COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE
FORTNIGHTLY

VOL. XIV, NO. 5  MENA, ARKANSAS: MARCH 15, 1938  $1.00 A YEAR

Model Relief Meeting
Set for March 18-19

Plans are complete for the twoday model conference on unemployment and relief that is being held at the college on March 18 and 19 under the auspices of the classes in Union Methods and Parliamentary Law. Nearly all students and staff members will participate in the meeting, acting as “representatives” of AFL and CIO labor unions, railway brotherhoods, unemployed organizations, farmers’ unions and youth groups.

The purpose of the conference is to draw up a comprehensive program whereby the working men and women of the country can secure adequate relief measures during the present depression and safeguard themselves against future business crises. Phases of this program include the sponsoring of specific legislation, national, state, and local; the drafting of plans for organizing all unemployed workers and persons entitled to old-age pensions; and the outlining of a policy for long-range political action.

The conference will be based on the general pattern of similar gatherings held recently in various states, notably Montana and Michigan; but, according to Norman Lefever, Union Methods instructor, the “representation” will be much broader, and the program will go much farther. Incidentally, a National Conference on Work and Security having something of the same aim is scheduled to open March 19 in Washington, D.C., with Senators Murray of Montana and Green of Rhode Island on the list of speakers.

Like the model meeting on labor unity held last quarter, the present conference will have two aims; it will acquaint the students with the issues involved and will give them practice in speaking and in parliamentary law. Considerable local interest has manifested itself in the gathering. A party of labor union leaders from Fort Smith is scheduled to arrive Friday to attend the sessions held that night and Saturday afternoon, and numerous neighboring farmers and townsmen are expected to visit the college for the meeting.

TO OUR ALUMNI

During the fourteen years of its existence Commonwealth has sent hundreds of students into the world. Some are now working directly in the labor movement, some are in factories or mines or professions, some are in Spain. We are asking all Commoner alumni to write in and tell us what they are doing and have done so that we may have a record of their activities. Address Donald G. Kahler.

Sharecropper Play To Be Given Campus Production

“One Bread, One Body,” the sharecropper play written last month by Lee Hays, Commonwealth dramatics director, with the assistance of students in the dramatics class, will be presented before the college student body and residents of the neighborhood on Saturday night, March 27.

The play was originally produced at Little Rock on February 26 before the convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, with convention delegates taking part as “extras.” The action revolves around the lives of a group of characteristic tenant farmers, depicting their oppression by the planters and the importance of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union in teaching them to act together to redress their grievances. Claude Williams, Commonwealth director, played the role of the STFU organizer in the original presentation.

The script has been mimeographed and is available to setting groups upon application to the college.

Hays, author of the play, has been interested for some time in recording dramatically the deprivations of the sharecroppers and the fervor of their struggle for a more nearly adequate life whenever a glimpse of opportunity appeared. In 1937 he participated in filming a motion picture showing conditions among the tenant farmers and in the writing of a play entitled “Gumro” which was taken on tour in Tennessee by Highlander Folk School students and staff members.

VARIED ENROLLMENT
FOR SPRING QUARTER

Opening April 11, the spring quarter at Commonwealth promises to bring with it an increased student body of varied backgrounds and experiences in the labor movement.

At least a half dozen of the present students have already expressed their intention of staying over for another quarter, in most cases their third. In addition to these, some twenty applications have been accepted from new students. These include a textile worker from Nashville, Tenn.; three men from Hammond, Ind., from the SWOC, the Hod Carriers’ Union, and the Workers’ Alliance, all of whom determined to apply for admittance as a result of their acquaintance with Norman Law, a recent alumnus; a member of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union from South Carolina; the wife of a Cleveland CIO organizer; a telephone lineman from Kentucky; and an oil field worker from Texas. Students are also expected from the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union in Arkansas and from the Farmers’ Educational and Cooperative Union in Arkansas and possibly Louisiana.

The course in Union Methods will be required for all new students, as has been the practice during the past two quarters. Other courses offered will be Political Economy, Labor History, International Affairs, Workers’ Dramatics, Labor Journalism, Public Speaking, Rural Economy, English, Mimeograph Technique, and Typing.

The dramatics field program, which during the winter quarter included the writing and presentation of two original plays before farm audiences in Arkansas, will be further extended. The play “Get Goin’, George,” which has been used for organizational work in connection with the Arkansas Farmers’ Union, will probably be taken on tour again, and possibly supplemented by another farm play. An industrial play dealing with the problems of unemployment and relief, begun during the past quarter, will be revived with a view to presenting it before labor union audiences in Arkansas and Texas.
The Southern Scene

Anti-Lynching Bill Killed

This anti-lynching bill is dead, killed by the filibustering voices of Southern senators. Says the Nation in requiem: "It has become clear that the fight against the bill had an economic base. It was a fight on the part of reactionaries in the South not only to continue the right of terrorizing Negroes through lynching, but also to continue the right of terrorizing whites as well as Negroes and keep them from organizing for decent wages and for political and educational opportunities. The fight against the bill has done much to complete the process of bringing the Negroes to political consciousness. It has become clear to them who their enemies are, and clear also that their enemies are the enemies of civil liberties and economic progress."

Industrial Strife at Forrest City

As example of how the inroads of industrialization into the South divide a community against itself and bring about enmity between neighbors is afforded by the situation in Forrest City, Ark., where unionization of a small garment shop has given rise to considerable ill-feeling.

The shop opened about two years ago, employing some 250 girls. Although Forrest City is located in the heart of the plantation district and attempts at sharecropper organization in the vicinity had met with merciless repression, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union determined to fight the sweatshop conditions, and succeeded in organizing the workers. The National Labor Relations Board ordered the company to recognize and deal with the union, whereupon the shop closed its doors.

That happened eight months ago. Now twenty-nine church, municipal, and civic organizations, not realizing that decent wages and working conditions are essential to the well-being of the community, have petitioned the Labor Board to reverse its action. The Labor Board will of course do no such thing. The union is still standing firm, and chances are that the company will eventually reopen as a union shop. Meanwhile, however, the girls report that old friends have refused to speak to them on the street, and well-intentioned citizens of Forrest City have wasted much indignation denouncing the "union agitators" instead of turning their anger against the sweatshop employer and the competitive system behind him.

Georgia Chain Gang Ended

Word comes that the Georgia chain gang system, long a byword for brutality and terror, has been wiped out by legislative action. With the chain gang, presumably, go the inhuman practices of the shackles, the lash and the sweat-box. The gangs are to be replaced by work camps. The thought occurs, however, that the work camps had best be watched closely; for unless the entire penal system has been cleaned up, the old abuses are bound to creep back.

Bureau of Fine Arts

A legislative measure of interest to the South as well as to the country at large is the anti-lynching bill, which would set up a Bureau of Fine Arts to take over and place upon a permanent status the work now being done by the Federal Theater, Music, Dance, Art, and Writers' Projects under the WPA.

Ex-Commoner Publishes Poems of Social Protest

A volume of poems by Joe Hoffman, leader of the Workers' Alliance in St. Louis and former Commonwealth student, has just been published under the title "Let Them Eat Cake!" by B. C. Haggland, at Holt, Minn.

The title poem was written on the occasion of the march on the St. Louis City Hall in May 1936 by unemployed workers demanding food or work. Other verses have such themes as sit-down strikes, May Day parades, war, and the fight against fascism in Spain. The entire volume reflects a bitter protest against the injustices and starvation of present-day society, and calls for a new order of things.

"Sharecropper and Wonder," a poem dramatizing the condition of the sharecroppers, was first printed in the FORTNIGHTLY.

Pecan Shellers' Strike

Five thousand pecan shellers, among the most poorly paid workers in the world, have been on strike in San Antonio, Texas, for some six weeks against a twenty per cent wage cut which would have brought their average pay down to less than two dollars a week. The strike has been carried on almost without funds, and in the face of police repressive measures of almost unimaginable brutality.

"Police and the corrupt city administration have denied the workers the right to picket," says a statement by Pecan Shellers' Union No. 172. "They have beaten them, lined up men, women, children and mothers with babies in their arms, on private property, and then without warning shot tear gas into their midst... Over 700 arrests have been made. Scores of people have been kept in jail for days without being charged with any offense. Police have threatened to set up concentration camps if picketing continues."

The strikers, organized by the United Canners, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, are mostly Mexican-Americans who have been forced for years to live according to sub-human standards. With a possibility of establishing a firm organization and at least defending the miserable wages they have been earning, they are determined to fight to the last, and meanwhile are living on almost nothing. The strike committee has announced that a dollar will feed five workers and their families for nearly a week, and has conducted the strike so far on a total expenditure of $700. Contributions should be sent to the Pecan Workers' Emergency Relief Committee, J. Austin Beasley, Secretary-Treasurer, Box 1861, San Antonio, Texas.
Low Wages Prevalent in Southern Cotton Mills Demonstrated by Federal Statistics

Cotton mill workers in the South were receiving 20.6 percent less for their hourly pay last July than similarly employed workers in the North, according to statistics published by the United States Department of Labor in the Labor Review for January. The figures are the latest available on mill wages.

Cotton wage standards in the South have always been considerably lower than those in the North, the maximum difference being reached in 1924, when the Southern figure was 39 percent less than that of the North. The contrast lessened gradually during the depression, but in July 1938 the difference was still 26 percent. The gap decreased abruptly with the introduction of the NRA coder, which established a legal differential of only 8.3 percent. This difference was never actually attained, but the hourly earnings under the NRA in the South did climb to within 15.6 percent of Northern scales. After the collapse of the NRA wages in the South again fell, both relatively and comparatively.

Low Wages Prevalent in Southern Cotton Mills Demonstrated by Federal Statistics

Cotton mill workers in the South were receiving 20.6 percent less for their hourly pay last July than similarly employed workers in the North, according to statistics published by the United States Department of Labor in the Labor Review for January. The figures are the latest available on mill wages.

Cotton wage standards in the South have always been considerably lower than those in the North, the maximum difference being reached in 1924, when the Southern figure was 39 percent less than that of the North. The contrast lessened gradually during the depression, but in July 1938 the difference was still 26 percent. The gap decreased abruptly with the introduction of the NRA coder, which established a legal differential of only 8.3 percent. This difference was never actually attained, but the hourly earnings under the NRA in the South did climb to within 15.6 percent of Northern scales. After the collapse of the NRA wages in the South again fell, both relatively and comparatively.

During the period from July 1936 to July 1937, however, actual wages showed a considerable increase, both in the North and the South. In the North, where the TWC drive was more vigorous and the unions better established, the increase in hourly earnings averaged 19.6 percent; in the South it was 14.7 percent.

Employment figures also show a greater increase in the average number of hours worked in the Northern mills during the upswing of production. For the year July 1936 to 1937 the aggregate gain in work-hours in the North over the previous year was 8 percent, in the South only 3 percent.

It should be remembered that three-quarters of the cotton textile industry in the United States is now located in the South, and that the remainder naturally looks longingly upon the Southern wage differentials. These differentials are based squarely upon the absence of labor organization. Maintaining living standards in the country as a whole inevitably demands the unionization of Southern labor.

Cotton mill workers in the South were receiving 20.6 percent less for their hourly pay last July than similarly employed workers in the North, according to statistics published by the United States Department of Labor in the Labor Review for January. The figures are the latest available on mill wages.

Cotton wage standards in the South have always been considerably lower than those in the North, the maximum difference being reached in 1924, when the Southern figure was 39 percent less than that of the North. The contrast lessened gradually during the depression, but in July 1938 the difference was still 26 percent. The gap decreased abruptly with the introduction of the NRA coder, which established a legal differential of only 8.3 percent. This difference was never actually attained, but the hourly earnings under the NRA in the South did climb to within 15.6 percent of Northern scales. After the collapse of the NRA wages in the South again fell, both relatively and comparatively.

During the period from July 1936 to July 1937, however, actual wages showed a considerable increase, both in the North and the South. In the North, where the TWC drive was more vigorous and the unions better established, the increase in hourly earnings averaged 19.6 percent; in the South it was 14.7 percent.

Employment figures also show a greater increase in the average number of hours worked in the Northern mills during the upswing of production. For the year July 1936 to 1937 the aggregate gain in work-hours in the North over the previous year was 8 percent, in the South only 3 percent.

It should be remembered that three-quarters of the cotton textile industry in the United States is now located in the South, and that the remainder naturally looks longingly upon the Southern wage differentials. These differentials are based squarely upon the absence of labor organization. Maintaining living standards in the country as a whole inevitably demands the unionization of Southern labor.

Cotton mill workers in the South were receiving 20.6 percent less for their hourly pay last July than similarly employed workers in the North, according to statistics published by the United States Department of Labor in the Labor Review for January. The figures are the latest available on mill wages.

Cotton wage standards in the South have always been considerably lower than those in the North, the maximum difference being reached in 1924, when the Southern figure was 39 percent less than that of the North. The contrast lessened gradually during the depression, but in July 1938 the difference was still 26 percent. The gap decreased abruptly with the introduction of the NRA coder, which established a legal differential of only 8.3 percent. This difference was never actually attained, but the hourly earnings under the NRA in the South did climb to within 15.6 percent of Northern scales. After the collapse of the NRA wages in the South again fell, both relatively and comparatively.

During the period from July 1936 to July 1937, however, actual wages showed a considerable increase, both in the North and the South. In the North, where the TWC drive was more vigorous and the unions better established, the increase in hourly earnings averaged 19.6 percent; in the South it was 14.7 percent.

Employment figures also show a greater increase in the average number of hours worked in the Northern mills during the upswing of production. For the year July 1936 to 1937 the aggregate gain in work-hours in the North over the previous year was 8 percent, in the South only 3 percent.

It should be remembered that three-quarters of the cotton textile industry in the United States is now located in the South, and that the remainder naturally looks longingly upon the Southern wage differentials. These differentials are based squarely upon the absence of labor organization. Maintaining living standards in the country as a whole inevitably demands the unionization of Southern labor.
Students Visit Fort Smith
Non-Partisan League Rally

A group of Commonwealth students from the Union Methods class under the leadership of Norman LeFever, instructor, made a field trip to Fort Smith last Sunday to visit a mass meeting conducted by Labor's Non-Partisan League. Porter Ford, former president of the Fort Smith Central Labor Council, acted as chairman of the meeting, while the principal speaker was Paul W. Fuller, provisional national president of the Federation of Flat Glass Workers, who is visiting Arkansas in the course of an organizational tour. David Fowler, president of District 21, United Mine Workers of America, also spoke at the meeting.

The Commonwealth group had the opportunity to discuss the general labor situation in Fort Smith with leaders there. Horace Bryan, instructor at the college last quarter, is county secretary for Labor's Non-Partisan League and is organizing for the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America in the Fort Smith area. The college group also stopped off briefly at another meeting of Labor's Non-Partisan League which was being held at Excelor, a coal community, for the purpose of bringing about action on relief and unemployment problems.

Commoners Return from Mexican School

Two Commoners returned to the campus last week after a month's visit to Mexico in the course of which they established contacts with the new school in continental-American backgrounds and languages at Celaya, Mexico, poet and intellectual leader, as a place in which Latin-American teachers might become acquainted with the language, history, and institutions of the United States, and teachers from this country, in turn, might learn Spanish-American speech and backgrounds. Failing to establish the school in Nicaragua, de la Selva carried his project to Mexico, where he interested Gilberto Bosques, editor of El Nacional, daily newspaper of the Mexican government party. Through Bosques, who is former president of the federal congress and prominent in Mexican political circles, the support of numerous government officials including President Cardenas was enlisted, and an appropriation was made in the federal budget to provide scholarships and maintenance for students.

The school was opened in September 1937, with Bosques as president, and continued until this month, when government budgetary difficulties caused its temporary suspension. Resumption of work is expected shortly, and elaborate plans have been made for a summer session, at which some internationally known figures as Lila Lomax, Mabel Fulks, and Russell, J. B. S. Haldane, Alexander Meiklejohn, Louis Gottschalk, Ernst Toller, Diego Rivera, Orozco Romero, Carlos Merida, and others, will appear as lecturers and teachers.

Fulks and Tennant were introduced to de la Selva by Dr. William Zeuch, one of the founders of Commonwealth, who is chairman of Anglo-American studies and professor of sociology and economics at El Centro. They were offered scholarships and maintenance in exchange for their services as instructors in the English language, and had just become a part of the staff when the school suspended activities.

Fulks will probably go back to Tlapan, which is a suburb of Mexico, D. F., when the school reopens.

State Figures on Educational Expenditures Show Discrimination Against Negro Schools

Amazing discrimination against Negroes in opportunities afforded for education is shown by a study of Arkansas educational expenditures made last year under the auspices of the New Era Schools at Little Rock, now merged with Commonwealth College.

Arkansas is one of the nineteen states in which Negroes are required by law to attend separate schools. In these Southern states reside nearly four-fifths of all the Negroes in America, constituting about a quarter of the entire population of the South. Thus it can be seen that conditions in Arkansas, which are fairly typical of the South, reflect the educational plight of more than nine million Negroes, 20.0 per cent of all the Negroes in the United States.

During the period 1931-34 the state of Arkansas spent $13 per year for the education of each white child while spending $4 for each Negro. White children averaged 153 school days per year; Negro children 112. The value of school buildings and equipment devoted to whites was $71 per pupil; for Negroes it was $21.

A more detailed examination of counties with heavy Negro population revealed still greater discrepancies. In Crittenden County, the most flagrant example of discrimination, $80 was spent on each white child to $1 for each Negro. In St. Francis County the ratio was $13 to $1, in Ashley, Lee, and Little River Counties it was $10 to $1.

Only 16 of the counties in Arkansas provided a full high-school course for Negroes. In these 16 counties there were 24 high schools to take care of 96,717 Negro children of school-age. In the same 16 counties there were 160 high schools for 124,856 whites.

In 48 counties which did not afford any opportunities for full high-school education to Negroes there were 65,844 black children. These counties had 275 high schools for whites.

The statement is sometimes made that Negroes cannot be given adequate educational opportunities because they do not contribute sufficiently to the support of their schools. This defense of inequality, aside from being sociologically unsound, is not true. The study demonstrates that in many cases nearly the entire state apportionment to the counties has been used for white schools, and in some cases has even been diverted from the funds raised for education by taxes on Negro farms. In Crittenden County in 1934 $15,001 was raised by the 16-mill tax on Negro-owned farms; only $14,710 of this sum was spent for Negro education, the remainder being diverted to white schools; and in addition the entire state apportionment was used for white children. Crittenden, it will be remembered, is the county in which the ratio of white to Negro educational expenditure was 30 to 1. This same county, significantly, shews the largest degree of tenant farming in the state, there being 6,751 tenants cultivating 150,448 acres to 248 owners farming 10,838 acres.

The study does not, perhaps, afford a sufficient statistical basis to draw a close parallel between the amount of farm tenancy and the discrimination against Negroes in educational opportunities. None the less, it is obvious that owners of large plantations having hundreds of more or less completely disfranchised Negro tenants exert a controlling influence upon local politics, and are not going to permit their taxes to be used for the development of Negro education. Education brings about awakening to social and economic discrimination, and consequent resentment. There is a sound basis for the Southern tradition that the educated Negro is a troublemaker.