

AT HOME

COURTS

THE TESTIMONY OF LOUIS E. TACKWOOD

*"Lord, Lord, they cut George Jackson down,
Lord, Lord, they laid him in the ground."*

BY MARK SCHWARTZ

August 21, 1971, the day George Jackson was slain, and the cops in the Criminal Conspiracy Section (ccs) of the Los Angeles police were pissed off—not at Jackson's death itself, but because their own plans for killing him on the 23rd had been suddenly mooted. "They always screw up up north," a lieutenant snapped. The California State Bureau of Identification and Investigation (sbii), fearful of ccs incompetence, killed Jackson two days ahead of schedule.

That's what Louis E. Tackwood says. Tackwood, for a decade an informant and agent-provocateur for both the ccs and the sbii, made his allegations Thursday at the San Rafael, California, trial of the San Quentin Six. They are accused in the killings of three guards and three fellow convicts during the August 21 "escape attempt" in which Jackson, black revolutionary and author of *Soledad Brother*, was shot to death. Charles Garry, attorney for one of the Six, Black Panther Johnny Spain, asked Tackwood, "Can you tell the Court and jury what was your last completed assignment in the northern part of California?" Tackwood replied, "To assassinate George Jackson." "You may cross-examine," Garry said to the prosecution and sat down.

Helping The Plot Along

"As far back as October of '70 we knew that there was a plot to break him out, a plot to break him out by various people," Tackwood told the press during a court recess. "I went in with the specific orders to help the plot along, and find out the dates, the approximate dates, that they would try to break him out, and then we'd step in an kill him. . . . I can name names, dates and places, people and the guns used."

Prosecutor Jerry Herman objected to Tackwood's testimony, and a hearing took place outside the presence of the jury. During that hearing, Tackwood disclosed that the ccs had infiltrated the Black Panther Party, both in Los Angeles and in the Bay Area. He also testified that the ccs assassination

scenario called for Melvin "Cotton" Smith, like Tackwood and informant/provocateur, to kill Jackson on the 23rd, when the prisoner was scheduled to be transported from San Quentin to San Francisco to appear in a trial there.

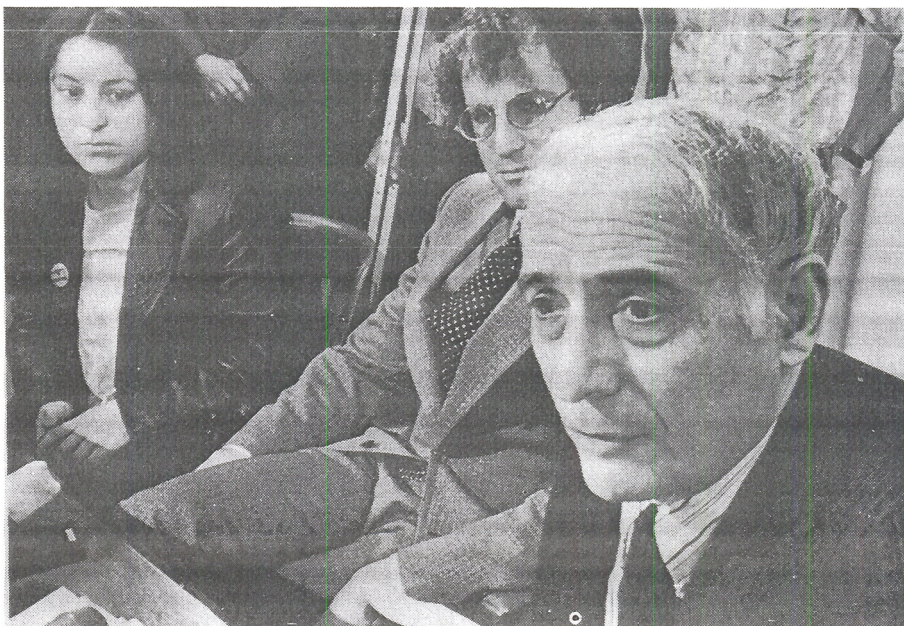
But the sbii—in a case of internecine rivalry—jumped the gun. Tackwood said that, as part of the plot, on August 1 he and two other Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers gave an inoperative .38 calibre snub-nosed revolver to a San Quentin guard to be planted outside the adjustment center. When news of the slayings reached Los Angeles, Tackwood continued, Lt. Robert Field, ccs officer in charge, responded, "Now we're going to have to get that gun out of San Quentin. But it's a good thing they killed that black bastard anyway."

Shortly afterward, Tackwood, who is black, left the LAPD. In a series of bizarre and tense meetings with members of the Los Angeles radical community—as described in his book, *The Glass House Tapes*—Tackwood gradually "came out" and disclosed his role as a provocateur.

Returning to the court on Friday, Tackwood was warned by Judge Henry Broderick that his testimony could leave him open to a charge of first-degree murder and that he would not allow Tackwood to testify further without the appointment of a lawyer to advise Tackwood of his rights. Tackwood replied, "Are my employers going to be prosecuted too?" That afternoon Tackwood told reporters that at least 25 other agents and California state officials, including State Attorney General Evelle Younger, would be implicated in his testimony. "If I am to be indicted, will my employers be indicted, I asked the judge as you'll remember. And if that becomes the case, then I'm going to tell you I don't mind standing trial," he declared.

Judge Broderick also ruled that Tackwood's testimony must be limited to his own personal knowledge of or involvement in Jackson's death, specifically his allegations about the planting of the .38. "I'm not going into areas that would confuse the jury," the judge said, "This might be the most important story in California law enforcement in 30

Charles Garry (below, right) has defended the Black Panthers, Los Siete Chicanos, and other radicals before the California courts.



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LABOR

GOING OUT ON THE TOWN

Positions on both sides harden as the strike by San Francisco's municipal crafts unions enters its second week.



Stephen Shames/Black Star

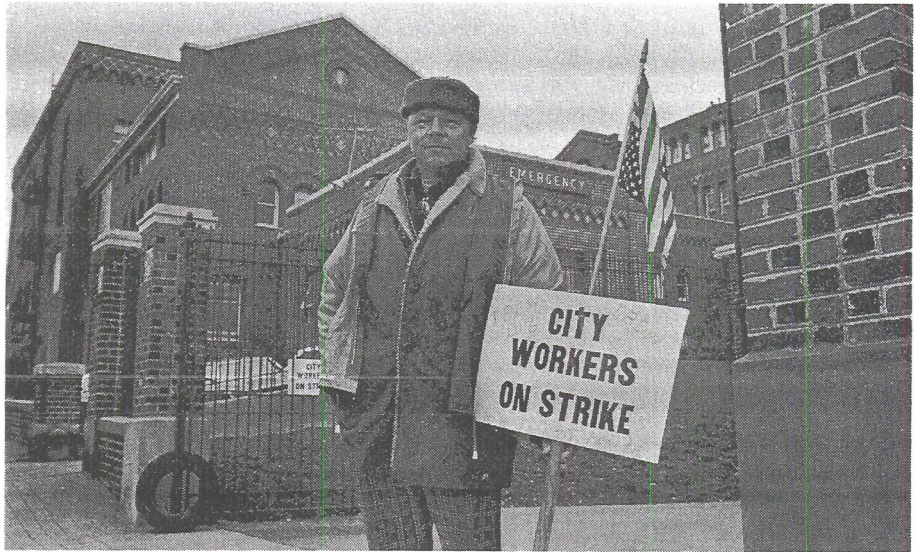
When he was 18, George Jackson was convicted of robbing \$70 from a gas station and given a one-year-to-life sentence.

years, but tell it to a grand jury. We'll end up trying the L.A. Police Department."

Tackwood maintains that the San Quentin Six were set up, caught in the webs of two official plots. At issue is Tackwood's credibility. For ten years, he belonged to the demi-monde of cops who had become crooked and crooks who had struck bargains with the law, a realm whose coin is betrayal. Down those mean streets, Tackwood became one thing most of all: a survivor. The art of lying well was perhaps the sole skill which kept him alive. But there are ways to lie about some things and still tell the truth when it counts. The question is whether the story has to tell about the death of George Jackson makes sense on that ultimate level.

Louis Tackwood's career with the ccs—and his anti-Panther work in the Bay Area—have been documented beyond question. Donald Freed, Los Angeles radical and conspiracy theorist, feels that what Tackwood says "must be considered with the utmost seriousness." He also points out that Tackwood's *Glass House Tapes* allegations have been confirmed by both collatere documentation and lie-detector tests. Others concede lingering doubts, not as to whether Tackwood was a provocateur or whether George Jackson was assassinated, but as to the specific details of Tackwood's involvement with that plot. Officials of the Los Angeles Police Department and the State Bureau of Identification and Investigation, reached over the last weekend, refused to comment.

James Baldwin has stated, "No black person will ever believe that George Jackson died the way they tell us he did." Tackwood's testimony brings us closer to the day when questions about Jackson's death no longer obscure the significance of his life. □



David Powers

A striking transit worker. MUNI was struck because "the hills, the topography, keep people from walking and it's dramatic," said MUNI manager Curtis Green.

BY JERRY ROBERTS

"The Battle of Thermopylae" is what one long-time observer of San Francisco politics called the current labor conflict there. In his view, labor forces in the city, like the 300 Spartans who guarded a key pass during a war with Persia, are prepared to fight to the end.

Among those determined to defeat what Gerald Crowley, president of the San Francisco Police Officers Association, calls "a master plan to break the city unions" is striking cement mason Terry Webster. "This town isn't anti-union, but the politicians are," he declares. "I can't see why people can't see they're trying to bust the unions."

As the strike of nearly 1900 municipal craft workers—city plumbers, electricians, street-sweepers, carpenters, and laborers—entered its second week with no settlement in sight, the San Francisco Labor Council, ready for a showdown, voted on Tuesday for a

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general strike of all union members in the city. This threat to "shut the city down" was aimed at San Francisco's 11-member Board of Supervisors, whose March 30 decree of pay cuts, wage freezes, and massive reductions in health and welfare benefits for the crafts workers ignited the original walk-out.

Labor Aristocracy

The supervisors claim that the wage cuts—ranging from \$1,000 for city gardeners to \$4,000 for plumbers and totaling \$5.7 million annually—are mandated by voters' approval last fall (by a 2 to 1 margin) of a "Proposition B," which established new pay guidelines for crafts workers. Before this, crafts unions were guaranteed high hourly wages, fringe benefits, and short work weeks identical to those negotiated by building-and-trade unions with private contractors. The public crafts workers, known as the "aristocracy" of the labor movement, enjoyed the best of two worlds: while private crafts workers were limited to working nine months of the year because of winter rains, those