

Revolutionary Socialism in Germany

By Karl Liebknecht

WHAT was the meaning of March 24, 1916? The eighteen delegates who finally decided on December 21, 1915, to vote against the first war credit, voted on March 24th openly against the proposed special war budget. While in December they issued a "declaration," they now gave the motives for their vote in a speech. The content of this speech, however, did not go beyond the declaration of December. Even the excuse that Germany was safe against invasion was again brought forward. What was it then that caused a sensation on March 24th? It was the wild uproar of the Socialist majority, together with the bourgeois parties, the infamous attitude of the president, the expulsion of the eighteen from the official party parliamentary group. But in this action, the eighteen were "object" and not "subject"; this action was forced upon them and they disliked a rupture so much, that they tried their best to avoid, still in January 1916, an open break with the treacherous majority, as well as tumultuous scenes against bourgeois parties. And even now on March 24, 1916, they play the part of offended innocence rather than that of showing the clenched fist of rebellion.

What then, is the meaning of March 24th? A true opinion can only be formed in connection with the general situation. The new "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" are the same eighteen, the "neither flesh nor fish" policy of whom proved a failure in December and again in the submarine issue on March 22nd, and again in the discussions March 23rd. Could you expect the lambs of yesterday to become all of a sudden lions?

Just now the so-called "losen blaetter" (loose leaflets) are published by comrades affiliated with the group of the eighteen. These leaflets do not even mention the important fundamental problems which are at stake. Direct taxes instead of indirect ones is about the highest wisdom of the program on taxation of the eighteen in the midst of the world war! They do not show any deeper insight into the problem of taxation. They do not even see, as was stated in the resolution of the Convention in Chemnitz, that direct taxes can as well be saddled upon the masses and that the decision as to what part of the burden will rest on each class, finally is a problem of political power, not a problem of tax reform; that it depends upon the political and economical situation as a whole, the tax policy being an organic part of the general policy. They do not even see, that the best possible direct tax on top of a system of indirect taxes may easily become a fig leaf of the system and a barrier against a thorough reorganization of the system of indirect taxes. Under the heading "How long will it last", the loose leaflets of the eighteen talk about war in sentimental language, without saying a word about the imperialistic causes of the war. The war is considered due to stupidity of the rulers! They give as highest wisdom the theory that Imperialism has led to a deadlock out of which the Governments cannot find an escape, so that they need the advice of the loose leaflets... a pitiable mix-up indeed!

And what about the stand of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft" in the first test in the Budget committee? Two days prior to the explosion, this group did not take any decisive stand on the submarine issue. Now the delegate in the Budget committee argued, on humanitarian declarations about the horror of the war, against the sinking of vessels without warning. No understanding was shown that the submarine issue is first of all decided by the ultimate aim of the war, as the result of a struggle of groups of capitalists for the control of the war-policy according to the sharpening

INTRODUCTION

Karl Liebknecht was sent to prison by the government of the Kaiser for four and one half years because of propaganda against the war. Released from prison by the Revolution, Liebknecht is now the dynamic individual expression of the Revolution.

On August 4, 1914, the representatives of the Social Democratic Party in the Reichstag, speaking through their official spokesman Hugo Haase, approved and voted for the first war credit. On the second credit, Karl Liebknecht voted "No!" On December 21, 1915, eighteen Social Democratic representatives, the Haase-Ledebour Group, voted against the fifth war credit, and on March 21, 1916 they voted against a special credit. This created a storm, the eighteen were expelled from the Social Democratic Party.

Many Socialists considered that these eighteen represented revolutionary Socialism, that they voted against the war because of revolutionary convictions. This was not the fact, as Karl Liebknecht makes amply clear in this article to the comrades, written after March 21, almost two years ago.

The eighteen of the Haase-Ledebour group subsequently organized the Independent Socialist Party. This party was neither one thing nor the other; it was against the war, but not on definite Socialist issues; it wanted to go back to the days before August 4, instead of forward to the new tactics and the new International. Liebknecht and other revolutionary Socialists in Germany attacked this party; and today the Independent Socialist Party, by its wavering and essentially counter-revolutionary policy, is confirming the analysis Liebknecht makes in this article of their tendency. The intellectual expression of this party is Karl Kautsky, the moderate and compromiser, the man who manufactured one theoretical justification after another for the Social Democratic Party's abandonment of Socialist principles, the man who declared four years ago that all Socialists were justified in supporting their governments since all nations were on the defensive. This article of Liebknecht's is an historic document and deserves the serious study of every Socialist.

of the war political situation, and a fight for political power in home policy, in which the scene was carefully prepared to stage Bethman-Hollweg as a liberal and moderate Imperialist, in order to facilitate the treacherous policy of the leaders of the party and labor unions. The delegate of the eighteen even went so far as to advocate again the abolition of the right of confiscation, to attack the English capitalists instead of the German Government at a moment in which this latter Government capitulated before the most unscrupulous war fanatics and needed the most energetic opposition. This policy means a continuance of the Baralong policy of Ledebour on January 15th.

Whether all of the eighteen and all of the "official" opposition in Berlin accept the responsibility for the loose leaflets and the policy of their delegates or not—a group, leaders of which express such opinions, are very far from a policy on principles, although they may claim so loudly. The formal combination of all kinds of indefinite oppositional feelings and motives is always a great danger, especially so in a time of world changes. This means confusion and dragging along on old lines, it sterilizes and kills the militant elements, which get into this mixed company. What must be the conclusion from all this?

The warning against uncritical overestimating of the action of the eighteen and of the events on March 24th. The warning, to keep your eyes open, not to forget that if we should join the eighteen unconditionally, this would mean the surest way to make the new group a shield to cover the governmental policy, and to make the 24th of March a mere phantom, just as December 21st has already become a ghostly historic event. In so far as March 24th means progress, this is to a great extent due to the uncompromising critics of all half-heartedness; it confirms the efficiency of these critics on the strengthening of the oppositional spirit.

The tactic of endless consideration and avoiding

of conflicts and decisions is damned by the events on March 24th. In the turmoil of a world war all compromising breaks miserably together. Whoever tries to move around between warring armies will be shot from both sides, unless he saves his life in time by joining one party or the other, where, however, he will be received not as a hero, but as a fugitive. The way of the eighteen was a round about way, and not a pleasant one either. Not one advantage worth while to a serious man in this serious period has been gained by this delay.

The masses were ripe for the test already at the beginning of the war. They would not have failed. The only result of the hesitation and doubt has been the strengthening of poisonous opportunism.

Clear cut principles, uncompromising fighting, whole-hearted decision!

Uncompromising Socialist action against the war, against those who caused it, who profit by it, who want to continue to support the war! Also against the supporters of those who slander the name of Social Democrats. Against the policy of the majority, against the National Committee and the Executive Committee of the party, against the Central Committee of the labor unions and all instances of the party and the unions that carry this treacherous policy. To counteract this policy with all means is now the main issue of the war against war. A struggle to gain the majority against the party, misrepresented by the demagogues of the majority. A struggle for democracy in the party, for the rights of the masses of the comrades, against the failing and treacherous leaders, who form the main supporters of the war. Against all of those who in peace time have played into the hands of militarism by opposing mass action in favor of law and order, and who now hang around in the waiting rooms of the army headquarters and the imperial ministers.

Now is the moment to throw away all formal considerations. The party machinery is used ever more and more without scruple by the bureaucrats to enforce their policy. Autocratic decisions are standard feature in the party. After the methods of von Puttkamer, power is used to force the opposition, the meanest methods of Prussian-Russian police brutality are used by the party leaders against the minority. The independence of the party press is disregarded with growing brutality by the so-called party majority. Even the censorship of martial law is beaten by the docile scholars of the military terror of the official Socialist party. War against this party all along the line, to conquer the party for the party! War against the traitors and usurpers, who must be driven from their jobs and mandates laden with the disgust of the workers!

Reconquering of the party from the bottom up through revolt of the masses, who will have to take their organization into their own hands! Not only words, but deeds! Away with all doubt and cowardice! Away with compromise and a policy of the swamp! Away with half friends, feeble mindedness and sentimentalists! Those are out of place where the fight is heart against heart. The struggle for a decision in the party is on! It must be fought without any consideration for the sacrilegists, the traitors, the deserters from Socialism.

To the present system of party politics, not a man and not a cent, but a fight to a finish. Those who are not with us in this fight will be considered against us!