

Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (1998), p. 106f.

Workers were divided, and were joined by revolutionary soldiers and mutinous sailors and radical intellectuals who all pursued their own political programs. At the same time, middle-class constituencies adjusted to the new circumstances with astonishing speed, organizing bourgeois councils, special interest groups, and paramilitary formations. While the return of thousands of veterans from the western front did not spell the end to the revolution, it meant that its momentum had slowed and its direction changed. Each new wave of political mobilization in the fall of 1918 revised further the register of revolutionary demands and angry denunciations.

In a brilliant sketch, Berlin's favorite artist, Heinrich Zille, caught this evanescent palimpsest. Along a smudged wall, tattered edges of prerevolutionary texts are still readable: an advertisement for a patriotic war exhibition and an official proclamation signed by Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Graf von Hertling, the chancellor who had preceded Prince Max von Baden. The names of Ebert and Scheidemann can be made out as well on a poster fragment that must date from the first days of the revolution. It is pasted over with a notice announcing "meeting of the Spartakus League in Moabit's Arminiusshallen for 18 December. Two stark graphics, side by side, compose the most recent layer and make very different comments on the revolutionary struggles. One depicts a figure who appeals to Germans not to "strangle" their "young freedom" in senseless internecine conflict, the other conjures up an alien, obviously Slavic-Bolshevik threat to "die Heimat," home and hearth. [107] Handwritten chalk messages register more spontaneous responses: "Hail Liebknecht! ... Down with Ebert."



Heinrich Zille: November 1918

Zille's German autumn is sharp-edged with anger, denunciation, and alarm. It is also quick changing. Patriotic and revolutionary sentiments come and go, the effects of rain and wind have left only traces. There is a melancholic aspect to this revolution which lacked encompassing and generous gestures. And yet Zille has also well illustrated the newly energized public sphere. A vibrant mobilized political landscape has left its marks on the sandstone wall. Even passersby inscribed their own handwritten messages. It is just this self-authorization that makes the German revolution such a significant event for all social groups. November 1918 lacked the unanimity and national purpose of August 1914, but both war and revolution promoted the search for new political forms.

The image itself is published in: Dieter and Ruth Glatzer, *Berliner Leben 1914-1918: Eine historische Reportage aus Erinnerungen und Berichten* (Berlin, 1983), p. 567.