Revolution in Germany
1918 - 1919

The Facebook Diaries (I)
By Bernd Hendricks
Between November 2018 and April 2019, I posted the diary **TODAY 100 YEARS AGO** on Facebook about the Revolution of workers and soldiers that swept away the Kaiser monarchy, gave birth to the first republic in Germany, and wrestled without success against the power of big industry and the military.

Here, I have compiled these postings and added a few. They are based on what I as a child learned from members of my family and their friends who were involved in the revolutionary events, as well on recently released books about the subject and new studies by young historians who are not bound anymore by the ideological limits of the cold war.

I have written the texts in English to the best of my knowledge. I apologize for any grammatical or spelling errors or for wrong punctuation you might find. If there is an error unbearable to you, please notify me. I am in a position, history will never be: I can correct the mistakes and will present you a new and better version.

*Bernd Hendricks*

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**Summer 1918.**

The war is in its fourth year. It has eaten millions and makes the living starve. Cabbage instead of patatoes: Seven hundred thousand die in Germany of malnourishment. However, the industrialist Hugo Stinnes alone earns 400 million Reichsmark with his ammunition factory in Dortmund. In January, mass strikes for peace have taken place. In Berlin workers elected for the first time a Workers’ Council. It was banned. Arrests followed. Germany is in the grip of a military regime. General Erich Ludendorff and field marshall Paul von Hindenburg govern with decrees. The Kaiser signs their drafts. The chancellor and his ministers obey.

**September 28. Army headquarters, Hotel Britannique in Spa, Belgium.**

Yesterday, Germany’s ally Bulgaria has capitulated. American troops have landed in France. The Entente has started its offensive at the western front. In the morning, general Ludendorff reveals to chancellor count Hertlich and his deputy Hinze a confidential analysis. The war cannot be won anymore. Hertlich’s cabinet has to give way to a civilian government. This new government has to negotiate a truce with the enemies. Ludendorff fears a Revolution in Germany, and so he
discusses with Hinze a plan to prevent it. Their idea is the introduction of a parliamentary system. The Kaiser’s responsibilities should be restricted to representative duties. They call their plan “Revolution from the top.”

At noon: Ludendorff and Hertlich present the plan to Hindenburg. The field marshall accepts.

Afternoon: Hindenburg presents the plan to the Kaiser. His majesty listens and nods.

**September 29. Train stations in Berlin.**

Every evening since August, the stenographer Marta Globig walks from train station to train station and talks with the soldiers who are waiting for their train to the front lines. She advises them to stay. Nobody knows the exact number, but at this moment up to 40,000 deserters live in Berlin. They hate the war and they know whenever they will fight again, then in the streets of Berlin, then against those who had driven them to the trenches with patriotic clamor. Most of them are keeping their rifles and pistols.

Noon. Hotel Britannique in Spa, Belgium.

Kaiser Wilhelm II. decides that in the future his majesty will neither determine the policy nor appoint the government anymore. A parliament shall do that. He fires count Hertlich and appoints as the new chancellor prince Max von Baden who has to organize the transition. General Ludendorff urges Max von Baden to ask the enemies for a truce in the next 24 hours. The western front is deteriorating slowly and inexorably, and slowly and inexorably, the old order of the homeland is slipping away.

**October 1. Hotel Britannique in Spa, Belgium.**

General Ludendorff speaks to leading officers, to the most important and the most intimate. He says, the allies will break through the German front lines, soon. Soon, the war will be over and Germany will be without a victory. The men start sobbing in this little hall. The general says, the poison of socialist activities has contaminated the morale of the army. The troops will flood over the Rhein river and bring the Revolution to Germany. The men start grinding their teeth in this little hall. The Kaiser, the general says, will put those into the government who have been nagging all the time. These men here waged war for four years. They
ordered murder and owned the victories. The defeat, however, they will give to the civilians. These civilians should spoon out the soup. In this little hall, the eyes of men, still wet from the tears, start shining about this daring plan.

**October 2. Berlin, Reichstag, room of the parliamentary group of the SPD.**

The chairman of the social democratic party (SPD), Friedrich Ebert, learns that the war will end with a defeat. Ebert cries. Has he not done everything for the war? When the war broke out, has he not kept the workers quiet? Did he not go to the big rally in Treptow in January and asked the striking workers to return to the armament factories to “deliver the best weapons possible?” Did he himself not sacrifice two sons to the war and to the Kaiser? The head of his parliamentary group, Hugo Haase, had resigned demanding peace. Ebert called him an “insolent scoundrel.” His party colleague Karl Liebknecht has been in prison for the last two years because he had shouted to a couple of hundred workers on Potsdamer Platz, “Down with the war! Down with the government!” Did Ebert not express contentment to the military about this punishment? Did he not give up the unity of his party, this proud and strong party of the working class? He had to let Haase go to found his own party, a party of peace and socialism, the independent social democratic party (USPD). Ebert is crying. Ebert loves his fatherland more than peace, even more than the working class. And now, what will happen to the fatherland? What will happen to his SPD? Ebert is crying bitterly.

**Oktober 29. Bremerhaven.**

At the seaport Bremerhaven after receiving the order to sail for an exercise, sailors of the battleship *Thüringen*, a 160 meters long swimming fortress with 12 cannons, refuse to lift the anker. The night before, waiters of a restaurant had come to the ship and told the sailors about a drinking feast of officers of the *Thüringen*. The officers clinked the glasses to “doom in honor.” The sailors are not going to an exercise, but to a deadly battle against the British navy. The war is almost over, and it is lost. The sailors refuse to die for the honor of generals and admirals somewhere in Berlin. Here, in the cabins of the *Thüringen*, the Revolution begins, and in a few days it will spread throughout Germany and topple the Kaiser.
October 30. Bremerhaven.

Yesterday, the sailors of the battleship Thüringen refused to sail into a hopeless battle against the British navy. Today, the admirals sent torpedo boats. They ordered the sailors to end the mutiny, and aimed torpedos at the ship. In return, the sailors turn the cannons at the torpedo boats. The stand-off takes one long hour. In the meantime, sailors of another battleship, the Helgoland hand to each other flyers with the slogan “Down with the war!”. They, too, refuse to sail. Last night, hundreds have deserted other ships and found refuge in the homes of dockworkers. Eventually, the torpedo boats back off. The admirals have canceled the battle and ordered the fleet to sail to Kiel. Marines enter the Thüringen and the Helgoland and arrest the mutineers, around thousand sailors. They face prison and then execution. The government believes it has everything under control but they have no idea that in Kiel a great rebellion is waiting.

In between:

A poster of the government in Berlin remembering the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote, asks, “Wofür streitest Du?” It means,“For what do you fight?”

The women’s right to vote was introduced during the Revolution in November 1918. According to the official version in many history books and in speeches by politicians we heard at the anniversary, the right to vote was given by the government on November 12, three days after the people toppled the Kaiser. We are told that women voted the first time in January 1919 during the election of the National Assembly.

However, women voted earlier without asking the powerful for permission and without much consideration for future historians. After the uprising of the sailors in Bremerhaven and Kiel, workers in factories and neighborhoods elected Councils of Workers (Arbeiterräte); soldiers in barracks created Councils of Soldiers (Soldatenräte). In a matter of days thousands of those Councils sprung up throughout the country and replaced the crumbling power of the monarchy.

The first election with women’s participation that is documented was in the night from November 9th to the 10th, the election of the Worker’s Council of Berlin, two days before the government declared the right to vote. According to statistics I read, around 70 per cent of workers in some parts of the armament
industry were women at that time. In mid December 1918, the Central Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils met in Berlin with ca. 500 delegates. However, only two of them were women. Unlike in the U.K. and in the U.S. where mostly middle class women fought and achieved the right to vote, in Germany working class women took the leadership not only for their own rights but often for the Revolution itself. During the storm of the police headquarters by thousands in the early afternoon on November 9 in Berlin to free political prisoners, the worker Helene Zirkel put the red flag on the roof. In some violent conflicts, like in Berlin in March 1919 women shot with machine-guns and organized attacks against the Kaiser police, or in peaceful instances initiated strikes like the 5,000 female employees of the Wertheim department store chain in Berlin. When on Christmas 1918 troops of the old military attacked the People’s Navy Division, sailors who came to Berlin to protect the government institutions, women rushed to the battle site at the castle and, disregarding the danger, convinced the attackers to lay down their weapons. This was the last time, the generals would let women mess up their plans. In response, the Freikorps, a voluntary army whose soldiers in some instances carried already a swastika on their helmet, was formed, and in the course of the following year and a half, the Council movement, this new form of democracy, was suppressed by military force. The Freikorps committed massacres in many places in Germany, especially in Bavaria, Bremen, the Ruhr Valley and in Berlin, killing thousands of people, many of them women and children.

**November 1. Kiel.**

The frigates of the 3rd squadron enter the port of Kiel with 1,000 prisoners on board. Two days earlier, they rebelled in Bremerhaven by refusing to sail into a hopeless battle against the British navy. Fearing insubordination of the entire fleet, the admirals withdrew the battle order. Now, as they have to march to the prison of Kiel, their mates - and guards - realize that these mutineers have actually saved their lives. The prison gates close in front of them but instead of going back to the ships the sailors meet in the trade unions’ building. What can they do? How can they free their friends?

They send a delegation to the military commandant of Kiel to demand the release of the prisoners. On the decks of the ships, the officers pace back and forth, aristocrats and bourgeois sons who hate the sailors more than the war
enemies. As rumors go, in Metz in France, an entire division has refused to return to the trenches. They say that the Kaiser has traveled to headquarters in Spa in Belgium. His majesty does not know that he will never come back to Germany. In Kiel, the SPD hands out flyers. They ask for “calm and order.” Friedrich Ebert, the man later generations will celebrate as the “father of German democracy” declares in Berlin, “Germany is not ready for a Republic.”

The delegation has returned. Their message does not surprise. The commandant refuses to fulfill the sailors’ demand. The military trial and the executions of the prisoners are imminent. Night falls. The sailors made their decision. They will return to the ships on more time - to get their weapons.


The marines close the house of the trade unions in the morning. In the afternoon, it opens again. Too many sailors have gathered in front of it; there is little the navy command can do. Only those can prop up the Kaiser who were once his biggest enemy: The leading men of the social democratic party. Vice-admiral Wilhelm Souchon sends a telegram to Berlin: “Send me a talented social democrat to give a speech to avoid the Revolution.” The leading men of the party obey. They choose the military expert of the SPD parliamentary group, a proponent of the war, a man who hates turmoil and disorder and loves giving great speeches. In a couple of days, the sailors will give him a triumphal welcome. They will believe he came as a friend. He will get the situation in Kiel under control with revolutionary rhetoric and grand gestures. He is tall, wears round glasses, his hands are delicate but in a couple of months these hands will be stained with the blood of those who are trusting him at this moment. His name is Gustav Noske.


They fetched their weapons from the ships and now they are waiting in front of the house of the trade unions. Karl Artelt, a sailor and machinist from Magdeburg, and the sailor Lothar Popp from Bavaria climb the stairs and call for a march to the prison. Another man appears beside them. Gustav Garbe, the local official of the SPD, wants to hold back the sailors - without success. They march to local factories to ask workers to join. Now they are six thousand approaching the
prison. On the Landstraße at the Café Kaiser a line of soldiers tries to stop the march, rifles in hand. Their lieutenant, named Steinhäuser, orders to shoot. Nine demonstrators die. A sailor aims at the lieutenant and pulls the trigger. Steinhäuser is dead. A few minutes later, the prison gates open. The prisoners are free. In the evening, the sailors and workers introduce democracy to Kiel, to Germany. In the house of the trade unions, they elect the first Council of Soldiers with Karl Artelt as chairman. The Council presents demands to the local military commander, Bartels: Abdication of the Kaiser, free elections and the women’s right to vote. Bartels is flabbergasted. “But gentlemen, this is a political program,” he says.

They march to the train station. From up north dozens of delegations set off into the night with the German railroad committing the original sin in the Kaiser’s empire, they refuse to be obedient and break the law. There is no return. They must carry the revolt into the country. Under their feet the wheels rumble agains the rails. The locomotive’s steam crosses the compartment windows and disappears into the darkness. The sailors are silent. Behind them lies Kiel under red flags, in front of them the black night. In a few hours they will know what the next day has in store for them. Death or Revolution?


Red flags fly on every warship. Kiel is in the hands of 40,000 sailors and workers. They have occupied the city hall and patrol the streets. Meanwhile, the first sailors are arriving in Berlin. The ministry of war prevents an order by general von Linsingen to bomb the trains by air but bans all demonstrations. An illegal group of workers in factories in Berlin called “Revolutionary Stewards” has been preparing an armed uprising collecting weapons and building bombs. They set the date for the Revolution: November 11. In Germany, nothing goes without a Terminkalender. In Kiel: Gustav Noske steps out of the train and gives a fiery speech, hails the sailors and calls for calm and order. The sailors and workers elect him as the chairman of the Kiel Council of Workers and Soldiers and do not know that they are making their first mistake. The man they trust writes in his diary later this day, he is “in the heart of the mutiny that I condemn and want to end.”

The Revolution reaches Hamburg, the first big city. Workers and soldiers elect a Council and take power in the city. Sailors patrol the streets. Where ever they see officers, they take away their weapons and pull off their epaulettes. The SPD politician Hermann Müller awakes in his hotel bed from noise in the lobby. Sailors, searching for officers, enter Müller’s room and ask for his papers. When he gives them his passport, one sailor remarks that the passport has expired and Müller needs to renew it. This is a Revolution in Germany: A rebellious sailor who is committing high treason in the eyes of the empirial power is concerned about the validity of IDs. In the evening: Workers’ Councils take control in Bremen and Bremerhaven, then Oldenburg, then Hannover where sailors stop an attack by troops of general von Haenisch. The general gets arrested. Everywhere the same demands: The Kaiser must go, free elections, women’s right to vote, free speech, release of all political prisoners. In Berlin, the USPD, a workers party that has split from the SPD and has been opposing the war, announces for the evening 26 meetings despite the ban of any gatherings. Kaiser troops occupy the Lehrter Bahnhof (today Ostbahnhof). They fear arriving sailors. Nevertheless, the Revolution is rolling forward and tomorrow it will surprise the good citizens of Munich.

Wednesday, November 7. Munich.

The day begins with a general strike in Munich. Thousands gather on the Theresienwiese (today the location of the October fest) demanding peace, the end of the monarchy, and unity of the two rivaling labor parties, the social democratic party (SPD) and the independent socialists (USPD). SPD leaders speak and then leave the place while the masses stay. Thousands march to factories and barracks, lead by the writer Kurt Eisner, an old man with grey hair and a long beard, and hand in hand with the blind leader of farmers and peasants, Ludwig Gandorfer. The people love Eisner. He often gave speeches for peace in the beer hall Goldener Anker and for that he often went to jail. His friends are poets, artists, journalists like himself. The crowd arrives at the parliament building, break open the doors, get inside. For the first time, poor people take the benches - and power. Eisner proclaims the Free Republic Bavaria. The people there in this room, Catholics, working class people, elect for the first (and probably the last) time in Bavarian history an intellectual, a Jew from Berlin, Kurt Eisner as their president.
Outside, people enter police stations and occupy newspaper buildings, and at around 7 pm thousands start surrounding the king’s palace. King Ludwig III and his family flee in a car. The more than 700 years old Wittelsbach dynasty has come to an end. In Berlin: The powerful are looking for a way to stop the Revolution. Chancellor Max von Baden meets privately with Friedrich Ebert, the head of the social democratic party and a staunch supporter of the war. Ebert wants to save the monarchy too, but not with Wilhelm II, the Kaiser the people hate. The Kaiser must go, he says, if not “we will have the social Revolution. I don’t want it. I hate the Revolution like sin.”

Thursday, November 8.

Look, how the old regime crumbles!

Koblenz:

An old man with a red ribbon on a stick walks through the streets. Children follow chanting Frieden, Frieden (peace, peace). Police want to disperse them but soldiers step in and push them aside. The crowd occupies the police headquarters and free the political prisoners. Later a Council of Workers and Soldiers assumes power in the city.

Cologne:

The Infantry Regiment No 29 has order to occupy the Neumarkt and the bridges and to shoot at revolutionaries. The soldiers refuse and join the demonstrators. In a pub on Fleischmengergasse, people elect a Workers Council. Weapons are brought in.

Munich:

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke goes to a meeting of citizens in the beer hall of the Wagner Hotel and hears as he later wrote to a friend a “young, pale worker” speak. The worker urges the crowd not to leave the peace negotiations to the rulers. He suggests to take over the next broadcast station. “We, the common people will speak to the common people on the other side and then we will have peace the next day.” He points at the intellectuals in the crowd: “The gentlemen professors speak French. They will help us.”

Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland):
The authorities release the peace activist, socialist and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg from jail.

**Spa, Belgium, army headquarters:**

The Kaiser asks the 39 commanders of the German field troops if their soldiers would be willing to return to Germany with him as the leader and suppress the Revolution. The commanders respond with silence. The Kaiser has lost all support.

**Berlin:**

For weeks, the Revolutionary Stewards, an illegal group of workers, has collected pistols and built granates. They cannot wait any longer. For tomorrow, they call for a general strike in Berlin; tomorrow must be the day of an armed uprising. However, one of them, Richard Müller, observes at Hallesches Tor with horror how heavy armed government troops enter the city with artillery and machine-guns. When the troops move into the Alexander barracks some soldiers start to question their mission. They meet the SPD politician Otto Wels who urges them not to shoot at the people. The news from Spa and the Alexander barracks reach chancellor Max von Baden. “We cannot crush the Revolution anymore,” he says. “We must suffocate it.”

**Friday, November 9. Berlin.**

6:00 am: The office worker Cläre Casper-Derfert hands out flyers to workers of a factory on Kaiserin-Augusta-Straße in Charlottenburg, calling for a general strike at 9 am. Like her, many members of the Revolutionary Stewards are mobilizing people throughout the city.

8:00 am: Thousands are on their way to the city center. Some carry weapons, others signs: Peace, Freedom, Bread, Socialism.

8:30 am: The Naumburger Regiment refuses to shoot at the people.

9:05 am: Chancellor Max von Baden receives a call from the army headquarters, based in Spa, Belgium. The abdication of the Kaiser is imminent, they say.

10:15 am and later: One regiment after another takes the side of the people. More and more people march towards the government area. Soldiers throw their weapons into the Spree river.

Around 10:45 am: Workers of the AEG engine factory gather at the Maikäfer barracks, Chausseestraße. They want to convince the soldiers to join the
Revolution. Officers shot into the crowd and kill three workers. (Today, a street in Berlin-Mitte is named after one of the victims, Erich Habersaath.)

11:00 am: No news from Spa. The Kaiser is silent.

12:00 pm: Berlin is boiling over. Although the Kaiser is still silent chancellor Max von Baden simply declares his majesty’s abdication. Von Baden hands over his job to Friedrich Ebert, the head of the social democratic party. Ebert’s first official act is signing a flyer in which he urges the “fellow citizens” to leave the streets and go home. The masses ignore his message.

1:00 pm: Alexanderplatz. Thousands surround the police headquarters and the prison (today Alexa shopping mall). When the antiwar activist Emil Eichhorn knocks at the door to ask the authorities to hand over the building, the police men throw their pistols and sables into the court yard and leave. The demonstrators release 650 political prisoners. On the roof, the worker Helene Zirkel raises the red flag.

Around 1 pm: The masses move to the city castle, where hundreds begin to carry out furniture and other valuable things. A man named Schlesinger puts an end to it: “The castle is now property of the people and cannot be touched,” he cries.

2:00 pm: Ebert and the SPD politician Philipp Scheidemann have lunch in the canteen of the Reichstag when a crowd outside demands a statement. Scheidemann steps to an open window and proclaims the “Social Republic”. Afterwards, Ebert is furious: “You have no right to proclaim the Republic. Only a National Assembly can do that.”

3 pm: Workers appear at the barracks in Spandau. They carry signs: “Brothers, don’t shoot!”

4:30 pm: On the balcony of the city castle, the leader of the Spartakus group, Karl Liebknecht, proclaims the “Free Socialist Republic.” A few hours later, he will be invited to join the new government but he declines. He demands, “All power to the Workers’ Councils.”

Evening: Ebert manages to form a cabinet, a coalition with the independent socialists (USPD). Meanwhile, workers, sailors and soldiers go in and out of the Reichstag, sleep on the floor, smoke, discuss.

Shortly after 10 pm: The Revolutionary Stewards whose actions began this tremendous day will end it in the chamber of the Reichstag. A couple of hundreds discuss the next steps and decide that tomorrow morning, Berlin’s workers and soldiers will elect representatives for a meeting at Zirkus Busch (nearby
Hackesche Höfe). As if Ebert and his efforts did not exist they call for these representatives to build a revolutionary government. For the first time, women are allowed to vote and to be candidates. Ebert is shocked when he hears the news. He must act quickly and mobilize his base during the night.

11 pm: The phone rings on Ebert’s desk in the chancellery. Ebert is surprised because the sailors actually have cut all telephone lines; except this one, a secret line to the army’s headquarters. Ebert hears the voice of the representative of the Prussian military, general Groener: “Would you like to work with us? We have an offer to make.”


The Kaiser enters a train in Spa. He leaves to the Netherlands into exile. Although he will never return to Germany again, his military and his state apparatus are still intact - as well as the secret telephone line over which general Groener last night offered to the chancellor, Friedrich Ebert, the support of the military. In return, the military expects that Ebert fights bolshevism and restore order in the army. This means no more Councils of Soldiers, no more Councils of Workers, no abolition of private property of banks and big industry. Ebert agrees.

For 5 pm a meeting of the Berlin Councils of Workers and Soldiers is planed at Circus Busch (nearby Hackescher Markt) to determine a revolutionary government. In the night, the Revolutionary Stewards and Ebert’s people, rush to the factories and barracks to campaign for their candidates. The war minister of the Kaiser, Scheuch, still in office, gives technical support to Ebert’s SPD, cars, telephone lines. Scheuch appoints the SPD politician Otto Wels as the city’s mayor.

5 pm: Three thousand representatives gather in Circus Busch. Outside commotion breaks out when Otto Wels approaches the circus with a group of soldiers. A young man steps in front of him, a pistol drawn, and yells, “You dog, you will mess up everything.” They push him aside. In the circus, the atmosphere is tense. Ebert shows up. His opponent, Karl Liebknecht, accuses him to be a traitor of the workers because he has supported the war. The delegates boo. They want unity. Soldiers storm the podium shaking their riffles. Ebert presents the coalition he put together last night. The majority supports him. Liebknecht leaves angrily. The Revolutionary Stewards seem to be outmaneuvered but their speaker Emil Barth suggests to form an Executive Council consisting of delegates that
controls the government. The meeting agrees and demands a “quick and thorough socialization of the means of production,” the end of capitalism. The private property of banks and the big industry is at risk. Workers, among them many followers of Ebert, want to take control of the companies. Like Liebknecht before, Ebert leaves. He does not feel safe anymore in Circus Busch.

**Sunday, November 11. Compiègne, France.**

Peace!

Representatives of the Allies and the German government sign in the Forrest of Compiègne, France, the armistice that ends the war. Fifteen Million people died on the battlefields. The generals and navy officers of the Allies wait in vain for their military counterparts. As pompous German generals act in their victories and *Hurra-Patriotismus* as cowardly they are in defeat. The highest ranking general, field marshall Paul von Hindenburg, sends a group of civilians lead by the politician of the Center Party, Matthias Erzberger. He signs the armistice and in the next months and years, he will be scorned by rightwing radicals as traitor. Much later, Hitler will use the stab-in-the-back legend for his propaganda. According to this myth, the German army could have won the war if there have not been a Revolution that brought civilians to power. On August 26, 1920, two members of the secret rightwing group of assassins *Organisation Consul*, shoot Erzberger to death. Thirteen more years later, Hindenburg is president and on January 30, 1933, he appoints Hitler as chancellor.

**Monday, November 12.**

The new government, the so called Council of the People’s Representatives, a coalition of SPD and independent socialists (USPD), make the following decisions:
- Freedom of speech and assembly
- Abolition of censorship
- Freedom of religion
- Eight-hour workday
- Introduction of unemployment benefits
- Free and fair elections, women suffrage

The Executive Council, a body of the Berlin Councils of Workers and Soldiers,
that controls the government, adds the following demands:
- Socialization of key industries like coal and steel and of those companies that profited from the war: Stinnes, Thyssen, Krupp, Borsig, AEG, Siemens and others.
- Break-up of the Prussian military. Instead, building of a People’s Army.

The government will never fulfill these demands. It will assist the owners of big industry against striking workers, and the Imperial officers will remain. The new government has no idea that it is going to feed the grave diggers of the Republic they just have founded.


When members of the Dresden Council of Soldiers inform the king of Saxony that he is dethroned, Friedrich August III can not help but to express his hurt feelings: “Well, then, do your shit alone!”

November 15. Berlin.

In a hotel in Berlin, the leader of Germany’s trade unions, Carl Legien, and the most important industrialists, among them Hugo Stinnes, Ernst von Borsig, Felix Deutsch and Walther Rathenau (both AEG) as well as Carl Friedrich von Siemens (Siemens) agree to a form of labor relations that the world has never seen before. The bosses recognize the trade unions which means they will regularly bargain wages. They accept the eight-hour work day and the establishment of Betriebsräte, of shop stewards. What looks like a triumph of the unions and a major concession of the industrialists is in reality a compromise that starts to fall apart the moment it got signed. The Workers’s Councils, already the most important form of power, are surprised because they have not being included in the talks. The industrialists are still enjoying their power because the private property of their companies remains untouched. Legien will honor the agreement, the industrialists will not. In two years, the eight-hour work day will be abolished. The shop stewards will only have some social functions. Wages will be cut and everyone who protests against it will be fired.

Meanwhile in the city castle, the former Kaiser residence: 1.800 sailors, the ambassadors of the Revolution, move in. They want to protect the Revolution, will guard government buildings and patrol the streets. They call themselves the
People’s Navy Division. They do not wear badges of rank. They elect their commanders. They form the first - and so far last - democratic military unit in Germany.

Mid November.

By now in almost every city, Councils of Workers’ and Soldiers’ are the new power. They disarm officers and organize food distribution. They occupy city halls (like in Neukölln) and try to get the administration under their control. They allocate empty apartments, confiscate buildings of speculators (like in Munich) and prepare the takeover of companies (like in the Ruhr Valley). In Berlin a School of Councils will be founded. The people want to know how to run a country and a company. On December 16, a Central Congress of Councils is planned where representatives of all Councils decide Germany’s future. However, the old power does not give up. Over the phone, chancellor Ebert talks every evening with the Kaiser generals. The social democrat leaves them in office. He says, only they are able to organize the return of the troops, and he wants to celebrate the army after the end of this terrible war. So he decides that on December 10 the returning troops shall hold a parade in Berlin. The generals are delighted. What will be a parade according to Ebert’s plans will be an invasion according to the generals’ intentions. For them the nightmare of Revolution will be over on December 10 and the Central Congress of Councils will be canceled. They are planning a coup d’état.

On November 20, hundreds of thousands of Berliners march from Tempelhofer Feld to the cemetery in Friedrichshain to say farewell to the eight citizens who gave their lifes in the uprising of November 9.


Artists around the expressionist painter Max Pechstein found the November Gruppe in the gallery Fraenkel & Co at Lützowufer 13 in Berlin. This group wants to develop new forms of art and exhibit their works. Later, artists like the dadaists Hans Arp and Hannah Hoech, the painter George Grosz, the architect Mies van der Rohe and the composers Hanns Eisler and Kurt Weill will join the November Gruppe.

The cabinet which is called Council of the People’s Representatives is meeting in the chancellery when sailors of the People’s Navy Division enter the room and pass a note for chancellor Ebert. The note says that according to rumors among soldiers and sailors, officers are planning a coup d’état, possibly today. Even the code name is known: “Black heart on red ground.” The sailors wait for orders to protect the government but Ebert ignores the warning.

At 5 pm, military vehicles advance to the chancellery and circa 150 armed men in uniform surround the building. A sergeant named Spiro climbs the hood of a car and demands to speak with Ebert. The chancellor appears at the entrance and listens to Spiro’s offers. The sergeant wants the National Assembly be moved to an earlier date, to December 20, and the Central Congress of Councils, planned in a few days, be banned. In the same time, the military would declare Ebert a dictator. Spiro asks whether Ebert accepts. Before he vanishes behind the door, Ebert responds that he has to talk with the cabinet about these offers. He does not condone the officer’s actions, he does not reject them either. A few hundred meters away, around 25 soldiers have entered a meeting of the Executive Council at the Prussian parliament. This Council is a panel elected by the workers of the capital to control the government. The soldiers declare the Council to be arrested. A heated discussion follows. Emil Barth, leader of the Revolutionary Stewards, uses the Prussian subservience of the counter-revolutionaries to the benefit of the Executive Council. He asks the soldiers if they can produce a written order by the government because without such an order they are not able to do anything. The soldiers are baffled and in this moment of confusion Barth barks at them. He as a member of the government orders the soldiers to leave the building. They obey and draw back.

At least here, the Republic has been saved but not at the intersection Chausseestraße and Invalidenstraße. Soldiers of the fusilier troops from the nearby Maikäfer barracks are waiting for a workers’ demonstration from the north of Berlin. The city’s mayor Otto Wels (SPD) has ordered them to stop the march. The news about the coup attempt has reached the factories, and whoever can starts out to the government area to protect the Executive Council. They reach the intersection shortly before 6 pm. A streetcar passes by. A couple of people rush to cross the street but some of them will not reach the other side alive. From Chausseestraße in the direction of Oranienburger Tor a machine-gun fires for two
Did this working class fighting for democracy. In 100 people lie in their blood when the salvo ends, 16 of them are dead, among them a 16 year old girl in the streetcar.

**December 8, Berlin.**

On this day, the fate of the Revolution is in limbo. In two days, front troops will march through the Brandenburg Gate in a homecoming parade. Berlin is talking about another coup in the making. Rumors spread through the crowds on the streets. A first lieutenant called Heyne rushes to a meeting of Berlin’s Councils of Workers and Soldiers and informs about troops amassing outside the city. The homecoming divisions are suppose to occupy the city and arrest the Councils; the officers want to grab the power, so the rumors go. Ebert has commissioned general Arnold Lequis, chief of the general command of Berlin, to organize the parade. Lequis hates the Councils. He does not show compassion towards rebels which he has proven eleven years ago when he participated in the genozide against the Herero people in Germany’s Africa colonies.

In the evening, finally, Berlin’s working class appears in the streets. 150.000 people join the funeral of the victims of the December 6 massacre. That’s how the day is ending: A tragedy is behind it, a farce lays ahead.

**December 10.**

Except for the parade itself, nothing what the protagonists of this day have intended works out.

Friedrich Ebert waits on a pedestal at the Brandenburg Gate for the approaching ten divisions. Generals surround him, one of them commander Lequis. Ebert greets them politely although he knows that they have been ignoring his directions. He demanded red flags on the Brandenburg Gate but imperial war flags fly instead, the black-white-red symbol of Prussian militarism. The troops should have left heavy arms outside the city, Ebert allowed only rifles with little ammunition. However, general Groener who has promised support for the chancellor, told his officers to ignore the order. Only soldiers from Berlin are suppose to march, accompanied by workers delegations. Instead, the parade is lead by captain Waldemar Pabst with his Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division, an elite unit from the east front that would rather batter workers.
Ebert wears his best suit and waves his top hat while the troops are passing by. He gives a speech praising the German army and hailing patriotism and cries, “No enemy ever defeated you. Now, Germany’s unity is in your hands.”

What Pabst and Lequis really want to see in their hands is power. Days earlier, they prepared a plan of attack and wrote orders. Once they would pass the pedestal the divisions would enter the city, move to the barracks and disarm the local army units. The officers would declare martial law. Every person who will be seen with a weapon should be shot. They want to crush the Revolution, a month after its triumph. As they watch the troops marching by, something unbelievable happens, something that has never before occurred in the history of the German army, maybe in the history of any army, and will never occur after that to this day. The soldiers, tired of war and glad to be alive, just shrug, shoulder their rifles and go home. Helplessly the officers watch their soldiers disappearing into the crowd and never return to their units. Ten thousand soldiers participated in the parade. In two weeks, only 800 of them will report for duty.

**December 16 - December 21.**

The Central Congress of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils convenes in the Prussian parliament building. The Congress of 514 delegates is a sensation, the first nation-wide institution after the fall of the monarchy that was created in free elections. For the first time, women in the entire country were able to vote. However, only two of them were send as delegates. The majority (300 delegates) belongs to the social democratic party, to the SPD. Hundred delegates belong to the USPD. The rest of the delegates are not affiliated with any party or belong to the Spartakus group of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Both have not been elected and are not allowed to address the congress. Thus, Liebknecht leads several thousand Berliners to the building and demands “All Power to the Councils.”

On the panel are the members of the cabinet and the Executive Council. In the plenum chamber, the delegates debate Germany’s future. Some delegates report of open acts of counter-revolution in their regions, about troops that arrested Workers’ Councils, burned red flags or formed paramilitary groups. Richard Müller who represents revolutionary workers from factories in Berlin accuses the government to organize the elimination of the Councils. Chancellor Ebert does not deny. He demands a National Assembly, a parliament that has been elected by
all social classes and that will secure the power of the propertied class. He gets what he wants. The majority of the congress supports the election of the National Assembly on January 20, and therefore, votes against a Council system. But the congress demands the socialization of big industry as well, hoping that working people take over the factories.

Three days before the end of the session, a dramatic incident occurs. Soldiers of 17 regiments, most of them have walked away after the parade a few days earlier, and sailors of the People’s Navy Division enter the building and occupy the stage, weapons over their shoulders, posters in their hands. They demand the dismissal of the generals and the abolishment of all ranks. The army must be a people’s army where the soldiers elect their commanders. The central command over the army should be in the hands of a Supreme Council of Soldiers to make sure that a German army will never wage war again.

The delegates jump from the chairs, screaming at each other. Some of them want to leave the meeting. The congress postpones the topic, and in the next morning they agree on the so called Sieben Hamburger Punkte named after a proposal by the delegation from Hamburg. In them the congress follows all demands of the soldiers but leave the central command to the government.

After the news of the congress’s resolution reaches the army headquarters, field marshall Hindenburg refuses in a telegram to Ebert to accept the decision. Ebert caves in to the general and obeys the industrialists. His government will neither hand over the industry to the workers, nor the army to the soldiers.


For weeks, several hundred sailors are stationed at the city castle. They call themselves People’s Navy Division. They came from the coast where they had started the revolt against the war. Now, war comes to them.

Until now they have protected the government and guarded the government buildings. The people respect them but the government wants to get rid of them. The People’s Navy Division is the opposite of what the Prussian military represents. The sailors elect their commanders and refuse to act against the people. A week ago, they stormed the Central Congress of Councils demanding the dismissal of the Kaiser’s generals. Now, newspapers report rumors sailors have looted the castle. Mayor Otto Wels tells them he will give their pay only when they hand over the keys of the castle to the government and vacate the
building. A delegation arrives with the keys at the chancellory. Emil Barth of the Revolutionary Stewards and member of the government receives the keys and calls Wels who refuses to pay the money when the order does not come from Ebert. But Ebert’s assistants tell Barth the chancellor is not available.

On the way back, the sailors enter the city mayor’s building, declare Wels as arrested and take him to the castle. Others detain the members of the government and cut the telephone lines except one, the secret line between Ebert’s desk and the army headquarter. Ebert asks the army for help. He wants Wels rescued. General Lequis and captain Pabst gather their troops at first in the Tiergarten park. At night they lead them to the Humboldt University at the center of the city.

Ebert issues the order to attack at two o’clock in the morning. An hour later, Wels knocks at his door, tired and disheveled. The sailors have slapped him and then let him go. At 7:45 a.m. officers issue an ultimatum demanding the vacation of the castle in ten minutes. The sailors are laughing. Moments later, the first 10.5-centimeter granates hit the city castle, tear a hole into the fassade and blow out windows. Gas granates follow poising the air in some parts of the building. The sailors have nothing but machine-guns. They fire back as good as they can, move to other rooms before the cannon gunners on the other side discover them.

This is the first artillery attack ever in a German city. The generals hope to break the sailors’ resistance with brute force. But brutality is noisy. The sounds of the explosions wake up the city. The people in the working class areas know immediately that their People’s Navy Division is being attacked. In the factories sirenes go off. Crowds leave the workshops and living quarters and rush to the city castle. They arrive at the battle scene when the first attackers are about to cross the Lustgarten park and the bridge. Without hesitation, the people confront the soldiers with no other weapon than their courage, among them many women with children. The soldiers pause as the women demand that they put down their weapons. The generals have to watch with horror, that their soldiers obey the women not them. Some drop their rifles to the ground. Others throw them into the Spree river.

The counter-revolutionaries retreat. Today, they are defeated. Never again, the generals swear, never again will they lead regular troops against the Revolution. In the hour of their greatest humiliation, they give birth to the idea of founding a volunteer army, military units of nationalists who hate nothing more than democracy, who are fanatical enough to shoot at women and children, too: the Freikorps.
The Christmas battle, as it is known, cost the lives of 68 human beings, 57 Lequis’ soldiers and 11 sailors.

The USPD leaves the government in protest of the attack against the People’s Navy Division. Now, the SPD with Friedrich Ebert as its leader run the government. Ebert calls Gustav Noske who got the Revolution in Kiel under control, and asks him to join the government.

In the building of the Prussian parliament, members of the Spartakus group and some communist organizations found the German communist party (KPD). Headed by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, they want all power to the Councils. The majority of the party congress rejects the proposal of Luxemburg and Liebknecht to participate in the elections to the National Assembly on January 19.

January 4, 1919.
The government fires the police chief of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, and triggers a civil war in the capital.

Emil Eichhorn, the antiwar-politician who lost his son in the war lead the occupation of the police headquarters on November 9. In the last couple of weeks, Eichhorn had replaced the old police with workers’ militias. On Christmas, he had refused to send the militias against the People’s Navy Division. Ebert has decided that Eichhorn must go. The nerves of the city are on edge. This evening at a meeting with representatives of the Revolutionary Stewards, the USPD and the KPD, Eichhorn calls for a demonstration for the next day. But what happens tomorrow and the days after, he and his friends will not be able to control anymore. Gustav Noske is back in town. The hour of the counter-revolution has come.

Sunday, January 5.
Hundreds of thousands follow the call for protest against the firing of police chief Emil Eichhorn. The Siegesallee (today Straße des 17. Juni) at the Tiergarten, the boulevard Unter den Linden, the castle square, the Königsstraße and the
Alexander square in front of police headquarters are filled with people, many armed, the “most tremendous demonstration of the Berlin workers since November 9,” as one observer notes. They fear the return of the old regime. Eichhorn speaks from the balcony of police headquarters, followed by the leader of the Spartakus group, Karl Liebknecht, the old pacifist and socialist Georg Ledebour and the revolutionary worker Ernst Däumig. The speakers go back into the building and form with 86 others a “revolutionary committee”. Here, Heinrich Dorrenbach, commander of the People’s Naval Division, announces that the sailors and the Berlin regiments are ready to support the uprising. Shall they dare? Would it be possible to topple the government, to break up the old military, to nationalize the big industry and establish a system of Councils? In the Spartakus newspaper *Rote Fahne*, the socialist Rosa Luxemburg warns of a premature uprising. The rest of the country would not follow. After all, in two weeks will be the elections to the National Assembly. While the masses are waiting, the revolutionary committee debates endlessly. At dawn, the first people leave. Then, someone shouts, “Let’s go to the newspaper area!” Around 600 armed workers approach the building of *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the governing party SPD on Lindenstraße, near Hallesches Tor. Others occupy a telegraph news agency and the publishing houses *Mosse*, *Scherl* and *Ullstein* as well as the print shop of a Berlin newspaper. The January uprising has begun but the rebels have lost already. What Dorrenbach euphorically promised, he cannot keep. The regiments will not move. Even the sailors of the People’s Naval Division will declare themselves neutral. The first shots will fall in 24 hours. Then, no one will be able to help the occupiers.

**Monday, January 6.**

In the morning, crowds of people assemble again in the center of Berlin, many of them armed. The government calls for a counter-demonstration. And so, on the Unter den Linden boulevard they pass each other with their own parades, peacefully, quietly looking at each other, workers on each side, the procession of division, one parade towards police headquarters where around 200 revolutionaries barricaded themselves, the other parade towards the chancellery. Here the counter-revolution is in conference. Colonel Reinhard, head of an extrem right-wing Freikorps militia suggests general von Hoffmann as the leader of the military operations against the insurgents. Chancellor Ebert rejects the idea
because a Kaiser general would “not be well received by the working class.” Then
Gustav Noske, just returned from Kiel and newly appointed minister, utters the
infamous sentence that will go into history: “Well, I will do it; someone has to be
the bloodhound.”

Noske is ready for a bloodbath while the revolutionary commitee at the
imperial stable behind the city castle is still debating. The revolutionaries want to
take power but do not know how and with whom. Last night, groups of armed
workers spontaneously have occupied newspaper buildings. Now, they are
occupying train stations and the government print shop. There is neither
coordination nor communication. The commitee gives order to occupy the war
ministry. A sailor named Lemminger moves with 300 armed men to the ministry’s
entrance and shows a lieutenant the order. When the lieutenant notices that there
are no signatures, Lemminger replies, “Indeed. We cannot occupy the ministry
without signatures.” The revolutionaries turn around and go home.

First gunshots in the newspaper area at around 4 pm. Then, at 4:30 pm fire by
machine-guns and artillery, then silence until 5:30 pm when the bombardment
begins. In the evening, Freikorps at the chancellery shoot into the crowd, killing
25 people and wounding 50. The bloodhound has begun his work.

**Tuesday, January 7.**

Gun fights in the government area. At 4 pm a fight breaks out at the
Brandenburg Gate because whoever occupies the Brandenburg Gate controls the
access to the Reichstag and the chancellery. Hundreds of people flee towards the
Tiergarten park. Revolutionaries climb the gate where government soldiers put up
a machine-gun. Because it has a jam they cannot shoot. The soldiers flee, the
revolutionaries capture the gate - for now. Meanwhile, politicians of the USPD,
among them the old marxist theoretician Karl Kautsky, negotiate a cease-fire. The
arms are silent but while rebels and government talk, troops are moved from
Potsdam to the newspaper area around Hallesches Tor. They take positions with
machine-guns on roofs and with cannons and mine-throwers in the streets. A tall
man with thick glasses leaves the chancellery, makes his way through the masses
of protesters asking politely for passage. Nobody recognizes him, Gustav Noske,
supreme commander of the government troops who wants to finish the Revolution
for once and for all. He is on his way to the neighborhood in Dahlem in the
western part of the city. Here, in a former boarding school for girls, his Freikorps
In between

Who is Karl Liebknecht?
Son of the co-founder of the social democratic party SPD, Wilhelm Liebknecht, born in August 1871 in Leipzig. Friedrich Engels is his godfather.

Since 1900 member of the SPD. In 1907 he publishes a small but explosive book, titled *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* in which he describes how the military has penetrated every aspect of society, and how it is used internationally against other countries and colonies, and domestically against the people. The Kaiser reads the book and is disgusted. So, the authorities indict Liebknecht for high treason and sentence him for one and a half years to prison. While still in prison, the citizens of Berlin elect him into the Prussian parliament. Since 1912 member of the German parliament, the Reichstag, for the SPD, and here his fate will be decided two years later in December 1914, four months after the beginning of the war when he voted as the only one in the Reichstag against the war credits, against the war, and thus against his party comrades Ebert and Noske. Liebknecht joins the party faction *Gruppe Internationale*, an opposition group against the war Rosa Luxemburg has founded in early August. When he wants to speak in the Reichstag in April 1916, conservative politicians scream at him, calling him “thug” and an “English spy.” A few weeks later, he wants to give a speech at an antiwar rally on Potsdamer Platz. He can only say eight words, “Down with the war, down with the government,” before the police arrests him. When the court sentences Liebknecht in August 1916 to four years in prison, 50,000 workers in Berlin strike in solidarity.

Released shortly before the beginning of the November Revolution. Leads the Spartakus group, a small organization sympathetic with the Russian Revolution a year earlier. Proclaims the “Free Socialist Republic” at the city castle, two hours after SPD politician Scheidemann has proclaimed the “Social Republic”. Liebknecht is popular among the workers, but he overestimates his political influence. On December 31, he and Rosa Luxemburg found the German communist party. His enemies, the Kaiser officers and his former party friends
hate him. As early as early December, a “anti-bolshevist league” calls on posters in Berlin for his and Luxemburg’s murder.

**Wednesday, January 8.**

Liebknecht is one of the leaders of the January uprising. The revolutionary committee meets in the Bötzow brewery in Prenzlauer Berg. An emissary of the Workers’ Council of Leipzig finds him here as he is pacing between the machine-guns and screaming orders nobody listens to. Liebknecht is desperate. He senses defeat. In a few days, his life will be over.

**In between:**

Who is Rosa Luxemburg?

Born in 1871 in Zamość in Eastern Poland as child of Jewish parents. Polish is her mother tongue. She later speaks German, Russian, French, reads English, knows Latin and ancient Greek. She loves literature - in her last hour she reads in Goethe’s *Faust*. Writing is her passion. At 13, she writes a satirical poem against the Kaiser who is visiting Warsaw.

She goes to secondary school for women, and that is all a woman can do in the kingdom of Poland which belongs to tsarist Russia. Thus, she moves to Zurich where men and women can study together. Studies botany, economy, mathematics, philosophy. Meets socialist emigrees from all around Europe, among them Leo Jogiches, laywer from Vilna in Lithuania. They fall in love, become a couple and remain a couple when she marries the metalworker Gustav Lübeck who is German and wants to help her to attain German citizenship. Joins the SPD. Campaigns for the SPD in Silecia, inspires thousands of workers with her speeches. She wins the district for the SPD, of course not for herself because as a woman she is neither allowed to vote nor to be elected. Writes for social democratic newspapers. Quarrels with the SPD ideologue Eduard Bernstein who has developed the theory that capitalism can be overcome by electoral success and reforms; a Revolution would not be necessary. Luxemburg belongs to the marxist faction. She disdains nationalism. The year before the war, in August 1913, she proclaims at thousands of people in Frankfurt, “When we are called to raise
murderous weapons against our French or other brothers abroad, we will declare: ‘No, we will not do this.’” Result of her speech: 14 months in prison.

Then the war begins. When the SPD leadership decides to support the war, she considers suicide. Founds the antiwar group Gruppe Internationale. Between 1915 and 1918, the government locks her up in “protective custody” in Wroclaw. In Prison, she learns about the Russian Revolution which she supports. However, she rejects Lenin’s ideas of power. She preferes the power of the Worker’s Councils to the power of one party. She is released from jail on November 8, and reaches Berlin on November 10, the day after the workers had toppled the Kaiser. Meets Liebknecht. Editor in Chief of Die Rote Fahne. Founds with Liebknecht the communist party on December 31. She wants her party to participate in the elections for the National Assembly on January 19, but her comrades outvote her idea. She believes that revolutionaries should never take power without the support of the majority of the workers.

**Thursday, January 9.**

In a heated debate Rosa Luxemburg confronts her friend Liebknecht. He has ignored that the uprising has not the support of the majority of the workers. She warns against a “Berlin Commune” which, isolated from the rest of the country, must fail like the Paris Commune in 1871. For the military, the industrialists and the SPD government, she symbolizes everything that threatens their power: She is a revolutionary, a woman, a Jewess, a foreigner, a brilliant intellectual. In less than a week, they will have a blow of a rifle butt for her, and, because it will be not sufficient, a bullet as well.

**Friday, January 10.**

Two days ago, the Ebert government published a statement against the insurgent workers in Berlin: “The hour of reckoning is approaching!” For the local Council of Workers and Soldiers that since yesterday has occupied the city hall of Spandau with machine-guns, this hour has come. The military shells the city hall with howitzers, mine-throwers and tanks, and put the interior of the building on fire with flamethrowers. The Council surrenders. The military takes 63 prisoners, eight of them women, and immediately shoot Robert Pieser, the chairman of the Council outside at the wall of city hall.
Attack against Schlesischer Bahnhof (today Ostbahnhof). The occupiers flee, ten of them are women who take their weapons with them.

Attack against the Mosse publishing house. The occupiers, most of them members of a socialist youth organization, escape through a rear exit.

The communist party KPD pulls Karl Liebknecht out of the revolutionary commitee because they consider the uprising a failure. Although the military is searching for Liebknecht, he still takes the U-Bahn. He meets Rosa Luxemburg in a hideout, in an apartment near Hallesches Tor but neighbors recognize him. Both have to leave.

At the same hour, evening: Industrialists and bankers listen to a lecture of the nationalist author Eduard Stadtler. The topic: “Bolshevism as a threat to the world.” The director of the Deutsche Bank, Paul Mankiewitz, has invited, and top leaders of German businesses came: The weapon manufacturers Ernst von Borsig and Hugo Stinnes, Felix Deutsch (AEG), Carl Friedrich von Siemens, representatives of banks and the association of the steel industry. They meet in the “House of Aviation” at the Schöneberger Ufer near the newspaper district. The cannons firing against the revolutionaries they are hearing is background music for a proposal Hugo Stinnes makes and that everyone happily accepts: To found a “Anti-bolshevist fund” in which their companies pay a fee. Five hundred million Reichsmark will be available in the coming weeks for counter-revolutionary volunteer units, the Freikorps, for weapons, ammunition and propaganda material.

**Saturday, January 11.**

In the morning, a short but brutal battle for the building of the Vorwärts on Lindenstraße.

Government troupes have surrounded the building of the SPD newspaper, put snipers on neighboring roofs, moved cannons and mine-throwers closer. Inside the building, 300 revolutionaries hold out, many unarmed, some with machine-guns and rifles. Those with pistols guard hostages, Vorwärts employees and government officers they have captured. The revolutionaries believe thousands of Berliner workers will soon appear behind the back of the soldiers and bring help. They will never come. Serving commander major von Stephani orders the attack. The first assault fails. Then artillery opens fire. A shell cuts through all floors. Falling debris kills a machine-gun group. Major von Stephani tells his soldiers that he can see a petite woman at another machine-gun - Rosa Luxemburg herself,
bloodthirsty, that “red gunwoman.” Soldiers capture two messengers who wanted to bring the news about the battle to the rest of Berlin. Smoke fills the building, it is impossible to breathe in the dust. At 10 am, five peace negotiators step out, large pieces of white paper in their hands. Von Stephani orders to bring them and the messengers to the Garde-Dragoner barracks (today revenue office Meirngdamm). After waiting in vain for their return, the occupiers discuss what to do. Someone suggests to shoot the hostages. The majority is outraged. Revolutionary workers do not kill defenseless hostages. They release the hostages and leave the building with raised hands at 10:45 am. Stephani phones Noske. “Shoot all of them,” Noske demands. Stephani does not follow through with the order, at least in part, not even against the petite woman at the machine-gun. Her name is Hilde Steinbrink. When the mob of soldiers wants to jump on her, Friedrich Stampfer, editor-in-chief of the Vorwärts, intervenes but watches silently how the massacre against the negotiators and the messengers unfolds. The soldiers spit on them, call them “Russian pigs”, kick them, beat them with their fists, the butts of their rifles and with whips. When the victims lie helplessly on the ground, they shoot them like madmen, emptying their cartridges, laughing. When a hostage - their own man - wants to thank his former guards for the fair treatment, they punch him and knock him to the ground. The newspaper area has been cleansed. Tomorrow they will take the police headquarters, where among others a 16 year old boy will be shot after he has called, “Long live Liebknecht!”

In the evening, Noske leads 3,000 soldiers in a victory parade through Berlin. Some people cry out, “Noske, murderer.” Noske orders the protesters be dragged into the parade and be beaten. The murderers of the seven men will never be charged. The January uprising is over, and democracy, as some historians and journalists will write hundred years later in eloquent commentaries, has been saved.

Wednesdays, January 15.

They feel their end approaching. In the last couple of days, they hurry from one hide-out to another, from the apartment of a doctor at Hallesches Tor to an apartment on Weisestraße 8 (Schiller-Kiez), then to the family Marcusson on Mannheimer Straße 43 in Wilmersdorf. At 8 pm armed men of the Wilmersdorf militia knock at the door. Liebknecht claims to be someone else. They do not believe him. One man speaks to Rosa Luxemburg:
“Are you Fräulein Luxemburg?”

“Frau Luxemburg,” she responds and packs her little suitcase with a sewing kit, a book and a couple of letters.

From early December on, at the orders of minister Noske, agents of the government have intercepted their phone calls and letters and followed their movements. The banker Solomon Marx has awarded bounty on their heads. Later he pays the militia men 13,000 Reichsmark.

They bring them separately - Liebknecht first, Luxemburg later - to the Hotel Eden at Kurfürstenstraße (today Olof-Palme-Platz, in front of the zoo entry). Here, the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützendivision, an elite cavallery division has its headquarters, a counter-revolutionary unit that has offered its services to the government. Its leader, captain Waldemar Pabst reports the capture of the two revolutionaries to Noske on the phone and asks if he should kill them. Noske says he cannot give an order to kill. His party which millions of workers follow would break apart on this. However, he adds, “You have to take responsibility yourself for what needs to be done.”

At 9:30 pm, they bring Karl Liebknecht to Pabst for a short questioning, then to a separate room. At 10 pm Papst sees Luxemburg briefly. She has to wait as well. While she is sewing at her dress and then reading in Goethe’s Faust, the soldiers and officers prepare their murder. At 10:45 pm, they lead Liebknecht through the hotel lobby. Outside, the soldier Runge hits him with the butt of his rifle. Liebknecht loses his glasses, bleeding from his head. They push him into a vehicle and drive into the darkness of the Tiergarten park. The car stops. Someone speaks of an engine breakdown. They ask Liebknecht to leave the car and after he has done that naval officer Horst Pflugk-Hartung shoots him in the back. Liebknecht is dead. At 11:40 pm, they bring Rosa Luxemburg through the lobby. Soldiers spit at her, insult her. Outside, soldier Runge is waiting with his rifle. The blow at her head is so hard that she falls to the ground losing her consciousness and a shoe. They throw her into a vehicle. After a short distance, the car stops. An officer steps out of the dark - as planned - and shots into her head. Then the car speeds up. At the Landwehr canal, they throw her body into the water. The murders remain unpunished. Only Runge receives a two year jail sentence in order to smooth public outrage. When the cabinet learns of the murders the next day, some ministers are shocked. Noske frowns, “You got nerves like old women. War is war.”
January 19. Germany.

With a turn-out of 83 per cent, the people elect the National Assembly. The SPD is the strongest party with 37.9 per cent. The USPD which has been crucial in mobilizing workers for the Revolution receives only 7.6 per cent. The three conservative parties representing the middle class, big industry and banks win together 48.5 per cent. Two of them will form a coalition with the SPD. The National Assembly will convene on February 6. Five days later the parliamentarians will elect Friedrich Ebert as president of the Republic. The SPD politician Gustav Stresemann will be chancellor. The National Assembly meets in the theater of Weimar, a little town around 250 kilometers away from the capital. Berlin is too dangerous, too restless, too rebellious. The desire for fundamental change is still too big to be ignored.


In the morning, the Workers’ Councils of Berlin call for a general strike in the capital. One million people stop working. The factories are silent and the stores are closed. Buses and trams remain in the depots. Only the gas and power station provide service. A few newspapers are published but in a couple of days the printers will strike, too. The Berliners meet in factory halls and trade union buildings. The Revolution has been stalled. Since the Germans have freely elected a parliament in January, the government insists that the Councils of Workers and Soldiers dissolve. The war generals are still in command. The big industrialists are still controlling the economy. Working people are still earning too little to feed their families. Although women gained the right to vote for parliament for the first time, more and more women are pushed out of the factories. According to the will of the factory owners, men who are returning from the war should take their jobs. Today, the Workers’ Councils of Berlin proclaim the goals of the strike:
- Recognition of the Councils
- Disbandment of government troupes and Freikorps
- Punishment of the Kaiser, the generals and politicians who are responsible for the war
- Release of all political prisoners

War minister Gustav Noske declares a state of emergency. Thirty thousand soldiers of the Freikorps start marching on Berlin, with them artillery,
flamethrowers and fighter planes, ready to unleash a bloodbath that has never been seen before on German soil.

March 4. Germany.

Shots in Scheunenviertel (today: quarter between Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and Hackescher Markt). Nobody knows why. It is only known that sailors have fired at a police station. Newspapers report about attacks against two dozen police stations but not by whom. According to rumors, one police station on Frankfurter Allee (today Karl-Marx-Allee) has handed over weapons to the attackers without resistance. A provocation? Still, the people follow the call for a general strike. The organizing committee urges to stay in the factories and not to demonstrate on the streets because the military is entering Berlin with 30,000 soldiers, their rifles unlocked. The people know that in early February these soldiers put down the short-lived Council Republic of Bremen; more than 80 people had died. In mid February, the military suppressed the general strike in the Ruhr Valley where workers had occupied the coal mines; they wanted the expropriation of the coal industry. On February 21, Munich: An officer shoots the socialist Kurt Eisner, the first president of free Bavaria. Eisner died on the spot. On March 1, the military entered the city of Halle. In Münster, they arrested the local Workers’ Council.

When on February 6 the National Assembly convened in Weimar for its first meeting, Freikorps troops surrounded the meeting place, the theater of Weimar. What was meant as protection looked like a siege. Hours before, the Freikorps had thrown the Weimar Soldiers’ Council in jail. They had offered the protection of the people’s representatives themselves.

In between

Who are the Freikorps?

By now, a volunteer army with 400,000 men. Initiated by the social-democratic government. Supported by the “Anti-Bolshevik Funds.” Financed by industrialists like Hugo Stinnes, Carl Friedrich von Siemens and Ernst von Borsig. In mid January, the troops of captain Waldemar Pabst has already murdered the socialists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The Freikorps are nationalistic and therefore hate the Revolution. In the streets they sing, “Kill the Jews!” Fifteen
years earlier, leading officers participated in the genocide of the Herero people in south west Africa by German colonial troops. Others have just returned from Finland where they commited massacres against revolutionary workers. A soldier named Heinrich Himmler marches with them. Another soldier named Rudolf Hoess has just joined them. They do not know their future master yet; Hitler is still roaming Munich as an unknown private. However, they loose all scruple in these days in the streets of Berlin and later in Munich, and in streams of blood they will pass the test of murder. In less than two decades from now, Himmler will oversee the holocaust as the leader of the SS, and Hoess will be the commandant of the concentration camp in Ausschwitz.


This morning, Berlin looks at the Alexanderplatz with horror. The ground has been torn open by granates. Windows and facades are splintered, horse carriages are turned over, and lantern poles are twistet by explosions. Last night, police shot from the police headquarters (today shopping mall Alexa) at a patrol of the People’s Navy Division. The sailors shot back. More sailors rushed to the scene, more shots were fired. The Republican Security Guards, a unit that protects the government quarter, and later armed workers join the sailors. Tanks of the Freikorps appear, soldiers behind them firing at sailors and workers. The fight for the Alexanderplatz lasts all night. In the morning, the revolutionaries retreat to the east towards Lichtenberg. For the last three days, around one million people kept striking, but now their unity starts falling apart. The strike commitee is locked in conflict. When it decides with a narrow majority to include the water supply companies in the strike, the social-democratic workers leave the meeting. The others want negotiations. The government refuses. War minister Noske does not want a compromise. He wants to destroy the opposition. In protest, residents of the Scheunenviertel, a working class area in the city center (today between Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and Hackescher Markt) gather at the Bülow-Platz (today Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz). Freikorps surround the plaza and shoot into the crowd. Fifteen people die. The bloodbath has begun.

The general strike has failed. Last night at 7 pm, after a dramatic debate and with a narrow majority, the strike committee decided to call it off. Many workers are returning to the factories, some are building barricades along Linienstraße and Frankfurter Allee (today: Karl-Marx-Allee) because the Freikorps positioned their artillery and mine-throwers. Tanks are approaching the working class areas of Mitte and Lichtenberg. Behind the barricades: A couple of hundred people with rifles, among them many women. In front of a police station in Lichtenberg a shooting occurs, and in the scuffle that follows, a policeman is trapped by a group of women. For years he, an officer of the Kaiser police, has terrorized the neighborhood. Because of his look, he is called “porky face”. The women beat him to death with broom sticks, hand brushes, pans and oven hooks. Later that evening, driven by what is today called “fake news”, the printing presses start running and tomorrow the Berliners will read about a “bestial massacre” in Lichtenberg against 57 policemen according to same papers, against 150 according to others, committed by communist spartacists. Captain Waldemar Pabst of the Freikorps has already drafted a firing order that will end the Revolution for once and for all. Few hours later, war minister Gustav Noske will sign it.

March 9.

The well-to-do Berliners who are arriving at the dance cafes on Potsdamer Platz are wondering if the rolling thunder from afar will bring a storm. They look at the sky and follow the dark humming spots that are floating towards the eastern part of the city. They are missing a historic moment. For the first time, air planes equipped with machine-guns and bombs, flame-throwers, artillery (150-mm and 75-mm caliber) and tanks painted with skulls attack the civilian population in a German city. The Linienstraße back there in Scheunenviertel where the rebellious workers live has just become the first street in Germany bombarded from the air. This morning, war minister Noske (SPD) has signed an order: “Every person who is found fighting against government troops must be shot immediately.” Buildings collaps under the fire of the canons. Stores are burnt by flame-throwers. Fleeing people run into machine-gun salvos. Hundreds of those who survived search at the morgues for their loved ones. The mayor of Lichtenberg, Oskar Ziethen, wants to mediate. Only three hundred workers are armed but willing to surrender their
weapons when the Freikorps withdraw, he suggests. An officer responds, “On November 9th we turned a blind eye on the Revolution. Now, there will be no mercy.”

March 10.

The Freikorps have captured Friedrichshain and surrounded Lichtenberg. They shot everyone they see on the streets after 7 pm, everyone who moves behind a window curtain, everyone who shows them a gesture of contempt, everyone they deem to be a revolutionary; workers, owners of small businesses, old men, women, children. They have established their command center in the Andreas Highschool on the cross section Koppenstraße at Singerstraße (near Ostbahnhof). Whoever they bring into the school will not leave it alive. Outside, three mothers beg for the lives of their sons. Soon after, soldiers throw the bodies of the boys onto the sidewalk and declare that they were shot on the run. In the pocket of a cigar salesman they find a membership card of the USPD, a workers’ party whose representatives sit in the parliament in Weimar. The man is unarmed. Shot. In Friedrichshain, a worker refuses to give a light to a soldier who wants to smoke. Shot. Soldiers enter the pub Schwarzer Adler at Frankfurter Allee and Gürtelstraße and beat a woman with a whip. When a guest protests and calls them “cowardly riffraffs”, they lead him outside. Silence, than a shot, the man is dead. In the next few days, the pub will be the place of a notorious court martial. Officers will pass dozens of death sentences and drink even more pints of beer.

March 11.

Newspapers in Berlin publish an ad: The government invites the People’s Navy Division to receive outstanding pay. These sailors have brought the Revolution to Berlin, occupied the Kaiser’s city castle, and protected the government and government buildings. The payroll office is not far, Französische Straße 32 (today: behind the Catholic church, Bebelplatz). Three hundred are going, but they will never get their pay, and for 30 it is their last march. Freikorps are waiting in the court yard. The officers close the gates. The sailors are trapped. A first lieutenant named Otto Marloh orders them to pass by so he can sort them out. Some have to step to the left, others to the right. A captain intervenes. Both argue, then Marloh stops the selection. When the sailors on the left turn around, they face
a dozen machine-guns, and when they realize what is going to happen to them, it is too late. They start running. The machine-guns fire six minutes until all of them lie on the ground. An officer, pistol drawn, inspects the bodies and puts a bullet in the head of every one who shows signs of life. Then, the soldiers plunder the dead, empty their pockets, pull rings from their fingers and boots from their feet. Only one man survives because he pretends to be dead, and only because of him, the sailor Hugo Levin, there will be a murder trial in September. First lieutenant Marloh invokes the firing order of the war minister Noske. The court calls Noske into the witness stand. Noske shrugs: “Rather sacrifice a couple of madcaps than a people of 60 million.” Marloh and his accomplices will be acquitted.

**March 12.**

The Freikorps have won. In the working class areas, they rage one more night. One last time, officers hand down sentences in a summary trial in the pub *Schwarzer Adler* on Gürtelstraße against eleven people. At night, soldiers lead the convicted to a cemetery across Möllendorfstraße, put them against a wall and shoot them, and in the morning they take pictures of the dead. Two sailors of the People’s Navy Division, the brothers Fritz and Albert Gast, the sixteen year old apprentice Georg Pormann and a women whose name we do not know are among the victims. In Lichtenberg some single shots can be heard. Then, everything is quiet. Bodies float in the Spree river, thrown from the Schilling bridge where soldiers had executed workers during the night. The general strike has been suppressed. The Revolution has died in Berlin and with her 1.200 people these days; this is the official number. The historian Mark Jones calls the Freikorps terror the “founding massacre of the Weimar republic.” It will take one more year until the Berliners will rise up again, in March 1920 against a coup of the very same Freikorps, and with the biggest general strike in German history the workers will save the Republic that had betrayed them today.

**April 7. Munich.**

Poets take power in Bavaria! Last November, workers and soldiers toppled the Bavarian king and elected the socialist Kurt Eisner as their president. However, his party reached only 2.5 per cent of the votes in the elections to the Bavarian parliament. On February 21, when Eisner was about to announce his resignation,
the officer count Arco shots him in front of the parliament building. Chaos in the chamber, shots; two more people die, the members of parliament ran away. Workers’ Councils demanded a Council Republic, but the minister of cultural affairs and SPD politician Johannes Hoffmann took control over the government. Then, news about the Revolution in Hungary excite the Bavarians. Strikes, demonstrations in all Bavarian cities. The Hoffmann government flees to Bamberg. In the morning of April 7, posters appear in Munich: “Bavaria is a Council Republic. The working people are the masters of their own destiny.” To the revolutionary government belong the writer Ernst Nikiesch, the writer, pacifist and anarchist Gustav Landauer, the poet and playwright Ernst Toller. Novelist Heinrich Mann chairs the “Political Council of Intellectuals.” He is the brother of Thomas Mann who lives in Munich and is against the Revolution. The poet Erich Mühsam is chairman of the Council of Workers and Soldiers in Munich. The press is controlled by a writer who calls himself Ret Marut. No one knows his real name. From his little apartment he publishes the anarchist magazine Ziegelbrenner. In Augsburg, a young playwright joins the local Workers’ Council. His name is Bertold Brecht.

Hoffmann organizes troops in Bamberg. He wants them to march on Munich. The revolutionaries are unexperienced. They draw up a new world, a world of justice and peace, but they forget to protect it and to arm the workers. Three weeks are left to them, and in these three weeks they will pass reforms to which we look today with greatest respect.

In between:

This is how the Bavarian Republic of Councils of Workers and Soldiers where poets run the government started to solve the housing crisis:

(Directive about the Confiscation and Rationing of Housing Space)
- Building owners lose power of control over their apartments and buildings. From now on, the municipalities will allocate empty apartments.
- Each person is entitled to one room. People in need, e.g. the poor or working families with many children will be prefered.
- It is not allowed to sell or buy buildings without the permission of the municipalities.
- The municipalities determine the rent. The rent price will be regulated by the income of the tenant.
- Building owners who violate the directive can be fined with 100,000 Reichsmark or sentenced to one year in prison.

Signed by Ernst Toller, (poet, playwright), chairman of the government of the Council Republic of Bavaria.

**April 7 - April 28, Munich.**

These are further decisions made by the revolutionary government of Council Republic of Bavaria:

- The eight-hour workday is mandatory.
- An initiative of Ret Marut, responsible for the reform of the press, leads to the first labor agreement between publishers and journalists. Publishers must lose their power over information, and therefore, the press must be socialized. Newspapers and other media will be financed with public funds.
- The mining industry is socialized. The miners take control over the production.
- No one is allowed to withdraw more than 100 Reichsmark. This measure is aimed “against big capitalists who try to transfer money abroad,” as Ernst Toller, the head of the revolutionary government writes.
- The new commissar of finances, the pharmacist Silvio Gesell, wants “negative interests”. The longer money stays in an account, the more it loses its value. Gesell would like the savers and banks to invest the money.
- The government releases all prisoners of war.
- The writer Gustav Landauer, commissar for education and culture, orders the separation of church and state, free entrance for museums and the national theater. He bans corporal punishment and abolishes homework because “they reward the laziness of the teachers,” Landauer declares.

To protect these steps the government of the Council Republic has handed out only 600 rifles to the workers on Munich. Didn’t they hear about the massacres Germany’s war minister Noske has committed in Berlin, Bremen and the Ruhr Valley?
I spare you the agony. Your hopes may rise and fall with the events. Little victories tumble out of every day, and you will be happy but in the following nights doom lurks, grows, eats all victories and at the end it will swallow the day as well. I want to be frank with you. The Bavarian Council Republic, a treasure in the history of the little people, will drown in blood. On April 13, workers and writers fight off a coup attempt, and the Council Republic seems to be saved. The former government still sits in Bamberg, too weak to mobilize their own troops. They call the Prussians. War minister Noske sends 40,000 soldiers, also Freikorps who are smelling blood; they have murdered in Berlin already. The Council government falls apart, is formed again, this time under the leadership of the communists, of Eugen Leviné, Ph.D of economy. He and the 23 year old sailor Rudolf Egelhofer organize Munich’s defense and dispel all illusions. Leviné admits before workers and soldiers, “I am afraid we are lost.”

General strike. Formation of the red army. Thousands of rifles are handed out to workers. Ban of the press. Battle near Dachau. At first, the red army pushes back the attackers. The defenders go home. The counter-revolutionaries return, this time successful. They reach Munich on May 1 and break the resistance of the workers. Two days before, revolutionaries have shot seven hostages of the right-wing Thule society. Infuriated, Noske’s soldiers take revenge, execute people on the streets, in beer gardens, kill a Catholic bible study group. The young men beg for their lives but the soldiers not comprehending the Bavarian language only laugh at them, bludgeon and shoot them eventually.

They find Egelhofer and shoot him on May 3. They have arrested the anarchist and poet Erich Mühsam days earlier. He will be sentenced to 15 years in prison but will be released in 1924. Eugen Leviné will get a trial, be sentenced to death and be executed on June 5. The author Gustav Landauer who dreamed of a school system without beatings will be beaten and trampled to death. “You don’t know what you are doing,” are his last words. The playwright Ernst Toller escapes but will be captured later. The state wants to sentence him to death. The writer Thomas Mann and the physicist Albert Einstein write letters on his behalf, and so, Toller will receive a five year prison sentence. Silvio Gesell, the pharmacist with his free-money-theory, will be arrested, then acquitted. He moves to Argentina for a couple of years. His son will open a hotel at the coast, south of Buenos Aires. A village grows around it, than a city, named Villa Gesell, today a popular vacation resort. Ret Marut whose real name no one knows, the publisher of the magazine Ziegelbrenner, escapes an execution because two guards took pity of him and let
him go. Until 1921, he publishes the magazine in Cologne. Then he falls silent and disappears without a trace. Eight years later, Erich Mühsam will put an ad in the newspapers: “Where is the Ziegelbrenner?” The man who called himself Ret Marut made it to Mexico. Here, he writes novels about the lives and struggles of Mexico’s poor. They touch the hearts of millions of readers around the world. He is a literary mystery, unsolved until today. Except of his pseudonym - his second - nothing is known about the author B. Traven. The writer Oskar Maria Graf, a sympathizer of the revolution, visits Munich’s morgues and writes down what he saw, endless rows of victims. Almost 600 people died during the counter-revolution in Munich. One of them is the iron turner Johann Lehner. The Freikorps have pulled him from a pub after they had been shot at from the building’s roof. Lehner was just drinking beer. His only crime was to be a worker. The photo shows him and his murderers on May 3, 1919 shortly before his execution. He is 18 years old.

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