PART II
DEMOCRATIC ELITISM: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES
Few of Max Weber’s theoretical propositions were as topical and as intended to influence the course of political and social developments in late Wilhelminian Germany as was his concept of leader democracy, which later evolved into the theory of democratic elitism (Mommsen 1959; Mommsen 1984; Mommsen 1988; Beetham 1985:95–118, 215–249). Germany’s leadership, like the leaderships of other European powers in Weber’s time, was confronted by two main challenges: pacifying a highly unequal class society under the growing pressures of mass mobilization, and securing a leading position in the struggle for supremacy in Europe and beyond. Home of what was by far the largest and strongest socialist party in pre-WWI Europe, a late-comer to great power status, and wedged in a precarious geopolitical position between mighty competitors, Germany and its leaders faced challenges that were especially acute. The Wilhelminian regime’s response was to curb the influence of the democratically elected Reichstag by averting, in particular, its influence in the filling of government posts so that this prerogative would remain exclusively with the Kaiser and the Chancellor. The stipulation in Bismarck’s Imperial constitution that forbade Reichstag membership and the simultaneous holding of a government post was only changed in a last-minute attempt at reform a few weeks before the constitution became obsolete with the November Revolution of 1918 (Wehler 1995; Best et al. 2000).

The erratic course of Wilhelm II’s personal rule (Persönliches Regiment) and its counter-productive consequences for Germany’s external status and internal stability were subject to harsh contemporary criticism. Despite this criticism, there was always some open and much tacit support for monarchical rule – even among prominent liberals like Otto Hintze (1911; Best 1989). Concentrating state power in the hands of a strong monarch and separating that power from the