

## **Kiel before the revolution 1918**

In order to understand, how the revolution came about to happen, one has to look at the previous situation of the city. In 1918, Kiel used to be an Imperial War Harbour. At that time 70.000 workers of about 100.000 working people were employed in the industrial sector, which is why the resident unions were constantly gaining political influence.

In June 1916, there had already been first political unrest and owing to insufficient supplies there were several protests in March 1917. This unstable state was decisive for the beginning of the revolution in November 1918.

## **The sailors' resistance**

The sailors, especially those from the third squadron, were an essential factor for the revolution. In Wilhelmshaven a tense atmosphere prevailed as well, which led to a mutiny of the deep-sea fleet in August 1917. As this mutiny was caused only by the first and the third squadron, it was decided to separate these two units. The ships of the third squadron, under vice admiral Hugo Kraft, were supposed to return to their home port Kiel, where they granted the sailors a shore leave [in order to defuse the situation].

Several sailors from the ship "Markgraf", who were regarded as the ringleaders of the mutiny in Wilhelmshaven, were arrested in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Kanal [now known as the Kiel Canal]. This aggravated the conflict even further. The final trigger was the plan of the German Navy's highest command to send the fleet into a hopeless decisive battle, a last honourable fight. [This contradicted political instructions.] However, the sailors had already heard about it in the night of 29 October 1918 to 30 October 1918, which led to a mutiny. Consequently, the plan for the last big battle had to be dropped, because the sailors resisted the commands.

## **1 November 1918 – Kiel**

On 1 November, the governor of Kiel, vice admiral Wilhelm Souchon was taken aback by the arrival of 5000 sailors, all potential rebels. This was a big problem the governor attempted to resolve, because there had already been waves of labour unrest and because a big strike was being organized at that time in order to bring about peace terms at the same time. Souchon's plan to move the flotilla to another harbour failed, because the sailors had been granted generous shore leave and through its cancellation he feared further riots and chaos.

## **1 November 1918 – trade union office (today's Legienstraße)**

250 sailors assembled in the trade union office in the Fährstraße, [which is now called Legienstraße]. In civilian surroundings, they wanted to discuss what to do if the command to put out to sea was repeated. Moreover, they demanded the release of the jailed sailors and they decided to hold another meeting the next day. The naval management found out about the second assembly and lest there would be additional unrest and mutinies, they had it stormed. As a result, many of the sailors were arrested.

## **2 November 1918**

Saturday afternoon, the state secretary of the Imperial Naval Office, Ritter Ernst von Mann, reported in the imperial capital on the incidents aboard the first and the third squadron. The sailors planned a big assembly in front of the trade union office and several hundreds of them set off to go there. As the people responsible for the German navy heard about it, the plan was stopped and the crowd marched to the Exerzierplatz, [the parade ground of Kiel]. At 7:30 p.m. 500 to 600 sailors from the third squadron, as well as proxies of the "USPD" [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] assembled there. After that, Karl Artelt, a comrade of the Torpedo Division, gave a speech in which he demanded [from the government] to release the jailed sailors, to subjugate militarism and to disempower the ruling classes. Secondly, he requested a people's assembly and an ensuing protest march. Just shortly after the meeting, Artelt was addressed by the local chairman of the "USPD", Lothar Popp. After that, they developed and hectographed a leaflet in the party office of the "USPD" on the same day. The leaflet had the inscription: "Comrades, don't shoot at your brothers! Workers, demonstrate in droves, don't abandon the soldiers!"

## **3 November 1918**

After the meeting the day before, 57 sailors were jailed. The situation in Kiel was now also reported on in Berlin, at the German Naval Office.

The leadership of the German navy in Kiel took measures to prevent a demonstration planned by the sailors, like activating sirens all over the city, but this alarm was ignored. As Kiel was the German naval port, many relatives of the sailors lived there, which is why parts of the population joined the demonstration.

In the evening of 3 November about 6.500 people had come together on the Exerzierplatz, a public place in the city, and demanded the release of the arrested sailors.

As the crowd arrived at the prison, the street was closed and soldiers started shooting at the demonstrators, with the result that seven people died and many were injured. This act of violence by the government strengthened the solidarity of the sailors, which supported the actions during the next days.

## **4 November 1918**

After the troubles the day before, when it had come to a violent confrontation between mutinous sailors and troops loyal to the government, a wave of solidarity for the sailors followed on 4 November, and the land marine and other workers joined the sailors.

The simple mutiny developed into a great wave of political revolution, which could be controlled neither by the governor nor the superiors of the single military units. To prevent further conflicts, the governor found himself compelled to negotiate with the mutinous sailors. As a result the sailors and representatives of the Social-Democratic Party received the assurance that at least some of the arrested sailors would be released. The rebels celebrated this as a great success. In the evening of 4 November a soldiers' and workers' council was formed, that took control over Kiel from this day on.

## **5 November 1918**

In Kiel there was nervousness and agitation, since there was a rumor going around that troops loyal to the monarchy were on their way to Kiel.

That is why the soldiers' council took the governor Souchon as a hostage at 2 a.m. and detained him in the railway station until the rumor was proven to be wrong and they released the governor at 6 a.m. The soldiers' council hoisted the red flag of the revolution above the town hall and all towers and ships.

## **6 November 1918**

Since the rebellious sailors and workers had officially taken control of Kiel, the situation in the city stabilized.

The vice admiral was given the task to end or at least to contain the rebellion, but he failed. Among other things this failure was caused by the fact that the revolutionary idea spread to other cities (e.g. Wismar, Schwerin, Flensburg, Wilhelmshaven) where other workers' councils were formed. Rendsburg also joined the revolution and a local newspaper in Rendsburg wrote: "The flame of freedom has flared up in Rendsburg as well."

The sailors searched for, arrested and dismissed officers (mostly without specific reasons) because they feared retaliation by them. This fear caused many arrests and releases of officers and civilians, which further intensified the critical atmosphere in the city.

## **Monument "Wik" Kiel description**

The monument was created from 1978 for the 60th sailor revolts' anniversary of Kiel, which led to the end of World War I, the fall of the German empire and to the proclamation of the republic on 9 November, 1918 in Berlin.

The council group of the social democratic party of Germany suggested a competition of ideas, making an artistically note of the revolt and its memories. However this suggestion brought a public debate with it, because the sailors were also called mutineers and were therefore considered unworthy a monument.

Nevertheless the competition was carried out and the work of the winner Hans-Jürgen Breuste was erected on 16 June, 1982.

The work is found at the Jensendamm/Ratsdienergarten and is accessible to the public at any time.

Since the monument is taller than a human being, it cannot be overlooked. Granite and steel were used to build the monument.

The three rusty and monumental blocks of steel are put in a sloping position to each other and are each pierced through by a granite pillar. There are many interpretations for the monument, so everyone has the chance to make up his or her own. The blocks of steel are rusty and rough and have corners and edges. The round shaped granite pillars are cut straight at the ends and have visible notches, which are meant to be there. The memorial

seems very abstract and is difficult to categorize. It is surrounded by trees and green space and is therefore not in a relationship with its environment. The few details give the monument a clumsy touch and make it seem not very interesting. Furthermore there is no explanation or title found on or near the object, which makes it mysterious and in a way incomprehensible. It looks very heavy because of its height and the material it was built from. It is in fact very heavy. But in spite of this, it doesn't seem stocky because of its partly floating pillars. The memorial's place and purpose are criticized and also that it is hard to find for people who do not live in Kiel.

### **The memorial's inscription**

The quote on the memorial, which says "The one who clears the path dies on the threshold but death bows down to him in reverence" originally belongs to the play "Feuer aus den Kesseln" by Ernst Toller. This play is dedicated to the sailors Albin Köbis and Max Reichpietsch, who died in their fight for more humanity in dealings with sailors. In 1917 they were charged with mutiny and were sentenced to death, because they fought for an ending of the war and better rations for sailors. Matching the quote on the memorial, those two sailors can be seen as forerunners of the revolution in 1918. Breuste used the sailors' often-discussed conflicting behaviour or rather the play that was dedicated to them as an inspiration for his memorial. The quote is used to commemorate all those who rose up like Albin Köbis and Max Reichpietsch to protest against the injustice they had suffered. Through their sacrifice the path was cleared for the sailors' revolt and the revolution in 1918.

### **Creation of the monument**

The monument "Wik", named after one of Kiel's biggest districts and former settlement of sailor barracks, was created in 1982. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the sailors' mutiny, a competition of ideas was held for the construction of a monument to commemorate the sailors' mutiny. This happened 60 years after the revolution, because for a long time people in Kiel tried to avoid a critical examination of the revolutionary period.

The participating artists, chosen by the council meeting, Hans Kock, Waldemar Augustin, Hans Jürgen Breuste, Otto Hajek and Alfred Hrdlicka were granted all artistic freedom. Their ideas were presented as sketches and models in the shop windows of the Kieler Nachrichten [the local newspaper in Kiel], so the citizens could participate in the discussion about the monument. Jürgen Breuste was awarded the contract for his design in the end, because his plan was the most feasible. As a place for it the Ratsdienergarten [a park in the centre of Kiel] was recommended by the government building officer.

### **The portrayal of the monument "Wik"**

The monument "Wik", which can be found in the Ratsdienergarten in Kiel and has been crafted by the artist Hans-Jürgen Breuste, shall commemorate the sailors' mutiny in 1918. It consists of three rusty, rounded steel blocks, which stick crookedly in the ground, and each is pierced by a granite pillar. Granite is a traditional material and embodies a claim to eternity, so you could assume that it symbolises the rigid order in the German Empire (1871-1918).

The steel is corroded Cor-Ten steel, which also embodies a claim to eternity, but which is questioned as it is corroded. It also gives a rebellious contrast towards the granite, because with its rough surface it shall not please, but warn. It is not clear, what the monument should portray. On the one hand it could show cannon barrels made useless, but on the other hand the rusty steel blocks could represent rusty walls of ships. Also the steel blocks could be gravestones or human bodies, pierced by the granite pillars.

In any case, the monument has got an accusatory and oppressive effect, but many people criticize that the monument does not have a clear statement. When the monument was completed in 1982, only 300 people were at the inauguration and the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] kept completely away, except for the President of the City Council who he felt obliged to come because of his official duty.

The CDU thought that the background of the mutiny would be presented in a distorted way by a monument and got support by the FDP [Free Democratic Party]. In 1978, for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mutiny, it was especially the SPD [Social Democratic Party of Germany] that was of the opinion that this historical incident should not fall into oblivion, but not all parties were of the same opinion and so it became an explosive topic. Nowadays only a few know what the monument should remind of, but this should change with the 100th anniversary and the monument should get more attention through yearly events. These are mostly organised by clubs for the protection of historical monuments, supported by some parties, especially the SPD. The German President Frank Walter Steinmeier is also invited and with these events it is tried to establish a new reputation for the mutiny today.

## **Controversy: The sailors' mutiny in Kiel**

### **Introduction:**

With the following presentation we would like to inform you about the controversy around the 1918 Kiel sailors' mutiny and the November revolution, which is inseparably connected with it, in a chronological order. The reception history, which is heavily influenced by the prevailing political orientations, will be in the foreground in order to enable a presentation of the events through which the controversy is broken up and presented in a comprehensible way.

### **Perception during the events:**

While they were happening the events were perceived in different ways. The majority of the population of Kiel was appalled. Since the media had great influence, people were more likely to share the opinions of the Conservatives or Liberals, who thought that Germany lost its prestige in the world because of the events. On the other side were the Communists who approved of the mutiny due to their beliefs.

In the rest of Germany, especially in Berlin and the Ruhr area, there was a much more positive response towards the events than in Kiel. That became clear when the officers and mariners of the ships sunk returned to their homes in 1920 and were celebrated there.

Within parties like the SPD [SPD stands for Social Democratic Party of Germany. The SPD was founded in 1863 and is one of the two major political parties in Germany] different views occurred because some people still felt connected to the former monarchy while others were longing for progress.

The local authorities were against the sailors' mutiny but were preoccupied with maintaining the public order at that time. Meanwhile, many soldiers felt as if the mariners wouldn't do much and that they alone fought without protest for their country. The mariners' refusal to obey orders therefore seemed like a betrayal of the front. All in all it can be said that it was hard at that time to establish a democracy because the people weren't able to really understand it yet. Therefore the mutiny was counterproductive because it frightened many citizens.

### **The Weimar Republic:**

During the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), which was heavily influenced in its creation and development by the sailors' mutiny, the reception of the events of 1918 was mostly positive. Through the change from a federal monarchy in the empire [The German Empire existed from 1871 until 1918] to a parliamentary system through Philipp Scheidemann (SPD) [Scheidemann, a social democrat, was a very influential politician and proclaimed the republic in 1918] the foundation for the Weimar Republic was formed. Many people were hoping for the end of the First World War and the empire, which is why the mutiny and its consequences were perceived in a very positive way by these opponents of the old regime, most of them Social Democrats.

However, there also were negative opinions, mostly expressed by bourgeois conservatives who thought that the mutiny of 1918 had been responsible for the defeat in war and the fall of the empire and that it had been the reason why Germany had lost its significant position in the world.

It is important to consider the proximity of time between the mutiny and the Weimar Republic, which is why the media still had a big part in influencing people's perception the same way it had had during the events. During the Weimar Republic the victims of the mutiny were buried with honors and their cemetery in Kiel still serves as a memorial.

### **German Reich**

During the time of the German Reich, from 1939 to 1945, the politics of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) were influenced by right-wing extremism. To avoid revolutionary ideas like the ones during the sailors' revolt, a kind of filter was "laid" onto the events and it was kept quiet about them. To some extent, this so-called filter remained unchanged a long time after the end of the German Reich. The evaluation of the sailors' revolt at this time is mainly based on three aspects:

A considerable part of the National Socialist ideology included glorifying the military. Therefore, people had a strong dislike of "traitors" and "mutineers".

Another aspect was the so-called "stab-in-the-back myth", which was invented by the imperial military leadership and used during the Weimar Republic by right-wing extremists to promote their agenda and narrative.

The third and most obvious aspect refers to the persecution and murder of communists and social democrats by the national socialist regime. These were mainly involved in the sailors'

revolt and the “German Revolution“. Thus these events were judged a crime against the German nation.

### **The reception in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)**

In the FRG there were multiple views on the sailors’ revolt, especially as one wasn’t sure whether to call it a “revolt“ or a “rebellion“.

In general, because of the impression of the Cold War one had a problem with the sailors’ revolt as it represented a rather left-wing movement. The myth was spread that only communists had controlled the sailors’ revolt, so the rather conservative “camps“ could justify themselves and could discredit the sailors’ revolt. However, because of the social liberal change at the beginning of the 60’s the view on the sailors’ revolt changed increasingly.

While the conservatives mostly called it a “stab in the back“ towards the navy , “left-wing“ SPD politicians claimed that “blind obedience“ would lead to catastrophes and that thus the sailors’ revolt had been legitimate. Afterwards, in 1968 at the 50th anniversary of the sailors’ revolt , student-led revolts broke out, in which the sailors’ revolt was exploited in slogans like “Long live the revolution of 1918 and 1968“. This controversy about the sailors’ revolt continued until the 80s and 90s.

In 1978 at the time of the 60th anniversary of the sailors’ revolt, the council faction of the SPD suggested to build a monument in Kiel, which led to a public discussion.

In particular the FDP [Free Democratic Party] and the CDU [Christian Democratic Union of Germany] argued against it. In the end, the monument “Wik“ was built at the “Kleiner Kiel“[ a small canal in the old city centre] in 1982. Nevertheless, during the opening of this monument the different opinions became clear again, as the council faction of the CDU wasn’t present at the opening, only the President of the City Council, a CDU member, who came because of his position.

As the sailors all pursued different goals, they were still partly judged to be “anti-democrats“.

### **Perception of the mutiny in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)**

In the GDR people had a fundamentally different view regarding the sailors’ revolt. As there was a kind of enthusiasm for revolution in the GDR, the perception of the sailors’ revolt was evaluated in a more positive way. In East Germany there could be resumed a kind of “traditional line“, because the November Revolution (also named German Revolution) was often portrayed as the “missed chance“ to build a republic governed by workers’ councils.

The thesis of this “missed chance“ was the reason to spread the idea that the whole revolution had been supported by socialist tendencies and that the Social Democratic Party, with its reformist and anti-Bolshevist attitude, had committed a betrayal of the proletariat.

Differently to the German Democratic Republic, West Germany was marked by a wide spectrum of opinions. Although the peoples’ mind was dominated by socialist views there was a certain presence of the West German opinions of history which were however neither popular nor socially acceptable.

## **Perception of the event today**

Nowadays, the controversy over the sailors' mutiny does not continue.

But on the occasion of the 100 year anniversary of the mutiny this controversy could stir up again. The decreasing interest in political and historical incidents could be a possible explanation for the fact that there are fewer discussions about the sailors' mutiny. People have become tired of talking about it.

Although there still are different political views nowadays, it is difficult for today's generation to understand the feelings which had left their marks on the contemporary witnesses. A closer look at the political scene shows the current important role of the sailors' mutiny in the year 2018. This is why this historical event is a part of the image campaign in Kiel in which the sailors are linked with democratic ideas in an undifferentiated way. In reality, the mutiny's intention had nothing to do with democratic ideas because the majority of sailors didn't demand a parliamentary democracy.

Nevertheless, a Kiel agency developed a concept in which Kiel is presented as the city of democracy. The slogan "Kiel - a city of democracy" is only one example of the various inscriptions on posters.

In conclusion, it becomes obvious that the sailors' mutiny controversy does not continue in recent days. Though, there are many monuments that commemorate this historical event. 2018 could be the year the controversy becomes more apparent again because of the publicity surrounding the anniversary of the sailors' mutiny and its marketing.

## **Final word**

As the final word, we would like to sum up the problems regarding the controversy and the different perceptions of the mutiny. Therefore, it should be noted that the cause of the sailors' mutiny itself had already set off a controversy. Even shortly after the mutiny there was a discussion whether the decisive command given to the sailors was legally acceptable, because at that time the peace treaty had already been drafted. This is why it is partly described as the revolt of the Admirals who were against the idea of giving up at war times. Until today, there has not been given a sufficient answer to the questions why the perception of the mutiny and the sailors' actions are connected with the perception of the Admirals' revolt.

In general, it is difficult to assign one specific opinion to a period of time because of the wide range of opinions which depend on the individual historical awareness as well as on the political idea in the respective time.

## **New interpretation of the memorial**

The memorial consists of two materials, which are granite and steel. These form a contrast, which is the base of the interpretation.

Granite is the first material of the memorial. Unshakable and long lasting, the granite stands for the German Empire. It shows that the people were too proud, unshakable and convinced of their principles and sense of honor to give way. Things were good the way they were and they wanted to go into battle one last time with these unshakable structures. The three granite bolts embody all these aspects.

But then there is a new malleable movement, which unhinges the old structures and powers. The mutiny, represented by the steel construction, comes forth and turns the Empire, and transferred to the memorial, the granite bolts, upside down. The Empire finds itself literally in full teeter. The three powers of state, legislative, executive and judiciary, which are embodied by the granite as well, are in the grips of the mutiny's steel construction. The new material actually succeeded in turning upside down what was thought to be immovable. You can see this on the basis of the irregular and seemingly arbitrary order of the granite bolts. Being used by the Empire itself, the steel turns against it, while the granite can only watch how it demonstrates its force without any means to stop the mutiny.

But as you can change the shape of steel, the mutiny has not reached its final stage yet. Granite is unchanging and immovable like the Empire was thought to be, while steel can be formed. The steel blocks present in the memorial feel raw and inconsistent. You can see the sharp edges, too. It seems uncut. In some way you can speak of an uncut diamond. During the mutiny, nobody really knew what path this revolution would open and whether this really was the beginning of a new order of state.

You can also see the memorial in its raw state as the first solid foundation of democracy in the German country. It was just the beginning and it took time to take form. The rust covering the steel construction can be linked to the state of democracy, too. Being the sign of decay, it shows that democracy is not to be taken for granted, but a gift that must be treated with care and protection.

Lastly, the intimidating size of the memorial stands for the significant impact the mutiny had on Germany.

## **The monument "Wik" – A controversy**

The monument "Wik", built from 1978 to 1982 by Hans-Jürgen Breuste, deals with the rebellion of the sailors from 1918, which initiated the November Revolution in Germany. The memorial shouldn't please the public but remind them.

The monument consists of three steel sculptures which are each pierced by a granite pillar. There are a lot of possibilities how you can interpret the monument. Many people see these steel figures as fallen soldiers, who were impaled by the granite bars, while others think that the steel sculptures should represent crosses on a graveyard. Some people interpret them as walls of ships, but an official explanation from the artist doesn't exist.

The rebellion of the soldiers in November 1918 resulted from an order to put out to sea shortly before the end of World War I, from a refusal to obey orders and the following mutiny of the mariners. The reception of this revolt is marked by some controversy which influenced the debate about the monument. A question much discussed concerns the reputation of the sailors: Were they mutineers who rejected commands or champions who fought for the republic and social justice? 60 years later, the council of Kiel voted in favour of the monument with the majority of only one person. Even before its establishment, the monument was heavily criticized.

While the former SPD [Social Democratic Party of Germany] and left – wing parties supported the construction of the memorial, conservative parties like the CDU [Christian Democratic Union] were against this plan. They saw the sailors as deserters who refused to follow the instructions of their superiors and therefore protested against the structures of society. In contrast, the SPD, which fought for the workers, said that the seamen were pioneers for the revolution and social justice, because they demonstrated for better working conditions.

The CDU showed their displeasure very clearly: Only one member of the party, who was the president of the city council at this time, was present during the inauguration of the monument in 1982. But in the last 40 years, there have always been some representatives of the CDU present at the annual wreath laying ceremony, which shows that there is a greater openness towards this historical event.

Among other things the monument was criticized for its costs, which were around 380.000 Mark [Mark was the German currency from 1948 to 2001. 380.000 Mark equal 193.800 Euro]. A lot of people think that the monument isn't worth this price and that it looks ugly. The memorial is in the Ratsdienergarten, a central place in Kiel which is passed by many people. According to a survey, the majority didn't recognize any aesthetics in this memorial and they even had no idea for which reason it had been built, although many of them had heard of the rebellion of the sailors. This, in our opinion, is the biggest problem, because it should remind people of an important part of history. However it is very hard to recognize what the monument wants to represent and even its information table doesn't mention the rebellion of the sailors. To build a memorial like "Wik" is very important, but, and there we share the same opinion as the people who were interviewed, it should be recognizable and you must be able to put it in the right historical context.

Additional information: In Wilhelmshaven in 2016, the idea was formed to build a second monument for the rebellion of the sailors. But the financial situation of the city, an already existing memorial graveyard and the fact, that Kiel has the monument "Wik" were reasons for not building it.