

# "They Shall Not Die!" Cry of Thousands On May Day, Thrills Scottsboro Mothers

This is the first part of an interview with five of the mothers of the nine Scottsboro boys, by Otto Hall. The second part of this interview will be published in Monday's Daily Worker.

These five mothers are going to Washington on May 13, Mothers Day, to see the President, and demand from him the immediate freedom of the nine boys who are being mistreated in the Birmingham jail, and who have been imprisoned for nearly three years, despite overwhelming proof of their innocence. A send-off meeting will be held Friday night, May 11, in St. Nicholas Arena.

By OTTO HALL

"I'm going to Washington to see the President about my boy," said Mother Ida Norris, when the writer asked her about her intended trip to Washington on Mothers' Day.

"Do you know," she said, "that me and my boy Clarence were born in Warm Springs, Georgia, where the President lives in the winter time? Well, we're going to find out what kind of a deal Mr. Roosevelt gives his home town folks," she said, very determinedly.

All five of these mothers were born down in "Dear old Georgia," where the "Honeysuckles Bloom" and "Everything is Peaches," according to the song writers. Poets can sing, novelists can spin romantic yarns, about southern belles, gallant colonels, Negroes singing in the cotton and such tripe, but to see the careworn faces and toil-ridden hands of these mothers, and to hear their stories of a life of hard work and privation, one gets a real picture of that feudal hell, known as the "sunny" South. This is the South stripped of its halo of romance and exposed as one of the most benighted, disease-ridden, poverty-stricken sections of this great United States. Where the Bourbon rulers have made both Negroes and "poor whites" their beasts of burden.

## Encouraged by May Day

I found the mothers still talking about the great May Day demonstration, in which they participated, and they told me how encouraged they felt when they heard the tens of thousands of workers pass Union Square shouting: "The Scottsboro boys shall not die." They told me that they know that the International Labor Defense, which has the support of all those workers, will save their boys.

The stories of these mothers, which in many respects are similar, give an accurate picture of the oppression and enslavement of the

Negro nation in the southern "Black Belt." Nearly all of them came from large families and have had to toil on plantations as sharecroppers or plantation "hands" and went to work at an age when children in more fortunate circumstances were still in nurseries. The average age of these mothers when they "set out to chop cotton" was seven years. Mother Viola Montgomery says she was about six years old when she started to chop cotton on the plantation of George Felkner, who was the richest plantation owner in Monroe County, Ga., where she was born. She said that she was supposed to have been paid the "liberal" sum of 25c a day for her work at that time, but never saw any money. The "Colonel" said it all went for her "keep." After she was grown up, she chopped cotton for 65c a day.

Mother Montgomery was born on this plantation 44 years ago and was one of a family of seven girls. The father, a plantation laborer, died when she was very small and all of them were forced to work in the fields from the time they could barely toddle. She married when 15, thinking to escape this slavery, but found that instead of escaping so much toil she had to work even harder than before. She began to

have children so fast, she said, that it looked like she hardly got through having one, than she was "big" with another. She was the mother of six, only three of whom are still living. When her boy Olin, who is now in prison, was about four weeks old her husband got into trouble and was sent to the chain gang for a term of years, leaving her to take care of the children. Her oldest daughter died from neglect because she had to toil in the field and couldn't give her proper care. Because she had to go out and work a few days after Olin was born, she has been in bad health ever since. This is the life of the average Negro toiler in the South.

## Olin Supports Family

Her oldest boy married and there was nobody to help the family but Olin, who worked at a boarding house for \$3 a week. He told his mother that he was tired of working there and not getting anything for it so he was going to Chattanooga to see if he couldn't earn more money. Mother Montgomery says that she never saw him any more until she saw him in Kilby prison.

Mother Norris, the President's fellow-townswoman, does not know her age but thinks that she is around 45 or 46 years old. She is the daughter of a sharecropper and

has worked since she was seven years old.

She says it seemed as though their family could never get out of debt. The harder they worked, the more they owed. She married at 17, thinking that she would have an easier life but like the others, found she was taking on more trouble and work. She is the mother of 10 children, eight of whom are living and two are dead. She has been a widow for 10 years. She left Warm Springs to get away from the plantation and moved to Moline, Ga., her present home.

She took in washing and all of her children had to go to work. Her boy, Clarence Norris, now in prison, was working in a saw-mill for 50 cents a day. He also took a job on a peach farm, picking peaches, but the pay was so small, that he decided to give it up. He told her that he was going away to the North where he could make more money and be better able to take care of her. He said that he "wasn't going to follow nobody's mules no more." He went to Atlanta where he caught the train to Chattanooga. He never met the other boys until he got on the freight train. She says that she did not see him any more until she saw him in prison.

(To Be Continued.)

## Scottsboro Mothers at Communist Meeting



On the platform at the Madison Square Garden Tuesday night. Left to right: Ida Norris, Viola Montgomery, Ruby Bates, Mamie Williams,

Janie Patterson. Josephine Powell, the other mother, is not in the photo.