Breslau in the German Empire, 1871-1918

The German Empire, established through the force of Prussian-led armies, was proclaimed at Versailles in a defeated France in January 1871. It was to experience phenomenal economic and demographic growth, outstripping its rivals, like Great Britain, in many sectors of production and showing an almost 50 per cent growth in population in its first three decades. Seemingly unperturbed by its social and political stresses, the German Empire exuded an unshakeable belief in its own strength. Yet, trapped between a vengeful France and an expansive Russia, it was vulnerable to the international turbulence of the era. Despite more than a generation of peace, it plunged, by the deliberate choice of its leaders, into the maelstrom of the First World War.

The Empire proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors was not a unitary state. In theory, at least, it was a voluntary association of twenty-five rulers, including four kings, eight princes, six grand-dukes, four dukes and three senators of the free cities. The King of Prussia, who assumed the mantle of Emperor, was merely the first among (nominal) equals. Under this federal system the imperial government in Berlin assumed responsibility for defence, foreign affairs, customs, currency, banking and the criminal and civil codes, while the individual state governments retained control of education, agriculture, justice, religious affairs and local government. The remnants of provincial sovereignty produced some interesting peculiarities. Saxony, Bavaria and Württemberg, for example, all maintained their own diplomatic missions at Vienna, St Petersburg and the Vatican until 1914.

Any residual feeling of independence in the member states was, however, illusory. The German political system was based on the power of Prussia. By far the largest state, with more than 60 per cent of the population, and hosting the imperial capital, Berlin, Prussia dominated from the start. The imperial constitution, drawn up by the Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, enshrined Prussian supremacy. In the Upper House, the Bundesrat, where representatives of the states met to discuss common action, Prussia (with seventeen out of fifty-eight votes), played the key role. Given that meetings were invariably held in private and in the presence of the Emperor or Chancellor, few representatives of the other states would oppose Prussian proposals. The office of imperial Chancellor also derived its importance from being held in tandem with the Minister-President of Prussia. ‘Imperial policy was in effect Prussian policy writ large.

Moreover, despite the existence of various democratic bodies, the system as a whole was not subject to democratic accountability. The Lower House, or Reichstag, was elected via a free ballot and on the basis of universal male suffrage. As such, it developed a genuine popular legitimacy, yet it was politically rather emasculated. It only rarely initiated legislation and imperial Ministers were not even required to appear before it or to answer its members’ questions. It had been deliberately starved of power. But the complaint voiced by the Socialist Karl Liebknecht, that it merely served as a ‘fig leaf to cover the nakedness of absolutism’, is exaggerated. In practice, if not in theory, the Reichstag had a role to play. Though its remit was limited, it was empowered to discuss all aspects of German legislation, including the annual budget. Even the Chancellor was to some extent dependent on its good will. Though he could only be appointed or dismissed by the Emperor, he relied for the success of his programme on the cooperation and support of the Reichstag. All imperial Chancellors except one were obliged to resign when they lost that support.

The place of Silesia and Breslau in this constellation was relatively simple. As an integral part of the Kingdom of Prussia, Silesia was divided into thirty-four constituencies returning members to the imperial Reichstag. Its capital city yielded two: Breslau East and Breslau West. It was also represented, as previously, with sixty-five seats in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies (Abgeordnetenhaus). That body was elected, not by universal male suffrage, but rather by the so-called 'three-class franchise’ (see pages 254-5), thereby perpetuating the conservative character of the Prussian administration.

Initially, amid the enthusiasm of a victorious war and the unification of Germany, the peculiarities of the imperial constitution were ignored or overlooked. The Emperor’s new subjects were enthused by the new state. The early years of the Empire, known as the Gründerzeit, or 'Time of Foundation', were characterised by rapid economic growth and a speculative boom. New businesses sprang up, railways and public works proliferated. Their proprietors' elegant new villas vied for space on the fashionable boulevards with the newimar the enthusiasm of a victorious war and the unification of Germany, the peculiarities of the imperial constitution were ignored or overlooked. The Emperor’s new subjects were enthused by the new state. The early years of the Empire, known as the Gründerzeit, or 'Time of Foundation', were characterised by rapid economic growth and a speculative boom. New businesses sprang up, railways and public works proliferated. Their proprietors' elegant new villas vied for space on the fashionable boulevards with the new
with the conflict known as the *Kulturkampf*.  
In essence, the *Kulturkampf* was a political conflict over the influence of Catholicism and of the Catholic states within the Empire. Bismarck viewed the supranational allegiances of Roman Catholics with suspicion, especially after the promulgation of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility in 1870. And he was especially worried by the (Catholic) Centre Party, which had been founded the same year and which soon became the second largest party in the Reichstag, attracting many of the Empire's opponents. His initial legislation was intended merely to clarify spheres of influence. But from 1872, Bismarck sought to subordinate the Catholic Church to the state.  
The main body of *Kulturkampf* legislation was drawn up by Adalbert Falk, Prussia's Breslau-educated Minister of Culture. The May Laws of 1873 stipulated a university education for all candidates for the priesthood, subjected all appointments to an examination (*Kulturexamen*) and hence to a state veto, and suspended subsidies in dioceses where the measures were resisted. They provoked a papal encyclical declaring the measures invalid and punishing compliance with excommunication, but the power of the state outweighed that of the Papacy. By 1876, the imprisonment or expulsion of disobedient clergy had left almost one-third of Prussia's Catholic parishes without an incumbent.  
Due to its Catholic majority, the province of Silesia was profoundly affected by the *Kulturkampf*. The attempts of the Prince-Bishop of Breslau, Heinrich Forster (1799-1881), to resist resulted in personal fines, the freezing of his income and, in 1875, his deposition. He was forced to retire to Jauernig in Austrian Silesia, which, though part of his diocese, lay beyond the borders of Germany. The initiator of the legislation, Dr Adalbert Falk, was his godson.  
Though Forster's successors did much to repair Church-state relations, the *Kulturkampf* was to have lingering effects, especially in Upper Silesia, where the Catholic population represented 88 per cent of the total and was mainly Polish to boot. It served to galvanise the very forces that it had sought to suppress. In 1871, only half of Germany's Catholic electorate had voted for the Centre Party, giving it 18 per cent of the vote. Three years later, the Centre Party vote had risen to 28 per cent. In Upper Silesia where only one of twelve constituencies had returned a Centre Party candidate in 1871, all twelve returned Centre Party members to the Reichstag a decade later. Over the same period, the proportion of the Centre Party vote in Silesia as a whole rose from 17.7 to 41.9 per cent. The government in Berlin was reaping a harvest of its own making.  
As the *Kulturkampf* was drawing to a close, Socialism began to occupy Bismarck's mind. The SPD (Social Democratic Party) was on the rise. After gaining only two seats in 1871, it had gained twelve six years later, with 9 per cent of the vote. After two assassination attempts were made on the Emperor, the new creed's supposed threat to social order was thought to be manifest. The resultant anti-Socialist legislation of 1878 was a curious mixture of coercion and latitude. In a raft of laws, Socialist meetings, Socialist societies and Socialist publications were forbidden, and the authorities were granted special powers to deal with Socialist agitation. Yet Socialists could still stand for election and speak freely in the Reichstag. In the 1880s, further measures were introduced. Known as 'state Socialism'; they included free medical treatment, accident and sickness insurance and state pensions. Such schemes had been planned since the 1850s, and their introduction can be seen as an attempt to wean the working class away from revolutionary Socialism.  
Though Bismarck created the first comprehensive welfare system in Europe, his ulterior motive of undermining political Socialism was not achieved. Indeed, as with the *Kulturkampf*, his efforts were largely counterproductive. The Socialist vote fell in 1878, but rose again in 1884, yielding twenty-four seats in the Reichstag. Moreover, far from being crushed, the movement went underground, becoming better disciplined and better organised. In the Gotha Programme of 1875, it successfully reconciled the two rival factions of Lassallians and Marxists. In Silesia, the SPD vote rose from 0.6 per cent in 1871 to 11.7 per cent in 1890. Breslau returned its first SPD MP in 1878 before emerging as a long-standing bastion of Social Democracy. On the eve of the First World War, Breslau and Liegnitz (Legnica) both returned SPD votes of more than 35 per cent, while that of Silesia as a whole reached nearly 28 per cent.  
The Bismarckian era cannot be considered an unmitigated success. Outwardly, the new Germany went from strength to strength; inwardly, it was faltering. Bismarck's heavy-handed methods had alienated both the working class and many Catholics, while his pseudo-democratic constitutional system had hampered Germany's political growth. More ominously, his removal in March 1890 left his creation in the hands of elements all too ready to use an aggressive foreign policy to distract internal dissent.  
Meanwhile, the ship of state sailed on without its pilot. The conciliatory instincts of the new Chancellor, Leo Caprivi (1831-99), extended the social-welfare system and allowed the anti-Socialist legislation to lapse. The later Biiłow government of 1900-9 continued the conciliatory trend by forming a pro-government bloc of parties in the Reichstag. Such moves contributed to a growth in the importance of the Reichstag and to the tentative emergence of a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, constitutionalism. At the same time, more sinister forces were ever more openly at work.  
German nationalism became a mass creed in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In a sense, it was necessary to overcome strong regional differences and the federalism of the constitution. But it emerged in a form
that depreciated the older Saxon, Prussian or Hanoverian identities and it possessed a particularly ebullient, boisterous, even vulgar flavour:

> Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?
> Ist's Preussenland? Ist's Schwabenland?
> Ist's, wo am Rhein die Rebe blüht?
> O nein, nein, nein!
> Sein Vaterland muss grosser sein,
> Sein Vaterland muss grosser sein . . .
> Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?
> So nenne endlich mir das Land.
> 'So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt
> Und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt,'
> Das soil es sein, das soil es sein!
> Das, wacker Deutscher, nenne dein,
> Das nenne dein."

(What is the German's Fatherland?
Is it Swabia, or the Prussian land?
Is it the Rhine where the sweet vine blooms?
Or on the Belt, where the seagull swoops?
Oh, no, no, no!
His Fatherland must greater be,
His Fatherland must greater be . . .
What is the German's Fatherland?
Won't you tell me where it can be found?
'As far as the German tongue resounds
And hymns to God in Heaven abound'
That shall it be. That shall it be!
That, bold German,
Is the land for thee!)

Such patriotic songs were very much in fashion. By 1890, the Deutschland-lied, which had begun to evoke similar sentiments, had been officially adopted as a national anthem; all the basic emblems of German nationality - flag, anthem and currency - were now in place. In some quarters, the growing nationalism spilled over into chauvinism.

The Alldeutscher Verband (ADV), or Pan-German League, was founded in 1891 to promote Germany's 'national-imperial mission'. Though modest in size, it was perhaps the most strident of the nationalist organisations. Concerned mainly with political lobbying and nationalist 'philanthropy', such as the provision of libraries and book clubs, it was relatively weak in conservative eastern Germany, where the colonial question was hardly to the fore. Nevertheless, Breslau was numbered among the three active ADV chapters east of Berlin and hosted the organisation's general meeting in September 1913. Like other such groups, the ADV enjoyed a schizophrenic relationship with central government. Though its extremists were a thorn in the side of responsible politicians, they enabled the German government to pose as the voice of moderation. Their usefulness was acknowledged by an official of the Wilhelmsstrasse, who, paraphrasing Voltaire, said, 'if the Pan-German League did not exist, we would have to invent it'.

The Deutscher Ostmarkenverein (DOV), or German Society for the Eastern Marches, was of particular relevance to the eastern provinces of Prussia. Known colloquially as the Hakata, after its three founders: Hansemann, Kennemann and Tiedemann, it was established in 1894 in reaction to Caprivi's conciliatory policy towards Prussia's Polish community. Despite the violence of its rhetoric, it strictly disclaimed any aggressive designs and preferred to see itself as a club for 'Teutonic Knights in frock coats'. Yet its goal was to promote German resettlement, to strengthen German cultural and economic interests and to undermine the historic Polish population of the East. (Since it was convinced that all parts of Prussia were German by right, it complained of 'Polonisation', as if it were the German element that was under attack.) Though concentrating its efforts in Posnania, it found a great deal of support in Silesia. By 1914, Silesia could count some 12,000 Hakata activists; and Breslau maintained a regional secretariat, run by the brothers Fritz and Kurt Vossberg. Under their efforts, impressive growth was achieved, and a measure of autonomy was gained from the headquarters in Berlin. Felix Dahn, popular novelist and Rector of Breslau University (see below), became a renowned speaker at Hakata events. But his success was limited. By 1906, it was noted with alarm that neither the landowners nor the working classes were being attracted. In the ensuing campaign, the movement began to concentrate on the Upper Silesian question and found impressive support there.

Somewhat predictably, national consciousness spread among the Poles in proportion to the restrictions imposed upon them. From 1873, strict limitations had been imposed on the use of the Polish language in Prussia's eastern provinces and a state policy had been introduced of purchasing Polish-owned estates for German settlers. In response, a highly effective Polish national movement had organised itself, aided by a Polish-language press. By the turn of the century, Polish and German nationalism were at loggerheads. Some Germans tended to view the Poles as indolent and untrustworthy and to talk condescendingly of 'making human beings out of them'. For their part, the
Poles of Prussia watched it change from a haven of relative tranquillity into an oppressor that rivalled Russia. They became famous among Poles elsewhere for their supposedly German characteristics of efficiency, meanness and national assertiveness. In Great Poland, in particular, they beat the German nationalists at their own game, actually increasing their share of landed property and greatly strengthening Polish cultural activities. From 1904, they launched a series of ‘school strikes’ in protest against the Germanisation of Polish children.

By that time, Germany had become the single most powerful European state. It stretched for more than 1,280 kilometres, from Metz to Memel on the Russian border, and from Emden on the North Sea to Pless (Pszczyna) in the environs of Cracow. Its 65 million population was Europe’s most productive, yielding more than 18 million tonnes of steel and 280 million tonnes of coal per annum. The state created by Bismarck in 1871 had been consolidated and nurtured through two generations and now stood at its height. Yet behind the brilliant facade, dark problems festered. Its political system had been explicitly crafted to preserve the influence of the old elites and to exclude genuine mass participation, and it was peculiarly resistant to change. In foreign affairs, its demands for ‘a place in the sun’ had led to a programme of armament and colonial expansion, which served only to antagonise its European neighbours. Its Emperor, William, was a manic-depressive with an inferiority complex, whose ill-judged speeches and tactless asides caused consternation both at home and abroad. In the prelude to war, Germany’s unbridled ambition added a dangerous ingredient to an international crisis marked on all sides by a fatal mixture of pride and complacency. The assassination at Sarajevo of the Austrian Crown Prince, Franz Ferdinand, provided the spark that ignited the fuse. A flurry of mobilisations and declarations of war came hard on its heels.

Challenged in both east and west, the German military had put their faith in the so-called Schlieffen Plan. As Chief of the General Staff before 1905, Alfred von Schlieffen (1833-1913) had been charged with drawing up Military preparations for the expected war. He envisaged a swift victory against France, necessitating a rapid sweep through Luxemburg, Belgium and Holland. This would be followed by the rapid transfer of Germany’s triumphant forces from west to east for a concentrated offensive against Russia. In this way, it was thought, the nightmare scenario of a drawn-out, two-front war could be avoided. But it was not.

At the turn of the century, Germany was drawn into Europe’s growing international crisis. From Berlin’s viewpoint, the Franco-Russian Alliance had put Germany at a distinct disadvantage and the only prudent response was to exploit the Empire’s new-found industrial might and to launch a major programme of naval and military armament. Breslau, like all cities, was deeply involved, not least in the expansion of heavy industry. But two symbolic moments signalled her involvement. Firstly, in 1911, a fast modern cruiser was named the Breslau in her honour; it would number the later Grand Admiral Karl Donitz among its crew and would be instrumental in bringing the Ottoman Empire into the First World War. Secondly, in September 1906 Breslau was chosen as the headquarters for the annual manoeuvres of the imperial army.

Breslau’s preparations for war began in the autumn of 1912. Materials were assembled for withstanding a siege and plans drawn up to support a minimum of 390,000 people. The state-financed Kriegsverein, or ‘War Club’, and Spiel und Sportverein, or ‘Games and Sports Club’, sought to raise physical and ideological fitness. In 1913, on the centenary of the War of Liberation, a huge propaganda campaign was launched to encourage patriotic enthusiasm. The Kaiser himself
attended the VI Army Corps' autumn manoeuvres.

In July 1914, news of the assassination in Sarajevo repeatedly brought Breslau's students on to the streets in support of their Austro-Hungarian ally. On 1 August, the University Rector, the historian Professor G. Kaufmann, summoned a meeting in the Aula Leopoldina to say farewell to staff and students who were leaving to join the colours. War was being imposed on Germany as it had been in 1870, he said, but he believed in the strength of German youth. He was answered by lusty cries of 'Burschen herauf!'.

In August 1914, the bulk of German forces, including the VI Army Corps based in Breslau, were sent to confront the French and British armies on the Western Front. They enjoyed some successes, notably the surprise attack on Liège and the battle of the Marne, which almost brought them within sight of Paris. But the line held, and the German advance was halted. In mid-September, German forces fell back to the line of the Aisne. The Schlieffen Plan was abandoned, together with all hopes for a rapid conclusion to the war.

The end of the German western offensive left Prussia's eastern provinces dangerously exposed. In Breslau, which was one of the primary targets of a Russian advance, fear was heightened by the absence of the VI Army Corps, and by rumours that the Russian General Staff was about to force the Lower Silesian border. As the French Ambassador in Petrograd reported, 'The Grand Duke [Nicholas] is determined to advance with full speed on Berlin and Vienna, more especially Berlin, passing between the fortresses of Thorn, Posen and Breslau.' The scare led to the erection of barbed wire defences to the east of the city and the evacuation of Silesian children to less threatened areas. In the winter of 1914-15, the Russian army camped barely eighty kilometres to the east of Breslau in the direction of Lodz and, to the south, reached the outskirts of Cracow. German frontier positions were strengthened by a rapidly created Silesian Landwehr under General Remus von Woyrsch, which, together with Austrian units, faced down the superior Russian forces throughout that first winter. A solitary thrust towards Breslau in mid-December 1914 hinted that the offensive was about to start. But the threat was effectively removed by the German victories at the Masurian Lakes in September 1914 and, above all, at Gorlice in Galicia in August 1915. It did not recur for thirty years.

Nonetheless, Breslau still contributed greatly to the German war effort. The city garrison, incorporated into the German VI Army, had formed the 'pivot' of the Schlieffen Plan, fighting the French in the battle of the Ardennes in August 1914. It would subsequently see action at Verdun in 1916 and in the following year at Passchendaele. Another regiment from Breslau, that of the 1st Leib-Kürassiere, was engaged at the battle of the Marne in 1914, before transferring to the Eastern Front in Poland. Some 10,000 Breslauers of military age lost their lives.

Two military figures connected with Breslau deserve special mention. Manfred von Richthofen, the 'Red Baron' (1892-1918), remains one of the legendary heroes of military aviation. Born in Breslau the son of an officer, he entered the Prussian military academy in Wahlstatt (Legnickie Pole) at the age of eleven. His first love was horses: he had been a regular competitor in horse races around Breslau and served in a cavalry regiment on both fronts in 1914. The following year, he joined the nascent German air force, thereby confirming the theory - widespread at the time - that pilots were the 'cavalrymen of the air'. After only twenty-four hours' training he set off on his maiden solo flight, which finished with a crash-landing. His first 'kill' against the Royal Flying Corps came on 17 September 1916:

I was so close to my opponent that I was afraid I would ram him. Then, suddenly, his propeller stopped turning. Hit! The engine was shot up and the enemy was forced to land on our side, as it was out of the question for him to reach his own lines. I noticed the machine making swaying movements that indicated something was not quite right with the pilot. Also the observer was no longer to be seen, his machine-gun left pointing skywards. Therefore, I had hit him and he was lying on the floor of the fuselage.

In his excitement, Richthofen landed nearby and raced to the crash-site. He arrived in time to see the bodies of Flight Lieutenant L.B. Morris and Lieutenant T. Rees being pulled from the wreckage. He was to become the most successful, and probably most famous, flying ace of the First World War, with some eighty victories to his credit. Awarded the prestigious Pour le Merite or Fighter Pilot's Cross for bravery, he was appointed commander of the Jagdgeschwader 1, or Fighter Wing I, which became known in the Allied camp as the 'Richthofen Squadron'. Despite numerous injuries and the efforts of the German authorities to ground him, he continued flying. But by the final year of the war, he no longer flew with the carefree insolence of old:

I am in wretched spirits after every aerial combat . . . When I put my feet on the ground again at the aerodrome, I go directly to my four walls, I do not want to see anyone or hear anything. I believe that the war is not as the people at home imagine it, with a hurrah and a roar; it is very serious, very grim . . .

Soon afterwards, in April 1918, the 'Red Baron' was shot down and killed near Amiens. The twenty-five-year-old had fallen to a single bullet through the heart. He was buried by the British with full military honours, while an unseemly spat erupted between the Allied units claiming this most prestigious of 'kills'.

Though not originally from Silesia, the Moltke dynasty had settled near
Schweidnitz in 1867, when the Kreisau estate was granted to Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke for distinguished services during the Austro-Prussian War. The Field Marshal's nephew, also Helmuth von Moltke (1848-1916), enjoyed rapid promotion through the ranks, succeeding Schlieffen as German Chief of Staff in 1906. This time, the Moltke name belied its owner's abilities. He was blamed for fatally tinkering with Schlieffen's Plan, weakening the right wing of the German sweep through the Low Countries so as to preserve Dutch neutrality, while needlessly strengthening the German holding forces in the east. After the battle of the Marne, he suffered a nervous breakdown and was relieved of his command. He died in Berlin two years later. The family's reputation would be fully restored by his son (see below).

The wartime tribulations of Germany's civilian population were considerable. Breslau's City Council was immediately ordered to hand over to the Stellvertretende Generalkommandos der Korpsbezirke - that is, to the Regional Military Command. A curfew was introduced from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Public meetings were banned; the press was heavily censored. Almost from the outset, the British blockade led to shortages of raw materials and foodstuffs. In 1915, a domestic bloodbath mirrored the human one on the Western Front. Germany's nine million pigs were slaughtered as the country could no longer afford to feed them. Despite this, there was soon a shortage of pork. Rationing was introduced for bread, and was extended to meat, milk and butter and even to carrots and turnips. Prices rocketed: potato prices jumped by 200 per cent; eggs by 362 per cent. One of the city's two market halls was closed. Widespread food riots resulted in many cities, including Breslau. The so-called 'turnip winter' of 1916-17 heralded a further deterioration, and a failed potato crop left millions of Germans on the verge of starvation. The daily diet in Breslau in 1917 stood at 1,132 calories compared with 1,750 in Munich. Ersatz became the new watchword, with snail meat and herb tea on the menu. It was estimated, and reported by The Times in London, that the British blockade caused more than 750,000 civilian deaths in Germany. At the very end of the war, the municipal authorities of Breslau decreed capital punishment for food hoarding. Over the four years of conflict, Breslau's trade had fallen by two-thirds. Gas and electricity production fell, too. Cold and disease took their toll. Tuberculosis was rife, claiming more than 8,000 victims. The overall population dropped from 544,000 to 472,000. Russian prisoners joined the wartime landscape. The first group of about 3,500 reached Breslau in 1915 where they were put to work in the big factories. The Linke-Hofmann works benefited from more than 700 POWs.

Once the Schlieffen Plan had failed, Germany was faced with the two-front war that its statesmen and generals had so feared. Thereafter, though largely undefeated, and indeed victorious in the east, she could not realistically win the war. After the entry of the United States, the superior resources of the Entente powers took their toll. Discontent, when it came, was directed mainly at the government and the supreme command. It was also reflected in domestic politics. In 1916, the inter-party Burgfriede, or 'political truce', agreed at the onset of hostilities, crumbled. The following spring, spurred on by the fall of the Tsar, German Socialists recovered their voice. The splinter USPD, or Independent Socialists, began calling for genuine parliamentary government and for peace without annexations. One of the many defectors to the USPD was the Reichstag member for Breslau, Eduard Bernstein.

From 1915, the German conquest of Russian Poland and the restoration of the Polish kingdom under German auspices did not pass without a suitable response. Since the German authorities had permitted the celebration of Poland's National Day on 3 May 1916 in Warsaw, they could hardly prevent it a year later in Breslau. The Polish 'Sokol' Youth Movement revived. But the Commander of the VI Corps drew the line at recruiting for the Polish legions. Breslau's commercial community briefly saw prospects for eastern expansion and a special Eastern Fair was held in Scheitnig Park in August 1918. But defeat on the Western Front put an end to all such plans.

By 1918, four bitter years of war had eroded the trust between ruler and ruled. In the autumn, impending defeat in the west provided the gloomy climate for a breakdown of discipline. The revolution began in Kiel on 29 October, when naval crews mutinied. Civil unrest followed elsewhere in Germany, often inspired by military defectors. In Breslau in early November, the garrison mutinied, liberating convicts from the jails, looting numerous shops and occupying the offices of the Schlesische Zeitung in a vain attempt to influence its content. One person freed from Breslau's Kletschkau Prison was the co-founder of the German Communist Party (KPD), Roza Luksemburg (see below). On the same day as the Kiel mutiny, the Emperor left Germany, never to return. His Empire was pronounced dead.

The First World War for Germany finished in practice at the Armistice of November 1918, and in law at the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919. The feelings of humiliation were crushing. In Breslau, a series of meetings was held to remember the dead. On 16 July 1919, Professor Kaufmann, who had sent his students to the front five years earlier, joined the new Rector in saluting their sacrifice. 'The Fatherland', they said, 'will rise again to be a great power.'