World War I and Its Consequences

Europe and the World, 1914–1929

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Europe that so many non-European intellectuals sought to imitate or reject between 1880 and 1920 came very close to self-destructing between 1914 and 1918, and bringing many of the world's peoples from Asia, Africa, and the Americas down with it. The orgy of bloodletting, then known as the "Great War," put seventy million men in uniform, of whom ten million were killed and twenty million were wounded. Most of the soldiers were Western European, though Russia contributed more soldiers than France or Germany, while Japan enlisted as many as the Austro-Hungarian Empire that began the war. Enlisted men also came from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the colonies; India, French West Africa, and German East Africa, among others. The majority of soldiers were killed in Europe, especially along the German Western Front—four hundred miles of trenches that spanned from Switzerland to the English Channel, across northeastern France. But battles were also fought along the borders of German, French, and English colonies in Africa, and there were high Australian casualties on the coast of Gallipoli in Ottoman Turkey.

The selections in this chapter focus on the lives and deaths of the soldiers, as well as the efforts of some of their political leaders to redefine the world around them. We examine the experiences of soldiers and how the war changed the lives of those who survived its devastating toll. We compare the accounts of those who fought on both sides of the great divide. Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, joined by the Ottoman Empire, formed an alliance called the Central Powers (see Map 24.1). In opposition, England, France, and Russia,
the Allied Powers, were later joined by Italy, Greece, Japan, and the United States. We compare views across the generational divide as well as from the trenches and government offices.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Understanding Causes and Consequences

From 1914 to 1920, the greatest divide was the war itself. It marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. Few events have left the participants with such a profound sense of fundamental change. And so our study of the war is an appropriate place to ask two of the universal questions of major historical change: What caused it? What were the consequences?

The causes are those events or forces that came before; the consequences are the results, what the war itself prompted to occur. Thus, causes and consequences are part of the same continuum. Still, we must remember that not everything that happened before the war was a cause of the war. Similarly, not everything that happened afterward was a result of the war.

In this chapter we explore specific ideas about cause and consequence. Our goal is not to compile a definitive list of either but, rather, to explore some of the ways that historians and thoughtful readers can make sense of the past.

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DAVID FROMKIN

Europe’s Last Summer, 2004

The author, a modern lawyer and historian, has written extensively on the Middle East as it was shaped by the First World War. In his book Europe’s Last Summer, subtitled “Who Started the Great War in 1914?,” he argues that Germany most wanted the war. In this selection from that work, he discusses three of the background causes of the war: imperialism, social-class conflicts, and nationalism. According to Fromkin, how did the clash of empires become more severe in the last decade or so of the twentieth century? How did domestic social conflicts increase the chances of war? How did nationalism undermine the European peace?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

While the development of imperialism, social-class conflicts, and nationalism are often counted as background causes of World War I, there is little agreement among historians as to which of the three is the most important. What factors would you weigh or what questions would you ask to make such a determination? Secondly, historians might argue that there were other background causes. Even in this brief selection, Fromkin touches on other changes in Europe that might be considered background causes. What are these? How important are they?

Empires Clash

At the start of the twentieth century Europe was at the peak of human accomplishment. In industry, technology, and science it had advanced beyond all previous societies. In wealth, knowledge, and power it exceeded any civilization that ever had existed.

Europe is almost the smallest of the continents: 3 or 4 million square miles in extent, depending on how you define its eastern frontiers. By contrast, the largest continent, Asia, has 17 million square miles. Indeed, some geographers viewed Europe as a mere peninsula of Asia.

Yet, by the beginning of the 1900s, the Great Powers of Europe—a mere handful of countries—had come to rule most of the earth. Between them, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia dominated Europe, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and even substantial parts of the Western Hemisphere. Of what little remained, much belonged to less powerful European states: Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and Spain. When all of its empires were added together, Europe spanned the globe.

But the European empires were of greatly unequal size and strength, an imbalance that led to instability, and as they were rivals, their leaders were continuously matching them against one another in their minds, trying to guess who would defeat whom in case of war and with whom, therefore, it would be best to ally. Military prowess was seen as a supreme value in an age that mistakenly believed Charles Darwin’s survival of the fittest to refer to the most murderous rather than (as we now understand it) to the best adapted.

The British Empire was the wealthiest, most powerful, and largest of the Great Powers. It controlled over a quarter of the land surface and a quarter of the population of the globe, and its navy dominated the world ocean that occupies more than 70 percent of the planet. Germany, a newly created confederation led by militarist Prussia, commanded the most powerful land army. Russia, the world’s largest country, a backward giant that sprawled across two continents, remained an enigma;
enfeebled by a war it lost to Japan in 1904–05, and by the revolution of 1905, it turned itself around by industrializing and arming with financial backing from France. France, despite exploiting a large empire, no longer was a match for Germany and therefore backed Russia as a counterweight to Teutonic power. The Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary ruled a variety of nationalities who were restless and often in conflict. Italy, a new state, as a latecomer aspiring to take its place among the powers, hanged to be treated as an equal.

It was commonly believed at the time that the road to wealth and greatness for European powers was through the acquisition of more colonies. The problem was that the Great Powers already controlled so much of the world that there was little left for others to take. Repeatedly, in going forward, the European powers ran up against one another. Time and again, war threatened, and only skilled diplomacy and self-restraint enabled them to pull back from the brink. The decades before 1914 were punctuated by crises, almost any one of which might have led to war.

It was no accident that some of the more conspicuous of these crises resulted from moves by Germany. It was because Germany's emperor—the Kaiser, or Caesar—in changing his Chancellor in 1890 also changed his government's policy. Otto von Bismarck, the iron-willed leader who had created Germany in 1870–71, was skeptical of imperialism. Far from believing that overseas colonies bring additional wealth and power, he apparently viewed them as a drain on both. In order to distract Europe from thoughts of recovering territories in Europe that Germany had seized—in Alsace-Lorraine—Bismarck encouraged and supported France in seeking new acquisitions in North Africa and Asia. As such a policy would bring France into frequent collisions with imperial England and Russia, thus dividing Germany's potential rivals, it suited all of Bismarck's purposes.

Post-Bismarck Germany coveted the overseas territories that the iron Chancellor had regarded as mere fool's gold. It positioned itself to take part in the coming partition of China. But the rulers in Berlin had come to the game too late. Germany no longer could win an empire on a scale proportioned to its position as the greatest military power in Europe. There was not world enough. No more continents were there for taking: no more Africans, no more Americas. Nonetheless—heedlessly—Wilhelmine Germany displayed an interest in overseas land.

As France moved deeper into Morocco at the beginning of the twentieth century to round out its North African empire, Germany, instead of offering encouragement and support, as Bismarck would have done, stepped in to oppose. These German moves misfired and sparked two of the more high-profile international crises of those years—the Morocco crises of 1905–06 and of 1911. To the German government these maneuvers may have been mere probes, but they caused genuine alarm in Europe.

In retrospect, it is clear the problem was that Germany's post-1890 hunger for empire could no longer be satisfied except by taking overseas territories away from the other European countries. This was not something likely to be accomplished by peaceful means. Could Germany therefore content itself with retaining the leading military and industrial power on the Continent but with African and Asian empires smaller than those of England or France? Germans themselves disagreed, of course, about what the answer to that question ought to be, and the climate of opinion was changing. Germany in 1914 was the only country on the Continent with more industrial than farm workers, and the growing strength of its socialist and working-class masses suggested that the nation might be compelled to focus its attention on solving problems at home rather than on adventures abroad. Alternatively, it suggested that Germany's leaders would have to pursue an aggressive foreign policy in order to distract attention from problems at home that remained unsolved.

Classes Struggle

Nor was Germany alone in being divided against itself. Europe before the war was in the grip of social and economic upheavals that were reshaping its structure and its politics. The Industrial Revolution that had begun in eighteenth-century France and England continued, at an accelerated pace, to effect radical changes in those two countries, as well as in Germany, and was making similar changes in others. Agrarian Europe, in part still feudal, and smokeshack Europe, bringing modernity, lived literally at the same time but figuratively centuries apart. Some still were living as though in the fourteenth century, with their pack animals and their slow, almost unchanging village rhythms, while others inhabited the crowded, sprawling cities of the twentieth century, driven by the newly invented internal combustion machine and informed by the telegraph.

At the same time, the growth of an urban factory-working population in the Industrial Revolution brought conflict between that population and factory owners over wages and working conditions. It also pitted both workers and manufacturers, on the one hand, who could expand their exports only in a free-trade world, against farmers, who needed protection, and the cash-poor landed gentry on the other. Class became a line of division and loyalty—the chief line according to many. Domestic strife threatened all the countries of Western Europe.

In Britain, the Labour party was formed to speak for a working class no longer content to be represented by the Liberal party, which sympathized with wage-earners but spoke as the voice of the professional.
classes and even some of the well-born. On the Continent, labor also turned to socialism, with growing success at the polls; in the German elections of 1912, the Social Democrats emerged as the largest single party in the Reichstag. It should have been some consolation to German and British conservatives that workers in their countries usually expressed their socialism peacefully by voting rather than (as Syndicalists did in France, Spain, and Italy) by strikes, riots, and terrorist attacks. But governments, in these times of frequent war crises, worried that their peoples might not support them if war broke out. The issue had another side to it—foreign adventures could distract from class and social conflict and bring the people instead to rally around the flag. Which would it be? Would class and social clashes divide, or would international conflicts unite?

Nations Quarrel

To socialist internationalism, the rival was nationalism, a passion that increasingly was taking priority over all else in the minds and hearts of Europeans as the nineteenth century departed and the twentieth arrived. Even Britain contracted the fever. Ireland—or at any rate its Roman Catholic majority—agitated violently for autonomy or independence, and clashed with the Protestants of Ulster who prepared to take up arms to defend the union with Great Britain.

Edwardian England already was a surprisingly violent country, torn by such issues as industrial wages and working conditions and also by the cause of woman suffrage. It was rocked, too, by a constitutional crisis that was also a class crisis. The crisis focused on two interrelated issues: the budget, and the power of the hereditary House of Lords to veto legislation enacted by the popularly elected House of Commons. Between them those conflicts eroded the sense of national solidarity.

Now that the country also was polarized on the question of home rule for Ireland, large sections of the army and of the Unionist Conservative party seemed prepared to defy law and government in order to hold on to the union with Ireland. The precedent set by the United States in 1861 was troubling. Would there be a British civil war?

On the continent of Europe the flames of nationalism threatened to burn down even structures that had endured for centuries. Hapsburg-ruler Austria, a holdover from the Middle Ages that until recently had been headed by the so-called Holy Roman Empire, remained, as it had been in the nineteenth century, the principal enemy of European nationalism. The two great new nations of Germany and Italy had been carved out of domains that the Hapsburgs once had dominated. At universities, coffeehouses, and in the dimly lit hiding places of secret societies and revolutionists, in the Balkans and Central Europe in the early years of the twentieth century, plans were being hatched by ethnic groups that aspired to achieve something similar. The nationalists were in contact with one another and with nihilists, anarchists, socialists, and others who lived and conspired in the obscurity of the political underground. It was there that Serbs, Croats, Czechs, and others plotted to disrupt and destroy the Austrian Empire.

The Hapsburgs were a dynasty that over the course of a thousand years had come to rule a motley collection of territories and peoples—a multinational empire that held no prospect of ever becoming a homogeneous national state. Centered in German-speaking Vienna, Austria-Hungary encompassed a variety of languages, ethnic groups, and climates. Its 50 million people comprised perhaps eleven or so nations or parts thereof. Many of its lands originally had been dowries that had come with marriage to territorial heiresses: whatever else you might say about them, the Hapsburg family wedded well. At its height in the sixteenth century, when it included Spain and much of the New World, the Hapsburg family holdings comprised the largest empire in the world. Hapsburg roots went back to Christmas Day 800, when Charlemagne the Frank was crowned emperor of the Roman Empire in the West by the pope. As Holy Roman Emperor, a post to which a Hapsburg was almost always elected from the fifteenth century until it was abolished in the early nineteenth century, the Hapsburgs dominated Central Europe, including its many German- and Italian-speaking political entities. In the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, they lost their Italian possessions to the newly unified Italy, and they were excluded from Prussian-organized, newly unified Germany in 1870-71. Once the leader of Europe’s Germans and Italians, the Hapsburg emperor was left as the odd man out.

Left alone with a German core—of Austria’s 28 million inhabitants, only 10 million were German—and a revolting empire of Central European and Balkan peoples, mostly Slavs, the Hapsburg ruler Franz Joseph found himself presiding over a political entity that arguably was not viable. The solution that he found in 1867 was a compact between Austria and a Hungary that was ruled by its Magyar minority, in which Franz Joseph served both as emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. The Dual Monarchy, as it was called, was a state in which Austria and Hungary each had its own parliament and its own Prime Minister, but there was only one foreign minister, one war minister, one finance minister—and, of course, only one monarch of both the Austrian empire and the Hungarian kingdom. The peoples who ruled were the minority Germans of Austria and the Magyar minority in Hungary. What they attempted to rule, in the words of one Hapsburg statesman, was “eight nations, seventeen countries, twenty parliamentary groups, twenty-seven parties”—and a spectrum of peoples and religions.

Europe was rapidly becoming a continent of nation-states. As it entered the twentieth century, a chief weakness of Austria-Hungary was
that it was on what looked to be the wrong side of history. But what was threatening to bring it down was a force that was not entirely progressive either; nationalism had its atavistic aspects.

Whether considered to be a political philosophy or its contrary, a type of mass delirium, nationalism was ambivalent. It was the democratic belief that each nation had the right to become independent and to rule itself. But it also was the illiberal insistence that nonmembers of the nation should assimilate, be denied civic rights, be expelled, or even be killed. Nationalism was having some as an expression of loving others. To add to the muddle, there was no agreement on what constitutes nationality. The 1911 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica calls it a “vague term” and remarked that “a nationality . . . represents a common feeling and an organized claim rather than distinct attributes which can be comprised in a strict definition.” So there was no general agreement on which groups were nations and which were not. It was one more issue for Europe to fight about. Some thought—some still think—that it was the main thing that Europe had to fight about.

In the absence of scientific measurement of public opinion through polls, historians are unable to tell us with any certainty what the people of Europe thought or felt in the pre-1914 age. This leaves a gap in our knowledge. It is not so great a gap as it would be today, for a century ago the public played little role in the formation of foreign policy. But public opinion was of some significance, in that decision-makers presumably did take it into account—to the extent that they knew what it was.

Evidence suggests that the most widespread feeling in Europe at the time was xenophobia; a great deal of hostility toward one another. The ethnic groups of the Balkans provided a conspicuous example of mutual hatred, but countries farther advanced exhibited such tendencies too.

England is a case in point. It had been in conflict or at war with France on and off since the eleventh century—in other words, for about a thousand years. Anti-French feeling remained high well into the twentieth century. Even during the First World War, in which the two countries were allies, British and French officers schemed and maneuvered against one another to take control of the postwar Arab Middle East.

Britain came into collision with Russia much later than it did with France, but once they did clash it was all across the board. The two countries opposed each other on one point after another, economically, politically, militarily, and ideologically. But that didn’t deter the British from opposing the Russians nor merely for what they did but for who they were. The story is recounted at length in a classic: The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain by John Howes Gleason.

Germany came into existence as a state only in 1871, and seemed to be possibly ally—the idea was discussed at the highest levels more than once—but the British became suspicious of Germany and then antagonistic. This was for a variety of reasons, thoroughly discussed in Paul Kennedy’s definitive account, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism.

So the British, though they believed themselves to be open-minded, detested the peoples of the next three ranking Great Powers: the French, the Russians, and the Germans.

The questions that European statesmen attempted to resolve at the dawn of the twentieth century therefore were being faced against a background of peoples who harbored hostile, sometimes warlike, sentiments.

The rise of independent mass-circulation newspapers in the nineteenth century in such European countries as England and France brought to bear upon decision-making yet another powerful influence impossible to calculate precisely. Appealing to popular fears and prejudices in order to win circulation, the press seems to have exacerbated hatred and divisions among Europeans. Of the anti-German British press, the anti-British German press, the German emperor wrote to the King of England in 1901: “The Press is awful on both sides.”

2

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

All Quiet on the Western Front, 1929

All Quiet on the Western Front, one of the most famous war novels ever written, follows the daily routines of the German army on the “Western Front,” the long line of trenches that stretched across northern France from Switzerland to the English Channel for most of the war between 1914 and 1918. Born in Germany, Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) served on the Western Front during the war until he was wounded. In this selection from the beginning of the novel, the narrator recalls how his teacher, Kantorek, induced him and his friends to enlist. Now one of them, Franz Kemmerich, has been seriously wounded and the group of friends visit him. What does this selection suggest about the types of people recruited to serve in the army? How do they experience the war, and how does it change them? Do you imagine that German soldiers behaved very differently from French or English soldiers?

Kantorek had been our schoolmaster, a stern little man in a grey tailcoat, with a face like a shrew mouse. He was about the same size as Corporal Himmelstoss, the “terror of Klosterberg.” It is very queer that the unhappiness of the world is so often brought on by small men. They are so much more energetic and uncompromising than the big fellows. I have always taken good care to keep out of sections with small company commanders. They are mostly confounded little martinetts.

During drill-time Kantorek gave us long lectures until the whole of our class went, under his shepherding, to the District Commandant and volunteered. I can see him now, as he used to glare at us through his spectacles and say in a moving voice: “Won't you join up, Comrades?”

These teachers always carry their feelings ready in their waistcoat pockets, and trot them out by the hour. But we didn't think of that then.

There was, indeed, one of us who hesitated and did not want to fall into line. That was Joseph Behm, a plump, homely fellow. But he did allow himself to be persuaded, otherwise he would have been ostracized. And perhaps more of us thought as he did, but no one could very well stand out, because at that time even one's parents were ready with the word “coward”; no one had the vaguest idea what we were for. The wisest were just the poor and simple people. They knew the war to be a misfortune, whereas those who were better off, and should have been able to see more clearly what the consequences would be, were beside themselves with joy.

Kateczinsky said that was a result of their upbringing. It made them stupid. And what Kat said, he had thought about.

Strange to say, Behm was one of the first to fall. He got hit in the eye during an attack, and we left him lying for dead. We couldn't bring him with us, because we had to come back helter-skelter. In the afternoon suddenly we heard him call, and saw him crawling about in No Man's Land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he could not see, and was mad with pain, he failed to keep under cover, and so was shot down before anyone could go and fetch him in.

Naturally we couldn't blame Kantorek for this. Where would the world be if one brought every man to book? There were thousands of Kantoreks, all of whom were convinced that they were acting for the best—in a way that cost them nothing.

And that is why they let us down so badly.

For us lads of eighteen they ought to have been mediators and guides to the world of maturity, the world of work, of duty, of culture, of progress—to the future. We often made fun of them and played jokes on them, but in our hearts we trusted them. The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a more humane wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in phrases and in cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces.

While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one's country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger. But for all that we were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards—they were very free with all these expressions. We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action; but also we distinguished the false from true, we had suddenly learned to see. And we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.

Before going over to see Kemmerich we pack up his things: He will need them on the way back.

In the dressing station there is great activity. It reeks as ever of carbolic, pus, and sweat. We are accustomed to a good deal in the billets, but this makes us feel faint. We ask for Kemmerich. He lies in a large room and receives us with feeble expressions of joy and helpless agitation. While he was unconscious someone had stolen his watch.

Müller shakes his head: “I always told you that nobody should carry as good a watch as that.”

Müller is rather crude and tactless, otherwise he would hold his tongue, for anybody can see that Kemmerich will never come out of this place again. Whether he finds his watch or not will make no difference, at the most one will only be able to send it to his people.

“How goes it, Franz?” asks Kropp.

Kemmerich's head sinks.

“Not so bad... but I have such a damned pain in my foot.”

We look at his bed covering. His leg lies under a wire basket. The bed covering arches over it. I kick Müller on the shin, for he is just about to tell Kemmerich what the orderlies told us outside: that Kemmerich has lost his foot. The leg is amputated. He looks ghastly, yellow and wan. In his face there are already the strained lines that we know so well, we have seen them now hundreds of times. They are not so much lines...
as marks. Under the skin the life no longer pulses, it has already pressed out the boundaries of the body. Death is working through from within. It already has command in the eyes. Here lies our comrade, Kemmerich, who a little while ago was roasting horse flesh with us and squatting in the shellholes. He it is still and yet it is not he any longer. His features have become uncertain and faint, like a photographic plate from which two pictures have been taken. Even his voice sounds like ashes.

I think of the time when we went away. His mother, a good plump matron, brought him to the station. She went continuously, her face was bloated and swollen. Kemmerich felt embarrassed, for she was the least composed of all; she simply dissolved into fat and water. Then she caught sight of me and took hold of my arm again and again, and implored me to look after Franz out there. Indeed he did have a face like a child, and such frail bones that after four weeks’ pack-carrying he already had flat feet. But how can a man look after anyone in the field?

“Now you will soon be going home,” says Kropp. “You would have had to wait at least three or four months for your leave.”

Kemmerich nods. I cannot bear to look at his hands, they are like wax. Under the nails is the dirt of the trenches, it shows through blue-black like poison. It strikes me that these nails will continue to grow like lean fantastic cellar-plants long after Kemmerich breathes no more. I see the picture before me. They twist themselves into corkscrews and grow and grow, and with them the hair on the decaying skull, just like grass in a good soil, just like grass, how can it be possible?

Müller leans over. “We have brought your things, Franz.”

Kemmerich signs with his hands. “Put them under the bed.”

Müller does so. Kemmerich starts on again about the watch. How can one calm him without making him suspicious?

Müller reappears with a pair of airman’s boots. They are fine English boots of soft, yellow leather which reach to the knees and lace up all the way—they are things to be coveted.

Müller is delighted at the sight of them. He matches their soles against his own clumsy boots and says: “Will you be taking them with you then, Franz?”

We all three have the same thought; even if he should get better, he would be able to use only one—they are no use to him. But as things are now it is a pity that they should stay here; the orderlies will of course grab them as soon as he is dead.

“Won’t you leave them with us?” Müller repeats.

Kemmerich doesn’t want to. They are his most prized possessions.

“Well, we could exchange,” suggests Müller again. “Out here one can make some use of them.” Still Kemmerich is not to be moved.

I tread on Müller’s foot; reluctantly he puts the fine boots back again under the bed.

We talk a little more and then take our leave.

“Cheerio, Franz.”

I promise him to come back in the morning. Müller talks of doing so, too. He is thinking of the lace-up boots and means to be on the spot.

Kemmerich moans. He is feverish. We get hold of an orderly outside and ask him to give Kemmerich a dose of morphia.

He refuses. “If we were to give morphia to everyone we would have to have trucks full.”

“You only attend to officers properly,” says Kropp viciously.

I hastily intervene and give him a cigarette. He takes it.

“Are you usually allowed to give it, then?” I ask him.

He is annoyed. “If you don’t think so, then why do you ask?”

I press a few more cigarettes into his hand. “Do us the favour—”

“Well, all right,” he says.

Kropp goes in with him. He doesn’t trust him and wants to see.

We wait outside.

Müller returns to the subject of the boots. “They would fit me perfectly. In these boots I get blister after blister. Do you think he will last till tomorrow after drill? If he passes out in the night, we know where the boots—”

Kropp returns. “Do you think—?” he asks.

“Done for,” said Müller emphatically.

We go back to the huts. I think of the letter that I must write tomorrow to Kemmerich’s mother. I am freezing. I could do with a lot of rum. Müller pulls up some grass and chews it. Suddenly little Kropp throws his cigarette away, stamps on it savagely, and looking around him with a broken and distracted face, stammers “Damn shits, the damned shits!”

We walk on for a long time. Kropp has calmed himself; we understand, he saw red; out there every man gets like that sometime.

“What has Kantorek written to you?” Müller asks him.

He laughs. “We are the Iron Youth.”

We all three smile bitterly. Kropp rails: He is glad that he can speak.

Yes, that’s the way they think, these hundred thousand Kantoreks! Iron Youth! Youth! We are none of us more than twenty years old. But young? Youth? That is long ago. We are old folk.