

A PLEA FOR CLEMENCY IN SCOTTSBORO NEGRO CASE

IN LETTER TO GOVERNOR MILLER OF ALABAMA, MATTHEW WOLL,
ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL CIVIC FEDERATION,
URGES COMMUTATION OF DEATH SENTENCE TO LIFE
IMPRISONMENT PENDING INVESTIGATION

FLAGRANT EXPLOITATION OF CASE BY COMMUNISTS FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES

The Executive Council of The National Civic Federation has addressed a letter to the Honorable B. M. Miller, Governor of Alabama, urging him to commute the death sentence imposed on Haywood Patterson, one of the Negro defendants in the "Scottsboro case", to life imprisonment pending a thorough investigation by the Governor into the guilt or innocence of said defendant.

The letter, signed by Matthew Woll, Acting President of the Federation, is given below.

New York City, April 19, 1933.

Honorable B. M. Miller,
Governor of the State of Alabama,
Montgomery, Alabama.

Sir:

The conviction of Haywood Patterson at Decatur, Alabama, for the crime of rape and the sentence of death imposed upon him by the court raise issues of paramount national importance.

The Executive Council of The National Civic Federation does not pretend to pass upon the guilt or innocence of the defendant. It is, however, deeply concerned for the good name of American justice. Together with Americans almost everywhere, it is shocked by the harshness of the penal code of your State permitting the imposition of capital punishment for a crime which, however abhorrent, is treated with less severity in practically every other civilized jurisdiction. In addition, the circumstances attending the trial, involving the injection of alien influences and the raising of social prejudices, create the impression that the jury could hardly escape being influenced by considerations other than the cold facts of the case.

Under these circumstances, we urge you, in the interest of justice, to commute the sentence of Haywood Patterson to life imprisonment pending a thorough and searching investigation on your part into his guilt or innocence. We are satisfied that you would make an impartial investigation and that, should you be convinced that there has been a miscarriage of justice, you would exercise your right of pardon.

This plea is made to you with full knowledge of the fact that this defendant has the right to appeal to higher courts and despite our confidence that his rights and those of his co-defendants, regardless of color, race or religion, will be fully protected by those courts.

Respectfully yours,



Matthew Woll
Acting President.

There are those who doubt the propriety of calling upon the Governor of the State of Alabama to perform what would naturally be regarded as his sworn duty and, were it simply an ordinary criminal case, that might be admitted. But this is no such instance. It is a deliberate piece of Communist propaganda directed from Moscow. Because it is "just another one of those Negro rape cases", few know what is involved in this tragedy.

No better statement of the case can be made than that put out by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People which is the organization in the United States recognized as the real defender of the rights of the Negroes. It is made up of both colored and white persons. Senator Arthur Capper is a Vice President. William Allen White, Jane Addams and William Allan Neilson are members of the Board of Directors which also contains the names of the radicals, other than Communists, Oswald Garrison Villard, John Haynes Holmes, Charles Edward Russell, Clarence Darrow, Arthur Garfield Hays and Felix Frankfurter, and it includes the following representative Negroes: Bishop John A. Gregg, James Weldon Johnson, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois and William Pickens.

As the N. A. A. C. P. took up the defense of those boys at the time the crime was committed, what happened to that organization is best told by Walter White, its secretary.

He stated, after the conviction in the first case, that:

"When a motion for a new trial was denied, appeal was taken to the Alabama Supreme Court. * * *

"But while these investigations and negotiations were proceeding, a new element entered the cases which simultaneously complicated them to an unbelievable degree and, at the same time, made them the most notable test of strength to date between those who seek justice for the Negro through American forms of government and those who seek to spread Communist propaganda among American Negroes.

"With a blare of trumpets the Communists seized upon the Scottsboro convictions. It was, they realized, a golden opportunity to put into effect the plan decided upon by the Third Internationale and upon which they had been assiduously working but with only a modicum of success—to capitalize Negro unrest in the United States against lynching, jim crowism, proscription, and insult. As far back as 1925 a segregated wing of Communism, 'The American Negro Labor Congress,' which later became 'The League of Struggle for Negro Rights,' had held at Chicago a convention to win Negroes to the cause of Communism. In October, 1928, there was issued in Moscow a lengthy resolution on the Negro question in the United States, urging the Negro working class to form organizations which 'if properly organized and well led' could 'play a considerable role in the class struggle against American imperialism' and in leading 'the movement of the oppressed masses of the Negro populace.'

"These efforts at organization were based upon the theory that the Negroes are the most oppressed group in the United States and, therefore, should be the most fertile field for revolutionary propaganda. The Scottsboro case offered the most dramatic opportunity yet afforded for this campaign."

So bitter was the attack of the Communist body, the International Labor Defense, upon the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that Clarence Darrow, who had been retained by the latter body to defend the boys, was forced out of the case despite the fact

that he had already been paid \$2,000. The accusations against the conservative organization by the I. L. D.—that it was being influenced by capitalists, imperialists, etc.—so stirred the nine boys and their parents or guardians that they signed a letter repudiating the N. A. A. C. P. and placed their case completely in the hands of the I. L. D. The world-wide campaign of the Communists in this case is conducted, according to their boasted purpose, to make it another Sacco-Vanzetti or Tom Mooney case—and they are doing it. Cable dispatches from various cities in Europe, South America and in fact, all over the world where there are Communists even if there are no Negroes, show that pretexts are being found for parades, meetings and demonstrations before United States embassies and consulates in the interest of the “Scottsboro boys.” The columns of the *Daily Worker*, the organ of the Communist Party in the United States, directed from Moscow and published in New York, are reeking with blatantly incendiary slogans such as “The Capitalists Shall Not Murder the Scottsboro Negroes!” “The Boys Shall Not Burn!” and so forth. Of course, the public, not seeing these Communist sheets and having no knowledge of the case other than that gleaned from sporadic articles sifting through the public prints, has no conception of the significance of this campaign and its far-reaching ramifications.

Mr. Darrow was replaced ostensibly by Samuel S. Leibowitz but the real chief of the defense counsel is none other than Joseph R. Brodsky, International Labor Defense lawyer and one of the most notorious Communists in the country.

Despite its ejection from the case by the Communists, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is continuing its endeavors on behalf of the boys because, as it says:

“The case involves more than the lives of the boys. It involves the welfare and the status of every Negro in the United States. Unless it is won, unless the system of oppression which it exemplifies is completely exposed to the gaze of the civilized world, Negro Americans remain virtually slaves and white Americans, for all their protestations to the contrary, remain hypocrites and slave-holders.”

The following is quoted from a statement made to The National Civic Federation by an observer in Harlem, his name being withheld at his request:

“The Negroes in Harlem are greatly disturbed over the Scottsboro case. The *Amsterdam News*, an anti-Communist paper, put up a placard **Patterson GUILTY** on Sunday night when the verdict came down. It created an emotional scene. Many Negroes were observed crying. You have no idea what that case has stirred up. The Negroes have not been inclined at all towards Communism but this verdict is regarded as a miscarriage of justice. Now it needs only a spark to turn Harlem Red overnight. For political purposes, the Communists wish to see the Negroes in this Scottsboro case electrocuted because it will afford the opportunity to campaign against ‘Capitalistic injustice.’ If the trial last week had resulted in Patterson’s acquittal, they would have been deprived of anything to propagandize on. When the U. S. Supreme Court decision, which brought a new trial, was handed down, the Communist propagandists had nothing on which to continue their campaign but the Alabama Court now has played right into their hands and they are using that decision as a political football.

“The International Labor Defense is conducting a world-wide campaign: The Communists have received over \$200,000 from widely scattered sections. Checks, money orders, telegrams and so forth are pouring into the I. L. D. Many persons who have never been inclined towards Communism are now becoming sympathetic.”

The “Free the Scottsboro Boys” March on Washington, described by the *Daily Worker* as a “peaceful but vigorous and militant demonstration,” is scheduled to arrive at the National Capital on May 8. Among the slogans are the following:

“Demand the immediate, unconditional and safe release of the Scottsboro boys!”

“Demand services of Negroes and white workers on the jury!”

“Raise funds for the defense of the Scottsboro boys!”

“For the solidarity of the Negro!”

Preparatory to this National Mass March, thousands of New York workers, Negro and white, will march through Harlem in a big “Scottsboro protest parade,” while thousands of workers in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Norfolk, and many other cities will make simultaneous demonstrations, according to announcements in Communist papers.

These Cuts show Communist Demonstrations in Chicago



Demonstration against “Legal Lynching” of Scottsboro boys. Starting point of parade, Chicago, April 15, 1933.

“Death to Lynchers.”



Scottsboro parade on South State Street.

“Wake Up, Negro.”



Scottsboro parade on South Dearborn Street, the heart of Chicago’s Negro section.

“We Demand Release.”

