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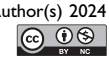

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# Women in Politics and the Public Sphere: Munich 1918/1919

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## Abstract

Women have never been passive bystanders to the history being made around them and they have always found ways to contribute to shaping their world. Munich in 1918/1919 provides a useful site to examine women's experiences and roles due to the long-standing involvement of women in the peace movement and welfare work, as well as the foundation of the Bavarian Soviet Republic after the First World War. However, Munich in the early years of the Weimar Republic is most commonly associated with Adolf Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch in 1923, an attempt by right-wing men to seize political power. Moreover, the 1918 revolution is also often told through the lens of male political figures. As a result, politics in the early twentieth century is easy to view as a male-dominated affair with women merely experiencing the effects of male political power. This era, particularly from the perspective of Munich, also becomes viewed through the lens of the rise of fascism, which obscures and distorts the alternative political visions many women held and worked towards. This article centres on women's experiences and roles in politics and the public sphere in revolutionary Munich to ask what opportunities the revolution and its immediate aftermath presented for women and how they were able to influence political decision-making despite huge barriers. Through an understanding of how their world was gendered, their role as political agents comes to the fore.

## Keywords

First World War, German, Munich, politics, revolution, women

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## Introduction

The 1918/1919 revolution upended the old political structures across Germany and created a space in which new ideas about how to govern could be discussed. Women had long been excluded from politics and much of the current historiography implicitly and explicitly rejects women as revolutionary actors. The revolution in Munich was very different from other areas as it became the seat of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic and experienced widespread violence afterwards. As will be discussed, Munich had a legacy of women's peace activism and welfare work which provided a distinctive arena for politically active women during the revolution. This article focuses on women in Munich to ask how this period presented new opportunities for women in politics and the public sphere to imagine and shape their future and the future of Germany. In order to understand women's roles in politics, it is not enough to simply identify the few female politicians or female revolutionary leaders or to examine the myriad of ways in which men and pre-existing patriarchal structures excluded them. Instead, we need to understand how the world in which they lived was gendered and how they were able to influence decision-making and the decision-makers who held the power. What barriers did they face and what strategies did they employ to overcome them? What were the outcomes of their actions and what consequences did they face for challenging patriarchal power structures? Through addressing these questions, we gain a clearer picture of women's engagement with political ideas and structures and how women were able to advocate for change in a system that did not encourage or welcome their contributions. As a result, our picture of the political landscape in Munich is diversified and a more comprehensive understanding of the revolution and its consequences becomes possible.

It is true that the political landscape in Munich and in Germany as a whole in 1918 was filled with men. In particular, suffrage was not extended to women until 1919 and women had only been allowed to participate in political meetings since 1908. Furthermore, many historians focus on mutinying sailors or how the revolution spread amongst the soldiers, leading some to claim that the entire revolution was gendered as male.[1] Often a 'top-down' approach is used, blaming the revolution on the decisions of the military high command which sees the revolution as a failure of masculine leadership; an approach that obscures the revolutionaries themselves.[2] When women are discussed, as gender and cultural historian Ingrid Sharp highlights, they are often included in a single chapter that aims to address the plurality of all women's experiences or the analytical framework relegates women to supportive roles rather than recognizing them as historical agents.[3] Our understanding of women in politics is distorted. Women have been

[1] Benjamin Ziemann, 'Germany 1914–1918: Total War as a Catalyst of Change', in Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (Oxford 2011), 378–99, here 387–8.

[2] Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918–1919* (Cambridge 2016), 11–12. There are also biographies of some of the leading figures, including some women. See, for example, Heidi Beutin and Wolfgang Beutin, *Fanfaren einer neuen Freiheit: Deutsche Intellektuelle und die Novemberrevolution* (Darmstadt 2018).

[3] Ingrid Sharp, 'Dangerous Visionaries and Revolutionary Transformations: Women's Political Cultures in the Aftermath of War', *Oxford German Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2020), 401–19, here 410.

excluded from the institutionalized realm of politics but when we examine the political 'process[es] of negotiation or struggle over the distribution of power' then it is clear that women are both affected by this process but are also active participants.[4] My research continues the efforts to place women at the centre of our knowledge of this era, to see them as historical actors, and to gain a fuller picture of what happened, how and why. This is vital in order to analyze how power operates, who wields it, and how it can be resisted. Without understanding power, and being curious about the gendered nature of power, it is impossible to understand how change happens and how political decision-making occurs.[5]

As well as shifting the focus of research to women, we also need to take a regional approach. The events of the German Revolution at the end of the First World War were highly regional, as different actors took to the political stage at different moments and the authorities responded in different ways. By looking at Germany as a whole, the diverse nature of the revolution becomes lost and the complex experiences and motivations of the revolutionaries becomes simplified. For a number of reasons, Munich provides a useful framework through which to explore the changing landscape for women in politics. Firstly, Munich was a site of anti-war and anti-government demonstrations before and during the war, and its people joined the revolution in November 1918 before the people of Berlin. It took longer for Munich to witness the kinds of food shortages that Berlin had from 1915 onwards, but by the end of the war, the effects of the economic blockade were visible in the form of food queues and demonstrations. These became an important site for revolutionary organizing and agitation.[6] Secondly, it was also the heart of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, a short-lived, radical, left-wing state.[7] Thirdly, it became a key part of Hitler's narrative of his rise to power, which is repeated in current historiography as historians examine the revolution and the foundation of Weimar democracy through the lens of its ultimate collapse.[8] This narrative of failure erases the plethora of alternate visions of Germany that the revolutionaries expressed. As the old order was swept away, there was a moment for new voices to come to the fore and many of those who had long been excluded from power, including women, saw an opportunity for their voices to be heard.

This article cannot encapsulate the wide variety of women's experiences. In order to begin the process of developing analytical depth in terms of women's lives, I have chosen to focus on women who were involved with the council system and/or the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Their engagement with the revolution reflects their broader desires to enact political change and this brought them into conflict with existing power structures

[4] Judith Squires, *Gender in Political Theory* (Cambridge 1999), 3.

[5] See Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA 2014).

[6] For more on food protests see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC 2000).

[7] See Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 286–323.

[8] See for example, Thomas Mergel, 'Dictatorship and Democracy, 1918–1939', in Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (Oxford 2011).

in the public sphere. It is beyond the scope of this research to consider women who opposed the revolution. Moreover, working-class women were less likely to have the kind of profile that led them to be identified by their male contemporaries as political activists worthy of inclusion in revolutionary organizing. I have therefore chosen to focus on four women who give a range of perspectives on the revolution and had a mixture of reactions. All four women come from similar class backgrounds and, by 1918, had spent a considerable portion of their lives in Munich. Unlike notable feminists Lida Gustava Heymann and Antia Augspurg, who were not in Munich for the initial outbreak of revolution, all four witnessed the events of November first hand. Hilde Kramer (1900–1974, later Hilde Fitzgerald) and Toni Pfülf (1877–1933) were both highly political women who joined the revolution enthusiastically to bring about democracy and fought for lasting political change. Pfülf was elected to the National Assembly in 1919 and Kramer became the secretary to the City Commander during the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Clementine Krämer (1873–1942) and Rahel Straus (1880–1963) were both involved in welfare work through their campaigns with the League of Jewish Women and they both went on to hold prominent positions in welfare organizations and were not members of political parties.[9] They both joined the Frauenrat (Women's Council) during the revolution. Clementine Krämer (who was embedded in Liberal Judaism) and Straus (who became a Zionist) provide an insight into some of the complex positions Jewish women held in Munich. Their encounters with anti-Semitism highlight how the revolution could provide opportunities for further equality, but also represented the destruction of an order that had provided some stability and advancement. Although none of the four was born in Munich, due to the activities they undertook, they demonstrated a belief in the right to fight to improve the city.

## Politics and the Public Sphere: Sources and Approaches

The revolution was a moment when almost everything destabilized and boundaries became blurred. In order to examine these women's lives during and after this moment of upheaval, we need an understanding of what politics and the public sphere are. In democratic societies there is both a formalized institution of politics and a public sphere, a space in which political grievances can be brought to light and pressure can be applied to the formal institutions of politics to bring about change.[10] However, within the public sphere, pre-existing power dynamics influence whose voices are heard and which topics are acceptable, and which are labelled as private. As a result,

[9] For the perspectives of further Jewish female revolutionaries and a broader look at Rahel Straus's work see Corinne Painter, 'Revolutionary Perspectives: German Jewish Women and 1918–19', *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2021), 93–110; for Jewish male writers, see Sterling Fishman, '1919. German Jewish Writers Begin to Give Literary Expression to Memories of the Munich Revolution of 1918–19', in Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes, eds, *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096–1996* (New Haven, CT 1997), 377–83.

[10] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt 1962). Margaret Farrer and Jamie Warner, 'Rah-Rah-Radical: The Radical Cheerleaders' Challenge to the Public Sphere', *Politics and Gender*, Vol. 2 (2006), 282.

women's voices and issues have frequently been excluded.[11] Alternative 'counterpublic' spaces have been identified as arenas for those excluded from the public sphere to retreat and recover, but also to educate and challenge the public sphere. The public sphere is not a clearly defined space with an impermeable wall around it; instead, it is a flexible arena containing the struggle of competing voices and ideas. Through considering the interaction between different forms of publics the permeable nature of the public sphere becomes apparent and notions of success or failure to influence the public sphere are undermined. In the context of the German Revolution, a perceived distinction between politics and the public sphere is problematic as the revolutionaries began as activists in the public sphere but then occupied the formal institutions. By understanding these processes, we gain insight into how decisions were made and how life in Munich was shaped. For the purposes of this article, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils will be considered as the formal institutions until June 1919 when the Bavarian Soviet Republic was crushed, and a parliamentary democracy was instated. It is certainly true that the realm of institutionalized politics before the revolution was solely the domain of men and men remained the overwhelming majority afterwards. However, it is not true that women played no part in politics. All four of the women featured here participated in institutionalized politics through the council system at the start of the revolution but the routes they pursued varied greatly.

Archival practices have tended to privilege materials created by organizations and formal institutions, which, as discussed above, frequently excluded women and therefore women's experiences. These official records often avoided recording debate and dissent in full in order to present clear decision-making, which distorts our understanding of how these decisions were reached and what the experience of the decision-making process was.[12] Accessing women's understandings of this era requires the scholar to read against the grain of official documents and to cast a wider net to find different sources. There are a wide variety of sources produced by women to examine this notion of politics and the public sphere in Munich. I use both contemporaneous materials, including fiction and reportage, and memoirs by women to uncover how each writer responded to the revolution and the barriers she faced to contributing to Munich's political life and the public sphere. These writings are subjective and cannot be expected to represent a singular 'truth' about this era; as feminist scholars have long identified: 'all research is situated and pure objectivity is a pretence' while autobiography highlights this subjectivity.[13] Autobiography is a way to examine the negotiation and re-negotiation of self-representation by subjects who have been erased by official records.[14] By engaging with multiple perspectives, the texts both enrich and undermine the official archival

[11] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, Nos 25/26 (1990), 56–80.

[12] Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe* (Cambridge 2013), 23.

[13] Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield, eds, *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London 2000), 13.

[14] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The Afterlives of Those Who Write Themselves: Rethinking Autobiographical Archives', *European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol. 9 (2020), 9–29.

materials. As with any interpretation of historical sources, any scholar undertaking this work must resist overly simple interpretations and recognize that these sources contribute perspectives rather than truths.[15] Through these different sources this article reflects on the impact of the different ways in which women can participate in shaping the world and their relationship to formal power structures.

Kramer and Straus both wrote memoirs which examine their perspectives on the revolution in detail. Pfülf's body of work consists of personal and political writings that have not yet been published as a single work. Krämer has generated a large archive of personal letters, articles, short stories and poetry through which her position can be deduced. None of these women have left a single, perfect source. However, through the material we have, new perspectives on Munich as a space for women in the revolution can be identified. This is by no means an exhaustive study but by centring these women's experiences and focusing on the micro-level of individual lives, a wider understanding of women's involvement in shaping political debate in Munich in this era can become clear. In order to highlight commonalities and differences between the women's accounts, I will first provide an overview of Munich and the revolution, then I will examine Kramer and Pfülf and their enthusiastic participation in the revolution, the councils, and their later political careers. Straus and Krämer and their more complex positioning towards the revolution will then be discussed.

## Munich in 1918

At the start of the twentieth century, Munich was a city undergoing enormous change. Around the fin de siècle, Munich was home to an avant-garde art, literary and theatre scene, publishing popular literary and artistic journals such as *Simplicissimus* and *Jugend* and culminating in Jugendstil (the German complement to Art Nouveau). It had several large publishing houses ensuring access to the latest works. Most heavy industry was kept out of the city, allowing the city to present itself as a modern city that was unblemished by the industrialization that Berlin had undergone. In the pre-war era, Munich was described as a Kunststadt (arts city) and Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art), something which Hitler attempted to revive in the 1930s.[16] Munich had been a cultural, political and financial hub but since unification in 1871, its importance had begun to wane as Berlin's grew. However, the cultural boom that Munich had undergone did not disappear overnight as artists continued to live in the city and produce work, influencing the ideological landscape and, in the case of architects, the literal cityscape.

Munich is also a useful city to examine in this period due to its complicated relationship to war and peace. The Wilhelmine Empire used the victory over the French army in the Franco-Prussian war as a cornerstone of its foundation myth and the two decades of

[15] Maggie Gale and Vivien Gardner, *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester 2000), 4–5.

[16] Douglas Klahr, 'Munich as Kunststadt, 1900–1937: Art, Architecture, and Civic Identity', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2011), 179–201.

peace that followed. In Munich, the golden Angel of Peace stood over the city as a testament to both victory in war and the ensuing peace. Military culture permeated much of German society, with regular military parades and the promotion of patriotic ideals in schools. Despite this celebration of the military, Munich also had a burgeoning peace movement. In 1892, the German Peace Society was founded and the prominent Munich resident (and later Bavarian politician) Ludwig Quidde (1858–1941) served as its president for a number of years. Many key figures from the women's movement in Munich were also important within the peace movement. In 1899, a group of Munich feminists organized a Peace Conference in The Hague to bring together women and women's groups from all over the world to challenge the male congress that Tsar Nicholas II had organized. Many of these Munich women were also involved in organizing rallies to protest the Boer War and the First World War. The women involved were frequently also members of women's and suffrage organizations. Their campaigns explicitly connected war to male aggression, and they condemned the male domination of politics as causing worldwide suffering.[17] While official political institutions were closed to women at this time, campaigning for peace provided a public platform for women to hone their skills and develop networks that could be further utilized in their campaign for broader changes.

Peace activism continued after the outbreak of war and, as the situation on the home front worsened, gained momentum. The allied naval blockade was very effective at stopping imports and there were poor harvests in 1915 and 1916, which compounded shortages that were particularly acute for urban consumers.[18] Munich had been largely protected from the worst of the food shortages during the First World War due to higher levels of production in Bavaria. It was also far from either the eastern or the western fronts and did not witness any fighting. However, Munich was still affected by stagnant wages and, by 1918, food queues were common. The job market had collapsed as men left to join the army and industries were not immediately prepared to hire women; there were also large areas of poverty and slum-like housing. Rising prices and a lack of raw materials put pressure on household incomes, meaning that many domestic servants often lost both their jobs and their homes as wealthier families economized.[19] Munich had several welfare organizations working to alleviate poverty, many of which had been founded by and were run by women, but the demand was far greater than they were able to meet. As a result, as the war continued, unrest spread throughout the city and, despite censorship and heavy policing, was fostered by left-wing movements hoping for social change.[20] Attempting to deal with these problems may have

[17] See Hiltrud Häntzchel 'Nur wer feige ist, nimmt die Waffe in die Hand: München- Zentrum der Frauenfriedensbewegung 1899–1933' in Christina Böck and Sybille Krafft, eds, *Zwischen den Fronten: Münchner Frauen in Krieg und Frieden, 1900–1950* (Munich 1995), 18–41.

[18] Davis, *Home Fires*, 25.

[19] See Christina Böck, 'Pikrinsäure und Dotschen: Münchner Frauenalltag zwischen Erwerbstätigkeit und (Familien) Versorgen im Ersten Weltkrieg', in Christina Böck and Sybille Krafft, eds, *Zwischen den Fronten: Münchner Frauen in Krieg und Frieden, 1900–1950* (Munich 1995), 41–62.

[20] Böck, 'Pikrinsäure und Dotschen', 58. Police informants reported on women going door to door to organize protests and pass on pamphlets with information.

seemed overwhelming, but it provided an opportunity for women to bring all of their pre-war skills in welfare work and provide services for the city. They were also able to use their positions and community networks to agitate for change.

## The Revolution and Revolutionary Opportunities

The revolution ignited at the beginning of November 1918, as sailors in northern Germany mutinied, and spread quickly. On 7 November 1918, the people of Munich, both men and women, took to the streets to demand peace, bread and an end to the monarchic family that had led them into the war. Hilde Kramer described the masses of people marching peacefully through the streets, shouting slogans. The ruling Wittelsbach family fled, and a new government, copying the model of the Russian Revolution and consisting of soldiers' and workers' councils, was proclaimed.[21] Across Germany, these councils were a hastily constructed compromise between the councils, the previous leadership and civil servants. In December 1918, council delegates met in Berlin and agreed on new national elections in January 1919, although they were deeply divided, with many opposed. [22]

Although the revolution had begun peacefully in Munich and the demonstrations on 7 November 1918 had not resulted in any deaths despite the large numbers participating, 1919 saw violent incidences and a state of near civil war. Kurt Eisner (1867–1919) declared the Bavarian Free State and the Provisional National Council took over governance. Universal suffrage was declared on 8 November 1918 but of the 256 council members, only eight were women.[23] In February 1919, Eisner was assassinated by an anti-Semite. The Bavarian Soviet Republic was declared in April but soon crushed by government forces and paramilitaries with fierce gun battles breaking out in many Munich districts and the surrounding area. Swiss revolutionary Anny Klawa-Morf (1894–1993) joined the red guard in Dachau, Bavaria, and witnessed some of the worst excesses by both sides. She also spent time in prison with many of the other female revolutionaries.[24] Both the so-called 'red guards' (the left-wing fighters) and the 'white guards' (paramilitaries and government forces) took and executed hostages, and executed non-combatants, but the red guards were killed in greater numbers and, once the Bavarian Soviet Republic was crushed, the leadership was imprisoned. Some were murdered, and one, Eugen Leviné, was sentenced to death and executed.[25] The legacy of this violence was long-lasting and marked the outcomes of elections and the

[21] Hilde Fitzgerald, Günther Egon and Thies Marsen, *Rebellin in München, Moskau und Berlin: autobiographisches Fragment 1900–1924* (Berlin 2011), 47–50.

[22] Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 15.

[23] Helen Boak, 'Women in the German Revolution', in Gaard Kets and James Muldoon, eds, *The German Revolution and Political Theory* (London 2019), 33.

[24] Annette Frei, *Die Welt ist mein Haus. Das Leben der Anny Klawa-Morf* (Zurich 1991).

[25] Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 286–9.

make-up of the parliament.[26] The prominent Jewish men who were murdered (such as Eisner and Gustav Landauer) and those who were imprisoned (Ernst Toller and Erich Mühsam) were used by anti-Semites to smear the revolution in Bavaria and target Jews.[27] For women, especially Jewish women, this violence affected how they chose to engage with politics and the public sphere.

## Embracing the Revolution

Within this chaotic political system and ongoing revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence, there were opportunities for women. New administrative structures needed to be created, and it is here that women across Germany often played prominent roles. For example, in Göttingen, student Maria Saran (1897–1976) created new official paperwork to demobilize soldiers and enable them to access rations.[28] In Kiel, secretary Gertrud Völcker (1896–1979) worked at the Trade Union Headquarters, coordinating meetings and keeping official records. This administrative work could also entail personal risk as Martha Riedl (1903–1992) described running messages for the Kiel revolutionaries as the bullets flew.[29] As the revolution also led to the introduction of universal suffrage, there was the potential for a new space for women's voices not only as voters but also as politicians.[30] In Munich, female representatives from a range of women's groups and from both the social democrats (SPD) and the independent socialists (USPD) formed the Bund sozialistischer Frauen (Association of Female Socialists) in December 1918. This unusual gathering of women from across the spectrum of female organizations only held a few meetings and records are sparse, but Augspurg, Heymann and Pfülf were all members and the group discussed themes including pacifism and the importance of educating female voters on socialist topics.[31]

However, despite this potential and some opportunities, in reality the revolutionary new leadership remained closed to the vast majority of women. The soldiers' councils and their leadership were of course made up of men, but the workplace councils were also overwhelmingly dominated by men. The workplace councils drew from trade unions, bodies which had long excluded women and, due to demobilization practices

[26] Donna Harsch, 'Codes of Comradeship: Class, Leadership, and Tradition in Munich Social Democracy', *Central European History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1998), 391.

[27] Michael Brenner explores this in his book *Der lange Schatten der Revolution: Juden und Antisemiten in Hitlers München* (2019) but although several men form the focus of various subchapters (Eisner, Landauer, Toller, Eugen Leviné), and he uses quotations from men as epigraphs, not a single woman is similarly highlighted.

[28] Mary Saran, *Never Give Up* (London 1976).

[29] Klaus Kuhl, 'Novemberrevolution', Kurkuhl, last modified 16 May 2021, available at: http://www.kurkuhl.de/de/novrev/novrev_intro.html.

[30] See, for example, Kathleen Canning, 'Gender and the Imaginary of Revolution in Germany', in Klaus Weinhauer, Anthony McElligott and Kirsten Heinsohn, eds, *Germany, 1916–23: A Revolution in Context* (Bielefeld 2015), 103–127.

[31] Christiane Sternsdorf Hauck, *Brotmarken und rote Fahnen: Frauen in der bayerischen Revolution und Räterepublik* (Köln 2008), 19–24.

that prioritized jobs for returning soldiers over women, became increasingly male.[32] Munich also had a 'Frauenrat' (Women's Council) and a 'Rat geistiger Arbeiter' (Council of Intellectual Workers) that formed part of the soldiers' and workers' councils. The effects of the segregation of women into a separate council will be discussed in this article. After the brutal end of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in June 1919, many of these women continued their work within welfare organizations and continued to campaign for equal rights and better treatment under the law.[33]

Hilde Kramer, born in Leipzig in 1900 to a middle-class family, was one such woman who embraced the revolution and the political opportunities it presented.[34] After her father died in 1911, she and her mother moved to Munich to be with her older sister. Her mother died soon after, and Kramer was then raised by a foster family in a village on the outskirts of Munich. This foster family was well-educated, Kramer learnt English and Russian, and was involved in radical activism. During the First World War, her foster mother was involved in organizing food distribution for the poor in the local area and Kramer was soon aware of some of the social inequality at that time. Kramer's foster mother was arrested towards the end of the war and served time in prison for her anti-war activities. The family were in correspondence with radicals from across Germany; they sent food stamps to members of the Bremen Soviet, and the son of the left-wing politician and later revolutionary leader, Karl Liebknecht, stayed with them for a summer. As a result of this, Kramer spent her formative years in a radical environment that discussed inequalities and fought for social justice. By the age of 18, Kramer had decided she was uninterested in pursuing formal education and was ready to dedicate her life to improving the world. She joined a group of left-wing students in Schwabing, a Bohemian district in Munich, and – unable to secure accommodation – she was soon sleeping in different friends' homes. This insecure lifestyle was to become a common theme until her forties. With her friends, she visited many of the local cafés and heard speeches and debates from anarchists and radicals which gave her a thorough introduction to discourse in the public sphere.

By 1918, Kramer was involved with anti-government activities to prepare the ground for revolution, and ensured she had useful skills to contribute by working on her typing and stenography and reading socialist texts.[35] Kramer joined the revolutionary marches in November 1918 and witnessed soldiers taking over their barracks and stripping their officers of command. In January 1919, she was arrested for distributing a leaflet protesting Eisner's government and calling for a continuation of the revolution that she had written and signed with a number of individuals who were to become leading figures in the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Eugen Leviné publicly criticized Kramer for signing

[32] Ingrid Sharp, 'The Disappearing Surplus: The Spinster in the Post-war Debate in Weimar Germany, 1918–1920', in Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, eds, *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923* (Leiden 2011), 145.

[33] For the different perspectives of the organized women's movement and welfare organizations, see Andrea Kampf, *Frauenpolitik und politisches Handeln von Frauen während der Bayerischen Revolution 1918/19: Akteurinnen - Konzepte - Handlungsräume* (Hagen 2017).

[34] Kramer left an incomplete autobiography, published in 2011. The following details are from this work.

[35] Fitzgerald et al. *Rebellin in München, Moskau und Berlin*, 42–6.

the leaflet, dismissing her as a schoolgirl. However, Kramer saw this as her right, equal to the other revolutionary signatories. She saw her gender and her age as positives; the revolutionaries found it hard to know who to trust, but Kramer, as a young woman who had not had a chance to make a mark on the public political stage, was seen as trustworthy.[36]

In April 1919, Kramer joined the Bavarian Soviet Republic and was the secretary to the City Commander. She saw the Bavarian Parliament (Landtag) set up under Eisner as a betrayal of the revolution. She described her dedication to her work, not leaving her post and sleeping in her office. At this time, female secretaries were not as ubiquitous as they would seem in the later 1920s, and in trades unions and left-wing political circles, the secretary was a key role. Kramer was well-connected through her wartime activism and many of the key figures in the Bavarian Soviet Republic were personal friends. We can interpret her role as being a recognition of her political activism and skills even though she was a young woman.

After the brutal repression of the Soviet, she was arrested and served several months in jail. This was a considerably lighter sentence than Ernst Toller, who was sentenced to five years and spent long periods in solitary confinement, or Leviné, who was sentenced to death. At her trial, the director of the children's home, who had placed her with her radical foster family, took full responsibility for what he claimed was her indoctrination, beating his chest in a dramatic fashion.[37] It is entirely possible that the judge saw her as a teenage girl who had been led astray rather than the dedicated activist her memoir portrayed and that her comrades recognized through appointing her to the position of secretary. This is also indicated by the fact that Kramer was a delegate to the founding meeting of the communist party (KPD) in Berlin in December 1918. Kramer faced long-lasting consequences for her role in the revolution, but this did not deter her from continuing her political activism. She was expelled from Bavaria which motivated her to move to Berlin and then to Moscow where she worked again as a secretary helping with the construction of the new state.

Despite taking on such prominent roles at such a young age, Kramer described her difficulties in taking ownership of the public sphere. In her memoirs, she recalled a meeting of revolutionaries in a beer hall where she began to make her way to the front to speak when her confidence failed. She described feeling out of place and not having anything worthy to contribute, which may have been a result of her frequently being dismissed on account of her age. She was overcome with such anxiety that she did not speak in public meetings ever again: 'Whenever anyone gave me the floor, it was as if my throat closed up, and I still get this fear today. This has always been a great obstacle in my political work'.[38] Kramer may have been visible in the public sphere but unable to speak her contributions. Her gender and age may have given her credibility in her network to hold important roles, but it was a barrier to further prominence within the wider revolutionary movement.

[36] Ibid., 51–2.

[37] Ibid., 69.

[38] Ibid., 59. All translations are my own.

Toni Pfülf was another revolutionary who, like Kramer, chose to participate in political institutions.[39] Against the wishes of her middle-class family, who did not want her to pursue a career, she chose to train as a teacher. When her family learned that she had also joined the SPD it caused an irrevocable split, but she remained a member of the SPD for the rest of her life. Her teaching career was interrupted for several years when she caught tuberculosis, but during the First World War she resumed this work. Pfülf was also involved in campaigns for better access to education for working-class children, improving access to healthcare, and improving housing conditions to reduce tuberculosis rates. These campaigns gave her a keen insight into social deprivation in the city. Challenging the expectations of those around her and dealing with the consequences thereof provided training for her later political career because, although she had a seat in Parliament, her voice was not automatically heard.[40]

Following the revolutionary marches on 7 November 1918, the soldiers' and workers' councils were formed in Munich, with members co-opted rather than elected. At the end of November 1918, Pfülf forced her way into a council meeting. Erich Mühsam, who was leading the meeting, insisted that she should leave, but Pfülf stated 'You can only remove me from this hall by force. After all, it is my duty to represent the interests of women to this Workers' and Soldiers' Council'. She then presented her demands – that the council consider the plight of women who were losing their jobs in the war industry, include women and children in health insurance schemes, and provide welfare for those who had been injured in the war. As the council could not make her leave, they voted to ban her from any future meetings. Erhard Auer (who became Minister for the Interior in Eisner's brief government) was particularly incensed by Pfülf's interventions and saw to it that she would never be a politician in Munich, but she did successfully represent Oberbayern and then Niederbayern in the Reichstag.[41] She remained critical of the councils and their inability (or lack of political will) to engage women in their processes.[42] Pfülf chose to stand for election to be a force for change and she was a key figure in local and national politics but she still had to fight for her platform.

## Unease at the Revolution

For Jewish women, the revolution occurred amid a landscape of overt and covert anti-Semitism. Since the 1880s, as a result of pogroms, anti-Semitic discrimination and poverty in Eastern Europe, Munich had become home to Jewish refugees and acted as a transit space as many made their way further west. It was a city in flux as different

[39] 'Toni Pfülf', Fembio, Institut für Frauen-Biographieforschung, Last modified 12 December 2017, available at: https://www.fembio.org/biographie.php/frau/biographie/toni-pfuelf/

[40] More experiences of female politicians during and after the revolution can be found in Angelika Schaser, 'Was bedeutete Gleichberechtigung nach 1918? Demokratischer Aufbruch aus hierarchischen Traditionen', in Marianne Schmidbaur and Ulla Wischermann, eds, *Feministische Erinnerungskulturen. 100 Jahre Frauenstimmrecht. 50 Jahre Autonome Frauenbewegung* (Frankfurt 2019), 29–38.

[41] Reinhard Bauer and Eva Volland, eds, *München, Stadt der Frauen: Kampf für Frieden und Gleichberechtigung, 1800–1945: ein Lesebuch* (Munich 1991), 120–1.

[42] Kampf, *Frauenpolitik und politisches Handeln von Frauen während der Bayerischen Revolution 1918/19*, 89.

ideas and languages flowed through, but anti-Semitic slurs and accusations were also a part of the discourse around immigration. By 1910, an estimated 70,000 Eastern European Jews populated German cities, making up 13 per cent of the Jewish community. These new arrivals were more likely to be Orthodox, Yiddish speaking and poorer than the established German Jewish community, making them a visible group. Prior to the First World War, they were also the target of expulsions from some German states (especially Prussia), which made the German Jewish community feel vulnerable and that their own position was open to attack. As a result, many German Jewish women created welfare organizations to help specifically Eastern European migrants and refugees integrate into German society by providing language classes, vocational education and advice bureaus. These organizations had the dual aim of helping Eastern European Jews in Germany access higher paid work and improve their standard of living but also to help them to blend in and hopefully avoid the attention of anti-Semites and anti-Semitic policies. Both Clementine Krämer and Rahel Straus were prominent members of the League of Jewish Women (Jüdischer Frauenbund or JFB), the Munich branch of which had been founded in 1911.[43] For German Jewish women in Munich, entering the public sphere meant negotiating this complex space in which anti-Semitic discourse was prevalent, but through their welfare work they were able to gain important skills and leadership positions.

Rahel Straus was one of the first female doctors in Germany and ran her own practice before, during and after the First World War. She was exposed to the suffering caused by the war both through her medical practice but also through her voluntary charitable work. Her husband was also a lawyer who worked occasionally with Russian prisoners of war, which also may have contributed to Straus's understanding of the injustices of the world around her. In her memoirs, she described initially supporting the revolution and attending demonstrations and mass gatherings to bring an end to the war and the ruling elite that had caused it. She was invited to sit on two of the revolutionary councils: the 'Rat geistiger Arbeiter' (Council of Intellectual Workers) and the 'Frauenrat' (Women's Council). She was also able to attend the Soldiers' and Workers' Council as a delegate. Straus's memoirs provide little detail on why she chose to join these councils, perhaps she felt that due to her work it was only right that she should participate. She was thoroughly unimpressed by the councils and described them as being far too much talk and too little action: 'I can hardly recall a single resolution with any positive impact'.[44] She was also unimpressed by many of the revolutionary men and soldiers. She denounced Erich Mühsam and Max Levien as damaging speakers, 'not constructive but destructive', and she dismissed the proposals of Gustav Landauer and Ernst Toller as impossible ideas.[45]

Straus was also concerned by the violence that she witnessed during the elimination of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. After Eisner's murder, the streets were full of workers with red armbands and guns and no one went out after dark. Straus described an eerie feeling

[43] Rahel Straus, *Wir lebten in Deutschland; Erinnerungen einer deutschen Jüdin, 1880–1933* (Stuttgart 1961).
[44] Ibid., 227.
[45] Ibid., 226–7.

that everything was about to come to a terrible end. Some of her patients were shot and others witnessed bloody executions in the streets.[46] She was troubled by the number of Jews in prominent positions in Munich, believing that they would be blamed for Germany's difficulties: 'It was a disaster and the beginning of the Jewish catastrophe [der Anfang der jüdischen Katastrophe], whose appalling end we are still experiencing'.[47] Anti-Semitic right-wing organizations were quick to falsely accuse Jews in both their published literature and public meetings for hoarding goods and occupying homes needed for returning soldiers.[48] As a consequence of witnessing this violence, concerned that as a Jewish woman she could become a target of anti-Semites, and keenly aware that the male-dominated politics was a pointless farce, she did not choose to join a political party or take up a position after the revolution.

Clementine Krämer, a housewife to a wealthy banker, worked with Catholic and Protestant women's organizations to raise money and collect and distribute donations for war widows and their families.[49] She had received the kind of formal schooling available to girls of her class background but had no access to higher education. She dedicated much of her life to improving access to education for girls. She was also involved in suffrage campaigns and the founding of a Munich campaign group in 1911. Despite her public respectability and involvement in welfare work, privately she wrote anti-war letters, poems and short stories. She visited slum areas to assess families in need and facilitate access to welfare.[50] She was most likely on the Women's Council with Straus, although a definitive list of all members is not available. Like Straus, she was also concerned about anti-Semitism and resigned from her welfare work in spring 1918 after an anti-Semitic incident which saw members of a Munich homeowners association occupy her office. Her willingness to cooperate in cross-religious action to improve the city had a clearly defined limit.

Similarly, Krämer was horrified by the violence that swept through Bavaria in the wake of the revolution, even writing about the legacy of this violence on rural communities in her novella *Die Rauferei* (The Brawl, 1927). The lack of leadership, which was also identified by Straus, was one of the causes of the violence in this text. In this story, the protagonist, a farmer named Baptist, kills a student during a fight over a local girl. Baptist's conscience is initially quietened by the judge who determines the killing to have been an act of self-defence but through his conversations with the deceased student's mother and the Baroness, the village figurehead, he comes to a position of pacifism and that 'it is better to be killed than to kill'.[51] Baptist and the Baroness both take the stage

[46] Ibid., 229–33.

[47] Ibid., 225.

[48] Adam R. Seipp, '"Scapegoats for a Lost War": Demobilisation, the Kapp Putsch, and the Politics of the Streets in Munich, 1919–1920', *War & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2006), 35–54, 43.

[49] Corinne Painter, *Writing Lives: A German Jewish Perspective on the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford 2019).

[50] Werner Cahnman, 'The Life of Clementine Kraemer', in Joseph Maier, Judith Marcus and Zoltan Tarr, eds, *German Jewry: Its History and Sociology: Selected Essays by Werner J. Cahnman* (New Brunswick, NJ 1989), 175–201.

[51] Clementine Krämer, *Die Rauferei* (Potsdam 1927), 28.

at a debate in the village hall over the problem of violence and brawling in rural communities to emphasize the role the community plays in ending violence. However, the novella is more than an allegory for pacifism as the end of the novella obscures this message. Baptist is drawn into another fight and tries to walk away. The other party draws a knife but Baptist's girlfriend, Porti, identified by the narrator as a gypsy, throws herself between the two men, is stabbed and dies in Baptist's arms. Baptist is left despairing of his pacifist ideals and isolated in the chaos. This interwar world is marred by the violence of the First World War but also by the revolution that upended the social order but did not introduce effective new leadership. The Baroness espouses pacifism but struggles to convince others and also displays anti-gypsy prejudices. Her fiancé, Prince Hubertus, shouts about fighting for king and country even though the king is no more. The local priest ignores the idea of peace on earth to focus on smiting one's enemies. It is this failure of leadership that enables the violence to continue in the community, with deadly consequences. Publishing provided an opportunity for Krämer to intercede in the public sphere and political debate and provide nuanced critiques of society without the battle to find a platform amongst the clamour of male voices. It is unsurprising that Kramer and Straus also utilized publishing to promote their ideas and voices.

Both Straus and Krämer had reservations about the revolution. As Straus asked: 'Where were all the civil servants, officers, teachers who had faithfully pledged their allegiance to the King?'.[52] Straus and Krämer had been critical of the old regime and the war, but at the same time they were aware of how the Wilhelmine Empire had brought about legal Jewish emancipation, ensuring for the first time that Jewish Germans were citizens and had access to the same rights as non-Jewish Germans. In practice, anti-Semitic discrimination had continued but the revolution represented uncertainty and the possibility that these rights could be removed. Whereas before the First World War intellectuals of all faiths and none had been welcome in the Krämer household, by 1918, only Jews remained.[53] It is unclear whether this was an intentional retreat to a Jewish sphere or whether previous friendships had ended, but Krämer seems to have become somewhat detached from the non-Jewish public. The assassination of the Bavarian Premier, Kurt Eisner, who was Jewish, by an anti-Semite in February 1919 could only have heightened their anxieties. Straus and Krämer were at the State Parliament when the news of Eisner's death reached them. Straus declared 'the news of his murder was like a bomb' and she described the streets becoming filled with armed men. She also noted her discomfort when it was ordered that the church bells would ring in memory of Eisner, a Jew, on Good Friday. She explained this act was sacrilegious in Catholic Bavaria and she described the effect as 'uncanny'.[54] Eisner's murderer was initially sentenced to death, but this was reduced to five years in prison, and he was pardoned in 1927. The killing of a prominent Jewish politician and the ineffectual response from the Weimar

[52] Straus, *Wir lebten in Deutschland*, 225.

[53] Werner Cahnman, Joseph Maier, Judith Marcus and Zoltan Tarr, eds, *German Jewry: Its History and Sociology: Selected Essays by Werner J. Cahnman* (New Brunswick, NJ 1989), 188–9.

[54] Straus, *Wir lebten in Deutschland*, 229.

Government must have served as a reminder to women like Straus and Krämer that they were unsafe, and the authorities could and would do little to protect them. Anti-Semitic incidents did not end with the collapse of the Bavarian Soviet Republic; right-wing groups continued to publish and distribute anti-Semitic literature and hold anti-Semitic demonstrations with little censure from the authorities.[55] As a result, the two women's withdrawal from institutionalized politics can be seen as an act of self-defence as well as a calculated decision about where they could operate most effectively.

## Legacies of Revolution

The revolution had a lasting effect on all the women discussed in this article. For Hilde Kramer, radical activism was a cornerstone of her later career. Although she was unable or unwilling to speak publicly, she continued to write; she was a journalist in Berlin and wrote protocols and policy documents in Moscow. She was also part of a network of activists that reached across Europe. As a result of this network, she was able to flee the Third Reich in 1937, come to the UK and begin working for the Labour Party after 1945. What is clear from her memoirs is her dedication to her cause and her persistence in continuing her work in the face of personal risk and discomfort. Toni Pfülf continued to represent the views of the people of Bavaria as an elected politician and much of the later stages of her career were consumed with sounding the alarm about the rise of the far right.

Rahel Straus remained active with the JFB and campaigned on issues that directly affected women such as women's education and sexual health.[56] She and her husband Eli had been involved in Zionist organizing in the pre-war era, most notably establishing the weekly publication *Jewish Echo* in 1913, but the Munich Jewish community had been reluctant to elect them to prominent positions. After the revolution, proportional voting in all public bodies meant that Eli was elected and able to represent his and Straus's Zionist positions.[57] Straus joined the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) after the German branch was formed in 1929. As a result of this work and her connections, she was able to emigrate to Palestine in 1933.

Clementine Krämer also chose to remain outside formal political power structures, and in 1927 she became leader of the Munich branch of the JFB. She eschewed Zionism, believing her future to lie in Germany. However, the kind of cross-religious collaboration she had participated in during the First World War was not repeated. In 1926, she founded a girls' school to provide a comprehensive education for Jewish girls but also to teach them how to run a Jewish household. The education that this school provided undoubtedly had a lasting effect on its pupils, but, moreover, due to its focus on practical domestic skills, it gave many pupils the skills that were needed to be able to apply for work

[55] Seipp, '"Scapegoats for a Lost War": Demobilisation, the Kapp Putsch, and the Politics of the Streets in Munich', 44.

[56] Straus, *Wir lebten in Deutschland*, 255.

[57] Ibid., 160–2.

overseas and escape from Nazi Germany in the 1930s.[58] Her decision to become a leader in the Jewish women's movement and to focus on educating the next generation of leading women, may have been a result of her disappointment with the political structures that she encountered during the revolution.

## Conclusion

On the one hand, it is possible to view the outcomes of the revolution and women's engagement in politics as a story of loss and retreat: the revolution did not immediately achieve its goals, the repression of the Bavarian Soviet Republic was violent, and in 1923 Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch became a stepping stone on his journey to power. For the women discussed in this article, it is also easy to tell their stories as failures. Rahel Straus did not join the government after her involvement with the councils and she left Germany in 1933. Hilde Kramer was exiled from Bavaria in 1919, and then Germany in 1937, and she had a lifelong fear of public speaking. Clementine Krämer stayed in Munich until she was deported to Theresienstadt where she died in 1942. Even Toni Pfülf struggled to make her voice heard in the male political world. She spent the late 1920s and early 1930s sounding the alarm about the right-wing threat and trying to rally the SPD and the trades unions into resistance but took her own life in June 1933.

Munich's power structures also excluded women and privileged male voices and concerns. There was a women's council, but the separation of this council suggests that women's voices and issues needed to be segregated from the main body of the revolution. When Pfülf insisted on speaking to the male leadership about the need to include women and the needs of women, she was dismissed and criticized for daring to speak out of turn. Moreover, the demobilization practices that prioritized the returning male soldiers over the women who had been working to support themselves furthered the erasure of women from the public sphere. Anti-Semitism and the fear of anti-Semites contributed to pressurising Jewish women to remain out of view and to changing the composition of their social circles. Against such insurmountable barriers, it is easy to accept the absence of women from the historiography and the public sphere as inevitable.

However, I aimed to tell a different story; these women's actions and lives do not simply fit into a success or failure narrative. Against the odds, the revolution opened up spaces, provided opportunities for women to demonstrate the skills they had and to develop new ones, and to offer a new vision of what Munich could have been after the First World War. This work was life-changing for the women involved and was life-saving for those whom they were able to help. The revolution and their involvement in it gave them a chance to imagine how the world could be improved and allowed them to further develop their skills. For Straus and Kramer, it also provided them with the networks they needed to escape the Third Reich. Krämer was able to pass her skills on to the

[58] Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford 1998), 114. As non-Jewish vocational schools were closed to Jewish pupils, schools like this were able to fill the gap and provide important skills for young women.

next generation through her school and enable them to find safety. Pfülf used her skills to fight fascism until the end of her life.

Through this close examination of these women's lives, it becomes clear both how power structures excluded them and how they still had agency. By ignoring women's experiences, we lose sight of these power structures and the revolution becomes an incomprehensible sequence of events that happened. By focusing on these women, we have begun to see how the councils were shaped and their agendas were altered by women. Their voices and ideas were devalued in many ways, but they were still able to play different roles in changing Munich's society and shaping its future. With the old order gone, new spaces opened up for women to make contributions to the city and its governance. Universal suffrage allowed women to run for public office and imagine a way to shape their world. The council system, despite its inadequacies, did include women. The Bavarian Soviet Republic needed people to run it and that included women like Kramer. Women like Straus and Krämer were also able to demonstrate that they had vital skills from years' worth of dedicated welfare work. They knew what Munich's biggest problems were and they had training in campaigning, organizing and public speaking from their long years of service. That they returned to this work in the 1920s does not have to be seen as a failure; they continued to write, to speak and to train others in their fight for a more equal world.

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