



NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD



*The legal arm of the movement
for social change*

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD

“The National Lawyers Guild is an association of lawyers and law students . . . which faces squarely the need for radical change in the structure of our political and economic system. Recognizing the fact that the legal system under which we live is the creation of our society, we seek to change that society so that it will more adequately meet the needs of its people. . . .

“This, of course, means the development of our skills in the courtroom, but more than that, it means the utilization and development of our skills in the large arena outside the courtroom—in the analysis of political and legal problems, in the development of legal doctrine to support radical activities, and in the exercise of our professional skills wherever legal issues may be relevant.” (Quoted from Program of the National Lawyers Guild adopted at the Guild national convention, July, 1968.)

The Guild has been backing up that statement with programs and activity for over thirty years.

THE GUILD IN THE PAST

During the '30's and '40's, Guild members drafted, litigated, and administered much of the more progressive New Deal legislation and fought for the rights of labor and the disadvantaged. In the 50's, the Guild engaged in the struggle against McCarthyite repression, achieving major victories on behalf of the rights of association and freedom of thought.

In the early '60's, the Guild opened the first bar association office providing legal representation to the southern civil rights movement. The Guild raised issues regarding the legality of the War in Vietnam and expressed its opposition to that war. Guild lawyers pioneered the development of broad legal expertise in the areas of Selective Service and Military Law, anticipating the draft resistance and G.I. movements.

MASS DEFENSE

The Guild National Office, Chapters, and Regional Offices have provided or sparked organized mass legal defense in the Columbia University student strike, the Ocean-Hill Brownsville arrests, the San Francisco and Valley State college strikes; in Welfare Rights and high school demonstrations; and at the Pentagon, the 1968 Chicago Convention, the People's Park, and many other confrontations.

INDIVIDUAL DEFENSE

Guild lawyers have also participated in nearly all of the critical political trials of recent years, representing Huey Newton, Reies Tijerina, Eldridge Cleaver, H. Rap Brown, Benjamin Spock, the Oakland 7, the Chicago 8, the Presido 27, the Panther 21, the Milwaukee 14, Los Siete de la Raza—to name just a few.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The Guild has provided countless amicus briefs and presented numerous conferences relevant to current political/legal needs. Workshops have dealt with racism in the law, tenant law useful for tenant organizing, Military and Selective Service law, techniques of trying a political case, and new forms of the practice of law. Recent Guild publications include "Minimizing Racism in Jury Trials—the Voir Dire by Charles Garry in the Huey Newton Case"; "The New Draft Law"—a manual for lawyers and counselors; "Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Handbook," as well as the "Guild Practitioner" our bi-monthly theoretical-practice and news publication. On numerous occasions the Guild has sponsored petitions and demonstrations to express its position on developments in the courts and the law, such as the numerable actions in Chicago and around the country in support of the Chicago 8 and their lawyers.

GUILD LAW STUDENTS

Hundreds of law students have formed Guild chapters at law schools throughout the country. They participate in every important political case, and work closely with political groups, workers and student organizations. In addition, Guild law students have led struggles on their campuses for curriculum reform, open admissions, and student participation in the decisions affecting legal education.

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE

At its convention in February, 1970, the Guild approved the following programs:

- (1) Establishment of a National Defense Committee to exchange experiences and discuss common legal strategy in political cases. It will provide for the exchange of legal briefs and other materials and it will open discussions within the movement and amongst the movement legal

defense workers to determine the best means and style available to develop an effective and coordinated legal response to the accelerated repression.

(2) Rallying the bar in support for those attorneys who are being threatened or penalized for the representation of radical individuals and groups that seek social change in this country. The Guild resolved to expose and isolate judges who engage in the repression of lawyers and to develop appropriate legal and political techniques for resisting such attacks. To that end, a National Lawyers Defense Committee has been established.

(3) Establishing and equipping permanent Guild Chapter or regional offices, where they do not exist, in which young lawyers, law students and other movement legal defense workers can work at subsistence salaries, along with volunteer attorneys and law students, provide continuing legal assistance to those engaged in struggle, organize and coordinate mass defense operations, and engage in the vital educational process that results from continuous involvement in political struggle.

The Guild also approved establishing a job placement service for Guild members; to support Black and Brown law students in efforts to make law schools more open and more attentive to their needs; expressed opposition to sex-based discrimination in the legal professions; and urged the establishment of day care facilities for the children of law office employees.

As movements for radical social change expand and grow, the Guild will be there utilizing its experience and skills as new areas of struggle develop, and the Guild will go on organizing and training lawyers and law students to meet the ever increasing demands for political legal skills.

And finally, the Guild will continue as the only organization providing geographical and generational continuity and coordination to the efforts of lawyers and law students engaged in the movements for change in this country.

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