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Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918

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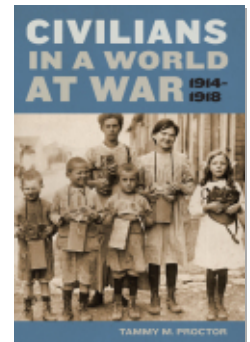
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Civil War and Revolution

Rumour has it that the strikers wanted to blow up the Renault munitions factory last night. We are living on a volcano and everyone is complaining. The example of the Russians bodes no good.

—French Postal Censors’ Report on Morale, 1917¹

Between August 1914 and the signing of the peace treaty in June 1919, civil revolts, rioting, and revolutions broke out in dozens of countries around the world as the strain of wartime demands pushed crowds to desperate actions while also creating opportunities for dissident groups. Because many of these disturbances were civilian in nature, they have often been treated as separate from the war, but in fact, most of them were shaped fundamentally by the events of 1914–1918. Historians have categorized revolutions and revolts as “civilian” and as separate from the First World War for a century. While the war is often cited as context, it is defined separately from these civil conflicts, perpetuating the idea that “real” war fought by soldiers of the state for the protection of civilians is a far different thing than “civilian” wars fought by irregular troops of guerrillas, nationalists, and rebels. This chapter tries to integrate civil conflict into the larger narrative of the civilian experience of the war, suggesting that these violent confrontations were born of wartime militarization of whole populations. Civilians, adjusted to lives of violence, perpetuated the violence in attempting to reconstruct their societies in the midst of and in the aftermath of war.

War weariness and economic distress helped create an environment in which violence appeared to be the answer to a whole host of woes, while militarization of society and prevalent war rhetoric engendered violence as a means to solve all sorts of problems. The revolts, disturbances, and revolutions of the war period and its immediate aftermath varied widely in intensity, violence, and impact, but all pointed to the destabilizing forces unleashed in societies around the world by the years of industrialized warfare. The conflicts can be grouped mainly around three large themes: (1) identity politics (race, ethnicity, nationalism); (2) social and political revolution; and (3) anticolonial revolts, which include conscription and antiwar concerns. In all cases, men and women, civilians and soldiers were drawn into the fray, and many conflicts were either complicated or prolonged by the needs of the wartime situation. This chapter will briefly examine some of these wars within the war, demonstrating that violence was never limited to the formal battle fronts nor to regular soldiers.

Identity Politics

World War I called into question expressions of identity on a number of levels around the world. National or colonial allegiance, racial and sexual identity, age, ethnicity, personal loyalty—all these concepts were tested as millions of civilians were mobilized to serve the needs of states at war. Some of the first tensions regarding identity emerged at the personal level as families and individuals sought to cope with the demands of the state for their sacrifices. These personal identity struggles played out in a variety of private and public situations, in the form of pension applications, conscientious objectors' entreaties, and drawing-room battles. For families with divided loyalties regarding the war, assertion of a united identity was often impossible, and this led to cleavages. Even in families or communities with the same surface loyalty, different interpretations of war, sacrifice, and patriotism could spark tensions or even violence. War meant choosing sides and taking stands, and for individuals, the expression of individual loyalties was often the first hard task.

As for larger-scale identity politics, communities at war fragmented along a number of lines; most commonly, the fractures appeared over

questions of class, race, ethnicity, language, nation, gender, and religion. As war made demands on society, the fragile bonds connecting people together often were severed, and differences became a focal point for the violence and bitterness of war. In France, for example, the importation of colonial and foreign workers led to workplace violence, escalating personal attacks in the streets, and, in some cases, collective violence or rioting. As historian Tyler Stovall has written about these attacks, the patterns of racial violence suggest a close correspondence with “the crisis of morale and the rise of war weariness in France” but also with a wave of strikes and working-class agitation after 1917.² In this case, race might have served as a visible marker of other anxieties surrounding class status or gender issues such as protection of French women, who had entered the workplace in larger numbers by 1917. Uncertainty over jobs certainly fueled much fear in the minds of male workers at the front and behind the lines.

Indeed, workers’ agitation and strikes, along with subsistence riots, were a staple of the latter years of the war in almost all nations involved in the conflict, even those on the periphery, such as Argentina, Chile, and Peru.³ In Germany, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Britain, industrial strikes undermined the war effort, and bread riots also contributed to a dangerous atmosphere in cities. Unemployment was a significant problem in many urban areas in 1919, and strikes were common occurrences in large cities such as Paris and London in the latter years of the war and into the early postwar period. Even combatant countries far from the physical damage of the war, such as the United States and Australia, faced significant labor unrest. For instance, a general strike in Sydney shut down much of the city for the month of August in 1917, while in the United States a civilian “Protective League” deported and interned an estimated twelve hundred men, women, and children in New Mexico in order to stop a mining strike in Bisbee, Arizona, in 1917.⁴

Those on the margins of society—foreigners, Jews, gypsies, and refugees—were often most at risk in the violence that sometimes ensued from labor agitation or civil war. As historian Christopher Capozzola has observed, sometimes the line between national defense or patriotic vigilance and vigilante violence was blurred. War’s emphasis on sacrifice and vigilance fed the flames of extra-legal justice.⁵ In the United States the

reorganization of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915 and a wave of anti-German sentiment led to lynchings and other violence against minority groups and perceived internal enemies. Such mob violence was only exacerbated with conscription in 1917, when African Americans and recent immigrants were called to national service alongside “white Americans.” The concentration of young men of all races in training camps around the country led to clashes with civilian populations near the camps. This violence did not stop with the end of the war, and in fact, it escalated in the immediate aftermath with race riots throughout the country between 1919 and 1922. In 1919 alone, there were more than twenty-five documented race riots in U.S. cities, from Chicago to Washington, D.C., to Tulsa to Omaha.⁶

Racial, religious, and ethnic violence became particularly severe and prolonged in regions where order had completely collapsed, such as the Russian/Austro-Hungarian borderlands. In East Galicia, which had suffered through occupations by more than one army over the course of the war, violence followed in 1918 amidst terrible economic hardships and lack of effective leadership. Armed bands of looters, army deserters, and criminals terrorized villages and towns, while quickly formed paramilitaries sought to regain control. In the Polish-Ukrainian border wars that plagued the region in late 1918, Jews tried to remain “neutral,” but this policy was a dismal failure, with Jews targeted again and again by both sides in the conflict. In one of the most egregious episodes of the conflict, Polish forces attacked the Jewish community in L’viv over several days in November 1918. The pogrom resulted in hundreds of casualties, including more than a hundred dead. In addition to the human casualties, the pogrom led to property damage and the loss of irreplaceable historical buildings and artifacts (including a seventeenth-century synagogue).⁷ A prominent scholar of the event, Carol Fink, called the 1918 attack on L’viv “the most prolonged and extensive carnage against civilians in Eastern Europe since 1906.”⁸ Despite an international investigation of this incident, violence against Jews continued, especially as a feature of the Soviet war with Poland and the Ukraine between 1919 and 1921.

Spontaneous violence in regions still more or less at war continued into the 1920s, but a more calculated unrest also resulted from the war. In some regions occupied by foreign powers, the wartime occupation policies had sought to inflame racial or ethnic tensions, or to create collabo-



Flemish activists in Belgium march with their slogan “Flanders for the Flemish.” German occupiers encouraged the split between Flemish and French speakers in Belgium during World War I, fueling a dispute that continues into the twenty-first century. *U.S. Signal Corps, National Archives and Records Administration.*

rators among certain groups in the occupied zones. German occupiers in Belgium encouraged the development of Flemish separatism, arguing that the Flemish speakers were “Germanic” and belonged as allies of the Germans. The occupiers targeted young Flemish-speaking men in internment or POW camps in Germany but also tried to create Flemish-only laws within occupied Belgium. In Ghent, they closed the French-language university and opened it again only for Flemish-language coursework. Flemish activism and sense of separateness from the French-speaking Belgian communities existed prior to the war, but the occupation policies ignited many of the issues that had only simmered before. At one point in the war, opportunistic Flemish leaders tried to declare an independent Flemish nation, but the Germans balked at such autonomy, wanting only Flemish allegiance to a German federation. With the end of the war and the return of the Belgian king, Flemish activism was checked (at least temporarily), but Belgium’s postwar political decisions reflected

an ever-increasing politicization of identity politics surrounding issues of language, national identity, war service, and collaboration.⁹

Nationalism created tense political standoffs even in areas that were counted among the victors in the war, particularly when the promises of wartime diplomacy failed to deliver land or concessions that were expected by weary civilian populations. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht described this process in Italy as a perceived “national slight.” Allied promises that Trieste would become a free city and that Italy would gain territory in Dalmatia disappeared in the postwar peace negotiations, leaving Italians feeling angry and betrayed. The subsequent uprising, an odd occupation of the city of Fiume (now in Croatia) by poet Gabriele d’Annunzio and a band of rebels in September 1919, symbolized Italy’s sacrifices and its postwar claims. Gumbrecht cites d’Annunzio, who captured this sentiment in his public speeches: “Not only has our war not ended—it has only now reached its climax.”¹⁰ D’Annunzio’s claims initially captured Italian and world attention and some measure of sympathy, but as the crisis unfolded, civilians in the city fled to avoid Italian dictatorship and privation. Throughout 1920, those civilians still living in the city itself turned on d’Annunzio and helped undermine public support outside of Fiume for this action.¹¹ Civilian nationalism in the aftermath of World War I helped create the Fiume revolt while civilian nationalism in response to the revolt helped end it.

In other areas with complicated linguistic and cultural divides, the war led to tension over citizenship and war patriotism as well. Canada had to call in troops to pacify a rebellion in Quebec in 1918 after the nation introduced mandatory conscription. The “Easter Riots” of March and April 1918 in Quebec City and other parts of Quebec province led to property destruction and more than 150 casualties before the state reestablished control by declaring martial law and putting an occupying military force in place until spring 1919. As historian Martin Auger wrote, “It was, at the time, the largest military force ever assembled in aid to the civil powers in Canada.”¹² The suppression of these anticonscription riots meant that the draft was established in all provinces of Canada, but it also helped quell the possibility of a larger civil uprising in 1918 or 1919 amid fears of bolshevism and Quebecois nationalism.¹³ As in Belgium, revolution did not follow the war, but the linguistic, cultural, and political divides deepened with the actions of the wartime state.

While Canada struggled with its attempt to introduce conscription, other regions of the world dealt with social transformations from foreign occupation. The presence of wartime settlers in occupied zones often reconfigured societies to meet the needs of occupiers disrupting social, religious, and political traditions. Japan's occupation of Micronesia during the war led to a "Japanization" of society with mandatory Japanese-language training, Japanese-style education, and an aggressive policy for moving Japanese, Okinawan, and Korean settlers to the islands. By 1920, just over a quarter of the population of the major town of Saipan was Japanese.¹⁴ Similarly, in the German occupied Ober Ost (Baltic region), the long-term impact of German "reshaping" policies was hard to calculate since the Germans had classified, regulated, and moved populations to fit its notion of order. Ultimately, though, German attempts to "Germanize" the region with university and secondary educational institutions, German-language publications, and intense propaganda failed. Instead, historian Vejas Liulevicius suggests that the postwar Freikorps violence in the zone expressed better the German crisis of identity occasioned by defeat in the war rather than a crisis among the multicultural populations of the Ober Ost.¹⁵ Yet regardless of whether these occupation policies failed or succeeded, in every case the attempts at social engineering led to dislocations and conflicts.

Clearly the war sparked identity crises for many of the individuals and communities involved as they sought to make sense of victory or defeat, the dissolution of empires, and the assumed return to normalcy. The forces unleashed by World War I shaped the twentieth century, often lighting the fuse for conflicts that would simmer well into the contemporary period. In some cases, however, the resentments and perceived injustices of the war boiled over into outright revolutions or civil wars in the midst of the First World War and in its aftermath.

Revolution

The most significant of these was the Russian Revolution of 1917, a crisis sparked by and shaped by the First World War. The first stage of the revolution in February 1917 (Russian calendar) began after a series of shortages, strikes, and unrest surrounding food and work pressures.

The catalyst was a demonstration marking International Women's Day in one district of St. Petersburg.¹⁶ These food demonstrations were not necessarily more severe than or markedly different from those in Berlin or Vienna during the war, but what made them escalate to revolution was the Russian Empire's political failure in managing the wartime mobilization of resources effectively.¹⁷ Added to this was the difficulty in mobilizing and sustaining a population largely "disengaged from the war effort," especially by 1917.¹⁸ The combination of poor central war planning, lack of rationing, and tensions based on class and ethnicity helped the Russian riots escalate into a full-scale conflict in 1917.

Eyewitness Countess O. V. Bennigsen described the early days of the revolution in a town near St. Petersburg:

In the afternoon of the 27th [February] processions of workers and large crowds of people were passing along. . . . [They] carried banners, sang but without causing any serious disturbances. . . . On March 2, as soon as I and my mother woke up our maid came running into our room saying: "Mistress, soldiers are coming along the street with red banners and machine guns." . . . There were also women in the motor cars; they also carried cartridges, revolvers and were sitting arm in arm with the soldiers; they were yelling and waving small red banners.¹⁹

As Bennigsen described it, the revolution incorporated a disparate group of angry women, weary soldiers, and disaffected workers into a revolutionary crowd, which seized rail stations, munitions, and public buildings.

Perceived inequities in distribution and ineptitude by wartime leaders probably fueled support for movements calling for an end to the tsarist regime and to the eventual rise of a Socialist solution.²⁰ Civilian perceptions that their needs were not being met reflected the reality of grain shortages, rising prices for food and fuel, and very unorganized (and only localized) food controls and rationing. The Russian government made the decision not to ration in a nationwide manner, which most other combatant nations were doing, and tried to control producers instead. This was a disastrous policy that alienated rural producers and probably contributed to shortages. By 1917, civilians felt justified in believing that

the “tsarist regime made only haphazard provision for civilian consumers.”²¹ As housewives, workers, and soldiers joined forces in the street, the tsar abdicated in favor of his brother, who chose not to accept the invitation. Sheila Fitzpatrick described this surprising turn of events in spring 1917, noting that “[d]e facto, then, Russia was no longer a monarchy.”²² Civil unrest that many felt would topple the current tsar, but not destroy the monarchy entirely, suddenly led to a politically unstable and volatile situation in wartime Russia.

The February Revolution led not just to the abdication of the tsar and the creation of a provisional government at the national level but also, and importantly, to a radicalized local soviet system, particularly in Petrograd. The two saw themselves with different tasks and constituencies, but they also clashed over how to manage the war and the economic problems. Continuing tensions between these two “authorities” helped create a situation for a second phase of revolution in October, with the Bolshevik coup.²³ The German interest in fomenting rebellion among its enemies contributed, with Germany helping to provide transport for Vladimir Lenin and other Bolsheviks in exile to return to Russia. Here too the war played a role, as the pressures that had sparked the February Revolution had not disappeared, and the provisional government continued to try to fight the war. Many civilians and soldiers alike had expected that the February Revolution would lead to an end of war. Instead, the provisional government launched a war loan drive in spring 1917, and it “re-dedicated the country to the cause of war,” which became its most damaging mistake.²⁴

As the months progressed, and the war did not end, morale plummeted in army training camps, rural villages, and urban workplaces. Dissent within army units deepened as well, inspiring the institution of Order Number 1 by the Petrograd Soviet, which called for election of officers and “democratization of the Army.”²⁵ This order sparked class conflict and violence in some units of the army, exacerbating problems with discipline and morale. Added to these underlying problems, the disastrous failure of a summer offensive in Galicia led to hundreds of thousands of casualties, sparking mass desertions and major unrest. Demonstrations in Petrograd during the “July Days” highlighted the ongoing wartime pressures and dissatisfaction with the provisional government’s policies, set-

ting the stage for further revolutionary activity in October.²⁶ Led by the Petrograd Soviet and a small vanguard of Bolsheviks, the October Revolution toppled the provisional government and attempted to create a workers' state. Revolutionaries occupied governmental offices in Petrograd and surrounded the Winter Palace in a coordinated series of actions, leading to a mostly bloodless coup.²⁷ By the end of the month, Lenin had established a one-party system with himself at the head, and he called for an armistice on November 19, 1917.²⁸

Despite the Bolshevik success in ending the Russian role in World War I by March 1918, their October Revolution unleashed more violence than it cured. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk ceded Russian territory in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic to its wartime enemies, setting the stage for nationalist struggles and eventually civil war within the Soviet Union and in these former territories. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland all declared independence in 1918 with the withdrawal of the armies of the Central Powers, and in many cases, German authorities set up local administrative bodies to provide a semblance of "national self-determination."²⁹ The promise of independence, however tentative, combined with the disintegration of the Central Powers' authority on the eastern front and led to a situation in which many nationalist groups sought permanent autonomy. Soviet forces hoping to reabsorb these territories found themselves fighting multiple insurgencies throughout the Baltic areas, Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine as well as civil war within their own borders by the early 1920s.³⁰

The civil wars and rebellions that broke out in 1918 and 1919 lasted well into the early 1920s, in effect extending the war beyond the "peace" in the Soviet Union.³¹ As Peter Holquist has astutely noted, the "Soviet Union never really demobilized from 'total mobilization.' . . . [T]he remobilization of society for revolution continued for several decades longer."³² Those hurt most by this unending state of war were civilians, many of whom faced starvation from 1916 to the 1920s. While hardships abounded, the war itself probably made possible the intensity and length of the civil wars that followed. The 1917 revolution benefited enormously from the wartime militarization of society that had already regulated much economic activity, and Bolshevik leaders quickly understood that they already had an "apparatus capable of being deployed for revolution-



Polish children wait for soup from the American Relief Administration after World War I, as civil war continues to create hardships for civilians. *Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.*

ary work.”³³ In many ways this continuing societal mobilization made it possible for the Soviets to fight the civil wars that would fester until the early 1920s.

One result of the “success” of the October Revolution was a fear among other nations in Europe that international Marxism was on the march. The fear that Bolshevik sentiment might spread and infect countries around Europe and Asia was not unfounded. Even in tiny Luxembourg, which had spent the entire war under German occupation, a group of revolutionaries proclaimed a republic and created a Committee of Public Safety in Luxembourg City in November 1918. Demanding the dissolution of the monarchy, leftists sought to use the end of the war crisis and the perceived Germanophilia of the grand duchess, Marie Adélaïde, to reshape the political and social order. The short revolt was abruptly

stopped by the threat of French troops, which the revolutionaries called a fratricidal act, and the abdication of the grand duchess in favor of her younger sister, Charlotte.³⁴ Like Luxembourg, the neutral Netherlands also experienced a few days of revolutionary tumult in November 1918. Led by Social Democrat Pieter Troelstra, meetings and processions calling for revolutionary change escalated with a march to military barracks in Amsterdam on November 14. Shots were fired from the barracks into the crowd, killing a handful of people and injuring a dozen more. What looked like a possible revolutionary impetus ended abruptly by November 18, with the threat by the Allies of an end to the importation of food into the Netherlands. On the 18th, a large pro-monarchical demonstration was staged at the Hague to reaffirm “the popularity of the Queen.”³⁵

In nearby occupied Belgium, Belgian Socialists joined German soldiers with red flags in the streets in early November as well. A Brussels diarist described the scenes of November 9–11, 1918:

The Kaiser has abdicated & the Kronprinz has renounced the throne! . . . Bavaria has proclaimed the Republic. . . . All the big military men have vanished & the soldiers are doing as they like. They hoisted the red flag on the ministères, plucked off their German imperial insignia from caps & uniforms & threw them on the ground. . . . Mme W went to Louvain to-day with Vollenhoven, in his motor. She says the “revolution” there was much more serious than here. There was firing in the streets, the soldiers stopped them several times, wanting to take the motor, but refrained, as it was the Dutch minister’s. . . . We are anxious about what may ensue. . . . there is not sufficient police, no established authority here just now, capable of controlling the masses. . . . [S]ome Belgian Socialists having manifested against the King . . . the revolutionary movement may spread amongst the Belgians. I consider that if the armistice is signed, we should have a powerful military Allies’ forces here at once, to keep the Germans & our socialists in order, & make the former realise that we master the situation & “boss the show” now.³⁶

In Belgium much of the revolutionary tumult ended with the departure of German troops and the triumphal return of King Albert and his family. Other nations suffered much longer from the revolutionary chaos of the war’s end.

In Hungary, three successive waves of revolution and a period of foreign occupation followed the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. The first stage, a moderate revolution with a coalition government, gave way to Communist Bela Kun's new pro-Bolshevik republic in Hungary in March 1919. This second coup led to the Hungarian invasion of parts of Slovakia and the establishment of a Soviet Republic there as well.³⁷ It also sparked a showdown with nearby Romania, who occupied Budapest for several months, ignoring demands by its allies that it leave.³⁸ Finally, a popular counterrevolution helped defeat Kun in November 1919, leaving a new state under a military dictator, Admiral Miklós Horthy, who would remain in control of Hungary until 1944.³⁹

Other regions in the Balkans saw civil unrest or continuation of war-time situations, such as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Balkan coast. War between Greek forces and Turkish troops lasted until 1923, creating millions of refugees and forced migrants, reopening old wounds from the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913.⁴⁰ Guerilla fighters in the mountains of Montenegro battled Austrians and Bulgarians in an armed resistance movement that began in 1916. The fighting eventually culminated in the Toplice Rebellion of February 1917, in which more than twenty thousand civilians perished in the quelling of the uprising.⁴¹

Various national armies invaded nearby territories in all these conflicts in order to jockey for land in the peace treaties of 1919 and the following years. Italy, for instance, administered Trento, Trieste, and other coastal territories—an American ambassador described this occupation as organized chaos: "All Government had vanished in these regions save the military rule of the occupying Italian forces. All food-supplies had been exhausted, or were on the point of being so; and all the customary means of renewing such supplies had ceased to function."⁴² At the same time, Italy was trying to maintain control of a volatile situation at home, where continued shortages and urban unrest were threatening the political status quo. By the end of the postwar conflicts in the Balkan region, a massive population shift had occurred in much of the eastern Mediterranean as a result of wartime violence and displacement, negotiated peace treaties that forced emigration of whole groups of people, and political change.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the empires of the Central Powers dissolved in revolutionary activity in 1918 as well. Germany exploded in violence in

October and November 1918 as scarce resources and war weariness fueled popular anger and organized revolutionaries sought to extend the Communist revolution beyond Russia. The event that triggered the revolutionary wave was a sailors' mutiny in Kiel on November 3, 1918, but workers, soldiers, and housewives had all shown signs of discontent prior to this period; Kiel merely moved this vague and unorganized rage into a new stage. The wartime context, with its shortages, and increasing demands for loyalty and sacrifice, had led to widespread war weariness and disillusionment. As Richard Bessel has argued of the German situation in 1918, "In failing to provide the basic necessities to the working population, Germany's wartime rulers had broken the unspoken contract they had made with the German people at the outbreak of the war."⁴³ There was little loyalty left to the kaiser's regime by 1918.

The revolution in Leipzig is a good example of the ways in which authority crumbled in a number of locations throughout the Wilhelmine Empire in October and November 1918. In Leipzig, rioting and striking were common occurrences by the end of the war, but they intensified by October 1918 as the economic, military, and political situations deteriorated. That same month, Socialist groups began to call openly for revolution as elites seemed unable or unwilling to control the situation. News of the events in Kiel seemed to be the last straw. By the first days of November, not only had workers come out into the streets to protest, but they had been joined by sailors and soldiers. Leipzig's revolution officially began on November 8, and it inspired revolutionary activity in the nearby big cities of Dresden and Chemnitz as well as in many other small Saxon municipalities.⁴⁴ Australian Ethel Cooper recorded her reaction to seeing the hoisting of the red flag by soldiers in Leipzig, where she had been living during the war:

Republic of Germany! . . . I have seen the red flag! I think long before this reaches you, you will have seen it too. It began last Monday—we read in the evening papers that the sailors in Kiel had risen, disarmed their officers, hoisted the red flag on all the ships, and that the Government had given in to practically all their demands. . . . On Tuesday and Wednesday, the other great ports, Lubeck Bremen and Hamburg followed suit—on Thursday Munchen and with it all Bavaria.⁴⁵



Marchers in 1918 Berlin carry placards with this demand: "Give back our fathers!" *Library of Congress.*

Cooper went on to talk about the development of worker and soldier councils and the abdication of the kaiser. When the peace terms were published, Cooper reflected with dismay on the depressing reality of continued blockade, noting that German civilians were just crushed and shocked. Cooper noted sadly, "I have not dared to speak to a German since, but one thing is clear to me—that everything must be accepted, and yet humanely speaking can't be fulfilled."⁴⁶ Cooper concisely summarized the problem, namely, that Germany had to accept peace conditions in order to end the Allied blockade and stave off starvation, but acceptance of Allied terms might further destabilize Germany itself and lead to other problems.

By the time Berlin's revolution occurred, Bremen, Hamburg, Württemberg, Saxony, Hanover, and Bavaria had already experienced revolutionary violence.⁴⁷ In the capital itself, women and radical youth were joined by workers in street demonstrations on November 9. Evelyn Blücher recorded in her war diary her impressions of the first stirrings of revolution in Berlin:

(24 Oct 1918) Last evening there was another demonstration going on under our windows, caused by the triumphal procession accompanying the notorious Socialist, Liebknecht, who has returned from prison, where he has been for the last two years. He was seated in a carriage with his wife, surrounded by flowers, and they drove slowly by the Reichstag and through some by-streets, landing finally at the Russian Embassy. There Liebknecht addressed his assembled friends in a speech tainted with Bolshevism. . . . (9 Nov 1918) And here we are right in the midst of the tumult of a great revolution. After all our expectations, it has in reality fallen on us like a bomb—the Kaiser's abdication and the revolution.⁴⁸

She described mobs of soldiers and youth in the streets shouting, waving flags, and exhorting others to join their cause. As they sought a "bread peace," demonstrators demanded an end to war and privation. Many thought the 1918 revolt would lead to a widespread Socialist revolution that would transform German society. Instead it toppled the kaiser and his government, and it created a new republic replete with promises, albeit not the kind of revolutionary transformation for which many hoped.⁴⁹

The crushing of these hopes led to further outbreaks of violence and revolution in the 1918–1919 Spartacist uprisings in Berlin and Munich. The radical Berlin revolt ended with the lynching of its leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, on January 15, 1919, as well as a vicious counterrevolution.⁵⁰ German revolutionary instability continued, and the new republic unleashed thousands of demobilized soldiers organized into Freikorps, whose job it was to crush the revolutionary instability. In Munich, more than a thousand civilians died in the Freikorps assault on the city in early May 1919.⁵¹

The violence in Munich was particularly surprising to observers since the political transition there in November 1918 had been rela-

tively peaceful and had led to a moderate Socialist leader, Kurt Eisner. However, by early 1919 he had been ineffective at creating a viable state coalition, and on February 21, 1919, he was murdered in the street.⁵² Violence erupted in the wake of the assassination and eventually a Soviet Republic was declared in April 1919, leading to a power struggle between the deposed Bavarian government and the new Soviet Republic. The national provisional government in Berlin provided troops in the form of twenty thousand Freikorps volunteer units, who proceeded to sack the city.⁵³ As with the Spartacist uprising in Berlin, the Bavarian Soviet leaders were murdered and brutal repression was the order of the day. Scholar MacGregor Knox noted in his study of postwar Europe that the Freikorps, composed of demobilized soldiers and young men who “missed” the war, wanted “less to reestablish republican order than to revenge defeat upon the ‘internal enemy.’”⁵⁴ What emerged as a major difference between revolution in Germany and revolution in Russia was the reaction of soldiers; in Russia, soldiers joined the revolutionaries to turn the tide at crucial times, while in Germany enough soldiers became forces of repression to stop the revolutionary impetus.

The German revolutionary wave of 1918–1919, which ultimately failed in its radical aims, provides an excellent example of the role of the war in uniting soldiers and civilians for revolution. Defeat mixed with four years of wartime sacrifices to create a volatile political and social situation. The impact of these revolutions lasted well into the twentieth century, shaping the nation-states that would fight again a mere two decades later. However, it is also important to remember the context of the civil disturbances of 1918 and 1919—nations were attempting to demobilize large numbers of men, which would inevitably lead to unemployment and social dislocation at first. Even though not all states experienced revolution or even major civil disturbance, the threat of such activity remained in the forefront of official concerns.⁵⁵ So revolution, wherever it occurred, loomed large in the minds of leaders around the world in 1918. These revolutions questioned the very basis of imperial authorities throughout the warring states, and they both reflected and catalyzed notions of revolutionary upheaval in the broader colonial setting of the European overseas empires.

Anticolonial Revolt

While those in Europe felt betrayed by their wartime leaders and expressed their rage in civil revolt, many living in colonial situations felt a much different sense of anger over their use by colonial authorities for war service with few promises in return for extension of citizenship or rights. Imperial authorities often took for granted the notion that their subjects around the world would want to support their war efforts. When resistance occurred, officials within these empires often resorted to coercion to fulfill their labor and resource needs during the war. Inevitably, coercive practices and the drain of wartime requisitioning led to unrest and violence in colonial regions of empires.

One of the major sparks for localized rioting and broader rebellions was resistance to labor recruitment for the war and to conscription, especially in areas poorly integrated into multinational empires. Minority groups, often targeted for aggressive recruitment by officials, felt particularly aggrieved by exploitative strategies designed to use their labor, and they suspected government officials of trying to use their men as “cannon fodder” in the war effort. Such fears and suspicions led to attacks on recruitment offices and widespread rebellions around the world during the war. In South Africa, not only did more than eleven thousand Boers rise up in rebellion in 1914 to protest conscription for a British cause, but another thousand fled to German territory in order to enlist against the British.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most serious and longest-lasting revolts against conscription took place in the Russian Empire’s Central Asian provinces (modern Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). The rebellion featured several stages and a variety of peoples, both nomadic groups and agricultural laborers. Many of those involved were poorly integrated into the empire, with their own languages and cultural/political traditions. When war was declared, the peoples of Central Asia provided supplies of money and goods for the Russian war machine as “donations” or as required by requisition orders, but they were not subject to conscription. This changed in 1916 with increased demands for soldiers and laborers for the war effort. Revolts immediately broke out in summer 1916, and the rebellion was not entirely suppressed until 1917, with dire consequences for the region as refugees

fled into China to escape atrocities by occupying Russian troops. For some areas affected by the revolt, estimates range as high as 20 percent of the population killed as a result of the revolt.⁵⁷

The French also experienced a violent rebellion as they attempted to impose conscription in some of their colonies. In the Haut-Senegal-Niger region (today, Mali and Burkina Faso), a group of villages revolted against France in 1915 in the face of conscription demands and perceived insults by French administrators toward Muslim leaders. The French raised an army to fight an estimated army of ten thousand but were repulsed several times by an armed federation of villages. It was not until the end of 1917 that France “pacified” the region at great cost; more than thirty thousand locals died in the fighting as well as hundreds of soldiers from the French Empire.⁵⁸ While their resistance was not as widespread or bloody, colonized peoples in British areas also rebelled against conscription, with uprisings in Nyasaland, Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Southern Rhodesia. “Coercive military recruitment of local labor” in Portuguese East Africa also led to rioting and rebellion.⁵⁹ Those in colonies who chose not to rebel often fled recruiters, “feigned illness,” or went into hiding.⁶⁰ Throughout European colonies, migration functioned as a further form of resistance to conscription into colonial armies, as men decided to flee rather than fight either in state uniforms or against them.⁶¹

Anticonscription agitation sometimes assumed a purely political character, with some street violence, but more often with wars of words. The Australian case is a good example of a prolonged and wrenching public debate about conscription over the course of 1916. The anticonscription victory achieved by a narrow margin in the first national referendum on the issue shocked many in Australia and in the British Commonwealth (as did the subsequent failure of the second referendum in 1917), but it also suggested the war weariness that had begun to characterize many of the nations at war by late 1916.⁶² Had the conscription bill passed, it is unclear whether Australia would have faced some of the same violence witnessed by other regions where conscription was imposed. Certainly the outbreak of serious labor agitation in Australia by 1917 suggests that anticonscription rebellion would not have been outside the realm of possibility. As one British official noted in 1916 regarding possible Irish conscription, it is not “feasible to demand national service from any com-

munity without a general measure of consent.”⁶³ The violence surrounding proposed conscription of nonwilling populations supports his claim, especially in the Irish case.

One of the earliest uprisings during the war, which had revolutionary potential if not success, was Ireland’s Easter Rising in 1916. General resistance to the demands of the British wartime state and the possibility of conscription played some role in the mobilization of Irish resistance in 1916, but more importantly, the leaders of the rising saw the war as an opportunity to reinitiate their demands for independence. Thwarted in earlier risings beginning in the eighteenth century and denied the peaceful moderation of Home Rule, Irish rebels in 1916 assumed that Britain’s absorption with the war effort and German assistance with arms would provide the means for successful rebellion. Germany promised, through John Devoy (leader of the American Clan na Gael), to deliver rifles, machine guns, and explosives to the Irish rebels. Poor planning and communication led to the seizure of the ship carrying the German arms by the British navy, with a loss of all the arms.⁶⁴ The revolutionaries decided to move forward with the rising anyway.

A small group of revolutionaries took control of several buildings in Dublin for a week in April 1916 before British forces broke the rebellion. The rising disrupted life in Dublin but had little effect on Irish forces on the western front at the time, and it seemed destined to be forgotten quickly in Dublin until British mishandling of the aftermath.⁶⁵ There was little popular support for the rising, but widespread anger at the brutal and summary execution of the leaders at the hands of the British government, and the resumed threat of mass conscription in 1918 helped change the mood of the populace. Even then, however, the rising did not assume its mythic nationalist importance until the postwar period, when it helped construct the alliance that would lead to an independent Irish Free State by the early 1920s.⁶⁶

The memory of the Easter Rising, along with the anticonscription riots in 1918 in Ireland, led to a protracted war between revolutionaries and British authorities from 1916 to 1923, in which more than ten thousand people were killed or wounded. The use of former World War I soldiers as forces of order in Ireland (Black and Tans), plus the availability of men on both sides with military training and possession of weapons, made the

revolution and civil war an extension of wartime trauma. In one of the most publicized incidents of the Irish Civil War, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was assassinated in June 1922 in London on his way home from unveiling a war memorial to those who died between 1914 and 1918; the two Irish assassins had both served as British soldiers in the war.⁶⁷ Was it any wonder that civilians had difficulty knowing where the lines of loyalties were drawn?

As in Ireland, India experienced postwar violence, a sign perhaps that Britain's hold on its empire was weakening around the world. Just as Ireland had hoped for Home Rule on the eve of the war and then felt betrayed by Britain, India had pinned its hopes for independence on the 1917 Montagu Declaration and subsequent reforms, which pledged that Britain would help India develop self-government with an eye towards devolution of power. However, little real change was realized in the last years of the war, and severely repressive measures followed in 1919 to control Indian nationalism. By 1919, Indian "disaffection was widespread."⁶⁸ It was in this charged postwar atmosphere that a well-known example of colonial repression of a peaceful protest occurred—India's Amritsar massacre. In April 1919, British troops fired into a peaceful gathering in the Punjab town of Amritsar, killing several hundred and wounding more than a thousand in what became known locally as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.⁶⁹ This controversial event occurred during a festival period, but many were gathered for two alternate reasons: the continuation of a general strike and the funeral of strikers killed earlier in the week.⁷⁰ The general in charge, Reginald Dyer, ordered the shootings into the crowd of twenty thousand because of a recent law barring gatherings, which he had read out publicly two days before the incident. Dyer, unrepentant after the event, justified his actions by saying the violence was necessary to teach a moral lesson to all who thought to defy the British Empire in the wake of war, saying famously that "there could be no question of undue severity."⁷¹

Although widely publicized and condemned in the world media, Amritsar was only the most egregious of a series of repressive measures in India aimed at suppressing anti-British sentiment. Many of the punishments inflicted on "offenders" were humiliating, such as public flogging, "making people skip," or public recitations of poetry. Dyer was also

responsible for the infamous “Crawling Order,” which forced pedestrians to crawl through filth. These acts and other repressive British measures, such as the Rowlatt Bills, led to the development of a new phase of Indian nationalism.⁷² Amritsar, some scholars argue, radicalized Indian nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru.⁷³ Perhaps more importantly, it allowed Mahatma Gandhi to move from being one of a group of prominent nationalist leaders to the unquestioned spokesman for the Indian nationalists by the early 1920s. Amritsar was clearly the turning point in this process.⁷⁴

The war unleashed many protests and revolts in other dependencies and colonies as well, particularly in areas that had suffered physically because of the war or that felt cheated by the terms of the postwar peace treaties. For the former, the harsh effects of colonial conscription of labor and soldiers, famine, and influenza combined to spark rebellions. A peasant rebellion that broke out in Egypt in spring 1919 reflected hardships and shortages caused by British army demands on the population. The violence focused mostly on supply networks, with the smashing of rail lines and looting of supply depots. While undoubtedly much of the anger was directed at the British as a colonial occupying force, there is no doubt that fear of hunger helped drive the protests. The Egyptian revolt required thousands of British troops to suppress it.⁷⁵ In other colonial areas, rebellion as such did not occur, but all political and social order disappeared, leaving “ungovernable” populations. In central Tanzania’s Dodoma region, colonial requisitioning of men, food, and cattle led to a multi-year and devastating famine called the Mtunya, in which approximately one-fifth of the population perished.⁷⁶ As one official described the situation, there was “no system of administration at all. The Gogo chiefdoms gone—the German system had gone—and the famine had so churned up the population that some chiefs had no people at all.”⁷⁷

Such traumatic breakdowns of sustenance and political authority had long-term consequences for colonial regimes. After the war, further unrest occurred as demobilized soldiers and carriers found their way home. When the war ended, in many cases men were released with few provisions and left to fend for themselves in getting home. In Nyasaland (today, Malawi) not only did soldiers return home malnourished and in rags, but they brought with them venereal disease and influenza,

contributing to postwar misery. While Malawians did not resort to overt violence, they expressed their postwar frustrations and fears in a series of new social and cultural institutions, which in turn helped feed nationalism as the interwar period progressed.⁷⁸ Veterans associations, in Malawi and other former colonies, also became sites for social and political discussion that helped feed the emergent independence movements of the twentieth century.

In other regions, Woodrow Wilson's championing of principles of self-determination warred with colonial powers' determination to contain and retain their imperial possessions. Wilson's pronouncement that the fate of people around the world should be determined according to "free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment" met with anger from his allies, who had no intention of releasing their colonies or of granting independence to many colonies of defeated nations.⁷⁹ Protests against the peace treaties and unfair colonial obligations led to violence and long-term bitterness in many of these states, and the British Empire alone saw major nationalist pressure in Ireland, India, Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq, just to name a few regions.⁸⁰ In many African colonies, returning veterans often had few services to depend upon, and this led not only to difficulties of reintegration into village life but also to looting and crime. Colonial authorities in the midst of world war and its aftermath had little patience or real understanding of the claims of colonized peoples in the period, and the result was massive repression of anticolonial revolts.

While China was technically not a colonial possession of any other nation at the end of World War I, it experienced a reaction to the "turbulent new forces unleashed by the First World War."⁸¹ Most historians agree that the May Fourth Movement of 1919 shared characteristics of anticolonial revolts and that it was sparked by the war and its immediate aftermath. When the armistice was signed, the Chinese media signaled high hopes for the postwar settlements and called on Wilson as a champion. One journalist wrote in November 1918, "Wilson is the best qualified statesman to assume the role of champion of human rights generally and of the rights of China in particular," as the Chinese version of Wilson's "Fourteen Points" became a bestseller.⁸² When the treaty terms of 1919 favored Japanese territorial ambitions by awarding former German holdings in China to Japan, popular protests broke out among students in

Beijing and then spread to the countryside. Specifically, the Chinese protested both the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty and Japan's "Twenty-One Demands" issued to China in 1915, which called for China to cede territory in Manchuria and Shandong province to Japan. The revolt helped crystallize opposition in China to foreign control and altered the political landscape, leading to a reorganization of nationalists (Guomindang) and the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.⁸³ For China, the result of World War I was a sense of betrayal by and alienation from Europe and the United States, and the creation of political forces that would shape China's future to the present day.⁸⁴

In China, as in many cases of popular protest during and just after the war, civilian resentment at the perceived disregard of their sacrifices during wartime played a role. Many ordinary men and women thought that war service, in all its variety, would entitle them to some measure of respect and independence from colonial authorities and foreign governments. What they discovered, however, was that Wilson's promises of "self-determination" had limits, and that in the fraught postwar environment of the peace negotiations, some nations and peoples were more entitled than others.

Although many of the revolts and civil disturbances of the late-war and postwar periods were later obscured by the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference and by the treaties, the number of regions affected by civil violence remained astonishingly high, ranging through Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Table 8.1 demonstrates the variability and scope of some of the major revolts.

In addition to the revolutions and revolts listed here, many other nations suffered waves of strikes, marches, and riots throughout the second half of the war, requiring the use of armies against civilians on the home front. For some soldiers, demobilization was postponed as they were posted to rebellion zones. Others made a postwar career out of violence, such as the Black and Tans in Ireland or the Freikorps of Germany and the eastern front. Some nations saw a rise in the politics of hate, with the development of antiliberal and increasingly violent ideologies such as fascism and national socialism and the emergence of white supremacist organizations such as the newly reconstituted Ku Klux Klan in the United States.

TABLE 8.1.
Civil revolts, wars, and revolutions

<i>State</i>	<i>Type of Disturbance</i>	<i>Years</i>
Austro-Hungarian Empire	Austrian Revolution Hungarian Revolution	1918 1918–1919
Baltic zone (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia)	Civil War	1918–1919
Bulgaria	Civil Revolt and Coup	1918
Canada	Anticonscription Revolt	1918
China	May Fourth Movement	1919
Egypt	Civil Revolt	1919
Finland	Civil War	1918
France	Mutinies	1917
Germany	Revolution	1918–1919
Greece	Turko-Greek War	1920–1922
India	Amritsar Massacre Afghan War	1919 1919
Ireland	Easter Rebellion Anticonscription Riots Independence War, Civil War	1916 1918 1919–1923
Italy	Conflict in Fiume	1919–1920
Luxembourg	Civil Revolt and Coup	1918
Mali	Volta-Bani War	1915–1917
Montenegro	Rebellion	1916
Morocco	Rif Rebellion	1921–1926
Netherlands	Civil Revolt	1918
Nyasaland	Chilembwe's Revolt	1915
Ottoman Empire	Armenian revolt Azerbaijani Rebellion Hejaz War Iraqi Rebellion Oman Revolt	1915 1918–1920 1919–1926 1920–1921 1913–1920
Poland	Civil War	1918–1923
Portugal	Rebellion	1919
Russian Empire	Central Asian Rebellion Revolution Civil War	1916 1917 1917–1920
Serbia	Toplice Rebellion	1917
Singapore	Mutiny	1915
South Africa	Boer Rebellion	1914–1915
Turkey	Turko-Greek War	1920–1922
United States	Caco Revolt (in U.S.-occupied Caribbean) Race Riots	1918–1920 1917–1921

The disruptions of postwar demobilization and the continued economic pressures on civilian populations meant that the civil revolts, strikes, revolutions, and disturbances created a never-ending state of war. For civilians, the militarization that had marked their lives from their nations' entry into the war continued well into the next decade in both subtle and occasionally overt, and violent, ways.

Conclusion

In spring 1916, Mary Martin recorded in her diary the shambles of Dublin's General Post Office and general vicinity in the aftermath of the Easter Rising, noting that amidst soldiers and barricades, the city was a shocking sight:

Troops & artillery have arrived in large numbers. . . . Although prepared for great havoc it is much worse than I anticipated From O'Connell Bridge to Cathedral Lane past Earl St is utterly destroyed being only a heap a smouldering rubbish with a few facades standing to mark where some of the more important buildings stood. The GPO is only a skeleton front the interior being complete [sic] gone & the house down to the Coliseum also.⁸⁵

Martin's diary, which recounts the anxious days of the revolt and its aftermath, was intended as an eventual letter for her son, Charlie, who was missing in action after Salonika. Martin, a civilian living far from the battle fronts, describes to her citizen-soldier son scenes of pitched battle more reminiscent of soldiers' letters than those of noncombatants. Later, as she dealt with the news of her son's death and the ensuing grief for him and anxiety over her other children, still overseas, Martin witnessed further nationalist unrest, conscription riots, and the outbreak of full-fledged civil war in Ireland by 1919.

For Martin and other civilians caught up in new wars, the lines between World War I and the conflicts it spawned were ephemeral at best. Violence, whether officially sanctioned and managed by the nation-state or not, disrupts civilian lives, threatens their physical safety, and destroys their peace of mind. Millions of people experienced little change in their



This Russian refugee in the early 1920s clutches a piece of bread, her face showing the ravages of years of war, revolution, and civil strife.

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

circumstances with the armistice of 1918; instead the war ground on, just with different trappings. Most had no notion of when “normalcy” might return. Especially for those who watched their identities shift before their eyes, the disappearance of governments and whole empires spurred not only violence but confusion and disillusionment. The ends of historic empires in Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Germany created instability and dislocation for millions of people for years after the “official” end of war in 1918. As Aviel Roshwald has observed, “Political and institutional responses to these dilemmas were hastily improvised . . . amidst the often violent clash of conflicting interests . . . yet many of the resulting arrangements were to remain in place for years to come, with far-reaching consequences.”⁸⁶

By 1919, the world had changed irrevocably, and the political and social upheaval of the war and its aftermath reshaped global relationships for good. World War I set the stage for the emergence or revitalization of nationalist movements around the colonized world in the interwar period, it provided ammunition for budding ethnic and cultural separatists, it ushered in the era of successful Communist revolution, and it unleashed new right-wing political ideologies in the form of fascism and national socialism that spawned even more violence and destruction. Certainly one should not draw a straight line from 1914 to the tragedies of the 1940s or the independence movements of the post-World War II period, but many of the political and social changes unleashed by the First World War shaped irrevocably a generation of men, women, and children, all of whom would determine the future of the twentieth century.