

Fate of Atlanta Six Bound Up With Angelo Herndon Decision

Editor's Note: Mary Dalton is one of the six workers who was arrested in Georgia in 1930, and indicted under the "insurrection law"—the same law that was pressed into service to railroad Angelo Herndon to a sentence of 18 to 20 years on the chain-gang.

The case, which has become famous as the case of the "Atlanta Six," involves two young white women, Mary Dalton and Ann Burlak; two Negro men, Herbert Newton and Henry Story; and two white men, M. H. Powers and Joe Carr.

The case of the "Atlanta Six" has never been tried. But when the Supreme Court handed down its adverse decision in the Herndon case, Assistant Solicitor General John Hudson of Georgia announced his intention of pushing the prosecution of the "Atlanta Six"; of Annie Mae Leathers and Leah Young, two white women textile workers, and of ten workers taken in illegal raids in Atlanta in 1934. All 18 are held under the "insurrection law." Their fate is bound up with the fate of Angelo Herndon.

By MARY DALTON

"DEAR Union, Friends and Brothers:

"We workers in Georgia are pushed to death in the speed-up. We are telling you the good truth when we say we haven't a minute to call our souls our own. They are docking us and cheating us. If we open our mouths to the bosses, we are fired. We want the union started here. Come and help. Be careful, do not use my name, if they find this out I will lose my job and home."

After the great Gastonia strike, letters like this began to come into the office of the National Textile Workers Union, from mill workers all over Georgia. I went down there in January, 1930.

We concentrated our efforts in two places. One was the Anchor Duck mill in Rome, Georgia. The other was the Fulton Bag Mill in Atlanta. The Fulton Bag is not, officially, a company town; it stands in the very heart of Atlanta. But actually the workers are isolated in the life of the typical mill village. The company owns not only the mill, but also the school, the church, the store, and the houses the workers live in. Fulton Bag is known even in the Southern boss press as one of the "sore spots" of the South. The hours were from 10 to 12 daily, and the wages from \$9 to \$12 a week.

Organizers Harried

We found the workers of Georgia determined to organize, and the bosses equally determined to smash every attempt to start a union. The work of organization was extremely dangerous. Anyone out late at night—that is, after nine or ten o'clock—would be held in jail for investigation. The headquarters of the union was raided several times during the early months of 1930,



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and the material taken in these raids was used later to indict the Atlanta Six.

The ministers of the large churches—and some of the smaller ones—joined the hue and cry against the textile organizers, and preached sermons in which they called down the wrath of God on the heads of workers who joined the union. The press harped on the Negro question, and threatened a repetition of the massacre of 1909, saying that "once more the blood of Negroes will redden the streets of Atlanta."

Bosses Try to Drive Out Union

The work of the union progressed rapidly. Soon we had established contact in so many small towns that it was decided to hold a Southern textile conference. But the bosses, the boss press, the state and city officials, and the Klansmen swore that they'd drive the union out of Georgia. On the day of the conference police on motorcycles patrolled the Dixie highway, and turned the cars of delegates back.

All during these months, organizers were being arrested, kidnaped and beaten, whenever they were found in the South—in Birmingham, Chattanooga, Houston, Norfolk, Winston-Salem.

The first arrests in the cases that were later to become known as the Atlanta Six took place on April 21, 1930, at a meeting held in Atlanta under the auspices of the Unemployment Council. Joe Carr, organizer of the Young Communist League, got up and declared the meeting open. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the police came forward and arrested him and M. H. Powers, Communist Party organizer. Powers and Carr were held in jail for a week on minor charges and released on bond. But meanwhile Assistant Solicitor John Hudson was at work, and before a week was out he had dug up the old "slave insurrection" law

and procured an indictment under it.

On April 5, a particularly horrible lynching took place at Locust Grove, Georgia, between Atlanta and Macon. J. H. Wilkins, a Negro Pullman Car porter, was taken from the train—which was stopped especially for this purpose—turned over to a lynch-gang and roasted to death. An investigation carried through by the International Labor Defense established the fact that Wilkins had been murdered because he had smiled at a white woman passenger while he explained that he could not find a berth for her on the crowded train.

Anti-Lynch Meeting

The American Negro Labor Congress and the National Textile Workers Union organized a protest meeting in Atlanta, against this lynching.

Henry Story, an Atlanta worker, a printer by trade, opened the meeting. He introduced Herbert Newton, organizer of the American Negro Labor Congress. As Newton got up, two police, each armed with a double-barrelled shotgun, approached him and Story, and said: "That's enough." When Ann Burlak and I got up to protest, we were arrested too. The police then gave orders to seize every white person in the hall.

We went to the city jail, and then to the preliminary hearing. Hudson waved the Daily Worker and other literature at the judge, and harped especially on a leaflet showing a Negro and white boy clapping hands. He wound up by saying: "Your honor, we shall ask the death penalty in these cases."

The Hell of Fulton Tower

During the months that Ann and I stayed in Fulton Tower, we had a taste—but of course only a taste, since we were women and white—of the torment that Herndon was forced to endure. We ate only twice a day. At 5 o'clock in the morning trays were brought in with two hard, cold biscuits, molasses, and black coffee. The second and last meal was at one in the afternoon, and consisted of two biscuits, fat-back and cabbage or beans. The food was filthy, badly cooked and wholly inadequate.

But all this time, the protests of the workers kept coming in. We used to stand at the bathroom window, which gave a view of the yard, and we could see the telegraph boy coming and going. Once Jailer Holland lost his temper and burst into our cell to say that he was "sick and tired" of the protest telegrams.

At last, after two months, we were released on bail—all six of us. To this day our cases have not been tried. And if Angelo Herndon is freed, if the Georgia insurrection law is smashed, we too have a chance to go free. But if Herndon goes to the chain-gang—and this much Hudson has already announced—we will almost surely be brought back to Atlanta, and the death penalty or a long sentence will be asked against us.