



1/ Ending War, Fighting for Peace

Revolutionary Women

University of Leeds

“ revolution has broken out ...
I’m crying tears of joy ”

Minna Cauer

Ending War, Fighting for Peace

The First World War was mobilised by Kings, Emperors and governments, who expected the loyal support of their armies, parliament and people.


When it was over, it left 10 million soldiers and at least 7 million civilians dead.

But how did the war end?

In Autumn 1918, popular revolutions toppled the Empires in Germany, Austria and Hungary, sweeping away the rulers and declaring people’s republics in the name of bread and peace.

These were ordinary people who decided enough was enough and stood up for what they felt was right.

How much do you know about the end of the war? What was it like in Germany as the war came to an end?



Action Frauen

ENDING WAR, FIGHTING FOR PEACE

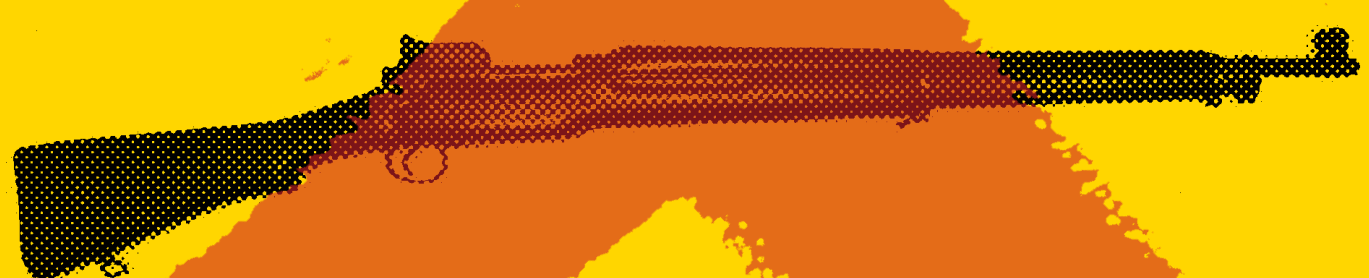


Minna Cauer, second from right

Minna Cauer / Activist

Minna Cauer (1841–1922) was a radical feminist leader, pacifist and editor of the women’s weekly journal *Die Frauenbewegung* (*The Women’s Movement*) from 1895–1919. In her diary, she wrote at the peak of the revolution on 9 November 1918:

“The emperor has abdicated, revolution has broken out [...] I’m crying tears of joy. The dream of my youth has been fulfilled in my old age. When I die it will be as a citizen of a Republic!”



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MAKING A STAND FOR PEACE

“War is methodical, organised, gigantic murder” Rosa Luxemburg

It was hard even to express opposition to the war while it was happening. What newspapers were allowed to print and what people could say in public was controlled by military censorship.

But not everyone supported the war. In 1915 over 1,300 women met at The Hague in Holland to discuss peaceful ways of stopping the war. They founded an organisation called the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

After the congress, delegations of women visited Heads of State and suggested ways to end the war through talking and compromise.



Rosa Luxemburg / Activist

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was one of the most famous anti-war activists of the First World War. She was imprisoned for her peace work:

“War is methodical, organised, gigantic murder.”

Rosika Schwimmer / Pacifist

Rosika Schwimmer (1877–1948) was a radical feminist and pacifist, campaigning internationally for peace, suffrage (the right to vote) and social justice. Born in Hungary, she was a founder member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

“Brains – they say – have ruled the world till today. If brains have brought us to what we are in now, I think it is time to allow also our hearts to speak. When our sons are killed by millions let us, mothers, only try to do good by going to kings and emperors, without any other danger than a refusal!”



The 1st meeting of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

From their meeting at The Hague, the women made these statements:

Protest:

We women, in International Congress assembled, protest against the madness and the horror of war, involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life and the destruction of so much that humanity has laboured through centuries to build up.

Women’s Sufferings in War:

This International Congress of Women oppose the assumption that women can be protected under the conditions of modern warfare. It protests vehemently against the odious wrongs of which women are the victims in time of war, and especially against the horrible violation of women which attends all war.



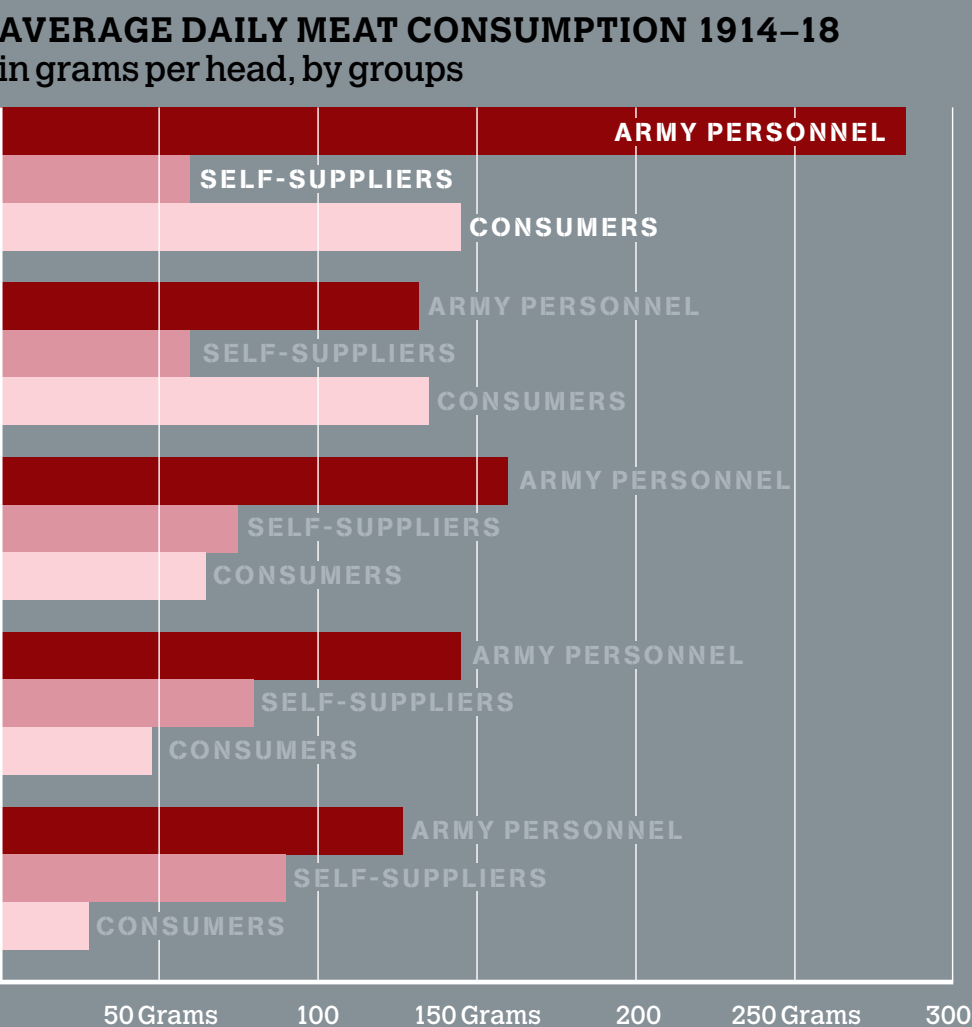
THE WAR AT WORK

For all countries, this was the first ever industrialised war and huge armies were involved. They relied on the labour of the entire population to support the war. People worked in factories to supply munitions and uniforms. Farmers produced food for the army and the military took over forms of transport. The army came first, making life very tough for people at home.



With hunger and poverty an everyday reality, children collect scrap metal for recycling

Rations Reduced :



The workers in the factories, both men and women, were unhappy and began to organise more and more strikes against long hours and low wages:

1916: 240 STRIKES

1917: 561 STRIKES

100,000 WORKERS ON STRIKE

4,000,000 4 MILLION WORKERS ON STRIKE

1918: 28th January— 100,000 workers were on strike, demanding an end to the war. Within days there were more than 4 million strikers protesting in the streets of cities across Germany

Police Officer Marschke described an incident in Berlin in October 1915: “Before the Göbel butter shop at Landsberger Ave. 54, a number of women protested loudly against the higher butter prices and assumed threatening behaviour, so that the manager of the shop closed early, at 6.30 pm. After that, police easily enough dispersed the protest. However, at 8.00pm large crowds gathered anew. Provoked by the loud griping of particular bigmouths, the crowds began to howl, whistle, and even throw a couple of stones at the shop, which broke the shop’s show window. When the attending officers attempted to intervene, stones were repeatedly thrown at them... It was 11.30 before peace returned to the street. All in all, about five to six thousand people participated in the [later] riot.”

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The allied blockade cut Germany off from supplies of food and fertiliser. Food shortages got worse and worse as the war continued. Worst of all was the Turnip Winter of 1916–1917.

“...he was disgusted by the world into which he had been thrown”

Pacifist Lola Landau

Pacifist Lola Landau (1892–1990) describes how her poor diet affected the birth of her son:

“The child was so weak that he couldn’t feed. After a few mouthfuls he would fall asleep on my breast while the milk dripped from his lips, which were drawn back in disgust. The tiny wrinkled face had the tired expression of an old man. Compared with his energetic brother, he had no desire to grow or to live, as if he was disgusted by the world into which he had been thrown.”

NOTHING TO EAT



Food queues were a familiar sight

Women begin to Riot

August 1916. “Towards seven o’clock, the mayor emerged from the city hall and informed the women nearest him once again that the distribution of butter could not take place until next Saturday ... These women said that they understood, but because the crowd standing behind them continued to scream and yell, he asked the women near him to convey this information to the others and to calm them down, which they promised to do; and he went back into the city hall. Between 7 and 8 the crowd diminished a bit, but around 8.30 they appeared in significantly larger numbers and began to attack the house of a member of the board of the Tangermünde dairy, in whose cellar there were rumoured to be four hundred kilograms of butter. Large rocks were torn out of the gutter, other rocks fetched from other streets, where they lay, and thrown at the house. By 11 in the evening, all the windows of the house had been broken. Someone even attempted to break down the door with large rocks. The police were powerless in the face of all this; some policemen were lightly injured by rocks.”

Food and Survival

Today, we know that men need 2,500 and women 2,000 calories to survive. After the winter of 1916–1917 many Germans were surviving on just 700–900 calories per day. Over 700,000 civilians died directly from lack of good food during the war.

Lack of Food Takes its Toll

Jane Addams (1860–1935) was an American feminist who led the first International Women’s Congress in 1915 and brought together women throughout the war.

“Walking the streets of Zurich the day we arrived I turned a corner and suddenly met one of the Austrian women who had been a delegate to The Hague Congress. ... She was so shrunk and changed that I had much difficulty in identifying her with the beautiful woman I had seen three years before. She was not only emaciated as by a wasting illness, looking as if she needed immediate hospital care—she did in fact die three months after her return to Vienna—but her face and artist’s hands were covered with rough red blotches due to the long use of soap substitutes, giving her a cruelly scalded appearance. My first reaction was one of overwhelming pity and alarm as I suddenly discovered my friend standing at the very gate of death.”



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People were Starving to Death

Total Military Deaths = 1,691,841
Total Civilian Deaths = 6,149,095
Total Civilian Excess = 474,085





“The Revolution has started;
it will be the end of the war...”

Gertrud Völcker

RISE AND

REVOLT



Rosa Luxemburg created a newspaper, Rote Fahne (The Red Flag) during the revolution and wrote:

“The leadership has failed... The masses (the people) are the decisive element, they are the rock on which the final victory of the revolution will be built.”

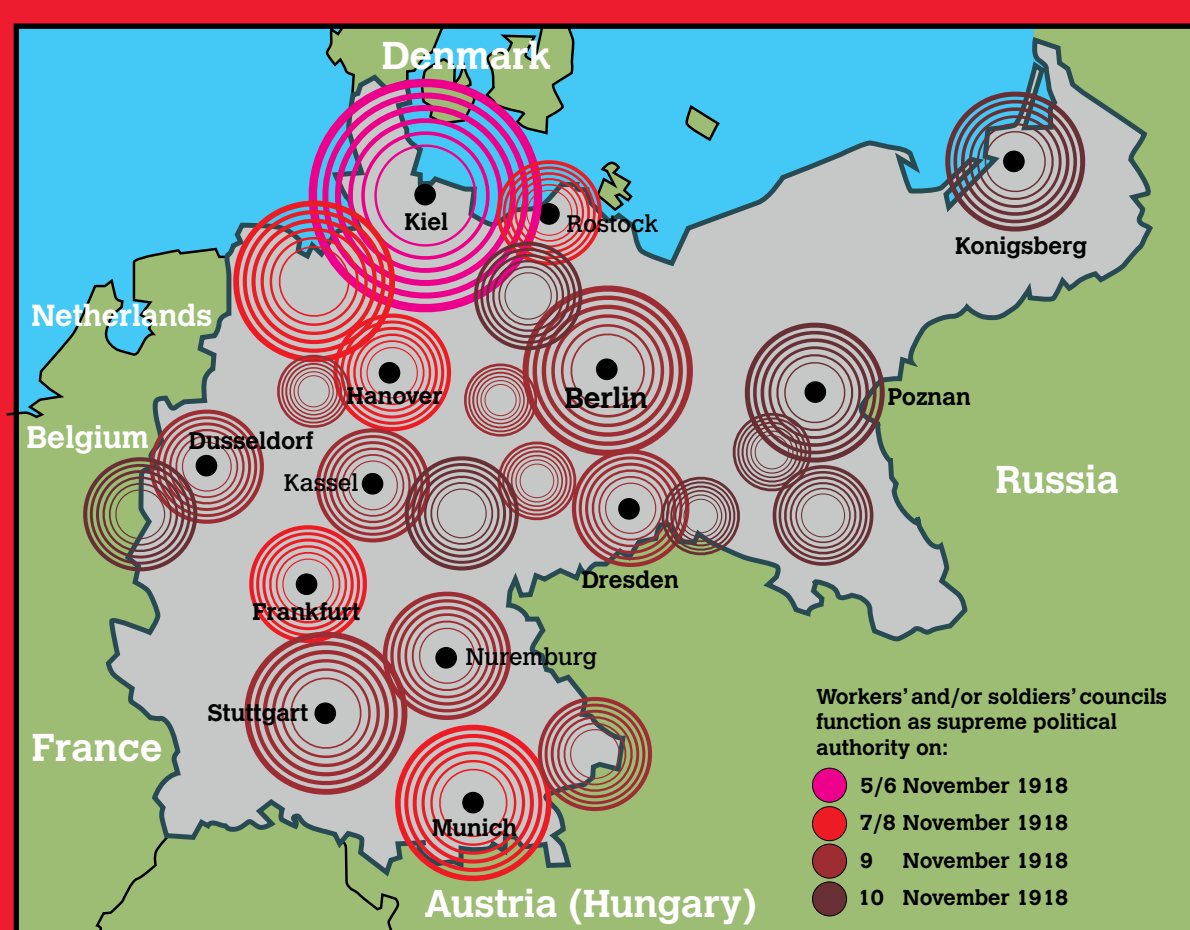


Gertrud Völcker (1896–1979) was a secretary, daughter of a metal worker, and part of the Trade Unions. She describes the outbreak of the revolution in her hometown of Kiel:

4 November:

“The sailors have been mutinying since Saturday. Yesterday there was a bloody clash: men shot at their fellow men. Some died and some were injured. So far, 20,000 sailors and dockers are on strike. The troops have invaded the town with machine guns. They have been ordered to shoot at us. No, the military won’t leave without bloodshed.

The revolution is starting; it will be the end of the war, the war caused by world-conquerors, who now stand before a sky-high mountain of corpses and rubble.”



With all the riots and hunger, by 1918, Germany was ready for a revolution—it just needed a spark.

At the end of October, soldiers in Wilhelmshaven refuse to follow orders—mutiny! They are sent to Kiel and imprisoned.

KIEL

5 November:

In Kiel, workers, soldiers and townspeople join together to protest against the imprisonment of the soldiers and call for the Kaiser (the Emperor) to abdicate and the war to end. The protestors are fired upon and 7 are killed. The protestors seize control of the town.

6 November:

The revolution in Kiel is the trigger for people across the whole country to take to the streets.

7 November:

Revolution spreads across Germany quickly—reaching Munich in just 2 days.

9 November:

The Kaiser abdicates and flees Germany. The government agrees to end the war!

And so, the First World War ended because the people went out onto the streets and demanded peace. It wasn’t stopped by military force, but by everyday people, and many strong women!



6/ Stop the War!

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“ I had never seen anything like it...
this is what a revolution must look like. ”

Hilde Kramer



STOP

THE WAR!



The people's demands went beyond supporting the mutinying sailors. They wanted to stop the war and called for peace and bread. They blamed the Kaiser for starting the war and when the upper classes saw the people on the streets they panicked and fled. It was up to the revolutionaries to come up with a new system of government.

Alle Macht den Räten!

All Power to the Councils!



Hilde Kramer

Hilde Kramer (1900–1974) was just 18 when she joined the revolution in Munich having decided to ‘dedicate her life to the fight for socialism’:

“On the way to the train station there was such a mass of people, I had never seen anything like it. I thought to myself: this is what a revolution must look like. Masses of soldiers, bare-headed and with their coats undone. In the beer hall, a large group was listening to a speaker who had planted a red flag in front of him: ‘for us the war is over’, he said. When I finally got home, tired and hungry, I was convinced that .. we didn’t just have the workers on our side, we also had the soldiers.”

Hilde Kramer spent the last years of her life in Otley, having left Germany in 1937 to escape the Nazis.

People Power

Many towns and cities set up councils made up of elected people from different workplaces, trades or professions. Councils were elected by fellow workers to represent their views. In Munich, they called themselves a ‘Council Republic’—a new, free state where no king or emperor would ever be in charge again.





7/ Visions of a New Germany

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The revolutionaries imagined the future of Germany in different ways. They wanted to prevent future wars and create a fairer society. This included equality between rich and poor, men and women, the military and civilians. The revolution fundamentally changed German society for ever. As well as changes in government, women were granted the vote, along with all men over 20 and greater freedom of speech.

VISIONS OF A NEW GERMANY



Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann

Writing for a New World

Anita Augspurg (1857–1943) and Lida Gustava Heymann (1868–1943) were feminists and pacifists, editors of the newspaper *Die Frau im Staat* (*The Woman in the State*) and founder members of WILPF. They were active in the Munich revolution and also opposed violence.

“A new life had begun! The heavy weight of the war years had vanished, we were striding confidently towards the future. At last women could throw themselves fully into their work. Women’s participation was wanted in all areas of politics and society. We called for women’s councils, which we had always seen as one of the best ways to raise German women’s political consciousness and confidence so they could learn to make their contribution to the new republic.”

WOMEN
OF
Action

“A new life had begun!”

Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann



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8/ Revolutionary Legacy

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“We are fighting for the next generation...”

REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY

After the revolution, the government was run by many of the same people as before, and they wanted things to return to normal as quickly as possible. Many of the women we have seen wanted the revolution to bring about huge changes in society, particularly people like Rosa Luxemburg. She and her friend Karl Liebknecht were murdered and the Council Republic in Munich was brutally crushed. Their legacy remains to this day, and people in Germany still get together to remember their lives and work.

The German revolution shows us that people working together to call for peace and justice can bring about major change. War was brought to an end by the people who said no, who imagined a new, peaceful, democratic and hopeful future without social inequality.



Rosa Luxemburg paid the highest price, but was always determined to inspire those around her.

“I want to affect people like a clap of thunder, to inflame their minds with the breadth of my vision, the strength of my conviction and the power of my expression.”

Hilde Kramer was imprisoned for part in the revolution. From there, she wrote:

“We are fighting for the next generation—we’re going to prison for their sakes. Our leaders died for them. We are clearing a path for them, building them a new age.”



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8/ Revolutionary Legacy

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“Stand up for what you believe in
even if you’re standing alone”

Sophie Scholl

REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY

Did the revolution pave the way for Hitler and the Third Reich?
The Treaty of Versailles was deeply unpopular in Germany
because it said the Germans were guilty, had to disband their
military and pay back money to the other countries.



The victorious allied leaders met at Versailles near Paris.
From left to right: Clemenceau (France), Wilson (USA),
Lloyd-George (GB).

Article 231:

‘The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and
Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and
her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which
the Allied and Associated Governments and their
nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the
war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany
and her allies.’

Article 159:

‘The German military forces shall be demobilized and
reduced as prescribed hereinafter.’

Those who quashed the revolution left a legacy of
violence and made people distrust and hate each
other. Far right groups were able to use all of these
factors to attack the new Republic, dividing those
who once stood together for peace.

Until the global recession of 1929, Hitler’s ‘National
Socialism’ was just one choice among many. But
as people began to struggle financially, it became
easier to make them hate and fear each other and
vote for Hitler’s party, which promised to make
Germany great again and give ‘pure’ Germans
more benefits.

Although the Nazis took power, many ordinary
German people continued to resist the rise of
fascism.

In 1942, a small group of students formed The White
Rose, a group which wanted to see an end to
Hitler’s power. They produced leaflets and tried
to get other students and people to join them. In
February 1943 brother and sister Hans and Sophie
Scholl, alongside Christoph Probst, were caught,
tried and sentenced to death.



Sophie Scholl (1921–1943)

“Stand up for what you believe in even
if you’re standing alone”



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