

Long Years of Prison Ended— Cleveland Welcomes Gus Hall

By JEAN KRCHMAREK

"We have to keep the picture of this epoch in front of us as we go forward. . . ."

SO SAID Gus Hall some seven years ago. Now in his forty-fifth year, Gus is about to be paroled from Leavenworth prison. Twenty years ago, Gus was one of those among us who were libellously dubbed the "lost" generation. We were, indeed, an unique generation. We were the depression children, and we still remember, as in a nightmare, bread lines, relief offices, and grim men on strike. We remember dingy store fronts lettered with the brave initials SWOC—the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. We remember the men shot on lonely roads, the gannet miners marching from their hills to the county seat, and the veterans encamped on the Potomac.

We seemed to be a generation destined to have no future. We went to Spain; we contended with Franco. Hitler loomed like a malignant demon over our youth. It was our generation who took on fascism. We fought in Europe, we rode triumphantly into Berlin on a tank, we survived the steaming jungles of the Pacific. Some of us, some of the bravest and best, never returned. We remember Anzio; we remember Guam.

But we were never "lost." Casualties we had, physical casualties and spiritual casualties. Many of us, however, survived. We are no longer the youthful generation, although we are still young enough to regard our own tall sons and daughters with some wonder. We are Gus' generation, and we are old enough to begin to reckon the sum of our lives.

Ours was the generation that weathered the depression, that fought in Madrid, that defended the Scottsboro boys, that built the unions that defeated Hitler, that talked back to McCarthy. And out of our generation came Gus Hall.

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WHAT MANNER of man is Gus, this veteran of prisons? Jail is no new experience for Gus. While it is true that the prospect of jail is being added now to the routine of our generation's life, Gus has been more consistently locked up than the rest of us.

They—the custodians of our thoughts, the lockers-up of our persons—have good reasons to stand in angry frustration before



GUS HALL

Gus. When we remember Gus, we even remember him as being bigger than life, although Gus is imposing enough in real life. We remember him for his leadership, his astuteness, his incorruptibility. We remember his warm, human qualities. We remember his laughter.

It was this, his laughter, that was particularly confounding to those very ones who had built up a horrendous picture of Gus as the bloodiest of revolutionaries. "Mixes Mirth With Marxism," reported the Cleveland Press at one time, in an agony of incredulity.

We remember Gus and his children. Children naturally love Gus; they swarm all over his ample person. When we remember Gus, we see him surrounded by children.

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WE REMEMBER Gus twenty years ago, twenty-five years ago. In the early 1930's, Gus went to work at Republic Steel in Warren, Ohio. Those were the days of the labor spies, of company arsenals and coal and iron police. Those were the days when steel was almost 100 percent unorganized, when starvation wages existed throughout the industry.

It took men of heroic quality to organize the steel industry. We remember 1932; Gus Hall led the first strike in the in-

dustry since 1919, in the Warren Republic Steel plant. For this he was fired and black-listed.

We remember the '30's, the desperation of those days. It was Gus who played a decisive role in the organization of the steel union in Ohio. So effective was his work that in 1936 he was made sub-regional director of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in the Youngstown-Warren district.

It was Gus who led the Little Steel Strike in the Warren-Niles area in 1937. After the strike, the LaFollette Committee calculated that the steel companies had spent over \$178,000,000 depression dollars for all types of guns and ammunition. Republic Steel alone admitted buying 552 revolvers, 64 rifles, 245 shotguns and 2,707 gas grenades.

The strike was won; the union was won. The work of the SWOC was finished. But we do not forget those days.

We remember Gus, growing and maturing. The war years found him serving in the Navy in Guam, where he was in charge of naval repairs. We remember those years.

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WE REMEMBER 1947, 1948, 1949, the rise of McCarthy, the first Smith Act arrests. Among the first, inevitably, Gus.

Shortly before he went to jail, Gus wrote: "If you just take what has happened in our time—not in a period of generations, but in our time since we have been old enough to understand—with what strides history is advancing! First, the birth of the Soviet Union—what a world-shaking historic event! But since its birth 33 years ago the Soviet Union has continued to grow, so that it has risen from its state of backwardness and Czarist oppression to the No. 1 nation in the world. This is a big thing to happen in our lifetime!

"Or take now the birth of the countries of the People's Democracy in Europe. All these countries but a few short years ago were associated with dungeons, feudalism and backwardness. Now all this has been destroyed, and these countries are building Socialism. In our time the 475 million Chinese people destroyed the age-old feudal system and established the People's Republic of China. That is a tremendous historical advance. . . . Today, the colonial liberation movement is rising all over Asia and the world. This world has really changed. That is a big chunk of history—all in our time. That describes the epoch we live in. . . ." And he said further, "We have to keep the picture of this epoch in front of us as we go forward. . . ."

These are not the words of a lost generation. Far from being lost, many of us knew exactly where we were going. Especially a man like Gus. He is a product of our epoch, and his participation in the broad social movements of our times has made a special contribution to this epoch.

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WE HAVE REMEMBERED Gus during the long years of his imprisonment. Now that the time of his release is at hand, our thoughts turn inevitably to the gates of Leavenworth prison. We know that prison takes its toll of men's bodies; we know that these years will have left their mark. But because we know Gus, we know, absolutely, there is that part of him no law can suppress, and no prison can warp; we know that from the dungeons of Leavenworth there will emerge Gus' unconquerable spirit, that is like the tree growing by the water, that will not be moved.



Gus Hall with other Cleveland Smith Act Defendants. Left to right are Anthony Krchmarek, Martin Chancey and Joseph Brandt who helped launch a defense campaign for arrested workingclass leaders. The latter three are now appealing Smith Act convictions and are free on bail.