Bismarck's policy against the Guelphs was not only successful in his struggle against the royal family and in winning the allegiance of a large majority of the Hanoverian population, but the situation also allowed him to come into possession of a fortune which he used against Guelph particularism as well as to strengthen the Reich against other anti-national forces. In this sense the Guelph affair affected many more aspects of political life than were ever dreamed of in 1869 when the sequestration order went into effect, for it demonstrated the manner in which Bismarck utilized the opportunities afforded him in a given situation to the advantage of his overall policy.

As we have seen, the Fund had been created from money accruing on the sequestered possessions of King George. The principal in this Fund was kept intact, but the interest could be withdrawn and used to combat Guelph agitation. The interest, which continued to grow annually, was placed with the capital in a special fund known as the Guelph Fund (Welfenfonds). There was also another name for this Fund, derived from a remark which Bismarck made in the Landtag. On January 30, 1869, in one of his speeches calling for the sequestration of the property of the deposed princes, Bismarck had stated that he would drive these "reptiles" into their very holes. There were objections, however, to his application of the term reptile to the Guelphs. For example, Ludwig von Gerlach, one of the founders of the Prussian Conservative Party, recorded in his diary on March 1 that his nephew Friedrich was very indignant that Bismarck had used such a name for royalty and cousins of the Prussian royal family. But continued Guelph opposition to the annexation caused Bismarck to refer

1 See Chapter III.
2 Bismarck, Reden, IV, 131. 41st Session of the Prussian House of Deputies, January 30, 1869.
to their persistent activities with contempt. Later on, Bismarck's opponents applied the word *reptile* to those journalists who were paid out of the Guelph Fund by the Prussian Government. Thus, the Guelph money which Bismarck had at his command became popularly known as the "Reptile Fund."  

After 1869 rumors about the Fund and its uses seemed to associate it more readily with its less official name. No one knew exactly how much was spent to prevent the Guelphs from continuing their plottings. The Landtag was given no list of the purposes for which the money had been expended. It was in such an atmosphere that rumors were created that Bismarck was using the money not only to combat the Guelphs but also for secret political purposes which were not connected with the Guelph problem. While Bismarck was in office nothing was definitely proved about the illegal use of the Fund. Since then, historians have varied in their interpretations of the significance of this Fund. Even today there is a difference of opinion. Ludwig Reiners in his book *Bismarck* states that the Fund did not merit the notoriety it received. Only part of the interest on the Guelph possessions, says Reiners, was ever used for "secret purposes." The great majority of it was used for construction of buildings in Hanover. Compared to the amounts of money spent by other nations for secret journalistic purposes, this Fund was a small item. A. J. P. Taylor also adopts this attitude by comparing the notoriety which the Fund received to that of the British secret service fund in the eighteenth century.

The parallel supplies a useful warning. Our historians now regard the secret service fund as more of a myth than a reality; and the "reptile fund" was much the same. These interpretations which de-emphasize the uses of the Fund are countered by historians such as Erich Eyck and Otto Becker. Eyck states that the yearly amount put at Bismarck's disposal for secret political purposes was far in excess of 600,000 marks. He stresses that this was used for whatever Bismarck desired. Only a small part of this sum was ever used against the Guelphs, especially after the end of the Legion in 1870, while most of this money was used for purposes such as bribing the German press. Becker, in his massive book on Bismarck's politics, also treats the Fund as a source for political bribes.

---

8 Becker, pp. 796-797.