

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Kaiser Wilhelm I on the eve of the March Revolution

December 5, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Or rather the future Kaiser Wilhelm I. At the time, he was still Prince Wilhelm of Prussia. This is from a letter he wrote on March 28, 1848 to London before his temporarily exile there, sourced from an article by Karl Haenchen entitled “Kaiser Wilhelms I. Bericht über die Berliner Märzrevolution 1848,” originally published March 1938 in the Weißer Blätter (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wei%C3%9Fe_Bl%C3%A4tter). (not the same as the earlier expressionist journal *Die weißen Blätter*) — the premier German monarchist journal of its day. Hell, probably the only one? They didn’t mind the First Reich, they could swallow their pride for the Second, but the Third was right out.

You wake up one morning, and the joys of free speech and civic participation are unfolding:

The first signs of unprecedented demonstrations of a political nature were the gathering of liberal literati in the tents, which began on the 8th with few listeners, but increased on the 9th and 10th to around 1000 people. From the revolutionary speeches arose an address of the general demands. It was handed over to the magistrate on the 11th; he rejected them, which caused great excitement, and even pushed the moderates into being suspicious of the king. On the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth, at the tents, there were again meetings of artisans who had been instructed by the same men about their unfavorable situation, who were being incited to rebellion against the law, and so on. **All these demonstrations were not hindered by the authorities; why not, I can not understand, for the view that was put forward, was that all this was harmless, that one should not attach importance to the cause, that they scarcely had one at all, that they would make themselves look ridiculous, etc. These were excuses which I resolutely fought but nowhere was there anyone who appealed to my view; I did not fool myself for a moment about where all this would lead.**

The authorities were probably still under the impression that they were dealing with the equivalent of ritualized peasant revolts. That or they bought into it. (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/12/03/the-transition-from-prussian-conservatism-to-german-nationalism/>).

The demonstration starts to get quite heated, and the Berliner Stadtschloss is surrounded. According to Kaiser Wilhelm I’s statement, the government was remarkably concerned about whether some potentially innocent blokes might have been struck in the chaos, as opposed to actually defending the building:

On the 14th Fritz [Friedrich Wilhelm IV] was in Potsdam. I was with the Queen ... and Strelitzens at the opera, when at half-past 9 o'clock I heard the news that there were new disturbances and the garrison was moving out. I could only make sure that the gentlemen came safely to the castle, which was very easy, since only a few people had gathered. Of course, there was growing excitement in the city with each troop release and complaints that even innocent people would have received saber strokes; the constant accusation against the troops, as if they should first ask each one at Einhaun, whether he was guilty or innocent! Nevertheless, an order of the Government and Minister of the Interior appeared, according to which an investigation was to be conducted against the guards who had hit innocents. I was so upset about this arrangement at the moment when the troops were under the rifle every day that I complained to the king; but that all disappeared later.

The romantic nationalist demands are put forth and entertained:

On the 17th, the scene repeated itself all day on the Opera Square; In the evening the guardsmen, perhaps 800 to 1000 persons, like the local constables, put on bandages and sticks, and until half past nine in the evening brought about the break-up of the piles. Afterwards the citizens blew up in number, and at night the policemen decided to go to the head of the citizenry and, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, to take a lift to the castle to petition the king to withdraw the troops from the villages, also no longer to use them in the city, grant press freedom, recognition of the principle of Germanness [Deutschum], etc. This whole demonstration seems to me the reflection of the bourgeoisie [Buergerschaft, possibly also the Frankfurt Parliament]. It should be marked on this occasion, which of course was reached on the 19th – the current popular rule! Freedom of the press and Germanism [Deutschum] were proclaimed, appearing printed in an hour. It was 12 o'clock; the deputation proclaimed the answer to the assembled groups in the palace square, a tremendous jubilation sounded, thousands and thousands poured forth, the king appeared several times on the balcony, it was a joy. But the jubilation in front of the gate soon turned into ranting on the soldiers who had occupied the gate to prevent the penetration of the masses.

Although the fighting in Friedrichstrasse would subside, plenty of gore would erupt over a barricade at Breiten Strasse, which had also been the site of a much more obscure revolt in 1830 known as the "Schneiderrevolution."

A very fascinating statement is made by Wilhelm when at one point he calls a German flag "[at that time still] **an enemy sign**" [ein feindliches Zeichen].

The schwarz-rot-gold. Now a national flag, once a flag of national occupation. Why not still? We can call it the "Frankfurt Occupation Government," or FOG. "The FOG machine is censoring swastikas in my copy of Wolfenstein" will be the battle cry of a new generation of identitarians.

Ultimately, the mob overwhelms the city, and Count Arnim [Minister President of Prussia for a whopping 10 days] basically shrugs and says that it's all over for Berlin and the throne, so just get out of dodge. But in the interim, some lust for blood:

This was the last time I stepped on the balcony because I was told that the people were mad at me for commanding the bloodbath, so I should not show myself anymore. The screaming and the noise continued: “Troops away! Weapons! Poland free! (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_National_Committee_%281848%29)” Individual bodies were carried over the square, accompanied by hundreds of people.

But the worst of all was the abomination, when three corpses, all dressed, stained with blood, laid on tabletops, covered with laurel leaves, were brought to the balcony, and thousands of people were shouting for the king, their heads bared: “He must come to see the bodies!!!” In this scene, my heart turned around. Such shamefulness, such cannibalism, has not existed in world history! They cried in the rooms, they fell into each other’s arms, shuddering to see something like that happen! While cannibalistic joy reigned below, the crushed grief prevailed above — the fall of kingship and monarchy. **For the feeling of seeing royal dignity, prestige, and power in the dust in one hour’s time, and the popular anger and popular sovereignty in its place, was a terrible feeling! This was the hour of Prussia’s fall, from which it can never recover!**

So it was the hour of Prussia’s fall.

Certainly the ambitions of the Frankfurt Parliament would temporarily be stopped, but the core dilemma would remain, best expressed by the staunch unificationist Johann Gustav Droysen in 1848: “We cannot conceal the fact that the whole German question is a simple alternative between Prussia and Austria. In these states German life has its positive and negative poles—in the former, all the interests which are national and reformatory, in the latter, all that are dynastic and destructive. **The German question is not a constitutional question, but a question of power; and the Prussian monarchy is now wholly German, while that of Austria cannot be.** . . . We need a powerful ruling house. Austria’s power meant lack of power for us, whereas Prussia desired German unity in order to supply the deficiencies of her own power. Already Prussia is Germany in embryo. She will “merge” with Germany.”

Sometimes the worst enemies of the fatherland are the patriots.

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