

**WORKERS AND WORKERS MOVEMENTS DURING THE FIRST
WORLD WAR**

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ABSTRACT

The level of industrialization that European societies attained in the decades preceding 1914 conditioned to a great extent the kind of war that erupted. It also fated the workers who powered European industry to play an important role in the conflict. What “workers” meant and the role they played varied from country to country and transformed over the course of the war. Everywhere, new social groups entered the workforce and influenced to a greater or lesser extent the character of workers’ movements in the years 1914-1918. The established prewar workers’ movements - the biggest of which were socialist/social democratic and gathered under the organization of the Socialist Second International - faced grave external challenges in the form of state persecution and right-wing nationalism. But they were also increasingly riven by internal strife between warring factions that viewed the war and its meaning in very different ways.

INTRODUCTION

This article introduces several major research issues derived from a survey of important and recent literature on the subject of European workers and workers’ movements in the years 1914-1918. It also presents repositories (mostly archives) that may be of use in exploring these and other related issues. Some particularly useful collections or fonds are listed under the names of archives. An annotated list of resources accompanies each introduction of a research issue. A comprehensive list of chosen repositories and the highlighted records within them is to be found below. Many of the archival resources are drawn from the bibliographies of relevant literature, a selection of which is to be found at the end of the article (preference given to English-language publications when available). Others are drawn from the author’s personal research experience. The focus is thus on Central Europe and particularly on the heavily industrialized areas of the Habsburg Monarchy. Especially welcome additions to this guide would expose more sources in Western Europe, Southern Europe, the Balkans and Russia.

The subject of workers and workers’ movements during the Great War was long riven by political factionalism—a product of the contentious role of Leftist mobilization in modern European history and, more specifically, by the fractious internecine rift between socialism and communism that itself was a product of the war. Cultural history in particular presents promising new approaches to this subject, avoiding the sectarianism of previous generations. Archival sources on workers and workers’ movements are, on the whole, organized in a manner reflecting the socialist and/or communist party landscape of the past century or the administrative bodies that regulated labor and monitored workers’ activism.

Note of the Author

As with all CENDARI Archival Research Guides, users may add material to this document. Users may, for example, consider that a relevant major research issue is missing and choose to add it. In that case, the user ought to ensure that the new research issue is properly framed, contains ample primary source material, and, if necessary, is logically divided into sub-sections. If a user regards a current existing research issue to be in need of significant reframing or revision, this should only be done in consultation with the original author. Alternately, a user may find that relevant/important resources from a library or archive are missing and choose to add them. In all instances, the source material highlighted in this document should have corresponding entries in the Archival Directory AtOM and links should connect this document with entries in that repository. The user should ensure that any additional source material appears in the ‘Resources’ section and, if possible, under a Major Resource Issue.

MAJOR RESEARCH ISSUES

The Changing Labor Force

Early in the conflict, as belligerent countries restructured their economies for the requirements of an unprecedented, industrially powered war, unemployment hit the European working classes. Then, as millions of men employed as wage laborers departed for the front, the labor surplus that had produced unemployment transformed into a labor shortage, which necessitated the entry of women, youth, and unskilled labor into crucial war industries such as munitions and metalworking. Historians have documented these processes—if less assiduously for the south and east of the continent—and research has shifted to examining the cultural ramifications of these restructurings. How did the prewar gender order transform? To what extent did wartime perceptions of social difference displace prewar classes as meaningful categories? What were the effects of these transformations on the ability of belligerent states to prosecute the war effort?

Ego documents of Workers

First-person accounts offer an unparalleled view into the changing perceptions of workers. Several repositories are very valuable in this regard:

[Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien, Vienna](#) (in particular, see the diary of Heinrich Graf and the memoirs of Alexander Hahn, Anton Hanausek, Hans Fuchs, and Karl Schovanez)

[Fondazione Archivio Diaristico Nazionale Onlus, Tuscany](#)

[Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung \(AdsD\), Bonn](#) (see the Nachlässe, which include those of lower-level functionaries too)

Other repositories contain very valuable ego documents:

[Archiv hlavního města Prahy \(Archive of the capital city Prague\), Prague](#)

- [Berger Vojtěch](#) (Vojtěch Berger was a Czech socialist carpenter who lived and worked in Vienna until the First World War, served as a sapper in the Austro-Hungarian Army, became a communist after the war and continued to work in carpentry in Czechoslovakia. He kept a detailed and acerbic diary for most of his adult life.)

[Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Kriegsarchiv, Vienna](#)

- [Armeeoberkommando](#) (Sub-fond Gemeinsames Zentralnachweisbüro des Roten Kreuzes (GZNB) 1914-1918 contains letters and censors' reports.)

[National Archives, Kew](#)

- [War Office: First World War and Army of Occupation War Diaries.](#)

For more ego document resources and a methodological reflection on them, see the [ARG Private Memories of the First World War](#).

Trade union archives and collections

These sources sometime provide a useful broad view on the changing structures of the working class:

[Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung \(AdsD\), Bonn](#)

- [Akten des Bundesvorstandes des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes \(ADGB\)](#)

[British Library of Political and Economic Science, London](#)

- [Webb: Trade Union papers](#)

The “Burgfrieden”: Compliance and Social Policy

Whereas workers' organizations—both economic in the form of trade unions and political in the form (predominantly) of socialist parties—had been in a largely oppositional position vis-à-vis the state before the war, the war years witnessed compliance of the more established organizations with their respective national war efforts. Workers' former enemies among employers and rival parties called for a social truce in order to enlist their strength for the task at hand. The organized workers' movement either saw few alternatives to the so-called [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgfriedenspolitik> [Burgfrieden](#)] (“castle peace”) or, in the eyes of reformist workers' leaders, saw in cooperation an opportunity for winning major social-political concessions from the “class state”. This had some success as a combination of lobbying by conciliatory workers' leaders and the awareness of state administrations of the need to address workers' concerns produced advances in co-determination and social welfare legislation. The extent to which these advances (or concessions) represented new configurations of power—and thus a new epoch in European

statecraft—remains an important research question, particularly in comparative perspective. Another question concerns the motives for entering into, and sustaining, the [Burgfrieden](#). Of the subject nationalities of the central and eastern European multinational empires, and their workers' movements in relation to the imperial war efforts, much work still remains to be done.

Compliant/Regime-friendly Socialist Leaders

The list of such leaders is long and the records of their activities copious and often well-studied. Nonetheless, comparative and transnational queries promise new vistas. Relevant repositories and record groups include:

[Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung \(AdsD\), Bonn](#) (See the many Nachlässe of prominent SPD leaders, including Ebert himself.)

[Service Historique de l'Armee de Terre, Vincennes](#)

- [6N Fondes de personnalités politiques et militaires \(Poincaré, Buat, Clemenceau, Gallieni, Lebrun\)](#)

[Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Vienna](#)

- [Adler-Archiv](#)

[Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Vienna](#)

- [Nachlass Seitz](#) (For the Viennese Social Democratic leader and mayor, Karl Seitz.)

[Národní Archiv \(National Archives\), Prague](#)

- [Šmeral Bohumír, JUDr.](#)

[International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam](#)

- [Eduard Bernstein papers](#)

Institutions of Social Partnership

[Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Archiv der Republik, Vienna](#)

- [Bundesministerium für Soziale Verwaltung, 1917-1940](#)

[Bundesarchiv](#)

- [Reichskommissar für die Übergangswirtschaft](#)

[British Library of Political and Economic Science, London](#)

- [Fabian Society Archives](#)

Radicalization of Workers

While their political and trade-union leaders mostly rallied around the flag in 1914, ordinary workers were often ambivalent. Especially in central Europe, they were faced with worsening privations due to food shortages, dramatic price hikes and draconian labor regulation as the war dragged on. Social conflict was the result in Austria-Hungary, for example. In the final years of the war workers expressed their discontent with huge strike waves, mutinies, demonstrations, and riots. The latter two forms of unrest saw high participation of recently recruited women and youth workers. Workers also increasingly supported the anti-war Left-wing oppositions within their respective socialist movements. In central and eastern Europe, this discontent boiled over into revolutionary movements, which famously succeeded in Russia. Elsewhere, such movements established themselves as a more or less durable oppositional force that destabilized the fragile interwar political order from the beginning. What were the motives, expectations and perspectives of ordinary workers during this turbulent period? How did they make sense of the war and their role in it? How did the balance between **coercion and consent** tip toward the former in so many workers' minds? Such cultural historical questions still loom large for the southern and eastern regions of Europe.

The View of the Authorities

Labor and workers' political activities fell under the purview of a number of official bodies, ranging from military authorities, high-ranking civil authorities (e.g. Ministries of the Interior), and local police forces and gendarmerie. Growing recalcitrance and radicalization among workers was recorded at all levels, each reflecting somewhat different priorities and outlooks. For instance, while military authorities were concerned with maintaining the highest level of fighting readiness, civil authorities often strove to keep industrial productivity high. Here is a sampling of some particularly valuable resources (an array of similar resources can be found below):

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Kriegsarchiv, Vienna

- [Kriegsüberwachungsamt](#)
- [Kriegsministerium und Militärliquidierungsamt](#) (On workers' radicalization, see Abteilung 5 (military intelligence) from 1918 in Hauptreihe—Akten.)

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Vienna

- [Ministerium des Innern, esp. Präsidialreihe 1910-1918, sign. 22, in genere](#) (On workers' radicalization; see also crownland-specific cartons.)

Národní Archiv (National Archives), Prague

- [České místodržitelství Praha - prezídium](#)
- [Policejní ředitelství Praha I - prezídium](#)

Bundesarchiv

- [Reichsministerium des Innern](#)

Archives Nationales, Fontainebleau, Paris, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine

- [Police générale F7](#)

Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz

- [Ministerium des Innern](#)

Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome

- [Ministero dell' Interno, 1814-1986](#)
- [Ministero delle armi e munizioni, 1914-1932](#)

Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford

- [Russian Imperial Secret Police \(Okhrana\), Paris office](#)

Radicals and Revolutionaries

A number of prominent workers' movement activists fought against the war and pursued a much less compliant variant of socialism:

International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam

- [Friedrich Adler papers](#)
- [Clara Zetkin papers](#)

Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, Warsaw

- [Akta Róży Luksemburg](#)

[Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung \(AdsD\)](#), Bonn (See the records of the Independent Socialist Party, Communists, etc.)

University of Manchester Library

- [Ramsay MacDonald Papers](#) (MacDonald vocally opposed the war, even if he was not among the European Zimmerwald Left)

Bundesarchiv

- [Arbeiter und Soldatenräte Berlin](#)

[Государственный архив Российской Федерации \(State Archives of the Russian Federation\)](#), Moscow

- [Совет народных комиссаров РСФСР \(The Council of People's Commissars\)](#)

[Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории \(Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History\)](#), Moscow

- [Политическое бюро ЦК \(Политбюро\) \(The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party\)](#)

RESOURCES

Archival sources (by country and institution)

Austria

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Kriegsarchiv, Vienna

- Armeeoberkommando
- Flugschriften- und Plakatsammlung
- Kriegsüberwachungsamt
- Kriegsministerium und Militärliquidierungsamt
- Generalkommando Wien

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Vienna

- Ministerium des Innern 1848-1918

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Archiv der Landespolizeidirektion, Vienna

- Stimmungsberichte aus der Kriegszeit

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Archiv der Republik, Vienna

- Bundesministerium für Soziale Verwaltung, 1917-1940

Österreichisches Staatsarchiv - Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna

- Kabinettskanzlei

Landesarchiv Niederösterreich, St. Pölten

- NÖ Statthaltereie, Präsidium, Erster Weltkrieg mit unmittelbarer Vor- und Nachkriegszeit

Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Vienna

- Adler-Archiv

Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, Vienna

- Nachlass Seitz

Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte, Universität Wien, Vienna

Czech Republic

Národní Archiv (National Archives), Prague

- České místodržitelství Praha - prezídium
- Policejní ředitelství Praha I - prezídium
- Šmeral Bohumír, JUDr.
- První světová válka - negativy
- České místodržitelství Praha - prezídium - tajné
- Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická - Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická, Praha

Archiv hlavního města Prahy (Archive of the capital city Prague), Prague

- Berger Vojtěch
- Okresní správa politická Karlín
- Magistrát hlavního města Prahy I.

Vojenský historický ústav České Republiky (Military historical institute of the Czech Republic), Prague

- 9. sborové velitelství /9. Korpskommando

Moravský zemský archiv v Brně (Moravian Provincial Archives in Brno), Brno

- Moravské místodržitelství - presidium
- Policejní ředitelství Brno

France

Archives Nationales, Fontainebleau, Paris, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine

- Police générale F7
- Travaux publics F14

Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris, Paris

- Cabinet du Préfet de police (1869-1970)

Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes

- 6N Fondes de personnalités politiques et militaires (Poincaré, Buat, Clemenceau, Gallieni, Lebrun)
- 16N Grand quartier général

Germany

Bundesarchiv

- Arbeiter und Soldatenräte Berlin
- Reichsministerium des Innern
- Reichskanzlei, Alte Reichskanzlei
- Reichskommissar für die Übergangswirtschaft
- Reichstag des deutschen Reiches

Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

- Geheimes Zivilkabinett
- Ministerium des Innern
- Geheimes Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode
- Landtag

Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (AdsD), Bonn

- Akten des Bundesvorstandes des Allgemeinen Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (ADGB)

Great Britain

British Library of Political and Economic Science, London

- Webb: Trade Union papers
- Fabian Society Archives

Labour History Archive, Manchester

- Labour Party Archives

National Archives, Kew

- War Office: First World War and Army of Occupation War Diaries.
- War Cabinet and Cabinet: Minutes
- Supreme War Council: British Secretariat: Papers and Minutes

University of Manchester Library

- Ramsay MacDonald Papers

Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego w Londynie (The Józef Piłsudski Institute), London

Italy

Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome

- Ministero dell' Interno, 1814-1986
- Ministero delle armi e munizioni, 1914-1932

Fondazione Archivio Diaristico Nazionale Onlus, Tuscany

Netherlands

International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam

- Friedrich Adler papers
- Clara Zetkin papers
- Eduard Bernstein papers
- Karl Kautsky papers
- Labour and Socialist International Archives

Poland

Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (The Central Archives of Modern Records), Warsaw

- Akta Róży Luksemburg
- Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy

Russia

Государственный архив Российской Федерации (State Archives of the Russian Federation), Moscow

- Совет народных комиссаров РСФСР (The Council of People's Commissars)

Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), Moscow

- Политическое бюро ЦК (Политбюро) (The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party)

United States

Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford

- Russian Imperial Secret Police (Okhrana), Paris office
- American Relief Administration. European Operation Records

Instytut Józefa Piłsudskiego w Ameryce (The Józef Piłsudski Institute in America), New York

Published sources**Published collections of primary sources**

- A magyar munkás-mozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai, vol. 5 (Budapest, 1956)
- Libuše Otáhalová, ed., Prameny k ohlasu velké říjnové socialistické revoluce a vzniku ČSR. Vol. 1: Souhrnná hlášení presidia pražského místodržitelství o protistátní, protirakouské a protiválečné činnosti v Čechách 1915-1918 (Prague, 1957)
- Rudolf Neck, Arbeiterschaft und Staat im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918 (A. Quellen) Bd. I Der Staat (1. Vom Kriegsbeginn bis zum Prozeß Friedrich Adlers, August 1914-Mai 1917) (Vienna, 1964)
- Rudolf Neck, Arbeiterschaft und Staat im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918 (A. Quellen) Bd. I Der Staat (2. Vom Juni 1917 bis zum Ende der Donaumonarchie im November 1918) (Vienna, 1968)
- Sborník dokumentů k vnitřnímu vývoji v českých zemích za 1. Světové války 1914-1918 (Prague, 1994-1997)

Secondary sources

- Ute Daniel, The War from Within. German Working-Class Women in the First World War (Oxford, New York, 1997)
- Belinda Davis, Home Fires Burning. Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin (Chapel Hill NC, 2000)
- Dick Geary, "Arbeiter," in Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumreich, Irina Renz, eds., Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg. 2. Auflage (Paderborn, 2004)
- Maureen Healy, Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire. Total War and Everyday Life in World War I (Cambridge, 2004)
- Peter Heumos "„Kartoffeln her oder es gibt eine Revolution.“ Hungerkrawalle, Streiks und Massenproteste in den böhmischen Ländern, 1914-1918," in Hans Mommsen, Dušan Kováč, Jiří Malíř, Michaela Marek, (eds.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Beziehungen zwischen Tschechen, Slowaken und Deutschen (Essen, 2001)
- John Horne, Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918 (Oxford, 1991)
- Jürgen Kocka, Facing Total War. German Society 1914-1918 (Göttingen, 1984)
- Rudolf Kučera, Život na příděl. Válečná každodennost a politiky dělnické třídy v českých zemích 1914-1918 (Prague, 2013)
- Richard Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, Arnold Suppan, Innere Front. Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918 (Munich, 1974)
- Giovanna Procacci, "Popular Protest and Labour Conflict in Italy, 1915-18," Social History, No. 14, Vol. 1 (Jan. 1989): 31-58.

Extra Material

Relevant articles in 1914-1918 Online

Thematic Survey Articles

[Labour](#)

Regional Thematic Articles

[Labour \(China\)](#)

[Labour, Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes \(Italy\)](#)

[Labour Movements and Strikes, Social Conflict and Control, Protest and Repression \(France\)](#)

[Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes \(Belgium\)](#)

[Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes \(Latin America\)](#)

[Labour Movements, Trade Unions and Strikes \(Russian Empire\)](#)

[Labour \(Russian Empire\)](#)

Encyclopedic Entries

[Victor Adler](#)

[Otto Bauer](#)

[Ignacy Daszyński](#)

[Eugene Debs](#)

[Friedrich Ebert](#)

[Béla Kun](#)

[Vladimir Il'ich Lenin](#)

[Józef Piłsudski](#)

[Leon Trotsky](#)

Relevant other links

[Online lexicon of Austrian Social Democracy](#)

[Collaborative bibliography of International Society of First World War Studies](#)