

Angelo Herndon's Story *Continued from April Labor Defender*

On August 3, in Birmingham, three white girls were shot. Two died, one recovered. The shooting happened in an exclusively white neighborhood, but a Negro war veteran, Willie Peterson, was framed for the crime. According to reports in the capitalist newspapers, the Negro had made a "Communist speech" before he shot the girls down.

Next day, while I was out visiting some miners, one of the notorious gunthugs that had arrested me before, came to my room, broke in, and confiscated a batch of literature. Next morning, before day, I was lying in bed, with one of my room-mates, when one of the gun thugs came to the window and put a gun in our faces. Other gunmen broke in the door. My room mate and I were forced to get out of bed, and then handcuffed. When we began to put our clothes on, we were stopped and forced to put on only what they wanted us to wear.

We didn't know what it was all about. When we got to the police station, we demanded to know what were the charges against us. The thugs told us that we would find out in time.

While we were being questioned, one of the thugs hit me across the head for refusing to say "No, sir" and "Yes, sir". We were not locked up until 9 o'clock. About one hour later, they came to my cell, and took me about twenty-one miles out of the town. All the while I was being carried to the woods, some of the thugs would point to places where they had killed Negro workers.

After we had gotten far into the woods, the car stopped. One of the thugs asked me if I had my thinking cap on. I said, for what? He answered: "You'll soon find out." Then they said: "We don't care anything about your little old Communist Party, but we want to know who shot Nell Williams and the other two girls." I said I didn't know. They said: "If you didn't do it, you know who did—and you are going to tell us, otherwise you won't leave here alive." Two of them pulled their coats off, and slipped a rubber hose from their trousers. I was still handcuffed. Then they started to beat me across the head. One would beat me while the other rested. They beat me for half an hour, but I did not talk. They said: "You god-damn Reds aren't supposed to tell anything. But before you leave here, you are going to tell plenty." I said: "I have told you all I know, and that is nothing."

Then they handcuffed my hands behind me, and started again. They beat me for almost another half-hour. One of them said: "Let me go down in the woods and get mad. Then I will kill the son-of-a-bitch." I told him he could turn blue if he wanted to.

On the way back to jail, they asked me to point out some of the white comrades. I told them I wouldn't.

That evening Nell Williams, who had "identified" Willie Peterson by his hat, came to the jail to identify us. As we marched in line before her, she began to shake her head. We could see someone hear her telling her to say "Yes."

We were finally booked on a vagrancy charge. Three weeks passed before we were tried.

In a few days I was out on bail. The comrades decided that I should go to Atlanta. For 1 week I stayed home, for I was still suffering from the severe blows I had received on my head.

In June, 1932, all relief agencies in Atlanta cut off relief. This affected more than 23,000 people. The county commissioners, with their usual make-believe, handed out statements that nobody was starving in Atlanta.

The Unemployed Council then distributed thousands of leaflets, calling upon the starving unemployed white and Negro workers to demonstrate before the relief offices and demand the continuation of relief. When the workers went to the Commissioners' offices, no one was to be found. Finally when someone did come to the offices, the Commission locked the door until a group of policemen arrived.

There was no "disorder" or "violence" during the demonstration. The next day, however, in spite of the fact that even the commissioners had admitted that there was no money in the county treasury to provide for relief, they voted \$6,000 to aid the jobless. About a week later, when I went to the Post Office to get the mail, I was arrested.

When I demanded to know what I was wanted for, I was told that Solicitor Boykin wanted me. I was taken to the police station, where the police tried to get in touch with Boykin, but Boykin was out of town. Then the police began to question me themselves. One big pot-bellied fellow sitting in a revolving chair and puffing a cigar, said to me: "I used to belong to a labor union myself, and I think it's a swell idea, but you Reds try to get by the law and you are always hiding. If you meant any good, you wouldn't always be dodging around."

Another red-headed, dapper-looking gentleman popped up and said: "You damned guys are nothing but a bunch of degraded bastards. You would drink the blood from your mothers just for the sake of agitating." Meanwhile, I was playing dumb-brute. One guard asked me where I lived. I told him I didn't know.

This guard said: "Let's take this bastard upstairs and give him the works. He thinks he's in the hands of the

New York police. But he can't fool us." They led me up a dark flight of stairs into a little dark room. There was a coffin and skulls were strewn around it. In the center was a chair made of steel. One of the men connected some wires to it.

Someone said to me: "Now, if you don't talk, we are going to electrocute you." I still refused to say anything. One of the men walked over and slapped me in the face. I told him he would have to kill me before I would get in that chair. Then another said: "Take that bastard back and lock him up." I was placed in a filthy, lousy place called the "state cell."

The first six months before I was tried, I was forced to live in a cell with a dead man. I almost died from starvation and lack of medicine. After my lawyers had demanded a trial, time after time, a trial was finally called for January 16, 1933. The trial judge was obviously hostile. He overruled motion after motion that would have given me my freedom. He warned the court to keep quiet, for a man was on "trial" for his life. And he wanted "justice" to be done in this case. The solicitors raved and snorted about Communist revolution and social equality among the white and Negro workers.

Solicitor Hudson demanded that the jury bring in a verdict with an automatic penalty of electrocution. We offered white economists as defense witnesses, to testify as experts on the nature of the literature confiscated from my room without a search-warrant. But the judge overruled this attempt. He stated that the court does not deny the fact that the defendant is an economic (?) man. The defense could make little headway through the mountain of prejudice and the talk of the Red Scare.

The state's star witness was one of the solicitors who had investigated me—before the trial. On the third day, the trial ended with a verdict of "guilty". The jury recommended "mercy". Sentence was from 18 to 20 years on the murderous Georgia chain-gang. An application for bail was filed with the trial judge, but promptly denied. A writ of habeas corpus was then filed, demanding bail, and it was likewise denied. A new trial appeal was taken before the State Supreme Court, where it is still pending awaiting a decision.

Meantime, I am still in the death house at Fulton Tower, where I have seen four prisoners go to the electric chair within the past two months. This is further proof that the slave masters are determined to kill me or drive me crazy, from the strain of waiting in the death house.