Banned, Not Silenced

How Germany's socialists endured a government crackdown

TOT.C.2.1.A "Germany's Social Democratic Party and anti-socialist laws,"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways the government tried to weaken socialism, and circle two details showing how socialists continued to take part in politics.

The Law That Could Not Stop a Party

1 In 1875, two German workers' parties united to form the Socialist Workers' Party, the forerunner of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). It called for political rights and changes that would give workers more power. Factory workers faced long hours and dangerous conditions, so its message drew support. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck feared that socialism threatened the German Empire's existing order. After two separate attempts to kill Emperor Wilhelm I in 1878, Bismarck blamed socialists, although the party was not shown to be responsible.

2 In 1878, the German parliament passed the Anti-Socialist Law. It banned socialist meetings, organizations, and newspapers. Police could break up gatherings and seize publications, making it hard for activists to organize openly. The law did not ban socialists from running for seats in the Reichstag, Germany's national parliament. Socialist candidates therefore kept campaigning, often as individuals rather than as representatives of a legal party organization. Lawmakers renewed the law several times, keeping these restrictions in place until 1890.

3 The crackdown did not end support for the movement. Socialist candidates won more votes over time, even while meetings and newspapers faced bans. Bismarck also backed sickness, accident, and old-age insurance programs, partly to draw workers away from socialism. In 1890, lawmakers declined to renew the Anti-Socialist Law. That year, the movement adopted the name Social Democratic Party of Germany. Its survival shows a limit of the crackdown: stopping party organizations and publications did not stop workers from choosing socialist candidates at the polls.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did Bismarck want to weaken the socialist movement?

2. How did the Anti-Socialist Law make organizing difficult?

3. Why could socialist candidates still campaign under the law?

4. How were Bismarck's insurance programs meant to weaken socialism differently from the law?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum visitor claims, "The 1878 law ended Germany's socialist movement." Write a three-sentence reply that evaluates the claim using the movement's election results and what happened in 1890.

ANSWER KEY # Banned, Not Silenced

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways the government tried to weaken socialism, and circle two details showing how socialists continued to take part in politics. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did Bismarck want to weaken the socialist movement?	**He feared socialism threatened the German Empire's existing order.**
2	How did the Anti-Socialist Law make organizing difficult?	**It banned socialist meetings, organizations, and newspapers, allowing police to break up gatherings and seize publications.**
3	Why could socialist candidates still campaign under the law?	**The law restricted socialist organizations but did not ban socialists from running for Reichstag seats.**
4	How were Bismarck's insurance programs meant to weaken socialism differently from the law?	**The programs offered workers benefits to draw them away from socialism, while the law restricted socialist activity.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

That claim is false because socialist candidates won more votes over time despite the restrictions. The law expired in 1890 when lawmakers declined to renew it. That same year, the movement took the name Social Democratic Party of Germany, showing that it had survived.

Accept replies that reject the claim using both growing electoral support and the movement's continued existence in 1890. Students need not give vote totals.