

**FREE THE DAWSON 5!**



**SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE  
BLACK BELT NATION!**

(Reprinted from UNITE!, July 1977)

*Dawson, Georgia* — Here in the heart of the Black Belt South, just miles away from Plains, 5 youths face the electric chair because of a shooting incident that they had nothing to do with. On January 22, 1976, a white ranch foreman was shot in the head in a small grocery in Dawson. The store owner, Tiny Denton, said that 4 Black males wearing ski masks shot Bubba Howell and then stole \$100 from the till. Tiny Denton said that he hadn't recognized any of the murderers - that is until 5 days later

when he pointed the finger at Roosevelt Watson. This is very strange indeed because Roosevelt and the Watson family had a charge account at the store and the previous Christmas Denton had given Roosevelt a Christmas gift. Very strange indeed, that he didn't recognize Roosevelt right off the bat.

Roosevelt, his brother, his cousin and two friends were quickly arrested and charged with murder. Once arrested, Roosevelt was threatened with castration and electrocution if

he did not do the bidding of the police. The bidding was to confess and to search through a cold water swamp for hours looking for the murder weapon. None was found. Roosevelt's signature was even forged in order to waive his rights.

The fact of the matter is that the 5 youths had been sent by Roosevelt's mother, in the opposite direction from Denton's store, with gallon jugs to be filled at a neighbor's well several miles away. Her pump was broken.

It has now been 17 months since the youths were arrested. Roosevelt and Henderson are now out on \$100,000 bail and the other 3 still sit in Terrel County jail on \$100,000 bond. The trial has been set for August 1st.

Up until the first of June the Judge maintained that the trial would be starting during the regular session of the Superior Court in late June. Now the Judge expects the case to begin some time in September or October. He claims this is necessary because of the illness of the prosecutor and the need to consider pre-trial motions by the defense, one of which is the complaint that the youths are being denied the "right to a speedy trial."

Are these youths cold blooded murderers with long criminal records that would merit such high bond? Should they be considered a high security risk? Do they deserve to sit in jail for 17 months without a trial? These youths have much in common. They are all Black, all rural poor, and never been in "trouble" before.

—Henderson Watson, 22, after he completed the 8th grade, left school

and began picking cotton and peanuts in Terrel County. He has always lived with his family and never been in any trouble with the law. — Roosevelt Watson, 17, like his brother worked in the fields picking cotton and peanuts to help support his family. After completing the 8th grade he went to work for the Drew Hill peanut plant where he was arrested. He also has lived with his family all his life and never been in any trouble.

— J.D. Davenport, 18, one of nine children, was from Tifton. His mother does factory work. He is a cousin of the Watsons. He most recently worked in tobacco factories. He also has never been in trouble before.

— Johnny Jackson, 18, born into a sharecropper family who have worked 2 farms in the Terrel area. He also worked for Drew Hill. He has never been in trouble with the law.

— James Jackson, 17, worked the fields along with his family and worked for Drew Hill. He has never had any problems with the law.

So we wonder why these 5 innocent young men were fingered for this murder. What is the situation in Terrel County that would make it possible for these young men to be facing electrocution?

Dawson, Georgia is located in southwest Georgia. It is a cotton and peanut farming area which is 60% Black. However, it is dominated and controlled by a small white minority. The earnings of the vast majority of Black families is below the poverty level. A good job is a \$2 an hour shift at the peanut shelling



J.D. Davenport (18)

James Jackson (17)

Johnny Jackson (18)

Henderson Watson (22)

Roosevelt Watson (17)

plant where several of the young men worked. Many homes in the area are similar to the Watson home. It is without running water or heating. The cracks in the floor are covered by flattened snuff tins.

Here in Dawson despite the numerical majority, Blacks hold no office in the city or county government or the school board, even though the public schools are almost entirely Black. The white students all go to private schools. The situation in Dawson is not new or unique. There have been many cases in the past and

today that are very similar to the case of the Dawson 5. One of the most famous cases which bears striking similarity is the case of the Scotsboro Boys, where 9 youths were framed for the rape of a white woman and sentenced to die. This kind of oppression that exists in the South has gone on for hundreds of years.

#### IMPERIALIST EXPLOITATION

After the Civil War, Blacks struggled to claim the land that they had

earned with their sweat and blood as slaves. Despite the fact that land was promised to them in Reconstruction, Southern plantation owners and the northern industrialists and bankers made a deal to deprive them of this basic democratic right. The North would have the agricultural and mineral resources for use in the northern factories and the plantation owners would have the lands back and rule over the Blacks and poor whites. Through open and brutal terror by the Ku Klux Klan, the Southern landlords were able to steal the land back from the freed slaves. In this way the northern imperialist interests took over the control of the nation in the South with full cooperation of the Southern aristocracy.

*The systematic oppression of this nation in the South has continued to this day. Open terror is still used to maintain the system of rule by the minority, and the case of the Dawson 5 is such an example. Who it is that is chosen as a target for this kind of terror is often arbitrary. It could have been any 5 youths as long as they were poor and Black. The point is to consistently have an example.*

This kind of oppression can and will be ended. It will be ended when

the imperialists are driven out of the nation in the South and the people of that nation have the right to the land and the right of self-determination.

The case of the 5 youths from Dawson is an important struggle for several reasons. One is because there are 5 Black youths lives at stake. Secondly because it is a question of resisting this continued national oppression. We must actively support the Dawson 5 in their fight for freedom. There are petitions available to have filled out that demand the charges be dropped. We must try to get resolutions passed in our unions, student governments, church groups, etc. that demand charges be dropped. We must do everything that we can to prevent these youths from ever seeing the electric chair or spending the rest of their lives in jail.

Sample resolutions and petitions are available through Unite! in Chicago, or in Georgia, write:

MLOC  
PO Box 90518  
East Point, Georgia

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