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HAMBURG IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

CHRISTOPH STRUPP

The First World War was a “total war”¹. The differences between the military and civilian sectors and between the war front and the homeland became blurred. Cities became theatres and actors, even where no direct hostilities took place and news of military events arrived home only indirectly through official reports, millions of letters and private accounts. Nevertheless in major cities like Hamburg the war became a transformer of established orders and a catalyst leading to fundamental changes in politics and society.

Hamburg under the Kaiser

The decades before the First World War were characterised in Hamburg by growth and economic success. If in 1890 the city counted approximately 622,000 inhabitants, by 1910 the million mark had been passed. A further half million lived in the neighbouring Prussian towns of Altona, Wandsbek and Harburg. Hamburg and its port profited from the upturn in world trade in the first phase of globalisation. Major building and infrastructure projects were a sign of wealth. Admittedly this wealth was unevenly divided: contrasting with the genteel residential areas around the *Außenalster* (Outer Alster Lake) there were very modest workers’ dwellings and areas of downright misery near the port².

¹ Cf. CHICKERING R., *Freiburg im Ersten Weltkrieg. Totaler Krieg und städtischer Alltag 1914-1918*, Paderborn et al., 2009; CHICKERING R. and FÖRSTER S. (ed.), *Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, Cambridge, 2000.

² Cf. BÜTTNER U., “Hamburg in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts”, in *Hamburg im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die Zeit des Politikers Otto Stolten. Sieben Abhandlungen*, Hamburg, 2000, p 9-28, here p 11-13; STALMANN V., “Einleitung”, in ders. and STEHLING J., *Der Hamburger Arbeiter- und Soldatenrat 1918/19*, Düsseldorf, 2013, p 11-16.



Programme of a patriotic demonstration on the Town Hall Square, September 1914.

Politically Hamburg still clung to pre-modern structures. The city of a million people was ruled by 18 senators, elected for life. The administration consisted of a network of agencies, offices and commissions whose ineffectiveness had become apparent in the cholera epidemic of 1892. The right to vote for the city parliament, the Hamburg *Bürgerschaft*, depended on the franchise, which was accorded on the basis of income. Accordingly, in 1892, out of over 600,000 people only 23,645 had the right to vote. In addition it was a three-class vote, a division which after the early electoral successes of the Social Democrats in 1906 became even sharper. In 1914, the SPD (Social Democrats) of Hamburg, with about 68,000 members, was one of the strongest branches with regard to membership in the Germany of the Kaiser³.

³ Cf. STALMANN V., "Einleitung", p 16-24; TEETZ Ch., "Bürgermeister Otto Stolten. Ein biographisches Portrait des ersten Sozialdemokraten in der Bürgerschaft", in *Hamburg im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts*, p 219-244.

On the eve of the First World War, therefore, Hamburg could be seen as an economically successful metropolis but also one marked by the social tensions of a class-based society, in which the institutionalised political dominance of the upper-class commercial and shipping circles and the antiquated administrative and public authority structures provided no suitable basis for the management of crises.

The crisis of July and the outbreak of war 1914

In Hamburg, as in all European cities, the news of the assassination in Sarajevo on 28th June, 1914 caused a great sensation. In the Anglophile commercial circles of the city, however, the idea of war was not taken into account and in particular the involvement of Great Britain⁴. It was only at the end of July that events began to follow each other thick and fast. The major newspapers carried extra pages to cover the succession of mobilisations and declarations of war which on 1st August also involved Germany and raised nervous tensions in the public life of the city⁵. For the evening of 28th July the SPD of Hamburg had called 19 protest meetings across the city but after the German declaration of war the party leadership followed the Government line and accepted the argument of a German war of defence against autocratic Tsarist Russia. The majority of workers followed them in this but some of the younger members in particular were extremely downcast at the turn of events⁶. In bourgeois circles, however, “there were great swells of public enthusiasm, finding expression in patriotic songs and cheers for the Kaiser, the Reich and the Allies”⁷. There were absurd excesses of nationalism which, in an international port city such as Hamburg, seemed strangely out of place when, for example, the *Café Belvedere* renamed itself the *Kaffeehaus Vaterland* or when English marmalade suddenly became unsaleable. Conscripts and

⁴ Cf. KERSTEN D., *Die Kriegsziele der Hamburger Kaufmannschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Kriegszielpolitik im kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-1918*, Diss. Hamburg, 1963, p 43 et seq.

⁵ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Vom Augusterlebnis zur Novemberrevolution. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte Hamburgs und Norddeutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Bremen, 1999, p 9-18.

⁶ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 12-17; ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag. Hamburg im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Cologne, 1982, p 10-21.

⁷ *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, 3.8.1914, quoted from: REYE H., *Der Absturz aus dem Frieden. Hamburg 1914-1918*, Hamburg, 1984, p 30.

volunteers who, as citizens of Hamburg, enrolled in Prussian regiments, were cheered as they marched through the city to the Central Railway Station. All in all, by the end of 1918 approximately 230,000 of the 1.1 million inhabitants of Hamburg had taken part in the war as soldiers. 34,181 of them – 7% of the male population – died, about 31,500 of whom as a direct consequence of war⁸.

At the beginning of the war, the executive power, including the control of the right of association and assembly and press censorship, was assigned to the acting Supreme Command of the 9th Battalion in Altona, whose area of authority spanned the civil administration boundaries between Hamburg and Prussia. Up to the middle of 1916 the effects of this in Hamburg were only partially evident, particularly affecting sections of the labour movement, for example, which had to contend with spying, bans on public meetings and the conscription of their leaders⁹. Responsibility for the administration of the city, on the other hand, still lay in the hands of the Senate and the Hamburg authorities.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, unemployment rose in the sectors which depended on the port and trade and at the end of the month the *Hamburger Echo* carried a report on homelessness and hunger¹⁰. The Social Democrats, in the first war-time meeting of the *Bürgerschaft* on 6th August, demanded that the Senate take over the provision and distribution of basic foodstuffs and employ additional workers in building projects. They did not succeed in this, particularly because, given the expectation of a short war, such measures did not seem necessary. For additional expenditure caused by the war, however, 5 million marks were approved. A special committee of ten trusted people chosen from all parties advised with regard to distribution¹¹. In October of 1915 Hamburg was already paying 2.8 million marks monthly as

⁸ Cf. FUGE J., “Reich, Republik, der gefallene Soldat - und die Vaterstadt: Konfliktlinien im “Bürgerkrieg der Erinnerungen” im Hamburg der Weimarer Republik”, in dies., HERING R. and SCHMID H. (ed.), *Das Gedächtnis von Stadt und Region. Geschichtsbilder in Norddeutschland*, Munich and Hamburg, 2010, p 39-60, here p 52; URIAS, *Die Hamburger Juden im Kriege 1914-1918*, Hamburg, 1929, p 7-14.

⁹ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 26-30.

¹⁰ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 19 et seq.

¹¹ Cf. Protokolle und Ausschlußberichte der Bürgerschaft (hereafter: Protokolle) in the year 1914, meeting of August 6, 1914, p 250.

support for 89,000 families and although the allowances were higher than national rates, they did not allow the recipients to keep abreast of inflation. By the end of the war in 1918 the budget deficit had increased more than tenfold from 22.4 million marks in 1913 to 245.2 million¹².

The economic development of Hamburg during the war

Because of the British sea blockade, which only came to an end in the middle of 1919, the principal economic pillar of Hamburg, the port, was brought almost completely to a standstill. The last ship from overseas arrived in the port on 13th August, 1914, after which only neutral ships came in a sporadic way. “The lifeblood of the city (...) had been cut off”, according to a *Kriegsbuch* (War Book) published in 1916¹³. Employment in port handling operations sank to a fifth of what it was in the pre-war period; the shipyards, on the other hand, built torpedoes and submarines in three-shift operations, as a result of which unemployment had already been replaced in the autumn of 1914 by a shortage of labour¹⁴. While the inflow of workers in the first half of the war still occurred spontaneously, the law on emergency service to the fatherland which came into force on 6th December, 1916 abolished free choice of work place and obliged men between 17 and 60 years of age who had not enrolled or did not work in agriculture to work in the armaments industry or in an establishment of importance for the war.

One of the fundamental changes in the employment structure of the city was the extended employment of women¹⁵. From 1914 to 1918 the number of male workers in Hamburg sank by about 80,000 and the percentage of women in industry and trade rose from 20% to 33%. “An example that we see every day is the female tram conductor. At first journalists frequently declared in the newspapers that women were not brought up to such exertions but in the end

¹² Cf. for these figures Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of October 6, 1915, p 196 (Rohde); KUNDRUS B., *Kriegerfrauen. Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Hamburg, 1995, p 60.

¹³ “Der Hamburger Hafen zur Kriegszeit”, in: JAHRMARKT K. (ed.), *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1915*, Hamburg o.J., 1916, p 388 et seq, here p 388.

¹⁴ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 78-83.

¹⁵ Cf. BÜTTNER U., *Hamburg*, p 13.

bitter necessity made it unavoidable that women be employed here too – and has there been any noticeable worsening in the situation? No, tram traffic flows quite as punctually as in peace time”¹⁶. While this work for most women was a necessity in order to ensure survival in view of the rising prices for everyday necessities – for which they were paid lower wages than men – work outside the house or philanthropic commitment to wartime emergency services also served as a distraction in middle-class circles¹⁷.

Economic life in Hamburg, from 1915 at the latest, suffered from state regulation which had been brought about by the pressure of war and was becoming increasingly intense. The authorities in Hamburg – but in the second half of the war more particularly in Berlin – imposed quotas on raw materials and foodstuffs, fixed maximum prices, monitored compliance with regulations e.g. in the supply of foodstuffs, and so restricted entrepreneurial activity to a great extent. In a commercial city like Hamburg, where intellectual considerations were not foreign to independent traders, the spreading of this “state socialism”¹⁸ was particularly unwelcome. From the increasingly embittered population they had also to defend themselves against accusations of extortionate prices and speculation, accusations which in the second half of the war were not made only by the opposition Social Democrats.

The material support for the war in the city

On 5th August, 1914 in the *Hamburger Nachrichten* the first appeal for funds appeared for a new organisation which had been founded by the major charitable associations and civic societies, the Red Cross and Poor Relief under the leadership of Senator August Lattmann: the *Hamburgische Kriegshilfe* (Hamburg War Aid). With a network of district committees in which hundreds of volunteers cooperated, they had the task of intervening anywhere families had fallen into need as a result of the war. The affected persons were assisted but were also subject to a control of their way of life inspired by

¹⁶ Replacement of male workers by females, in JAHRMARKT K., *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1916*, Hamburg, 1917, p 325 et seq.

¹⁷ Cf. MOLTHAGEN D., *Das Ende der Bürgerlichkeit? Liverpooler und Hamburger Bürgerfamilien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen, 2007, p 322-324.

¹⁸ Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of December 19, 1917, p 478 (Jacobey).

middle-class values. Not the least consideration was that the *Kriegshilfe* should conserve and reinforce the “moral coherence of our countrymen”¹⁹.

Enormous costs were involved in the most important measure carried out by the *Kriegshilfe* in order to defuse the social dynamite of hunger²⁰: mass feeding of the population. By the middle of August 1914, 55 war kitchens had already been set up; in September 1916 there were 88, each of which served up to 4,000 beneficiaries. The number varied with the food supply situation but with a clear upward trend until 1918. Meals were served below cost price, “cooked together”: barley soup, canned meat with noodles, maize or millet with elderberry soup, sour soup (poached eel soup), pea-flour soup or meat with swede turnips, although meat meals already had to be reduced from 1916²¹. In addition to the war kitchens the *Kriegshilfe* also ran a central warehouse in the city centre, in which donated goods – laundry, garments, shoes, everyday objects – were distributed.

Wounded and disabled soldiers constituted a particular group of needy people. Their presence in the panorama of the city by 1915 at the latest was a drastic reminder of the horrors of war. The wounded were received by the Red Cross and allotted to military hospitals over the whole city. Permanently incapacitated invalids were cared for by the *Hamburgischer Landesausschuss für Kriegsbeschädigte* (Hamburg Committee for the War Wounded) directed by Senator Gottfried Holthusen. The paramount goal of the care and special training was to reintegrate the men into the work process²².

The commitment of the population of Hamburg to the war effort found expression in innumerable fund-raising and collection drives. In the summer of 1914 this initially meant cash donations for the *Kriegshilfe* or the Red Cross and all sorts of donations in kind for soldiers and needy people in the population. On 1st August, 1915 on the Jungfernstieg a wooden 2.70 metre

¹⁹ Friedrich Zahn, Bericht über Entstehung, Organisation und Tätigkeit der Hamburgischen Kriegshilfe, Hamburg, 1914, p 12 (quotation); KUNDRUS B., *Kriegerfrauen*, p 93, 218 et seq.

²⁰ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 40.

²¹ Cf. Mass feeding in Hamburg, in JAHRMARKT K., *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1916*, p 309-313.

²² Cf. GROSCHEK I., “Wo bleibt der Dank des Vaterlandes? Zur Situation der Schwerkriegsbeschädigten des Ersten Weltkrieges unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Hamburgs”, in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte* 88 (2002), p 147-177, here p 160 et seq.



Mass feeding in a Hamburg war kitchen, w.d.

high statue of St Michael was dedicated into which nails could be driven. In this way up to early 1916 approximately 270,000 marks' worth was collected²³. Similar "nailings" of smaller objects were possible in shops and in other public spaces. Great sums of money were also collected on the occasion of the October *Hamburger Opfertagen* (Hamburg Offering Days) and contributors were rewarded with little flags much coveted by children. Still in the spring of 1918, 2.2 million marks were collected in Hamburg in aid of the war injured²⁴.

In the autumn of 1914 collections also began aimed at the elimination of shortages of raw materials or foodstuffs. Up to 1918 the people of Hamburg gave, from their households, metal, corks, old clothes, wool and kitchen waste for cattle feed and children collected acorns for pigs, cockchafer for hens, fruit stones to extract oil and nettles for fabric²⁵. In the summer of 1917 church bells were melted down, in the summer of 1918 public monuments.

Bread substitute, potato crisis and the "turnip winter"

The greatest and, for the majority of the population of all German cities, most obvious difficulty in the course of the war was the provision of food. The "turnip winter" of 1916-17 became a synonym for a general shortage of food, to which many factors contributed: lack of planning for the event of war in the civilian area, Germany's dependence on imports for basic foodstuffs, the idea of a short war which in 1914 seemed to make any comprehensive provisioning unnecessary, problems in organising distribution, where market principles were only partially abandoned, the lack of manpower and draught animals in agriculture due to the demands of the military and finally unfavourable weather conditions and bad harvests.

In addition, Hamburg as a politically independent city state could not draw on an agricultural hinterland of its own and, with regard to supplies of meat, was almost totally dependent on deliveries from the bordering Prussian

²³ Cf. SCHNEIDER G., *In Eiserner Zeit. Kriegswahrzeichen im Ersten Weltkrieg. Ein Katalog*, Schwalbach/Ts. 2013, p 249-251 (with ill.); "Der eiserne Michael", in JAHRMARKT K. (ed.), *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1915*, p 376 et seq.

²⁴ Cf. GROSCEK I., *Dank des Vaterlandes*, p 160.

²⁵ JAHRMARKT K., *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1916*, p 313-318.

districts²⁶. That the central offices in Berlin did not take appropriate account of Hamburg when making allocations and that the Prussian district administrators of the surrounding areas did not commit themselves to Hamburg was a complaint made repeatedly in the *Bürgerschaft*²⁷. Conversely, the fact of being near to Altona or Wandsbek enabled the population to compare the quantity, quality and prices of agricultural produce and led to dissatisfaction when this comparison was to the disadvantage of Hamburg. One of the measures intended to increase the autonomous production of foodstuffs was, from March 1915, the reclamation of the island in the Elbe, Hahnöfersand, for the production of potatoes by 1,200 Russian prisoners of war from Güstrow²⁸.

In the spring of 1915 the city administration rationed bread and flour and introduced the bread ration card, for which even at this stage only products eked out with potato meal could be had. It was soon “such a condition (...), as would break a dog’s heart!”²⁹ A “Committee for War Provisioning” directed conjointly by the Senate and *Bürgerschaft* was given the task of ensuring the supply of basic foodstuffs and distributing these to the population. In June of 1915, in the light of the acute potato crisis, it was already being argued that the food purchased accordingly should be released sooner, especially as there were allegations of great losses of potatoes and deep-frozen meat because of damage during storage³⁰.

²⁶ Cf. Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of May 10, 1916, p 176 (Meyer), and Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of November 24, 1915, p 229 (Stubbe), Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of April 5, 1916, p 144 (Platen), Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of November 14, 1917, p 398 (Diestel).

²⁷ Cf. for example Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of April 5, 1916, p 144 (Platen), Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of June 6, 1917, p 205-207 (Platen).

²⁸ Cf. “Die Urbarmachung des Hahnöfersandes”, in JAHRMARKT K. (ed.), *Hamburger Kriegsbuch 1915*, p 409-414.

²⁹ Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of October 6, 1915, p 193 (Platen). Cf. also *Kleines Hamburger Kriegskochbuch*, pub. by HK-Ausschuß für Volksernährung, Hamburg 2nd Ed. 1915.

³⁰ Cf. Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of February 8, 1915, p 24; Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of June 9, 1915, p 111 et seq. (Stolten); with regard to the work of the Leo Lippmann Commission, *Mein Leben und meine amtliche Tätigkeit. Erinnerungen und ein Beitrag zur Finanzgeschichte Hamburgs. Aus dem Nachlaß* pub. by Werner Jochmann, Hamburg, 1964, p 214-221.



A canteen for children in Hamburg, w.d.

At the end of November 1915, the SPD again requested in the *Bürgerschaft* that foodstuffs should be requisitioned, maximum prices set and potatoes and coal distributed at the cost of the Reich to the needy. To justify this Deputy Heinrich Stubbe pointed out that people were hit by rising prices in different ways: while for the poor it had already led to malnutrition, the “wealthy classes” had so far not suffered any great restrictions in their way of life. Stubbe also criticised the fact that in Hamburg discussion of the provisioning problem was suppressed³¹. The Conservatives contradicted this and objected that such proposals made Hamburg seem weak in the eyes of the enemy.

In 1916 the food situation was still a constant theme of discussion in the *Bürgerschaft*. In particular the middle-class deputies saw the constantly recurring seasonal provisioning crises, which besides flour or potatoes now also

³¹ Protokolle in the year 1915, meeting of November 24, 1915, p 225-230. How the Acting General Command prohibited the public meetings of trade unions and the SPD scheduled for 27th November, 1914 and 25th June 1915. For the price rises cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 39 et seq.

extended to meat, fats, milk, eggs and vegetables, as a distribution problem rather than as a basic war problem: there were endless discussions of distribution systems, food ration cards and staggered hours for the release of products in order to prevent crowds forming outside the shops. Berlin organisations such as the *Reichskartoffelstelle* (Potato Authority) of the Reich were held responsible for the problems, as were competing cities and the farmers, who sold their vegetables at higher prices to purchasers from outside instead of supplying Hamburg.

From the summer of 1916 the scarce potatoes were at least delivered to the population directly from the barges in eleven unloading places, in the working-class urban area Barmbek among others, leading, however, to long waiting times for people. Discontent grew: “there are now to be heard... on the trams, the streets, in private houses and wherever one goes – serious denunciations of our authorities”³². The social differences in the possibilities of supply were also a factor in this: after two years of war, the scarcity of food and long queues affected ever greater sections of the population, but by no means all. In early July 1916 the *Fleischers Weinstuben* (“Butcher’s Wine Bar”) was advertising “lobster, oysters and caviar” in the newspapers, as well as “exquisite wines”³³.

At the end of September 1916 the newly instituted *Kriegsversorgungsamt* (KVA) (War Provisioning Office) took over the powers of various authorities. However the KVA was obliged to follow the instructions of the Central Office in Berlin and in particular could no longer independently buy and store commodities³⁴. The winter of 1916-17 was for many the bitterest winter of hunger of the war. Swede turnips, which the city had stored in a huge open-air warehouse in Billbrook, served as a substitute for other foodstuffs but had themselves to be rationed at the end of the winter. At the end of February 1917 a Hamburg working-class woman wrote: “Here with us in Hamburg things are in a sorry state, for the last 5 weeks no potatoes, flour and bread scarce... we go hungry to bed and get up hungry in the morning... only the eternal turnips, without potatoes, without meat, just boiled.” The icy cold and the lack of heating materials led to a great decrease in public life:

³² Cf. Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of June 21, 1916, p 206 (Rohde).

³³ *Hamburger Woche*, 101. *Kriegsheft*, July 5, 1916, p 8.

³⁴ Cf. Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of November 15, 1916, p 343f. (Diessel). For a contemporary perspective on the KVA cf. LIPPMANN, *Mein Leben*, p 222-237.

shops reduced their opening hours, places of entertainment and schools stayed closed, churches could not longer be heated and gyms were used as public “heating halls”. In the spring of 1917 there were cases of famine oedema in Hamburg and there was a clear rise in the mortality rate³⁵.

In the war winter of 1917-18 also, there was a lack of foodstuffs, e.g. fats. Speculation and the black market were not held under control, there was no efficient supervision of farmers in the hinterland who had supply obligations. There was once again a massive decrease in public life in order to save coal. Hunger and cold wore down the morale of the people.

Individual and collective war experiences

On the level of individual experience the war was also characterised for many of the citizens of Hamburg by the interruption of personal relationships between spouses, parents and children, relations, friends, school or club companions. Letters from the war front replaced daily contact: soldiers on the front reported on their circumstances, letters from home highlighted the change in conditions, particularly in the world of work and in provisioning, and naturally worries about family members in the context of battles leading to heavy losses³⁶. Here the gap in experience grew throughout the war: in Hamburg, at least among the middle classes, daily life during the war was also “characterised by the normalising of the state of emergency”³⁷, at the front understanding of problems at home faded away: “We live here in a reinforced cellar, eat well, chat and tell stories and for us everything turns on one thing: the homeland. If someone were to say to us here that it was not so pleasant there, because of bread-, meat- and milk ration cards and other things, we would just laugh at him and challenge him to swap with us”³⁸.

The individual experiences of the people of Hamburg, which can be appreciated only selectively in letters or diaries, became consolidated in the course of

³⁵ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 63-67 (quotation: p 65). Food at the front was in fact better at this point: cf. MOLTHAGEN D., *Ende*, p 100.

³⁶ Cf. MOLTHAGEN D., *Ende*, p 156-159.

³⁷ Cf. MOLTHAGEN D., *Ende*, p 122, also p 113.

³⁸ Letter of Wilhelm Weihrauch, September 30, 1916, quoted from: MOLTHAGEN D., *Ende*, p 164. For the experiences of Hamburg soldiers at the front, cf. also MÜNCH Ph., *Bürger in Uniform. Kriegserfahrungen von Hamburger Turnern 1914-1918*, Freiburg/Bremen, 2009.

the war into collective experiences, channelled through public functions, the press and propaganda. “Yesterday evening I was with my sister and Gutti in town on the *Rathausmarkt* (Town Hall Square). Here every Sunday evening things are very lively. From half past eight on, a band plays patriotic songs and the public sings along. Just imagine thousands of people and all of them singing. (...) It’s lovely on the *Rathausmarkt* when the Senators announce a great victory from the balcony of the Town Hall. The bells ring beforehand and make you dream (...) and the jubilation which then follows is wonderful”³⁹.

Many organisations, such as associations, churches, schools and also the *Kolonialwissenschaftliche Institut* (Colonial Scientific Institute), the precursor of the University, arranged lectures about the war⁴⁰. In illustrated weekly supplements the Hamburg daily newspapers gave an account of events in the war, as also did the cinema, then still in its infancy. The war became literally visible in the city when, on 5th November, 1914, three captured English cannons were displayed on the *Rathausmarkt*. In June of 1915 a replica “war landscape” was built in Eppendorf complete with trenches and captured weapons, which could be visited subject to a contribution to the Red Cross, and from May to July 1916 there was a major war exhibition in the Ernst-Merck-Halle⁴¹. From the summer of 1916, after the first disturbances due to hunger, the acting General Command in Altona – and from 1917 also the *Kriegshilfe* and KVA – made greater efforts to influence the population in a targeted way⁴². Throughout the entire war the trade unions were also of great importance with regard to the supply of information to the workers.

Finally, the young also had a particular role in private and public propaganda efforts. From 1915 the secondary school authorities of Hamburg presented every student in the final school year with a *Kriegsbuch* (War Book) with

³⁹ Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg, Archiv, Best. 11/G16, Letter of Luise Dannehl to Martin Schulz, September 14, 1914.

⁴⁰ Cf. also the publications in the series “Deutsche Vorträge hamburgischer Professoren”, Hamburg 1914-15. The historian Max Lenz of the Kolonialwissenschaftlichen Institut was one of the signatories of the controversial “Aufruf an die Kulturwelt” in the autumn of 1914.

⁴¹ Cf. REYE H., *Absturz*, p 77 et seq., 149; *Deutsche Kriegsausstellung 1916 in Hamburg*, Amtlicher Führer, Berlin o.J.

⁴² Cf. LOCH Th., “‘Aufklärung der Bevölkerung’ in Hamburg. For German internal propaganda in the First World War”, in: *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 62 (2003), p 41-70.



Images of Hamburg soldiers killed in war in the 101st war booklet of the *Hamburger Woche*, July 1916.



Patriotic field postcards sent to Hamburg, February 1916.

reports from the fronts and the homeland. Just after the beginning of war in 1914 male youths from the age of 15 were called upon to enlist in youth battalions for pre-military training without uniforms or weapons. In November of 1914, 4,455 young men were already participating in this⁴³.

Attention for young people was also due to the fact that they were particularly affected by the upheavals in daily life resulting from the war. Young people from the working classes suffered the physical consequences of malnutrition, became involved in the search for food, which in the second half of the war could mean standing for long hours in queues in the early morning or in bad weather before the outlet points, as was anxiously pointed out in the *Bürgerschaft*⁴⁴, and from 1916 took part in disturbances in the city. Lack of supervision because of absent fathers and working mothers, according to youth workers with middle-class values, led to waywardness – the number of serious cases of theft by young people rose from 621 to 2,138 between 1913 and 1917⁴⁵. The higher wages which could now be commanded in some sectors because of the lack of manpower promoted lack of discipline in young men. On the other hand girls were thought to be more endangered by lack of employment, which induced them to stay needlessly out on the streets, where the training grounds of the troops and the proximity of the barracks with its lively dealings were also a factor⁴⁶.

Controversies about war objectives and political conflicts in Hamburg

Even politically liberal business circles in wartime Hamburg tended in their confidential memoirs to make far-reaching demands with regard to the aims of the war. The war was seen as England's economic war against Germany. In particular in 1914-15 there were demands for the development of Germany's position in world trade and the extension of colonial possessions. On the other

⁴³ Cf. HOLLWEGE D., *Militarisierung und Disziplinierung der Jugend im 1. und 2. Weltkrieg unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Hamburgs*, MA-Arbeit, Hamburg, 1989, p 175; zur Einbeziehung der Arbeiterjugend ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 33-35.

⁴⁴ Cf. Protokolle in the year 1916, meeting of June 21, 1916, p 207 et seq. (Rohde).

⁴⁵ Cf. HOLLWEGE D., *Militarisierung*, p 176. cf. also KUNDRUS B., *Kriegerfrauen*, p 191 et seq.

⁴⁶ *Hamburgische Jugendpflege in und nach dem Kriege*, Hamburg 1916, p 22 (quotation); KUNDRUS B., *Kriegerfrauen*, p 196.

hand, the expansion of the Reich in Europe, for example through the annexation of parts of Belgium, was less popular, although the Hamburg Senators, Justus Strandes, Friedrich Sthamer and Max Schramm held office from 1914 to November 1918 as chairmen of the civil administration for Antwerp⁴⁷. Even in May 1918 the *Bürgerschaft* approved a proposal of the National Liberals that the Senate should campaign for “sufficient war reparations from our enemies”, the development of the colonies, the rebuilding of trade and the ensuring of free maritime traffic⁴⁸. The Senate in December 1915, in a memorandum to the Chancellor of the Reich, had put forward war objectives concerned more with internal politics: hoping, among other things, for the transfer of bordering Prussian areas to Hamburg, to enable the growth of the port and of industry⁴⁹.

The *Burgfrieden* (imposed political truce) of August 1914 and censorship for a long time prevented, not only any open discussion of war objectives in wartime Hamburg but also discussion of the urgent problem of political reforms. In April 1915 the *Bürgerschaft* approved the postponement of the pending elections until after the war. The difficulties to be overcome by the Social Democrats in order to achieve political equality – although their cooperation had made it possible “to wage this war in the field and in the homeland as it has been waged up till now”, as the Left Liberal Carl Petersen put it in a keynote address on the democratisation of the political system in 1917⁵⁰ – became clear in several *Bürgerschaft* debates in the second half of the war. On 18th April, 1917 the Senate and *Bürgerschaft* agreed on the appointment of a common commission to advise on voting rights and constitutional matters. In June Petersen again avowed his support for a wide-ranging new order⁵¹. The Social Democrat Friedrich Paeplow warned of the danger that the people might rebel against the power structures and that “economic hardship could change into political bitterness”⁵². The Conservatives, on the other hand, demanded that the political influence of trade and shipping be preserved after

⁴⁷ Cf. KERSTEN D., *Kriegsziele*, p 47, 50-57, 155, 165-169.

⁴⁸ Protokolle in the year 1918, meeting of May 8, 1918, p 98 et seq. Cf. also Protokolle in the year 1918, meeting of May 15, 1918, p 103-105.

⁴⁹ Cf. KERSTEN D., *Kriegsziele*, p 56 et seq.

⁵⁰ Cf. Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of April 18, 1917, p 159-163 (quotation p 160). Cf. also SCHAMBACH, *Carl Petersen*, p 50 et seq.

⁵¹ Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of June 27, 1917, p 215-217. Cf. SCHAMBACH, *Carl Petersen*, p 52.

⁵² Protokolle in the year 1917, meeting of June 27, 1917, p 226.

the war. On 11th July, 1917 the liberalising of the electoral law of 1906 was finally decided. After that the Commission drew up proposals for further reforms. The election of Petersen to the Senate on 27th September, 1918 made it clear that this development could no longer be checked.

At this point the tension in the city had on a number of occasions erupted into strikes and public protests, brutally suppressed by the police and military. Here price rises and the food crisis were contributing factors – on 18th and 19th August, 1916 in disturbances in front of bread shops in Barmbek und Hammerbrook, on 26th and 27th October, 1916 in strikes at Blohm + Voss and in the Vulcan shipyard⁵³ and on 22nd and 23rd of February, 1917, when not only in Barmbek but also in middle-class areas such as Winterhude, Uhlenhorst and Eppendorf, and later in Altona and Wandsbek, there were serious riots and food shops were plundered⁵⁴. Increasingly political demands were also made. In the middle of August 1916 2,000 participants had demonstrated in front of the trade union building, a year later some 10,000 workers gathered in the Heiligengeistfeld in St. Pauli and demanded peace, freedom, equality and bread and, on 28th January, 1918, 25,000 Hamburg shipyard and metal workers went on a strike of several days, demanding an improvement in living conditions, an end to the war and greater democracy⁵⁵.

The SPD had worked together with the strike leadership but at the same time tried to defuse the situation. While the radical forces within the party, those opposed to the policy of reform and support for the state, were still in August 1914 only a small minority, they gained in clout in the course of time. In the spring of 1917, this resulted in a split: the opponents of the *Burgfrieden* policy were expelled from the party and founded a district association of the “USPD” – the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany – for Hamburg-Altona⁵⁶.

End of the war and revolution

⁵³ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 54-60; ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 51-62.

⁵⁴ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 64-67; ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 68-72; for an account of the sexual dimension KUNDRUS B., *Kriegerfrauen*, p 131-141.

⁵⁵ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 109-157; ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 48-50, 114-117, 126-133.

⁵⁶ Cf. ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 39-53, for the USPD 1917/18 in detail *ibid.*, p 68-91; ULLRICH V., *Kriegsalltag*, p 105-108, 118-122; STALMANN V., “Einleitung”, p 27-38.

Am 1. Oktober 1916

Opfertag für die Deutsche Flotte!

Die Dankbarkeit des deutschen Volkes gegen seine Krieger, die ihm in übermütigen Genuß seiner Opferwilligkeit gestiftet hat, will auch seiner Flotte nicht versagen, die in mehr als zwölfjährigen, stetem Kampfe auf allen Weltmeeren sich so glänzend bewährt. Die Hingabe der großen europäischen Mächten hat gegen die verarmten Flotten von fünf oder sechs Millionen sich nicht nur behauptet, sondern unermessliche Leistungen sich erworben. Ohne Rücksicht haben ihre Kreuzfahrten Monate lang den feindlichen Handel übergründet und in den Schindeln von Costa Maria und den Schiffswracks unzählige Tausende zu Tode und zu Leiden gewacht. Im Mittelmeer, im Schwarzen Meer, in der Nord- und in der Ostsee haben ihre Einsatzkraft und Kräfte dem Feinde unbeschreibliche Schäden gebracht, und am 31. Mai hat unter höchster Aufsicht der Kaiserlichen Flotte der Welt einen Schlag verfehlt, als sie ihn mehr als hundert Jahre nicht verfehlt hat.

Ihr und der Hingabe Jährlinge der deutschen U-Boote, Kreuzfahrter, der Wasser-Luftschiffe und -Flugzeuge, der Hingabe opfermüder Kämpfer der Minen- und Torpedoböote und nicht zuletzt der Tausende tapferen Matrosen in Flandern will das deutsche Volk gedenken, die so viel dazu beitragen, den gefährlichen wackeren Feinde, Verfeindeten, zu bezwingen.

Daher bitten, den Hingabe von Herz in jeglicher Weise zu helfen und ihnen jegliche ein Neben helfen Dankes darzubringen, denn für der Opfertag der Deutschen Flotten-Ver-ein, des Flottenbundes Deutscher Frauen und der Deutschen Marinevereine dienen, helfen Ergebnisse von der Seemannschaft für freiwillige Arbeit an die Marine unter Leitung

des Großadmirals von Keelitz

in jedem Keller Wein verteilt werden soll.

In alle Deutschen geht daher die Bitte:

Geht und gebt reichlich für die Deutsche Flotte!

Gedenken nehmen ihnen kein entgegen:

Hals Kreuze und Ehrenzeichen in Rinnens
 (siehe die Prospektseite Königstraße 122.)

Fundraising for the German fleet, October 1916.



Crowd on the Twon Hall Square in Hamburg, November 1918.

On the evening of 6th November, 1918 discussion of the Commission proposals for reform was on the agenda, but it was too late: the revolution had begun and the initiative had passed to the street. The Conservative Finance Councillor, Leo Lippmann, later said that the cause of this was the “food shortage” which had made it easy for the ringleaders “to make desperate people follow them”⁵⁷. Sailors from Kiel occupied the tunnel under the Elbe, the Central Station, military barracks and the trade union building, during which gunfire was also exchanged. A provisional Workers and Soldiers Council was formed and in the *Rathaus* (Town Hall) the Senate declared itself willing to work “in the service of this new era”⁵⁸.

On 11th November the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Hamburg elected a steering committee, on which until the middle of January 1919 the left-wing radical journalist, Heinrich Laufenberg, was to play a predominant role⁵⁹. On the following day the Senate and *Bürgerschaft* were declared discharged / dissolved – a measure revoked when the bourgeois elite had made it clear that the city would then be plunged into financial ruin and chaos. Thereafter the extreme-left Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council (ASR), the reform-minded Majority SPD, the unions, the previous Senate and the middle-class administration worked together with a relative lack of friction in order to provision the population and ensure public order.

In the elections to the National Assembly on 19th January, 1919 the SPD in Hamburg took 51.3 percent of the votes, the USPD only 6.8. On the following day Laufenberg resigned and the ASR lost importance. The election for the constituent *Bürgerschaft* in which for the first time, on 16th March, 1919, all men and women over 20 years of age could take part with an equal vote, confirmed the predominance of the SPD: it took 50.5 percent of the votes, the DDP, the successor to Petersen’s United Liberals, 20.5 percent. On

⁵⁷ LIPPMANN L., *Mein Leben*, p 272.

⁵⁸ Cf finally STALMANN V., “Die Revolution von 1918/19 in Hamburg”, in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62 (2014), p 5-24; BÜTTNER U., *Hamburg*, p 14; ULLRICH V., *Augusterlebnis*, p 158-171.

⁵⁹ Cf for the Hamburg ASR STALMANN V., “Einleitung”, p 49-82 and the Sitzungsprotokolle: STALMANN V. and STEHLING, *Der Hamburger Arbeiter- und Soldatenrat*.

28th March the first completely parliamentarily answerable Senate of Hamburg took office. Beside the first Mayor, Werner von Melle, who like eight other previous senators had been continued in office, the Social Democrats put forward Otto Stolten as Deputy Mayor.

The coalition made up of the SPD and the left-wing liberals of the DDP guided the city through the challenges of the post-war period: the huge shortage of foodstuffs and coal continued and led in June 1919 to the *Sülz* (brawn jelly) riots, which were suppressed by military force. The conditions of the Treaty of Versailles signed on 28th June, 1919 shocked the shipowners and overseas traders of Hamburg, for the loss of the colonies, the surrender of the merchant navy and the obligation of one-sided most-favoured-nation treatment for foreign trade partners seemed to destroy all hope of recovery for port and trade and make the reintegration of soldiers and the conversion of industry to peace-time production difficult.

The war in the memory culture of the city

The memory of the war and its victims, in Hamburg as elsewhere, was not free from political exploitation. In the mid-1920s the *Volkstrauertag* (National Day of Mourning) was established as a remembrance day for the war dead with strongly Conservative connotations⁶⁰. In November 1931 the *Totensonntag* (Sunday of the Dead) served as a republican-oriented antipole. A central monument for the victims of the war was inaugurated on the *Rathausmarkt*: a 21-metre-high granite column, carrying on one side the inscription “40,000 sons of the city gave their lives for you!” and on the other side the image “Mother and Child”, by the artist Ernst Barlach⁶¹. In March 1936 the National Socialists also inaugurated a memorial by the sculptor Richard Kuöhl to the 76th Infantry Regiment in a central place in the inner

⁶⁰ Cf. FUGE J., *Reich*, p 52-57; FUGE J., “‘Ohne Tod und Sterben kein Sieg’. Die gefallenen Soldaten des Ersten Weltkrieges in der Hamburger Erinnerungskultur der Weimarer Republik”, in *Historical Social Research* 34 (2009), p 356-373.

⁶¹ Cf. KLINGEL K., *Eichenkranz und Dornenkron. Kriegerdenkmäler in Hamburg*, Hamburg, 2006, p 62 et seq., 135; PLAGEMANN V., “*Vaterstadt, Vaterland, schütz Dich Gott mit starker Hand*”. *Denkmäler in Hamburg*, Hamburg, 1986, p 138-141.

⁶² Cf. KLINGEL K., *Eichenkranz*, p 35-38, 67f; PLAGEMANN V., “*Vaterstadt, Vaterland...*”, p 142-147.

city: a grey block of limestone with marching soldiers and the inscription “Germany must live even if we have to die”⁶². Barlach’s work was removed in 1939 and only restored in 1949, Kuöhl’s “war block” was largely neutralised in 1983 by the “Memorial against War” by the Vienna artist, Alfred Hrdlicka, but even today periodically provides material for political arguments in the city⁶³.

⁶³ Cf. KLINGEL K., *Eichenkranz*, p 108-111; PLAGEMANNI V., “*Vaterstadt, Vaterland...*”, p 155 et seq., 171-173.