

# We Can Fight Back and Win

## REPORT BACK

January 1983

### *Mayor Eddie Carthan "Not Guilty" in Mississippi Murder Case*

#### **Fight for Freedom Goes On**

On November 4, 1982, after only 40 minutes of deliberation, a Holmes County Mississippi jury found Eddie James Carthan "not guilty" of the murder charge that threatened to send him to the gas chamber. This victory came as a result of a year long organizing drive that brought the case to national attention, directed mass protest toward federal and Mississippi officials, and assisted the legal defense. Carthan remains in jail with two other frame-up cases still to be fought, but the way is opened now to winning his complete exoneration.

Carthan was elected mayor of Tchula at the age of 27 in 1977. The town's population is 80 percent Black. Of the Black population, 30 percent is unemployed; 80 percent lives in dilapidated housing; more than half of which has no indoor plumbing; and two thirds are on some form of welfare. Carthan tried to change things. Under his administration CETA jobs, nutrition, public health, and day care programs were started. Roads were paved; public housing and a library were built.

But the local white power structure would not accept this challenge to their misrule and corruption. Carthan was framed on charges of assault on a police officer when he and his deputies were forced to disarm and arrest a "police chief" illegally appointed by the plantation owners. When the U.S. Justice Department was asked to investigate this attack on the Mayor, the F.B.I. helped to frame Carthan on federal charges of bank fraud. He still faces seven years in prison.

#### **HOW THE VICTORY WAS WON**

The Alliance worked around the Carthan case with our proven formula: unity + struggle + organization = victories. We set out to create the broadest possible united struggle around the issues of the case and give that struggle the organized form, direction, and consistency that win political victories. We linked the case with other attacks on Black elected officials and movement activists, the rise of racist violence in the South, the failure to enforce the Voting Rights Act, and Reagan's program to strengthen racism and reaction through "states rights" and resegregation.



Mayor Eddie James Carthan leaves Holmes County Courthouse after Victory in Frame-Up Murder Trial. (Wide World Photos)

During the months before the murder trial the Alliance organized a Freedom Tour by our Co-Chair Angela Davis and Mayor Eddie Carthan. There were mass rallies, meetings with elected officials, and media interviews in Chicago, Detroit, Louisville, Birmingham, and Washington D.C.

On October 19, the opening day of the trial, the Alliance organized a National Day of Protest Against Legal Lynching in the South, taking up the Carthan, Bozeman-Wilder, and Mitchell-Welch cases, as well as voting rights. Demonstrations and protest delegations to U.S. Attorneys' offices were held in 27 cities. Support has come from city councils in Detroit, Oakland, and Los Angeles; from members of the Congressional Black Caucus such as John Conyers, Harold Washington, George Crockett, and Ron Dellums; the NAACP, the Black press, the National Conference of Black Mayors, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the International Longshore and Warehousemen's Union, the United Transportation Union, the National Council of Churches, and many others.

To strengthen the defense in the courtroom the Alliance Legal Support Committee sent attorneys to Mississippi to work with local counsel and volunteers to do community education to prepare people for jury service.



Over 300 picket Federal Building October 19, 1982, at NATIONAL DAY of PROTEST. (NAARPR)

**1973-1983: Ten Years of Unity + Struggle + Organization = VICTORIES!**

## OTHER VICTORIES IN 1982

- **Delbert Tibbs**, Black Chicago poet, has finally had all charges dropped against him in a case involving the rape of a young white woman and murder of her companion. Tibbs had had his conviction thrown out in 1976, with the Florida Supreme Court ruling that there was no evidence connecting him with the crime. Then the Nixon-Reagan Supreme Court ruled he could be retried. Florida prosecutors under pressure of mass protest admitted they had no case.
- **Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder**, Black women senior citizens sent to prison for aiding other Black people to vote in Pickens County, Alabama won a limited victory when they were paroled in November. They can now return to their homes.

- **Voting Rights Act** was extended as a result of massive pressure from civil rights and labor movements. NAARPR collected over 30,000 signatures on petitions demanding extension and enforcement of the VRA and submitted them to the Senate Judiciary Committee.
- **Attorney Lennox Hinds**, Co-Vice-Chair of the NAARPR won dismissal of disbarment proceedings against him in New Jersey. The charges against Hinds stemmed from comments he made to the press about the racist character of Assata Shakur's trial in 1977. In fact it was an attempt to silence all people's advocates.
- **NAARPR Associate Director Frank Chapman**, after 21 years of prison and parole had his sentence commuted by the Governor of Missouri who was under pressure from Chapman's supporters including several elected officials. At the age of 19 Chapman had been sentenced to life plus 50 years on frame-up charges of murder and armed robbery.



San Francisco Area Bus Drivers at Massive Labor Demonstration Against Reaganomics, Fall, 1982. (Greg Kestel)

## NAARPR 1983 PROGRAM PRIORITIES

- **Mayor Eddie Carthan**: Must be freed of all charges and able to return to his family and work.
- **Petition to Congress**: Demanding federal action to enforce the Voting Rights Act, stop legal lynching in the South, and end racist violence; to be circulated among organizations and individuals across the country with a massive presentation of signatures in Washington.
- **Voting Rights Act**: Organize state-wide citizens' monitoring committees in the South to investigate and report violations, and demand federal enforcement.
- **Maggie Bozeman and Julia Wilder**: Must be fully exonerated through a pardon of innocence, removing these false charges from their records and restoring their civil rights.
- **David Truong**: National campaign for executive clemency to free Truong from his 15 year sentence on phoney espionage charges for allegedly sending information to academic colleagues in Paris. The information was publicly available, non-military, and posed no possible threat to U.S. security. Truong is a long-time activist for peace and normalization of relations with Vietnam. His conviction was a racist, vindictive act which threatens journalists, researchers, and peace activists with "national security" charges simply for maintaining overseas contacts.
- **Leonard Peltier**: A new trial and full freedom; Peltier, an American Indian Movement (AIM) leader who led the Trail of Broken Treaties to Washington D.C. in 1972, is serving two life sentences in Marion Federal Prison. He was framed on charges of murdering two F.B.I. agents. Peltier's attorneys have obtained documents through the Freedom of Information Act that prove that the F.B.I. and government prosecutors knowingly presented false evidence at the original trial and misled the judge out of court, portraying AIM as a dangerous organization threatening to kill Judge Benson and prosecution witnesses.
- **Charlene Mitchell and Mike Welch**: Continue the struggle to exonerate NAARPR Executive Director and staff member from false charges of public drunkenness and obstructing a police officer. Mitchell and Welch, an interracial couple, were brutally dragged off an AMTRAK train in Gainesville, Georgia last February as they re-

turned from an Alliance Board meeting, in an attack on our leadership designed to divert the Alliance from its urgent tasks. The case is now on appeal.

- **Ku Klux Klan, Nazis and other Hate Groups**: Work to outlaw these terrorist groups as the only effective way of removing the threat they constitute to society in general and people of color and the people's movement in particular. The Alliance has helped to write and supported the passage of legislation outlawing racist terror, paramilitary training camps, and racist and anti-semitic organizations in Connecticut, New Jersey, California, Alabama, Oregon, and in Detroit.
- **Death Penalty**: Continue our work to end the death penalty. There are 1102 people on death row across the country, and 49 per cent are people of color. All are poor or working class. The Reagan administration has gleefully pointed out that many are reaching the end of their legal challenges and projects multiple executions this year, possibly averaging one a week. In addition in 12 states there are moves to reinstitute the death penalty.
- **Undocumented Workers**: Step up efforts to combat the Reagan administration's attempts to make undocumented workers the scapegoats for the failure of its policies and rising mass unemployment. A series of bills has been introduced that pose both immigration and civil liberties dangers. These bills are fascist in the precise sense that they would require every U.S. citizen, whether foreign born or not, to show documents to prospective employers proving eligibility for work, thus policing every inhabitant of the U.S. old enough to work. They also create a quota system making it more difficult (if not impossible) for those seeking asylum to gain it from repressive governments, e.g., Haiti and El Salvador.
- **10th Anniversary Conference**: May 13-15 in Chicago the NAARPR will mark its 10th Anniversary with a conference that will be a mass demonstration, an example of united struggle against racist and political repression, and an educational and planning conference that will help launch us on our second decade. Present will be members of the Alliance, its affiliate organizations, elected officials, neighborhood organizations, trade union locals, and church bodies; in other words all the forces committed to defending and extending democratic rights.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE AGAINST RACIST & POLITICAL REPRESSION

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