

What Happened to Ernest McDuffey After the Attempted Lynching in Anoka on September 5, 1931

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Background

On Saturday, September 5, 1931 an attempt was made to lynch Ernest McDuffey, an African American prisoner at the Anoka city jail.

Later that evening, Ernest McDuffey was moved to Minneapolis for his safety. This article describes some events that occurred over the next few years after McDuffey was moved from Anoka.

The descriptions are compiled from newspaper articles in the Twin City Herald, the Daily Worker, the Anoka Union, the Anoka Herald, and the Minneapolis Spokesman.

Legal Advice While in the Hennepin County Jail in Minneapolis

An Anoka lawyer and the garage owner where McDuffey worked represented themselves as friends of the accused and met with him. They urged that McDuffey plead guilty. They said that if he pleaded not guilty he would go back to Anoka and he could be lynched. The best he could hope for was 20 years in prison. They told McDuffey that if he pleaded guilty he would get a light sentence of about 6 months.

Court Appearance

Ernest McDuffey appeared in court on Wednesday, September 9, 1931. The Anoka papers reported a week later on what happened.

The Anoka Union reported "Ernest McGuire, the negro garage mechanic charged with mistreating a little girl of eight, and who had quite a scare when a crowd besieged the jail late Saturday night, bent on vengeance, was taken before judge Mathias Baldwin in Minneapolis where he pled guilty and was sentenced to one to seven years at St. Cloud, and was at once removed to the Granite City. McGuire didn't want to be brought to Anoka and told the officers he would plead guilty."

The Anoka Herald reported "The case of Ernest McDuffy, negro, charged with indecent assault on an 8-year-old girl, was held in municipal court Wednesday. His attorney waived preliminary hearing and he was bound over to district court. In district court he pled guilty to the crime and was sentenced to the St. Cloud Reformatory to be discharged by due process of the law."

The Daily Worker reported that the entire trial took only 3 minutes and no witnesses testified.

Ernest McDuffey was given a sentence of 7 years in the St. Cloud Reformatory.



St. Cloud State Reformatory Case File, Box 120.C.8.4F

Ernest McDuffey (Partial transcription of #9540 case file)

Name: Ernest McDuffey

Number: 9540

Received: September 10, 1931

County: Anoka

Crime: Indecent Assault

Term: 0-7 years

Date of Sentence: September 9, 1931

Ongoing Efforts of International Labor Defense and the Communist Party of America

The International Labor Defense (ILD) was the legal defense arm of the Communist Party USA. The ILD combined aggressive courtroom battles with tactics such as rallies, media campaigns, and strikes. The ILD was involved in high profile cases such as the Scottsboro Boys and Sacco and Vanzetti.

During the 1930s, the ILD fundamentally reshaped the American civil rights landscape by injecting aggressive, mass-protest tactics into African American legal defense. Shifting its focus toward anti-racist organizing under the Comintern's "Black Belt" thesis—which viewed Black Americans as an oppressed nation—the ILD filled a critical void by defending marginalized Black individuals who lacked financial or legal resources mainly in the Jim Crow South.

March 13, 1932 Daily Worker

The Daily Worker (the official newspaper of the Communist Party USA) in New York published an article discussing the frameup of Ernest McDuffey and the current work being done to try and free him.

The article states that:

- "Demonstrations throughout Minnesota will take place on March 18, for the release" of McDuffey.
- A petition with 7000 signatures would be provided by the ILD and given to the governor.
- **Past racial violence in Anoka.** "Investigators have discovered that the few Negroes living in Anoka were terrorized. McDuffy and others had been subjected to frameup before but had fallen through."

April 18, 1932 Daily Worker

"Negro and white workers under leadership of Struggle for Negro Rights and Young Communist League begin fight for release of Ernest McDuffy".

July 30, 1932 Twin City Herald

A committee from the Minneapolis ILD visited Ernest McDuffey in St. Cloud Reformatory and offered him their assistance. A committee "will explain the details of the case to Negro and white organizations throughout the state".

August 13, 1932 Twin City Herald

The ILD "continues its fight to free" Ernest McDuffey. The ILD planned to ask Governor Olson to pardon him. The ILD claims that it is backed by many citizens of Anoka.

December 31, 1932 Twin City Herald

The Twin City Herald announced a meeting at the AOUW (Ancient Order of United Workmen) where Mrs. Ada Wright would speak. Mrs. Wright was the mother of two of the Scottsboro Boys. She was on a tour of Europe and the United States talking about the Scottsboro Boys, who had just been granted a new trial.

The meeting was also the occasion of "furthering the fight to free Earnest McDuffy". The petition for the release of McDuffey had been denied by the Pardon Board.

July 7, 1934 Twin City Herald

An ILD committee went to the State Capitol to file an application with the Pardon Board for the release of Ernest McDuffey. The case had come up before the Pardon Board twice before and pardon was denied both times.

The ILD committee talked with the Pardon Board and were told that the Chief Justice, the Governor, and the Attorney General (the three members of the Pardon Board) are willing to release McDuffey. The ILD requested that witnesses be allowed to testify. Resolutions were sent to the governor from "churches, clubs, fraternal organizations, cooperatives, etc."

July 14, 1934 Twin City Herald

"A group of white and Negro citizens appeared before the Minnesota State Pardon Board" on behalf of Ernest McDuffey.

Why Is
He In
JAIL ?



Why Is
GOV. OLSON
Silent?

For over three years, this young Negro worker, an auto mechanic, has been kept in St. Cloud Reformatory. He was sent up on a frame-up charge of "taking indecent liberties with an eight year old white girl." IT HAS BEEN PROVEN WITHOUT EVEN A SHOW OF A DOUBT THAT McDUFFY IS INNOCENT, that the methods of the Southern lynchers has been used to frame him.

The International Labor Defense has conducted a vigorous campaign for his release and brought the case before the Pardon Board of Minnesota, three times. In spite of all the statements of individual members of the Pardon Board that a great injustice has been done, McDuffy is still in jail.

The Pardon Board consists of Governor Olson, Attorney General Peterson and Chief Justice Devaney. All three are Farmer-Laborites. All of them claim to be friends of the workers and of the Negro people. All three are now seeking the support of the Negroes to be re-elected.

We ask all workers, intellectuals, professional people, Negro and white, to ask these three candidates the following questions:

1. You have time to release McDuffy before the day of the elections.
WILL YOU RELEASE McDUFFY?

2. Are you not lending encouragement to Negro oppression and to the attempts to "burn" the Scottsboro boys by your callous indifference to the fate of Ernest McDuffy?

3. It is a fact that segregation and Jim-Crowism is a common practice in this state. Why are doing nothing to stop it?

Gov. Floyd B. Olson,
Attorney-General Peterson,
Chief Justice Devaney.

You three who constitute the Pardon Board, and who claim to be fair and impartial, hold the fate of McDuffy in your hands.

WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

International Labor Defense
McDuffy-Scottsboro Defense Committee,
10 So. 3rd Street, Room 5.

December 28, 1934

Minneapolis Spokesman

December 29, 1934

Twin City Herald

The Minnesota State Pardon Board denied a pardon to Ernest McDuffy. No evidence was presented in the hearing.

Before the Pardon Board meeting, Governor Floyd supported the pardon and State Attorney Peterson stated that the maximum sentence should have been 90 days on the work farm.

The Minneapolis Spokesman contends that the Pardon Board delayed announcing their decision until after Election Day.

Release from Prison and Life After Prison

I have been unable at this time to find out any information about Ernest McDuffey's release from prison or his life after prison.