

THE I.L.D. MUST GROW

1935 Will Present Greater Defense Problems to the American Workers

By ANNA DAMON
Acting National Secretary I.L.D.

IN 1925, the working class was confronted with the absolute necessity for establishing a permanent, national defense organization. Worsening conditions, increased attacks against the workers,—organized and unorganized, native and foreign born alike—dictated the need for the I.L.D., and it was formed. Conditions today, repression, growing fascism, make the necessity for the I.L.D. greater than ever before.

In 1934, 57 workers were killed in economic struggles, shot down by armed forces, police, national guards, vigilantes organized by the bosses and their government. The New Deal promise of the Roosevelt administration—promises to the “forgotten men”—turned out to be something very different from what it sounded like at first.

The New Deal for industrial workers, for the unemployed, for the poor farmers driven to struggle by starvation conditions, turned out to be an organized system of terror and repression and wholesale violation of all civil and democratic rights. In the South, this terror drive has taken on especially severe and widespread proportions. All the old repressive laws, a Southern slave law from the year 1861, Criminal Syndicalism laws drafted during and immediately after the World War, deportation laws, have been dusted off and put into operation against militant workers all over the country.

HOW DO THESE CONDITIONS EFFECT ORGANIZED WORKERS?

By organized workers, we mean not only those who belong to trade unions, but those who are members of all mass organizations, economic, fraternal and even cultural. All organizations that carry on any form of struggle for better conditions have been and surely will be to an increasing extent met with repression and terror. Most of these organizations have no defense apparatus. In many cases, when the necessity arose, various organizations have set up temporary defense committees, especially during strikes. The temporary character of this defense apparatus is obviously unsatisfactory. As soon as the particular action around which it was established is over, it ceases to function. And

defense work is a daily necessity in the continued struggles for unemployment insurance, for relief, for higher wages, against evictions, for free speech, for the right of asylum for foreign born, etc.

Many organizations are not affiliated to the I.L.D. Whenever the need for defense arises, they immediately call on the local I.L.D., as an outside agency, to come to their aid.

HOW CAN THIS SITUATION BE REMEDIED?

The I.L.D. grew out of a number of temporary defense committees which dissolved immediately after the specific issue around which they were created was ended. The I.L.D. knows the experiences and weaknesses of such committees. It was created out of the necessity for a permanent, national, defense organization. Clearly then, one of the first necessary steps to meet the defense needs of a workers' organization is immediate affiliation with the I.L.D. Whenever an organization is preparing action, it should at once contact the local I.L.D., to form a joint defense committee, to prepare to meet whatever defense emergency the situation will create.

The basis must be laid by all and every means to create for every worker, a defense apparatus to meet the daily needs of his organization. Another important step besides those already mentioned for accomplishing this aim, is the establishment of an I.L.D. committee of 2 or 3 or 5 in unions and other organizations whose special task it is to bring forward the I.L.D. as the only defense organization of the working class, to carry on preparatory work for defense struggles, to recruit individual members into the I.L.D. and to work for affiliation of the organization as a whole.

ADVANTAGES TO MEMBERS OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN JOINING THE I.L.D.

One of the greatest advantages, of course, is the accumulated experience of almost 10 years of defense struggles waged in defense of workers' rights. Another, is the organized strength of

thousands who can be swiftly mobilized into mass defense and mass protest action. There is still another advantage, not as readily recognized, but extremely important. The I.L.D. conducts a constant struggle for the recognition of the status of political prisoners. Legally, there is no such status in the United States today. Workers thrown into jail as a result of their working class activity are treated like common criminals, given no privileges, allowed no literature, etc. The fight to win this status is an important one and could gain tremendous force and impetus through the backing of affiliated trade unions, etc., with hundreds and thousands of members.

In addition, there is the Prisoners' Relief Activity conducted by the I.L.D. which provides regular monthly relief to the families political prisoners leave behind them, and to the prisoners themselves so that they can purchase some small comforts to make prison days less dreary.

A WORD TO I.L.D. MEMBERS

It is, of course, the work of the districts and branches of the I.L.D. to reach into all workers' organizations with the necessity of joining and building the I.L.D. This can be done only by engaging in the struggles of these workers and by agitation, by spreading information and bringing them to the realization of the necessity for building the I.L.D. through their own experience with it.

Every action of a workers' organization must be considered by the I.L.D. as a means of utilization for building our organization and bringing about that relationship between the organizations that will achieve the unity of action so vital to the working class as a whole at the present time. Convince the workers of the necessity for the I.L.D. through concrete examples of action. Tell them of its role in the Denver FERA strike where as a result of I.L.D. participation in the picket lines and in the defense, 3 new branches were formed by the relief workers themselves.

Facing realities in 1935, must mean immediate action to build the I.L.D. into the powerful mass defense organization it must become in the fight against rapidly growing fascism in the United States.