

# Convicts Strike for Wages, Attack 'Forced Slave Labor'

Male convicts of the Atlanta City Prison went on strike Tuesday and stated that "regardless of what kind of punishment they want to force on us we will not do any more work for the City of Atlanta."

A spokesman for the 449 striking inmates described work they were doing as "forced slave labor" and refused to return to work "unless the city pays us a minimum wage." The South, he said, "still can't get out of this pre-Civil War history. They can't give up that free labor."

The revolt came at daybreak when the farm's 271 white in-

By **DICK HEBERT**

mates, most of them serving sentences for drunkenness or related charges, refused to report to work squads.

By that time five Negro men already were on their way to work assignments at the City Jail and two more were at work in the prison kitchen, but then other Negroes also refused to work.

"Apparently they were pressured by the whites," said Capt. R. F. Jordan who only a week ago assumed duties as new prison administrator. He said that later in the day Negroes agreed to report to work but

by then it was too late. "We used the women inmates in the kitchen," he said.

The striking white men demanded—and were permitted—to speak to Charles Morgan, southern regional director of the American Civil Liberties Union, and a reporter for The Atlanta Constitution.

A seven-man committee of inmates met with the two for more than an hour, listing their grievances and stating their demands.

They described as "cruel and unusual punishment" forced work sentences for alcoholics

Continued on Page 6, Column 7

# Convicts Strike Against 'Slavery'

Continued from Page 1

in light of a Fulton Superior Court ruling last summer that alcoholics no longer can be convicted of drunkenness charges.

"Because it's a disease," Morgan told them. "Just like you couldn't give a man punishment for having a cold."

Since that ruling several hundred Atlanta men have been diagnosed as alcoholics by the Emory Alcohol Project and have special cards on file in City Court. These men legally cannot be sentenced for drunkenness.

## FOUR HAVE CARDS

Four of those on the inmate committee Tuesday said they have such cards as alcoholics but policemen have circumvented them.

"I heard him (one policeman) say 'I'll never arrest a man that's got a card for public drunk—I'll put something else on him'." inmate James Cosper said. "He told Judge (T. C.) Little that's the only way to retaliate."

"All they're doing is evading Judge Jack Etheridge's ruling," said the spokesman, Charles Foster.

## A LOUD SLEEPER

Cosper said he is serving a 75-day term on three convictions, two for "sleeping in public" and "violating the noise ordinance."

"You must be a loud sleeper," Morgan said.

Inmates said they never had been jailed before under charges such as loafing, curs-

ing, making noises or public sleeping, until Etheridge's ruling and the start of the card file. "I never had those charges thrown at me until I got the card," one said.

However, Judge Little said later that such charges always have been routine.

## NOT AGAINST THE PRISON

Inmates at the prison stressed that their action is not aimed at Capt. Jordan or prison policies.

The sit-down came on the heels of a "shakedown" search of the prison Monday which Capt. Jordan described as "routine" but several inmates said was "the worst they've ever had."

Jordan said they were searching for a pistol rumored to have been smuggled inside, but a Negro inmate during the search reported the gun had been pawned before reaching the prison. Jordan said guards found a packet of six .22 caliber shells in the hallway over the weekend.

Inmates said many personal belongings, such as underwear and personal care items, were taken during the search, bed-sheets were thrown on the floor by guards, and one inmate "even lost his teeth" he had left at his bed.

The white inmates said they would continue to keep clean their own living quarters and cook their kitchen meals—"if they'll let us," but that they would do no work that they feel the city should provide for itself.