UNITED FRONT FORMED
AT COMMONWEALTH

Committee Will Direct Organizational and Defense Work in State

An all-inclusive unit front for work in the state of Arkansas and vicinity was formed recently at Commonwealth without a dissenting vote. Organizations participating are the Commonwealth College Association, which is the governing body of the school, made up mostly of teachers, the Socialist Local and the Communist Fraction on the campus. All persons at the school who are unaffiliated are organized into a fourth group, and each of the four groups has a representative on the United Front Action Committee.

The purpose of the United Front is:
[1] To work with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union,
[2] To build unemployed organizations in the state and aid those already formed,
[3] To work with the I.L.D. in defense of share-cropers and others failed for organizational activities,
[4] To aid the miners of District 21, United Mine Workers of America, to secure autonomy,
[5] To support the Chatanooga conference against lynchings,
[6] To build revolutionary student and teacher organizations in the colleges of the state.

The United Front Action Committee has charge of all details of action. Criticism of the united front is to be free and democratic but must be confined to theoretical and tactical questions and must not involve personalities. The whole purpose of the united front is to bring about united action on specific issues and struggles that arise in the state.

WRITERS UNION LOCAL FORMED

The Writers Union, local number two, has been organized at Commonwealth with 18 members. Bill Cunningham is chairman and Bob Brown secretary. One purpose of the union, which was started recently in New York, is to secure FERA funds for unemployed writers.

DELEGATION BACK WITH LYNCH ROPE

Bringing a lynch rope with which they might have been hanged, Lucien Koeh, director of Commonwealth, and Atley Delaney and Bob Reed, students, returned to the school February 10. The following letter, written by Lucien on scraps of a torn paper sack, tells their story. The last paragraph is omitted for lack of space. The rope, with its hangman's knot, will be displayed in the Museum of Social Change.

I finished talking—the leader appealed for a president, secretary, and members. It was obvious to almost everyone that something was bound to break. In spite of that, a large number plunked down a dollar and joined (no whites included). "We Shall Not Be Moved" was chanted with feeling. We were herded outside the doorways.

Five men filed into the room, walked toward me, headed by the riding boss. They ordered me to "come along." I refused. They bashed their revolvers, dragged me from the seat, and kicked me from the room. One Negro had a gun in a brief-case but couldn't get to it. Another had a pistol drawn on him when he reached for his pocket. Deputy sheriffs were among those raiding. Outstanding brutality was handled by two chiefly, Jake Lewis (riding boss) and Benton Moore (ex-justice of peace, currently deputy sheriff). He was recently released from the insane asylum at Little Rock. Both were violently drunk, others smelled of liquor, too.

I was hustled to a car on the road. Bob was too loyal to see me go alone. He came out to inquire where they were taking me. They started beating him and forced him into the car with me. Moore and Lewis whirled their weapons, fingers on trigger. They poked guns into our faces and bellies, they kicked us, punched us—Bob's presence dividing the blows. We were both bloody about the face and head, Bob had a barrel wound on the cheek, I on the scalp. We looked worse off than we really were.

The car was moved down the road about a quarter of a mile and stopped. Rough treatment started again. Drunk deputies stood around and allowed it to go on. Everything must have been planned beforehand. Our lives weren't worth an Indian penny in the hands of those drunk, frothing, madmen. But who the hell cared? The sole impulse was to get back at them. We were helpless at the time.

[page 3]
BERTRAND RUSSELL: INTELLECTUAL CRAWDAD

by William Cunningham

Freedom versus Organization

by Bertrand Russell

W. W. Norton and Company, New York

A reader particularly interested in personal motives might have a hard time deciding how much malice there is in Russell's latest book, and one might argue that most of his misstatements, even on Marx and Marxism, are due to ignorance and lack of philosophical depth, rather than to any conscious attempt to distort.

But malicious or ignorant or both, Russell must be regarded as a liberal crawdad, since he not only travels backward but muddies up the waters as he goes. Moreover he is unimportant except as a specimen for study, typical of his kind. In the aggregate the Bertrand Russells are dangerous, for their works are read by hundreds of thousands of well-meaning but innocent youngguns.

The real theme of his book is quoted by the publisher on the blurb cover. "Marx was not a wholly pleasant character: envy and malice abound in his pages. Unfortunately, much of what was least admirable in his disposition has been copied by his followers. One cannot but feel that any war waged in such a spirit, must, if successful, lead to a peace as disastrous as that of Versailles. Hatred, indulged beyond a point, becomes a habit, and must seek perpetually new victims."

Children, whatever you do you must not engage in a hateful class war, nor indeed fall into the habit of hating capitalists, for if you proceed, under Marxian leadership, to destroy the capitalist system, the next thing you know you will be hating liberals like Russell, and that is bad.

And so, in considering Mr. Russell's book, we shall not be hateful and ascribe to him any malicious motives. We shall assume merely that he is ignorant and shall register only amusement and astonishment at his treatment of Marx and Marxism. Quoting Mr. Russell:

"Marx starts from the orthodox economic doctrine that the exchange value of a commodity is proportional to the amount of labor required for its production. We have already considered this doctrine in connection with Ricardo, and have seen that it is true only partially and in certain circumstances. It is true in so far as the cost of production is represented by wages, and there is competition among capitalists which keeps the price as low as possible. If the capitalists have formed themselves into a Trust or Cartel, or if the cost of raw material is a large part of the total cost of production, then the theory is no longer true. Marx, however, accepted the theory from the economists of his day, although he despised them, apparently without any examination of the grounds in its favor."

Mr. Russell apparently doesn't know that the theory of value is Adam Smith's as well as Ricardo's; doesn't know that Marx carefully criticized Smith's and Ricardo's theories; doesn't know that Marx, far from despising them, regarded them as scientists for their day. (Marx did despise economists of his day who vulgarized Ricardo's theories.)

But what is most astonishing is that Russell doesn't know that Marx always takes great pains to explain that the exchange value of a commodity is not always proportional to the amount of labor required for its production. The distinction between exchange value (price, in its money form) and value is fundamental in Marxist economics. Prices fluctuate about value. The state operates to keep prices above value. Where does Mr. Russell suppose raw material gets its value, and hence its cost? And why not read enough of Capital to discover that the value of raw material reappears in the finished product?

"Malthus's theory of population, like Ricardo's theory of value, is subject to limitations which we have already considered. Marx always rejects it contemptuously, and is bound to lose, since, as Malthus was careful to point out, it would, if valid, make all communistic Utopias impossible. But Marx does not advance any reasoned argument against Malthus, and, what is still more remarkable, he accepts without question the law that wages must always (under a competitive system) be at subsistence level, which depends upon the acceptance of the very theory he at other times rejects."

If Russell had read Vol. I of Capital, Chapter xxv, he would have discovered 112 pages of "reasoned arguments" which demolish Malthus completely, although Malthus is mentioned only a few times.

Marx, according to our bourgeois scholar, "accepts without question the law that wages must always... be at a subsistence level..."

What Mr. Russell has in mind is Lassalle's "iron law of wages," formulated by the latter as follows: "The iron economic law which determines wages under present conditions, when labor power is subject to supply and demand, is: Averge wages are constantly falling to the necessary existence minimum required for the maintenance of life and reproduction."

How Marx and Engels "accepted without question" this "law" is shown in a letter which Engels wrote to August Bebel in 1876 concerning the Gotha Programme.

"... our people have allowed the Lassallean 'Iron Law of Wages' to be imposed on them, which is based on an absolutely obsolete economic theory, to wit, that the worker receives only a minimum wage for his labor and the reason for this is based on the Malthusian theory of population, that there are always too many workers. (This was Lassalle's line of proof thereof.)"

"Now Marx has shown in Capital, in detail, that the laws which regulate labor-wages are very complicated, that this or that factor preponderates according to varying circumstances and that the question cannot be dismissed in a few words as Lassalle imagined. The Malthusian foundation of this law attributed by Lassalle to him and Ricardo (by falsification of the latter)... is refuted in detail in Marx's chapter on The Process of Accumulation of Capital. Thus, by adopting the Lassallean iron laws, we are committed to a statement based on a falsehood."

It is particularly unfortunate that Mr. Russell should have accepted the "iron law of wages" to Marx-unfortunate, that is, for Mr. Russell-since anyone interested can turn to the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" and find out what Marx thought of the "iron law."

After getting off to such a fine start, Russell suddenly discovers a passage in which Marx explains that price may deviate from value. But Mr. Russell doesn't want to change his mind or his copy, so he declares that "Marx has another conception of value which obscurely conflicts with the definition of the iron law."

After this the reader's mirth begins to get out of hand. Russell discovers that "where price and value diverged, he (Marx) felt that price represented the wickedness of capitalism."

There is no space to go into Mr. Russell's profound explanation of historical materialism. Suffice it to say that he finds Marx a pragmatist and that he directs against historical materialism an argument that applies only to teleology.
Commonwealth College Fortnightly

Vol. XI., No. 3-4 February 15, 1935

PRINTED AT COMMONWEALTH BY STUDENT AND TEACHER LABOR

Published twice a month at Mena, Arkansas, by Commonwealth College. Subscription one dollar per year. Established January 20, 1914. Under the act of August 24, 1912.

Blast is dead—long live the Little Mag! Ben Hagglund, Thist River Falls, Minnesota, is printing next issue of Medallion with complete nolwetle of Der- leth, article by Villa, stories by Joffe, Babb, Huddlestone, Maxham, etc. Poetry is dead. Vol. I, No. 1, 26c, 516 Fifth Ave., N.Y.C. a few days hence, if you can digest it: reprints from Voices, Good Housekeeping Magazine, Post Lore, The Virginia Quarterly Review, The New Republic, Scribner's, Spirit, Lyric, Smoke et al. It pays for original verse. 2c Plowshare, Woodstock, N.Y., has had to cut down expenses and now pays but $1.50 an issue 2c. In joining the Little Magazine Association The Latin Qua- rterly says: "Another good idea for our secretary to pursue might be the exchange of credit information. For in- stance, we shall gladly furnish informa- tion about bookstores we've had good dealings with, those that haven't paid and so forth. And by canvassing the member magazines a sort of general code of procedure might be worked out and a lot of time thus saved for new magazines. Our experience has been that it's a sheer waste of good money to send out sample copies. People who send a postcard demanding that you mail them a sample copy, not even enclosing a stamp, never have any intention of subscribing; it's just a racket." Pen and Fist Vol. I, No. 1 blows in from 615 State St., Madison, Wis. Mimeographed John Reader with a red cover Dave Moss of Mose & Kamin, who compiled the first bibliography of little mags in Con- tact, says: "You must remember that the Wine- House idea sounds good. It should help author and publisher. As it is, there is too much poor stuff being published. Your magazine center would probably be an influence for improving the tone and tempo of some of the magazines." Huddlestone writes: "He is outgrowing the others. It's just a racket." He is Abbot Scott, teacher to this section devoted to religious relics is out rowing the others. H.L. Mencken is still the leading contributor to the magazines of all sorts to properly preserve and show hundreds upon hundreds of class conscious souvenirs. Virginia Don- aldson of New York is expected on the campus soon, to catalog, mount and gen- erally look after the material. Student Nat Brown who won the scholarship by naming the museum is on the job making swinging wall-files and doing some nifty interior decorating in the gallery.

"Why," Mr. Russell cries, "should the outcome of a conflict in politics always be the establishment of some more de- veloped system?" If Mr. Russell had read as far as the second paragraph of the Communist Manifesto he would have encountered the words:"a warfare that invariably ended, either in a revolu- tionary change in the whole structure of society, or else in the common ruin of the contending classes." If he had read this however he would merely have said: "Marx and Engels have another theory of history which obscurely con- flicts with their notion that the outcome of a conflict in politics... etc.

But the prize sentence, perhaps, in the whole book begins:"I think it may be doubted whether Engels quite under- stood Marx's views..." After that it is impossible to be very angry with Mr. Russell. He is such a drool fellow—and pausing to recover our breath we recommend his book to all mature readers who are familiar at least with the Com- munist Manifesto.

Little Mag, What Now?

"He is a droll fellow—and pausing to recover our breath we recommend his book to all mature readers who are familiar at least with the Communist Manifesto."
Two new deputies appeared on the scene and drove us to Marion, the gangsters following. We crouched in our seats to keep the lights of following cars from striking us. Once at Marion, we were taken to the sheriff's office. A group questioned us. We answered with long theoretical discourses. This seemed to impress them. We were taken to the basement where we were allowed to wash. We were taken to an attorney's office. He questioned us all the time, stressing the matter of the basement where we were allowed to wash. They escorted us to our truck. We entered the church to wash.

Bob and I at top speed wended our way toward Market Tree, half expecting to be intercepted. About a mile from M.T. we recognized one of our men standing in a truck. We stopped as fast as possible, without brakes, sounding the horn. The truck contained 14 men, all armed with revolvers and high powered rifles. A picked crew to go for us. All of them good trigger men. Seeing them and knowing of the staunch union backing was worth all the beating. We exchanged greetings. Seeing our condition, the deputy invited us to rope; they wanted to be off immediately. We decided against it, wanting to delay violence as long as possible even though the planters had precipitated it. A hundred wanted to go on the expedition but there was no means of transportation.

The share-cropper who had been with us at Gilmore was his getaway, hence the rescue party. Delaney was all afire on hearing the news. He got to a phone, called up the sheriff as a New York representative of the I. L. D., asking what had become of us. The sheriff pleaded ignorance, but the telephone call probably had something to do with our speedy release. Part of the party returned home, the rest of us went to the Negro leader's home to talk plans. Two plans were proposed. One was to beat to a pulp Lewis and Moore. The other was to hold another mass meeting Tuesday (today). But damn it, here we are in the can! The second plan was accepted, realizing it might also involve the first. A noon meeting was as possible to be prepared. The meeting was to be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday. Whether the meeting is being held, Ward and I are unable to say. (God damn this incarceration.) At 2 a.m. the caucus broke up and we went to our various homes. News of our release spread rapidly. There was genuine rejoicing among share-croppers. (The Crittenden affair occurred Friday night.)

On Saturday the convention was held as scheduled and the Market Tree mass meeting started at 2 p.m. (the largest meeting ever.) The sheriff, deputies, planters, were ubiquitous. Roy Burt and I made main talks. Ward acted as chairman, Mitchell and Howard Kester spoke for shorter periods. The meeting was a great success and a thank answer to planter brutality.

After the meeting (3:30) Ward, Delaney, myself, left to make a street meeting in Lepanto. Bob did not attend because he was weak from the beating. For the same reason, he did not speak at the mass meeting. His nose had been bleeding all morning.

We entered Lepanto by 4 p.m. At 5 p.m. Delaney, Ward, Baker, and I were in jail.

This is what happened during the interim. We looked for the man who was supposed to arrange the meeting. We couldn't find him immediately, so we went ahead ourselves. Spreading word and announcing the gathering place, I ran into the man who was in charge. Together, we went to see the mayor to tell him of our plans. He was a planter, Smith by name, cordial in manner (he shook hands and asserted he was our friend) but a hypocrite of the first water in fact, as all planters seem to be for reasons we know. He advised against holding the meeting in town and suggested going to the city limits. I went back to tell the boys. They wanted to know why I asked of a group of their whereabouts. They volun­teered "in jail." I walked up to the City Marshall and deputy sheriff, J. May, standing nearby and made inquiry. He threatened me and ordered me to "come along." In a second I joined the others. They greeted me with song. I got their story. Rodgers started speaking. He hardly started before he was enmeshed down. Delaney was in the crowd, was picked up also. The law caught up with Baker, who was down the street, and took him along. We learned later we were charged with disturbing the peace. That charge was later shifted to obstructing streets and alleys and another charge, batterry, was added. Rodgers was not obstructing streets or alleys (he was talking 40 feet back from the street) and Delaney, Baker and I were not. I enclosed a clipping from Commercial Appeal, which tells of batterry charge.

The cell is about 7 feet square, four inches between bars, 12 inches between horizontal bars. It is patched where previous breaks have been made. There are no cots, originally there were 3 shelves two feet wide but now only two are usable. There is no water in the cell. The wash basin is corroded and without water. The commode is filled with crap and there are a couple of filthy blankets. The stale stink of body waste and accumulated filth permeates the place. Across the way, four feet off, are four drunks in a cage constructed after a different pattern. They are young fellows, happy mostly, instructive in their language, talking about "beetles," prostitutes; "beetle-hoots," prostitute patrons; "maidenheads," a greenhorn like myself, "fresh meat," one newly arrested. Water is standing all over the jailhouse. It is about 20 by 25. The three windows have no panes, only bars. The only heat comes from a small coal stove which runs according to the mercy of the Marshall. All of us get colds or worse colds during the night. Delaney stood in danger of coming down with pneumonia. Baker had a congested chest. We received 4 sandwiches during the first 48 hours; friends supplemented them. Now Ward and I are getting 4 every 48 hours.

The Marshall, J. May, is a human beast. His hobby is to bully and threaten as long as he has his guns. He didn't like our singing. We pay very little attention to him.

A gang of 45 planters and deputies came to Lepanto on Saturday night. They were mobilized from all parts of the county, so the 45 must represent about the limit of their strength. They invaded the jailhouse and opened the windows. It was in the air. They threatened, bullied. They had gotten the report that we were going to be rescued. They were heavily armed, dangerous. They dispersed about 4 a.m.

Newspaper men called on us. The Marshall wouldn't stand for much talk.

Our hearing before the mayor was set for 3 p.m. Monday. The mayor refused a hearing for Saturday evening. Our lawyer is T. C. Carpenter. He had the cases at Wynne Monday morning. The Marshall took us to the mayor on Monday morning. They wanted to try us without help of counsel. We protested and won our point. At 3:30 we were delivered to the mayor's office. A crowd gathered in front of the office, some from Market Tree. A sympathetic crowd—a majority of the townspeople are with us. Delaney and Baker were released by the mayor. He tried us first on a charge of obstruction. It was a farce. We were framed, kanzaroed, rolled. He fined us both $30.

[The case was appealed and will come up in March. The batterry charge was dismissed.]
Because Commonwealth College has shown an interest in the wholesale, unlawful eviction of sharecroppers in eastern Arkansas, and has been active in aiding all Arkansas workers in their struggles, an attempt is being made by powerful interests to destroy the school. If Commonwealth survives it will be only because friends of the institution raise a nation-wide protest.

On February 13 the Arkansas house of representatives passed a resolution calling for a legislative investigation into alleged “communism” at Commonwealth. The Senate will have passed the resolution before this reaches you and the investigation may have begun.

The resolution says: “Whereas, persistent rumors recur concerning Commonwealth College... to the effect that said college fosters communism and permits the teaching of un-American doctrines, and whereas, from newspaper accounts its instructors always attend meetings where it is possible to incite hatred... therefore be it resolved... that a committee of five members of this general assembly... be... authorized to conduct an investigation of the said college to the end that any condition existing there which fosters un-American ideas may be corrected.”

Commonwealth has nothing to hide. Every reader of the Fortnightly knows what the school stands for. Descriptions of the courses taught here appear from time to time in this publication.

But in this state a short time ago Ward Rodgers was given a six-months’ term and a $500 fine for advocating, in effect, that planters be required to obey the law in the matter of evictions and in sharing benefits of the crop-reduction plan with their tenants.

Every activity carried on by Commonwealth and its teachers and students comes within the provisions of the Bill of Rights.

But the Bill of Rights will not save the school.

Every friend of labor education who reads this should wire the Arkansas legislature, Little Rock, protesting against any interference with the work of Commonwealth.

Thousands of wires and letters must pour in at once!

Don’t bother to write or wire us your sympathy. We take that for granted. Address all your communications to the legislature, speaker of the House or president of the Senate, Little Rock.

Get your local union or club to protest. Organize Commonwealth Defense Committees, with as wide a representation as possible, to resist forcible closing of the school.

Get statements into your local press.

Watch the daily papers for developments and protest each new move on the part of the planters and business interests of the state to destroy Commonwealth.

If Commonwealth goes under that will be the signal for an attack on other labor institutions, and on periodicals and organizations representing the working class.

IT'S UP TO YOU.