



Still-born change that created the space for Bismarck. Friedrich Wilhelm IV receives a deputation from the National Assembly, April 1849

mark him out for a successful political career in Prussia.

But significantly Bismarck squandered the opportunities conferred on him by his birth, background and education and he never achieved power by the traditional route. Sent away to school at an early age, he never made the most of his education and although he passed his exams he wasted much of his time at university. He exploited his mother's contacts and joined the Prussian civil service in 1836, but he found life as a lowly bureaucrat intolerable. He hated being told what to do and eventually left in 1838, famously remarking that he wanted to make his own music rather than play a small part in an orchestra. Drawn to country pursuits, he spent most of the 1840s on his family's estates, trying to make them more profitable so that he could pay off all the debts he had accumulated from drinking, gambling and running after women. He obviously still harboured political ambitions, however, because he tried joining the civil service again in 1844. But this attempt lasted only a few weeks before he gave up again. He did not have the temperament to work in the bureaucracy. And in Prussia before the revolution of 1848 it was only through a career in the state service that a man could eventually expect to rise - through long years of dutiful service rather than political talent - to power and influence in the state.

The impact of revolution

Although it was perhaps not apparent at the time, the European revolutions of 1848 were to be a crucial turning-point in Bismarck's political fortunes. The revolutions have often been seen as failures by historians

because many of the reforms they heralded were later retracted once the old rulers were firmly back in control. But the revolution in Berlin in March 1848 transformed the political landscape in Prussia and there was no complete return to how things had been before it broke out. Bismarck was very hostile to the revolution in 1848 but he benefited greatly from the new political conditions and opportunities the revolution brought about.

The revolution provided an enormous boost to Bismarck's political ambitions. On the eve of the revolution he had begun to meet socially with an influential circle of friends who introduced him to Ludwig von Gerlach, the brother of the King's adjutant-general. The Gerlach brothers played an important role in encouraging and promoting Bismarck's early political career, especially once the revolution broke out. Bismarck moved to Berlin in 1848 and he became, in effect, a new kind of professional politician. He helped to set up conservative political associations and a conservative newspaper, the *Kreuzzeitung*, with the aim of mobilising popular support against the revolution. He also proved his worth throughout the revolutionary turmoil as an effective parliamentary speaker. He sat in several elected assemblies including the Erfurt parliament of 1850 which discussed what he saw as highly irresponsible plans to create a united Germany that excluded Austria. Bismarck's energy and his uncompromising political views attracted notice in 1848. In particular, they won him the gratitude of the monarchy and its supporters for his services on behalf of the counter-revolution. In 1851, Bismarck was catapulted over the obstacles that had previously blocked his political career. He was appointed Prussian minister to