

# The Kiel Sailors' Revolt: Fourteen Points Raised by the Soldiers' Council (November 4, 1918)

## Abstract

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In the fall of 1918, the defeat of the German Reich could no longer be denied by the Supreme Army Command (OHL) and the political decision-makers. When the Naval War Command (SKL) nevertheless issued the order to provoke a naval battle against the British navy in October, numerous sailors from the High Seas Fleet mutinied in Wilhelmshaven. Sailors and workers in Kiel showed solidarity and protested their arrest. From November 3, 1918, they attempted to free the prisoners and bring about a ceasefire in what became known as the "Kiel Sailors' Uprising." When the protests turned into violent unrest between the insurgents and the police, the sailors organized themselves into workers' and soldiers' councils.

On November 5, these councils presented their demands to the public with a list of 14 points. The format was a reference to the 14 points formulated by U.S. President Wilson in January 1918 for a European peace order after the First World War. Inspired by the Kiel Sailors' Uprising, councils were formed throughout Germany in the following days, which adopted the "14 points."

## Source

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Comrades!

Yesterday will be forever remembered in German history. For the first time, political power has been placed in the hands of the soldiers.

There is no turning back anymore!

Great tasks lay before us. But we need unity and agreement within the movement in order to fulfill them.

You have appointed a Soldiers' Council, which is working closely with the Workers' Councils.

Follow its instructions and decisions, strive for order and calm so that nothing happens that can be used against us. Also make sure to maintain order in the barracks.

Yesterday, in the late evening hours, the general government, in the presence of Social Democratic Member of Parliament [Gustav] Noske and Undersecretary [Conrad] Haußmann, reached the following decisions:

1. Haußmann accepts our demands and promises the rapid implementation thereof by the government.
2. All military measures aimed against our movement will be stopped at once.
3. Cooperation in bringing the fleet to port.
4. In collaboration with the Workers' Council, the Soldiers' Council will be given the papers of those remaining in prison, in order to decide upon their release, with the exception of those convicted of dishonorable activities.

In order to complete the action committee, colleagues Haase and Ledebour are to be sent for via telegraph.

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The fourteen points raised by the Soldiers' Council and accepted by the Governor [of Kiel, Admiral Souchon] are as follows:

1. The release of all inmates and political prisoners.
2. Complete freedom of speech and the press.
3. The abolition of mail censorship.
4. Appropriate treatment of crews by superiors.
5. Exemption from punishment for comrades returning from ships and to the barracks.
6. The launching of the fleet is to be prevented under all circumstances.
7. Any defensive measures involving bloodshed are to be prevented.
8. The withdrawal of all troops not belonging to the garrison.
9. All measures for the protection of private property will be determined by the Soldiers' Council immediately.
10. Superiors will no longer be recognized outside of duty.
11. Unlimited personal freedom of every man from the end of his tour of duty until the beginning of his next tour of duty.
12. Officers who declare themselves in agreement with the measures of the newly established Soldiers' Council are welcome in our midst. All others have to quit their duty without entitlement to provision.
13. Every member of the Soldiers' Council is to be released from any duty.
14. All measures to be introduced in the future can only be introduced with the consent of the Soldiers' Council.

These demands are orders of the Soldiers' Council and are binding for every military person.

The Soldiers' Council.

Source: "Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung," November 5, 1918; reprinted in Kurt Ahnert, *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Revolution und das Kriegsende in der Zeit vom 1. Oktober bis 30. November 1918 in Leitartikeln, Extrablättern, Telegrammen, Aufrufen und Verordnungen nach den führenden deutschen Zeitungen*. Der Burgverlag: Nürnberg, 1918, pp. 156–57.

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