

The Governor Thinks Whip Is Best

New Masses Editor Interviews Talmadge, Sits in Stocks

Why do they have chain gangs, Winchesters and bloodhounds in Georgia? Joe North talked with Governor Talmadge, and he tells why...

By Joseph North

IT'S all tied up together: to understand the Herndon case you must understand Georgia and Georgia means the South and the South means cotton and cotton means a Negro people living in semi-colonial oppression. Hence the chain-gangs and the Winchester rifles and the bloodhounds and Governor Eugene Talmadge.

Our Gene did not have his traditional red suspenders on when we talked things over in his office to-day but he did flourish his best "back-state" accent, and dropped g's and "swanned" and "goshed" for the best part of an hour, but the sense of his talk was clear.

He did think a heap of Hitler and Mussolini for they are strong men and must be "hepin" their people or their people wouldn't have them. "Ain't it so?" And besides he doesn't believe all this 'ol' stuff about Hitler persecutin' Jewry. "Shucks, Hitler ain't so small as to do a thing like that."

He Praises the Whip

Consequently you understand the man more clearly when he got up at the Sixty-Fifth Convention of the American Prison Association at the Hotel Biltmore and shocked even the scarcely humanitarian wardens by advocating the whipping post for minor offenses and praising the rugged athletic life of the Georgia chain-gang.

You get to understand the Herndon case considerably better after you listen to a chain gang break rock and to A. A. Clarke, Jr., head of Fulton County prison camps who will tell you his prisoners put on weight and get their diseases cured after a term under his beneficent care.

You understand it more when you sit in the stocks (the same kind they used to put witches in in New England about the time of Cotton and Increase Mather.)

I startled Warden Morgan of Bellwood prison camp when I insisted on climbing into the stocks.

My Wrists Still Ache

"We only keep prisoners there a few minutes till their contrariness is over. Never for mo' than an hour at a time," he explained as he shifted his holster with the forty-five in order to wield the lever operating the stocks.

I climbed in, my body hanging by wrist and ankles and happily he released me when I suggested it, a few minutes afterward. My wrists still ache as I type this.

I begin to understand even more as I look through the window of this train returning North: every once in a while we cut through a cross-road town named Mina or Lawrenceville or Calhoun Falls and you see under an arc-light a couple of dozen bales of cotton waiting freight; cotton that has been toted here from the back roads of deep Georgia on rickety wagons drawn by mules and driven by undernourished sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

Wealth and Squalor

Cotton is way down and the A.A.A. is not helping the poor farmers much and the processing tax is squeezing him and farmers are begging nickels in Atlanta competing with school-boys in selling that noble Democratic paper, The Atlanta Constitution, on Forsyth and Forsyth Streets.

The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce boasts: Georgia is the "Empire State" of the South, the largest state east of the Mississippi River. On its area of 59,285 square miles live some 2,900,000 persons. About 60 per cent, or 1,836,000 are white; 1,071,000 are Negro.

It is a state rich in "all of God's goods"; as the Chamber of Commerce puts it, "Georgia produces or is capable of producing 44 of the 52 commercial minerals, nearly every character of fruit or vegetable, lumber, live stock, poultry, and in fact, practically everything needed for the sustenance or comfort of life."

And I have never seen such misery, such squalor. And that is why Georgia must have its chain-gangs and Winchesters and bloodhounds and Governor Eugene Talmadge.

Unions Feared

For the greater part of its \$181,435,000 sale of agricultural products last year was cotton; and cotton is grown chiefly by black and white sharecroppers. The black kept in medieval squalor by every means of terrorism, the white only a peg or two above. And today those pegs are being removed. As a result news of the Sharecropper Union of Alabama and Arkansas is being welcomed here and Gov. Talmadge knows it. He is a big planter himself with a farm down-state near McRae County.



"My wrists still ache..."

But we do not get the idea that Georgia is merely an agricultural state. It is not; it has an extensive textile industry, near to the cotton fields so that transportation is cheap. In fact, Georgia's chief manufactory is textiles, which composes the majority of the \$386,210,000 manufactured products sold last year.

And that is why Georgia must have its chain gangs and Winchesters and bloodhounds and Governor Eugene Talmadge.

For the textile interests are determined the United Textile Workers Union shall make no headway here. And when they struck last year good 'ol' Gene up there in Atlanta called out the State Troopers and broke the strike.

"But No Picketing!"

"I'm for the laborin' man, sho'," he said to me. "I been a laborin' man myself."

"How about organized labor, Governor?"

"Why, course labor must organize. But they can't use force and violence. I'm agin picketing. Strike?

Sho, strike, but don't go to picketin'. That's illegal and unconstitutional. Why they've had many a strike on my farm down in McRae. And they've won every strike, sho'. But they never did picket me. They call a strike and light out over the fence and don't come back till I call them back and then I got to give them what they want.

"The Herndon case? Tell you the truth, I don't know much about the merits of that case. I ain't followed it much. There's such a heap of crime goin' on, you know, I can't follow them all."

Herndon!

"Up North and in the West there's a great deal of talk about the Herndon case," I told him. "And millions of people are stirred up over it."

"Somethin' like that Burns fella," the Governor commented. "The one who wrote I Escape From a Georgia Chain Gang."

"Bigger," I said. "Much bigger. That insurrection law of last century," I said, "people throughout America don't like that law. What

do you think about it, Governor?"

"Well, it's constitutional and I'm sworn to observe the constitution and the statute books."

"What do you think of the Herndon case itself?"

"I'd rather not commit myself, he hedged. "You see, I understand it might come up before me shortly and I'll have to make a decision and therefo' I'd rather not say much about it now."

"Been a good deal of telegrams and letters come in on the case, hasn't there, Governor?"

"A heap."

Chair: Gangs

I asked him what he thought about the attacks on the chain gangs delivered at the convention of the criminologists and prison officials at the Hotel Biltmore. William B. Cox, executive secretary of the Osborne Association, had assailed "the public degradation that comes in working men on public highways, often in shackles and stripes." Cox had described seeing "the dirtiest and most foul-smelling cage wagon imaginable" in one Georgia prison camp. Dr. Nathaniel Cantor, penologist and professor of criminal law at Buffalo University minced no words. "The Georgia chain gangs are probably the most bestial elements in the American prison system." He had displayed a postcard he had received from a chain gang worker complaining of "undue punishment due to the indifference of the Georgia Prison Commission."

Did this faze the Governor? Not Eugene Talmadge, our 'Gene.

"Well, I said what I thought about that at the convention, weren't you there?" Here is what he said:

"The change in environment and work of the prison camp or chain gang is one of the most humane ways to keep prisoners. A good whipping in a man's own county and town would work better than detention in the smaller crimes such as gaming and wife-beating."

"Think a Good Deal of Hitler"

I asked him how small a crime he felt wife-beating was. He said that depends on how hard you hit her.

When I said that reminds me of Hitler who says woman's place is in the kitchen, he said he thought Hitler was a mighty fine man. "Course I don't know for sure, since I haven't ever been in Germany, but folks I know been there and they think a good deal of Hitler. Why the man must be he'pin his people or they'd put him out. Ain't it so?"

I didn't want to talk too much about S.S. men and Gestapo men as I had to stay in Georgia myself a few more days and the six-footer who was sitting silently on the other side of the room didn't look to me exactly like the Commissioner of Highways, as Gene had introduced him.

I went out into that ante-room. Men in overalls, bony, unkempt, sat in plush-chairs waiting on the Governor. Women waiting to plead for their sons' pardons, ward-politicians and visitors from Florida up to pay their respects to a real man and the farmer's friend, Our 'Gene.

BOOKS IN REVIEW

By JOHN STANLEY

TIMES have passed when the American college undergraduate could sit pretty, drink deep, strike poses and look wise. The class struggle has caught up with the universities; Plato is being manhandled by the proletariat; and the sacred writings of Adam Smith and the public utilities are being violated by sinister references to Karl Marx, V. I. Lenin, the New Masses—even, among the bolder spirits, the Daily Worker. . . . In fact, as is made abundantly clear in James Wechsler's aptly-named book, there is *Revolt on the Campus* (Covici, Friede, 458 pages, \$3).

James Wechsler, not yet twenty years old, was last year's editor of the *Columbia Spectator*, in succession to the fiery but individualistic Reed Harris. His vividly written and unusually well documented book tells the real story of the powerful

tution untenanted by some vessel of the Morgan-Rockefeller-Mellon dynasty" (giving pages of data to prove it), young Wechsler devotes his book to a very detailed—and vigorously partisan—account of student uprisings. With a keen flair for background, he gives us the story of the pilgrimage to Harlan, Kentucky, of several bus loads of young American intellectuals, who then saw, at first hand, something of the indescribable brutality of the class struggle in the South. Subsequently Reed Harris included editorial approval of this expedition in the *Columbia Spectator*; further assaults upon profiteering, militarization, high-pressure athletics and other administration policies, led to his expulsion—and proved to be the beginning of a nation-wide insurgence of American students against all forms of reaction.