

## SPECIAL FEATURE

## The Second International

## Part I:

## Butchers of Luxemburg and Leibknecht

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**Introduction:** *Hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the world today are undergoing a weaning process, a process of realizing that "their" organizations — the trade unions and Social Democracies in particular — have turned against them and must be superceded by an organization of the international working class. Forced to confront the open allegiance to corporatism being sworn by the Social Democratic class traitors, many still hesitate to take the final step, to leave the organizational fold. They are still gripped by the sense that the Social Democracy and its International were once committed, in some misguided fashion, to the goals of the international working class, and thus deserve their loyalty.*

*This series is dedicated to destroying this myth. The Second International, the CIA's lackey for kidnapping and red scares, has never had more than a nominal commitment to Marxism; from its inception its day-to-day practice was anti-socialist. One should not be deceived by the brief periods during which the Second International seems to have stuck its neck out to preserve the working class. Every such "defense" has been predicated on cowardice, the thinking of the crafty bureaucrat who is out to preserve his organization from all sides at any cost. Actual leaps forward in the living standards and culture of the working class always came as a by-product of revolutionary activity. Whenever it came to a real choice, the choice between socialism or fascism, the Social Democratic leadership knew no hesitation: it chose the fascists.*

*In this first article, we trace the evolution of the German SPD from a nominally working-class organization to an anti-communist state apparatus, the apparatus which spawned the very seeds of the Nazi SS. In the second, we will detail how, despite deeper and deeper collaboration with the bloodthirsty industrialists, the Social Democracy fell victim before the relentless scythe of Hitler's police along with the Communists. In the third, we will show how a paper-mache model of the pre-war SPD was created by the CIA and British Intelligence in order to once more enslave the working-class to its "natural" leaders — an image not to be ripped apart until the depression crisis of the 1970s once again began to draw the irrevocable class lines. We now move to destroy them once and for all.*

From the time of Marx there has never been a middle ground between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary thought, but it was upon this very ground that the German Social Democracy, the core of the Second International, was born. From its very inception, the Second International tried to reconcile

nationalism and international struggle, laundry lists of "good demands" and a program based on the conception of expanded reproduction, organizational housekeeping and the mass strike process, **service to the bourgeoisie and the working class.** Its "class struggle" phraseology could not prevent it from being infiltrated and controlled by police agents at the top, such as Ferdinand Lasalle and from adapting to the shopkeeping, fatal conservatism of its trade union base. Marx himself criticized the SPD for the variance between the motion of its mouth and its feet, demonstrating in the Critique of the Gotha Program how a revolutionary method could never be adduced from the addition of step-by-step revisions in capitalist society.

The intensification of the capitalist crisis leading up to World War I had to strain the "international" amalgam to a breaking point. Pressures from both the right (the financially desperate German imperialists) and the left (which had been tempered by the 1905 Russian Revolution) intensified to a fever pitch on the German Social Democratic leadership. Unable to accommodate both sides, it had to make a choice.

#### The Infamous Choice

The choice came on August 4, 1914. After joining the French Socialist Party, the British Labour Party, and other International members in touring Europe with anti-war speeches, the SPD leadership broke ranks with the working class. On that infamous day it voted up the Kaiser's war credits. Their capitulation to war-mongering nationalism was soon copied by renegades in France, and later by a faction of the Polish Social Democrats led by Josef Pilsudski. Although bitterly opposed by the International's left wing, led by Rosa Luxemburg of the SPD and Vladimir Lenin of the Russian Social Democracy, these renegades continued to pose as part of the so-called revolutionary movement for years. It was the beginning of a career of open butchery against the working class.

The decision of the Social Democracy to support World War I should have come as no surprise. Bound up by its subservience to trade unionism, which is predicated on the maintenance of the employer at all costs, the Socialists did not change their ideological principles by putting their national bourgeoisie before the international working class. Shock waves, however, ran through the minds of those, like Lenin, who had evaluated parties like the SPD on the basis of their rhetoric, rather than the guiding principles of their day-to-day practice.

Once the SPD had crossed class lines, it could not turn back. It began to perform more and more degrading tasks for the capitalists — serving as sergeant majors not only for the carnage of the war, but also for the brutal suppression of liberties and life within its "own" country. The SPD leadership —

specifically Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann — took advantage of the lack of organized opposition forces to turn the hegemonic institution within the working class to the destruction of that class.

After defeating the anti-war minority, the SPD leadership immediately declared it would voluntarily act as policeman for a "Burgfrieden" ("civil peace") for the duration of the war. There would be absolutely no working class strikes to interfere with the war effort if the SPD leadership had anything to say about it.

The catastrophic results of the Burgfrieden for German workers were immediate. The bourgeois historian Carl Shorske (German Social Democracy) writes: "The year 1916 saw a drop in the bread ration, severe rationing of the already scarce fat and potato supplies, and, finally, the failure of the potato crop which led to the terrible "turnip winter" of 1916-17. Simultaneously, real wages began to drop rapidly."

By mid-1918, the German working class was living on government rations which provided a mere **one thousand** calories per day — thirteen hundred calories less than what is required for survival. Health conditions so deteriorated that the mortality rate among infants up to one year's age was thirty-three per cent.

Yet when strikes inspired by the revolutionary struggle in Russia broke out in Berlin and Leipzig in April 1917 over a new reduction in the bread ration, the SPD smashed the strikes. It confined its own action to suggesting that the government improve the food situation if only to keep up "the morale and the physical ability of German workers and troops for a better fight on the battlefronts." Lest the government take umbrage at even this expostulation, the SPD warned workers that the damage the bread strikes were causing to the German war machine were even "more objectionable than the permanent damage resulting from the continuation of existing conditions in regard to nutrition."

And what did the Kaiser give the SPD for its efforts on behalf of the German Reich?

- In late 1916, the notorious *Hilfsdienstgesetz* (compulsory labor mobilization law), a slave labor law prefiguring Hitler's labor laws, froze workers in their jobs and placed them fully at the disposal of their employers. SPD leader Karl Legien's General Commission of the Trade Unions helped the government draft this law and the SPD parliamentary group voted it up in the Reichstag!

- Abolition of freedom of speech and the press. The SPD leadership seized upon the occasion of a timid government demand for SPD self-censorship to purge the party's anti-war left wing of all influence in the SPD's numerous newspapers throughout Germany. This made it virtually impossible for the left minority within the party to defend itself from incarceration for the duration of the war. The ailing Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg, and countless lesser left leaders were put in "military protective custody" without hope of trial for the duration of the war. Karl Liebknecht was illegally drafted into the army to silence him, as was the leader of the leftwing Shop Stewards' movement. The SPD leadership of rightwingers breathed a sigh of relief at these government measures.

- Despite these measures, working class rage had built up to such a point that, despite complete SPD collaboration with the Kaiser's government in the

Reichstag, the Kaiser was forced to put the country under a military dictatorship led by General Ludendorff, who later became a key pro-Nazi general in the Reichswehr (German Army).

By Jan. 1918, virtually the entire working class wanted to end the war, but the SPD leaders — Ebert, Philip Scheidemann, Noske, Karl Legien — supported the war to the very end, including the annexationist aspirations of the German bourgeoisie and the Prussian Junkers (quasi-feudal landlords). Workers continued to stick to their old party of of sheer loyalty alone — all that binds the German worker to agents Brandt and Schmidt's SPD today.

That month strikes swept throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire — also Second International-policed — and into Germany. The strike subsided without visible results, but an emerging Communist leadership of the working class had begun to test its strength. By autumn following, the German ruling classes could sense the ground shaking beneath their feet. In Oct. 1918, a new government was formed under Prince Max of Bavaria and the SPD leadership was brought into the cabinet of the bourgeois government — something the "Marxist" SPD had always (correctly) condemned when done by working-class parties in other countries.

#### SPD to the Rescue Against Revolution

On November 4, 1918, the volcano of ferment which had been dampened by war demands and lack of organizational expression began to burst.

Sailors at the Kiel naval base, realizing that their officers were trying to send them into a naval engagement which would further prolong the war, mutinied and dispersed throughout Germany, spreading the revolution wherever they went. Throughout Germany "Soldiers displaced their officers, formed councils (soviets), and deserted in droves. Officers who walked in the streets risked having their epaulets and insignia torn off," writes one astonished bourgeois historian.

Within five days the strike had spread to every city and garrison in Germany. Prince Max rushed to consult with SPD party-head Friederich Ebert. "If I succeed in convincing the Kaiser (to abdicate)," asked Prince Max, "can I count on your support in fighting the social revolution?" Ebert replied: "Unless the Kaiser abdicates, the Social Revolution is inevitable. But I will have none of it (the revolution); I hate it like sin." (emphasis added).

Ebert, a saddler turned trade-union-functionary, then party-bureaucrat, was a servant of the working class in chains. Like union bureaucrats who enforce Rockefeller's harassment campaign against the Labor Party today, he justified his active opposition to revolution by the residual backwardness of his base. In so doing he led his base into what was increasingly the only alternative to revolution: military rule.

In 1918, with the spread of the revolution to Berlin, center of the working class left wing movement, there was no middle ground. Prince Max on behalf of the German bourgeoisie, consigned the government to Ebert's SPD and fled the city. Scheidemann, less sentimental than Ebert, moved to catch the SPD leadership up with the population in the streets by unilaterally announcing the Kaiser's abdication as a cooling-off measure. Ebert meanwhile established a secret telephone "hot line" connection to Ludendorff's successor as head of the German Supreme Command, General Wilhelm Groener. On the day the SPD

provisional government was organized, under Scheidemann's nominal leadership, November 10, General Groener called Ebert offering him the services of the army for "combatting Bolshevism" in return for the SPD government's necessary assistance in helping preserve "order and discipline in the army...." Ebert did not hesitate to accept Groener's offer.

With Ebert's agreement, General Groener was to send ten divisions from the front to put down Berlin's radical working class. But only 1800 soldiers showed up in Berlin...and even these disappeared in the course of their first engagement. The proud army of Imperial Germany — of King Frederick, General Clausewitz, and Bismarck — had ceased to exist. Starved and exhausted, it had no intention of killing its working class brothers; the soldiers picked up and sent home.

Germany in 1918 was in a revolutionary situation. Under the leadership of a skilled unconsolidated Communist Party led by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Karl Radek, a National Congress of Soldiers and Workers Councils had been formed and was contesting for rule. Yet the German working class had not yet given its allegiance to the program and self-conscious leadership of the revolutionaries. As Rosa Luxemburg recognized, an intensive testing and educational process through the class struggles of the months ahead would be required to consolidate and develop the revolutionary ferment within the class. Tragically, the international communist movement was not even strong enough to prevent the massacre of its leading cadre by the criminals of the Social Democracy.

The Social Democratic leadership was resolved to maintain power and the only order they knew — capitalist order. To do so in the face of the mass strike upsurge they were forced to turn to the victorious Allies for aid. On November 11, 1918 Ebert sent a cable to the American government asking for the supply of foodstuffs to Germany "without delay provided public order in Germany is maintained." Food shipment to Germany did not begin to reach Hamburg until March 1919 — when the most significant battles against the resistant working-class militants had been won. The Allied blockade of Germany was not fully lifted until July 12, 1919 — when the Social Democracy's mop-up operation against the working class was over.

The Ebert government was also complicit in mass starvation domestically. By sabotaging the expropriation of the huge Junker agricultural estates in East Prussia, he guaranteed that food production would be criminally limited. From the beginning of World War I to the end of Ebert's food control, a minimum of 750,000 Germans starved to death.

#### Setting Up Murder and Fascism

To hold the German working class within the political bounds required for them to endure the privations required by the devastated German ruling classes, the SPD leadership could not merely succeed by sins of omission. To carry out their police role against the masses of workers who still identified pre-war social progress with the Social Democracy, they had to carry out an aggressive, murderous policy against the working class itself.

The German bourgeoisie could not command a workers' army so Ebert conspired with the Allies and the bourgeoisie to help them build one. What they

created was a collection of subhuman adventurers and perverts culled from the aristocracy, the middle classes and military schools. **Ebert's close friend and Minister of Defense Gustav Noske founded, funded and directed a 400,000 to 1 million-man fascist army — the Freikorps.**

From January to June 1919 the Freikorps hordes — armed with flamethrowers, machine guns, and full military regalia — moved from city to city butchering workers. Their special target was Berlin, political center of the revolutionaries and the militant working class. On the pretext of a quasi-insurrection set up by provocateurs in Berlin, the SPD leadership sent in the Freikorps to "restore order," while the SPD paper Vorwaerts called for the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and the anti-war hero Karl Liebknecht. On Jan. 15, 1919 Luxemburg and Liebknecht were arrested and murdered — by fascists under the command of the SPD.

Said Noske about the defeat of the Berlin uprising: "Somebody had to do the job, and I understood perfectly well that it will mean for me that I must go through the German revolution as a bloodhound."

In March 1919 the bloodbath was repeated on a much larger scale. Freikorps units were ordered to shoot oppositionists on sight. Fearful at the continued growth of workers' self-defense organizations, Noske let loose an orgy of carnage, "justified" on the basis of false rumors that government soldiers had been shot down. In Berlin the Volksmarine, an army division which had persistently hesitated to carry out bloodbath orders, was informed that it should assemble to be "paid off." Like hundreds of Berliners who were shot down on the streets, the Volksmarine assembled — in order to be gunned down with machine guns. Hundreds of captured and handcuffed Berlin workers were murdered in cold blood.

Vorwaerts published the following resume of the March 1919 period "(The Freikorps) have performed a very difficult task and if isolated acts of brutality have occurred, our judgement can only be that their actions were only human...Certainly no one would be happier than the (SPD) government if such men (as the Freikorps soldiers) could be found in great numbers."

Despite every atrocity, the working class had not deserted the SPD leadership. In March it defended the SPD leadership through a general strike against the ambitions of the Freikorps murderers to rule in their own right — the Kapp putsch.

For five days of a general strike the Erhardt Brigade sat thoroughly isolated from everyone — and the putsch collapsed. Remoralized, the Ebert-Noske government returned. The Erhardt Brigade, with scarcely a scolding, began marching in tight columns out of the city. A silent hostile crowd watched from the sidewalk as they passed. A small boy laughed. Two soldiers stepped out and beat him with their rifles until he stopped moving. When someone in the crowd hissed, an officer barked a command, machine guns opened fire on the crowd. The Brigade then reformed ranks and marched in impeccable order through the Brandenburger Tor.

Yet within days of the defeat of the attempted Freikorps putsch, Ebert and Noske deployed the very same Freikorps butchers to suppress armed workers' brigades in the Ruhr. The "Red Army of the Ruhr," which had mobilized to destroy the Freikorps for good and had demanded a purge of the army and civil

service along with socialization of key sectors of the economy, was also suppressed by force.

Fearful of provoking mass defections into the arms of the Russian led international communist movement, the industrialists shelved the fascists for the time being. Social Democracy was allowed to "peacefully" preside over defeat after defeat of the German working class — right up to 1929.

The Freikorps, however, had a longer life. The SPD government allowed the Freikorps to set up a virtually autonomous state in Bavaria — the subsequent center of Nazi and other right-wing movements. Freikorps leaders became instructors of the Nazi youth fronts, and assassins for the police, government and judicially-protected murder organizations which killed many hundreds of Germans of all political colorations. In the words of one anti-communist historian: "Hitler needed the Freikorps and without their help it is highly probable that the Nazi movement would not have come to power."

The Social Democracy, now controlled directly on an international basis by Rockefeller's CIA through the Second "Yellow" International, is ready and prepared to carry out such butchery again. The German Social Democrats have advertised their crimes on the front page of Vorwaerts, boasting that the SPD was the force that prevented Germany from becoming the first workers' state in Western Europe. It is no surprise that the Second International is the main organizer for a bloodbath in Portugal; that the Second International has been the midwife of kidnappings and potential murders in Mexico this week; and so around the world.

It is the working class itself which must take responsibility for the activity of its leadership — the leadership of the SPD, the UAW, the PCI. The Social Democracy, which cut the head off the German Communist leadership, must today be decapitated. Its members will become socialists or fascists — there is no middle ground.