On Studying Theory

BY JULIUS KARSTEN

Subjects taught at Commonwealth are listed broadly under three headings: theoretical, practical, and historical. Political Economy is a "theoretical" subject. "How," the student asks, "can I apply the theoretical to the practical?"

The course in Political Economy has at its center the following principle taken from Engels' "Anti-Duhring":

"The forces operating in society work exactly like the forces operating in nature: blindly, violently, destructively, so long as we do not understand them and fail to take them into account. But when once we have recognized them and understand how they work, their direction and effects, the gradual subjection of them to our will and the use of them for the attainment of our aims depends entirely upon ourselves."

The above quotation is the clearest and most cogent answer to the question: "Of what use is theory?" To understand the forces operating in society is to use them for the attainment of our aims.

Political Economy, as taught here, bases itself on the materialist conception of history. We start with the premise that in every society that has appeared in history the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure.

From this point of view the course takes up a study and analysis of the basic law of motion of capitalist production and exchange; the class alignments developing as a result of this law; the industrial revolution in England, France, Germany, the U.S.A. We study the Marxian theory of the state, Imperialism, Fascism. We study the Soviet Union.

Students are helped considerably by the fact that Commonwealth has a library second to none in the possession and availability of the necessary source books for this study. The course is one that requires reading and study. Hence easy access to the required text books is of no little help.

Once a month the students are required to answer a quiz based on the studies during that period. The papers are of a remarkably high standard. As a special assignment during the study of imperialism all of the students presented papers on American imperialism. Each student dealing with a different sphere of American influence. The papers reveal fine research work, a splendid organization of material and competent presentation. The papers are being prepared for filing in the library and will be useful to future students as well.

As in all the courses here Political Economy is inter-related to the other courses. Thus the same student studying Trade Union Problems is able to grasp solutions and situations more clearly by virtue of his theoretical knowledge.

The course has been a highly instructive and fruitful one, both to students and instructor.

Radio Talks

Two more "radio talks" like that which appeared in the last issue of the Fortnightly will be found on the inside pages. "Religion in the Soviet" and "The Negro Question" were delivered before the Public Speaking class by two southern students.

Liberty Exposes Commonwealth After Exhaustive Two-Hour Investigation!

After an exhaustive two-hour investigation, Macfarlane's Liberty magazine has rushed into print with a sensational article about Commonwealth.

In effect, Liberty is conspiring with local reactionaries to give a false and distorted picture of Commonwealth College to the people of the nation, and to provide the basis for the destruction of the only residual southern labor school.

Liberty is serving "old hush" which has its basis in the planter-inspired Arkansas Legislative Investigation Committee's report of 1935.

After being thwarted in his attempt to enter Commonwealth as a student under false pretenses, the reporter, resorted for his "facts" to the one-sided and outdated testimony reprinted by the Ku Klux Klan from the Legislative Committee's report. The reporter hypocritically tries to give the impression that his "data" is current. The same slanderous material has recently been broadcast by the Reverend L. D. Summers, Memphis Baptist minister.

There are reactionaries in the state and nation who will welcome the Liberty article. The planters of eastern Arkansas, with the blot ofpeonage, will welcome this latest attack upon Commonwealth. Hearst will side with his brother journalist. But the people of America will recognize the article for what it is: a shallow, sensational attempt to discredit the labor school which has consistently supported the struggles of the oppressed workers and sharecroppers of the South—a school which has carried on, and continues to carry on, a valiant fight for academic freedom and for the protection of American civil liberties.

Classes Combine for Union Local Meeting

The Trade Union and Public Speaking classes recently held a combined session which proceeded as a model trade union local meeting. It was an example of the practical education that Commonwealth affords.

No amount of "telling" could have answered so clearly any questions that a student might ask: How does a union conduct a meeting? What are the intricacies of parliamentary procedure? What were the issues at the recent A.F. of L convention?

Prior to the class session students were given the setting and prepared for their role in the meeting of "Federal Local No. 18,888." There were sergeant-at-arms, inside sentinel, recording secretary, financial secretary, two delegates returned from the Tampa Convention. Three students were assigned to represent outside mass organizations and to appear at the meeting with credentials and requests to speak in behalf of their organizations.

During the two-hour session some stu...
The Negro Question
BY EDWARD NORMAN, Florida

We approach the Negro question. It is necessary, first of all, to rid our consideration of any prejudices which our environment and the teachings of our elders may have imposed in us. We consider the Negro on the basis of human beings, for, after all, they are human beings having the same instinctive desire for existence, for good food, good clothing, good shelter, and the means of enjoying cultural living and expression. They have, after all, the same capacity for grief and joy, love and hate, compassion and brutality as any other race and differ only in one major characteristic, namely, the color of their skin. It is only from such an approach that justice and sincere handling of the question can spring.

The reason for concerning ourselves, as the working class, with this question seems evident. The Negro is, predominantly, a working man, a member of our class. Without including him in our plans and struggles for the improvement of working class conditions of existence we will seriously weaken our force and consequently our chances of immediate success. Unless the Negro is included in the emancipation, the working class will not be free, for he is part of that class. The bosses favor this merger of forces, hence the base, mythical, Negro inferiority propaganda to prevent it.

With this in mind we attack the problem as we find it in existence in the South today. Upon a study of geography and of United States census reports followed by a combination of results one will find that there is a continuous territory of Negro majority beginning in northeastern Virginia, and running in a narrow strip along the coast of North Carolina; occupying nearly all of South Carolina; the central section of Georgia and a narrow strip extending down to touch northern Florida, one along the coast, another along the western boundary of Georgia; the south central part of Alabama; all but the north and southeast corners of Mississippi, the Mississippi River Valley from its mouth to Memphis in its mouth; a large area of northern Louisiana and a small area of northeastern Texas. The concentration of Negro people within this area is a result of the plantation economy which exists in this cotton growing belt. Slavery is best adapted to cotton growing, hence Negroes brought from Africa were sold in this area.

Here they lived in subjection to their white owners. They were forced to utter no word of their native tongue but to speak English. Consequently, they developed a common language. The existence under uniform environment resulted in a common culture, that is, a common folklore and tradition even though it existed in a social system based on slavery. Their very revolt and activities directed toward freedom reacted in cementing them into a more solid front. Their universal distrust of all whites was reflected in this unity. These characteristics they have retained, and since capitalism has invaded the South, they have a common interest in their fight against exploitation, in their fight for social and economic equality. These qualities are all that is necessary to designate a people as a nation.

Nations, before they can truly be free, must have the right of self-determination. That is, they must subject themselves to a social system or a government, which is a reflection of that social system, voluntarily of their own will and desire. It oneonders this statement for a moment he will see why it is true. We all recognize the fact that an efficient, wasteless social system has, as one of its component parts, the individuals which make up that society. I am not sure that the generation of individuals educated to take part in a society would be anything but hearty, in fact, would consist of deliberate sabotage and revolt when opportunity presented itself.

Nations, because of their common interests are very like individuals and react in much the same way. The Negro nation in the United States is no exception. In order that we may gain the cooperation of this nation we must dispel this feeling of coercion by the whites by giving the Negroes as a nation the right to voluntarily cooperate with us in forming a workers' country.

Of course the realization of such an ultimate goal will come only after a long struggle; it is not to be expected that it will be gained today or tomorrow. What are we to do today or tomorrow, while working towards that ultimate goal?

Let us look at the South where the Negro question is most acute. We find here a markedly lower wage level and standard of living than obtained in the North. This condition is not unexplainable; it has its cause.

We all realize that the wages a capitalist pays is dependent entirely upon his supply of laborers and the degree of effectiveness of strikes of these laborers. The race problem affects the labor supply negligibly, but on the contrary, has considerable effect upon the success of strikes.

If a strike breaks among white workers in the plant of a southern boss, he will simply throw out the white workers, saying that he had all the time wished he might use Negroes, who would work for less. But he had felt obligated to use those of his own race, which was no longer so. He wins the Negroes to strike breaking by asking them what they owe the 'white trash.' He will tell them, 'Stick with your jobs and I'll see you get a square deal.' Who can blame them if they break the strike? Whose fault is it that the white workers have to take the wage cut or longer hours? Certainly not the Negroes!

If on the other hand the Negroes strike, the boss gets his white strike breakers by bellowing about the superiority of the white race and his desire to have white rather than Negro laborers. The boss will say, "Why should you be squeemish about searing on a bunch of 'niggers,' and besides, if you will help me break the strike I will do as you have been asking and kick all the 'niggers' out and hire white men instead."

The strike is broken and down go wages again. The boss plays one race against the other to his benefit and there common detriment.

We can thwart this strategy of the capitalist by eliminating "Jim Crowism" from our unions. Let us organize a fight against this playing of one race against another. Let us put an end to lynching and other terror used to keep Negro labor subjected.

Many southern workers will agree to these steps but draw the line at social equality of the races. It seems to us that common decency and the much flaunted southern honor, if no other reasons, dictate that we should not turn our backs upon the men to whom we appeal when in trouble as soon as the trouble has vanished for the moment. So let us join hands with our fellow Negro working man and present a solid front and purpose against our common enemy, the capitalist.
Religion in the Soviet

BY CULLEN OTT, Louisiana

IN ORDER to understand the religious situation in Soviet Russia today it is first necessary to have some knowledge of conditions before the proletarian revolution in the fall of 1917. It is essential to realize, in the first place, that the Greek Orthodox Church was the official state church of Russia, working hand in hand, generation after generation, with the cruel Tsarist tyranny and a knowing accomplice with it in the most constant and brutal injustices. The Tsar himself was head of this church, which received huge subsidies from the state and was in reality simply a department of the government. Naturally it enjoyed all sorts of privileges denied to the other religious groups.

These minor sects were, in fact, continuous objects of discrimination and persecution. Especially was this true in regard to the Jews. The Greek Orthodox priests helped government officials to investigate and even carry through the bloodiest kind of pogroms against the Jews. In the fall of 1905, for example, over one hundred pogroms occurred in different parts of Russia, results in 3500 killed and 10,000 wounded. These took place with either the open or tacit approval of the Orthodox Church. A number of the priests went so far as to betray the confession for purposes of espionage.

In almost every respect the Greek Orthodox Church was intellectually inferior to the Catholic and Protestant Churches of the west. In Russia before 1917 there never took place, as in western Christianity, any Reformation and successful bourgeois revolution to give the church a push in the direction of modernity. Any attempts to develop a liberal wing within the church were promptly and harshly suppressed by the state-controlled Holy Synod, the governing body of the church. The clergy of the Russian church were on the whole ignorant, superstitious, and in their social and economic views highly reactionary.

The Greek Orthodox Church was decidedly inferior morally to its western counterpart. It is generally admitted that in 1917 it had become as corrupt and decadent as the Tsarist government itself. There were good economic reasons for the Greek Orthodox Church to support the Tsarist regime with its full strength. Up till 1917 it was the wealthiest single organization in all Russia, exploiting thousands and thousands of peasants on its immense estates and owning great blocks of the most profitable stocks and bonds. At the time of the revolution the bank account of the church amounted to about $20,000,000 and its annual income to about $200,000,000. In addition, there was the tremendous capital value of its twenty million acres of land, its churches, its monasteries and the gold and silver decorations of these religious edifices. In short, the church itself was a great feudalist-capitalist institution in old Russia with its interest dependent upon the continuance of the Tsarist system.

It was only natural, then, that the Greek Orthodox Church both before and after the revolution, should have fought the Communist and other radical groups with all the might at its disposition. A high church official, the Metropolitan Antonii, issued the following characteristic carse against Communists: "By the power given me of God, I bless every weapon raised against the red, satanic power and remit the sins of him who lays down his head for the cause of Russia and in the ranks of bands of rebels or as solitary avengers of the nation."

In the Soviet decree of 1917 "on freedom of conscience and religious societies" the following sections are important to note. The church is separated from the state. No

Campus Notes

- Commonwealth College renewed some old friendships and made some new ones during the recent Thanksgiving weekend. A number of visitors, all arriving at about the same time, enlivened the campus and gave students and faculty an opportunity to get some first hand information on recent developments in various fields of endeavor.
- From Little Rock Mr. F. A. Post, a former instructor here, was accompanied by Reverend Hunter and Dr. Thatcher of that city. Dr. Hunter, chairman of the International Committee for Peace and Freedom, spoke briefly at an evening forum, stressing the urgent need for an organized campaign against war which seems to be so near. Dr. Thatcher, who is in charge of medical research at the University of Arkansas, also addressed the students, giving a short informative talk on some important advances made in the field of medicine.
- Mr. and Mrs. Claude Williams, their three children, and Donald Kobler also visited over the weekend. Mr. Williams, well known to all of the people here for his part in many of the struggles of the sharecroppers of eastern Arkansas and as vice-president of the American Teachers Federation, was warmly welcomed by the students. Speaking on Saturday and Sunday he gave a vivid account of some of the more dramatic features of the struggle in the South and also dealt with some problems of organization of the Workers Alliance. In his Sunday talk he stressed the need for a Farmer-Labor Party as the best weapon to meet the violent reaction so prevalent in this part of the country.
- Donald Kobler described conditions of the unemployed in Little Rock and Arkansas generally and told of the work being done by the Workers Alliance of which he is the organizer.

Half the Population

CLAIRE MAE PERKINS

Organizing women, like the weather, is much talked about, but not much is done — though small beginnings have been made. The great mass of women is untouched by any organized effort or organization. Here at Commonwealth, the situation is quite typical. There are 55 of us, 13 are women, and five of those are just wives. However, it is the wives particularly who must be reached.

My own experience in organizing men on the Fort Peck Dam in Montana has proved to me that it is impossible to hold men in an organization while their wives are either indifferent or hostile. Many a good man quit our Federal Union because his wife was afraid he might lose his job, or because she thought a union wasn’t quite respectable. Or, maybe she merely wanted him to take her to the movies instead of going to a union meeting.

To say that women must be organized on the basis of our own problems is not tautological. Women are people and extremely social people at that. Therefore, we will respond to organizational efforts even more readily than men when we understand the purpose. That does not mean that we are not bright enough to understand easily, but that in our experience we must be talked to in our own language — the language of housekeepers, wives, and mothers. We know instinctively many things which men must learn logically. We hate war and fascism; detest political corruption, and seek unity because — well, because. And through unity we can conquer the world for all of us, and run it in a good, orderly, housewife fashion.

— From "The Scoop."

local laws or regulations may be issued throughout the territory of the republic which limit or hinder freedom of conscience or grant any religious societies advantages or privileges on account of allegiance to a religious creed. Every citizen is at liberty to practice any religion or none at all. All penalties attaching to the practice of any creed whatsoever, or to the non-practicing of any creed, are abolished. The school is separated from the church. Instruction in all state and public schools, and also private educational institutions in which general subjects are taught is prohibited. Citizens may privately instruct and be instructed in religion. These laws are more severe than the laws on religion in the Soviet Union.

Today all religions in the Soviet Union

PRINTED AT COMMONWEALTH
BY STUDENT AND TEACHER LABOR

Published twice a month at Mena, Arkansas, by Commonwealth College. Subscription one dollar a year. Entered as second class matter January 30, 1926, at the post office at Mena, Arkansas, under the act of August 24, 1912.
I shall not step from here to the world with the cobwebbed eyes of the scholar at large.

There’s too much in me seen and felt, too much bought with understanding

for me ever to wander, as many wander, aimless transients, lost their way

asking directions of thousands like them, aimless transients lost their way.

And I have found too many, wise with letters not found in alphabets, strong from kinships corded tougher in the press of poverty.

All were fluent—those who talked and those whose lean faces, bright eyes burning, looked unspoken words.

The lanky Texan
whose blond hair and blue eyes matching belied in him the fiery flow of Indian blood;
who drewl with affection of his dad, the old-time fighting town radical;
of their great father and son days on the ranches and railroads,
of how dad brought his lashing brogue and his fists to the seabs and Kluxers, and made it safe wherever he went, for organization.

the country school teacher
kitchen-man, professional hobo;
burning eyes deep-set above tanned cheek bones;
streaked hair and temple; precise sentences,
taught the eighth grade on the basis of just that much education;
and the endless hours of eyestrain from the glare of coal-wicks, past midnight.

and the hunched, chuckling farmer
now landless,
with his five-gallon hat and his gait accustomed to spurs;
his neck and hands, ingrained from whipping his tractor through dust-storns;
his hundred of yarns full of bawd and wisdom for the old territory days,
and hardly laughter and anger
for what he has seen in the erosion of land and his people.

And that single man
with the talmudist’s young face and eyes, the full chest and the gently powerful voice;
the borrowed clothes too big for him and the borrowed hat too small to cover the bald patches of his crown and temples where the planters had laid on with their clubs, their tar and their nine-tails.

Run out of four counties, run into nine jails, twice left for dead and twenty times hunted, not once did he falter on his daily hitch-hike and freighting from town to town and farmhouse to farmhouse with his facts, his advice and his questions, and his still, tall wife
the mother of his children
who said nothing but looked volumes, her pinched lips smiling as she kneaded her work-worn hands and the wedding band and listened to his calm recital of torture.

And the scores of others—the dirt-farmer from Missouri, the machinist from Chicago, the newspaperman from Detroit and the country, the muleteer from Georgia, the brakeman from Honduras, the old Finnish sailor from every port in the world, who have come here to learn, to think, to teach, to rest for a moment, poised like swimmers; and then to plunge down from this hilltop to the surge and the battle.

And it doesn’t take algebra to get what they’re saying, to wash all the sleeping sand out of your eyes, to clear your mouth of all lip and hesitation, to knit in your shoulders their wood-chopper’s muscles; for the words they have spoken are a song sung in chorus, gathered up from the country, as a ballad is gathered, each new stanza swelling the power, each new voice drawing more to the singing.

[RELIGION from page three]
are on an absolutely equal basis. Furthermore, whereas in the old days atheists were unmercifully hunted, now there is freedom of conscience for both believers and unbelievers.

Here in these laws of the Soviet Union that I have shown you, is proof that religion in the Soviet Union today is more at freedom than it was in Russia before the revolution. Today the majority of the religious people is not being exploited by the minority as in Russia before the revolution.