

# How strong was nationalism in the second reich?

Government



In 1871, Bismarck unified Germany; however this great achievement did not mean that his job was done. Now, the ultimate threat for him was a revolution, so he needed to make sure that everyone was reasonably happy in the new unified Germany. The constitution of the German Reich was created on 19 April 1871. This aimed to please the upper class, middle class, working class and the German states.

The upper class were pleased by the fact that they would be ruled by a German Emperor (William I) who was also the King of Prussia and Supreme Commander. This way, they could maintain an element of autocracy and social hierarchy.

The Federal Council could over-rule the Reichstag if it wanted to so this helped to avoid democracy, again, pleasing the upper class.

Having a constitution would please the middle class as it enables democracy to a certain extent. They would have been pleased by the fact that the constitution allows the middle class suffrage and in turn, gains them more power. Gaining the vote and power within the constitution also pleased the working class.

Twenty-five confederal states made up the Federal Council, meaning that Prussia did not overrule everyone; this pleased the other German states. Prussia was only allowed seventeen representatives; however, the council had the power of veto, if they were supported by 14 votes. This meant that it would take only 14 of the 17 representatives of Prussia to overrule the other states.

The careful planning of the constitution helped to encourage nationalism, as everyone in it was kept quite happy. The middle and working class got elements of democracy whilst the upper class had elements of autocracy. However, it was more absolutist than it appeared to be. Bismarck and Prussia still had subtle control over Germany.

How did the government encourage the people to be good Germans?

Nationalism throughout Germany was encouraged in areas such as education, industry and the monarchy. The writings of Heinrich Von Treitschke were very influential to the German people.

He believed that Germans were driven by ideas such as nationalism rather than being practical. The acquisition of power was the key to a successful Germany, "only the truly great and powerful states ought to exist." As he was such an influential writer, it was causing nationalism to grow amongst the German people. Treitschke also believed in conformity and wrote that "the individual has no right to regard the state as a means for attaining his own ambitions in life", meaning that people should do as they are told by their government, and not revolt (like the French did.)

Both the acquisition of power and conformity had created a replacement to absolutism known as authoritarianism. His writing showed that nationalism was becoming more and more conservative. To be a good German, you had to be pure blooded and a militarist. Treitschke taught that war was a good thing and it makes you a better person. "The sacred power of love which a righteous war awakes" is an example of what he wrote about war. Germany

was founded through three wars, so to Germans it must seem a very good thing. However, this all changed after WWI.

Nationalism was also being encouraged through education. Textbooks would contain phrases such as " the ideal bearers of civilisation with an innate superiority and pureness of blood." Introducing to children the ideas of the Aryan race.

How serious was opposition to nationalism?

The main opposition to nationalism consisted of the Catholic church, workers and women.

Problems with the Catholic church arose because Bismarck tried to control the country through education. However, for Catholics, their education lies in the hands of their religion so what they were taught by their religion was very different to what Bismarck wanted to teach them. In 1870, the Vatican Council adopted the doctrine of papal infallibility, meaning that whatever the pope said or did was right, and no one was allowed to question it. This was a problem for Bismarck as he continued to try to gain control over German education. He passed many laws such as the May Laws (1873) which forbade catholic inspections of schools, but by 1887, a bill was passed to give the Church its old independence. The Catholics won the Kulturkampf so they proved to be a threatening opposition to nationalism.

Socialism of the working class was the most serious form of opposition to nationalism. The social democrats were similar to communists in the sense that they wanted the abolition of classes and class rule. Bismarck tried to

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prevent them from growing, by introducing anti-socialist laws, but they continued to grow even faster.

By 1912, the SPD were the largest party in the Reichstag with nearly 4million votes!! Bismarck even attempted to encourage working class nationalism by introducing state insurance and pension, however, this was simply mocked by socialists. They called it 'state socialism.' The social democrats continued to be the largest party in the Reichstag up to the outbreak of WWI in 1914.

Another form of opposition to nationalism was women. This was not as serious as the Suffragettes in Britain, although it still posed a threat to nationalism. Women were seen as second class citizens who were oppressed by the ruling classes, generally men. The women's movement achieved very little under Bismarck, however, they managed to get the right to get involved in politics. It was the most low key of the three main threats to nationalism, as it was not as significant as the Socialists or the Catholics.

Out of the three, the biggest threat to nationalism seems to be the Social Democratic party, as they managed to become the largest party in the Reichstag, meaning that they would have quite an influence over parliament. However, the Federal Council could just simply dissolve the Reichstag if they felt it was necessary.