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Berry Case Pri Are Called To About Convict Barnett's Favorite Hillbilly Now Sings Parchman Blues

By WILLIAM B. STREET

Staff Writer

PARCHMAN, Miss., Jan. 30. — Wendell Cannon considers himself a musical director without portfolio — or paycheck.

Mr. Cannon, Gov. Ross Barnett's hillbilly band leader during the 1959 campaign, maintains he's still on the staff of the state penitentiary here.

Prison Supt. Fred Jones says he's not.

One thing is for sure. He's not being paid. On this, both sides agree.

Mr. Jones said he fired Mr. Cannon because "he was agitating against me with the prisoners and prison employes."

"I was not," said Mr. Cannon.

The Cannon story started back in the summer of 1959 when Mr. Cannon wrote a song which topped Mississippi's political hit parade. It went something like this:

*"In '59 Ross took a little trip
To talk to all the people in
the state of Mississip.
He took a little logic and a
little common sense
And talked to the people
The response it was immense
Ross fired his gun
Little Carroll started run-
nin' . . ."*

The song (sing it to the tune "Battle of New Orleans") was the musical highlight of a successful campaign. The "Little Carroll" of course, referred to former Lt. Gov. Carroll Gartin, Governor Barnett's run-off opponent.

The tune propelled Mr. Cannon into the job of musical director at the state penitentiary and into a perplexing situation that Mr. Cannon said Tuesday he doesn't know how to explain.

When Mr. Cannon first came to Parchman, he organized two prison bands, white and Negro, which went over the state performing. The board decided this wasn't a very good idea and told Mr. Cannon to restrict performances to the prison itself.

About three months ago (Mr. Cannon and Mr. Jones don't recall the exact date) Mr. Jones fired Mr. Cannon.

The board of penitentiary commissioners, said Mr. Cannon, told him to stay put. They even issued a couple of pay checks to him which he couldn't cash because Mr. Jones wouldn't co-sign them.

Mr. Jones says he ordered payment stopped on the checks.

Mr. Cannon says he didn't find this out because he didn't try to cash them.

Some members of a legislative committee investigating the penitentiary have heard reports that attempts were made to bypass Mr. Jones' signature and get another prison official to co-sign the checks. This was not confirmed by anyone Tuesday.

The penitentiary commissioners once fired Mr. Jones, but rehired him at the instigation of Governor Barnett.

Mr. Cannon has taken his troubles to Governor Barnett.

"He said he would try to work it out," said Mr. Cannon.

Mr. Cannon's wife is a nurse at the prison hospital and the Cannons still live on the prison property. He's going to stay on at the prison and see what Governor Barnett works out.

Both he and Mr. Jones seem quite adamant on the subject.