



# BOOKS



## TWO REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS.

SPEECHES OF FERDINAND LASALLE (Vol. III, Voices of Revolt). International Publishers. Fifty cents.

SPEECHES OF KARL LIEBKNECHT (Vol. IV, Voices of Revolt). International Publishers. Fifty cents.

Lassalle and Liebknecht each stand at the head of a historic movement in the German working class. They were of those gifted individuals that are thrust above the ranks of men by the tides and crises of social conflict to represent the needs of a period and a class. While both of them were popular leaders of the workers' revolutionary movement, their personal characteristics were almost completely dissimilar. Lassalle was an aristocrat among men; Liebknecht was thoroughly the man of the people. Lassalle was amazingly vain, a fop, almost condescending towards the workers he led; Liebknecht was none of these. Lassalle had a dozen different literary, scientific and amorous interests aside from his labor activities, and his friends were princes, princesses, monarchists and diplomats as well as workers. Liebknecht was completely immersed in the revolutionary movement and was an inseparable part of the class with which he fought for freedom.

There is no sharper contrast of the two men than this: Lassalle, leaving for Switzerland on a long holiday six weeks after the formation of the General German Workingman's Association, almost deliberately neglecting the essential work of agitation among the workers and the same Lassalle announcing with proud defiance from the defendant's stand in a Berlin court that he had prevailed upon Bismarck (!) to proclaim universal and direct suffrage; and the picture of Liebknecht, at the most furious point in the war, appearing at Potsdamer Platz on May Day, 1916, surrounded by his stalwart rebel youth, to call upon the thousands to make war against the imperialist war of the Kaiser.

But there have been greater contrasts in history, each period of which takes whatever is best fitted for its needs, for there were also many similarities in the two men. Liebknecht was a splendid orator, a man who could move thousands with his passionate eloquence. Lassalle was adjudged, even by a reactionary Prussian newspaper obituary, the greatest orator of his time. George Brandes said of Lassalle that the word agitator might have been invented for him; Liebknecht was perhaps even more tireless, persistent and single-minded a spokesman for his ideas than Lassalle. Like a Moses separating the waters of the Red Sea, Lassalle wielded a flaming sword to split the workers from the bourgeoisie and lead the former on the firm ground of independent proletarian action; Liebknecht hacked his way through the black mass of social-democratic betrayal in order to open a lane for the onward march of the revolutionary working class.

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These two new books are stimulating introductions to both of these revolutionary geniuses. The speeches of Lassalle indicate wherein lay his chief work. He set himself the task of divorcing the German proletariat, which was already beginning to take definite, solid, immense-proportioned shape immediately after the revolution of 1848, from the German bourgeoisie, from the "liberals" and "progressists." He had that rare ability of expounding with clarity, logic and simplicity problems which from the lips of others remain complicated, incomprehensible and abstract. In argument and polemic with the opposition he was brilliant, swiftly perceptive, and merciless.

All through his speeches, however, runs not only an annoying tone of egotism and vanity, an incredible self-assurance of leadership, but also the false notes of his utopian projects and policies, for which Marx on more than one occasion attacked him. Lassalle, who at one time placed the period of labor's final emancipation five centuries hence, proposed to proceed towards it by the organization of Productive Associations of workers to undermine capitalist production by collective work and exchange. The financial support for these hopeless associations were to come from the State.

Lassalle's constant attacks upon the "chaff" of liberalism, in order to win the "wheat" of the working class, together with the misguided negotiations with and reliance upon Bismarck which compromised him, brought upon his head the charge of "reactionary" from the liberal bourgeoisie. But the integrity of Lassalle and the magnitude of his service to the German proletariat is indubitable. He was an ardent revolutionary, a virile hater of injustice and class oppression. He was one of the most brilliant leaders of the German working class, and its first great organizer and spokesman.

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The Lassalle book is unfortunately marred by Jakob Altmaier's introduction, which largely discusses the relation of Lassalle to Marx. It is true that Marx valued highly and praised the qualities of Lassalle, despite the latter's frequent plagiarisms of his work. But it is impossible to estimate Lassalle correctly by minimizing his differences with Marx. They were unfortunately too profound for reconciliation and no one knew this better than Marx. The evil of many of the Lassallean theories, which had their first direct effect on the social-democratic party in the program of the Gotha unity congress of 1875, is still apparent in the work and program of the German social democracy today. It can be said for Lassalle, however, that much of what he said and wrote against the timidity and unreliability of the bourgeoisie of the last century applies with as incisive force to the Ladas role of the social democracy today.

Karl Liebknecht's was a voice that directed the German working class out of the black swamp of betrayal into which they had been drawn by the official social democracy. It is a curious coincidence that he was born during the Franco-Prussian war, which established the German empire that was able, forty years later, to command for its imperialist Weltpolitik the corrupted leadership of the party of Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Liebknecht, together with Rosa Luxemburg and those kindred spirits who became Spartacus, was the stormy petrel of the struggle against the poisonous corruption that was eating the heart out of the revolutionary movement in Germany. His speeches incessantly called attention to the growing sharpness of the militarist danger. At party congresses, in mass meetings, to his favorite audience, the youth, he persistently pursued his task of awakening the working class to the fate which was to overtake it unless it was alive to the necessity of combatting the many-headed hydra of imperialism and its child, militarism. His speeches to the youth are filled with warm appreciation for their receptiveness, insight and courage; his speeches against the jingoes of his own party are filled with the burning hatred of treason that comes with the love of the revolutionary cause.

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Liebknecht has left the working class and the revolutionary movement a tradition of glorious and honorable struggle, rich with courage and ardor. With the knife of the reaction in his back, Liebknecht could say, like Lassalle's Ulrich von Hutten: "To future ages I bequeath an avenging." In this period of revolution, the locomotive of history, the few years that have passed are akin to ages at other times, and the avenging of Liebknecht will come with the approaching victory of the workers.

MAX SHACHTMAN.