14 and a 10-hour day for those aged 14–16).

Weltpolitik

However, few opportunities presented themselves for the type of global expansion demanded by supporters of Weltpolitik. Despite the pressure for colonial expansion from groups such as the Colonial League, the opportunities after 1900 were minimal because most territory had been seized by the other European powers in the preceding 30 years. A tension was therefore created by the pressure for expansion, on the one hand, and the limited opportunity to do so, on the other. The approval in 1899 of the planned extension of the German-built Constantinople-to-Konia railways through to Baghdad kept alive imperialist dreams of extending influence into the Near and Middle East.

The Herero Uprising

Weltpolitik was not always a force for political cohesion, quite the opposite. The SPD stood against imperialist adventure when there was so much social reform needed at home. Up until 1906, the different strands of von Bülow's political policies were sufficient to keep the broad alliance of conservative, liberal and centre parties content. This was known as the Blue-Black Bloc (blue for conservative, black for the clerical Catholic party). However, it was the actions of an arrogant, murderous army and non-accountable colonial administrators who created the conditions for a political crisis in Germany in 1906.

- In January 1904 the Herero people, who were the indigenous people of German South West Africa, rose in revolt against their colonial repressor. They were defeated at the Battle of Waterberg in August 1904.
- The Herero people were then subjected to a deliberate policy of genocide though execution, incarceration in concentration camps and forced migration into the waterless Namib Desert. The Herero population in 1911 stood at 15,000 in comparison to 80,000 before the rebellion.

Some of the more conservative elements of the leadership of the Centre Party were cautious about challenging von Bülow's government. However, the considerable majority of Centre Party members of the Reichstag were scandalised by the reports fed back to Germany by Catholic missionaries in the colonies and highlighted by rising political star Matthias Erzberger.

The affair highlighted two issues:

- the lack of parliamentary accountability for the colonial service and the army
- the need for greater parliamentary financial control of colonial affairs (by December 1906 suppressing the Herero rebellions had cost the state 456 million marks which was the equivalent to building 12 dreadnoughts).

The Hottentot election

On 26 May 1906 the Centre Party joined the SPD in voting down government plans for a new railway in South West Africa, compensation for settler losses in the region and the elevation of the status of the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office into an independent imperial office. In the light of the Centre Party's attitude to the government's colonial policy, the Reichstag was subsequently dissolved. The so-called 'Hottentot' election of 1907 was fought on the issue of nationalism. Von Bülow entered into the election fray supported by nationalist groups including the Pan-German League, and threatening that the consequences of a Red-Black victory would be an alliance of Centre and SPD Parties. He succeeded in frightening the German voters into backing candidates from the so-called Bülow Bloc, thus delivering a convincing majority.

Discussion points

- 1 How successful were Bülow's Weltpolitik and Sammlungspolitik?
- 2 Why was there not an even greater outcry in response to the Herero genocide in Germany?

Daily Telegraph Affair 1908

The Bülow Bloc held together for a short while, but Bülow's government was being undermined by an ever-growing financial deficit, indeed just the kind of deficit the Centre Party was complaining about in 1906 during the Herero crisis. Increased military spending meant that the government needed to raise 380 million marks. Bülow half-heartedly proposed a property tax or an extension of the current inheritance tax. The result was the break-up of the Bülow Bloc, with the conservative parties siding with the Centre Party to oppose such measures. This in itself did not threaten Bülow's position, but what happened immediately afterwards did.

In October 1908 the Kaiser gave an interview to a British newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, in which he gave the impression that he wanted a close alliance with Britain. The Reichstag objected to the implication of the article that the Kaiser made foreign policy without consultation (although he virtually did), and he was roundly criticised. The Kaiser blamed Bülow for failing to censor the interview and gave a guarantee to the Reichstag that he would be more circumspect in the future. The Reichstag dropped

Definition

Hottentot

The slang name used to describe the Khoikhoi peoples of southern Africa. It is now considered to be an offensive term to use.

Table 1.7 The 1907 election: the Bülow Bloc (number of seats)

Conservatives	60
Free Conservatives	24
Agrarian League	13
National Liberals	54
Progressives	49
Anti-Semites	16

Definition

Anti-Semites

People who stood on a platform that was anti-Jewish. Anti-Semitism at this moment in German history was popular at court and among some sections of German society. It was further stirred up in 1900 by the publication of Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain's book *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, which described history as a struggle for supremacy between the German and Jewish races.



### Biography

#### Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg

A member of the Prussian administrative service, he rose to become Prussian and then Imperial Minister of the Interior. In 1909 he became Chancellor of Germany, a post that he held until 1917. His role in the creation of tensions in the run-up to war and in the outbreak of war in 1914 has been much discussed (and is outlined in Unit 2). He died in 1921.

the issue without demanding any restraint on the Kaiser's power. The end of Bülow's Chancellorship came in the summer of 1909 when his budget was formally defeated. But it was not the end of the Bülow Bloc that finished the Chancellor, rather the fact that he no longer had the confidence of the Kaiser.

#### Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg

Bülow's successor as Chancellor was Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg. An able administrator, he was an unremarkable Chancellor in domestic policy.

- In 1910, he tried to reform the Prussian voting system, which was so warped that it was blatantly unfair. In the 1908 election to the Prussian Landtag the conservatives won 16 per cent of the vote and 212 seats while the SPD won 23 per cent of the vote and just seven seats. In the face of conservative opposition, he dropped his proposals.
- To please the conservatives he started the process of seizing estates in the east that belonged to Poles, with the purpose of redistributing land to the German peasantry.
- In 1911 the Imperial Insurance Code was introduced, which consolidated all previous workers' insurance laws and amended and extended their provisions. Certain groups of white collar workers were insured against sickness, old age and death by a separate and simultaneous law.
- He introduced a constitution for Alsace-Lorraine in 1911 to try to integrate the province more with the rest of Germany.

#### 1912 election

In the election the SPD polled 4,250,000 votes and became the largest party in the Reichstag with 110 deputies. This improvement in fortunes was partly due to an alliance with the Progressive Liberals. Philipp Schiedemann of the SPD became Vice-President of the Reichstag. The problem was that there were few other parties in the Reichstag that would consider any form of alliance with them. But in 1913 the SPD voted for an Army Bill, which would increase the size of the army by 136,000 soldiers and officers but at a cost of a billion marks. The SPD members were prepared to vote in favour of the Bill because:

- they did not want to be labelled as unpatriotic, especially in the light of what some felt were gathering war clouds
- the money was to be raised from a direct property tax.

#### The Zabern Affair 1913

An incident of military indiscipline took place in 1913 that escalated into a political crisis that encapsulated all of the contradictions and tensions of the Second Reich.

### Discussion point

Given the fact that the SPD voted for the Army Bill, why were the Socialists so mistrusted by the political élite?

### Background

The position of Alsace and Lorraine in the German Reich was unique. Won as a spoil of war, the region had been initially designated as 'Reichsland Elsass Lothringen' in 1871. Instead of the region being given the same autonomy as all of the other states in the new German Reich, Elsass Lothringen was to be ruled by an imperial governor known as a *Statthalter*. By the Treaty of Frankfurt of October 1872, residents of the region were given the option of emigration or taking German nationality. Around 200,000 French speakers fled to France or the French colonies (notably Algeria) in the handful of years following the annexation. They left behind a minority of French speakers who constituted around 10 per cent of the population. The imperial government tolerated the use of French as the official language in those parts of the province where French speakers were in the majority. In 1911, the imperial government of Bethmann-Hollweg attempted to promote closer assimilation of the region into the Reich by granting it a constitution. This involved the creation of a two-chamber legislature, some regional autonomy, a flag and even a national anthem. Any positive sense created by Bethmann-Hollweg's actions was undermined by events in Zabern in December 1913.

### Events

In November 1913 a young German army officer, Second Lieutenant von Forstner, who was stationed in the Alsatian town of Zabern, made some derogatory remarks about the locals to his troops that were printed in the local press. The Governor of Alsace Lorraine, Karl von Wedel, tried to persuade the army to transfer von Forstner away from the town. The local garrison commander, Colonel von Reuter, refused. When von Forstner appeared again on Zabern's streets he was jeered at. Von Reuter's response was to imprison some of the townspeople and, as a result, a state of siege hung over the city. The Kaiser was unmoved by alarmed reports from von Wedel and, on the advice of senior army officers, ordered military reinforcements into the town. A case brought against von Forstner for assault on a disabled shoemaker was dismissed by a military court as self-defence, even though von Forstner was with five colleagues at the time of the assault and the shoemaker was on his own.

Throughout the affair, the Kaiser remained on a hunting expedition at Donaueschingen. He refused to see von Wedel who had requested an audience despite the fact that as Governor of Alsace-Lorraine, von Wedel was the Kaiser's representative in the region. Instead, the Kaiser accepted the explanation of events from the local military commander-in-chief, General von Deimling, which underplayed the incident. As far as the Kaiser was concerned, the matter was a military affair, and he forbade Bethmann-Hollweg to inform the Reichstag that he had sent a senior military officer, Major-General Kühne, to Zabern to investigate matters. On 3 and 4 December Bethmann-Hollweg faced a barrage of questions from critical members of the Reichstag including deputies from the Progressive Liberals, the Centre Party and the SPD. The Chancellor and

the War Minister simply defended the military to the dissatisfaction of the Reichstag, which supported a vote of no confidence against the Chancellor by 293 votes to 54.

SPD-inspired protests in the Alsace-Lorraine region in the following days were diffused by the Kaiser's instructions to send the offending regiments out on manoeuvres and by the use of repression.

### Impact

The Zabern Affair highlighted the limits to the Reichstag's influence:

- The Reichstag's vote of no confidence was simply ignored by the Chancellor, who was responsible to the Kaiser rather than the Reichstag.
- In the light of events, von Wedel resigned as Governor to be replaced by someone far more reactionary and opposed to the 1911 constitution that had attempted to integrate Alsace Lorraine into the rest of Germany.
- The political parties showed themselves to be far too timid; it took a week after the vote of no confidence for a politician in the Reichstag to demand the Chancellor's resignation. When SPD member Philipp Schiedemann did demand the Chancellor's resignation he was ignored by most of the other politicians in the Reichstag.
- In January 1914 the Reichstag set up a commission to discuss the boundary line between military and civilian authority, but it disbanded after a month.

### What was the extent of constitutional change 1900–14?

Despite the emergence of the SPD and the growing influence of the Reichstag because of the increase in the weight of business, there was still no great move by 1914 towards parliamentary democracy. On the eve of war the Chancellor still operated independently of party politics and the central points of the constitution remained unreformed. What were the reasons for this lack of political modernisation?

### Constituency boundaries

Set in 1871, these remained unformed throughout the period in question. This benefitted the conservative and liberal parties. The urban seats remained the same despite the huge growth in the urban population. Therefore SPD members of the Reichstag, in particular, tended to represent many more constituents than National Liberals. Because of the way that constituency boundaries were drawn, elections were not decided on the popular vote. Indeed, in the 1907 election for the Reichstag the Centre Party and the SPD received 3 million more votes than the Bülow

Bloc but still suffered a comprehensive defeat in terms of numbers of seats gained.

### The Kaiser

Afraid of being tarnished as unpatriotic by one or all of the nationalist pressure groups, no political party was prepared to challenge the power of the monarchy. Indeed, even many socialists were bound to the institution of the monarchy by strong bonds of loyalty that meant that they were unwilling to argue in favour of constitutional reform. In 1907 the right wing SPD leader Gustav Noske made a speech stressing the loyalty of the SPD to the 'Fatherland', thereby stressing the deep-seated sense of patriotism that was felt by the majority of German politicians.

### Parties as interest groups

This is a theme that will be picked up again later in this book (see pages 70–71). Parties in this period of German history acted as interest groups. They looked after the interests of the groups that voted for them; the Conservatives protected the interest of the landowners, the SPD looked after the workers. This made collaboration between parties difficult. Fear of the revolutionary image of the SPD meant that few politicians from other parties would consider any form of political understanding. The parties did not really trust each other; for example the Social Democrats steered clear of the National Liberals because they had supported Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws.

### Unit summary

#### What have you learned in this unit?

You have learned about the German Constitution and how the German political system operated in practice from 1900 to 1914. In particular, you have found out that the German constitution did not change despite the tensions in Germany in the period in question.

You have learned about industrialisation and the development of agriculture and how these had an impact on German society and politics. You are aware that the divisions inherent at the start of the period still existed on the eve of war in 1914.

#### What skills have you used in this unit?

You will have come to grips with a number of new ideas and concepts. Indeed, it might be quite good for you to have a 'definitions page' in your notes where you can write down some of the new concepts and words that you have picked up. You have discussed a number of issues and you have shown that you understand the significance of various events.

### SKILLS BUILDER

- 1 In 300 words summarise the events of the Zabern Affair.
- 2 What does the Zabern Affair tell us about the power of the Reichstag in 1913?