A Page From An Organizer's Diary
BY DON WEST

The little mountain coal town seemed sleepy enough. Groups of ragged kids played around slate dumps. Dinky miners' shacks clung to the fringes like runt pigs of a broad pushed off by stronger ones. The center of town boasted a few frame store buildings, some brick dwellings, a tobacco juice be-smattered court house and jail.

Our meeting was in this court house. Two hundred unemployed relief workers had just been turned off in the county. Kentucky's democrat governor Chandler had maneuvered to turn the two million relief dollars to the old age pensions. No other appropriations or provisions for relief had been made. Kentucky was doing exactly nothing to meet the situation of hunger and misery of thousands of native Kentuckians out of work.

Feeling runs high in Kentucky these days. Workers who never knew or thought of organization before are waking up. New unemployed and relief unions have sprung up for struggle. These groups are militant and ready for action. I was speaking in the court house to one of them.

The meeting was well attended. I spoke on need for broader unity. I stayed over to meet with other groups next day.

But the coal operators and relief officials were disturbed. They didn't want the workers organized. I was arrested and thrown in the little jail house. I looked out through the bars at the mountains and sky. Maybe this was another time when an organizer would be out of action by serving in jail. For a person who is naturally impatient, to be locked out of activity is nerve grinding. But even an impatient person comes to the place, after experience, where he takes such things as a part of the routine. You learn not to fret unduly, to conserve energy, save yourself for future freedom. I've got that way.

Mountains and skies were not the only things I saw through the bars. There were...
Dolly Bristow, Union Woman

"Down in the Tennessee Mountains, away from the sins of the world..."

But contrary to the old ballad Tennessee is not without its sins. It is filled with the great sin of oppression of the poor white and black.

Dolly Bristow was born and reared in piney Anderson County. She comes of rugged Cumberland Mountain stock. Her father was one of the Tennessee Hoxkines, whose mother was half Cherokee. Her mother's people were study Dutch.

Dolly was reared to a life of soil and drudgery. "Things have been rocky ever since I was born," she says.

Dolly's parents were poor, honest, hard working. Her father, who died when she was ten, worked long hours in the black dust and muck of the coal mines that he and his wife and children might live. He was killed by a deputy sheriff during a strike at the notorious Brushy Mountain mine. Dolly grew up with little or no chance to get an education. There was something more important to think about--the struggle for existence.

Dolly saw her sixteen and twelve year old brothers march off to the yawning mines to dig for a living for their mother and little sisters. Dolly's brothers couldn't go to school and get themselves good educations like the mine officials' sons. Their child's bone and muscle bore the strain of long hotter hours of toil in the foul pits. But there's some good thing about the mines. It makes militants. It makes fighters of those it doesn't kill.

Dolly's people have always been good unionists since the organization of unions in their community. Dolly says, "Us union girls wouldn't go with a sean boy. If a boy asked to escort one of us from a meeting we always asked him whether or not he was a union man. If he was a seab we'd have nothing to do with him. So it came about when she married she chose a union miner.

Dolly had been married only a few months when her husband was crushed in the mines by a fall of slate. It didn't kill him. He lived nearly twenty years unable to walk a step. The injury deprived him of the use of his legs and one arm.

"But," Dolly says, "Anyhow he wanted to go I carried him on my back." Till he died in 1922.

In Tennessee they won't let women work in the mines. So, Dolly came west and timbered. She hasn't seen any of her people in nearly twenty years.

Dolly has made railroad ties, run rafts, cut sawlogs and made piling. She has stood in water up to her armpits and made piling. She's loaded lumber and hauled it with teams. She did this kind of work for a period of nearly twenty years to support herself and her invalid husband.

Life to her has been filled with hard work and though it may have left its mark on her body and calloused her hands, it has not robbed her of the merry twinkle of her kindly eyes or abated her spontaneous laughter. She takes great pride in her honestoil.

After she moved from western Arkansas in 1925, Dolly has interested herself in the struggle of the sharecroppers of her new home community in the northeastern part of the state. They are the kind of people she fights for. The sharecroppers, white and black, are the worst exploited people she knows of. She joined the Southern Tenant Farmers Union when it was organized. She has worked by the side of her comrades in till. In 1935 the landlords, officers and businessmen formed a mob and shot up the home of a member of the union in which Dolly and other union members had held a meeting. One fifteen-year-old girl was shot in the head.

Dolly tells how the sharecroppers are denied the right to trade or to have their cotton ginned where they wish. How they must deal only with the planter owned and controlled firms. How the very poorest of the croppers, Negroes and white, subsist on refuse from the tables of the planters which they are permitted to have only after it has become unfit for food. How their children are unable to attend school because they can't pay clothes and must help their parents make a living. How they are forced to live in the meanest shelters constructed in many instances of old crates and bits of tin.

Dolly likes Commonwealth. Money was raised by the school to permit her and six other sharecroppers to attend the Spring term. She hates to see the time come when she'll have to leave. She is studying public speaking and intends to go out from Commonwealth on speaking tours to raise funds to educate others of her people so that they may awaken to their plight.

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TAKE OUR LAND
BY HAROLD NOISE

The sun sinks in Arkansas
Splashing the hills with funes of copper,
Dipping through skywater, cloudless and pale.
Sinking like a ripe old skipper,
Full sail headlong down the crest;
The pines and blackberry bushes darkle,
And the blue phlox in the grass;
The barbed wire fence stretches way down the lane
Toward the sun, the hummingbird like a restful sigh
Sliding above and beyond.
The southwind moistens, bringing salt of a seacoast
To this inlandtrusted place;
And it makes me mad to think of those Ozarks
Where we drink the water of the evening.
Keeping our lips woodnecked.
We have no more
The Old Man in his old jacket,
Who drinks the water of the evening.
If I had a mule and a gray moustache,
I could go the road that leads to San Juan Hill
And be back before the sun was up:
And if a feller'd realize this land's not his,
This spring and sour we drink from.
These yeller rocks, and the sugar tree there...
In these hills the rain and sun
Are important as one breath following another.
Sharecropper mules balk at the pace,
The sharecropper pauses to wipe his face.
His kids, he thinks in the heat, and blue-eyed wife,
"Caint fatten on corn tea and flour gravy."
No wonder at the pellagraed dead, he thinks,
Before the age of three.
If a feller'd realize..." the old man said;
And they'd take this from us too, by God!
They'd pire the well, and then they'd fight each other till one big feller'd come down.
With a monopoly; then where'd we be?"
We live plain, feel with the soil a strange companionship—a crazy love of the land.
Take our land and we are a fly without wings.
"That's the thing..." he was saying;
And his gray eyes, like a buzzard's, flared, So that you'd swear you saw those cannons,
And the ballyhooned Rough Riders,
And all the hullabaloo of San Juan Hill, except that
Now those eyes shot cannon of the same voice
As the starving rebel's of '76.
Wild Boy

by Jeems Adams

Hope Freedon swung to the side of a freight gondola and eased himself to the ground. Rain peppered. The rush of air gave an added chill and force to the slanting drops and made Hope's teeth click together in spite of him. He was leaving the hotshot here in this east Texas town because he'd had damn plenty of riding in the rain for one night. He would swing on to the next one that came through, though, after the rain had slackened.

He was 18 and an undersized frail-looking little runt. Five feet two and skinny. Clothes too large hung from him in tatters.

He had been down in the southwest looking for work. He had found a reeferful of fellows like himself for every job. Only most of the fellows were brawnyer than he. He'd hung around down there a while pan-handling a little to keep himself alive or washing a stack of dishes here and paring a sack of spuds there. In this manner he'd kept skin, bones and soul together.

Finally, in desperation, he was going home.

No, he wasn't exactly going home. Home meant fireside and kinfolks. Hope had no kinfolks to speak of. True, he had a father, but his old man was blind and had to live an unwelcome existence in the home of his sisters. Hope's two sisters, younger than he, worked in private homes first one place and then another for their keep.

His mother was dead. She'd died when her last kid was born.

Hope's feet touched the cinders. Still hanging to the car he started running with the train.

So he was going home. He was going to the only place he knew how to go. Back to that little Kentucky town. And he would not stay there long. He knew there was nothing there for him, but the place drew him. After he'd been back a while he'd be off again atop a boxcar—or in one if he were lucky. Off again to continue the endless search for work.

Hope was a hardened hunter of the roads. Railroads and the gray ribbons of asphalt. But he was unlucky at hitchhiking and took to the highways as a last resort.

When he was twelve his father had let off a shot prematurely in the mines and when he'd come out of the company hospital he was blind as a bat. The coal company wouldn't pay him anything for loss of his eyes and had beat him in a lawsuit. Had claimed and proven to the satisfaction of a rubberstamp court that his old man had been trying to commit suicide on account of ill health or something.

He had owned a little home, but his lawyers had taken it in payment for services rendered.

Up ahead the whistle of the locomotive moaned. Hope could hear it above the rumble of the train.

His life thus far had been spent bumming from one part of the country to another, looking for some place where someone would pay him enough to keep him alive in hope.
crowds of workers gathering about. As time passed I noted an increasing mass of people gathering before the court house. Guns were noticeable. But such is quite common in the Kentucky mountains. So that was no surprise. However one could see, even from the jail window, that the density outside was growing. The crowd pushed toward the little two-by-four jail house. I watched with curious interest. The sheriff was among them. He swung his hands and talked excitedly. The judge toddled along by his side, putting in words edgways at every chance. The crowd just moved on in a slow wave. I judged them to be three or four hundred, relief workers and miners.

At the jail steps they stopped; I could now hear plainly what was going on. The sheriff's high-pitched voice came through the bars: "We ain't got nothin' agin you fellows organizin'. But we don't want outside agitators comin' in to stir up trouble. You are all good fellows. I know most of your fathers, but . . ."

The tall hungry-faced miner who had introduced me at one meeting, pushed past to the front. He spoke with the calm quietness of a mountaineer, of one sure of his ground and willing to go down fighting for it.

"Sheriff, we put you in office to keep the peace. We didn't put you there to tell us who we could have or not have to speak at our meetings. That matters are public and civil. We'll attend to them ourselves. Now git along and open the jail door afore we do it."

A secretary edged into the judge with a paper. It looked official, and the judge adjusted his spectacles. He waved his hands. The crowd listened. The judge said:

"Here, fellers, we have a contract. If he will sign this agreement to stay out of — County, we will let him out of jail right now. All he got to do is sign this piece of paper."

The tall worker was speaking again:

"Judge, we don't intend to have him sign no such a damn paper. He's broken no laws. This is a free country. We've only asked what any law-abiding citizen has the right to ask. We want him out of jail. We'll take him out if necessary. He can stay here as long as he wishes and speak whenever we need him."

There was no threat in the man's voice. No threat was intended. It was merely the statement of facts. As I gazed through the window I realized something of the tension of the situation. Deputies were edging in around the sheriff and judge. Guns were plainly visible in many directions. I thought of the trigger-fingered nerve of the mountain man. One shot fired by one hot-head might mean a dozen deaths. I hardly had time to calculate the probable results and implications of such a thing in the future. The judge and sheriff were putting their heads close together. They seemed to have some disagreement but finally the sheriff spoke.

"All right boys, we'll turn him loose. We allus want to play fair about every thing. I told you that in elections and I'll tell you that next time. We'll turn him loose because that's the fair thing."

The jail keys turned and I was led outside. Looking at my watch on the sidewalk before the court house, I found that it had been just two hours and twenty minutes since I'd been locked up. Two hours and twenty minutes! It is the shortest time I've ever seen in jail. My attorney was M A S S DEFENSE. That is the greatest defense weapon the workers can muster.

References Are Ready

The list of ready references on a Farmer Labor Party, previously announced, has been made up into a 14 page mimeographed booklet and is now ready for distribution. The price is fifteen cents for single copies or ten cents a copy for bundles of five or more. Send orders to Charlotte Moskositz, Executive Secretary, Commonwealth College, Mena, Arkansas.

[SUMMER SESSION from p. 1]

Making, weekly sessions, eight weeks. (To be announced.)

Graphic Methods of Propaganda, eight weeks. (To be announced.)

DISCUSSION GROUPS

(Two one-hour sessions daily)

June 20 to July 4: The International Scene, Carl Haessler.

July 6 to July 11: The Soviet Union Today. (To be announced.)

July 13 to July 18: The Fight Against War and Fascism. Mother Ella Reeve Bloor (and another to be announced.)

July 20 to July 25: The Youth and Student Movements. (Representative from American Youth Congress and American Student Union, to be announced.)

July 27 to August 1: Tramps in the American Trade Union Movement. (To be announced.)

August 3 to August 8: The Sharecroppers', Rural Workers', and Farmers' Movements. (To be announced.)

August 10 to August 15: The Organization of the Unemployed. Bill Reich.


Commonwealth To Hold An Anti-War Institute

A N ANTI-WAR Institute for trade union students will be conducted at Commonwealth from August 21 through September 19. The program will be so arranged that the course may be completed in two weeks, with the third week optional. Free scholarships will be available and trade union students who are interested are invited to send in their requests for applications immediately. Inquiries will be answered as soon as arrangements for the institute can be completed.

Full plans for this important innovation in Commonwealth's curricula will be announced in a subsequent issue of the Fortnightly.

[NEW YORKERS from p. 3]

make herself comfortable on the ironing board. That was the last straw for Harold and Millv. They decided that they must go back to live at Commonwealth if ever they were to have a bed to themselves.

Frank Farmer of the "People's Press" gave a brief talk on the work of the school, ending in a collection appeal to which there was a generous response which made a profit for Commonwealth of seventy dollars.

Square dances to the tune of a single fiddle followed. Then Will Geer arrived after his show, upon his face still some traces of the mud and dust of the part of "Poppy," which he is playing in "Bury the Dead." Will has been one of the most sought after artists in New York this winter, and his songs were much appreciated.

The floor was cleared for general dancing and refreshments, and New Yorkers who had never attended a Commonwealth party before were delighted with the originality and informality of the affair, and all said they wanted to come to another soon.

— Rose Brown, N. Y. C.

[WILD BOY from p. 3]

return for his labor. He'd found that factories and shops and mines were no prospects for him. They were not willing to take a chance on working such a puny looking little bastard. afraid they'd have to pay out a lot of compensation.

On this last forage he'd found nothing. Now he was back to the starting place of his expeditions. He would spend a few restless days with relations and acquaintances. But they would begrudge him every bite he ate and be glad when he hit the road again. All his people were poor folks who didn't have anything for him to do and nothing to spare him.

He was always searching for an anchoring place. He was tired of just knocking about.

There was a little hole in the eindery ground. Hope's foot got caught in it. He stared stupid and fell. He rolled by under the freight and the wheels cut his body in two pieces.