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DAVIS TRIAL OPENS IN ISOLATED ROOM

Jury Selection Under Way
—Coast Security Strict

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SAN JOSE, Calif., Feb. 28—

The trial of Angela Davis, the black activist, on charges of murder, kidnapping and criminal conspiracy began here today in a tiny courtroom isolated by stringent security measures.

Superior Court Judge Richard E. Arnason called the case to trial at 10:20 A.M., ending nearly 18 months of pretrial maneuvering.

Less than 15 minutes after Judge Arnason called the case, No. 52613, the painstaking process of jury selection was under way.

If there was anything unexpected on this first day of the trial, it was the atmosphere here at the Santa Clara County Criminal Legal Building.

Much of the tension that had been so evident in many of the pretrial hearings was missing today. The relaxed atmosphere was attributed largely to the fact that Miss Davis, who had been imprisoned since her arrest in October, 1970, was freed last week on bail.

Because the 28-year-old defendant, an avowed Communist, is charged with what had been capital crimes, she had not been eligible for bail. But that was changed 10 days ago when the California Supreme Court struck down the death penalty. Miss Davis was granted bail last Wednesday.

This morning, rather than being slipped into the courtroom under elaborate security, she walked up to the courthouse accompanied only by her private guards and Jarvis Tyner, a Communist who is running for the Vice-Presidency of the United States.

Examination of Jurors

A panel of 116 prospective jurors was present for the start of the trial, and 12 were promptly called by Judge Arna-

son for preliminary examination.

The first 12 called were all white—something the defense had feared—but included four students from colleges in the area. However, two of the students were dismissed chiefly because the trial, expected to last four to six weeks, would cause them to lose two semesters of schooling.

A third juror, Mrs. Marjorie F. Morgan, was also excused when she conceded that she already felt that the defendant was guilty of the charges.

"I don't believe that I could give her a fair verdict," Mrs. Morgan told the court. She said that pretrial publicity had reinforced her opinion and that she did not believe that she could change her mind at this point.

Miss Davis, a former philosophy instructor at the University of California at Los Angeles, is accused of helping to plot and participating in a kidnapping attempt at the Marin County Courthouse in August, 1970, that ended with four persons being killed.

Escape Attempt Failed

One of the persons killed was a judge who was kidnapped from his courtroom along with three others who were used as hostages in an effort to free three convicts from San Quentin Prison. Miss Davis is charged with having supplied the guns used in the escape attempt.

While the tension was at a minimum today, the security was elaborate. Eight-foot-high fences surrounded the courtroom. Not only were spectators thoroughly searched but they were also required to pass through metal-detecting devices so sensitive that spectators often had to remove their shoes, belts and jackets.

Deputy sheriffs, armed and in uniform, were stationed inside the courtroom and others were at the doors just outside.

The courtroom itself was selected for security. It is at an isolated corner on the ground floor of the building and is being used although it normally seats just 59 spectators.

At the urging of Judge Arnason, under pressure from the defense, 10 additional seats were installed just before the trial began. However, when the proceedings started this morning there were several empty seats in the courtroom.

By mid-afternoon six prospective jurors had been examined. Three were excused and three others passed through the first phase of the examination.

In preliminary questioning the length of the trial itself was posing a problem for prospective jurors. The examination of prospective jurors continues tomorrow.