

I Visit San Quentin Prison

By ANGELO HERNDON

I ENTERED the gates of San Quentin and picked up the pen to sign my name in the visitors' ledger, as a preliminary to seeing the five working class leaders condemned to serve one to fourteen years in that jail under the anti-labor "criminal syndicalism" law of California.

As I began to write, the guard noticed on my finger a ring with the hammer and sickle. "Oh, you're a Russian!" he said, and it is this stupid and ignorant man who has in his keeping our brave fellow workers of California.

I See McNamara

I was made to wait in a little room, and soon there came J. B. McNamara, the world's oldest political prisoner, who has been buried alive for 25 years in San Quentin. I was not allowed to talk to him, but McNamara smiled broadly, and I waved my hand to him.

I was then called in to see Jack Crane, one of the "criminal syndicalism" defendants. I asked about his treatment. Having barely escaped with my life after 36 months of jail fare in Fulton Tower in Atlanta, I knew what they were probably eating. For breakfast they get black coffee, bread and musty bacon meat. For lunch, stew every day. For dinner, milk and bread. On Sundays they are given only two meals.

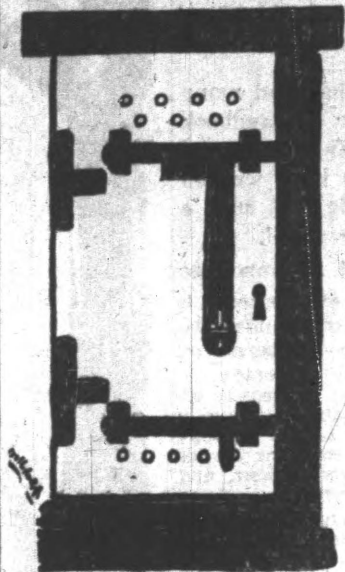
Jack Crane is very ill—has been ill for some time. He has ulcers of the stomach, and cannot eat anything. At the time I saw him he had not eaten for five days.

Prison "Medical Care"

"Have you had any attention from the prison doctor?" I asked Crane. He said he had not. "I sent a message to the International Labor Defense asking them to send me a doctor, but the message was not delivered," he told me. "A Jewish rabbi pleaded with the prison doctor, Stanley, and finally got him to come to the jail to examine me."

"Stanley said: 'You're a Communist, aren't you?' I told him I am. He said: 'Well, you don't believe in capitalism, you don't like capitalists,

so why should you ask for treatment from the capitalists?' A few days later the doctor asked me if I would undergo an operation, but because of the savage mishandling of prisoners who are operated on, I refused. I remembered only too well the case of a young prisoner



"I entered the gates of San Quentin."

who had a serious operation, and only ten days later was sent back to the jute mill, which is a health-destroyer under any circumstances. This man died within a few days."

Treated Worse Than Criminals

"How are the other prisoners getting along, Jack?" I asked.

"We are treated worse than hardened criminals," Jack answered. "I have to stay in the same cell with a fellow who is guilty of a number of crimes. He is a stool-pigeon, and is placed in my cell to watch me."

"Sometimes when the guards are drunk, they kick and push the prisoners and draw their revolvers

and shoot into the air. One guard fired his pistol into a crowd of 5,000 prisoners, and the bullet injured one man. The guard was not punished.

"We cannot get books or newspapers from the outside. They don't even let us have the local papers printed here."

I told him about my own case and the fight the workers are putting up to set me free. I mentioned that a joint Herndon-criminal-syndicalism meeting was being held that night. "Then tell the workers there," Crane said, "that we will never lose confidence in their power to free us. In my own name and the name of all the other politicals here, I send sincere revolutionary greetings to the meeting."

As I walked away, Crane called after me: "I am honored at this visit, Angelo, I shall never forget you."

Graft in San Quentin

I went to the warden's office to leave some money for the boys. No prisoner is allowed to buy more than six dollars' worth of food a month from the jail commissary. They must pay seven cents tax on every dollar, and give tips to the guards for the privilege of spending what little money they get.

There were three other prisoners convicted under the "criminal syndicalism" law in the Sacramento trial. These three I could not see; they were at the Tehachapi Women's Prison, over 400 miles away. But here is a telegram that I received from them:

"Greetings to Angelo Herndon and to all those present at the Herndon and criminal syndicalism protest meeting. We have confidence in the International Labor Defense and the whole working class. We know you will free Herndon, Mooney, the victims of the criminal syndicalism laws and all political prisoners. Solidarity."

The telegram was signed by Nora Conklin, Caroline Decker and Lorraine Norman.