Lecture 11
Prussian Poland 1848-1914

I. Introduction

Importance of the history of Prussian Poland. It was here that the national conflict became most acute, which made the area a stronghold of the Endecja. The Jews, caught between the Poles and the Germans, mostly left the province. This was seen by the Endecja as the way the Jewish question should be solved. Yet area was also the most prosperous part of Poland with the best balanced agricultural system. As the national conflict escalated, a sense of national identity began to develop in areas, like Silesia and East Prussia which had not been part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

How far is there continuity between the policies of the Prussian and German governments and those of the Nazis?

II. The Aftermath of 1848

The experience of 1848 convinced conservatives and moderates that the best course for Poland to work with confines of legality. Organic work and tri-loyalism gain wider support. In Prussian Poland, a Polish League founded August Cieszkowski in June 1848. It favoured the peaceful organisation of Polish economic strength. But its central body forbidden by Prussians in March 1850 in the reaction which followed the crushing of the revolution.
During the 1850s and 1860s, Polish issues were very much in the background of
the Prussian government’s attention. But the revolution of 1848 in the Grand Duchy of
Poznań had banished whatever doubts remained in the ministries of Berlin about the
Polish nobility and clergy. Before 1848, even so resolute an enemy of the Polish gentry
as Eduard Flottwell, Provincial President in the 1840s, believed that, given sufficient
exposure to German discipline, culture, and prosperity, they would gradually acquire a
loyal Prussian mentality. After the revolution, the Prussian government abandoned all
such hopes. The Poles, as a report of the Ministry of the Interior put it in November 1849,
were the captives of their ‘longing to break away.’ ‘They cannot be won by any
concessions’; it was therefore of no concern to the government if they felt embittered by
Prussian rule.

What then was the Prussian state to do with its Polish subjects? Provincial
President Eugen von Puttkammer provided the Prussian ministry of Baron Otto von
Manteuffel with a classic answer to this question. Of the Polish national movement
(‘Polonism’) he wrote in 1851:

It is and will remain an element hostile to the Prussian government, no matter the
form in which it may choose to appear. To conciliate it [ihn versöhnen] is
impossible. To extirpate it [ihn ausrotten] is inhumane (as well as impossible; at
least it would take generations to do so). Therefore, nothing remains but to
confine it energetically to the subordinate position it deserves.

The policy of containment and suppression of Polish nationalism which the
government adopted after 1848 implied as a corollary the necessity of the
‘Germanization’ of the Province of Poznań. In the 1850s and 1860s, the word
Germanisierung, hitherto seldom encountered in the Prussian political vocabulary,
became a routine expression of he positive content of official policy.
‘Germanization’ could, in one sense, be understood as suppression of ‘Polonism’: the more politically passive the Polish population, the more secure the province under its Prussian administration. Until 1858 the Prussian government applied its reactionary policies with special rigor to Polish political agitation, electioneering, and press and associational life. But with the opening of the ‘New Era’ in 1858 the government could not deny the Poles the civil liberties it granted its German subjects, particularly since the Progressive opposition in the parliament upheld the Poles’ equal treatment in public life as part of a more general defense of the constitutional Rechtsstaat. Before 1871 a parliamentary majority in favor of anti-Polish ‘exceptional laws’ did not exist. Moreover, the Prussian courts enforced the Poles’ rights to communicate with state agencies in their native tongue, as guaranteed in the edict of 1832, and the employment of Polish as a language of instruction in elementary education, as provided by the edict of 1842. The tools available to the government for the suppression of ‘Polonism’ were therefore limited. In its secondary-school policy, it concentrated on channeling students into new gymnasiums in which German was the predominant language of instruction, so that by 1870 only two which employed Polish to any considerable degree remained. In the field of elementary education, the Prussian government felt greatly cramped by the authority and autonomy of the Archbishopric of Poznań-Gniezno.

Official support of German interests in Poznania represented another strategy of Germanization. At this stage few government resources were put into this program. As Manteuffel put it in a Landtag debate of 1850; ‘If the German nationality requires the protection and leadership of the state administration to advance its interests, then it has no future ahead of it.’ It was above all by denying Polish landowners credit, which was
general practice until 1858, that the government attempted to advance German economic interests. Many Polish estates were thus sold and, the German share of the province’s estate land expanded by more than 100,000 hectares between 1848 and 1861.

III. Bismarck and the Poles

1. Introduction: The Bismarckian Reich

Bismarck’s unification of Germany by means of military force created a new situation for Prussian Poland. His violent methods created a German national state, fatefully wedded to the semi-absolute Prussian monarchy which dominated it. Yet by establishing the Empire against the opposition of Prussian agrarian and German particularist conservatism, he ran the risk after 1871 of falling into dependence on the moderate National Liberal Party and the more doctrinaire German Progressive Party, the pillars of middle-class liberalism and nationalism. At the same time, he was determined to diminish the influences of what he conceived to be the anti-Prussian forces of German Catholicism, represented by the Catholic Center Party and was compelled to rely upon the liberal parties in the anti-Catholic Kulturkampf of the 1870s. The liberals hoped that this alliance would transform the Imperial government into a ministry responsible to the Reichstag, but Bismarck evaded this outcome in the ‘refounding’ of the Empire in 1878-79. The conservative parties joined in a pro-Bismarckian alliance with the National Liberal Party. The bases of this alliance were support of agrarian and industrial tariffs as defenses against the ‘long depression’ which had begun in 1873, opposition to
parliamentarization of the Reich, and support for the proscription (1878-90) of the nascent but burgeoning socialist movement in Germany. In the 1880s, Bismarck added a new dimension to this alliance by official promotion of overseas expansion. He sought both to ensure foreign trade outlets for German industry and to invest the ruling classes and parties in Germany with the prestige of empire.

By 1890, Bismarck had grown accustomed to dividing the German parties into ‘friends of the Reich’ (Reichsfreunde) and ‘enemies of the Reich’ (Reishsfeinde). Among the former stood the German Conservative Party, supported by the Prussian agrarian-military bureaucratic nobility and the North German Protestant peasantry; the Free Conservative Party, representing other conservative interests, particularly outside Prussia; and the National Liberal Party, purged in the 1880s of its oppositional liberalism and representing socially conservative, bourgeois nationalist interests and opinion, especially in industry and the professions. The Reishsfeinde were first and foremost the supporters of the militant Social Democratic Party, representing the industrial workers and radical intelligentsia; secondly, and less unequivocally, the Catholic Center Party supported by the Catholic peasantry, bourgeoisie, and large numbers of Catholic workers; and finally, the Progressives, speaking for Protestant and Jewish middle-class professionals, anti-protectionist businessmen, and ideological liberals. In the Reichstag elections of 1890, the parties ‘friendly to the Reich’ won 135 seats, the ‘unfriendly’ parties 217. These figures symbolize the limits of the Bismarckian unification of Germany.

2. Bismarckian Polenpolitik.
Bismarck’s attitudes towards Poland and the Poles were remarkable not for their originality but rather for the vehemence with which he expressed them and the ruthlessness with which he acted upon them. He fully accepted Clausewitz’s thesis of the incompatibility of Prussian and Polish national interests. He never wavered in the convictions he expressed in 1848 as a young and reactionary parliamentary deputy outraged by German liberal sympathy for the Polish cause.

The national evolution of the Polish element in Posen can have no other sensible goal than preparing the restoration of an independent Polish state. One may wish for the resurrection of Poland in its borders of 1772, as the Poles do, though they do not admit it openly; one could give back to Poland all of Posen, West Prussia, and Ermland. In that case the best sinews of Germany would be severed, millions of Germans would fall prey to Polish arbitrariness. Thus one would gain an uncertain ally, covetously awaiting any sort of trouble on Germany’s part in order to tear away from it East Prussia, the Polish part of Silesia, the Polish regions of Pomerania. On the other hand, one might wish to restore Poland in narrower limits, giving it only the decidedly Polish part of the Grand Duchy of Posen. In that event, only he who is completely ignorant of the Poles would doubt that they would be our sworn enemies so long as they had not conquered from us the mouth of the Vistula and, beyond that, every Polish-speaking village in West and East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia. Only a German who allowed himself to be guided by tearful compassion and impractical theories could dream of establishing in the immediate neighborhood of his own father land an implacable enemy always ready to externalize his feverish domestic turbulence in war and, in any serious complication we might find ourselves in, to fall upon us in the rear.

Convinced that Polish national aspirations were anachronistic and chimerical, Bismarck occasionally permitted himself the hope that the Poles would perceive this too and accept the consequences by becoming loyal Prussians. He was never interested in offering political concessions to the Prussian Poles to gain their loyalty for his regime. It was up to them to demonstrate their allegiance. It was one of Bismarck’s fundamental maxims that only repression of the Polish national movement would convince its leaders
of the hopelessness of their cause and incline future generations of Prussian Poles to become Polish-speaking Prussians.

Between 1862 and 1871, the Polish question played a minor but noteworthy part in Bismarck’s diplomatic calculations. The outbreak of the Polish insurrection of 1863 in the Congress kingdom, although confined by the Polish rebels as in 1830 to Russian soil, allowed Bismarck, through the negotiation of the short-lived Alvensleben Convention with the Petersburg government, to underscore Prussia’s solidarity with Russia’s anti-Polish stance. At the same time, the Alvensleben Convention forced a breach in Russo-French relations useful to Bismarck in his subsequent diplomacy. The insurrection, despite the modest support it found among the Prussian Poles, gave Bismarck an opportunity to take action against those who expressed sympathy for the Uprising.

After the formation of the German Empire, Bismarck faced the delicate task of assembling a coalition of political supporters both in Prussia and on the Reich level. At home, he could rely on the liberal parties to support him against anti-Imperial ‘particularist’ groups. Chief among these, in the early 1870s, was the German Catholic church and the Catholic Center Party. Abroad, his chief concern was to isolate France while drawing Austria and Russia into a conservative alliance with the German Empire. This constellation of problems led Bismarck into the Kulturkampf of the 1870s, in which the autonomy of the Catholic church, especially in educational matters, was sharply curtailed, the loyalty of the Center Party to the Reich challenged, and hostility to Catholic France forged into a dogma of the new Empire, which meant he needed the support of the Prussian liberals. Despite the liberals’ cultural secularism and Bismarck’s Protestant conservatism, they could agree in uniting against Catholic influence in education.
These circumstances led Bismarck and his advisers in the Prussian government into a sharp attack on ‘Polonism.’ Indeed, one of the prime objectives of the *Kulturkampf* was to undermine the Polish character of the Archbishopric of Poznań-Gniezno and to carry through the Germanization of education in the Polish districts. Hundreds of Polish priests refused to submit to the governmental controls of the May laws of 1872 and in consequence lost their ministries. Many were imprisoned for their opposition, including, finally, in 1876, Archbishop Mieczysław Ledóchowski himself.

The May laws abolished the Catholic Section of the Prussian Ministry of Religion and Education and replaced priests with state-appointed laymen in the local supervision of elementary schools. These measures, although part of Bismarck’s broader attack on the Catholic church in Prussia, drastically reduced the Polish clergy’s influence on lower education throughout the Polish-speaking east. Bismarck was keenly interested in the anti-Polish thrust of these changes.

In the course of 1873 and 1874, a series of administrative decrees substituted German for Polish as the language of instruction in all secondary and elementary schools of the Province of Poznań. The Polish language henceforth figured only as an aid to learning German and in teaching religion to Polish Catholic pupils. So that Polish children would properly understand their religious education, instruction in Polish grammar continued in the lower classes of elementary school only. In 1876, the Landtag approved a law which made German the sole permissible language in public administration, in the courts, and in all official political bodies, annulling the Poles’ right to use their own language in dealings with these institutions.
From the Polish point of view, these were exceedingly harsh measures. The propagation of Polish literary culture lost all state support and threatened to collapse if the Poles could not find private means to carry it on.

The Kulturkampf and the Germanization laws of the 1870s outraged the Poles and brought a mass of new recruits into the nationalist movement. By the 1880s it was clear that government policy needed stiffening if Germanization was to succeed. Meanwhile, the political constellations prevailing both in Prussia and on the Reich level had changed fundamentally as a result of the crises and conflicts of the 1870s which Bismarck had resolved in the conservative parties’ favor during 1878 and 1879. Henceforth, until the collapse of the German Empire in 1918, Prussian Polenpolitik was formulated by an openly conservative and antiliberal government reliably supported in the Prussian Landtag by the combined forces of the agrarian Conservatives, Free Conservatives, and National Liberals. This coalition, unrepresentative of the Prussian population as a whole, stayed in parliamentary power in Prussia thanks to the oligarchical three-class voting law of 1850.

Bismarck now felt no compunction in continuing an aggressive Polenpolitik. Launching attacks against the Poles had become a standard and predictable part of the Imperial and Prussian governments’ conservative-nationalist policies. In 1883, Prussian officials began summarily expelling Russian and Austrian subjects who had settled permanently in Berlin and the eastern provinces. At first, the victims of these measures were mostly Jews. In the fall of 1885 the expulsions reached a high point.

The expulsions of 1883-85 signaled the start of a new governmental attack upon the Poles. The fact was that, despite the drain of westward emigration, falling rates of
mortality combined with a birthrate much higher than that of the Germans or Jews to produce both an absolute and a relative expansion of the Polish-speaking population. Because of emigration, the Poznanian population rose relatively slowly between 1871 and 1890—from 1,584,000 to 1,752,000; but the Poles increased their proportion of the total population from 61 percent to 63.6 percent. The German-speaking population excluding the Jews, fell from 35.1 percent to 33.9 percent of the whole, while the percentage of Jews dropped from 3.9 percent to 2.5 percent. The German population increased absolutely in the 1870s and 1880s by 7 percent, but since the number of Jews fell absolutely by 28 percent, the increase of Germans and Jews counted together was cut to only 3 percent. By contrast, the Polish population grew absolutely by 15 percent.

From 1815 to the mid 1870s, the population of the Prussian east as a whole had grown faster than that of the central and western provinces, primarily because of earlier marriages and greater fertility among peasants freed from serfdom. Once central and western Germany had begun to industrialize, it was inevitable that the surplus population of the eastern villages would migrate to the west to avoid the consequences of rural overpopulation and impoverishment. The agrarian crisis of the 1870s triggered this westward migration, which continued at a more or less rapid rate into the 1930s. Had industrialization flourished in East and West Prussia, Pomerania, and Poznania, the ‘flight from the east’ (Ostflucht) would have been correspondingly smaller. But this would have entailed a weakening, if not the economic destruction, of the system of east-Elbian large estates. Prussia would have been compelled to open its frontier to Russian grain imports to gain access for its eastern industries to the Russian market for manufactures. Moreover, in an industrializing setting, extensive grain cultivation would
have come under great economic pressure to yield to livestock and intensive market farming. But this threatened the social base of the Prussian aristocracy, the ‘knightly estate’ (*Rittergut*). Despite the *Ostflucht* the Prussian government took no steps to promote eastern industrialization. It concentrated its energies instead on shoring up, through tariffs and fiscal-commercial arrangements favoring the large landowners, the traditional agrarian structure in the east. In the Polish regions, this policy favored not only the German Junkers, but the Polish nobility as well. It injured local commercial and manufacturing interests, which were still largely German and Jewish. Had the large estates been parceled out to the local peasantry, emigration to the west and overseas would have slowed down, population density in the east increased, and a larger rural base for local industrial development created. But such measures would have undermined the Junkers. And since the Poles outnumbered the Germans among the eastern peasantry, wholesale parcellation of the large estates would have tipped the demographic balance even farther in their favor.

In the 1880s, the Prussian government and the German press became aware of the national ramifications of the depression and the demographic trends in the Polish areas. An alarming specter of ‘Polonization in the east’ and ‘the retreat of the Germans’ arose in German nationalist minds. In 1886, Bismarck’s compliant majority in the Prussian Landtag approved the creation of the Royal Prussian Colonization Commission, headquartered in Poznań and funded for a twenty-year period with a total of 100 million marks. Its purpose was to buy financially toppling Polish estates in Poznania and the adjacent Polish regions of West Prussia and parcel them out to German peasant colonists.
In its first years of existence, the Colonization Commission succeeded in buying out a number of hard-pressed Polish noblemen. It seemed to be accomplishing the goals Bismarck had set for it: ‘…to put it bluntly, to expropriate the Polish nobility’ and bring to an end the ‘cancer-like spread of Polonization’ in the east. By the end of Bismarck’s last campaign against them, the Poles appeared to be completely surrounded and pinned down by the Prussian state’s heavy artillery of Germanization.

IV. Prussian Poland 1890-1914

1. The Crisis of Government under Wilhelm II

In the 1880s the parliamentary base of Bismarck’s regime was the cartel or ‘rallying’ (Sammlung) of agrarian-aristocratic, bureaucratic, and conservative bourgeois interests, expressed in a coalition of the German Conservative, Free Conservative, and National Liberal parties. This alliance rested on the assumption that the interests of heavy industry and Prussian estate agriculture were not only of roughly equal importance in the Imperial German economy, but also that tariff protectionism served the two equally well. The cartel parties upheld the Bismarckian constitution in exchange for tariff rates favorable to both the heavy industrialists and the Junkers.

The cartel system, or what was also called Sammlungspolitik, represented a balancing of the three dominant interests in Imperial Germany, the Prussian state, the Junkers and the industrial bourgeoisie. Yet between the 1870s and 1914, industrialization
and urbanization cast a heavy shadow on the social and economic landscape of traditional Germany, whose dominant features had been the village, the manor house, and the small town. The Reich population grew from 42 million in 1873 to 67 million in 1913. The proportion of city dwellers rose from 36 percent to 60 percent of the whole. Industrial output increased fourfold until by 1914 it was the greatest of any European state. Equally significant was the declining role of agriculture in the national economy. While in 1873 the value of agricultural output stood to that of large-scale industry in a relationship of 38:32, by 1895 the figures had reversed themselves. Similarly, net investments in agriculture and industry were of equal extent in 1879. But in 1910 more than four times as much new investment capital flowed into industry as into agriculture. By the eve of World War I, Imperial Germany had completed the passage from Agrarstaat to Industriestaat. The beneficiaries of these years of industrialization were the industrial and commercial middle classes.

The fundamental issue of Imperial German and Prussian politics after 1890 was whether the position of the Junkers could be maintained. The enrichment of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie raised the question whether it would remain content with junior partnership in a cartel system upholding the fulsome privileges of the monarchy and aristocracy.

Between 1890 and 1897, German politics passed through a crisis. Faced with political and economic contradictions within the cartel, Wilhelm II and his advisers vainly sought a purely domestic escape from this impasse first in a turn towards the left under Caprivi and then towards the right in 1894-95. Even had Wilhelm II wished to dispense with conservative backing, the bourgeois parties were too divided among
themselves to form a solid bloc shielding the monarchy both from the aristocratic right and the socialist left. Menaced in the rear by the socialist movement, these parties had no heart for a liberal assault against the monarchy and its aristocratic allies. Given their penchant for empire and tariffs as well as their antisocialist phobia, the National Liberals and many Progressives and Centrists as well could be tempted after 1897 to support a neo-Bismarckian cartel. Autarchy and imperialism were to unite the aristocracy and bourgeoisie behind Wilhelm II’s ‘personal regime,’ blocking the socialists off from power at the cost to the bourgeois parties of further parliamentarization of Prussia and the Reich. They paid this price in the hope of Imperial prosperity and the social and political patronage of the monarchical regime. But, as it happened, in 1897 Wilhelm II and his agrarian and industrial supporters only ‘exported the internal crisis and so took the road which led to diplomatic isolation, war and the collapse of the monarchy.’

Germany’s foreign policy between 1897 and 1914 functioned as a test of the legitimacy of the Wilhelminian system of domestic politics. If the Kaiser and his aristocratic servants could not translate their claims to a unique military virtue into glorious and economically profitable Imperial triumphs – triumphs which in turn might be expected to counteract proletarian hostility to bourgeois society and inspire enthusiasm for a ‘people’s empire’ (Volkskaisertum) – then the bourgeoisie’s political support and economic subsidy of the monarchy and the agrarian conservatives could only be a bad bargain. But it soon became apparent to the agrarian right that their political and economic future depended on the monarchy’s foreign policy successes, if only because failures raised the question of the political utility of the monarchy which shielded their privileges.
Such was the domestic scene from which the monarchy’s conservative leaders escaped in entering World War I. A successfully waged war, they thought, would establish German hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe, break the barriers to German overseas expansion, and salvage the social and political hierarchy Bismarck had imposed upon Germany. In early 1914, the Duke of Ratibor expressed himself bluntly on the political situation in Germany to Jules Cambon, the French envoy in Berlin: ‘The commercial and bourgeois classes are gaining the upper hand at the expense of the military and agrarian classes. A war is therefore in order to restore the old relationships between them. . . . The wars of ‘64, ‘66 and ’70 consolidated the military and agrarian parties.’ A war now, he concluded, was ‘necessary to put things back on the old tracks.’ During the July crisis, Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa, the leader of the German Conservative party, expected that war would ‘strengthen the patriarchal order and temperament’ in Germany, while even Bethmann Hollweg imagined it would ‘heal domestic relationships in a conservative sense.’ The same motives that inspired Bismarck to forge a Prussian-dominated German Empire in the fires of war led his successors in 1914 to look to war to preserve it.

2. Wilhelminian Polenpolitik: Old Wine, New Bottles

Wilhelminian Polenpolitik, particularly in the period 1894-1914, represents an elaboration in practice of the implications of Bismarckian policy towards the Prussian Poles and the frontier provinces generally. This can be seen in the continuation of the politics of colonization. Under Bismarck this had been intended both to strengthen the
German element in the east and to enable the Prussian government to appropriate the slogans of conservative, volkisch German nationalism, as they were formulated by such influential publicists as Heinrich von Treitschke and Paul de Lagarde

Bismarck’s successors during the Wilhelminian epoch pursued this mission too – with the exception of the man who replaced him, Leon von Caprivi, who attempted a policy aimed at conciliating the Polish aristocracy in Prussia. His efforts ended in failure, but not before provoking bitter opposition in official circles and among conservative and nationalist political groups. His successors made haste to return to Bismarckian orthodoxy. At the same time, in the two decades preceding the outbreak of World War I, Polish political opposition to the Prussian regime and the Poles’ demographic and economic positions in the east gained steadily in strength. To suppress ‘Polonism’ and promote Germanization, the Prussian government seized upon increasingly radical means. Its struggle against the Prussian Poles reached a height of intensity, unmatched even by Bismarck’s campaigns, during the period of Buelow’s chancellorship (1900-1909). By 1914, Prussian Polish policy depended upon means which glaringly contradicted the principles of the German ‘state of law’ (Rechtsstaat). It represented both a massive attack on the very existence of the Prussian Poles as a culturally and ethnically autonomous segment of the Reich’s population and a strenuous effort to push the ethnic German border eastwards. This model of officially promoted Germanization, posited upon the ideas of a Polish menace to the German nation and the necessity of the geographic expansion of the German people eastward, became one of the most fateful of Imperial Germany’s legacies to Hitler’s National Socialist regime.
3. The Caprivi Era: 1890-94

The threat of war with Russia overshadowed Caprivi’s chancellorship. Caprivi was aware that the aristocratic leaders of the Poznanian Poles, driven to desperation by Bismarck’s attacks upon them, were interested in better relations with Berlin. In his turn, Caprivi stood in need of Reichstag votes, but could not reckon on the support of the Polish delegation without making concessions to them. In addition, diplomatic considerations inclined Caprivi to abandon Bismarck’s policy of forcing the Poles into doctrinaire opposition to Berlin.

During these years, the Prussian government did in fact make a number of concessions to the Prussian Poles which were both intended and understood to signify a retreat from Bismarck’s policy of uncompromising hostility. Upon the death of Archbishop Julius Dinder in 1890, the government began to press the Vatican for appointment of another German to the see of Poznań-Gniezno. But in 1891 it bowed to the wishes of the local hierarchy and Rome in approving the consecration of the politically prominent and popular Father Florian Stablewski. The new archbishop thereupon publicly paid homage to the state and harshly denounced Russia and Russian policy towards the Poles. Between 1891 and 1894, teaching of religion in Polish was restored in the Poznanian elementary schools. So too was limited instruction in the Polish language itself. The government conceded to the system of Polish cooperative banks self-auditing rights, withholding of which might have dealt with Poles a heavy economic blow. In 1890, the government reopened the eastern frontier to seasonal immigration of Polish rural laborers from Russian and Austrian Poland. This was more a concession to
the East Elbian Junkers and Upper Silesian industrialists than to the Polish gentry, who nevertheless benefited greatly from it. Caprivi’s regime allowed the Poles to participate in the estate parcellation and peasant colonization programs established under the Prussian Rentenguter legislation of 1890-91. This produced the ironical spectacle of state-aided Polish land settlement occurring simultaneously with the Colonization Commission’s efforts to uproot the Polish gentry and settle German peasants in their stead. Finally, in 1891 the government appointed as Provincial President Baron Hugo von Wilamowitz-Mollendorf, a conservative Poznanian landlord with a reputation for fair-mindedness towards the Poles.

The Poles, in their turn, backed Caprivi’s legislation in the Reichstag. Despite their agrarian interests, they voted for Caprivi’s trade treaties, the objects of the Junkers’ bitterest political opposition. It was thanks to Polish votes that Caprivi’s hotly contested army bill of 1893 finally gained a majority, in recognition of which Wilhelm II conferred a royal decoration upon the Poles’ delegation leader, Józef Kościelski.

Caprivi’s fall from office in 1894 was only peripherally related to his conciliatory Polish policy. Wilhelm II abandoned Caprivi at the end of 1894 to make peace with the chancellor’s agrarian enemies. Out of the opposition to Caprivi arose the Pan-German League (Alldeutscher Verband). By 1894 it had become a highly vocal and visible propaganda organization urging upon the government, while popularizing among the educated and propertied classes, its policies of expansionist völkisch nationalism and imperialist conquest. In 1894 the League’s founder and one of its guiding spirits, Alfred Hugenberg, arrived in Poznań as a young official attached to the Colonization Commission. He organized a local branch of the League and soon established himself as
its expert on the domestic Polish question and as an influential voice in the formulation of official Germanization policy as well.

In September 1894 three of the province’s Junkers led almost two thousand German Poseners and West Prussians to Bismarck’s residence at Varzin where they listened to the ex-chancellor denounce Caprivi and the Poles. Heartened by their success, the leaders of this pilgrimage founded in November 1894 in Poznań the Verein zur Forderung des Deutschthums in den Ostmarken (Society for the Support of the Germans in the Eastern Marches). Known from 1899 as the Ostmarkenverein (Eastern Marches Society), this organization quickly rose to prominence both in the Prussian east and throughout the Reich for its tireless and strident attacks upon the Prussian Poles and its unrelenting pressure on the Prussian government to escalate its policies of Germanization. By the end of the year 1900, the Hakatists had recruited approximately 20,000 members, about half of them in the provinces of Poznań and West Prussia. State officials, schoolteachers, and Protestant pastors formed the majority of the society’s followers.

4. The Years of Hohenlohe’s Chancellorship, 1894-1900

Under the new Chancellor, Prince Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingfurst’s somnolent eye, Eulenberg, Miquel, Buelow, Tirpitz, and their allies in the ministries and among the political parties restored the cartel system and set the stage for Germany’s imperialist ventures. Caprivi’s successors were well aware of the unpopularity in conservative and nationalist circles of his Polish policies. They heard the clamour of the
Hakatists and the agrarian and Pan-German press for a return to Bismarckian methods, methods which in any case they as graduates of the Bismarckian school of politics approved. Resumption of an aggressive Polenpolitik was a logical corollary of a domestic policy based on the cartel parties and a foreign policy aimed at arousing mass support for the Wilhelminian monarchy.

Between 1895 and 1900, the Prussian government steadily sharpened its anti-Polish policies. While this represented a deepening commitment by the government and the cartel parties to Bismarck’s goal of expropriating the Polish gentry, it was also a tacit admission that achieving the goal was proving more difficult than had been expected. Although the Commission had been able to buy considerable amounts of Polish estate land in the first few years after its establishment, by the early 1890s the Poles had developed a system of private land parcellation societies to which financially hard-pressed large landowners could turn instead of to the government’s well-hated colonization agency. The Polish press had begun to brand sellers of land to the Commission as national traitors. Since the Polish parcellation banks could count on selling, at relatively high prices, farm-sized plots or smaller holdings to the land-hungry Polish peasants, they could afford to outbid the Commission. The Polish landlords, assured of high prices for their estate land by selling to their countrymen, thus found a means of reconciling profits and patriotism and turned their backs on the Commission.

The revival of the Polish nationalist movement after 1890 reflected demographic and socio-economic trends in the Prussian east which, in their political effects, favored the Poles over the Germans. The Prussian government found that suppression of the Polish nationalist movement and reduction of the Polish masses to a state of passive
Prussian loyalty were becoming maddeningly elusive goals. Without abandoning them, Caprivi’s successors inaugurated what seemed to them a defensive strategy of material and political support of the frontier Germans.

In the course of the 1890s, Prussian Polish policy began to pursue these ideological ends. The Prussian state, which had shouldered the interests of the German nation, now assumed responsibility for the German population living on the ethnic frontier. What before had been the prosaic fortunes of a peripheral population of German peasants, burghers, and Junkers now acquired a new and portentous significance. Their future both symbolized and literally stood for the future of the Germanic people. They were Imperial Germany’s bulwark against what Wilhelm II in 1895 called ‘the Slavic-Czech invasion which threatens us all in the highest degree.’ At the beginning of the twentieth century the Prussian government had sworn itself to guide them to victory over the Poles in the struggle for domination of the ‘eastern marches.’ Success would represent a first pledge for the fulfillment of Prussia’s ‘mission’ to promote once again, as nineteenth-century nationalists supposed it had in the days of the Teutonic Order, the expansion of the German nationality into the east.

5. Buelow’s Polenpolitik 1900-1909

Bernhard von Buelow, opportunistic though he was, believed profoundly in the importance of Prussia’s eastern mission. He was a forceful exponent of Treitschkean nationalism and symbolized in his own person Wilhelminian imperialist claims and
aspirations. When after 1900 Buelow assumed responsibility for Prussian Polish policy he spoke out frankly for ‘the Germanization of our eastern marches.’.

Urgency was lent to Buelow’s Polenpolitik by demographic and economic shifts in the eastern provinces favorable to the Poles. ‘The danger is all the greater,’ Buelow declared in the cabinet meeting of June 1900, ‘since we cannot count on pursuing a common policy with Russia against the Poles.

In his memoirs, Buelow claimed that he had never advocated ‘repression’ of the Poles in the spheres of education and religion. In fact, his memorial to the Prussian cabinet of 3 July 1901 recommended not only prohibition of the use of the Polish language in public assemblies but also complete elimination of Polish from elementary education. It was in pursuit of the latter goal that Buelow’s government first clashed with the Prussian Poles. Beginning in 1900, Konrad Studt, the Prussian minister of religion and education, ordered the replacement of Polish by German in the teaching of religion in the middle and upper forms of Poznanian elementary schools. This order automatically abolished Polish-language instruction at all levels, since it had been tolerated after 1898 only in those schools where religion continued to be taught in Polish.

Before the Prussian school authorities could apply this policy to all Pozoanian schools, Polish resistance broke out, above all in the town of Września (Wreschen). With the encouragement of their parents, Polish children staged a ‘school strike,’ refusing to recite or otherwise participate in German-language religion classes.

The new conflict took place against the growing awareness of the fact that the policy of colonizing Prussian Poland was not succeeding. Between 1882 and 1907, Polish landholdings in Poznania and West Prussia expanded, at German expense and despite
official colonization, by 52,000 hectares. In the decade since 1896, the figure was higher still (75,000 hectares). Thus after 1898 the Colonization Commission had no choice but to turn to German estate owners for its land.

The Poles’ successes in combatting the colonization program greatly enfuriated the Prussian government, the Royal Commission, the Eastern Marches Society, and the Pan-German League. At first it appeared that Polish parcellation was the chief obstacle confronting the Commission. A law of 1904 was aimed at forcing Polish estate owners to offer their holdings to the Colonization Commission by eliminating the alternative of turning to a Polish parcellation bank. In practice, this tactic failed to work.

But by 1906 Buelow had grown weary of collaboration with the Center. After the Reichstag elections of January 1907, he turned to an ideologically motley majority of Progressives, National Liberals, and Conservatives who, as the ‘Buelow bloc,’ supported him on the Reich level during the years 1907-9. While this political reshuffling eliminated one obstacle to the passage of an expropriation act, a still more serious one remained: Could the Prussian Conservatives, for whom the legal inviolability of land ownership was such a crucial question, be persuaded to support the Polish gentry’s forcible dispossession?

The prime question facing the Prussian government was whether the Conservatives would stand behind expropriation. For in this connection, as Bethmann Hollweg conceded, ‘the government will have to make its decisions basically according to the wishes of the Conservative Party.’ The Conservatives’ leader, Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa, finally agreed to support expropriation, but only on terms guaranteeing his Junker followers’ special interests.
Expropriation was only one part of a two-pronged attack Buelow’s government mounted against Polish nationalism in 1907-8. The debates stirred up by the expropriation issue gave Buelow a favorable opportunity to strike another blow against ‘Polish agitation’ which he had contemplated at least since 1901: prohibition of the use of the Polish language in public assemblies. Reich Secretary of Interior Bethmann Hollweg defended the language paragraph in the Reichstag debates with two not altogether congruent arguments. On the one hand, since ‘the essence of our existence as a state is German,’ there could be nothing exceptional or illegal about requiring the use of the German language at all public meetings. On the other hand, Bethmann declared, the state always had been and still was happy to tolerate public manifestations of loyalty, even when couched in foreign tongues. Like the expropriation act, the ‘gag law’ greatly provoked the Poles without really crippling their oppositional activities.

The discriminatory laws of 1908, following upon the school strikes and raising the highly publicized ‘struggle for the land’ to a new pitch of intensity, were Buelow’s last attacks on the Poles. Thereafter, he struggled with the diplomatic and military-financial crises which ultimately split the Reichstag bloc and forced his resignation in mid 1909. But in Poznań, Prussian officials, their hands strengthened by the legislation of 1908, kept steady pressure on the Poles.

By 1909 the Prussian government’s only means of counteracting the national consequences of their demographic strength lay in buying up Polish farms and smallholdings, expropriating the Polish estates which employed them as laborers, and creating a rival class of German worker-colonists as a labor force for the Junkers. But to level the sharp point of Prussian colonization policy directly at the Polish rural masses,
whose disaffection from Prussian rule had already been made plain during the school strikes, threatened to drive them into a nationalist opposition far more dangerous to the Prussian state and social order than that of the Polish middle and upper classes.

6. Bethmann Hollweg’s Chancellorship, 1909-14

Buelow’s fall from office temporarily neutralized the Polish question as an issue of Prussian cabinet and parliamentary politics. The conservative parties’ refusal to submit to a modest degree of direct taxation to finance the increasingly heavy costs of the Imperial fleet had split the Buelow bloc and undermined the cartel strategy of which an aggressive domestic Polish policy was part and parcel.

On the Reich level, where he confronted his greatest political problems, the new Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, had nothing to gain from continuing or intensifying, as Prussian minister-president, Buelow’s harsh political assaults on the Poles, even though the traditional Conservative-National Liberal majority stood fast in the Landtag and could be expected to cooperate in forging new links in the chain of Prussian Polish policy. Bethman was also well aware that attacking the Poles would weaken Catholic support for his Imperial policies.

Bethmann candidly set forth his view in a ministerial conference of 1907. ‘Pacification’ of Poznania and Polish West Prussia would be achieved ‘only when the local German population has been secured in both its political and economic ascendency over the Poles; only then – and not before – will the process of assimilation begin.’
surest means to this still distant goal was the colonization program, which Bethmann endorsed unreservedly.

As chancellor, Bethmann shared Bismarck’s and Buelow’s Germanizing objectives, but sought to realize them without stirring up political opposition which might undercut his policies on other fronts. Under these circumstances, Bethmann decided to resist German nationalist pressures for application of expropriation.

By 1911 it was clear that Bethmann had no intention of satisfying the radical German nationalists’ long-standing, increasingly impatient expectation that the government would energetically employ its expropriation powers to shatter Polish resistance in the ‘struggle for the land.’ Bethmann and Schwartzkopff realized that, if they offered the Poles even a partial dismantling of the already existing machinery of official Germanization policy, the Hakatists’ denunciations of the government for conducting a Caprivi-style ‘policy of conciliation’ would convince Prussian and German conservative nationalists opposed to the Eastern Marches Society’s demagogic radicalism but committed to the substance of Bismarck’s and Buelow’s policies.

Nationalist pressure exerted within the administration and by the conservative parties soon forced Schorlemer to concede, in the Landtag debates on the 1912 eastern marches financial bill that expropriation would occur before the end of the year. This expropriation action, which immediately became enmeshed in lengthy litigation in the courts, did nothing to tip the balance in the ‘struggle for the land’ in the Germans’ favor.

It was foreseeable and inevitable that expropriation would stiffen and radicalize Polish opposition to the Prussian government. Similarly, the Hapsburg government’s relations with the Galician loyalists underwent a predictable crisis, emerging intact but
weakened, as Count Ladislas von Szogyenyi, Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin and Berchthold, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, who learned of the Prussian expropriation decision in the newspapers, bitterly pointed out to Bethmann.

The political repercussions of expropriation were sufficiently negative to stiffen Bethmann’s resolve to avoid it in the future. Because of the political controversy surrounding it, expropriation, though an important symbolical issue of Prussian Germanization policy, failed as a practical instrument for providing the Colonization Commission forcible access to Polish lands.

Although the eastern marches appropriations of 1912 and 1913 struck at the Poles’ civil rights and economic interests, the Prussian government and the German nationalist parties regarded them as economically productive investments on behalf of frontier Germans menaced by ‘the Slavic flood’ rather than discriminatory attacks on the Poles. Bethmann did not believe passage of these bills posed any obstacles to his and Schwartzkopff’s policy of treating the Poznanian Poles in a ‘not unfriendly manner,’ a policy which led him to seek the support of the Polish land-landowers, whose political views were rather conservative.

V. Polish Reactions

1: Polish Society 1850-90: Capitalism, Organic Work, and Political Crisis

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the fast paced industrialization of Germany dragged the Poznanian economy along in its wake. Between 1850 and the mid 1870s,
many estate owners reaped high profits thanks to rising grain and wool prices, an abundant supply of cheap farm labor, and the completion of the railway network linking the province with western Germany and the Baltic ports.

The agrarian crisis which coincided with the long depression of 1873-96 forced the abandonment of sheep raising because of cheaper wool imports. As grain prices fell, the onset of rural migration to the west resulted in a rise in the cost of agricultural labor. The tariffs on foreign grain imports adopted between 1879 and 1902 ultimately reserved the rapidly expanding German market to the east-Elbian estates.

Nevertheless, the era of easy profits was over. Poznanian landlords had to rationalize their financial affairs, diversify their crops (especially through the cultivation of sugar beets), and replace workers with machines wherever possible. By 1890, most were making this transition, but many had been driven into bankruptcy or had been forced to sell part of their estate land to salvage the rest.

In a raw demographic sense, the Poles were in a stronger position vis-a-vis the Germans and Jews in 1890 than they had been in 1850. But this was primarily because of their greater fertility and attachment to their native soil. The economic strength of the nobility at the end of this period was shaky, the incomes of the peasantry and bourgeoisie modest, while urban and rural poverty was much greater among the Poles than among their German-speaking neighbors. In Polish society itself, stratification and economic inequalities were extreme. In 1882, six of every ten Poles were rural laborers. Of all persons with officially counted occupations, 11 percent were self-employed agriculturists. Most of these were small-holding peasants; only a thousand or so, in a total population of about one million, were large estate owners. Only 6 percent of the Polish
population were self-employed in industry, artisan trades, and commerce. Most of these were very small businesses, scattered about the province’s many towns and villages. Their employees (8.6 percent) barely outnumbered them. The intelligentsia--educated professionals, clergymen, schoolteachers, and state employees--accounted for 3.4 percent of all employed persons in Polish society. Domestic servants and occasional laborers comprised almost 12 percent, more than the landed peasantry and gentry or the educated and propertied bourgeoisie.

The Poles’ most enduring accomplishment in the four decades after 1850 was the creation of a set of Organic Work institutions which strengthened Polish society economically while they integrated into the noble-dominated national movement sizable contingents of the urban and rural common people. The political and confessional crises of these years, most of them initiated by Bismarck’s government, played into the Polish nationalists’ hands. Their successes in socio-economic organization and popular nationalist agitation offset their inability to resist the radicalization of official Polenpolitik in the arena of parliamentary politics.

In the aftermath of the revolution of 1848, the only privately organized Polish national organizations were the Marcinkowski Scholarship Society and scattered local economic and social associations among the gentry. The Prussian Reaction prevented the founding of new, centrally organized associations until after 1858. Nonetheless, the experience of the revolution had turned many of the Polish nobility and intelligentsia, political conservatives and radicals alike, towards an Organic Work strategy which they were eager to pursue.
The first province-wide organization to be established after the end of the Reaction represented, characteristically enough, the interests of the gentry. The Central Economic Society (Centralne Towarzystwo Gospodarcze—CTG), formed in 1861, consisted of county associations which elected and supported a provincial executive commission. It published a high-quality agronomic journal and arranged annual conferences at which, behind closed doors, the nobility could hear lectures on scientific farming, discuss their economic and political interests, and socialize among themselves. The CTG became a popular and effective institution, its county branches a focus for local action, its leadership a source of political influence.

This cooperative network expanded greatly in subsequent years. It was well-managed and succeeded in avoiding dependence on German sources of capital. Although they could turn to a variety of state-funded or private German banks, the Polish farmers and bourgeoisie preferred the Union system. It offered the villagers profitable alternatives to traditional high-interest personal loans and represented a major source of venture capital for small urban entrepreneurs. Although the clergy were often the banks’ founders and directors, full-time professionals came to replace them in day-to-day management. Thus the Polish middle class gained new strength, while for all those involved in the system nationalist sentiment accumulated with the deposits.

The Germanization of public education in the 1870s invigorated a movement which had begun in the 1850s to establish private Polish lending libraries throughout the province. Primers and works of popular Polish literature were required if the clergy and nationally conscious parents were to teach the national language and culture to Polish children now attending German schools. The liberal wing of the national movement took
the initiative by founding the ‘Society for Popular Learning’ in 1872. Because of ideological differences among Polish liberals and clericals in the 1860s and 1870s, Archbishop Ledochowski forbade the clergy to take part in this association, while the Prussian government immediately prohibited Polish public school teachers from joining any Polish cultural or socioeconomic organization. In 1878, the liberals composed their quarrels with the clergy, whose assistance as local activists and whose public endorsement of the libraries were essential to the movement’s success. In 1880 the system was reorganized as the Society of Popular Libraries (Towarzystwo Czytelni Ludowych - TCL). Thanks in large part to the clergy’s efforts, by 1890 almost 1,000 libraries were scattered across the province and throughout other areas of Polish settlement in the Prussian east. In the late 1880s, the Society’s leadership was distributing from 17,000 to 39,000 books annually. Their content was respectful to religion, conservative politically and socially, but as nationalistic as Prussian officialdom’s eagle eye for ‘Polish agitation’ would permit. In subsequent years, the typical library came to hold several thousand volumes drawn upon by five or six hundred borrowers. Thus the popular library movement, managed by priests and intellectuals and funded largely by the nobility, represented yet another pillar of Polish national consciousness and solidarity.

Advocacy of this Parcellation Law was proof that the colonization program had reached a critical impasse. Since the Poles refused to sell land freely to the Royal Commission and expropriation of Polish landowners had become politically hazardous Bethmann and his advisers saw no means other than forcible intervention in Polish land sales of providing the Royal Commission with Polish lands for peasant settlement, without which colonization must either further erode German large landholding in the east
or cease altogether. Neither of these possibilities was politically tolerable, given the social base and political ideology of the Prusso-German state. If to forestall them the search for an ‘understanding’ with the conservative Poles had to be sacrificed, Bethmann was clearly willing to do so.

Yet it is not certain the Parcellation Law would have passed the Landtag in the form in which it was proposed. The Conservatives objected to the fact that it was not framed as a specifically anti-Polish measure. Conceivably, therefore, it could in the future be turned against their own landholdings by German advocates of ‘inner colonization’ or agrarian socialism. The National Liberals criticized the ten-hectare limitation and feared the Poles would find legal means of evading the law’s effect – for example, by attaching a condition to the sale of their land that the state could not meet, such as the stipulation that it be sold only to a Polish purchaser.

The bill did in fact get bogged down in a parliamentary commission. But, had the war not intervened, it is certain that some more or less effective law further hindering Polish parcellation and land transfers would have found the approval of the Conservative-National Liberal majority.

2: Politics

In the sphere of politics, in the period 1850-90 the Prussian Poles confronted the radicalization of official Polenpolitik even as they witnessed, after the suppression of the great uprising in Russian Poland of 1863-64 and the foundation of the German Empire,
the apparently permanent eclipse of all prospects for the restoration of a Polish state. In attempting to master these changes, the traditional leaders of Polish society in Prussia wound up in a political dead end, exposed to the challenges of new and more radical forces in their midst which appealed to middle- and lower-class social groups until then politically passive or voiceless.

The *Kulturkampf* and Germanization laws of the 1870s produced an especially bitter reaction among the Polish national liberals because, in supporting these measures of Bismarck’s government, the German liberals were openly abandoning whatever concern they had evinced since 1848 for the Poles’ national interests. It availed them nothing to warn in their parliamentary protests that attacks on the religion and on the language spoken by part of the citizenry of the state contradicted the ideology and spirit of liberalism. ‘What injuries’, the Polish liberal, Kazimierz Kantak declaimed in 1872, ‘had the Poles committed against the state to justify such discriminatory treatment?’ Denying any revolutionary intentions among his countrymen, he protested that ‘we have turned our attention to practical life. Education and work are our slogans too.’ Yet the Prussian government denounced the Poles’ legal activities as ‘agitation’ and suppressed the remnants of their national rights.

Bismarck’s assault on the Catholic church spurred the Poznanian clerical party to action. In 1872, a daily newspaper, the *Kuryer Poznański*, appeared as an ideological alternative to noble liberalism. It called for defense of the church and denounced the threat to the Poles’ faith posed by liberalism in general.

In the 1880s, the Polish parliamentary delegations inched towards a position of conservative ‘loyalism’. They hoped that after Wilhelm I and Bismarck had passed from
the scene, which could not be far in the future, the Prussian state would cease its attacks upon them and perhaps even restore some of their national rights in the spheres of education and language policy. This program finally crystallized as official Polish strategy after 1890. It owed its triumph, which was to be brief, not only to the failures of national liberalism in the 1860s and 1870s, but to the example of the Galician Polish nobility who, in return for their support of Hapsburg conservatism, had won enviable national and social privileges in their own land. Moreover, in the 1880s the underground Polish revolutionary movement had revived, especially in exile and in Russian Poland. It spoke a language not only of national but also social upheaval, frequently couched in Marxian or Russian populist-revolutionary terms. This language was offensive not only to agrarian-conservative but also national-liberal ears. To these reasons for the Poznanian upper classes’ turn towards ‘loyalism’ in the 1880s yet another must be added: the slow emergence in their own midst of a populist political movement representing the Polish petite bourgeoisie and common people.

Certainly, the aristocratic hegemony in the politics of Prussian Poland did not go unchallenged. As was the case elsewhere in Poland, movements now began to emerge claiming to represent the interests of the peasantry. The rise of populism in Prussian Poland was not a simple function of popular hostility to the Prussian regime. But such hostility increased after 1848, with politically important consequences.

This Germanophobia the educated Prussian Poles absorbed through their reading of the post-1863 classics and their own experience of Prussian rule. It inspired, along with more idealistic nationalist feelings, their political action and their avoidance of all but the most necessary social, economic, and cultural interchanges with their
German-speaking neighbors. It could hardly have been otherwise. While the Germans were forging their national myths of Bismarck’s greatness, the Poles shuddered at what seemed to be the ‘Iron Chancellor’s’ unremitting and unfathomable malevolence towards them.

A deep psychological gulf separated the Poles from their German and Jewish neighbors. It contained a traditional component of animosity which grew larger on account of the Prussian government’s repressive policies. Among the best proofs of the lack of intimate bonds between Poles and Germans are the sparse data on religious conversions and interconfessional marriages. During eight years between 1832 and 1847, only 146 conversions of Catholics to the Evangelical Church occurred in the government district of Poznań. In the same years, the 446 conversions of Protestants to Catholicism bear witness both to the Catholic church’s opposition to mixed marriages and the readiness of a small number of Germans to enter into a largely Polish milieu. In 1889 the Catholic clergy in the western half of the province reported that in the preceding decade 426 mixed marriages were performed with the Church’s dispensation, 1,459 without it, the latter of course in Protestant churches. Bearing in mind that a certain number of these mixed marriages occurred in predominantly German counties and thus among German Catholics and Protestants, an annual average of fewer than 200 mixed marriages in a population of almost one million underscores the rarity of intermarriage among the nationalities.

Bismarck’s anti-Polish campaigns provoked a crisis of national confidence among the nobility. They were gratified to find a Reichstag majority speaking up for them and denouncing the expulsions of 1885, but their Landtag deputies were helpless before
Bismarck’s onslaughts. They could only reiterate their innocence of revolutionary intentions, whether nationalist or socialist, and wonder aloud why they, dutiful citizens as they were, were being placed under an official ‘ban’ and subjected to ‘a war of extermination.

In these straits, the noble politicians finally decided a change in tactics was in order. After Bismarck’s dismissal by Wilhelm II in 1890, they initiated an ostentatious policy of ‘loyalism’ hoping to make use of the more anti-Russian posture of the new government achieve something similar to the position established by the aristocratic conservatives in Galicia.

At the end of Bismarck’s chancellorship, nationality relations in Prussian Poland were tense. The Polish nationalists, embittered by the Germanization laws, oscillated between anxiety, despair, and rage. The German conservatives in Poznania did not bother to hide their belittling contempt for the Polish movement even as they expressed exaggerated fears of its treasonable powers. Towards their bourgeois liberal critics, the conservatives restrained with difficulty, in the interest of an elusive German national solidarity, the ‘drastic’ expressions and ‘sharp tone’ in which under Bismarck it had become fashionable for the military-minded Prussian-German upper class to defend its privileges.

The capitalist development of the province and the Germanization of education, contrary to many Germans’ expectations, did nothing to bridge the traditional social, cultural, and political divisions among the nationalities. These were growing wider as the Prussian government sought to hasten the ‘process of Germanization.’ To this end it
seized upon means which deeply divided German society. By disaffecting the Polish masses, Bismarck’s regime offered the Polish nationalists new possibilities for political and economic conquests. The stage was set for the spiraling conflict of the prewar decades as well as the emergence of new political forces among the Poles.

3. Polish Politics 1890-1914

In fact, by now most Poles supported the Endecja. The National Democrats, spoke mainly for the more secularized and class-conscious Polish burghers and urban workers, but were only one among three major ideological blocs within Polish society.

Opposed to their well organized and vigorous party stood the economic strength, social prestige, and traditional political preeminence of the nobility, tightly organized among themselves and commanding an agrarian-conservative movement supported not only by the landed peasantry but also by a majority of the rural workers who, on the clergy’s instructions, obediently followed their local squires’ lead. The conservatives occupied a powerful position within the system of electoral authorities, which through the years they had come to regard as the equivalent of their own party structure. In the upper clergy and among the local priesthood they counted powerful allies whose own institutional base was more widely ramified and highly respected than any other in Polish society. Polish religiosity thus tended to strengthen the agrarian conservatives’ political hand.

The third group was analogous to the Peasant Party in Galicia. To the degree that Catholic populism drew upon that religiosity to strengthen the common people’s national
consciousness and inhibit the spread of secular ideologies, it heightened Polish national solidarity. It also forced the ideologically more well-defined ND and conservative camps to formulate realistic bids for the allegiance of the increasingly politicized but still strongly Catholic rural workers.

V. Conclusion

Between 1886 and 1914, the Prussian government attempted, by a variety of more or less discriminatory and irritating measures, to impede the demographic growth and economic development of Polish society in Poznania. In the ‘struggle for the land,’ the government strove to uproot the Polish nobility. This policy also aimed, though the government did not trumpet the fact aloud, at driving Polish rural laborers displaced by German peasant colonization off the land and so, given the limits of urban employment in Poznania, into emigration in large numbers from their Polish homeland. Laws and regulations sought to prevent Polish peasants and workers from purchasing farms and plots carved from parcelled estate land. In the towns, both the civil and military bureaucracy boycotted Polish businessmen and professionals in awarding government contracts for goods and services. Wilhelm von Waldow, Provincial President in the 1890s and his lieutenants forbade soldiers and public officials to patronize Polish restaurants and shops. Many Polish state employees were transferred out of the province. Others failed to attain promotions or were dismissed because they did not meet the government’s increasingly ‘sharp demands’ on their ‘national behaviour.’ New appointments to
publicly funded jobs were reserved for Germans despite the fact that Polish taxes contributed to the creation of such positions in no small degree.

Simultaneously, the government tried to strengthen the Poznanian Germans’ economic and demographic positions through its many programs of aid to the German Junkers, peasants, rural workers, civil servants, and the urban middle classes. In view of these officially conferred advantages their national rivals enjoyed and the governmental discrimination they labored under, the Poles’ economic and demographic advances between the 1880s and the outbreak of the war appear all the more remarkable. The significance of these advances does not consist merely in the fact that the Poles increased numerically after 1890 at the Germans’ expense, or that the Poles gained more ground than the Germans in the ‘struggle for the land,’ or that Polish society grew richer in relation to German society. More importantly, its economic development in these decades strengthened the capacity of Polish society both to oppose the government’s Germanization programs and to pursue the more positive political, social, and cultural goals its national leaders had set for it in the course of the nineteenth century.

By 1914, the Polish nationalist movement could count for leadership and financial backing on a richer gentry and a more numerous and better educated clergy than ever before. It had gained a great many new political activists and financial supporters from the ranks of the increasingly prosperous and numerous industrial-commercial bourgeoisie and professional intelligentsia. The rising numbers of the petite bourgeoisie and of workers in industry and the skilled trades provided the nationalist movement with a burgeoning, increasingly vocal and volatile constituency in the towns. In the villages, the peasant farmers began to assert a political will of their own. Even the rural laborers, less
poverty-stricken than in the past, somewhat better schooled, and, above all, stirred up by the agitation of the nationalists and provoked by official Germanization policies, began to find their political voices.