

Bismarck and Germany: Past, Present, and Future (1897)

Abstract

This retrospective on thirty-five years of German achievement (1862–97) probably sprang from the imagination of the rabidly antisemitic publicist Max Beyer, who has been identified as the author of other titles in a series of thirty *Political Picture-Sheets* published during the 1890s, each of which was 50.1 x 64.2 cm in size (approximately 20 x 25 inches). This one, “The Handmaiden” (no. 23), is typical of the genre in that it situates present anxieties about the state of the German nation in the context of a glorious past and an uncertain future. It commemorates the four wars Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I waged together (including the one against the Prussian liberals during the constitutional conflict of the 1860s: thus, Wilhelm clutches a document labeled “abdication,” signifying his thoughts of abdicating the throne in 1862 before he appointed Bismarck as minister president). It also depicts the three historic battles Bismarck and Wilhelm won—Düppel in 1864, Königgrätz in 1866, Sedan in 1870—and the assassination attempts they survived (two each). However, in 1897, with Bismarck out of office (though not forgotten), the German lion slumbers and the threats facing Germany are fundamentally different from those of the 1860s. Now they are hydra-like. One set of heads depicts the archenemy France, ethnic minorities (Poles, Guelphs), the court camarilla, German “discord,” Social Democracy, and anarchy. Another set represents the Jewish danger (the “stock exchange,” “Cohen,” “the Jews”). Note, too, the fasces on the left and right—the symbolic bundle of rods containing an axe with a projecting blade, which in ancient Rome was carried in front of magistrates and after the First World War was adopted as an insignia of the Italian and other fascist movements. The caption at bottom left provides a commentary as ambiguous as the cartoon’s title: “Major-Domo or handmaiden—thus we squabble over your legacy. Here we peer into the future—as *you* have led us to it.”

Source



Source: "Der Handlanger," *Politischer Bilderbogen*, no. 23. Dresden: Verlag der Druckerei Glöss, n.d. Lithograph (1897). Caricature of Bismarck's relationship with Wilhelm I. bpk-Bildagentur, image number 00010732. For rights inquiries, please contact Art Resource at requests@artres.com (North America) or bpk-Bildagentur at kontakt@bpk-bildagentur.de (for all other countries).

© bpk

Recommended Citation: Bismarck and Germany: Past, Present, and Future (1897), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:image-1482>> [July 14, 2025].