

# Gustav Landauer and the Revolutionary Principle of Non-violent Non-cooperation

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## INTRODUCTION

A distinct strand in the history of ideas and activism for social change challenges a problem known as “voluntary servitude,” a notion put forth by Étienne de La Boétie: any tyrant can be toppled, any unjust system can be overcome, if only people deliberately withdraw their support, that is, if they apply the non-violent non-cooperation principle. This concept extends well into the twentieth century, beginning with Leo Tolstoy’s public statements in favour of the Russian Revolution in 1905, followed by Gustav Landauer’s *Die Revolution* (1907). Landauer also refers to La Boétie to highlight religious thinkers and groups—e.g. Petr Chelčický and the Doukhobors—whose practical spirituality had already influenced Tolstoy. Non-violent non-cooperation ultimately found practical

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expression in Kurt Eisner's organising efforts for the Bavarian Revolution of 1918 and in Landauer's leading role in the Munich Council Republic of April 1919. The concept also had a strong impact on the journalist and political pacifist Carl von Ossietzky (Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 1935, awarded in 1936).

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE COUNCIL REVOLUTION: KURT EISNER AND GUSTAV LANDAUER

If we, after 100 years, turn back to the Munich Council Republic and the November Revolution, the council-democratic ideas of the revolutionaries, Kurt Eisner and Gustav Landauer, may be summarised as follows: an end to all wars; an end to all causes of war; a guarantee of life and happiness—sociologically speaking—for each individual worker, peasant and citizen; federalism instead of centralism; the formation of active communities of creative human beings, cooperatively organising their own consumption and production; abolition of the distinction between intellectual and manual labour; maintenance of public order through the collective restructuring of the executive, judicative and legislative bodies, to be controlled by the councils; the disbandment of illegal army units, *Freikorps* (Free Corps), and intelligence agencies, in favour of a strengthened police force; reform of the judiciary on the basis of a human rights-oriented constitution; free and fair elections to the state parliament through universal suffrage.

In this programme, the new democratic authority, implemented and guaranteed by the councils, was designed to ring in the gradual yet swift disappearance of a malign spirit that had been haunting the political atmosphere. This malign spirit, constantly striving towards dictatorship, fed off authoritarian, imperialist, militarist and nationalist attitudes and policies. To make it disappear required a consensual process through the formation of a qualitatively new “common sense.” Perpetuated by the Kaiser, the Reich's chancellor and its generals—and reinforced by a complacent nobility and a chauvinistic-patriarchal and nationalistic bourgeoisie—this malign spirit also guided the minds of the predominantly submissive and uncritical journalists, bellicose and state-fixated teachers and university professors. Finally, Germany's military caste, encouraged by a rapidly expanding arms industry, harboured the same sentiments, as did the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League): this League constituted the core of the later antisemitic and ethnocentric (*völkisch*)

nationalism, which in 1933 meant the end of the democratic republic and the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship.

In retrospect, after 100 years, the history of the November Revolution and the Munich Council Republic is inextricably linked with the genesis of German fascism and right-wing terrorism. Such groups and forces included the *Freikorps* Epp, the *Marinebrigade* Ehrhardt and the *Organisation Consul*, the Pan-German League, the German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation (*Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund*; Dietrich Eckart, Julius Friedrich Lehmann), the right-wing paramilitary militias (various *Freikorps* units) and the DSP (*Deutschsozialistische Partei*), the German Workers' Party (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; DAP), the later National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP), the ariosophic Thule-Society (*Thule-Gesellschaft*; Walter Nauhaus, Rudolf von Sebottendorf), from its "Münchener Beobachter" to the "Völkischer Beobachter", the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in 1920 and the Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch in 1923. It was not only the antisemitic propagandist Julius Streicher in Nuremberg, but also Rudolf Heß, Adolf Hitler, Ernst Röhm, Hans Frank, Alfred Rosenberg and Karl Haushofer and other future Nazi criminals who started their career in these organisations for the militaristic and propagandistic defence against the authoritarian council type (soviet) of the Bolsheviks under Lenin and the Red Army under Trotsky. This was advocated in Germany by the Spartacus League and the KPD and inspired by the Russian (1917) and the Hungarian Revolution (1919). The cult of the völkisch-antisemitic swastika emblem and the orchestration of assassinations and Feme murders against liberal and socialist politicians from November 1918 onwards linked these racist societies with financial sources that should be of immense interest to historians and political science.

A central interest of the pacifist and council-democrat, Kurt Eisner, was not to repudiate the German share in and the German responsibility for the beginning of the war in 1914, something to which the nationalist historical revisionists aspired. Before and after the commencement of the Paris peace negotiations, especially at Versailles, these "stab-in-the-back legend" (*Dolchstoßlegende*) revisionists tried to shift guilt and responsibility: to deserters, conscientious objectors and pacifists; to insurrectionary and rebellious soldiers, particularly at the Kiel mutiny, in which also Bavarian sailors participated (e.g. Rudolf Egelhofer), who later continued their revolutionary activities in Bavaria; to independent socialists and

Russian revolutionaries; to the liberal and critical press; to socialists such as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg as well as Gustav Landauer and Kurt Eisner.

Both, Eisner as well as Landauer were convinced of the German war guilt. On 23 November 1918, Eisner, acting as the Bavarian representative in Berlin, published diplomatic memoranda from the Bavarian Foreign Ministry: “a document, through which now the last veil is torn from the secrets of this world war” (Eisner cited in Schmolze 1978, p. 165).

The *Denkschrift* by Matthias Erzberger from 2 September 1914, based on a memorandum by German industrialist August Thyssen, adopted the annexationist German war aims, which aimed at breaking the dominance of the British colonial empire. The September Program of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg from 9 September 1914 incorporated these war aims of Erzberger’s *Denkschrift* (Fischer 1967, p. 104).

Heinrich Claß, chair of the *Alldeutscher Verband*, which dates back to the stern opposition against the Heligoland–Zanzibar Treaty in 1890, reworked his own war aims memorandum from September 1914 into a pamphlet, which he then disseminated with a circulation of 35,000 copies, following Ludendorff’s agreement and involvement (Kruck 1954, p. 85). Channelling his policies through the *Deutsche Wehrverein*, Claß forced the German Empire’s massive military armament at the latest since the Agadir Crisis in April 1911.

All three documents not only give evidence of the war aims that were influenced by the expansionist, pan-German, militaristic, nationalist and racist *Alldeutscher Verband*, but they irrefutably prove German responsibility for the First World War.

Kurt Eisner and Gustav Landauer went to great lengths to spread the fact that Matthias Erzberger, through his *Denkschrift* of 2 September 1914, had a decisive part in the German war guilt, even though in 1917 he revised his earlier policies from 1914, supporting a separate peace as well as a corresponding peace offer from 19 July 1917.

Gustav Landauer’s commitment to international understanding dates back to at least June 1914, the month of the founding of the *Forte-Kreis* (Forte Circle) at the city of Potsdam. It was here, on the eve of the First World War, that Landauer presented seven theses for a transnational *Bund der Aufbruchsbereiten* (literally: Covenant of Those Ready to Depart), an organisation devoted to benevolence, justice and human dignity (Wolf 2011, p. 221). Members of this circle included, among others, Martin Buber, Henri Borel, Frederik van Eeden and Florens Christian Rang. The

French pacifist Romain Rolland was also sympathetic to it. Addressing Rolland directly in an article from 24 September 1914, published in Siegfried Jacobsohn's *Die Schaubühne*, Landauer remarks:

We, who do not want any war, under no circumstances at all, are isolated ones in all peoples; and among those isolated only fewest know, what reorganisation of humanity is required, in order to render possible a warless culture. (Landauer 2011b, p. 184)

A continuation of this commitment was the *Bund Neues Vaterland* (BNV; New Fatherland League, from 1922 onwards: German League for Human Rights). In November 1914, the BNV distanced itself from the *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft*, Germany's main pacifist organisation; the BNV was founded by the visionary of the "United States of Europe," Otto Lehman-Rußbüldt, Ernst Reuter and Lilli Jannasch (Leder 2014, pp. 718f.). Ultimately, after the army had drafted Max Müller, the printer of Landauer's journal *Der Sozialist* (1909–1915), Landauer committed himself more strongly to the BNV.

Following the authorities' prohibition of the BNV on 7 February 1916, many of its former members joined the newly founded *Zentralstelle Völkerrecht* (Central Office for International Law). The *Zentralstelle* advocated a mutually agreeable peace without any impairment to a peoples' right to self-determination: "for peaceful settlement of future international disputes by means of organised mediation or legal decision" in order to "put an end to the old peace-harming arms race politics," as stipulated in the foundational text from 25 August 1916 (Landauer 2011d, p. 207). This foundational text was penned, in accordance with a guideline from 30 July 1916, by Gustav Landauer together with the would-be Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ludwig Quidde (1979, p. 113). Signatories included, among others, Eduard Bernstein, Helene Stöcker, Hellmut von Gerlach, Walter Schücking, Julius Hart, Friedrich Wilhelm Förster, Minna Cauer, Hedwig Dohm and Hans Paasche (Leder 2014, pp. 719f.). The *Zentralstelle* was meant to be spread to all parts of Germany in order to organise rallies and gatherings to enable free and public debate about war and peace. Landauer led the local Groß-Berlin section. Its office was located in a building on Kantstraße 159 in Berlin-Charlottenburg, the future office of the journal *Die Weltbühne. Wochenschrift für Politik, Kunst, Wirtschaft*, which would eventually be edited by the Nobel Peace laureate Carl von Ossietzky.

The journalist Kurt Eisner already called on the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) in February 1915 to distance themselves from the German war politics and their aims. After seceding from the SPD, Eisner joined the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, USPD). Since December 1916, that is, the phase during the First World War, when both sides had rejected peace and mediation offers, Eisner gathered a discussion circle at the inn, *Goldener Anker*, at 116 Schillerstraße in Munich. The circle grew larger every week until finally 150 young people listened to Eisner analysing and interpreting newspaper articles and government documents. A first public demonstration in Munich failed in August 1917, the War Ministry issued a banning order, the police barred entry to the hall, Eisner was prevented from speaking. In the middle of December 1917, Eisner negotiated with USPD representatives about a strike in the war industry (Schmolze 1978, p. 39).

Taking part in Eisner's circle was his later secretary, Felix Fechenbach, as well as the communist-anarchist, Erich Mühsam, with whom the socialist council-democrat Eisner had considerable disagreements. Present at the gatherings in Munich was also the poet Ernst Toller, who held a fiery speech against the war and publicly recited his impressive anti-war poems, as Oskar Maria Graf recounts in his memoir *Prisoners All* (*Wir sind Gefangene. Ein Bekenntnis aus diesem Jahrzehnt*, first published in 1927 in Munich). They all later belonged to the leading figures of the revolution in Munich in November 1918 and the following months resulting in the first Munich Council Republic in early April 1919.

After the declaration of the German peace negotiators at Brest-Litovsk in December 1917, Eisner noticed that the workers yearned for a "peace agreement without annexations and reparations, with the right to self-determination for all peoples" (Eisner cited in Schmolze 1978, p. 45). For this purpose, a general mass strike was called. The representatives of the workers and the parliamentary representatives of the USPD agreed on a compromise: a three-day demonstration strike in January 1918. In order to prevent offensive poison-gas attacks—after the October Revolution in Russia and the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk as well as the Fourteen Points statement by US-President Wilson—Eisner planned, according to the pacifist educator Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster (Schmolze 1978, pp. 43ff.), to organise a strike of the munitions workers:

We must throw ourselves against this raging insanity in the last hour. We finally need freedom and truth. [...] The means though, to conquer the power for a German democracy is the mass strike, which – successful in Germany – then (after the victory over our inner enemy, over this odium generis humani [hatred for the human race]) will automatically take the weapons of war from the hands of the workers of all countries. (Eisner 1996a, pp. 231f.)

The Munich strike of January from 28 January until 3 February 1918, during which workers' councils were formed for the first time, was a continuation of two earlier strikes: the Liebknecht-strike (June 1916) and the April-strike 1917. On 31 January 1918, Kurt Eisner was arrested after giving a speech to the workers of the Bavarian Aircraft Works. In the early hours of 1 February 1918, the agitator Sarah Sonja Lerch, wife of a private lecturer at Munich University was also arrested. Lerch, née Rabinowitz, had already taken part in the first Russian Revolution of 1905 and died on 29 March 1918 at the age of only 31 years at Stadelheim Prison (Schmolze 1978, p. 64). The young writer Ernst Toller also joined Kurt Eisner's strike campaign: "The World War had turned me into an opponent of war. I had already realised that it had been a catastrophe for Europe, a plague on humanity, the crime of our century" (Toller 1934, p. 107). In a pamphlet circulating during the munitions workers' strike, dated 31 January 1918, Eisner related his message to the world:

*Manifesto [Kundgebung]*

The striking workers of Munich, first of all those of the Krupp Works, convey their brotherly compliments to the Belgian, French, English, Russian, Italian, American, Serbian workers. We feel at one with you in the solemn resolve, to put an end to the war of insanity and the insane immediately. We do not want to murder each other. Unite with us to enforce the peace between the peoples, which will secure freedom and happiness for all human beings while creating a new world. We German workers will hold our rulers, those responsible for the World War, accountable. The struggle for peace has begun. (Eisner 1975, pp. 64f.)

On Friday, 1 February 1918, 8000 workers went on strike. On 2 February 1918, 6000 strikers gathered on the Theresienwiese in Munich. Here, the student Ernst Toller spoke, who, in his first successful drama, *Die Wandlung* (1919), depicted his transformation of a

war veteran into a recognized artist and revolutionary. On 3 February 1919, 3000 workers again gathered on the Theresienwiese, forming a protest march through the city, which drew an additional 2000 people. Eisner's friends handed out pamphlets, which repeated the core demand: "Immediate peace offer from the German government to all warring nations on the basis of: no open or veiled annexations, no reparations, observation of the peoples' right to self-determination" as well as "full right of association and freedom of the press and freedom of assembly," a "purely democratic constitution," the "repeal of the state of siege," "demilitarization of all factories and repeal of the Law on the Patriotic Auxiliary Service" (Schmolze 1978, pp. 60f.). Toller was arrested, transferred to a military prison, then released to a regiment in Neu-Ulm, where he established contact with the anarchist Gustav Landauer, who then lived in nearby Krumbach (Schmolze 1978, p. 63), in order to encourage him to become active for the cause of the Socialist revolution. Gustav Landauer's seminal *Call to Socialism (Aufruf zum Sozialismus, 1911)* became the vision of Ernst Toller, who was under the influence of the thought of the sociologist Max Weber from Heidelberg.

The time after the first Russian Revolution of 1905 in particular was a time full of upheaval and hope for social reform, for an end to the monarchy and fundamental changes in society, which in Germany as well as in Russia were extinguished through prohibition and censorship. It thus came as no surprise that Landauer issued a special number of his journal *Der Sozialist* (1909–1915) on the occasion of Tolstoy's death in the year 1910. It is at the end of this very same year that Landauer went on to publish a series of his very own, first ever complete translations of Étienne de La Boétie's *Discourse de la servitude volontaire ou le Contr'un*, written during the mid-sixteenth century. How profoundly Landauer was impressed by the ideas contained in this essay may be recognised from his characterisation of La Boétie as "the youthful preceptor of all revolutionaries" (Landauer 2011a, p. 259). He published this public appreciation on 25 November 1918 in his article "The united German republics and their constitution" (*Die vereinigten Republiken Deutschlands und ihre Verfassung*), at a time when he was still hopeful for a true revolution.

Under the tacit influence of Tolstoy's *Für alle Tage* (Tolstoi 1906, pp. 439–442, 524–534), Landauer had already highlighted the revolutionary ideas of Étienne de La Boétie, friend of the French philosopher Michel de la Montaigne, in his seminal tract *Die Revolution* (1907). Boétie's treatise on voluntary servitude is usually regarded as the first essay in



the history of literature—even though it was Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had written the first essay: *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (1515), an essay against *any* war, which already at that time documented the relationship between humanism and pacifism. In *Die Revolution*, Landauer also mentions the Czech reformer and craftsman Petr Chelčický and his fundamental book *The Net of Faith* (written around 1443), which criticised ecclesiastical representatives and institutionalised religion from a socialist perspective, because they have not improved the lot of the poor.

Eisner and Landauer were guided by the cosmopolitan vision of a confederation of states as a world republic without armies, as Immanuel Kant stipulated in his *Perpetual Peace* of 1795, “in the same year, in which Kant, at the height of the Coalition Wars, countered the Prussian peace of humiliation at Basel with his philosophical sketch for a perpetual peace” (Landauer 1921a, pp. 152f.).

The principle of non-violent non-cooperation, as put forth by La Boétie and Tolstoy, which ultimately can be traced back to Laozi and his Tao Te Ching principle of “non-forcing” (*wu wei*), lies at the very core of Gustav Landauer’s political philosophy. Tolstoy had already written his essay “Non-Acting” (Tolstoy 1904, esp. p. 103) on the *wu wei* principle in Russian in 1893 (first English translation 1895). In 1917, Landauer’s friend Martin Buber had already published *The Teachings of the Tao (Die Lehre von Tao)* and elaborated the non-violent principle of *wu wei* explicitly with respect to the political ruler and his relation to the people (Buber 1917, pp. 87–90; esp. 90–94). Shortly before the end of the First World War, on 14 October 1918, Landauer echoed this tradition when criticising his friend Fritz Mauthner’s *Realpolitik*: “For true politics, the kind of politics, which goes back to Laozi and Buddha and Jesus, is not the art of the possible, but of the ‘impossible’” (Landauer 1994, p. 347). Landauer and Eisner advocated an independent socialism in a council democracy: the only political method to topple a tyrant through actions such as strikes in the armament factories to end colonialist and imperialist war crimes.

Owing to his commitment during and after the January strike in 1918 as well as due to the integrity bestowed upon him through his arrest in October 1918, Kurt Eisner became the representative of the Bavarian November Revolution and the first Prime Minister (*Ministerpräsident*) of Bavaria. His programme was to achieve Bavarian sovereignty from Berlin, in order to follow his federalist vision and to effect a connection between his council-socialist ideas with the parliamentary system. Eisner reached

the height of his authority on 17 November 1918, thanks to his speech delivered at the official celebration of the revolution at the National Theater of Munich. Here, Eisner's *Gesang der Völker* (Chant of the Peoples) became the anthem of the revolution (after the tune of a prayer of thanksgiving after the Dutch War of Independence) about which Landauer's impressively reported in a letter to his daughter Gudula from 24 November 1918 (Landauer 1929, p. 312).

The height of Landauer's authority was the proclamation of the Bavarian national holiday on his birthday, 7 April 1919. Motivated by anti-nationalist and internationalist sentiments, Communists immediately criticised this proclamation (Mühsam 1929, p. 55)—just as the federalist Eisner was later vilified by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* as “Partikularist” (Hitler 2016, p. 1411), because Eisner opposed Berlin's counter-revolutionary and bellicist centralism. After the murder of Kurt Eisner, Landauer, acting as a new representative of the Munich Council Republic, was equally aware of the fact that he could become a prime target of the counter-revolution by the “White Guards,” the *Freikorps* assassins and the Feme murderers. Therefore, he committed himself to the daily tasks as commissioner for people's education (responsible for the domains of education, culture and sciences) since the beginning of the Munich November Revolution, in full awareness of the mortal risk.

The fatal decision of the staunch council-democrat, Kurt Eisner, in December 1918 was his political agreement to the state parliament elections in January 1919 in order to document the democratic character of the November Revolution. This was because he stood for a council-democratic idea that was contrary to the one geared towards the authoritarian Soviet “dictatorship of the proletariat”-model. This motto was first propagated by the Spartacus League and later, in January 1919, continued by its successor, the KPD. Their Bavarian representatives pursued the same goal under the leadership of both Russian-born Max Levien and Eugen Leviné. Gustav Landauer, in contrast, wanted the “abolition of the proletariat” (Landauer 2011a, p. 258), for he despised the “dictatorship” of the same, as the motto from the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Karl Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* of 1875 and the October Revolution of 1917 would have it. The struggle against the bourgeois press had a similarly fatal effect on the continued existence of the Munich Council Republic as did its utilisation of the Spartacist militia as well as the temporary arrest of certain communists. In addition, Ludwig Gandorfer, a friend of Eisner and peasant leader, died

prematurely, which resulted in a lack of representation of the revolutionary fervour among the peasantry, whose reactionary representatives earned the most votes at the state election in January 1919.

The Majority Social Democrat, Johannes Hoffmann, was already minister of culture under the Eisner government and became prime minister, minister of foreign affairs and minister of culture on 17 March 1919, after the Bavarian parliament had been constituted. Against this government, the Central Council of the Bavarian Republic and the Revolutionary Council of Workers proclaimed the Bavarian Council Republic on 7 April 1919, which was welcomed by several other Bavarian cities. In mid-April, Hoffmann organised, together with the so-called White Guards, Prussian and Württemberg *Freikorps*-units, the counter-revolution against the Second Council Republic under Levien and Leviné, whose authority was shattered by the “Munich murder of hostages” of Thule-Society members on 30 April 1919. These dead became the first “blood witnesses,” i.e. martyrs, for the NSDAP. It was only due to the revolutionary Ernst Toller’s humanitarian intervention that the executions discontinued. Recalling this episode in his autobiography, Toller penned a most notable thought: “When would man cease from this endless harrying, torturing, murdering, and martyring of his fellows?” (Toller 1934, p. 199).

From 4 December 1918 until 25 January 1919, Adolf Hitler, together with 15 other soldiers, kept around 1000 French and Russian prisoners of war under guard in a camp lead by a soldiers’ council at the city of Traunstein. On 12 February, Hitler was transferred to the Second Demobilisation Company in Munich and on 15 February, he got himself elected as his regiment’s ombudsman. As such, he worked with the propaganda department of the new Bavarian state government under Kurt Eisner (USPD), required to school his comrades in matters of democracy. Thus, Hitler, together with his regiment took part in a demonstration of the Revolutionary Workers’ Council in Munich. On 26 February, Hitler accompanied Eisner’s funeral procession, who had been murdered five days earlier by right-wing extremist Anton Graf von Arco auf Valley.

On 15 April, Hitler was elected a member of the council of the Auxiliary Battalion of the soldiers’ councils of the Munich Council Republic. After its brutal suppression in early May 1919, Hitler denounced other ombudsmen from the battalion’s council as “the worst and most radical agitators [...] for the Councils’ Republic” (Hitler cited in: Herz and Halfbrodt 1988, pp. 41f.), thus contributing

to their accusation and buying himself the trust of the new authorities. He later withheld his initial cooperation from the socialist soldiers' councils.

In May 1919, Hitler for the first time met Captain Karl Mayr, head of the propaganda department of the General Command of the Reichswehr 4. On recommendation of his superior, Hitler, in the summer 1919 twice enrolled in "anti-Bolshevik propaganda courses" at Munich University for the purpose of "propaganda among the troops." It was here that the German-nationalist, pan-German and antisemitic academics schooled him for the first time, whose influence reached from the DAP all the way to the Nazi-party. Hitler continued his right-wing extremist path, taking on a job as a spy for the Reichswehr in July 1919, tasked with influencing fellow soldiers and gathering intelligence on the DAP. In these circles, Hitler's antisemitism took definitive shape from September 1919 onward. Impressed by the party's chair Anton Drexler, Hitler eventually joined the party himself and got acquainted with his future mentor Dietrich Eckhart, an active member of the Thule-Society and also founding member of the DAP, which, from February 1920 onward called itself NSDAP, adopting the swastika as its emblem.

#### KURT EISNER AND GUSTAV LANDAUER ON THE COUNCILS' REVOLUTION

On the night to 8 November 1918, Kurt Eisner, serving as chair of the Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Council, gave a speech "To the Population of Munich!" Here, at the height of his political authority, Eisner cited the non-violent aspect of his political programme: "Everyone help so that the inevitable transformation will go about swiftly, easily and peacefully. In these times of senseless fierce murder, we abhor all bloodshed. Every human life shall be sacred" (Eisner 1996b, pp. 237f.).

On 6 April 1919, Gustav Landauer, friend and successor of Kurt Eisner, drafted the proclamation of the first Bavarian Councils' Republic. Published in *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* on the following day, Landauer identified the general strike as a symbol of non-violent non-cooperation against capitalism, which generated war as the scourge of humanity:

As a sign of joyous hope for a happy future of all humankind, we hereby declare 7 April a *national holiday*. As a sign of the commencing parting of the execrable age of capitalism, work is suspended on Monday, 7

April 1919, throughout Bavaria, insofar as it is not necessary for the life of working people, about which further regulations will be issued at once. (Landauer 2011c, pp. 317f.)

Already in 1893, Landauer addressed the causes of war, among them, greed for annexations and expansion of capital in the colonies of imperialist states, but also the lack of resistance in society against nationalist governments and states:

But doesn't Mr. [August] Bebel know that only governments wage wars and not peoples? Indeed, as long as the states of today exist, there will be wars, because the peoples put up with it; but does any people have an interest in mangling the other? Only if this people is fanaticized from above and brought up with false, preposterous notions. Only the obsession to dominate human beings and the boastful desire to call a potentially very large territory one's property, to see it lying at one's feet, generates wars. Without domination, no war, this is clear, and only anarchy can put an end to warfare once and for all. (Landauer 1986a, pp. 111f.)

War meant mass murder and collective insanity according to Landauer, as he made clear again in 1895, stressing adherence to "truth" and reason: murdering other human beings can never ever further their own "well-being" (Landauer 1986b, p. 141).

More than twenty years later, in the year 1916, during the First World War, Landauer penned a letter to US-President Wilson after several failed peace offers. He described the relationship between militarism and armament as systematic preparation for war:

The European War has prepared itself and has broken out in 1914, because Europe has imposed on itself from 1870/71 onwards the heinous system of armed peace; of rising armament for war; of years-long detention of almost the entire male population in a rigid body, practicing destruction as vocation and technique; the system of these standing as well as fluent armies in a never-seen-before kind of way. Hermsdorf near Berlin, Christmas 1916. (Landauer 1968, pp. 257f.)

Writing for *Die Weltbühne* in May 1918, Landauer recalled the practical commitment of the Russian count, Leo Tolstoy, for the sake of peasant families and craftsmen threatened by starvation and death, for conscientious objectors in Russia and internationally, and for the

exemplary Doukhobors (spirit wrestlers), who publicly burnt all their weapons in 1895 as a demonstration and global symbol, visible to all humanity, for a new era of non-violence and peace:

He levelled relentless criticism against any politics, which, regardless whether conducted by the hierarchy, by Czarism, by pseudo-democratic oligarchs, by power of the crowds or revolutionary governments of violence; to him, the principles of public life were no different to those in private life. (Landauer 2013, p. 224)

Landauer, thus, followed Tolstoy, whom he called a spirit wrestler for logic, truth, benevolence, gentleness and solidarity. Non-violent non-cooperation also entailed determining the correct relation of means and ends in the revolution, a lesson which Landauer learned not only from Tolstoy but also from “his great predecessor Etienne de la Boétie” (Landauer 1921b, pp. 202f).

In his 1907 programmatic *Die Revolution*, Landauer had already referred to the essay of La Boétie as a “microcosm of the revolution,” after which he went on to extensively paraphrase entire passages such as:

But Etienne de La Boétie has the floor: nothing else is necessary, he says, but the desire and will to be free. It is a voluntary servitude. It almost seems, he says, as if the people despised the precious good of freedom, because it is too easy. “Resolve to serve no more, and you are free. I do not want that you chase away the tyrant or topple him from his throne over; simply do not support him; and you shall see how he like a great colossus, whose pedestal has been pulled away, falls of his own weight and breaks into pieces.” Fire can be extinguished by water; but one should stay clear of the conspiracies to chase away or kill a tyrant, and of those striving for fame and glory, yet only conserve and reproduce tyranny; they abuse the sacred name of freedom. (Landauer 1907, pp. 89f.)

This principle of non-violent non-cooperation was later recommended by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi—whom the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore called Mahatma (“great soul”)—as a means for the national emancipation of his country, India. From 1917 to 1919, he put it into practice in three regional campaigns of non-violent resistance against British colonial rule. The writer Arnold Zweig aptly summarised how the principle found global application:

Then rose the star of Gandhi. He showed that a doctrine of non-violence was possible. It seemed given [to] him to shape human society according to his teachings, in fact upon the basis that Tolstoy and Prince Kropotkin had already laid in Czarist Russia from the old doctrines of Christianity. In Germany [there] were [also] representatives of such convictions. Men like Kurt Eisner and Gustav Landauer, Carl von Ossietzky, Erich Mühsam and Theodor Lessing sought nothing else. Could they fail in Germany when Gandhi succeeded in India? (Zweig 1949, p. 331)

In December 1911, during Gandhi's first successful campaigns in South Africa, Landauer endorsed the principle of non-violent non-cooperation in a Socratic dialogue for adult education. Intended for print under the title *The Abolition of War by the Self-Determination of the People: Questions to the German Workers* (*Die Abschaffung des Krieges durch die Selbstbestimmung des Volkes. Fragen an die deutschen Arbeiter*) as a pamphlet of 100,000 copies (Leder 2014, p. 611), the fictional partners within the pamphlet's text reflect upon the strike as a method:

If, as a result of the war, an international economic crisis and increased unemployment are there, if, added to this, dejection, hunger, sickness, misery, and despair arrive, then there will be no more strength to act and no possibility for intervention [...]

This strike is not like any other [...] If in a State transportation of people and goods is stagnating, if no electricity is being delivered and no coal is being produced, if the cities are without light and the houses without water, then the whole thing does not have to take too long. The governments no longer know what it means when peoples arise and stand up for their self-determination. Then they will learn, and this strike will achieve its end. This end is: to make an impression at home and abroad; and to inspire imitation in all countries. [...]

Let us prepare ourselves so that, if it ever should come to this, we are the first who will honour the truth. Truth has but one honour: that she will become reality. In such very primal things all humanity, all peoples of culture know but a single truth: thou shalt not kill in order to live; thou shalt work to live. Let us take the first steps and after them, the second and so forth, in order, if need be, to have an effect through the last means of labour: You know: one has referred to cannons as the last means [ultima ratio] of kings. Now you know the last means [ultima ratio] of labour: non-working ["Nichtarbeit"]. [...] Let us follow our consciences and our insight [...]. (Landauer 2010, pp. 266ff.)

The editor of *Die Weltbühne* (The World Stage) in 1929, Carl von Ossietzky, consequently applied this principle of “non-working” to make workers realise their massive power over the control of industrial arms production:

No, the refusal to perform military services is not enough. Already in peacetime, we have to take out the nests of hell, where the instruments of war are manufactured. Do you believe, calling for a general strike still makes sense if the danger of war is imminent; the blood-propaganda of the press has set in, rumours are swirling around and the same lie is blasted from all broadcasting stations into millions of ears – ? What should be put into practice is the control of industry by the workers. (Ossietzky 1929, pp. 281f.)

## EPILOGUE

Kurt Eisner, Gustav Landauer, Erich Mühsam, Ernst Toller—four revolutionaries, whose erroneously tried to collaborate both with Majority Social Democrats (MSPD) and authoritarian Spartacus League (since 1919 Communist Party) members receiving their orders from Budapest and Moscow—after the first Congress of the Communist International (“Comintern”) in early March 1919. Why? Because the MSPD used the Freikorps as mercenary armies, which were financed by the arms industry’s anti-Bolshevik fund (*Antibolschewistische Liga*, later *Liga zum Schutze der deutschen Kultur*), to crush the Socialist revolution by military force and assassinate their protagonists, e.g. Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Eisner and Leo Jogiches. Because the heads of the Communists, Max Levien and Eugen Leviné, persistently refused to support the first council democracy of Landauer and Mühsam, calling it a pseudo-Soviet Republic (*Scheinräterepublik*). It was only on 13 April 1919, Palm Sunday Coup (*Palmsonntagsputsch*), when the Republican Protection Troop (*Republikanische Schutztruppe*) led by Alfred Seyffertitz (again, financed by the arms industry’s anti-Bolshevik fund) started their assault on the first council democracy, that the Communist Rudolf Egelhofer (later head of Leviné’s Red Army) stopped the counter-revolution. Gustav Landauer continued to implement his reform programme even during the second (Communist) council democracy, albeit only for the first two days.

If he knew what he was putting on the line when he, following the call of his friend Kurt Eisner, let himself be appointed as Commissioner of



Enlightenment and Public Instruction in the former Bavarian People's Republic and then went on to become a member of the council government, the same that Ernst Toller served on, Erich Mühsam, the Socialists Levien and Leviné? Just as countless other like-minded comrades, Gustav Landauer rejected violence in the very sense, even where she, weapon ready in-hand, put herself into the service of protecting those accomplishments that the revolutionary people had saved from the collapse of German Imperialism. (Zweig 1980, pp. 8f.)

Martin Buber, friend of Gustav Landauer, acutely described what a discussion about the problem of violence as means of revolutionary politics can bring to the fore between different revolutionaries. In recalling a telling episode from his time spent in Munich in the days of February 1919 leading up to the murder of Kurt Eisner, Buber dismissed Max Weber's distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* (ethics of conviction) and *Verantwortungsethik* (ethics of responsibility). Buber accompanied Landauer to a political meeting, in the process of which he observed that Weber's distinction was absurd in the face of revolutionary violence:

About two weeks after Landauer's memorial address on Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg I was with him, and several other revolutionary leaders in a hall of the Diet building in Munich. Landauer had proposed the subject of discussion – it was the terror. But he himself hardly joined in; he appeared dispirited and nearly exhausted – a year before his wife had succumbed to a fatal illness, and now he relived her death in his heart. The discussion was conducted for the most part between me and a Spartacus leader, who later became well known in the second communist revolutionary government in Munich that replaced the first, socialist government of Landauer and his comrades. The man walked with clanking spurs through the room; he had been a German officer in the war. I declined to do what many apparently had expected of me—to talk of the moral problem; but I set forth what I thought about the relation between end and means. I documented my view from historical and contemporary experience. The Spartacus leader did not go into that matter. He, too, sought to document his apology for the terror by examples. “Dzertshinsky” he said, “the head of the Cheka, could sign a hundred death sentences a day, but with an entirely clean soul.” “That is, in fact, just the worst of all,” I answered. “This ‘clean’ soul you do not allow any splashes of blood to fall on! It is not a question of ‘souls’ but of responsibility.” My opponent regarded me with unperturbed superiority. Landauer, who sat next to me, laid his hand on mine. His whole arm trembled. (Buber 1957, p. 119)

Therefore, the core message of La Boétie, Tolstoy, Eisner and Landauer remains this: “An end can only be reached if the means are already coloured by the colour of the end. Never can non-violence be attained through violence” (Landauer 2009: 276). Assassinations, hostage murders, executions and machine gun fire are the prison of any social revolution, as Oskar Maria Graf, writer and friend of Eisner and Landauer, and himself an eyewitness to the Munich Council Republic, confirmed:

I wanted to go to the Parliament House, but the sentry would not let me in. By chance, I met a radical worker, whose acquaintance I had made only recently. I walked with him for a bit and debated.

“This revolution is worse than the monarchy,” I said. He agreed.

“But just give us time, we shall soon be in power ... We need weapons first,” he said.

“What, but you’re a pacifist?!” I asked.

“Yes, yes, that’s true ... But we only want a proletarian struggle of self-defence against the counter-revolution ... a man cannot be a pacifist there,” he retorted.

“Really ... well, well, I always thought pacifism meant the repudiation of all war and all use of force ... So the militarists were actually in the right,” I replied.

He stared at me and did not know what to say next.

“Yes, once the power is in our hands there won’t be any more war,” he said after a while again and asked: “Or what do you think?”

“The general strike! Simply a very radical general strike. The rich and the bourgeoisie have not even begun to feel anything of the revolution yet ... When there is no water, no light, no bread, nothing at all, then that’ll be the end of the counter-revolution ... We need not shoot, just don’t lift a finger,” I answered morosely.

“Yes, yes, that’s quite right, quite right, but nobody will join in,” he said, “that sort of thing depends on everybody joining, otherwise it has no value. The Majority Social Democrats will only sabotage it all again ... So it’s better for us to look around for arms.”

“And with the shooting, will everybody join?” I asked, at once mischievous and sad.

“Oh yes, certainly.”

“Then we all are lost ... the revolution and us ... everything”, I replied and left. (Graf 1948, pp. 363f.)

Erich Mühsam retrospectively characterised the council revolution as “precipitous” (Mühsam 1929, pp. 5 and 61). Ernst Toller in his autobiography

*Eine Jugend in Deutschland* referred to it as a “mistake,” because of the revolution’s imperfect leadership, the break-away of the moderate Socialists, a disorganised administration, increased food scarcity and confusion among the soldiers (Toller 1934, Chapter 11). Gustav Landauer resigned from his post on 16 April 1919 with a letter to the Action Committee (quoted in *ibid.*), in which he explained that his concept of independent Council Socialism awakens all creative energies of the people (i.e. industrial workers, craftsmen, engineers, peasants, scientists, teachers, artists, lawyers) and that this new cosmopolitan vision, solemnly declared on Landauer’s birthday, 7 April 1919, “as a sign of joyous hope for a happy future of all humankind,” has never been shared by the Communists.

To summarise, Gustav Landauer agreed to become politically active in the Socialist revolution because Ernst Toller, the war veteran, anti-war poet and representative of the anti-militarist youth, urged him to do so and because Kurt Eisner asked him to join the Munich November Revolution “to assist in transforming souls” (Landauer 1929, p. 296) through political enlightenment. Both Kurt Eisner and Gustav Landauer have not realised the principle of non-violent non-cooperation (according to Etienne de La Boétie and Leo Tolstoy) with complete success, Ernst Toller’s major endeavour was to minimise bloodshed during the downfall of the revolution, and Erich Mühsam was arrested and unable to prevent the worst which happened in May 1919—one hundred years ago today.

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