

Barriers of Religion, Politics, Race Are Torn Asunder As Hundreds of Thousands Sign 'Free Herndon' Petition

By ELIZABETH LAWSON

LEWIS W. FEUER is a Jewish farmer in Marlow, Vermont. A few days ago the Angelo Herndon Petition Committee received a letter from Mr. Feuer, which read in part:

"Imagine me, a poor Jewish farmer, who never went to school, scouring the countryside of this very conservative New England region and holding forth on the Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln, and the 20-year chain-gang sentence of Angelo Herndon.

"Enclosed find a petition for Herndon's freedom, filled with 100 names. I have been working on this petition several days and nights. I toured the territory, distributed literature on the subject, and did lots of speech-making. One evening I nearly lost my life and nearly wrecked my car by backing out of a yard into a deep gravel pit. Nevertheless I escaped with no physical injuries. Several workers helped me dig the car out, and I got their signatures that same night.

Cross-Section of America

"When the full hundred was secured, I felt very happy, and entered the home of a friend dancing a jig and waving the petition high in the air. The petitioners include intellectuals, writers, ministers of churches, physicians, architects, teachers, philosophers, public officials, federal employees, school teachers—and above all workers and farmers. They are of many races, creeds and political beliefs—a true cross-section of America's population. I also collected funds as I went, and here is \$2.70 for the Herndon campaign."

The drive to gather two million signatures to a petition to Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia, for Herndon's freedom and the repeal of the "slave insurrection" law under which he was convicted, is taking on the heroic proportions of the Herndon bail fund campaign of last year. When the officials of Georgia, thinking to make sport of the labor movement, set bail of

\$15,000 for Angelo Herndon, people all over the country rolled up their sleeves and pitched in to collect this sum, penny by penny and dollar by dollar. The collection of the bail was, quite literally, a race against time, for on Aug. 4, 1934, Herndon was slated for the chain-gang. But on the very morning of Aug. 4, Joseph Brodsky, chief counsel for the International Labor Defense, appeared in Fulton Tower Prison in Atlanta—with the precious \$15,000 in bail!

Another Race Against Time

The present petition campaign is, also, a veritable race against time. When the Supreme Court reconvenes in October, it will have before it the question of a re-hearing in the Herndon case. The work of the next few weeks—the collection of signatures, the demonstrations, the protests to Governor Talmadge, the letters and telegrams to the U. S. Supreme Court urging a rehearing—in other words, the sum-total of mass pressure—will decide the fate of Angelo Herndon.

During these crucial weeks, in which the specter of Angelo Herndon in chains on the roads of Georgia looms very large, workers are showing tremendous skill and ingenuity in the struggle for Herndon's liberation. Where good methods of work are used, it has not been difficult to collect signatures to the petition for his freedom.

Lewis Feuer, the Jewish Vermont farmer, is only one of the thousands who have been stirred to action. The effort to snatch Herndon from the waiting chain-gang is becoming a mass movement, in which differences of religion, race, creed and political belief are swept aside in face of the common danger to the people of the United States if Herndon goes back to Georgia a prisoner.

Churches—Cafes—Gas Stations

A worker in Dallas, Texas — we withhold his name because we know the South—sends us the following letter: "Herewith petition to Governor Talmadge, with 63 signatures thereon. These names were

obtained by a Negro minister, Rev. T. C. Thomas. Neither racial lines nor religion nor politics—I am an infidel and a single-taxer and he is a Baptist—stand in the way of our friendship, and we were both glad to give this work our attention."

The owner of a small cafe in Roswell, New Mexico, sends a filled petition list, which he hung at the cashier's desk and which was signed by patrons as they paid their meal checks. A worker in a service station in Cumberland, Maryland, approached customers with the petition—and sent in a full list.

At meetings of union locals, the signature petitions are passed around and signed—for the fight for Herndon is bound up intimately with the right of the workers to organize. The American Federation of Pull-Fashioned Hosiery Workers, at its annual convention in Philadelphia, passed a resolution for Herndon's freedom. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is circulating the petition among its members. So are locals of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York City. Among local unions which have collected and turned in signatures are Lodge 52 of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, Gary, Indiana; Local 463 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers, Philadelphia; Local No. 1 of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers, New York; Local 2353 of the United Mine Workers, Yukon, Pennsylvania; Local 38-100 of the Ship Scalpers, I. L. A., San Francisco. Many of these union locals, and others, have sent funds to help defray the heavy expenses of the Herndon campaign.

Movies, Theatre and Sidewalk Booths

In Pittsburgh, members of the Young Communist League received permission from the owners of several movie and legitimate theatres, and from the owners of halls, to set up tables in the lobbies. The tables contained Herndon petitions,

a supply of pencils, and literature on the case. Behind each table, one or more young workers were stationed. The method was extremely successful; hundreds of signatures were obtained.

In the same city, a booth was maintained in front of Pythian Temple, one of the largest halls. Every passerby was approached; the issue was explained in a few sentences. "Out of all the people we talked to, housewives, businessmen, steel workers, Negro and white," writes a member of the committee, "not more than one in twelve refused to sign. When we began to hear 'I've already signed' we moved the table to another vantage point."

A sympathetic Negro minister in Cleveland preached a sermon on Angelo Herndon, and the worshippers signed the petition as they passed out of the church.

The New York district of the International Labor Defense, by working systematically, collected more than 3,000 signatures during the Aug. 3 anti-war march. Workers with signature lists fastened to boards were stationed at regular intervals among the marchers.

Traditions of Haymarket

The traditions of the fight to save the Haymarket martyrs have been used by the New York workers in the struggle for Herndon. Lucy Parsons, widow of Albert Parsons, one of the four anarchists who were hanged in 1886, recently wrote to the Labor Defender, organ of the I. L. D., describing how tables were placed on the sidewalks of Chicago, with a supply of petitions on the case. The workers of Harlem, acting directly on this letter, stationed tables on the streets, with Herndon petitions and literature.

But the tempo of the campaign must move far more swiftly. At a time so crucial, indifferent methods of work are a crime against the working class and the Negro people. In this respect, four points:

Our successes in bringing dozens of different organizations into the Herndon campaign, show that

where vital issues are involved it is possible by careful work to smash barriers of politics, religion, race—and achieve a genuine united front of struggle. Let there be no organization of workers or farmers, students, intellectuals or professional people, into which we fail to bring, sharply and clearly, the fight for Herndon's liberation.

A second point: Every meeting, picnic, political rally or other affair, of any considerable size, should be covered with Herndon petitions. Organizers should make it their business to note in good time what meetings are being held. Such meetings and affairs should include, not only those of sympathetic organizations, but also—we might even say particularly—of organizations never approached before on such an issue.

Public Officials Sign

Point three: While in a number of cities excellent work has been done in approaching public officials and other influential persons for signatures, not nearly enough has been accomplished in this direction. Eleven United States Congressmen have already signed the petition for Herndon; many more will sign if they are pressed by their constituents. The petitions bear also the signatures of three city mayors; how many more such signatures would they bear if the proper pressure were brought?

Point four: The chief weakness in the Herndon campaign is the trade unions. Yet where the issue has been brought into the unions, considerable success has been attained.

Two hundred thousand signatures have already been collected. They come from 47 states of the Union, the District of Columbia, and five foreign countries. The goal of two million signatures must be—can be—achieved. One million of the signatures should be collected by the time the Supreme Court reconvenes on Oct. 7. The successes we have already attained in the petition campaign are the token of our strength.