

Brilliant Murals by Joe Jones Decorate Labor College Walls

Realistic Portrayal of Southern Work- ers' Struggles

By AL LEHMAN

PEOPLE from all over the South are beginning to come to Commonwealth College, near Mena, Arkansas, to see the first mural depicting realistically the life of the Southern worker on the walls of a Southern institution. The work is being done by Joe Jones, nationally known revolutionary artist from St. Louis, in the main building of the college.

"This is no picture to be put in a museum," Jones said. "Here on the walls of a workers' school it will be seen by the miners and share-croppers about whom and for whom it is being painted."

Mother Ella Reeve Bloor, who is at present lecturing at Commonwealth College—and whose fifty years' leadership of the farmers and workers of America give her authority to speak for them, commenting on the Jones mural, said: "Every worker will know what it means. This is the beginning of workers' art in the South. It is the first picture portraying adequately the struggles of the workers and farmers that I have ever seen. In this mural there is not only struggle and poverty, but hope—and this hope comes from the share-croppers and miners themselves. From their unity, and their realization that they can only be emancipated by helping one another."

THE Jones mural consists of five panels, each dependent upon the others in depicting the outstanding condition and major struggles of the Southern working people. The first panel is done in rich blues and green, with a working Arkansas mine in the background. In the foreground is a group of miners deep in thought watching a mine leader pouring water from his dinner pail, the signal for strike.

In the two center panels Jones has painted, with the underlying vitality of artistic expression and aim that characterizes his work, three Negro lynchings. The panels are a maze of fiery reds and greens, mingled with the creamy whites of a cotton patch.

The last two panels show in a truculent panorama of color and vigor the living conditions of the South-



One of the panels from the Joe Jones murals at Commonwealth College.

ern share-cropper. Tornadoes, flood, drought and dust storm careen across the panel in a realistic pattern along with the fly-ridden hovel which is the share-cropper's home. In brutal contrast to the "act of God" misery of the sharecropper portrayed in the foreground is the figure of a farmer, drawn with a boldness that is unique with Jones, plowing under the cotton that is the life blood of the 'cropper.

JOE JONES himself is a middle-westerner, having lived all his life in St. Louis. He is twenty-six years old and until about eight years ago, earned his living as a journeyman house painter. Jones has never had any formal art training. He is self-taught.

He first gained prominence as a teacher of the unemployed Negroes and whites in St. Louis. His class painted a collective mural on the walls of the old Courthouse in St. Louis depicting the struggle of

the workers they all knew so well, and defended it against the "respectable" citizens of the city who wanted to destroy it.

Jones became an artist of undisputed national importance this summer through his one-man show in the A. C. A. Galleries in New York. He came to Commonwealth College as a special lecturer for the school's summer session. Passing through the State he was immediately seized with enthusiasm for this present project. "The Arkansas miners and share-croppers force an honest artist to paint them," he said.

Commonwealth is the labor college which was recently under investigation by the Arkansas state legislature for alleged "un-American activities." The college won its fight for academic freedom and the right to continue as a working class school through the support given it by workers' and farmers' organizations throughout the country.