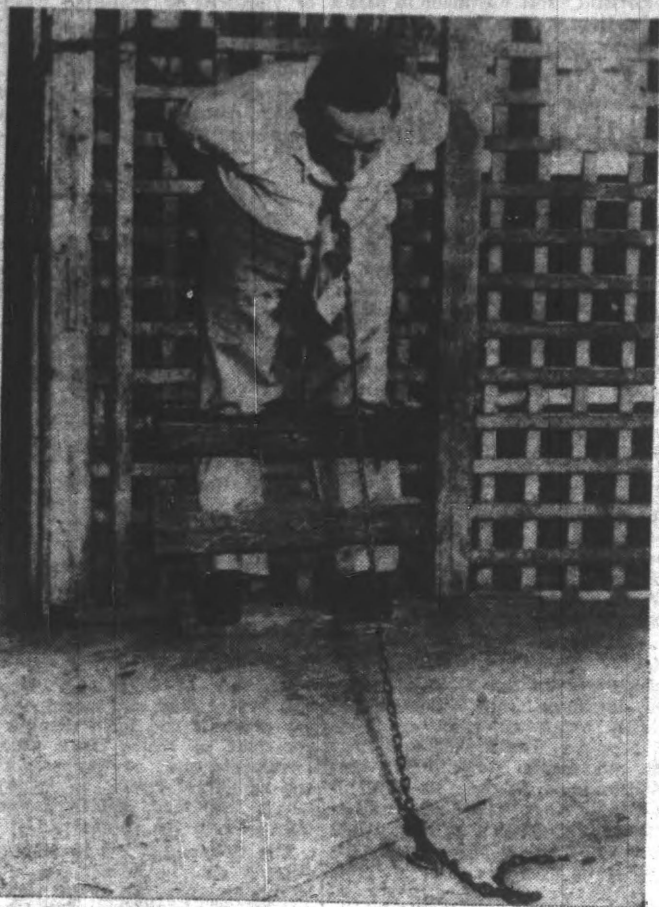


Fear of Communism Haunts Southern Officials



How chain-gang prisoners are tortured in Georgia. This investigator, who posed in stocks at Stonewall, Ga., was barely able to stand after only five minutes in them. Prisoners are kept in them for hours.

'Rev. Col. Gen.' John W. Hudson, Prosecutor in Herndon Case Interviewed by the Editor of the Labor Defender

[Editor's note:—This is the second of a series of articles by Sasha Small, editor of the Labor Defender, written after a trip to Georgia and Tennessee. Sasha Small visited chain-gangs, interviewed important officials, saw the relatives of the Scottsboro boys and observed at first hand the conditions of the Southern workers. In this article she tells of the antics of the Reverend Colonel Assistant-Solicitor-General John W. Hudson, who prosecuted Angelo Herndon, and the work of the Prison Commission, which runs the chain gang.]

By Sasha Small

ATLANTA, Ga.—Just as they keep the spectre of the chain-gang haunting the black and white masses of the South, so the ruling class, and particularly its officials, are haunted by the spectre of Communism. They fear it to the point of madness. They see it lurking behind every building, around every corner.

Reverend-Colonel-Assistant-Solicitor-General John W. Hudson, the man who prosecuted Angelo Herndon and demanded the death penalty for him because he led a successful demonstration of white and Negro unemployed to ask for bread, is the hardest hit of all. The man is completely insane on the subject of Communism. I went to hear him preach at his Gordon Street Baptist Church, in the wealthier white neighborhood of Atlanta. The title of his sermon was "Tomorrow—a Message to the Young."

Demands Death from Pulpit

The Reverend Hudson's eyes, set close together in his long, emaciated face, are black and beady—snake eyes. He stares into space as he speaks, waving his long, gaunt arms around like a windmill. His text was based almost entirely upon the speech he made to the jury in the Herndon case, demanding the death penalty for this young "menace to law and order," in January, 1933. Judging by the reaction of his con-

(Continued on Page 2)

Southern Officials Fear Communism

(Continued from Page 1)

gregation, he has made exactly the same sermon ever since. The weary semblance of attention they gave him clearly indicated "We've heard all this before."

On a small table right below the pulpit, he has spread out an array of Communist literature—the Party Organizer, the Communist International, The Communist, the children's book, "Our Lenin," and stacks of pamphlets.

The sermon itself? It is impossible to record with any accuracy the ravings of a madman like Reverend Hudson. The sentences simply don't hang together. The words follow each other, but they don't make sense. His voice rises from a hoarse whisper to wild shouting.

Herndon's Prosecutor Raves

He began with a quotation from Isaiah. That was the only thing that sounded like a sermon. Then he began firing questions. "How can young people have a good time and still be decent? How can you go to college and still remain a good Christian?" From these questions he leaped to the demonstration at the liner Bremen in New York, where "Communists tore down the swastika flag, the flag of a sovereign nation," and flung it into the sea! "The Communists are plunging us into war!" This seemed to lead directly to the "seventh international-ee" which was sitting in Moscow at that very moment plotting against the State of Georgia and the whole world. From this flowed quotations from Bishop William Montgomery Brown—the same quotations which Hudson used to condemn Angelo Herndon to 18 to 20 years on the chain-gang, because a copy of the Bishop's "Communism and Christianity" had been found in his room.

A Maniac with Power

He read a passage which stated that the Old and New Testaments were filled with lies. He read it twice. Then he stopped dramatically and whispered: "You, young people, did you learn anything like that in your schools in Atlanta? Of course you didn't. But that's how these Communists are."

"They send tons and tons of this literature here to our city. I've written time and again to New York, to the Mayor and the Post Office officials there, asking them to stop it from the mails. But what do you think they answer? They say they can't stop it legally and they advise me to ignore it!" Here he roared the word "ignore" three or four times. After another half-hour of ranting and raving about what the Communists think of marriage, religion and private property, he was through.

And this man has in his hands the power to prosecute thousands of Negro people, workers black and white, and send them to the chain-gang, as he hopes to send Angelo Herndon.

Georgia Wants Herndon Back

His conversation with me was quite short. He was tired out by his performance. So I was from New York! Well, there was a delegation coming from New York to see the Governor, to ask him to abolish "our anti-Communist law we have down here."

"I didn't know that Georgia had an anti-Communist law," I offered.

"Oh, yes, we have. And it's a good one. And we're going to keep it. They're going to ask him to free that nigger Angelo Herndon, too. They'll probably come to see me, too. He's out on bond now," he said with a sorrowful wag of his head, "but we'll get him back soon enough."

Three Old "Judges"

Next I went to visit the Prison Commission, composed of three old men, E. L. Rainey, G. A. Johns and V. L. Stanley. They call each other "Judge." Every official in Georgia who hasn't any other title is called Judge.

First, they gave me their last printed biennial report covering the years 1933 and 1934. During these two years, 9,154 prisoners, convicted of felonies, served on the Georgia chain-gang. They do not record the additional thousands serving for misdemeanors. Of this number, only 554 men, 303 women and 52 tubercular patients served on the two State Prison farms. The rest worked in the chain-gangs on the highways. There are 130 such convict camps—all operated by the counties under the supervision of the Prison Commission with the exception of nine run directly by the State Highway Commission.

Profits from Prison Goods

One State Prison farm is at Milledgeville. The descriptions I got of it from men who had been there sounded like the stories of Charles Dickens about the paupers' prisons in England in the early years of the last century. Only the old and decrepit and sick are sent to the farms, those who are

"no good" out on the roads. They are herded together into wooden barracks, and those who are not too feeble—25 per cent according to the officials' report—work out on the farm, or make auto license tags. The official report states that though "conditions are still somewhat crowded, the men are better satisfied, there is less trouble and fewer escapes."

Each prisoner produced goods to the value of \$79 monthly. They do not get a cent in pay. The Prison Commission thought I was crazy when I asked how much the prisoners got for their work. The total income from farm products produced by male prisoners for the year 1934 was \$51,378.93. The women produced \$20,242.27.

The production of auto license tags has been rationalized to the point where the State saves \$16,683 yearly on their manufacture. They cost exactly .0682 cents to produce. Neighboring States have to spend .1084, they proudly announce.

The ages of the prisoners range from 13 to 84, and the greatest number—330—are serving life sentences. The official figures state that during this period, 103 men died on the chain-gang and 872 "escaped." There are official individual reports on each of these cases, some of which they let me look at.

No Coroner's Inquest

There is an official death report blank to be signed by the doctor. Unless a man dies under "unusual" circumstances, there is no coroner's inquest. The doctor's signature is sufficient!

The 103 deaths for this period were entirely due to "natural causes," the commissioners informed me. They were a little more vague about the "escapes." They are supposed to receive full reports about all the circumstances of every escape. But some wardens aren't always as accurate as they should be! Only 450 of those who escaped were ever caught and returned. What happened to the others?

A shrug of the shoulders was the only answer I got in that office. But it is not difficult to arrive at the real answer. Every day the papers carry full reports of convicts recaptured. All night long police sirens wail through the streets of Atlanta, announcing the hunt for men who have run away. Only those who manage to get out of the State escape, and often they are tracked down and extradited by obliging governors.

What happened to the remaining 422 prisoners listed as "escaped"? Their hidden graves hold the secret. Men who worked beside them keep it locked behind their fear. The records of the prison commission prepared and sent in for filing by the wardens are clean.

Chain-Gang Rules Brutally Frank

The rules that govern the Georgia chain-gang system are brutally frank.

"Separation of races: 'These buildings must be so constructed as to completely separate whites and Negroes. At least twice each year, unless painted, the buildings and stockades must be white-washed.'

"Hours of Labor: The hours of labor shall be from sunrise to sunset; no convict shall be taken from camp until sunrise and all convicts shall be returned to camp at sunset."

"Duties of Wardens: They shall safely keep all prisoners committed to their custody and rigidly enforce discipline by the use of such humane modes of punishment as will best enforce submission to authority and compel and induce performance of good and faithful labor during work hours, such as solitary confinement, restriction of diet, restrictions of privilege of receiving visitors, and other privileges usually accorded first class prisoners; shall strictly enforce grade rules and good conduct; the use of shackles and striped clothing; fastening them in stocks in such a way as will restrict their movements for no longer than one hour at any one time."

"Guards shall not be permitted to strike a convict except to prevent escape, in his own defense, or in that of another," and as a last ironical gesture, "and in no case will he be permitted to curse a convict."

So much for the written reports, rules and regulations. In the next article, I shall describe the attitude of the Prison Commission towards their work, towards their charges, towards Angelo Herndon—and the chain-gangs as they really are.

The Daily Worker is the union man's newspaper. Every member of a trade union should do his bit in the \$60,000 drive! Make collections among your fellow members!