

75 YEARS
OF
STRUGGLE!



The Life of
Nanny Washburn

Introduction

May 3, 1975 will mark Leah [Nanny] Washburn's 75th birthday and begin her 45th year of militant activity in the working class struggle.

Nanny Washburn's life is a testament to the horrors of imperialist exploitation, which is particularly naked in the South—but most important is a monument to the proud traditions of working class resistance.

She was born to a sharecropper's family in the rural, Georgia black belt at the turn of the century, personally witnessing the full wrath of KKK terror and brutal national oppression of Afro-Americans there. Beginning work at the age of eight in Georgia's cruel textile industry, she easily grasped Marx's famous words that, "Labor in the white skin cannot be free while in the Black it is branded."

With depression devastating the South, Nanny Washburn enthusiastically joined the Communist Party in the 1930s. This story, told in her own words, illustrates the powerful force which is created when scientific, socialist convictions are combined with the existing hatred by the workers for their conditions.

The Marxist-Leninist education she received from the Party sustained her fighting spirit and activity during the years following the Party's shameful betrayal and cowardly retreat from the South. Her conviction that the socialist system will inevitably triumph over imperialism—and that the masses, although not yet fully awake, will surely take up this momentous task—kept her going despite isolation from other comrades.

Internationalism is the single most striking lesson which Nanny Washburn embraced. Support for the once-socialist Soviet Union, the fight against U.S. intervention in both Korea and Indochina, and most important her dedication to breaking the slave-like bonds on the Afro-American people are all proof of this. Grasping the right of Black people to self-determination has meant her consistent battle against every type of national injustice. With this view, Nanny Washburn had not a second thought about moving her family to Alabama for six months to

better participate in the civil rights struggle. Her insistence on wiping out the disease of white chauvinism has always been linked with her complete faith that white workers have every interest in and will take up these struggles as their own.

Since we first met Nanny Washburn, her humility, undying love for the people and willingness to sacrifice anything for the struggle has greatly inspired many young revolutionaries, especially thousands of poor and working women who are following in her footsteps.

At 75, Nanny Washburn is still living in Atlanta, Georgia, an active member of the October League [Marxist-Leninist]. She can be found at most every demonstration there, whether it be against police terror in the Black community, at a factory gate where workers are on strike, in a march for women's equality or against imperialist war. She can usually be heard speaking out against injustice and bringing forward her communist conviction that "we will not be free so long as this rotten capitalist system still exists." At a recent October League Labor Conference in Atlanta, she said that her brightest hope for the future was that "a new communist party be built which can lead the people". We hope this pamphlet about her life will make some contribution to that urgent goal.

Early Years

I was born in Douglasville, Georgia, in 1900. I was born into a sharecropper's family. My daddy and mother was sharecroppers on Arthur Milan's farm.

It's fine to work and live on a farm if you have your own piece of land. But it's very, very bad to be a sharecropper and to work practically all the year and then the landlord gets all that you have slaved for. You're turned out for the winter without any means of livelihood. We had to go out to the river and gather watercresses and wild onions to fry them for food.

Our neighbor, Brother Miller, a Black man, was a great neighbor. He was the only one we had. He used to go across a rotted bridge to visit us and this was dangerous. The county wouldn't fix it, so he dynamited the bridge to force them to build a new one. Brother Miller was shot to death supposedly for stealing a chicken, but we never did believe that.

My mother was born in Todd County in 1866. Her father had to go to the Civil War against his will. They forced him to go. Home was where he belonged because his wife had cancer and nine little children. That's what happened to him and it was against his will.

My mother lived to be 98. She was always a person who associated with Negro people. Even back when she was a child, she would slip off (she had to) over to the Negro church. She loved the Negro church better because of the music and singing.

When she had her first baby, she didn't give enough milk (they didn't know about bottles) so her Negro neighbor who had a little baby the same age came over and divided her milk every day with my brother.

My mother just naturally loved people. She didn't ever see one too low but what she wouldn't give them a helping hand. She wouldn't call the law; she'd give them some food 'cause she knew what they needed. She never went to school a day in her life and she was much smarter than my educated daddy. He was radical too.

My father was born in 1861 and lived to be 87 years old. He'd been involved in the Populist Party and took the Party's paper, the RIPSAW. My father used to sit and we wondered what's he



would oversleep. I'd carry their lunch when I was seven, remember I dreaded going over that bridge across what I'd call a big creek. I reckon it was a river. You know cottonmills had to have water.

NANNY GOES TO WORK

Anyway, I learned how to work at seven and asked the boss to give me a job. He says, "Ah honey, you're too little." I said, "Well, I can tell you right now I can work. I can learn that thing quick."

So I learned to work at seven. I was running winders then. I'd catch on quick and help my sister but she was afraid that I might get hurt. Well, I can run winders and I can run drawers. In Porterdale, Georgia, I run combers and I've run quillers. I've done almost everything buL .leave and work in the card room.

In 1907 they had a riot. It was a white man's riot. The white men started fighting Negroes here in Atlanta and it spread clear out. I was seven years old and they was two long rows of houses we lived in. We didn't have a bathroom or toilet and on each side of the houses was the woods.

The superintendent of Elizabeth Cottonmills sent a man around and he commanded that every person on that bridge [editor's note: white millworkers] must go to the cottonmill that night. They said the "n's" was coming in there to get us, kill us every one and rape the women. (I hate that word "nigger" so I say "n's".) Every person in the village had to go to the cottonmill that night and they closed the doors.

While they was doing that, they were burning, lynching and hanging the Negroes and burning their homes. Some of them had homes but after that they never did come back.

That evening one of my mother's friends, A Black woman, came through the woods. She had gotten caught in this jam. When our family went to the mill that night, mother told her, "You go and be real quiet. I'm going to put you in a closet. Don't you go to the doors, don't you do nothing, make no noise." She stayed in the house til 4 or 4:30 that morning. My mother saved her life that night. Honey, they were burning, hanging and murdering the Negro people. That's the kind of life I have experienced.

When I was 14 years old I knew I was supposed to go back to school. But they wouldn't pay us sharecroppers' children no attention. I went to school three months and walked five miles to get there. When I left I didn't even know my ABC's.

laughing about. He'd come across a good article, something so radical, til he'd just holler out about the paper. The paper was doing him some good. It just tickled him to death because the paper was hitting at the rich man.

My father was an organizer. The cottonmill where he worked was very hot, down in the bottoms. They hauled 18 to 30 people out on stretchers every day because they had passed out. My father couldn't take it so they went to the bosses, him and my brothers. He had them all organized. I remember they's telling us about what the boss said and how my father told him, "You better open them windows and get those people some air in here; if you don't we're gonna open them ourselves." They forced the windows open in that cottonmill!!!

Nearly everyone of my family got brown lung, you know like black lung in the coal mines. Practically all my brothers is suffering with that lung and so are my sisters.

When we was living out in the country, the textile industry was looking for help. They go to the ignorant people—they thought we was all ignorant. They'd tell the people, "You'll get rich if you bring your families to the textile mill." They said, "You'll get rich and then you'll have a toilet in the house in a year or so."

We moved from Douglas County to Newnan, Georgia, where the agents was hiring. From Newnan we moved to the Elizabeth Cottonmill, out near Hapeville. We'd move from one cottonmill to another thinking we'd get better paid and not work as many hours.

Sometimes my sisters and brothers who worked at the mill

I saw Miss Sallie Mae Vancey walking from school to the landlord's house where she stayed. I said, "Miss Sallie Mae, I sure do wish I knowed my ABC's." She said, "Don't you know your ABC's? That's the way it goes." She was teaching all the landlord's children 'cause she stayed with them.

I had to teach myself to read. I got a letter from a man in Rome, Georgia, and I wanted to know what was in the letter. Mother said, "Well go and read it." I went under a oak tree in College Park where I was working at the Gate City Cottonmill.

NANNY AS A YOUNG WOMAN

In 1918 my brothers was state organizers in the Wobblies. They followed the field harvest. They had to hobo and they didn't have enough money. Harvest workers would go to be hired to the landlord to work in wheat. They'd put them in the barn to sleep and the real radicals would organize against that.

Willie and Archie, my brothers, were out in Tacoma, Washington. The Salvation Army would be on one side preaching to break up the workers' meeting. My brothers and the IWW would be on the other side singing, "Work and pray, live on hay, for when you die, you'll get pie in the sky." So that is how they'd break up the Salvation Army.

Anyway, Archie said they arrested 30,000. Every person demanded a separate trial. The judge says, "Wooh, that'd break this state to give separate trials to 30,000 people." Thirty thousand people all demanded a separate trial. Wouldn't that have been marvelous if they could have broken it?!!

My brothers came back and had a big suitcase full of literature. I was 17. I had married at 15 and was working at the Elizabeth Cottonmill.

I had to be the servant and help. You know women was cooks and housekeepers. I was washing dishes, cleaning and cooking but I loved to hear them talk. They would talk about how the old tsar got killed in Russia. That done me more good, I loved to hear them! Archie would say, "Hell, you know that old tsar ought to been killed years ago. He was living in a gold house, gold luxuries and the people was having babies in the street. They had to overthrow him. In the Soviet Union they can live free now. And that's what the people will do in this country too."

And they will too! I'm going to try to help do it as long as I can. I'd like to overthrow this country this second. I'd catch all that stuff but yet I didn't have the time, you know. Women was working like slaves in the house. We got to organize

for the women to have their freedom from men looking at them as a piece of property and a playpretty. I don't believe in being under slavery. I believe there ought to be a society where women wouldn't have to be legal prostitutes. Socialism is all that will ever take care of that.

I was having children by a man I didn't love that just wanted to use me as a chaingang wants to use a prisoner. I was a bedfellow—I had to go to bed with him sick or well. I had to have his babies. I never did want a big drove of children 'cause I didn't have the means to take care of them. But how could I help it?

I finally kicked him out. He gave me syphillis twice and he caused me to have two blind children. What could be more low down than a man bringing syphillis in to an innocent ignorant woman? How many tears you think I've shed over the children having to suffer? It will follow me to the grave. He caused my heart to be broke forever.

Why should I have to live a life of legal prostitution and so on? Signing up a paper to be married and then money to be divorced. I had to pay the money and it came out of my sweat and blood. I had to raise the children by myself and he never even sent them a card. What kind of society do you think this is? It's rotten!! We must liberate the women and do away with this going to the courthouse and paying money to marry a man and have babies. That's exploitation. Women ought to be free.

Nanny Becomes

A Communist

At this time I was timid, and beat down like most young women. But that changed when I met Mr. Otto Hall and Mr. Angelo Herndon. That was the greatest experience of my life. They were both communists and they had come down to help organize the unemployed.

We lived on Whitehall Terrace in 1930. That spot there was where I first went to radicalism. We were burning coal in the fireplace and was lucky to have that. We were eating slop out of those soup kitchens where they had rotten produce.

I had been reading THE DAILY WORKER that was being sold secret and other communist literature from my cousins that helped organize at the Gastonia, North Carolina, textile strike.

Mr. Otto Hall and Mr. Angelo Herndon, two Black comrades, knew we was a radical family so they started coming over to visit us. I liked how they talked and how they tried to build unions and organize the people. I'll never forget Mr. Hall sitting by my sick mother's bed, she was 75, and the rest of us gathered around. He taught us and read to us about the capitalist system and fighting for socialism.

And from that you see I read Karl Marx and Lenin and Stalin. Through Mr. Otto Hall I learned my ABC's of capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. I thought this was the greatest thing in my life. It was hard studying. There was a lot of interruption with five children and I wasn't in good health then so I never learned as much or studied like I wanted to. But Mr. Otto Hall kept coming until he just made life worth living. You know, I had no freedom until Mr. Otto Hall and the Communist Party taught me how to get free, how women could get free. He talked to all of us, not just me.

Then Mr. Otto Hall asked me to join the Party. It was an honor to me, almost like going to another world. I had so much respect for the Party before it went revisionist. I loved the Communist Party. It was a part of me and it opened my mind to know that someday we would be free.

We did whatever we could for the Party. We worked day and night to build it, just like today when so many are working so hard to build a new communist party. My mother put up I don't know how many Communist Party members and organizers and would cook for 10 and 20 at a time. Many of us in my family would put in any money we could scrape up into the Party because we knew the working class needed a party to lead the struggle, that's just how important the Party was to us.

WORK IN THE THIRTIES

We worked all through the 30's and 40's, on the Scottsboro Boys' case and so many others, doing union organizing and the unemployed, marching and demonstrating, putting out leaflets, organizing the WPA workers. We didn't have no freedom. We couldn't put out literature except at 2 or 3 in the morning when the police weren't around. We didn't have cars or telephones. We had to walk and ride the trolley when we had the money in order to get out and organize the people.

We went to organizing an unemployment council. We called a demonstration. We published a piece in the newspaper saying if



anybody was hungry they should come uptown around the courthouse.'Course the rich said there was nobody hungry. But we was all starving to death. Mr. Angelo Herndon started a mimeograph machine to run off leaflets and put them out all over the city and county. We led a demonstration and I think it was 8000 people, Black and white, from Hapeville, East Point, College Park, all over Atlanta and everywhere. They had come to town to let the rich know they was hungry.

They arrested Mr. Angelo Herndon and went in his room and took all his communist papers and literature. He was put in jail at Big Rock on Butler Street. The International Labor Defense defended Mr. Angelo Herndon. Those brilliant lawyers come out and Mr. Benjamin Davis Jr. (his daddy published a newspaper and I went to a Communist school in his house once) defended Angelo. All my people went to the courthouse but I had to stay home 'cause I was tied down with babies. But my whole spirit was there. He stayed in Fulton County jail on Butler Street for 19 months. They wanted to electrocute him but finally tried him and gave him 20 years and let him out on bond.

Around this time was when the Gastonia textile strike was going on. Miss Ella Mae Wiggins was an organizer there in 1929. She was a poet and composed songs too. She lived in a little shack out in the woods. The people missed her for five days. The thugs went out there and put poison in her spring water. It's a wonder that she wasn't dead and her children too.

The fellow workers went down to see what was wrong and found her poisoned. But she wasn't afraid. She got on a truck and they was going to a big meeting and the company thugs shot and killed her.

About four years later in 1934 my sister, Annie Mae Leathers, and I was arrested for organizing textile workers out at the Exposition Cottonmill in Atlanta, [editor's note: J.P. Stevens owned this mill. It opened in 1880 and closed down in 1970.] This was during the national textile strike in 1934. Gene Talmadge said if millhands would all vote him in, he would see to it the National Guard wasn't called out on us. But they was called out in LaGrange, Georgia, right after he got elected. They even stuck bayonets in some of them's hearts down there in LaGrange.

My sister and I organized at the Exposition Cottonmill. I was off work 'cause I was moving. I had to move because the Ku Klux Klan paraded down there and kept my little children scared to death 'cause I was putting THE DAILY WORKER out in the cottonmill. I was organizing then. I wasn't official but I had THE DAILY WORKER and I knew people needed to get it so I distributed it.

My sister was working out at the Exposition. She belonged to the AFL union, the United Textile Workers. That morning I got up early and you know I didn't have one grain of sugar, didn't have coffee, didn't have a piece of bread. I looked over at those children and I felt like tearing this society up.

I told the children I was going to go down to the welfare and see if they'd give me anything. I said, "Now, if they don't give me anything, you won't see me no more til tonight late." I went down there and one of them prissy little welfare workers said, "I can't give you anything 'cause it's not legal. But I can give you 50 cents." I said, "No, you can't give me 50 cents 'cause that won't feed five people!"

So I went on to the cottonmill and I stuck some DAILY WORKERS in my bosom. I didn't take them out—I had good judgement 'cause Mr. Otto Hall and Mr. Angelo Herndon taught me. I went on to the mill and we stayed there til 10 p.m. I was radical as hell!!! I told the workers, "Now listen workers. I'm a worker too. I run warpers in that mill. And now the warpers and the whole mill is closed down. You know where the strength is, out here on the picketline. The owner of this cottonmill, let him weave his cloth, let him spin his thread, let him do anything he wants to. But he can't do it. We got the advantage. We're out here on the picketline and this is where the strength is. Don't go back to work!!!"

I*

«>

They had the police there and the crooked organizers in the AFL. They got together. My sister and I went down to a woman's house to go to the bathroom about two blocks from the mill. We was walking back and the police grabbed us and carried us to the Big Rock jail. They searched me and my hair and my female organs. They found THE DAILY WORKERS on me when they stripped me naked. They took them and put a charge against us of INSURRECTION, trying to overthrow the government. We was in jail under the law that was passed to hold the slave to the master. They told us we would be electrocuted. And that's what they meant to do—electrocute us organizers in the Communist Party. Where was any other organization? The Communist Party was the only one that stood up.

While we was in jail, the matron whipped my sister because she wanted to tell the prostitutes and girls that it was this sick society that made them be prostitutes. The matron gathered the prostitutes to get them to whip my sister and kill us. She told them prostitutes and alcoholics, "Listen, I want to tell you about these low down goddamn Communist bitches. That bitch was caught in bed with a nigger." She was agitating them to kill us.

I talked back to her. Annie Mae was sitting there and that matron came over and slapped her with all her strength, beat her terrible. My sister put assault and battery against her, had the lawyer get a warrant.

We called a white lawyer that we had been advised if we ever had trouble to call. I demanded my rights and called him. He come down and commenced hemming and hawing. He said, "Well, I don't think I can handle this case. I can go down and get the International Labor Defense lawyer, but you know he's Black." I said, "What do you reckon I care about him being Black? I want him to defend me. I don't care nothing about his skin!!!"

So Mr. John Gear, one of Ben Davis' partners, took the case. And the white man dropped out. You see, the white man's never done nothing for me. Mr. Gear defended us. He had to stand up and listen for two hours and 45 minutes at my tongue running, exposing, villifying and humiliating the capitalist system.

«•

Angelo Herndon's case was pending in the U.S. Supreme Court. When that insurrection law was declared unconstitutional, Angelo Herndon came free and so did we. When my sister got out of jail, she went back to the mill but her union, the United Textile Workers, turned her out. You see, unions wouldn't have communists.

After I got out of jail, I went back to working. When we didn't have a job in the 30's, we worked in the WPA (Work Projects Administration). During this time, the whole country was hungry. One time I was working in a print shop cleaning up. I got a telegram from the Communist Party in Alabama telling me they was picking me up that night. We were going to a demonstration to get food for the hungry in D.C. It was the dead of winter. I sat up all night waiting. They picked me up and we went. There was three Negro men from Alabama. The car was open, just an old rattletrap and we didn't have any money. I have been many times on hunger marches in Washington and in New York City.

In the WPA we had set up a Workers Alliance and a WPA union. I lost my job for trying to organize the workers to go to a march in Washington against hunger and to save our jobs. I had a ballot box, a pretty red ballot box that my daughters had made me, and I was going to get the workers to vote as to if they wanted to go to the demonstration. I wasn't trying to force the seamstresses to do what I wanted them to do. But I wanted to give them a chance.

I told them that I wanted them to not think that I was forcing us to go march on Washington to stop us from being cut off from WPA. I said, "You have a line here on the ballot; you can vote if you want your job and you have a place over here to tell that you're not in favor of us going to march on Washington."

I told my supervisor that I was going to carry this ballot box down to the sewing room in the basement when lunch time comes and take a minute or two to make a speech to tell the seamstresses about it. She said I couldn't do it until she called the head of the administration. She was a big shot sent here from Washington. The big shot told me not to do it but I went anyway.

I told the workers, "They're gonna cut off the WPA and if we don't protest it, we will not have a job." After I made my speech, I went back to sewing and the supervisor handed me a layoff slip.

So I went out and reported it to the Workers Alliance. I had been working at WPA paid by the government. They had the money and were giving us a little bit back they had stole from us—from slaves, from Negroes, from poor people and from sharecroppers.

Roosevelt set up that administration because he wanted to save capitalism from being overthrown. Society would have been changed, overthrown and turned into socialism if it hadn't been



for that Roosevelt. They had to give the people relief and jobs. That saved the ruling class from being overthrown.

We put up a fight against WPA and won my job and some others' jobs back. It took us a week of protest. When I went walking back in the WPA office with my slip and handed it to my supervisor, she almost fainted.

Besides organizing, we worked on things like police repression. There was a lot of low down things going on around here. There was a blind Negro man, 72 years old, and the police killed him. One police, named Wooster, had a record of killing more men than anybody else on the police force. He killed 17. We had a demonstration of 8000 people protesting down at a church on Auburn Avenue. The police was lined up and tried to keep white people out. Only me and another white man, Mr. Sanger, a Jewish man, could get through the police to the church. Wooster claimed he did it in self-defense and that man was blind!!

Once I was putting out THE DAILY WORKER in the mill village. Over there lived a wonderful woman, Nellie Clark. Her daddy used to go see Eugene V. Debs when he was in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. He took her and she carried Mr. Debs a red rose. They lived in Cabbagetown (Fulton Mill Village). Nellie found one of them DAILY WORKERS and do you know she hitchhiked to New York City to find out what it was



about. Hitchhiked and that was in the early thirties. She got married to a man there in New York City. They came back here to Atlanta and we organized together.

One time we were having a meeting in a little Negro shack. It was raided and we were arrested. She refused to be fingerprinted. Nellie Clark fought them and she never let them fingerprint her. They poured a glass of freezing water down her back and she already had a touch of rheumatic heart fever. You know that killed her.

Nellie Clark was buried near Stone Mountain. After she died, intellectuals who had a little money put a hammer and sickle on her tomb.

The Party Retreats- - Nanny Continues

In the late 40's they really started clamping down on the communists and most of them were driven out by either the law or the Klan. After they put the Atlanta district organizer, Homer Chase, and some more on trial here, just about everybody left and the party organization fell apart.

I kept on working and didn't hear a thing. I thought it was because of the Smith Act, those 11 people who were indicted for being communists. I figured everybody had to go underground. Thought I was such a small person, grass roots and ignorant, that they didn't keep me informed of those things.

Now I never did care much for Earl Browder after I met him up in Tennessee. I took a group of Young Communist League comrades up to Monteagle, Tennessee, to hear him speak. He didn't seem to like that bunch from Atlanta, wasn't the least bit friendly to us. The way I understand it, he went bad. I didn't realize the broader thing until they turned him out of the Party.

So after the Party fell apart, I went on with my beliefs and work. But I feel I lost a lot of time and education by not having leadership. See, we comrades can boost each other up, help each other to go on and do the best work—even when the times are hard.

I stayed divorced for 21-and-a-half years. Mr. Washburn and I were comrades. He and his first wife, an Indian woman, lived in Campbell County. We had been working and organizing together for 25 years. My mother took them into our family. His first wife worked to do away with the Black Shirts who were fascists (near about the same as the Klan). She died in March, 1950.

Mr. Washburn and I were married in October, 1951 and we worked together more than ever. My life with him was very different. Oh, beautiful. All the pleasure in the world 'cause I had a companion that I could work together with, who had the same beliefs I did. He was calm and smooth, a good psychologist. He knew my life was tied up in the class struggle and he was the same way. It was an adorable life, a beautiful life with him. He didn't impose on me in any way. He gave me equal rights. No communist party's any good if it don't fight for women.

I can remember we'd go out at 1, 2 and 3 in the morning and give out literature where we'd be safe. Mr. Washburn carried us (my sister, children, grandchildren and all) and we'd petition every house in this town. My sister had credit and went down to Sears and bought a mimeograph machine. My husband never had typed. But you see I boosted him and influenced him so much and showed him how simple it was and I didn't even know myself.

We were doing something all the time, but there was very little money. We still got mailings from many organizations and learned about the different campaigns going on.

We fought to save the lives of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram and her two young teenage sons who had defended themselves when the white landlord had tried to sexually attack Mrs. Ingram. They had fought him off and killed him. The state wanted to electrocute them. We sent a delegation to Reidsville prison. They were forced to serve seven years before they were finally released. We worked to expose the case of the murder of Emmett Till, a young Black teenager who was taken out by the Klan and thrown into the Mississippi River because they claimed he whistled at a white woman.

We worked hard—organizing and sending petitions—to fight the spy frame-up case of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and Sobell. My son was the first person in Georgia to sign that protest petition and he lost his job at the Boys Club because of it. I was arrested down on Pryor for getting signatures. Oh, how it **grieved** our hearts when they finally electrocuted them—after 4



years of fighting. It was nothing but a lie and frame-up to keep people scared and afraid of communism.

We set up the Atlanta Peace Center then to work against U.S. involvement in the Korean War, to ban hydrogen bombs and protest the build-up of nuclear weapons. At a national peace meeting, my husband and I were chosen to go from this country to the World Peace Council in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1954. We didn't have any money so we pawned everything we owned, including our tractor, so we could go. We were practically the only ones who could go because the government refused passports to many leading Party comrades. After we got back, ours were cancelled because we refused to sign that damnable loyalty oath.

In Stockholm we were invited to have a special meeting with the delegates from China. Twenty years later I had the wonderful opportunity to go to China myself. The comrades there traced back who we had met in Stockholm. It turns out the Chinese comrade we met now is in the United Nations delegation in New York City.

After we got back we visited nearly a dozen cities in the North and Midwest to speak to the people about the threat of war. It was when we came back through New York that we were contacted by the Communist Party, after years of hearing nothing. They signed me and my husband up as members. But

after we came back South, the only thing we heard from them was getting THE DAILY WORKER and form letters asking for money and donations. We would scrape together whatever we could send them, \$25 whenever we could, but that's all we ever heard from them.

They kept on watering down everything until the DAILY WORKER became the DAILY WORLD. In 1967 they cut it off, it stopped coming to me and I never took it since. I knew there was something wrong, never hearing from them except asking for money. But I didn't realize at that time just what it was. I just knew they wasn't fighting like a communist party should.

i had taken training and received my license as a nurse. I worked over at the Peachtree Sanitorium. I was always interested in nursing, not for the money but to help people. I was determined with my limited education to get my license.

Mr. Washburn was an electrician all this time. He had been beaten a number of times by the Klan because of his work and beliefs. On the 28th of January, 1956, he fell dead at a union meeting about 8:30 at night.

There was just a few of us left, but my belief in communism gave me the strength to go on even without an organization. Seeing the misery of the people, especially the Black people, made me know we had to keep on fighting.

Especially out in Douglas County where I had moved to. Things was very bad, no running water, just a well. Black people couldn't eat or drink where they wanted. Even had separate water fountains for Black and white.

I started stopping poor Black people on the street and would ask them if they would be so kind as to come in and eat with me because I was tired of seeing Black people pushed around. We'd go in and make them serve us together. I remember one time in the courthouse drinking the "white" water then the "colored" water. The Black water tasted better to me.

One day I struck out from my house and walked 12 miles to see a Black minister. His wife asked me into their house and when I met him I said that I was tired of seeing "white" water and "colored" water signs all around Douglasville. We went to work and he took it to the NAACP. We got those signs took down finally. But you know, about four weeks after that, a white man ran into that minister's car and killed him—after he had put up that fight about getting the signs taken down.

We communists always fought hard for equality and civil rights even when our forces were weak and we couldn't do as much as we wanted to. All our literature brought up freedom for

Black people and self-determination for the Black Belt Nation. Living in Douglas county, I tried to do what I could.

When they dynamited that Birmingham church and killed the young girls (1963) it just went all over me. We was following all this and heard about how Black people was beaten down to the ground on bloody Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama, in 1965 just for trying to register to vote.

We talked about it, one of my daughters, my blind son and me, and decided we had to go over there if they would accept our help. So we called up and talked to Mrs. Abernathy who told us we'd be welcomed and that they sure needed people. So we drove over to Selma to do what we could.

We went out to the marches and helped with the cooking, cleaning and first aid at the church. I told the minister he had to let us help in the kitchen because we wasn't going to eat no Jim Crow food. Black women had been cooking in a white man's kitchen all her life and we was going in here and help with the cooking too.

There was polices and State troopers and all kinds of law across the road trying to keep us from going to the courthouse. They attacked the marchers—beat them up, young and old, little children and pregnant women.

We joined in the 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the brutality, the denial of civil rights and the way Black people were treated. We slept in cow pastures at night. There was polices all over the highways and planes flying over us. L.B.J. had to send in soldiers to keep the Klan down because he knew that if he didn't there would be a full-scale war down here. The Klan burned their crosses all along the way. It was back on the way from the Montgomery march that we learned that Mrs. Liuzzo had been shot down and murdered because she was supporting the march and riding civil rights demonstrators in her car.

Right after that we heard they was beating and macing people over in Demopolis, Alabama. We left to help out. It was worse than Selma—there wasn't the national attention. We had to slip into town and come up to the church through the bushes and crossing ditches without the law catching us. They had a ring of police around the church nearly all the time. The police broke little children's ribs, beat up old people, kicked pregnant women, broke shoulders and arms, sprayed mace in people's eyes. In one day there, we sent 40 people to the hospital who were hurt too bad for me to give them first aid. Joel, my blind son, was teargassed and arrested, kept in jail for a good long



time. The law and the Klan threw big six-foot snakes in the church doors and windows to try to run us off.

One day I was out front of the church helping clean up and a big Deputy Sheriff hauled me off to jail. While I was there, the Black woman in the cell next to me and I became good friends. Whatever she was in for, they made her work 20 hours a day. She had to cook and clean for the sheriff, his family and his grown sons' families and after that go out and work in the garden. They dragged me to jail with nothing and I still have the little comb she gave me for my hair.

They sent in a doctor who declared me mentally insane, took me off to Tuscaloosa Mental Institute. One good thing, on the way to the Mental Institute, we drove through Scottsboro, Alabama. It brought back to me how hard we had worked on the Scottsboro Boys case where they tried to electrocute nine young Black men for a frame-up case. But a lot of organizing by Angelo Herndon and thousands of others all over the country, kept them from being murdered by the state.

When the police brought me into the hospital, I told all of them that they weren't fit to handle the public, that they weren't even fit to handle animals. I said that they's the ones ought to be in a mental institute.

They kept me there for 21 days, making me take big tranquilizer drugs. If you didn't take them, they'd throw you down and make you. They kept trying to make me see doctors but I told them I wasn't sick—I was just hurt that I couldn't even nurse wounded people without being put in jail. It took nearly a month for my family to get me out of there.

I knew that by supporting the Black people's struggle, I was helping myself. I won't be free until all of us are free.

Later, when I got back to Atlanta, several people came to visit me. Some were from the Georgia Communist League. A lot of people can say they're communists but I watched all the time to see if they meant it. And these young people seemed to mean it. I went to pickets and strikes with them. I went to a study group and then joined the October League. There was some people I met who said they were communists, but I watched them too and they didn't act like communists to me. Saying you're a communist and being a communist are two different things.

This is my experiences becoming a real radical. And I am.
And I'd like to say nothing on earth will ever change it, not even
the electric chair, the Ku Klux Klan, or any human being can
ever change me from my beliefs. I'll die before any capitalist or
anybody can change it!!!!