

German Unification

"Not by speeches and majority resolutions are the great questions of the day decided—that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by blood and iron." — *Otto von Bismarck*

The Age of Bismarck



Otto Von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor of Germany

OTTO VON BISMARCK used this phrase to describe the method by which a unified German state would be created. The **FRANKFURT ASSEMBLY OF 1848**, which attempted to unify Germany through constitutional means, had been crushed. Bismarck knew that the chances of peaceful revolution were nonexistent: Germany could be created only through war.

Two great powers lay claim to German leadership: Austria and Prussia. Both peoples spoke the German language and followed many traditional German folk customs. The two rivals struggled with each other to lead the smaller German states.

In 1851, Bismarck began to represent Prussia in the diet of the **GERMAN CONFEDERATION**, an organization dominated by Austria. Bismarck served as ambassador to Russia and France in the late 1850s, and in September 1862, he was named Prussia's chief minister. He was less concerned with German nationalism than he was with expanding the power of Prussia.

The path to such power lay in eliminating Austria's influence over German affairs. Prussia had already created the **ZOLLVEREIN**, a customs union of German states that did not include Austria.

Realpolitik

Bismarck was the architect of a policy that came to be known as **REALPOLITIK**, which means "practical politics." He was determined to strengthen Prussia by any means necessary. Alliances were merely convenient and could be dissolved to exploit an opportunity. Bismarck supported democracy to gain internal support, but had no true interest in liberal reform. He watched international events closely, waiting for the proper moments to advance his agenda.

The Danish king's attempts to annex the **DUCHIES OF SCHLESWIG AND HOLSTEIN** provided an opportunity for Bismarck to act. He enticed Austria to declare war on Denmark to acquire these two territories. Following a brief war, Prussia assumed control of Schleswig while Austria occupied Holstein. Denmark was too weak militarily to stop either larger power. Bismarck never intended to make the joint occupation permanent. He immediately made plans to stab the Austrians in the back.

Otto-Suggestion

Bismarck then crafted an alliance with Napoleon III of France, receiving assurances that the French emperor would remain neutral in the event of military conflict between Austria and Prussia. Bismarck promised Venetia to the Italians in exchange for their support of Prussia.

Tensions mounted, and in June 1866 Austria declared war on Prussia. Austria was no match for Prussian armed forces, which used the telegraph and rail links in its mobilization. Prussia crushed Austria in only seven weeks of fighting. The **TREATY OF PRAGUE OF AUGUST 1866** officially ended the Seven Weeks' War, resulting in Prussia's control of both Schleswig and Holstein.

Bismarck then annexed the recalcitrant pro-Austrian German states to form a new **NORTH GERMAN CONFEDERATION**, marking the end of Austrian influence in Germany.



This map illustrates the territories of the German Empire at the time of its creation. The captured province of Alsace-Lorraine, located at the empire's southwest border, proved to be a point of contention until and during the Second World War.



Only several small German kingdoms in the south, such as Bavaria, remained independent of Prussian control. These territories might have fallen into the Prussian, Austrian, or French spheres of influence. Although aligned with the new North German Confederation in the face of French imperialism, south German states feared further "**PRUSSIANIZATION**" OF GERMANY. Bismarck soon conspired to annex those lands.

The Iron Chancellor

Bismarck first used the pen rather than the sword. He seized the opportunity to provoke France when **QUEEN ISABELLA OF SPAIN** abdicated her throne in 1868. Fearing an encirclement by Prussian leaders, France opposed the choice of a Prussian Hohenzollern prince to replace Isabella. Napoleon III demanded in July 1870 that **KING WILHELM OF PRUSSIA** also oppose it. Wilhelm was reluctant to start trouble with France, so he crafted a polite, diplomatic response, which one of his officials conveyed to Bismarck.



Bismarck, in the famous **EMS TELEGRAM**, carefully edited the king's words to create the impression that the French ambassador and King Wilhelm had traded diplomatic insults. France thus declared war on Prussia on July 19, 1870.

Fearing a French attack, the south German states joined the North German Confederation, satisfying Bismarck's dreams. Although the Franco-Prussian War officially ended in May 1871, France was soundly defeated by Prussian forces within two months. In January 1871, in the Palace of Versailles, **WILHELM I** was crowned kaiser of the new German Empire, which now contained 39 million Germans. The peace settlement humiliated France, laying ground for future conflict. Germany received an indemnity payment of five billion francs and the territories of Alsace and Lorraine.

Germany was now satiated and ready for peace, Bismarck said after the war. But the balance of power in Europe was completely changed. In five short years, Bismarck's Germany had become the most powerful country in continental Europe, soon rivaling Britain in industrial output and military power.

The Economy and Population Growth in Imperial Germany

Germany experienced an economic boom immediately after unification. For the first time, the country was a single economic entity, and old barriers to internal trade were lifted. The money that France had to pay Germany after losing the 1870-71 war provided capital for railroad construction and building projects. Germany's economy grew rapidly. By 1900 it rivaled the more-established British economy as the world's largest. German coal production, about one-third of Britain's in 1880, increased six-fold by 1913, almost equaling British yields that year. German steel production increased more than tenfold in the same period, surpassing British production by far.



Industrialization began later in Germany than in Britain, and the German economy was not a significant part of the world economy until late in the nineteenth century. Germany's industrialization started with the building of railroads in the 1840s and 1850s and the subsequent development of coal mining and iron and steel production, activities that made up what is called the First Industrial Revolution. In Germany, the Second Industrial Revolution, that is, the growth of chemical and electrical industries, followed the enormous expansion of coal and steel production so closely that the

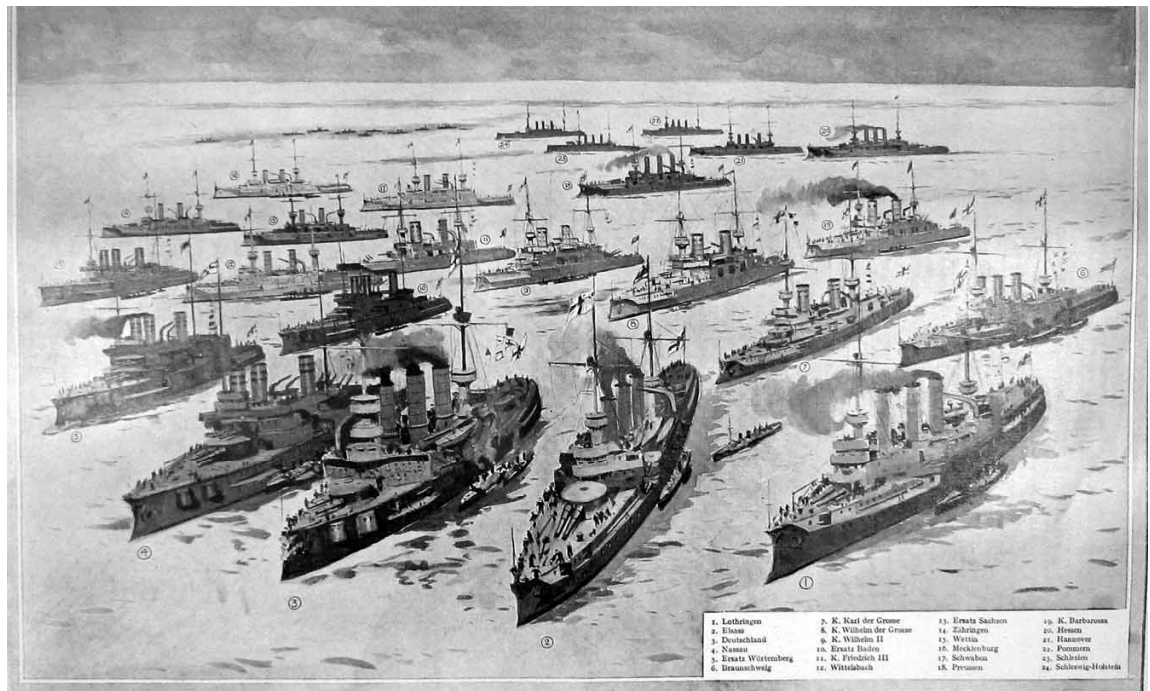
country can be said to have experienced the two revolutions almost simultaneously. Germany took an early lead in the chemical and electrical industries. Its chemists became renowned for their discoveries, and by 1914 the country was producing half the world's electrical equipment. As a result of these developments, Germany became the continent's industrial giant.

Germany's population also expanded rapidly, growing from 41.0 million in 1871 to 49.7 million in 1891 and 65.3 million in 1911. The expanding and industrializing economy changed the way this rapidly expanding population earned its livelihood. In 1871 about 49 percent of the workforce was engaged in agriculture; by 1907 only 35 percent was. In the same period, industry's share of the rapidly growing workforce rose from 31 percent to 40 percent. Urban birth rates were often the country's highest, but there was much migration from rural areas to urban areas, where most industry was located. Berlin, by far the country's largest city and a major industrial center, grew from almost 1 million inhabitants in 1875 to 2 million in 1910. Many smaller cities, especially those in areas with much industry--such as the Ruhr region, the upper Rhine Valley, the Neckar Valley, and Saxony--tripled or quadrupled in size during this period.

Kaiser Wilhelm II fired Bismarck in 1890. Wilhelm II Bismarck's cautious diplomacy of the 1871-90 period. Germany planned to build a fleet of sixty battleships of the formidable Dreadnought class. battleships capable of challenging the British navy began. This new bellicosity alarmed the rest of Europe, and by about 1907 German policy makers had succeeded in creating Bismarck's nightmare: a Germany "encircled" by an alliance of hostile neighbors--in this case Russia, France, and Britain--in an alliance called the Triple Entente.

The German naval expansion program had many domestic supporters. The Kaiser deeply admired the navy of his grandmother, Queen Victoria of Britain, and wanted one as large for himself. Powerful lobbying groups in Germany desired a large navy to give Germany a worldwide role and to protect a growing German colonial empire in Africa and the Pacific. Industry wanted large government contracts.

The chief figure in promoting the naval buildup was Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, who is considered the founder of the modern German navy. Tirpitz was an effective spokesman for the program and had the ear of the Kaiser and his advisers.



The view of the "battle-squadron" of the Kaiser's "High Sea Fleet," as it will be in 1910--in less than two and a half years' time from now, that it should prove of particular interest at the present moment. It represents the total fleet of our great European rival, in commission and at sea, as it will then appear, including the four new German Dreadnoughts laid down last year, the first of which was launched in the presence of the Kaiser himself on the 8th of this month, and named the Nassau. Together with these four giants of the future are seen all Germany's first-class battleships of the present day, which will, in 1910, be still in the forefront of the active list and available to form the first line of the fleet. They are of practically equivalent types to our own London and Majestas now serving in the Channel and Home Fleets. They are of about the same age as our ships, but of inferior gun power. There is no equivalent, in the German Navy, to our other and more powerful ships of the pre-Dreadnought type; the eight King Edwards, and

that mighty pair, the Lord Nelson and Agamemnon, which two ships not a few naval officers and foreign critics maintain are indeed as formidable fighting machines as the Dreadnoughts. At the present moment the Nassau has been launched just three weeks, and is now being completed at Wilhelmshaven; the second German Dreadnought, the Ersatz Sachsen, is building at Kiel. These two are of 17,710 tons, much the same displacement as our Dreadnought has. The second pair, the Ersatz Württemberg and Ersatz Baden, are to be much larger ships, of 19,000 tons each, which will be practically of the same displacement as our "improved Dreadnoughts," of the St. Vincent and Collingwood classes. The German term "Ersatz," if may be mentioned, means "substitute"--i.e., the ship in question is to take the place of a certain antiquated type of vessel still borne on the strength of the fleet. These are certain of the "points" of the first of the German Dreadnoughts.

the big Nassau, as far as is known. The British secrecy about our first Dreadnought has been copied at Wilhelmshaven, and improved upon. She is expected to carry twelve heavy 11in. guns of exceptional power, fifty feet in length, and firing shells from 7000 to 8000 lb. weight. Five of the guns at a time can fire together on each broadside. Besides, the ship will have twelve 6in. and eight 3in. quick-firers, and also six torpedo-tubes to discharge torpedoes of 19in. diameter, the most powerful extant. Engines of 25,000 horse-power are to be put on board to give a speed of between nineteen and twenty knots. In size the hull of the Nassau will be 422ft. in length, with beam of 81ft. 6in., and draught of 26ft. The total cost of completion is set down in advance at £1,818,000, of which sum £675,000 is to go on the guns and £20,000 on the torpedoes. One may judge of the "points" of the other three ships, the Ersatz Sachsen and the two "improved Nassaus," from what has been said of their prototype-ship.

The Kaiser's Dreadnoughts: The German Battle Fleet as it Will Be in 1910

DRAWN BY DAVID R. WATERS

Imperial Germany

Militarism

Industrialization

Nationalism

Modernization