WHAT IS COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE?

Commonwealth College is a non-factional 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, proletarian culture, creative writing, public speaking, journalism, psychology, etc., are taught from a point of view partisan to the working class.

Most of the food consumed at the college is grown on the college farm. The school has its own laundry, cannery, 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 (three 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, on the college farm, in the garden, office, library, etc.

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

The school has an excellent library with 8,000 bound volumes and one of the best labor pamphlet collections in the nation.

The school plant includes 320 acres of land, about half of which is in cultivation, four dormitories, seven cottages, a guest house, a cellar, the "Commons" (kitchen, dining room and auditorium combined), a store, carpenter shop, classroom building, office building, and a barn.

The school has a herd of cattle, horses, mules, a few pigs, etc., farm implements, and other equipment. It has a water system and electric system, neither of which is adequate for all the needs of the school.

All this represents years of unpaid work by students, maintenance workers and teachers, and represents also thousands of donations from funds and individuals. But most of these donations have been small ones. Commonwealth is maintained by a very small amount of cash.

Commonwealth must always remain a small school because of its method of support. Its student body ordinarily numbers fewer than fifty.
COURSES

American Labor Movement — This course traces the development of the class struggle in the U.S. It begins with a study of the extension of European capitalism which resulted in the colonization of America. It seeks an understanding of the general development of capitalism. With this understanding as a background the economic and political struggles of the American working class are studied in detail up to the present-day labor movement.

Public Speaking — In this course conviction and clear thinking are held to be more important to good speaking than voice culture. Students are given abundant opportunity to speak on subjects relating to their interest in the labor movement. The teacher and class give corrective criticism. The course seeks to give practical training for organizational activity among the workers and farmers.

Marxism — This course is chiefly concerned with political economy. The workings of the capitalist system are investigated and the question is answered: "What are the contradictions in the present system that are bringing about its collapse?" Dialectical materialism and the Marxian theory of the state are also studied.

Writing — This course is made to fit the needs of the individual student. It may include sentence structure, labor journalism, short story writing, play writing, or article writing, depending on the previous training, the ability and the ambition of the student. Writing is regarded as a skill, not a body of knowledge, therefore the student is expected to write, not memorize passages in a composition textbook. Most of the more talented students in the writing course begin writing for publication before they have completed the course.

Psychology — Labor colleges are faced with the problem of developing a new approach to psychology — an historical approach to the problem of personality. The content of bourgeois psychology is used only to an extent. The course at Commonwealth attempts to understand personality under the conditions of class conflict and the struggle for a new society.

Imperialism — This course is designed to present a Marxian analysis of the last stage of capitalism, to set forth the historical forces that have led up to this stage, and in this manner make scientific predictions as to the future. The struggle of the great capitalist powers for monopolies over raw materials, over the right to develop so-called backward areas, etc., are studied in their relation to finance-capital. Theory is linked up with current situations so that the student is enabled to read the papers and magazines with much greater understanding. He is taught how to interpret political events not only in their relation to economic forces, but also in their effect on the working class.
Working-class History—This course aims not to give a glorified "drum and trumpet" history, not chronicled court gossip or parliamentary merry-go-round, nor unrelated facts and isolated events, but a survey of the growth and changes in the mode of production and class relations during the social system of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. The student is not urged to memorize dates or learn by rote obscure happenings, but is encouraged to assimilate the meaning of underlying social and economic forces at work during the given epoch under consideration. Interpretation, the relationship between cause and effect in social movements and institutions, is stressed. Marx's theory of historical materialism is accepted as the most scientific appraisal of the evolution of human institutions.

Labor Problems—This course grapples with the problems that have confronted the labor movement both historically and currently. Each problem is analyzed and examined in its socio-economic setting. Some of the subjects are: Reasons for the rise and fall of the Knights of Labor; strengths and weaknesses of the American Federation of Labor, its structure, philosophy, membership, pre-war and post-war accomplishments, etc. Special attention is given to the reasons for the growth and decline of various radical labor organizations.

Office Methods—This course is designed to prepare students for work in labor offices. It includes typing and shorthand (Gregg), mimeographing, the work of a recording, financial and corresponding secretary, preparing copy for a printer, keeping union records, etc.

Labor Drama—Commonwealth sends out groups of students and teachers to various nearby centers to put on labor plays and entertainments. The school also stages plays in its own auditorium for students and neighbors. Most of the plays are written at Commonwealth, although outside material is used whenever it suits the needs of the group. All members of the community are free to try out for these plays and those with most interest and ability are chosen.

Music—Labor songs are sung at every Commonwealth gathering. Some of these were written at Commonwealth. Any student interested in solo or quartet singing will be given every aid and encouragement.

Other courses may be arranged if there is sufficient demand.

The writer and musician in the labor movement. — Artistic talent is greatly needed in the labor movement. Songs and plays written by Commonwealth students are now commonly used all over the nation. Short stories written by students have been published in magazines of national circulation and have received favorable attention by leading critics. The college publishes a literary magazine, The Windsor Quarterly, recognized as one of the best of the "little" magazines. The permanent staff includes several established writers so that the student with literary ability is always sure of aid and competent criticism of his efforts.
The wooded Ouachitas

A mountain stream

Three teachers

Harnessing a mule

Teachers work too

Corner in social room

Sunset from the campus
CALENDAR - 1934-1935

Fall Quarter - opens October 1, 1934
Winter Quarter opens December 31, 1934
Spring Quarter - opens April 1, 1935
Summer Session - opens July 1, 1935
Fall Quarter opens September 30, 1935

OFFICERS OF THE COLLEGE

Lucien Koch
DIRECTOR

Charlotte Moskowitz
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Clay Fulks, William Cunningham, Bob Reed
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

METHOD OF OPERATION

Commonwealth raises most of its own food on its 320-acre farm-campus. Students and teachers work side by side at the required industrial and communal tasks. Students put in 20 hours a week. Teachers put in 15 hours at industrial work and teach one course, or 10 hours and teach two courses. There are also a number of resident workers who contribute their services to the college, putting in a minimum of 30 hours per week. Classes are held in the morning and industrial work done in the afternoon.

GOVERNMENT

Commonwealth College is owned and controlled by the Commonwealth College Association, incorporated under the laws of the state of Arkansas. To be eligible for membership in this body one must have been at the school as a teacher or maintenance worker nine months or as a student ten months. The Association selects new members from among those eligible, a two-thirds vote being necessary for admission.

Final authority in all matters rests with the Association, but this body delegates to the student body complete jurisdiction in the following: (1) Enforcement of rules of conduct, (2) Enforcement of standards of academic work, (3) Enforcement of industrial efficiency; except that only the Association can expel. Any administrative responsibilities delegated to the student body are subject to revocation by the Association when judged by the Association to be ineffectively handled.

- 6 -
ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

To be admitted to Commonwealth the student must display intelligence and an interest in the labor movement. Students are admitted who have not even finished the eighth grade, provided they can prove in their answers to a series of questions that they have the equivalent of a high-school education. They need not know certain subjects, algebra, geometry, Latin, etc., they must know more of what is going on in the world today than the average high-school graduate knows. Most Commonwealth students are young men and women from factory, mill, office and farm. Some are accepted, however, who have not yet had industrial experience, provided they have a real interest in the problems with which Commonwealth is concerned.

INDUSTRIAL WORK

Among the necessary tasks at Commonwealth are farming, gardening, cooking, laundring, dishwashing, office work, library work, bookkeeping, canning, etc. Students and teachers are assigned to those tasks for which they are best fitted. So far as possible individual preferences are taken into consideration in assigning work.

WHAT TO BRING

Students should bring three sheets (cot size), two pillow cases, a pillow, towels, blankets to meet individual needs. It should be borne in mind that although Mena is in the South zero weather is not unknown here.

Clothing worn at Commonwealth is of the very simplest kind, as this is one of the ways by which students economize. Overalls or other work or outdoor clothing is always in style. It is well to have a pair of heavy work shoes for industrial work, and a comfortable pair for hiking over mountain paths. Sandals and tennis shoes are convenient in warmer weather.

Baggage may be shipped ahead prepaid by freight, express or parcel post and addressed in care of Commonwealth College. In such cases, the College will collect it and hold it until the student's arrival. It is advisable that the student ship bedding ahead or have it with him in his hand luggage, rather than to pack it in baggage which is to follow him.

Mena is on the Kansas City Southern Railroad and on bus lines from Fort Smith, Texarkana and Hot Springs. Many Commonwealth students hitch-hike, even from distant points, but hitch-hiking is not what it used to be. Sometimes the College can put you in touch with another student driving this way.

Upon arrival in Mena, inquire at the City Drug Store for the Commonwealth truck. If the truck is not in town, it is necessary to hike or rent a car to the campus. A car may be hired at a reasonable cost. The campus is eleven miles west of Mena on the Talihina Highway.
WHAT KIND OF STUDENT “FITS IN”?  
Commonwealth has found from experience that the student (and teacher) who fits best is the one who has well-developed qualities of good nature, adaptability and tolerance. A healthy dissatisfaction with the social injustices that afflict the world is necessary. But the person who is merely dissatisfied with his fellow-men in general will find just as much to complain about at Commonwealth as anywhere else.

WHAT DO STUDENTS DO AFTER THEY LEAVE COMMONWEALTH?  
The college grants no degrees, credits nor certificates. Whatever the student takes away he must carry in his head. Neither does the college attempt to equip students for paying jobs of any kind. The student is expected to go back to the job he had before he came or to a similar job, and take an active part in the work of organizing and educating those who work with him. If no job is available the former student may do valuable work among the unemployed.

There is a great variety of work to be done in the labor movement. Organizers, speakers, writers, actors, editors, scholars and teachers are very much needed, and the labor movement can absorb your best efforts, no matter whether your special skill is stenography or novel-writing. The modern labor movement is the greatest and most significant movement in the history of mankind. Commonwealth seeks to give you a theoretical training, so that you may know what this movement is and better understand your own place in it, and it also works to develop in you certain skills that will make you more valuable to society.