

How successful was
bismarck in
maintaining his
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How successful was Bismarck in maintaining his political control in Germany in the years 1878 to 1890? Bismarck set about trying to achieve his political objects by always siding with the party that would help him facilitate his needs.

The years from 1871 to 1878 were known as Bismarck's " Liberal Era" because Bismarck was sided with the National Liberal Party. He sided with the liberals and appeased them by introducing a number of reforms. He created a single currency the Mark; he set up the Reichstag Bank. Bismarck also abolished internal tariffs within the empire, standardised commercial law and other legal proceedings.

The reason that Bismarck was allied with the Liberals was not because he believed in Liberal ideologies, far from that. Bismarck sided with the liberals at this point in time because they were the largest party in the Reichstag and he needed their support to introduce his administrative reforms and help launch the Kulturkampf. After 1878, Bismarck no longer needed the support of the Liberals so he cut ties from them. Bismarck had a new enemy; he had set his sights upon The SPD, the Socialists. Carr noted that " Socialism, like Catholicism had allegiances beyond the Nation state which Bismarck could neither understand nor tolerate. " The whole of Europe was already fearful of the events that took place within Paris, and even though the socialists were hastily quashed, they managed to overthrow a major European power albeit for a very short period of time.

Socialism was on the rise in Germany, and Bismarck was unhappy with this as the current order was under threat. In order to attack the Socialists,

Bismarck now needed to set up ties with a different political party on the spectrum and this was the Conservatives. Bismarck learned to a certain extent that he could not use his "Blood and Iron" approach like he did with the Catholics; he needed to take a much more subtle and less outright oppressive approach. As Germany was becoming more and more industrialized, there was a creation of a large working class which inevitably led to a rapid growth in socialism. Like Catholicism, Bismarck saw the socialists as a threat to the social and political unity of Germany as well as Europe as a whole. He accused them of having un-German interests and greatly disliked the international nature of their movement.

In order to appease the masses and to try and draw support from the ever growing SPD, Bismarck implemented a series of social reforms himself seen as a "carrot and stick" approach. He simultaneously used repression whilst trying to gather the support of the masses. Williamson wrote that Bismarck wanted "to reconcile the working classes to the authority of the state." Bismarck perfect opportunity arose when two assassination attempts were made upon the life of the Kaiser. Although there was no tangible evidence that the assassin had any association with the SDP, Bismarck was set to launch an attack on the Socialists, and this was a two pronged attack which included the anti socialist laws and state socialism. Bismarck introduced a series of measures known as "Sozialistengesetz."

" This law which passed the Reichstag in October 1878, didn't ban the SDP outright, it merely tried to indirectly cripple the party by banning any group or meeting purposed to spread socialist messages, it outlawed trade unions which is where socialism was flourishing and closed down forty five
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newspapers. This was the “ stick. ” The other phase of Bismarck’s attack on the Socialists, the “ carrot” was Bismarck’s implementation of Socialist measures. These were designed to undermine the Socialists and draw support away from them towards himself, further unifying Germany under himself. As the Socialist threat was mainly coming from the newly formed industrial worker sector, most of these were mainly aimed at them. In 1883 a measure was introduced that compensated workers during illness.

In 1884 an accident insurance law was introduced to compensate workers that were injured at work. In 1889 an old age pension scheme was introduced for workers over the age of seventy. Bismarck was favoured by Kaiser Wilhem I because of the fact that they both shared the same conservative view; to keep Germany under the control of the Prussian Junker class. Although the Kaiser had a significant amount of power, such as being in total control of the army, as well as complete control of foreign policy, we see that the Kaiser throughout this period takes a much more of a backseat role. Bismarck’s aims and his legislation in order to achieve those aims coincided with the beliefs and the views of Wilhelm, so he effectively allowed Bismarck to continue his crusade of German Unity and Prussian dominance without much interference.

The crux of why socialism was growing so fast within Germany was the sheer pace of industrialisation. Even though Bismarck carefully tried to quash socialism, it can be stated that he failed in his aim. Probably the most important reason as to why this was so would be the fact that Bismarck didn’t directly ban and outlaw the party, he tried to undermine and choke them. Even if he did try to push legislation to ban the SPD, it would be very <https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-was-bismarck-in-maintaining-his-political-control-in-germany-in-the-years-1878-to-1890/>

doubtful that it would have made it through the Reichstag. It is doubtful that any party would be in favour of this due to the fact that it would open the floodgates to other parties being banned. Whilst Bismarck was introducing his socialist legislation, it seems that he overlooked the growth of the SPD.

In 1884 they had 550, 000 to 1, 427, 000 in 1890 and had gained 35 seats in the Reichstag, suggesting that people realised that Bismarck's socialism was superficial. It was clear to people that whilst they welcomed these new socialist measures, they weren't as effective as the measures that the SPD were rooting for, that Bismarck didn't really do anything to narrow the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. Bismarck lost the support of the Liberals by abolishing free trade. Traditionally Prussia and Germany had favoured free trade, however with growth of the industrial sector and increasing competition from foreign markets, industrialists, businessmen and landowners alike rallied for change.

Tariffs were ferociously opposed by the National Liberals who favoured a laissez faire ethos. In 1879 in response to well organised political pressure and competition from abroad, Bismarck abandoned free trade and introduced protectionist tariffs. The Kulturkampf practically severed Bismarck's relationship with the Centre Party, they wished for more involvement of the church in the running of the government while this was vehemently opposed by Bismarck. When Germany was first established there was no German identity in 1871, there was no national flag, no national anthem, language changed regionally.

Bismarck wished to change this, to try and unify the nation which was always one of his fundamental aims. Bismarck tried to suppress the German ethnic minorities (The French, Poles, and The Danes) He used measures such as encouraging resettlement and tried to impose the German language. This was known as Bismarck's Germanisation policy. This was largely unsuccessful. The reason for the success of the administrative reform is that they were indeed positive.

They were a step in the right direction aimed at helping the German people and allowing the economy to flourish. It is much easier to implement a system of such reforms than to try and force a culture upon people. After the Franco-Prussian war and the acquisition of Alsace Lorraine, the people living within these regions predominantly spoke French and still regarded themselves as French, if legislation was passed ordering them to speak German, something like this would be extremely difficult to impose and implement. Kaiser Wilhelm II did not take such a stance as his predecessors.

He believed in the Divine Right Of Kings and this signified from the very beginning that he would not have taken such a passive role as the previous Kaisers. In 1889 he favoured a group of striking miners against the advice of Bismarck which set the scene of the relationship between the new Kaiser and the Chancellor, it was not to be as smooth as before. The elections of 1890 went badly for Bismarck when he attempted to introduce a new anti socialist bill. The bill was defeated in the Reichstag with the Kaiser opposed to the law.

From this point forward, Bismarck was beginning to lose his footing and his influence over German political affairs. He ordered ministers to not see the Kaiser without consulting him first. Wilhelm demanded that this be overturned this order or resign. Bismarck managed to give the impression that he disagreed with the Kaiser on issues of foreign policy and he resigned.

In conclusion, I agree with the statement that that Bismarck was successful in maintaining political control in Germany from the years 1878 to when Kaiser Wilhelm II ascended the throne to Germany. However during this period in time, we see some of Bismarck's policies flourish, while others turned around and had the opposite effect that Bismarck desired. This was probably because Bismarck was a little impetuous when implementing domestic policy. He created and united Germany with great brilliance. Bismarck tailored the very fabric of the German constitution that was outwardly democratic, but in reality was a facade that was autocratic and empowered only those who Bismarck wanted to have power. Tactically, Bismarck made some very clever and also very foolish moves which implies that he wasn't really calculating.

He was obsessed with annihilating any mere trace of opposition. He made threats more intimidating than they already were and he also believed it too which ultimately led to his downfall. An example of where we see Bismarck spectacularly fail is the Kulturkampf. Many German Catholics were in opposition to the Pope's infallibility, but resented what Bismarck and the Liberals did more. So instead of siding with Bismarck, they rallied alongside the church.

Instead of weakening the Centre Party, he did the opposite and only strengthened them. Bismarck completely misunderstood and underestimated the power of the Church. Through all of this, Bismarck only divided the people, the opposite of his aim to unify. By trying to oust the church out of state affairs, Bismarck succeeded in reuniting the divided Catholics and also turned many Protestants who were supporters into active opponents. Bismarck's social policy was successful in the sense that the German working class was subservient to government policy up to 1914.

AJP Taylor noted in "Bismarck, the Man and the Statesman" (1955) that it was due to Bismarck's policy of state socialism that "the workers seemed to have received social security as the price of political subservience, and drew the moral that greater subservience would earn yet a greater reward." He was successful in the sense that because of his socialist stance helped to improve the lives of many ordinary Germans. Germany was twenty years ahead of Britain the aspect of social welfare. Massie concluded that "Bismarck had given the German working class the most advanced social legislation in the world.

" However he did fail in his initial and fundamental aim which was to curb the growth of the SPD and their sphere of influence. Bismarck was idolised by many of the people in Germany for his role in unifying and shaping Germany into what it was. Carr stated that Bismarck compared to the other statesmen of his time was "a giant among pigmies." However his eventual demise was probably down to his defects in his personality as well as him not seeing eye to eye with Kaiser Wilhelm II.