"Adam Coaldigger" Talks About Things

Oscar Aminger was “educated” in a Catholic school in Southern Germany. It was an excellent education, he says, “It was the only education I ever had. And when I lost my religion I had in my head an absolute vacuum.”

“That’s why I learned so much,” he explains. “All I had to do was keep my eyes open. What we need for the young college graduate is some way to drain his crank every once in a while.

A three-day visit by “Adam Coaldigger” was the most important event of the summer upon the Commonwealth College campus. He spent the first day of his visit in a long and exciting discussion with all comers. The second day he gave the labor journalism class his experiences as editor of the Milwaukee Leader, and as founder of the Oklahoma Leader, now the American Guardian.

He was chief speaker at the Sacco-Vanzetti memorial program, Monday night, August 22. The common was packed by a crowd of neighbors: from many miles around, and these Arkansans farmers became what was perhaps the most enthusiastic gathering in the history of the school.

He’s Been Wrong

During the third day of his stay he explained to the class in labor problems the situation that faces coal miners and the coal industry. Also he listened to criticisms of his latest manuscript, soon to be published as a pamphlet: “The Yankee Prime.”

Ameringer calls members of Commonwealth community “you kids.” It is no exaggeration to say that he aroused a great deal of enthusiasm among the “kids.” But Adam Coaldigger is always uncomfortable if he feels that he is being taken too seriously: “I may be wrong,” he said again and again, “I’ve been wrong so damn many times.” (He never swears before high brow audiences.)

The Commonwealth community, like every other community that is intellectually alive, is troubled by a thousand-and-one questions. An answer or partial answer to these questions, an opinion that contributes to the solution

HELP THESE MINERS ATTEND COMMONWEALTH

Commonwealth wants to raise scholarships for ten Illinois coal miners.

The bravest fight ever waged in America to save labor unionism is now going on in the Illinois coal fields. The next few years will see militant unionism victorious or completely wiped out. The mass of miners have shown that they have the courage to fight and endure hardships without end.

The rank-and-file leadership of today admit that their chief need is for more thorough study of the history, theory and tactics of their cause.

You will read in the accompanying story of the dramatic struggle now going on and of the fearful leadership of men like G. E. Allard and Pat Ansbro, the future of labor needs with young men like these. We would like to have Geary and Pat, and others like them, at Commonwealth. They need Commonwealth. We need them.

Blacklisting and starvation wages have left these militant leaders penniless. Yet the extremely low cost at which scholarships can be established at Commonwealth leads us to believe that there are readers of the Fortnightly who can help some of them to attend.

Forty dollars means a scholarship for a quarter for one of these young miners. The college will provide room and board in exchange for his part-time student work. Will you pay for a scholarship or part of one? If you can’t pay in full now, will you pledge so much a month?

HELP now where it will help the most. Help in the task of establishing a miner’s scholarship for each of the ten Illinois coal districts.

Commonwealth Group Brings Stirring Account of Franklin March

To see history in the making was the rare privilege of the Commonwealth visitors to the Illinois coal fields. This issue is largely given over to an account of the dramatic events they witnessed. The party consisted of Oliver Carlson (writer of the account) and his wife, Bessie, teachers, and Joe Hamburger and Henry Forbizzle, students.—Editors.

Our trip to the Illinois coal fields lasted two weeks. In that short period we talked to miners; met jail and held communication; were smuggled, and threatened with additional beatings; were driven out of Franklin County under police guard since we were told our lives were not safe there and the State’s Attorney refused to promise us protection.

A young mine leader, Geary Allard, who had been arrested with us, was told by the State’s Attorney that he should not return to his home that evening as “a gang was out to get him.” When Allard demanded that he be given the right to carry a gun for purposes of self-defense, it was refused him. The next morning Allard’s pal and associate in his local union, Joe Colbert, was ruthlessly murdered by a mine guard. Two days later another miner was riddled with bullets, and as he attempted to rise his neck was broken by a baseball bat swung by one of the guards.

The delegation of college students from Chicago had been stopped by the sheriff’s forces at Mount Verno (except the advance man, whom we met in jail at Benton); so they proceeded directly back to Chicago without entering Franklin County or making contacts with the miners.

We got in the “back door.” The authorities of Franklin County wanted us to go directly back to Mena. This we refused to do. Instead we went to East St. Louis. We had already arranged to meet with some of the lead-

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Day by Day In the Coal Fields

Notes by Oliver Carlson in collaboration with other members of the delegation

Sunday, Aug. 14. — Planned to start from Commonwealth at 6 a.m., but didn't get under way till 8. We sing a group of workers' songs, shake hands and off we reach Manual at night. Stay with the Forrest Albright.

Monday. — Away to an early start. We hurry on all day long. Reach West Frankfort, Ill., about 7 p.m. A mass of miners are gathered about the Union Hall. We stop and Allard almost at once. Says he: “Boys, we're sure glad to see a bunch of student investigators here. Hell is popping. Meet some of our miners.” We visit his home. There is no food; so we share ours. An advance representative for the Chicago student delegation is reported to be in Benton, seven miles distant. Ick and we go to a meeting of the West Frankfort Protective Association (a relighting outfit) but are refused admittance.

Henry and Joe drive to Benton for contact with the Chicago man. Allard goes to speak at a union meeting. All of us meet later that evening. A group of two-faced men, fondling shot-guns sit in nearby autos, eyeing us suspiciously. We are told they are thugs and gunmen who are terrorizing the miners. Our first sight of the forces which are keeping “law and order” in Franklin County.

Late into the night we discuss the conditions of the miners with a number of their leading men. Truly, a terrible story of betrayal and starvation and terrorism.

Tuesday. — At 6 a.m. we drive out to watch the picket line at one of the mines to be struck. No luck. We are stopped by armed deputies. We protest, but what’s the use? On to Benton with a car loaded with machine-guns trailing us. The county jail at last! What a vicious bunch of scoundrels these deputies prove to be. Ignorant, domineering, full of bluster and ready to hit, club and shoot as long as they wear the badge of authority. We talk back to them. Bang! A sock in jaw for me. I'm threatened with more. The sheriff's wife tells the deputy that it's O. K. to beat us up, only he should not do it in the presence of so many others.

We demand to know why we are booked. No answer. We want to get in touch with an attorney. Refused. Mrs. Allard, who is with us, and whose 5-year-old child was left home alone, is refused permission to go home or phone to anyone to look after her baby. We are locked up and for the rest of the day are cut off from all the world. Kangaroo Courts, bookleggers, thieves, rapists — all new to most of us. What a life!

My demand to see Judge Horner (Democratic candidate for governor) has finally been realized. Some miners raised the question about us at his mass meeting. Horner tells me: “These are primitive people, whose passions run high. Remember, we can't change human nature, etc.” Not a word in reply to my questions about what is he going to do about our illegal arrest, and will he tolerate the suspension of civil rights and liberties in Franklin County? We are promised our release, but told to go back to Mena. We refuse. We are told not to associate with Allard and for good reason. Tell the judge and the Franklin County officials that we will associate with whom we please. At last we are released. Marion Hart, State's Attorney, tells us that our lives are not safe and that he cannot guarantee our safety. He assures us that he expects to see “lots of blood-letting soon.” Sieverts, the Chicago delegation advance man, was in jail when we got there. He is released with us. We drive on to Mount Vernon, where the local paper tells how the Chicago delegation was met by armed guards, surrounded and turned back. We drive on toward St. Louis, for we don't know where and when another group of duped gangsters may waylay us. All goes well. At 2 a.m. we reach East St. Louis.

Wednesday. — Reporters, news stories and contacts with the Civil Liberties Union. We read of the cold-blooded murder of Joe Colbert in West Frankfort. The reign of terror there enters a new phase.

Thursday. — Back to Belleville. We meet Allard and Ansbury, another militant mine leader, a lighting young Irishman. He is not afraid and can't be talked out. Henry goes with Ansbury to notify the miners of central Illinois of the shooting of Colbert. Allard goes with us to report to Civil Liberties Union.

At this point I'll introduce some notes by Charles Fordhale on some high-light's that stand out in his memory:

“At Kineaid, there is the queerest setting for a speech I have ever seen. A ball park filled with sleepy miners at 2 a.m. Two Penney company houses burning and lighting up the sky about a quarter of a mile away. The houses obviously fired by agents of the coal operators to get out the militia. A man speaking from the back of a truck with a flashlight shining on his face. The man, Pat Ansbury, exhorting the miners to attend Joe Colbert's funeral and also march on Franklin County to break the reign of terror. Eight thousand miners answering as one man, "We'll come down Pat!"

"At West Frankfort the reign of terror becomes a reality. Entering Pat's house at dusk, we see a car coast by with its lights out. Four men are in the car - - gunmen. We sit on the porch at night. Pat's father-in-law has a pump shot-gun across his knees. At intervals a car approaches with no lights. The shot-gun is held ready and we slump down in our chairs - just in case. These gunmen are not here to kill - just terrify. But you never can tell when they have had "one too many" or some twist in their sadistic minds will make them open fire. That's what happened to Joe Colbert..."

"At Ziegler, with Geary Allard who is to speak at a mass meeting. We separate the dingle with the crowd. I almost run in two 'deputy sheriffs.' One is our old friend, Stanley Mundel who stabbed Carlson. Geary's wife has been told they are looking for us. Ward is sent to Geary who is talking in a group of miners. Getting in a car we pick up Geary beside the road and beat it. There is no law in Franklin County..."

"On the line of march...Thousands of cars and 25,000 miners are approaching Franklin County. Ansbury is with us. He is to fly over the mines in the morning dropping the leaflets that call on the miners to meet your 25,000 union brothers at the Franklin County line..."

"The cars are coming back, riddled, shot through. Machine guns were turned on the ambushed marchers as they sought refuge in the corn fields. Soon discipline is re-established among the retreating miners. Ansbury and other leaders speak to the thousands, calling on them to prepare for new struggles."

FIFTY APPLICATIONS FOR FALL

"Bigger and better," the late battle cry of American business, is an apt expression to apply to Commonwealth's anticipated enrollment for the fall quarter opening October 3.

Already 50 prospective students, counting the mangled with the crowd who wish to return, are on the books. Those interested in attending are advised to apply promptly.
First-Hand Story of Illinois Coal Fight

Continued from page One

ing miners a day or two after our arrest. We met them in Belleville, Ill. They gave us a complete account of the situation.

Into the Fray

In cooperation with them, we arranged for one of our delegation to drive one of their men to meet with the striking miners of central Illinois so that a unified plan of action could take place. Another of the miners went with us to appear before a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union group in St. Louis. We issued stories to the press of the attack that had been made upon us, and how the authorities of Franklin had declared that no civil liberties existed in that County.

Later, we met with the entire policy committee of the Union and aided them in their work of preparing for the march in Franklin County. When the march of the 25,000 miners took place, two of our boys went along. They spoke to the miners. They saw the cars which had been riddled with shot-gun and machine gun bullets. They interviewed miners who had been shot, clubbed, beaten. They slept with the retreating army in Pinckneyville, and attended the final mass meeting held by the miners before they were forced by state highway police to proceed to their homes.

What the Delegation Saw

All in all, the Commonwealth delegation had a chance to witness and take part in most of the greatest struggles in which any section of the American labor movement has ever been engaged. We saw the coal company thugs and the armed deputies. We saw the "business" interests using machine guns, revolvers and other weapons on unarmed men, women and children. We saw the homes of the miners, noted the conditions under which they are forced to live. We discovered that the cynical labor leaders of the United Mine Workers of America were working hand in glove with the coal operators.

We found out that a "red scare" was being carelessly exploited by the bosses. They were organizing Citizen's Protective Associations, to which we were refused admittance, but whose leaders we discovered included bootleggers, brothel-house keepers, men under indictment for rape, for murder, etc.

We read the local press of the coal fields. At the time when the thugs in Harlan and Bell County, Kentucky had been ways of our delegation there, these papers had protested against such action. At that time they said that such a thing could never happen in Illinois. Only a few months later, such things did happen. But the papers had changed their tune by that time. They were shouting for blood. They heaped insults on our delegations. They cheered when militant miners were shot in the back. They did all in their power to raise the spirit of lynch law. Such was the condition we found in Southern Illinois.

The Commonwealth College delegation went to the coal mining region of southern Illinois for the purpose of investigating the conditions of the miners. What we discovered was this:

(1.) The whole mining industry is in a state of disintegration. The Illinois fields, which at one time employed about 110,000 men, now have less than 50,000 remaining in the industry. Of this number, no more than 22,000 are employed at any one time. Thousands of miners have been without work for more than one year. Even those who are employed manage to get no more, on an average, than one week's work out of five. Through the installation of conveyors, coal-cutting machines, etc., the productive capacity of the average miner has been increased more than three-fold, but his wages have been cut, and his working year decreased.

How the Referendum Worked

(2.) The official heads of the United Mine Workers of America (Lewis, Walker, et al.) have made an almost open alliance with the coal-company operators. In direct violation of the constitution of their own union these officials have negotiated contracts with the coal operators which failed to embody a single demand of the miners' convention.

When the miners, by referendum vote, defeated the new wage-cut agreement by a vote of 25,000 to 10,000, the well-paid union officials declared that referendum null and void. The officialdom then began an "educational" campaign to convince the miners why they should accept this new wage cut. Imposition, terrorism, race prejudice were brought to bear by the officials in their campaign.

Once more the referendum was taken. Again it seemed as though the miners had voted down the agreement. Then something unique took place. Most of the tally-sheets were reported stolen; so John L. Lewis declared a state of emergency to exist, and signed the contract. Our delegation has in its possession an affidavit, sworn to by one of the miners who had been sent to watch the counting of ballots. He declares that the tellers of the Union threw the package of ballots into the automobile which belonged to Fox

SUMMER SESSION ENDS; STUDENTS PLAN ACTIVITY

With the end of the summer session, Commonwealth students and visitors are returning to their jobs, to other schools, or to the long, hard business of looking for work. A check-up of departing students revealed the majority of them are going to be in the same predicament as the other citizens—unemployed—but with this difference: Commoners hope to work with others to do something about it.

One young man, a summer student at Commonwealth, is returning to his trade as a meat-cutter in New York. He says he believes now that he can do his best work by attempting to organize the meat-cutters of his locality. Another student, who will be a senior at a large Eastern university, intends to major in speech in his final college year, with a view to doing creative work in labor dramatics. He says that a semester at Commonwealth gave direction to his plans. A Chicago school teacher, unpaid for a year, spent his last dime to come to the summer quarter and is going back to the job with an understanding of the practice and theory of economics.

Students agreed that Commonwealth's summer quarter was a success, many indicated a hope of returning in the future. The enrollment for the quarter just closing was the largest yet, at one time the group numbering 63.

The fall quarter opens October 3. A few visitors will remain during September.

Hughes, Vice-president of the Illinois district of the U. M. W. A. Furthermore this affidavit declares that Fox Hughes himself was in his car when this was done.

(3.) The coal miners of Illinois have been betrayed by their own leaders. They have been intimidated and smuggled by the hired thugs and gunmen of the coal companies. The forces of civil
INSIDE STORY OF COAL FIGHT

Continued from page Three

government in the southern counties have remitted against aid to the coal operators in jailing, shooting and terrorizing the miners.

No Civil Liberties

(1.) The authorities, operators and union officials have formed a united front against the miners. In order to crush these workers, they have abolished all semblance of civil law and rights in Franklin county and in some adjoining counties. (2) Out-of-towners who come there to investigate conditions are jailed, beaten and their lives threatened. You are an "unwanted foreigner", an "undesirable" no matter how peaceful you may be, no matter how impartial you intend to be in your investigation.

(3) The miners are determined to wage this battle to the very end. Out of their ranks are arising rank-and-file leaders who cannot be bought and who refuse to be intimidated by the combined forces operating against them. The mass of the 25,000 miners into Christian county and the subsequent march of over 25,000 unarmed miners to Franklin county stand out as events never before equaled in the annals of American labor history. The battle has only begun. The coal-diggers of Illinois need aid to keep their union intact. Neither sell-outs nor assassinations will stop them.

(4) Every individual, every organization, that declares itself a part of or sympathetic with the labor movement in this country must give aid and support to these miners in their struggle. Attacks on these men were not leading this great attempt of the miners to save themselves and their organizations must be looked upon with grave suspicion the more so if these attacks come from sections of the working class movement.

The miners of Illinois need all the aid that can be given them, morally and materially. We of the Commonwealth College delegation, in our talks with many of these miners, found that they were anxious to do more studying so that they may prepare themselves better to build their union. We told them about our school. They are interested in it. Many want to attend. We feel that our friends should aid us in raising funds to establish a number of permanent scholarships for young miners of Illinois and elsewhere. Our school can be of invaluable aid to them. The young men who are now taking over the leadership of this vast movement of the coal miners are brave and intelligent, but they need more training and education in the leadership of any current problem, is welcomed with enthusiasm. Oscar Ameringer, with a lively, intelligent, and a good fund of information, can help the "kids" a great deal in this bothersome process of thinking. He does not get nor does he expect universal agreement, but certainly no other visitor has made a similar contribution to campus thinking.

1. Is There a Labor Movement?

For instance, Commonwealth students and teachers have recently pumped much air through their voice boxes in an effort to come to some agreement upon the question of whether or not the labor propagandist should use international or American terminology in getting the message to the American worker. One group contends that since the labor movement is international in its scope, it should talk in international language: "proletariat," "bourgeois," "materialist conception," etc. The other group is convinced that we must talk "American" if we are to accomplish anything: "common people," "industrial democracy," etc.

Oscar Ameringer does not hesitate a moment over this problem. "The idea," he says, "is the only thing that is important. We've got to be understood. We've got to talk our own language."

Here are some of the questions asked him, with the answers that he gave:

"Is there an American labor movement worth the name?" "No." "Will there ever be one?" "Sure." "When will it start?" "We want to see it start." "In the Middle West and the Southwest." "What class in America is most likely to start thinking and acting in the near future?" "What class is most inclined toward radicalism?" "The farmer."

Ameringer, now grey-haired, has been in America since he was sixteen. He has been in the midst of working-class struggles in Maine and California, Wisconsin and Louisiana, Oklahoma, Illinois, and most of the other states. He knows America and the American perhaps as well as any man has ever known them. And yet he speaks with a slight German accent.

The Ameringer Paradox

But more surprising still, he can talk with no trace of an accent. He is a superb actor, and when during his talks he "takes off" an American, he gets exactly the Yankee twang. Why, then, does he retain this German accent?

The answer is paradoxical but obvious. Because he has traits which we patriots like to ascribe to the American, frankness, honesty, freedom from affectation. He refuses, unconsciously perhaps, to talk exactly like one of us.

5,600. A milestone in the history of Commonwealth's library was reached the other day with the accession of its 5,600th book. The college book collection has maintained a steady growth during its nine years life, starting on a shoestring in the form of a handful of books donated by students, teachers and friends and now being housed in a three room building of its own, with prospects of a much-needed fireproof home in the not too distant future. Commonwealth buys few books. Interested friends send down their books, duplicate magazines. With this help and a recent grant from the Carnegie Corporation, the college has been able to build up a good collection and a servicable reference department.

6,500th book to be catalogued was fittingly: "Unemployment and Adult Education," a symposium published by the American Association for Adult Education and donated by one Ed Johnson, here for the summer session and once a student at Grinnell College, whence came lately a box of books, gift of undergraduates and instructors.

THANKS FRIENDS

BOOKS


When he came over here he was an honest, unaffected German boy. He learned to talk the language the best he could, with an accent of course. During the formative period of youth he did not wish to appear to be anything other than what he was, a German immigrant. His speech had a foreign ring all the time. He still sometimes refers to himself as "an old Dutchman." And thus he remains; so thoroughly American that he talks like a foreigner.

Trio. Commonwealth's summer dramatic season closed on the Saturday evening of the next-to-last week with the presentation of three one-act plays by local "talent." (Quotation marks are unnecessary for the "local," anyway). These were "Murdered: a Talent for Living," by Clifton Hicks; "Moscow Divorce Court No. 13," a light educational piece by Sam Liske, and "Risen From the Ranks; or From Office Boy to President," a farce on a dying American legend by Harold Coy. A good time was had by all, including authors and audience.

Society Notes