

A Negro T. U. U. L. Organizer in the South

By GILBERT LEWIS.

THE bourbon capitalists of the South have been able to maintain their semi-feudal sway over the millions of brutally oppressed and bitterly exploited Negro and white toilers solely because of their ability to keep these workers unorganized and divided. About this the Southern ruling class has no illusions. It knows that these workers and especially the Negro workers, when organized under the militant leadership of the Communist Party and the revolutionary trade unions can be but a battering ram for the smashing of the entire capitalist system, breeder of all forms of economic, social and political inequalities.

Thus they will do all in their power, resort to all forms of terror to keep these workers unorganized. This is shown in the bitter attacks upon the National Textile Workers Union and the Communist Party in Gastonia, the International Labor Defense in Charlotte and Norfolk, the NTWU and Communist Party in Atlanta, the Trade Union Unity League, and especially the Negro organizer of the Trade Union Unity League, in Chattanooga.

I, along with four other workers, two of them white organizers for the T.U.U.L., were arrested on March 5, while holding an open-air meeting. This meeting, the final mobilization of workers for the great March 6 demonstration, was held on the corner where most of the unemployed gather. The police, after a vain attempt to drive the workers from the streets and our meeting, arrested us and charged us with "blocking traffic and refusing to move on when ordered to do so by a police officer."

Use of Fascist Methods.

From the moment of my arrest until the time of my release open fascist methods were employed against me.

"Lynch him, lynch the black bastard!" cried a group, identified as Ku Kluxers, who gathered around the police when I was seized. Noticing, however, the militancy of the Negro and white workers who had also gathered around in my defense they thought better of the matter.

"You got a helluva nerve," said one big Southern detective, "to get upon these streets to make a speech. Stick up your damn hands before I blackjack you."

In the courtroom little effort was made by the capitalist judge, Martin A. Fleming, to conceal the true class against class issue of the case. I was charged with blocking traffic; the following are the major questions that were asked:

"Do you believe in the Christian religion?"

"Didn't you get up in a meeting and advise the workers to stay away from church and stop giving money to the preachers?"

"Isn't it true that your organization is trying to smash the American Federation of Labor."

"Where did you come from?"

"Were you sent here to organize the Negroes?"

cesses and were for a time deprived of their clear understanding and sober outlook.

In order to straighten out the line of our work in the sphere of collective economic construction, we must get rid of these sentiments. This is one of the immediate tasks of the Party at the present time.

The art of leadership is a serious matter. One must not lag behind the movement, because this means getting separated from the masses. But one must also not hasten on ahead as one thereby loses touch with the masses. He who wishes to lead the movement and at the same time maintain contact with the million masses, must carry on a fight on two fronts—against those who lag behind and against those who hasten on ahead.

Our Party is strong and unvanquished, because in leading the movement it knows how to maintain and strengthen contact with the masses of workers and peasants.

"Where did you get that fancy talk from? You didn't learn it in the South."

An open hand for all terror against me even in the courtroom, had been given the bosses' thugs.

"Why in hell don't you stand still before I kick hell out of you!" one big thug said to me as I, becoming tired of the long proceedings, shifted from one foot to the other.

I was given a fine of fifty dollars cash or 112 days on the chain gang. A cowardly lawyer refused to appeal the case and I was led away to a cell.

Southern Lynch Law.

Before reaching the cell, however, several things occurred to me. Three detectives took me into a private room, locked the door and made an attempt to change my accent.

"You're a fresh Nigger," one of them said. "I am going to change that fancy talk of yours and make you talk like a real Chattanooga Nigger," and with this he landed a blow on my jaw. Another came to his aid and the two of them rained blows upon my head and face.

After convincing themselves that my speech could not be changed from that of a militant T.U.U.L. organizer to that of a cringing, Uncle Tom type of Negro, with his "Yessir" and "No-sir" and abject servility, they turned me over to another, who weighed and finger printed me.

Five o'clock in the afternoon, no lawyer having been found who would take the case. I was taken from the city jail to the workhouse. On entering the workhouse the driver of the patrol said to the guard, (pointing to me): "Here is a fellow who swears he can't be made to work, but wants to overthrow the government and believes in social equality for Niggers. (In the South social equality means only one thing—intermarriage). I guess you know what to do with him."

In the workhouse a steel ring $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter was riveted on each of my legs. These were joined together by a steel chain 14 inches long, the chains are placed on your legs on entering the prison and are not removed until the day you leave.

The next morning, along with 44 other prisoners, I was taken out to a large slag (rock pile) and set to work digging rock with a sixteen pound rough-handled pick. My hands began to grow blisters. One of them burst and the blood shot out. I paused for a moment to wipe it away.

"Go on there, you," shouted the burly guard. "A little blood of your own will do you Reds good."

A little later, while attempting to drive the pick through a three-foot mass of solid rock, I became exhausted and stopped to blow. The guard yelled at me to keep going, stating that Reds would find no picnic on the chain gang as long as he was around. He stood over me, gun in hand, the whole time I was there, watching my every move. About eleven-thirty workers and sympathizers came forward and paid my fine. The guard showed his disappointment in being cheated of the chance to work a "Red" to death or shoot him should he offer the least resistance.

These bitter attacks upon the revolutionary organizations of the workers by the bosses is being met with increasing resistance from the workers. On the very day that I was being sentenced to one hundred and twelve days on the chain gang for organizing the workers to struggle for work or wages, workers throughout the world were demonstrating millions strong against starvation. Right in Chattanooga, though all of the leaders were in jail, rank and file workers of the Unemployed Council held a mass meeting and would have marched on City Hall but for a fierce rain storm that made it impossible. The attacks of the bosses are bearing fruit but not the kind of fruit counted upon by these bosses.