



Revolutionary perspectives: German Jewish women and 1918–19

Journal of European Studies

2021, Vol. 51(2) 93–110

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DOI: 10.1177/00472441211010899

journals.sagepub.com/home/jes



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Abstract

In November 1918, revolution swept across Germany: it led to the end of the war, the abdication of the Kaiser and a new parliamentary democracy. While leading figures of the revolution, such as Ernst Toller, Rosa Luxemburg and Kurt Eisner, have been the subject of much scholarly interest, less research has been conducted into the motivations and aims of the rank and file, a group which included many women. Women played key roles as revolutionaries: by spreading the revolutionary message, working in its administration or participating in direct action on the streets. By choosing to become a revolutionary, individuals risked imprisonment or even death. For German Jewish women, who faced anti-Semitism in their daily lives, the risk was even greater. This article focuses on these forgotten female revolutionaries to uncover their roles, aims and motivations, and to contribute to a heterogeneous understanding of the revolution.

Keywords

First World War, German, Jewish, revolution, women

Introduction

In late October and early November 1918, revolution spread across Germany, leading to the abdication of the Kaiser and a new parliamentary democracy with universal suffrage for men and women over the age of 20. It began in October 1918 when sailors in northern Germany were imprisoned in the town of Kiel for refusing to follow orders. The people of Kiel joined in mass strikes and protests, and by 5 November they had taken over governance of the town. The unrest spread rapidly across Germany, carried by ordinary men and women in a variety of roles and each with individual motivations and aims. The revolution drew inspiration from the Russian Revolution of October 1917, and the organizations to build a new society were set up on similar lines with workers' and soldiers' councils established in most towns and cities in Germany.¹

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The revolution spread with speed due to well-prepared ground: after four years of misery caused by the Allied economic blockade and government mismanagement, Germany had been gripped by strikes and protests from 1915 onwards. Many of these protests was centred on food: the blockade was extremely effective in preventing Germany importing food and the chemicals needed for fertilizer and 1914 saw a poor harvest. Bread queues, riots and mass demonstrations were common occurrences in cities across Germany (Davis, 2000). Proto-revolutionary groups, many of them organized by women, had been spreading opposition to the war through trades unions, welfare organizations, political groups and so on. Through understanding the nature and scale of this activism before the acts of November 1918, a fuller picture of the revolution itself can be gained. While the events of November 1918 were broadly peaceful, the counter-revolution was not: in Berlin in January 1919 and Munich in April 1919, bloody battles were waged in the streets between supporters of the revolution and forces supporting Friedrich Ebert's government. Uprisings and reprisals continued into the 1920s and the state struggled to establish its legitimacy.

Understanding how the revolution happened requires an investigation into the rank and file of the revolution, rather than just examining the leadership. Belinda Davis (2000) and Ute Daniel (1989) have both written about women's experiences on the home front and how deprivation and inequality led to a pervasive sense of social injustice which was fertile ground for the revolution. The male experience of the revolution has been well researched through the published memoirs of revolutionaries: for example, Ernst Toller's *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (1933) and Benjamin Ziemann's research (2011 and 2013) about the experiences of German soldiers. However, the motivations, roles and experiences of female revolutionaries have been broadly overlooked. A small number of publications have considered women's experiences of the revolution, but these do not frame the women themselves as revolutionaries and do not consider the particular position of Jewish women. Often the focus of women's involvement is through the lens of suffrage campaigns when, as my research demonstrates, women's revolutionary motivations were far bigger.² Research that claims to reflect on Jewish experiences of 1918–19 omits the perspectives of Jewish women. Sterling Fishman (1997) notes that the numbers of Jewish participants at all stages of the revolution were high and that Jewish writers reflected on the revolution and their personal involvement. However, despite the gender-neutral title of his chapter title, the work only considers the writings of Jewish men (for example Ernst Toller, Erich Mühsam and Lion Feuchtwanger). More research is needed to reveal the heterogeneous nature of the revolution and the revolutionaries themselves.³

Identifying and defining revolutionary women

Within the category of Jewish female revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg is the most prominent figure. While Luxemburg has been the subject of scholarly interest, she is very much an isolated female figure in the historiography. Furthermore, although she was raised in a Jewish family and her Jewishness was later used by anti-Semites to discredit her, her relationship to Judaism was complex. Placing her and her experiences into the category of German Jewish perspectives on the revolution would flatten her complexity and lose some of the nuance of the breadth of revolutionary experiences I aim to introduce. In order

to uncover some of the voices of German Jewish female revolutionaries, the article will consider the experiences of Lola Landau (1892–1990), Rahel Straus (1880–1963) and Toni Sender (1888–1964). Each one was involved in different political groups and had different revolutionary aims. By analysing these women's different experiences, some of the diversity within the revolution becomes clear. Landau was involved with pacifist activism throughout the war, Straus was a campaigner in the women's movement, and Sender was a trade unionist. Adding more voices and more women to the revolution will add diversity to our understanding of it, but due to the limitations of space, I will focus primarily on these three.

In order to understand these women's revolutionary experiences and the complexities of the revolution, a broader timeframe than merely the days of October and November 1918 must also be employed. This must include the roots of the revolution earlier in the First World War and the after-effects of the revolution in 1919. For example, women were very active in the general strike of January 1918, and in demonstrations and protests against the war, often speaking publicly against the war and being confronted by the authorities as a result (Kampf, 2016: 56). Through broadening the timeframe to encompass more of the war and its effects, the ways in which the revolution grew out of protests and unrest and how different political and social activists were able to challenge the state come to light. I introduce some of the forgotten German Jewish female revolutionaries and examine their roles and reflections. If women and people from marginalized groups are excluded from the historiography, our understanding of how the revolution spread and why events happened in the way they did can only ever be partial. This article, therefore, provides a grassroots perspective on the revolution, showing how revolutionaries cooperated with and joined different groups to spread and carry the revolution, and their different motivations.

The German revolution incorporated people from a wide variety of backgrounds, regions and political ideologies and each had different goals for what they wanted from the revolution. Some saw it as a chance to stop the war and for those from pacifist groups it was an opportunity to ensure that war would never happen again. Socialist groups wanted the abdication of the Kaiser and the establishment of a new socialist government, but there were huge divisions between the different political parties and their members about whether a parliamentary democracy or a council-based system was the right one for Germany. Campaigners in the suffrage movement wanted to extend the franchise and establish a new democracy (Canning, 2015). There were many further motivations, personal and political, and the motivations of those who died during the revolution or have not left records in the archives will remain obscure. I will not be able to comprehensively examine the entire experiences of German Jewish female revolutionaries, but by introducing some key figures from different political groups, our understanding of the revolution can be diversified. The analysis is limited to members of the German middle classes, a group which represents the majority of German Jews, and therefore more research is needed to understand the experiences of working-class women, who were most likely to have been affected by the major food shortages in Germany. Through these new voices, we can learn about how and why the revolution happened in the way that it did, who carried it and how, and the motivations of those outside the narrow leadership.

In order to choose which voices should contribute to this study of German Jewish revolutionaries, a solid definition of revolutionary is needed. Does participating in direct revolutionary action automatically confer revolutionary status? With so many barriers to women's participation and the difficulties of finding documentary evidence, should questions around the evidence of involvement automatically exclude women from the designation of revolutionary? Limiting the definition to those making inflammatory speeches, to the sailors whose mutiny became the symbolic spark, or to those who participated in street combat ignores the vast structure and work that was undertaken to prepare the ground for the revolution and the administrative support that ensured that the fighters were fed and equipped. Without an appreciation of this hidden labour, the revolution, and how and why it happened, remains incomprehensible. It was difficult for women to self-define as revolutionaries because this required them to see themselves as actors who could effect change. This was particularly difficult for women, who were excluded from political meetings in Germany until 1908 and did not have the right to vote until 1919. Relying on those who defined themselves as revolutionaries therefore creates an incomplete picture of the revolution. For the purposes of this article and for the development of research in this field, a new definition is needed. In Jack Goldstone's (2014) work, a revolution is defined as including 'both mass mobilization and institutional change *and* a desire for social justice', something the women I discuss all share (2014: 4). This definition requires the revolutionaries to have a revolutionary imaginary, a vision of the world they wanted to create. Kathleen Canning (2015) has examined this idea of the revolutionary imaginary with regards to women's suffrage and the gendered experience of demobilization, linking the revolution and the home front through gender. However, Canning explores this through cultural products created later in the Weimar Republic rather than in the words of female revolutionaries.

Finding the sources

Many of the official records of the revolution excluded women's voices and participation. There were many barriers to women attending and participating in meetings and making the kinds of contribution that were likely to feature in the official minutes. Workplace councils did occasionally elect women, but demobilization practices pushed women out of the workplace in favour of returning soldiers and thereby out of workplace councils (Sharp, 2011: 145). Furthermore, accounts by male revolutionaries often do not include their female counterparts. For example, when Ernst Toller's account of the revolution is compared with the accounts of the women who knew him, it is apparent that the women who hid him from the authorities, worked with him, wrote with him and, in the case of Anny Klawa-Morf (1894–1993), even fought beside him, are all missing from his account. Archives and archival practices are also not gender-neutral. Unlike the letters from soldiers at the front, women's writing was less likely to be preserved. Bureaucratic documents might initially appear to be without gender, but they were often written by men to record male voices and concerns.⁴ Through finding and centring women's writing and voices, assumptions about the gender of the revolution are challenged and the idea of men's work and women's work is subverted.

Female revolutionaries are also difficult to find in the sources due to the characteristics of women's activism. As Temma Kaplan (1982) noted, women's organizing is based around women's networks, which are formed through close connections and physical proximity. These networks sustain the community in times of hardship but become sources for organizing and collective action during times of revolution. As these networks are based on conversations during daily life, often little record remains other than the recollections of the women themselves in their memoirs (1982: 547). Women's activism is also often depoliticized and seen as personal and individual. However, in times of struggle, providing food for the family and protesting against the government's inability to solve the issues around food shortages become political acts. Men striking for higher wages is a political act, and so are women's protests in the bread queue. These public protests also gave women the chance to meet, to share their suffering and identify that the problems they faced were systemic rather than an individual issue. The revolutionary fighters needed food, clothing, social support, communication networks and so on. As Anne Simpson (1983) noted in her study of El Salvador,

We tend to take all of this for granted and look in the wrong place to see where people are contributing . . . women are presumed to have taken a fundamental step in the direction of equality of the sexes when they move from the hidden area of work to the more visible. (1983: 895)

Women's work in the revolutionary context highlights the diverse nature of activism, the causes of the revolution and the motivations of the revolutionaries.

Memoirs by women are one source that enables women to reflect on their revolutionary practices and experiences at length. These sources must be treated with care: they were written many years after the events described, in a new context, and the writer had to reposition events and their role in order to create a coherent narrative. Furthermore, whoever writes a memoir has to see themselves as a subject – as someone who can influence events. This is unusual for any individual, but especially for women in this era, as they had long been excluded from the sphere of political influence (Byron, 2007: 7). Despite these concerns, these kinds of sources can be illuminating. Writing a memoir requires the author to use 'emplotment'. According to Hayden White (1973), historians have to fit events into a coherent narrative to make sense of the past, and this is very similar to the writer of a memoir. The process of writing allows authors to try to make sense of themselves and how their lives fit into (or resist) broader events and society: an attempt to create 'order' (Eakin, 2014: 39). Through understanding how the writer has created their memoir, we can gain an insight into how they see themselves and the events they witnessed. There are concerns about 'truth' and whether a writer has manipulated or misremembered events. Using official records of events can corroborate the broad details of a memoir. However, autobiographical writings are far more than a historical record of an individual's life: the author is engaging in rhetorical acts to convey meaning, to challenge beliefs and/or to imagine a future rather than simply trying to convey a 'truth' (Smith and Watson, 2010: 13–14). By analysing the language and the way the writer describes events, we learn about the writer's perception of those events and how they understood themselves. Memoirs are a form of dialogue between the writer and the reader: the writer sets her 'self' out and attempts to ascribe meaning and motivation to

the events, so that together the reader and the writer come to a 'shared understanding of the meaning of a life' (Smith and Watson, 2010: 16). Through close reading of these texts, new perspectives on the revolution can be discovered and the revolutionaries can present themselves and their experiences in their own words.

Using this broader revolutionary context and these sources, I examine women who were involved in the revolution, either through participation in direct action (strikes, riots, protests) or through their involvement in the administration of the revolution (for example, working on a council). These are women who wanted to bring about fundamental social change (for example, the end of the war, the overthrow of the monarchy or the establishment of a socialist state) and therefore they had an ideology, a revolutionary imaginary, about how they wanted the new post-revolutionary world to be.⁵ It is the combination of these factors, participation in groups and action to radically change society and a revolutionary ideology, that make the women chosen for this analysis revolutionaries. While this definition is not comprehensive and contains grey areas (how do counter-revolutionaries fit within this model? how do revolutionaries' aims change and does this affect their status?), it opens the discussion of female revolutionaries and challenges current perceptions about the way the German revolution was carried and spread.

Responses to the revolution

It is difficult to encapsulate the experiences of the revolutionaries, and it is also difficult to examine the diverse responses and understanding of the revolution amongst German Jews. The Jewish members of the leadership have been well researched (Ernst Toller, Eugen Leviné) but the Jewish revolutionaries outside the leadership, in particular women, have been overlooked. German Jews had a variety of reactions towards the revolution. Some saw it as a chance to realize the full emancipation promised by German unification in 1871 but not fully delivered in a society which remained highly segregated.⁶ Others were horrified by the revolution and saw it as a betrayal of the German army – the origins of what would become the 'stab-in-the-back' myth (Fishman, 1997: 382). Some, as will be discussed later, were conflicted between the opportunities that the revolution presented and the attention that taking these opportunities received from anti-Semites. As Fishman notes, it did not take long for anti-Semites to label the revolution a Jewish one and to attack German Jews as a result (1997: 382). Furthermore, the category of Jewishness itself is complex, as every individual had a different relationship to faith, culture and heritage. For consistency, all the women examined were raised in observant Jewish families, did not convert out of the faith, and were persecuted by the Third Reich, but their personal relationship to religion and belief in God varied. Through examining the experiences of German Jewish female revolutionaries, perspectives from a marginalized group can come to the fore. What did the revolution mean to this group and what did their participation entail?

For Rahel Straus, the revolution was connected to the welfare work that she had undertaken within the women's movement. In Germany, this organized movement began to flourish in the 1890s with the establishment of the Bund deutscher Frauenvereine (Association of Women's Organizations or BDF) which aimed to bring together the multitude of women's organizations that were involved in campaigns for the vote, improved

educational and employment opportunities and social work across Germany. The membership of the BDF and the organizations it represented was predominantly middle class, as it was this group of women who had the means and the time to be involved in charitable work. In 1904, the League of Jewish Women (Jüdischer Frauenbund or JFB) was formed to give Jewish women a public platform and voice to unify and represent their interests. Straus joined a variety of Jewish and women's organizations, including the JFB, in Munich. The BDF and the JFB were both broadly supportive of war work, as they saw it as an opportunity for women to demonstrate their service to the nation and use their skills that had been honed over decades of social work. For the JFB, war work also gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their dedication to the nation and the fight against anti-Semitic accusations.⁷ Privately, not all members were supportive of war work and the war, but openly challenging the war was very difficult and the need for welfare work was great.⁸ Some of the leading figures of the women's movement in Munich, such as Straus, saw the post-revolutionary restructuring of society as an opportunity to take their place on the political stage (Kampf, 2016: 68). The unique position, skills and experiences of these women put them in a good position to lead and organize during the revolution too.

Women's organizations were quickly mobilized to help the war effort in 1914. Gertrud Bäumer, leader of the largest women's organization in Germany, organized the Nationaler Frauendienst (National Women's Service or NFD) to unite and coordinate women's welfare work across Germany. For many involved in the organized women's movement, welfare work presented an opportunity to demonstrate women's citizenship through service to the nation and to push for further rights, in particular the right to vote, and reforms to areas such as education, employment and family law. As a result, military language was often used to promote war work as an alternative form of service for women (Schaser, 2000: 156–60). The position in German society of Jewish women, who had only been legally emancipated in all German states with unification in 1871, had felt more precarious. Many engaged in war work as a way to consolidate their rights and to join with non-Jewish women in campaigns for further rights. Welfare groups representing all major denominations were created in cities across Germany, and many worked together for the first time to organize welfare for needy Germans.

For female pacifists, such as Lola Landau, responding to this mass action was difficult and, as censorship was very quickly deployed to control public discourse, finding a platform to express war opposition was difficult and highly risky. Some, like the writer Claire Goll, went into exile in Switzerland. Others who remained in Germany, such as Helene Stöcker or Anita Augspurg, refused to participate in any welfare work, both as a refusal to support the war effort but also with the hope that the people would soon recognize the cause of their deprivations and rise up against the war. Whatever course of action a pacifist chose, finding like-minded individuals and attempting to agitate for an end to the war was dangerous and difficult. Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin were imprisoned in 1916 for their anti-war activities. For Jewish women, there was the additional risk of attracting the notice of anti-Semites who blamed Jews for undermining the war effort and who were emboldened after the *Judenzählung* (census of Jewish soldiers) conducted in 1916. The census actually showed that German Jews were more likely than non-Jewish Germans to enlist in the army, but the results of the census were suppressed, and the

government's agreement to even conduct such a census in the first place gave credence to anti-Semitic assertions that Jews were shirking their duty (Kaplan, 1991: 226). Despite these risks, women collaborated internationally in an attempt to put pressure on governments to pursue a path for peace. Their best-known action was at the 1915 Hague Congress when around 1200 women from 12 nations (including belligerent and neutral countries) gathered. This organization later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) of which Lola Landau was a member.⁹ The tensions between opposing the war and the risks of doing so, as well as rhetoric similar to that of the WILPF, can all be found in Lola Landau's biography autobiography.

Finally, I will examine Toni Sender to uncover how the revolution was perceived in socialist and trade union spheres. Women were well represented in the socialist movement in Germany due to the separate women's organization, which at its peak had over 170,000 members. Women had been banned from attending political meetings and therefore set up their own organization to continue to work for socialism clandestinely until the law was changed in 1908. Clara Zetkin (1857–1933) and the bimonthly Social Democratic Party (SPD) journal *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), which she edited, were central to the movement. These organizations worked to raise women's class consciousness and were highly critical of the movement to which Straus belonged, which they derided as 'bourgeois' and unable to achieve equality for working-class women. The women of the SPD also sought to unionize female workers, and by the outbreak of the First World War there were over 200,000 unionized women (Gaido and Frenca, 2017). In 1917, Sender and other anti-war activists such as Zetkin were expelled from the SPD and formed the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) (Critchfield, 1992: 703). Toni Sender, her work and experiences, fit into this model of organized women's labour and her perspective on the revolution are reflective of her work and her position.

Lola Landau

Lola Landau has received some scholarly attention, most of which has concentrated on her literary output or her relationship with the writer Armin T. Wegner (see, for example, Kappel, 2018). Her memoirs provide an insight into the complex interactions between the expectations of her faith, her class and her gender (Landau, 1992). Her father was a doctor and she was raised in a middle-class family in Berlin. She moved to Breslau after her marriage but spent much of her time between Breslau and Berlin, providing a dual perspective on the home front and the roots of the revolution. Throughout her memoirs, she related incidents of anti-Semitism and her fears for herself and her family. These increased in number and became more threatening during the Third Reich, but she described an incident during the First World War when taking a train to Breslau with her sons, a two-year-old and a new-born. The baby began to cry and disturbed a military officer travelling in the same carriage. He shouted at the baby to be quiet and suggested that Landau should not be travelling in that class. She refused to leave and she observed how the officer looked at her son: 'ich sah noch etwas anderes, Häßliches in seinem Auge funkeln, etwas Verächtliches, das ich damals nicht zu deuten wußte. Es war Rassenhaß, der antisemitische Widerwille des preußischen Junkers gegen die Jüdin' (I saw something else, something hateful glinting in his eyes, something despicable that I didn't

know how to express back then. It was race hate. The anti-Semitic disgust of the Prussian Junker towards a female Jew') (1992: 83). Before leaving, he commanded her to raise her children better, a threat that reflected common prejudices surrounding Jewish mothers: that their children were loud, rude, unclean, uneducated and fundamentally un-German (Kaplan, 1991: 55). In order to participate in revolutionary activity, Landau needed to balance these concerns about attracting the attention of anti-Semites with any course of action. Concerns about anti-Semitism may have been a barrier to the participation of Jewish women in the revolution, and through the writings of women like Landau we can see the effects of this threat on their daily lives.

Landau's revolutionary activity came from her opposition to the war which brought her into contact with proto-revolutionary activism. Her husband volunteered to fight in the war, even though he was exempt from initial conscription. Their relationship had been fraught. Landau described the family pressures she felt when agreeing to marry him and the couple would later divorce. However, when he returned from the front, she described him as almost unrecognizable. He had lost his academic interests and was incapable of holding a conversation. Landau was frequently troubled by the war and these concerns grew when her husband sent her a letter he had found on the body of a dead English soldier. He wanted her to send the letter back to the soldier's widow. She read the letter and reflected on how she and the English widow were in a very similar position, and had fate taken a different turn, it could be Landau's husband who had died. Landau described this woman as 'meine Schicksalgenossin' ('my comrade in fate') and 'Wir beide waren verbunden, schuldlose Opfer des Wahns, der die Völker gegeneinanderhetzte. Wir beide sprachen mit verschiedene Lauten die gleiche Sprache, die Sprache des Lebens gegen die Vernichtung' ('We were both connected; innocent victims of the delusion that stirred people up against each other. We both spoke, with different sounds, the same language; the language of life against extermination') (1992: 52).

Soon after this incident, Landau joined a pacifist discussion group under the guise of a knitting circle. The group, under the leadership of Dr Käte Linden, blended bourgeois female norms with political activism:

Als sie plötzlich ihre Tasse mit einem Ruck fortschob, als fege sie alles Überflüssige von sich weg, sah uns ein veränderter Mensch mit strengem blauen Blick und strengem Mund an, voll gespannter Aufmerksamkeit. Der idyllische Teetisch verwandelte sich in das karge Podium einer politischen Versammlung, die sie überlegen leitete.

('When she suddenly pushed her teacup away with a jolt, as if she wanted to sweep away all superficial things, a completely different person with a determined look and strong mouth was looking at us with tense attention. The idyllic tea table had changed into an austere political gathering which she led in its deliberations.) (1992: 54)

Through this group Landau was exposed to new ideas, but this quickly led to calls for action. The group was divided between those who wanted to work undercover and those who wanted to lead marches through the streets. The group agreed that they were not yet ready to take direct public action, and Landau reflected, 'Wie ohnmächtig waren wir doch, wie durch Stacheldrähte von der Welt abgeschnitten' ('How powerless we were, as

if barbed wire had cut us off from the world') (1992: 55). These debates reflected the tension between the desire to create change and the knowledge that any direct action was likely to face brutal repression. They wrote anti-war pamphlets, and Landau agonized over how to distribute these without drawing the attention of the authorities. While this action may have been before the commonly understood period of the revolution (November 1918), and the decision to distribute pamphlets for peace might not initially seem revolutionary, these women were risking their lives to spread their anti-war message, as other revolutionaries would later do, and they are explicitly preparing for revolutionary action. Landau also described this group as generating a 'revolutionären Kern' ('revolutionary core') (1992: 55). Women like these in secret groups such as this one are part of what made Germany such fertile ground for the revolution when it came.

When the revolution reached Berlin, Landau took to the streets, joined a march through Berlin and called for the Kaiser to abdicate. Landau's pacifism motivated her responses to and reflections on the revolution. On her march through Berlin she described looking up at the Brandenburg Gate and thinking about the military victories of the past that it now represented: ('es war ein anderer, besserer Sieg, den wir errungen hatten . . . den Sieg der Menschheitsidee, eines neuen Europas, einer geläuterten Welt' ('it was another, better victory, which we had achieved . . . The victory of the idea of humanity, a new Europe, a reformed world')) (1992: 105). She hoped that this revolution could mark a better kind of victory, one through peace rather than the absolute destruction of the enemy. She also reflected on the revolution as an international community of mothers, reaching out to one another across borders to create a new world. This is her revolutionary imaginary: her vision for social justice. She described humanity as moving forward: no longer will people be divided into different nations or ethnic groups but there will be an international *Mensch* who is not part of a *Volk*. These ideas for the future are far from unique to Landau as their share much with Kant's theory of cosmopolitanism. In *Zum ewigen Frieden* (Toward a Perpetual Peace), Kant (1792) set out the relationship between nation states and that if rights are violated in one nation or by one nation, the world as a whole is damaged. No one nation is superior over another. Landau's vision for the world used Enlightenment thinking to pursue the ideal of a lasting peace and nations working together. Landau's focus on mothers as leading the way to peace intersected with the focus of the early WILPF, reflecting the influence of her small revolutionary group and the ideas to which they had access (Vellacott, 1993: 26). Despite her hopes for the future, Landau was also horrified by the violence that was an inherent part of the revolution even before the counter-revolutionary violence. She witnessed an officer being punched and reflects: ('War dies das ungeschriebene Gesetz der Befreiung? Gewalt gegen Gewalt?' ('Was this the unwritten rule of liberation? Violence against violence?')). As a pacifist, negotiating the need for political change with the violent response by the government and the excesses of the crowd is a difficult process and perhaps explains why Landau did not seek any kind of leadership position within the revolutionary movement.

Landau's experiences indicate some of the hidden aspects of the revolution. The pacifist work she undertook had to be done covertly, and as a result it is impossible to know how many other groups there were like the one she joined and how many other people secretly harboured anti-war sentiments and were prepared to act on them. Reading the

memoirs of those involved in welfare work and the organized women's movement is a way to uncover more women who shared Landau's sentiments and who were prepared to act through their organizations when the revolution came.

Rahel Straus

Rahel Straus (née Goitein) was one of the first female doctors in Germany. Born into a middle-class family in Karlsruhe, Straus moved to Munich on her marriage to Elias Straus, a lawyer. She continued to run her medical practice throughout the First World War, the revolution and the Weimar Republic while also raising her five children. She was involved in the JFB and became a leading figure in the women's movement although her Zionist views often put her at odds with the JFB, especially in the 1920s. She wrote her memoirs, dedicated to her children, shortly before her death in Jerusalem in the 1960s. Straus's position on the subject of war is difficult to summarize concisely. Her husband was ill with a heart complaint for the early years of the war and she was preoccupied with visiting him in various hospitals and sanatoria and caring for her family. She was involved with the JFB and their war work and she described the effects of malnutrition on women and children that she saw and the government's stance that this was redressing the balance of overeating in the pre-war years. In February 1917, she gave a speech to her former university friends in which she stated the belief that women, as protectors of the home and mothers of sons, should oppose the war (1961: 204–23).

A wide variety of Straus's work has been preserved, both medical texts and articles she wrote for the JFB, and her life as a female student has also been included in studies of universities (Freidenreich, 2002). Straus is a difficult figure to claim as a revolutionary because she described herself as 'ganz unpolitisch' ('entirely unpolitical') even though her actions belied this statement. However, perhaps what she meant was that she did not align herself to any particular party rather than being engaged in any political activity, as she certainly was. This positioning is also similar to her colleagues in the women's movement Rosa Kempf and Helene Sumper, who were also involved in the councils in Munich, but who saw themselves as lacking formal political training (Kampf, 2016: 68). Nevertheless, all of these women saw their place within politics rather than outside it. Furthermore, Straus dedicated a chapter of her memoir to the revolution and the events in Munich, indicating that these events were a key moment in her life and in her self-understanding. She certainly was involved in mass action to bring about change and, as the following analysis will reflect, she had a clear vision for achieving social justice. As a result, a revolutionary status can be claimed for Straus but not without some caveats.

Straus attended meetings for different revolutionary bodies and was a member of both the Frauenrat (women's council) and the Rat geistiger Arbeiter (council of intellectual workers). Acting as a member of these different councils would seem to make it easier to call Straus a revolutionary. However, she was incredibly critical of the councils and many of the prominent male revolutionaries. Both Erich Mühsam and Max Levien are criticized by Straus for using violent language and creating divisions in the council (Straus, 1961: 227). Her main criticism of the council as a whole was that there was too much discussion and very little action, indicating that she wanted to play an even more active role in the revolution than she was already undertaking: 'Lange kam es zu keiner

richtigen Arbeit. Es wurde viel geredet, ohne ein wirkliches Arbeitsprogramm' ('In the long run it did not get on with any real work. There was much talking without a real plan of work') (1961: 227). Her involvement in the organizational structures of the revolution and her desire to use them as a way to bring about lasting change do make her a credible revolutionary. Her critical perspective and critique of male revolutionary leaders provides a useful alternative view to the revolution and some insights into why it ended in the way it did, in particular the violence in Munich and its legacy that Straus perceived in the Weimar era.

As well as her criticisms of the leading figures, Straus was also critical of the soldiers who were demobilized due to the revolution. Rather than seeing these men as heroic figures who were carrying the revolution across Germany, Straus described them as wanting to go to the cinema and have a good time: 'Die Soldaten, frei nach so langen, schweren Kriegsjahren, wollten sich austoben. Sie waren glücklich, der Hölle entronnen zu sein, etwas Neues gab es für sie in diesem Augenblick noch nicht' ('The soldiers who were free after such long, difficult war years wanted to let off steam. They were happy to have escaped from hell; in this moment there was nothing new for them') (1961: 225). To her, their position was understandable as they had been experiencing the deprivations of war at the front and risking their lives, but it was a disappointment, nonetheless. Landau was similarly critical of soldiers whom she describes as merely seeking beer, bath and bed (1992: 118) and lacking the intellectual philosophy to join a revolution. Through the writings of these women, we can see that just as there was a plethora of reactions to the revolution among women, in particular German Jewish women, there was also diversity among the men.

The legacy of the revolution and the violent response by the government and paramilitary forces were of great concern to Straus. She described the violence of both the revolutionaries and the counter-revolutionaries in detail. Some of her patients were even victims of horrific acts of murder or shootings (1961: 231–3). Like Landau, she was openly concerned about anti-Semitism. She comments on her belief at the time that the prominence of Jewish Germans in the revolution and in revolutionary positions was going to result in an anti-Semitic backlash:

Es war zu verstehen, daß so viele Juden an der Spitze standen, sie waren die 'Intellektuellen'. Aber es war ein Unglück und der Anfang der jüdischen Katastrophe, deren entsetzliches Ende wir noch miterleben. Und es ist nicht so daß wir das erst heute wissen, wir haben es damals schon gewußt und ausgesprochen.

(It was understandable that so many Jews were at the forefront; they were the 'intellectuals'. But it was a misfortune and the beginning of the Jewish catastrophe, the terrible end of which we also lived through. And it is not that we only know this today, we knew it back then and spoke about it. (1961: 225))

Although it is easy to dismiss her concerns as issues being raised as a result of hindsight, as Fishman (1997) notes, the contemporary Munich press was quick to blame the revolution on Jews, and anti-Semitic conspiracy claims were made in the aftermath of the revolution. Straus also noted that, after Eisner's murder, church bells across Bavaria were rung on Good Friday in his memory, something which went against Catholic conventions: 'Wir

fühlten, das mußte Folgen haben' ('We felt that there had to be consequences') (1961: 229). Without blaming the revolutionaries or dismissing their aims, Straus drew connections between the revolution and the Holocaust and thereby indicates that anti-Semitic reactions to the revolution were a concern for Jewish women in the same way they were a concern for the male commentators Fishman analysed.

This concern about anti-Semitism and the revolution may have also prompted another of Straus's reflections on the revolution surrounding the end of the *Kaiserreich*. She criticized the former leaders for displaying a lack of leadership and abdicating their responsibility as royal families across Germany fled: 'Es war eine merkwürdige, ungläubliche Sache: Keiner stand auf gegen die neue Regierung. Wo waren alle Beamten, Offiziere, Lehrer, die dem König, der Verfassung die Treue geschworen hatten?' ('It was an odd, unbelievable thing. No one stood up against the new regime. Where were all the civil servants, officers, teachers who had sworn their loyalty to the constitution to the King?') (1961: 225). From this lack of leadership, there could be no smooth transition to the new order, and the revolutionaries would always struggle with a lack of experience and questions around their legitimacy. The revolutionaries were also unable to improve the lives of the population quickly. As Straus noted: 'Der Krieg war vorbei, die Grenzen blieben geschlossen, der Hunger blieb. Man konnte nicht einsehen welche Gründe es gab, ein Volk hungern zu lassen' ('The war was over, the borders remained closed, the hunger remained. We couldn't understand what the reasons were to let a population starve') (1961: 226). While Straus placed the blame for the ongoing difficulties on the Allies, the revolutionaries had to fight against the disappointment that the wartime shortages were ongoing.

Toni Sender

Toni Sender was a prominent figure in left-wing politics during the Weimar Republic and was elected to the Reichstag in 1920. However, she has received little scholarly attention. Her political activities in the late 1920s and her anti-Nazi campaigns are featured in Smaldone (2009) and an overview of her life is in Critchfield (1992). Neither of these works considers her role as a revolutionary in much detail, and nor do they reflect on her position as a Jewish woman.

Sender's family was comfortably middle-class and from an Orthodox background, but she chose to defy class conventions and study commerce. She then worked in Frankfurt and Paris for metal companies so that she could achieve financial independence. This work led her to become active in the trade union movement, and initially she joined the SPD, but she split from them over their support for the war, at first becoming part of an anti-war faction within the party, but then leaving entirely after being inspired by the works of Rosa Luxemburg. She worked in Paris where she wrote about trying to recruit workers to join the trade union, but with limited success. She was in Paris on the eve of the First World War and gave many speeches to socialist groups about the German anti-war perspective, but she had to flee to Switzerland as war was declared. She continued to be involved in anti-war work while working for a metal company in Frankfurt. She was troubled by her involvement in arms production but saw her work as a way to encourage class consciousness among the workers. During the revolution in Frankfurt,

Sender spoke to workers and passers-by to encourage them to join the revolutionaries and she described how ready people were to participate, most likely as a result of their frustration at the wartime deprivations and their sense of betrayal by the political class (Sender, 1940: 85). Sender also worked for the revolutionary workers' and soldiers' council and described dealing with many of the day-to-day issues of running a city. When looting broke out in a police station she went personally to speak to the looters and tried to reason with them. The mob threatened to drown her and Sender had to be persuaded to leave (1940: 121).

Like Straus, Sender dedicated a chapter of her book to the revolution. Sender's peace activism, depictions of wartime suffering, and the outbreak of the revolution in Kiel and its passage to Frankfurt feature in a chapter titled 'The eve of revolt'. Her role in the council and the governing of the town is described in the following chapter 'Days of revolution'. That the revolution occupies two chapters in a 13-chapter memoir indicates the importance she placed on these events. The arrival in Frankfurt of the revolutionary sailors from Kiel is also seen as the 'eve' rather than the revolution itself, because from her perspective the revolution was her work for the council. In Sender's work, the revolution was not a single event, but a longer process and she views her role as vital: 'I must go in to the city, try to meet soldiers and speak to the people in the street. Something must happen soon, and I feel it my duty not to keep aloof' (1940: 87).

Unlike Straus and Landau, Sender did not mention anti-Semitism or being the focus of anti-Semitic attacks. Her main concern was that she was young, in her early twenties, and looked younger than she was and that therefore she might be dismissed by the other revolutionaries. Her memoirs do make links to the Third Reich, but unlike Straus she was very clear that the events of the revolution were not responsible directly for the rise of Hitler. As she pointed out, rumours indicated that Hitler joined the MSPD in this period (1940: 101). She was also concerned about violence, and described a speech she gave believing that the revolution could achieve change without violence 'If we act swiftly and thoroughly, great things may be accomplished without violence' (1940: 91). Unlike Landau, however, she described the revolutionary crowd as demonstrating great restraint: in her account soldiers did not react with violence towards their former officers (1940: 89).

She acknowledged that the revolutionary sailors came from Kiel, but they did not seem to play a large role in generating the revolutionary action in Frankfurt. The soldiers were involved in different aspects of the revolution, from marching in the streets to organizing councils, but Sender criticized their lack of experience:

In the first hours of the revolution we encountered what was to be its main handicap, the Soldiers' Councils. The soldiers, to a large extent, were completely untrained politically. What they demanded was the end of the war with as little disturbance as possible . . . The programme of the Soldiers' Councils in contrast with that of the workers, was not revolutionary. (1940: 92)

Like Landau and Straus, the people themselves were ready for the revolution through years' worth of anti-war agitation and wartime suffering. Sender's role was to encourage this dissent and then to work within the leadership to guide the revolution on its path.

Conclusion

All three revolutionary women went against the expectations of their class and gender when they decided to oppose the government, and yet all three were able to use these expectations to their advantage when they needed to. For Straus, her work within the women's movement gave her the necessary skills and recognition to participate in the councils. For Landau, the cover of a bourgeois women's tea party enabled her to meet and plan with like-minded activists. Sender described some French soldiers stopping her vehicle in the Rhine region. She spoke to them in French and played the role of a confused, wealthy woman who did not realize she was breaking any regulations. The soldiers let her and her driver continue (1940: 111). By using their class as a guise, these women were able to hide their revolutionary activities in plain sight. However, this was a double-edged sword, as Landau criticized the middle classes, who were not inspired to fight for peace as she was, represented through the figure of her father. When she returned to his home, he was enjoying a card game with some neighbours: 'Sie glauben wirklich, dies ist eine Revolution? Die deutschen haben nicht das Talent dazu. Es wird sich nicht viel ändern. Leider' ('Do you really believe this is a revolution? The Germans don't have the talent for that. It won't change much. Unfortunately') (1992: 107). It was also their ability to hide in plain sight that may have allowed the revolutionary activities of women like these to go unnoticed both in the accounts of male revolutionaries and in writings about the revolution.

For these women, the revolution was not a single event after which they returned to their traditional roles. Lola Landau travelled to the Middle East during the 1920s and fled the Third Reich by moving to Jerusalem. Here she was involved in welfare work and dreamt of building the kind of international community that the revolution had promised her in 1918: 'Nein, sie sind nicht mein Volk, noch nicht . . . Aber ihre Urenkel und meine Urenkel werden ein Volk sein' ('No, they are not my people. Not yet . . . But their great grandchildren and my great grandchildren will be one people') (1992: 384). The horrors of Nazism changed this dream, however, and it was now only through an international Jewish community that Landau believed it could be achieved. Rahel Straus continued her work in Munich, working mainly with the JFB to address welfare needs and Jewish concerns. She also emigrated to Jerusalem to escape the Nazis. Toni Sender took up a career in politics, sitting first as an independent social democrat (USPD) in 1920 and then returning to the SPD in 1922. She was involved in a very ambitious programme of reforms, attempting to revolutionize the school system (1940: 127). She used her experience of organizing strikes during the war and the revolution to call for mass strikes to oppose Hitler in 1932 (1940: 289). Her calls went unheeded, but she was attempting to use the same tactics that she had learnt in 1918.

These women overcame remarkable barriers to become revolutionaries, and as a result they developed skills and networks that they used for the rest of their lives. Their pre-war interests in social justice and ending suffering led them to become involved in action that brought them into conflict with the state. What does it do to our understanding of the revolution when we add the voices of Jewish women to the historical narrative? First, we gain a more complex understanding of the revolution itself: the reasons why some revolutionaries chose to get involved and, as the barriers they faced become

highlighted, the reasons why others may not have done. Second, a study of their writings provides an opportunity to uncover the plurality of voices, motivations and experiences within our understanding of the German revolution. Third, this research gives us an opportunity to ask new questions about the revolution. Rather than focusing on the male leadership and their demands and successes or failures, we can look outside this paradigm to ask new questions about the goals of the revolution and uncover new methods of activism and motivations for joining it.

By reading the memoirs of these women, we can see how the revolution fits into the bigger picture of a life. For all of the women mentioned here, the revolution was neither an impulsive act nor the pinnacle of achievement. Instead the revolution and their activism grew out of their longer-term subversive activities where they challenged the state and its decisions. They developed skills and networks that they utilized in their later careers. It is also notable that all three of these women escaped the Holocaust. Older women were more likely to remain in Germany, having sent their younger and male family members overseas. That all three women were able to escape speaks to their wealth, since emigration was a costly process, but also to their connections that made this possible. It also seems likely that their raised political profiles made them a target for anti-Semites early in the Third Reich and was a factor that pushed them to leave Germany. Sender received death threats in both 1918 and 1933 and her initial response in both instances was to continue the struggle but also to carry a gun. In 1933, however, these threats became explicitly anti-Semitic in character, and the Nazis, who may well have been those sending the threats, had infiltrated the police force, so she used her trade union connections to escape to Czechoslovakia and from there to the USA (1940: 291). While revolutionary work put these women in danger, it may have also helped to save their lives.

This article has only been able to examine the works of three Jewish women. There remain more voices from the revolution to be uncovered. Through them we can begin to see the plethora of motivations for the revolutionaries: for Landau, her revolutionary activity grew out of her pacifism. A new world order was needed to end the war and to prevent future wars and this could only be achieved through a revolution. The violence of the revolution remained a troubling point for Landau and may have limited her active participation. For Straus, the revolution was an opportunity to mobilize the women's movement and to ensure women's voices were represented in the revolutionary hierarchy. She felt disappointed that the revolution was unable to achieve its aims and that too many meetings were lost to circular debates without proper resolutions. She was also troubled by the violence of the revolution and the counter-revolution. She was keenly aware of the anti-Semitic accusations levelled at the revolutionaries and that they were attracting too much negative attention. For Sender, the revolution was the next stage in her political career, and suffrage rights enabled her to stand for office. By removing the old order, she believed she could work to bring about a new political system that challenged social injustice. She was not concerned about violence or anti-Semitism, despite receiving death threats, but the return of this in the 1930s would ultimately force her to leave Germany. As revolutionaries, all three women shared similar imaginaries – a vision of a world without suffering – and participated in mass action to seek institutional change, but they differed in their approaches to how to realize this vision.

Notes

- 1 For more detailed information about the revolution see Jones (2016).
- 2 See, for example, Grebing (1994) and Sternsdorf-Hauck (2008). Kampf (2016) discusses the political engagement of women but does not use Rahel Straus as a case study.
- 3 I would like to thank Ingrid Sharp for her invaluable perspectives on this research.
- 4 For more about the gendered nature of archives, see Durepos et al. (2017).
- 5 This definition is developed from Kalyvas's work (2015).
- 6 Fishman uses the example of the scholar Emil Gumbel who collected statistics to show how anti-Semitism was preventing Jews from achieving equal employment in the field of law. According to Gumbel, the right was able to use the counter-revolution to permeate the upper echelons of Weimar governance and consolidate their power (Fishman, 1997: 381).
- 7 For detailed information about the origins of the JFB and their involvement in the First World War, see Kaplan (1991).
- 8 See Painter (2019) for an example of one member, Clementine Krämer, who initially engaged in war work but was filled with doubts about the kind of work undertaken and withdrew from it before the end of the war.
- 9 More information about WILPF can be found in Vellacott (1993) and Hellawell (2018).

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