

# War and Youth

## Early History of International Youth Day

By Sam Darcy

THE split in the Social Democratic Party of Germany was presaged as far back as 1904. Not in any conscious manner, perhaps, but thru the growing realization that the Party was not paying attention to the real struggle against militarists. Comrades are wont to say that already at that early period Carl Liebknecht realized the right-wing character of the leadership. An examination of whatever material is available leads one to doubt this. However, even in beginning of his anti-militarist work Liebknecht was already striking a new note in the activities of the Party.

The "grey beards" of Social Democracy frowned on Liebknecht's activities and called them mad youthful adventurism. But Liebknecht continued his work which essentially gave him large contact among the youth—and this was to be of tremendous important in later years.

When the World War broke out the German Party split into three main factions. The bulk of the leadership of the Party supported the war, but not in a united fashion. They were split into two factions—the openly patriotic pro-war elements and those who tended to centrism and pacifism. Liebknecht, however, stood out as the leader of the anti-war group.

The test of this came on the discussion in the parliamentary fraction as to how to vote when the question of war credits arose. There Scheidemann spoke for support of the bill, for the rallying the Socialists of Germany in support of it, and for the calling of Germans thruout the rest of the world to come to the support of the Fatherland. The Kautskyites were for abstaining from voting. They said that the war was here and there was nothing they could do about it but that direct support would be impermissible. So they advocated absention—which of course meant giving support, because of the confusion that would be thrown into the party ranks. Liebknecht, however, fought against voting war credits and favored a militant struggle against the war. In this struggle, he was supported by Clara Zetkin now a member of the Communist International in charge of women's work; by Franz Mehring, the veteran Socialist who died shortly after Liebknecht's murder; by Rosa Luxemburg, and by most of the younger elements in the Party.

Liebknecht was overwhelmingly defeated in the Reichstag fraction. On the first vote he obeyed Party discipline and voted with the rest of the group in favor of the war credit proposals. On the second vote a short while later, however, he realized that this was a funda-

that the Party was going to split.

The bureaucracy, however, felt calm thinking that Liebknecht could do nothing against their united opposition.

The anti-war and really revolutionary elements in the Party began to sizzle with excitement over the betrayal. They were, however, mostly the younger Party members. The old veterans supported Kautsky and the others who had at one time given good service to Social Democracy but who had now collapsed in the face of a real test. Very little could be done openly, however, for the time. The kaiser's government supported the right wing and threatened extermination to all who took any revolutionary action.

This situation continued until the latter part of 1915. By that time the revolutionary youth, fired by the example of Liebknecht, began to feel more confident about the possibility of carrying on anti-war work.

They secretly called a conference of all the Socialist youth organizations of Europe in Berne, Switzerland. The border regulations were strict and the governments were watching carefully any movement which might develop along this line. Germany was at the height of its military success. Yet they succeeded, despite everything. Delegates from the youth movements of five countries gathered and took steps which had a marked influence on the whole history of what was to transpire during the next few years. The workers took courage from this brave display of revolutionary valor and began again gathering their forces for a renewed offensive against capitalism. Other conferences took place. And finally from these came the organization of the Communist International. Thus, it was that the youth was destined to play the leading role in the beginning of the organization of a new revolutionary international of workers.

The Young Communist International set aside a day annually to commemorate the heroism and loyalty that these young workers showed in accomplishing what they did in the face of an opposition that extended from the kaiser thru the allies to Kautsky and the Socialists. This day is **International Youth Day**.

At first, Lenin called the revolutionary youth the **vanguard of the vanguard**. Because, indeed, were not these young workers the leaders in those early days of that section of the working class which was destined to become the vanguard of the whole class? Today, however, the youth movement is taking its more natural place as a support to the Communist Parties thruout the world and as the rallying center for all young workers.