

Epton Testifies in His Defense And Denies Charges of Anarchy

By RICHARD J. H. JOHNSTON

William Epton, vice chairman of the Progressive Labor Movement, took the witness stand at his trial yesterday on anarchy charges and denied having ever advocated violence.

The 33-year-old Negro electrical worker responded to questions put by his defense lawyer, Mrs. Eleanor Jackson Piel, with a staccato delivery.

"We are a political organization; we're not terrorists or anything like that," he declared in State Supreme Court, Criminal Part.

The lanky, seemingly relaxed defendant is charged with conspiring to riot, conspiring to advocate the overthrow of the New York State government and advocating its destruction. A fourth count, charging him with being a participant in the Harlem riot of July, 1964, was dismissed last week by Justice Arthur Markewich, on the ground that the prosecution had not proved he was at the disturbances.

Mr. Epton was the first defense witness called on the 15th day of the trial. He had been at liberty in \$10,000 bail since his arrest on Aug. 5, 1964.

The jury listened impassively as Mrs. Piel drew from the defendant his life story—his birth in Harlem, schooling in the public schools there and graduation from De Witt Clinton High School in 1950.

He told of a brief sojourn in California in search of a "job with a future" and of being drafted into the Army in 1952. He said he spent 13 months in Korea and received an honorable discharge after 23 months of service.

"I joined the Communist party in 1958," he recalled, "because conditions of housing, employment, etc., because I believed the party had a program to improve those things."

He testified that he became disillusioned with the Communists and quit the party in 1962, to join the Progressive Labor Movement.

The defendant said that the Progressive Labor Movement "had a program that revolved around the basic issues" facing the people of Harlem.

"I had seen police brutality in Harlem since I was able to open my eyes and since I was able to walk in the streets of Harlem," he said.

Mr. Epton said that he had

put into "historical perspective what was happening to the black people of this country and the white workers also" when he addressed a street rally at 136th Street and Lenox Avenue on the evening of July 18, 1964. It was in that speech that he was alleged to have advocated killing policemen and judges.

He said the state's principal witness, an undercover detective, Adolph W. Hart, who had infiltrated the Progressive Labor Movement, did not tell the truth when he testified that Mr. Epton had advocated violence.

The trial will resume at 10 A.M. today.