'Criminal Syndicalism' in Mississippi

Atlanta, Ga.

With a recent wave of arrests under a new state law outlawing 'criminal syndicalism,' Mississippi has again shown that politically and legally it continues to side with racists.

Last May 11, during what was the longest legislative session in the state's history—23 weeks, Senator E. K. Collins of Laurel introduced the criminal syndicalism bill to outlaw advocating, teaching, aiding, or abetting the commission of crime or unlawful acts of force and violence or of 'terrorism' to effect a change in ownership or political or social change, or for profit. The outlawed acts include written or spoken words, publications, organizational efforts, and such. Punishment ranges from fines of from $200 to $1,000 and sentences of one to ten years for violating or encouraging others to violate the law. Owners of property or those who control it and permit an assembly for such purposes face fines of from $100 to $500 and up to a year in jail.

Kenneth Toler, writing in the Atlanta Constitution, commented on the bill: "Taking cognizance of the [racist] movements, the state senate this week passed a bill which was primarily aimed at suppressing militant white supremacists from forming in the state." A UPI dispatch from Jackson, the state capital, reported the belief: "A bill designed to cripple the growth of white supremacy groups that advocate violence won Mississippi Senate approval Monday. Sources said an organization drive by the Ku Klux Klan and other new, militant-segregationist groups were the sparkplug for the proposal." And Robert Gordon, newsman for Jackson Clarion-Ledger, also reported that the bill "was primarily aimed at suppressing [sic] groups of militant white supremacists who advocate violence."

However, Sen. Collins, who at the Democratic National Convention argued before the credentials committee for the seating of the regular Mississippi delegation, said the bill could be used as well against liberation groups. It was passed without discussion.

A companion bill, also introduced by Sen. Collins, was aimed at persons outside the state who advocate or aid 'criminal syndicalism.' This law would punish such persons if they were found in Mississippi. Collins said it might make civil rights groups "think twice" about sending workers into the state. He also commented that the bill may be unconstitutional, but, "it can't do us any harm."

The criminal syndicalism law was forgotten during the summer by civil rights workers, who at first had been concerned about it. Like a few of the other bills were prepared. Even parents were not permitted to see their sons in jail.

That day, John C. Gibson, writing in the county seat newspaper, the Magnolia Gazette, said that Dennis Sweeney, white S.N.C.C. worker who was also arrested, "in our book of extremism should draw a penalty equal to that for treason, because what he and others like him are doing is treason." In the McComb newspaper, Charles Gordon reported, "Sheriff R. R. Warren said today he believes increasingly the explosions—four of which have occurred since Sunday—are being staged in an effort to induce the federal government to declare martial law here." Even Gov. Paul Johnson concurred: On September 30 he said, "Some of the bombs were 'plants,' and we can say that they were the outgrowth of COFO activities." ("COFO" is the Council of Federated Organizations that coordinates civil rights work in Mississippi.)

But the next day three whites were arrested and charged with two of the bombings. Membership cards in the A.P.W.R. and K.K.K. were found in the car of one of them. The three and eight others subsequently arrested were not charged with criminal syndicalism, although the bill was supposedly aimed at white terrorists. They were charged under a law against the illegal possession of dynamite that was originally passed to enable the sale of dynamite in this state. The bills passed with the required three-fourths vote on the third reading.
grand jury on $1,000 bond each and remained in jail.

Then on October 15 four S.N.C.C. field
secretaries were arrested for criminal
syndicalism while they were walking down
a street in the downtown Negro section.
They had not been passing out leaflets, but
each had a Freedom Democratic Party
leaflet with him. The four have remained
in jail.

Lawyers began legal action against this
law. A petition for an injunction to enjoin
its enforcement has been filed in relation
to the McComb arrests. A three-judge
panel is to hear the petition at some future
date. Attorney Carrie Hall, who asked for
an injunction preventing further arrests.

The legal challenge will be based largely
on recent rulings in Georgia and Pennsylva-
nia where similar, though not identical
state statutes were declared unconstitutional
by federal courts.

A different tack is being taken in
Belzoni, where petitions have been filed to
have the cases moved to federal court. A
subsequent suit will challenge the law’s
constitutionality.

Meanwhile, over twenty civil rights
workers wait in Mississippi jails.

Louisiana’s Chessman

New Orleans, La.

The last time a white man was executed
for the crime of rape in Louisiana was in
1907. In its entire history, the state has
executed only two white men for rape—both,
interestingly enough, were Negroes. Over
forty of whom have been bailed or
electrocuted for rape in this century, have
fared less well, though in recent years
some determined legal efforts have pro-
longed the lives of several.

Such efforts have succeeded in making
Edgar Labat heir to Caryl Chessman’s role;
Labat’s is the oldest pending capital
case in the country. A Negro, he was an
attendant at a Catholic hospital in New
Orleans when in November of 1950 he and
Clifton Poret were arrested for the rape
of a white woman. In March of 1953 the
two men were sentenced to death; their
continued existence, after an unsuccessful
appeal to the highest courts of both states
and nations, is a source of frustration to
those charged with the administration of
Louisiana justice.

There are ironies here: since federal
courts have balked at the state’s wilful
failure to observe due process in the
impartial selection of juries, it has been sev-
eral years since the state has been able
to execute a Negro. Confederate justice is
all but abolishing capital punishment for
Louisiana Negroes.

Of the two defendants, Labat is the more
articulate. He has been allowed to write
and has been doing so. Five chapters of an
autobiography are already finished and are
being edited by a Massachusetts woman,
and several of his poems have appeared in
the Vineyard Gazette. But an increasing
flow of letters from here and abroad—
where he has received more press coverage
than at home—testifies to his emerging
legal rather than literary prominence.

He has had eight stays of execution.
Describing one occasion when his reprieve
came three hours before he was to die, he
recounts that his sister had arrived to claim
the body, his head had been shaved, and
he could hear the stepped-up humming of
the prison generators. To read his own
letters is to wonder at his reasonableness.

Now in an eight-by-ten-foot cell in
Louisiana state penitentiary at Angola,
Edgar Labat faces his fourteenth summer
of imprisonment; he has been on death
row or another since his conviction. His
case is now being handled by Washington’s
Edward Bennett Williams and, for the
Louisiana Civil Liberties Union, by Benja-
meh E. Smith in New Orleans.

“Over its lifetime of operations,” the

States Brewer’s Association, Inc.

965 International Life Bldg., Austin, Texas

In Texas after bowling, beer is a natural

After you’ve bowled a game or two, or when you’re winding up
the evening at the neighborhood bowling center, it’s good to relax
with friends and compare scores. What better way to add to the
sport and the socialness than with a refreshing glass of beer?
However you take your fun—skipping, skating, or by your seat in the
game room—beer always makes a welcome addition to the party.

Your familiar glass of beer is also a pleasurable reminder that we
live in a land of personal freedom—and that our right to enjoy
beer and ale, if we so desire, is just one, but an important one, of
those personal freedoms.

In Texas... beer goes with fun, with relaxation

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