Commonwealth College Fortnightly

Volume 10, No. 5.

NOTE: Pages one and four of original were printed askew.
Director to Pennsylvania; Teacher of Current History to Spain

Farm Manager Made Member Of Commonwealth Association

KOCH

Director Lucien Koch left Commonwealth February 18 for Pennsylvania where he will organize and supervise workers' education projects under the direction of the Affiliated Schools for Workers. He will be away from Commonwealth for eight or ten weeks.

The Pennsylvania Department of Instruction will supply unemployed teachers for a number of groups in the anthracite section of the state, around such centers as Mahanoy City, Frackville Center, and Hazzleton. Local classes will be set up in economics, English and history. Miss Hulda Kandell, who formerly taught at the Southern Summer School, will have charge of labor drama projects.

Lucien will help select the teachers, supervise their work, and perhaps teach one or two of the groups.

Says Eleanor G. Coit, director of the Affiliated Schools for Workers: "We realize that we must approach the work in an experimental fashion and that we have yet to prove many things about this method of work... We are anxious to use Pennsylvania as a particularly important demonstration center."

PRICE

With Mildred away on a jaunt,
Oh where are the figures we want,
On currency inflation,
The Cuban situation,
And the loans to the little cantona?

Harold Coy and Mildred Price, his wife, are the regular teachers of current history at Commonwealth. During certain sea ones of the year Harold suffers from asthma; he remains in Arkansas, and thus he has a habit of working in St. Louis as director of publicity for the community fund. For this reason Harold and Mildred have money.

They have been planning for some time to visit Spain in order to make a special study of the labor movement there. On February 22 Mildred left Commonwealth, with their small son, Christopher, to join Harold in St. Louis. They will sail March 7 from New York.

After a week in Paris they will go to Madrid and will remain there for four or five months. They expect to be back at Commonwealth in September.

For a long time Mildred has been conducting the class in current events here. On the eve of her departure Commonwealth gathered and sang, to the sentimental tune of "Sweet Violets," a number of home-made limericks, of which the one above quoted is typical.

During their stay in Spain, Mildred and Harold will contribute regularly to the Fortnightly.

OKA

From a tower a hundred feet high,
and dangerous,
One cannot reach and touch the stars and planets.

For a long time the Cunninghams have had on their mantelpiece two odd little figures, evidently Orientals carved out of soapstone. One of the has upon its side an inscription that has, until recently, never been deciphered.

When Oka, the Japanese scholar, arrived on the campus he was very tired from a three-day trip on the bus. He was permitted to sleep for eighteen hours. But as soon as he awoke he was taken down to Luna Lodge and asked to translate the strange characters. Thus a Chinese poem was discovered in the Ozark hills.

This important business over, it was arranged for Oka to deliver a series of lectures upon the Orient. He will also take over Mildred's class in current events.

RATTEL

Russell Ratte, 21-year-old farm manager, was voted into the Commonwealth Association at the regular February meeting.

Russell has been at Commonwealth since the fall of 1932, when he enrolled as a student. In the summer of 1933 he was given charge of the farm.

Shortly after he became farm manager he returned to his home in Wisconsin for a three-month visit, and as a result brought back with him Dolly Hayter as Dolly Ratte. (Like Clarice Cunningham and Mabel Fulks, unlike Mildred Price and Charlotte Moskowitz, Dolly does not follow Lucy Stone.)

This winter Russell has been planning: planting and plowing, and hauling tons of rock off the Commonwealth farm.

GORE TO IOWA

Hugh Gore, 24-year-old farmer of Potter, Arkansas, joined the "holl-
1933 AT COMMONWEALTH

This article is a report made by the Commonwealth College Association to the conference on workers' education held at Brookwood Labor College on Washington's birthday.

Nineteen thirty-three has not been a spectacular year at Commonwealth College, but it has been a year of steady progress. The work of the school, academic and industrial, has been improved. Enrollment for the year was about average, although it has become increasingly difficult for working class students to raise the relatively low tuition fee.

Increased efficiency in industrial work has been brought about partly by additions to plant and equipment. A new barn was built, new tools and implements purchased; the dairy herd was doubled; pigs, horses, harness, etc., were bought. The farm was greatly improved, and the school now has more acres under cultivation than ever before. The financial report for the year showed that the farm furnished 57 percent of the food consumed by the group, as against 50 percent for 1932.

The financial situation of the school changed very little, if at all, during the year. Commonwealth has always operated on a small cash budget; and this amount was raised no more easily in 1933 than in previous years. It is interesting to note, however, that whereas tuitions in 1932 were 55 percent of the total income, tuitions in 1933 were only 40 percent of the total. In 1932 donations made up 30 percent of the income; in 1933 donations made up 47 percent.

The personnel of the faculty has remained practically unchanged for the past three years, and these teachers have, of course, increased their efficiency. As Marxist students and students of the current situation they have shown steady forward progress, and as they have clarified their own thinking they have been able to contribute more and more to the labor atmosphere of the school.

The curriculum has been improved from year to year, and a constant effort is made to adapt the training at Commonwealth to the needs of active workers in the movement. The aim is to give the student not only a theoretical background but to add as much as possible to his factual knowledge. Commonwealth classes are not open forums, wherein conflicting points of view are given an equal opportunity. The class struggle is taken for granted. Liberalism is ruled out. The teacher takes his stand on the side of the working class. Material is interpreted from the point of view of scientific socialism.

An unflagging effort is made to imbue each student with the notion that radical activity is the only activity now-a-days worth his consideration and that in the labor movement he will find ample outlet for all his energies and sufficient opportunity to exercise whatever talents he may have or can develop. In other words, Commonwealth aims to train professional revolutionists.

Partly because of our location and partly because of the type of student we get, political work receives the greatest emphasis, although trade-union organizational work, cultural work, educational work, etc., are not neglected.

Labor drama has had considerable attention at Commonwealth. Short labor plays and skits are frequently presented at the school. Commonwealth teachers and students have written a number of these short plays, suitable for presentation by working-class groups, and during the past two years there have been at least two hundred presentations, in various parts of the nation, of these plays.

Commonwealth keeps in close touch with the labor movement, even though the school is situated in the Ozark mountains, far from industrial centers. During 1933 a delegation went from the school to the South, Mississippi, and there attempted to organize the workers of a clothing mill. Members of the delegation were threatened with death and finally were escorted out of town by a mob of several hundred armed thugs hired by the mill owner.

Commonwealth sent delegations to the "Free Tom Mooney" conference in Chicago, the United States Congress Against War in New York, the Continental Congress in Washington, and the Second National Farmers' Relief conference in Chicago.

Because Commonwealth is situated in a "lily-white" county in western Arkansas, it has heretofore been impossible to invite Negro students to attend. In an attempt to test the race prejudices of the residents of this county, and perhaps to do something toward breaking down this prejudice, Commonwealth has been attempting for two years to induce some prominent Negro to visit the school and make a talk to the student body. So far, the college has been unable to find a Negro speaker willing to take the task.

Arrangements have been made recently, however, for a Negro speaker to visit Commonwealth some time soon, and it is unlikely that members of the group will again be disappointed.

Commonwealth teachers have been active in organizing the farmers in the immediate vicinity of the school. A Commonwealth farmer formed the first "holiday" local in the state. When the Farmers' National Committee for Action was organized, this local and others that had been organized in the neighborhood, joined into a county Farmer Protection Association. One farmer of this county, now a Commonwealth student, has been made a member of the Farmers' National Committee for Action. He is also state secretary of the F. P. A.

The non-factional position of the school has been the source of internal difficulties in the past, but during 1933 the various factional organizations in the campus got along quite well with each other and with the management. Both the Communist and Socialist parties have organized groups on the campus, the Communist groups having a larger membership. The C. P. I., I. W. W., Proletarian groups and others have been represented in the student group also during 1933. There have been, of course, heated discussions and arguments that never cease, but factional strife has created very little personal animosity. We have no assurance that the factional peace will always prevail—that the school will never again be torn by political disagreement—but at the present time the factional problem is not acute. Although the administrative problem is increased by the presence of so many factional groups, yet the educational advantages that flow from the conflict of their various viewpoints cannot be overestimated, and the advantages easily outweigh the disadvantages.

The composition of the Commonwealth student body is changing slowly, with changed economic conditions on the outside. During the entire history of Commonwealth, unskilled workers have made up about 36 percent of the student body. During 1933 this percentage rose to more than 42 percent. Skilled workers in the past made up 24 percent; in 1933, 23 percent. The percentage of profes-
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Editors, particularly of labor and farmer papers, are welcome to make free use of material appearing in these columns. A line crediting the Commonwealth College Fortnightly will be appreciated.

At the first session of the class in working class history a student inquired: "Why working class history and not general history?" This immediately resulted in discussion on definitions of history, which in turn led to arguments on interpretations of history.

We study working class history in order to make history for the working class. From the trade union and political history of the workers we learn certain lessons and we gather specific conclusions which help us build up class-struggle theory for practical use in forthcoming conflicts.

After discussing the many and varied interpretations of history pronounced anciently or offered currently, we adopt as the most effective clue to the interrelation of seemingly chaotic social forces Marx's theory of historical materialism. If history is to be regarded as a science it is necessary, first, to view society as an evolutionary unity, based ultimately on the mode of production and exchange, and second, to seek for cause and effect in social events. Marx did that and thus he was not able only to analyze the existing social forces of his time but also to forecast their general development and trend.

The factual material covered in the present course relates to the development of working class movements, trade union and political, in England, Germany and Russia, from 1875 to date. Significant current events are linked up with the history of the struggle of the workers fifty years ago, twenty years ago or with similar movements in other countries. Whether it is the strikes of 1889 in England, the organization of the Independent Labor Party, Hyndman's sectarian "Marxist" party, the organization of the mass Labor Party in England, the conflicting groups and theories in the Second International, Bernstein's revisionism or Kautsky's orthodox Marxism, the Russian Revolution of 1905, the general background of English and German imperialism, the Socialists and the world war, the formation of the "Second-and-a-Half" International, the Spartacist Bund in Germany or the rise of Fascism in Europe, causes and effects are sought and lessons learned.

There is not always agreement, but in the fire of discussion many problems are clarified and many conclusions substantiated or refuted. Although the student is definitely biased in favor of the working class this does not remove the problem of grasping adequately the significance of such questions as the policy of the united front, the program of the International Federation of Trade Unions, the twenty-one points of the Third International, and the dual role of trade unions as fighting organizations of the workers and as obstacles used by bourgeois governments to stop the militant progress of the workers.

A statement which surprised and agitated many a student was the following, taken from Lenin's "What Is To Be Done?": "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness."

The students are required to do a great deal of outside reading and after they have received assignments sometimes in four or five different books it is not uncommon for a student to ask, with ironical humility, "Is that all?"


Editor's Note—This is the first of a series of short articles on Commonwealth Courses.

Commonwealth teachers invite correspondence on subjects included in their special fields from those genuinely interested either as teachers or students.
This has been a bad winter for wasps—or a good winter, depending upon your point of view. These insects hatched out in great numbers during the many spring rays in mid-winter, only to perish on frosty mornings.

The trees have been fooled into budding out a half dozen times, and even the robins made the mistake of appearing. But the greece were wiser. We haven't heard any honking yet, and we won't until all this confusion is cleared up.

The wood crew hasn't quit work, and Elvira reports that heavies are still coming in to the laundry—which speaks well for the intelligence of the human species.

*Dialectic.*—Commonwealth students take their studies seriously. What they learn in class they apply immediately and thoroughly to their extra-curricular activities, sometimes inadequately, sometimes surprisingly, but always seriously.

After the method of dialectic reasoning was explained in the Marxism class, it was applied to phenomena observed on the farm, in the kitchen, on the tennis court. "What is the dialectics of this?" these students asked each other. "Elvira, the laundress, pulls buttons off and Hilda, the seamstress, puts them back on."

When Commonwealth was a liberal institution, hash was seen merely as a result of entropy change. That is, the cook introduced a random element into meat and potatoes. But now that the school is Marxian, hash is regarded as a synthesis, (meat, thesis; potatoes, antithesis). It is, in other words, a perversion of opposites, a negation of negations, etc.

One of the principles of dialectics is that a quantitative change becomes qualitative. Relying upon this principle, Commonwealth boys sometimes permit the fuzz to grow on their chins for weeks, hoping that the fuzz will increase in quantity until it changes in quality, i.e., becomes a beard. Unfortunately, with most of them, the quantitative change ceases too soon; the fuzz grows long before it looks anything like a beard.

Weather.—Seldom has the weather made such conversation as it has this winter, chiefly because there hasn't been any winter at Commonwealth this winter. It is all very confusing. As we go to press winter seems to be upon us, now that spring is here. In

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authority—Harold Coy, teacher of current history, shot a gun for the first time in his life about two years ago. He has never had a pair of skates or skis. As a part of his job for the St. Louis Community Fund he recently wrote a pamphlet entitled: "How to Have Fun in Winter." The pamphlet has been picked up nationally by the National Recreation Association and sent throughout the country. "So," Harold writes, "you have the spectacle of a poor devil who haven't stick his nose out of the window on a winter day becoming a national authority on the delights of skiing, ice skating and tracking wild animals through the snow!"

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