

Tenn. Verdict Hopeful Omen for New South

By Claudia Jones

The freeing of 23 of 25 Negro citizens of Columbia, Tenn., by an all-white jury in Lawrenceburg is an outstanding victory for the Negro people against the lynchers and white supremacists.

The jurors rose above southern racism to give an historic verdict in a Jimcrow court.

Involved was nothing less than the right of Negroes to defend themselves and their right to live from mob violence.

As such, the verdict has put under challenge the southern bourbons precept that "Negroes have no rights which white men are bound to respect."

VICTORY NOT COMPLETE

It is of course not a complete victory. Two Negro defendants, Bob Gentry and John McKivens, were sentenced by the same jury to 21 years. Moreover, the acquitted 23 defendants, together with five others, still face trial on other indictments. Undoubtedly it will require even greater support to free them, if for no other reason than that the reactionaries will now fight to block a complete victory.

But only the most sectarian would fail to see that the jury's action is evidence that real dents can be made in the southern superstructure of Jimcrow.

Another sidelight of the jury's action throws into a cocked hat the bourbon cry that "outside interference" hurts the South. In the past this device was successful in arousing the most narrow sectional prejudices. But not even this held sway with this all-white jury.

This by no means indicates that the powers-that-be will not still attempt to thwart every step made by the Negro people to reject the "traditional" Jimcrow place carved out for them. But undoubtedly this shows a growing desire on the part of many white southerners to do more than express passive disgust with racism.

Without the "outside" aid of the able NAACP legal defense and the thousands of people who aided the Columbia case, this victory would never have resulted.

But primary credit for the exposure of this frame-up should go to our own paper, the Daily Worker and The Worker.

Harry Raymond's dispatches exposed the mockery of democracy toward Negro citizens as seen in a southern courtroom.

HOPE OF SOUTH

The trial showed that the hope of a new South rests in the stalwart men and women like the Tennessee defendants, the Blairs, Mortons and Bellafonts, the young Negro veterans and workers who dared all for justice. It showed that there are white southerners

like courageous Maurice Weaver, whose final appeal to the jury was made not in a paternalistic, humanitarian manner, but in their own interests—in the interests of a South in which the

united strength of the people, Negro and white, will some day retire the landlords, politaxers and lynchers and build a real democracy.

To us in the North, the verdict

should be a challenge. A challenge to indict Romeika, the Freeport cop who still walks his beat through the good graces of Governor Tom Dewey, who dares to speak about "no Bilboism" in

New York. A challenge that we must match the example of the southern people who themselves are beginning to meet the challenge of American racism and Jimcrow.



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