

THE PATTERSON CASE

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IN THESE TIMES of war tension and rising fascist danger the Government, in order to stifle the voice of the left and to terrorize generally the working class and its allies, proceeds from one judicial outrage to another. American traditions of justice are thrown unceremoniously into the discard. Men and women are being arrested in all parts of the country on the absurd charge that they are conspiring to overthrow the Government by force and violence, they are crowded off to jail for shockingly long terms.



One of the most outstanding of these many cases of judicial abuse is that of William L. Patterson, executive secretary of the Civil Rights Congress. In his case the government is making use of the especially insidious and dangerous device of "double jeopardy." This means to try a person twice for the same offense, a malpractice contrary to American legal concepts ever since the foundation of the Republic. But the government, desperately determined to beat down all those who dare to speak against its reactionary policies, is not hindered by this elementary fact.

For the second time within six months Patterson has been sent to prison for 90 days on precisely the same charge—contempt of court. His "crime" is his failure to produce records of names and addresses of CRC

supporters (so they may be persecuted by the FBI) records which he has sworn that he has not got. His second imprisonment makes it obvious that unless he "purges himself of contempt" by doing the impossible, this 63-year old Negro leader and fighter for democracy may be jailed again and again under the pretext of continued contempt. The threat that actually hangs over Patterson is life imprisonment as an "habitual offender." Meanwhile, the CRC, of which Patterson is the head, is also being persecuted, as a "Communist front," under the McCarran Act.

THE REAL "CRIME" of Patterson, of course, is not the imaginary one of refusing to turn over to the government books and records which he does not possess. What the red-baiters and Negro-haters in the Department of Justice have against him, above all, is that three years ago he presented to the United Nations, then sitting in Paris, the famous CRC Genocide petition. This great document outlined irrefutable facts and figures of the genocidal policies being carried out in the United States against the Negro people by the jimcrows. At the time of his two imprisonments, Patterson was working to bring "Genocide" up to date.

Early in the current year Patterson also presented to the delegates to the recent Inter-American conference at Caracas, Venezuela, a document exposing the deterioration of civil and human rights in the United States, entitled, "Six Year Retrogression Toward a Police-State." These are the "crimes" for which Patterson is being punished, in vio-

lation of basic principles of American legality and justice. His documents are highly embarrassing to the maneuvers abroad of the Wall Street warmongers who, for their own purposes, are striving to obscure from the world's peoples the increasingly reactionary political regime in the United States. So Patterson has to be jailed, disregarding every element of free speech and free press.

IT IS OUTRAGEOUS — the vendetta that the government is carrying on against secretary Patterson of the CRC, but especially dangerous is the weapon of double-jeopardy that is being used in this persecution. Numerous of those fighters imprisoned under the Smith Act, on lying charges of advocating force and violence, are due to be released from prison in a few months, but already the government has indicated that it proposes to use its double jeopardy tactic against them also. That is, it is planning to jail them again, on the so-called second indictment for alleged membership in the Communist Party. This would mean a ten years' sentence on top of the five year just served—and for no crime at all.

There should be a strong protest movement developed against the outrageous treatment being dealt out to William L. Patterson and the other political prisoners now threatened with the double-jeopardy frame-up. The workers must not let this monstrous railroading scheme be established in the cases of the political prisoners. The fight to free Patterson is the fight to defend the Bill of Rights.