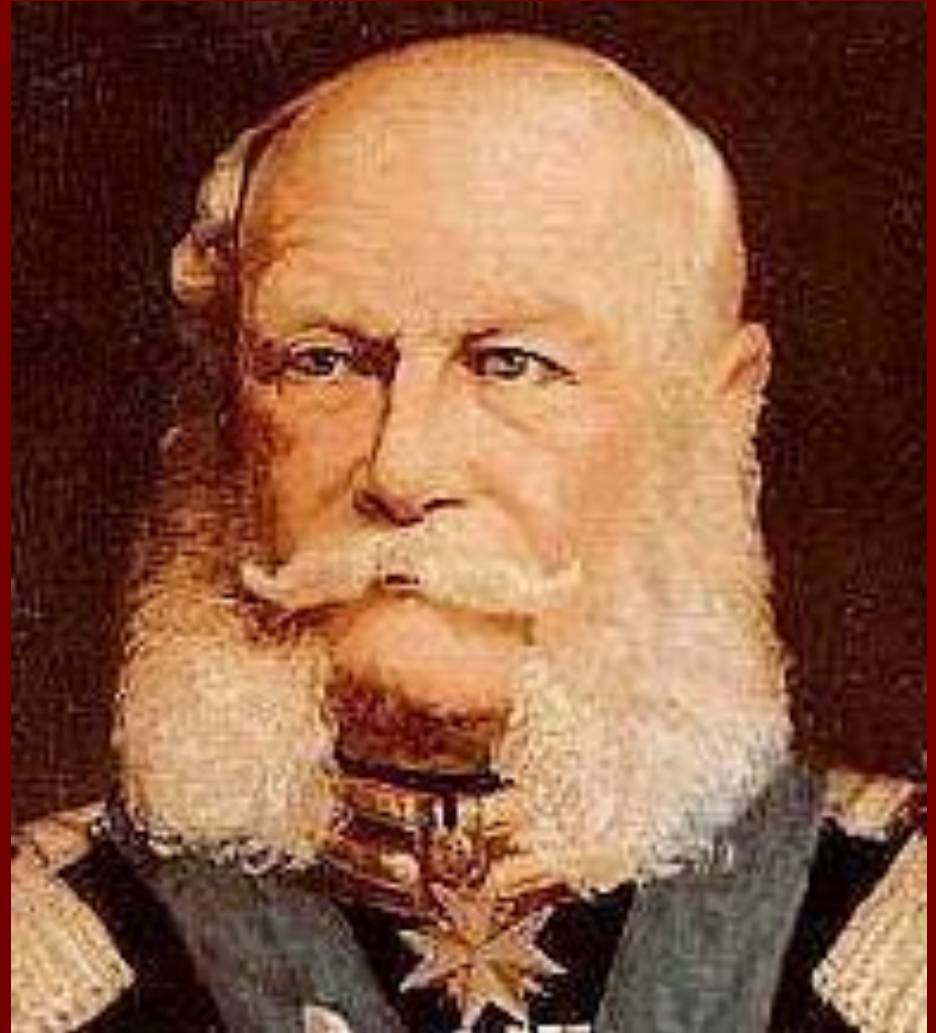


Otto von Bismarck

1862

New era: Wilhelm I

- 1858, FWIV declared insane – brother Wilhelm ruled as regent and succeeded in 1861
- Came to power at 63, ruled for 27 years until he died at 90!!



Wilhelm's attitudes

- Believed in DRoK
- Dismissed the reforming Manteuffel, replaced him with a government of mainly conservatives
- National / liberal agenda abandoned and followed a deeply conservative programme

Success for the liberals

- Elections to the Prussian Assembly were held in 1858 for the first time in 8 years (Wilhelm needed them to agree a new military budget)
- The liberals did very well and began granting new freedoms – this led some to speak of a 'new era'
- Various liberal groups formed the new Progressive Party and in the elections of December 1861, they became the largest party

Wilhelm's policies

- Reform the army by downgrading the *landwehr* (people's militia) in favour of the professional army run by the aristocracy.
- Made Albrecht Theodor von Roon responsible.



Constitutional Crisis I

■ Von Roon's plans:

- Increase annual intake of regular army from 40K to 63K per year
- Eventually double its size by creating 39 new regiments
- Massively increase military budget
- Increase period of service from 2 to 3 years
- Reduce power of the m/c *landwehr*

These plans came up against stiff opposition from liberals. They feared that the regular army could be relied upon to shoot dead not just Frenchmen, but Prussians! (e.g. Berlin, 1848)

Constitutional Crisis II

- Standoff in December 1861
- Von Roon (monarchy) vs Progressive Party (parliament)
- THINK – why did von Roon need parliament's support?
- Wilhelm called another election in May 1862 as von Roon pressed ahead with his plans. But in this election the Progressive Party increased their majority.

- Wilhelm contemplated abdication in the summer of 1862, fearing civil war
- But on advice from von Roon, he appointed Otto von Bismarck as Chief Minister in September 1862 to resolve the crisis.

