Commonwealth to Debate Texas College

As the Fortnightly goes to press final arrangements are being completed for the debate between Commonwealth College and the Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College of Texas on the subject: that a Farmer-Labor Party is necessary to represent the interests of the working people of America. The debate is scheduled for the court-house in Mena February 10th with Judge Parker presiding as chairman.

The Commonwealth team, chosen by students and teachers, will uphold the affirmative. George Edison, formerly of the University of New Hampshire will last year represented 21 New England colleges, including Yale and Harvard Universities, at the Brussels Student Conference Against War and Fascism, will be Commonwealth's first speaker. The second member of the team will be Francis Kwallek, born and raised on a Wisconsin farm. He taught country schools and worked several years in the North woods as a logger. The first alternate will be Rollin Griffith, a pattern maker and delegate to the Waukesha, Wisconsin, Central Trades and Labor Council.

The debate marks the first inter-collegiate competition between Commonwealth and a southern college. It is expected that the debate on the labor party question will draw a large audience. Richard Whitten is acting as coach.

Farewell Party Given College Secretary

All the Commonwealth community, including students, faculty and maintenance workers crowded the Commons on the night of Saturday, February eighth, in a farewell party to the college secretary-treasurer, Charlotte Moskowitz. "Chuck," as she is known and loved by the Commoners, has left on a long deferred vacation. On her six-weeks trip to the East she will meet with the New York Commit-tee for Commonwealth College, then travel on to Syracuse, to visit her parents at 918 Irving Avenue.
A "Brain-Truster" Reports

Secretary Wallace receives a report from one of his agricultural experts.

As recorded by Alford Wason, a Minnesota farmer, and student at Commonwealth College. Editors.

Dear Henry,

You remember that as I left Washington in very much of a hurry, we had no time to work out a program, which you left to me. Now, just to tell you the un-thinkable truth, you can reason with them. Well, that's what I did, and here's where I am.

The second evening after my arrival in Minnesota, I collected and spoke to a large group of dairy farmers. I started out by "lambasting" the Supreme Court, I told them the great benefits the A. A. A. had brought to the farmers as a whole—how the price of cotton had been raised from 5 to 12 cents as a result of plowing under of small pigs were converted into pence; and how the nine old fossils in the Supreme Court could not see the inescapable truth, didactically speaking, of "the less one has in the pantry the more he has to eat."

With this good start, I swung into a discussion of their own dairy industry. I told them that they produced several million gallons of milk that could not be consumed, that is, sold at a profit; and that, on account of the new trade agreement with Canada, this surplus would be increased by several million more gallons; but that this could not be helped, since the Canadians would have to sell their surplus milk to us that they, in turn, would be able to buy milking-machines from our manufacturers to produce more milk.

"There are all three things you might agree to do. First, you might sell those millions of surplus milk to the hogs; but that would seem a waste of labor. Or, second, you might give the milk to the poor; but that would hardly pay. Or, third, sell your cows."

"For three cents a pound," somebody shouted. I could see that the crowd was getting out of hand, so I cried, "Now! I'm not done yet, ten cents a pound is what you can get. Someone hollers, 'He's crazy.'"

"Wait a minute," I yelled above the uproar, "I have this all figured out to the page four..."
WHY I CAME TO COMMONWEALTH

BY EUGENE FELDMAN

After graduating from high school I wanted to study journalism at the State University. I knew that if I wanted to go I would have to work for my room and board. So I went to Madison a week before the regular Fall session began, to look for work. The first thing I did upon my arrival was to go to the student employment agency.

There I found about thirty students crowded in the little two-room office. I was told there were no permanent jobs. I was given an application which I was asked to fill out and they said that if any temporary job turned up they would call me. The other students had been told that too, and they were filling out application blanks. What chance if a few jobs did turn up? There were so many students who wanted them. So I left the employment office without hope of getting something.

I walked down the business street from State to the Square—down to the large restaurants and small lunchshops. Everyone answered the same way, "NO WORK". I saw Mr. Rakass, owner of a large restaurant. I approached him as a son would have come to a father, asking him for assistance to get a chance in life; but it didn't help. He handed me a menu, and gave a smile, to a customer who had just come in.

I went to look for a room to stay for the night. The next day I would leave for my home town, disappointed because my plans to enter the University had fallen through. Walking down Langdon Street where the private rooming houses are located, while trying to find a room for the night, I thought I'd take another try at asking for work. I rang a bell at an exclusive 'women's' boarding house. An elderly woman, the housemother, answered.

"Is there any possibility of a student working here for room or board?"

"Well, I have a furnace that needs tending and you can have the job if you take the room next to the furnace. It's the best I can do!" She led me down to the cellar. It was raining that day and the water was seeping in through the sides down onto the floor. The room had a little window. It would be white-washed and a little cot would be put in. Here was a job. Here was the only chance given me to study at the University. Of course I was glad that night. But my happiness didn't last, Mrs. Rox, the housekeeper, insisted that I help with other work. I had to do this or take the chance of losing my job. Mrs. Rox's work took much of my time. I couldn't get at my studies properly. She would wake me even at midnight if I thought that she felt cold. She would pound on the floor above me with a broomstick.

"Gene, Gene! Are you looking at the furnace?" I felt that I wasn't living as I should — skimping by on three dollars a week I got from home. I should have had five dollars for meals. I was working so hard that often I was tired; but I couldn't do very much about it because if I gave up this job I knew that there wasn't another.

I found many young student friends in the same position as myself. One had an M. A. in journalism and couldn't get a decent job. He had to work from nine to twelve every p.m. for two meals a day and then they gave him, and all the other students that worked there, food which was left over on the plates of their customer guests.

I wondered what the journalism professors had to say about this problem of young people who are making a serious and conscientious effort to enter their place in life, only to find their way completely blocked. The professors said nothing about this question. They kept on giving us a history of journalism: who was the first American newspaperman to — etc., etc. This knowledge was meaningless to us. We wanted something which we could apply to the problem which was worrying our minds.

Santos, the Italian who lived in Madison, told me that he thought the course wasn't going to be any good. He said, "This is going to be do-bunk." Now I knew what he meant. Santos took me to his house and introduced me to his mother and father. His father worked in a box factory and he told me what the workmen had done when Mr. Stone, head of the factory, cut their wages so that they couldn't even pay the rent. "We all got together and stayed out and didn't let anyone in. We closed down the whole works — and got more money. Now he's afraid to cut our pay; but if we didn't stick together, you know he wouldn't respect us so much." He laughed, and Mrs. Santos laughed too — life had been hard for them, but they weren't afraid any more. Mr. Santos belonged to the Union. He took an interest in me, and wanted to see all the young people who wanted chances in life. He said that if the big bosses had their way they'd cut the workers' pay even more to add to their profits—but the workmen wouldn't stand for that.

Mr. Santos said that the way things were now — the big bosses put in their

Koch, Former Director

Greets New Program

DEAR WHITTEN:

I want you to know how genuinely pleased I am that Commonwealth is going ahead so successfully. The latest Fortnightly brings news of the enlarged student body with many of them coming from the south and middle west, in line with the school's new regional emphasis. After your contemplated tour of the south in the Spring you'll have to open up branches to take care of the influx. That's the thing to do all right — train workers and farmers of the south and middle west.

I'd like to see Jim Jones' mural again; in fact everything and everybody that goes to make up Commonwealth. The financial problem is still with you, I see, and believe me, I know what a drag that is. In view of the work which is being done, surely enough people can be persuaded to throw in their coin to keep that Commonwealth can keep going. Anyway I surely hope so.

Here's wishing Commonwealth the most success.

Sincerely,

Lucien Koch
Feb. 4, 1936

FORMER TEACHERS

CONDUCT RUSSIAN TOUR

This summer Bob and Rose Brown, former teachers at Commonwealth, are taking another United Front group to the Soviet Union, including several who went with them last year. This trip will include sight-seeing in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Helsingfors on the way to Leningrad. Then Moscow and the Grand Soviet Tour, with auto rides over the mountains, boat trip on the Volga, etc., returning via Warsaw and Paris. Sixty-six days at a cost of $398. The Group is sailing on the second trip of the Batory, an ultra-modern Polish Line motor ship, leaving New York July 21 and returning early in September. This new boat, which won't be launched until Spring, has staterooms for one, two and four, running hot water and real beds in third class.

Readers of the Fortnightly with the price to go to may yet in touch with Rose and Bob, either care of the Company Travel Bureau, 55 West 42nd New York City, or at 311 West 26th, where Cora has just joined them; or with Charlotte Moskowitz, Commonwealth College, Mesa, Arkansas.
A MINER’S STORY

BY RAYMOND KOCH

"If you kill a man, hire another. If you kill a mule, buy another." This is a maxim of the Kentucky coal barons. From the heart of coal-digger Nelson, a student telling us his story.

The flames up loop the chimney of the common stone fireplace. Seventy Commoners and a few neighbors sit on benches in a semi-circle before the fire. We lean forward attentively to catch the mountain brogue of the Sunday night forum speaker. The radiating warmth sweeps by, meeting the cold half-way across the room and pushing it back.

Nelson went to work in the mines, twelve hours a day, when he reached the "ripe age" of fourteen. Back through the telescope of a score years, he remembers treacherous slate overhead, the energy drained at the end of the day, when he had reached his goal, "Goodnight, my little boy!"

Nelson stops, ill at ease, suddenly conscious that he is making a speech. "I don’t know if I can make it," he says. Many urge him to continue.

"A miner tells an official that the roof of his company shack is leaking. ‘Well, Goddammit! Get out of the house then!’ You’ve no business living in a leaky house!” If a miner needs $5.00 a day before pay day, he can get it at the Company store—for the price of $1.00!

When the UMWA came to Kentucky Nelson didn’t have to be converted to its program. Instinctively his was a united philosophy—a philosophy growing naturally from the conditions of his life.

"The UMWA was busted up in 1922, after the war," he said. "I joined the National Miners Union when it came. It was a sure enough ‘Red’ union and the operators fought it hard. They beat us down with hired guns.”

"I haven’t worked in the mines these last years because the bad air in the mines got me down. We started the Unemployed Council to get relief. Gun thugs raided our homes for literature and told our women-folk they would ‘burn us out.’ Six of us were arrested on a frame-up. I had gotten permission to take lumber off a broken down tipple; but anyway, they put a charge of grand larceny against me.

Nine months in jail for the crime of organizing! Jails in the land of the coal barons step down hard on a human life. "There was all manner of diseases in the jail and they treated us pretty bad," he continues. "Generally when a man took a whuppin’, two out of three smallest detail. You’ll admit a calf is an animal that sucks a cow three months, and then you sell it for veal at ten cents a pound. Now here’s what to do; a cow is only a grown-up calf, teach her to suck herself three months, and then sell her for veal.”

...Well, the next thing I knew, a milk-bottle struck me in the breadbasket, another struck my bulldog head... and I awoke, here in a padded cell, where I am being fed milk in a paper cup. What further steps shall I take?

Aseyever, Hiram McNutt.

["BRAINTRUSTER" from page 2]

went to the hospital with kidney trouble. ‘Dead heads’ (too sick for work) were given jobs preparing meals. Many had running sores. Blue flies swarmed greedily to the scraps and garbage left lying in the cannery where they canned the food we ate.”

Nelson concludes his talk: "Now—a days a man can’t make a living in the mines. Up Mingo Hollow where I live they only run two days a week. A man can make only about $2.00 a day."

For moments after Nelson had found seats, the faces in the audience reflected the picture painted for their minds—a picture of the threat to workers lives, the uphill struggle. Others there in the audience could duplicate with similar stories for their walk of life—the student from steel mills, a North Carolina textile worker, a farmer from drought-stricken North Dakota.

All of us realize the common interests which brought us together in workers’ school.

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factories a lot of labor saving devices which threw men out of work and when there was a surplus of workers they tried to force down the pay. ‘But just let em try,’ Mr. Santos said.

Here was some knowledge I could apply to my living. I would go along with the workers and fight for better social conditions. I wanted more knowledge in order that I might be able to work in the best possible way for a better living.

It was through the Santos’ that I heard of Commonwealth College. Their son had dissatissted at New York work. Beto Santos insisted that I come over for Sunday dinners. She gave me a catalogue of Commonwealth. In it I read about a college which interpreted economic conditions with an idea of bettering the social relations of man.

I enrolled at Commonwealth in the Fall of 1938. The school is partly self-supporting and we’re here to do co-operatively. My first job was peeling pears to be canned. I felt my work was productive. These pears would be canned and then used in the kitchen. No competition here—no fighting of egos, but the cooperation of egos.

Other students were in similar positions. There was Davis, a citrus worker from Florida, who received small wages during the picking season and was attempting to organize his co-workers for better pay and a more secure living.

There was Walter from Philadelphia, whose father, an unemployed factory worker, wasn’t able to give him the financial support which a young man needs and so he joined the C.C.C. expecting to find some solution to his search for a decent living. Instead he found long hard hours of work, poor and insufficient food, and stupendously brutal attempts to discipline the boys in military fashion. Rose, formerly a trained nurse, had fought in hospitals and had seen enough of race prejudice and a cutting down of Charity wards in a time when they were needed most by the poor and unemployed. They had all come to Commonwealth to get present exist social conditions and with the serious purpose of analyzing scientifically these conditions and equipping themselves that they can help in building a better society.