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# Karl Liebknecht:

THE MAN, HIS WORK,  
AND MESSAGE.



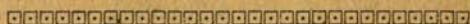
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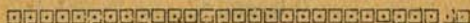
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BY WM. PAUL.

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## Early Life.

Karl Liebknecht was born in 1871. His birth took place in the same year that saw the success of German Imperialism over the equally sordid Chauvinism of France. This year, which beheld the first great triumph of Prussian militarism, thus witnessed the birth of one who was to meet a martyr's death for helping to finally crush capitalist warfare. When Karl Liebknecht was born his father was incarcerated in prison in consequence of his allegiance to International Socialism and his embittered opposition to the Franco-German war. Thus, in passing, we may note the pre-natal influences which operated upon one who, too, was to suffer for his hatred to capitalism and his fidelity to the cause of International Labour.

We are only concerned with Karl Liebknecht in so far as he was an ardent and enthusiastic worker on behalf of Socialism. Having studied economics and law at Leipzig, Berlin, and Wurzburg Universities, he took his doctor's degree in those subjects at the latter place. When but a mere youth he interested himself in the Socialist movement, and made a heroic defence in pleading the case of a comrade prosecuted by the authorities. He was a successful propagandist, and at a very early age took a most active part in organising and educating



the younger members of the working class. Liebknecht, like the S.L.P., believed in the efficacy of educating young workers upon the principles of Socialism and anti-Militarism.\* Karl Liebknecht realised the influence of Socialist instruction upon the brains of young workers. He knew that to capture their minds meant also to capture their future activities for the Socialist movement. In his famous book, "Militarism and Anti-Militarism" (published by the S.L. Press; 1s. paper edition), he says:—

Anti-militarist propaganda must be cast over the whole nation like a wide net. The proletarian youth must be systematically imbued with class consciousness and with hatred of militarism. This kind of agitation would warm the hearts and rouse the youthful enthusiasm of the young proletarians. The proletarian youth belongs to Social Democracy and to Social Democratic anti-militarism. It must, and will, be won over if everyone does his duty. **He who has the youth has the army.**

When he was thirty years of age, Liebknecht was elected to the Berlin Common Council. Four years later (1906) he delivered a lecture against militarism at the Mannheim Conference of the German Young Socialist organisations. The material of that lecture was worked up and elaborated, and finally made its appearance in book form in 1907. Thus appeared his most important work, "Militarism and Anti-Militarism," which was afterwards translated into English and published by the Socialist Labour Press. This book is undoubtedly the greatest pre-war criticism of militarism. It was Liebknecht's belief that the International Socialist movement had not paid sufficient attention to the question of imperialism and that it had failed to define a coherent policy, along the line of class war action, to prevent a world war. Within Germany the superficial leaders of the Socialist movement tried to assure Liebknecht that his fears regarding their inability to rouse the workers in case of a world war were groundless.

Nevertheless, Liebknecht, believing it to be his duty, pub-

\* The two foremost propagandists, in the young peoples' revolutionary movement in this country, are two S.L.P.ers—Comrades Tom Anderson and James Stewart. The former was the most energetic member of the S.L.P. Socialist School, which published "The Revolution," which was suppressed; he is now equally enthusiastic in the Proletarian School, which circulates the "Red Dawn." The latter published and edited the "Young Rebel," which was also suppressed. J. Stewart was imprisoned in 1918 for writing an attack upon Conscription in his paper.

lished his book. He was arrested and his book confiscated. In October of the same year he was tried at Leipzig. The charge was high treason. The trial, which lasted three days, was one of the most important legal cases ever heard in Germany. We can do no better than quote the words of the late Alexander Sirnis (the translator of Liebknecht's book into English), who graphically described the famous trial:—

The proceedings were begun by the presiding judge in his red robe (the fourteen judges who sat with him were also in red robes), who read the following preliminary indictment, drawn up on 9th August, 1907:

“ By order of the Imperial State Attorney, in accordance with paragraph 138 of the law concerning the judicial procedure of the Imperial Courts, the main proceedings are opened before the united Second and Third Criminal Chamber of the Imperial Courts, against Dr. Karl Paul August Friedrich Liebknecht, lawyer, of Berlin, who is suspected of having set on foot a treasonable undertaking in the years 1906-7 within the country—that of effecting a change in the constitution of the German Empire by violence, viz., abolition of the standing army by means of the military strike, if needs be conjointly with the incitement of troops to take part in the revolution, by writing the work ‘ Militarism and Anti-Militarism,’ and causing it to be printed and disseminated, in which he advocated the organisation of special anti-militarist propaganda, which was to extend throughout the whole Empire, and conjointly with it the setting up of a Central Committee for conducting and controlling same, and making use of the Social Democratic Young People's organisations for the purpose of organically disintegrating and demoralising the militant spirit, the necessary sequence of which would be—in the case of an unpopular war and in exceptional cases even to-day, such as in the case of a war between France and Germany or in the case of Germany's intervention in Russia—a military strike, and the eventual incitement of troops to take part in the revolution; that is to say, he not only pointed out the ways and means which appear to be destined and suited to further the aforesaid treasonable undertaking and to ensure its success, but he also demanded the speedy application of these methods. (Crime against paragraph 86 of the Criminal Code, in connection with paragraph 81, No. 2, paragraph 82 of the Criminal Code).

“ The accused is found guilty of having set on foot a treasonable undertaking, and is condemned to incarceration in a fortress for eighteen months. The costs of the prosecution are to be paid by the accused.

“ All copies of the work ‘ Militarism and Anti-Militarism,’ which



has been put under the ban, in the possession of the author, printer, publisher, wholesale booksellers and retail booksellers, as well as all publicly exposed copies of this work, or those offered for sale, as well as the plates and formes for their production, are to be destroyed."

In this trial Liebknecht was defended by a number of able lawyers. He completely smashed the argument of the prosecuting counsel by quoting that person's books against himself. His defence was as bold as it was thrilling. So much interest was manifested in the case throughout Germany that even the trembling Kaiser, so it is said, was connected to the court by a secret wire. Shortly afterwards the workers of Berlin elected the imprisoned champion of Socialist anti-militarism to represent them in the Prussian Landtag. In 1912 he was returned for the Kaiser's constituency of Potsdam to represent revolutionary Socialism in the Reichstag. This victory of Liebknecht's in the political field coincided with his systematic investigations into the roots of imperialism. His revelations astounded Germany. He proved that munition and armament industries were internationally related. He demonstrated that those industries made arms for any nation which was prepared to yield them good profit. He proved that the jingo press was dominated by the armament companies, and that these firms even provoked "scares" in foreign countries in order to obtain orders, and incidentally profits, from other nations. Liebknecht showed that German munition firms had capital invested in British armament companies and that, on the other hand, there was the closest financial relationship existing between British patriots and German jingoes. These exposures were fully vindicated during the recent war when Austrian firms, **controlled by British capital**, launched submarines to attack British ships and drown British seamen. When Liebknecht dragged aside the veil of patriotism which hid international imperialism and showed it in all its hideous reality, he struck terror into the hearts of the world's junkers. He was unable, however, to arouse the Socialist movement to a realisation of its international responsibilities regarding the imminence of war and the organised means to stop it.

The curse of the Socialist movement has ever been its readiness to pass resolutions without devising and organising methods to enforce them. It has been content to dream that **words** can do the work of **actions**. There was no intelligent foresight brought to bear upon the importance of building up some kind of organised revolutionary resistance to the projected war of the internationalist imperialists. In addition to Lieb-



knecht's revelations regarding the possibility of a world war, there was the admission made by the German Socialist Democratic Party when it passed the famous resolution on imperialism at its 1912 Conference, held at Chemnitz. In the same year the International Socialist Congress at Basle passed a brave resolution which showed how capitalism, in its imperialistic stage, automatically provokes war. "These words," says Lenin, "were forgotten by the Socialists when the expected war burst forth in all its world wrath in 1914."

### **Liebknecht and the War.**

There is probably nothing so pitiful in the history of the Labour movement than to read the bombastic statements made by the German Social Democratic Party a few days prior to the war, on its platform and in its press. The bold "talk" about mobilising the proletariat against the war were only mere words in the absence of a well-balanced industrial organisation to enforce these words. If the Socialists in Germany, as elsewhere, had no organised plans to stop the war, it soon became apparent that **the ruling class had organised its forces** to stampede the workers into the war. By a series of lying statements, backed up by the press of the country, the German Statesmen speedily demoralised the influence of the German Social Democratic Party over the masses. The Trade Unions in Germany were dominated by reactionaries such as Carl Legien, who was as jingoistic as our own Messrs. Henderson and Thomas. We now know that there were thousands of German workers ready to make any sacrifice to stop the war. But these workers were deserted by their Parliamentary leaders and betrayed by their Trade Union officials. In such a crisis, when the country was turned into a vast military workshop and when the State stood over everyone, ready to strike down any rebel, it was impossible to improvise or spontaneously create an effective revolutionary anti-militarist organisation. Nevertheless, there was a small band of determined anti-militarists, who at once commenced an heroic agitation against the war. This band was headed by Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin, and Rosa Luxemburg. Of these four Liebknecht was the only one who was a member of the Reichstag.

Within a few days of the commencement of the war, the German Socialists had to decide their attitude towards the war credits. The Social Democratic Group, representing the Reichstag members, decided by seventy-eight votes to fourteen to vote in favour of the war credits. Liebknecht and three other members repudiated the idea that the workers had a Fatherland

to defend. They argued that the International revolutionary movement was the only Fatherland which the workers should fight for and defend. Although there were fourteen votes cast against supporting the war credits, it was argued that the minority should vote with the majority. The reason for this was due to an old custom in the Social Democratic Group that its members should always act unitedly in the Reichstag. Liebknecht reluctantly accepted the discipline of the Party and voted for the war credits. He had no sooner voted than he rebelled against the discipline of a party which made men act against their principles. He thus denounced his own action, and afterwards became his own unsparing critic. He speedily threw himself into the fight against the war, and found himself continually in opposition to the Social Democratic Party which was seeking to show that there were no divisions in its ranks over the war policy. Liebknecht at once wrote to the "Burger Zeitung," and showed that there were divisions in the party regarding its official attitude towards the war. On every occasion afterwards Liebknecht voted against the war credits, and declared that neither a man nor a penny would he subscribe for such a war.

While the Nationalist-Socialists were helping the Government to solve several difficult industrial problems which arose in connection with the war, while the Trade Union leaders, as in Britain, were shackling their members so that they could neither rebel nor strike, Rosa Luxembour, Clara Zetkin, Mehring and Liebknecht started a revolutionary journal in opposition to the war, entitled "The International." This paper was suppressed by the Government. The dauntless work accomplished on behalf of revolutionary Socialism by Luxembour, Zetkin and Mehring cannot be ignored. Rosa Luxembour and Clara Zetkin were both imprisoned for their agitation. But Liebknecht's revolutionary activity was most conspicuous because he conducted a virulent campaign in the Reichstag and Landtag against the very statesmen who plunged Germany into the war. He was not one who sneered at political action. He said that **the political struggle is nothing more or less than the class struggle in its most concentrated form.** To him, of course, revolutionary political action did not mean being a human automaton servilely voting in Parliament or the Reichstag, according to the instructions of a party caucus. The political struggle, to him, meant waging the class war outside and inside the political chamber. Wherever there was an opportunity of denouncing capitalism, there must the revolutionary Socialist



plant himself. Every weapon must be used and every avenue of social activity utilised. Liebknecht carried on his revolutionary agitation on the floor of the Reichstag. He not merely made speeches, he not only demonstrated there, he even utilised the opportunities afforded him as a member of the Reichstag to ask questions and demand answers from the servants of the Prussian State. We have already seen how earnestly he worked in the Young Workers' Socialist League. He carried on a literature campaign against imperialism during the war—at a time when it was impossible to print leaflets and pamphlets in the ordinary way. These leaflets and pamphlets, which had to be secretly printed, and which took the form of typewritten copies, had also to be secretly distributed. The famous Spartacus letters first appeared in this way. Liebknecht also set out to reach the industrial workers, and sought to organise them in the factories, mines, railroads, etc. He carried on an active agitation among the soldiers. He saw the need for stimulating the enthusiasm of the women of the working class and of directing their activities into revolutionary channels. And when the time came, and the conditions demanded it, Liebknecht bravely carried the class war into the streets and organised the workers to carry on the struggle along the lines of revolutionary mass action. He was not thus a lopsided revolutionary who feared to enter the national assembly of capitalism, nor was he a critic who giped at industrial action. His speeches in the Reichstag against the imperialists were dubbed seditious, and might have meant his imprisonment. This is what Lenin calls **Revolutionary Parliamentarism**. And Lenin also adds (see "Downfall of Second International"; price 1s., S.L. Press):

If there is no other signal for transmitting to the working masses of Germany and of France the revolutionary frame of mind and the idea of the need for revolutionary action, the arrest of a deputy for a bold speech would have played a useful part as a battle-cry addressed to the proletarians of different countries to unite for carrying on revolutionary work.

All that Liebknecht insisted upon in his revolutionary work was that he should not be hampered by opportunists.

### **War Speeches in the Reichstag and Assembly.**

When the second War Session of the Reichstag took place (December 2, 1914) Liebknecht, who refused to accept the discipline of the Social Democratic Group, voted against the war credits and handed a statement to the President of the Reich-

stag to read to show why Socialists should oppose the war. Although the statement was neither read in the Reichstag nor printed in the press, it was distributed throughout Germany as a pamphlet, and was afterwards published in Switzerland. For his attitude in voting against the war credits, Liebknecht was censured by the Social Democratic Group. He, however, replied to this in a spirited letter which showed that he at least had remained true to the international principles of Socialism. A few days later he again incurred the wrath of his colleagues by sending a New-Year's greeting to the English working class. This message was addressed to the I.L.P., which has neither been able to emulate the revolutionary anti-militarism nor the virile class-war tactics advocated by Liebknecht. On March 2 Liebknecht also spoke in the Prussian Assembly at its war meeting. In this speech, in criticising the ruling class for its murderous neglect of the working class, he said:

The class struggle alone is the salvation of the proletariat, and we hope that we will carry on very soon the class struggle in open international intercourse with the proletariat of all countries, even with those with whom we are at war. In this international struggle rests not only hope for the democratisation, for the political and economic emancipation, of the working class, but also the one hope for the mass of the people concerned even during the war. . . .

Away with the hypocrisy of the civil truce. Forward to the class struggle! Forward to the international class struggle for the emancipation of the working class and against the war.

—(Quoted from "The Future Belongs to the People," by K. Liebknecht. 7s. nett. The MacMillan Company, New York.)

In the same speech Liebknecht made a sneering reference to the war aims of German finance by saying:

Gentlemen, the mine fields of Briey and Longwy, the mine fields of West Poland, the colonies (which promise important profits), and some other nice things, are really not bad investments for German capital.

The reference to the minefields of Briey and Longwy must have enraged the financiers present in the Prussian Assembly. Because it was just at that time that a secret petition—drawn up by six large associations in which the interests of the iron-masters of the Rhenish-Westphalian country were well represented, demanded the French iron districts of Briey and Longwy—had been presented by them to the Government. These minefields were defended by the Verdun fortress. We see, thus, how the great offences and defences at Verdun were merely



moves determined by the economic interests of financial groups in France and Germany. There is much more behind Liebknecht's taunt regarding the minefields of Briey and Longwy than meets the eye. It is well known that there was some communication between the French and German Governments in reference to that district on the eve of the war. Many people who have studied military tactics are not at all satisfied regarding the tactics pursued by the Allied armies in this region. And a few months ago a French Socialist in the House of Deputies made a startling statement against the French Government in reference to their military conduct regarding the Briey and Longwy minefields. Some day, no doubt, the full sordid story will be told.

A few days after his defiant oration in the Prussian Assembly, Liebknecht made another brave speech, this time on behalf of Rosa Luxembourg, who had been imprisoned. And on March 20, 1915, Liebknecht, for the second time, cast his vote in the Reichstag against the war credits. On this occasion Otto Rühle voted with him. It was at this session that Georg Ledebour delivered a telling speech against the war, which was replied to and criticised by the now notorious Scheidemann, who spoke on behalf of the Socialist jingoes.

The revolutionary activity of Liebknecht outside and inside the national political chambers was causing the Government a great deal of trouble, so he was called to the army. This did not worry him very much, because it simply changed the scene of his revolutionary activities. Even though in the army, he still had the right to speak in the Reichstag and Prussian Assembly. He never missed an opportunity in either of these Chambers to scathingly attack the capitalist class and the tame Socialists who repudiated the class war. So successful was his campaign of questions in the Reichstag that he was expelled from the Social Democrat Party for having caused the Government great trouble, for having disobeyed the instructions of the Party, and for having refused to accept its discipline. But while the moderate, weak-kneed section of the Social Democratic Party had expelled Liebknecht, he was then the centre of a band of determined revolutionary communists whose numbers rapidly grew in the same measure that the half-baked Socialist elements moved to the Right wing towards the middle class. We may notice a similar tendency throughout every capitalist country. In Russia the masses moved away from the middle-class representative — Kerensky — and rapidly acclaimed the Bolsheviks. In Germany to-day the masses are deserting

Scheidemann and Ebert, and travelling in the direction of the Spartacists. The same thing is noticeable in France, Spain, Italy and America. And in Britain the transition is decidedly towards the S.L.P. This does not mean that organisations like the I.L.P. are decreasing in membership, it rather means that while the bona fide Socialist elements in that body are leaving, **their places are taken with large detachments of middle-class sentimentalists, who see in the I.L.P. a bitter antagonist against revolutionary agitation and class war action, who see in it the resurrected ghost of the Liberal Party.** The policy of the I.L.P. in its attempt to attract non-revolutionary middle-class elements was never better revealed than when its leader, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, said, at the Party Conference, that—**"The first Soviet ever known was the Soviet of the British House of Lords"**! ("Daily Herald," 23/4/19.) This nonsensical and treacherous statement was made when, in addition to Russia, the Limerick and Hungarian workers were fighting to establish their Soviets.

On March 3, 1916, Liebknecht delivered a long and impassioned speech on capitalistic justice in the Prussian Assembly. In this attack upon capitalism, Liebknecht proved himself to be a thorough-going student of Marxian Socialist science. He not only denounced the hypocrisy of capitalist justice, but showed how revolutionaries like Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin, and Rosa Luxembourg had been persecuted for attempting to publish the "International."

He proved that German soldiers had been shot down by cannons sold by Krupps to Belgium. He demonstrated that "crime is a constitutional disease of bourgeois society." He analysed the roots of modern warfare, and proved that imperialism flourishes through loosening the social impulses of the masses and by perverting their minds with a false notion of education. He was frequently insulted and interrupted. But he insisted upon addressing the Chamber. During one of the scenes he cried out:

If defending the peace idea, if the proclamation of the international proletariat class struggle against war, is treason, **then it is an honour to be reproached as a traitor.**

Two weeks later we find Liebknecht again hurling his barbed arguments at the sophistries of capitalism. This time (March 16, 1916) he challenged the whole bourgeois system of education. This speech is a splendid vindication of the S.L.P. criticism of modern education. Liebknecht, in the following



passage, also clinches the Marxian contention regarding the **class bias** of modern education, and thus corroborates the position of the Plebs League in its plea for independent working class education. He said, among other things:—

The educational system cannot be separated from social conditions. . . . Education in the capitalistic order is not an aim in itself. . . . The higher schools serve as preparatory institutes for higher official positions, whereas the primary schools teach the fundamentals which serve to make tools for capitalistic society. . . . But more than ever before the primary school is used to-day in order to make firm the position of the ruling classes, **to capture the souls of the young proletariat for the ruling class, for militarism.** . . . By these amendments you try to give an impression of wishing to throw open the road to education to the people also, **but that is because capitalism requires educated soldiers.**

Instruction in history has been for a long time systematically used to inculcate certain political sentiments in the pupils. The higher schools especially have been for years places to exercise this practice, and in these higher schools hatred against England was systematically developed, which seed has now sprouted in such glorious fashion. . . . The world's history has been **ad usum delphim** turned into a political fiction. Not political truth, not objective knowledge, but the opposite, are the main features of what you teach. In German teaching the soul of youth should have a chance to develop freely. But what are the themes put to our children? They are set to write patriotic editorials; and certain phases of war patriotism are taught them. In that way we sow the seeds of falsehood.—(Quoted from "The Future Belongs to the People.")

In this speech Liebknecht also showed how religion is used by the ruling class as an educational force to mould the minds of the workers' children against other nations and races, and to accept their poverty without protest. The speaker was incessantly interrupted during this daring assault upon the false educational principles enforced under capitalism. But Liebknecht continued undismayed, and said, in reply to the President, who contended that he was wandering from the point under discussion:

I speak about the motion, about the chance of those who are [not] well off to attend high schools and colleges. This spiritual liberation can also be the deed of the working class, and it is our duty to say to the working class on this occasion: **To action! Those in the trenches, as well as those here at home, should put down**

**their arms and turn against the common enemy**, which takes from them light and air. ("The Future Belongs to the People.")

Although his speech on education ended in an uproar in the Chamber, Liebknecht once again returned to the attack, and in the Reichstag on March 22, 1916, he protested against the submarine warfare. The very next day he was threatened with personal violence in the Reichstag for making a criticism during a discussion on the Budget. On April 7 he made a further attack upon the use of submarines. In this speech he also severely criticised the Government for attempting to get Irish prisoners to fight against England. During this speech he was continually interrupted and called a "traitor." Notwithstanding the blackguardly attacks made upon him, even by the tame Socialists, Liebknecht on the following day made a terrific onslaught upon the financiers in the Reichstag on the subject of the fourth German war loan, which, he contended, was a gigantic swindle. For this speech he was well equipped with facts and figures. He held copious notes in his hand in order to expose German war finance. As he proceeded to prove his case, the Chamber broke out into a most embittered demonstration against him.

Amidst cries of "Treason" and "Traitor" he attempted to speak, when suddenly his notes were stolen and scattered along the floor. When Liebknecht stepped down from the tribune to collect his papers and continue his indictment of the financiers, he was surrounded by a mob of frenzied members, who would have assaulted him had he not been rescued by several Independent Socialists. This historic meeting of the Reichstag broke up in disorder.

### **Arrest and Imprisonment.**

Despite the taunts and jeers hurled at him, Liebknecht continued his revolutionary agitation. On May Day, 1916, he issued a manifesto, which contained the following pregnant passages:

Let thousands of voices shout "Down with the shameless extermination of nations! Down with those responsible for these crimes!" Our enemy is not the English, French, nor Russian people, but the great German landed proprietors, the German capitalists and their executive committee.

Forward! Let us fight the Government; let us fight these mortal enemies of all freedom. Let us fight for everything which means the future triumph of the working classes, the future of



humanity and civilisation. (Quoted from "The Future Belongs to the People.")

On this May Day, the second one since the war, Liebknecht organised a huge demonstration in Berlin. Full well he knew the great risk he was taking in defying the Government. As a soldier, it was illegal for him to appear in public in civilian dress. Before thousands of Berlin workers he delivered a bold, uncompromising, revolutionary speech. But he was not allowed to finish. In the middle of an exhortation calling upon the workers to end the war, he was suddenly pulled off the platform, arrested, and thrown into prison.

### **Liebknecht's Revolutionary Policy.**

Before being confined to prison, Liebknecht addressed two letters to the Royal court-martial, in which he set out his case as follows:

The present war is not a war for the defence of national integrity, nor for the liberation of down-trodden people, nor for the benefit of the masses. From the point of view of the proletariat, it only signifies the greatest possible concentration and intensification of political oppression, of economic exploitation, and of the wholesale military slaughter of the working class for the benefit of capitalism and absolutism.

To this answer the working class of all countries can give but one answer: A harder struggle, the international class struggle, against the capitalist governments and the ruling classes of all countries for the abolition of oppression and exploitation, for the termination of the war by a peace in the Socialist spirit. In this class-struggle is included the defence of everything that a Socialist whose Fatherland is the International has to defend.

The cry, "Down with the war!" is meant to express that I thoroughly condemn and oppose the present war because of its historical essence, because of its general social causes and the particular form of its origin, because of its methods and its aims; and the cry is also meant to express that it is the duty of every representative of proletarian interests to take part in the international class struggle for its termination. ("Militarism and Anti-Militarism," S.L. Press.)

Many jingoism in Britain seemed to derive some satisfaction from Liebknecht's heroic onslaught upon the German Government. They seemed to imagine that because he attacked the German State, and its part in the war, that he was attacking German Imperialism only. But Liebknecht was essentially an

Internationalist. He did not fail to make that perfectly clear in his statement at the Royal court martial which sentenced him. His words were:

If the German Socialists, for instance, were to combat the English Government and the English Socialists the German Government it would be a farce or something worse. He who does not attack the enemy, Imperialism, represented by those who stand opposed to him face to face, but attacks those from whom he is far away, and who are not within his shooting range, and that even with the help and approbation of his own Government (i.e., those representatives of Imperialism who alone are directly opposed to him) is no Socialist, but a miserable hack of the ruling class. Such a policy is not class war, but its opposite—inciting to war.

When Liebknecht was brought up before the court martial he made a spirited effort to have a public trial. Even here we find him seeking to use his trial as a means of revolutionary propaganda. The trial was, however, conducted secretly. Liebknecht was sentenced to thirty months' penal servitude. An unsuccessful attempt was made in the Reichstag, by the Independent Socialists, to secure his release. When the result of the trial was announced large demonstrations of workers took place in Berlin and other parts of Germany. In many of these demonstrations the workers came into conflict with the police. In the large industrial centres several big strikes took place against Liebknecht's sentence. Although Liebknecht was imprisoned, he sought to keep the minds of the workers attracted to the need of revolutionary agitation by appealing against his sentence in the hope of either squashing the verdict or of having the case reheard. The imprisonment of Liebknecht had a far-reaching effect upon the German masses. From this date they swerved very rapidly towards a policy which had for its determined aim the stopping of the war and the overthrow of the Kaiser. Within the masses there was now an influential Spartacist element which was boldly making plans and creating organised machinery to establish the Socialist Republic. The Spartacists were to be soon tested. And the test of a true revolutionary party is whether its policy is one of revolutionary talk, or one of courageous revolutionary **action**.

The policy outlined and put into operation by Liebknecht at the beginning of the war was condemned, as we have seen, by the largest section of the German Socialist movement. But the heroism of Liebknecht, as compared with the opportunism of Ebert and Scheidemann, who led the middle-class elements in the Socialist Party, gradually gained vigorous and dauntless



adherents. When he faced the Reichstag and challenged the hatred of the financiers and their lickspittle supporters in the Social Democratic Party by courageously voting alone against the war credits, there were many who sneered at Liebknecht's "one-man" party. Mere numbers, however, neither determine the correctness nor the strength of revolutionary principles. **The only test of revolutionary principles is the putting into operation of a certain line of organised action in keeping with the social needs of the masses.** No less a man than James Connolly, one of the founders of the S.L.P., correctly summed up the relation of numbers, as compared with revolutionary principles, when he stated that the real strength of a revolutionary party lay in **foreseeing social tendencies, organising, and bravely acting accordingly.** This is due to the historical fact that revolutionary movements do not achieve success because of the number of adherents, but rather because social conditions work in their favour. Given the correct policy, social crises will drive the masses in that direction. But even here history does not move mechanically. Revolutions are not produced automatically. It is just at this point where revolutionary agitation, initiative, and courageous audacity plays its part. It is here where the social forces and the daring, conscious, human element converge, and by their joint force destroy the old and create the new. It was the recognition of this that made Liebknecht strong, even when standing alone amidst taunts, insults, and jeers. It was the recognition of this law that made Lenin powerful while working away silently and quietly in Switzerland during the many years that preceded the triumph of the Russian Soviet Republic. And it is the recognition of this historical truism which makes the S.L.P. virile; it refuses to sacrifice its policy to make members; it declines to ally itself with a bastard Labour Party—as the I.L.P. and the B.S.P. have done—in order to borrow a false strength from political charlatans like A. Henderson and J. H. Thomas.

Events proved Liebknecht to be correct. Every day in its passing produced some crisis or other which vindicated his policy. The Governmental-Socialists, like Scheidemann and Ebert, who criticised Liebknecht's attitude at the beginning of the war, together with those who chided him upon the fewness of his supporters, found their own rank and file slipping away and joining the more extreme Independent Social Democratic Party, which rapidly passed from being a minority section to a powerful majority. While Liebknecht and the Spartacists were more extreme than the Independent party, nevertheless, the

growth and strength of the Independents showed how the German workers were rapidly moving towards a more revolutionary policy. The Governmental-Socialists, led by the opportunists like Scheidemann and Ebert, approached ever more closely to the policy of the Government and the financiers. The day came when Scheidemann was given a post in the Government—the hall-mark which stamps the betrayal of the working class. The day came when even the Kaiser invited those safe Socialists to meet him. The world knows what a weakness the German Monarch had for meeting and dining with tame Labour men! But just as Scheidemann and Ebert and their party were losing supporters among the masses, so they were being "strengthened" from a new source—from the middle class, and the financiers, who saw in these safe "Labour leaders" ambitious tools who might be used at a critical moment against the revolutionary working class.

The overthrow of Tsardom had a far-reaching effect upon the German masses. The triumph of Lenin's policy and the success of the Russian Soviet Republic thrilled them. Throughout the peace negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the German Imperialists there were genuine rumblings of revolt in the ranks of the working class in favour of the Russian Republic. These threatened uprisings of German Labour brought the master class more and more in contact with the Governmental-Socialists, headed by the two arch opportunists. Not even the marvellous military success of the German armies in 1918 sufficed to retard the revolutionary agitation going on throughout the industrial centres of Prussia. And when the hurricane burst forth and the workers of Germany stopped the war; when the masses swept forward towards their emancipation, the financiers and middle class rallied their forces for one brief moment to see how best they could save capitalism. They quickly decided upon their policy. **They handed over control to Scheidemann and Ebert!**

Meanwhile the Kaiser fled. And Liebknecht, who had stood alone at the beginning of the war and cast his solitary vote against it in the Reichstag, was now escorted from his prison cell and joyously conducted to an open carriage covered with flowers. There he delivered a speech. This speech marked the end of his war campaign, but it marked the beginning of a new campaign—a campaign directed against the Socialist middle-class Government of Scheidemann and Ebert, which now stood in the way of the workers' Industrial Republic. The revolution which provoked the overthrow of the Kaiser, like the one that



deposed the Tsar, was a mere **political** revolution. Scheidemann and Ebert in the German political revolution are playing the same part as Kerensky played in Russia—the part of staying off the **Social Revolution**. Liebknecht plunged into the new agitation to achieve the **Social Revolution!** The daring Spartacists gained strength every day. The bold energy of Liebknecht and of Rosa Luxembourg showed the capitalists the danger of the **political** revolution, which had only changed **political relations**, becoming a **social** revolution, which would fundamentally change **social relations**. That is why they murdered Liebknecht and the dauntless “Red Rosa.”

### Liebknecht and Lenin.

Many people have been impressed with the courageous and determined will of Liebknecht. They have also noticed a close resemblance between his tactics and those formulated by Lenin. There is indeed a close relation in their revolutionary tactics—just as there is an underlying relation, despite slight modifications due to local peculiarities, between the tactics adopted by all **bona fide** revolutionary organisations who adhere to the Third International. In Britain, where revolutionary **phrases** generally take the place of revolutionary **activity**, certain parties seek to cover their cowardice of action—just as they cover their revolutionary principles by their affiliation to Henderson’s Labour Party—by “reasoning” that conditions are so much different in this country as compared with Germany and Russia. The **essence** of Lenin’s tactics, and Liebknecht’s policy, are applicable to every one of the modern capitalist-imperialist nations. That **essence** consists in adopting every means, of an uncompromising nature, to fight capitalism; to work up a revolutionary ferment in the minds of the workers; and to establish the industrial domination of the proletariat. That **essence** also implies the scrapping of any tactic, or organisation, which impedes revolutionary activity and the speedy transition to new tactics, new methods, and new organisations. Lenin, in a brilliant passage, compares Labour’s army to a modern army on the battlefield, and he says:—

We must set up a revolutionary organisation, for both the changed historical situation and the era of revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat demand it. But such a transition is possible only **over the heads** of the old leaders who strangled revolutionary energy; **over the head** of the old party, and along the path of its destruction. . . .

Take the army of to-day. It is a model of good organisation.

And this organisation is good solely because it is flexible and at the same time able to imbue millions of men with a single will. To-day these millions are in their homes in various parts of the country. On the morrow the order is given to mobilise, and they assemble at given points. To-day they lie in trenches where they may possibly remain for months. To-morrow, in different order, they go into the attack. To-day they work miracles in evading bullets and shrapnel. To-morrow they do wonders in open fights. To-day their advanced detachments lay mines underground. To-morrow they advance over dozens of miles as directed by aviators. This is what is called organisation—when enthused by a single aim and animated by one will, millions of men change their mode of intercourse and action; change the place and the methods of their activity; change their instruments and tools in accordance with a change in circumstances and the requirements of the struggle.

The same relates to the struggles of the working class with the bourgeoisie. If no revolutionary situation is in existence to-day, or conditions which breed discontent amongst the masses and increase their activity; if to-day you are handed a voting paper, take it and organise so that you may beat your enemy, but do not use it for the purpose of sending men to Parliament for the sake of soft jobs, at which they clutch, for fear they may be sent to prison. (Quoted from "Downfall of Second International." Price 1s. S.L. Press.)

Karl Liebknecht, no less than Lenin, realised the need for continually revising the revolutionary methods of attacking the capitalist system. We have already seen him working enthusiastically in the Young People's Socialist organisations and amongst the women and soldiers. We have seen him, prior to the war, exposing the world-wide ramifications of the international armament trust, and thus preparing the minds of Labour for a world-wide war. We have seen him energetically denouncing the Statesmen of German imperialism inside the "sacred" precincts of Capital's national legislative chambers, and this part of his work also compelled him to attack the Socialist Party for its revolutionary inertia. We have seen him conducting a vigorous literary agitation by addressing a series of leaflets, the famous Spartacus letters, to the German masses; these leaflets were secretly and, therefore, illegally distributed, but the **revolutionary needs** of the moment made such a policy imperative. We have seen him seeking to create a revolutionary industrial organisation in opposition to the inactive trade unions whose policy was determined by reactionary jingoes like Carl Legien. And when the imperialist Powers, acting through their Labour Statesmen, Ebert and Scheidemann, attempted to



smash the revolutionary movement by crushing it violently in the streets, Liebknecht at once swung the revolutionary masses into the streets to meet the new conditions: this was possible due to the number of returned armed soldiers who thronged to the banner of the Spartacists. Thus we see that Liebknecht speedily cast aside methods and organisations whenever these failed to meet new and rapidly-changing situations. He was taunted by many in the German Socialist Party—who had failed to perceive that a revolutionary movement is much more than a mere theoretical dialectical association—for being intolerant and for seeking to draft a ready-made scheme for achieving Socialism. Strangely enough the very same stupid objection was put forward at a recent Socialist Conference in opposition to the S.L.P.!

There was much whining by the Pacifist Socialist movement in this country when Liebknecht and the Spartacists were compelled to defend the revolutionary movement by carrying the class war into the streets. The favourite argument put forward by such papers as the "Labour Leader" was a depreciation of the use of **force**. The function and roll of force in history may be defined as **any organised method adopted by any section of society to enforce its will upon the community**. Every political organisation, no matter how peaceful, which intends to enforce its policy upon society, adopts the weapon of force. Thus Lloyd George aptly described the demands of the miners—backed up by a determined, though peaceful, organisation—as a **pistol** held up to the head of the State. Indeed the joint action of the miners, railwaymen, transport workers, engineers, etc., would be an element of force as brutal to the minds of the capitalists and as powerful as armed force. There is a tendency to confuse force with violence. Violence plays, indeed, a very small part in the social role of force. But it is sometimes absolutely necessary as the culminating point in a long series of agitational measures. Socialists believe in the efficacy of force. Because the intensity of force at any given period in history is merely the indication, on the social plane, of the intensity of economic conflict. In the measure that society is rent with opposing economic interests, so in the same measure does force appear as the class reflex of these economic conflicts. And so long as society breeds economic antagonisms, just so long will force exist as the medium through which all economic strife must manifest itself. But while the capitalist class uses force to **maintain** the present social system with all its economic conflicts, the revolutionary Socialists, on the other hand, use force

to destroy the power of capital and to usher in—perchance through a proletarian dictatorship—the Socialist Republic wherein all economic conflicts are destroyed and from which alone can spring a true democracy. This was exactly the position adopted by Liebknecht and the Spartacists, and it is also the tactic enforced by Lenin.

### The Final Phase.

When the news first reached this country that Liebknecht had been killed, the press attempted to show that he was shot from behind in attempting to run away from his captors. It was not until a few weeks later that the "Daily News" published the following facts regarding the murder of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg:—

When in my message describing the scene at Liebknecht's grave I tried to give you a hint of some deeper horror which was accountable for the extreme nervous tension among the mourners, and which had a very close connection with the deaths of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, I had only the thinnest thread on which to found my suspicion that behind these two deaths there was being deliberately hidden a terrible truth which must ultimately come out.

An hour ago I chanced on one who has given me what in all solemnity he assures me is the story of what actually took place. Apart from the fate of the two victims, it has a very grave bearing on the wider question of the true condition of Germany, and the relative power of the old military regime and the present Government.

My informant claims to have been an eye-witness of the incidents which he describes. He was staying, he says, at the Eden Hotel, where the horrible affair took place, and he returned there on the night of the tragedy at 10.30 to find an armed sentry guarding the door. This sentry told him that Liebknecht had been arrested and that it was intended to beat him to death.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the hotel nobody was to be seen. Thus the story circulated in the official report about the "infuriated crowds" was false, and the crowd existed only in the imagination of the military authorities who spread the report.

When he entered the hotel he found a group of eight military officers and half a dozen civilians. There was an air of expectancy about them, and in about fifteen minutes Rosa Luxemburg appeared, accompanied by the "Kriminal Wachtmeister." A few minutes later Liebknecht came downstairs, after having been questioned by



the military. He was guarded by armed soldiers.

At the moment Liebknecht was passing the narrator of this affair an officer of the Guards Cavalry suddenly sprang towards him, shouting, "Is that fellow still alive?"

The officer then joined the military escort, which left the hotel with both prisoners. In about fifteen minutes he returned and said that Liebknecht had been beaten to death with the butt-ends of rifles. The blows were struck from behind, and at the second blow Liebknecht collapsed.

Again, the story circulated about Liebknecht's attempt to escape appears to have been invented by the authorities concerned and to be sheer falsehood. According to a statement made by one of the sentries, Liebknecht was deliberately murdered by the soldiers, who were encouraged to this deed by their officers.

The next step taken was to compel all civilians to leave the hall of the hotel while the military and hotel employees were assembled alone. These employees afterwards declared, quite independently of each other, that Rosa Luxemburg had also been beaten down at the entrance to the hotel by soldiers and officers. There was no sign of any enraged crowd.

Liebknecht's life and message, aye! the very death he died, should inspire all of us. He was one who refused to compromise and who was the foe of opportunism. He fought and died manfully. "He dared, ever dared, and dared again." The Kaiser's prisons did not prevent his principles from spreading, nor will the murderers' deed prevent Liebknecht's principles from triumphing. His life's work was but the embodiment of Dante's famous line, "Hold to your course and let the people talk."

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