THE MISSISSIPPI INDICTMENT

For the first time since 1903 a federal grand jury has indicted five men in Jones county, Mississippi, on charges of lynching Howard Wash, a Negro, last October.

This indictment can become a real challenge to the feudal-like, Hitler-like so-called white supremacy system which has robbed the Negroes and the vast majority of southern whites alike of their political, economic and cultural heritage. This trial can mark the beginning of the end of lynching.

We are enheartened by this move of the Department of Justice. But we refrain from any predictions as to the effects this indictment will have in quelling the lynching phase of Hitlerism until the trial is over. Its possibilities must be clear to all Americans.

We have not, however, forgotten the peonage cases prepared by the Department of Justice but never tried.

The lynching of Howard Wash was as revolting a murder as the landlord lynchers have ever incited. Like most working Negroes in the South, Wash was probably systematically robbed of his wages. His employer was killed but there was no proof that Wash had done the deed. But he was lynched. Why? In order to terrorize Negroes who, taking the Atlantic Charter, Vice President Wallace’s speeches and the very aims of the war literally, might try to extend the democracy for which we fight to the Southland. Terror has never broken an exploited and oppressed people. Certainly it has never destroyed the will of Negroes to freedom.

Lynching will not hold back the tide of democracy and liberty in America. Lynching will go because it daily becomes more clear that the lynchers are the enemies of America—not black America alone. Today the enemies of our country, if given a murderer’s license can and will destroy the state itself. The necessities of war dictate the extermination of lynching.

Whether this case will start the federal government after the lynchers, we are loathe to say. But this war has started things toward that end. We do say: “Write Attorney General Biddle, call for a real prosecution in the name of National Unity and Victory.” Only if we wholeheartedly enter politics, fighting to gain equality of opportunity to strike at Hitler abroad through the destruction of Hitlerism at home, can we really become a dynamic part of national unity and play the role today Negroes have played in every national crisis.