College Faculty Union Supports Memphis Teachers

At a special meeting of Commonwealth's local union of teachers the following action was taken in support of the brother local of union teachers in Memphis, and against the fresh attack on civil and democratic rights in the South, particularly those of organized labor:

Local 194, A. F. of T.
March 24, 1936

Board of Education,
Memphis, Tenn.

Our Local 194 of the American Federation of Teachers is deeply shocked to hear that the Memphis Board of Education is denying the fundamental right of teachers to organize. We hold that the Constitution guarantees the workers of any calling the freedom to associate for the improvement of their conditions.

We wish to enter a vigorous protest against your hasty order that Memphis teachers "give up their union or give up their job" before July first. This act is, we feel, a threat to the organization of teachers throughout the South, and to organized labor generally.

You no doubt are familiar with the great aims of the American Federation of Teachers—"Democracy in education and education for Democracy." We hold that this spirit is in keeping with the best American traditions which you are now about to violate. The organized teachers of the country have above all attempted to maintain high standards in their industry—the important industry of training the young for citizenship and constructive building.

We urge that you reconsider your hasty action in curbing the fundamental rights of teachers.

Signed:
M. Page,
President Local 194,
A. F. of T.

WHITTENS ATTEND SOUTHERN CONFERENCE

DIRECTOR Richard Babb Whitten and his wife, Barbara, have just returned with enthusiastic reports from the conference called by southern trade unionists in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on March twenty-second, for the purpose of launching a campaign to end the lower wage rates on W. P. A. projects in the South.

Initiated by local A. F. of L. unions in Chattanooga, the conference received wide support, including the endorsement of the State Federations of Labor of Virginia, Alabama, and Texas.

Director Whitten reports widening interest in the South in Commonwealth and in the possibility of increasing numbers of southern unionists being sent here for further training in the labor movement.

Welcome Back, Chucky!

CHARLOTTE MOSKOWITZ, better known as Chucky, is back on the campus, after a six-weeks' trip to New York and the east. While there she made contacts with Commonwealth's many friends and supporters, and succeeded in raising considerable financial assistance for the new sharecroppers' department which the school is organizing. This is recognized as a distinctly new feature in American workers' education, making a real advance in labor college service to the labor movement.

Eight Arkansas sharecroppers, active members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, will be students at the college this quarter, also farmers, workers and croppers from Georgia, Alabama, and other southern states, as well as the north and west.

Mattox and Gowen Join Commonwealth Faculty

COMMONWEALTH has secured two strong additions to its teaching staff beginning with the spring quarter, with Charles Mattox, mural painter and artist, to give courses in art and Emmett Gowen, a well known writer to give courses in journalism and writing.

Emmett Gowen, a native of Tennessee and a member of the Writers' Union and League of American Writers, has published two novels, Dark Moon of March and Mountain Born. He is now working on another novel, as well as a play, depicting the lives of southern sharecroppers which he knows from firsthand experience. His story, Southern Mother, which appeared in the New Masses last year created wide comment.

Charles Mattox, a member of the Artists' Union, has studied art at Bethensburg College, Kansas City, and with such outstanding artists as Diego Rivera and John Douglas Patrick. His experience as a teacher of art includes teaching in the Kansas State Y. M. C. A.'s boys' camps teaching arts and crafts and supervising camp publicity.

In 1928 he traveled through Kansas giving chalk talks to Farmers' Union national convention. His most recent post was that of technical supervisor of mural and easel painting projects for the Federal Arts project in New York City.

Charles Mattox plans to make his art course one of immediate practical usefulness for those working in the labor movement with instruction in lettering, layout, posters, sign painting; also there will be an opportunity given those students interested in general art training.

Commonwealth welcomes Emmett Gowen and Charles Mattox and also his wife Celia Mattox as new and valuable members of our faculty and community.
Printers’ Comeback

Helen Norfjord and Jeems Adams

The report of a gun rings out; a roll of smoke issues from the print shop door. On the campus a Commoner stops dead in his tracks and looks around, his eyes bulging. What? Mutiny in the print shop? He hurries over. We printers regard him calmly over our cigarettes.

“What was the smoke?” he asks agitatedly.

“Well,” we shrug our shoulders and glance significantly at the cigarettes, then think of a better o.e. Press got hot today.” But he glimpses Gene tearing around the corner from the back door, and Gene’s face is a dead giveaway. So Art openly lays up his firearms. (Useful when visitors disregard our polite indication of the exit—though we want to disclaim here and now any really serious intention of letting daylight through anyone.) Certain of our visitors, we hesitate to relate, have carried away strange tales of the indolence and inactivity of the print shop crew, which we hereby emphatically deny.

For instance—here’s a scene from our diary’s back pages:

All at the typewriter cases, tensely leaning forward, arms and fingers working madly, hair disheveled, lurid gleams leaping from our eyes. What is it? Printers innoculated with working fever serum which is suddenly taking effect? Nothing so drastic. Presently one of us ceases with a wild cry of triumph. It was only a little contest between printers to determine who could settle a stickful of type fastest, best man wins, loser relegated to the status of printer’s devil.

Sometimes during a lull in the pastime of discussing campus characters and when the type is rhythmically clicking, all of us will laugh and the others will know that a new honer has been found in the particular “abund” article being set at the time.

We lay aside our own work for the moment to enjoy with the finder his find.

“Read this sentence and see if you think it makes sense.”

We read aloud deliberately and distinctly.

“It’s no. The way he should have said that is like this—”

“A, nerts! You should read the article I’m working on. It’s screwy.”

“Oh well, we’ll let ’em go. I guess the fault’s with us if the stuff sounds so screwy—and after all, we just work here.”

Library Book Needs

R. P. Vance, Human Geography of the South.

Martin Anderson Neko, Pelle the Conquerer.

Mikhial Sholokhov, And Quiet Flows the Don.

Vincent Sheehan, Personal History.

Isidor Schneider, From the Kingdom of Necessity.

Romain Rolland, Death and Birth of a World.

Grace Lumpkin, A Sign for Cain.

Fielding Burke, A Stone Came Rolling.

Emile Burns, Handbook of Marxism.

Maxim Gorky, Belomor.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Soviet Communism.

“Yeah, we’re only the printers and who’re we to question and criticize the literary outpourings of writers like— and—”

Then we parade all our opinions of Fortnightly contributors. If one happens, by chance, to make a remark halfway complimentary about any of the batch of would-be writers it calls forth from the others such expressions as “You don’t feel called upon to state your real opinion of course.” Or “If you think he can write, I think you’d be a bum editor.”

During the quarter we have been called upon to suffer many indignities such as Bernie’s fool-proof folding machine which set up a racket like the sound of exploding bombs and bursting shrapnels (most conducive to an atmosphere of revolutionary labor, no doubt but quite deadly to the nerves.) But Bernie’s brain child was moved to the office where we hear it has developed into a quiet, well behaved young one.

Then there was the day we went back to the good old-fashioned way of folding, and the entire campus went broad-shouldered and offered their services. Hectic day! of heated arguments, liberals getting their feet stumped under socialist hosts, socialists jabbed by communist elbow, printers suffering jostlings and shinkicks from all and sundry. Result: theory of “the more the merrier” definitely disproved in the print shop.

Then, the old experienced printers rather felt the dignity of their profession assaulted when the new printer grabbed a crowbar and viciously

Homesick

By Bob Reed

A former student now organizer for the Workers’ Alliance in Little Rock, Arkansas, perplexed, he stopped walking and toed still in the sandy lane. Though he had three miles yet to walk to the meeting place and was late, he took off his hat and held it in his hand and stood there looking at the sun glow in the west. In the pleasant cool breeze that sometimes comes after a hot day in the bottoms, he breathed deeply all the smells of freshly plowed land. “What makes me feel this way?” he thought. What was the sudden strange emotion that had swept over him, leaving him bewildered and lonely.

His nostrils greedily drank in the atmosphere, seeking for something that he couldn’t quite discover. It was a strange feeling. He felt not quite able to cope with it. Then he smiled. The breeze had brought him an answer. Just ahead by the road was a little leaning barn belonging to a sharecropper. From it came odors that were old and familiar. He knew why he felt as he did. He was homesick.

He smelled manure, and it made him homesick. He smelled cows and mules and the years of his life were turned back. With astonishing vividness he had become a farm boy of seventeen on his way home from the field after a hard day’s work. He pictured himself sweaty and sticky with dust from the field. He had a tired feeling in his back and his arms ached from swinging the gooseneck. Pretty soon he would be in swimming in the tank behind the barn and would feel better after that. Then he’d go into the house and see mamz setting the table, perhaps with the kerosene lamp already lighted, wining plate carefully she’d be humming a tune—probably the “Old Rugged Cross.” About that time we would bring in the two pails of milk from the cowbarn and strain it into the big earthenware crock. The kids would be still outside rolling the automile tires around the house in the dim light, yelling and having a good time.

Dan was no lesser an organizer for the surrounded type into a too-full line. (Well, we ain’t got no hammers.)

But we like the print shop. The work has been pleasant and amusing and the blackbird names we’ve played when cow was running low have never become boring.
Depression Youth

By Gale Bascombe

PICTURE a group of about twenty young men of college age playing poker. Just the sort of scene you might find in any city park since the fall of 1929. Sometimes they talk about other things besides their card playing. Once in a while even youngsters get to chewing the fat over more serious matters than sports.

Robert appears to be older and more serious minded than the others. He begins, "They say jobs were easy to get in the old days. A guy finished school. He started at the bottom. And he stuck until he worked up. Usually he fell for some girl who was willing to struggle along with him. Nowadays, what good does it do a guy to fall in love with a jane? He can't get married."

"You don't have to marry 'em just because you love 'em, dumbell."

"It's been years since a fellow could the share-cropper union. He was a farm boy of seventeen who had never heard of a union."

"Oh," he thought, "Doesn't seem any time at all when we lived there so peacefully and hoped each year to make a crop that would put us out of debt so we could get some new furniture and I could go off to school."

It hadn't been so long since they lived there on the farm and were happy.

The feeling flooded through Dan until there were almost tears in his eyes. Then as suddenly as it had come it was gone. On ahead, he heard the Negro share-cropper calling the cows. "Sook, sook," his voice rolled out musically. Dan put his hat on his head and started walking. As he passed the barn, then the little outhouse that the family lived in, and on down into the bottoms where the breeze felt clammy against his face, he thought of the meeting which he was to attend and the strike vote which was to be taken.

Homesickness, clinging to the past, was a sign of weakness. No use thinking now of a happy home of past years. The farm had been taken over by a mortgage shark and the family were living on relief. It was at that foreclosure that Dan got interested in the class.

His family had been kicked out of their home. It had made a fighter of him. Now was no time for mushy sentiment. Now was the time to remember the mortgage sharks, the greedy landlords.

He was an organizer on his way to a meeting.

even buy a job in this town."

"Every try running news agent on a local?" Dave Parker, prize poker of the crowd is speaking. "There's a job that's always for sale. They keep a standing ad in the newspapers. Bait for the sucker with twenty-five dollars who doesn't know that nobody's been traveling on locals since the war."

Ed Smith shakes his head sagely. "How well I know it. And after that I tries pushing doorbells with one hand and a vacuum cleaner in the other. More cold turkey."

"I used to answer their blind ads," says Robert. "You know the kind that read like one chance in a lifetime, but don't tell you anything definite. When you find the place it's a room all rigged out with desks and blackboards. And there you sit getting all worked up inside. The longer you wait the more you get to believing something big is headed your way. Then when the jolt comes it's hard to take. Last time it was a high pressure boy with a mysterious black suitcase. What a line that bird had. He could have sold safety razors at a barber's convention. Boy, you should have heard his 'pep' talk. First he locks the door, ducks the key, sprays across the room and hoists the windows. When he turns and grins, and asks you if 'everybody's happy' it's so catching you grin back. And you sit there with your mouth open listening to his boloney. You wonder where he's been hiding all your life. When he's through spouting he taps the black suitcase and says, 'We have here the Monarch vacuum cleaner.' It's the first time he's stopped for air since he started talking, and you breathed easier too. After that only a few chumps listened. But oh boy! the stampede to get out, when he finally turns the key in the door.

"Somebody ought to start another war," one of the boys says.

"What's the matter? You think the 'big shots' need more cheap cannon fodder?"

"The getting bumped off part is all a gamble," replies Jimmie. "But wars sure are pure gravy for the guys back home. Talk about prosperity. During the war time they pay inexperienced punks ten and twelve bucks a day. Kids hold down the men's jobs. Glad to get them at any price."

Felix Miller adds his testimony, "I talked with a guy that was young during the war. He said the bosses begged fellows to take jobs."

"I suppose they brushed off the seats when they came in," says red headed Dave Parker.

"Anyway wars are hell for the guys who get shot up," Robert reminds them.

When Earl Garrity wins, he stops concentrating on the business of card playing to speak for the first time.

"My old man says, 'If things don't get better soon, plenty of good people are going to turn bolshevik'."

"My dad has been out of work for a long time too," adds Earl Smith. "But he says getting bitter about it won't help. Better times are coming," he says. "The country's sound and we have the best government in the world, The past depressions have been followed by prosperity. So he thinks we ought to be patient and hopeful until we snap out of this one."

"But can a man get hungry waiting for the prosperity right around the corner."

Dave Parker grins. "Earl should talk revolution. Earl Garrity, the ace card player of the juvenile bums Youngest of three generations of champs. His old man's taken every horseshoe pitcher around here to the cleaners. And his
Campus Notes
By Louise Adler

SATURDAY marked the close of the winter quarter. Three car loads of students drove into Mena where some made train and bus connections while others made ready to enjoy box car facilities. Here's hoping they conquer the world!

A farewell party for students took place Friday night at the Commons. Faculty Chairman John Barnett gave a brief talk expressing his confidence that the students would carry on faithful work after leaving Commonwealth.

Some of the Commoners also spoke and told of the benefit they received from the college. Our friend, Covington Hall, was with us again for a few days after spending some time in the southwest. Students and faculty were glad to have him back and to hear his talk on Trade Unionism.

New students for the coming term have started to arrive. It looks like there will be an alert and peppy group here next term. There will be a number of sharecropper students from the South.

Henry Black, imperialism instructor, who recently returned from a vacation trip to New York, gave a talk to the students about labor activities in the "Big City."

At the last forum Arley Woodrow, a lawyer from Mena, spoke to the gathering on "How to Work in the South." Myra Page, of the faculty, also gave a brief talk on "The Franco-Soviet Peace Pact."

Among recent visitors to the campus from Mena were a group from the Woman's Literary Club, headed by their president, Mrs. Dean. The club members visited the library and several of the faculty. They plan to return to visit classes next quarter.

We were glad to have with us for a day Mrs. Harper from the Juvenile Court at Little Rock, who drove out to the campus with a Mena friend of the college.

Many of the students and faculty spent Sunday at neighbors' homes. Clyde Washington, a most popular neighbor, gave a dinner party for a party of five; other neighbors also entertained small groups of Commoners. There is much to be gained in visiting with our friends of the community as they contribute a great deal of worth while knowledge to us (knowledge that cannot be found in books).

Bernie Stevens, our mechanic, was recently elected a member of the Commonwealth Association. When not fixing the many cars on the campus, he has been busy these last weeks repairing Commoners' shoes. When he operates on a limousine he puts his whole soul into it and his heart too—when he's short on parts. When Bernie is not in sight on the campus you can usually find him comfortably stretched out underneath a truck gently tinkering with the what-you-call'em hidden inside the great body of structures under a bushel.

[DEPRESSION YOUTH from page 3] grandad's a checker shark if there ever was one.

"I suppose ought to thank the Lord for all this free time," says Robert.

"Why hide your lights under a bushel?"

The boys drop their cards and look with Robert past the tiny deserted is- land in the middle of the lake to the opposite shore. The shore is so near, the two groups can be plainly seen; in one the middle aged men are gathered about the horse shoe court; in the other the old timers face one another from benches where they sit with checker boards between them.

"I wonder if we will be doing that twenty-five years from now?" Dave Parker questioned the boys.

"You bet! and fifty years from now if this depression don't break:"

It will be easier for us. We'll be so used to it by then," Dave Parker is still trying to be funny.

Well, fellows, I'm glad the basketball season is starting," Jimmie Rand chides in. "It gives us something to do and think about."

"You tell 'em, Jimmie," says Dave Parker. "How about making 'Throw a basket and forget the depression' our slogan from now on?" The others agree.

Butler Returns
RUSSELL BUTLER, President of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and member of Commonwealth's faculty, has just returned to the campus, also Mrs. Ruth Moskop, STFU executive board member. They had been attending union board meetings in Memphis and arranging for the union's appointing six additional members to attend Commonwealth this quarter.

New Woman's Magazine

PROMINENTLY featured in the second issue of The Woman Today is an article by Elmore M. Herrick, chairman of the Regional Labor Board in New York. She objects vigorously to the decision declaring the New York State Minimum Wage Law unconstitutional and condemns the gross injustice of this act.

A statement on the New York State Court of appeals concerning the ruling on the minimum wage law by William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, will appear. He urges women to organize into unions so that they can bargain collectively with their employers.

Francis J. Gorman, vice-president of the United Textile Workers of America, writes on "Women and the Labor Party."

The Woman Today is published at 112 E. 19th St., New York City. Subscriptions are 50 cents a year, ten cents a copy and special rates for bundle orders.

Commonwealth College Fortnightly

LATEST NEWS FROM THE S. T. F. U.
— on developments in the sharecropper region of Eastern Arkansas.
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— from labor organizers in the field.
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