

# The Crawford Case and the N. A. A. C. P.

## NAACP Lawyers Aided White Rulers Frame Crawford

By HARRY HAYWOOD

GEORGE CRAWFORD, Negro, stepped out of the courtroom at Leesburg, Va., hands chained by steel cuffs, to enter the penitentiary for a life behind bars.

Out of that same courtroom, the representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stepped, with the brand of treachery graven deeply upon them.

The hands of the legal representatives of the N. A. A. C. P. at that trial are stained with the blood of innocent Negroes. Their feet have helped the Virginia courts trample down every human right of the Negro people.

### False Promises

To the Negro masses, the N. A. A. C. P. appealed for funds to "fight" the case of George Crawford. The Crawford case was to be "another Dred Scott trial," another test of the rights of the Negroes. The Crawford case was to establish a "new Underground Railroad" over which an oppressed people could escape from slavery into freedom.

But to the white ruling class lynchers and their courts the leadership of the N. A. A. C. P. contracted for service as assistants in the persecution of the Negro people. They volunteered as watchmen over the privileges of the white slave-drivers. They volunteered to act as overseers in the bloody rule of the American rich over the oppressed Negro masses.

### Agents of the Lynchers

Many honest Negroes, many white workers and intellectuals devoted to the cause of Negro liberation, have believed that the Communist Party is guilty of exaggeration when it brands the leaders of the N. A. A. C. P. as "agents of the lynchers." The events of the Crawford case leave no doubt in the mind of any sincere fighter for Negro freedom, that the leaders of the N. A. A. C. P. are the best lieutenants the lynchers have at their command.

Reading the testimony in the case of Crawford, one is constantly

puzzled by the question: Was Charles Houston, the lawyer supplied by the N. A. A. C. P., acting as defense counsel—or was he part of the prosecution? Was his evidence presented to free Crawford—or to convict him?

### The Facts of the Case

Review for a moment the facts of the Crawford case. Two white women were found dead in a cottage in Middleburg, Va., by a white man. Under ordinary circumstances, the white man would have at least been held for questioning. As it was, the cry of "nigger" was raised at once. George Crawford was picked up in Boston, and on the flimsiest of evidence indicted for the Middleburg murders.

The fury of the Negro masses, including the rank and file of the N. A. A. C. P., made it imperative that the N. A. A. C. P. take action. The Crawford case had all the earmarks of another vicious frame-up by the white rulers. Since that historic day, now three years ago, when the organizations of the revolutionary workers raised their hands to stop the legal massacre of nine innocent boys at Scottsboro, Ala., the white ruling class has trembled before these organizations. The fear that these forces will step into the case of framed and persecuted Negro and white workers, haunts the courts of the land, particularly the courts of the South. For a revolutionary organization to enter into such cases, will surely mean that the veil will be torn from the hideous oppression of the Negroes and the white workers. The basic issues involved in the degraded position of the Negro people will be brought out into the open. No stone will be left unturned to expose the frame-up, to free the defendant, to make the issue one more hammer-blow at the whole structure of oppression, discrimination, Jim-Crowism.

### The Lesser Evil

Rather than run such a risk, the Virginia courts agreed to let Negro lawyers plead for a Negro charged with the murder of a white woman. This was the first time such a procedure had been allowed in the state. But these Negro lawyers must be humble Negroes, "good" Negroes, Negroes with no thought of overturning the monstrous sys-



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tem of slavery in the South, Negroes pledged to uphold American capitalism and all its ways. On these terms, the Virginia courts were willing to let the representatives of the N. A. A. C. P. go through the motions of defending George Crawford.

What happened was startling. Charles Houston did not even go through the motions of defending Crawford. Quietly, politely, unswervingly, Charles Houston helped the state of Virginia to erect the prison bars about an innocent Negro.

So brazen was this treachery, that even members of the N. A. A. C. P. staff, probably believing in all sincerity that the N. A. A. C. P. is an organization dedicated to the struggle for Negro rights, were shocked into exposing from the inside the tactics in the Crawford case. Helen Boardman, veteran N. A. A. C. P. investigator, in an article appearing in the *Nation*, accused the N. A. A. C. P. of downright treachery. A week later Houston answered the charges. The first article was an indignant exposure. The second was a shameless self-exposure.

**Masses Demand Militant Defense**  
A few weeks of investigation, and it became clear to the N. A. A. C. P. heads that the Crawford case would not be as "pretty" as

they had hoped. It would involve exposing the denial of the right of Negroes to serve on juries; exposing the practice of obtaining forced confessions; exposing the whole set-up by which the state of Virginia keeps Negroes in semi-slavery. The Negro masses, roused to watchfulness on these issues by the Scottsboro case, were demanding militant defense. The rulers of Virginia wouldn't like it at all. The N.A.A.C.P. was ready to drop the case of George Crawford like a hot potato.

Why didn't they, then? Because, as Houston said, "the case had achieved an international notoriety, and the Association had become committed to it beyond any possibility of withdrawal." The N.A.A.C.P., in other words, simply couldn't help itself. It had to go on with the Crawford case. And so, in the most efficient manner of efficient attorneys, the N.A.A.C.P. counsel helped the prosecution, helped the state of Virginia, to find Crawford "guilty" and to sentence him to a life in prison.

### The Defense Forces a "Confession"

First, Houston announced to the world that his client was guilty. He had, he said, obtained a confession from him. Crawford later denied this confession. In the face of complete lack of evidence of guilt, Crawford's counsel nevertheless announced in advance that the man he was defending was a murderer. Helen Boardman sums up the "evidence" of guilt by saying: "It [the state] had no eye-witnesses to the crime, none who could place him [Crawford] at the scene of the crime within seven or eight hours of it, no finger-prints to connect him with it, no blood-stained clothing, murderous weapon, or recognizable loot found in his possession." The ordinary criminal attorney would rejoice at having a case in which innocence was as patent as this. But not Houston, not the representatives of the N.A.A.C.P. There was no need for the lynch-ridden state of Virginia to prove Crawford's guilt. Houston waived all that. Doing the job of the prosecutor, he claimed to have obtained

## Investigators Expose Treacherous Policies of NAACP

a confession. This was but the first step.

Judge Lowell, yielding to the anger of the workers, had refused to allow Crawford to be sent back to Virginia to be murdered. The higher court set aside this opinion, and the U. S. Supreme Court refused to review the matter. Not once did the N.A.A.C.P. open its lips to expose this action of the U. S. Supreme Court.

### All-White Jury—But No Appeal

The "defense" failed to investigate witnesses who had seen Crawford in Boston at the time of the crime. The defense failed to cross-question important witnesses for the state. The defense called no witnesses to testify on Crawford's behalf. The case of George Crawford was tried before an all-white jury, but there was no appeal to the higher courts on this issue. Not only did Houston ask for a life-sentence for his client; he actually asked the court to state to Crawford that one of the conditions of sentencing him to a mere life-term in jail—instead of putting the noose about his neck—was that he aid the state of Virginia in running down and framing another Negro for the same murder. "Spare the life of this man, put him behind bars, so that he may become the instrument for a new frame-up against my people," said Houston to the state of Virginia. Can treachery go further than this?

Crawford having been duly sentenced by an all-white jury, Houston deliberately permitted the time for an appeal to elapse, and made no move.

All this time the masses of the Negro people were diligently kept out of the picture. No mass pressure, said the N.A.A.C.P. heads. No telegrams of protest, no demonstrations; to annoy the excellent gentlemen who sit in the seats of the lynch-courts of Virginia.

(To Be Continued)