

The International Labor Defense In Action

ON the eve of the Third Annual Conference a brief review of some of the campaigns conducted by International Labor Defense in the past year or so will show that while they have been of a variegated nature, covering every field and section of the labor movement, there has, at the same time, been a unifying thread that has connected one task with the other in a logical harmony with the work of creating a mighty instrument of struggle and defense for the American working class.

The work of the past period that overshadowed all else was the mobilization of a world-wide movement for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti. The International Labor Defense was the organizing center for the protest movement in this case. The I. L. D. does not believe in confining defense work to the tortuous and corrupted channels of the court-rooms. It was the I. L. D. and the militant workers everywhere that succeeded in taking the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti out of the poisonous atmosphere of the courts, and raising it as a banner to rally angry, determined armies of the people in every part of the world. Almost at one blow, in swerving the course of the movement from the hopeless, drab channels of the vindictive machinery of class law, into the vivid, tumultuous torrents of the mass movement, the legal red tape that bound Sacco and Vanzetti like Prometheus was cut like the Gordian knot. The case of Sacco and Vanzetti was transformed from a "law suit" into a burning issue of the class struggle.

Hundreds of mass meetings were arranged by the I. L. D. for Sacco and Vanzetti. The country was flooded with leaflets and special issues of its official organ, "The Labor Defender." Hardly a demonstration or gathering of workers for Sacco and Vanzetti occurred without the striking poster of the I. L. D., drawn by Fred Ellis, having its place at the head of it. The Sacco-Vanzetti united front conferences organized throughout the country, which embraced hundreds of thousands of organized American workers, were formed in almost every case upon the initiative and with the energy and experience of the I. L. D. The magnificent international movement of solidarity, which pounded with sledge-hammer blows upon the prison doors until the very last moment, was greatly aided by the I. L. D. which appealed by cable to the sections in various countries and to the executive committee of International Red Aid for renewed support to the protest movement.

At the core of all the work of the I. L. D. has been the belief that only in the creation of a powerful movement of the workers, on a non-partisan basis, but pursuing a class policy, lies the safeguard for

By MAX SHACHTMAN
(Editor of the "Labor Defender").

the successful conduct and conclusion of all its activities. This belief has characterized all the work of the International Labor Defense.

The work of building a movement for Sacco and Vanzetti was not, of course, the beginning and end of the activities of the I. L. D. Literally dozens of other workers and fighters have in the past year been defended, always on a non-partisan basis. The list includes men and women arrested in all parts of the country, belonging to different parties and organizations and holding various views, and victims of capitalist persecution in other countries.

There is the fight against the continued persecutions of the Passaic textile strikers who are being victimized because of the struggle they carried on for almost a year against the mill barons. Many of them have been imprisoned already, on framed-up charges, and indictments still hang over the heads of numerous others. Most of the dependent families are in a destitute condition and the financial aid that the I. L. D. sends to them every month is a real material aid to them and a spiritual support to the strikers in prison.

The fight carried on by International Labor Defense against the deportation to Italy of Enea Sormenti, one of the foremost working class opponents in this country of fascism, probably saved him from imprisonment or death at the hands of the black-shirts. Through our efforts Sormenti was permitted to depart for whatever other country he desired.

Sormenti is not the only foreign-born worker against whose deportation the I. L. D. has fought. With the same vigor it opposed the deportation of the three anarchist workers in Fall River, Massachusetts, and the Czech-Slovak workers' leader, Emanuel Vajtauer. At this moment, it is conducting the defense of Stephen Zinich, a South Slav Communist editor, who is being held for deportation by the authorities.

The I. L. D. has not been lacking in the fulfillment of its international obligations. It is no exaggeration to say that the campaign of I. L. D. successfully destroyed the value of "Bloody Queen" Marie's tour and brought to the attention of thousands of American workers the frightful terror against workers and peasants in Roumania. The new wave of persecution in Poland and Estonia was exposed in the United States by the I. L. D. and warning pro-

test sent the capitalist executioners of that country that the progressive workers of America demanded an end to the reign of terror in those lands.

The I. L. D. has been able in large measure to coördinate and centralize the work of legal defense for workers in this country. Thousands of dollars have been spent in the past year for legal defense in the scores of large and small cases that have come up in court. Every strike and action of the workers has resulted in arrests or indictments, which the I. L. D. spared no resources to fight. In many cases the prompt and proper action of the I. L. D. has been the means of releasing the arrested worker and enabling him to resume his place on the firing line.

Not the least important work of the I. L. D. has been its policy of sending regular monthly checks for five dollars to all imprisoned class war fighters. It means a great deal to the men in prison to know of the movement and interest among the workers on the outside, and to be able to purchase these little comforts—fruits, candies, cigarettes and tobacco—that they are otherwise denied by their jailors.

Equally important has been the contribution sent to the dependent families of imprisoned workers. The twenty dollars they receive every month from the I. L. D. is of considerable aid in relieving the hardships of the mothers, wives and children of these soldiers of labor who have sacrificed their freedom for their devotion to the movement of the working class.

The popularity of the I. L. D. has grown throughout the country, steadily, since its organization in 1925. It is as yet small and weak in comparison with its gigantic tasks. But it is an upward-striving movement of solidarity which draws ever larger bodies of workers into its fighting ranks. The coming conference will mark a new stage in this development and give a new impetus to its work.

Every new struggle brings with it new victims of class persecution and justice. The frame-up system does its work with the cold-blooded regularity of a juggernaut. The I. L. D. has thus far proved a dozen times over its value to the working class and the labor movement by its militant class fight for labor defense. The signs of coming great struggles, which are already now apparent, are also harbingers of greater battles that will be fought in the movement of labor defense, the movement of the great solidarity. The work that the I. L. D. has already accomplished permits one to say that it will be found in the van of the struggle—a shield of the working class.