

Half the World

by Claudia Jones

I WANT TO WRITE A BIT about my sojourn at the Women's Detention House and the events which led up to the arrest on June 20, of seventeen working class leaders for the crime of speaking and acting for peace, equality, security and democracy.



CLAUDIA JONES

We received a million dollar publicity. And personally, I am still amazed that I am literally worth my weight in gold—$20,000 of it. Oh, yes—and $5,000 more for deportation. Incidentally, the Department of Injustice issued an order for deportation for myself and Alexander Bittelman, practically the very day of our arrest, just so that the repressive pro-fascist war hysteria could be increased, around our indictment under the Smith Act.

Now, one is pretty surly when awakened at seven o'clock in the morning. But to be awakened at seven o'clock in your own home by FBI characters—who scarcely rate being termed men and women, who are never around when lynchers, Ku-Kluxers and anti-Semites are to be found—to be awakened by a rude ring of your doorbell by these creatures is to grow evil, indeed.

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THEY CAME to my house and the homes of other working class leaders early in the morning. They arrested seriously ailing and sick people like the venerable 70-year-old working class leader Israel Amter, they refused to allow the men to shave, they drove through the early morning even as the German fascists drove through the city streets, while children trotted to school, and early wagons delivered milk for families who can pay the high prices these days. One heard people who drove by near us talk about ordinary things, never suspecting that next to them was an example of the denial of free speech and thought—in which cars—a telephone had signaled that the round-up of working class leaders was proceeding on schedule!

Clearly, not having (or could ever have!) examples of what is termed "overt" acts, they tried to give the impression that they really believed that if people **"did leave 35 East 12th Street"** or "mailed envelopes" or "wrote articles for peace" which mothers and women want, or "dressed," (they attempted to search me for 'weapons' after they saw me dress from my birthday suit) this was an overt act. **But thousands and millions are learning that working class leaders are "dangerous" as are millions of peace-loving people because our ideas are the ideas of peace and security, of Negro equality, of women's dignity, of youth's future and the happiness of children!**

From the Women's Detention Home, which rises like a huge fort in the midst of Greenwich Village, one could see people carrying on their normal routines of daily living—going to the grocer, to the sailor, to the florist, maybe, going and coming from work. You were asked by blunt matrons to move from the window if you stood there too long, a jail window one could hardly get a fist of protest through. And, in the prison itself—well the best that could be said of it is that which impressed the women prisoners most was that Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Betty Gannett, Marion Bachrach and I were worth so much money. No, they didn't segregate me but they did Pettis Perry, chairman of the Farm Commission of the Communist Party and national secretary of the National Negro Commission. **That is until the wind of protest made itself felt in the Federal jail and he was quickly moved with the others.**

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EVEN IN JAIL, these working class leaders fought against the racist filth of white chauvinism and jimcrow segregation which has become known all over the world as the unique export of the war and American imperialists. It is an export well-known to Negroes—it was known to the murdered Willie McGee, and the Martinsville Seven, to thousands of Negro men and women who died at the hands of Wall Street representatives whose voices quake in fear at the sound of peace talks in Korea and crises-bound inflation.

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HISTORY HAS PROVED that they cannot jail the Communist Party. A growing list of people, ministers, professionals, Negro Americans, women, youth and newspapers of all opinions have spoken out against the jailing of 11 Communist leaders—the result of the Supreme Court decision. But even more millions must speak out, organize and unite to demand an end to the arrests, against the outlawing of the Communist Party, against the jailing of the Communist leaders, for a rehearing of the Supreme Court, for the Communist Eleven, for peace now in Korea and the overall settlement of the Big Five nations for a lasting peace.

The road may be thorny and rough, but to the people belongs the future and to them forever belongs the ageless democratic rights of free speech, equality and fraternity—and above all—PEACE!