"THE ALABAMA FIVE"

by CYRIL BRIGGS

"When Israel was in Egypts' Land!
Let my people go!
Oppress'd so hard they could not stand
Let my people go!
Go down Moses, way down in Egypt Land,
Tell ole Pharaoh
LET MY PEOPLE GO!"

LET MY PEOPLE GO.'

From five cells in grim Death Row in Kilby Prison, Montgomery, Alabama, the strains of the old slave song of revolt, so feared by the slaveholders as to be harshly prohibited on the plantations during chattel slavery, rang out fiercely, defiantly, in the early hours of February 9, 1934.

The newspapers, reporting the mass legal lynchings that morning of nine Negro workers in three different Southern states, played up the singing or the plaintive spirituals like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", by the five doomed men in Kilby prison in the old slave confederate capital, but barely mentioned their defiant singing of "Go Down Moses"—just as the same capitalist papers covered up the terroristic nature of the mass butchery, deliberately designed to throw terror into the hearts of the Negro masses moving forward into struggle against the imperialist oppressors.

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But in the reports was a thinly disguised note of fear, expressive of the growing alarm of the southern lynch rulers before the rising militancy of the oppressed Negro masses. The prostitute scribes of the capitalist press were forced to admit that nine Negroes, victims of an unparalleled mass legal lynch orgy, had gone to their death bravely, heads high and knees unbent, scorning any cringing appeal to their brutal murderers for mercy. "THEY DIED LIKE MEN", Robeta G. Nixon, Hearst writer and one of the more vicious of the mercenary scribes, admitted in describing the greatest mass execution Alabama's death chamber ever seen

"I'm just an innocent man going to glory—that's all," Bennie Foster, first to go down the long corridor to the murder chamber, had calmly declared, throwing back a terrible indictment in the faces of the lynch lords who, under cover of legality, wreaked their vengeance on him for his "audacity" in exchanging blows with a white boss who had attempted to beat him up.

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And, preceding by only a few minutes the monstrous legal lynchings, the strains "Go Down Moses" had carried the defiance of the doomed men to their executioners. Ringing out from the death cells, the song was eagerly picked up by scores of other Negro prisoners in the grim prison edifice, symbolic of capitalist "law and order", of violent suppression of the struggles of the Negro masses for land, freedom and equality, of vile frame-ups and murders of militant Negroes, of brutal attacks on white and Negro workers and croppers rallying to the joint struggle against their exploiters and oppressors.

Its defiant words, flung against the strong prison walls, found a militant echo in the rising revolutionary struggles of Negro croppers and poor farmers, in the defiant rifles of Negro croppers at the Battle of Reeltown when they heroically resisted the capitalist-landlord-police gangs seeking to expropriate their sole remaining means of livelihood, their mules and meager crops, of the mounting struggles of Negro croppers and poor farmers against the robbery of the Roosevelt "New Deal".

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No doubt, the militant defiance of those five doomed Negroes evoked specters to haunt the sleep of the lynchers and their Negro and white agents:—spectors of armed uprisings of which Charles H. Houston, William Pickens, Walter White and other leaders of the N.A.A.C.P., have so constantly and faithfully warned their imperialist masters, as in the speeches of White and Houston before the sub-committee of the Senate Judiciary Committee at the hearing on the Costigan-Wagner imitation anti-lynching bill. Quite probably it evoked memories of the heroic slave insurrections which shook Virginia and the other slave states in the 19th century. The descendants of the slave-holders must have thought the South was hearing once more the voice of Harriet Tubman, fearlessly uplifted in "Go Down Moses" on her frequent incursions into the slave territory to bring back her aged father and mother and other slaves via the famous Underground Railroad.

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And in the small death chamber, the vibrant challenge of that young Negro, fearlessly hurling his indictment against the lynch lords:

"I'm just an innocent man going to glory—that's all."

But that is not all! This one Negro could not break the bonds, but his limp body, thrown into a rough pine cofifn, was given a mass funeral in Selma, Mississippi, by white and Negro workers. His last words are calling through the South for vengeance. What one individual could not do, thousands of united workers, black and white, are today pledging to do—to break those bonds that strapped Bennie Foster in the lynch chair, to save the Scottsboro boys from a similar fate, and to smash the bonds of slavery that hold the toiling masses in misery. Bennie Foster's body "lies moldering," but his heroic defiance of the lynchers and their murder courts goes marching on stirring a responsive chord in the breasts of the Negro masses, stridently calling on the workers, black and white, to **UNITE AND FIGHT!**