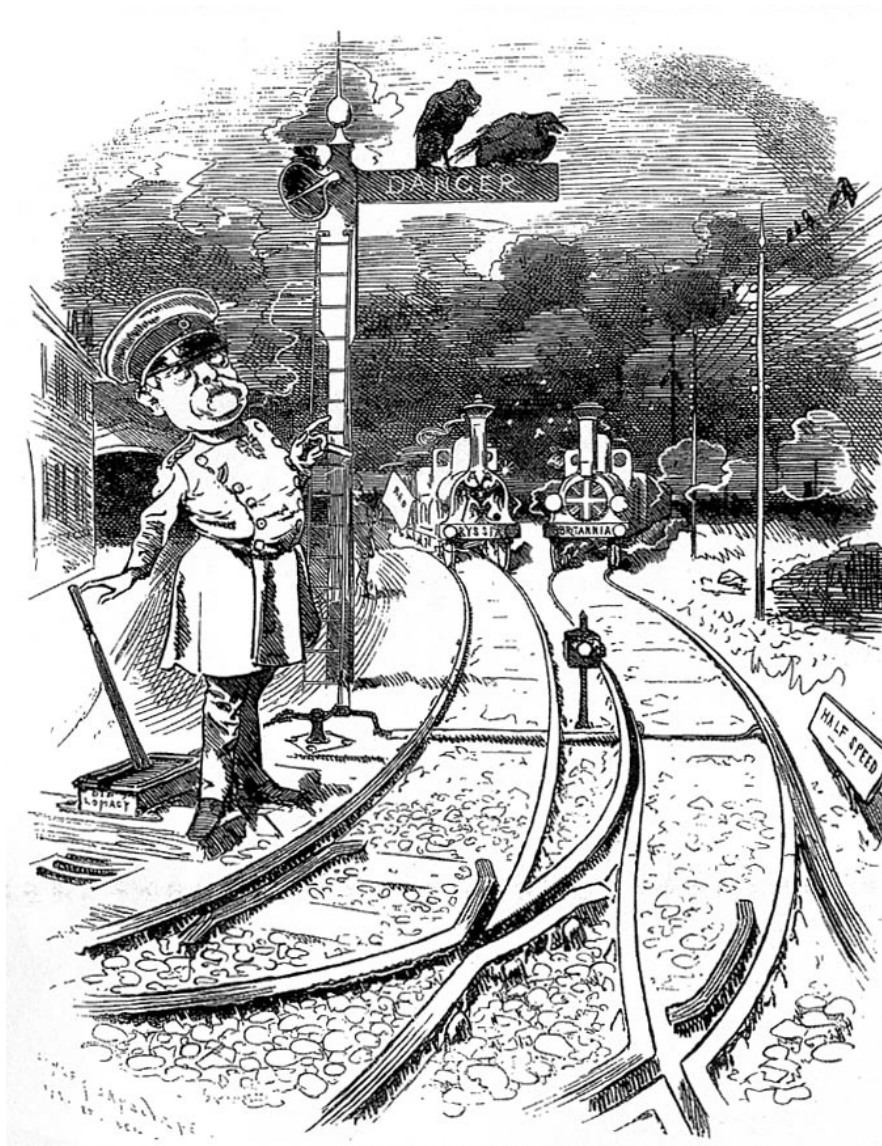# Bismarck's Dance

A Solitaire Game of
The Balance of Powers
1870 – 1890

v1.0.1

By 1871, after a series of three short but deceicive wars, Bismarck has forged a new German Empire with iron and blood. The chancellor sees that the young empire might get to dominate the European continent and thus upset the Balance of Powers and find itself surrounded by hostile powers. He therefore reinvents himself as a peacemaker and declares Germany saturated – without any desire for further conquests. As imperial chancellor, he persues a cautious foreign policy which tries to isolate France and plays the other European powers against each other and their geostrategic interests to prevent the formation of an Anti-German coalition.

Print-and-play components:
- 63 cards
- 1 board (A4)
- 5 flags

Additional components:
- 7 influence discs
- 2 six-sided dice

Setup

Lay the game board on the table. Take the 3 cards *Universal Suffrage*, *Honest Broker* and *Intelligence* into your hand, these are marked with an asterisk. Shuffle the remaining 60 cards and put them next to the board as a draw pile (see Figure 1). Place the 5 Flag tokens onto the correspondingly marked space of the Diplomacy Track with their active (colourful) side up.

Put 1 Influence disk on the Catholic Centrist (Z) space of the Parliament. Draw 5 cards from the draw pile and lay them above the board as the Event Card Row. Cancel any card in the Event Card Row by putting Influence discs onto it. The price is the number under the die face, i.e. 1 for the 1st spot, 2 for the 2nd and 3 for the 3rd to 5th spot. Put the remaining Influence disks into the Influence Pool.

## Turn Structure

1 Influence Allocation Phase

Take any Influence discs from the Influence Pool and allocate them to the Event Pool, the Diplomacy Pool or the Politics Pool. You can put all Influence into one pool or distribute the Influence freely between different pools.

2 Event Phase

In the 2nd phase events are executed based on a die roll.

2.1 Roll Dice

Roll the dice. When both dice show the same side execute the corresponding Balance of Power Event, then reroll unil they show different numbers. This might trigger further Balance of Power Events.

Balance of Power Event Whenever you roll doubles, execute the corresponding Balance of Power Event. For ⚀ to ⚄ the event affects a power, see the table in the bottom right corner of the board to see which power is affected. Move that power's flag 1 space in the direction of the gray arrow at the bottom of its space on the Diplomacy Track.

On double ⚅ immediately lose the support of 1 party which currently supports you.

tip Action cards with the 🎲 icon can be used skip a die roll and turn the involved dice to a side of your choice. This can be used to manipulate the event die roll and the die roll requested by the *Assassination card*

tip Chances for event activation, i.e. the smaller one of two distinct die faces:

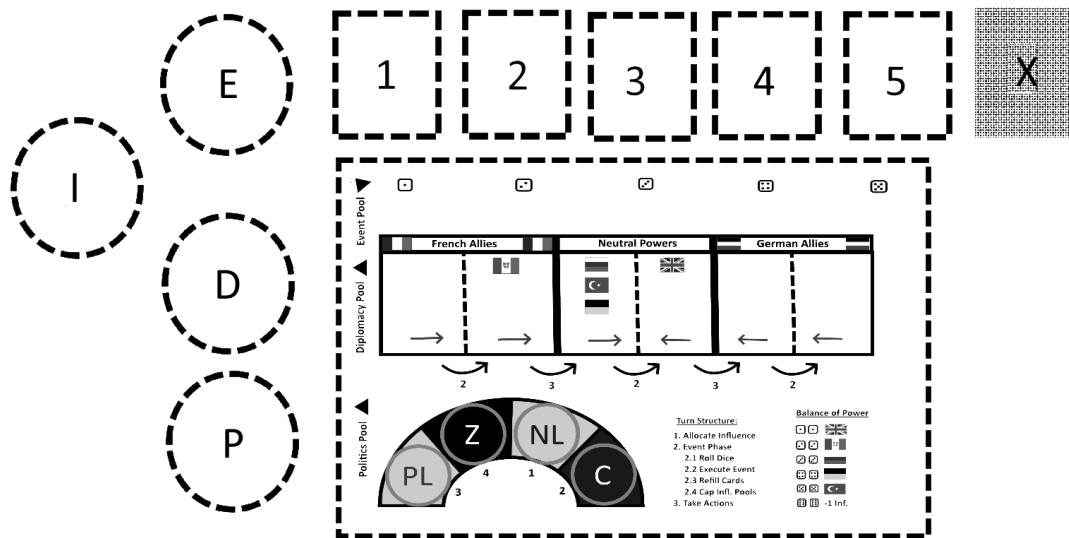| ⚀	⚁	⚂	⚃	⚄
33%	27%	20%	13%	7%

Figure 1: Game Setup: Cards 1-5 above the board form the Event Card Row, X is the draw pile. The pools to the left of the board are just areas in which Influence disks are stored, they are blank table surface except for the Influence disks which might be stored there. I is the Influence Pool. E is the Event Pool located to the left of the Event Card Row. D is the Diplomacy Pool located to the left of the Diplomacy Track. P is the Politics Pool located to the left of the Parliament.

2.2 Execute Card

Activate the card in the Event Card Row in the position corresponding the smaller one of the rolled dice. If the card was cancelled and at least 1 Influence disk remains on it, do not execute the card, put the card onto the discard pile and return any Influence disks on it to the Influence Pool. This is the only way a card can be removed from the Event Card Row while cancelled.

There are 4 types of cards: plain Event Cards (black), Action Cards (green), Crisis Cards (red) and Duration Cards (blue). Event Cards and Action Cards might have the Issue icon 🏛, which denotes them as Issue cards. The special Duration Card *Spa* has no effect when activated, its effect is active as long as it remains uncancelled in the Event Card Row.

2.2.a Event

Event Cards and most Action Cards contain an event section, Crisis Cards and Duration Cards do not. When a card with an event gets activated, execute the text on the event section, on Action Cards the event section is preceded by the keyword *event*. If a power is made inactive by an effect, turn its flag to its blank side.

> Effects that would push a powers flag out of the six-space Diplomacy Track move the flag the last space and have no further effect, a flag cannot be moved beyond the track. Similarly, events have no effects on inactive powers, they cannot be moved by an event or the player until they are turned to the active side again at the end of a Crisis Check.
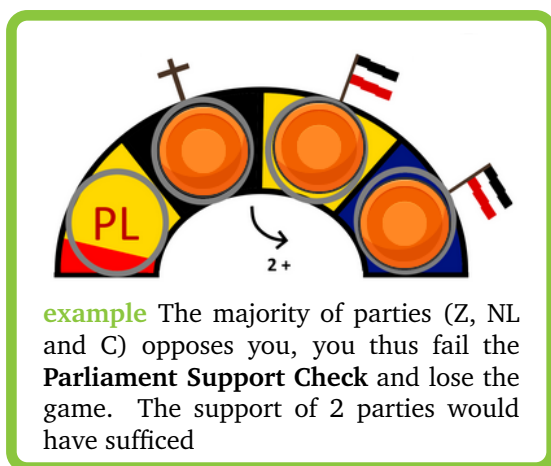
After executing the effect of an Event Card, remove it from the Event Card Row to the discard pile. After executing an Action Card, take it in your hand, you can now play it for its action. Cancelled Action cards go to the discard pile.

> There is a strict hand card limit of 4. Whenever you take a 5th card into your hand immediately discard 1.

2.2.b Issue

Some Event or Action Cards have the Issue icon 🏛 next to their title. The cost of the Politics Action depends on the number of Issues in the Event Card Row.

When an Issue card gets activated, execute its effect normally, then conduct a **Parliament Support Check**. If less than 2 parties support Bismarck (i.e. 3 or 4 factions in the Parliament have Influence disks on them), the Kaiser cannot afford to leave Bismarck in office anymore and you lose the game.

example The majority of parties (Z, NL and C) opposes you, you thus fail the **Parliament Support Check** and lose the game. The support of 2 parties would have sufficed

Lose Party Support   The important factions in the Parliament are Progressive Liberals (PL), Catholic Centrists (Z), National Liberals (NL) and Conservatives (C).

Whenever and event causes you to lose the support of a party, you have to put 1 Influence disks onto the corresponding spot of the Parliament if that spot is empty. If the spot is already occupied by another disk, do nothing. Take the disk from either the Influence Pool, the Event Pool, the Diplomacy Pool or the Politics Pool, and if all of those are also empty take it from one of the cards in the Event Card Row. Should the last Influence disk be taken off a card, it is not considered cancelled anymore.

2.2.c   Crisis

Most Crisis Cards have 1 or more Theatre icons (Balkans 🌏, Africa 🌍, Asia 🌏). When a Crisis Card is activated, all other uncancelled Crisis Cards in the Event Card Row that share a Theatre with the original crisis get activated as well. Cancelled crises are not affected and stay in the Event Card Row.

Every power which is present on at least 1 of the activated Crisis Cards is involved the crisis. You now have to side with one of these powers at the expense of your relations with all of the other involved powers. Move the chosen power's flag 1 space to the right on the Diplomacy Track, move all other involved powers 1 space to the left.

Germany and France are special. You cannot choose to side with France, when France is involved double all effects, move flags 2 steps instead of 1.

If Germany is involved and you do not choose Germany, lose the support of the Conservative Party (C). If both France and Germany are involved and Germany is not chosen, lose the support of both the Conservative (C) and the National-Liberal Party (NL). Siding with Germany has no effect except preventing this support loss. *Siding with Germany will barely suffice the jingolists.*

After applying the crisis effects, execute a **Crisis Check**. If the French Allies sphere contians more powers than the German Allies sphere, the crisis escalated into a global war between the great powers and you lose the game, otherwise proceed with refilling the Event Card Row (2.3). Inactive powers do not count towards the Crisis Check, after the Crisis Check turn any inactive powers to their active side.

After executing the Crisis and the Crisis Check, discard all involved Crisis Cards.

Inactive powers   A power that has been turned to its inactive side, it cannot be moved anymore, neither by the player nor an event, and does not count towards any alliance during a Crisis Check. This effect lasts until the end of the next Crisis Check when all powers are activated again.

Inactive powers in the German Allies sphere count towards the victory condition normally.

4

example The crisis in Bukhara breaks out, you have 2 options:

- Side with GB:
  GB →
  ← Russia
- Side with Russia:
  ← GB
  Russia →

example The Bukhara crisis gets activated while another crisis from the Asian Theatre is also uncancelled present in the Event Card Row. The combined crisis involves Germany, France, GB and Russia. This leaves you 3 options:

- Side with Germany:
  ←← GB
  ←← Russia
- Side with GB:
  GB →→
  ←← Russia
  lose support of both C and NL
- Side with Russia:
 ←← GB
  Russia →→
  lose support of both C and NL
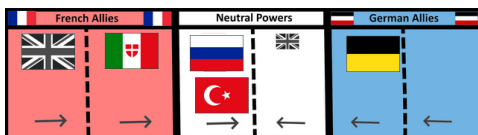
example You survive the **Crisis Check**, Germany and France are each supported by 1 power, GB does not count as it is inactive. After the Crisis Check, turn GB back to its active side

2.3 Refill Event Card Row

After executing the event and discarding the card, slide all remaining cards in the Event Card Row to the left until they form a continuous group. Move any Influence disks on a card with it. Then draw new cards and fill the empty spots on the right of the row until it contains 5 cards again.
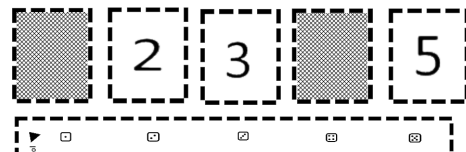
example Spots ⊡ and ⊞ are empty before refilling the row. Afterwards the cards from ⊡, ⊡ and ⊠ have slided to the left, which left spots ⊞ and ⊠ empty to be filled by newly drawn cards.
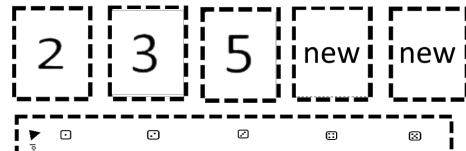
2.4 Cap Influence Pools

At the end of the Event Phase, for each of the Event Pool, the Diplomacy Pool or the Politics Pool which holds more Influence discs than the greater number of this turn's die roll, remove all excess Influence discs to the Influence Pool.

example If you roll ⊞ and ⊡, remove disks from any pool which holds more than 4 disks until only 4 disks remain in it

3 Action Phase

During the last phase of each turn, you can take any number of Cancel Card, Diplomacy and Politics Actions in any order as long as you can pay the coresponding cost.

3.1 Cancel Cards

This action allows you to prevent events and crises. Move Influence disks from the Event Pool onto a card in the Event Card Row. Cancelling

the 1st (leftmost) card requires 1 Influence disk, the 2nd 2, and the 3rd to 5th card cost 3 disks. The disks remain on the card until it is triggered during phase 2.

> **Cancelled Card** Any card with 1 or more Influence disks on it is called cancelled. A cancelled card has no effect when activated and also does not passively interact with other cards in any way.
>
> The only way a cancelled card leaves the Event Card Row is when it is activated by the event dice.

3.2 Diplomacy

This action allows you to sway great powers towards your side. It is your goal to move powers from the French Allies sphere (the 2 leftmost spaces), through the Neutral sphere (the 2 spaces in the middle) into the German sphere (the 2 rightmost spaces).

Choose 1 power and move it 1 space to the right. Moving inside a sphere (over a dotted line) costs 2 Influence disks from the Diplomacy Pool to the Influence Pool. Crossing a solid line out of the French Allies sphere or into the German Allies sphere costs 2 Influence + 1 Influence per power in the German Allies sphere - 1 Influence per power in the Frech Allies sphere, but at least 3. That is 2 + 1 per ally Germany has more than France if Germany has more allies than France, otherwise 3.

An inactive power cannot be moved by the Diplomacy action until it is turned to the active side again at the end of a Crisis Check.
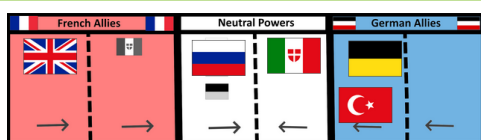
> **example** Moving Italy into the German Allies sphere costs $2 + 2 - 1 = 3$ Influence disks. Moving Russia, GB, Austria or Turkey 1 spot to the right costs 2 disks, because the crossed line is dotted
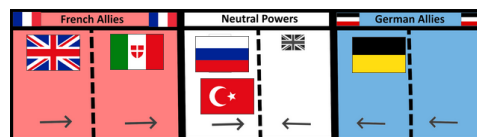
> **example** Moving Italy into the Neutral sphere costs $\max\{3,\ 2 + 1 - 2\} = 3$ Influence disks in this situation

> **tip** GB is difficult to control due to its many potential conflicts with Germany. Russia many interests also make it a difficult ally.
>
> Leaving 1 power in the Fench sphere can be advantageous as it can be ignored without costs
>
> To move the last power into the German sphere via Diplomacy Action is difficult as 6 Influence have to be spend and there is a 67% chance that capping the Diplomacy Pool will remove the 6th Influence disks. It is advantageous to move GB or Russia into the German sphere last as these are easier to move via crisis.

3.3 Politics

This action allows you to regain the support of parties in the Parliament. Gaining a party's support costs 2 Influence disks + 1 further disk per uncancelled Issue card in the Event Card Row. Pay Influence disks from the Politics Pool to the Influence pool, then move the disk from the Parliament to the Influence Pool.

> **example** The event row contains 2 Issues and 1 cancelled Isuue, the remaining 2 cards are either Crises or other Events. This results in a price of 4, 2 base cost + 1 per uncancelled Issue.

> **tip** NL is the easiest to control while Z is maybe the most difficult.
>
> When you do not have the support of NL and C anyway, you can ignore German interests in all crises. Keep in mind though that not having the support of 2 parties is makes upcomming Issue Cards already a bit dangerous.

4 End Turn

Move any remaining Influence disks from the Event Pool, the Diplomacy Pool and the Politics Pool to the Influence Pool.

If at the end of a turn neither a victory nor defeat condition is reached, start the next turn with its Action Allocation Phase.

> **Play Action Cards** You can play a green Action Card from your hand to execute the effects listed in the action section, after the keyword *action*. For some a phase is given in which they can be activated, when no phase is given a card can be played in any phase, but in most cases the effects of those cards only work during a specific phase anyway.
>
> Action cards with the Duration Icon ∞ stay in hand after usage. After playing an Action Card without that icon, discard it.

> **Game End** You win the game if at the end of a turn all 5 flags are in the German Allies sphere as you achieved your goal to isolate France.
>
> You lose if you fail a Crisis Check, fail a Parliament Support Check, or draw the last card from the deck.

Advanced Variants

Players who have accustomed themselves with the normal game might try a challenging variant which replaces *Balance of Power Events* with *Snake Eyes of Fate*. When rolling double ⚀⚀ to ⚅⚅, execute the corresponding card in the Event Card Row, then reroll the dice, repeating this procedure until they show different sides. On ⚀⚀ lose the support of 1 party and reroll the dice. The Event Card Row is still only reset once per turn at the end of the Event Phase. If a repeated die roll hits an empty spot, where the card has already been executed and discarded, it has no effect.

Crazy Snake Eyes of Fate makes for even more unpredictable and challenging game. On doubles execute the corresponding event, then turn the dice to the opposite side, execute the corresponding event and then reroll the dice.

When rolling ⚁⚁ for example lose 1 support, then execute the card in spot ⚄ and then reroll. On ⚂⚂ execute ⚂, then execute ⚃ and then reroll.

Historical Notes

Otto von Bismarck is an ambiguous figure which pursued goals that at times seemed to be at odds with each other. When playing this game, the player should be able to experience the dilemmata Bismarck faced during the 1870s and 1880s.

Iron and Blood

Bismarck is – especially outside Germany – best remembered for unifying the German Empire by provoking a series of three short but decicive wars during his first decade as Prussian prime minister. Early on Bismarck framed a martial image of himself by shocking the liberal majority of the Prussian parliament with his first speech after his appointment.

It is not Prussia's liberalism that Germany looks up to, but its power. [. . .] Prussia's borders after the treaty of Vienna are not favourable for a healthy state. Not through speeches and voting will the problems of our age be solved – that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but through Iron and Blood.

Less perceived is his role as chancellor during the following two decades when he tried to secure the position of the newborn Empire among the powers of Europe. Bismarck saw that its own industrial and demographic strength posed the greatest danger to the German Empire. This strength might compel its neighbours to form a coalition and preventing this was the main goal of Bismarck's foreign policy. To the other European powers he presented Germany as saturared – without the wish for further conquest – and reinvented himself as an honest broker who mediates international conflicts without selfinterest. These attempts were at odds with the chauvinist zeitgeist which the Kaiserreich had started to develop since the proclamation of victory at Versailles.

Bismarck had convinced Wilhelm I. to spare Austria after the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 but had allowed the humiliation of France after its defeat in 1871. France could not forgive

Alsace-Lorraine and saw its economy crippeled by draconic reparations. The German Empire had created itself an archenemy which would seek allies for revanche.

Crises and Coalitions

Age and obesity took a toll on the chancellor's health and he often had to retreat to the spa at Kissingen. There in 1877 he dictated his approach to the looming Balkan crisis, which illustrates the general outline of his foreign policy:

[...] I wousd see as desirable outcomes of the oriental crisis:
1) gravitate the Russian and Austrian interests towards their rivalries and towards the east
2) make Russia take a strong defensive position in the orient and at its coasts, and relying on our alliance
3) for England and Russia a satisfying status quo that gives them the same interest in the preservation of the current state that we have
4) detatching Enland from our enemy France because of Egypt and the Mediterranean
5) realtions between Russia and Austria which make Anti-German conspiration difficult, which centralist and clerical elements in Austria might favor

If I were healthy I could further elaborate the picture: not of any conquest but of a political situation in which all powers except France need us, and are hindered to from forming coalitions against us by their relations.

This game tries to represent crises as both, advantageous or diadvantageous depending on the constellation of involved powers. The Great Game over Central Asia and the conflicting English-French interests were major hindering blocks for an Anti-German Entente, while the conflicts on the Balkans let Austria and Russia diverge and thus led to the end of the Alliance of the Three Emperors.

Bismarck constructed a system of alliances in which he tried to included all European great powers except France, which he wished to isolate. The *League of the Three Emperors* allied Germany with Russia and Austria in 1881. In 1887 Bismarck brokered the Anti-Russian *Mediterranean Entente* between England and Italy, later joined by Spain and Austria. In the same year the secret *Reinsurance Treaty* insured neutrality between Germany and Russia, which contradicted Germany's contracts with Austria.

THE BOILING POINT.
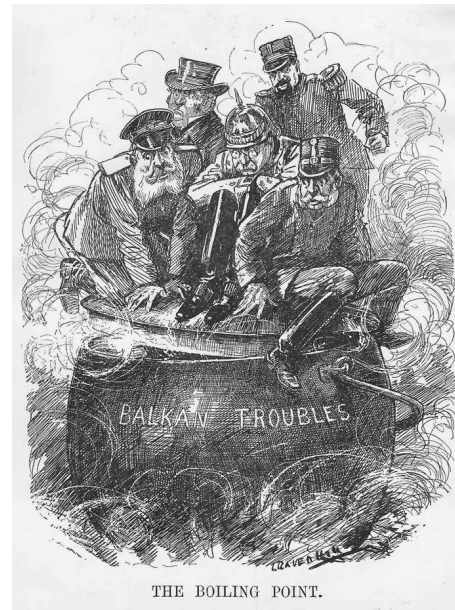
Ideological Struggles

Bismarck's domestic politics are generally considered less successful than his foreign policies. They can be divided in two phases during which Bismarck identified different political movements as inner *enemies of the empire* and tried to suppress them.

First Bismarck joined the struggle between the liberals on one side and the Catholic church on the other side. The black faction in the parliament – named after the robes of the many clerics in its ranks – had organised itself into the Centrist party which opposed many of Bismarcks policies during the *cultural struggle* between state and chruch. Together with the liberals Bismarck ended the dominion of the church over large parts of people's lifes. They introduced civil marriage, closed all monastries, frobade priests to comment on politics during mass and transferred the supervision of schools from the church to the state. The last point was Bismarck's central concern as he wanted all schools to switch from Polish to German as the language of education to which the church did not agree.

Later Bismarck saw a greater threat in the Social-Democrats, which were rising in popularity during Bismarck's time as chancellor, but could never win more than a handfull of mandates as elective districts were tailored to favour rural votes. Still Bismarck saw them as the primary danger and employed a two-faced strategy by suppressing the movement

while trying to win its voters over with social benefits. To enable both he dropped his liberal allies and introduced Anti-Socialist laws as well as public health and pension insurances together with the Catholic Centrists and Ultra-Conservatives. These measures could not stop the Social-Democrats from increasing their share of parliament seats over the following decades.

The Social-Democrats are not represented as a separate faction in the parliament as they never gained more than a handfull of mandates during Bismarck's lifetime. The Progressive Liberals represent some aspects of Social-Democracy.

Imperialist Expansion

During the second half of the 19th century, European great and middle powers rushed to acquire territories in Africa and Asia as colonies. Bismarck initially resisted the calls from nationalists to take part in that race, he thought that the economic gains would not outweigh the diplomatic friction such a move would have caused. In 1884 and 1885 he suddenly changed his mind and declared several territories in Africa protectorates to then return to his former policy and not acquire any further colonies for the remaining five years of his chancellorship.

Eager to turn a profit from its newly established colonies, the German Empire introduced extensive taxes, production quotas and forced labour. Where the situation became unbrearable the population launched depserate rebellions, which were quelled by colonial forces with modern weapons.

No political party in the German Empire fundamentally opposed imperialism. But it were Conservatives and National-Liberals that pushed towards a German participation in the *struggle for Africa* while Centrists, Progressive Liberals and Social-Democrats critisised the German involvement in Africa when exploits and massacres became known.

Dramatis personae

Bismarck saw his political legacy – the German Empire – born into a difficult geopolitical situation. As both Europe's strongest and most central power, it was surrounded by potential rivals and needed thus to attempt good relations with all powers but France, which he considered irreconsilable.

After Prussia and her Allies had defeated the French Empire, they burdened the newborn French Republic with draconic reparations which would cripple its economy for years in addition to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. This humiliation turned both nations into irreconsilable rivals.

The Russian Empire has historically seen Prussia as its natural ally and minor partner. Despite the strength of the newborn German Empire it refuses to see it as a power of equal rank, which causes friction between German and Russian diplomats. Later Russia would come to see France as its natural ally due to German support for Austrian interest in the Balkans.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland prefered continental Europe to settle in a *balance of power* so it could stay in its *Splendid Isolation*, avoid any intervention on the continent and focus on its vast colonial empire. The many colonial interst would produce friction with other colonial powers, especially with Russia during the *Great Game* over Central Asia.

In 1866 Bismarck had convinced the King to spare the defeated Austro-Hungarian Empire and abstain from annexing any of its territories. He planned to covert Prussia's former archrival into its most reliable ally. The Russian pressure on the Balkans made the weakened Empire depend on Germany's friendship until its downfall in WW1.

Italy, the second youngest European great power, had been united just ten years before Germany. Together Italy and Prussia had defeated Austria in 1866 but, as Italy's colonial ambitions in Africa and the Balkans has brought it in conflict with the Western European powers, it would increasingly seek the Triple Alliance with both Central European powers.

Many considered the Ottoman Empire the *sick man of Europe*. With Russian support its European provinces rebelled and gained their independence while the empire had to resist additional Russian pressure from the Caucasus and Russian attempts to gain control over the Bosporus. England and France tried to stabilise Turkey to keep Russian influence away from the Mediterranean but also ensured extensive privileges for their businessmen and thus turned Turkey into a semi-colonialised nation.

Credits