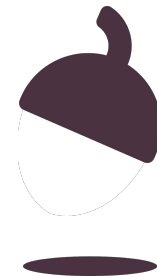


History

The German Reich 1871-1918

Ms Barnett



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The Creation of the German Reich

Although there have been German-speaking people for hundreds of years, Germany, the country, was created quite recently. Officially, the country was called the German Reich and it was formed in 1871 after lots of smaller German kingdoms united. The German Reich was created after one of the largest German kingdoms, called Prussia, fought and won a war against France. The war fought between Prussia and France included soldiers from the other German kingdoms, but the fighting was led by Prussian generals. So after the war, Prussia became the leading state in the German Reich. Consequently the King of Prussia became the new ruler of the German Reich - Kaiser Wilhelm I.



Authority in the German Reich

As the German Reich was a new country, rules needed to be chosen to decide how the country should be governed. These rules are known as a **constitution**. The German constitution gave most power to the Kaiser; however it also created a parliament where all Germans could be represented. This parliament was called the **Reichstag**. The constitution however allowed the Kaiser and his advisors to run the country. As the Kaiser and his advisors were from a military background they put the needs of the military first to make sure Germany was seen as strong nation. So, if the Reichstag did not support extra funding for the military, the Kaiser might ignore the Reichstag. Although this might seem **authoritarian**, people at the time were respectful of authority and supported the idea of one person being in charge and making decisions for the country.



Politics in the German Reich

The 1871 **Constitution** of the new German Reich did however have some democratic features. All men aged 25 were allowed to vote and express their opinions in elections for the Reichstag. The majority of the population lived in rural communities. The Kaiser and his advisors assumed that most of these people would vote for political parties that supported the Kaiser and the military.

However, in the 1870s new political parties emerged that challenged the traditional power base of the Prussian military. Left wing parties, such as the Social Democrats (SPD) gained popularity through their push for moderate **socialist** reforms for workers - this included limiting the hours that could be worked by children and banning work on Sundays. The SPD also called for more revolutionary change too, believing the workers should rise up and challenge the social hierarchy. This alarmed the leadership of the German Reich.



The Army

Most government decisions were still made for the benefit of the army. For example, the military budget was approved every 7 years without question, regardless of how much money was requested. Government ministers were often chosen from the army, meaning a lack of political experience but lots of support for military matters. Military spending rose steadily, as did army membership - it stood at approximately 6 million by 1914. The German Reich's leaders believed it was important for Germany to continue to be seen as powerful.



The economy

By 1914 German industry was performing well. The German Empire quickly became a leading producer of steel, glass, cement and chemicals, along with exporting their key natural resource - coal. As a result by 1900 they had the largest industrial economy in Europe.

Although agriculture declined in importance for the economy, the introduction of new crops meant agricultural output grew rapidly and food prices fell improving diets for many. However, the standard of living decreased in other areas, as many people moved to the industrial cities for work and found themselves in poor living conditions.

By 1914, Germany was economically and militarily the most powerful country in Europe. However, some of the other European countries, especially France, were upset about the power of the German Reich.



Glossary

Authoritarian - expecting or requiring people to obey rules or laws, not allowing much personal freedom.

Constitution - the basic beliefs and laws of a nation, state, or social group by which the powers and roles of the government are established and certain rights are guaranteed to the people.

Reichstag - building where legislation is passed. In this case the German Parliament buildings.

Socialist - Someone who believes that society should be classless and that all property and wealth should be owned by the whole community and not by individuals.



Questions

1. Why did Prussia dominate the new German Reich?
2. The leadership of the German Reich was described as **authoritarian** - why do you think that is?
3. Why were the military able to be so influential in the new country?
4. Explain how the German economy developed between 1871 and 1914.
5. Challenge Yourself - Describe what Germany was like in 1914. Try to include comments on its economy, politics, military and leadership.

Aim to do this in a short paragraph.

By 1914 the German Reich was....

This can be seen in

