

KARL LIEBKNECHT

Murdered January 15, 1919 by the German Junkers and their Socialist Allies By **KARL RADEK**

Continued from Page 1

masses of skilled workers more endurable conditions of living, it thereby restrained them from sharp revolutionary struggle. In appearance, socialism became "red-cheeked". The party organizations grew, the trade unions bloomed. Revolutionary resolutions were adopted at branch meetings and the party conventions. But in practice the struggle was carried on only for small improvements in material conditions of the workers, not for the revolutionary overthrow. And since deeds are as decisive in the character of a party as they are in determining the character of a man, the social democracy became a party of reform and not of revolution, no matter how revolutionary were the words it employed.

Imbued with Revolutionary Traditions

Karl Liebknecht, who grew to his youth in the period of this moderation and petrification, who followed political and social events with the greatest concern, even if he had not yet then put his hand actively to politics, was in a way already insured by heredity against this bourgeoisification and mechanization of the revolutionary spirit. In the house of Wilhelm Liebknecht lived the traditions of 1848, the traditions of the revolution and the struggle for the republic.

Ten years ago it had already struck me, when I had the opportunity to become acquainted for the first time with the German party leadership, that Karl Liebknecht was the only one of the "permanent" leaders for whom republicanism was no purely theoretical creed, but a practical burning question. And, secondly, what caught one's eye was the fact of how little petrified he was in the conception that the evolution would be slow, that neither the state nor social relations would be set into motion before long. In this connection, it was for him no question at all of the theoretical weighing of forces, that would soon bring quiet, "peaceful" Europe into rebellion. The situation was not yet revolutionary, it was necessary to go to the masses in order to arouse them. And here another characteristic feature of Liebknecht comes to light. Before the war he was frequently reproached because he was very "broad" in his conceptions, that every form of activity was dear to him, even if it were not of much importance "in principle". The basis of this accusation was formed by the, for Germany, unusual animation of Liebknecht which did not allow him to give up any method of influencing the workers on the ground of some doctrinaire considerations. This also explains his intervention in the movement for withdrawal from the church. He had a good eye for new requirements, for new movements opening a road.

When he entered politics, the first signs of the imperialism that was growing stronger in Germany also, began to be marked, the strides of capital beyond the "fatherland's frontiers" for new sources of profit. The party divined the dangers of war arising from it, but only Liebknecht saw it in real life as the Moloch that stretched out its arm for millions of proletarian youth. That is how he was one of the few who hurried to the threatened youth to summon them against these dangers. The party forbade special anti-militarist agitation. It declared that the education of the proletarian youth must by itself arm them against the militaristic spirit and that the whole struggle of the proletariat against capitalism was at the same time a struggle against militarism. But Liebknecht felt the falseness of these objections "in principle". He saw that the "education" of the proletarian youth alone did not suffice, but that the youth must be stirred up specifically against militarism. He knew very well that militarism could only be smashed together with capitalism by the proletarian revolution, but he understood how important it is for the revolution to make it clear to the young proletarians forced into a uniform that their liberation from militarism could only be part of the general political struggle for freedom. The party leaders shook their heads over the special actions of this "hot-head" but the young Liebknecht stuck tenaciously to his cause. His revolutionary feelings drove him to it inexorably.

The consciousness of the threatening international danger fortified the inherited feelings of internationalism in Liebknecht. He was one of the few in Germany who

had the most ardent desire to know how things stood in the brother parties, not only in France and Russia but in any small Balkan party.

His trips to America and France, his close relations with the Russian comrades sprang from the consciousness of how immeasurably important it is to keep up international relations. And how thoroughly, how tirelessly he had himself enlightened on the complicated Russian questions during the trip to the International Congress in Copenhagen we made together with Leon Trotsky from Berlin: We know that for Liebknecht the International is no formal alliance of various parties, but it is his real fatherland as the principles of the Spartakusbund later said. The most precious political qualities of Liebknecht, even before the war, had to make him unpopular among a section of the leaders, while they created popularity for him in the working masses and in the International. He sprang too far beyond the limits of the German party not to be accused by the small minds of being ambitious. To this are still added his human qualities by which he also diverged from the prescribed type of a worthy party leader. He loved life; unrestrained and unconcerned, he clutched at it wherever it called. There was so little phillistinism in this youthful Absalom, so little hypocrisy, so much of the childish joy of life, that because of them many overlooked the deep seriousness, the mildness and graciousness of his nature. I will never forget how we once came to Peer Gynt in a conversation during a walk. He knew the drama in the translation by Passarge and I told him of the gracefulness of Morgenstern's translation. He came to me and for three hours—it was already long past midnight—read Morgenstern's translation. When he came to the scene in which Peer Gynt hears the song he did not sing, the tears he did not weep, the battle he did not fight, lament in the rustling of the leaves, lament a life that was not whole, the features in Liebknecht's face tightened and he said: "That confounded half time, and in spite of it we can, and must lead a full life." Thus he was before the war, a fiery agitator, an energetic politician, a hothead, animated and jovial, a favorite of the women, a man good—as the Poles say—for fighting and drinking. In every gesture he was the son of his father, of the great leader of the people, of the great, lively man who could laugh like a child.

There came the war and its fire forged out of all these elements of the Liebknecht temperament the hero of the German working class.

The Imperialist War Comes

The war came. With the first reports the rumor reached the outside that Liebknecht together with Rosa Luxemburg, had been shot. The report over-anticipated the reality, but it showed that outside of Germany friend and foe knew from whom the struggle against the powers of war might be expected. Liebknecht was stirred by these precipitate events. On the threshold of the heroic period of his life he paid his last obligation to the party whose revolutionary power was his vanishing dream. The belief that August 4 would remain only a dismal episode caused him to maintain discipline and to abandon an open protest against the war on August 4. After a few days he saw that he had committed a great mistake. He drew closer to Rosa Luxemburg, whose strictly laid-down theoretical line was foreign to his broad, questing nature and there arose between them, in spite of all differences in their natures, a life and death alliance.

In the first weeks of the war, they seek to go to the working masses; the government prohibits public meetings. Liebknecht is determined to raise the banner of rebellion at the second voting of credits. He endeavors to arrive at a concerted action by the fourteen deputies who voted against the granting of war credits in the Reichstag fraction. They refuse. Liebknecht, whom the cravens later accused of acting only out of conceit so as to shine as the only one, fought to the last moment in order to draw with him, out of the troop of hesitant colleagues, at least two, or even one, into the path of the joint struggle. It was miserable to see how, although he employed every means of intellectual and moral suasion, he was nevertheless unable to shake a single one in a fraction of over

a hundred men, to make it clear to one of them that it was necessary to break with all putrid compromises. It showed how much, in the final analysis, the collapse of leadership was a moral problem. Liebknecht remained alone. His features hardened, a bitter line was drawn around his lips. He determined to proceed by himself, despite the dissuasions of his friends. In that hour I saw how the last doubt vanished in Liebknecht, the last softness, how the great moral power was released that did not depart from him until death: the iron determination to open the road of the reawakening of socialism even if it were necessary to parry every spear with his own breast.

Workers Stand By Liebknecht

The struggle for the mud-trampled banner of socialism was taken up entirely in the open. The entire press sought to suppress Liebknecht, in part by calumny, in part by making a bagatelle of his deed. He was to be terrorized by threats and by the suggestion that his sacrifice was futile. Yet thousands stood up for him. The declaration on his motive for his separate vote was copied and mimeographed by thousands of workers; it passed from hand to hand, aroused a feeling of responsibility and united men and women in struggle. Liebknecht became the storm center of the decisive opposition. Towards the end of December, 1914, when I arrived in Switzerland, it became clear to me to the full extent how fruitfully his deed had taken effect internationally. It was the first sign visible from afar that there were revolutionary forces in Germany. Lenin, that man devoid of all phrase, who probably measured most deeply the collapse of the International immediately understood that the decision to raise the banner of rebellion against the whole fraction was a decision that gave the signal for imperishable deeds. Liebknecht's name became one of the best beloved in the growing vanguard of the Russian proletariat, and it was no different in France, in Italy. In his *Le Feu*, Barbusse erected a monument to him as the only German, who illuminated the last point of French socialism like a star in the dark night. In October 1915, when the dispersed parts of the militant remnants of the old International gathered in Zimmerwald, and Ledebour, answering attacks from the Left, declared in the name of his partisans (later the Independents) that there was no Liebknecht fraction, Trotsky shouted out to him, amid the lively acclaim of the French and Italians: "For us there is only the fraction of Liebknecht."

When the report arrived of his arrest on Potsdamerplatz, many friends outside of Germany asked why one in his exposed position participated in the demonstration. Many saw in it a sign of a great internal agitation that must be capable of dominating a leader. What drove him to the streets was however, also consciousness of duty. Confidence in the social democratic phrase had, thanks to the betrayal of the social democracy, sunk so low that whoever wanted to form a new revolutionary power could not limit himself to intellectual general staff service behind the battle-front. Liebknecht's "recklessness" was profound wisdom and his prison martyrdom did more for the revolution than all the "cautious" endeavors of a whole party could do. The nucleus of Karl Liebknecht became a center of a radiating moral power that no measures of isolation could dam. The "I dare it!" reverberated throughout the world, stirring up imitation.

The Russian revolution broke out, the first army of imperialism mutilated, the first army of socialism began to be formed. As we sat in Brest-Litovsk around the conference table with Count Mirbach and General Hoffmann, we spoke over their heads to the prison convict and his people. The German proletariat responded to our call. The January strike broke out. None of us assumed that this was the victory, that German imperialism would yield, and in spite of it Trotsky rejected every compromise. It was necessary, despite the greatest danger, to show the German proletariat that we had confidence in it. It was necessary to show the world proletariat that German imperialism might smash us but that we make no voluntary compromises with it. Later, when we were nevertheless compelled to conclude the peace, to take the cross of Brest upon us and to retreat, we often asked ourselves uneasily: Do Liebknecht and his comrades understand our position and tactics? And Liebknecht

told me later of the torments he suffered in prison when he thought that all our sacrifices might be futile, that the German working class might not rebel in time so as to unite with us. He feared that we would go too far with our concessions, and summoned his friends from prison to act so that we would be spared the last bitter tear cup.

Fearful of the impending revolution, he was released by the government of German imperialism, which stood on the brink of bankruptcy. His first steps were to the Russian embassy. On the night of his release Bucharin let us know by telegraph that Liebknecht was in full accord with us. The joy of the Russian workers at Liebknecht's liberation cannot be expressed. Could he have come to us at that time no king was ever welcomed as Liebknecht would have been welcomed by the Russian workers.

When I came to Germany towards the end of December and could press his hands again after four years, he said calmly, without the slightest disappointment: "We are only at the beginning, the road is still long." And we agreed with Rosa Luxemburg and him that the distance to the end could only be shortened by tireless agitation, propaganda and action. Whoever saw how both of them worked from early morning to late at night, how resolutely they cut the last ties that still bound them to the world of half-heartedness by founding the Communist Party of Germany, whoever was there to see how they warned their own supporters against exaggerations in the midst of the revolutionary ecstasy, could grasp their profound confidence in the Communist movement of Germany.

Fallen in Battle

Liebknecht was not alive to see the new times. The first wave of the proletarian revolution bore him further than he wanted, tore him with it. In the storm he did not see the distance far enough. When the January uprising was suppressed and the social-patriotic government pursued his no one dared urge upon him the thought of flight, even though it was clear that his imprisonment contained the danger of death. He wanted to fling himself against the pogrom incitement. On the day the assassin's bullet struck him, he brought up the idea of calling public meetings in the next few days. Then he fell into the hands of the executioners who wanted to strike in him and Rosa Luxemburg the German, the International revolution. He fell in the first phase of the struggle, full of confidence and the consciousness of victory. He fell as he lived: captured at the battle position. And we, who knew him intimately with his merits and weaknesses, we who understand the immeasurable loss the revolution suffered when this iron warrior was torn from its ranks, we say at his grave: "For us he will be a model of loyalty to socialism, of devotion and courage without which the revolution cannot triumph."

Liebknecht was not only inspired by a deep insight into the objective necessity of Communism but the still deeper personal yearning for the completely harmonious life that is possible only on the basis of Communism, and this yearning sprang from an infinite love and kindness a sympathy for every suffering creature, a readiness to give assistance without which socialism is a delusion. The world knows only Liebknecht the heroic warrior. Broad sections of proletarians, who applied to him as an attorney, received humane assistance from him, loved him as a man. Liebknecht's courage was the union of his love for every man and his discernment that in the period we live in, individual suffering cannot be helped without beginning the life and death struggle for socialism. He fell in the raging struggle. And thousands will follow him to the martyr's death until naked, hungering, wound-bedecked humanity will have the leisure to remember its martyrs with love. Soldier of the Revolution his father called himself. To Karl Liebknecht fell the honor of earning this title with death in the struggle. The Soviet republic has created the Insignia of the "Red Star" for its most valiant son. Lay it on Liebknecht's grave, and may all of our friends know no greater honor than, through the achievement of this Insignia, to approach the spirit of Karl Liebknecht who went the road that we want to tread to the end, even should each of us win the Red Star only at the bier. Berlin, January 13, 1919.