
Punishment of Political Offenders in Germany and America.

by Victor L. Berger

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The German government, according to a dispatch from Amsterdam to the Exchange Telegraph Co., intends to grant pardons to a number of politicians imprisoned since the war began, including the Socialists, Dr. Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Dittmann. A general amnesty, the dispatch adds, probably will be granted to all political offenders.

Dr. Karl Liebknecht, the son of Wilhelm Liebknecht (one of the founders of the German Social Democracy) is the most striking figure in German Socialism and one of the few German Socialist leaders who have consistently stood against the government in its war policies.

Dr. Liebknecht was arrested at Berlin, May 1, 1916, for participation in riots. In the following month he was tried on the charge of attempted high treason, gross insubordination, and resistance to the authorities. He was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment in a fortress.

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Dr. Liebknecht for several years represented Potsdam in the Reichstag. His constituency contained a large body of workingmen employed in government work. In 1913 he exposed the war party's bribery plot and accused Krupps of inspiring a war spirit against France in order to sell munitions. His bribery charges resulted in the conviction of four lieutenants.

Deputy Wilhelm Dittmann is an Independ-

ent Socialist. His name was linked in October 1917 with those of Deputies Haase and Vogtherr, other Socialists charged with inciting the mutiny of the German fleet.

He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for inciting to high treason.

All of them will now be pardoned.

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Incidentally, I want to call attention to the punishment meted out to political offenders in "autocratic" Germany — as compared with the vengeance on dissenters in the American "democracy," so-called.

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Dr. Liebknecht — a soldier, by the way — was found guilty on the charge of "attempted high treason, gross insubordination, and resistance to the authorities."

Sentence: An imprisonment of 30 months in the fortress.

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Eugene V. Debs intimated in a fine speech that this war is a capitalistic war. He must serve 10 years in the penitentiary.

Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes said something simi-

lar. Ten years in the penitentiary also.

Other Socialist who have committed the same terrible crime got various sentences up to 20 years.

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Deputy Dittmann was found guilty in Germany of trying to incite a mutiny in the German fleet. Five years' imprisonment.

About 20 Mennonites in Kansas refused to enlist because their religion, to which they have adhered for many generations, forbids them to kill a human being. They all received sentences varying from 20 to 25 years — as “conscientious objectors.”

And our noble friend Carl Haessler got 12 years.†

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The Socialist papers of Germany — even those of the Independent Socialist Party, which is practically preaching revolution against the kaiser every day — are in full swing, although one issues is suspended on some days.

Most of the Socialist papers in the United States were killed off entirely by losing their second class mailing rights. The few that are left were crippled so much that they can hardly exist.

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And all this is done in order “to make the world safe” for Morgan, Rockefeller, Schwab, and Woodrow Wilson’s Democratic Party.

†- Carl Haessler, a former member of the editorial staff of the *Milwaukee Leader*, received a sentence of 12 years at hard labor for refusing to accept military service. Haessler, conscripted into a Machine Gun Company of the 46th Infantry, declined a transfer to non-combatant duty and refused further participation on June 22, 1918. He was tried by court martial on July 8 and sentence was passed July 17. In a statement to the court martial published in the Socialist press, Haessler declared that hew was “not a pacifist or pro-German, not a religious or private objector, but regard myself as a patriotic political objector, acting largely from public and social grounds.” He stated that he was “rendering the country a service by helping to set an example for other citizens...in the matter of fearlessly acting on unpopular patriotic convictions instead of forgetting them in time of stress.” [*Milwaukee Leader*, Oct. 4, 1918, pg. 2].

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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