



History

Paper 1L (A-level) Specimen Question Paper

Question 02 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.1 20/08/15

Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1L (A-level): Specimen question paper

02 How successful was the Bismarck in preserving his political authority in the years 1871 to 1890?

(30 marks)

Student Response

Between the years 1871 and 1890, Bismarck's authority as chancellor was never fully secured or preserved. Whilst Bismarck was a skilful and able politician, who could use his opportunism and pragmatism to ensure his authority was upheld in the short term, in the long term his authority was constrained by the forces of the Reichstag and the Kaiser.

During the earlier years of his chancellorship, Bismarck was able to preserve his authority by creating working alliances in the Reichstag, ensuring he could push through desired policies. From 1871, Bismarck secured an alliance with the National Liberals, who had a 125-seat majority in the Reichstag. With their support he was able to push through the Kulturkampf. Later, in 1878, when the National Liberals were proving to be irritating, Bismarck broke with them, preferring his more natural conservative allies. With their support he was able to pass the Anti-Socialist Law in 1878, restricting Socialist activities a group level and undermining the SPD (regarded as enemies of the state by Bismarck). Between 1877 and the 1878 their seats fell from 12 to 9 and their membership declined, strengthening Bismarck's control of the Reichstag as well as preserving his political authority.

Bismarck's political authority was further upheld by the support of the Kaiser. Although Bismarck, in theory, was supposed to govern with the Kaiser, Bismarck could usually get his own way by threatening to resign. Moreover, the Kaiser depended on Bismarck so heavily that he more or less allowed him to do as he pleased. Bismarck could rely on the Kaiser to dissolve the Reichstag and hold new elections to gain more supporters and preserve his authority. This was demonstrated in the 1886 when the army budget came up for renewal and Bismarck wanted a 10 per cent increase. Bismarck successfully exploited the Boulanger crisis in France to create a war scare and in January 1887 Bismarck dissolved the Reichstag; the Conservatives gained seats and Bismarck engineered a majority to pass the army bill, strengthening his authority.

However, Bismarck, in the long term, never had complete authority as it was constrained by the Reichstag; it had the power to reject laws and Bismarck worked persistently hard to ensure he had a majority there. After 1878, Bismarck didn't have a working majority there until 1887. Moreover, his Anti-Socialist Law had failed to quell support for the SPD; their number of seats grew from 9 in 1878 to 35 in 1890, whilst the Conservative seats declined, weakening his authority. The clearest

example of how the Reichstag could constrain Bismarck was in October 1890, when the Reichstag rejected Bismarck's permanent Anti-Socialist Law. Whilst Bismarck could, in the short term, use his opportunism to gain control of the Reichstag, in the long term, the Reichstag became uncontrollable, weakening Bismarck's political authority.

Bismarck's political authority was also constrained by the Kaiser. The Kaiser was the hereditary monarch who appointed the chancellor and devised policy with him. Bismarck's authority was constrained by the need to win the Kaiser's favour. If Bismarck lost the support of the Kaiser he had no power in his own right. This was clearly demonstrated when Kaiser Wilhelm II succeeded in 1888 after the death of Wilhelm I. Wilhelm II wanted his own personal rule and to take a more active role in decision-making. He also favoured social reform to win over workers, whereas Bismarck wanted to repress Socialism. The Kaiser strongly opposed Bismarck's attempt to make the Anti-Socialist Law permanent. Bismarck thereafter lost the Kaiser's favour and Wilhelm II forced him from his office as chancellor, demonstrating the power the Kaiser had to undermine Bismarck's political authority.

In the years 1871 to 1878, Bismarck wasn't successful in preserving his political authority. Whilst Bismarck scored early successes such as the Anti-Socialist Law and the army bills, his authority declined as his premiership progressed. The constitutional constraints of the Kaiser and the Reichstag, when Bismarck failed to pass the permanent Anti-Socialist Law, weakening his authority, causing him to fall out with the Kaiser and leading to his resignation; proving his attempts to preserve his authority had failed.

Commentary – Level 4

In many respects, this is a strong response. The introduction clearly sets out the argument which is then followed through consistently, clearly and with supporting detail. Occasionally, it tends to assertion rather than supported judgement, especially in assessing Bismarck's relations with the Kaisers. The conceptual understanding of what was actually meant by 'political authority' within and beyond the Constitution is not developed.