WILL COMMONWEALTH GO ON?

If Commonwealth were like any other school this would be an announcement of its closing. According to the treasurer's latest report the school has only enough money on hand to last till June 1.

Commonwealth's present plight is due to the ever widening gap between rising prices and tuition receipts. Most working-class students can no longer raise even the small tuition fee of $30 per quarter, so that the school's problem cannot be solved merely by raising tuition charges to meet prices.

The treasurer's report shows that during the fall quarter of 1933 our maintenance expenses were 25 percent above the average for the three preceding terms, and that our expenses for the first quarter of 1934, are one-fourth higher than the 1933 average.

We never devote space in the Fortnightly to our financial difficulties unless it is absolutely necessary, and a casual reader might get the impression that Commonwealth is poor but independent.

But the treasurer says that the school must have $3,000 by June 1 in order to open next fall.

We have increased the efficiency of our farm about 100 percent. It now supplies all of our meat, milk and butter, in addition to the garden stuff it has always supplied.

But it is still impossible for us to grow a new flywheel for the pump motor, or to raise overalls for our teachers, or milk our own flour, or cultivate magazine subscriptions for the library.

Conventional universities are spending hundreds of millions for dollars training young men and women for individualistic careers—a thousand carreerists for every career—and Commonwealth is asking for $3,000 to spend in training young men and women for service in the labor movement—where thousands of workers are needed for every one available.

Millions to increase the over-supply of doctors, lawyers, teachers and dentists; but education with a social purpose goes begging!

The present plight is nothing new in the history of Commonwealth but never before has the school been faced with the problem of rising prices and falling income from tuition.

The money you send to Commonwealth will not be hawked out as wages, salary or profit. It will be spent on six- or seven-cent meals for teachers, students and maintenance workers; on overalls; seed; farm implements; paint; lumber; books. During recent months the management of Commonwealth has granted part scholarships to needy students.

The school must have a number of $100 and $200 donations if it is to raise the necessary $3,000.

If you have been in the habit of donating $100 a year, this is the proper time to raise your donation to $200.

It has always been difficult for Commonwealth to make both ends meet, but never before have these ends been so far apart. Never before has there been such a need for trained workers in the labor movement, and Commonwealth, one of the few institutions attempting to supply that need, will not be able to open for the fall term unless money comes in immediately.

We are making this appeal as brief and direct as possible. No one here is in a state of panic. In the past a frank statement of the financial condition of the school has always brought necessary support. We cannot predict Commonwealth will go on; but we can put all our efforts into keeping it alive.

Your immediate response to this appeal is of the utmost importance to Commonwealth, no matter whether you have $100 or $1 to spare.

COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE
MENA, ARKANSAS
Dear Commonwealth:

I have $200.00 (more --- or less ---) to contribute to labor education.

I want Commonwealth to go on with its work.

Enclosed find my contribution. You will, of course, continue to send me the FORTNIGHTLY.

To send you this I had to tear up my copy of the FORTNIGHTLY. In your letter of acknowledgement please send me another copy of this issue.

NAME __________________________

ADDRESS __________________________
KEN'S family lived in an unpainted shack by the edge of the cotton patch. The pigs were always getting out of their pen and hurling their backs against the kitchen floor and grunting. He thought about these pigs all the way to school one morning; some day he was going to meet one over the head with a stick.

It was a two-mile walk to the brick school house with two rooms, and on the way a jack rabbit jumped up out of the sugarbrush and ran along ahead of Ken. It had long ears that stuck straight up in the air, even when it crouched behind a bush and the rest of its body was out of sight.

In school Ken studied arithmetic and learned how to write themes and read geography. He liked geography, because once when he was asked what he intended to travel a lot. He wanted to know where he was going, so he could be thinking about it now. He was good in all his classes, but sometimes he didn't like very much to go to school because his clothes were not as good as everybody else's and they all knew that his folks lived in a house that wasn't painted and that they did not have any money.

His folks were not like other people. They were poor and always having babies. His mother never went anywhere except the little church to which the family belonged. Ken hated girls. And at times he was almost convinced that he did. But at other times he almost cried because he was lonely. It was worse at night just after he went to bed. He would lie there and think.

Of course there was the little Schultz girl, but none of the kids liked her because her folks lived in a shack and were cotton pickers. So when the boys at school started playing with the girls, ken went off to himself to spin his top.

It was April 1st. The boys had planned the day before to play hooky. They figured that if only two or three of them went they would get a ticket, so the whole bunch of boys decided to go. When the bell rang in the morning for classes they turned and ran in the other direction. Their lunches they had hidden in the coal bin, and they picked them up as they passed. The week before had been warm and the sun was shining brightly that day.

They started toward the creek, playing leapfrog as they went. When they got there they sat down by the water in the warm sand to rest. The water was not over waist high in the deepest place. They played around until noon, and by that time had pulled off their shoes and were wading in the water. Someone suggested that they pull off their clothes and go in. There was a scramble, the last one to get 'em off was a "cat's hind end."

They had fun then, wrestling on the warm sand. Ken was pretty strong and threw two or three of the boys. It was not often that the boys could get away from the old folks and do as they pleased. Ken was enjoying himself. He sat down in the sand to rest for a minute. Naked bodies — they were as happy in their release from clothes as is a colt which had been penned up too long, and is turned out into the pasture. Loud yellow yells rolled back from the cottonwoods across the creek.

"Why couldn't it always be like this, thought Ken. Everybody in the world was all right. They were bouncing around on the sand naked. How could one bare body be better than another? The boys today were treating him as if he were as good as they. And he was. When they stood
side by side, naked, what difference did it make if one's father did own a big farm and a store in town, while the others lived in a two-room shack and picked cotton for a living? It was fun today, but tomorrow had money and thought because some­one else did it. He didn't feel ashamed of them any more; and he didn't feel it was just as much right to good clothes as anybody else, and that they must never stop fighting until everybody wore the kind of clothes and ate the same kind of food. Then there would be no unpainted shacks, no cracks in the floor big enough to throw a cat through.

SIX NEW LABOR SONGS

Commonwealth College publishes a pamphlet containing six new labor songs, and is selling these pamphlets at cost—ten cents.

Agnes Cunningham, Commonwealth student, wrote the music. The words are well-known poems. Since these songs were written, more than a year ago, they have been very popular with the Commonwealth group but have never before been published.

Four of these songs are in unison and two are part songs.

Agnes Cunningham, raised on a farm in Oklahoma began her musical career at the age of eight playing chords for her father, an old-time fiddler.

The six poems are:

White Heather Pleach (Men of Eng­land,) Percy B. Shelley; I Sing the Battle, Harry Kemp; Song of the Lower Classes, Ernest Jones; Black Man in Prison, Marion Doyle; March of the Hungry Men, Reginald Wright Kaufman; The Cry of the People, John G. Neihardt.

In the writing courses at Common­wealth, writing is treated as a skill and not a body of knowledge; that is, it must be learned by practice and not by reading texts on rhetoric, journal­ism, style, and the craft of writing. Moreover the student already knows practically all he needs to know — the language, grammar, syntax, spelling. The prob­lem, then, becomes one of relaxation.

Why cannot the student write free­ly? Because all through his school career he has been scolded at for his errors by old maid school teachers, male and female. Pedagogues cannot write because they know everything not to do and nothing to do. If the student takes them very seriously he is convinced that he cannot write a paragraph without making some sort of error. As he sits down to write he is tense. Every sentence costs him supreme effort. He is suffering from the literary equivalent of stage fright.

If he has not taken these teachers seriously he may be merely cynical about writing, may regard his literary ambition as a good joke on himself.

If we can get him young enough we can recondition him, undo what his teachers have done, talk him out of his high school sophistication, turn him from a sophomore into an adult. To do this we must rebuild his naive­ty, restoe his self-confidence, give him the courage necessary for original work.

We must help him find himself or rather class himself. We must take his attitudes, one by one, and show him where they came from. If he be­lieves in art for art's sake, we disclose to him the class origin of this belief. We study contemporary literature, distinguishing the decadent from the progressive or revolutionary. We try to convince him — and usually have little difficulty in doing so — that his only salvation as an artist lies in his completely identifying himself with the working class, that the hopeful, militant attitude of the vanguard of the working class is conduing to great art; that the troubled, cynical, morbid state of mind of the present day ru­lers of society can sponsor only a de­generate art.

But, on the other hand, we try to avoid the error of certain newly-reds who, by confusing propaganda and argument, arrive at the conclusion that only hot argument can be great art — the hotter the better. Argument is primarily an appeal to the reason; art to the emotions; the first seeks to organize ideas; the second, feelings. The social philosophy of the artist is implied in everything he writes, paints, etc. Literary art, then, must be revolutionary in its implications — if it is to serve mankind—but it need not be argumentative. In fact conscious striving after "orthodoxy" will ruin any bit of writing.

The young writer must clarify his thinking upon social problems, must, unless he is to write for the dying bourgeoisie, identify himself with the working class, develop confidence in the mass of mankind. All this is a part of his technical training as a writer. Without a certain naivete and self-confidence, without a settled phil­osophy of life, the would-be writer is helpless. He cannot bring himself to write; therefore cannot learn. With them writing becomes easy; his liter­ary output grows constantly; the prob­lems of syntax, style, etc., take care of themselves.

What, for instance, distinguishes a proletarian story? Is it one full of lice and profanity, bad grammar, pov­erty, dirt and filth? Is it a record of a particularly gruesome industrial acci­dent? Must it end with a quotation from the Manifesto? The answer, as given in the Commonwealth writing courses, is this: The proletarian short story, or novel, or play, is built around an individual conflict which is a part of the greatest of all conflicts, the class struggle. Moreover it is told from the point of view of the working class, not from a detached, or liberal point of view.

The class-struggle theme is regarded not as a great responsibility, but as a great opportunity for the young writer, the greatest opportunity in the history of literature.

NEW RESEARCH BULLETINS

"Price-fixing Under the NRA," will be the subject of Commonwealth's third research bulletin, appearing next week. Believing the dissemination of information is as important as the collec­ting, a research committee of fac­ulty and students launched a bi-weekly publication a month ago. First topic was "Munitons and Profits," followed by "The Peace Movement and Its Parts." Both bulletins have received favorable comment from labor stu­dents, economics instructors, writers and others.

The bulletin, a regular research ser­vice on contemporary social problems,
Music. When Caruso reached the heights of passion in an aria from Paga- niacci our poor, proletarian phonographs simply couldn't take it. They made it seem that the great tenor was singing into a large and rusty funnel. Neither they nor the rest of us had been prepared for Beethoven's Seventh. Imagine an orchestra playing in a bank vault, with grim and steely measures already played tangled up with the tender new music—echoes that return like screaming, horrible ghosts to haunt the living chords.

Our phonographs are portables of the sort you buy in a second-hand music store for $3.50 if you are a generous and simple soul, or for $1.35 if you are hard-boiled and willing to haggle for half an hour. Moreover they have been hitch-hiked across the continent for three times and have holes in their periphery where they have encountered tire tools. They have loose screws in their throats.

They are earnest and intense, remembering their youth. Give them Shubert's Unfinished Symphony and they will try to rice to the occasion. They will all but split themselves in bursts of passion. But their very ambition is their undoing. They scream and rattle. Give them "That Old Girl of Mine" and they settle down to a calm and adequate rendition.

We kept on expecting too much. Proletarian youth seems to have a handkerking after the classics. We like to hear Tchaikovsky even if he is under a tab on a tin roof. It has been estimated that one student wins her phonograph five miles each quarter.

We have never had a radio for long at Commonwealth, partly because we have to fool with batteries but mostly because this is the only chance some of us have to escape from advertising for a few months. In the city with the elevated running past every seven minutes, your spirit is numbed. You can stand it. But out here, where there is no harsher sound than that made by a flock of crows warning an owl on a dead limb, your sense of decency revives, and you don't want to hear the noises herded up to the microphone by the advertising manager and hustled away again when the three minutes is up—all for Pepsodent and General Foods.

Strange to say, chill penury taught us something about phonographs. We ran out of needles and put the classics away against the time when some one should get a check from home. But nobody bothered to put out of reach Rudy Vallee, headed for the last roundup, and as luck would have it someone put Rudy on the felt and settled the last needle on the last roundup. Rudy was hissed out. There came from the patient machine a flying sound through which Rudy could scarcely be heard saddling old Paint for the last time.

But the student who wanted to hear Rudy had an inventive mind. He stopped the machine, whittled a piece of match stick into the general shape of a needle and tried again, with amazing results. Rudy's voice, muted and beautiful, would have brought a lump to the throat of any bank president who once dreamed of the open range.

Caruso was brought out and a new match stick whittled. The tenor sang as if he were far away, over toward Bear Mountain on a still evening. The bosom of the little phonograph swelled and thrilled with the passion of Pag­ niacci. The funnel was gone. The screws were unshaken. Next, up through the soft wood of another match stick, came dramatic, tragic, humo­uous, magnificent old Beethoven, brought to life by an uninitiated orchestra over across the creek among the pines.

And so, as long as we have match-sticks we shall have Caruso, Shubert, Chapin and others, out from under the tub but across the creek, and perhaps our chief winder will wind ten miles this quarter. But we'll have Rudy, too, drying the tears of his old pal, because after all the fellow who whittled the first stick has got some rights!

KARLIN ELECTED PRESIDENT

Jean Karlin, N. Y. C., was elected president of the Commonwealth student body at a recent meeting. This is Jean's second quarter at the school.

Members of the student discipline committee are Fernlee Weinreb, Ed­die Wilkes and Claudio Govers.

ISE TO BE SPECIAL SUMMER LECTURER

Kansas Educator to Talk on "An Appraisal of Capitalism"

Professor John Ise, of the School of Business of the University of Kansas, will be at Commonwealth as a special lecturer this summer from August 13 to 27. His subject will be "An Appraisal of Capitalism." Topics to be covered include: "The Fundamental Significance of Economic Factors," "Liberalism vs. Conservatism," "Rationality," "Survival of the Fittest," "Market Price and Production," "Monopoly," "Business Control," "Economic Inequality," "Insanity," "Socialism," "Communism," "Fascism," "The Outlook of Humanity."

Ise is the author of works on oil and forestry and was formerly on the editorial board of the American Economic Review. He took a Ph. D. degree at Harvard and has taught at Kansas for 18 years.

Commonwealth's summer session will open July 2. Regular courses will be offered, including working-class history, Marxism, creative writing, public speaking, etc. In addition to these courses there will be a series of special lectures by eminent labor leaders and well-known educators.

Names, dates and topics of other special lecturers will be announced in the forthcoming issues of the Fortnightly.

Students will pay a tuition fee of $40 for the 10-week session and will work fifteen hours per week in exchange for board, room and laundry service.

Low rates will be arranged for short-time visitors.

FORTNIGHTLY DELAYED

The present issue of the Fortnightly has been delayed more than two weeks by a breakdown. The 32-volt motor which runs the press burned out and was taken to a mechanic in Mena, who promised to have it repaired in a few days. For more than a month various "experts" in Mena and Fort Smith have "fixed" the motor. They wound it backwards with the wrong size wire and have made every other possible mistake.

In operation the school has at last ordered a new motor and because it takes some time to get one here the press is being run by hand —a modus operandi as cumbersome and lumbering as it is slow.