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Ernst Thaelmann

INTER
INST **WAR and FASCISM**



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LABOR DEFENSE**

Do you know what it is to pass two years, day by day, completely alone, in a prison cell? Do you know what it is to have before your eyes not only the naked, miserable walls of a prison, but the sneers of the cruel, triumphant Nazi jailers? Never a friendly face. Never a chance to hear a kindly word. Is this not a slow assassination carefully planned in advance by a government of fascist murderers? It is a cowardly attempt to physically and morally weaken our comrade Ernst Thaelmann; a cowardly attempt to smother his incomparable revolutionary energy, so that they may protect themselves from the risk of such discomfiture as they experienced with George Dimitroff.

—WILHELM PIECK.

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Introduction

By ANNA DAMON

Acting National Secretary, I. L. D.

As this pamphlet is being published, Ernst Thaelmann, who has become the symbol of the struggle against fascism and war, lies in Moabit jail, near Berlin, where he has been shut away from the world for over two years. He is in the hands of the infamous *Gestapo*, Hitler's secret police.

His trial, before the People's Courts, is still being prepared. When it will be called is not yet known. But the threat of its arbitrary decision hangs like the executioner's axe over Thaelmann's head. During the years of his imprisonment Nazi terror has not for one moment relinquished its brutal hold on the German people. Ghastly executions continue, torture in the concentration camps has not abated, raids, arrests, cold-blooded murder are still the order of the day.

A lawyer who recently sought to assist Ernst Thaelmann was arrested. Three more of the former Communist members of the Reichstag and the Prussian Diet have been captured and murdered—Maddalena, Stamm and Rembt. Four more assassinations were added to the gory list of the mercenaries of Schacht and Krupp when they recently killed the Communist functionaries George Handke, Helene Glatzer, Willi Muth, Ludwig Einigke. The Storm Troops have foully slain Fritz Huseman, 60-year-old former Social-Democratic member of the Reichstag who, until 1933, was chairman of the Miners' Federation of Germany.

The charges against Ernst Thaelmann, aside from the general cry of "high treason," have never been disclosed. What the Nazis will finally accuse him of makes little difference. His crime is that he was the fearless leader not only of the German people but of the world's working class in the struggle against fascism. His crime is that in the face of all war preparations Thaelmann was the ardent champion of peace, of international working class solidarity against the warmongers of all lands. This, according to the fascists, is "high treason"—punishable by death.

The fight to free Thaelmann is the fight against fascism! The fight to free Thaelmann is the fight against imperialist war.

In this fight the International Labor Defense has played and must continue to play a leading role. The organization which fights tooth and nail to defend not only the victims of rising fascist terror in the United States, but also the victims of fascism the world over, has a real debt of international solidarity to the German workers and their leader Ernst Thaelmann. It was he who led them in their splendid demonstrations in behalf of the Scottsboro Boys. It was he who always pointed to the necessity for building the I.L.D. in every country of the world.

It is around the fight for his freedom that the I.L.D. now centers its campaign of international solidarity with all the victims of fascism. It is around the defense of the victims of America's fascist terror—Angelo Herndon, the Gallup miners, the Sacramento defendants and the new thousands of victims that developing fascism will bring, that the I.L.D. strives to rally ever greater masses of American toilers.

One of the strongest bulwarks against fascism in America will be a more powerful, more united International Labor Defense. Defend the political prisoners of today and the victims of tomorrow by joining the I.L.D. Add your voice to the ever mounting thousands in the fight to free Ernst Thaelmann, Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro Boys, Tom Mooney and all class war prisoners, by joining the only organization that fights ceaselessly to keep them out of jail when they are arrested and to win their freedom if they are thrown behind the prison bars, organizes material support for them and their families until they are free—the International Labor Defense.

THE LIFE STORY OF ERNST THAELMANN

JANUARY 25, 1933, was a freezing winter day in Berlin. It was so cold that people's breaths turned to ice in the air. A furious wind blew through the streets, making the cold more bitter. But in spite of the cold, the people of Berlin were gathering at various points throughout the city by the thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands.

Railroad workers, steel workers, gas workers. Young and old. Strong and weak. The young people particularly surged forward, their eyes glowing with anger and courage. They came in groups named after their comrades who had fallen under the enemy's fire. All these thousands converged on Bulow Square, toward Karl Liebknecht House, the seat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany.

"Red Front! Long live our central committee!" No storm more powerful than this thunderous cry of the masses. Then one voice rose above the rest. It came from the tribune of red-draped Karl Liebknecht House. "Long live the revolutionary united front!" It was the secretary of the Communist Party speaking, Ernst Thaelmann, acknowledging the acclamation of the masses.

Near him stood John Scheer, who one year later was murdered by Goering's cossacks "while attempting to escape." The workers of Berlin had begun their demonstration at three o'clock in the afternoon. They did not leave the square until late in the night, though it was twenty below zero. They were all there, filled with the revolutionary will to oppose the fascist menace. The stream of people seemed unending. The salute of the army of workers reverberated in the cold air. It echoed above the roof where, in the light of huge projectors, clustered banners waved. It shouted to the sky, "Long live Thaelmann! Long live the leader of the German working class!"

Five days later, the ruling class of Germany put the reins of power into the hands of Adolf Hitler. He was appointed Chancellor. Four weeks later the Reichstag burst into flame. The greatest provocation of the twentieth century was achieved. An infernal chorus of hate and Nazi lies resounded: "The Communists set fire to the Reichstag under orders from Thaelmann."

That same night, fascist bands descended upon the working class quarters of Berlin. Communists and Social-Democratic workers were arrested by the hundreds. The threat of death was posted against the leaders of the German Communist Party. It is important to note that these pogroms were launched by order of the government. Goebbels took personal charge. He was the author of the infamy that made the rounds of the bourgeois press: that Thaelmann had run away to Copenhagen after having grabbed all the money he could lay hands on.

But the beasts were caught in the snare of their own insanity.

The same edition of the Hugenberg paper (March 3, 1933) which carried a screaming headline: "Thaelmann Flees to Holland," announced elsewhere the news of his arrest in a worker's home in Charlottenburg.

The truth of the matter was that Thaelmann spent every hour in revolutionary work. When the police occupied Karl Liebknecht House, he immediately moved his office and carried on in illegality what he had always done in the open: the task of being the militant revolutionary leader of the toiling masses.

The Story of a Leader

The story of this man is the story of a worker who devoted all his energy to the struggle for the liberation of the working class, who applied all his zeal to the study of the solution of the problems of the working class, and above all, whose revolutionary experience placed him at the head of the German working class, this courageous army of workers who struggle for liberty in the heart of Europe.

He was born in 1886. His father, Jan Thaelmann, was a small innkeeper, whose establishment was the center of social-democratic activity in Hamburg, a place for illegal work. It was in this atmosphere of working class conspirators that Thaelmann received his first impressions. It was here in Hamburg that he passed his youth, going to work at a very early age because his father was thrown into prison for his working class activity and his family was left without resources.

Ernst Thaelmann for a time attended the Communal school where he was classed among the most gifted and promising pupils. He got up at 4 or 5 o'clock every morning to help in the house and then to join his father in making both ends meet, because after Jan Thaelmann's release from prison the little business he established brought in hardly enough to keep alive on.

And then school days were over. The family did not have enough money to follow the advice of Ernst's teacher and send him to the university. He went to sea, and when he returned he became a transport worker. At the age when most young people enjoy a carefree youth and spend their leisure time in trivial pleasures, Ernst Thaelmann, age 16, joined the Social-Democratic Party.

In the evenings he devoured all the party literature and at the

age of 18 he became a member of the association of transport workers.

At this time he was already developing into the person whom the world knows today: a worker who had nothing at his command but his two strong fists, his proletarian honor and his desire to work for the triumph of socialism. Every evening he carried out his duties as union treasurer and as a member of the local group of Social-Democrats.

In 1912 the authorities began to watch him closely because of his political activities. He was blacklisted. Nevertheless when his fellow trade union members offered him a well paying post in the union he refused to accept because he refused to become a party to the reformist politics already prevalent in the trade union.

From the time of his political awakening, Thaelman adhered to the left wing of the Social-Democracy and the trade union movement.

The Anti-War Fighter

While the reformist bureaucracy of the trade unions tried, from behind their shiny desks, to stifle the workers in the swamp of reformism, a policy that was directly hostile to the anti-militarist program of Karl Liebknecht and the other leaders of the left wing, Thaelman fought consistently against war in the very center of reformism—in Hamburg.

We do not know whether he knew Karl Liebknecht in 1908—but we do know today, a quarter of a century later, that Thaelmann, together with a score of fellow-workers, wrote powerful anti-war leaflets and spread them among the seamen on board the battleship *Emperor Charlemagne* which was being repaired in the harbor. These leaflets were not very important but extremely characteristic. They show the man.

Thaelmann was denounced by the leading officials of the Social-Democracy, but he was determined to enlighten the soldiers. He won the hatred of the union's board of directors, when he refused to accept a paying position. He became a complete puzzle to the mandarins of the party. But that was Ernst Thaelmann.

He was always like that and he remained unchanged. There is not a single stain upon his whole career. This is the man for

whom the workers of Germany, of Europe and of the whole world must struggle, just as he struggled for them all his life.

Evidently like most of his class brothers, he did not have much faith in the revolutionary spirit of the leaders of the party and the unions.

But he hoped that they would take all the resolutions they passed seriously and put into life all their declarations made at their congresses—as for instance, the Congress at Basle where they declared war against war.

And here was this man, never accustomed to bow to superiors, who resisted military discipline at all times and who was finally brought before a court martial in the very front line trenches of the war—for two and a half years at the front.

Many of the soldiers became drunk with the glory of butchering as many workers in the uniform of the enemies as possible. Thaelmann thought differently. He had no desire for these glories of war. Decoration and promotions were distasteful to him. His courage was of another kind.

His arms were more dangerous than bayonets. The enemy he sought, the foe that he denounced to his comrades, was to be found right in their own country. He distributed the *Journal des Bre-mois*, the newspaper issued by the extreme left wing of the social democracy, in the trenches. He kept in contact with illegal groups in Hamburg, which constantly sent him pamphlets and other literature.

On the Barricades of Hamburg

When the first and still vague news of the revolt of the sailors at Kiel reached Thaelmann's ears nothing could keep him in the trenches. Together with five comrades, he took the first train for Hamburg to take part in the revolution that was beginning. He quit the front of imperialist slaughter to throw all his energies into the civil war.

The massacre of the Soviet partisans in Bavaria, the horrible butchery of workers who were fighting for Socialism at the gates of the mines in the Ruhr region, in the streets of Berlin, set fire to Hamburg.

Noske had subdued the uprising in the South of Germany with the aid of his envoy, Epp—today a Nazi governor. He trans-

formed Berlin into a cemetery and "pacified" the western part of Germany in the same way. His goal was the North with Bremen as the first objective. The ancient Hanseatic city was besieged. In Hamburg the masses took to the streets demanding arms. At this moment all was not yet lost. A proletarian army could still crush the enemy's forces that had encircled the neighboring city; it was still possible to save the class brothers there and give for the second time the signal that had already been given six months before.

Thaelmann was aware of this. But such was not the case with the party leadership. Noske lost no time. The Gersenberg division, commanded by the famous Captain Denner, who was too late to defend the Hamburg of the profiteers against the workers, advanced every day. And what was the great Soviet of Hamburg workers doing during this precious time? It quibbled and discussed into thin air.

Then Thaelman intervened. He distributed arms among the workers and then led them to the armories and police stations where they found the bayonets thus far denied them by the Soviet.

Too late. While the first trains were leaving for Bremen, news arrived that the city had fallen. Several weeks later Hamburg itself was the scene of decisive battles. After the defeat of the "Bahenfelder" a counter-revolutionary group, the African general, Lettow Vorbeck, marched from Altoona onto Hamburg, which was menaced at the same time by naval forces on the sea.

During these stirring times, Thaelmann was always to be found, armed, in the ranks of the fighters.

During this period events followed upon each other so rapidly that dozens of years seemed to be concentrated into a few months. It was during these weeks that Thaelmann took a decisive step. For some time now, he had been guiding the destinies of the Independent Social-Democrats.

Thaelmann the Leader

He was known to a large public as a deputy in the *Bürgerschaft*, the parliament of Hamburg. He aligned himself definitely with the Communist Party of Germany and upon its advice remained among the Independent Social-Democrats only for the

purpose of leading the entire membership toward Communism. He led a gigantic struggle and emerged victorious. At the historic congress in the autumn of 1920 of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, held at Halle in the Saare, 95 per cent of this powerful group, led by Thaelmann, joined the German Communist Party.

Six months later, Hoersing, the Social-Democratic president, plunged central Germany into war; he tried to disarm the workers in Thuringia, Halle, Senna and Mansfield. He tried to destroy this great revolutionary center.

Thaelmann was the first to come to the rescue. It was he who led the protest strike of the Hamburg longshoremen against the bloody adventure of Hoersing. Thaelmann marched in the ranks of the hundreds of thousands of workers who went from the port to the Millertor. Suddenly an explosion resounded and human bodies flew through the air; the Social-Democratic senate had ordered the demonstration dispersed.

In 1921 Thaelmann made his first trip to Moscow. Here he met the victors of the proletarian revolution. He breathed the air of the first Soviet republic. He devoured avidly all the books and pamphlets on the October revolutions, the teachings of Lenin.

By 1925 Thaelmann was so popular a leader of the workers that he became the logical candidate for the presidency of Germany. In 1932, Thaelmann was again the workers' choice. During these years he was constantly the object of the deepest hatred and the sharpest attack from the Social-Democracy. In 1931, at the moment when he was being persecuted in a cooked-up plot against the safety of the state, he was deprived of his parliamentary immunity—his by right of his position in the Hamburg *Bürger-schaft*—with the consent of the Social-Democracy.

In 1931, the reformist leadership of the Transport Workers Union, which had only two years previously honored Thaelmann "*for his loyalty and devotion proven during 25 years of his membership in the union*"—expelled him from its ranks.

They explained this move on the grounds that Thaelmann, as president of the Communist Party, was too partial to the left wing opposition in the union.

All the hatred of the enemies of the people became more and more concentrated against the individual, Ernst Thaelmann. Several attempts were made to assassinate him. The infamous

Captain Ehrhardt tried to kill him. Von Techow, Rathenau's murderer, planted dynamite under the windows of his house in Hamburg. Only the fact that Thaelmann was away at a meeting at the time, saved his life.

THE FASCIST TRIAL AGAINST THAELMANN

In Hamburg and in Berlin files are piling higher and higher upon the desks of officials. Thaelmann's name is printed in large letters on every one of these files. Goering slaves sit behind the desks sweating away at the indictment.

In addition to containing all the crimes punishable by death, the indictment is also striving to avoid another Reichstag fire trial fiasco. These gentlemen of Hitler's know that Thaelmann is of the same heroic caliber of Dimitroff. They know he will conduct himself with the same revolutionary courage if he is given the chance. And so they toil away collecting a mountain of lies and plots and slanders beneath which they hope to crush the revolutionary truth embodied in Ernest Thaelmann.

A Line-Up of Villains—

1. M. AUGUSTE LASS (Halmut) member of the Prussian State Police Commission established solely for the purpose of preparing Thaelmann's trial. Once editor of the *Rote Fahne* (German Communist paper), he was sent to Danzig by the Communist Party in 1933. It was there that he exposed himself as a fascist stool pigeon. In this crater of imperialist passions, in this powder box that could set fire to Poland, Germany and the whole world, Lass began to organize a "*Communist Army*" on the frontier—a clear maneuver to provoke a war between Poland and Germany. It is known that he spent large sums of money provided by Gestapo (State Secret Police) and had at his disposal large quantities of arms and ammunition. The signals were all arranged. The Nazis were hopeful of a war resulting from this plot and if it failed—well, it could always be blamed on the Communists. Only the intervention of the Communist Party of Danzig and the Central Committee of the German Communist Party prevented the execution of this plot. This is only one of

a series of crimes against the working class accomplished for the Nazis by this traitor, Lass.

2. M. GEORGE SCHWARZ—who sells his poisonous pen to the highest bidder and loves the basest spying intrigues. It is he who gave birth to a book called the “Bankruptcy of the German Communist Party”—240 pages of infamous lies. The least of these atrocity stories is that Thaelmann’s wages were 60,000 marks!

Schwarz was driven from the Communist Party when it was proved that he drove his wife to prostitution and lived regally on the money she made. Since then he is steadily sinking from one level of baseness to the next. Now he is one of those creatures who spy on the whole world and sell their information to the highest bidder.

He furnished information about the Communist Party and the Red Front Fighters League to M. Piduhn, chief of the political police in the Ruhr. In 1928, he sold this same information to the French secret police in Dusseldorf through a Mr. Seldte, today working for the Nazis. He also worked for the Prussian Minister of the interior and for Severing, who paid generously for his services. He sold some of Captain Roem’s famous letters about his homo-sexual life to the newspapers. These are only a few of the characteristics of this charming fellow.

The International Fighter

On October 31, 1932, Thaelmann went to Paris to address a mass meeting to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. He said:

“On this side, just as on our side of the frontier, the bourgeoisie tries to convince the workers that their enemy is not ruling class of their own country, but the workers who toil on the other side of the frontier. We the Communists assure you, workers and toiling masses of France, your companion in misery in Germany, the German worker and peasant, is not your enemy but your natural ally. And we tell the German workers that the French worker is not his enemy, but his class brother, his comrade.”

Twenty-four hours later, Thaelmann was addressing another meeting, this time of German workers in the Palace of Sports. He asked them, in regard to the chauvinism being preached at that time by the leaders of Social-Democracy: “Is this our

fatherland, where the fist of the capitalists crushes and exploits millions of workers? Is this our fatherland where thousands of technicians, engineers and other intellectuals walk the streets besides their unemployed brothers of the proletariat? Only the leaders of Social-Democracy, like the fascists, can give the name of *fatherland* to this capitalist country of slavery and oppression."

To the Storm Troops

The words which Thaelmann addressed on this same evening to the Storm Troops gathered outside the walls of the Palace of Sports, have not lost their significance:

"We call the attention of the revolting S.A. and S.S. men to our historical struggle against the bloody 'dictates' of Versailles. We say to them: you who direct your armed strength against your revolutionary brothers and sisters—against the true enemies of Versailles—you, who on the orders of your fascist chiefs, massacre the loyal soldiers against fascism, there will come a day when your eyes will be opened and you will see that you have been fooled by your leaders. On that day you will see that you have been made the mercenaries and the slaves of Versailles."

The I.L.D. Fights for Thaelmann

No one can deny the danger which faces Ernst Thaelmann. The band of brown cossacks who hope to avenge the defeat they suffered in Leipzig with the liberation of Dimitroff and his comrades—this band of assassins who murdered John Scheer, is capable of anything.

They have imprisoned 200,000 political prisoners and torture them daily. They allow the wives and children of the political prisoners and the murdered workers to die of hunger.

But there is a force, a power, that brushes across frontiers and brings its aid to all those who suffer in body or in spirit, to all those whom fascism tortures physically and mentally. This force is the International Red Aid and its heroic section—the German Red Aid. Ignoring all party, race or national lines, they take care of imprisoned anti-fascists and their families as well as the families that the assassinated fighters left behind them.

Thousands upon thousands of political refugees driven from

their homes, from their families, from their country, forced to wander from city to city, from street to street—find the fraternal support of the International Red Aid.

More than once Thaelmann underlined the importance of this organization: *"The revolutionary worker becomes the ready game of fascist justice. Those thousands who find themselves behind the bars of the fascist jails, are guilty of nothing but fighting for the freedom of the working class, fighting against the terror and oppression of the ruling class. Families lose their breadwinner, children lose fathers and sometimes their mothers.*

"Millions of German workers, regardless of party or trade-union affiliation, owe these victims the duty of support in return for the sacrifices they have made. Do not forget your class brothers and sisters. Concentrate your efforts on supporting with all your strength, the I.L.D., the organization of working class solidarity."

Free Thaelmann!

Let each individual who reads this become filled with these words, Free Thaelmann. And with this idea: *every new act of protest, every effort to free Thaelmann*, halts the Nazis from inflicting some new torture on defenseless prisoners. Who is willing to be a party to the cowardly inactivity which assists the murderers? Who can feel that he has the right to remain silent when it is a question of saving the bravest of our comrades.

Thaelmann . . . this glorious name has become the symbol of all the enemies of the murderers who are destroying the German people, the symbol of all the enemies of the regime of bankers and landlords. Free Thaelmann from his dungeon! This slogan must unite all workers, regardless of race, color, or creed, all thinkers, all tillers of the soil. This slogan expresses the common desire of workers from Moscow to Paris to New York. It is the connecting link between the youth in Soviet China and those who demonstrate on the streets of New York City. Free Thaelmann from his dungeon.

The flames of proletarian struggle, the ardent solidarity born in the generous hearts of workers will dry the tears of blood which fall from the eyes of our martyrs. They will save the lives of Thaelmann and of his companions in misery in the prisons. They will smash down the triple doors of their jail.

FELLOW WORKERS:

This pamphlet is only one of the many ways in which the International Labor Defense is trying to organize the workers against oppression and persecution. There is only one guarantee that the International Labor Defense will be in a position to carry out its working class task of organizing the defense of the workers and the support of the political prisoners and their families, and that is if we will have a mass International Labor Defense of hundreds of thousands of workers and their friends, and supported by still larger numbers of workers.

Therefore if you want to help guarantee that the International Labor Defense will be able to defend all class war prisoners, and support the political prisoners and their families:

Join the International Labor Defense!

Support the International Labor Defense!

Tear this stub off and fill out the other side of it and bring or send it to the nearest branch of the International Labor Defense.

TEAR THIS OFF AND KEEP IT AT ALL TIMES

If Arrested—Remember These Points:

1. Give no information to officers. Only a name.
2. Plead *Not Guilty* and demand a jury trial.
3. Demand that the *International Labor Defense* defend you.
4. Insist that you be let out on your own recognizance; if they refuse this, demand that bail be set low.
5. Demand a copy of the complaint.
6. Do not sign anything.

Carry on your working class fight in the jail and in court.

Read "What To Do When Under Arrest" which can be bought for 1c. It gives more information what to do when under arrest.

Hold classes in your I.L.D. branch, organization, in small study groups of workers, on workers' defense.

I, the undersigned, would like to become a member of
INTERNATIONAL LABOR DEFENSE.

Name Date.....

Address City

AgeWhere do you work?.....

Union, political or fraternal affiliation.....

Unemployed initiation: 5c plus 2c for the book.

Employed initiation: 25c plus 2c for the book.

Employed dues: 20c per month; unemployed, 2c per mor

If you do not want to become a member of the Internatio
Labor Defense but wish to support it, write S on this and ch
the following ways in which you are willing to support the I.L.

Monthly pledge to Political Prisoners' Relief.....

Will buy the *Labor Defender* if it is delivered to me.....

Will donate to the various campaigns of the I.L.D.....

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