

new Masses

OCTOBER 29, 1935

"Ready to Give His Life—"

"THERE can be no greater honor than fighting for the freedom of the Negro people and for the freedom of the working class. If they should decide to take my life for doing this—let them know that I would rather die fighting for what belongs to me and my class than sit idly by while they trample my people underfoot. I prefer death—if I am not given my freedom." Four days before he went back to Georgia to start serving his murderous sentence of eighteen to twenty years on the chain gang, Angelo Herndon spoke these words. Those who heard them will never forget that heroic Negro boy—tall, straight, proud—standing before them, determined and unafraid. On October 24 Angelo Herndon was to surrender to the authorities of Georgia. In January, 1933, they demanded his death, because he led one thousand hungry people, Negro and white together, to the county commissioners to ask for bread; because he had in his possession literature which spoke of self-determination for the Negro people in the Black Belt of the South; because they said, possession of this literature was proof that Angelo Herndon was working to overthrow the constituted authority of the State of Georgia and set up in its place a "Black Republic." The jury listened to the frenzied demand for his life presented by the prosecution. They recommended "mercy"—18 to 20 years on the Georgia chain-gang. Because Angelo Herndon organized the hungry, because Angelo Herndon read and thought, because Angelo Herndon was courageous enough to fight for what he believed in—flinging into the teeth of the lily-white jury—"You can do what you will with Angelo Herndon, but you cannot kill the working class—" Angelo Herndon was sentenced to a living death.

THE State Supreme Court upheld the verdict. The United States Supreme Court twice refused to review it—and now Angelo Herndon is back in the hands of the Georgia lynchers. The International Labor Defense which conducted his case from the lowest to



RETREAT FROM NEW YORK

Boris Gorelick

the highest courts, which raised the \$15,000 cash bail that won his freedom for a year and three months—has not yet accepted this verdict as final. Neither have the scores of organizations, political parties, trade unions and Negro groups which have forged a powerful united front of defense to save Angelo Herndon. Governor Talmadge now has the power to free Angelo Herndon. Two million signatures are now being gathered demanding that he exercise this power, not only to free Angelo Herndon and the eighteen other men and women whose fate hangs in

the same balance that holds Angelo Herndon's, but also that he abolish the vicious, unconstitutional slave law under which they were all indicted. The campaign to collect these 2,000,000 signatures on a petition addressed to Governor Talmadge has almost reached the half-way mark. (Petition blanks can be secured from the Herndon Petition Committee, Room 610, 80 East 11th St., N.Y.C.) Time is of the greatest importance. Every day that passes means another day for Angelo Herndon on the Georgia chain-gang. Signatures, telegrams, letters to the governor

demanding Herndon's freedom—funds to the I.L.D. to carry on the fight—these are little enough to ask in the face of what Angelo Herndon faces. He is ready to give his life. Those of us who believe in justice, freedom and human rights must give him our support.