To what extent was Germany a parliamentary democracy in the years 1900-1914?

Intro:

Define democracy – 'a democratic system of government in which the party with the highest amount of support from the electorate becomes the executive, representing the opinions of the majority.'

Significant pressure group activity and universal suffrage was present

Initial argument – During this time Germany had aspects which attempted to represent democracy and in some ways it was more advanced than Britain for example with universal suffrage, however there were many contrasting elements to this which suggest that Germany failed to become a true democracy during 1900-1914.

Paragraph 1: - Democracy

1903 election – the SPD and the Centre parties gain more power and the Kaiser could have dissolved them in order to show autocracy, but he did not do so.

1908 Daily Telegraph Affair – After the Kaiser came into conflict with the Reichstag by making a comment to Britain about foreign policy that he had no discussed with them first, he used Bulow as a scapegoat, blaming his errors on him. If the Kaiser was truly autocratic this would not have been a necessary movement.

1911, New Constitution for Alsace-Lorraine – gave some regional autonomy, own flag and national anthem – Kaiser giving away power?

1912 election – power given back to the SPDs and the Kaiser permits it to happen, despite what happened at the 1906 Herero Uprising.

Paragraph 2: - Autocracy

Prussian three class franchise voting system – Introduced by Wilhelm IV in 1849

1909 – Bulow proposes tax reforms – the Kaiser dismisses him as a result – shows that the Kaiser was able to dismiss whoever he wishes.

1906 Herero Uprising – Kaiser dissolves the Centre and SPD party who went against him.

1913 Army Bill – the SPD now feared the Kaiser’s power so voted for the bill rather than against it.

1913 Zabern Affair – vote of no confidence in Bethmann-Hollweg however the Kaiser ignores it.

Paragraph 3: - Role of Bismark

Wanted the cooperation of the Reichstag in order to pass legislation however at the same time continued to limit their status and importance in order to restrict their influence.

Bismark knew that universal suffrage would project the idea of parliamentary democracy and preserve stability within the newly unified Germany – more a smoke screen to hide the true corruption of the political system. Another method of doing this were the laws to improve welfare:

1900 Accident and Invalidity Law
1903 Sickness Insurance Law
1908 Working Hours Law