

Conspiracy Trial is a Riot

Liberation News Service

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CHICAGO (LNS)—It was beginning to look like the Democratic National Convention all over again.

The “conspirators” were back in town, people were fighting the pigs in the streets and there was the bejeweled mayor of the city muttering darkly on TV.

Wednesday the 24th was opening day.

By noon, 5,000 young people had turned out for a rally at the Federal Building in support of the eight men on trial whom the government would like to put away for possibly ten years.

The same day thousands of black and white youths in the city responded to the Black Panther Party’s call for a strike in support of Panther Chairman Bobby Seale, kidnapped from California by federal agents and held incommunicado in the Cook County jail. Seale is one of the Conspiracy Eight (the others are Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, Lee Weiner, John Froines, Dave Dellinger and Rennie Davis).

During the rally at the Federal building, two youths wearing swastikas attempted to attack the demonstrators.

Around the same time, hundreds of white construction workers, angry at blacks pushing for a fair share of jobs in the building industry, came marching into the area and fights erupted between them and the demonstrators.

Chicago’s finest then emerged by busloads from side streets and an underground garage, and separated the two groups. The demonstrators then moved to Grant Park. It was a disciplined march, marshaled by the Panthers.

As the rally at Grant Park broke up, the cops moved out in force. There were some skirmishes, but mainly the busloads of pigs seemed to be practicing their crowd control tactics in preparation for bigger battles to come.

Nevertheless, five pigs and two city lawyers were injured and 19 people were arrested, including four SDS members. Three more were arrested at an apartment the next day on warrants, and the *Chicago Tribune* ran a three-inch headline: SDS LEADERS NABBED IN RAID.

That was not the end to arrests of movement leaders. On Friday, the 26th, three more SDS people were arrested, bringing total bail to \$55,000 for the ten on charges of disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, aggravated battery and mob action.

Among the ten were Bernadine Dohrn and Howie Machtinger, both members of SDS’s national interim committee (NIC). Cha Cha Jimenez, leader of the Young Lords Organization, was also busted.

On Thursday, Sept. 25, the Conspiracy Eight found out exactly what it means in an American political trial to be judged by a jury of one’s peers, not to mention by a 74-year-old senile, bigoted judge.

“We feel the jury has not been asked a single relevant question,” said Bill Kunstler, one of the defense counsels.

Judge Julius Hoffman, otherwise known as Mr. Magoo for his startling resemblance to the bumbling cartoon character of that name, handled the whole process of jury selection himself, as is allowed in federal proceedings.

He refused to allow attorneys on either side to directly question the prospective jurors. Instead, the attorneys had to submit their questions to Magoo, who in turn would ask, twist or ignore them.

The defense wanted to know the prospective jurors’ opinions on the Vietnam war, long hair, drugs and the right of political dissent. (One defense question was, “Can you identify Janis Joplin?”) Magoo refused to ask any of these questions.

The selected jury is made up of two white men and ten women (only two of them black). The establishment press predictably identified the women only as housewives, widows or divorcees—women defined entirely by their current relationship to some man.

Nearly everyone on the jury is in his or her fifties.

But there were more surprises than anyone really expected when court opened for business on Friday, Sept. 26. The defendants had requested a postponement of the trial on the grounds that their lawyer, Charles Garry, was seriously ill in California and could not be present in court.

The Sixth Amendment guarantees counsel of one's choice and it is more or less standard procedure to grant postponement in such a case. But in an incredibly biased move, Magoo ordered four out-of-town attorneys, Jerry Lefcourt, Michael Tigar, Michael Kennedy and Charles Roberts to appear in court to defend the Eight.

The lawyers refused on the grounds that they had only helped in pre-trial preparation of the case and they did not represent the defendants now.

Magoo cited them for contempt and issued warrants ordering them to Chicago. Tigar, a law professor at UCLA and highly respected in legal circles, was flown here in handcuffs from Los Angeles.

Lefcourt showed up on his own and was held in Cook County Jail in summary contempt of court without a hearing. Warrants were still out for Kennedy and Roberts.

Lawyers around the country were incredulous at this blatant attempt to deny the defendants their constitutional right to counsel of their choice, and to hassle left-wing lawyers at a time when the movement needs them most.

On Mon., Sept. 29, over 200 lawyers picketed the Federal Building in protest of Hoffman's incredible treatment of their fellow attorneys. Hoffman relented and dropped the contempt citations against the four.

Magoo is clearly unbelievable. The day before, he made one of his more blatant racist gaffes. A prospective black juror was asked if he knew anyone who was connected with the case. He replied that his wife was once employed by prosecuting attorney Thomas Foran.

Mister Magoo peered over his glasses and queried, "Was she employed as a domestic?" The man replied that his wife had been Foran's legal secretary. (The prospective juror was dismissed.)

And when Abbie Hoffman, one of the defendants, was presented to the jury on Friday, dear Abbie threw them a kiss.

"The jury will disregard the kiss thrown by the defendant," said Magoo solemnly.

It was one of the lighter moments in what could be a very heavy trial.



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