

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE

AROUND the country with
the HERNDON chain-gang
cage

By DONALD BURKE

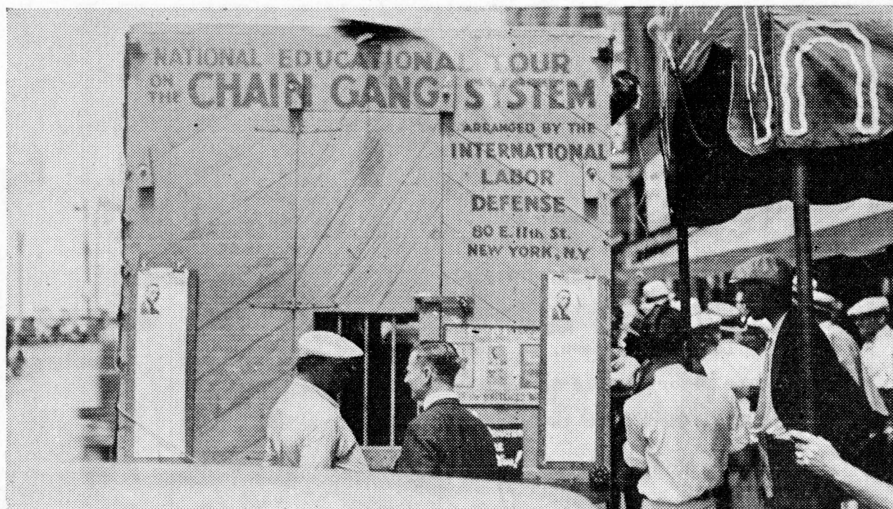
Who was in charge of the tour

Wherever we stopped on our journey which has already covered more than 10,000 miles bringing an exact replica of a Georgia chain-gang cage right to the front door of the American people, the same thing happened. Frowns, gasps, shaking of heads and troubled murmurs, "It's hard to believe, it seems impossible, isn't it awful."

Ever since we left New York on July 4, we have been the center of attraction of large and sympathetic crowds which gather immediately wherever we stop. People walk all around the cage, then come back to read our photostatic reports, clippings and to look carefully at the actual photographs of chain-gang tortures mounted along the sides. They are amazed, astounded—all except those who have themselves been victims of chain-gang torture some time in the past. We came across scores of these—Negro and white alike. All hastened to assure us and the rest of the crowd that our cage was just like the real thing. Some of them exposed legs and arms to show us scars left by shackles—scars that have never healed though the chains were removed ten or fifteen years ago.

Farmers, miners, city workers, cowboys, steel workers, Negro and white, they gather around to look and listen to our explanation of what they see, to the story of Angelo Herndon and the reason why we are touring the country with this exhibit. And everywhere, there is the same reaction. They begin

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The cage in Los Angeles.

immediately to relate what they see and hear about Georgia to their own experience and misery. The farmers start talking about the way they are being foreclosed and run off their land. The miners remember the company thugs and the bullets they rained on the picket lines during strikes. The city workers think of their own special forms of terror and jim crow persecution. Then they believe what they see and always there is the question, what can we do to help.

I wish I could put down here all the spontaneous speeches made by people in the crowds who came to our meetings. Most of them didn't even realize they were making speeches—they just spoke straight from their hearts, simply, clearly and beautifully explaining why saving Angelo Herndon from the hell which they only saw a sample of was their business and concern. They realize that victory for the lynchers who want to send Angelo Herndon to the chain gang, will mean victory for the forces of reaction that are denying them relief, trying to smash their unions, trying to take their land, keeping them oppressed and divided.

But our road was not smooth and our going was not easy. In almost every city and town through which we passed we clashed with the police. In some places they just tried to break up the meetings and rush us out of town. In others they dug up all sorts of ordinances and laws which we could be accused of violating. In Denver the police announced way in advance, their decision to prohibit the truck to enter the city and to arrest the occupants of the truck. They were baffled by the permit which was forced from the governor to exhibit the truck at the foot of the capital steps. They sent a motorcycle escort to bring us to the steps without stopping anywhere else in the city. The action of the Denver police was the 11th serious attempt to

interfere with our progress. But we got over 200 signatures after our meeting, including the signature of State Representative Frank O'Toole who remarked, "When I sign this it means that 40,000 people are signing it."

On the South Side of Chicago we got 500 signatures in two hours. In Minneapolis a group of strikers came to get petition lists to take on the picket line.

In Rock Springs, Wyoming, the local meeting of the United Mine Workers of America adjourned to the windows of their meeting hall to listen to our meeting down on the corner which was carried to them by our loudspeaker. They sent their contributions to the collection which amounted to \$17, much of it in large silver dollars dropped into the hats.

In California we had our most serious interference from police and vigilante groups. They tried to stop us with technicalities. They sent the Red Squad after us. They sent police to break up the meetings around the cage. But in each case we were protected by the determined crowds which refused to disperse—and our meetings were continued.

The most significant thing about our tour is the deep impression it is making on all who see it. Even those who stop out of sheer curiosity, ready to scoff, stay and listen, examine the chains and instruments of torture, look at the bunks, and come away impressed with two things—first, an appreciation of what the I.L.D. is doing to acquaint America with what faces Angelo Herndon if he is permitted to go back to the Georgia chain gang, and second the necessity of adding their voices to the protest against his infamous sentence.

Our chain gang cage replica is leaving thousands of new friends for Angelo Herndon behind it all over the country—and more than that—new friends and members for the I.L.D.