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INTRODUCTION

The contrasts between national feeling and international thinking, the psychological inconsistencies arising out of this apparent incompatibility, and the violence of popular reaction to these contrasts and inconsistencies have rarely been more strikingly revealed than in the tragic personal history and political failure of the lonely German Marxist Karl Liebknecht. Nor, until July 1944, has the problem of loyalty and/or obedience to the only existing government in time of war and in the face of military defeat, as over against an attempt—certain to be treated as treason if it failed—to secure a "saving" peace by immediate acceptance of defeat, been more poignantly illustrated than in his strange career.

As a Marxist and a member of the German Social Democratic Party, and later as a founder of the German youth movement and an early leader of the German Communist Party, Liebknecht advocated varying forms of collectivism, presumably in the ultimate interest of the individual as he saw it; but no one was more ruggedly individualistic in his own thinking than he. He usually walked alone and stood at last alone. He denounced militarism for its reliance upon force and its subordination of the individual; yet while deprecating violence he advocated a revolution which, whether he realized it or not, could have been effected only by violence, and a new order in which the individual would again be submerged.

To what extent was communism already recognizable in Liebknecht's day not even as a Russian phenomenon or article for export but as a Russian monopoly controlled from Moscow, a "world movement" for the benefit of the Imperial Soviets? To what extent must a communist party within Germany renounce its German character and accept eventual immolation within an international movement which had not lost, and seemed unlikely ever to lose, its predominantly Russian character? This problem also Karl Liebknecht seems to have confronted before he died.

An unsympathetic biography of Liebknecht would surely fail to do him justice. A too sympathetic portrayal of his character or of his labored thinking would similarly fail to do justice to his associates, with virtually all of whom he eventually quarreled. An objective ap-

praisal of his career and an understanding of his purposes require of his biographer a rare combination of clinical perception and historical insight and imagination. These qualities this biography seems to the writer of this introduction to manifest to an exceptional degree.

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PREFACE

Many alert people throughout the world and certainly most historians are familiar with Karl Liebknecht, the international revolutionary Socialist. Notwithstanding this familiarity, however, no attempts have been made to synthesize the political career of this "man without a country" who was considered "the darling of the masses" in Germany. Another revolutionary, Lenin, first looked to Liebknecht for the salvation of the Russian revolution; eventually Liebknecht had to turn to Lenin for funds and weapons. Lenin succeeded and Liebknecht failed in their respective circumstances.

Largely because of his failure, Liebknecht, unlike Lenin, has been ignored as a subject of historical study. The generation since his murder has produced only one biography of him: Harry Schumann, *Karl Liebknecht: ein Stück unpolitischer Weltanschauung* (Dresden, 1923). As the title of this book suggests, Schumann treated the person, not the politician. I hope that by providing this brief record of Liebknecht's political career I am filling a vacuum which has long needed filling.

Within the framework of this purpose, I have necessarily attached some meaning to Liebknecht's place in history; synthesis and analysis perforce are related—they cannot be entirely isolated. Liebknecht's personal failure, to illustrate this relationship, was in a sense the microcosm and epitome of a greater miscarriage, that of the German revolution. This revolution did not produce a new Germany because the "Moloch" of militarism survived it; and the nub of this tragedy was Liebknecht, the most outspoken foe of German militarism, who not only failed to destroy it, but who breathed new life into it. If in describing Liebknecht's career, however, I have raised more questions than I have answered, the purpose of suggesting new lines of inquiry will have been served.

Although Liebknecht is most often associated with the German revolution, I have endeavored to stimulate an awareness of his significance in German politics before 1918. His public battle against militarism, the "bulwark of capitalism", began shortly after the turn of the century. With an inexhaustible fund of nervous energy and

determination, and almost alone, he fought for his ideals among the youth, in the parliaments, in the party caucuses and congresses, in the streets, in the newspapers, in the court-rooms, and even in the prisons. The sum of his activities during this period accelerated the dichotomization of his party, whose last thread of unity he was the first to cut during World War I. In splitting his party, he bestowed on Ebert and, because of his final failure, on Lenin, the mantles of authority over the divided legacy of what had been the most powerful and influential Socialist party in the world. Significantly, this division in the Socialist world, with all of its problems, is still with us today.

I have tried to recapture some of the spirit of Liebknecht and his ideals by quoting liberally from his writings and speeches. Moreover, I frequently use the words of other writers not only because they have new light to offer, but because, like Montaigne, "I quote others only the better to express myself." And if I dare make any claim for originality, I would do so only in the sense of Voltaire's definition: "Originality is nothing but judicious imitation."

Although I have not acknowledged the contributions of other writers through the medium of footnotes (I have sought to spare the general reader the distractions of academic devices), I have listed all of my basic references in the bibliography; and needless to say, my debt to the authors listed is no less great.

Finally, I want to express my indebtedness to Professor Chester Easum of the University of Wisconsin, who read the entire manuscript and gave it the benefit of his trenchant historical insights. I am also grateful to my good friend Professor Helmut Haeussler of Wittenberg College, who offered a number of valuable suggestions. The responsibility, of course, for the errors which remain is entirely mine.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin KARL W. MEYER

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LIEBKNECHT THE ELDER

Karl Liebknecht saw the light of day in Leipzig, August 13, 1871, the same year in which Bismarck gave the Germans their place in the sun by welding them into a competitive national state. Most Germans, "good Germans", were ready to stand and be counted with Bismarck in the contest to protect national pride and power and the right of self-determination. Though Liebknecht was one of the first to be born under this star of promise for all Germans, he turned out to be a "poor German". Bismarck's time failed to educate him in the ways of a German nationalist. Rather his father, Wilhelm Liebknecht, a founder of German Social Democracy, convinced the impressionable youth by instruction and example that it was more important and honorable to be a good Socialist.

The two decades before World War I—the era of Wilhelm II, the "Knight in Shining Armor"—made an even better Socialist and worse German out of Karl Liebknecht. He singled out German militarism, whose expansion paralleled the growing national interests and consciousness and which was the symbol of both, for his choicest invectives from the Socialist dictionary. His rise to prominence during this period was associated with a corresponding will to defy the government at the risk of acquiring a personal reputation which all patriotic Germans were careful to avoid.

The period of World War I provided more evidence to most Germans of what they by this time held Liebknecht to be: a national renegade. As a member of the Reichstag and the Prussian Assembly, he was the first to vote alone against the war credits and most outspoken among the opposition in criticism of the war effort. Reichstag delegates in the heat of debate labeled him with the words: "He is no German!" They accused him of "queering the pitch" to the point where an important Reichstag session had to be brought to a close.

Liebknecht admitted that he was a member of the international proletariat and called for the overthrow of the government to end the war. He was finally locked up as a revolutionary, and for over two years he watched and waited for Germany's defeat. When Ger-

many finally crumbled to defeat, he won his release and harangued the masses to win support for an extension of the Russian revolution in Germany. The outcome was not a revolution, but a counter-revolution; and he became a victim of it.

It should be asked at this point: What factors moulded Liebknecht's personality? What contributed to his zeal for reform and change? What made him a revolutionary Socialist? Harry Schumann, his only biographer, would credit his revolutionary traits, in part, to his ancestors, of whom the most illustrious revolutionary was none other than Martin Luther. Wilhelm Liebknecht made reference to this relationship in 1899, in a speech to an assembly gathered near his birth-place at Giessen: "I do not want to say anything against the Reformation, for I belong to a family which prides itself in the fact that it descends from Martin Luther."

Both Martin Luther and Karl Liebknecht, according to Schumann, were reformers whose connections were of a kind which only a blood relationship could create. There were some differences. Luther was a religious reformer, the passionate warrior of God. Liebknecht was the anti-clerical politician, the hero of the masses who wanted a relief from repression and finally war. Both fought for a reformation, however; and both fought for their ideals with body and soul. The dominant traits of Luther, which caused him to take his stand with the purported words: "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God, Amen" appeared in Liebknecht too.

Although the comparison between Luther and Liebknecht is interesting, it is nothing more than that. The background for Liebknecht's personality and career is much more immediate. One of the most significant influences was the general character of his father which heredity passed on to him. Eduard Bernstein, who knew father and son intimately, wrote that "those who wish to understand Karl Liebknecht rightly must study the character and actions of his father." Other Socialists—August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, and Karl Radek—believed similarly. Another important factor which gave direction to his life was the tradition which the liberal wing of the Social Democratic Party of Germany represented and which his father helped to develop. To understand some things about Wilhelm Liebknecht and the origins and growth of the Social Democratic movement in Germany is to understand why Karl Liebknecht behaved the way he did. These two sources of influence now must be briefly considered.

SOLDIER OF A REVOLUTION

Wilhelm Liebknecht was born in the Hessian town of Giessen on March 29, 1826. Though but a child when his father died, he was well provided with money and guardians. Many of his relatives were either professors or state officials; and he had early ambitions to follow along one of their paths. He was of bourgeois origin and received a good bourgeois education. In this respect he (and his son Karl after him) was not unlike his colleague of later years, Karl Marx, who was also of bourgeois origin and educated accordingly, but who regarded bourgeois intellectuals as anathema to the proletarian movement.

Liebknecht began his higher education at Giessen University, where an ancestor had been rector at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From Giessen he moved on to the Universities of Marburg and Berlin where he studied hard and long. "I wished to study that I might educate myself, and I wished to educate myself that I might fulfill my duties towards the state, and towards society." At Berlin he studied the French Socialists and looked to Paris, which he knew would be the center of a future revolution; he wanted to be ready when the signal came.

Then for a number of reasons Liebknecht tired of Europe. He laid aside his ambition to obtain a professorship at some small university, fearing that he would lose his independence. He also rejected the idea of entering the service of the state: he did not want to bolster the reactionary power of some petty duke. Most of all, however, the signal would not come from Paris. He saw no flicker of hope for the fires of liberalism; Metternich and his kind, he thought, were in Europe to stay. He wanted to leave Germany because he had no desire to become a "peruked mummy". "How can anyone, who does not have the soul of a dog, remain here?" This was 1847. Liebknecht planned to go the way of other distraught souls, to America and the state of Wisconsin. There he would not lose his youth and enthusiasm for liberty behind the bars of some prison. And if things should explode in France, he could always return and help Europe save itself.

Liebknecht never reached America. While on a train heading for Hamburg and America a Swiss teacher by the name of Dr. Ludolf was impressed with Liebknecht's enthusiasm for reform and urged him to remain and serve his own people. While listening to this advice Liebknecht remembered something from Heine: the Frenchman, when dissatisfied with his government, starts a revolution, but

the disgruntled German departs for America. The sting of this scornful thought and the advice of the Swiss teacher convinced Liebknecht that Europe was his post after all. He accepted an invitation to live in Zurich.

In Switzerland Liebknecht for the first time learned to know the working man. He attended the German Labor Union in Zurich to obtain information; "this was the first opportunity I had of hearing workers themselves speak of their position and aspirations." His immediate ambition was to study law (an ambition later also pursued by his son) and be called to the bar in Switzerland.

On February 23, 1848, the signal came from Paris. Liebknecht (as his son after him) was to have his revolutionary days after all. Like a shaving of steel, he was attracted to the magnet in Paris. He departed from Zurich, hurried through Basel, but arrived in Paris just in time to be too late. The barricades, used in the battle already fought and won by his fellow liberals, were being removed from the streets.

Liebknecht's thoughts turned naturally to Germany next. Would it be affected by the revolutionary tide? News arrived that Berlin revolted on March 18. This was good news and an incentive for action for the frustrated German liberals in France. Liebknecht joined a small group of young enthusiasts under the leadership of Georg Herwegh (a ne'er-do-well student of theology and law, a failure in military service, and a poet who wrote about revolutionary themes) who planned to carry the flag of revolution to all of Germany.

Marx, who was also in Paris, refused to take part in Herwegh's expedition, which he claimed the newly-founded bourgeois government in France organized to get rid of the undesirable German elements who competed with Frenchmen on the labor market. To Liebknecht, however, "the moment appeared favorable. I would have been a coward or traitor in my own eyes if I had not joined." These words, coming twenty-four years later, reveal him, unlike Marx but like Karl Liebknecht, a man of passionate convictions and poor calculations. Herwegh's group failed to republicanize Germany. The Germans turned on Herwegh's guerillas; apparently Herwegh was a better poet than a leader of men.

In the fall of 1848 Liebknecht joined another revolutionary expedition under the command of Struve. Its objective was to fan the fading revolutionary embers in Baden into a flame once more. The Grand Duke of Baden caught Struve out of position and defeated him. Meanwhile Liebknecht, who had been dispatched by Struve

to arrange for a junction with another group of insurgents, instead of seeking safety across the Rhine in Switzerland, decided in his enthusiasm to continue his march into Germany, hoping to make a revolution of his own. Before he could carry out his plans, however, he was captured and imprisoned. Again his enthusiasm was a poor substitute for tactical calculations. He was released in 1849 and joined another brief revolutionary effort in Baden, which was saved from the revolutionaries by an army led by the Prussian Prince who later became Emperor Wilhelm I. This time Liebknecht sought refuge and crossed the Rhine into Switzerland.

Liebknecht, the experienced but unsuccessful revolutionist, entered Geneva in July, 1849. He was mature then, in spite of his twenty-four years. He could now be called a "soldier of the revolution", an appellation to which he never objected. He was a wiser man for his experiences, but also a man without a country. It was here that he met Friedrich Engels: "I looked up to him, he had done great things." And it was here also that he began his agitation among the working people. The beginning of his life's work was at hand.

Liebknecht's revolutionary experiences showed him that neither princes nor the middle class would tolerate revolution of force by a few. He therefore resorted to educational rather than conspiratorial propaganda among the masses; for it was this approach that organized the many rather than the few. To this principle of educating the masses Liebknecht, unlike his son Karl, remained faithful throughout his life. If there were any changes to be made, they would have to be made by the masses, not by a revolutionary junta; and only through knowledge could the masses of the workers gain power.

Liebknecht's plans were too ambitious, however, for the post-revolutionary authorities on the continent. He became popular enough among the workers to excite the imaginations of the Austrian and Prussian governments, which brought pressure to bear upon the authorities in Geneva to expel him. He was arrested for organizing a congress of German-Swiss trade union representatives and accused of planning a new revolution in Germany. He eagerly accepted the opportunity to defend himself. His reply reflected a policy which he followed throughout his life and which was also accepted, except for the tragic last days of his life, by Karl Liebknecht: "Our purpose is not to call forth a revolution . . , but to keep ourselves prepared to come to the aid of our country when there is a chance for success. We will never support a revolution which is not sup-

ported by a greater majority of the people. We will not lend our hands to a partial insurrection." His defense evoked no sympathy from the authorities. Though he denied that he was "a conspirator by profession", and perhaps because he had no apologies to give for his actions, he was treated as a dangerous revolutionary and packed off to England into exile.

Liebknecht remained with his family in London for thirteen years, struggling for an existence and busy with studies in various fields. Here he joined the Communist League and worked closely with Marx and Engels. He also made his acquaintance with the English labor movement, which at that time was just moving out from under the influence of Chartism.

When in 1862 the Prussian government granted Liebknecht an amnesty, he returned to Berlin where he became an influential writer for the *North German Gazette*. He had taken writing seriously for the first time while in Switzerland, and in England he managed to supplement his meager income by serving as London correspondent for the *Augsburg Gazette*. In Berlin he made a mark for himself as a Socialist writer; he enjoyed working in his chosen field and did well in what he thought was well worth doing.

Just as his popularity with the *North German Gazette* began to grow, politics interfered, and Liebknecht was once more out of a job. Bismarck, who had been called by King Wilhelm in 1862 to form a ministry, would not sanction an organ which waged war on the conservative order and captured it. Liebknecht at once severed connections with the paper, although Bismarck's agents promised him handsome rewards if he stayed on. Bismarck, who made every effort to win the workers to his side, wanted especially the support of their leaders; but Liebknecht, who cared for neither dignity nor welfare when it meant compromise on principles, refused the offers made to him. The struggle between the forces of Bismarck and Liebknecht, which was to reach its climax two decades later, slowly began to crystallize.

Liebknecht's next step was to join Lassalle's growing Socialist group. Karl Marx delegated him to win over the Lassallean group for the First International, just founded in London in 1864. Moreover, he joined the group with the express purpose of preventing its falling into the hands of Bismarck. Bismarck, however, was aware of Liebknecht's efforts against him. In consequence Liebknecht was ousted from Prussia in 1865; subsequently he moved to Leipzig where he, together with a wood turner, August Bebel, worked for the cause of International Socialism.

Liebknecht's eviction from Prussia and separation from Lassalle's group marked the beginnings of the visible dichotomy within the German Social Democratic movement. The supporters of Lassalle oriented themselves along national lines.[1] Those within the movement who in the decade before World War I inherited these propensities toward national viewpoints were the "reformists", who in turn became the majority Socialists during the war period. The legacy of internationalism, on the other hand, for which Liebknecht was largely responsible, passed on to Karl Liebknecht and the "radicals" of the immediate pre-war period. During the war they were identified as the International Group *(Gruppe Internationale)*, the Liebknecht Group *(Gruppe Liebknecht)*, or the Spartacus Union *(Spartakusbund)*. The Center group, the "orthodox Socialists", oscillated between the reformists and radicals, according to the circumstances and personalities involved, and during the war constituted the left-centrist Independent Socialists. The Liebknechts, father and son, served a span of over half a century for the cause of left-wing German Social Democracy. A brief consideration of German Socialism in the days of Liebknecht the Elder, as background to the political record of Liebknecht the Younger, is therefore in order.

SOCIALIST BEGINNINGS

The beginnings of German Socialism reach back into the early thirties of the nineteenth century. French Socialist thinking, as formulated by St. Simon, Fourier, and Proudhon, provided the general foundation on which German Socialism established itself. The original keystone to the general German structure, however, was Ferdinand Lassalle, often called the "Father of German Socialism".

Lassalle was born in Breslau in 1825, the son of a Jewish merchant. He took an active interest in philosophy and law, and by 1844, in the writings of the French Socialists. The appearance in 1859 of his pamphlet *The Italian War and the Duty of Prussia* brought him into the arena of politics. The pamphlet showed that he was a practical politician and German nationalist, who wanted Prussia to usurp Austria's leadership of the Germanies by taking Schleswig-Holstein. In it he also admitted a division between domestic and foreign policy and advocated cooperation between political parties; unlike Marx, who regarded foreign policy simply as an extension of domestic policy and wanted no pacts or agreements with other domestic parties.

On April 12, 1862 (a date which might be remembered as the birthday of German Social Democracy), Lassalle addressed an artisans'

association in Berlin. The published address, *Workers' Program*, outlined a new future for the workers. It called upon the German Revolution of 1848 as the charter of freedom for the German worker. The Prussian police took Lassalle into custody for promoting dangerous doctrines, specifically for "endangering the public peace by publicly exciting subjects of the State to hatred of each other".

Various workers' associations took notice of Lassalle's address, however, and began to organize. In Leipzig the local association elected a central committee to make arrangements for the organization of a workers' congress, with representation from associations throughout Germany. The committee turned to Lassalle for guidance. He complied with his *Open Reply Letter*, which has been called the "Charter of German Socialism" and which Lassalle compared with Luther's theses against indulgences.

In his *Open Reply Letter* Lassalle urged the workers to form an independent political party and through political action to improve their social conditions. He carefully explained the operation of Ricardo's iron law of wages, which, based on a capitalist-worker relationship, prevented social improvement for the working classes. The solution for the destruction of the iron law and the capitalist-worker relationship hinged on the creation of producer cooperatives by the state, in which the workers would be their own capitalists. The immediate prerequisite for the successful establishment of the cooperatives was the achievement of universal suffrage, so that the state would be "the consolidated people". The people's state would be responsible for the organization and financing of the producer cooperatives, and the individual worker could free himself from the capitalists, who would disappear.

The congress of workers' associations at Leipzig greeted the *Open Reply Letter* with enthusiasm. In 1863, under the leadership of Lassalle, the German workers entered the political fray by organizing the General German Workers' Association *(Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein)*. The untimely death of Lassalle in the following year deprived it of much of its prestige. Even at the time of his death the Association was small numerically, and it was the future which held the true significance of this almost premature political party.

While the Association floundered under a succession of mediocre leaders, Liebknecht worked hard to win new recruits for the banner of international Socialism. He labored particularly with the Saxon workers in and around Leipzig, his new home after his exile from

Prussia in 1865. In August, 1866, he gathered a congress of Saxon workers at Chemnitz, where he gave them a platform of democratic reforms. Among the demands he formulated were the following. 1: Universal, direct, equal, and secret suffrage. 2: The abolition of a standing army and the creation of a people's militia. 3: Sovereignty of Parliament in questions of peace and war. 4: Unity of Germany as a democratic state. 5: Abolition of all privileges of position, birth, and confession. 6: Separation of church and state and separation of church and schools. 7: Emancipation of all workers from pressures and constraints. 8: Promotion of a free press, the right to assemble, and the right of coalition.

The fourth demand—i. e., that Germany be unified as a democratic state—meant that there should be "no Little Germany under the guidance of Prussia, no Prussia enlarged by annexation, no great Germany under Austrian guidance, no Triad." This clearly defined the position of the Liebknecht group, in contrast to the Lassalleans, on the issue of national politics. Liebknecht and his supporters were essentially *gross-deutsch*, the Lassalleans *klein-deutsch*, on the question of German unification. Bismarck gave emphasis to this distinction when he opined that Lassalle was "by no means a Republican, but animated by strongly marked national and monarchical feelings. His ideal, which he strove to realize, was the German Empire. This was the point of contact between us." (Another point of contact between them, it should be added, was their mutual hostility to middle-class liberalism.)

The Chemnitz program attracted many supporters in 1866; and by 1868 Liebknecht could count as his followers the greater majority of the workers' associations which had no connections with Lassalle's General German Workers' Association. The enthusiasm with which the German workers accepted Liebknecht's program was reflected when in 1867 his supporters entered the field of politics for the first time. Both Liebknecht, whom the Prussian police had imprisoned for visiting Berlin in 1865, and Bebel, who also provided much of the leadership in collaboration with Liebknecht, won seats in the first Reichstag of the newly created North German Confederation. Liebknecht used the Reichstag, which he called "the fig-leaf of absolutism", primarily as an avenue to express again and again his oppositional views, and in 1867 no less than to protest against the recent annexation of Schleswig-Holstein. His protests notwithstanding, Schleswig-Holstein remained annexed with the help of the Las-

salleans, who evidently remembered that Lassalle himself as early as 1859 had advocated annexation.

Liebknecht worked untiringly to unify the various labor organizations along the lines of the International and against Lassallean state Socialism. In August, 1869, his efforts were rewarded when he led his workers' associations and certain dissentient Lassallean groups in the formation of the Social Democratic Labor Party *(Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei)*. The party's birthplace was Eisenach, where the first Social Democratic congress for all Germany gathered. Orthodox Lassalleans attended the congress, but withdrew when the strength of the Liebknecht group confronted them and their hopes for controlling the congress disappeared. The Marxians now had an open field.

The party adopted the Eisenach program, based on Marx's theory of the destructive rule of capitalism, and largely a repetition of the Chemnitz program of 1866. It emphasized that political action must precede economic emancipation and called for the establishment of a Free People's State *(freier Volksstaat)*, in which all class supremacy would disappear. This would make possible the introduction of the cooperative system in which the workers would bear the full fruit of their labors. Liebknecht reinforced these views at a second congress held in Stuttgart in June, 1870, when he again urged the establishment of a state "which shall know nothing of class domination, which shall tolerate neither masters nor slaves, and in which society shall be organized on a co-operative basis."

Liebknecht's supporters multiplied as his views developed and took on a more definite shape. As this happened, the Prussian state, which had exiled him, increasingly took the brunt of his attacks and criticisms. A parallel to the growth of his influence, however, was the excitement of the surge of German patriotism, which advanced with all stops out in the summer of 1870 as war clouds once more approached Prussia. Liebknecht's protests against German hurrah-patriotism brought him into conflict with individuals within his own organization over the questions of national wars and peace. In June, 1870, he and a colleague, Bracke, hotly disputed the issues of war with France and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. The quarrel assumed such serious proportions that Karl Marx was asked to judge it. He sided with Liebknecht and declared for peace with France and non-annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

The advent of the Franco-Prussian War put Liebknecht's devotion to Socialism to a practical test, much in the same manner that World War I tested Karl Liebknecht in August, 1914, and after. Each sat

in the Reichstag when the government requested moneys for war. Wilhelm Liebknecht's first impulse was to vote against the war credits needed in 1870. His colleague in the Reichstag, Bebel, did not agree with him, however. A vote in favor of the credits would mean, of course, "a vote of confidence in the Prussian Government which has prepared the present war by its actions in 1866;" but a vote against the credits "might be interpreted as supporting the mischievous and criminal policy of Bonaparte." Liebknecht finally accepted Bebel's viewpoint and abstained from voting.

The action of Liebknecht and Bebel aroused a great storm of protest in the executive of the Social Democratic Labor Party. Recriminations and vituperations followed. Liebknecht, then editor of the party organ, the *Volkstaat*, threatened to quit. In a letter to Bracke he wrote that he was contemplating emigration to America "out of disgust with these patriotic junketings."

Liebknecht and Bebel followed up their Reichstag action with published protests against the war and government. Bismarck considered their writings treasonable and accused Liebknecht of insulting the Emperor for referring to him as the "boom-boom Kaiser" and the "grapeshot prince", for whom the "white slaves in uniform" did every bidding. Bismarck wired orders from Versailles that both Liebknecht and Bebel should be arrested and brought to trial.

In 1872 the Leipzig court tried Liebknecht for high treason. He courageously defended himself in line with his professed convictions. As in the case of most Socialists, including later Karl Liebknecht when brought to trial, he exerted every effort to convert the proceedings against him into a public spectacle for the benefit of the working class. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to prison for two years. It was during the previous year, while sitting under arrest behind bars, that he became the father of Karl Liebknecht, whose future experiences were also to include prison sentences as punishment for "treasonable writings".

The Prussian victory over France gave the conservative wing in new Germany new political strength. The anti-national policy of Liebknecht's party during the war consequently cost the Socialists a defeat in the first election after the war, before German war-time patriotism had time to slough off. As German workers began to think more about their economic welfare after the war, those who voted against Kaiser and Reich during the war made a swift comeback in the elections of 1874. Socialist representatives in the Reichstag increased to ten, with the help of some 450,000 votes. Of the ten, seven including Liebknecht (whose prison term had not yet ex-

pired) and Bebel, belonged to the Eisenach or Liebknecht group; three represented the Lassallean faction.

The election of 1874 revealed that perhaps Socialism in Germany had a future after all, in spite of the prominence acquired by the conservative forces as a result of their foreign and domestic successes. The hardships caused by the financial crises of the early seventies seemed to promote eager acceptance among the workers of the Marxian theories relating to the exploitation of the masses through the capitalist organization of state and society.

Bismarck watched the Socialist recovery with apprehension. He clearly perceived the extent of the Socialist danger as early as 1871 when Socialists in the Reichstag lauded the Paris Commune: ". . . I instantly recognized the fact that Social-Democracy is an enemy against whom the State and society are bound to defend themselves." Acting quickly in the same year, he attempted to build a united front among the governments of Europe against international Socialism; but he failed. In 1874 he turned from the international to the domestic front and proposed an amendment to the press law, which would have curbed what he thought were illegal acts and disrespect for law on the part of the Socialists. This proposal failed, too; for its suggestion brought back memories to the Reichstag of the Metternichian Carlsbad decrees.

In the Reichstag Liebknecht was a thorn in Bismarck's side. Liebknecht accused him, among other things, of promoting militarism at the expense of the worker, of corrupting and enslaving the nation, of stifling public opinion, of opening private letters, and of employing domestic servants as spies. In short, Liebknecht accused Bismarck, as Karl Liebknecht later accused Wilhelm II, of promoting a police state.

Evidence of Bismarck's will to repress the Socialists contributed to the merger of the Lassalleans and Liebknechtians into a single organization: the Socialist Labor Party. The divisive issue of national unification had been settled and buried by Bismarck. The luckless Lassalleans, moreover, plagued by incompetent leadership, found it convenient to join the Marxian group, which since its inception had been growing progressively, thanks to the efficient leadership of Liebknecht and Bebel. The assimilation of the phlegmatic Lassalleans by the dynamic partisans of Liebknecht was solemnized at Gotha in 1875.

The new Socialist Labor Party adopted the Gotha program which, though not too satisfactory, remained the charter of the Social Democratic movement until the adoption of the Erfurt program in 1891.

In view of the traditional differences between the two newly-merged factions, the program was essentially a compromise, thus disappointing as many as it satisfied. Its economic aspects satisfied the Lassalleans most completely. It provided for the abolition of the capitalist-worker relationship through the destruction of the iron law of wages. The political side of the program came nearer to satisfying the internationalism of the Liebknecht group. Though working first of all within the national limits, the party was conscious of the "international character of the labor movement" and the "universal brotherhood of men." The program included other vague references to Marxian doctrine and the usual demand for critical democratic objectives.

Marx had little use for the Gotha program, which, he felt, said far too little about his economic doctrines, revolution, or the class character of the state. In a letter to Bracke, a mutual friend of Marx and Liebknecht, Marx labeled the program as "thoroughly objectionable" and "tending to demoralise the party." Fortunately for the sake of party harmony, Liebknecht, who probably agreed with Marx, obtained possession of the damaging letter and held it secret for a number of years until it was no longer dangerous. Engels also dispatched a letter to Bracke and accused Liebknecht of muddling up "the whole business . . . in his zeal to bring about unification and pay any price for it."* Liebknecht no doubt could have been a better Marxist; but because he was not, the German Socialists were under the roof of one party. If the party lacked Marxian purity, it nevertheless united in its pursuit of important and immediate democratic objectives; and that was the principal consideration for Liebknecht.

German Social Democracy began flexing its muscles after the Gotha unification of 1875. Liebknecht, too, became more outspoken in his capacity as leading spokesman for the party. Occasionally he uttered remarks in his enthusiasm which did not reflect his conventional and judicious principle of Socialist progress through education and agitation. "Socialism is simply a question of power," he said on one occasion, "to be decided not in parliament but in the street and on the battlefield, like any other question of power." This doctrine that might made right, he added, the Socialists had learned from Bismarck himself.

If might made right, it was Bismarck, however, not the Socialists, who usually had both. In 1876 he proposed to amend the penal code with the thought of curbing the privileges of free speech and writing which the Socialists enjoyed; but this proposal was rejected by the

Reichstag. The year 1877 transpired with no new proposals from Bismarck; but it revealed a new increase in the number of Socialist votes and members elected to the Reichstag. Liebknecht was now one of twelve members elected on the strength of almost 500,000 votes. On May 11 of the following year, Bismarck thought his chance had come to land a telling blow on the Socialists. A half-witted character named Hödel attempted to assassinate Emperor Wilhelm I. Pictures of Liebknecht and other Socialists were found on his person. The nation was horrified, and Bismarck ordered the immediate preparation of an anti-Socialist law. Bismarck was not present in the Reichstag to support his own command, however; and with the aid of Liebknecht the hastily prepared bill fell by the way.

Lightning struck a second time, however, when on June 2 of the same year a Dr. Karl Nobiling fired at the Emperor and wounded him. Indignation against the Socialists reached new heights, and the demand for repressive measures against them became general. The preamble of a newly proposed anti-Socialist law declared that Socialists, as subversives, had forsaken the ground of equal right for all. This time Bismarck was on hand in the Reichstag to support the law. He advanced ideas on a project of state Socialism, depriving Liebknecht's Socialism, as it were, if its *raison d'etre*. The "Law against the publicly-dangerous endeavors of Social Democracy", or Exceptional Laws, was enacted on October 19 by a vote of 221 to 149, after Liebknecht declared that the bill could "neither be made better nor worse". It gave extensive powers to the executive and the police, particularly over Socialist propaganda activities whether in speech or in writing. The heart of the law was the twenty-eighth article which conferred on the authorities exceptional and extreme powers when, in their opinion, Socialist activities endangered public security.

The German Socialists now entered their "heroic age". Until the legislation against the party expired in 1890, Liebknecht did double duty, keeping the party intact and looking out for himself. Although the party suffered a temporary setback immediately after the passage of the Exceptional Laws, it generally increased its members directly in proportion to the amount of repression Bismarck applied. The party experienced another benefit during the dozen years of hiding, running, and keeping tongue between the teeth: it sifted from its ranks those faddists and adventurers who were not seriously sympathetic with the party's cause. The anti-socialist legislation saved the party from this class at a time when Socialism was just becoming fashionable.

On September 30, 1890, the Exceptional Laws expired. Wilhelm II did not favor their renewal and had accepted Bismarck's resignation earlier when the latter insisted that the laws be renewed. The Socialists returned to the scene amid rejoicing. The general feeling was that now the Socialists, embittered through their experience, would become reckless in their action. However, their experience taught them prudence instead of rash action. They proved that their cause could be won through maxims and education, not with weapons. That this proved to be so was in no small part the work of Liebknecht, who believed in education and not conspiracy. Had he organized conspiracy against the government, he would have played into the hands of those who wished to crush Socialism by force. To him patience and propaganda were the better parts of valor. As it was, the Socialists emerged from their trial better for wear; but without the blessings of German patriots who labeled them "fellows without a country" *(vaterlandslose Gesellen)*. Karl Liebknecht, who failed to master the teachings of his father completely, slipped into the use of force in January, 1919, and fell victim of it.

The first task of the German Socialists after their liberation was to put their house in order. The leading item on the agenda was the revision of the Gotha program of 1875, which had proved too unsatisfactory for many in the party. When therefore the party met at Erfurt in 1891 for its annual meeting, it formulated and accepted a program which turned out to be the fullest expression of Social Democratic principles in the nineteenth century. It remained the official charter of German Social Democracy until World War I.

The first part of the program, inspired by the *Communist Manifesto*, damned the "rich become richer and the poor become poorer" philosophy and aimed at the long-range objective of collectivism through political action. The goal of collectivism was to be reached through the united action of German Socialists in concert with workers of other countries who were equally interested. Thus the two-fold theme of the first part of the program was collectivism and international action. The second part of the program enumerated many immediate and popular demands, differing little from those of the Chemnitz, Eisenach, or Gotha programs. It demanded such democratic reforms which within the framework of contemporary capitalist society were necessary to achieve political power. These included universal suffrage for men and women, direct election of officials, proportional representation, and others.

The Erfurt program was Liebknecht's kind of Socialism. It was at once revolutionary and reformist. It counseled the revolution-

aries within the party to be patient and the reformists to remember their revolutionary heritage and goal. Though little was said about the Marxian materialistic conception of history or theory of surplus value, either could have been read into the program.

Liebknecht was never concerned too seriously with how closely he conformed to Marx's teachings and doctrines. It was enough for him to regard Marx as a primary source of inspiration. He did not have the desire, nor the background for that matter, to qualify as a scientific theorist in the style of Marx himself, or after the fashion of Kautsky, Bernstein, or Rosa Luxemburg. He cut down theory to its barest essentials. More than that, he saw little distinction between theory and practice; for practice was nothing more than applied theory. These same distinctions applied later to Karl Liebknecht.

Though the Erfurt program is a reliable summary of Liebknecht's philosophy of Socialism, the final and personal summary of his views is given in his article "The Program of German Socialism".[8] He advocated abolition of private property classified as "instruments of production"; abolition of wages-work and capitalist-worker relationship and the establishment of a commonwealth organized into cooperatives and a system of associated work; and the organization of labor on a national and international basis with equal rights and duties for all. He listed also the critical democratic objectives mentioned in the Erfurt program. These reforms should be realized through "the legal, constitutional transformation of society." Though he acknowledged that German Socialists were evolutionists and reformers, they were also revolutionists "because our programme means a total and fundamental change of our social and economic system."

Liebknecht lived long enough to see German militarism grow into the bulwark of reaction that he thought it was. He laid the groundwork upon which Karl Liebknecht was to stand in his life-long crusade against it. German Social Democracy, by its various programs from Chemnitz to Erfurt, had consistently called for the abolition of national armies and the use of a people's militia. Liebknecht believed that national armies were tools of the capitalists, who conscripted the workers as cannon fodder. To top it off, it was the worker, and in many cases the Socialist, who financed the very thing he opposed by paying direct and indirect taxes for military expenditures. Ironically, the Socialists, who were "the party of the discontented", according to Liebknecht, contributed more than their share

to the contentment of the ruling classes by supplying them with men and money.

Liebknecht laid open his record, and that of his party, against militarism at the international congress of Socialists at Zurich in 1893. He reminded the congress that his party had denounced the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine as a crime, for which it received an aggregate of more than a thousand years in prison. Since the party's inception, it sanctioned neither military conscription nor military budgets. His personal maxim in his fight against the military was "not a man, not a penny." Not only a negative but also a positive approach to the defeat of militarism was necessary, however. The Socialist spirit had to be implanted into the army. "When the masses are Socialists," from whom the militarists draw their manpower, "militarism will have seen its last days!" To this end Liebknecht pledged the German Socialists before the representatives of the international proletariat.

In the last year of his life, on the occasion of the Reichstag discussion of the navy bill of 1900, Liebknecht roundly berated the Pan-Germans for their desire to enter into naval competition with Britain. He challenged them by asking: "Which nation threatens us?" If it was Britain, "we will never conquer England on the sea." Britain, because it was an island, had and needed the largest navy in the world and should not be antagonized. But Liebknecht and like-minded Socialists failed to dampen the German military spirit. Militarism, many Germans felt, was necessarily an essential feature of German life. General von Moltke once explained the necessity for militarism: "What we have conquered with weapons in a half a year (referring to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1) must be protected with weapons for a half a century so that, what we have gained, will not be taken from us again." Both Wilhelm and Karl Liebknecht lived during Moltke's critical "half a century;" both protested against his excuse for militarism; and Karl Liebknecht received credit from or was blamed by many for significantly contributing to the battlefield defeat of Germany's armed strength in 1918, as well as the loss of the gains which this strength was assigned to protect. Whether or not he was largely responsible for the dissipation of Germany's military strength in World War I (and this writer maintains that he was not), he witnessed the temporary fulfillment of Moltke's prophecy: almost fifty years after the Franco-Prussian War, Germany's weapons lay smashed, and it lost what it had gained fifty years earlier.

The greatest significance of Wilhelm Liebknecht for the German Social Democratic movement was his worth as a leader and agitator.

Though short on practical ability, he possessed other abilities which qualified him for party leadership. His colleague Bebel once complained that others had to carry out the measures inaugurated by Liebknecht. Perhaps Bebel, who was some years Liebknecht's junior, was jealous of the amount of influence the latter wielded and the dictatorial inclinations he displayed. "As a rule," lamented Bebel, "I had to eat the soup which he (Liebknecht) had stirred." Almost everyone, however, acknowledged that Liebknecht had a gift to write in brilliant fashion and that it was this gift which made him one of the great leaders of German Social Democracy. Bernstein recalled that Liebknecht "could write articles or polemical reviews under the most difficult circumstances; in a railway carriage, in a room full of loudly talking people, and once I even saw him working at an article while he was acting as a chairman of a by no means peacable meeting." He dedicated his writing talents to a number of Socialistic newspapers and periodicals. *Vorwärts*, organized in 1890 under that name and the party's most prominent newspaper thereafter, was his major editorial assignment.

Liebknecht, prominent in public and party circles, was quite plain, unassuming, and almost ascetic in private life. Although he could carry a "good cargo of drink and eat a hearty meal," he was usually satisfied with much less. As many Socialists, he had little use for religion. He once confided that he lost all religious faith; but if he should become believer again, he would "go the whole hog and become a Catholic." Only two classes of people were sympathetic with the workers: Socialists and priests.

In summary, how did Wilhelm Liebknecht and the Social Democratic Party he led into prominence contribute to or affect the personality and future of Karl Liebknecht? It has been noted that many of Karl Liebknecht's personal characteristics were inherited from his father. Both father and son had a liveliness which they applied to everything they undertook. Both had minds of a persistently inquiring nature, which resulted in their readiness for any intellectual tussle; although both lacked the ability to deal with scientific theorizing. Both displayed a passionate devotion to revolutionary ideals, for which they reached with boundless enthusiasm and optimism (a revolutionary who is not enthusiastic and optimistic is soon out of his circle). Both had vivid imaginations which often curbed their practical ability. Both were men of conviction, who declared what they thought to be the real truth, and without regard for personal consequences. And they faced strikingly similar situations

and problems, which they met with a similar stubborn tenacity to their ideals.

There were some differences between father and son, however. A failure to appreciate this would prevent a better understanding of Karl Liebknecht. Wilhelm Liebknecht was unquestionably a more successful leader of German Social Democracy than his son. The father learned his lessons about revolution early in life, particularly during his unsuccessful revolutionary activities of 1848 and 1849. It was in these lean years that he learned that education, not machination, was the prudent tool for carving out equality for the masses. Moreover, his first-hand knowledge of the English reform movement, acquired during his years of exile in Britain and heavy with the Chartist influence, also led him to believe that moderation and time were part of the total revolutionary picture. Karl Liebknecht, on the other hand, learned about the danger of rash revolution just in time to be eliminated by it. To him the English reform movement was remote and perhaps forgotten history. Instead he was much more impressed by the more immediate Russian revolution and its attendant abruptness.

More differences between father and son: Liebknecht the Elder had the fortune of working with formulators of scientific Socialism, men of experience and calculation. He lived in the intimate company of Marx, Engels and Bebel, who were ready to counsel or reprimand. He had enough respect for their influence and judgments to make general cooperation possible and beneficial. Liebknecht the Elder was also fortunate in that he had a special talent for writing which his son lacked. Newspapers and other written media were much more adaptable for gradual education of the masses. And because he led the workers with his pen and did not resort to street tactics, German Social Democracy remained intact and prospered, in spite of the critical and hostile attitude of the German government.

As to the meaning of the nature of the pre-war Social Democratic party for Karl Liebknecht, reference must be made to party principles which were later faithfully upheld by him, notwithstanding the changing circumstances in which the majority of the party deserted them. The first of these principles to which he remained loyal was internationalism. The Erfurt program declared that German Socialists were "at one with the class-conscious workers of all other countries." Although it appeared that the party accepted this Marxian principle as the yardstick for future action, Karl Liebknecht's distinction rested on the fact that the party, except for the minority to which he belonged, did not interpret the principle in the Marxist

sense. His efforts to persuade the party to adhere to Marxian internationalism brought him personal prominence, but nothing more. The majority continued to preach internationalism and practice nationalism.

The second principle which Liebknecht promoted was the party's original view on anti-militarism. As the government siphoned more and more men and money from the ranks of the Socialist workers, he endeavored to persuade his errant party to honor the maxim of his father: "Not a man, not a penny." Unlike his father, however, he devoted a proportionately larger share of his energies to vigorous promotion of resistance to mounting militarism. In this connection he assumed a vital role in the organization of the Socialist youth movement. He believed that a Socialist education for the youth, during their impressionable years and before they were conscripted, would prevent their capture by and contribute to the downfall of the reactionary forces of militarism.

Finally, the party's original anti-war principle also remained on Liebknecht's personal political agenda. His father fulminated against the Franco-Prussian War without much regard for personal consequences. It took a braver or more foolhardy man to denounce World War I and to vote against the moneys for its continuation. This was done with a greater disregard for personal fate; and in the end, Karl Liebknecht's fate was more tragic. It could have been otherwise had he not sought to cling to a rigid interpretation of his father's party's anti-national, anti-militarist, and anti-war tradition.

[1] Cf. Sinclair W. Armstrong, "The Internationalism of the Early Social Democrats of Germany," in *The American Historical Review* (January, 1942), LXVIII, 245-258.

[2] For Karl Marx's criticisms and letters see his *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

[3] Wilhelm Liebknecht, "The Programme of German Socialism," in *The Forum* (February, 1895), XVIII, 652ff.

II

LIEBKNECHT THE YOUNGER

If first impressions are important, then the youth of Karl Liebknecht must be taken into careful account, for it was during the plasticity of his younger years that his Socialist and anti-militarist views germinated. He grew up witnessing the growing pains of German Social Democracy. And the time which a father normally devotes to rear a family was sacrificed in this case by his father to the ideals of Socialism which he held so dear. When Karl Liebknecht at the age of three first saw his father, the latter was in prison for criticizing the Prussian war effort of 1870-71.

Liebknecht was seven years of age when the Exceptional Laws came into force against his father's party. Socialists were eligible game for the police, and father Liebknecht moved his family from Leipzig to a near-by out-of-the-way village, Borsdorf. Here he spent his youth. At Borsdorf the Liebknecht family was in a bad way economically. Previously, father Liebknecht had supported his family by the talent of his writing; but now the Exceptional Laws dried the ink of his pen. Karl Liebknecht now, for the first time perhaps, realized that the way of an idealist was a thorny one. The living conditions at Borsdorf were poor. The father fought the power of money, and it followed that the family would be without that which the father fought. But the father was a good teacher, the son a good student; and Karl Liebknecht learned to know the Socialist cause as a commendable one and to hate the power of money.

As might have been anticipated, Karl Liebknecht as he matured developed an anti-materialistic philosophy of life. He found the stuff of life in books and nature. As a student of nature he collected butterflies and studied plant life and the songs of birds. His sensitive spirit also urged him to write poetry, but he was self-critical enough not to reveal any of it. He memorized parts of *Faust* and took a deep interest in humanistic studies and classical art. Perhaps his greatest love was music and Bach. Because he possessed no means, his knowledge of music and other subjects was self-acquired. These—books, nature, poetry, art, and music—were his interests long before he entered into the field of politics.

When the time came to make a decision with regard to his future

profession, he decided on law and political economy "in order to defend Marxism." Because his father's income was small, it was only with the party's help that he was able to carry out his studies. He studied first at Leipzig; and at Berlin he received his doctor's degree in law and political economy. In 1893 and 1894 his professional pursuits were interrupted when he and his older brother, Theodor, served with the Imperial Pioneer Guards in Potsdam. Here, in the uniform of the Emperor, he learned about the militarism which he learned to despise. After passing his law examination, he accepted a post as junior barrister in the Westphalian region of Arnsberg and Paderborn. His mystic soul found some compatibility with the native Catholic religion. He drew himself to the proud Westphalian peasants, the *Volkstum*, who like his kind struggled for an existence. In these contacts, together with his own experiences in Borsdorf, he found the richest sources for his enlightenment as to the needs, customs, and daily lives of the proletariat.

In 1898 he advanced to the position of assessor and moved to Berlin as a lawyer. In 1900 his father died; and in the same year he entered into his first marriage. Ten years later his wife, by whom he had three children, died. In 1912 he married the woman who became his second wife, a Russian by birth and a graduate of the University of Heidelberg. There were no children by his second marriage.

Upon moving to Berlin in 1898, Liebknecht dedicated his legal talents to the Socialist movement and entered the field of politics. He quickly followed in the footsteps of his father. He delivered his first public political speech in Kommandanten street before an assembly of workers. By 1902 he attracted enough attention and support to be elected to the council of Berlin.

He acquired a greater prominence two years later in connection with the Königsberg trial. Socialist propaganda had infiltrated into tsarist Russia from East Prussia. A number of "offenders", mostly propertyless peasants, who were accused of having participated in the smuggling process, were brought to trial at Königsberg where the German government made common cause with the Russian government to defend the reactionary cause. Liebknecht dedicated himself to the defense of the accused. In the process of the trial a number of political intrigues were discovered, such as the existence of Russian spy circles in the borderlands and cruel subjugation of the peasant folk by the Russians. These revelations greatly angered Liebknecht, in whom the hatred against international repression and intimidation of the reactionaries now waxed bitterly.

The trial created a mild sensation, and the public took note of Liebknecht's name. He did not miss his opportunity to develop a tirade against what he called the multitudinous sins of capitalism. All of Europe, he said, had its eyes turned on Königsberg because of the malicious attempt to penalize German Social Democracy for taking the part of Russia's repressed peoples. Here we see the public beginnings of his hatred for tsarist Russia, perhaps his number one hate at this time. He accused Russia of "russifying" the border provinces and raping Finland. "Russian history," he said, "is written in blood." He quoted Peter the Great who said: "I cannot deal with people, but have to deal with animals which I want to educate into people." "But today," Liebknecht added, "the Romanovs are dealing with people of whom they want to make animals." The people went to Siberia, while the animals belonged to those elements which supported the government. Only Social Democracy, he then insisted, could rid Russia of the terrorism for which it was famous. He injected a word against Germany too by calling the trial "an act of courtesy of Germany to the Russian government in whose interests it (the trial) is being conducted."

Liebknecht's defense of the accused was primarily an apology for Social Democracy and a condemnation of the reactionary governments of Russia and Germany. In the tradition of his father, he eagerly capitalized on an opportunity to participate in a trial in order to air his political views and the cause of his party. He made his mark, however, and thenceforth had to be reckoned with.

Meanwhile, within the ranks of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD),[1] a schism began to develop which during World War I resulted in the formation of two different permanent labor parties: the one reformist and democratic, the other totalitarian and socialist-revolutionary.[2] Reformism or revisionism (the terms, though not strictly synonomous, are used interchangeably) developed with the gradual opposition to the Marxian point of view. One of its earliest leaders in the SPD was Georg von Vollmar, who as early as 1894 took the unprecedented step of leading the Bavarian Socialists to vote for the budget in the Bavarian Assembly.

It was Eduard Bernstein, however, who gave reformism its theoretical base in his *Evolutionary Socialism*, published in 1899. The SPD, he said, should abandon its revolutionary theories and traditions now that it lived in a permanent capitalistic and non-revolutionary society and confess to itself that it was a democratic-socialist party of reform. Bernstein's opportunism, though not officially subscribed to by the SPD, made sharp inroads among the member-

ship to give an equally sharp stimulus to a new revolutionism among those who claimed to be the defenders of Marxian purity. The result was that the revolutionists were "as hostile to the traditional tactic of the Social Democratic Party as the revisionists were to its theory." One could use very conveniently Liebknecht's party record to plot the course of the new revolutionism which culminated in the formation of the German Communist party in December, 1918.

It was in 1904, the same year of the Königsberg trial, that Liebknecht began to display some initiative in party politics. One of the dormant demands of the radical Socialists had been the use of the mass strike as a weapon against militarism, as well as for the winning of the franchise, among other political objectives. The question of the mass strike was an old one: the English Chartists viewed it as a means of enforcing their demands. The idea received a fresh impetus, however, when in 1902 and 1903 the Belgian, Dutch, and Swedish workers resorted to its use to achieve their respective objectives. In Germany during the same years the idea spread under the leadership of Raphael Friedeberg, who unsuccessfully sought to bring it to the attention of the SPD. Liebknecht's sympathy for the use of the mass strike moved him to bring it before the SPD's annual congress at Bremen in 1904. He suggested that the party at its next annual congress in 1905 re-examine the possibilities of using the strike as a political weapon; but his proposal held little attraction for the majority of the party.

The Russian revolution of 1905 momentarily rocked the SPD out of its reformist thinking. At its annual congress held at Jena in 1905 the party was eager to discuss the question of the mass strike. Even the party chairman, August Bebel, not only devoted a three and a half hour speech to the issue; but he recommended the use of the strike as a defensive weapon. This time Liebknecht too had a better audience. He emphasized that the strike must be used not only for economic, but also for political ends: it must be used to prepare revolution. To the question whether a political strike would assure a successful revolution, he replied: "There has never been insurance for the success of any revolution; such insurance has yet to be invented. . . . The blood of the masses is dear to us, but the ideals and the political rights of the masses are no less dear, and we do not want to lose them without offering resistance." The SPD was interested, yet careful. It finally adopted Bebel's resolution recommending the mass strike primarily as a "defensive" weapon. It was to be used to promote the gradualist, not the revolutionist tactic.

Although Liebknecht's optimism for the success of the Russian revolution lingered on, the majority in the SPD soon realized the futility of the Russian course of events which had inspired them to accept the principle of the mass strike. After the revolution failed and emotions cooled, the question of the mass strike soon lost its significance. As early as November, 1905, the party executive rejected a plan to organize demonstration strikes in behalf of the workers' suffrage cause.

Another factor which contributed to the defeat of the mass strike was the essential political conservatism of the trade unions, which at their triennial congress held at Köln in May, 1905, had already declared war on the radicals. The important trade union leaders were not willing to sacrifice their organizations and the economic gains achieved for their membership by subscribing to the mass strike which in their thinking would lead to nothing more than revolutionary adventure. At the SPD's congress at Mannheim in 1906 the trade union leader Legien drove home the point that strikes lead to street fighting and bloodshed, and that unsuccessful strikes would mean the end of the SPD.

Moreover, in February, 1906, (before the party congress of that year convened) a secret meeting took place between the leaders of the SPD and the trade unions. Party leaders agreed never to call the workers to strike unless they had the consent of the trade unions. The success of the mass strike tactic, therefore, hinged upon the relationship between the party and the trade unions. The primary purpose of the party congress which met in the fall of 1906 was to define that relationship and determine a basis for unity between the political and economic wings of the labor movement. The trade unionists, allied with the party executive, wanted parity and with it, of course, control over the question of the mass strike. It got both. Liebknecht's thinly veiled proposal to subordinate the trade unions to the party was rejected.

The mutual hostility between Liebknecht's political radicalism and the trade union's political conservatism not only affected his failure to successfully promote the use of the mass strike, but made it impossible for him and his colleagues to win the long-term support of the trade union following. The radicals could not offer the trade union rank and file any more than they already had, and perhaps could not offer them as much. Essentially they remained strangers to the masses which supported the trade unions and the party reformists because they, including Liebknecht, were unable to appreciate sufficiently the appreciation which the masses had for the successes

achieved for them by the unions and party over a period of time. This helps to explain why the Liebknecht group failed to receive any *significant* mass support during the war and particularly during the revolutionary days of 1918-19.

THE MOLOCH OF MILITARISM

The SPD's failure to approve the use of the mass strike was a blow to Liebknecht's ambition to destroy militarism. The alliance between party reformists and trade union leaders on the strike issue was insurmountable, and he wasted little effort thereafter in reviving the problem. Only here and there do we find him raising the issue again, but never again with any great enthusiasm. At the Jena party congress in 1913, for example, he made a feeble effort to develop interest in it as a measure to be applied specifically to the abolition of the Prussian three-class system, but the only satisfaction he derived from this attempt was the privilege of accusing Philipp Scheidemann, a reformist leader, of being inwardly an enemy of the mass strike, although he paid lip service to it.

The downfall of German militarism would have to be brought about by different means: through long-term education, agitation, and organization. In his struggle against it, Liebknecht revealed a fulfillment of the self-announced purpose of his life: "The purpose in my life is to fight militarism to the last drop of blood." And the SPD, he said, borrowing some of Frederick the Great's phraseology, should be *"toujours en vedette"* and use "every means at its command . . . to fight militarism, the greatest, most brutal danger to the party"; and it should not rest "until it has succeeded in burying this *rocher de bronce, . . .*"

It was at the party congress in 1904, the same year in which Liebknecht acquired prominence in connection with the Königsberg trial and the mass strike question, that he also first began to call the SPD's attention to the problem of militarism. The fight against it, he said, needed special attention and organization. He urged especially that the youth be imbued with the gospel of Socialism before they were conscripted and indoctrinated by the military. The party rejected his proposals, however, with the excuse that German courts would not sanction anti-militarist propaganda among the potential conscripts.

At the party congress at Jena in 1905, the SPD tilted to the left in reaction to the Russian revolution. In the same spirit that it adopted the essentials of the mass strike principle it also conceded attention to Liebknecht's plea for action against militarism, which

had been brushed aside the previous year, he reminded the congress, with a "certain amount of scornful laughter." He again called for special agitation and organization among the youth and proposed specifically that public pre-induction meetings be held to inform the inductees of those things which would cause them to acquire a repugnance of militarism. His proposal was accepted by the party.

At the Mannheim party congress in 1906, Liebknecht tried to step up the party's agitation against militarism. He acknowledged that to do battle with militarism was a complicated and dangerous business; but Germany lagged far behind France and Belgium who had accomplished much more against this foe. He proposed that in order to compensate for past indifference the party should create a special central committee for anti-militarist action. This committee would serve as a sort of "General Staff" to direct the offensive against the "strongest bulwark of capitalism".

The failure of the Russian revolution was apparent by the time the SPD gathered at Mannheim, and it returned to its normal reformist channel. The party chairman, Bebel, accused Liebknecht of wanting to undermine the party executive with his proposal for a "General Staff". Furthermore, Liebknecht had no right to compare the situation in Germany with those in France and Belgium, the latter which "means nothing, and whose army cannot be compared with the Prussian military organization." The SPD, going along with the trade unions and reformism in rejecting the strike principle, was now much less ready also to go along with Liebknecht's anti-militarist crusade.

In 1907 the SPD suffered an electoral defeat, which the reformists blamed on the party's anti-national attitudes. The resulting increased opposition to Liebknecht's anti-militarism revealed itself at the party congress at Essen in 1907. The SPD majority, though ready to criticize specific abuses of German militarism, was equally prepared to reconcile the traditional principle of the people's militia with the idea of national interest: an attempt which to Liebknecht appeared to be a major concession, pure and simple, to national militarism.

Typical of his opponents on the military issue was Gustav Noske, later the "butcher" of the Spartacists in January, 1919, whom he attacked for his nationalism and lack of enthusiasm for international solidarity. Noske wanted as much discipline for the army as the SPD wanted for itself; to which Liebknecht countered: more discipline for the party and much less for the army. Noske, according to Liebknecht, would be a better example of party discipline if he would

say more about class warfare and less about the warfare which Germany through its armed strength was able to promote. It was Liebknecht's conviction that only if the proletariat dedicated itself to an active and vigorous program of class warfare, would army discipline fold, the ruling classes lose their strength, and the masses be relieved of the oppressive tributes which the militarists demanded.

As the opposition within the party to Liebknecht's campaign against militarism mounted, he proceeded virtually alone, but for the limited company of Rosa Luxemburg, Hermann Duncker, and a few others —all later Spartacists—in the struggle "to fight militarism to the last drop of blood." In this almost unilateral effort he resorted to his most significant tactic: the organization and education of the youth against militarism before they were conscripted, so that the army would have to deal with critical, not pliable recruits. On November 28, 1906, several weeks after the annual party congress which paid no heed to his "General Staff" concept, he read a paper before a conference of young people gathered at Mannheim. These youth were witnesses to one of the most vitriolic public attacks ever uttered against militarism in Germany. His speech was revised and published in pamphlet form the following year under the title *Militarismus und Antimilitarismus.*[8] His ideas on militarism, as reflected in the pamphlet, should be briefly reviewed: they were significant and unorthodox enough to earn for him a prison sentence.

In describing the nature of militarism, Liebknecht depicted the army as a national institution, which attacked abroad or protected against a danger from abroad, in the interests of the ruling classes. The function of the army was a necessary one. General von Moltke explained its existence on the premise that "eternal peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one, and war is part of God's world order." War developed "the noblest virtues of man, courage and abnegation, dutifulness and self-sacrifice at the risk of life. Without war, the world would sink into materialism." A second form of militarism was navalism, which revealed all of the vicious traits of land militarism. He cited the naval race between Germany and Britain and concluded that in the circumstances navalism was a greater threat to peace. The third offspring of capitalism was colonial militarism, which drove colonial natives into the slave service of the ruling classes. Colonial armies, moreover, sometimes consisted of the scum of the Europeans—"the most brutal and abominable of all the tools employed by our capitalistic states."

Militarism served not only to attack and defend against the foreign enemy, but it was also a weapon in the hands of the capitalist

class for the suppression of the burdened masses on the domestic front. As such it cooperated with the police, law courts, schools, and churches in protecting the existing order of society. The ruling classes armed the people against themselves, and therefore the worker should know that the fatherland for which he fought was not his fatherland. Instead, the proletariat of every country should be bound to the proletariat of other countries; for the capitalist class in every country exploited and oppressed the proletariat. The capitalists led the workers into war to fight against fellow-workers, and thus against their own interests. The classic example of the application of militarism for the suppression of the working class and its interests was Asiatic, despotic Russia.

In examining the "means and effects of militarism" Liebknecht contended that the Prusso-German bureaucratic, feudal and capitalist military system, in order to be effective, had to inspire the army with the proper spirit. The proper military spirit, also called the "patriotic spirit" or "loyalty to the king", simply signified a readiness to execute faithfully without question whatever was commanded. Ideally, the most stupid soldier would be the best soldier, except that modern warfare called for a certain degree of intelligence. Capitalists, however, could not use a stupid mass of people in the performance of economic functions characteristic of a capitalistic order of society. Capitalism, to grow and prosper, needed people of intelligence and refinement. Militarism and capitalism, therefore, were in a quandry. The East Elbian farmhands were stupid enough to be herded without trouble, but not intelligent enough to perform the modern techniques of war. The Socialists on the other hand were not stupid enough to be commanded at will; but they were intelligent enough to fulfill the modern demands of technology.

The army therefore faced the task of bending the will of the worker-soldier by one technique or another. The army's existence and efficiency depended on the spirit of crazy jingoism, narrow-mindedness and arrogance. How was the proletarian soldier to be infused with this spirit? First he had to be separated locally from the members of his class and family and shut up in barracks. Next, segregation had to be enforced for a lengthy period. Finally, the time thus gained had to be devoted to capturing his dormant or rebellious spirit.

To accelerate the soldier's process of conversion to the canons of militarism, his vanity and ambition were stimulated. The highest honor was the soldier's honor, which entitled him to a number of privileges. There was no finer uniform than the soldier's, a gay

dress which appealed to his finery. The coarser and more unrefined the soldier was in his tastes, the greater he would be thrilled by his uniform and fascinated by the glittering medals which praised his proficiency in one field or another. The lower the mentality and social condition of the soldier, the better was the effect of these means. "One need only think of an American Negro or an East Prussian agricultural slave suddenly invested with the 'most distinguished' coat."

When the soldier's will to serve was assured by these means his mind was systematically trained by daily military school lessons, including drill, the capstone of his training, which taught him discipline and order. The coat of the officer or non-commissioned officer was canonized; and it did the soldier's thinking for him. The disciplinary system was militarism's whip, which stripped the soldier, the "watchdog of capital", of all initiative.

In order to insure moral and material support for its existence, militarism also extended its influence to the civil population. One method of doing this was through the reserve-officer system which carried the caste spirit of militarism into civilian society. This technique was particularly vicious because reserve officers held teaching, legal, administrative, and other highly influential positions. In this manner civilians gradually acquired a militaristic view of life, a condition which made it progressively easier for the army to acquire and discipline its manpower. Veterans' associations in their civilian activities also promoted sympathy for the cause of militarism.

Militarism also diffused its influence by its character as a consumer and producer of goods, which enabled a host of businessmen to live from the profits acquired from business transactions with the military forces. The people who produced and transported the necessities for the military and who profited from them comprised and influenced the population of entire towns, particularly near the garrisons. Many became powerful princes in their own right. Of greater import, and more vicious, were the people who manufactured armaments for the military. These were the Krupps,[4] Stumms, Löwes, Wörmanns, Tippelskirchs, and others. These armament manufacturers "pour out the holy ghost of militarism over 'their' workers and all that are dependent on them, and conduct a relentless war against the forces of the revolution."

Among the "cardinal sins" of militarism was the maltreatment of soldiers. Although the German army no longer had to resort to thrashing in order to assure conformity, as in the days of Frederick the Great, brutal insults and beatings still had a place in the Ger-

man military educational system.[8] The proletarian soldiers in particular were maltreated if they exhibited any reluctance to the process of conversion into an efficient unit of the military machine. The management of making a soldier forget his proletarian identity was primarily in the hands of the non-commissioned officers ("the representatives of God on earth"), mostly uneducated people lacking all pedagogical talent. They were for the most part *"stramme Soldaten"* who frequently could not get along in civilian life. Liebknecht recognized in the issue of maltreatment a weapon which the Socialists should employ against militarism. Capitalist barbarism in the army was to be advertised through the Socialist propaganda organs as another means of undermining military discipline and liberating the proletariat.

Another cardinal sin of militarism was its obstruction to the fulfillment of Germany's task of civilizing the world. Militarism impeded progress in education, art, science, public sanitation, and other fields. Liebknecht compared the one and a third billion marks of Germany's military budget of 1906 with the 171 millions disbursed in Prussia for all educational purposes. The military Moloch had to be fed while decrees were passed against the raising of teachers' salaries. An ironic aspect of this sin was that capitalistic interests shifted the burden of supporting militarism on the shoulders of the workers. The capitalists were not satisfied with making the workers executioners of other people; they also wanted them to pay dearly out of the sweat and blood of their daily toil.

Another way in which the capitalist-military alliance suppressed the proletariat was the use of the army in competition with the workers' right to work. The army competed with labor by sending soldiers to help harvest the fields, to work in post offices and on the railroads at times of heavy traffic. The army also interfered with the struggle of labor to free itself by dispatching soldiers to act as strike-breakers. In Germany a special technique had been developed by which ex-servicemen were pushed into the ranks of the strike-breakers, as during the Nuremberg strike of 1906. Liebknecht admitted that military strike-breaking was practiced on a larger scale outside of Germany. This moderation was not the result of the government's mild disposition, however; rather it was because Germany's police force, Europe's finest, broke strikes in the army's stead.

This was the militarism which Liebknecht condemned. Only its removal could lead to the fulfillment of the Marxian ideal: "The conquest of political power." The government apparently paid little

heed to his views when he first uttered them to the young people gathered at Mannheim in 1906. In the following year, however, when his views were published in pamphlet form, the German authorities ordered all copies of the speech confiscated and Liebknecht arrested. They brought him to trial for high treason. If he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father, he would have to take the good with the bad. The Imperial Court accused him of subversive activities, particularly in that he endeavored to deprive the Emperor of his authority to declare war. The prosecution also charged him with inciting France to war against Germany— a charge, however, which had to be dropped. Actually his pamphlet was virtually harmless as far as the masses were concerned. It was too philosophical and doctrinaire to have any real effect. The authorities admitted that "it was somewhat difficult for the simple layman" to comprehend.

Hugo Hasse, a rising star within the SPD and later the leader of the war-time Independent Socialists, ably defended Liebknecht. Haase insisted that Liebknecht's criticism of militarism was in the interest of liberty and the preservation of culture. His criticism stemmed out of honest idealism which gave him not only the right but the moral duty to promote the interests of the working class.

The trial attracted wide attention, and its proceedings were carefully followed by the Kaiser. The press carried undenied reports that Wilhelm II, who had a copy of Liebknecht's speech before him long before the trial, remained in constant touch with the trial's progress by special wire and detailed written reports.

The authorities gave Liebknecht hope for clemency if he would plead guilty to the charges against him. To this he said: "I take entire responsibility for every word I have written." On the second day of the trial he declared in court that he was convinced that the verdict of guilty had already been reached by the court. Then he proceeded with his defense speech which, in his words, promoted "splendid propaganda for my ideas on anti-militarism." His defense was incisive and to the point. The government trial was conducted not on the basis of juridical principles, but for political purposes. It was an act of state *(Staatsräson)*, not an act of justice. He grasped at the opportunity to attack his nemesis of militarism once more. "If you want peace, prepare for war, namely against militarism!" Then he confessed that he wanted to strip the Emperor of his authority in the matter of war declarations. He considered it his duty to bring the power of decision regarding war or peace from the darkness of the cabinet chambers and from the secret

paths of diplomacy into the light of the public. The right to decide on war or peace belonged to the jurisdiction of the people. It was the duty of every man of culture, of every Social Democrat, to fight for this right to decide; for it was the people who had to carry the onerous and distasteful burden of war. Finally, he demanded that the force of the army be withheld in cases of domestic opposition and not be employed in case of civil war. "Here I publicly represent the principle of peace." To make certain that the judges understood his position, he declared: "The aim of my life is the overthrow of the monarchy, as well as the emancipation of the exploited working class from political and economic bondage. As my father, who appeared before this court exactly thirty-five years ago to defend himself against the charge of treason, was ultimately pronounced victor, so I believe the day not far distant when the principles which I represent will be recognized as patriotic, as honorable, as true."

Liebknecht was convicted and sentenced to one and a half years in the military prison in Glatz, Silesia. One might have anticipated a more severe sentence in view of what he had said, written, and confirmed. Perhaps the authorities suspected that he elicited some degree of sympathy from the workers, particularly in industrial Berlin, where the trial was conducted and where he was a relatively familiar figure. The trial was so conducted that, to the disadvantage of the government, Liebknecht emerged as a martyr for his principles in the eyes of at least a portion of the masses. If the authorities suspected these things, then their suspicions were confirmed when in 1908 the workers elected him, while he was still in prison, to his first important public office—delegate to the Prussian Assembly *(Landtag)*.

In the Prussian Assembly, after his release from prison, Liebknecht rapidly acquired the reputation as the most outspoken champion of the Left. There on one occasion he participated in a discussion pertaining to the construction of a new opera house. "The opera house for which we are asked to vote the necessary funds should last for many generations," he assured. "We trust that it will last long after it has lost its character as a Royal Opera House." (After the abdication of the Kaiser in 1918 the Royal Opera became the Opera-House *Unter den Linden.)*

Liebknecht used the Prussian Assembly especially for his attacks on the Prussian three-class system of voting. He had been elected to the Assembly with five other Socialists on the strength of 600,000 votes, while the Conservatives gained 212 seats on the basis of only 418,000 votes. The injustices of the Prussian franchise system thus had been dramatically emphasized in the eyes of the Socialists. The

Prussian king had promised reforms, but with the help of the Conservatives was able to postpone them year after year. In 1909 and 1910 street demonstrations occurred in Prussia as an expression of disappointment over the unredeemed promised reforms. It was the suffrage issue, underscored by these demonstrations, which drew forth most of Liebknecht's scoldings in the Assembly, rather than the issue of militarism whose denunciation had cost him time in prison. It was for the remedy of the injustices of the electoral system that he had suggested the application of the general strike, already discussed.

Whatever Liebknecht censured in the Assembly however, whether it was the unjust franchise, opposition to the mass strike, or the Prussian police, for whom he had a particular antipathy, he did so with the "greatest honor" of having attacked the "Moloch of militarism," as he often called it, and having served a prison sentence to deserve that honor. He considered his actions more honorable than those of the Conservatives, who professed Christianity but at the same time trampled it under their feet.

Liebknecht's public criticisms of militarism, his critical speeches in the Prussian Assembly, at the party congresses, and later in the Reichstag, convinced some people that he was a man devoted essentially to destruction and without any real constructive ability. In 1910 he visited the United States, in the traces of his father before him.* He was impressed, but only in a critical and negative sense. He returned to Europe with a greater hatred for money, for to him the United States was the most imperialistic and capitalistic of all countries. Though he could not very well attack militarism in the United States, he asserted that in no European country, and we presume he included Germany which in his words "enjoys the reputation of being the police state *par excellence*," would the police dare handle its people as they did in the United States.

Liebknecht also charged that the United States constitution was "not worth the paper it is written upon." Later, in December, 1918, he told the Associated Press correspondent, S. Miles Bouton, that United States' entry into World War I "proved that your constitution is no better today than it was when I expressed my opinion of it nine years ago." If the National Assembly (Weimar) succeeded, it "will bequeath to us a charter equally as worthless. The workingmen are opposed to the perpetuation of private ownership."

EDUCATION AGAINST MILITARISM

The primary source from which Liebknecht sought to draw his strength against militarism was the youth movement. It was in the year 1904, at the party congress at Bremen, that he revealed openly his intent to win over the youth of Germany in order to defeat militarism, the power apparatus of capitalism. He rendered his formula for a successful fight against militarism to the congress in the following words: "Education of the youth means education against militarism." On another occasion he said that "whoever controls the youth, controls the future."

The ingredients in Liebknecht's formula included the premise that the young people were to be educated in the ideals of Socialism before they entered military service; for the law forbade agitation among them after induction. The character of militarism, perhaps as outlined two years later in his speech to the youth conference at Mannheim,' would be a subject of study, so that the youth would better be able to understand the evils of the army after induction and conduct themselves accordingly. In other words, Social Democracy was to pick off the youth before the military, the highest concentration of the brutal force of capitalism, had the chance to do so. To convert the young was more than a matter of Social Democratic parents teaching them the principles of Social Democracy. Education of the youth was a matter which the party had to accept as a principal and official plank in its platform of agitation.

As in everything else he suggested to the party in 1904, Liebknecht was rebuffed also on the youth issue. Bebel and other party leaders were not willing to risk the reputation of their party by sanctioning the organization and activities of impetuous youth. Liebknecht repeated his ideas in 1905 at the Jena party congress, which submitted to the party executive proposals in favor of a broad program of education and agitation among the youth. He won a paper victory at the next congress, held at Mannheim in 1906, when the party adopted his resolution calling for the "stimulation of proletarian youth to independent organizational activity."

Thus encouraged, Liebknecht launched his vitriolic assault against militarism at the Mannheim youth conference a few weeks later. His address was part of the counsel which he gave to these youth who had organized under the name of "Union of Young Workers of Germany". He also contributed to their publication, *The Young Guard*, in which he sought to give life to the horrors of militarism for youth about to enter the military service. He warned them that the military would tear them from their homes and discipline their entire

lives: their eating, drinking, coming and going, writing, sleeping, and thinking. They would be subjected to maltreatment, insults, and humiliation; but to soothe their feelings, they would receive glittering uniforms. The purpose of all this regimentation was to "protect the fatherland," which meant to duplicate the fatherland's deeds in China, Africa, and Morocco. They would be asked to fight against the domestic foe, and at the command of the "court-dogs of capitalism," to fire on their own fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. In addition, they would be forced into the ranks of the strikebreakers. They would become part of a system which he designated the "destroying angel of culture," which barbarized civilization and drained the people of the means which could insure progress.

This was plain language, and Liebknecht wanted more support for it from the party. At the Essen party congress in 1907 he chastized the SPD for its failure to abide by his youth resolution of the previous year and reminded it of its obligation to the anti-militarist resolution adopted by the Stuttgart international Socialist congress in August, 1907.[8] The SPD, having previously rejected Liebknecht's proposals on the issues of the mass strike and militarism, this time lamely accepted his resolution committing the party to intensified activities in the creation of youth organizations.

Liebknecht's apparent progress with the youth movement before his imprisonment must be reviewed also in connection with the international attempt to organize the youth for revolutionary Socialism. The origins of the international youth movement are vague, though Schüller holds that it, like Socialism, had its beginnings in the epoch of imperialism and industrialism. As youth became more important and more easily exploited than adults in most phases of industrial production, a "class consciousness", which provided incentive for organization, developed among them. Schüller contends that the growing pressure of militarism also contributed to their desire for organization.[9] As far as German youth groups are concerned, they began to appear in the generative climate of 1904-1906, some of them with the assistance of Liebknecht. Whatever their exact origins, the youth groups from the first were more radical than reformist: they had no reformist or parliamentary tradition; they were inevitably idealistic; and often they were forbidden the right to organize and assemble, and thus forced underground into revolutionary channels.

The youth movement became significant for the first time when it was organized internationally. Attempts to organize the youth on an international basis were made without success in Paris in 1890 and Amsterdam in 1904. The Russian revolution of 1905, however, gave

the youth movement a significant impetus. In addition to this, the questions of war and militarism and the counsel of Liebknecht and another German youth leader, Ludwig Frank,* motivated a conference of South German youth to renew the proposal for an international youth organization. In March, 1907, on the initiative of the South German youth, a provisional international bureau was organized, comprising Liebknecht and Frank of Germany and de Man of Belgium. This provisional bureau summoned and organized the first international Socialist youth conference, which met in conjunction with the international Socialist congress in Stuttgart, August, 1907.

Significantly, the international Socialist congress devoted itself to the questions of militarism and war. It adopted an anti-war resolution (one of the important documents in Socialist history) which declared that "the struggle against militarism cannot be separated form the Socialist class struggle in general." Wars were caused by capitalism, and the only remedy was the application of Socialism. It was the duty of the working people to "combat with all their power naval and military armaments and to refuse means for these armaments." It was also the duty of the working class to see to it "that the proletarian youth is educated in the spirit of the brotherhood of peoples and of Socialism and is imbued with class consciousness."

It was in the spirit of this resolution that the first international Socialist youth conference also met. It considered the questions of Socialist youth education and organization in the light of the international Socialist congress' resolutions on militarism and war. In this environment, Liebknecht played a leading role in the organization of the youth conference and had the full support of Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin.

Twenty delegates, representing thirteen countries, elected Liebknecht and Bader (Switzerland) as their chairmen. They resolved to found an international organization of the Socialist youth, known officially as the "International Union of Socialist Youth Organizations", or more conveniently the "International of Socialist Youth." The new youth organization, rather than adopting a formal program, accepted a series of resolutions which constituted the guiding principles to govern its future actions. The resolutions, formulated by Liebknecht, clearly reflected the revolutionary character of the international youth. The resolutions repeated Liebknecht's doctrine that the Socialist creed of class struggle was inseparable from the struggle against militarism; the two went hand in hand, and for this reason it was necessary to educate the youth against militarism. The resolutions "were a triumph for the ideas which the pioneers of the

Socialist youth movement, especially Karl Liebknecht, pursued in their activities."

The youth conference also gave its attention to a paper by Liebknecht entitled "The Battle Against Militarism", in which he sketched the enormous development of militarism and its double role of fighting the external enemy and suppressing the working classes on the domestic front. The main point of his paper was the need for special antimilitarist agitation to be developed within the framework of the revolutionary planning against the capitalistic order. Perhaps with even greater effort he sought to impress on the youth that it was they who had to play the key role in the struggle against militarism.

The delegates accepted the principles of Liebknecht's speech and adopted a resolution, proposed by him, that the youth conference "acknowledges the resolution of the Stuttgart international (Socialist) congress (not to be confused with the youth conference) relating to militarism and the duties formulated for the anti-imperialist struggle and the youth organizations." The youth conference also resolved to direct "special attention to the danger of militarism within the class struggle and appoints it a duty for the international youth movement to combat militarism in the sense described by the resolution of the congress."

Liebknecht no doubt had great hopes for the fulfillment of his ideas. The International of Socialist Youth accepted his revolutionary tactic, which inspired him to push harder for the organization of radical youth within Germany. "The soul of the conference was the revolutionary battle against militarism and imperialism in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht." His progress among the international youth in August, 1907, was matched, as we have seen, by the SPD's acceptance in September of his resolution calling for intensified agitation among the German youth. The appearance of his pamphlet *Militarismus und Antimilitarismus* in the same year gave both the German and international youth a handbook of guiding principles. In October, however, his progress in the organization of opinion in favor of the revolutionary youth movement was both acknowledged and checked by the government when it imprisoned him for one and a half years.

Though it had formally complied with Liebknecht's request for party support, the SPD was by and large oblivious to his plans for a revolutionary and independent youth organization in Germany. The SPD in this instance again welcomed the support of the trade union's general commission which had conferred on the youth issue in December, 1907. The trade unions naturally reacted sharply to the possibilities of radical youth activity, much in the same manner that

they had reacted against Liebknecht's ideas on anti-militarism and the mass strike. In order to eliminate the dangers of an irresponsible youth movement, the general commission urged party leaders to take the movement out of the hands of the youth and assume responsibility for their "cultivation."

A further antidote to the growth of Liebknecht's independent Socialist youth groups was the establishment of conservative youth organizations, such as the "Union of Young Germany", founded in 1907 by General von der Goltz for "the welfare of the youth". In April, 1908, the government coincidentally accomodated the SPD and the trade unions by issuing a law of assembly which curtailed the freedom of assembly for youth under eighteen and forbade their membership in political organizations and attendance at political assemblies.

The party fathers now argued that there was greater need for adult control over the youth movement; for if the youth groups in their enthusiasm violated the state law of assembly, the entire labor movement would be embarrassed. On the other hand, they also needed the party's protection against state persecution. At the Nuremburg party congress in 1908, the party executive in alliance with the general commission of the trade unions took advantage of Liebknecht's absence, and bouyed by the government's action against him as well as by the government's new law of assembly, passed a resolution in the spirit of trade unionist Legien's comment that Liebknecht's organization of the Socialist youth had been "a mistaken undertaking". Although permitted the privilege to organize separately and locally, the youth would manage their affairs in consultation and agreement with the parental wing of the labor movement. Thus the independence of the proletarian youth movement in Germany as Liebknecht had wanted it was formally restricted; but radicalism was not entirely eliminated and cropped out again with the help of Liebknecht's agitation during World War I.[11]

After his release from prison in 1909, Liebknecht made it his business to speak for the youth movement again at the party congress in Leipzig. Though the movement was now largely in the hands of the reformist SPD, he could do no less than to remind the party of its new responsibility. Though the party at its previous congress had established a youth publication, the *Youth Worker*, in order to insure its influence over the German youth, he criticized the SPD for not giving enough support to it. Other youth publications, he warned, had greater circulation. The *Youth Worker's* circulation should be in the hundreds of thousands instead of 30,000. He urged articles of higher

caliber, even if this meant that some fourteen-to sixteen-year-old youth would not understand them. It was more significant to write for the eighteen-year olds, who in their period of growth undergo rapid physical and spiritual changes.

Liebknecht also demanded better teachers for the youth, teachers with fresh, lively temperaments. Pedagogical talent in the party was hard to find, he admitted; but there was no purpose greater than that which the teachers of youth served. He cried for more agitation among the youth in trade union circles and athletic associations and for the establishment of more youth homes. The Protestants, Catholics, and the government had the advantage over the Socialists in the matter of educating and organizing the youth, which accounted for their superiority in numbers and influence. The cause of educating the youth for Socialism was so great that the party could at least match the energy of the Christians and the state. Liebknecht could have fared worse. In deference to his pleas, the SPD congress ambiguously resolved "to support the youth movement with greater energy" and make available more means for that purpose.

Both party energy and means were not forthcoming in sufficient quantities, however. At the Jena party congress in 1911 Liebknecht could only bemoan the fact that the state was gaining more and more influence over the young people. German youth had given in to the "boy scout" idea of much-hated Albion; and the scouts were taking their places now in military ceremonies. They had succumbed also to the fad of sports imported from America. In this fashion the state deflected the attention of the youth from the struggle of the proletariat.

Liebknecht's influence in the international youth conferences diminished, too. In 1910 he accompanied Radek and Trotsky to the second international youth conference in Copenhagen. Germany was not officially represented; for after the SPD's capture of Liebknecht's independent youth groups in 1908, the youth movement in Germany had no connection with the international body. The members of the conference welcomed him as an honored guest, however, and listened to him read a paper on anti-militarism. The conference adopted a resolution which paid tribute to his ideas; but with militarism and nationalism on the rampage everywhere, his views had little, if any, influence on the international youth movement at this time. He appeared again as guest at the third international youth conference in Basel, 1912. His presence there, however, was nothing more than a gesture of respect to the organization which he helped establish.

It was only during World War I, the threat of which had stimulated

the proletarian youth to organize, that the radical youth movement more significantly fulfilled its reason for existence and that Liebknecht's responsibility for its character became more clearly apparent. After the war the radical International of Socialist Youth joined the third International under the name of the International Communist Youth. It is in this sense that Liebknecht is regarded as the "soul and organizer" of the Communist youth movement.

THE KRUPP AFFAIR

In 1912 the people of Potsdam elected Liebknecht to the Reichstag, notwithstanding the fact that he was at odds with the majority of his party and that he had been branded as a revolutionary by the German government. As a radical, he was elected by a radical constituency from an industrial province where radicalism was likely to flourish. Now in one of the nation's highest tribunals he could reach a greater number of people with a greater voice of authority. His speeches and ideas took on a significance which necessarily reflected the opinions of a portion of the masses. And he was elected from under the window of the man who wielded the highest authority in Germany, and whose authority he had pledged to diminish. The Emperor once watched Liebknecht tried for high treason. How would Liebknecht now conduct himself in the Reichstag?

In the Reichstag Liebknecht had a new vantage point from which he could attack the system of militarism which supported the Emperor's power. He had talked and written against it and been imprisoned as a consequence. He had organized the youth against it, but was outdone by reformism. Now he enjoyed the privileges of a Reichstag deputy. Militarism had grown, but he had grown with it. He waited for his opportunity.

Liebknecht's first big chance in the Reichstag came in April, 1913, when he found a way of blasting militarism by probing into the secrets of the armaments industry. It was April 18, after a dull discussion on the second reading of army estimates, that he took the floor of the Reichstag. Before making his appearance on the floor, he had informed the newspapers that he was about to make some sensational disclosures and requested the presence of a battery of reporters. The reporters were late, and he delayed his speech until the press-gallery was full, and publicity thus assured.

He began to unfold his disclosures by launching a vicious assault on capitalism and the armaments industry. Capitalism and the armaments industry knew no country; they were apatriotic. The armaments suppliers, accused Liebknecht, delivered their goods abroad,

everywhere. All customers who paid the best price were treated alike, even though the highest bidder to whom the weapons were delivered, no matter who, might use them against the German army. Here he cleverly played on the sympathies of the nationalists to get at his pet target, militarism. He cited the Dillinger Works as an example of a military industry supported by international capitalism. The Dillinger Works, he charged, developed on a diet of French capital. While there was talk of France as the "hereditary enemy" and the "great danger," French capitalists sat in this German company and were initiated into the secrets of German armaments. Then in cooperation with German capitalists the French saw to it that a good deal of money was demanded of the German people for "national defense." This Liebknecht committed as evidence for the existence of the international solidarity of capitalism.

He next produced evidence to support his accusation that one of the greatest German weapons manufacturers, the German Munitions and Armaments Works, promoted an international armament race so that "money will jingle in the coffer." He referred to a letter, which was then in the possession of the Minister of War, from the German Munitions and Armaments Works to one of its agents in Paris instructing him to insert in a prominent French newspaper, "probably the *Figaro*," the news article that the French army administration "has agreed to accelerate considerably the modernization of the army with machine-guns and to order double the number which was first intended." The letter concluded with: "We ask you to spare no effort in working for the acceptance of an article of such a kind." The letter bore the signatures of the German Munitions and Armaments Works officials. Liebknecht contended that the circulation of this false report in the foreign press was promoted to create feeling among the Germans on behalf of the new army bill. The passage of the army bill would then bring adequate returns to the German Munitions and Armaments Works and its fellow armaments suppliers.

Then Liebknecht came to his most startling and original revelation. He disclosed that Friedrich Krupp, head of one of Germany's largest armaments works, maintained an agent in Berlin by the name of Brandt. It was Brandt's business to consort with government and military officials, and by bribing them, to obtain secret information which would interest the Krupp company. Brandt was particularly interested in the various bids received by the government from other armament concerns on prospective armaments construction. Krupp's purpose was to use Brandt's ill-gotten information to underbid the

competition and receive the contract award. Brandt received a lavish sum of money to carry out this enterprise in Berlin.

Liebknecht also accused the Krupps of bribing high and low Prussian officials in an effort to obtain military secrets. This corruption, he said, had been a long standing affair. "These secret reports, piled up neat and proper, lie—or lay!—in the secret cabinets of a von Dewitz in Essen, a high official of the Krupp firm." He did not accuse the War Ministry of participating in these intrigues and revealed that investigation and arrests were under way. He was also certain that these conspiracies were not typically German. The French armament firms, Creusot and Schneider, for example, were no better.

It was next the turn of General von Herringen, the Prussian Minister of War, to reply to Liebknecht's charges. He knew nothing of the affair of the German Munitions and Armaments Works. He did know something of the Krupp affair, however, as Liebknecht had said; but he had asked him not to reveal the Krupp case until preliminary investigations had been completed. There was some truth in what Liebknecht revealed, but Heeringen accused him of exaggerating the facts. Heeringen admitted that a subordinate of the Krupp concern had successfully corrupted several non-commissioned officers and an official to betray documents (to Socialist cries of "It is always a subordinate!"). He insisted, however, that these documents did not contain military secrets, and that there was no case of treason to the fatherland. Germany, he said, should recognize with gratitude that the German army owed to the Krupps its reputation of artillery superiority.

The Liebknecht revelations and the admissions of Heeringen caused some embarrassment in the right wing of the Reichstag. To prove that there was truth in his statements, Liebknecht asked the Reichstag session on the following day, April 19, to note the comments concerning his disclosures in some of the papers "which never have enough of patriotic screaming." Then he proceeded to reinforce his disclosures of the previous day. He claimed to have proved with written evidence his charges against the German Munitions and Armaments Works. He also insisted that he had proved that military secrets had been betrayed through bribery by the Krupps. He repeated his charge that a large number of secret documents relating to the Krupp affair lay in the safes in Essen, under the guardianship of Dewitz; but that he had some of them at his disposal which he had turned over to Heeringen, for whom he had "demonstrated a highest measure of loyalty." He protested, however, against Heeringen's expression of gratitude to the Krupps. Instead he would ask

how much "the Krupps owed to the German people" and "whether the hundreds of millions, now in the hands of this firm, did not come from the pockets of the poorest of the poor of the German people." It was the Krupps who should thank the German people for permitting, although at times reluctantly, the growth and increase of this firm. The Krupps, along with the Dillinger Works, the German Munitions and Armaments Works, and others, were the same people who drained the millions out of the pockets of the people; they were the same elements who instigated action for the suppression of the masses and for prison and exceptional laws against the Socialists. They were also the same people who, as the best patriots of Germany, called the Social Democrats apatriotic.

Liebknecht also demanded a general investigation of a well known fact (which "the sparrows whistle from the roof-tops") that the armaments industries formed a cartel in which the Krupps were the most influential. Then he referred to the record again by citing a letter in which Friedrich Krupp advertised his armaments to the French emperor, Napoleon III, in 1868; to which Napoleon replied, wishing Krupp "the success and expansion of an industry which is meant to render considerable services to humanity." It was with blessings of men like Napoleon on one hand, and at the expense of the suppressed masses, on the other, that the Krupps prospered.

General von Heeringen again took the floor to answer the charges levied by Liebknecht. He regarded Liebknecht's accusations relating to the German Munitions and Armaments Works as gross exaggeration. This was an old matter, he said, which had been aired previously. The firm had tried to insert an article in the French press; but the insertion had been promoted, according to previous testimony of the firm's directors, "merely with the purpose of securing by means of contradiction something definite to go upon regarding the intentions of the French military authorities" (Socialist laughter). Furthermore, the second day after Liebknecht accused the German Munitions and Armaments Works, the French paper *Figaro* flatly denied his implications that an article on the new mitrailleuses for the French army had been "placed" in it in order to foment the agitation in Germany for an increase in German armaments.

Liebknecht, however, had something on the Krupps. Even Heeringen admitted again that some of what Liebknecht had revealed about them was true. He urged patience, however; the affair was handled by the Prussian and German courts which "was a guarantee that the decision would be given without respect of persons. . . ."

(Socialist laughter). He contested that there was no question of treason or betrayal of military secrets. There was some truth, however, in the charge relating to the bribing of certain officers and civil officials by agents of the Krupp firm to obtain data on competitive bids; but that was all.

The Krupps, too, did not deny completely Liebknecht's accusations. Shortly after the accusations were levied in the Reichstag, the Krupp firm issued statements of a general sort to the *Cologne Gazette* and to the *Rhenish-Westphalian Paper* to the effect that the disclosures implicating it were exaggerated. The Krupps admitted payments, but insisted that the amounts spent upon bribery were negligible. The pay of *agents-provocateurs* was small, argued Liebknecht, and yet the police secret service fund was considerable. One Krupp official took Liebknecht's exaggerations more seriously than the others and challenged him to a duel; but Liebknecht politely declined to accept the invitation.

The trial of the government and military officials implicated in the Krupp affair began in July, 1913. There were seven persons accused of conveying information to the Krupp agent, Brandt. The seven included a chief clerk of the Ministry of War, four lieutenants in the Artillery Technical Department, and two subordinate clerks of the same department. The approach and methods employed by Brandt were revealed. He invited his informers to dinners at expensive restaurants, gave them theater tickets, and in several cases gave them money in return for desirable information. It was revealed, for example, that one of the four lieutenants, Tilian, had supplied Brandt with 360 reports out of the total of 700 reports which the police found and confiscated. Liebknecht had mysteriously got possession of seventeen of these incriminating documents as early as October, 1912, copies of which he dispatched to the War Ministry. Liebknecht did not reveal the source of his documents; but it was suggested that his channel of communication was the well-known Rhenish industrialist and competitor of Krupp, August Thyssen.

Brandt was brought to trial in November, 1913. The court found him guilty of bribery and sentenced him to four months imprisonment—a period, however, which he already had served in prison awaiting trial. In the judgment of the court, there was no betrayal of military secrets abroad; so this charge of Liebknecht fell by the board, too.

As a result of the Krupp affair, the government resolved to form a committee to inquire into the system of contracting for the armed

forces. Delbrück, Secretary of State for the Imperial Ministry of the Interior, assumed the chairmanship of the committee. All political parties in the Reichstag were to be represented on the committee. Liebknecht and Gustav Noske were named to serve for the SPD. The government objected to Liebknecht's nomination, however, "on account of the pronounced attitude which he personally had taken in the public discussion of the so-called Krupp affair." The SPD objected, as expected, to the government's attitude; it withdrew Noske and refused to serve.

The Krupp affair gave Liebknecht the impetus to carry his fight against militarism and the armaments industry right down to World War I, when that event provided him with new material for agitation. In a Reichstag speech on April 26, 1913, he dwelt on the dangers arising out of the international character of the capitalistic armaments industry. "The fatherland is in danger! But the danger does not come from the external enemies; rather it comes from the dangerous domestic enemies, particularly the international armaments industry." The SPD's newspaper, *Vorwärts*, carried articles authored by Liebknecht in which he denounced Krupp and the armaments industries with scathing invectives. "Militarism is great, and Krupp is its prophet."

Liebknecht attacked the international armaments industry again in a well-known debate in the Reichstag on May 11, 1914. Here he emphasized and elaborated on his views which he expressed on the subject in the previous year. He proceeded from his celebrated Krupp revelations of 1913 and presented a detailed picture of the prevailing conditions in the international armaments cartel system. He strove to show how the armaments corporations, working as a coalition, dealt in materials necessary for war purposes, and how they exploited as many nations as possible for their own interests. In Germany the industry operated on the basis of finances nominally estimated at 270 millions; but in reality its shares were worth half a billion. Krupp did not limit himself to Germany in trade and corruption; he was the giant in international war traffic and among firms who were in the same business.

On the same day Liebknecht accused the late Prussian General von Lindenau of having trafficked in titles. This was promoted allegedly with the Emperor's permission. These charges again created excitement among governmental authorities. The army and conservatives ridiculed him for attacking a dead man; but this did not deter him from condemning the evil associated with Lindenau.

Liebknecht's belligerent persistence in matters of this sort was not

generally appreciated by the Reichstag delegates, and their opinion of him reached a new low on the eve of World War I. They tired of his perpetual sermons and tirades and accusations which produced relatively little evidence in relation to the magnitude of his charges. Many Germans must have pictured him as a witch-hunter who, in his prejudiced enthusiasm to promote Socialism by finding fault with the government and its interests, consciously avoided acknowledgment of the positive virtues of the German way of life which tolerated him.

* * *

In summing up Liebknecht's activities before World War I, we may note that he aimed his efforts primarily at reactionary power and its manifestations; but he also devoted himself to the secondary task of stemming the swelling tide of opportunism within the ranks of the SPD. If he had been successful in the first instance, he would have succeeded in the second; although success against the reactionaries was equally as hopeless as it was against the reformists. He personally experienced a small measure of German authoritarianism when its heavy hand nudged him into a prison cell for his anti-militarist activities, particularly among the youth. Likewise the reformist SPD handed him a personal setback when it usurped control of the proletarian youth movement while he sat behind bars. Though the odds for success against him were great enough to warrant desperate measures, he never despaired. His conviction, enthusiasm, and optimism blinded him to the disadvantages under which he labored. A more sensible German would have gone along with both reformism and nationalism.

A survey of Liebknecht's campaign against reactionary government reveals his method of attack. He concentrated on the destruction of militarism, to him the greatest prop of capitalism. The secret of combating militarism successfully, he thought, was through the proper education of the youth. This was so important to him that he orated and wrote against militarism and its evils without regard for his personal fate, particularly if he could transform his personal fate into the idea of martyrdom.

He moved in the vanguard of those who criticized most severely the contemporary displays of the power of militarism. The Morocco question of 1911, for example, was not one of saving the "honor and interests of the German nation," but one of establishing the interests of capitalism for which the government demanded the *Gut und Blut* of the German people. The reactionaries also protected their flank with the feudal three-class suffrage system in Prussia, the home of

everything which stood for reaction . To this question Liebknecht also applied his anti-national formula: "The democratization of Prussia is not only a German, but a European question as well."

The minor stays of reactionary power received his attention, too. He criticized the out-moded alien laws of Germany, under which the government justified any means to prove whether or not a foreigner was a burden to the state. He advocated a change so that foreigners might have adequate guarantees of safety to person, property, and liberties which were considered by him to be the "natural rights of modern citizens." In the words "natural" and "modern" we have apt clues to Liebknecht's anti-reactionary sentiments.

The boundaries of authoritarianism, however, were not only the boundaries of Germany. It existed in varying degrees throughout the world. The best example of the worst thing was found in Russia. The Russian revolution of 1905 had given new hope to a hopeful people, and Liebknecht shared this hope. The revolution rapidly strengthened his influence in the SPD, which temporarily swung to the left. The failure of the revolution, however, brought about an equally rapid deterioration of his position within the party; but it failed to dash his enthusiastic optimism. The re-establishment of tsarism under Nicholas II and his chief minister, Stolypin, elicited renewed attacks from Liebknecht.

At the Bremen party congress in 1909, he predicted a new revolution of the Russian proletariat within a few years and called upon the German workers to support their Russian brethren. He appealed to the German proletariat to condemn the Kaiser, who provided the Russian tsar ("a barbaric and lawless criminal") on his celebrated visit to Germany the protection of German soldiers and officials, whom the German workers supported with their tax money. He also emotionalized strongly against the "re-russification" of Finland after the 1905 revolution, and pleaded his cause with a "Down with tsarism! Long live the freedom of the Finnish people!"

A review of Liebknecht's secondary struggle against the reformism of the SPD shows that he proceeded primarily along practical rather than theoretical lines. His theoretical knowledge and education in Marxism were second to his revolutionary enthusiasm. He was a better practical politician than a Marxian theorist. Both his practical and theoretical abilities, however, were distinctly inferior to his revolutionary self-dedication, which was outstanding. As the events of the German revolution were to demonstrate later, his shortcomings on practical ability were as great as his excesses of revolutionary eagerness.

The growing power of reformism within the SPD stopped but did not discourage Liebknecht at every major turn, whether on the issue of the mass strike, militarism, or the German youth. The SPD's drift to the right was clearly revealed in 1907 when it emerged from the Stuttgart international congress as the leader of the conservative wing of international Socialism. The SPD explained its opposition to Liebknecht's tactics partially with the excuse that in order to safeguard those gains already achieved the masses had no other choice but to conform to law and order. Liebknecht, however, wanted the masses aroused and, as war threatened, called up to lively demonstrations. *("Die Massen müssen aufgerüttelt werden!")*

At the bottom of the differences between the reformists and Liebknecht was the issue of nationalism. Most Social Democrats found a way of at least partially reconciling Socialism with the idea of national security, prosperity, and pride. The reformist attitude toward nationalism was expressed thus by Vollmar at the Stuttgart international congress: "It is not true that we have no fatherland. . . The love of humanity cannot for a moment prevent me from being a good German, and it cannot prevent others from being good French or Italians." Liebknecht was convinced that the Lassallean trend in the SPD undermined the original excuse for the party's existence and refused to believe in the reconcilability of Socialism and nationalism. Though he attempted to instill in the SPD the desire that "we want to be a united people in brotherhood, in distress and danger never to separate," he failed signally to revert it into its professedly original course of class struggle and international solidarity.

The SPD became more and more amenable to the German monarchy which Liebknecht pledged to overthrow. The reformists worked for the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and the right to vote. So did Liebknecht; but his means of and reasons for reaching these ends differed greatly. The reformists were oppositional, not revoluntionary. Only Liebknecht and his kind were revolutionary, more so especially as party opportunism found greater support. The government and reformists were his enemies.

[1] At the German Socialist Labor Party's congress at Halle, October, 1890, the party name was changed to Social Democratic Party of Germany *(Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands)*. Hereafter cited as SPD.

[2] For a recent analysis of the development of the German Socialist schism see Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism.*

[3] The full title of this revolutionary document is *Militarismus und Antimilitarismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der internationalen Jugendbewegung* (Berlin, n. d.). It was translated anonymously and published under the title *Militarism* (New York, 1917). The introduction to the English translation, written by a "friend", gives a short review of Liebknecht's antimilitarist activities.

[4] See below, pp. 41ff.

[5] Shortly before the war, Rosa Luxemburg wrote an article on the brutal treatment of German soldiers, and proceedings were initiated against her for insulting the army. According to her biographer, Paul Frölich, the defense issued an appeal for evidence sustaining Rosa Luxemburg's charges, whereupon thousands of victims and witnesses of military maltreatment responded to offer testimony. The trial had to be postponed to prevent the witnesses from entering the witness box. *Rosa Luxemburg*, 207.

[6] It was during the days of the Exceptional Laws against the Socialists that Liebknecht the Elder went on a lecturing tour in the United States, where people constantly reminded him of his strong resemblance with the late James G. Blaine

[7] See above, pp. 28ff. [8] See below, p. 37.

[9] For the history of the international youth movement, this writer has relied largely on Schüller, *Geschichte der kommunistischen Jugend-Internationale;* this work treats Liebknecht from the Communist point of view.

[10] Ludwig Frank was a reformist, not a social revolutionary, who was willing to resort to radical action in order to establish democratic institutions. He was a Jew, and at the age of forty, one of the first Socialists to enlist in the army. He was killed in action shortly after he enlisted.

[11] See below, pp. 56, 89ff.

III

WAR AGAINST WAR

Though Liebknecht fought both the political reactionists and party reformists, the relations between the government and party in which he was in the minority were little short of hostile. The Socialists, most of them, were still regarded as the *vaterlandslose Gesellen*, and their party "the purest incarnation of Marxian Socialism" on the eve of World War I. According to Rosa Luxemburg the SPD before the war held and wielded "a peculiar prestige as teacher and leader in the second International", which in 1907 at Stuttgart dedicated all Socialists to take measures to bring about the early termination of any war and to strive with all their power to use the economic and political crises created by the war to arouse the masses politically and hasten the overthrow of capitalist rule. This opinion of the SPD, had it been uttered before the war, would have encountered little formal criticism, notwithstanding the fact that party reformism after 1907 may have led some careful observers to believe that the SPD would not leave the fatherland in the lurch in the event of war. In other words, general opinion expected the SPD to live up to its anti-war position in August, 1914.

All external evidence immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities seemed to indicate that the SPD would live up to expectations, in spite of the fact that Sarajevo, according to Liebknecht, provided the militarists with "a gift from heaven." In reply to the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia in July, the SPD officially proclaimed on July 25 that "not one drop of a German soldier's blood shall be sacrificed to the lust of power of the Austrian rulers and to the imperialistic profit-interests." The last proclamation issued by the party executive on July 31 repeated the same essentials. The official party newspaper, *Vorwärts*, reflected similar views and refused to be swept away in the chauvinistic current, even on the day of mobilization.

On July 28 Austria declared war on Serbia. On July 29 and 30 a meeting of the international Socialist bureau, to which the SPD dispatched one of its leaders, Hugo Haase, took place in Brussels. Austria, he told the gathering, carried the entire responsibility for the commencement of hostilities. And even if Russia intervened,

"the German proletariat contends that Germany must not intervene. . . ."

The SPD directorate then sent one of its other members, Hermann Müller, to Paris after receiving the report of the Brussels meeting. The purpose of the mission was to discuss the arrangements for the congress of the international Socialist bureau which was scheduled to meet in Paris on August 9; but the real object of his mission may have been to ascertain what the French Socialists were going to do in the matter of voting war credits. Müller surprised the French when he dropped in on them on August 1, the day Germany declared war on Russia; but he was cordially received nonetheless. Müller told them that there were two lines of opinion in the German party. One group was for voting against the war credits; the other was in favor of abstaining from voting, in the tradition of Wilhelm's Liebknecht's action in 1870. That anyone would vote for the credits, however, was out of the question.

1914: CIVIL PEACE TO CIVIL WAR

On August 3 Germany declared war on France in the wake of charges that French aviators had dropped bombs and French cavalry and infantry detachments had appeared on German soil. On the same day the SPD Reichstag deputies called a caucus and deliberated on the question of war credits. The reality of war brought out the true colors of the SPD. To the surprise of many, the caucus recognized on principle the duty of defending the fatherland. Liebknecht, voicing the opinion of the minority, declared the expression "defense of the fatherland" to be a "misleading phrase" *(Verwirrungsphrase)*. All except Liebknecht and thirteen others in the caucus voted to support the credits the following day in the Reichstag. The minority thought, however, that the right course to maintain was to abide by majority decision and uphold party discipline. It even persuaded Haase, an opponent of the credits, to read the declaration of unanimous approval for the SPD delegation in the Reichstag.

On the following day, August 4, the German Emperor announced the policy of "civil peace" *(Burgfrieden)* with the words: "I know no more parties, I only know Germans." Thereupon the chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, made public the invasion of Belgium with the excuse that "necessity knows no law." Bethmann-Hollweg's speech was followed, after an hour's intermission, by Haase's declaration giving "our sanction to the voting of those moneys demanded." Thus Liebknecht, the anti-militarist and anti-nationalist, went on record in support of a "war for defense."

It should be noted that the SPD formally voted for the credits *after* it had knowledge of the invasion of Belgium. The majority of the SPD, however, took Bethmann-Hollweg's statement that the invasion of Belgium was a "military necessity" at its face value. Germany was on the defensive and had to take this drastic measure, or be killed. Liebknecht, however, immediately on the heels of the announcement of the Belgian development wanted to register his dissent from Haase's declaration of unanimity on the proposed credits. This, however, was made practically impossible, according to Liebknecht, by the decision that there should be only three speeches —one by Bethmann-Hollweg in behalf of the government, one by the president of the Reichstag in behalf of the middle-class parties, and one by Haase in behalf of the Socialist faction. This foregone arrangement made it possible to say that there was unanimous support for the war credits.

The SPD's pledge to support the war credits provided the necessary unity in Germany to wage a complete and efficient war. The Socialist majoritarians in the Reichstag were sincere in their conviction that Germany became involved in the interest of self-preservation. A defensive war could be justified ideologically on the grounds that Marx and Engels acknowledged the right of national defense. Engels, for example, had justified a war of defense against Russia and France, but with the provision that the proletariat should lead the war and bring about the downfall of militarism and reactionism at the war's conclusion.

Russia, in the eyes of German Socialists, was an invader who would bring horror to the fatherland; German women and children must not fall into the hands of the barbaric Cossacks. Philipp Scheidemann wrote to the *New York Volkszeitung* on August 21 that "nobody" wanted war in Germany. "The chief guilt for the present war rests upon Russia." The average German worker, too, believed that this was a war to defend the fatherland. The majority of the German people were ignorant of Germany's annexationist designs until 1917. Moreover, the Socialists, even Liebknecht, considered Russia to be the epitome of reaction. Prussianism was bad enough, but Russianism was worse. This gave the Socialists, and perhaps Liebknecht too, the psychological justification for their party's August 4th action. The watchwords "invasion", "war of defense", and "struggle against tsarism" had their effect upon the SPD.

By voting for the war credits on August 4, Liebknecht broke the tradition of his father, who had abstained from voting in a parallel situation in 1870. It is interesting to speculate why this most out-

spoken enemy of militarism and war did not apparently remain loyal to his professed ideals when he failed to break party discipline and vote against the credits. We have his own words as a partial basis for an explanation. He admitted that the failure to cast the negative vote stemmed from uncertainty and weakness. He constantly nourished the hope, however, that the Socialists' action in voting for the credits would be nothing more than a sad and fleeting episode, that the SPD would surely come back to its senses, especially when the true character of the war was revealed.

Not to be overlooked was the tradition of holy respect for party discipline. The insistence for absolute party discipline in the past, moreover, had been the practice of the party minority specifically; it was the radicals, including Liebknecht, who consistently took the majority to task for its inclination to break discipline in its efforts to "reform" the party. Now, on August 4, the minority felt obligated to maintain the respect for majority decisions out of devotion to that discipline which it had insisted the majority uphold. A separate vote was something unheard of in the history of the SPD's parliamentary participation; it was inconceivable, psychologically, that the party would ever display a divided front on the floor of the Reichstag. Respect for discipline was so strong that Liebknecht could but rebel in spirit and declare "that he could not himself understand what had possessed him when he gave his vote in the Reichstag to the war budget."

There is another explanation that Liebknecht upheld party discipline for strategical reasons. By voting with his colleagues the first time, instead of breaking into opposition against them, his chances of later deflecting them into the party's original anti-war position would be greatly enhanced. The watchword "self-defense" was momentarily too strong to overcome. Another question: Would he be able to retain the loyalty of the working people if he placed himself into an embarrassing position by voting against the majority? If these considerations were valid in Liebknecht's thinking, then he must have decided that the risk of breaking party unity was too great. He did not want to worsen his relations with his party colleagues, and he did not want to lose the support of the workers if their thinking was momentarily sterilized by war fever. Caution was in order. It would be better to remain with the SPD until it repented; then he could assume a prominent place, by virtue of having been one of the minority in the party caucus, among repentant Socialists.

Liebknecht's action in the Reichstag can be explained also in

view of more obvious considerations. A logical reason for his support of the credits could very well be that he believed with the majority (perhaps more than he cared to admit) that Germany had to be defended against the invading barbarians from Russia. He had expressed his dislike for Russian tsarism often enough, and he appreciated the Russian danger in August, 1914. He was an exceptionally cultured man, who had taken a cultured Russian woman for his second wife. He would have been one with the best Germans in objecting to the destruction of European culture by the relatively uncultured Russians. Moveover, the friends of his father, Marx and Engels, as we have seen, justified a defensive war if Russia and France made common cause against Germany. He would have readily justified support of the credits in the name of orthodox Marxism, as did the other members of the Socialist faction, if subsequent events had made this necessary. "If the minority had looked upon the passing of the credit on August 4 as a sin against the Socialist gospel, it would have disregarded Party discipline; especially so self-willed and fearless personality as Karl Liebknecht." It was only after Liebknecht became convinced, according to this view, that the German government conducted an aggressive war that he decided to vote against the credits in December, 1914.

Any one of these explanations of his action bears a degree of justification in the light of what he did before or after August 4. The view that he appreciated the Russian danger is a strong one. He was an inflexible man who would have voted against the credits if the party's action had been a sin against the Socialist doctrine. To violate what he thought was orthodox Marxism was a greater sin than to violate party discipline. Party discipline was strong, but not strong enough to shackle him against his own will, his words on party discipline notwithstanding. If he did not momentarily sympathize with "the war of defense" against the Russians, he subscribed to party discipline for reasons other than it was too strong. Perhaps he had plans at that moment to lead an oppositional movement; and he could have endangered his position with the faction delegates and the working people by acting too soon. He did not know how much support he had in the Reichstag or among the public at the outset of the war. He wanted first to see who his friends were; and events moved too fast for a dependable evaluation. He could always play it safely, then act after the facts had been established. That he was sincere in his approval of the war credits is the view held by the party reformists; that he voted for them for tacti-

cal reasons, with the view of planning later opposition to the government, is the approach naturally accepted by the radicals.

Foreign quarters expected or at least hoped that the SPD would obstruct the German war effort. This was a logical expectation based on the party's official pronouncements before the war. This hope explains the credulous acceptance of rumors by the foreign press to the effect that Socialist deputies raised the standard of revolt and that Liebknecht was shot to death for refusing war credits.[1] When these rumors were dispelled, the allies sobered up to the almost incredible fact that the SPD seemed as a unit in supporting Germany's war effort, an effect which the German government worked hard to create and which Liebknecht made possible.

The month of August, 1914, was a period of discussion and reflection among the potential oppositional forces. Already in the evening of August 4, Liebknecht, together with Franz Mehring, attended a secret meeting at the home of Rosa Luxemburg, where, according to one source, the group then already resolved to fight the politics of the majority with illegal methods.[2] A nucleus of an opposition group was also formed in Hamburg on August 13 under the leadership of Laufenberg, Wolfheim, and Herz. In the days after August 4 Liebknecht journeyed throughout Germany speaking with various people around whom a resistance movement could be built. In Berlin small groups of workers reproached him for not breaking party discipline and casting a vote against the war credits on August 4. It turned out too, now that the war had come, that the smouldering radicalism of some of the German youth, particularly in the Berlin industrial suburbs of Neukölln and Niederbarnim, burst out into a flame again. From these youth circles the underground literature in Germany during the war first originated and gradually spread outward. A new Socialist march, a parody of the old one and appearing in hectographic form, was one of the very first examples of illegal literature during the war.

If Liebknecht's approval of the war credits on August 4 was a reflection of his belief in the validity of the "defensive war" slogan, then this attitude was of short duration. He immediately became convinced that the invasion of Belgium was not a "military necessity," and that Germany conducted a war for annexations. Perhaps he came to his senses after the dramatic effect of the first events wore off; or perhaps he detected among the masses a greater sense of opposition to the war than he had at first anticipated. At any rate, by September 3 he was determined to destroy the illusion of a united SPD supporting the German war effort. On that day he dispatched

a communication to the *Bremen Bürgerzeitung*,[8] a Socialist newspaper, in which he revealed to the public the existence of differences of opinion within the Socialist Reichstag faction on the approval of the war credits. Not only was it "entirely untrue to say that the assent to the war credits was given unanimously," but that the "opposing views found expression with a violence hitherto unknown in our deliberations."

On September 10 Liebknecht, in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, and Clara Zetkin, issued another declaration, this time to the Swiss Socialist paper, the *Berne Tagwacht* (which published it on October 30), reinforcing his September 3rd broadcast of the split within the SPD. The statement took issue with comrades Südekum and Fischer, who represented the majority view of the SPD as the only and official view of the party in the various party presses in Sweden, Switzerland, and Italy. Liebknecht and other signatories added that only martial law deprived them for the time being of the possibility of publicly advocating their views in Germany.

In the same month Liebknecht received permission to travel to Belgium, ostensibly to find out what happened to his brother-in-law, a Russian student, after the bombardment of Liége, where he had been living. The government may have favored him with a passport in the hope of winning him over to its war effort. At Lüttich he refused to pose with a ranking German officer, suspecting that such a photo would be widely circulated in Germany as evidence of solidarity between himself and the government.

In Brussels Liebknecht received a cool reception from the Belgian Socialists who had memories of other German Socialists who had visited Belgium since the invasion. He went to the office of Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the International, and explained the division of opinion in the SPD caucus on August 3. He declared that he was incapable of treason to the International, just as his father had been.

According to the Belgian Socialist, Emile Royer, Liebknecht in his Belgian itinerary "sighed continually and seemed profoundly distressed" with the spectacle of ruin and desolation; and he reproved German soldiers for their orgy of war crimes against Belgian civilians.

Although Royer's account of Liebknecht's reactions to his Belgian visit may be somewhat exaggerated, there is no doubt that what Germany had done to a neutral country made a cutting impression on him. He returned with his first-hand information and demanded that the party executive should protest against German war excesses; but he was reprimanded and told to hold his tongue.

Shortly after his visit to Belgium, Liebknecht appeared in the radical city of Stuttgart in Württemburg, where he was always well received. Württemburg was a radical hotbed which produced much of the later Communist leadership in Germany. He revealed to his Württemburg comrades what he had told the Belgians—that the Socialist group in the Reichstag was not unanimous on the question of war credits. His presence and personal disclosure may have stimulated the Württemburg radicals at this point. In a meeting on September 21 in Stuttgart, Frits Westmeyer, head of the local Socialists, declared that if the party had acted decisively, war would have been avoided. "If only 500,000 workmen in Germany had started a general strike the Government would have thought twice about going to war."

On November 9 Artur Crispien, editor of the Socialist *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, also denounced the leadership of the SPD. He was responsible for giving the paper's public support to Württemburg's vocal oppositional forces which protested against the approval of the credits. The first significant war-time break with the mother party was in the making. In the same month the party executive purged the *Schwäbische Tagwacht* of its radical elements, and the breach within the SPD was publicized more than ever.

Scheidemann, in the name of the party executive, now took Liebknecht to task, particularly for revealing the proceedings of the August 3 caucus meeting to the press and to the Belgian and Württemburg Socialists. Liebknecht defended his actions in the name of self-respect and in the interests of the SPD. Scheidemann argued that the party executive had not delegated to Liebknecht the authority "to look after the 'interests of the German Party' . . ." If Liebknecht had any intentions of regenerating the SPD, he should wait until the issue could be discussed among the party members.

Liebknecht in his reply to the party executive held that the preservation of party interests was not the monopoly of the party executive, but the duty of every party member. The International was for him no empty illusion. The Belgians, even though victims of German aggression, were his comrades, brothers, and friends, as before. Even though the party leaders defended the invasion of Belgium, his sympathies for "the poor unfortunate Belgians have only become more affectionate—in spite of everything." As to the Stuttgart revelations, he considered it his duty and right to regenerate the SPD. This right, he said, rested upon a basis more secure than did the attempt of the party leaders to limit it. Finally, he called upon the SPD to weaken the signal for war just as it had originally given it

for the intensification of the war, for which it carried a greater measure of guilt than the other Socialist parties.

On October 22 the Prussian Assembly voted in favor of a war loan. *Vorwärts* issued a statement that the Prussian Socialists too had voted in favor of the loan. This report attracted attention because Liebknecht was a member of the Assembly. Immediately he sought to destroy the illusion that the radical Socialists had made common cause with the government. He had voted for the loan, but it was to be used chiefly for the purpose of affording relief to people suffering from the war. The money was to be expended on the continued construction of canals, for relief to families of government employees, for the increase of food and fodder, and for the relief of Prussian districts laid waste by the Russian army. These were humanitarian purposes for which every Socialist could approve a grant of money.

Liebknecht stated the position of the Socialists in the Assembly more clearly in a declaration to *Vorwärts* on October 23 in a renewed attempt to advertise the growing split between the radical Socialists and the government. He mentioned that in the reading of the greetings of the Kaiser to the house, the entire house stood, with the exception of the Socialists (a fact which *Vorwärts* could not have failed to notice). He also pointed out that at the close of the discussion of the war, applause was heard from all parties of the house, except from the Socialists (another fact which *Vorwärts* surely noticed, since it was customary for all papers, especially Socialist papers, to report the parties from which the applause came).[4] During the president's closing speech, half of the Socialist faction left the Chamber, and "the others surely did not take part in the applause." The Assembly also gave cheers for the supreme war lord; but half of the Socialist group left the chamber before the cheers were given, while the other half, if they were true to an original plan of action, only arose but did not take part in the cheering. Liebknecht was one of the Socialists who walked out of the chamber on the occasion of the president's closing speech so that he would not have to join in the cheers for the army and supreme war lord.

Liebknecht's denunciation of "the hollow phrase" of unity among the German people, which the government tried to impress on the rest of the world, continued well into the war until German disunity became apparent to everyone. In December, 1915, he bravely boasted in the Reichstag that he belonged to the social democracy of Marxist convictions, and that he for one was not part of the unity of which the government was want to boast. By this time, however, both the boastings of the government and Liebknecht were superfluous; that

there was a wide-open breach within the SPD was well known throughout the world.

Liebknecht worked feverishly to gain momentum among the oppositional elements before the time came for the next Reichstag discussion of the war credits in December, 1914. He was often discouraged in this task, however, in view of the limited resources at the command of the opposition. For the time being he had to satisfy himself with publicizing the divergent views within the SPD. At the same time, however, he did not neglect attempts to work behind the scenes in an effort to bend the majority of the SPD to his way of thinking. As early as August 31 the party executive rebuffed him when he suggested that the SPD sponsor demonstration gatherings against the policy of annexation. On September 29 he urged the party executive to issue a specific public announcement against the policy of annexation and for an early peace. When this was refused, his hopes that the SPD would alter its pro-war position diminished. In a letter to the party leaders, dated October 26, he spiritedly accused many of the party of cooperating with the government's war of conquest. The fairy-tale of an hostile invasion, he said, was a thing of the past. Likewise, the parody on the "War of liberation against tsarism" had also played out. Then he called upon the party to issue a proclamation expressing the will for the cessation of hostilities and advocating international solidarity, the self-determination of peoples, and resistance to any form of annexation. On October 31 he stubbornly dispatched another letter in which the demands were essentially the same. The SPD brushed off his proddings, however, and refused to move from its position.

In December, 1914, the government confronted the Reichstag with a new request for war credits in the amount of five billion marks. Already since the middle of November, Liebknecht had addressed letters to the party leaders, in which he expressed his opinions on the matter; and from November 29 to December 2 the party caucus deliberated on it. During these meetings Liebknecht worked enthusiastically to gain opinion for action against the credits. The majority, however, remained adamant and stated that it "did not depart from the standpoint which the Chancellor had taken on August 4 with regard to Belgium and Luxemburg." In effect this meant that the German Socialists considered the invasion of Belgium a wrong, and that it should be indemnified upon the completion of hostilities. It also meant, however, that no new facts had been brought forth which proved that the invasion of Belgium was not "a military necessity." Because German frontiers were still menaced by hostile forces, all Germans were still "bound to put forth their whole strength

for the defense of the country . . . and Social Democracy grants the credits asked for. . . ." This was essentially the heart of the declaration which was read by Haase again for the SPD in the Reichstag on December 2, 1914.

Liebknecht, however, viewed the matter otherwise. His requests of the previous months to the party executive revealed that he considered Germany as a promoter of a war for conquest. His visit to Belgium, no doubt, strengthened this conviction. When the question of voting credits was put to a vote in the party caucus, he was again a member of the minority (this time numbering seventeen) which opposed approval. He asked the party caucus for permission to vote against the credits and reminded it that an approval of the credits would be counter to its commitments agreed upon before the war. The majority refused his request, however; and the minority resolved, as on August 3, to submit itself to party discipline and vote for the credits.

Following Haase's official declaration of approval of the credits on December 2, the formality of voting, which was expected to demonstrate the official unity of the SPD, took place. Liebknecht, however, broke the sacred party unity and discipline by conspicuously remaining in his seat while the others stood in approval. He cast his negative vote against the well-meant advice of some of his closest collaborators who thought that he might do their cause more harm than good. His act "created a world-wide sensation" and was interpreted as the first visible sign of revolutionary fever in Germany. It also had an immediate effect in radical Stuttgart, where a meeting of Socialist delegates adopted, by a vote of ninety to two, a resolution of sympathy for him. Forty-two other delegates, who held a separate meeting, resolved to endorse the stand of the majority Socialists in the Reichstag.

Another clear consequence of Liebknecht's solo act was the appearance of an illegal broadsheet crudely entitled "The World Spits Blood," written by Frits Ausländer. It was one of the first illegal documents to express the will for peace, and it found a response among the radicals. The total effect of Liebknecht's action was that anti-war feeling, as well as the split within the SPD, began to take shape.

Liebknecht dispatched to the president of the Reichstag, for the record, a memorandum defending his unprecendented action. President Kämpf, however, refused to permit Liebknecht's declaration to be entered into the stenographic reports of the Reichstag on the ground that it contained expressions, "which, if uttered in the House,

would have called forth calls to order." Liebknecht communicated his explanation to the newspapers also, but none published it. It appeared throughout Germany at the end of the month, however, in the form of an illegal broadsheet and allegedly also had its effect upon the radical workers.

According to this declaration, Liebknecht based his negative vote on the following grounds. The war was a preventive, not a defensive, war, provoked by the joint action of German and Austrian war parties in the obscurity of secret diplomacy. It was a war which tended to demoralize and destroy the growing labor movement. Germany, the accomplice of tsarism, and the model country of political reaction, was not qualified to play the part of liberator of peoples. Liberation of the Russian and German people had to be the work of the people themselves. He demanded again a peace without annexations and without humiliation to anyone. Only a peace based upon the international solidarity of the working classes could be a durable peace. With this in view, the proletariat of every country was to make a Socialist effort to end the war. On the other hand, nothing could seem too great that could be asked for the victims of the war, "for whom I feel the deepest compassion."

On December 3 Liebknecht communicated with party leaders and explained his "embarrassing situation" to them. His vote against the credits was determined by his belief in the validity of the party program and the resolutions of the international congresses. For him it was a case of conscience to subordinate the duty toward party unity to the duty of representing the true program of the party. In other words, it was a greater wrong to violate what he thought was the party's true gospel than to sin against the ideal of party unity. He took issue with the party's attitude that his vote and declaration "have encouraged the war-mongerers of the hostile foreigners" and "contributed to the prolongation of the war." The David-Heine-Scheidemann group, he said, believed that to talk peace was a policy of weakness which drove the enemy to greater effort. This attitude was wrong and only led to the burial of international Socialism.

On February 2, 1915, the Socialist Reichstag faction raked Liebknecht over the coals for his spectacular action of December 2nd. Frohme proposed that Liebknecht be deprived of his parliamentary privileges in the Reichstag. The trade union leader, Legien, went so far as to propose that he should be expelled from the party, or Legien and others "for whom he spoke, might consider whether they could continue to belong to it." Both Frohme and Legien, however, were

persuaded that such extreme measures should be reserved for a party congress where they could be discussed publicly.

The majority of the faction passed a resolution, however, which expressed its displeasure with Liebknecht. It provided that "if any deputy is unable conscientiously to participate in the voting, he may abstain, but he must not give his abstention the character of a demonstration." According to this, Liebknecht was entitled to his opinions, but he must not express them publicly. The resolution further condemned "in the sharpest way the Liebknecht breach of discipline" (this clause was approved by a vote of 82 to 15) and rejected the motives for his negation of the credits as incompatible with the interests of the SPD (passed 58 to 33). It denounced him for broadcasting in the previous year the fact that the SPD was divided and then denied "the misleading information as to occurrences inside the party which has been spread in foreign countries by Liebknecht" (passed 51 to 39). The entire resolution was passed 65 to 26, representing perhaps the general distinction between Liebknecht's opponents and friends in the Socialist faction.

The resolution against Liebknecht was for him but a confirmation of what he had already suspected in December, i.e., that the SPD would not change it ways. His expressed hopes that the party would come to its senses after August 4 failed to materialize. His letters to the party executive calling for action against the war of conquest were meaningless; the party would not turn to face what he thought were its pre-war commitments. As his hopes for party regeneration disappeared, therefore, he turned increasingly to illegal work to gain support for his opinions. He made no effort, for example, to curb the illegal circulation of his December 2nd declaration intended for the stenographic record of the Reichstag.

That he found illegal support in the distribution of his document induced him to draw up another defense of his Reichstag actions, which was also distributed secretly in the form of broadsheets throughout Germany. It bore the caption of "Breaches of Discipline". In it he defended himself against the vituperations from all sides for having violated the trust of party discipline, particularly against those hurled at him in the February 2nd session of the Reichstag group (which, according to the broadsheet, cast such aspersions as *Lump, Lümmel, Hampelmann,* and *Fatzke* at him).

To demonstrate the honorableness of his December action, Liebknecht also used the broadsheet to publicize an event which occurred at the same party session. While during the meeting the majority of the group castigated him, a member of the right wing of the party,

Edmund Fischer-Zittau, suddenly leaped to his feet and breathlessly exclaimed: "The action against Liebknecht is a revolting hypocrisy!" Then Fischer-Zittau related that as he traveled to Berlin in August, 1914, he was completely convinced that the party faction would vote against the war credits in the Reichstag. He made up his mind, however, that he would vote for the credits under any circumstances; and many of his friends, perhaps twenty-five or thirty, had reached the same conclusion to vote for the moneys, party discipline notwithstanding. This fact that many, now with the majority, had planned to violate party discipline in different circumstances, could not be contested; and therefore he again called the proceedings against Liebknecht "a revolting hypocrisy." This revelation, said Liebknecht, created great excitement among those present at the meeting, but no one protested.

Rosa Luxemburg followed with an article of her own on the topic of party discipline, in support of Liebknecht's action. Significantly, Liebknecht's episode in December brought him and Rosa Luxemburg into an alliance which was broken only by their deaths in January, 1919. Before the war, contacts between the two had been sporadic, though they worked for the same political ends. The war had come as a great shock to Rosa Luxemburg; and the news of the conflict depressed her to the point where she contemplated suicide. Her friends, however, persuaded her to spare herself. She quickly recovered the spirit to fight the war and after December 2 found a new source of strength and inspiration in Liebknecht.

The anti-war sentiment expressed in Liebknecht's defense of his December action in the Reichstag found expression again in his New Year's greeting to the British Socialists. He collaborated with Rosa Luxemburg, who wrote salutations of her own, and both dispatched their messages to the *Labour Leader* in London. The letters not only had their effect upon the British working class, according to Liebknecht's supporters, but they also elicited a response from the German workers among whom they were illegally circulated. Liebknecht approached the British in the spirit of the International, which lay smashed to the ground by the ruling classes of Germany and Britain. He called for the building of a new International "of another kind, and with a different power." To lend a glimmer of hope to this idea he reported that "among the German working people there is already a greater opposition against war than has generally been supposed. The more it hears the echo of the call for peace in other countries, the more passionately and energetically will it work for peace."

Then he called upon the workers of the world to unite in war against the war.

On January 15, 1915, Liebknecht gave his oppositional ideas more authority by expressing them publicly in a speech to a Neuköln gathering. This speech marked a turning point in his war-time career. He was now not only a critic, but also an agitator. His goal was to bring the people into the streets to demonstrate against the war. He became a popular crusader with a defined purpose. His vote against the credits in the previous month gave him the psychological impulse to accept the active leadership of the dissatisfied masses. What he had to say to his audience was daring enough. International Socialism once more had to gain its self-respect, which could be recovered only through international class struggle and cooperation of the proletariat of all the warring countries. Only fighting against the war, not supporting it, could bring the desired end. "If the party does not take up the struggle today, during the war, people will not believe in its fighting spirit. Now is the time to prove it true." Thus Liebknecht, by this speech, marked the acceptance of the Leninist thesis that national wars should be transformed into civil or class wars.

By now Liebknecht had gained also the reputation throughout the world as the hero of resistance against the war. As early as November 24, 1914, the French Socialist, Vaillant, expressed his anticipation of a split within the SPD as a consequence of Liebknecht's show of resistance. He hoped that as a result of the split the Entente would emerge victorious. At about the same time Lenin expressed hope for a split which would save the International. "The Lefts among the Germans are beginning to stir; if there is a split among them, then, perhaps, the International will be saved from rotting." After December 2, 1914, Liebknecht's name was again on the lips of the French Socialists. "Heroically Liebknecht has protested. But we know that there is already more than one troubled heart."

Liebknecht attracted attention in the United States also. In August, 1914, the *New York Call* excused the action of the German Socialists; but after Liebknecht refused to vote for the credits in December, it changed its attitude in favor of the party minority. The *American Socialist* also endorsed him with the statement that "Karl Liebknecht's voice has again spanned the seas." It praised him for standing where he stood before the war began. He was referred to as "the bravest man in Europe" because he assailed the authorities when every word he uttered might have been labeled treason. His message to the *Labour Leader* was cited as "his peace message

to the world"; in it he said: "Many Socialists blame our principles for our present failure. It is not our principles which have failed, but the representatives of those principles."

Liebknecht's courage, which consisted in a readiness to risk death, became the subject also of poetry. The following poem, printed in *Harper's Weekly*, paid tribute "to the kind of courage required by the individual to stand by his principles, even when the majority of his countrymen are going wildly in an opposite direction."

I love thee for one hero, only one.
My spirit straightens, like the tempered blade
Of his unmasterable weapon made
In heaven's high forge, not hell's. I had begun
To dread thy horrid shadow in the sun,
To hate thee for thy national parade
Of heathen men idolatrous of Trade,
Shouting the great commandment of the Gun.

But thou hast bred out of thy land a man
Of braver metal than thy generals;
Above the thunderbolt his courage calls.
It is thy founder and thy guardian,
It is thy hero, Liebknecht, who alone
Under the lightning lays the cornerstone.

LEGAL OPPOSITION, 1915-1916

Liebknecht's Neuköln speech in January, 1915, no doubt created some apprehension among German authorities. When a month later he received a summons to serve in the armed forces, he immediately declared his refusal to shoulder weapons. Shortly thereafter he received another call, this time for non-combat duty. Military authorities forbade him to participate in assemblies and promote propaganda of any sort. He had to be furloughed on occasion, however, to fulfill his duties as a Reichstag and Prussian Assembly deputy. In the same month the German authorities arbitrarily arrested Rosa Luxemburg, and except for short interruptions, she remained confined in prison for the remainder of the war. Thus the government hoped to crush the growing revolutionary movement in the bud.

The further development of revolutionary spirit, however, was not easily suppressed. Liebknecht still enjoyed the privileges of a member of the German parliaments, and he made the most of his various immunities. During the Prussian Assembly in March, for example, he attacked the government for imprisoning Rosa Luxemburg; and he used the opportunity also to denounce the civil truce and the German spy and police systems. Until the founding of the

Spartacus Union early in 1916, opposition to the war originated primarily in German parliamentary circles, centering particularly around Liebknecht.

The yawning gap within German Social Democracy became more apparent as the majority, losing ground, became more conservative, and the minority, gaining influence, became more radical, notwithstanding, or perhaps because of, the government's measures against Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. The growing conservatism of the majority faction was evidenced on February 22 when the Socialist patriot Wolfgang Heine, a Reichstag deputy, declared that it was not the German way to be chauvinistic, but that the Germans were simply defending their soil and way of life. The time had not come to seek peace. If the German people desired peace they should trust the German armies, generals, and Emperor. If German Social Democracy was to progress, it should be prepared to shift ground. Even Liebknecht the Elder declared himself ready to change tactics a hundred times if necessary.

On the radical side the growing dissatisfaction with the war and government found expression in the words of Heinrich Ströbel, a member of the editorial board of *Vorwärts*, who said: "I confess quite openly that a complete victory by the Empire would not be in accordance with the interests of Social Democracy." And in the Reichstag Liebknecht was joined by Haase, who also expressed in a speech on March 10 his disgust for the war, albeit perhaps for somewhat different reasons.

The enlargement of the fissure within the SPD was evidenced even more, however, in the Prussian Assembly than in the Reichstag. There the deputies who supported the policies of the majority in the Reichstag were actually in the minority within their party faction. Of the ten Socialists in the Assembly, five stood with Liebknecht. It was in the Prussian Assembly, not in the Reichstag, where Liebknecht delivered his most lengthy criticisms, and with greater abandon. In the Reichstag his desire to speak was limited by Reichstag and party officials, and he resorted more often to the rarely used parliamentary weapon, the interpellation.

The vigor with which Liebknecht assailed the government in the Prussian Assembly is revealed in his speeches of February 8 and March 2, 1915. On February 8, despite some Socialist deputies' plea for a united front, he set upon the Prussian three-class electoral system, the government censorship, the state of siege—in short, everything which he thought curbed the freedom of action of the masses. "Confidence in the Prussian government must be denied.

An early peace for all countries can come only if the working class expresses its will for peace."

On March 2 he delivered a speech so strong that its publication was prohibited throughout Germany by the censorship which he condemned. During the course of his delivery, deputies from the right and center made their exit from the chamber in a demonstrative manner. He again made a plea for constitutional reforms and accused the government of deceiving the masses "with beautiful sounding words about unity and the glorious enthusiasm of the people. The hateful, naked fact, however, is that everything remains as of old in Prussia." Against the fist of the government which suppressed the masses he cried: "Away with hypocrisy of civil peace, on with the international class struggle for the emancipation of the working class and against the war." *Vorwärts*, still partial to Liebknecht and defying the censor, paid tribute to March 2 "which will remain for all time a remarkable day in the history of the Prussian state. Only one man, Dr. Liebknecht, treated the franchise question as thoroughly as it deserved."

When the third war loan came up for approval in the Reichstag on March 20, thirty Socialist deputies abstained from balloting, while Liebknecht, joined by Otto Rühle, remained in the chamber and negated the credits. Thus the opposition were actually thirty-two, but only Liebknecht and Rühle were ready to split the party outwardly. Moreover, while Liebknecht's negation was an outright rejection of the government's war effort, the thirty who abstained failed to register a vote of confidence only because the government would not fulfil demands for civil and political equality.

Liebknecht was again censured by the Socialist group as well as by some men from the front lines, who resented his unpatriotic action. Military authorities, arguing that they had jurisdiction over him by virtue of his conscription, endeavored to initiate proceedings against him. Reichstag officials, however, gave their opinion that he was entitled to his parliamentary privileges and therefore immune to arrest. He apparently was not yet dangerous enough to the state, in the eyes of many in the Reichstag, to violate the sacredness of the principal of parliamentary immunity. The government supported the Reichstag view, and the military dropped proceedings against him.

The next significant development in Liebknecht's legal opposition occurred in August, when the government again requested war credits. Preparatory to the formal action on the moneys the Socialist caucus on August 14 deliberated on the question of war aims, among

which was the status of Belgium. The group resolved that the restoration of Belgium was imperative, but that Germany could not in the interest of "its own security and movement permit Belgium to become a military advanced post and political instrument of England." Liebknecht, however, proposed that Belgium be restored "in unlimited internal and external independence, every kind of compulsory political or economic attachment being excluded." Both the Socialist group and the party executive rejected his amendment and thus failed to declare themselves for full restoration. In the Reichstag, too, Liebknecht campaigned against Germany's policy toward Belgium (whenever Reichstag or party officials failed to limit his right to speak). And he frequently interrupted the speeches of those who supported government policy, especially with regard to Belgium, with his standard interjections, such as "capitalistic interests!"

When the party caucus discussed the question of credits, a swollen minority of thirty-six deputies emerged to oppose the government's request. But in the Reichstag on August 20 only thirty-two abstained from balloting, while Liebknecht again alone voted against the credits.[8] On the following day he made it a point to correct the Reichstag's president—who had announced, perhaps intentionally, a unanimous vote—that it was not unanimous; he had *rejected* the credits again! He had no intention of permitting his name to be recorded with those who sanctioned the war.

On the same day that he voted against the credits, Liebknecht resorted for the first time during the war to the interpellation as a means of embarrassing the government. Used infrequently in the parliamentary procedure of the Reichstag, he tried to popularize it to the best of his advantage. On this occasion he challenged the government with the question: "Is the government, in case of corresponding readiness of the other belligerents, ready, on the basis of the renunciation of annexations of every kind, to enter into immediate peace negotiations?" The presiding officer responded that he would be meeting the wishes of the great majority of the house if he declined to answer the question "at the present time as inopportune." Liebknecht replied that this refusal must be interpreted as a concealment of the capitalistic policy of conquest, as a confession of the policy of annexation. The people, he added, want peace.

The Socialist group sharply reminded Liebknecht that his tactics of questioning the government was highly dangerous business and that he had again broken party discipline. Instead of submitting his interpellation to the party executive for approval, he had dis-

patched it directly to the Reichstag bureau. But Liebknecht, calloused by and thriving on reprimands, continued to utilize the interpellation at every opportunity.

Between August and December, 1915, there was no significant development in the record of Liebknecht's legal opposition. On December 9, however, the Reichstag echoed with a debate on peace terms. The Socialist group assigned Scheidemann and Landesberg to speak for the majority view and at the same time determined that Liebknecht should not be given an opportunity to increase his prominence in connection with the debate. Liebknecht, however, made his own rules and demonstrated his hostility for those who supported the government by continually interrupting their speeches from his seat. He singled out Bethmann-Hollweg on numerous occasions as the butt of his guerilla tactics. As Bethmann-Hollweg in one instance, for example, praised the courage of the German women in their deeds, Liebknecht interrupted sarcastically: "And what have you done?"

On December 14 Liebknecht again excited the Reichstag when he attempted to embarrass the government with his greatest barrage of interpellations. In using them he sought to draw from the government definite commitments on the questions of peace, origins of the war, popular exercise of foreign policy, relief for the German masses from the economic distress caused by the war, and democratization of the constitution, among others. Each question, however, was "ruled out of order", refused an answer by "the Imperial Chancellor", or successfully evaded in other ways.

In the same month, the government again asked for war credits. On December 15 the party caucus polled itself and discovered that forty-four members opposed a new grant, while sixty-six favored it. For every three members who approved, there were now two who disapproved granting the government's request. The group again refused the minority the right of independent action in the Reichstag. In the vote on the credits which followed in the Reichstag on December 21, however, nineteen deputies, who were convinced that they had to give public expression to their views, broke party discipline and voted with Liebknecht against the estimates.[6] Twenty-two more deputies signified their disapproval by vacating the chamber and abstaining from voting.

The action of "The Twenty" was a significant event in the history of German Social Democracy during the war. There were now two formidable sections of Socialists in the Reichstag. This division ran deep into the SPD organisations throughout Germany. After

a transitional period during 1916 in which the minority formed its own parliamentary group, the Socialist split was given a formal and permanent war-time status when in April, 1917, this group formed a distinct political party known as the Independent Socialist Party of Germany (USPD).' Leadership was in the hands of Haase and Ledebour, who represented the right and left wings respectively of this left-centrist Socialist opposition.

While "The Twenty" produced an eventual and final break with the majority, they did not unite into a closer working relationship with Liebknecht and his followers. Liebknecht, although counted among "The Twenty", did not agree with the others whose reasons for negating the credits differed from his. Theoretical differences between the Haase-Ledebour group and Liebknecht's radicals were sharply drawn. The left-centrists based their rejection of the credits on the fact that Germany's military situation was favorable, and therefore it behooved Germany to initiate the first steps for a settlement of the war. Their goal was a peace of understanding, a return to the *status quo*, and constitutional reforms. The left-centrists were pacifists.

Liebknecht, on the other hand, with a social revolution in mind, urged class warfare against the war, the Leninist idea of promoting a civil war in order to end national warfare. His ideas also differed from those of the Haase-Ledebour group in that he based his plans, present and future, on international solidarity. Although the left-centrists were not chauvinists, neither were they internationalists in Liebknecht's thinking.

Along these lines Liebknecht attacked the Haase-Ledebour group in the first of the famous *Political Letters* issued by the Spartacus Union, founded in January, 1916. His arguments appeared in a broadsheet, manifolded in typewritten form, which was distributed illegally through established underground channels. It bore the caption: "The December Men of 1915". Most of the "December Men", he said, desired peace only because "Germany had been victorious enough." Moreover, they lacked unanimity in their opposition to the majority Socialists and in their readiness to participate in decisive revolutionary action. Instead of attacking the majority with lightning and thunder, they spoke with a subdued voice, in the moderate spirit of "prudent" statesmanship. The action of the "December Men" was but a "beautiful gesture," unless they were ready to transform it into a will to accept class warfare as a means to destroy the parliamentary civil truce. December 21 was not a solution; at best it was a promise, a promise that was not fulfilled.

Although Liebknecht was the popular symbol of resistance to the war in the eyes of the war-weary masses, his program of class-war against the war elicited little sympathy from the better-informed. As the masses tired of war, they wanted peace, bread and much of what to them was good of the pre-war social-structure; not civil war and further suffering. Thus the pacifist program of the Haase-Ledebour group made a greater appeal to the majority of the discontented workers whose respect and admiration, if not practical support, Liebknecht earned by his more colorful oppositional tactics.

Left-centrists competed with the Liebknecht radicals for the support of the masses which the majority Socialists lost. This explains why Liebknecht suddenly directed his agitation against the "December Men" after December 21, when they made their first real show of strength, rather than against the majority Socialists who lost strength as the war wore on. As the masses became more radical in their views, in step with mounting anti-war sentiment, both oppositional groups endeavored to outdo the other in revolutionary propaganda; for the good will and support of the discontented were at stake.

On January 12, 1916, the SPD met to take inventory of damage done to its structure. Among other things, the group discussed the familiar topic of Liebknecht. Only the previous day he had again embarrassed the government with another series of his "small interpellations" *(kleine Anfragen)*. He had wanted to know, for example, how many people were killed or arrested by the German government for the sake of reprisals. The party leaders had not been successful in persuading Liebknecht to submit his interpellations first to the party executive committee for review, before he sprung them on the government in the Reichstag. The misuse of the interpellation, party leaders contended, led to the deterioration of the influence of the SPD in the Reichstag—an effect, of course, which he was happy to create.

Liebknecht refused to submit his interpellations to his party superiors, declaring that he would act independently in this matter. He also announced that he did not feel bound to obey the regulations of the SPD, for it had departed from the course of its original principles. To him policies adopted by the party and international congresses took precedence over the decisions of the Reichstag group. Liebknecht's attitude made it impossible for the group to maintain any form of relationship with him. Since he "in the grossest way" continued to violate the directives of the Reichstag group, he "was thereby forfeited the rights which arise from membership of the

Group." Liebknecht was ousted by a vote of sixty to twenty-five. Two days later another SPD renegade, Otto Rühle, joined him in party exile. They were men without a party, classified as "Independents" or "Wild Ones" *(Wilde)*.

Liebknecht's ouster from the party created a controversy on the matter of holding a party congress. Until now the party majority contended that a member could be expelled only after the matter had been referred to a national congress. The discussion over the calling of such a meeting became so lively that it prompted the general feeling that the strife within the Social Democrat Party had reached a point at which it could only bend or break.

Liebknecht, however, was no longer out to bend the SPD, but to break it into pieces. Following his expulsion, he resumed his attack on the Socialist majority in the Reichstag, accusing them of violating his right to speak because they were afraid of the truth which the people had the right to know. Reichstag deputies by now regarded him as an eccentric psychopath. His remarks were received with laughter, catcalls, and ridicule, to which he calmly replied: "Gentlemen, you should all be ashamed of yourselves!" This retort only provoked more hilarity and calls of *Pfui, Pfui!* He reminded the Reichstag that he no longer belonged to any political faction. The attempt to censor and limit his speaking, he said, should make the Reichstag blush before the parliaments of Britain, France, Italy, and even the Russian Duma. His remarks prompted the Reichstag deputies to accuse him of working in the service of the enemy. They accused him more directly of being a traitor to his country. He would rather be called a traitor, however, than speak according to the taste of the Reichstag.

In February the Germans launched their costly attack on Verdun; and as the people learned of their losses, defeatism and opposition to the war spread widely. Liebknecht rode the wave of the waxing anti-war sentiment among the masses. On March 3, in the Prussian Assembly, he reminded the deputies that Krupp cannon, which had been sold to the Entente before the war, were shattering German soldiers. On March 16 he returned to the Assembly to speak ostensibly on the subject of education. Classical education, he said, lay in the spirit of independence and humanity. "Your ideal of classical education is 'the ideal of the bayonet, of the bombshell, of poison gas and grenades, which are hurled down on peaceful cities, and the ideal of submarine warfare'." He capped his speech with a call to the working class: "To action! Those in the trenches, as well as

those here at home, should put down their arms and turn against the common enemy."

This was vigorous language and could never have been uttered by him in the Reichstag at this time without fomenting disorder. His status in the Prussian Assembly differed from that in the Reichstag, however. Whereas he was outside of the pale of the Reichstag Socialist group, he was not only still a member of the group in the Prussian Assembly but also its appointed speaker, in which capacity he was free to express his opinions. It was with reference to this difference between the two chambers that he remarked in the Reichstag that there existed more freedom of speech in the Prussian Assembly.

On March 24 the Reichstag discussed the issue of the government's plea for a new emergency budget. Liebknecht indicated to the Reichstag on the day previously his intention to deny the government every form of tax. It was Hugo Haase and not Liebknecht, however, who created all the excitement in the tumultous session of the 24th. He delivered a speech in behalf of the opposition, condemning the government's war policies and reactionary institutions, and pledging the emancipation of the proletariat. His declaration triggered unprecendented disorder and confusion among the deputies. "Ebert was purple in the face and roared inarticulate threats. Scheidemann gesticulated and danced like a madman." When the balloting on the credits took place, Haase's group of seventeen members voted in the negative, while fourteen others of the minority absented themselves without voting. Rühle declared that he and Liebknecht still upheld the maxim given prominence by Liebknecht's father: "For this system not a man, not a penny." But Rühle's boast came as an anti-climax to the uproar which Haase had unchained.

After the Reichstag session of March 24, the opposition around Haase formed a separate group in the Reichstag: the Social Democratic Labor Association. Its chairmen were Haase and Ledebour. As Liebknecht before it, this minority had by its "violation of discipline and bad faith", demonstrated by its March 24th negation of war credits, forfeited "the rights which arise out of membership in the Group." Being excluded from the old group, the formation of a new party group was necessary in order to enjoy the rights and privileges which inhered in party groups only. The Association remained within the SPD, however, until 1917.

The Liebknecht group recognized in the creation of the Labor Association another bid by the Haase-Ledebour group to create the

impression among the masses that it could be relied upon to provide effective leadership for the oppositional movement. This time Rosa Luxemburg, in the name of the Liebknecht group, issued a polemic, "The Lessons of March 24", against the compromising attitude of the left-centrist opposition. Just as Liebknecht had attacked it in his "December Men", so Rosa Luxemburg warned the masses to exercise caution in subscribing to the leadership of this new group; for "patient men do not become lions in twenty-four hours." Instead they were to demand of Haase's group that in the future all war credits and taxes should be refused the government, regardless of what the military situation might be; and that they should employ interpellations and other parliamentary means, as Liebknecht was doing, to arouse the masses against the imperialistic parties. The struggle against the war could succeed only if the left-centrists followed Liebknecht's program of class warfare and international solidarity among the proletariat.

As the Germans learned of their losses on the front, as the promises of a quick victory disappeared, and as the left-centrists increasingly threatened to assume the leadership of the discontented masses, Liebknecht became more violent in his remarks and actions. In an effort to outdo the rival opposition group, he became more revolutionary and spectacular as defeatism spread. His interruptions in the Reichstag continued and increased. It was Germany, he said, who chose war; and he repeatedly contradicted Bethmann-Hollweg, who said that German sons were not bleeding and dying for a single piece of foreign soil. He also criticized the government for pressing into service British, French, and Russian war prisoners, who were to perform traitorous deeds against their own states. He accused Undersecretary of State Zimmermann of coming to an understanding with Roger Casement* at the end of 1914, which provided that the Germans solicit and drill British prisoners of war, who were then to be pressed into service against Britain. By these means Liebknecht endeavored to gain the attention of the war-weary public. When he was refused the floor, especially after making allegedly unjustified accusations, he could always remind the credulous public that the government wanted to muzzle him because it was afraid of the truth.

On April 8 Liebknecht delivered an oration in the Reichstag which brought forth a great deal of indignation as well as attention to his person. He depicted the recent war loan as an enormity. Reichstag deputies, their patience wasted by Liebknecht's tactics, unremittingly interrupted his tirade of denunciations with furious re-

marks, accusing him of treason. "He is no German!" they shouted. Apparently unshaken, however, he branded his accusers as "representatives of capitalistic interests" (another stock reply) and complimented himself by boasting that he was a Social Democrat, a representative of the international proletariat. By now an opinion commonly held by the deputies was that he belonged in an insane asylum. Finally, a member of the Progressive party, Hubrich, grasped at Liebknecht's notes and scattered them to the floor of the Reichstag. Liebknecht stepped down to retrieve them, whereupon the presiding officer judged his speech to be at an end because he deserted the podium.

The unprecedented tumult created by Liebknecht's remarks brought the stormy session to a close. The commotion was of such proportions that the incident was discussed in the war-time Reichstag for weeks. It was also Liebknecht's last dramatic participation in the Reichstag. His next sensational act occurred on May 1, when he publicly denounced the government in Potsdam Square, an act for which he was imprisoned for the remainder of the war.

Liebknecht's last parliamentary act consisted of a letter of protest, dated April 28, to the president of the Reichstag. He vainly insisted that the Reichstag meet ahead of schedule to discuss the question of the threatened prolongation of the war arising out of the "Sussex affair" with the United States. He charged that the government, however, had already decided to solve the affair in the dark chambers of secret diplomacy, while the masses of the people were carrying the rope of martial law about their necks, and profiteering interests were working to bring new sufferings to these masses. In order that the German people might have a voice in the outcome of the conflict, he demanded more freedom of expression for the opposition in the Reichstag and a discussion by the people's representatives in the chamber of the entire material relating to the war and its origins.

ILLEGAL OPPOSITION, 1915-1916

Liebknecht contributed much to the growth of illegal opposition to the government and war by providing his supporters, through writing and deeds, with material for his group's illegal propaganda literature. After his Neukölln speech in January, 1915, the authorities, as we have seen, conscripted him and imprisoned Rosa Luxemburg. He was forbidden to participate in any civilian activity other than to fulfil his duties as a deputy in the Reichstag and Prussian Assembly. Government censorship and action against Lieb-

knecht and Luxemburg drove the radicals underground, but they did not relax their activities.

Following Liebknecht's Neuköln act, Clara Zetkin sponsored a celebration in Stuttgart (January 27) commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. In March his followers held their first national conference. In the following month there appeared the first and only edition of the *International*, which the authorities immediately suppressed. In Düsseldorf, the place of publication, the police conducted a house to house search for copies of the periodical. Work on the radical periodical had been begun earlier in the war by the elderly historian of German Social Democracy, Franz Mehring, in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg. The *International* was to serve as a program of enlightenment in support of Liebknecht's negation of war credits in the Reichstag, December, 1914. Among its contributors were Clara Zetkin, August Thalheimer, Käthe Duncker, Paul Lange, and Heinrich Ströbel. Rosa Luxemburg in the issue contributed an article entitled, "The Reconstruction of the International", in which she placed before the people two alternatives: Bethmann-Hollweg or Liebknecht, imperialism or the revival of the International and Socialism as Marx understood them. In the same month Rosa Luxemburg managed to smuggle out of prison her justly famous *Crisis of German Social Democracy (Juniusbroschüre)*, but it was not published until April 1916. This was the most penetrating Spartacist analysis of the origins of the war, and the radicals valued it highly as a theoretical guide for their oppositional activities.

While the Liebknecht group crystallized its opposition to the war at home, it also made an effort in the spring of 1915 to make something out of international opposition as well. It issued a peace manifesto and smuggled it across the German border into the Netherlands, from where it reached the *Labour Leader* in London and the *Humanité* in Paris, which published it on April 1 and April 7 respectively. The manifesto was signed by Liebknecht, Ledebour, Rühle, Fanz Mehring, Clara Zetkin, and Rosa Luxemburg. A Dutch comrade to whom the peace manifesto was conveyed for further expedition received with it instructions, dated March 12, "to get this manifesto into . . . the belligerent countries, in order to make our comrades . . . acquainted with the spirit and attitude of the German Socialists."

The manifesto charged that for Germany the character of the war had changed. It was no longer a defensive war; and the Socialist group in the Reichstag had declared on August 4 and December

2, 1914, that " as soon as national security has been gained and the enemy is inclined to make peace, an end be made to the war by a peace which secures friendship with our neighboring peoples." Germany should be the first to propose peace since "the incontestable fact is the favorable military position of Germany. The frontiers are secure, and the war is being carried on the enemy's ground." The manifesto in conclusion demanded the publication of conditions which the governments were ready to accept as a basis for peace.

The plea for peace created some surprise among the Entente-power Socialists, who singled out and denounced Liebknecht for making the plea on the basis of a return to the *status quo ante bellum*. Liebknecht, they said, differed too little with the German pro-war majority Socialists. Specifically, he did not ask for the indemnification of Belgium or a plebiscite for the Alsace-Lorraine provinces. And he wanted peace only because Germany enjoyed a favorable military position (a charge which Liebknecht also later levelled against the "December Men" of 1915).[3]

Gustav Hervé, a prewar radical Socialist but a war-time Socialist renegade, replied to Liebknecht in the *Guerre Sociale*, April 8, that he hoped no French Socialist would support his appeal. "We do not wish to help your Emperor and his 'Junkers' to emerge intact and unharmed from the river of blood in which they are now on the point of drowning." Hervé questioned Liebknecht's desire to overthrow the German government. He wanted more out of him than "no annexations;" he wanted "the rescue of annexed nations." "My poor friend, with all your powers of organization and of discipline, you are so little revolutionary; with all your Socialism you are so little republican that your people would leave your Emperor and his coterie on their feet." He reminded Liebknecht that the latter's father had protested against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871 and lived two years in prison for it. Just as Bismarck handed the French their republic, so now the French were going to give the Germans their republic.

Writing in the *Independence Belge*, April 13, 1915, Emile Royer, likewise published a reply to Liebknecht. He had hoped to find in Liebknecht the man for international Socialism. As early as January 1, 1915, however, on the occasion of his New Year's greetings to the *Labour Leader*, Liebknecht revealed that his desires were those of a German. The latest manifesto, also amounted to that at least, and must have pleased Wilhelm II.

The attitudes of Hervé and Royer reveal that Liebknecht failed to bridge an unsurmountable chasm on the international level. The

Entente Socialists were as much "defensive-war" minded as the majority Socialists in Germany. In their attitude toward Liebknecht, however, they were essentially wrong. He was much more of a revolutionary than Hervé was willing to give him credit for. In his remark that Liebknecht was so little revolutionary that he and the German people would retain the Emperor, Hervé was only half right. The German people and many Socialists would have retained the monarchy in one form or another, to be sure; but Liebknecht would never have tolerated its continued existence. And he perhaps refrained from mentioning boundary adjustments in order to prevent the climb of the chauvinists in the countries concerned to greater heights. He wanted nationalism subdued, not stimulated; he was internationalist, not nationalist; he advocated the unification of the international proletariat, not the settlement of reparations and boundary conflicts growing out of national competition.

Signs of spreading illegal opposition to the war began to multiply by May. Thirty meetings were prohibited in the vicinity of Dresden on May 15. On May 23 Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary. The radicals capitalized on the event by promoting street demonstrations. On May 28th some 1500 women gathered in front of the Reichstag to join demonstrations in which Wilhelm Pieck, a Liebknecht supporter and president of Russian-controlled East Germany after World War II was arrested. It was during these turbulent days that Liebknecht issued an effective and direct appeal to the people to oppose the war. It appeared in the form of a broadsheet entitled "The Main Enemy is at Home!" Other broadsheets previously written had limited circulation and did not seem to create a wide impression, whereas this one contributed significantly to the consolidation of the opposition.

Liebknecht accused the government of misleading the people by representing Italy as a faithful ally of Germany, while the true nature of German-Italian relationships was secreted in the dark closets of diplomacy. And now the government, from behind the bush of Italian perfidy, wanted to intoxicate the people to sacrifice themselves to a greater war effort, notwithstanding their growing plea for peace. Moreover, the German sinking of the *Lusitania* (May 7) not only encouraged Britain, France, and Russia to continue the war, but it also eased the load of the Italian war party at a critical time. The German government was in a precarious position, but yet it survived because it successfully banked on the people's willingness to forget what they had learned. Therefore, he proposed the maxim "Learn everything, forget nothing!" Like his father he be-

lieved in slogans to "educate" and arouse the masses. He concluded his written tirade with a more revolutionary slogan: "The main enemy is at home!" This warning applied not only to Germany, however. "The main enemy of every people is in its own land!"

The then current efforts of Liebknecht to promote and advertise the split within the SPD were expressed also in an illegal broadsheet, the "Appeal of the Thousand," which made its appearance in June. It was a petition to the Reichstag delegation and party executive demanding a break with the policy of August 4; for it could no longer be denied that the war was not fought for annexations. If the SPD did not denounce the civil peace and inaugurate class warfare, the responsibility for that which followed would have to be carried by those who pushed the party downgrade. The planning of this document was largely the work of Liebknecht and Ledebour. It bore the signatures of over one thousand party members from all parts of Germany. Thus Liebknecht was part of the first nationwide expression of the SPD opposition. Meanwhile the government tightened its restrictions on opposition speakers throughout Germany and raided the SPD printing office in Düsseldorf.

Immediately following the "Appeal of the Thousand" there appeared an article, "The Demand of the Hour", signed by the pacifists Kautsky, Bernstein, and Haase. These three of the best known and capable men of the SPD insisted that German Social Democracy could no longer support a war which had become openly imperialistic. The government, recognising the influence of these men among the Socialist workers, considered the article dangerous enough to suspend the *Leipzig Volkszeitung* for publishing it.

"The Demand of the Hour" gave the disgruntled masses a semi-official confirmation of their anti-war views. The signatories were party fathers, not considered by the masses as outside of the party; they gave the voice of opposition more authority and legitimacy. Liebknecht's Reichstag antics and illegal writings had made him the symbol of resistance since early in the war, but by his radical views and actions he had placed himself outside of the family. He thus lost contact with SPD and the people which it represented. Rather than supporting the radicalism and what appeared to them to be the putschist tactics of a party renegade, the discontented who generally desired peace and security, not Liebknecht's class warfare and international solidarity, were more inclined to give their support to the moderate and pacifist opposition promoted by the party luminaries. The significance of this fact amply justifies its reiteration in

explaining Liebknecht's lack of popular support during the revolutionary days of 1918-1919.

Illegal activities were held at a minimum during most of the remainder of 1915. Liebknecht was absent from the camp of the opposition, serving a tour of non-combatant duty on the Düna sector of the Russian front.[11] The authorities, moreover, did not relax their vigil for signs of subterranean activities. Two members of the party were charged with exciting class hatred through the distribution of Liebknecht's "The Main Enemy is at Home." Haase conducted their defense but failed to prevent conviction and imprisonment. On October 3 *Vorwärts* announced that special measures had been taken against the Liebknecht group. "A large number of comrades . . . in Essen, Düsseldorf and other places within the district of the 7th Army Corps have been warned by the police, upon instructions from the military General Command, that during the course of the war they are prohibited from *making any speeches* either in public or private meetings, and from circulating any *printed matter*." These measures did not apply to the SPD as a whole, but only to the sections represented by those who signed the "Appeal of the Thousand" of June 9,—i.e., the Liebknecht and Ledebour groups.

The prospect of another winter of war in the face of a more effective Allied blockade stimulated renewed illegal activities in December. Liebknecht, too, returned from the front in time to vote against the proposed war credits on December 21. The theoretical justification of the voting of "The Twenty" against the estimates on this occasion convinced Liebknecht that a line of division had to be drawn between the opportunists of the left-center and his own supporters. Rosa Luxemburg was also of the opinion that a more definite division within the opposition groups was necessary. Although under arrest at this time, she found some way of secretly communicating with Liebknecht, and together they decided that the alliance with the pacifist "chronic wobblers" was detrimental to the progress of genuine revolutionary action.

Within two weeks after the vote of "The Twenty," on January 1, 1916, Liebknechtians from different parts of Germany met secretly and independently at Liebknecht's home in Berlin. The group accepted as the basis for future action a set of "Guiding Principles" drawn up by Rosa Luxemburg and secretly smuggled out of prison. The "Guiding Principles", appended to the *Juniusbröschure* published April, 1916, appeared in printed form about a month after the New Year's meeting and circulated illegally in broadsheet form under the caption "A Question of Life for Socialism."

The "Guiding Principles" not only laid the basis for the detachment of the Liebknecht radicals from the opposition around Haase, Ledebour, Bernstein, Kautsky, and others, but they also provided the Liebknechtians with the best set of practical instructions in their oppositional activities in general. The first part of these instructions outlined a sweeping condemnation of the war and imperialism which had been strengthened by the action of Socialists in most belligerent countries. The war would develop premises for new wars unless the international proletariat intervened with revolution against the national ruling classes. The "Guiding Principles" firmly rejected the "utopian and reactionary plans" of the capitalists, who wanted international courts of arbitration, diplomatic treaties on "disarmament," "freedom of the seas," "European state alliances," and "national buffer states." The Haase group, because it advocated these same means toward the achievement and preservation of peace, must therefore also be refused support. The II International had been smashed by the official Socialists in the various states, and therefore it was necessary for true Socialists to create a new workers' International which would assume the lead in the revolutionary class struggle ("war against war") against imperialism. This proposal for the construction of the III International was the positive principle to which the Liebknecht group dedicated its subsequent efforts.

In order to fullfill its historical task, the III International was to rest on the following principles. 1. "There is no Socialism outside of international solidarity of the proletariat, and there is no Socialism without class struggle." 2. The class action of the international proletariat had to accept as its main aim, in peace as well as in war, the conquest of imperialism and the prevention of wars. 3. The center of gravity of the international proletariat organization rested in the International. The International was to determine the actions of its various national sections in time of peace as well as in war. 4. Any national section which acted in variance with the International placed itself outside of it. 5. It was to be the duty of the national sections to educate the masses in their obligations to the International. 6. The national sections in their agitation in parliaments and in the press, were to denounce the traditional phraseology of nationalism as the bourgeois instrument of power. "The Socialist International is the fatherland of the proletarians, to the defense of which everything else should be subordinated."

With this program and its stress on international discipline and revolutionary class warfare the line of demarcation was drawn within the opposition. The expected occurred. There were repercussions

within the ranks of the opposition; the "Guiding Principles" were not acceptable to the Haase group. The consolidation of the Liebknecht forces on January 1 was followed by the formation of the Haase-Ledebour Labor Association in the Reichstag in March. The Liebknecht group, to be sure, also participated in the secret conferences of the Haase-Ledebour opposition; but it also continued to hold its separate conferences to which only those who subscribed to the "Guiding Principles" were admitted.

In March the radicals once more rallied to a secret conference at which twenty-eight electoral districts throughout Germany were represented. On April 23 a radical youth group conferred under the chairmanship of Liebknecht.[12] It resolved to separate from the majority Socialist youth movement and support the anti-militaristic and international ideas which he propounded. The growing spirit of the illegal movement was reflected too in the belligerency of his Reichstag speeches which culminated in the riotous session of April 8, already discussed. On May 1 the radical opposition lost its leader when he became too radical and the government shut him up in prison.

A concomitant development to the greater independence and radicalism of the Liebknecht group after January 1, when it adopted the "Guiding Principles," was the expansion of the underground network for the dissemination of illegal literature. The group's legal channels of expression diminished as the influence of its activities increased. Public expressions were forbidden. In the Reichstag Liebknecht's influence also declined; for when the party expelled him in 1915, he lost many privileges which inhered exclusively in Party members.

The only alternative with which to orient the masses was to intensify the illegal circulation of broadsheets and brochures. There appeared on January 27 the first of the famous *Political Letters* signed with the pseudonym "Spartakus", the name of a leader of a slave uprising in ancient Rome. This illegal propaganda was at first typewritten and hectographed. The excellence of distribution reflected good organization of underground channels. It was after the appearance of the so-called *Spartacus Letters* that the Liebknecht group gradually became known as the Spartacus Union *(Spartakusbund)*.

Liebknecht was responsible for writing the first editions of the *Spartacus Letters*. The first brochure of letters included his lively polemic against "The December Men of 1915." Other letters in the first group implemented and justified his actions in the Reichstag. Among other things, he explained in "Liebknecht's Little Interpella-

tions"[*] his use of the interpellation in the Reichstag. He admitted that parliamentarianism for him was nothing more than a means of agitation and propaganda, a means by which the interests of the proletriat could be served. Parliamentary procedure was nothing sacred which had to be preserved, but a weapon to promote Socialist interests; and to this end he used the interpellation. On February 3 the second edition of the *Spartacus Letters*, which included the "Guiding Principles", appeared. In his commentary Liebknecht again revealed his concern for winning the masses in competition with the Haase-Ledebour group.

The *Spartacus Letters* continued to appear at regular intervals. They were reproduced in hectograph form until September, when it became possible to issue them from a printing press. Frans Mehring succeeded Liebknecht as editor of the *Letters* when the latter was imprisoned in May. After the authorities arrested Mehring in August, he was succeeded by Leo Jogiches, a Jewish Socialist from Vilna under whose supervision the *Letters* first were issued from the printing press. Other contributors to the *Letters* were Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Meyer, Paul Levi, and Julian Karski.

The *Spartacus Letters* served as the prime medium for fulfillment of the announced purpose of the Liebknecht group: "Universal peace cannot come without overthrow of the ruling powers of Germany. . . . The German workers are now called upon to carry the message to the East and to the West." In this service this illegal literature reflected a consistent devotion to the "Guiding Principles", attacking the left-centrist opposition, the majority Socialists, and the government with ridicule and violence, while crusading at the same time for the commencement of class warfare and the establishment of the III international.

INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION, 1915-1916

The collapse of the II International encouraged the left wing of the international Socialist movement to call for a new international demonstration of unity against the war. A Liebknecht supporter, Clara Zetkin, was one of the first to sponsor such an attempt when she called for an international Socialist women's conference in Berne, March, 1915. In all, approximately thirty representatives were able to attend the meeting. The German delegation consisted of seven members, headed by Clara Zetkin, who attended the conference notwithstanding the SPD's refusal to permit participation. The conference issued a manifesto which vociferously denounced the war

as imperialistic and called upon the "brothers" of all countries to unite in commanding "this slaughter to cease."

Of greater import was the international Socialist conference which gathered at Zimmerwald, Switzerland, in September, 1915. The planning for the meeting had been initiated in April by the Italian Socialists with the support of their Swiss comrades. Thirty-eight delegates from eleven countries attended, among whom was Lenin, who intended to consolidate the oppositional Socialists of the various states into a nucleus for a new International. The Bolsheviks, like the Liebknecht group in Germany, were the most revolutionary and wanted to transform the war of imperialism into a civil war.

The German delegation at Zimmerwald comprised of ten delegates, but they were not homogeneous in their views. The majority followed the lead of Ledebour, who would not lend support to any action which obligated a negation of war credits. Another group of three delegates, the so-called Württemburgers, was nearer to the position of Liebknecht. Ernst Meyer and Berta Thalheimer were two of the three, but they did not agree with Lenin and were not ready to break completely with the party. A third view was represented by a single delegate, Julian Borchardt, editor of the radical *Rays of Light (Lichtenstrahlen)*, who accepted Liebknecht's tactics without reservation. Only he of the German delegation supported Lenin's proposals. Ledebour swayed the majority of the conference, including Meyer and Thalheimer, to reject Lenin's tactics. Lenin and his supporters were regarded as an insignificant and outside minority.

The Zimmerwald manifesto issued by the conference majority appealed for the unification of the international proletariat; but its criticism of the majority Socialists was generally restrained and pacific. Since the majority of the conferees were not ready for an open break with their respective parties, the manifesto reflected their intention to regenerate the parties of the II International. The document enjoyed a wide distribution in Germany as well as in the other belligerent countries.

Zimmerwald was significant in that it gave more prominence to the differences between the Liebknecht and Ledebour forces in Germany. Although Liebknecht was not present, his differences with Ledebour were manifested vicariously through Lenin. Ledebour informed the conference that as far as he was concerned there was no Liebknecht group. The Bolsheviks replied that "for us there exists the Liebknecht group only." The Bolsheviks, moreover, optimistically declared that their ideas were being received with increasing sympathy among the international Socialists. Zinoviev,

later boss of the Comintern, voiced this opinion, too, when he promised that the time would come when all honest Socialists would exclaim with the Bolsheviks: "The Second International has died, riddled by opportunism. Hail the Third International purged of opportunism!"

The Bolsheviks, to consolidate their gains, organized their own bureau after the Zimmerwald conference, consisting of Lenin, Zinoviev, and Radek. Soon the international Socialists in Germany, led by Borchardt, strengthened this extreme left nucleus. The Bolsheviks advertised the example of Liebknecht in their agitation. Lenin described him after the Zimmerwald conference as a Socialist who was fulfilling his duty for the sake of ending the war, "who from the parliamentary tribune appeals to the soldiers to lay down their weapons, who preaches revolution and the turning of the imperialist war into a civil war for Socialism." Lenin regarded Liebknecht as the most famous representative of the new proletarian International.

An examination of Liebknecht's letter to the Zimmerwald conference reveals his differences with the Ledebour group and agreement with the Bolsheviks. Liebknecht, according to his letter, was "imprisoned and fettered by militarism" at the time of the conference and therefore unable to attend. He appealed to the delegates to settle accounts "with the deserters and turncoats of the International in Germany, England, France, and elsewhere, . . ." The only solution to the problem of international capitalism and militarism was international Socialism; and catching the ears of the conference members he suggested a new slogan to dramatize an old tactic: "Civil war and not civil peace!" He agreed with Lenin that a new International had to rise on the ruins of the old one. "Long live antimilitarism! Long live international people-emancipating, revolutionary Socialism! Proletarians of all countries—re-unite!"

Although he did not vote with the Lenin minority on this occasion, Ernst Meyer told how Liebknecht's letter, written in pencil and brought to Switzerland by Liebknecht's wife, was received by the Zimmerwald delegates. The letter elicited a storm of enthusiasm "from all members of the Conference except Ledebour and Adolf Hoffman, who felt hurt, not without reason, and whispered something about 'eccentricity'." Meyer related that Lenin liked especially Liebknecht's slogan: "Civil war and not civil peace." "Civil war—that is excellent!" Lenin repeated over and over again. Lenin later took Liebknecht's letter home, and his wife dispatched

it to Zinoviev, near the Vierwaldstätter Lake, where Zinoviev was living with his family in 1915.

The Zimmerwald organization further developed international opposition to the war when it formed an enlarged executive committee which met at Berne, February 5-9, 1916, to make arrangements for a second international conference. Existing accounts do not agree on exactly who and how many attended the meeting, but Berta Thalheimer apparently represented the Liebknecht group. She reported that the German radicals had called a separate conference at Liebknecht's home on New Year's day and read the "Guiding Principles" which they adopted. Zinoviev regarded the "Guiding Principles" as practically identic to the resoultion drafted by the Bolshevik minority at Zimmerwald.

Ledebour, who also attended, emphasized the mounting strength of the opposition within the SPD, and cited as evidence the circulation of some 600,000 illegal broadsheets and pamphlets, recurring street demonstrations, and the diminution of the SPD majority's leadership of the masses. He also censured Liebknecht for promoting a party split, while advocating that the hope of the opposition was the capture and not the abandonment of party machinery. He again denied the existence of the Liebknecht group and a split within the SPD.

The second international conference, attended by forty-four delegates, met in Kienthal, Switzerland, April 24-30, 1916. The German opposition groups had designated sixteen delegates, but only seven reached Kienthal. Adolph Hoffman and Fleissner led the four member Haase-Ledebour delegation, while Berta Thalheimer and Ernst Meyer represented the Liebknecht faction. The seventh delegate, Paul Frölich, spoke for the radical Bremen group with which Karl Radek was associated.

At this conference the Haase-Ledebour group moved farther toward the left, but it steadfastly refused to give its blessings to a split with the mother party (although in the previous month it had formed a separate parliamentary faction in the Reichstag). The members of this group labeled themselves as an "opposition *within* the organization," and repudiated the proposal of a III International. The Liebknecht delegates, who had voted with the majority at the Zimmerwald conference, moved all the way to the left in line with the Bolsheviks, with whom they now worked hand in hand. They not only approved of a party split but had in practice already become "schismatics" when they convened independently on January 1. Their "Guiding Principles", and another set of resolutions adopted

by them in March and submitted again at Kienthal, clearly defined their unqualified support of the III International.

The Liebknecht group's resolutions submitted at Kienthal described a significant opposition in Germany rising out of intolerable conditions on the home front. The military situation, which "has come to an impasse so that a purely military settlement appears today more hopeless," would continue the profligate slaughter unless the chains of the *Burgfrieden* were cast off. For those who were serious in throwing off the civil peace the resolutions bound the proletarian representatives of Social Democracy to refuse in any circumstance all war credits, taxes and other financial means in the belligerent countries, and to arouse the masses "to manifest their will against the war and in favor of the international Socialist solidarity." These tactics Liebknecht had practiced since December, 1914; and the resolutions, reflecting another Liebknecht tactic, provided that "the tendency of the youth movement to achieve an independent existence must be definitely supported."

A most significant omen at Kienthal, according to Zinoviev, were the reports from all of the German delegates that practical mass action against the war could be expected in Germany at any time. Although the Lenin-Liebknecht supporters were still in the minority, their rising influence, fed by the continuation of a seemingly fruitless war, towed the majority farther to the left, as revealed in the official manifesto. Although it did not advocate a break with the II International, the manifesto demanded that Socialists deny at once every kind of support to the governments' war policy, and that "they vote from now on against all war credits." The Kienthal manifesto, as the Zimmerwald declaration, was distributed illegally in Germany as well as in other belligerent countries.

Liebknecht, however, tired of manifestos, especially those calling for half-measures. His eagerness for practical action resulted in his arrest on May 1. His supporters, particularly those who represented him at Zimmerwald and Kienthal, praised his deed as "more important than the 'dignified' participation in the Second Zimmerwald (Kienthal) Conference." From his quiet prison cell he was "doing more for the restoration of the International in all countries than ten yards of the Zimmerwald manifesto."

On July 1 the international Socialist committee issued a proclamation of protest against Liebknecht's arrest. It urged the workers of the world to "come out and protest! Forward for the fight, which alone creates the International of strength and deeds." Lenin continued to argue for the III International. In January, 1917, he called

for obedience to Liebknecht's past and "to effect a 'regeneration' of the old parties 'from the top to the bottom'. We are certain that we have on our side all the class-conscious workers of the entire world, who have enthusiastically greeted K. Liebknecht and his tactics." In April, 1917, he appealed to the revolutionary Socialists throughout Europe to preach "our fraternal confidence in Karl Liebknecht." He urged them "to found the new Third International in a bold, honest, proletarian, Liebknecht way . . . It is better to remain alone, like Liebknecht, and that means remaining with revolutionary proletariat."

WARTIME YOUTH OPPOSITION

The outbreak of the war awakened the slumbering radicalism of some of the German youth. Party reformists and government authorities, who had usurped the leadership of the youth from Liebknecht after 1907, now lost ground in competition with the radicals for their favor. The progressive debilitation of the reformist youth organization can be measured in part, by the drop in the circulation of its publication, the *Youth Worker,* from 108,077 in 1915 to 30,000 in 1916. After coming out with one of the very first examples of underground literature against the war, the radical youth increased their numbers, especially in the urban areas of Berlin, Stuttgart, Dresden, Leipzig, and Hamburg. Youthful opposition to the war was particularly significant in Württemburg, where Liebknecht and his ideas always aroused strong sympathy.

Opposition to the war among the youth in other belligerent countries also early asserted itself. Following closely on the heels of the international conference of Socialist women, an international conference of Socialist youth met at Berne, April 5-7, 1915, to revive the decisions of the 1907 Stuttgart youth conference which had been led and inspired by Liebknecht. The international youth movement, as the German groups, also succumbed to reformism after 1907. At Berne the pendulum swung back toward the left; but the majority followed the lead of the centrist-pacifist from Switzerland, Robert Grimm, whose resolution not to break with the mother parties failed to satisfy the Bolsheviks, who held out for a transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war, according to the Lenin-Liebknecht formula.

Among the fourteen accredited delegates in attendance, three came from Germany. The Germans represented Liebknecht's views and voted with the Bolsheviks. Though the conference did not fully adopt Liebknecht's tactics, especially the idea of "civil war and not civil peace," it paid tribute to him as the father of the international youth

movement and resolved to establish a "Liebknecht fund" for the purpose of fighting militarism and supporting the victims of that struggle."

The conference also provided for the publication of the *International Youth*, of which ten numbers subsequently appeared and whose first appearance coincided with the first international youth day, October 3, 1915. This organ was the best example of the revolutionary spirit of the international Socialist youth during the war, and Liebknecht and Lenin were its moving figures. The first numbers carried a treatise by Liebknecht entitled "Antimilitarism" and signed *Implacabilis*. In expounding his favorite views on the subject, he declared that militarism succeeded in reaping its harvest after August, 1914, because his program against it had been relegated to the background by the reformist Socialists in alliance with the government. Now he saw the opportunity to revive the youth against this evil in the new period ushered in by the Berne youth conference. The old International which had repudiated his warnings lay demolished; but "the International of the Youth lives!" His renewed appeals through *International Youth* to fight "international" militarism, capitalism, and the armaments industry through education of the youth, general strikes, class warfare, and international solidarity once more fell on fertile ground.

The Liebknecht-inspired *International Youth* was widely distributed among the radical youth of Germany. Published in Zurich, it found its way especially into southern Germany, which helps to explain the pronounced radicalism among the youth of that area during the war. In Württemburg it was even reprinted and again distributed by the thousands.

The Berne youth conference and *International Youth* thus gave German radical youth a new shot in the arm. In September of the same year they sponsored their first youth day. Resolutions protesting against the continuation of the conflict and admonishing the youth of all belligerent states to rebel against it were issued. The youth also expressed their thanks and sympathy to the courageous Liebknecht, "the founder of the German youth movement," for upholding the honor of the international youth movement through his determined opposition to the government since the beginning of the war.

On December 5 there was established in Berlin the "Youth Central Labor Steads", which coordinated the youth of the middle-class and proletariat in common revolutionary activity. Its program accepted the international character of the revolutionary youth movement and aimed at the prevention of the militarization of the youth. This

organization, according to one of its founders, Wolfgang Breithaupt, enjoyed a rapid growth; but its war-time role was insignificant nevertheless. Eventually both sons of Karl Liebknecht were also enrolled.

Liebknecht's efforts to influence the German youth continued unabated in 1916. The longer the war continued, the more the government would have to turn to the youth for replacements for the army and munitions industries. The Liebknecht group, in a secret national conference in the middle of March, adopted, as we have seen, a number of resolutions which were also submitted to the Kienthal conference by Liebknecht's representatives. Among other things, the resolutions emphasized the importance of youthful opposition to the war and urged the establishment of an independent youth organization. Karl Radek also urged German youth to revolt and declare themselves for a new International. In Stuttgart even children were used to distribute propaganda material for the opposition. Police trials of the children gave the opposition the noble chance to agitate against the authorities. The trials also elicited sympathy for the children from the press of the majority Socialists.

By the spring of 1916 local radical youth organizations were established in the principal cities of Germany. The time ripened for a national conference of the oppositional youth groups. The impetus for a national conference came from three sources. The Württemburg youth organizations, which were entirely in the hands of the radicals, wanted a meeting. Otto Rühle, Liebknecht's Reichstag colleague who voted against the credits and worked with the Dresden youth organization, also promoted the idea. And Liebknecht himself thought the time had come for a national gathering. Preparations were made and the national conference met in Jena, Easter Sunday, April 23.

The conference, under the chairmanship and spiritual leadership of Liebknecht, resolved to split from the "hurrah-socialists" and to form its own revolutionary youth organization. Thus the split which was demonstrated within the SPD by the Liebknecht meeting of January 1, by the formation of the Hasse-Ledebour Labor Association in March, and again by a national gathering of the Liebknechtians in March, was now also extend to the Socialist youth movement. The new German group elected to append itself to the international Socialist youth organization, which had been rescued from the reformists at Berne, April, 1915.

As to political viewpoints, the new organization pledged itself to the fight against militarism according to Liebknecht's strategy. It

also resolved to boycott the majority Socialist *Youth Worker* (thus contributing to the drop in circulation referred to) and to found a new national organ as soon as possible. The youth of Braunschweig subsequently issued the *Free Youth*, which was suppressed after two numbers. In Württemburg the youth publication *Morning Red* appeared and met the same fate. In reaction to government repression the youth turned increasingly to illegal channels for the expression of their activities.

Thus the spirit of Liebknecht and the Stuttgart youth conference of 1907, suppressed before the war, now experienced another revivification at Jena. It was Liebknecht who formulated the majority of the fundamental resolutions at Jena, and their adoption brought the radical youth of Germany into the same camp with the Bolshevik Zimmerwald radicals.

The revolutionary spirit of the German youth asserted itself even as it was being organized. A number of young workers in Braunschweig raised the strike banner on April 22 in retaliation to the *Sparzwang*, or compulsory saving, which they regarded as a pay deduction used by the governement to implement the war loan. The strikers were able to win over many adult workers; on May 5 the *Sparzwang* was withdrawn. The strike has been interpreted by radical youth leaders as the first politically organized strike in Germany during the war. Supposedly, these Liebknecht-inspired youth by their action encouraged the entire revolutionary movement; for the success of this strike established a precedent which other radicals and disgruntled masses later followed.[28]

Liebknecht's arrest on May 1 gave the radical youth of Germany an opportunity to demonstrate their revolutionary fervor for the man who was their organizer and leader. Many youth participated in the street demonstrations in which he was arrested. In Stuttgart and Berlin youths were arrested and sentenced for distributing propaganda in connection with his imprisonment. International youth organizations also sponsored demonstrations in honor of Liebknecht's act, with greatest success in the neutral countries of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. Radical youth in Hamburg on the occasion of Liebknecht's second trial in August demonstrated again and came into conflict with the police. They echoed the clash with the broadsheet "The Hamburg Cossacks", which repeated Liebknecht's slogan of May 1, "Down with the war!" Liebknecht, they asserted, was doing more for the cause of peace in his lonely cell than all of the "stick-it-out politicians".

The second and third national conferences of the German radical

youth were held on Easter, 1917, and October 26-27, 1918, respectively. Liebknecht attended the latter just after his release from prison on October 21. The basic doctrines adopted by the group committed it to revolutionary battle and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. These revolutionary youth participated on the side of Spartacus during the events of the German revolution.

There is no question that Liebknecht's example and leadership significantly aided the growth of radicalism among the German youth during the war. Much of his success, however, was the result of circumstances which the war created. The war released many youth from parental restraint as soldier-fathers marched off to war. The war-time employment of young people made them wage earners, and some succumbed to the disordered life which money readily buys. Social disorganization and dislocation made Liebknecht's organization of youthful opposition to the war relatively easier.

[1] From the beginning to the end of the war Liebknecht was for many Americans, British, French, and Russian Bolsheviks, their hinge of hope for a German collapse. Their faith in him was based usually on wishful thinking, however; not on the realities of the circumstances. At the time of Liebknecht's arrest in 1916, for example, the *New York Times* (May 5) submitted the opinion that the German government would be compelled to release him in order to prevent a revolt. For other examples, see below, pp. 65f., 85f., 89, 119, 128.

[2] Herzfeld, *Sozialdemokratie*, 10.

[3] This newspaper later in the war became the organ *(Arbeiterpolitik)* of the Bremen radical opposition, including Karl Radek, Johann Knief, Paul Frölich, and Julian Borchardt (see below, pp. 85f., 124, 155). Bremen and Hamburg were two of the first centers of opposition during the war, but soon were eclipsed in illegal activity by other industrial centers.

[4] The editorial board of *Vorwärts* favored Liebknecht and his kind; but because it had to walk the tightrope of government censorship, it dared not report accurately what happened in the Prussian Assembly. Later, in October, 1916, when the divergence of views between the editorial board and the party executive became intolerable to the latter, *Vorwärts* met the same fate which befell the *Schwäbische Tagwacht* in November, 1914: its editorial power was usurped by the party executive and made to conform with majority Socialist policy (see below, p. 110).

[5] Otto Rühle failed to join Liebknecht this time in negating the credits. On August 26 *Vorwärts* published his statement explaining that he had intended to vote with Liebknecht; but he inadvertently absented himself from the chamber, and meanwhile the vote was taken so suddenly that he was unable to return in time.

[6] "The Twenty" included, among others, Bernstein, Oskar Cohn, Dittman, Geyer, Haase, Herzfeld, Ledebour, Liebknecht, Rühle, and Vogtherr.

[9] *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.* Hereafter cited as USPD. See below, p. 110.

[6] Sir Roger Casement was an Irish leader who landed on the Irish coast from a German submarine on March 20, 1916, to incite a rebellion against the British.

[9] See below, pp. 97ff.

[10] See above, p. 71.

[11] See below, pp. 95f.

[12] See below, pp. 91f.

[13] Liebknecht wrote in the third person to conceal his authorship.

[14] The fund was renewed in 1919, and collections were to have been made regularly in Liebknecht's memory.

[15] See for example, Breithaupt, *Volksvergiftung,* 43f.

IV

BEHIND PRISON BARS

In conscripting Liebknecht in February, 1915, the government hoped to remove a mainspring of a thriving oppositional force. It failed to silence him in the German parliaments, however, where he continued to express his views. Moreover, he did not hesitate to participate in activities which were expressly forbidden him as a member of the armed services. During much of the latter half of 1915, however, there was a general lull in resistance activity, which must be explained at least in part by the fact that the Liebknecht group, not yet mature, was without Liebknecht. It was in this period that he was in the shoes of a non-combatant soldier in an equipment service battalion.

Although Liebknecht's letters from the front reveal his sincere hatred of militarism and war and give a more intimate picture of him as a family man and private individual, they contribute little to a better understanding of his political record.[1] In all of his letters he showed the greatest affection and concern for his family. Those addressed to his two sons expressed particular interest in their education. He urged them to make the most of their schooling, while reminding them of the millions of others whose financial plight made learning unavailable. Diligence in school would have its later rewards. He advised them to cultivate self-confidence, to aim high with diligence and all the given talents; but self-confidence should not develop into self-complacency and egotism. Books would become their best friends, he counseled his lads, if they sat with them for hours at a time. They would find their best friends in the classics —Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Homer, among others.

In his letters Liebknecht also reminded his sons that he was a Socialist. The issues which motivated the war, he said, were brutally plain. The study of history revealed that capitalistic interests and war were old natural partners. Even the Crusades, promoted by misleading religious and cultural excuses, were great commercial wars. Liebknecht's enthusiastic interests in learning, books, and culture were surpassed only in scope by his devotion to the Socialist ideal.

Liebknecht's deep antipathy for militarism and war managed

to find expression again and again in his letters, notwithstanding front-line censorship. The military authorities repeatedly urged him to bear arms, particularly when his battalion was exposed to fire. He refused to comply in any circumstances. "I will not shoot," he wrote to his sons. In a letter to his oldest son, Helmi, he said: "I fear only trench warfare—everything else, all dangers play no role; only in helping with murder—that I cannot do—there it must stop." He would participate in Hindenburg's *sauerei* only to the extent to which he was forced. His minimal duties consisted of felling and sawing trees on the Düna sector of the Russian front, where at night from across the river he could hear the merry folk music of the Russian soldiers. Other duties included peeling potatoes and burying the rotting corpses of the dead.

The German soldiers on the Düna sector, according to Liebknecht, had the poorest attention. He criticized the inadequacies of medical care. The morale of the soldiers suffered also because the German artillery fired salvos on its own men. He urged his wife to inform Socialist deputy Haase of the conditions which he reported so that they would be aired in the Reichstag.

Any voluntary effort which Liebknecht exerted at the front was devoted to the propagation of his Socialist convictions. Although there is no conclusive evidence available to prove that he promoted widespread propaganda among the soldiers at the front, it is generally conceded that he made the most of any opportunity to do so; or he would have been out of character. "He was sent from unit to unit, staying everywhere for a short time only because he made the soldiers revolutionary wherever he appeared. Instead of leaving him where he was, every unit wanted to get rid of him." His letters indicate that military authorities suspected him of undermining the soldiers' fighting spirit and that spies were assigned to report on his activities. They also warned him that he had been reported for conducting anti-religious propaganda, which could be interpreted as anti-war agitation. They further reminded him that the censors opened his letters and cautioned him "with the best of intentions" to be on guard in his activities; and although he might think he had a host of "friends" to whom it would appear safe to express his opinions, many of them criticized and denounced him from behind his back.

Liebknecht, however, must have derived some satisfaction out of the feeling that he was being watched as the man who wanted to bring war to an end. A further consolation was the rationalized confirmation of his conviction and warnings that capitalism and militarism

were the evil detroyers of men and their culture. Possessed of *a priori* presumptions, he searched for first-hand evidence to prove, for example, that the armaments industry was international and the enemy of the proletariat. It was no difficult matter for him, therefore, to make a case out of his contention that the Russians were using American munitions to kill German soldiers, a happy situation for the profit-hungry American munitions makers.

MAY 1, 1916

Liebknecht's stay at the Russian front came to an end when he suffered a physical collapse in October, 1915. His impressions of war there steeled him to renew his anti-war crusade, and his return to Berlin signified a new period of growth for the Liebknecht group. Between December, 1915 and March, 1916, there followed in succession his host of embarrassing interpellations hurled at the government from the floor of the Reichstag (December 12), his negation of the government's request for war credits (December 21), the adoption of the "Guiding Principles" at a secret meeting of the radicals at his home (January 1), the appearance of the first *Spartacus Letters* which he edited (January), his expulsion from the SPD (January 12), and another secret national meeting of the Liebknecht group (March) whose resolutions at Kienthal strengthened the position of the Bolsheviks there.

In April Liebknecht triggered the Reichstag's stormiest session, in which he was denounced as a traitor, anti-German, and ready for the insane asylum. In the same month he reorganized the radical youth of Germany along revolutionary lines for future activity. Everything which he and his group undertook breathed an eagerness for action. Liebknecht in particular, who never compromised, was reaching a point of no return; his intense experiences were priming him for decisive tactics. He would have been beside himself if he could not redeem his ideals with attempts to fulfill them by deeds.

At the end of the month, the Spartacists issued an appeal, written by Liebknecht, calling upon workers everywhere to demonstrate on May Day against the prolongation of the war. The solicitation, circulated illegally, bore the caption: "Out for the May Day Celebration!" Sub-titles, consisting of the third and fourth "Guiding Principles", called the masses to pledge their allegiance to the International, their center of gravity, above all other institutions. The broadcast warned that "the German war-mongerers are pushing with energy for a war with the United States" and invoked the workers to "make an end to the vile crime of nation murdering." The Ger-

mans' enemies were not the French and Russian people, but the German Junkers and capitalists and their executive committee: the German government.

Circulated with the May Day appeal was a small hand card appealing to all who were against the war and for bread, freedom, and peace to appear for a demonstration in Potsdam Square, Berlin, May 1, at eight P. M. At the appointed time, several thousand Berliners (estimates run as high as 10,000), but mostly women and youth, responded to the call. Police were in attendance and immediately seized Liebknecht when he bellowed to the crowd with his loud, sonorous voice: "Down with the war! Down with the government!"

The exact details of the events on the day of Liebknecht's arrest were related by an intimate spectator, whose description found wide distribution.[8] This witness and three comrades visited Liebknecht at his home on the morning of May 1. Liebknecht himself opened the door. "He is thin, his hair looks unusually black and his face is deathly pale. He walks like a dead man, walking with grim steps." His silence convinced his visitors that he was about to throw caution to the winds. He handed each of them a copy of the speech which he was to deliver and remarked, "I have several thousand of these printed." They read his speech, went into conference with him, and left an hour later.

In the afternoon the streets began to fill with "surging, silently moving human beings." Most of them were women; there were some men over fifty. Then it became apparent that there were more youth in the crowds than men and women together. They moved in the direction where the May day demonstration was to take place, as though they were part of a funeral procession. "They are all sad, very sad." Mounted guards herded the procession along.

When the time came for Liebknecht to speak, he reminded his listeners that they had three cardinal rights. The first was the full privilege to carry a rifle. Boy Scouts played the ridiculous role of the soldier, and aged men performed forced labor in invaded countries "for the defense of the Fatherland." The second right was the freedom to pay taxes. In this the German citizen was far ahead of his brothers in other countries; and higher taxes were yet to come. The German had the third inalienable privilege to hold his tongue between his teeth. "Keep your mouth shut tight when hungry . . , when your children are hungry . . , when your children want milk . . , when your children cry for bread . . , and write no letters to the front." Then Liebknecht quoted a number of newspaper reports which denied any scarcity and at the same time appealed that

in no circumstances must the people complain of hunger; complaints annoy "the soldier terribly and cripple his fighting power." He sympathized with the unfortunate German soldier, who had to hold on and suffer because of the capitalists, hurrah-patriots, and armor-plate kings. The ruling classes, for whom the government existed, likewise forced the worker into the war by lies, and "by like lies they expect to induce him to go on with the war!" Liebknecht was cheered. He raised his hand for silence and then uttered the words which prompted the police to seize him.

The Liebknecht demonstration occurred shortly after eight in the evening. Various accounts reported that he was seized with the greatest difficulty. According to the authorities, he wore civilian clothes and was not recognized by the arresting officers. The following day the police searched his office and house. One-hundred twenty small hand cards, inviting the workers to participate in the May Day street demonstrations, and 13,000 copies of the May Day appeal were uncovered.

In the preliminary proceedings Liebknecht fully admitted his responsibility for the preparations leading up to the May Day demonstration; but he refused to divulge the names of comrades who participated in the affair. He also acknowledged that he offered resistance to the arresting officers. He regarded his public declarations as a service which he owed to the people of Germany and other belligerent states; therefore his act was not punishable. On May 3 two official warrants were issued for his arrest. One was for inciting the masses against the government, for inciting the army to revolt, and for resisting officials who were acting under orders in line of duty. The other warrant charged him with comforting and abetting the enemy.

On May 11 the Reichstag discussed the status of its wayward deputy. He enjoyed the privileges which protected all deputies against prosecution by civil authorities for the expression of political views. But he was also a soldier, furloughed on May 1. Was he equally protected against military prosecution? The Socialist deputies, on a motion of Albrecht, Bernstein, and comrades, moved in the interest of parliamentary privilege to suspend the criminal proceedings against him and to remove him from arrest. Moreover, although they did not condone his actions, they argued that it would be bad policy to make a martyr out of him. Haase, who spoke for the parliamentary Labor Association, defended him against the charge of treason. Liebknecht, he said, wanted the German people to bring pressure on the government to end the war, just as he desired other belligerent peo-

ples to move their respective governments for the same end. But Socialist pleas were unavailing, and the Reichstag members, having their fill of Liebknecht, abandoned him by a count of 230 to 110 to the jurisdiction of the military court.

While Liebknecht awaited trial, he dispatched a number of letters to the military court which handled his case. He hoped that these letters would be reviewed in the Reichstag through which their contents would reach the public, thus giving his supporters the opportunity to capitalize on the proceedings. As early as May 3, before the Reichstag formally abandoned him, the royal military court in Berlin received one of his letters in which he boldly explained his position. He succeeded in smuggling a copy out of prison, and his sympathizers distributed its contents through underground channels. He pictured the German government as the reckless champion of class suppression, militarism, barbarism, and war-mongering, and as such, he called for its overthrow. Furthermore, he hoped that his appeal for revolution against the government would actuate the proletariat to commence the international class struggle to end the war. He asked the court to read his published pamphlet on militarism and review his past record for a further clarification of why "I thoroughly condemn and oppose the present war."

In another letter to the military court, dated May 8, Liebknecht emphasized that to condemn an international Socialist for treason was pure nonsense, since every revolutionary Socialist worked for the overthrow of every other capitalistic government, not his own only. In a letter of June 3 he renewed his argument that he did not consider it necessary to defend himself against the charge of treason, for "I plainly acknowledge the politics of international Socialism which I have publicly supported for years."

In still another letter, dated June 10, Liebknecht admonished his judges on Germany's war of conquest. His discourse to them included a record of Germany's military recklessness from the Morocco crises to the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the battle of Jutland. He depicted not only an increasing clamor among the masses for bread and peace, but also a mounting unrest among the soldiers at the front. Many units fought only at the point of officers' revolvers. Others openly fraternized with their enemies where the war had reached a stalemate. The population of military prisons, he said, reflected the growing dissatisfaction among the fighting men. He boasted that he was not afraid of the chancellor's recent announcement that the people would retaliate against Liebknecht and his kind after the war. The settlement of accounts by the people would be

directed in an entirely different direction—"I hope it will be thorough and before the war comes to an end."

Liebknecht's declaration to the court at the main proceedings described accurately his participation in the May Day demonstrations. He acknowledged his responsibility for the origins and distribution of the illegal literature. He admitted that he agitated among the youth and attended their Jena conference in April; but he would give no additional information on this matter. He did not agitate among the soldiers, but he expressed the wish that illegal literature would also find its way into their hands. He recognized that military regulations, to which he was subject forbade him to promote propaganda of any kind; but his political and social duties commanded him to break military restraint. He contrasted the government's ideals with his: for the government it was "rather war than insurrection!", but for him it was "rather insurrection, rather revolution than war!" Finally, he would "imperturbably continue my political struggle, my international Socialist struggle, according to my strength, regardless of the judgment imposed upon me."

On June 28 the court sentenced Liebknecht to prison for two years and six months and discharged him from the army with dishonor—his punishment "for attempted treason in war, aggravated disobedience and contumacy to the authority of the state." The court conceded that political fanaticism, not personal turpitude, motivated his action against the state, and imposed the lightest possible sentence in the circumstances.

The mildness of Liebknecht's sentence may have been a precautionary measure on the part of the government. The costly battle of Verdun brought the German masses news of additional casualties and hardships; it did not bring them victory, not even peace. And the government at this time was not eager to test the extent of discontent by throwing the full weight of the law at Liebknecht, the national symbol of the will for peace. If the government had deprived him of his citizenship rights, he would have forfeited membership in the Reichstag and Prussian Assembly. New elections to fill the vacancies, the government may have concluded, would produce other anti-war Socialists who would have to be dealt with again.

Liebknecht eagerly accepted the chance to appeal the sentence imposed on him. The appeal proceedings were held in secrecy; yet a witness, allegedly an opponent of Liebknecht, succeeded in noting the conclusion of the process. Liebknecht is said to have retorted to his judges: "Your honor is not my honor! . . . No general ever

wore a uniform with as much honor as I shall carry my prison uniform. I am here to prosecute, not to defend myself. The only solution for me is civil war, not civil peace! Down with the war! Down with the government!" He reportedly repeated the last two sentences several times. If the court had not been certain of the advisability of imposing a heavier sentence in June, it showed a greater certainty in this respect when it sentenced him again in this instance. On August 23, while the German army was seeking a crucial decision on the Somme, the court, stung and insulted by Liebknecht's belligerent unrepentance, extended his term of imprisonment to four years. Its heavier hand also deprived him of citizenship rights for a period to extend six years after the expiration of his prison sentence.

Socialists in the Reichstag again protested against the sentencing of Liebknecht. Landsberg, who spoke for the majority Socialists, pointed out that although he did not agree with the methods used by this "extraordinarily complicated character", his goal nevertheless was peace. In reaching for this goal he did not attempt to undermine Germany in favor of the enemy countries; for peace did not sabotage the strength of any country. Bernstein's motion to lift the verdict on Liebknecht failed again as it had on May 11. The population of the Luckau prison had one inmate to the good; the Liebknecht group would have to do without Liebknecht.

The deprivation of Liebknecht's citizenship now cost him his mandate in the German parliaments, and new elections to fill the vacancies had to be held. In a letter to the Social Democratic organization in his electoral district, he recommended one of his supporters, the elderly Franz Mehring, as the best possible candidate to succeed him in both houses. In March, 1917, Mehring won Liebknecht's seat in the Prussian Assembly; but Emil Stahl, supported by the majority Socialists, captured it in the Reichstag.

It is interesting to speculate on the motives which prompted Liebknecht to brazenly defy the government on May 1. From a military point of view his arrest had to be considered a necessity, a fact which he undoubtedly appreciated. He purposely dropped his guard, inviting the authorities to arrest him. Had he behaved more discreetly on this occasion, he could have continued in some measure to reach the public from the safety of the walls of the Reichstag and Prussian Assembly. Why did he deliver his Way Day address in open defiance of the government?

It is possible that Liebknecht thought the hour had struck for a popular revolution against the war and government. His address

was an appeal to revolt; its purpose was to incite the masses to practical action. But if this was his plan, it failed. A successful uprising at this time required more than a Liebknecht. In the face of a fairly effective military dictatorship it needed the support of a greater and more revolutionary throng than he had gathered. The failure of the May Day revolution does not mean that he did not plan and hope for it; but it failed because he utterly lacked a realistic understanding of the circumstances. This unreal approach to practical problems, however, was characteristic of Liebknecht. His vivid imagination and ultra-idealism relegated practical considerations to the background in his make-up.

But perhaps Liebknecht, after closer examination, should be given more credit for ability to assess the temper of the times and to plan accordingly, at least in this situation, than is normally conceded. Perhaps he realized that the Spartacus Union, in spite of its rapid growth in the first four months of 1916, could never bring the war to an end by merely distributing illegal literature. Perhaps he perceived that it would require more than an off-color address in the Potsdam square to incite the vacillating masses against the government. Perhaps he believed he had saturated the discontented with his speeches and literature over the years and war months, and that something new had to be injected to insure the continued growth of the opposition until it ripened for revolutionary action. That "something new" would be his dramatic May Day act which he performed, seemingly without caution but in reality with more design, resulting in his capture, trial, and imprisonment. Liebknecht, the imprisoned dove of peace, would be regarded as a martyr to a noble cause.

Evidence points to the martyr's role as certainly a worthwhile alternate goal in the event he failed to incite rebellion, if not the real tactical goal, which Liebknecht had in mind. In this role he could satisfy his strong sense of duty for which he had a fanatical respect. What appeared to many people to be his light-mindedness could have been in reality a calculated plan carried out with considerable success. His imprisonment aroused more agitation than any previous act of resistance, and the government unwittingly played into his hands.

Moreover, the government failed to make an example out of a traitor to the state. It delayed his sentence for two months, giving his supporters the opportunity to transform a traitorous act into an heroic feat. The relatively mild sentence imposed by the government which he had repeatedly denounced as brutal and barbarous

not only preserved him as a dangerous living martyr; but it encouraged other revolutionaries, who until that time had feared heavy consequences, to accept a bolder position against authority. There is no doubt that Liebknecht's arrest and sentencing precipitated an upsurge of revolutionary activity throughout Germany.

CONSEQUENCES

The first significant manifestation of increased revolutionary sentiment in reaction to Liebknecht's conviction appeared instantly. Liebknecht's campaign for peace created a deep impression particularly among the war-weary and susceptible munitions workers in industrial Berlin, who looked upon him as their hope for peace and bread. Trade unionist revolutionary shop stewards *(revolutionäre Obleute)*, who had intimate contacts with the disgruntled workers in the factories, agreed to sponsor a protest strike in conjunction with Liebknecht's anticipated conviction. On the eve of the final proceedings against Liebknecht, while the Spartacists independently promoted a public demonstration, approximately thirty shop stewards, under leadership of Richard Müller, the president of the turners of the metal workers' union, and Emil Barth, gathered to lay careful plans for a strike on the following day. Ledebour of the left-centrist opposition of the SPD also attended. At nine in the morning of June 28, 55,000 workers deserted their machines to strike for Liebknecht. From Berlin the general strike also spread to Braunschweig.

Significantly, Liebknecht before his imprisonment had never been able to promote a demonstration of this size; his trial and imprisonment were paying dividends. The government suppressed the strike, however. Thousands of striking workers were drafted and dispatched to the front; but most of them were skilled workers upon whom the war industries relied heavily. Others received pay reductions and poorer working conditions. Popular response to the strike was sufficient, however, to encourage the revolutionary shop stewards to make further preparations for a revolution. According to Ledebour's statement in his trial for sedition in May, 1919, the first revolutionary symptoms appeared in Germany in connection with the stewards' organization of this strike. It is in this sense that Liebknecht, unchaining the events which led to the strike in his behalf, can be considered the pioneer of the German revolution.

The strike occasioned by Liebknecht's conviction was only the beginning of a significant and genuine revolutionary feeling against the government and war. Revolutionary shop stewards, who were to

gain rapidly in influence, were in the best position to lead a potential revolution; they were in direct contact with the workers whose support they needed to make a demonstration against the government a success. In their later revolutionary activities, as we shall see, the shop stewards were influenced ideologically by the Spartacists and the USPD, while using the trade unions and the USPD as the basis of their organization.

The Spartacists without Liebknecht, on the other hand, were strangers to the masses. When after the first and second trials of Liebknecht in June and August they appealed to the workers for strikes of protest, there was no response. Clearly, the Spartacus Union did not command the influence among the masses in proportion to the sympathy which they demonstrated for Liebknecht as an individual. The Union's program of revolutionary Socialism did not attract them; they wanted peace, bread, and even much of the old order—not the transformation of the national war into a civil war and further untold suffering. Liebknecht, to be sure, was a revolutionary Socialist in the purest sense; but popular loyalty to him was based more on the workers' appreciation of his courageous speeches in and out of the German parliaments and more on their conception of him as a champion of peace rather than revolutionary Socialism.

The significant aspect of the Spartacus Union, especially without Liebknecht, in the total picture of war-time opposition was its capacity for distributing illegal propaganda through its network of confidential correspondents. Even in this role its influence was limited by the intellectual nature of its literature. It was an illegal propaganda organization, advertising a product on which it was "sold", but which was difficult to sell to others. Buyers' resistance to the Spartacist program was high. Spartacist advertising, however, encouraged potential buyers to buy more of what other oppositional groups had to offer. They stimulated the wants and desires of the public but could not cash in on the demand which they helped to create.

Much of the fuel for the Spartacist propaganda machine for the summer and autumn of 1916 was pumped from Liebknecht's martyrdom. Two weeks after his arrest the Spartacus Union circulated an account of his May Day demonstration, confirming it as a huge success, but at the extremely terrible expense of his loss to the organisation. Spartacus also distributed two of his letters to the military court. These letters experienced a prolonged circulation. As late as September, 1918, at the port of Lindau in Bavaria, German cus-

toms officials apprehended a cargo of two thousand copies at the fast freight inspection.

The government's drawn-out proceedings against Liebknecht invited the Spartacists to make additional political capital out of the case. While he awaited trial, the right-wing Socialist David graciously attempted to minimize Liebknecht's danger with the words: "A dog which has a loud bark does not bite." Rosa Luxemburg, angered by this remark, answered it in a broadsheet entitled "A Policy for Dogs." Her incisive words reproached the Reichstag for not protecting one of its own members against the government. She complained that everything Socialists had undertaken since the inception of German Socialism had been interpreted by the government as treason to the state. The majority Socialists were no better than the government in this respect. Had they lived during the Bismarck's day, they would have brought August Bebel and "our old Liebknecht" to the gallows. The majority Socialists were denounced as dogs who "will certainly, when the day of reckoning comes, get the kick they deserve from the workers of Germany."

In the same month, June, another broadsheet written by Rosa Luxemburg, entitled "What About Liebknecht?" characterized Liebknecht's trial as a shameless comedy because the "judges" were prominent military authorities who personified the very rule of the sword against which Liebknecht had dedicated his life. She explained the delay of the trial on grounds that the government sought to defer judgment until the Reichstag and Prussian Assembly had adjourned, so that the court's sentence could not be aired in public. She appealed to the workers to unite with the supporters of Liebknecht in striving for peace: "Workers, Liebknecht's cause is your cause. Through Liebknecht they want to strike at you, to kill you, to silence you, so that the human slaughter will continue. Through Liebknecht it is hoped that the opposition of the German proletariat to the war criminals will be broken. Will you stand for that? No and a thousand no's! . . . Down with the war. Down with the government!" "What About Liebknecht?" found its way into France, where it was edited by propaganda officials and included in the *War News for the German People*, no. 21, dated July 21, and thus dropped again on German soil by French balloons.

The pen of the Socialist historian Franz Mehring also contributed to the general flood of Spartacist propaganda mushrooming out of Liebknecht's arrest. His broadsheet, "Workers!" compared the Germany of World War I with the era of repression in which Metternich issued the Carlsbad decrees. The German reaction to Napoleon's shooting of the German book dealer was mild compared to what the

reaction of the German proletariat was going to be to the Liebknecht case. Rosa Luxemburg and Mehring were both taken into "protective custody" during the summer for their eager defense of Liebknecht; but demonstrations and propaganda against the war continued.

Liebknecht's conviction on June 28 brought forth another broadsheet, "2½ Years Imprisonment!" It rendered a short report on the strike which the revolutionary shop stewards had managed, and called for a new mass strike. "The stone has begun to roll!" But there was no response; the gap between Spartacus and the public was too wide.

In August the Spartacus Union issued another series of its *Letters*. It included an article entitled "Retrospect and Prospect" in which the eventful happenings of the past three months were reviewed. Reviewing its own record in context with the economic and political situation in Germany of that summer, Spartacus optimistically declared that June 28 represented the turning point of the war.

Liebknecht's appeal and second conviction in August moved the Spartacus Union once more to issue a broadsheet in his behalf. Written by Rosa Luxemburg, it explained to the masses for what Liebknecht fought and why he was imprisoned. At the same time the Spartacists vainly issued another call to the workers to leave their work and factories on August 31 and strike for Liebknecht.

On November 5 the Spartacists issued the second series of *Spartacus Letters*, which included an article by Liebknecht, secretly smuggled out of prison and entitled, "Not the Old Song, but the New Sword!" He ridiculed the sacredness of parliamentary order to which Hasse's Labor Association subscribed. The Reichstag could not come to the aid of the revolutionary movement as long as it was only a "prayer-mill" for the parliamentary "opposition." He may have been saying, in effect, that the only hope for a successful revolution in Germany rested in the Haase-Ledebour group, which alone could turn the Reichstag into some sort of public revolutionary tribune. The Spartacus group alone, now without a single member in the Reichstag, could not carry on the revolutionary struggle without the effective aid of parliamentary opposition. He assigned the Reichstag opposition the choice of fighting or capitulating. There was no third choice. Whoever talked of battle but did not wage it, eluded it; and whoever eluded the fight, capitulated.

Liebknecht must have had some regrets for waging his battle in a way which put him behind iron bars. In a sense he waged his fight on May Day to avoid capitulation; yet his struggle led to forced

capitulation, and much of the remainder of the conflict eluded him. Helplessly isolated, his optimistic faith was being tried; but the Spartacists reassured him that his course was the right one. In the November edition of the *Spartacus Letter*, which included his article, they addressed the following encouragement to him: "No, you have not fallen! You are gone from us. But in the narrow cell, behind the iron bars, dressed in the uniform of a prisoner, you remain at your post as a fighter and leader for our sacred cause; and each day that you spend in prison is a thorn for the German working class, and each clanging of your chains is a trumpet-call for us all: To the fight! To the fight for our and your liberation!"

BEHIND PRISON WALLS, 1916-1918

When Liebknecht was not busy with his prison occupation as shoemaker, he devoted most of his preciously little free time to reading, writing, and study. The heavily censored letters to his family dealt perforce with non-political matters. They were full of advice on how to remain healthy, the importance of diligent learning, and the dangers of skating on ice during the thaw season. The urge to put his politico-social views into writing was not entirely suppressed, however. Even while awaiting trial in the Moabit prison, he committed to paper his observations and reminiscences of his activities during the early war years.[3] After his conviction and transfer to the Luckau prison, he continued work on his principal theoretical work, begun during his first prison term, 1907-1909, but since then untouched. Although he was free to work on this project during the evening hours, authorities rationed light, books, and writing materials; and he never proceeded far beyond the "chaotic" stage of his first outline.[4] He also resourcefully utilized old newspapers, books, and package wrappings on which he recorded passing thoughts and reactions to current events in the outside world.[5]

Liebknecht accepted his prison routine with equanimity. He encouraged his wife to be philosophic about his absence: "What are four years!" To bolster his spirit he read Ploetz's *Outline of History*, Goethe, and about the French revolution. How can one be depressed, he asked his wife, when there are Goethe, the arts, and a thousand other books for friends? By the end of 1916 the nervous Liebknecht regained enough composure to write poetry. In it he expressed the consolation that the government, though physically restraining him behind broad walls and iron bars, could not crush his spirit. "You take the earth from me, but not the heaven."

Rosa Luxemburg, also in prison, did what she could to ease Lieb-

knecht's concern for his wife by regularly dispatching letters of comfort to her. They advised her, among other things, to move to the country, close to nature, where she could recover from the unnatural circumstances for the benefit of her husband. The friendship between Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht, even in prison, was cemented in turn by Liebknecht's wife, who presented Rosa Luxemburg with a picture of Liebknecht, whose glances followed her everywhere in her cell.

For more than two years Liebknecht sat incarcerated on the inside watching the deterioration of Germany on the outside. The government faced one new crisis after another. In 1916 the costly battles at Verdun and on the Somme and the increasing effectiveness of the British blockade aggravated the vulnerable economic and political situation on the home front. These circumstances led to further regimentation when the government passed an Auxiliary Service Bill *(Hilfsdienstgesetz)* which froze all workers in their jobs. Singled out by the government, the workers complained that their last freedom had been taken away. The Spartacus Union, always up to date on signs of disaffection, gave ugly expression to this new regimentation with the broadsheet, "Germany—A Complete Prison!"

German leaders sensed ultimate defeat as the untoward circumstances of 1916 caused them to submit a "peace proposal" in December, when they "would have been glad to cash in their chips while still ahead of the game." To Liebknecht, however, an unaltered and unhurt Germany meant disaster for the international proletariat and the beginning of another war in the near future. He therefore viewed the "peace note" as utterly infamous.

The winter of 1916-1917 brought with it a desperate food problem. Even Liebknecht from his prison cell privately complained of the scarcity of food in this "turnip-winter". The Spartacists utilized this circumstance by appealing to the people in the bread lines with the broadsheet "Hunger". The only remedy for the food problem was Liebknecht's formula to end the war and work for the solidarity of the international proletariat.

During the depressing winter of 1916-1917 Haase and Ledebour called a conference of the opposition, including the Spartacists, to consolidate it against the high-handed measures of the majority Socialists. The majority Socialists had already called a national conference in September, 1916, in the interest of party unity. Käthe Duncker, representing the Liebknecht group at the conference, clearly stated that party unity was impossible unless the SPD buried the policy of civil peace. This the SPD would not accept; and almost

as if to force a party split, it continued its confiscatory policies by seizing control of *Vorwärts* from the opposition. The executive committee then appointed Hermann Müller as the new chief of *Vorwärts*, who not only accepted censorship but also political responsibility toward the government. "The Rape of *Vorwärts*" symbolized the SPD's arbitrary subversion of the minority, which explains why Liebknecht's supporters made it a point of honor to seize the *Vorwärts* building several times during the revolutionary days of 1918-1919.

Preparations for a national conference of the Socialist opposition were completed in December, 1916. On January 6 Spartacist representatives met in Berlin in order to discuss the pending question of organizational unification with other oppositional groups. At the general session of the opposition the next day, neither the Spartacists, comprising 35 of the 135 delegates, nor the Haase-Ledebour group, wanted a break with the party. The Spartacist spokesman, Ernst Meyer, advocated a complete party break for practical purposes, but would nominally remain with the SPD in order to weaken it step by step and to use the party as a recruiting ground for the opposition. The Spartacists wanted the same freedom of action vis à vis the left-centrists.

The opposition's decision to maintain party connections proved to be ephemeral. SPD leaders met on January 18 and declared that the opposition, by the very act of calling an independent conference, "had separated itself from the party." The opposition was expelled, and the formation of a new party became inevitable.

Preparations for a party day of the opposition culminated in a constituent meeting which took place at Easter in Gotha, where the split was institutionalized and where, forty-two years earlier, the Marxians and Lassalleans met to constitute the united Social Democratic Party of Germany which was now being severed. The core of the new Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) was the Haase-Ledebour Labor Association, the left-centrist parliamentary group in the Reichstag. Representatives of the Spartacus Union met during the previous days and reluctantly resolved to join the USPD organization. The Spartacists' relationship with the USPD, however, was critically conditional. They were to have full freedom of criticism and independence of action. It was an alliance of convenience rather than of principle. The USPD was to be protective cover *(schützendes Dach)* for the illegal activities of the Spartacists against the authorities.

A significant event which accelerated the revolutionary movement

in Germany was the Russian revolution of March, already several weeks old when the USPD was born. The overthrow of the tsar and the establishment of provisional constitutional government were but a prelude to the revolution of the international proletariat as far as the Spartacists were concerned. The Spartacus Union naturally interpreted the Russian events as evidence that the German government too was about to crumble, and encouraged the masses to prepare for the events to come. It tried to prove that Spartacus, after all, had correctly judged the international situation. People were getting tired of war, and it was only a matter of time before the world revolution would be in full swing.

Encouraged by the Russian events, the Spartacists in a document signed "German-French Group of Karl Liebknecht Supporters" appealed to the soldiers of all belligerent countries to follow the advice of Liebknecht: "Drop your weapons and turn against your own government!" They also circulated the Russian documents of the March revolution. Nowhere did the Russian revolutionaries, however, appeal to the German people to make common cause with Liebknecht, even for tactical purposes. Liebknecht from his cell predicted that epauletted Kerensky could not save the Russian masses; the March revolution was only one step in the right direction. Only a dictatorship of workers' and soldiers' councils could destroy the lurking tsarist government.

The industrial workers in Berlin and other centers followed the events in Russia closely. A terrible food shortage following the "turnip winter", aggravated by new food cut-backs by the government, aroused the discontented workers even more. The revolutionary shop stewards decided to give them action. On April 16, a week after the USPD constituted itself, the workers, numbering between 200,000 and 300,000, struck in Berlin as well as in such other important war industrial centers as Leipzig, Halle, and Brunswick.

The leadership of the strike, because they were unable to suppress it, was accepted by trade union executives, after Richard Müller, the leader of the revolutionary shop stewards, was drafted into the army three days earlier. They prevented the strike from becoming political in character by dwelling upon the food shortage as its chief cause. Most of the workers returned to their machines after receiving a promise that their rations would be increased.

In Leipzig, however, the strike had a political side to it, as revealed by the workers' demands. They demanded the abolition of martial law and censorship and a declaration from the government that it would be prepared to conclude peace immediately on the basis of no

annexations. The strikers even demanded the establishment of a workers' council. The demands were Liebknechtian in spirit. To what extent Liebknecht or the Spartacus Union directly influenced the workers, if at all, is difficult to determine, however.

The government dispatched General Groener, chief of the office of war production, to crush the strike; the usual mass conscriptions followed. Spartacists issued a broadsheet in the wake of the strike entitled "The Lessons of the Great Mass Strikes". It correctly blamed trade union leaders and the lack of organization for the failure of the demonstration. Despite its shortcomings, however, the April strike, until then the greatest mass demonstration against war, was a milestone in the history of the German Socialist proletariat. The document culminated in a direct appeal to the masses to drop their tools on May 1, but again the call went unheeded.

The opposition's peace propaganda and Liebknecht's example affected the German navy in the summer of 1917. Since the navy lay in the harbor most of the war, the sailors leisurely read various political newspapers and propaganda material. The political papers of the USPD found distribution among the sailors, but exactly to what extent this literature influenced them is hypothetical. A number of secret organizations took shape, and sailors greeted one another with "Long live Liebknecht!" At Wilhelmshaven a number of sailors expressed their will for peace by breaking military discipline. Seventy-seven sailors were court-martialed. The two leaders, Reichpietsch and Köbis, were executed, while the seventy-five others received severe penalties.

According to the diary of Richard Stumpf, a *Helgoland* sailor, the desire for peace was widespread in the navy. When he asked those who expressed their war-weariness what they would do "to improve our unhappy lot," the most usual answer was "make peace at once. . . Demoblize and disband the Army and Navy! Make Scheidemann Chancellor and Liebknecht Minister of War." Stumpf's reaction to the death sentences on Reichpietsch and Köbis was bitter: "I should have said that any one was a fool who had suggested that in my Fatherland a man could be condemned to prison and to death without having done anything wrong. Gradually an arc-lamp is lighting up my understanding of why some people fight so passionately against the army and militarist system. Poor Karl Liebknecht! How sorry I am for you to-day!"

These opinions indicate that the sailors, as the civilian masses, regarded Liebknecht as a crusader for peace. He aroused their sympathies as a pacifist, not as a revolutionary Socialist. Stumpf's re-

marks also show that the sailors, again no differently than the masses, did not appreciate the differences between Scheidemann and Liebknecht, and between the groups which they represented. It is even doubted that the naval insurrectionists had any knowledge of the existence of a Spartacus group. The sailors were aware of the USPD and its position and had lodged some complaints with USPD deputies in the Reichstag before the insurrection. The military authorities knew this and attempted to make the USPD the scapegoat for the insurrection. In the Reichstag Admiral von Capelle, Secretary of State for the Navy, formally charged the Independents Haase, Dittmann, and Vogtherr with fomenting the disturbances. All three deputies, however, in able speeches, cleared themselves of complicity; and Chancellor Michaelis, because of von Capelle's blundering, was forced to resign.

Spartacus propaganda again made the most of a favorable situation. The broadsheet "Follow their Example!" announced that the armor of German militarism had been cracked; the revolutionary will of the people would yet bring about the crushing defeat of the rule of the sword. The rebellious sailors had given the signal and the example; it was up to the workers to rescue them from prison.

This was the most which the Liebknecht group without Liebknecht could make out of the naval uprising; but the USPD did even less. The USPD should have used the Reichstag as a sounding board to stir the masses into action. This was Liebknecht's opinion from where he observed the events. The response of Haase and his comrades to the naval rebellion was lamentable. They retreated into a defensive position rather than jumping into the breach to conduct a violent counter-offensive against the government. The USPD deputies, instead of weakening militarism, actually strengthened it by their tactical error.

The response of the Haase group to the March revolution in Russia was just as pitiable. It grandiously announced the revolution as the greatest event of the century, and like a lame dog, "greeted it with sympathy," instead of appealing from the Reichstag for the German revolution. The reaction of the opposition in the Reichstag to these events was miserable; it was deficient "in initiative, in fixity of purpose, in strength—in everything!"

From these remarks of Liebknecht it may be judged, as far as the good fortune of the German government was concerned, that the Luckau prison was a good place for him. There is no doubt that he would have used the Reichstag, and other means as well, to reap a

greater harvest from the Russian revolution and the naval mutiny for the opposition.

In July the government experienced a political crisis, resulting in Bethmann-Hollweg's replacement by Michaelis, "whom Hindenburg and Ludendorff presented to the Kaiser as Chancellor of the Reich." The crisis was the upshot of the influence of the Russian revolution and of military failures, which gave the majority Socialists the incentive to embark upon a program of democratization of the Empire and for a peace of understanding with the enemy. It had its prelude in May when the Socialists called upon Bethmann-Hollweg to renounce annexations. He refused, however, to make a statement on war aims because "at the present moment" it "would not serve the interests of the country."

Liebknecht, recording his reactions to the events in the outside world, condemned the policy of serving "the interests of the country," the fulfillment of which could be achieved only at the expense of other states. Germany, he wrote, wanted Britain to give Ireland its liberty, though Ireland belonged to Britain since 1171. Nothing was to be said, however, about the restoration of Poland, parts of which were in the hands of Prussia only since 1795. Germany had to "liberate" Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, though it "never revolted against France." The liberation of Ireland had to satisfy the German's feeling for justice; the independence and self-determination of Poland, however, was not to be heard by the chaste ear of the German.

Reading between the lines of Liebknecht's notes on the question of annexation, it would appear that he wanted the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the creation of an independent Poland on the basis of self-determination. In proposing the righting of these wrongs, however, he was not guided so much by a sense of national justice as by the fear that the reactionary hand of the German Government would be strengthened by the retention of these lands. His writings and speeches show little reference to solutions for the settlement of boundary disputes. Territorial competition between national states was the evil fruit of capitalism and militarism, and as an international Socialist he had little desire to support any plan which would diminish friction between them. Territorial differences were not to be settled but to be used in the argument for international Socialism. The return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the restoration of Poland would not have satisfied his ultimate sense of justice. Only the realization of the solidarity of the international proletariat and the overthrow of warring national governments, which created

the question of war aims and the problem of annexations could have satisfied it.

The outcome of the July crisis was the Reichstag's peace resolution (July 19) and its equivocal acceptance by chancellor Michaelis "as I understand it." Liebknecht received the news of the peace resolution with as much skepticism as Michaelis had accepted it with reservations. The resolution as he interpreted it was an attempt to deceive in three directions. First, it was directed at Germany's allies, in order to keep them in the fight for Germany's territorial ambitions. Second, it was aimed at the German people and to keep the Socialists in line with the war effort. Third, it was intended for the masses of the enemy countries whose governments it appeared to him, "straightway fell for the German peace humbug with stupendous awkwardness."

The bankrupt peace resolution and the weak Michaelis government which became a tool in the hands of the army high command, brought forth a fresh wave of anti-war sentiment among the German masses. As a result, the Spartacus Union in August finally succeeded in promoting its first strike. It was a local affair in Braunschweig, which began on August 14 and lasted for four days before it broke down. The strike began in response to the adverse economic conditions; but it also had a political flavor. The workers demanded the removal of the military dictatorship, the abolition of the Auxiliary Service Law, the release of political prisoners, the freedom of assembly, the introduction of equal, general, and secret suffrage for Braunschweig, and peace without annexations and indemnifications. On September 2-3 Liebknecht's radicals sponsored a general anti-war demonstration which resulted in some minor local strikes. The broadsheets calling for the demonstration strikes were printed in Zurich.

The first party congress during the war of the old SPD was held in Würzburg, October 14-20, to discuss the division within German Social Democracy and the relationship of the SPD to the government. The "black-white-red" congress, as Liebknecht called it from his cell, proposed the "harmless", even "radical" goal of the restoration of Belgium as a "completely neutral state." As indispensable measures for the security of Belgian neutrality the congress advocated that all existing fortresses in Belgium be destroyed and new ones were not to be constructed in the future. The Belgian army was to be dissolved; only police forces were to be permitted. Such a restoration, Liebknecht contended, would be no restoration; it would be a "waxen nose in the hands of Germany." The disarmament of

Belgium would leave it defenseless; and this would be an infringement upon its political sovereignty. In this condition Belgium would fall into the hands of Germany, which would profit more than any other European power at Belgium's expense. These views of Liebknecht must again be considered against the background of his international Socialist convictions. He was not so much concerned with the sacred right of nations to defend themselves as he was with the diminution of the German government's power.

Germany's record in international affairs, Liebknecht also observed in his *Aufzeichnungen* at this time, was a black one. Germany demonstrated a traditional disregard for treaties, agreements, and international law, letting them "go to the devil." Its invasion of Belgium was an expression of its one guiding principle in foreign affairs: "Possession is nine-tenths of the law." Germany was the most notorious disturber of world peace; it wanted the wars of 1866 and 1870-71. International peace, which in a world of capitalism and imperialism is but a house of cards, was disrupted again when Germany together with Austria knocked in the first card in 1914.

Germany's policy was annexation without peace, not peace without annexations. This policy was the only language the German military clique understood; it was the chain which hung about the neck of the German proletariat. Only by weakening the power of German militarism could world revolution, to which Germany was the key, succeed. The way to the maintenance of Junker power was the longest way to the international social revolution.

In November Liebknecht's morale scaled to the heights of the Bolshevik elevation in Russia. The Bolsheviks demonstrated to the Spartacists how a revolution was born, and the revolutionaries in Germany now took new hope for themselves. The Spartacus Union eagerly circulated the revolutionary Russian army's call to the German soldiers to cooperate in the struggle for peace and freedom. The Bolshevik success gave the Spartacists a greater significance than they had enjoyed before; yet their significance was out of proportion to their insignificant numbers.

The Bolsheviks appealed in vain to the belligerents for a general peace. At the end of November, Trotsky requested the German high command for an armistice, leading to a democratic peace without annexations and indemnities. The hope for peace ran high among the German masses. Negotiations for a final peace settlement got under way at Brest-Litovsk early in December; but the Bolsheviks soon discovered that the German high command wanted annexations, with peace if possible, without it if necessary.

The negotiations wore on without results; so did the war. The German workers faced the prospects of a fourth war-winter hopelessly and seethingly. Food became scarcer and regimentation increased, while chances for political reforms diminished. It was Liebknecht's opinion that the German government had to negotiate and bring the war with Russia to a speedy end; it had no other choice if it wanted to remain alive.

The failure to conclude an immediate peace with Russia contributed significantly to the third major mass strike of the war, in January, 1918. It was the revolutionary shop stewards again, under the leadership of Richard Müller, who turned native dissatisfaction among the workers in Berlin into a political strike. The strike began on January 28 and spread rapidly to other centers in Germany. In all there were some one million workers involved.

The Spartacists exerted little or no influence on the strike movement. The strikers' demands did not include the goal of revolutionary Socialism; the demands were mostly political and pacifist, not social and revolutionary in character. The workers called for an immediate peace without annexations and indemnifications on the basis of self-determination of peoples, as formulated by the Bolshevik representatives in their current peace negotiations with the Germans. In addition they demanded more bread and the introduction of a democratic government. The Spartacists were not permitted to participate in the planning of the strike. The shop stewards feared that they would blatantly anticipate the strike and upset carefully laid plans. The Spartacus Union nevertheless had knowledge of the plans to strike on January 28 and to the consternation of the stewards issued the broadsheet, "The Mass Strike Begins on Monday, January 28!"

In the course of the strike, majority Socialist leaders Ebert, Scheidemann, and Braun joined the action committee headed by Richard Müller. Many of the strikers belonged to the SPD; and they demanded that their leaders make common cause with the revolutionary shop stewards and the latter's organizational base, the USPD. The historical function of the SPD's participation in this strike movement, Liebknecht noted, was to prevent it from becoming too radical. On February 3 the action committee terminated the strike. Ludendorff for the moment was the victor. Thousands of strikers, including Müller and virtually all of the other revolutionary shop stewards, were enrolled in the army, and many others were imprisoned.

Though the Spartacists did not plan the strike, they sought to

capitalize on it in their own way. They argued that the strike should have been prolonged, in any circumstances, until it materialized into open revolt. The shop stewards, however, refused to let it develop into a civil war; it was not to be a political struggle to the finish. Moreover, there was no armed force at the disposal of the strikers—a factor which the Spartacists, including Liebknecht, often overlooked in parallel situations. Even after the strike had been called off, however, the Spartacus Union insisted on its way. It issued a veritable flood of broadsheets calling for the resumption of the strike. The Spartacists, without Liebknecht and sufficient contacts with the masses, and with their revolutionary ideology, were unable to renew the struggle. Even if Liebknecht had been available, the result probably would have been the same, although Spartacus may have made a louder noise.

What effect did the January strike have upon the German-Russian peace negotiations then underway? Briefly, it weakened the position of the SPD and USPD in the Reichstag, where both parties were conducting a campaign against a victorious peace. The SPD and USPD had jointly given leadership to the strike against the Ludendorff dictatorship, but Ludendorff won out and thus strengthened the Junker bid for a victorious peace at Brest-Litovsk. The German high command wanted to play the middle against both the East and the West, and provide for Germany a *cordon sanitaire* against the Bolshevism as well. The advantages which would accrue from an annexationist peace in the East could be used profitably, it thought, for a successful annexationist peace in the West. On March 3, by imposing the victor's terms of Brest-Litovsk upon the Russians, the high command committed Germany to a dangerous gamble; and it turned out to be a dangerous precedent for the remainder of the first half of the twentieth century as well.

If Liebknecht had not been shackled, Ludendorff would surely have been a most natural public target for him. To him the high command, by forcing the acceptance of shameful terms, had treated the Bolsheviks abominably. He hoped that because the Bolsheviks had converted Brest-Litovsk into a revolutionary tribunal, however, that the masses in various states would now begin to move against their respective governments. And almost paradoxically, he was convinced that the Allies, in order to prevent another Brest-Litovsk, would step up their war effort against German *Hunnentum*.

Liebknecht also roundly condemned the German invasion of Russia, which persuaded Lenin to accept the German terms. He compared the invasion of Russia in 1918 with the invasion of Belgium in 1914. He chastized the Germans for their behavior in the Ukraine,

the home of his wife. Germany lived up to its reputation in international affairs by fighting in Russia after making peace. The German high command, he accused, desired control of the Baltic states because they were the door to Russia. They had to be in German hands in order for the German capitalists to gain economic access to North Russia and Siberia.

Ludendorff's seemingly successful policy in the East was timed with a spring offensive in the West, which also had its moments of promise. These were anxious moments for Liebknecht, who lost some of his revolutionary enthusiasm as he learned from his limited news sources that the Junkers might succeed in their final desperate bid for continental supremacy. During these for him dark days of March, he saw in the "German people" the scapegoat for the apparent failure of his cause. The German victories in the West particularly put the seal of shame on the German people, whose lack of political insight and morale permitted these successes. These were the quick judgments of a man who vainly hoped that the German people would awaken to aid the Russian proletariat.

For Lenin Brest-Litovsk was not the remedy he hoped it would be. A raging civil war and foreign intervention, among other circumtances, played havoc with his attempts to consolidate revolutionary Socialism in Russia. For the solution of his problems in the early months of his precarious struggle for existence Lenin looked to Liebknecht and the materialization of the German revolution. "It is an absolute truth that we will go under without a German revolution," he told a party conference in March. He believed that a German revolution and Liebknecht, who had been elected as an honorary member of the Petrograd soviet in February, would save the Bolsheviks; the Russians would learn from the Germans, who would come to their aid. "We are playing for time, we shall wait for them, and they will come to our aid." Lenin's optimism and belief in Liebknecht are more vividly expressed in the following words: "We know that Karl Liebknecht will be victorious; we know that he will come to our assistance, and that Liebknecht's revolution in Germany will liberate us from all international difficulties and from the necessity of revolutionary war. Liebknecht's victory will annul the consequences of our stupidities. But it would be the peak of folly to expect that Liebknecht will be victorious at just one moment and to count on speedy deliverance in such a mechanical way. The German revolution needs time. It needs preparation, propaganda, fraternization in the trenches, a period of development."

Enfettered Liebknecht agreed with Lenin that Germany was the

key to world revolution and to the success of the Russian revolution. "Only German revolution is world revolution. . . . The German revolution — not the English or the French — is the only possible deliverance for the Russian revolution, whose foreign policies are in a critical state, . . ." Russian Socialism and the Russian proletariat could proudly hold its head, even in the days of uncertainty, as the martyr for the dilatory tactics of the German proletariat. The German workers had their honor at stake; they had the sacred duty to do everything to rescue the Russian revolution. The destiny of the proletariat of the entire world depended on the integrity of the German labor movement. Liebknecht's appeal to save the Russians through a German uprising was faithfully, if vicariously, echoed also by the Spartacists in their conventional way.

The Spartacists, conscious of the significant role of the Red army in the Bolshevik effort in Russia, rediubled their labors to subvert the German army in 1918. The infection of the army, though difficult, was an absolute necessity; for only a Red army could secure the success of their ideal — government by the dictatorship of soldiers' and workers' councils.

Liebknecht realized that the tradition of discipline and patriotism was strong among the soldiers even in 1918. Preparatory work had to be initiated essentially behind the front lines. The young and the old replacements were the first to be bombarded with propaganda. They were to be reached, if possible, before they enlisted, but at the latest before they arrived at the front.The front-line soldiers were to be approached when they were on furlough and their conversion completed at the front through correspondence. In this connection he again emphasized the necessity of indoctrinating especially the youth. To permit the majority Socialists to exert influence over them would be worse than losing the parliamentary mandate. The youth question, particularly with reference to undermining the army in 1918, was "a question of existence for us."

The attempts of the Spartacus group to cripple the morale of the army reveal how faithfully it followed the methods outlined by Liebknecht. As early as January, 1916, the first broadsheets of doubtful character reached the front lines in empty sand bags sent there from Berlin. There were relatively few copies, however; and it is believed that soldiers simply cast them aside without notifying anyone. Although the origin of these broadsheets is not established, a comparison of their contents with the Spartacist literature of the time reveals a very striking similarity. After September, 1916, when the Spartacists first used the printing press to produce their propaganda,

soldiers on furlough and younger replacements received greater attention as a result of the increased production technique. After the battle of Arras in April, 1917, one month after the first Russian revolution, British troops discovered a mass of propaganda literature in captured German trenches.

The second Russian revolution, the January strike, and the failure of the German 1918 spring offensive prompted the Spartacists to step up their propaganda activities especially among the German troops. Channels of communication were improved to bring the broadsheets to the front-line soldiers. Among their various techniques, the Spartacists placed their agents in post-offices, who copied from routine soldiers' mail the envelope and return addresses. The sets of addresses were then relayed to Spartacists in Berlin, who dispatched propaganda to the front in envelopes bearing the apparently legitimate addresses. Many front-line troops receiving mail from "home" wondered, no doubt, why they had been singled out for this propaganda. One women confessed that she expedited between one and two hundred such letters to the front. She received addresses from Spartacist agents, bought envelopes and addressed them along with legitimate return addresses, inserted the propaganda, and sent the "letters" off.

Another organization which concentrated on the subversion of the front-line army was the Deserters' Union, organized independently of the Sparacists but sympathetic with them. One of its leaders was Wolfgang Breithaupt, who wrote an account of his activities after the war. Many members of the Union belonged to Liebknecht's international youth movement. They conspired to demoralize the front lines by organizing desertions. The deserters fled to Denmark and the Netherlands, where the British secret service awaited them.

The German government also contributed, unwittingly to be sure, to the deterioration of discipline by conscripting strikers into the army for front-line duty. The authorities should have expected the workers to act the same on the military as on the industrial front. By enrolling strikers into the military service the government obviously also aggravated the critical supply of skilled labor in the munitions industries. Liebknecht observed that sending strikers to the front was like sending poison. He could wish for nothing better than to see the front-line soldiers demoralized and disorganized by their own government.

The Russian Bolsheviks also sought to accelerate the debilitation of the German army. They dispatched peace proclamations and newspapers to the German front, approaching the soldiers in the name of Liebknecht. A special Bolshevik propaganda organization sponsored

The Torch (Die Fackel), a newspaper which was distributed among the German troops on the eastern front.* The Russians also relayed wireless messages to the German soldiers calling them to overthrow the Hindenburgs and to send them Karl Liebknecht.

Bolshevik influence on German troops was limited primarily to prisoners of war. Some individual troops eventually succumbed to various devious enterprises, such as black marketeering. The German high command, in desperate need of troops on the western front, established training centers to re-discipline the eastern troops for the sharp fighting against the French, British, and Americans. Many troop commanders, however, refused to accept these replacements, whose will to fight had been affected by pacifist and revolutionary propaganda. Much of the unrest among the eastern troops was the result of hunger, however. Some were on trains to the west for three days without food and threw hand grenades at railroad stations while enroute. Mass desertions and red flags came to the attention of the Emperor before the fighting was over in the West. In October, General Hoffmann reported that ten eastern divisions transferred to the western front were still effective for defense, "but against the 'fighting material' of the enemy they can no longer be employed."

Although it is not safe to discount entirely the influence of radical propaganda on the army, it can be established that the Spartacists and Bolsheviks made no appreciable inroads. Their propaganda reached many of the troops, but the core of the army was never affected by it. Discipline in the army began to flag only in the summer of 1918 when the vigorous onslaughts of the fresh American and refreshed British and French troops raised the specter of defeat. It was only then that one found in latrines and other private nooks words, phrases, and caricatures, written or drawn in pencil, expressing the desire for peace and bread or resentment against superiors. The enervation of the army progressed in proportion to the growing reality of a hopeless military situation, not to the increase of radical propaganda which only coincided with military failure. This is further confirmed by the behavior of the troops in reaction to the demands of Liebknecht after November 9: the soldiers wanted no part of revolutionary Socialism when they were free to make the choice; they wanted peace and bread after victory had been denied them.

Liebknecht, a month before his release from prison, eagerly awaited the dissolution of the German army, to whose destruction he had dedicated his life. Germany's military strength, he said, was not made of steel, but of cast iron. Once it began to break, it would be gone. He regarded the breakdown of army morale as an established

fact: "the biggest result of the war up till now," more revolutionary and greater than the Russian revolution. He enthusiastically visualized the creation of a Red army and the establishment of a soviet system after the Russian pattern, and assured himself that no enemy army would march againt a revolutionary Germany.

Liebknecht, gleefully sensing Germany's final defeat, now eagerly looked forward to the hour when he could rejoin his group of Spartacists. At the end of September he busied himself with writing a number of draft appeals to the German soldiers and workers. In seven different drafts he released his pent-up emotions and summed up everything which the Spartacus group had been advertising in the past two years. He devoted one draft to the crown prince, "the tennis player and dancer . . . a reactionary from head to toe." He singled him out as one of those most guilty of responsibility for the war. This was the same crown prince, he said, who telegraphed to the military authorities in the Zabern affair of 1913: "*'immer feste druff'*, with slashing swords and firing on the German people."

Here was Liebknecht authoring propaganda literature to be distributed upon his release from prison. With his finger on the pulse of developments, he drafted his appeals with an eye on possible political alternatives. The crown prince, for example, he presumed logically would be considered by the German people as the legitimate heir to his father, Wilhelm II, who would have to go by the board for his failure to bring victory to them. He wanted to anticipate such a reaction by giving the crown prince his due. The other obstacle to a Liebknecht government were the Scheidemann patriots, who also received considerable attention in his appeals. The government Socialists were the "fig-leaf of absolutism," he said, borrowing one of his father's descriptive phrases. For his own cause he echoed the call of the Paris Commune: "War to the palaces, peace to the cottages!" Gearing his slogan-making powers to the nature of coming events, he ended each of his appeals with the following: "The line of your enemies extends from Wilhelm the Hohenzollern to Scheidemann the tail-coat minister."

The beginning of the end for imperial Germany, foreshadowed most prominently on the field of battle in the summer of 1918, animated the opposition to traffic in arms for an uprising against the government at the proper time. As early as the latter part of 1917, weapons were smuggled from the front to the workers, especially at Herbesthal, near Aachen. The arms consisted mostly of hand grenades and revolvers and could not be traced. After the failure of the January strike, the organized revolutionary shop stewards met

on February 9 and agreed to plan more systematically for an armed revolution leading to peace. During the summer, Emil Barth, who succeeded Richard Müller as leader of the stewards, organized shock troops in the important factories. The stewards were able to obtain weapons for the workers from various sources; they enlisted recruits and established relations with all of the provinces.

During the pre-revolutionary days, before Liebknecht was released, the Spartacus group was limited to the intensification of its propaganda activities. The revolutionary shop stewards refused to accept Spartacist participation in the preparation for an armed revolt; their leaders were too intellectual and failed to comprehend the practical realities of revolutionary battle.

This isolation forced the Spartacists into an even more intimate relationship with the Russian Bolsheviks and their sympathizers. Though Liebknecht generally approved of this relationship, Rosa Luxemburg was extremely suspicious of the Russians and advised against full collaboration. After the arrival of the Russian embassy in Berlin in April, numerous writings of Lenin and Trotsky found their way into Germany. These were eagerly distributed by the Sparacists. Bucharin's *Theses on the Social Revolution,* written for the German proletariat, was also circulated by the Spartacus organization.

By October 1, things were happening fast at the poles of German society. The high command demanded that the government make immediate proposals for an armistice. Prince Max von Baden succeeded Count Hertling as imperial chancellor and ushered in the first responsible government in Germany. At the other pole, the Spartacists, sensing the impending revolution, held a war council. A national conference of the Spartacus Union took place at Berlin on October 7, which was attended by fifty-seven representatives. Among these were the delegates of the left-wing radicals, or the International Communists of Germany, who had their headquarters in Bremen. This Bremen group was led by Johann Knief and Paul Frölich, editors of the group's paper, the *Arbeiterpolitik.* The Berlin meeting resulted in the amalgamation of the Spartacists and the Bremen radicals. The significance of this union is that the Bremen group, through Karl Radek—a Russian "guest" in German radical circles for a number of years—was influenced almost completely by Lenin.

At Berlin the reinforced Spartacus group adopted a program of aims and action for the imminent political transformation. It demanded that a new united German republic, governed by workers' and soldiers' councils after the Russian pattern, was to cooperate with

the Russian soviet republic in unchaining international class warfare. The political revolution was to be accompanied by a social revolution which would expropriate the capitalists and denude the militarists; production and distribution were to be controlled by workers' representatives. The conference also presaged a split between the USPD and the Spartacists. Favorable results, it was stated, were achieved nowhere in cooperation with the USPD. The conference closed with a declaration of support for the immured Liebknecht, who supported the program.[1]

With the advent of German responsible government in October, Liebknecht's hopes for his release heightened. In the previous year, Haase, who championed him in connection with his arrests in 1907 and 1916, failed to persuade the Reichstag to initiate action for his amnesty. Now Prince Max's cabinet, implementing Germany's constitutional reforms, met to discuss the general question of pardoning political offenders. One of the most difficult cases was Liebknecht's. Scheidemann favored his release. As a free man he could be combated by counter-speeches; but as a martyr he won the sympathy of the workers at the expense of the government. The USPD desired and needed Liebknecht's detention in order to embarrass the majority Socialists in the Reichstag and before the masses. Scheidemann believed that an amnesty would not endanger national security; if it did, one could always shut him up again. The majority of the cabinet refused to pardon him, however. The military authorities also opposed an amnesty for him.

The pressure of unsettling events soon forced the cabinet to review Liebknecht's case again. Scheidemann declared that unless Liebknecht was released, he would be unable to face the onslaughts of the USPD. He was more dangerous in than out of prison. This time Scheidemann won his point. Prince Max, trusting "Scheidemann's feeling for the temper of the workmen, . . ordered the release of Karl Liebknecht in the teeth of the President of the Supreme Court-Martial and of the War Minister." On October 21 Liebknecht walked out of prison and into the maelstrom of Germany's dissolution.

[1] Liebknecht's letters from the front are included in *Briefe aus dem Felde, aus der Untersuchungschaft und aus dem Zuchthaus* (Berlin, 1922). As the title indicates, this source also includes letters from prison, 1916-18. See below, p. 108.

[2] The description of the events leading up to Liebknecht's arrest was published, among other places, in the columns of the New York *Volkszeitung*, a German Socialist newspaper.

[5] Liebknecht's comments on the activities of his early war years, published under the title of *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen aus grosser Zeit*, were appended later to his *Klassenkampf gegen den Krieg*, which appeared for the first time shortly after he was conscripted in February, 1915. This combined source is a mine of information on his attempts to muster the opposition within the war-time Socialist Reichstag faction.

[6] The drafts of Liebknecht's theoretical effort were edited by Dr. Morris and published under the title: *Studien über die Bewegungsgesetze der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung* (Munich, 1922).

[7] Liebknecht's prison notes referring primarily to national and international affairs in the last two years of the war were edited by his wife and published as *Politische Aufzeichnungen aus seinem Nachlass, 1917-18* (Berlin, 1921).

[8] For a Communist account of how Russian propaganda affected the German army see John Reed, "How Soviet Conquered Imperial Germany," in *The Liberator* (January, 1919), II, 16-27.

[9] The Spartacist Berlin program was distributed illegally for the first time in Germany in the Moscow *Weltrevolution*, no. 53, (October 24, 1918), three days after Liebknecht's release.

V

LAST DAYS

Liebknecht, out of prison, was received enthusiastically by the workers of Berlin, who escorted him in a carriage filled with flowers. Soldiers were no less demonstrative. Scheidemann, perplexed and amazed, complained that "Liebknecht has been carried shoulder high by soldiers who have been decorated with the Iron Cross. Who could have dreamt of such a thing happening three weeks ago?"

Some of the workers and soldiers who threw out the rug for Liebknecht no doubt envisaged a Liebknecht government rising out of the ruins of the one about to topple. Only a week previously a USPD leader, Wilhelm Dittmann, anticipating Liebknecht's release, addressed a group of workers in the Rhineland demanding, "as we always have, a Socialist republic. And if you should ask me who should be president of this republic, I could give you no better man than prisoner Karl Liebknecht." Other influential men also spoke for Liebknecht. In the Reichstag, the seventy-year old USPD firebrand, Georg Ledebour, argued for the restoration of Liebknecht's mandate in the Reichstag in favor of Stahl, the majority Socialist who had replaced Liebknecht in 1917.

One of Liebknecht's first acts was to confirm his group's decision of October 7 to collaborate with the Russian Bolsheviks for a world revolution. He was happy to be free again, though not so much for personal as for political reasons. He suffered grave misgivings in prison, he told the ubiquitous Radek, fearing especially that the German workers would not rise soon enough to aid the Russian proletariat. But now he was free and had no doubt that the Russian revolution would extend to Germany.

Liebknecht's first path led to the Russian embassy in Berlin where Adolph Joffe since April represented the Bolshevik government. From here Bucharin wired his colleagues in Russia that Liebknecht was in full agreement with them. The embassy also sponsored a brilliant feast in Liebknecht's honor, on which occasion, according to outspoken Emil Barth, there was so much mutual flattery and adoration that it was repugnant.

When the news of Liebknecht's release reached Russia, street cars stopped and factory workers celebrated; it was reportedly almost a

holiday. Radek averred that no king would have been received more royally and joyously by the Russian people in October than Liebknecht. Lenin and his associates, among them Stalin, also reacted promptly and without reserve: they wired their welcome of his release as "the signal for a new epoch, the epoch of victorious Socialism which now dawns over Germany and the entire world."

While Liebknecht and his Russian friends conspired and congratulated each other during the latter part of October, the German navy mutinied at Kiel. The Kiel revolt spread like a prairie fire throughout Germany during the next ten days, fed by the fuel of military failure and civilian frustration. Neither Liebknecht nor the Spartacus group had anything to do with the rebellion. The revolt at the outset was almost nonpolitical. The sailors demanded the liberation of political prisoners, freedom of speech, and the diminution of officer authority. Liebknecht's name may have been mentioned among the mutineers, but only as a symbol of peace, not revolutionary Socialism. Spartacus, however, optimistic as usual, dedicated a broadsheet to the occasion for the cause of a social revolution.

The Bolsheviks were gratified with the course of events. Liebknecht was free and the navy was in rebellion. To them Liebknecht was the key to a successful German revolution. He was the most popular and significant German Socialist in sympathy with their tactics and ideals. To help Liebknecht and the German revolution along the Bolsheviks dispatched trunk loads of propaganda material to Germany, appealing to the workers to demonstrate and rebel for an immediate armistice, and to make common cause with the Russian revolution. The center of this infectious propaganda was the Russian embassy, protected by diplomatic immunity. At Scheidemann's suggestion, an "accident" was arranged in which a suspected courier's trunk, full of propaganda material (which may have been "planted" by Scheidemann and his associates), was to be intentionally dropped by the railroad porters. On the evening of November 4 the Russian courier's packing-case went to pieces according to plan, revealing a cargo of propaganda documents. Thereupon ambassador Joffe and his staff were hustled to the frontier. Before quitting Berlin, Joffe also supplied certain left-wing members of the USPD and Ernst Meyer, editor of the *Spartacus Letters*, with large sums of money for the propagation of the German revolution.

Liebknecht also accepted Russian money, which was used to pur-

chase weapons and for other revolutionary purposes. Meanwhile, he visited one factory after the other, making speeches, and feeling the pulse of the workers' sentiments. His appeals to the workers to revolt brought him to the attention of the police once more. Hounded by the police, he was unable to go home at night; and he spent his nocturnal hours in all sorts of places, including the Treptow forest.

Liebknecht also became an important figure in the secret meetings of the Revolution Committee, which had been organized in 1917 by the revolutionary shop stewards, and which promoted the mass strike of January, 1918. The Committee consisted of the stewards; their political arm, the Independents; and the Spartacists, now that Liebknecht was free. On November 2 the Committee convened in Neuköln to discuss the strategy for a revolution. Liebknecht and Pieck were there for the Spartacists. Barth, the chairman of the meeting and the revolutionary shop stewards, and Ledebour, leader of the left-wing of the USPD, wanted to strike the first blow, demanding revolutionary action on November 4. They urged immediate action on the basis of knowledge that 10,000 arms were available for the workers. Present circumstances, they contended, called for a conspiracy to be directed by their revolutionary organization. Their revolutionary tactic involved making technical preparations and counting revolvers for the goal of one big *coup*, which was to materialize throughout Germany at a given hour. The time element was important.

Liebknecht vociferously opposed this plan for "making a revolution." Instead of conspiracy and the use of force, or the "revolutionary fist," he propagated his old idea of "revolutionary gymnastics," in which the masses would be worked up into a revolutionary mood through incessant demonstrations, strikes, sabotage, incitement of soldiers to insubordination, and "education" through propaganda. Only mass and spontaneous demonstrations of the workers from the bottom, goaded on by revolutionary propaganda rather than by a timetable, would bring the desired end. Without mature popular support the revolution would fail; the masses, not the elite, had to strike the first blow. Liebknecht based his arguments on his interpretation of the pattern of the Russian revolution; but the majority of the Committee countered with the argument, and correctly so, that conditions in Russia and Germany were totally different.

Haase, the chairman of the USPD and the leader of its right wing, cautioned that chances for a successful revolution were extremely slim. Supported by Dittmann, he insisted that "things are

not ripe for it and we cannot get the people to join us." The views of Haase and Dittmann braked the Committee's eagerness. By a vote of twenty-two to nineteen the revolutionaries decided not to strike on November 4, but on November 11. The followers of Haase and Dittmann no doubt hoped that the war would be over by then, and the chances for a new government would be greatly enhanced.

The Revolution Committee defeated Liebknecht and Pieck on other issues too. For their slogans "Peace now! Lift the state of siege! Germany a Socialist republic!" they received only five supporting votes. When it appeared that the Kiel naval revolt would spread to Berlin, Liebknecht proposed November 8 or 9 instead of 11 as the most logical date for the planned insurrection. The Committee refused to accept this timetable, however, because these days were paydays, on which the workers would be reluctant to desert the factories.

The Revolution Committee's plans to "make a revolution" on November 11 failed for several reasons. The sudden spread of the Kiel revolt toward Berlin, which Liebknecht had anticipated apparently, threw the Committee's timetable into confusion, encouraging many revolutionary leaders to act on their own in violation of the Committee's plans and thus losing organized contact with the workers. On November 8 the police arrested Ernst Däumig, the Independent deputy of the Reichstag and a chief political adviser to the revolutionary shop stewards. In his briefcase the police discovered details of the November 11 plan and a list of the revolutionaries. Liebknecht was also believed to have been arrested. In order to salvage some of the plan, the Committee advanced the date of the revolution to November 9, which Liebknecht had originally suggested, thus adding more confusion to the widespread revolutionary organization.

On the morning of November 9 handbills were circulated in Berlin, issued by the "Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council," including Barth, Haase, Ledebour, and Liebknecht, among others. This call to demonstrate utilized the government's arrest of Däumig and alleged arrest of Liebknecht to depict a monstrous growth of the military dictatorship, and demanded the creation of a Socialist republic. In response to the Revolution Committee's appeal, thousands of workers streamed from the factories and demonstrated in the streets, calling for the establishment of a republic.

In this situation, the SPD, guided by Friedrich Ebert, instructed

its worker followers, who could no longer be restrained, to join the demonstrations, hoping thereby also to force the Emperor to abdicate. This maneuver enabled the SPD to range itself at the last moment on the side of the revolutionary forces and made Ebert, whose name was known to everyone in Germany, the recognized leader of the revolution; and the revolution was deflected subsequently into more moderate channels. Thus Barth and his conspirators lost the leadership of the revolution, which they had barely begun to exercise.

Meanwhile, Liebknecht, who was thought to have been arrested, broke ranks with the Revolution Committee by acting on his own. Unlike the Committee and the SPD, he correctly appreciated the significance of the Kiel revolt forty-eight hours before it reached Berlin. Resorting to his "revolutionary gymnastics," he collaborated with Ernst Meyer and in the name of the Spartacus Union gave the signal that "The Hour for Decision has Arrived!" This sheet beat the drums for international Socialism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat patterned after and in cooperation with the Russian soviet system. With the appearance of this broadsheet, the war-time activities of Liebknecht and the Spartacus group came to an end. It was now up to Liebknecht and anyone who would follow him, after the morning of November 9 and the demise of the imperial government, to put his "revolutionary gymnastics" into action if Germany was to become a soviet state.

NOVEMBER 9-10

November 9 was a rare experience for Berlin. About noon Prince Max announced the Emperor's abdication and entrusted the chancellorship to Ebert. The factories stood empty; troops were without officers, and officers without troops; and workers' and soldiers' councils mushroomed into existence everywhere after the Kiel and Russian models. For the moment it seemed, except for the obstacle of Ebert, that the time for Liebknecht's Socialist republic had arrived. At one o'clock armed troops stormed the Moabit prison and liberated all prisoners. While Ebert and other SPD spokemen conferred in the Reichstag, a group of workers and soldiers interrupted them to demand that Scheidemann address the throngs outside; for Liebknecht was about to proclaim a Soviet republic! Thereupon Scheidemann, impelled by the fear that Liebknecht might succeed, rushed to the historic balcony of the Reichstag and, at two o'clock, proclaimed the German republic. About the same hour the Berlin

chief of police, von Oppel, was replaced by the Independent Emil Eichhorn, a man regarded "almost as a Bolshevik."

Shortly thereafter, Liebknecht, arriving in a small motor vehicle, spoke to a large gathering in front of the Royal Palace. After bidding the Hohenzollerns *adieu*, he proclaimed the "free Socialist republic of Germany, which shall include all people." He called back "our Russian brothers" and urged all who wanted to see the fulfillment of the world revolution to raise their hands to an oath (hands were raised to the shouts of "Long live the republic!"). Thereupon the castle guards cast aside their arms, and a workers' and soldiers' guard assumed responsibility for the imperial property. The imperial banner was lowered, and in its place Liebknecht hoisted the red flag.

Liebknecht's performance, however, proved nothing except that Scheidemann's fears that Liebknecht would succeed were unfounded. If Liebknecht's plans were to establish a revolutionary Socialist republic on this day, they could hardly be recognized as such. His proclamation of a Socialist republic came almost inconspicuously in the middle of his talk; he did not condemn the imperial nature of Ebert's office; he said nothing about a Soviet government and did nothing about forming one. Apparently he believed that the masses were not ripe for a successful revolution, Bolshevik style; therefore November 9 was but a part of his total long-range program of "revolutionary gymnastics." When he completed his address there were shouts of: "Long live the first president of the Socialist republic, Karl Liebknecht!" However, he parried this demand with the reply: "We are not yet that far!"

November 9, Liebknecht believed, was the beginning of the Kerensky period of the German revolution. Ebert and his comrades were not only determined but also able for the time being in preventing the free development of a genuine Socialist republic. Moreover, the revolution of November 9 would have been impossible without the aid and toleration of the majority Socialists. "The supporters of the ruling classes," said Liebknecht in a speech on November 28, "are for the moment largely indispensable as participating assistants. They are obligated to place themselves at the disposal of the revolution. . ."

Meanwhile, Liebknecht's objective was to ripen the masses for the day when the turn of the revolutionary wheel would bring an end to the Kerensky cycle and the beginning of the Bolshevik. For this purpose it was imperative to establish a revolutionary press

with which to "educate" the masses. German Socialists, perhaps more than any other, have always appreciated the power of the press to sway the workers. The SPD traditionally relied on the power of the written word to build up its influence; and German workers were well trained to accept the views of their party newspapers and periodicals. Liebknecht's father contributed more to this party-press relationship than any other Socialist. The founding of a revolutionary organ was so vital to Liebknecht that within a few hours after he "proclaimed" a Socialist republic he led a group of armed soldiers to the building of the conservative Berlin *Lokal-Anzeiger*, turned out its staff, and took possession.

On the following day, Sunday, November 10th, the revolutionary *Red Flag* (*Die Rote Fahne*) appeared in the streets of Berlin. The lead article, written by Liebknecht, praised the workers of Berlin for following the glorious example of the Kiel sailors and workers; but it warned that only a Socialist republic could sweep away the remaining ruins of feudalism. The flag of the Socialist republic "is not the black, red and gold flag of the bourgeois republic of 1848, but the red flag of the international Socialist proletariat, the red flag of the Commune of 1871 and the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917." The Reichstag and other parliaments were to be abolished, and all power was to rest in the workers' and soldiers' councils. Socialism through Sovietism only! Liebknecht urged the "people" to retain their weapons (all other armaments were to be surrendered to the councils), to be on the look-out, and not to forsake the streets.

Liebknecht's reluctance, if not failure, to promote a *coup d'etat* on November 9 was simply an acknowledgment, or result, of the fact that the events of that day were in the nature of a political and military collapse rather than a revolution. In order to "pick up the pieces" of what was left, not to create a drastically new politico-social order, Ebert almost heroically accepted the responsibilities of Imperial Chancellor and the opprobious duty of concluding a peace with the victors. No less important, while "everything collapsed in woeful impotence," Ebert's aim was to prevent a social revolution, which he hated "like sin," and which to him meant Russian Asiatic Bolshevism, pure and simple.

Liebknecht best represented what Ebert hated most; the two men were the extreme poles in a political vacuum. In this vacuum Liebknecht sought to construct a new edifice, built on a freshly poured foundation, on new land; whereas Ebert strove to salvage

much of what was good of the old structure, elsewhere in time rebuilding or redecorating, as needed. While Liebknecht harangued the masses not to leave the streets or to forsake their weapons, Ebert implored them "most urgently to leave the streets and maintain calm and order."

On November 9 Germany was at the crossroads, one road leading toward a social and political revolution; the other, in time, back to the substance of the old order. The German people, accustomed as they were to being led, waited for leadership to take them on either road. Liebknecht mistakenly believed they would not follow until they were ready to follow: the Germans were not yet mature enough for a social revolution. He perhaps credited them with more political intelligence and initiative than past experience had taught them. Ebert, on the other hand, provided the leadership, and the masses followed him, some not knowing whether on the road forward or backward, others mistakenly believing on the road toward a social revolution, and still others knowing on the road leading backward.

After it was all over, Ebert succeeded because he recognized that the German people, because they wanted to be led, would follow. Liebknecht failed because he believed that they would not follow until they were ready to follow a course of their own choice. Liebknecht's program was to prepare, agitate, and educate the masses for a social revolution until that time when they were ready to lead themselves into another world through spontaneous revolution; whereas Ebert, who had no intention of establishing a republic, but who accepted it by default after Scheidemann proclaimed it, "officially" liquidated the imperial government, and without legitimate basis, formed a new government.

In order to strengthen his hand against the Spartacists, but also to give his government the air of legitimacy, Ebert offered the USPD a share of political responsibility. When the Independent Oskar Cohn queried Ebert whether he would accept Liebknecht in the government, Ebert replied coldly that he would, for "we do not make the formation of the government dependent on questions of personalities." While Ebert took over the reins of government in Berlin, elsewhere in Germany workers' and soldiers' councils spontaneously assumed executive authority. Thus there existed a kind of dual authority in Germany on November 9, similar to the Russian situation in 1917.

At a meeting of the USPD in the evening of November 9, there

government with the majority Socialists. Ledebour and Richard Müller refused to work with the majority Socialists. Liebknecht, who did most of the talking, proposed that the USPD cooperate with the SPD for three days with the proviso that "all legislative, executive and administrative powers be vested in the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils." His proposal seemed ridiculous to Scheidemann, who was present to negotiate the arrangements for cooperation. The two men had been at loggerheads over party politics and harbored mutual hostilities. Scheidemann had little respect for Liebknecht as a person or politician, who in either capacity was unable to produce anything constructive. He wondered why Liebknecht, who he believed was not a member of the USPD, was permitted to do all the talking; whereupon an Independent corrected him that "he is now a member of us."

While Scheidemann carried on his feud with Liebknecht among the Independents, a more perceptive individual, Eduard Bernstein, became concerned with Liebknecht's conditions for cooperation and their ultimate effect on the course of the revolution. Bernstein, unlike Scheidemann, had a warm regard for Liebknecht, in spite of considerable differences between them; "but when he set about prescribing Bolshevism for the party in the way described, the thought flashed through my brain that he was starting the counter-revolution."

Liebknecht's demands found quick acceptance among the Independents, and around these they formulated six conditions for their participation in the government for three days, long enough to direct the negotiations with the victor powers for an armistice. Liebknecht consented to represent the USPD as a minister if the conditions were acceptable. At eight o'clock in the same evening, however, Ebert and his colleagues dispatched their reply, rejecting four of the six provisions. When the reply arrived, Liebknecht and the revolutionary shop stewards had departed from the meeting. In the meantime, Haase had arrived, and under his direction the Independents debated throughout the night and reached a compromise with Ebert in the morning of the 10th, agreeing to share the ministries with the SPD.

According to the compromise, only Socialists were to constitute the cabinet, all political power was to be vested in the councils, and the constituent assembly (which Ebert counted on to save Germany from Liebknecht) was to be delayed until the revolution

was consolidated. The new cabinet was known as the Council of People's Commissars *(Volksbeauftragten)*, to which the SPD named Ebert, Scheidemann, and Landsberg, and the USPD appointed Haase, Dittmann, and Barth. Haase encouraged Liebknecht to accept a post in the six-man cabinet to prevent Emil Barth, whom he disliked for moral and political reasons, from accepting a post. Liebknecht, however, refused to work with the SPD. "I was urged to compromise, but I refused to make any concession."

No sooner had the thought flashed through Bernstein's mind during the evening of the 9th that Liebknecht was starting the counter-revolution than Ebert turned to the Supreme Command, leading its forces in retreat, to save Germany from Liebknecht's Bolshevism. During the night of 9-10, secretly and without the knowledge of his comrades, Ebert telephoned army headquarters for General Groener, who succeeded Ludendorff as chief of the General Staff, and secured from him the fealty of the officer corps, who in order to save their military structure, agreed to support the SPD against Bolshevism.

If we can believe Groener's later testimony on this alliance Ebert and the Supreme Command agreed that the first goal should be to strip the Berlin workers' and soldiers' councils of their power, which Ebert pledged to uphold. Ten divisions, supplied with ammunition, were dispatched to Berlin for this purpose. "We worked out a program that, after the arrival of troops, provided for the cleansing of Berlin of the Spartacists." Groener thanked Ebert for his unquestionable devotion to his fatherland, and in return Groener "defended him (Ebert) wherever he was attacked."

Thus Ebert, to save defeated Germany from a social revolution, gave a new lease on life to the military which failed to bring victory and which deserved a worse fate than it got. This was a bitter pill for Liebknecht to swallow.

Meanwhile, the workers' and soldiers' councils of Berlin, who considered themselves the ultimate source of revolutionary authority, made plans to assemble their delegates during the late afternoon of the 10th in the Busch Circus "to name the provisional government." The assembly, comprised of some 3,000 delegates, and theoretically the nation's sovereign body, authorized the People's Commissars, of which Ebert and Haase were joint chairmen. In an effort to usurp the power of the People's Commissars and the SPD, the revolutionary stewards and Spartacists planned to establish a conciliar executive committee constituted exclusively

of their kind. The Spartacists resorted to the circulation of excerpts from the morning's issue of the *Red Flag* in their campaign to sway the assembly in favor of such a committee, or in effect, a soviet dictatorship.

The assembly heard three principal speakers: Ebert, Haase, and Liebknecht. Both Ebert and Haase, in order to prevent the capture of the conciliar committee by the radicals, demanded unity and parity. Ebert soon discovered that he had nothing to fear from the councils when the soldier delegates in particular tumultously demonstrated in favor of unity among the Socialist factions. Liebknecht violently attacked Ebert, depicting him as a menace to the success of the revolution. The reaction of the great gathering to the speakers left no doubt that Ebert had majority support. He was greeted with enthusiastic applause, whereas the delegates, particularly the soldiers again, shouted their disapproval of Liebknecht's tirade against Ebert. The assembly finally agreed to staff the Executive Council of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils *(Vollzugsrat)*, as the new political body was called, with Social Democrats, Independents, and soldiers' representatives. It did not include Liebknecht, who again refused to serve with the SPD.

Now Ebert had the support of not only the Supreme Command, but the majority of worker-soldiers were also pledged to him. The point should be made, however, that whereas the Supreme Command pledged its assistance in order to save its existence, the soldiers followed Ebert in the belief that he would honor the Busch Circus meeting's proclamation that Germany was a Socialist republic and that political power resided in the hands of workers' and soldiers' councils. Ebert, though not sympathetic with this proclamation, temporarily gave his blessings to it in order not to lose the masses to Liebknecht. At the same time, he could sanction almost any proclamation as long as he had the allegiance of the Supreme Command. What Ebert said and did were two different things. This explains why the masses could not understand Liebknecht, who also wanted a Socialist republic, but who took up the cudgels against Ebert's every effort to establish law and order. To them it appeared that Liebknecht created chaos and worked for selfish interests and personal glory, when he should have cooperated with the "official liquidators" of the old regime.

The Busch meeting clearly demonstrated that Liebknecht did not have the sympathy of the soldiers, even though they had organized themselves into soviets. With the Supreme Command and soldiers'

councils pitted against him, his chances for a successful social revolution became nil. In Russia the Bolsheviks succeeded with the help of the soldier soviets, who identified themselves with the Bolsheviks because they promised an end to the war. In Germany, however, the soldiers accepted the revolution after military defeat only. Peace was almost a reality; unless they were genuine revolutionary Socialists, they had no excuse to support Liebknecht. Whereas Ebert promised them Socialism through the orderly process of law and peace, Liebknecht demanded a civil war which alone could wipe out the last traces of the old order and open the road to an honest Socialist society. Liebknecht's tactic, moreover, possibly would have entailed a renewal of the struggle against the victor powers, who would not have permitted a Liebknecht victory in Germany. To the war-weary soldiers, Ebert made sense, Liebknecht nonsense, thus sealing the latter's eventual failure.

By the evening of November 10, Liebknecht recognized that his program and tactics were thoroughly incompatible with the will of the majority of the people. The validity of this fact was confirmed again and again as the revolutionary events of November, December, and January unfolded. Liebknecht, however, revolutionary and optimistic as usual, eagerly and impatiently threw himself into every fray, believing that by sheer force of effort the looming goal could be reached. November 9 and after was the opportunity he had been awaiting for a good many years; his enthusiasm, akin to desperation, waxed as his chances for success decreased. In the name of "revolutionary gymnastics," he leaped at every opportunity for success with uncalculated and utopian zeal and ecstasy. His quixotism not only failed to win practical popular support, but led to a dead-end street and personal tragedy two months later. Blinded by the righteousness of his cause, he could not retrace his steps; but, as in the past, he rather sanctified it with all the personal courage he could muster, regardless of personal consequences.

To many contemporaries Liebknecht appeared to be a careless and irresponsible agitator, more so now perhaps as a result of his martyrdom in prison. What logic he had gained in his legal training was missing; he was a passionate politician but without the sagacity of a good one. Anyone who gleans his writings, especially his notes jotted down in prison, will be impressed by references to his will to struggle and achieve. "No effort is too great or great enough." "The possible is attainable only by striving for the im-

possible." This was the theme of his revolutionary activities. It gives the answer to why this lonely man in the next two months remained steadfast in his course of what seemed to others, and perhaps to him, to be a series of one impossible situation after another.

GATHERING THE FORCES

On November 9 the Spartacus Union was a fragile organization, crippled by repression during the war. In order to exert influence in shaping Germany's future out of the critical days which lay ahead, it needed a formidable propaganda machine and a much tighter organization. Above all, it required efficient leadership, which Liebknecht and Luxemburg endeavored to provide. Rosa Luxemburg, a Jewess who had been in the Polish Socialist movement before she came to Germany, was an intellectual giant; but she lacked the genius for firing the popular imagination. Liebknecht, less of an intellectual and more popular with the masses during the war, now appeared to many, including some Spartacists, as an opportunist who lacked a sense of responsibility and good political judgment.

As if these deficiencies were not enough, Luxemburg and Liebknecht often differed in their interpretation of events and tactics; but when there was reconciliation, it was usually Liebknecht who gave in to the more prudent Luxemburg. Liebknecht, eager and impetuous, differed with the scientific and calculating Luxemburg especially on questions of cooperation with the Bolsheviks and the proper time for the use of violence.[1] These were critical disparities which not only prevented effective guidance, but also made it possible for irresponsible elements to capture the leadership of the Spartacist movement.

We have seen how Liebknecht confiscated the Berlin *Lokal Anzeiger* on November 9, converted it into the *Red Flag*, and issued the first edition of the paper on the 10th. One of the first acts of the Executive Council after its formation at the Circus Busch meeting, however, was to order the *Lokal Anzeiger* restored to its owners. Luxemburg, who arrived in Berlin on the 10th, objected to Liebknecht's seizure of the newspaper plant because she saw that the Spartacists would not be able to hold it if the seizure was contested. She, too, insisted on evacuation and no doubt persuaded the impatient Liebknecht to give in.

War-time restrictions on the use of paper made the publication of a newspaper a difficult undertaking, but Leo Jogiches finally

succeeded in re-establishing the *Red Flag*. It appeared again on November 18, bearing the names of Liebknecht and Luxemburg on its masthead. The issue's leading feature was a more elaborate Spartacist program for public consumption. It cautioned against the acceptance of a revolution "performed overnight with a few decrees from above;" final victory could come only by the conscious action of the toiling masses through all vicissitudes. It appealed to the rural proletarians (not "peasants") to join the workers and soldiers to strive for the formation of a soviet government (a Reich parliament of conciliar representatives), a proletarian Red Guard, and a workers' militia. All dynastic wealth and large-scale landed property was to be confiscated immediately. Finally, it demanded that a world congress of workers convene to stress the Socialist and international character of the revolution and to guarantee the future of the German revolution.

When the revolution broke out, the Spartacists, collectively, were thoroughly disorganized and scattered throughout Germany in a great number of almost autonomous groups. Although Liebknecht worked with the Spartacists upon his release from prison, he cast in his lot also with the revolutionary shop stewards, who had been actively and consciously preparing and organizing for a revolution since 1917. As differences developed between him and the stewards' revolutionary junta, he broke ranks to give more leadership to the disorganized Spartacists. His dislike for routine and practical matters, however, did not suit him for the task of organizing the scattered elements into an effective unit. His place was in the streets, barracks, and factories, where he could harangue the masses. In this effort he was assisted by a battery of speakers, among whom were Paul Levi, Hermann Duncker, and Wilhelm Pieck. The business of organization fell to the resourceful and capable Leo Jogiches.

In arousing the masses Liebknecht worked hard and tirelessly, apparently with some temporary success. This he enjoyed and knew how to do best. Scheidemann, who was always ready to express his irritation with him, reported that Liebknecht led noisy processions of many thousands, armed to the teeth, parading everywhere but always finishing in front of the chancellery to voice his threats. With the soldiers pledged to Ebert, however, Liebknecht had little success. When he speechified a unit at Spandau on November 14, for example, urging the soldiers to overthrow their

officers and join him, he found no response; but the officers ran to Ebert and Scheidemann and excitedly lodged their protests.

The gamut of Liebknecht's public harangues and activities included delivering funeral eulogies for the victims of November 9 on one hand, and organizing army deserters and stragglers whom he addressed in wild speeches, on the other. Not only the military outcasts, but also the prisoners looked to ex-prisoner Liebknecht for their salvation. Through the *Red Flag* he appealed to the Executive Council to release all inmates and at the same time demanded the abrogation of the death penalty in the penal code. Deprived of popular support, he chose to appeal to the dregs of German society in the name of justice and humanitarianism.[8]

In his attempt to gather support, Liebknecht on November 21 performed a typical "revolutionary exercise." Addressing a crowd with an inflammatory speech, he accused the military commander of Berlin, the majority Socialist Otto Wels, of making unjustified arrests. The excited gathering marched to the office of Eichhorn, the radical Independent chief of Berlin police, whose force, together with a division of revolutionary sailors *(Volksmarine)*,[9] regarded themselves as the watchdogs of the revolution. Eichhorn appeared to report to the crowd that he had no political prisoners in his custody. The popular excitement created by Liebknecht, however, was enough to alert Wels, who appeared on the scene with a truck full of soldiers. A clash ensued, and men on both sides were killed.

In this way Liebknecht electrified the atmosphere of the revolutionary days which were to give up more offerings to the dead. While on one hand he invited a counter-revolution by his actions, on the other he accused the government of promoting it. To calm the wrought up Berliners a contingent of soldiers was ordered to parade the streets on November 28 to "reassure anxious citizens that the government is capable of keeping peace and order here." In Kiel majority Socialist Gustav Noske sponsored a meeting of 800 soldiers to protest against "the latest *coup de main* of the Spartacists." The *Red Flag* in turn accused Wels of inciting "the most ignorant of the soldiers against Liebknecht. . . and imaginary attacks from the Spartacists." At the same time the *Red Flag* shifted from its official pacific tactic and warned that "whoever stands in the way of the storm chariots of the social revolution will be cut to pieces."

The *Red Flag* suggested the use of force not without reason: while Liebknecht called for the overthrow of the Ebert government, he

distributed weapons to the mixed elements of Spartacist supporters and sympathizers. These were dangerous ingredients. Would not this policy lead to bloody war between the various Socialist factons to the detriment of the republic? This was the question put to Liebknecht by Kurt Eisner, head of the Bavarian republic, who had arrived in Berlin on November 24 for a national conference of the various state governments. For two hours Eisner pleaded with Liebknecht, reminding him of the dire consequences which would follow if he continued to agitate in this fashion in the future. Eisner, however, could do no more with him than others who had tried to enlighten him.

When Liebknecht was not in the streets gathering his forces, he called to them through the *Red Flag*. Although he inherited the urge to discipline the masses through the press from his father, he lacked his father's ability to persuade with the pen. His arguments were too doctrinaire, too abstract, for the average person who was asked to pursue the real revolution "by the highest degree of intellectual maturity and idealism." The November issues appealed to the masses to extend the revolution; the Ebert government Socialists deserved no hand of brotherhood, but deserved to be fought. He analyzed in particular his conviction that the control of political power by the German proletariat was an illusion. The peasants' councils, he said, were in the hands of the landed owners. The workers' councils comprised many elements who were "imperfectly enlightened."

Liebknecht viewed with particular alarm the unfavorable situation in the soldiers' councils, which, according to him, officers and other feudal elements cleverly won for their selfish interests. Officers, in some cases joined by their men, still gave vigorous cheers for the Kaiser. General Winterfeld led two divisions to Aachen and Cologne to suppress the revolution. General Eberhard demanded the dissolution of all councils in the path of his army's retreat. Attempts were made to disarm revolutionary volunteer regiments, and distributors of Socialist literature were shot. Unfortunately, the Allies did not completely smash German militarism under the black-white-red banner; and the Ebert government was more interested in preserving military power than in sustaining the revolution. But if the government "continues to forget its duty, then the masses will have to take action themselves."

Liebknecht's intention was to transmit his personal wrathful indignation over the revival of militarism to the masses in an

exaggerated form. He had good reason for becoming aroused, however, if he believed in the validity of his cause. On November 15 and 16 two revolutionary sailors were court-martialed and executed in Hanover. On November 30 a division was constituted to fight against Bolshevik Russia and a number of other irregular units were formed to protect the eastern boundary. At the same time the government refused to permit a strike wave in Silesia and the Rhineland "to degrade the revolution into a great wage movement." Clashes with the government resulted in a number of deaths.

Through the *Red Flag* Liebknecht begged the international proletariat to rescue the German workers from the counter-revolution. Things were not going well for the German revolution, but Germany was "pregnant with social revolution, and the German proletariat is looking toward you in this hour." In calling for international help, Liebknecht not only acknowledged his frustrated position, but also that the Allied governments would succeed for the moment in deceiving their workers with the brilliance of their military victory over the Central Powers. The conquerors as well as the conquered, however, stood on the brink of disaster; for hunger, epidemics, degeneration, and stoppage of production threatened all humanity. If the victorious capitalists succeeded in making a capitalist peace, "you will only be more enslaved." Therefore, he demanded that the international proletariat act quickly, prevent the signing of the peace, and seize political power by electing workers' and soldiers' councils.

Just as Lenin had exhorted the international workers to rescue the Russian revolution, and then asked the Russians to give the international workers time to come to the rescue, so Liebknecht appealed to the outside for help and pleaded with the Germans to exercise patience until it arrived. In a speech to a gathering of conciliar representatives on November 27, he warned them not to expect immediate aid; and while they waited they were not to sign a peace of strangulation "built on the quicksands of Wilsonian mercy." The Allies, he conjectured, dared not invade Germany if it refused to sign a Wilsonian capitalist peace; for that would be the moment when the revolutionary flame would leap high. Patience and no peace terms! The German revolution was only three weeks old; and the Germans had kept the Russian revolutionaries waiting for a whole year. In the meantime, "our goal of happiness and welfare, brotherhood, freedom and peace" was not

to be achieved by murdering, plundering, robbing, or anarchy. More patience! While preaching patience and non-violence, however, impatient Liebknecht encouraged street demonstrations which inevitably led to violence and bloodshed.

Liebknecht's idealistic hopes bordered on the realm of impossibility. He asked a great deal of a people who were tired of turmoil. He promised them an endless struggle which would terminate only if other peoples finally came to their aid. Was he justified in making these demands? The answer must be yes if he is judged by the yardstick of personal conviction and devotion to his cause. He was essentially an honest, if not always objective, crusader, who was ready to take his place in the front line of battle for revolutionary Socialism. This he had proved and he was to prove it again. His curious disregard for personal dangers evoked an admiration from many; but his high regard for the Socialist creed to which he dedicated his life gained the adherence of only a minority.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR COUNCILS?

During the latter half of November and the greater part of December the atmosphere of Berlin was further enlivened by a contest between the supporters of a national or constituent assembly and the supporters of a conciliar or soviet government. Prince Max von Baden had relinquished the office of Imperial Chancellor to Ebert with the understanding that the new government would be established "on the basis of the constitution." By a statement issued jointly (November 22) by the People's Commissars and the Berlin Executive Council, however, the latter was vested with ultimate political supremacy "until an all-Reich assembly of delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils has elected an executive council of the German republic."

The intensity with which the radicals supported the conciliar over against a constituent assembly was demonstrated by Richard Müller, when addressing a gathering of workers' councils in the Busch Circus he promised that "the way to the National Assembly leads over my dead body." Although the government Socialist newspapers ignored or played down the significance of the November 22 agreement, the Independent paper, *Freiheit*, carried front-page captions: "Sovereignty of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils." Liebknecht's *Red Flag* screamed that whoever voted for a National Assembly turned the clock back on the revolution. To the Spartacists the issue was not a question of democracy versus

dictatorship, but one of middle-class democracy versus social democracy, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The threat of Liebknecht's Bolshevism struck terror into the hearts of Ebert and his comrades. Ebert, though formally subscribing to the agreement for a conciliar government, had no intention of letting it come into existence. Although he believed in an evolutionary and democratic program of social development, he was willing to rely on the remains of the old military order to prevent the formation of Liebknecht's soviet government. He would have rather relied on a workers' militia than Groener; but the anti-militarist and pacifist tradition of his party and the lack of trained military leadership among its members stood in the way of creating such an organization. It became a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils: German militarism or Russian Bolshevism. No wonder Liebknecht's *Red Flag* complained on December 3, for example, that mounted officers and their men paraded demonstratively through the streets of Berlin under the imperial flag and to the tune of *Heil dir im Siegerkranz* and other Kaiser marches, threatening the revolutionary security guard and refusing to relinquish their arms.

It was in this sense that Scheidemann accused Liebknecht of provoking Ebert into making republican Germany safe for militarism. It must be recorded too, however, that Ebert gave Liebknecht some cause for extremism: for Ebert accepted the support of the old army almost unconditionally and thus gave it a clean bill of health. In failing to distinguish between the old and the new, Ebert made it possible for Liebknecht, without the exercise of much imagination, to portray him as the devil's advocate.

In this threatening political climate, clouded by the issue of a constituent assembly or a soviet system, and by the alliance between Ebert and Groener, a series of events occurred on December 6, which commenced a virtual civil war, lasting for several months, between the various Socialist factions. That afternoon "several thousand armed soldiers" demonstrated in front of the chancellery and proclaimed Ebert president, or in effect, dictator of Germany. Ebert's reply was a discreet negative; he could not accept the position without first consulting with his friends in government; and the soldiers withdrew. Simultaneously with this incident, another group of soldiers surrounded the Prussian Assembly building and arrested the Berlin Executive Council. This news spread like lightning, and in a short time the revolutionary sailors sta-

tioned in the Royal Stables came to the rescue of the Council. Meanwhile, several processions of Spartacists, demonstrating in the northern section of Berlin, encountered a troop of Wels' soldiers, who opened fire, killing sixteen and seriously wounding twelve. Again at the same time, other soldiers occupied the offices of the *Red Flag*.

Although it is possible that this affair was the result of an unusual combination of circumstances, Liebknecht had little difficulty in making a case out of the four separate events: the attempt to proclaim Ebert "president"; the arrest of the Executive Council; the murder and maiming of "unarmed" Spartacists; and the invasion of the *Red Flag* offices. Ebert did not concoct this affair, but he did not have his "allies" under control and thus gave Liebknecht more ammunition for further agitation.

On the following day Liebknecht issued broadsheets, calling upon the workers to throw off Ebert and hold out for a soviet government. Rumors circulated that the Spartacists were ready for a putsch. Several thousand people responded to Liebknecht's call to gather in the Siegesallee, where he accused Ebert and Haase of plotting the events of the previous day. Even the most simple-minded, he said, should be able to see that the events of "bloody Friday" were part of a bigger plan to bring counter-revolution. He raved with great authority in the shadow of bristling machine guns, manned by his supporters. Spartacist demonstrations before December 6 displayed few, if any, armaments; but subsequently Liebknecht's public meetings were ruffled with arms for "protection" against the government Socialists.

From the Siegesallee the Spartacist procession moved on. Bloodshed was narrowly averted when Eichhorn, in his capacity as chief of the Berlin police, discovered and discouraged government troops lying in ambush with machine guns along the route of the Spartacist march. These troops, according to Eichhorn, had been given orders to disperse the demonstrators. The procession continued again, however, and came to a halt in front of the military headquarters of Berlin, where Liebknecht once more delivered a ranting speech. He reminded his followers that they stood in front of the offices from which the frightful events of December 6 were unleashed, and again appealed for the overthrow of the "bloodhounds" — Ebert, Scheidemann, and Wels. After other prominent Spartacists also addressed the gathering, it dispersed on two high notes. One was the demand that Liebknecht "must become our

president!"; the other, a call for a mass protest meeting at two o'clock the following day, Sunday, in Treptower Park.

It was the soldiers again who reminded Liebknecht of his unpopularity. On this same day, December 7, troops under the command of Wels arrested Liebknecht while, between his public appearances, he chanced to be in the offices of the *Red Flag*. Eichhorn again extricated him from the clutches of the counter-revolution before he could be carried off. It was later discovered, according to Spartacist Paul Frölich, "that the plan had been to kidnap and murder him. The social democrat Wels organized a body of mercenaries whose single instruction was to 'hound the leaders of the Spartakus League and prevent their organisational work'."

On December 8 the Spartacist demonstrations took place according to plan. Under Liebknecht's leadership thirty thousand people marched through Berlin on this day. The demonstrators encountered several motor lorries of soldiers and disarmed them. In the Treptower Park Liebknecht shouted his usual demands and threats. On the same day his *Red Flag* in coordination with his street demands and tactics accused the government of preserving the powers of the Supreme Command and creating a military despotism the like of which Germany had never seen before.

The events of December 6-8 had the same crazing effect on those whom Liebknecht accused of plotting a counter-revolution. Die-hard Conservatives especially resorted to the propagation of literature of the basest kind, much of it calling for Liebknecht's death. This orgy of baiting and vilification against him carried strong anti-Semitic overtones. "Kill the Jews! Kill Liebknecht!" Although he was not a Jew, it was often rumored that he, because of his political associations and convictions, belonged to the Jewish race. The "Union of Kaiser Faithfuls" circulated sheets which reminded the "deceived people of Germany" that the ratio of Germans to Jews in Germany was two hundred to three; yet there were eighty Jews to every hundred Germans in the provisional government. Only a complete victory over Liebknecht and his kind could solve the "Jewish problem".

The government Socialists also attempted to reinforce their position by warning, in contrast to Liebknecht's opinion, that the Allies would intervene in Germany unless legal order and peace were restored. *Vorwärts* quoted *The Times* of London as stating "that a Liebknecht victory would be reason for the Allies to invade Germany and establish order there."

About the same time the chief office of the militarist "Homeland Service", working with the "support and mandate from the government," issued broadsheets entitled: "Spartacus, Agent for the Entente!" If Liebknecht's Bolshevism succeeded in Germany, the Entente would invade and enslave. "Therefore, down with Spartacus!" The same office issued huge placards, signed by "Soldiers from the Front", inciting workers and citizens to save the fatherland by killing Liebknecht and other Spartacist leaders. "When they are dead you will have peace, work and bread."

Rosa Luxemburg countered this reactionary propaganda with her usual satire by writing that "Liebknecht has murdered 200 officers in Spandau. Liebknecht has been murdered in Spandau . . . Liebknecht plunders the stores . . . . Numerous persons have approached Liebknecht with stirring personal pleas asking him to preserve their spouses, nephews, or aunts from the intended Massacre of the Innocents."

On December 21 the victims of December 6 were buried with great and solemn ceremony. Liebknecht spoke three times, each time accusing the government that it alone was responsible for the shootings and deaths. *Vorwärts*, on the following day, put the issue squarely up to Liebknecht. The SPD wanted a free democratic republic. Liebknecht, on the other hand, incited a civil war with his lies; and yet he mourned over the victims of his senseless agitation. "Liebknecht cannot be brought to his senses. But we are staking our hopes on the reasonableness, the self-possession and the sense of justice of the German workers!"

The call for the election of an all-Reich assembly of councils was issued on November 23, and on December 16 this congress of soviets convened for five days in the chamber of the Prussian Assembly to settle the political future of Germany. If there was a turning point in the German revolution and Liebknecht's future, this was it. There were 500 delegates: sixty per cent were majority Socialist; twenty per cent were Independent; the remaining twenty per cent were largely uncommitted, but they generally voted majority Socialist. The fact that Liebknecht did not arouse a favorable response among the masses was once more demonstrated. Neither he nor Luxemburg was elected to the congress. Two separate motions, proposed the first day, to seat the two Spartacists with advisory powers were soundly defeated.

Why were the Spartacists rejected? Not because the masses did not want Socialism, but because they believed the Spartacists were

rabble-rousers who wanted to take away from the government Socialists the leadership of the Socialist republic. Still others believed Ebert's Socialism would be achieved peacefully and quietly, while Liebknecht preached civil war and class struggle. The masses were willing to accept Socialism if it was handed to them, but they were not willing to fight for it. Spartacist sympathizers explained Liebknecht's exclusion from the congress on the ground that the elections were held amid confusion and disorder (which, or course, Liebknecht did not create) and did not reflect the true will of the masses.

Liebknecht, however, made the best of a bad situation. He entered the assembly chamber unsolicited and addressed the gathering in guerilla fashion, hurling his favorite vituperations against Ebert and Scheidemann and demanding a true Socialist soviet republic. On other occasions, he led invasions of supporters into the chamber. Liebknecht speakers mounted the platform, shouted their demands, then headed for the nearest exits, permitting the confused congress to continue its work. Liebknecht's radical youth also made their bid to be heard at the congress. They called for a six-hour day for workers under sixteen and the abolition of military service, among other Liebknechtian demands.

Liebknecht's efforts to persuade the congress of councils proved futile. The majority of the delegates voted for the National Assembly, and the date for the elections was set for January 19, 1919. Majority Socialist Cohen's report that the Allies were prepared to invade Germany if the radicals' soviet system were adopted won the day for the National Assembly. The delegates also approved the formation of a Central Council *(Zentralrat)* to carry on the work of the congress until the National Assembly convened. It replaced the Berlin Executive Council as the supreme source of national political authority. Ebert insisted on certain limitations to its power; and because of these limitations, the Independents refused to serve on it. The Central Council was comprised of majority Socialists, thus making the eventual elimination of the conciliar system easier.

The congress also adopted a resolution, the so-called "Hamburg Points", which provided for the abolition of a conscript army and the creation of a people's militia under the control of the soldiers' councils. No army could exist on the basis of this resolution, and Ebert, mindful of Liebknecht's lurking Bolshevism, immediately telephoned by private line to General Groener at army head-

quarters. Hindenburg and Groener would not recognize the decision of the congress, and Ebert agreed not to implement the "Hamburg Points".

The decisions of the congress heavily underlined the fact that Liebknecht's chances for success were growing dimmer. In November the revolution was oriented to the East; it followed the pattern of Soviet Russia. By December the revolution leveled off to follow the model of the political democracies of the West. In this shift from East to West the congress played a significant role. Liebknecht knew this, but he refused to admit it; he always turned his eyes and ears to the lessons from the East. If he wanted to be the Lenin of Germany, he would have to wait until Ebert played out the role of Kerensky. For this he was willing to wait. Fortified by political patience, personal courage, and revolutionary optimism, he stepped up his activities, only to be cut down within a month by the counter-revolution.

Immediately after the dissolution of the congress, Liebknecht directed his activities against its decision to convene a National Assembly. The National Assembly would destroy all revolutionary progress; it was nothing but formal political democracy in which the ballot box was a useless weapon against capitalism. Wilsonian democracy was anathama to all true Socialists. Wilson's offer to provide the Germans with food was designed to bolster capitalist interests; or Wilson would not have approved Foch's armistice terms, which increased the intense need for food and clothing. He reminded his audiences that the majority Socialists shouted him down now for his attitude toward the National Assembly, just as they had thundered at him during the war, when they called him "a common traitor, an agent in the pay of the Entente, a man without a country, who wanted to see Germany defeated." Just as November 9 proved that he had been correct in fighting the war, however, events would prove that he would be vindicated again in his struggle against the National Assembly.

The immediate test of Ebert's strength which had been confirmed by the congress did not come from Liebknecht, however, but from the revolutionary sailors, who from the former Royal Stables and Royal Palace guarded the revolution. A band of unruly soldiers, probably followers of Liebknecht, had previously occupied the palace and plundered it. The sailors, however, were accused of the thefts. Wels, Ebert's military commander of Berlin, withheld their pay, and the government ordered the maligned sailors out of the palace.

The pride of this "revolutionary honor guard", however, would not permit compliance with orders from a caretaker government. On December 23 the sailors surrounded the chancellery and cut off the central switchboard to the outside. They also seized Wels and two of his deputies and held them hostage.

Ebert, however, by a secret wire again turned to Groener for help. "For heaven's sake, send us officers, or we are lost." On the morning of December 24 a regular army group under the command of General Lequis attacked the sailors by shelling the palace. The Supreme Command, hoping for a decisive military victory over the radicals, had to accept less. Many soldiers carried out their orders without enthusiasm after finding out what the matter was all about. Their military discipline was also dissipated by the spirit of approaching Christmas. Several thousand workers, moreover, paralyzed military action by infiltrating the ranks of the soldiers and discouraging them. The sailors won a clear cut victory over the government. Wels was released, but he was replaced by his deputy, Anton Fischer, as military commander of Berlin. The sailors received their pay and full amnesty, and evacuated the palace intact.

The Ebert government was momentarily off balance, but "the brain of the revolution, the *Spartakusbund*, floundered in indecision and uncoordinated gestures." Liebknecht failed to provide adequate leadership at the proper time. According to Groener's later testimony, Ebert feared an imminent attack from Liebknecht. Ebert asked, "What shall we do?" Groener replied that there were only 150 men left in Berlin and the Supreme Command planned to evacuate. To this Ebert despondently replied: "I shall go away now and sleep for three days. . . . I shall disappear utterly from the chancellor's palace and go to sleep. I shall also see to it that all the other gentlemen go away for the next few days. Only a porter will be left. If the Liebknecht crowd takes this opportunity to seize power there will be nobody here. But if nothing is found they will only be beating the air. And then we shall be in a position to set up our government somewhere else in a few days' time, possibly in Potsdam." Groener then suggested that Ebert come to Kassel. "But he went off to sleep, and this is the curious thing about the story — Messrs. Liebknecht and Company also kept Christmas and did not attempt anything during these three days."

Groener's testimony may be just as plausible as it is interesting. That Liebknecht, because of the Christmas spirit, failed to strike while Ebert's government tottered is logical. The holiday climate,

particularly strong in Germany at Christmas time, temporarily immobilized even the radicals. According to several reliable sources, "the Christmas spirit which had caused government's troops to evaporate in front of the castle affected the leftists, too." Liebknecht did not move because "everyone is under the Christmas tree."

There is evidence, however, that Liebknecht tried to make something out of the "bloody Christmas" affair, but failed to do so. On the afternoon of Christmas day the Spartacists in collaboration with other elements of the left wing of the USPD sponsored street demonstrations, in which Liebknecht and Ledebour addressed crowds numbering 30,000. In the evening an armed group of radicals temporarily occupied the *Vorwärts* building. Although Liebknecht may have indirectly incited the action, the invasion of the building was more the consequence of spontaneous action. According to Scheidemann at a cabinet meeting the following day, Liebknecht and Luxemburg made their appearance in the offices of *Vorwärts*. Liebknecht certainly did nothing to discourage this confiscatory move, when he should have been channeling the discontent into an entirely different, a political direction.[4]

An immediate consequence of the Christmas events was the resignation of the three Independents from the People's Commissars, and a few days later from the Prussian government as well. Because of Liebknecht's increased agitation against the Ebert-Groener alliance, the Independents found it correspondingly difficult to retain the allegiance of their followers who feared the return of the old military leaders. Their only alternative, if they valued their program and party unity (what there was of it), was to resign in protest against the Christmas "blood bath", which the majority Socialists alone had approved. The resignation of the Independents significantly increased the mistrust of the government by those who feared a counter-revolution. The Independent Bernstein called the abdication "a fatal capitulation to the Spartacists."

Thus the period of joint Socialist government came to an end. The Central Council, as we have seen, was already completely dominated by the majority Socialists. Now Noske and Wissell, both majority Socialists, replaced the Independents as People's Commissars. A third majority Socialist of required caliber could not be found.

The withdrawal of the Independents from the government not only widened the gap between the majority Socialists and the Spartacists, but it also shattered the unity of the workers who until this time had been largely behind Ebert. Opposition to the government increased

morally and numerically; but many of the oppositional workers, instead of lining up behind Liebknecht, stayed with the revolutionary Independent leaders and shop stewards. Liebknecht, however, had a greater source of susceptible people to incite for his program of revolutionary Socialism. This could be done more effectively if the Spartacists constituted themselves as an independent political party, which eventually also would absorb the left-wing of the USPD.

By the end of the year the lines between the various Socialist groups became more clearly drawn as the hostile groups consolidated, and as one became more conservative, the other more radical. Efficient government could be had only if one group reduced the hostility of the other. A final conflict in which the revolutionaries had a limited chance became inevitable; but this chance failed to materialize when Liebknecht broke down at the critical point.

FOUNDING OF THE KPD

Although it is doubtful that the Independents had any definite knowledge of the counter-revolutionary machinations of Ebert and his associates, they bore joint responsibility for all government actions and lost the respect and loyalty of many of the party rank and file. The Spartacists, still formally members of the USPD, recognized the opportunity to usurp the political leadership of the disorganized Independents; and on December 24, the day of battle between General Lequis and the revolutionary sailors, they informed the executive committee of the USPD of their intention to form a party of their own.

The Spartacists regarded the December events as a prelude to the climax of the revolution, and a centrally organized political party, united in its purpose, was necessary to erect the signposts for the masses along the revolutionary route. They therefore called a national conference for December 30. Although Pieck and Walcher presided, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were the leading personalities among the eighty-three delegates from forty-six districts. Present also was Karl Radek, who headed a six-man Russian Bolshevik delegation. The delegates resolved almost unanimously to break relations with the USPD and to constitute themselves as a new political party, the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus Union).[5] They elected Liebknecht and Luxemburg to the twelve-member party central committee.[6]

The conference delegated Liebknecht, who had the greatest influence among the USPD workers, the task of formally defending the split

with the USPD. He reminded the Independents that it was he, and not they, who first broke ranks with the SPD. Even though the Independents belatedly followed his course, their policy toward the war and the revolution vacillated and remained inconsequential. The Spartacists nevertheless remained with the USPD until now "in order to prod it, to have it within the range of our whippings, and to extract the best elements from it." The USPD functioned in the Ebert cabinet as a fig-leaf for the counter-revolution. It committed its greatest treason, however, when its leaders at the national congress of councils in December, 1918, supported the National Assembly instead of the soviet system of government. Haase, Dittmann, and Barth resigned from the People's Commissars only to revive a dead body. The Spartacists constituted the KPD, therefore, in order to pledge loyalty to the revolution, "to confirm formally what we have always been, and to continue our work on a broader base."

The delegates also adopted a party program drafted by Rosa Luxemburg.[1] Although it was essentially a reiteration of previous principles, it also reflected Luxemburg's concern with certain Spartacists', including Liebknecht's, propensities to yield to the temptations of short cuts and putschism in their haste to triumph. By accepting the program, the KPD clearly denied party dictatorship over the masses in the Bolshevik sense. The KPD also refused to share power with the enemies of the revolution, "merely out of chance or because it was slack in the hands of others." The party would assume power only "in response to the clearly expressed will of the great majority of the proletarian masses" (and then, we may assume, by force if necessary), "and only as a result of the definite agreement of the masses with the ideas, aims, and methods of the Spartacus Union. The proletarian revolution can come to clarity and maturity only gradually, step by step, along the painful road of its own bitter experiences, through defeats and victories." With this program Liebknecht was in complete harmony during his more judicious moments.

The most important political issue confronting the conference was whether the KPD should participate in the elections for the National Assembly. Luxemburg strongly favored participation in the circumstances. Parliamentary processes, too, could be used to mobilise the masses and to expose "all the tricks and machinations of this fine assembly." Liebknecht, nearer to Lenin than Luxemburg, was not sure. He seriously considered promoting a *coup* in order to prevent the National Assembly from coming into existence. He was eager

for action and straining at the leash; but yielding to the counsels of Luxemburg he teamed up with her and argued: "Were our parliamentary activities in the Reichstag altogether worthless?"

The two Spartacist veterans, however, failed to line up the KPD behind them on this issue. Under the leadership of Otto Rühle, Liebknecht's erstwhile Reichstag colleague, the adventurist elements gained the upper hand and out-voted the supporters of Liebknecht and Luxemburg by sixty-two votes to twenty-three. Rühle's motion called the party to place every obstacle in the way of the elections to the National Assembly. "If the National Assembly is removed from Berlin," he declared, "we will establish a new government in Berlin." Liebknecht "confessed he went to bed believing in participation in the elections and awoke opposed to it."

Defeated, Liebknecht and Luxemburg faced the problem of supporting a policy which they believed was the only right one, or remaining loyal to a party which had been captured by political opportunists. As subsequent events proved, they chose to remain loyal to their party above everything else. There is no doubt, however, that they should have split their party and divorced themselves from the putschist members. Marx and Engels never made major concessions to the members of their party; and Lenin and Stalin would have split (or purged) their party as often as it was politically necessary. Liebknecht and Luxemburg in agreeing with party's majority decision for political adventure "virtually surrendered the leadership of the Communist Party, and sanctioned in anticipation any act that might be perpetrated by some adventurers within the Party."

The Bolshevik influence among the delegates asserted itself when they accepted the Bremen left-wing radicals, inspired by Lenin and Radek, as members of the new party. The Bremen group had threatened to constitute its own party unless the Spartacists proceeded to build one. Luxemburg hesitated to combine with these elements because of their Bolshevik leadership; but Radek and Liebknecht provided the key support for the amalgamation, which the conference approved.

Liebknecht also assumed the leadership for the proposal to fuse the KPD and the revolutionary shop stewards, who nominally still belonged to the USPD. Although the Spartacists and stewards generally pursued the same goal, they differed widely on tactics. The stewards expressed a grave mistrust of the putschist elements within the KPD and demanded of Liebknecht that his followers should "give up their tactics of continuous rioting." The stewards would not ad-

mit Liebknecht's charge that they themselves had participated in Spartacist activities in the past; nor would the Spartacists, of course, confess that they were putschists.

The conditions which the revolutionary shop stewards proposed as a basis for their union with Liebknecht reflected their deep-seated desire for guarantees that the opportunism of his followers be curbed. The stewards advocated the KPD's participation in the elections for the National Assembly, contrary to the party's official decision on this matter. They demanded parity on the party's policy-forming committee, insisting especially that the precise tactics governing future street demonstrations and policies relating to press and propaganda of the KPD be mutually formulated and jointly controlled. Even the name "Spartacus Union," which the stewards regarded as a contemptible epithet denoting irresponsibility, should not to be used to designate the party. Liebknecht, ready to accept the immediate advantage to be gained through union, was disappointed when the KPD rejected the stewards' conditions. Luxemburg and Jogiches advised caution in fusing the two groups under these reservations.

The failure to gain the adherence of the revolutionary shop stewards was a heavy blow to Liebknecht's fortunes. The stewards, not Liebknecht, commanded the allegiance of the considerable number of workers in industry. The KPD headed for the storm of the January days without the organized support of these solid workers and had to depend on unruly and headstrong personnel, of which the members of the Deserters' Union were good examples. Even many deserters and stragglers were paid off by the government in return for their neutrality during the critical days of January when Liebknecht risked everything he had.

SPARTACUS UPRISING

The resignation of the Independents from the People's Commissars on December 29, and from the Prussian government on January 3, permitted the majority Socialists to assume virtually all government responsibility. To make their authority more complete, on January 4 they summarily deposed the left-wing Independent, Emil Eichhorn, as chief of the Berlin police. This arbitrary action aroused the passions of the radicals, who came to Eichhorn's support when he refused to abdicate his post. The revolutionary shop stewards and the executives of the USPD and the KPD negotiated between themselves in order to present a united front against the Ebert government. On

the morning of January 5, a Sunday, they issued a sharply worded manifesto in which they asked the workers to demonstrate that the revolutionary spirit of the November days was not dead in them. "Down with the tyranny of Ebert and Scheidemann! Long live revolutionary international Socialism!" Although the radicals did not contemplate action against the government, the manifesto could have been interpreted by the average Berlin worker as something more than a mere incitement for a harmless mass demonstration.

Thousands of workers, followers of the revolutionary stewards, the Independents, and Liebknecht, responded to the manifesto and gathered in the Siegesallee in the afternoon of the 5th. From the Siegesallee the demonstration moved to the Alexanderplatz, where Eichhorn addressed the throng from the balcony of the police headquarters. Liebknecht also took his turn. Although he was careful not to call for the use of force, he declared himself ready to defend Eichhorn, who had come to him for help. At the same time he cultivated a kind of temper among his listeners which inspired the more irrepressible ones to go into action. Later in the day armed groups of Spartacists occupied the majority of newspaper buildings in Berlin, including that of *Vorwärts*.

The size and spirit of these demonstrations exceeded expectations. The encouraged radical leaders met to decide what to do next. Among seventy opposition leaders, Liebknecht and Pieck were the only Spartacists present. Other leading spokesmen were Ledebour, Däumig, "Corpse" Müller, Dorrenbach, and Eichhorn. It soon became apparent, however, that Liebknecht set the tone of the meeting. He was convinced that the occupation of the newspaper buildings by the workers was a sign that the masses were ready to move into action.* Dorrenbach reported that his Berlin division of revolutionary sailors and also troops in Spandau with 2000 machine guns and twenty pieces of artillery were prepared to fight against the Ebert government. Still another report indicated that a revolutionary garrison at Frankfurt on the Oder was ready to march to Berlin. These reports and the popular demonstrations excited Liebknecht, who declared that it was not enough merely to defend Eichhorn, but that the overthrow of the government was possible and absolutely necessary.

Here was the impulsive Liebknecht, the anti-militarist, without a knowledge of military tactics and strategy, to say nothing of his lack of knowledge of the real strength of his opposition, declaring almost hysterically that the revolutionaries were ready to use tactical force

to assume power! Liebknecht's enthusiasm was infectious. Pieck spoke out for immediate approval of Liebknecht's proposals. The great majority approved three specific proposals: that the occupation of the newspaper buildings must be continued and supported; that the Berlin workers must be called out on a general strike; and that battle must be initiated against the government.

Liebknecht's idea of government was also accepted. The assembly voted a monstrous Revolution Committee of fifty-three people, headed by three co-equal chairmen, Liebknecht, Ledebour, and Paul Scholze. This committee was to lead the revolutionary action against Ebert and his comrades and serve as a provisional government after their abdication. Only six radicals, including Müller (head of the revolutionary shop stewards again) and Däumig, voted against Liebknecht's plans. They argued that the time was not ripe for revolution, and the entire revolutionary movement would be threatened by this isolated action.

Liebknecht voted for the putch on his own initiative and without the knowledge or approval of the KPD. Party leaders could not understand him; they feared that he jeopardized everything the Spartacists had achieved for the sake of one *coup*. Rosa Luxemburg showered him with reproaches for his arbitrary and unnatural action. She indignantly accused him of violating every tactical principle of the KPD. She even entertained thoughts that cooperation with him was no longer possible. Liebknecht, for his part, barked the sharpest words at any one who disagreed with him.

Paul Levi, a prominent party member who at the founding conference defended the KPD's participation in the National Assembly elections, testified to the differences within the party as follows: "You will remember that Karl Liebknecht was stubborn, and that it was Leo Jogiches who made the suggestion to publish a strong declaration in the *Red Flag* while the rising was in progress; a declaration which should definitely repudiate Karl Liebknecht; which should simply announce that Karl Liebknecht was no longer the representative of the Spartacus Union among the *Obleute* (revolutionary shop stewards). You know exactly how much Rosa Luxemburg disliked Karl Liebknecht's attitude and how severe her criticism was. She would have made known her criticism as soon as the rising was at an end."

Luxemburg, however, placed loyalty to Liebknecht and the masses above everything else. She did not agree with their tactic, but they were committed to the fight and should not be deserted. The atti-

tude of the KPD was essentially the same; the party clearly desired success, but did nothing officially to assure it. If the uprising failed the KPD would not be discredited; and yet, by allowing two of its leaders to participate as individuals, its prestige would be enhanced of the *coup* succeeded. The party's role in the action "had to be at once negative and critical on the one hand, and positive and encouraging on the other." Thus in spite of the differences, Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and the KPD marched hand in hand through the eventful days of the so-called "Spartacus Uprising."

January 6 was a big day for the rebels. Early in the morning a mammoth general strike began with full force in response to a manifesto which included the signature of the central committee of the KPD (whose name Liebknecht no doubt took the liberty of using for his own purposes). Liebknecht arrived in the Siegesallee at one in the afternoon to lecture, but not, as it turned out, to lead the crowds. The moment had come to act, yet caution had to be exercised, he said. The workers were not to return to the factories until they accomplished their purpose (he did not tell them specifically what their purpose was, however, or how to achieve it). He expected the aid of the Berlin troops "because we are ready to act." For good measure, however, he urged that everything be done to win their allegiance. January 6 was the beginning of the social revolution; but rifles were to be kept at order arms.

This was the best Liebknecht could do to mobilize great masses of workers who were clearly ready and willing to act. Apparently he wanted a negotiated revolution handed to the workers on a platter. Although he believed the time for a mass revolution had come, there was nothing in his speech to organize the masses for action. He called out the workers, he lectured them, but he did not lead them. The armed workers who occupied the newspaper plants were also forgotten; they received no instructions, but simply remained in their positions of no strategic importance. The only action of strategic significance was executed by some of the leaderless workers themselves when they seized a railway station.

On the same day Liebknecht's revolutionary junta established its operational headquarters in the Royal Stables, anticipating the aid of Dorrenbach's revolutionary sailors stationed there. Workers and soldiers arrived and placed themselves at the disposal of Liebknecht's Committee. Weapons and grenades were distributed to them without instructions. The military commander of Berlin and successor to Wels, Anton Fischer, also arrived at the Royal Stables to win the

sailors for the cause of the government. The Revolution Committee took him captive, and Liebknecht informed him that the government was to be overthrown the next day, the 7th. Fischer reminded Liebknecht that he did not have the majority of the workers on his side. Liebknecht, deceiving himself, replied: "That is immaterial, for the most active and intelligent ones are certainly on my side." Fischer then told him that Liebknecht's undertaking would lead to bloodshed; to which Liebknecht replied, as he had six weeks earlier to Eisner: "Facts and not feelings are the deciding factors, and the facts are on our side."

The government did not topple the next day. Liebknecht did not have the most intelligent or the majority of the workers on his side. True, many thousands of workers demonstrated, but only a small minority were genuine Spartacists. The government, of course, liberally labeled all demonstrators Spartacists, a derisory appellation which attracted the angels to the side of the Social Democrats. If anyone was governed by feelings, instead of facts, it was Liebknecht and not Fischer, who correctly evaluated the realities of the moment for Liebknecht, who could not see them.

A typical example of the general facial character of Liebknecht's efforts to establish a government was demonstrated when the Revolution Committee dispached one of its "intelligent" supporters to lead a group of sailors from the Royal Stables to occupy the War Ministry. Upon arriving at his destination, the leader of the sailors stated his business and in bureaucratic fashion displayed a warrant! The bureaucratic officer in charge of the War Ministry, however, called the revolutionary's attention to the fact that the warrant lacked a proper signature. Thereupon he returned to Liebknecht's headquarters to have the signatures affixed. Liebknecht filled in the necessary signatures, and once more sent the revolutionary off to the War Ministry. On the way it dawned on him what was happening. He changed his course, went home, and remained in bed.

The failure of January 6 revealed how miserably the forces behind the coup had been organized. Even the *Red Flag*, hoping for Liebknecht's success but officially neutral, could not resist the urge to satirize the Revolution Committee: "The fabulous happened. The masses stood from early in the morning, 9 A.M., in the cold and foggy weather. Somewhere the leaders were sitting and deliberating. The fog lifted, and the masses continued to stand. But the leaders deliberated. Noon came, and with it cold and hunger. And the leaders deliberated. The masses were feverish with excitement: they wanted

one deed, also but one word, to assuage their excitement. But no one knew what to do. The leaders deliberated."

If the masses which Liebknecht said were ready for action had been led, there is still the question of how many would have followed him into committing the final revolutionary act and the dirty business of killing fellow Germans. Many demonstrators were followers of the Independents; but many Independent leaders, though paying lip service to the revolution, did not intend to revolt and made no preparations. Instead they offered their services as mediators. Others, especially the workers in the heavy industries, followed the leadership of the revolutionary shop stewards; but two of the leading steward personalities, Richard Müller and Däumig, refused to provide leadership for a revolt which they thought was premature. In the final analysis, only a handful of the proletariat was ready to force the government out of existence. These were a small number of Eichhorn's personal followers; a small number behind the most radical shop stewards, led by Ledebour; and a few thousand motley but honest Spartacists, whose most important but questionable contribution was the occupation of the newspaper plants.

Liebknecht soon discovered, too, that the military support which had been "promised" on the 5th and which had been a decisive factor in his decision to declare war against the government also melted away. The revolutionary sailors declared their neutrality in the whole affair and arrested their leader, Dorrenbach, who had committed them to Liebknecht. They also evicted Liebknecht's Revolution Committee from the Royal Stables and set his prisoner, Anton Fischer, free. The support which the troops from Spandau were to have given to the Revolution Committee also failed to materialize.

Notwithstanding these critical disadvantages, it appears that Liebknecht still could have won the day with a minimum of leadership and an awareness of the difficulties under which the government labored. The government had little dependable military support on January 6. Scheidemann later recalled that the soldiers behind the government "were either dominated by a general uncertainness, and therefore militarily unemployable, or they silently went home to their mothers." Gustave Noske, who on the 6th assumed responsibility for the organization of the government's military forces ("Someone must become the butcher!"), and who was as much abreast of the military situation as anyone, held that some cool calculating on Liebknecht's part would have been crowned with success. Liebknecht, however, whom Noske regarded as a *Hansnarr* (tomfool or blockhead)

and a nervous and irritable man, became even more eccentric and excited than earlier in his career. Had he been able to exploit the situation and used the armed, desperate masses, his success would have been assured and Germany would have been Bolshevik, at least temporarily.

The extent and duration of Liebknecht's success would have been another question. Luxemburg repeatedly warned that power should be accepted only if it could be held, and she believed that it could not be held at this time. The relative weakness of the government was a momentary one; in the final test it would rally the necessary force, even at the expense of reviving the substance of the old state.

Again Luxemburg's appraisal of the circumstances was correct. On January 5 the government called upon the loyal workers to demonstrate in its behalf, knowing that workers would not fight workers. On the following day Scheidemann promised the workers: "Yes, we will arm the masses! Not, of course, with cudgels, but with rifles." The government also issued broadsheets stating: "Now our patience is at an end. We will no longer be terrorized by insane and criminal elements (namely, Spartacists)." On the 7th the government began to organize the regular army and numerous other irregular military units, including the notorious Free Corps, against the rebels. Noske, the newly appointed minister of defense, got in contact with various troop commanders in order to direct the old line soldiers against the Berlin insurgents. The Ebert-Groener alliance was to pay off again.

Liebknecht found himself in a dilemma. Utopian Spartacists had been committed to fight, but chances for victory disappeared. Should he desert them now that the cause appeared to be lost, or should he remain with the struggling radicals to the bitter end? Liebknecht, like Luxemburg, mistakenly chose to place loyalty to the misguided loyal above everything else. He was not willing to split the Spartacist movement by deserting those who acted unwisely for his cause. Desertion, moreover, would have tarnished his sense of honor and courage of which he was extremely jealous.

Liebknecht called out the masses for new demonstrations on January 7th. On the 8th the government signalled to its troops to march against the Spartacists. The People's Commissars issued a manifesto that the Spartacists would be dealt with. On the 9th, Liebknecht's Revolution Committee, holding what was to be its last meeting, accepted the challenge and issued a manifesto of its own (again bearing the signature of the KPD central committee). The declara-

tion accused the government of preparing a new blood bath and demanded the overthrow of Noske, who was rapidly becoming the Spartacists' favorite scapegoat.

The Spartacists, however, became painfully aware of the mounting strength of Noske's military organization. On the 10th the KPD central committee finally forbade Liebknecht's further participation in the Revolution Committee. The party thus confirmed the reasonableness of Russian Bolshevik Radek's earlier request that the KPD should call on the workers to break off the fight and beat a retreat. The Russian influence was apparent again when Liebknecht at the same time wired Moscow: the struggle had to be broken off as soon as possible, for the Berlin workers were not prepared for the dictatorship of the proletariat. He realized again, in the hour of defeat, the logic of his earlier statement: "Unfortunately the proletariat is a long way from maturity. There is yet much to be done. We are still in children's shoes."

On the 11th Noske's troops shelled the *Vorwärts* building, and the bloodletting began. The defenders emerged under the white flag of truce to surrender the premises. They were led to a nearby barracks and forthwith whipped, beaten, and shot. Germany saw its first Nazi atrocity. On the 12th Noske's soldiers recaptured all of the newspaper quarter and the police headquarters. On the 13th the Berlin executive of the USPD and the revolutionary shop stewards called the workers to return to their factories to avoid further bloodshed. Liebknecht, who tried to make the world safe for Bolshevism, helped to make Germany safe for the militarism which he vowed to destroy.

DARKNESS

Throughout the week-long fight Liebknecht attended the insurgents. He drifted from one position to another, giving the rebels moral encouragement and counsel, and dodging soldiers who had been ordered to hunt him down. Hungry and tired, he slept for only short intervals and in a different location each time.

As the Spartacists were flushed from one stronghold and then another, a dragnet was systematically spread for the revolutionary leaders. Already on the evening of January 10 the Berlin military command in a series of raids netted Georg Ledebour and Ernst Meyer. Leo Jogiches was caught the following day. Liebknecht received news that his oldest son, Helmi, had also been arrested. He accepted the report, as usual whenever fortune ran out on him, with philosophical calmness. "The important thing is that he remains

brave, for he is my son. Nothing can happen to him either, for he does not know how to use firearms."

Liebknecht, however, was still unbridled. Party leaders warned him to keep his distance from the offices of the *Red Flag*. During the evening of January 11 he attended a gathering in Luxemburg's refuge at the Halle Gate. The inner city of Berlin was no longer safe, however, and he fled to Neukölln where he hid in a home of a friendly working-class family. Here he found some unaccustomed peace and quiet. He sought relief in another world by devoting most of his time to reading fairy tales for the daughter of his host. A report that his wife and youngest son also had been arrested, however, jerked him into the realm of reality again. Neukölln, he feared, was no longer safe, and he fled to the middle-class suburb of Wilmersdorf where the man-hunt was not as intense.

The huntsmen, however, would not be denied. They found moral support for their efforts in posters, handbills, and the general press, which urged their readers to do away with Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Even *Vorwärts*, the paper which Liebknecht's father had made famous, contributed to this cajolery by printing a poem by Artur Zickler. It mourned the deaths of many workers who had been killed by the irresponsibility of their leaders who remained alive.

Many hundred corpses in a row —
Pro'etarians!
Karl, Rosa, Radek and Co., —
Not one lies there, not one lies there!
Proletarians!

On January 15 the corpses of Liebknecht and Luxemburg were added to the others. On the same day the *Red Flag* published Liebknecht's final column, which had been written at Wilmersdorf the previous day. In it he revealed a premonition of the impending personal disaster. He had the courage to admit that the Spartacist revolt lost much of its vigor through the indecision and weakness of its leaders. But he also wrote about a greater optimism and a firm belief that his efforts were not in vain. The defeated of today would be the victors of tomorrow, and every defeat was a valuable lesson. Thus in a moment of reflection he confirmed Luxemburg's theory that the road to ultimate victory was the way of painful vicissitudes and defeats, from which maturity, the prerequisite to victory, would grow.

There was more of the Golgotha road ahead, but the day of victory was near. "We have not fled, we have not been defeated. For Spar-

tacus means fire and spirit, the heart and soul, the will and deed of the proletrian revolution. For Spartacus means Socialism and world revolution." Liebknecht's last words reflected that illusory optimism which characterised his entire life. He still lived in a dream-world in which feelings and not facts were his *desiderata*. He saw Ebert, Scheidemann, and Noske forsaken by the Socialists throughout the world. "Besmirched, thrown out from the ranks of decent men, lashed out of the International, hated and cursed by every revolutionary proletariat, so they stand before the world."

Although all the details of Liebknecht's murder will never be established, it is generally accepted that he was intentionally and brutally killed in cold blood. A group of soldiers traced him to 53 Mannheimerstrasse, Wilmersdorf, at nine o'clock in the evening of the 15th. At first he gave a false name, hoping that the raid on the address was accidental. A friend who had been taken into confidence by him seems to have betrayed him, however. The soldiers seized and escorted him to the Eden Hotel, the headquarters of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*. After a period of "questioning", he was again led from the hotel, struck on the head several times with the butt of a rifle, and bleeding profusely, dragged into a waiting car by six armed officers. In the Tiergarten the car stopped because of an alleged breakdown. Liebknecht was pulled from the car and shot dead. The corpse was taken by the same men to a mortuary, where it was committed as "an unknown man found dead in the Tiergarten."

The *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division* issued a report of the affair. According to it, Liebknecht freed himself after the car stalled in the Tiergarten, and after stabbing one of his escorts in the hand, ran away. Liebknecht failed to heed the usual military warning to stop, and he was "shot while trying to escape."

A medical examination revealed, however, that Liebknecht was shot at close range. Moreover, he had been weakened by previous blows over the head, and in all probability he could not have made a quick dash for freedom. The possibility of having attempted a surprise escape seems all the more remote because he had an escort of six strong men who should have been able to snatch the weakened man if he had tried to flee.

In May, 1919 the men who murdered Karl Liebknecht were tried by a military court consisting of fellow officers from their own unit. All of the accused were either acquitted or given ridiculously light sentences which were never fulfilled. The murderers of Luxemburg,

whose body was finally recovered in a canal on May 31, also were not punished.

Liebknecht sympathizers vowed that the Ebert government deliberately planned the murders and supplied money for the purpose. They based their conclusions on evidence produced by the investigation of the murders by Leo Jogiches for the *Red Flag*, and by a series of post-war libel trials. They also used the Zickler poem in *Vorwärts* as proof that the government wanted the murders.

The most recent Communist attempt to fix responsibility for the murders involved the United States. Agents of the United States, according to this view, caused the failure of the German revolution and therefore the deaths of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. An alleged plot involved Woodrow Wilson, Bullitt, Lansing and their *agent provocateur* Ellis Drasel, who proposed "to create a military organization and to liquidate the revolutionary movement with 'energetic measures'." A certain Captain Herardy, who headed the American military mission, executed the plan in cooperation with Ebert and Noske.*

Ebert's government had its apologists, too, for the murders. According to them, the government, though it was impossible to find the full facts in the murder cases, made every effort to establish responsibility; and on the evening of January 16 it ordered a full official investigation. Those who were present at the chancellery when the news of Liebknecht's death arrived, testified to the unfavorable reactions which followed. Ebert was never seen so angry. Government officials feared that Liebknecht's death would lead to further riots and bloodshed because the Spartacists now had a real case of martyrdom to exploit.

Liebknecht's brother, Theodor, telegraphed Berne, where an international Socialist conference convened, and demanded that the German Socialists, because of their complicity in Liebknecht's murder, should be barred from the meeting. The conference, however, ignored this demand, maintaining that "there was not the slightest connection between Ebert's governing and this cowardly murder."

After passions have cooled, concrete evidence is still lacking to prove that the Ebert government desired or agreed to the murder of Liebknecht. It should not remain unsaid, however, that the government contributed to the death of this man by a political sin of omission: it did not instruct its forces on how to deal with him after his capture, which it surely anticipated.

FAILURE: SUMMARY AND CONSEQUENCES

Clearly, Ebert's government was more justified than not in suppressing Liebknecht's attempt to overthrow it, although the means it used to achieve this end may be questioned. The government had the right and duty to defeat the *coup* which, if successful, would have left Germany in anarchy. It is highly questionable whether the majority of Germans, and possibly the Allies, would have tolerated Liebknecht and the ideals which he represented.

German conservative traditions, not entirely destroyed or discredited by defeat, still were rooted in the hearts of many Germans to whom Liebknecht's radical utopianism was both foreign and frightening. That Liebknecht failed in January, 1919, or that he would have failed eventually if he had succeeded then, must be attributed in part to his personal shortcomings, and in part to the general weakness of his forces, which can be explained only by German political and social conservatism.

Liebknecht was essentially a dreamy, but an honest Socialist. In his calmer moments he judiciously denounced terror and force as instruments of political tactics. "We are not only the principal opponents of force, but as sound tacticians we also refuse to use it." He planned to lead the workers, whose moral and material support was a necessary prerequisite, to a social utopia by creating spontaneous revolutionary energy among them through agitation *(revolutionären Gymnastik)* and education *(revolutionären Schulung)*. Conspiracy *(Putschromantik)* had no place in his tactics; it came too near to brute force and would lead only to failure.

Liebknecht, however, was not calm and collected by nature. Promising chances for success so obsessed him that he lost sight of the means of reaching it. He was impetuous and reckless even in the little things of life. Rosa Luxemburg characterized him as follows: "The poor fellow had, of course, always lived *ventre à terre*, in a gallop, in eternal haste, hurrying to appointments with all the world, to meetings, committees, forever surrounded by packages, newspapers, all the pockets full of writing pads and slips of paper, jumping from auto into the electric car and from the electric into the steam tram, his body and soul covered with street dust. That was his way of doing, although in his heart of hearts he is of a poetical nature as few persons are and can take a childish delight in every little flower."

It is no surprise, therefore, that Liebknecht grew more emotional and less calculating when confronted with crucial issues and as the political vacuum of the revolutionary days encouraged him to

imagine imminent victory. He was blind to the historical differences between Russia and Germany, and believed that because the Bolsheviks appeared successful, he too would triumph if he only followed the Russian tactics and experience. The Berlin workers' spontaneous occupation of the newspaper quarter in early January, 1919, he accepted as the long awaited signal that the masses had achieved maturity and were ready for a showdown with the caretaker government. His reaction to both events—the Russian revolution and the seizure of the newspaper buildings—demonstrated his political immaturity and emotional idealism. He lost his head. When he finally acknowledged that he had overestimated the pace of or revolutionary development, he attempted to redeem his miscalculation by resorting to force. This was his final and most tragic miscalculation, one which a person with less conviction and more perspicuity would not have committed.

Liebknecht in the period of the German revolution stood in clear contrast to his more judicious companion, Rosa Luxemburg, who correctly evaluated the significance of the Bolsheviks and the January action. She was a clear and scientific thinker who sought to curb Liebknecht, but to no avail. The two battle-scarred veterans of Spartacus were not as compatible as is commonly believed. There were basic differences of opinion in matters relating to individual tactics, if not to theories; and there was a clash of personalities as well. Had not death snatched them together from their work, the issues arising out of their personal and tactical incompatibility would have separated them later, unless Liebknecht in calmer moments, as in the past, would have reconciled his practical tactics with his theories.

Notwithstanding his failures and political incompetence, friends and foes alike, with few exceptions, admired Liebknecht for his courage and personal character. He "had most probably the greatest integrity of all German public figures" of his time. Those who knew and fought him repeatedly acknowledged that "there was no question about his personal honorableness." Basically, his convictions were rooted in a humanistic respect for the dignity and welfare of the individual. In the struggle for what was condemned by others as a collectivist society but was for him a heaven on earth for the individual, there was no greater individualist among friend or foe than Liebknecht himself. It was his honest humanitarian spirit, for example, which led him to go on record with a request during the

hectic days of December, 1918, to spare the life of anyone who might assassinate him; "for he has been deceived!"

Liebknecht, moreover, fortified his convictions with a courage which did not permit him to flee Germany in the face of personal danger. Whereas Marx, Engels, Lenin, and even his father at crucial times had gone into exile in order to escape persecution, death, or failure, Liebknecht remained at his post at the recognized risk of violence to his person. Had he watered down both his personal courage and his faith in the gospel of Socialism, his life would have been a different story to tell.

Why then did the German workers and soldiers who wanted a Socialist republic fail to recognize the integrity of this man by not giving him their support? As we have stated, the majority of them believed that former saddle-maker Ebert, a patriotic and solid German worker who created an air of legality about his government, would inaugurate a progressive program of socialization in a peaceful and typically German orderly manner. Many therefore could not understand the chaotic antics of Liebknecht, also a Socialist. Why did he not cooperate with Ebert unless it was to satisfy a corrupt ego? Others who understood him more clearly were aware of the revolutionary aspect of his Socialism, which promised to destroy everything which to them was good as well as evil of old Germany, and which would involve them in a fratricidal war. Many workers after 1917 lost much of their sympathy for Liebknecht and gave their support to other oppositional factions when they discovered that he wanted Russian Bolshevism, not German Socialism. After all, Bolshevism would mean civil war — Liebknecht had preached this often enough; and the workers were nauseated by the nightmares of the war of 1914 which had been brought on to save Germany from the Russians in the first place. Was it therefore not more sensible and convenient to *follow* Ebert, than to *fight* for Liebknecht when both claimed to be pursuing the common goal of a Socialist republic?

There are other aspects to these observations. The Spartacists, during and after the war never numbered more than an insignificant minority of the total oppositional factions. During the war the government deprived them of their leadership and freedom of action. Their activities were relegated to the limited, albeit well-organized, dissemination of propaganda. Before August, 1916, the *Spartacus Letters*, because they were hectographed, appeared in small editions of about 500. After that they were issued from the printing presses

in editions of 5,000-6,000. In some provincial towns the material was recopied and hectographed, but on a much smaller scale.

The Spartacists were also handicapped by lack of funds. Until 1918 all costs had to be met by contributions from sympathetic workers. After the Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks supplied some funds. Although the extent of this financial assistance has not been established, the funds were supplied in small amounts; for the Spartacists adhered to the principle of printing only as much as their organization could disseminate. It was not until after November 9, 1918, that possibilities for dissemination of propaganda manifestly increased.

In November, 1918, however, Spartacus needed more than propaganda; it required leadership and popular support. We have seen that Liebknecht failed to provide competent leadership, and that the Spartacists were never more than a small minority among the many thousands of workers who demonstrated against the government during the revolutionary months. During these days he had practically no support from the skilled and intelligent workers. The revolutionary shop stewards, not Liebknecht, exerted the practical influence among the factory workers. The stewards controlled the most effective revolutionary elements; but they refused to amalgamate with the Spartacists who discredited everything "the honorable leftists" stood for; and they withheld their support from Liebknecht during the critical days of January, 1919.

Those who actively supported Liebknecht were a minority who had nothing to lose and everything to gain by a real social revolution. They can be labeled, without much fear of contradiction, as "dissatisfied elements of all sorts." These included young people, without property, experience, or political judgment; the "crazy fringe"; "army deserters and stragglers"; "liberated prisoners"; the "rabble elements"; the "utopian radicals"; the "dregs of the German labor movement" — in short, the "proletariat of rogues". Deprived of support from workers who were politically and industrially educated, Liebknecht appealed to the mobs which were under the influence of criminal elements and adventurers — the same people who in January, 1919, took the lead in occupying the newspaper quarter of Berlin and whose actions he loyally supported.

Liebknecht indeed confessed that he was the leader of unskilled, not skilled workers. Though skilled workers formally recognized the International, according to him, they also had a country. Their leaders voted against the war credits, but they were also the best

patriots and believers in national defense. The skilled workers were the quagmire of the working class. The unskilled, however, represented the proletariat in the true sense. They had no country. They had nothing to lose in their "countries" *(Herrschaftsorganizationen)* except their chains and everything to gain by joining the international brotherhood of men.

It was of tragic import for Liebknecht that during his last months he identified himself almost exclusively with the questionable elements of German society. His failure to disassociate himself from this group, which he could have cut loose by splitting the KPD, and to win the support of the "working class aristocracy", had its deleterious effects also in another direction. It precluded any support from the soldiers who may have entertained cooperation with him. Although the Spartacists exerted little influence in the army during the war, the formation of soldiers' councils and their backing of the "Hamburg Points" and the Socialist republic after November, 1918, showed that the worker-soldiers were ready to change the military as well as the political and social character of the German state. But for the same reasons that the workers supported Ebert, the soldiers permitted him and not Liebknecht to mislead them. The final touch to Liebknecht's failure to win the sympathy of the soldiers came on January 8, 1919, when the battalion which claimed him as one of its members during the war, and which proudly adopted the name "Liebknecht Company" in his honor, issued a manifesto which denounced his current criminal activities and pledged its full loyalty to Ebert. Liebknecht's abortive attempts to create a Red army should have warned him, if he believed in the Russian example, against the January Spartacist adventure.

Liebknecht's miscarriage and death no doubt affected the nature of future relations between German and Russian Communists. He not only relied heavily on the Russian experience, but also on Russian assistance, to lead him toward the goal of German Bolshevism. According to Paul Milyukov, a former member of Prince Lvov's provisional government in Russia (1917), Liebknecht contracted a secret treaty with the Bolsheviks in 1918, which specified that "a Russian army would take the offensive to support a Spartacist uprising in Berlin." In return for this support, Liebknecht promised to establish a German Red army of 500,000 men after defeating the Ebert government. This agreement must have spurred Liebknecht on to commit his January folly, against the advice of Luxemburg

who disagreed with Lenin on theoretical grounds and feared Russian leadership in the international Socialist movement.

It is reasonably safe to record, however, that Liebknecht in all probability would have strenuously objected to Lenin's Bolshevism once its true nature became apparent to him. Lenin had got no secure foothold among the German Spartacists before 1919 largely because of Luxemburg's opposition, though Liebknecht, momentarily intoxicated by his own revolutionary optimism, supported him under the illusion that Lenin believed in the existence of strong revolutionary mass parties as the basis for the new International. In the end, Liebknecht, the idealist, probably would not have compromised with Lenin's realistic concept of the professional revolutionary elite and limited state capitalism. Thus the deaths of Liebknecht and Luxemburg deprived the German section of the Socialist movement of the only leadership with sufficient authority to prevent the surrender of the KPD to Russian state policy. Fatally exposed to Russian influence, the KPD became a tool of Bolshevik policy after the war.[28]

Russian interference in the affairs of the KPD further strengthened the cause of German Rightists, who used the danger of Bolshevism as their excuse for a clean bill of health. German temper inclined to shift quite naturally to the Right at the signal of the slightest disturbance from the Left. This is evidenced by the gruesome figures of political murders in the years 1919-1923, a period of frequent reactionary and communist putsches against the Weimar republic. The Right was responsible for 354 political assassinations; and none of these crimes were properly punished. The Left, mostly Communists, committed twenty-two political assassinations, of which seventeen were brought to justice. Liebknecht, no doubt, would never have survived this period of wholesale murder had he not been done to death in 1919.

Although Liebknecht did not live to witness them, he unchained events and trends in his pursuit of revolutionary Socialism, which have in one way or another in the past generation fostered the growth of the twin nightmares of Fascism and Communism. The revival of post-war German militarism, which he sought to destroy, but which he by his tactics helped to resurrect, became the hotbed of Nazism. The Free Corps, which Noske organized and used against the Spartacists in January, 1919, were later absorbed by the Nazi SA *(Sturmabteilungen,* or Storm Troops) and SS *(Schutzstaffeln,* or Elite Guards) and the Nazi party. The Nazis throve on the "stab-in-the-

back" legend, in which Liebknecht and his kind, not the Allied armies, were cast in the responsible role for Germany's military defeat in World War I. The answer to a product of this legend—Nazi-inspired super-race nationalism—was World War II, unconditional surrender, and utter devastation.

The Nazi monster also fed on a diet of hysteria against the threat of Russian Bolshevism, whose influence in German politics was facilitated in part by the absence of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, who may have been able to interpose effective resistance against it. It will never be proved conclusively, of course, that Liebknecht would have resisted Bolshevik influence in German politics, had he lived long enough to do so. East German Communists after World War II, fully recognizing this fact, have remoulded Liebknecht historically according to directions from Moscow.[11] Thus a primary historical function of Liebknecht has been to serve twin evil masters which at the end of a "half-century of conflict" have been responsible for untold misery and suffering.

Confusing times and confusing issues always becloud historical judgment. To this the answer-seeking words of Sumner Welles, United States Undersecretary of State during World War II, give painful testimony: "Had there been enough Karl Liebknechts the future of Germany and of the world might have been different."[12] Different, yes —but not better.

[1] See below, pp. 154, 158, 171f.
[2] See below, pp. 156, 161, 170f.
[3] See below, pp. 150f.
[4] See above, p. 110.
[5] *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund).* Hereafter cited as KPD.
[6] Other members of the KPD central committee were: Hermann Duncker, Käte Duncker, Eberlein, Paul Frölich (as representative of the Bremen left-wing radicals), Lange, Jogiches, Levi, Ernst Meyer, Pieck, and Thalheimer.
[7] *Was will der Spartakusbund?*
[8] Spartacist Paul Frölich contended that the occupation of the newspaper buildings was led by *agents-provocateurs* hired by the government, and that the Spartacists fell for the bait. *Rosa Luxemburg,* 320.
[9] Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Berlin, 1952), 5, 146.
[10] For an intimate account of the subsequent struggle within the KPD over the matter of Russian influence, see Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948).
[11] See for example, Karl Liebknecht, *Ausgewählte Reden, Briefe und Aufsätze,* ed. by Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute beim ZK der SED, (Berlin, 1952).
[12] Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York, 1944), 16.

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