

Judicial Murder in America

By HERBERT ZAM

IT used to be a proud boast of Americans that the United States was the most democratic country in the world. By this an intelligent worker understood that in America the class character of the government was so cleverly concealed, that from a superficial examination, one would be led to believe that it was really serving the interests of the "people."

This myth has been shattered by what have become the three most notorious cases of judicial murder ever perpetrated.

There have been cases of manufactured evidence before; cases of intimidated juries, of bought prosecutors. But never before has the intimidation been so open, the manufacturing of evidence so plain, the buying of prosecutors such a matter of common knowledge, as in the Mooney, Sacco-Vanzetti and Centralia cases.

Tom Mooney and Warren Billings were found guilty of throwing a bomb during a preparedness-day parade; found guilty under circumstances which would have convicted the most innocent of men. Today the whole world knows that Mooney and Billings are innocent: the prosecutors admit it; the chief witnesses have filed affidavits telling how they were instructed by the prosecuting attorney on what to say. The President of the United States has requested the governor to grant a pardon.

Yet Mooney and Billings remain in jail and a new trial is persistently refused.

The American Labor movement had almost forgotten the Mooney-Billings tragedy when two events occurred which roughly shook it up. These were the Centralia and Sacco-Vanzetti cases.

On November 11th, 1919, during an armistice parade in Centralia, Wash., just when the parade had passed the I. W. W. headquarters, a group of members of the American Legion rushed into the hall with the intention of raiding it, beating up the occupants, and destroying the property. Twice before had they done this and had found easy sailing. This time they expected some more "fun". They got it. As they smashed in the door they were met by a shower of bullets. Their leader immediately dropped with a bullet in his abdomen and died later. Several others of the attackers were wounded.

The I. W. W. members took refuge in a sort of ice-box and later surrendered to the police. All this is of no consequence. What interests us is: The I. W. W. were defending themselves and their property against assault. It is evident that any killing done by them was done in self-defence. That also is of no present concern. We are interested in the trial and conviction of the I. W. W.

Five of them were found guilty of murder in the second degree and sentenced to from 25-40 years—the maximum penalty, although the jury had handed in a petition for leniency. Two were freed and one was adjudged insane.

About one year after the trial five of the jurors filed affidavits saying that they believe the men to have been NOT GUILTY; that they voted guilty thru intimidation and thru the fear that "an acquittal would have resulted in the immediate lynching of all defendants by the 60 armed Legionnaires who were present."

And yet, in spite of this evidence a new trial is refused the men.

The Sacco-Vanzetti case presents an even more gruesome aspect. In this case it is the jurymen who retract—it is the chief witnesses of the prosecution.

Mrs. Lola Andrews upon whose positive identification of Vanzetti the prosecution based much of its case has filed an affidavit saying that she was intimidated by District Attorney Katzman and the police officials into giving her testimony and that she was carefully coached in all she was to say.

We cannot here enumerate all the instances of perjury, lying and intimidation used by the prosecution to prove their cases.

These few examples are sufficient.

The interest in the cases seems to be dying down. This would be a crime on the part of the working-class. We urge all radical papers to constantly keep these cases before the workers, especially in view of the present Communist trial at Michigan.

Let the working class remember that these victims of capitalist judicial murder are still in jail and that attempts may be made to repeat these cases.