

Will We Allow Lynch Justice to Kill Our Brave Comrade Angelo Herndon?

He Dared to Organize Negro and White Unemployed

By MYRA PAGE

THE sombre walls of Fulton County Prison, where Angelo Herndon is entombed, rise in the very heart of Atlanta, "cultural center of the South." The jail doorbell jangles several minutes before the jailer bestirs himself from his comfortable perch and gossiping with a bluecoat, to let us in. We spy him eyeing us oddly through a grilled window, like some slow-witted Bosse behind a barbed-wire fence.

The heavy door swings back. He takes us into his office. My companion, member of a well-known Atlanta law firm whom the International Labor Defense has just interested in the case, produces his card. The jailer's waddling person exudes an ingratiating importance. And what may he do for us?

"We came to see a prisoner—Angelo Herndon."

The keeper's jaw sags. "That golden nigger! You come to see him!" Perplexed fear in his eyes, his bearing resumes its old hardness. He surveys me and I him, with mutual contempt. To think that this biped has in his keeping that rare spirit and working class fighter, Angelo Herndon!

He may manhandle and insult as he likes our young comrade, sentenced to twenty years on the chain-gang for having organized Atlanta's jobless in a march to the Fulton County Commission to demand relief. This alone has been his "crime."

What had most infuriated the Coca Cola and mill and cotton interests controlling Georgia was his defiance of Jim Crow. That "damn white nigger" had dared organize unemployed councils and demonstrations that included both colored and white. This was open rebellion! Inciting to riot!

The orderly demonstrators won their demands. The Commission found an extra \$6,000 for relief. (But get that Red!) Some days later, as he was entering the post office for his mail, Angelo was arrested. For eleven days he remained without any charges. Meanwhile he was treated to trips to the electrocution cell and similar diversions, "to make the bastard talk." Terror proved useless.

Finally the Red-baiting Solicitor Hudson bethought himself of an old law directed against rebelling slaves, and resurrected in recent years for rebellion workers. So in the summer of 1932, Angelo Herndon was charged under a law dating back to 1820, "for inciting to insurrection." The penalty was death.

"For six months before I was tried," the 20-year-old organizer writes, "I was forced to live in a cell with condemned men. I almost died from starvation and lack of medicine." After three days of a farcical trial, he was found guilty. But the wide protest roused by the I.L.D. caused the jury to "recommend mercy." Sentence was from 18 to 20 years on the Georgia chain gang. John L. Spivak in his book, "Georgia Nigger" showed what a death trap these gangs are.

THE jailer shoots a stream of "baccy into the spittoon." "That god damn nigger! The one I get all them telegrams about—demanding I release him. Imagine that! Demanding!" At my involuntary grin the keeper's fury pulls him to his feet. "That blasted oon! Oughta be on the chain gang, that's what. Where I'd put him, too." (Yes, but for those wires!)

Remembering the lawyer's quite wide connections, our host jingles his keys. His bearing modifies. "What you mixing up in such a case for?" he queries, adding quickly, "Come on. This ain't visiting day for niggers, but seeing as it's you, Mr. Lagnley."

His glum waddle precedes us to a high steel door, one side of a barred cage. Within are penned human beings. In the half-light, at square peepholes stand bedraggled white men, receiving their families. On the outside, staring through the



ANGELO HERNDON

bars at their father are three small children with their worn mother. Their faces and the man's are wet, stricken. He is a "poor white," tenant farmer or millhand. Nothing cruel in his face. However, he may have broken the rich man's law, it is clear that poverty has been his main crime.

The jailer pushes the woman and children aside, unlocks the door. We pass through, and the door clangs to behind us. Beyond another steel door, in a cage still further removed from sun and air are the colored prisoners. The Jim Crow system is very strictly enforced here: white men, be they thieves, murderers or dope addicts, are still "superior" to any Negro. So the Georgia state law rules.

From the narrow stone floor stagger tier on tier of musty cramped cells. This damp shaftway is like those in an East Side tenement, only the stench is worse. It is high noon outside: here the gloom seeps to your very bones. The tomb of the living dead.

IN A NASTY key, the jailer draws down "Bring that nigger Herndon down here." The cry echoes up the tiers, "Herndon!" Somewhere a key clicks, a barred door is thrown back. He starts down the tiers, this son of an Alabama coal-digger who began work in the mines, too, as a lad of 13. I recall the simple terse words in which he has recorded his first acquaintance with the revolutionary movement:

"One day a friend and I, in search of work, happened to come across some handbills stuck to a post. We snatched one off. We did not take time to read it right then. After looking all over Birmingham for work, we set out for home. I took the handbill out of my pocket. I saw the startling headline: 'Would you rather fight—or starve?' I called my friend. We both sat down and began to read that handbill. Near the bottom was the announcement of a meeting called for 3 o'clock in the heart of town, by the Unemployed Council. All the way there I said to myself, 'It's war. It's war. So I might as well get into it now as any other time.'"

The Negro youth finds white and colored workers uniting—something new in the South. His friend is afraid, but Angelo joins, goes to his first demonstration. When the National Unemployed Convention is held in 1930 in Chicago, he is elected a delegate. The Kluxers distribute threatening handbills, stage night-shirt parades. Angelo's relatives try to persuade him from going to the convention for fear their home will be bombed by the Klan. He goes anyway—and returns to begin organization work among the miners. The big Tennessee Coal and Iron Corporation orders his arrest. So at 17, he is handcuffed to a white organizer and comrade, and thrown in jail. They are charged with vagrancy, sentenced to a year's hard labor on the chain gang—but the I.L.D. has them acquitted.

Arrested several times after that for organizing the miners and unemployed, he is sent into the Black Belt to organize the sharecroppers, and barely escapes a lynch mob. He is active in the Scottsboro cam-

paign, the Dred Scott case of the Negro people in the South. The Birmingham underworld tries to frame him in connection with the Willie Peterson frame-up, but fail. Herndon, sent to Atlanta to organize the unemployed, although barely 19, is already schooled in the fight, and able to meet whatever comes.

THE steps grow nearer. Down the jail stairs comes a slight, upright figure in a white shirt and tan trousers. There is no mistaking his gait; his eyes are unafraid.

Not even Fulton prison can break a revolutionist.

The jailer glares his hate. "Visitors!" He thumbs at us. The youth crosses over, a slow, modest smile lighting his face. Visitors are rare, and our call unexpected. I see my lawyer friend's amazement. New to the case, he has not seen Angelo Herndon before. In all this filth, that lad has kept himself clean as a whistle, inside and out. "You're right," he whispers hurriedly, "he just doesn't belong here."

We introduce ourselves: Angelo Herndon puts out his hand. "Hello, comrade!" The words ring through the gloom. We shake hands; the jailer glowers. "What kinda monkey business is this," he fumes to the lawyer, "a white woman calling on and shaking hands with a nigger!"

We hear him, and shake again. Barely a quarter of an hour we're allowed; we have to talk fast. He speaks, not of himself, but of his joy that Dimitroff is free. He is eager to hear more news of the movement, the Soviet Union. In his pocket is a Daily Worker; he is so eager to enter as much as he can into things, even from his cell, to be a part. He is sure that the American workers will soon set him free. So am I. But Angelo Herndon has been waiting now, two years. His case has been appealed to the Georgia Supreme Court. Since last October he has waited for a decision. Workers, unions, mass organizations, will you raise such a protest that the judges must grant a new trial, and Angelo Herndon be set free?

For the message I bring from our

Prison May Break His Body, But Never His Spirit

comrade in Fulton Prison is grave, urgent. True, no terror or imprisonment can break our young comrade's spirit. But they may break his body. In a 9 by 12-foot cell they have kept him penned up with four other prisoners, condemned men. He has been forced to listen, night after night, to their bitter cries. Although wracking to a sensitive nature like Herndon's, if they thought by this to break his morale, they have failed. But it is not easy. We must see that he is immediately accorded the rights of a political prisoner, until set free.

Suffering from the terrific food and air, Angelo has only escaped serious illness through the extra food supplied him by the I.L.D. He was examined recently by two prison doctors, one white and one Negro. The white doctor actually made no examination but lectured our comrade on "bein' a bad nigger. Stop givin' out these statements," etc. But the Negro doctor did examine him. He reported that Angelo Herndon is threatened with tuberculosis, and requires sunshine, fresh air, special food. Also his eyesight is extremely bad. An immediate change is urgent.

Of all this, Angelo says little, except as I question him. But as the jailer demands we leave, we see Angelo standing there in the gloom, waiting. Waiting to be set free, to come back to his comrades and place in the ranks. Surely he shall not wait long, or in vain!

NOTE: — The Georgia Supreme Court on Monday 24, upheld the atrocious verdict of 18 to 20 years on the chain-gang against Angelo Herndon, Negro organizer of Atlanta white and Negro unemployed workers.

The I. L. D. is planning to carry the fight to the U. S. Supreme Court, calls for mass protests against the decision of the State court, demands for the immediate release of Herndon and financial support for its Free Herndon campaign.

'Sea or Land Horse They Got Only Bit and Whip for You'

By BEN FIELD

THE boys in the Marine Workers Industrial Union headquarters on Gravier Street, New Orleans, tell me I can find out conditions among the fishermen by driving down to Pensacola. Jim Yates is down there starting the work of organizing the fishermen.

The road from the west takes you over the railroad tracks and through the poorest section of the town where the Negroes live in shacks. In the heart of Pensacola are the spacious houses of the rich whites and churches, one of which shows you engraved in stone a saint with a harpoon. The sea glistens like a star. Kids are fishing with red snapper bait. Cafes, alleys, string-pieces of wharves are crowded with jobless fishermen.

Sure enough, in the Star of the Sea Cafe I meet Jim Yates. Husky ex-wooby, member of the Marine Workers Industrial Union. Jim has helped open half the halls on the Pacific, worked Columbia River two years, two seasons in Alaska, three seasons Pedro tuna fishing, Australia one season.

Jim was in the great fishermen's strike in San Pedro, January, 1931. In 1928, the fishermen were getting \$175 a ton for tuna. On the open market tuna was as high as \$200 and \$225. That wasn't so bad. Then the best grade of tuna, the albacor, swam off in schools the devil knows where to Japan. Boats had to be larger, able to make a cruise of 6,000 miles. So Van Camp and the other big cannery blind-man-bluffed the fishers to borrow money from them for boats. Many of the fishers sold their houses, put everything they had into the boats. The Van Camps gave the fishermen contracts: \$200

police are working behind coastals and in front even with the bootleggers. They keep us men down, telling us to hang around shore and not above Palafox Street. The city politicians feed like crab on a dead man. Jesus, it's awful when you take time off to think about it all.

"When the fellers are out on ching boats catching red snapper, they can't wait till they get back to shore. When they're ashore, they can't wait till they get back to sea."

A BUNCH of fishermen are lined up on a bench against the wall of the Star of the Sea like a lot of gulls waiting for scraps.

Jim says once more, "It's awful. Hell, because it's 40 per cent for the company, 20 per cent for the boat generally owned by the company, and 40 per cent for the crew. The captain gets two shares, the engineers share and a half. The company don't want you to catch more than 20,000 pound red snapper for one load. I been in boats where we got 35,000 and even 38,000 pounds. The fish weigh 14 and 15 pound a piece. We get five cents a pound for red snapper here. And now the company's trying to hammer it down to three cents."

"Go into any halfassed lunch-room, and you pay 45 cents for a dinner of red snapper. Cockroaches in the hold of the boats, the big fish hard to handle, no money for handling ice. We go out for a month. Far as Tampechie or Vera Cruz, got to catch a minimum of 7,000 pound. If it's less than that, you don't even get a fishtail like a cat. So you see why we got to organize them. The M. W. I. U. ain't done much with fishermen yet. But we'll shake the lead out one of these days."