

The Scheidemanns and Eberts have publicly called their supporters and the bourgeoisie to arms against you proletarians. The right of self-defence itself compels you to reply in kind. There is no choice! We must fight to the last! Destiny has issued its inexorable summons to every proletarian and every revolutionary soldier: onward to the last decisive struggle!

Leave the factories, you working men and women! Your first reply to Ebert and Scheidemann must be a general strike covering every enterprise! All wheels must come to a halt. Get out, out of the factories and into the street!

Show the scoundrels your strength! Take up arms! Use your weapons against your deadly enemies, the Eberts and Scheidemanns! Forward to the struggle, to the annihilating blow which must smash the blood-befouled Ebert and Scheidemann! The destruction of the revolution and the slaughter of the proletariat, or the destruction of the Eberts, the Scheidemanns and all the other deadly enemies of the proletariat: these are the alternatives.

Be armed, be ready, take action, take action, take action! Long live the proletariat! Long live the socialist revolution of the German proletariat! Long live the world socialist revolution!

Workers! Comrades! Come out of the factories! Forward to the general strike! Out onto the streets for the final battle, for victory!

The Revolutionary Shop-Stewards and representatives of
the big factories of Greater Berlin; the Central Leadership
of the Independent Social Democratic electoral organisations
of Berlin and surrounding districts; the *Zentrale* of the Communist
Party of Germany (Spartacus League).

Source: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands Zentralkomitee 1958, *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, Reihe II: 1914–1945, Band 3* (Berlin, Dietz Verlag: 1958), Nr. 16, pp. 33–5.

Note: This proclamation was certainly inflammatory; but it was not a call for insurrection. What was intended was a general strike and a protest demonstration against the removal of Emil Eichhorn. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards took the lead, and the KPD felt that it could not hang back where the masses were clearly in movement.

3.2 *'Despite Everything'. Karl Liebknecht's last article, 15 January 1919*

General onslaught on Spartacus! Through the streets there echoes the cry: 'Down with the Spartacists. Hit them, whip them, stab them, shoot them,

run them through, trample them down, tear them to pieces!' The atrocities of German troops in Belgium during the War are put in the shade by those now being committed. 'Spartacus has been faced down!' This is the jubilant cry which runs all the way from *Die Post*⁴¹ to *Vorwärts*. 'Spartacus overpowered!' And the sabres, revolvers and carbines of the restored Old Germanic police and the disarming of the revolutionary workers will set the seal on the defeat... The elections to the National Assembly – a plebiscite for Napoleon-Ebert – will be conducted under the bayonets of Colonel Reinhardt,⁴² and the machine-guns and cannons of General Lüttwitz.⁴³

'Spartacus overwhelmed!' Yes! The revolutionary workers of Berlin were defeated. Hundreds of their best people were slaughtered. Hundreds of their most faithful supporters were thrown into prison. The workers were defeated because they were abandoned by the sailors, the soldiers and the People's Militia⁴⁴ on whose help they had confidently relied. And their strength was reduced by the indecision and weakness of their own leadership. And they were drowned in the immense flood of counter-revolutionary slime welling up from the backward sections of the people and the possessing classes... They have been beaten, and it was decreed by history that they would be. For the time was not yet ripe. Even so, the struggle was unavoidable. For to abandon the Police Headquarters, that palladium of the revolution, to Ernst⁴⁵ and Hirsch⁴⁶ without a fight would have been to accept a dishonourable defeat. This fight was imposed on the proletariat by the Ebert gang, and the Berlin masses surged forth in elemental fashion, overcoming all doubts and reservations.

Yes, the revolutionary workers of Berlin were defeated... But some defeats are victories, and some victories are more fatal than defeats. The vanquished of this bloody January week have striven for great things, for the noblest goal of suffering humanity, the spiritual and material redemption of the toiling

41 *Die Post*: newspaper affiliated to the German Conservative Party.

42 Walther Reinhardt (1872–1930), Colonel in 1919, later General, Prussian Minister of War 1919–20, later military commander of Thuringia.

43 Walther Freiherr von Lüttwitz (1859–1942), general commanding the Third Army Corps in 1918, and all troops in Berlin in 1919, military organiser of the 'Kapp *putsch*' of March 1920. In exile in Hungary after its failure; returned to Germany in 1921, drew his full military pension, and was not put on trial.

44 The People's Militia (*Volkswehr*) was more an idea than a reality at this time. See 8.3.

45 Eugen Ernst (1864–1954), SPD, Prussian Minister of the Interior 1918–19, replaced Eichhorn as Berlin Police Chief in January 1919. Dismissed in 1920 for failing to oppose the Kapp *putsch*.

46 Paul Hirsch (1868–1940), SPD, Prussian Prime Minister 1918–20. Removed from office in 1920 for negotiating with Kapp. Mayor of Dortmund 1925–33.

masses; they have poured out their blood and thereby sanctified it. And from every drop of this blood there will arise avengers of the fallen, from every mutilated fibre there will emerge new fighters for the noble cause, which is as eternal and imperishable as the firmament.

The defeated of today will be the victors of tomorrow. For they will learn the lesson of this defeat. The German proletariat still lacks a revolutionary tradition and revolutionary experience. And it is only through hesitant attempts, youthful mistakes and painful reverses and disasters that it can gain the practical training which will guarantee success in the future.

And what of today's victors? They did their vicious, bloody work on behalf of a vicious cause. To defend the authorities of a past epoch, the deadly enemies of the proletariat. But the victors are already themselves defeated! For they are already the prisoners of those they thought to use as their instruments. Their sign still hangs in front of the shop, but they have very little time left before their demise. They have already been pilloried by history. Never have there been such Judases. Official German Social Democracy, which sank lower than any other political party in August 1914, now presents the most repulsive picture of all, in the light of the dawning social revolution.

The French bourgeoisie had to recruit the butchers of June 1848 and May 1871 from its own ranks. The German bourgeoisie, however, does not need to lift a finger: 'Social Democrats' perform the dirty, despicable, bloody and cowardly work. Noske, a German 'worker', is the German bourgeoisie's Cavaignac, its Gallifet . . .⁴⁷

They are sowing dragon's teeth! The proletariat of the world has already begun to turn away, shuddering with horror, from people who dare to stretch out their hands, reeking with the blood of the German workers, to the International! They stand before the world besmirched, expelled from the company of honourable human beings, whipped out of the International, detested and cursed by every revolutionary proletarian. Oh, their domination cannot last long now; a brief respite, and they will be judged . . . The revolution of the proletariat, which they could drown in blood, will rise up over them in its full immensity. Its first words will be: Down with the murderers of the workers! Down with Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske!

Those who have been defeated today . . . have been cured of the delusion that they can find salvation in the help of confused masses of troops; or that they can rely on leaders who have shown themselves to be powerless and incapable;

47 General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac (1802–1857) was the French Minister of War in charge of suppressing the workers' insurrection of June 1848; General Gaston de Gallifet (1830–1909) had the job of suppressing the Paris Commune in 1871.

cured too of their faith in the Independent Social Democrats, who left them in the lurch like despicable scoundrels. In the future they will fight their battles and win their victories by relying on themselves alone. And the saying that the emancipation of the working class can only be done by the working class itself has won a new and deeper meaning through the bitter lesson of the past week.

'Spartacus overwhelmed!' Come off it! We have not fled, we have not been defeated. And even if they put us all in chains, we are here, and here we remain. And the victory will be ours. For Spartacus means the fire and the spirit, the soul and the heart, the will and the deed of the proletariat's revolution. Spartacus signifies all the class-conscious proletariat's need, all its yearning for happiness, all its fighting resolve. Spartacus means socialism and world revolution.

The calvary of the German working class has not yet come to an end, but the day of redemption is drawing near. It is the day of judgment for Ebert-Scheidemann-Noske and the capitalist potentates who are still hiding behind them at the present. The storm of events casts the waves up to a tremendous height, and we keep on being thrown from the summit to the depths. But our ship keeps a straight course, sailing firmly and proudly to its destination. Whether we are alive when the goal has been reached or not, our programme will live on; it will dominate the world of redeemed mankind. Despite everything!

Like the trumpets of the Last Judgment, the roar of the approaching economic collapse will awaken the sleeping bands of proletarians, and the bodies of the murdered fighters will rise up and demand that they take revenge upon the accursed foe. Today we hear only the underground rumbling of the volcano; tomorrow it will erupt and bury them all in burning ash and streams of lava.

Source: Liebknecht 1919, *Die Rote Fahne*, Nr. 15, 15 January 1919.

3.3 *Paul Levi's Fight against Putschism in June 1919*

(1) It is not the task of the proletariat to make any attempt to get to power itself and thus take away from the bourgeoisie the frightful responsibility for the Peace Treaty (of Versailles). In this situation any action that would signify a struggle for power must be unconditionally avoided . . .

(2) A putsch from the Right in response to Versailles is more likely than one from the Left. It would be wrong for the Spartacists to attempt a revolution at this time. Revolution is not a mad, blind process of running amok but a clear weighing up and examination of the given social forces . . . To undertake isolated local putsches would be merely to provide victims for the butcheries of