



Die konstituierende Sitzung der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft in der Königl. Akademie der bildenden Künste zu Berlin.

Title 418

The Kaiser's most important action for German Science was to support the foundation of the Society, called after him, *The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft*, here seen in their inaugural session at the Berlin Academy of Arts on 11 January 1911. *Courtesy Archives of Max-Planck-Society.*

If buildings, streets and traffic give the first impression of a prosperous, young and growing capital city, though guided by the Kaiser and his ultra-conservative entourage, a deeper look into its political and intellectual life shows that the beginning of the new century contained the seeds for great changes in Berlin during the rest of the 20th century.

Around 1910, Berlin was politically both the capital of Prussia and of the German Reich. It had a Prussian Parliament and in addition the Reichstag, with its deputies elected from the *Reich*, the whole of Germany. Their political future emerged from the parliamentary representation of the working classes, the Social Democrats and later the Communists. By 1918, the end of the first lost World War, these new political parties had gained power when in 1919, the Weimar Republic was proclaimed. My father voted, I clearly remember, for neither the Conservatives, the German National Party, nor for the Left, but for the liberal Centre Party, although it was dominated by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. I can only assume that my mother shared my father's political views.

Similarly, in the field of science, the shape of things to come became apparent. To celebrate the centenary of the Friedrich Wilhelm University, established in Berlin in 1809, the Kaiser decreed in 1911 that a Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft should be created with Adolf von Harnack, the eminent theologian, as its first President and Franz von Mendelssohn as the first Treasurer. It was to carry out scientific research in Institutes, as a single scientist's work was no longer considered adequate to produce new knowledge to assure world leadership for German Industry. The Kaiser's was well advised.

Re-named the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft after World War II now has 30 Institutes in its biological-medical Section; 28 Institutes in the chemical-physical-technical Section; 14 Institutes in the humanistic Section, distributed over the whole of Germany, many of world excellence. These Institutes regained for Germany, after 1945, the high standard in science, which they had lost in 1933 [Title 303]. The Foundation of the Society in the first decade of the 20th century, was undoubtedly the most important event for the future of science in Germany.

As I well remember, my father always subscribed to a number of medical Journals which kept him up-to-date in his special subjects. So for example, during the extremely hot summer of 1911, resulting in a very high death rate of infants, 20 of 100 live births—this must have concerned him deeply. The rapid growth of biochemistry around 1909, the discovery of vitamins, hormones and enzymes, must have interested him greatly and he would have wondered how this new knowledge could benefit his patients.