The phenomenon of nationalism produces in its wake the politicization of various social institutions. Economic co-operatives, banks, athletic associations, language societies, scholarly organizations all may find themselves placed within the ranks of struggling national forces. Even elementary education, which involves a youngster's mastering accepted precepts, may become a battleground: as in the former Prussian province of Posen, it may become merely another aspect of the national struggle.

In the specific case of Posen, Polish students had studied the basics of learning in their own language from the Congress of Vienna through the 1860's. Then, in 1870, Otto von Bismarck transformed Prussia into Germany and attempted to mold all facets of this new, national Germany in accordance with his will. His will would determine even the content and form of Posen education.

Bismarck, whose talent lay chiefly in foreign policy, reasoned from the perspective of his specialty. He began with the assumption that two major relationships in European politics dictated Prussian policy towards the Poles. The first was the Polish-French relationship which, he believed, threatened his newly-united Germany with a two-front war. The second was the German-Russian relationship which, he was convinced, obliged Germany to co-operate with the tsar and, since the tsar suppressed his Poles, Bismarck concluded that he must suppress his own. His logic therefore placed Bismarck in the strongest possible opposition to a policy of acknowledging a unique position within Prussia for the Poles of Posen or, in the sphere of elementary education, educating Polish students in Polish: the German-Polish struggle in elementary education had begun.

Bismarck acted by prohibiting the use of Polish in Posen's schools and requiring the mastery of German to be the goal of a Prussian Pole's education. In fact, the approved method forbade any communication in Polish at all: the teacher would explain the meaning of a German word solely by using other German words. As a result, the school often produced children who repeated German phrases without comprehending their meaning. But pedagogical disasters failed to interest the Iron

3. While the method of teaching a foreign language by speaking only it and thus prohibiting the use of the students' native language in class might be employed today, employing this method in Bismarckian Germany while providing no study of the native language clearly indicated the state's desire to eradicate the Polish tongue.
Chancellor: these school regulations would remain as long as Bismarck held political power.

Elementary education thus had become an object of a politics which was only to be fundamentally shaken two decades later when Bismarck "resigned" in March, 1890. Since there was now a new Prussian leadership, Polish political leaders could hope for the restoration of the pre-Bismarckian status quo. They активitely attempted to transform this hope into a reality and in March, 1891, Father Florian Stablewski, one of the three Landtag deputies from Posen's district no. 7, once again appealed for the re-introduction of Polish language instruction in Prussian elementary schools. This time, since the successors to Bismarck decided they would make use of Polish support, the new Minister for Public Worship and Education, Robert von Zedlitz, considered Stablewski's petition seriously, and he and the new Chancellor, Georg Leo von Caprivi, "out of general political considerations" agreed to permit private Polish instruction in Posen's schools.

Zedlitz proceeded to inform the Oberpräsident of Posen and his chief subordinates, the Regierungspräsidenten of Posen and Bromberg, of this new departure. First, he correctly anticipated criticism and incorrectly attempted to neutralize it by maintaining that Bismarck had ordered the cessation of Polish language instruction solely to make more time available for German instruction. Since the government was going to authorize only after-hours instruction, the new edict, he contended, failed to contradict previous policy. Then he went on to justify the change by repeating Stablewski's constant contention that successful religious instruction required that the student be able to use religious materials in his native tongue. Thus, Zedlitz, in effect citing both Bismarck and Stablewski, argued that the state could at the same time retain the usual number of hours of German instruction while enabling Polish students to study Polish.

His decision was then made public in the edict of April 11, 1891, which permitted Posen's elementary school teachers upon application to the government to instruct children in Polish in state school buildings after-hours if the local district approved. It also provided for religious instruction in Polish for Polish children. However, children in mixed districts would be tested before they were assigned to a particular religious class: if they had mastered German, they would receive German religious instruction. In this way, and in the intrinsically uncertain status of private instruction in state schools, the edict still treated the Poles as second-class citizens and left the central issue of how to educate young Poles in Prussian Poland unresolved.

Since any answer would depend on "general political considerations"—which meant good relations with the government—Polish political leaders continued to address the new leadership. Józef Kościelski, the Polish Reichstag leader, in a memorandum sent to Caprivi on November 7, 1891, and meant to reach the eyes of

4. DZA Potsdam, Reichskanzlei, Die Polen (nr. 665, vol. 9), Stablewski's letter to Caprivi of March 10, 1891.
5. Ibid., Zedlitz to Caprivi of April 7, 1891.
6. DZA Merseburg, A.b. die Einführung eines fakultativen polnischen Lese- und Schreibunterricht für die Volksschulen der Provinz Posen (Rep. 77, Tit. 50, Nr. 21, Adh. 5). Zedlitz to Wilamowitz of April 11, 1891.