

How the Angela Furor Was Fanned

By Paul Avery

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"The defense of Comrade Angela Davis is the most urgent task and is of key importance."

—Gus Hall, National General Secretary, Communist Party, U.S.A., Nov. 21, 1970

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The trial of Angela Davis has begun and, as the song goes, "The whole world is watching."

Unwilling to await the unfolding of the evidence and the verdict of the jury, many

A
News
Analysis

people have already judged the case. They have found innocent or guilty depending on their own bias.

Miss Davis stands accused of murder, kidnap and conspiracy; she is alleged to be involved in the ill-fated attempt to free three San Quentin convicts from a courtroom in the Marin Civic Center on Aug. 7, 1970.

Two of the black convicts, a teen-aged black revolutionary who smuggled several guns — allegedly purchased by Miss Davis — into the courtroom, and a white superior court judge died in the gunfire that aborted the escape try.

Miss Davis has publicly proclaimed she is innocent, victim of a "political frame-up which, far from pointing to my culpability, implicates the State of California as an agent of political repression."

PROUD

Only because she is black, an outspoken advocate of Marxist revolution, and a proud member of the Communist Party is she being

prosecuted, Miss Davis says.

The state says she is on trial solely on the basis of evidence linking her with the crime. Justified criminal prosecution, says the state.

Unjustified political persecution, says Miss Davis — and her words echoed by, literally, millions of people around the world.

What has resulted from these polarized positions is the charge that a "political" trial is under way in San Jose.

SOME

What makes some people think it a "political" trial? A number of elements. Among them:

- The simple fact Miss Davis, a young (28), beautiful, intelligent, articulate black woman unquestionably proud of being a Communist, says she is being persecuted because of her political beliefs.

- The fact the chief executive of the state, Governor Ronald Reagan, and the top legal officer, Attorney General Evelle Younger, have felt called upon to reply to that charge. They say "there is not a shred of truth" to Miss Davis' claim.

- The fact "Comrade Angela" has been transformed

through a carefully planned and executed propaganda campaign by the worldwide Communist movement into a latter-day Joan of Arc.

- The fact more than \$100,000 has been raised in many ways to finance her defense and promote her cause.

- The fact some 400 newsmen representing newspapers, magazines and television and radio stations both in the United States and overseas are assigned to cover the trial.

- The fact a group of 17 members of the British Parliament wrote President Nixon expressing concern over the case. They questioned whether Miss Davis could receive a fair trial.

- The fact Mr. Nixon invited 14 prestigious Russians to attend and observe the proceedings. And also commented on the case (saying shortly after her capture

that it "should be a warning to those who engage in these acts that they eventually are going to be apprehended."), a faux pas which quickly drew from him a public apology.

• The fact there is so much interest in the case overseas that one rally alone, in Paris last October, drew an estimated 60,000 demonstrators chanting "Free Angela."

CRIME . . . H

er supporters in France and other European countries — in particular those with Communist governments — are convinced Miss Davis is on trial for her beliefs, not for the crime that occurred at the Marin Civic Center.

The worldwide Communist movement has helped mold that opinion and created a bonafide heroine whose name and face are as familiar to, say, a Russian factory worker, or a French shopkeeper as they are to any Californian.

The American Communist Party makes no bones about it: it set out, 16 months ago, to make Miss Davis into a Cause.

MET

On Nov. 21, 1970, a month after Miss Davis was arrested in New York, the national committee of the U.S. Communist Party met to decide its operational priorities for the following year. Gus Hall, the party's national general secretary, told them:

"The defense of Comrade Angela Davis is the most urgent task and is of key importance . . . the initial reaction to her arrest has been explosive . . . we have never had such a response from the world Communist movement . . . overnight her defense has become a world movement of great significance."

EFFECTS

Almost overnight, the Communists' "Free Angela" propaganda campaign was

in full swing.

There was also considerable support for Miss Davis from other, non communist, quarters. Some of the effects of both were:

• An American tourist stopped at a post office in Russia and was startled to see side-by-side framed pho-

tographs of Lenin and Angela Davis. The postal clerk told the tourist the United States was committing a crime through prosecuting "an innocent woman who is merely trying to help her people."

• The Council of Church and Race of the United Presbyterian Church donated \$10,000 to Miss Davis' defense fund "to ensure she receives a fair and just trial," that act setting off an explosion of criticism in circles both inside and outside the denomination.

• Theaters in large U.S. cities and in university and college towns began showing a film, "Angela — Portrait of a Revolutionary," an unabashedly pro-Angela film, which had just won an award as "best documentary" in the Moscow Film Festival.

• Some 3000 West Germans, mostly students, marched through the streets of Frankfurt with picket signs condemning the United States for bringing Miss Davis to trial.

CREDIT

The Communist Party is happy to take credit for just about everything being done in the "Free Angela" movement — except the formation of what is, officially, the "National United Committee to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners," which is called by its workers NUCFAD.

Officially, NUCFAD has nothing to do with the Communist Party.

The majority of the 118 persons listed as sponsors on NUCFAD's stationery are

merely well-known personages who believe Miss Davis is innocent. Some of the more notable:

Black legislator Julian Bond of Georgia, Assemblyman Willie Brown of San Francisco, soul singer Robert Flack, actor Elliot Gould, Coretta King (the widow of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.), attorney William Kunstler, folksinger Pete Seeger, author Dalton Trumbo, and the Rev. Cecil Williams, pastor of San Francisco's Glide Memorial Church and Miss Davis' "spiritual adviser."

But it is clear that a small

but significant number of the sponsors are also high-ranking members of the American Communist Party. These include such VIPs as Henry Winston, head of the American Communist Party, Hall, party theoretician Herbert Aptheker, and Charlene Mitchell, who ran

for President of the United States in 1968 on the Communist Party ticket.

The two names that top the listing on NUCFAD's letterhead on its press releases and fund-raising pitches are Franklin Alexander and Fania Davis Jordan, who share the title "national

co-coordinators."

They also share membership in the Communist Party.

SISTER

Mrs. Jordan, Angela Davis' younger sister, joined the party sometime in 1971.

Alexander has been a member for several years

sal from the UCLA faculty a few months before the Marin County incident.

The Regents of the University of California fired her twice — and the efforts were what first put Miss Davis in the headlines. The first time, in September 1969, she was fired because of her admitted membership in the Communist Party. This dismissal was later ruled illegal. In 1970, the Regents again voted to oust her from her teaching post, this time on the grounds she had made a number of off-campus speeches inflammatory in nature. That action is still being appealed.

MAJOR

NUCFAD maintained two headquarters: one in San Francisco (at 2085 Sutter street), the other in San Jose (at 892 Santa Clara avenue).

It also directs the efforts of regional offices in some 50 major cities across the country, including New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas and Birmingham, Ala.

It puts out news releases by the thousands to persuade people of the justice of her cause or to announce a fund-raising event. (One held March 4 in Los Angeles, headlined by singer Sammy Davis Jr., raised \$38,000 for her defense fund.)

SENDS

NUCFAD also sends out speakers. Mrs. Jordan has traveled to countless campuses and dozens of countries speaking in behalf of her sister.

Even the birth of a child became an avenue of propaganda.

Last May 5, a daughter was born to Miss Davis's sister, Fania Jordan.

The world's press wasted no time in reporting the child had been named Angela Libre, which, of course, translates to "Free Angela."

and heads the party's Che Lumumba Club, an organization of black Communists whose job it is to recruit young blacks into the party. Alexander helped bring about Miss Davis' enlistment in the American Communist Party, a move that played a part in her dismis-