

Appeal for Funds Now to Reverse Reginald Thomas Frameup Decision

By Angelo Herndon

Behind steel bars at Sing Sing prison, temporarily part of an army of shadows with no "legal" identity but a number on a gray uniform, is a young Negro as innocent of any crime as you who are reading this.

According to the prison records, and according to the judge who sentenced him to from two to four years in the state penitentiary he is guilty of the crime of "felonious assault in the second degree."

The only reason why Reginald Thomas is in Sing Sing today is because he is a Negro.

THE FACTS

The facts in his case are tragically simple. Five years ago, on the night of July 12, 1936, to be exact, a white policeman was stabbed on a street corner in Harlem. The crime occurred at a time when feeling was running high among the Negro people over events in Ethiopia.

On the night of July 12 such a meeting, held under the auspices of a Negro Nationalist group was broken up by the police and in the excitement which followed a patrolman, Danny Dolan, was stabbed. Police and lay eye-witnesses described Dolan's assailant as a youth of about 17, thin, slight, no more than 5 feet 4 inches tall

Reginald Thomas, at that time 29 years old, a tall, broad-shouldered young man, 5 feet 11 inches tall, was walking along the street with a friend. The friend was short and slight. They were stopped by the police who decided to arrest the shorter man as a suspect and took Thomas along.

Thomas was then taken to Suydenham Hospital where Dolan lay hovering between life and death. A police officer entered the room first and then Thomas was led in by two others. Dolan was asked "Is this the man?"

He nodded his head.

He was charged with the crime but it was not until a year and a half later that he was indicted. Dolan was a very sick man. He might die—and the District Attorney's office might then change the charge to murder.

Not until the end of June, 1941, did the district attorney's office get around to trying the Thomas case.

For more than three weeks an all-white jury sat and listened to the case of Reginald Thomas. With the exception of the vigorous fight put up by defense attorney Samuel A. Neuberger, they heard a practically one-sided case. Five years had passed. Many of the original eye-witnesses could no longer be found. The defense did have one eye wit-

ness. A Negro woman named Mrs. Louise Williams, who had lived on the first floor directly over the scene of the crime and who had from her window seen everything that had happened.

DIES IN COURT

She never got a chance to tell her story. She died in the court room about 5 minutes after she took the stand before she had the opportunity to give any of her testimony.

The jury listened and then took almost eight hours to reach its verdict. When it came back into the court room after midnight of July 22, the answer was "guilty—of second degree assault."

The next day one of the jurors, All Allison, wrote a letter to Judge Freschi who had presided at the trial. He came in to see the judge about what he had written. He said, he never had and did not now believe Thomas guilty. He had held out for seven and a half hours, but out of a mistaken notion of democracy, had agreed to vote with the rest though he was not convinced on the evidence of the man's guilt.

During the trial, friends of Reginald Thomas in Harlem, quickly set up a Thomas Defense Committee. With the cooperation of the I.L.D. which supplied the legal de-

fense it managed to secure enough money to pay the expenses of the trial. But the task of securing \$10,000 bail proved a difficult one.

The Thomas Defense Committee is confident that bail will be raised in a very short time and that Reginald Thomas will be a free man pending the outcome of the appeal.

But the appeal is not assured. Within eight days time (by Sept. 30) it must be filed. This means the printing of the whole record of the three and a half week trial. The appeal and the fight to free an innocent man will cost more than \$1,500.

Unless the greater part of that sum is raised within the few days left the Thomas case is lost.

I know that the people who love liberty and justice are always ready and willing to do everything they can to fight a frame-up like the Thomas case. I know how people in every part of the country helped the I.L.D. do what seemed to be the impossible in my own case.

The Thomas Defense Committee is located at 1 W. 125th St. Whatever you can send or bring there, no matter how little, will be gratefully received and will go a long way to right one of the greatest wrongs committed in a New York City Court—and there have been many.