

Liebkecht's Letters Present Position of Internationalists

German Socialist Explained to Military Court Last Spring Meaning of Cry: "Down With the Government!"—Socialists Must Fight Ruling Class of World, and Especially That At Home—Statements Smuggled Out of Germany.

While Karl Liebkecht, the most prominent and outspoken leader of the anti-Government or revolutionary Socialists of Germany, who is under sentence of imprisonment for four years and one month as the result of having taken part in an anti-war May Day demonstration in Berlin, was awaiting trial last spring, he sent two letters to the military court handling his case, in which he gave the reasons for his active opposition to the German Government and explained what the cries of "Down with the Government!" and "Down with the war!" heard at the May Day meeting were intended to mean.

It was Liebkecht's hope that these letters, which are a splendid setting-forth of the Internationalist point of view, would eventually be read in the Reichstag and thus reach the masses of the German people, but this was not the case. The letters were placed before the Parliamentary Commission which investigated Liebkecht's case, and on whose recommendation the Reichstag, by a vote of 229 to 111, refused to ask for his release, but this commission considered them so seditious that it did not include them in its report to the Reichstag, or to the Main Committee, summarizing them instead. Anticipating such a move, Liebkecht had made copies of the letters and managed to smuggle them out of prison to some of his trusted comrades, who, in turn, made more copies. Since that time three copies of the letters are known to have been sent out of Germany by the "underground route." One of these copies reached the New Yorker Volkszeitung, a Socialist Party organ in the German language another went to the Labor Leader, the official publication of the Independent Labor Party of Great Britain, and the third was slipped across the Swiss border for publication in the Socialist newspapers of the Alpine republic.

The two letters are given below in full, the translation having been made for the New York Times, and published on November 24:

I.

"To the Royal Military Court, Berlin:
"In the investigation of the case against me the records of my remarks need the following elucidation:

"1. The German Government, in its social and historical composition, is an instrument for the oppression and exploitation of the working masses; it serves the interests of the Junkertum, of capitalism and of imperialism, both at home and abroad.

"It is the unrestrained representative of the policy of world-wide expansion and the strongest promoter of competitive armament, and therefore of one of the most important factors in the creation of the causes of the present war.

"In partnership with the Austrian Government, it plotted to bring about this war and thus burdened itself with the principal responsibility for its immediate outbreak.

"It started the war with misleading the masses of the people and even the Reichstag (compare, among other things, the concealment of ultimatum to Belgium, the make-up of the German White Book, the elimination of the Czar's despatch of July 29, 1914, etc.), and it tries to maintain the war sentiment among the people by the use of reprehensible methods.

"It carries on the war with methods that are terrible, even when looked at from the standpoint that has prevailed up to now. The invasion of Belgium and Luxemburg; poisonous gases, which in the meantime have become of common use by all the belligerents; and then look at the Zeppelin bombs, which outdo everything and which are intended to kill all that live, combatants or non-combatants, within a wide region; submarine commerce warfare; the torpedoing of the Lusitania, etc.; the system of hostages and forced contributions, at the beginning especially in Belgium; the systematic entrapping of Ukrainian, Georgian, Baltic, Provincial, Polish, Irish, Mohammedan, and other prisoners of war in the German prison camps for the purpose of having them do treasonable war service and treasonable spying for the Central Powers—Under Secretary Zimmerman's agreement with Sir Roger Casement in December, 1914, regarding the organization, equipment, and training in the German prison camps of the 'Irish Brigade' composed of captured British soldiers; the attempts by means of threats of forcible internment to compel civilians of a hostile nationality found in Germany to do treasonable war service against their countries, and so forth. ("Necessity knows no law!")

"By proclaiming the state of siege it has enormously increased the political outlawry and the economic exploitation of the masses of the people; it refuses to enact any serious political or social reforms, while at the same time it tries to hold the mass of the people docilely in line for its imperialistic war policy by means of figures of speech about the alleged equal respect accorded to all parties, about the alleged abolition of unequal treatment in social and political matters, about the alleged 'Neuorientierung' (readjustment of political principles), and so on.

"Because of its consideration for agrarian and capitalist interests it has completely failed in its economic provisions for the people during the war, and thus smoothed the way for misery and the practice of revolting extortion upon the people.

"To-day it still clings to its war aims of conquest and so forms the main obstacle in the way of immediate peace negotiations upon the basis of renunciation of annexations and oppression of all kinds. Through its illegal maintenance of the state of siege (including the censorship, etc.), it prevents the public from learning unpleasant facts and the Socialist criticisms of its measures. Thus it reveals its system of seeming legality and 'fake' popularity to be a system of actual force, genuine hostility to the people, and bad faith toward the masses.

"The cry of 'Down with the Government!' is meant to brand this entire policy of the Government as fatal for the masses of the people.

"This cry is also meant to signify that it is the duty of every representative of the interests of the proletariat to wage the 'bitterest kind of war'—the class war—against the Government.

"2. The present war is not a war for the defence of the national integrity, nor for the liberation of oppressed peoples, nor for the benefit of the masses.

"From the standpoint of the proletariat it only signifies the most extreme concentration and intensification of the political subjugation, of the economic exploitation, and of the wholesale military butchery of the working class for the benefit of capitalism and absolutism.

"To this there can be but one answer from the working class of all nations: A harder struggle, the international class struggle, against the capitalist Governments and the ruling classes of

all nations for the wiping out of all oppression and exploitation, for the ending of the war by a peace conceived in the Socialist spirit. In this class struggle the Socialist, whose Fatherland is the International, finds included the defence of everything that he, as a Socialist, is bound to defend.

"The cry of 'Down with the War!' is meant to give voice to the fact that I thoroughly condemn and oppose the present war because of its historical nature, because of its general social causes and the particular way in which it developed, and because of the way it is being carried on and the objects for which it is being fought; and that it is the duty of every representative of the interests of the proletariat to take part in the international class struggle for the purpose of putting an end to it.

"3. As a Socialist I am a thorough-going opponent of the existing military system as well as of this war, and I have always supported with all my power the battle against militarism as being a particularly important task and a matter of life and death for the working class of all countries. (Compare my pamphlet, 'Militarism and Anti-Militarism, 1907, and the International Young People's Conferences at Stuttgart, 1907, and Copenhagen, 1910.') The war demands that we carry on the struggle against militarism with redoubled energy.

"4. Since 1889, May 1 has been dedicated to manifestations and propaganda in favor of the great basic principles of Socialism, and against every form of exploitation, oppression, and abuse; to the propaganda for the community of interests of the workers of all countries, which the war has not abolished, but has strengthened, against the workers tearing each other to pieces in fratricidal strife, for peace and against war.

"During the war this manifestation and propaganda is a duty doubly holy to every Socialist.

"5. The policy which I represent was outlined in the resolution adopted by the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart in 1907, which pledged the Socialists of all countries, after having failed to prevent a war, to avail themselves of all methods to bring it to a quick end and to use the conditions created by the war to hasten the abolition of the capitalist system of society.

"This policy is meant to be international to the last degree. It lays upon the Socialists of the other belligerent nations the obligation of doing their duty against their Governments and governing classes, as I, together with others, did against the Government and ruling classes of Germany.

"This policy has an international effect, as in spreading reciprocal encouragement from nation to nation it promotes the international-class struggle against the war.

"Since the beginning of the war I, together with others, have defended and given practical proof of this policy most openly and wherever possible, and besides, so far as possible, have entered into connections with those who shared my sentiments in the other countries. (For example, my trip to Belgium and Holland in September, 1914, my Christmas letter to the London Labor Leader in 1914, the meetings in Switzerland, which I unfortunately was prevented from attending in person through force majeure, etc.)

"6. This policy is not merely mine, to which I shall hold fast no matter what it may cost, but it is also that of a steadily increasing part of the population of Germany and of the other belligerent and neutral states. As I hope, it will soon become the policy of the working class of all countries, which will then possess the power to break the imperialistic will of the ruling classes of to-day and to shape the mutual relations and conditions of the nations according to its own will and for the benefit of all mankind.

"KARL LIEBKNECHT,
"Armierungssoldat. (Private in the Working Division of the rmy.)
"Berlin, May 3, 1916."

II.

"To the Royal Military Court in Berlin:

"In connection with the criminal case against me I remark further:

"1. High treason is the veriest nonsense for an international Socialist. He knows no hostile power which he could even think of 'aiding and abetting.'

(Continued on Page Six)

THE SPICE BOX

It is still the fashion in many districts to cover the wall with texts and mottoes—"Peace be Unto This House"—"Fear God, Honor the King"—"When you spit, endeavor to miss the porridge pot," and homilies of a similar nature.

So far the practice has not been greatly developed in the workshops and the factories, but a day may come when the profit shop walls will be adorned with such mural adjurations as:—

Love Your Boss.
The Shareholders Send You Best Wishes for Continued Activity.
The Foreman Will Tell You Whom to Vote For.

A correspondent informs us that some English Capitalists are already sticking up the following notice:—

LOYALTY.

"If you work for a man, in Heaven's name work for him. If he pays you wages that supply your bread and butter, work for him; speak well of him; stand by him and stand by the institution he represents. If put to a pinch, an ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. If you must vilify, condemn, and eternally disparage, why, resign your position and when you are outside, damn to your hearts' content. But as long as you are part of the institution, do not condemn it. If you do, you are loosening the tendrils that hold you to the institution, and the first high wind that comes along you will be uprooted and blown away in the blizzard's track, and probably you will never know why."

ALBERT HUBBARD.

LET THEM TRY IT.

Though bread and cheese are out of reach and pickles cost a quarter each,

Though spuds are high and cake and pie

Their upward course have started;
Though all the average man can make will not supply his kids with steak,

And even beans exhaust his means,
We need not be downhearted.

For dieticians tell us that potato peel and mutton fat

Cooked up with rice are very nice,
As well as most nutritious;

That any hungry man will find that scraps of water melon rind

Will satisfy a taste for pie
And prove still more delicious.

These persons show us how we may exist on twenty cents a day;

That people feed beyond all need
They say is past a question.

They say if we would just collect the scraps that other folks reject

When we prepare our daily fare
'Twould benefit digestion.

As I'm not very long on pelf I'm going to do these things myself,

I'd like to find some healthful kind
Of inexpensive diet.

And then about the cost of meat and other pleasant things to eat

I need not fret, but first I'll let
The dieticians try it.

—James J. Montague, in N. Y. American.