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Bismarck and Hitler: Different Yet Alike

The ways of Otto Von Bismarck were in many ways similar to that of Adolf Hitler when it came to run the state of Germany. Bismarck was indeed the initial mastermind of the grand unification of Germany, but when it came to running it, both have a lot of overlapping characteristics. Both were highly skilled in the art of statesmanship. Also, both had a charismatic personality that they extensively used in manipulating others to achieve their ends. Both were firm believers in the doctrines of "realpolitik" (John Bew). This meant that they were willing to backstab, conspire and use all sorts of illegal and extrajudicial measures to increase their power and status, both for their selves and for their nation. Both had unwavering loyalty for their fatherland and goals for the maximization of power for their beloved Germany.

The differences between both the leaders are though few and far between, are present and significant at the same time. These differences are the reasons that both are remembered differently in the pages of history books. One is remembered as a charismatic leader, and nothing short of one of the best statesmen in the history of the world, while other is remembered as a demon, a stone-cold killer and one of the evilest statesmen ever. These differences are largely due to the characteristics mentioned above. There is due to the presence of a greater sense of statesmanship in Bismarck, as he knew when to give up the violence and stop at the appropriate limit that would not provoke other European powers to take action against him for the sake of his nation. Hitler had to be the “Fuhrer”, or leader, and personally rule all the sections of the territories under his control with an iron fist. Bismarck stopped his drive to acquire new lands when he knew that he had gain power over a reasonable area and worked on making the Germans strong internally through his public policies (Quint). Hitler, on the other hand, wanted to take over the whole of Europe as his lust for more land would not be satisfied with his overwhelming successes. Bismarck adopted a series of oppressive laws so that he would be able to strengthen the nation internally, and he would never have committed ruthless killings for the achievement of internal peace in his state. Hitler, on the other hand, committed genocide in his era of ruling Germany, killing millions of Jews in concertation camps located throughout his territories.

Bismarck and Hitler were both overlapping political schools of thought when it came to running their state. Both were utterly ruthless in putting down their political opposition to strengthen their grip on political power as much as possible. Bismarck often did extensive legislation that was aimed at the containment of ambition of his political parties as well as the workings of state pressure groups that he saw as dangerous to the rule of Kaiser in the country. This can be explained by an example. In the 1870s, after the release of a catholic document called the “Syllabus of Errors” (IX), which attacked several state institutions of the time, he expelled the Jesuits, closed down all the Church schools, and removed all the subsidies to the church that were given by the state. In another incident that occurred in 1878, he forcefully asked the German Diet housed in the Reichstag to pass a series of laws that prohibited the practice of socialist parties that were involved in the act of opposing him (Hage). Summing up this argument, Bismarck knew the limits well. He knew very well when to push the limits and when to contain himself for doing so, but most importantly he did every single one of his political maneuvers discreetly. Hitler also used such methods to systemically eliminate the opposition in his way, but his methods can be categorized as brutal and blunt at best. This can also be explained with a historic example. On the "Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, the Schutzstaffel, or SS for short, killed thousands of members of the Sturmabteilung, or SA, as well as people from the Catholic action (Editors). Also, the state's prominent general, Kurt von Schleicher, and his wife were assassinated in his rule due to a slight disagreement with the Fuhrer. Here, the similarity of tactics by both leaders can be noted, but there are varying limits when it comes to the limit of exercising. It can be easily noted that Hitler had engaged in ceaseless, and often unnecessary practice of violence, while Bismarck was moderate and careful in his use of violence and systematic killing as a tool of power.

Where the arena of foreign affairs is concerned, both men act as they had done in their domestic ventures, meaning that they acted in a sneaky, brutal and an underhanded manner. At the same time, it can be observed that Hitler went overboard when it came to the political use of these violent tactics. Both were very aggressive in their political outlook, shattering all the accepted practices of former political and diplomatic standards and adopting the cruel Machiavellian doctrine of Realpolitik instead. Eventually, each of the two leaders would offer some leniency and offer some concessions in the form of treaties and ceasefires, that would seem as done in good faith. But in reality, they would act as far-sighted leaders as they would think about the seeming act of peace might give them the benefit of a military or political kind soon. To explain this, let us focus on a few examples. After the rise of Napoleon III, he initiated a series of military campaigns in Europe. During his numerous skirmishes in Belgium and Austria, Bismarck "conveniently" ignored his advances in Europe due to his diplomatic reasons (Kober). Another example is that of the political concessions to the territories of Holstein and Kiel, which he subsequently attacked later. This is another thing that Hitler has in common with the Iron Chancellor as he did employ similar tactics later on. On numerous occasions, Hitler did violate his prior peace agreements with all the states of Europe, a move that the major powers of the region ignored for some time due to their policy of appeasement.

Each person has a set of goals that are the compass of his existence. Here, each of the two leaders that two different sets of goals, but their end goal was the same, which was the greatness of the state of Germany. Bismarck was a progressive statesman in Prussia at the time when the united state of Germany did not exist. The principle policy of this focus was only to unite all the German states, except those led by Austria, and form the united state of Germany. Keeping the extreme focus on this goal, he was willing to implement any required domestic policy. He was also willing to go on the battlefield with powerful opponent nations, often multiple times, sacrificing almost anything in the process. Hitler, like Bismarck, was also extremely patriotic when it came to the affairs of his nation. He was wounded on the battlefield while performing his duties during the First World War, and he considered the defeat of Germany at the hands of the allied forces as the lowest point in his life. He never wanted to see Germany reduced to such a position again. According to his intellect, this was only possible by dominating all the areas of the former Holy Roman Empire, known in the history books as the First Reich. For this aim, he violated every treaty done at the of the First World War, sacrificed millions of his fellow countrymen in the course of the Second World War. He also killed millions of Jews and other undesirables in designated concentration camps in the name of purification of the Aryan German Race (Arnett). Again, there is an observable difference between the policies of Bismarck and Hitler on these points. It can be observed that Bismarck's goal was a reasonable one, and as soon as he had achieved it, he started to work for the internal stability of the Germans through other means. On the contrary, the behavior of Hitler shows that his goals were unreasonable. He wanted to take control of entire continental Europe, for which used several shocking and outrageous means in the course of achieving this goal, which includes blood purges, his war against the Allied nations, and his murders of millions of undesirables he deemed useless in the German society.

A question might arise from these points is that how Bismarck might have reacted if he was in the Fuhrer instead of Hitler. First, he would have only concentrated on uniting Germany and fighting Communism. The genocide of Jews and Undesirables might not have been on his list unless they were a challenge to his rule. Second, he would have not engaged in entire Europe at once, especially the states of France and the Soviet Union. He would have tried to ally with at least one of them. Bismarck knew that Germany could not stand against a combination of the three other European powers of his time - France, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. In his time, he created a system of alliances that kept the other powers from uniting against Germany. Third, if at some point, the Iron Chancellor had felt that there was an opening to destroy communism in Europe, he would have maneuvered Stalin into declaring war, causing a carefully constructed anti-communist alliance with France as there was no third power in Europe as Austria-Hungary was at his time.

In short, we can conclude that Bismarck and Hitler were similar in many ways. These political and sociological aims, and the reasons for such aims, and the methods used to achieve them were similar. They had a varying degree of morals when it came to the achievement of their goals for the sake of strengthening their nation. Their difference seems relatively minor but they were the deciding factor of their places in the pages of history. But these differences are to be noted sternly, as these were the reason the course of history of Germany was shaped in their subsequent years. Even, if their places were exchanges in their moments in time, there is no doubt that the entire course of world history might have been different.

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