

# United Front Opens Herndon's Jail

*("I'm Dead Sure You'll Get Me Out Soon")*

JOSEPH NORTH

"You know," he said to me a block or so away from the courthouse, "the nearer I get to the court, the nearer I feel freedom. I'm dead sure the united front'll get me out soon. Funny isn't it? The nearer I get to Fulton Tower, this time, the nearer I feel to freedom." He was silent a moment and then grinned. "That's dialectics, I guess, isn't it?"

—From "Herndon Is Back in Atlanta" in  
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**A**FTER Angelo Herndon said "so long" and walked up the courthouse stairs to give himself up to twenty years on a Georgia chain gang the authorities took him over to Fulton Tower and put him in Big Rock with thirty-two murderers. They have taken six of them out since Angelo came down, just six short weeks ago. A man a week to the electric chair. Georgia electrocuted them and they said good-bye to Herndon one by one as they went out the door for that last time.

They put Angelo Herndon in with murderers and condemned men because he had led a thousand starving people to ask for bread. The condemned men, the murderers, the two-gun men, looked up puzzled when the guards brought 22-year-old Angelo in with his armload of books. The authorities knew perfectly well what they were doing—this was the most turbulent wing in Fulton Tower and the men snarled at each other and fought with each other and plenty were stabbed in this barred, dark room where you could hear the 2,000 volts of electricity whirl on execution day. The big shots of Georgia thought the men would turn on Angelo one of these days and do a job for Georgia the authorities would love to have done. After Angelo came in there wasn't one fight, during the whole six weeks' period.

They kangarooed all newcomers, but the murderers and the two-gunmen looked Angelo over after the guards slammed the doors shut and they wanted to know what he was doing time for. One of the men spoke up and said he had heard Angelo while on his speaking tour in California and Angelo talked for the underdog. They scoffed at first and were impatient with a man who came 1,000 miles to give himself up to twenty years on the chain gang. They were no different than the editor of The Pittsburgh Courier, who had a cartoon drawn of a little figure in big chains and captioned it "Little Man, What Now?" when Angelo went down and surrendered.

The condemned men thought it over and decided Angelo wouldn't have to go on trial in kangaroo court and he would save the \$1.50 they charge every man for "breaking into jail."

They were black men, all of them, and they knew they were getting a dirty deal down there in sunny Dixie and they used to sing a song that started like this:

White folks call me nigger  
But that ain't none of my name  
When I get up in Heaven  
Gonna change that ugly name.

They asked Angelo to talk to them and explain some things to them. Angelo, graduate of a Workers' School in Chattanooga and member of the National Executive Committee of the Young Communist League, explained to the condemned men and they sat around and thought it over. One fellow who still had a chance for a pardon took Angelo aside and said, "Mr. Herndon, we have no foundation to build on; we colored people got no chance down here. I would like to know if I ever get out and go North could I go to night school?" The man had a wife and three children and he didn't want to believe he could never get out. For most of them felt that whoever entered that jail never walked out alive. When you did go out you were as good as dead, for the electric chair was at the other end of your walk.

Angelo walked out that door—but not to the electric chair.

Warden Turner had told me you would need to file through the recently-added twelve bars of "hard steel and soft steel" to break out of Fulton Tower. "No man done it yet." Angelo walked out that door and he didn't even have a finger nail file in his hands. The twenty six men condemned to die watched him go and they tried to figure it out.

The guard had come around, shortly after Judge Dorsey had ruled the insurrection law unconstitutional, on December 7, and had told Angelo to pack. "Get dressed, boy," he said. "You're going out." Angelo started packing his books but the guard said, "Hurry up, leave them damn books here, you got to leave fast."

"Go on, Angelo, dress," the condemned men said and they pitched in and packed up his stuff while Angelo donned his street clothes. They all crowded around to shake hands but the guard wouldn't give them a break. "Come along," he said, "you ain't got all day shakin' hands."

The Reverend, a man of 40, condemned to die for the murder of a woman, crowded forward. "I told you, Angelo," he said. "I knew it . . . knew it all along . . . I got a message from the Lawd." The Reverend had told Angelo he could commune with God, in fact he had seen God. Saw God in a Chicago police station once. God was blond and had blue eyes, wore police

riding boots and had a horseman's whip in his hands. "I can commune with God for you," he had told Angelo. "I can call God from here and get a message through to Him." In a prison cell you got to be real friendly even with a man with a glint in his eye and Angelo Herndon talked to the man who could get messages through to God.

When Angelo got the word to leave the Reverend beamed. He took it as a personal victory. "And stay out, son," he said. "Don't you ever let me catch you back here."

As Angelo walked down the corridors of gloomy old Fulton Tower he heard the condemned men singing the song they all sang over and over:

That old walker, walker [guard]  
Made me mad this mornin'  
About my time  
Lawd, Lawd  
About my time.

I gotta wife,  
Wife and three little chillen  
They're cryin' for bread  
Lawd,  
Cryin' for bread.

I'm gonna roll on, roll on  
A few days longer  
I'm goin' back home  
Oh, yes, I'm goin' back home.

If I had my, had my  
32-20  
I'd go today  
Lawd, Lawd,  
I'd go today.

He had referred to these songs in a letter written to a friend in the International Labor Defense which had organized the united-defense front about his case:

As per usual the boys are singing those songs—and to my own surprise I find that tears are dribbling from my eyes. I can hardly bear the thought of the thing—to sit and listen to condemned men singing songs that have words with so much meaning—and yet they don't realize it themselves. . . . I can understand how miserable the lives of those who were tortured during the Spanish inquisition must have been.

I, like them, am an outcast, a criminal, a murderer and everything else that is low and dirty—according to the thinking of my torturers. But I won't let that worry me. The day is fast approaching when the millions of robbed, exploited and downtrodden people will make the final and triumphant march against the real criminals, murderers and fiends who are skilled in the art of human torture . . . my whole life has been dedicated to that triumph—in spite of all the horrors I see today.

They set Herndon loose on \$8,000 bail and he had wiped his brow and walked

down the Atlanta streets breathing some fresh air and then he sent a wire cheering the Scottsboro boys and after that, a few hours to wait for his train, he took in a movie. He caught the evening train and came North.

The Daily Worker had got the word and had printed a special edition and thousands of people in New York had thrown their hats in the air and had cried out joyously, "Angelo is free."

Thousands of them gathered at the Pennsylvania Station when he came in Sunday at 4:10 p. m. and they hailed Angelo Herndon and sang "The Internationale" and "Solidarity Forever." Socialists, Communists, non-party people, there in the crowd, milling together in the crowd greeting Herndon in a crowd and not even the shrewdest dick could tell a Communist from a Socialist and the policemen shoving couldn't tell a Socialist from a Communist and the cry was "United Front!" When they hoisted Angelo up on their shoulders on Eighth Avenue he said: "It was the glorious united front you put up that set me free."

There were families, black, white, workmen and their wives and their kids, Communist, Socialist, and I saw Mary Fox, of the League for Industrial Democracy in the crowd, her six-year-old kid and an eight-year-old nephew hanging on to her hands. All had red ribbons on calling for Herndon's defense. They cheered for Herndon and they were shoved around by the police and they sang "The Internationale" for Herndon and the slogan was the united front.

Angelo Herndon walked down 125th Street in Harlem with a bunch of roses the workers had shoved into his hands and went to the workers' headquarters and made a little speech thanking the workers and asking to be excused because he hadn't slept for two days. And the workers cheered him and I heard a follower of Father Divine come up and say, "Peace, brother, ain't it wonderful. You're free."

And I thought of the old Reverend that Angelo had told me about and I thought the Reverend down there in jail hadn't got the right message when he communed with God for surely God would have told him about the League for Industrial Democracy, the International Labor Defense, the National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, the Non-Partisan League, the General Defense League of the I. W. W. God would have told the Reverend about the United Front and about the resolution passed in Atlantic City at the A. F. of L. convention against the insurrection law of Georgia and I'm sure God would have mentioned the million people throughout the United States who signed the Herndon petition, for many of the signatures were gotten in His churches.

God would certainly have said something about the need to strengthen the United Front, for the State of Georgia means to

appeal the case to a higher court. For Angelo is not scot-free. And Georgia gentlemen don't mean to let the man Warden Turner called "just a light-colored nigger" get off as easy as that.

The old Reverend was wrong and the boys in jail singing that old song about their 32-20 need to learn a new verse. It would deal with millions of men and women, white and black, workingmen all of all political

and religious denominations, getting together and constituting themselves the Supreme Court of these United States.

Commune again, Reverend, commune again down there in Fulton Tower, down in Big Rock. There's a new message abroad in America.

And one final word to the editor of The Pittsburgh Courier—Yes, little man, what now?

## Choral Ballade

*of the More Articulate Ladies in the  
Metropolitan Horseshoe*

EMANUEL EISENBERG

Never a time with the rich securer!

Never such furs at a Charity Ball!

Bond investments grow steadily surer;

Dividends show a tremendous haul.

Then why do paraders march out to brawl

With signs that we wish they would show to Sweeney?

Those frightening fools should be made to crawl.

What America needs is a Mussolini.

Let's question the most impartial juror:

Isn't ours the most plentiful land of all?

Then how can the poor be growing poorer?

It's propaganda to make us look small

And they're simply enacting each Moscow scrawl,

For nobody starves here—not one weenie!

The malcontents cry it to shock and appall.

What America needs is a Mussolini.

You give relief—and they raise a furor;

You distribute old clothes—and still they squall.

When will dumb masses become maturer

And learn there exists a permanent wall

Between throats that can gulp at a sandwich stall

And palates attuned to winned scallopini?

To demand lives like ours! such fantastic gall!

What America needs is a Mussolini.

L'Envoi

Benito, they say that you're due to fall,

That your victims are stirring, black-browed and spleeny:

If you get out alive, make us your next call!

What America needs is a Mussolini.