BILL PASSED BY ARKANSAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTLAW COMMONWEALTH AND DESTROY CIVIL LIBERTIES IN ARKANSAS

The planters of Eastern Arkansas are out to get Commonwealth.

Fearing that the legislative committee sent to investigate the school would find that Commonwealth was violating no law, the planters and other reactionary groups are attempting to rush through the legislature what will be if passed the most DRASTIC measure against civil liberties that can be found on the statute books of any state or nation, with the exception of Germany, Italy, and other countries in which there is an open fascist dictatorship.

Thus the fate of Commonwealth becomes a small matter compared to the possible consequences of the passage of the bill.

Unless a vigorous fight is made on this bill and its passage is thereby prevented, other state legislatures will follow suit.

Under the provisions of this bill the writings of Abraham Lincoln and of Thomas Jefferson, and passages in the Declaration of Independence, can be interpreted as "seditious."

Anyone quoting the following saying of Abraham Lincoln, (First Inaugural Address) is guilty of a felony: "This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it."

If, during a labor dispute, a strike leader were to quote this saying of Lincoln, and if during this strike agents of the employers were to start trouble that resulted in a fatality, the strike leader could be put to death under the provisions of this bill.

The civil liberties of every person in the U.S. are endangered.

Whereas, the Legislature of the State of Arkansas is now considering a bill (H.B. 211) making "Seditious" a felony and defining sedition as (among other things) "Bringing into this State, introducing, printing, or circulating any writing, publication, printing, cut or cartoon for the purpose of teaching the duty, necessity or propriety of engaging in crime, violence or any form of terrorism as a means of accomplishing political reform or change in government"; and

Whereas, the State of Arkansas has laws already on its statute books that adequately protect its citizens against "crime, violence or any form of terrorism;" and

Whereas, the bill now being considered will not only drive the trade-union movement underground but will destroy the freedom of the press, freedom of speech and assembly, and

Whereas, the bill plainly contradicts the spirit of the declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and other American documents, and is contrary to the teachings of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and other great Americans; therefore

Be It Resolved, that Local 194, American Federation of Teachers, at Commonwealth, hereby protests the passage of this or any similar measure aimed at the destruction of the civil liberties of the citizens of the State of Arkansas.

Lucien Koch, President
Charlotte Moskowitz, Secretary
A Bill for an Act to be entitled:

"An act to define the crime of sedition and to prescribe the punishment therefor: to define the crime of possessing seditious literature with intent to circulate, and to prescribe the punishment therefor: and for other purposes."

Whereas, many and diverse attempts are being made to spread seditious doctrines among the people of this State, which attempts are inimical to the welfare of the State and threaten the peace and tranquility thereof; and

Whereas, it is the desire of the General Assembly of Arkansas to retain the present laws of this State against insurrection and attempt to incite insurrection, but at the same time to supplement those laws with further laws to penalize the spread of seditious teachings,

SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, and it is hereby enacted by authority of the same, that the following shall be held to be included within the meaning of the word "sedition" as used in this Act:

Any writing, publication, printing, cut, cartoon, transmission by radio, or conduct, either individually or in connection or combination with any other person or persons, the intent of which is:

(a) To make or cause to be made any outbreak of demonstration of violence against this State or against the United States; or

(b) To encourage any person or persons to take any measures or engage in any conduct with a view of overthrowing or destroying or attempting to overthrow or destroy by any force or show or threat of force, the government of this State, or of the United States; or

(c) To incite or encourage any person or persons to commit any overt act with a view to bringing the government of this State or of the United States into public hatred or contempt, where the purpose of such conduct or incitement is to accomplish eventually the overthrow by violence of the government of this State or of the United States; or

(d) To incite any person or persons to do or attempt to do personal injury or harm to any officer of this State or of the United States, or to damage or destroy any public property or the property of any public official because of his official position.

SECTION 2. The following shall also be held to be included within the meaning of the word "sedition" as used in this Act:

(a) The actual damage to, or destruction of, any public property or the property of any public official, perpetrated because the owner or occupant is in official position.

(b) Bringing into this State, introducing, printing, or circulating any writing, publication, printing, cut, or cartoon for the purpose of teaching the duty, necessity or propriety of engaging in crime, violence or any form of terrorism as a means of accomplishing political reform or change in government;

(c) Organizing or helping to organize or becoming a member of any society or group, where any of the policies or purposes thereof are seditious as herebefore defined.

SECTION 3. Sedition, as defined in Sections 1 and 2 of this Act, shall be a felony, and any person convicted thereof shall be imprisoned not less than five nor more than twenty years in the penitentiary therefore. Where death shall result from any unlawful act herein forbidden, the person found guilty shall suffer the death penalty. However, upon the recommendation of the jury any violation of this Act not resulting in death or permanent injury may be treated as a misdemeanor and punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars and imprisonment in jail of not more than six months or both fine and imprisonment, or either.

SECTION 4. Possessing seditious literature with intent to circulate. Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that it shall be unlawful for any person to have in his possession, with intent to circulate or distribute the same, any seditious literature or magazine or any literature or magazine the contents of which advocate or teach the duty, necessity or propriety of engaging in crime, violence, or any form of terrorism as a means of accomplishing political reform or change in government. The possession of five or more copies of any such literature or magazine shall be prima facie evidence of an intent to circulate and distribute the same on the part of the person or persons so possessing. Any person violating the terms of this Section shall be punished by confinement in the penitentiary not less than one nor more than ten years.

SECTION 5. Should any Court of this State declare any section or clause of this Act unconstitutional or invalid for any cause or reason, then such decision shall affect only that section or clause so declared to be unconstitutional or invalid, and shall not affect any other section, clause, or part of this Act.

SECTION 6. All laws and parts of laws in conflict herewith shall hereby be repealed.

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WHAT IN COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE?

Commonwealth College is a non sectarian labor school which has as its function the training of young men and women for active service in some militant organization in the labor movement.

Its courses, which include economics, history, labor problems, production culture, creative writing, public speaking, journalism, psychology, etc., are taught from a point of view partisan in the working class.

Most of the food consumed at the college is grown on the college farm. The school has its own library, news service, print shop, etc. All work is done communally by members of the group. The school pays no salaries or wages. Teachers receive only their maintenance.

Students pay $40 tuition per quarterly term (thirty months) and receive their board and room in exchange for 20 hours work per week during fall, winter and spring terms, and 15 hours per week during the summer term. In addition the college provides free health, library, etc.

Commonwealth is located near Mena, Arkansas in the Ouachita Mountains, the southernmost range of the Ozarks.