

1. The Background to Germany

Task 1: Look at the two maps that follow, then do the following:

- a) What changes can you see between the 1789 and the 1871 maps?
- b) Can you list at least 15 States/regions that make up Germany

Task 2: Research Task: Who was Kaiser Wilhelm II? (when did he rule, background, character?) – write a brief fact-file for him.

Task 3: Our course begins at the end of WWI in 1918. However, it is important for us to understand what Germany was like before this so you can see how it changed. Read the extract on slide/page 4 and take notes. In particular:

- *How was Germany's constitution organised from 1871 onwards?*
- *What was Germany like/made up of?*
- *Where did power lie/who had power?*

THE GERMAN REICH 1871-1918



Germany
1871-1918

(The 2nd Reich)

- | | |
|-----|---|
| FHZ | = Fürstentum Hohenzollern (zu Preußen) |
| LD | = Fürstentum Lippe |
| OLD | = zu Großherzogtum Oldenburg |
| RÄL | = Fürstentum Reuß ältere Linie |
| RJL | = Fürstentum Reuß jüngere Linie |
| SA | = Herzogtum Sachsen-Altenburg |
| SCG | = Herzogtum Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha |
| SL | = Fürstentum Schaumburg-Lippe |
| SMG | = Herzogtum Sachsen-Meiningen |
| SR | = Fürstentum Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt |
| SWE | = Großherzogtum Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach |
| W | = Fürstentum Waldeck und Pyrmont (Landesteil Pyrmont) |

IV Germany 1890–1914

1. Introduction

Of all the European powers, Germany's power increased the most in the period after 1890. The country had been united only twenty years before, yet by 1900 had become one of the three great economic powers in the world. The massive and rapid economic expansion of the country therefore forms an important area of study for the historian. Equally, the relationship between this economic expansion and the constitutional and political structure of the country has concerned both contemporary and later historians. Was it possible for a highly modernized economy to be governed by an almost autocratic form of government? Thirdly, historians have studied the relationship between the politico-economic structure and the foreign policy of the country. So although this chapter studies these three fields—politics, economics, foreign policy—separately, it is in fact the relationship between them that is of most interest to historians.

2. The Constitutional Organization of the State

Diagram 6 outlines the organization of the German Empire according to the Constitution of 1871:

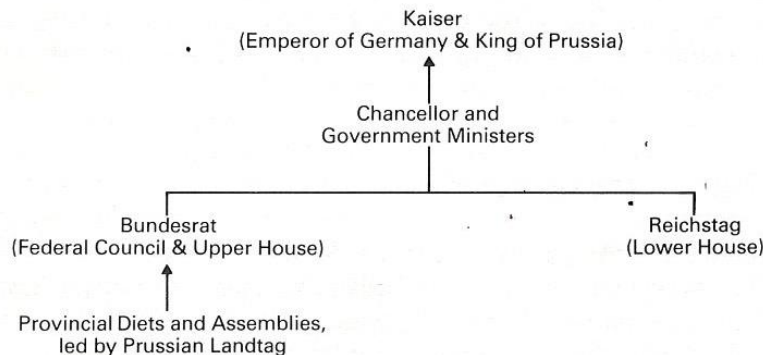


Diagram 6. The constitutional organization of Germany

The Empire technically consisted of four kingdoms, six grand-duchies, five duchies, seven principalities, three free cities and the Imperial territory of Alsace-Lorraine, captured from France in 1871. As the German state was federal, certain local powers remained in the hands of the individual states. Their power in the central government was maintained through the Bundesrat. There were fifty-eight members of this, one from each of the twenty-six states, except for the larger ones which had more. Bavaria had six and Prussia seventeen. The voting system was such that this gave the Prussian members a veto over legislation. The members of the Bundesrat were representatives of their state legislatures and thus bound by their instructions. The Provincial diets and assemblies were therefore of some importance, and the franchise systems in the States significant. These varied considerably. The Prussian Constitution of 1850 established a three-class voting system that assured the nobility of a majority. In the 1908 Landtag elections, 600 000 votes elected six Social Democrats while 418 000 votes secured 212 conservative seats.

Constitutionally, the power to make laws was held jointly by the Bundesrat and the Reichstag. Members of the Reichstag were elected by constituency every five years by all men over the age of twenty-five. In fact, its legislative power was considerably reduced by other aspects of the Constitution. Many revenues were permanent rather than annual, thus reducing the Reichstag's control over the individual ministers. It could be, and was, dissolved by the Kaiser with the consent of the Bundesrat. Consequently, the Reichstag criticized and amended legislation that was proposed by others. Its relationship with the Bundesrat and the Kaiser became critical in the period before the Great War.

The Chancellor and ministers were responsible only to the Kaiser. He appointed and dismissed them, and, as events demonstrated (*see page 71*), it was very difficult for them to pursue policies with which he was not in complete agreement. Since the Kaiser also had the power to dissolve the Reichstag, his control over politics was considerable. As Prussia dominated the Bundesrat and the Kaiser was also King of Prussia, he could also rely on loyal support there. Moreover, Kaiser Wilhelm II acknowledged the extent of his power and intended to maintain it; in a speech in 1895 he stated, 'It is my wish to uphold undiminished the Right and Fullness of Power founded on history and the constitution.' Wilhelm probably had greater control over the course of events than any other ruler in Europe.