

Social Questions Bulletin

The Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial membership organization, founded in 1907, seeks to deepen within the Church, the sense of social obligation and opportunity to study, from the Christian point of view, social problems and their solutions and to promote social action in the spirit of Jesus. The Federation stands for the complete abolition of war. The Federation rejects the methods of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society and seeks to replace it with social-economic planning to develop a society without class or group discriminations and privileges. In seeking these objectives, the Federation does not commit its members to any specific program, but remains an inspirational and educational agency, proposing social changes by democratic decisions, not by violence.

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The Coal Miner's Struggle In Eastern Kentucky

By Paul Nyden

Paul Nyden is an MFSA member, working on his Ph.D. at the University of West Virginia. He has spent weeks talking to the miners in Appalachia, and has contributed articles to "The Nation" and other journals. The following appeared in "Mountain Life and Work."

Tom Cornett is a coal miner. He has worked in the mines for thirty years, the last ten of them at the South-East Coal Company's mine at Camp Branch, owned by Harry LaViers, Sr. and Harry LaViers, Jr., or "Little Harry," as the miners call him. Tom was laid off from his job on the tippie a short time ago. His family has been living on his unemployment insurance and food stamps since. Men who were hired at the mine only weeks before the layoff were kept on; they were younger and could produce more coal for Little Harry than a sixty-one-year-old man who has trouble breathing. LaViers doesn't run into any trouble from the United Mine Workers. He broke their local at his operations back in 1962 and fought off their attempt to reorganize in 1965.

Little Harry has told Tom Cornett he'll take him back, if Tom will work *inside* the mine, instead of his old job outside on the tippie. At his age and in his physical condition, Tom knows that working underground again would kill him within a couple of years. So does LaViers. In a union mine, seniority provisions and job classification protect men like Tom Cornett. At a nonunion mine, all this is left up to the "good will" of the coal operator. A couple of weeks ago, LaViers announced another layoff—he laid off the entire day shift, keeping the afternoon and "hoot-owl" shifts operating at full production. Closing down production on the day shift, while operating at full capacity during the other two shifts is practically unheard of in the coal fields. His employees cite this as another example of Little Harry displaying his power over and contempt for the miners working under him.

Just down the road from the Cornetts, live the Isons in another, slightly larger, wooden shack. Orville Ison, thirty years in the mines, is totally disabled with Black Lung. His son Johnson is so sick that within a year he will be forced to

retire from the mines with a total lung disability. Johnson has worked for only eight years and is just twenty-eight years old. According to his father, "my son will smother to death from coal dust before he reaches thirty-five." Johnson Ison also works in Little Harry's mine.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action was founded in 1907 by five Methodist ministers—Harry F. Ward, Herbert Welch, Frank Mason North, Worth M. Tippy, E. Robb Zaring. We believe we are the oldest of such groups among Protestant denominations. The MFSA was asked by the 1908 General Conference of The Methodist Church to prepare a statement of principles, and this was adopted as the Social Creed of The Methodist Church. We cooperate with two other unofficial organizations, United Methodists for Church Renewal and Black Methodists for Church Renewal, and with the official Board of Christian Social Concerns of The Methodist Church (founded 1952) to alert ten million Methodists and others to critical issues. We invite the help of new friends, Methodists and non-Methodists, who agree with our masthead. Membership—minimum—is \$5 per year, including subscription to the monthly Social Questions Bulletin. Subscription to the SQB only is \$3 per year.

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Coal operators and their apologists continually claim they are "going broke." Miners must accept low wages and work nonunion, they say, or their companies will go out of business and deprive more poor people in Appalachia of their jobs. The independent coal operator is glorified as the preserver of free enterprise in America. These apologies always seem to gloss over or completely ignore the wretched living conditions nonunion miners and their families are forced to survive in. Apologies rarely describe the working conditions which smother young, as well as old, miners to death and cause disasters like the one at Hyden last December.

Harry LaViers, Jr. is one of the many operators who claims he is operating on a shoe-string.

He "can't afford" to pay more than one-half to two-thirds of union scale. He "can't afford" a decent hospitalization plan. He "can't afford" to honor seniority and job classification. And he "can't afford" to pay royalty or to provide his men with decent retirement for their old age. Yet Harry LaViers has managed to scrape together enough money to build a beautiful, split-level home with a swimming pool overlooking his multi-million dollar cleaning plant in Irvine, Kentucky. He has managed to purchase additional homes on top of beautiful Pine Mountain in Letcher County and in Miami, Florida; and he does own his private jet plane.

Local Owners vs. "Outsiders"

Men such as Harry LaViers like to say how much they are helping their employees by keeping their mines open. As

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Ray Burkhart, a retired miner from Black Mountain, counters, "No man I've ever heard of operates a coal mine just because he wants to help somebody. Especially not the poor people and the people that work for him. When the coal operator can no longer profit, and I mean profit, from the mine's employees, he has no more use for them." The major impact coal operators have had on employment in east Kentucky in recent years is explained by B. D. Sizemore, a thirty-six-year-old miner whom LaViers fired and blacklisted throughout east Kentucky when he tried to reorganize Camp Branch Mine in 1965: "Shoe makers, shirt manufacturers, and mobile home companies have all tried to set up factories in our area. But every time they try, the coal operators keep them from getting the land they need. The operators want to keep a pool of unemployed people so they can lay them off when they want to, and call them back when they want to. They want all the human resources to themselves." When General Electric tried to build an electric bulb plant in Hazard a few years ago, the operators blocked them from buying land too.

Coal miners themselves rarely make the distinction between "local" operators and "outside" operators, as some non-miners have been doing. Simply because an operator lives in the same county as his miners by no means insures those miners better working conditions or higher wages. Brookside, a small company town along Clover Fork, a few miles south of Harlan, was built by the multi-millionaire Whitfield family. Rows of small wooden houses sit in the bottom next to the river, which floods almost every spring. On a winter day, you can see poorly-clothed miners' children playing in the mud streets of Brookside or walking to their outdoor toilets. The Whitfields also built homes for themselves to live in. The home of Bryan C. Whitfield, Jr. is as lavishly furnished as any home in the New York suburbs. Like many other Kentucky operators, Bryan Whitfield lives right in Harlan County. His house is separated from the coal camp his father built by a row of pine trees, a two-lane road, and a little hill.

To coal miners living at the bottom of the hill, Whitfield and his way of life could just as well be a thousand miles away. When seventy-one-year-old Bryan Whitfield, worth between \$39 and \$40 million, speaks about his "fellow Kentuckians," he speaks of how lazy they are, how unemployment is being increased by welfare and poverty programs, how poor people crowd the banks in Harlan when they cash their relief and social security checks—and how they take up too many beds in the county hospital! The major national problem, according to Whitfield, is Nixon. "We elected him and now he's trying to move the country into socialism." The Whitfields are common; as you drive by many coal towns, huge houses where the operators live sit up on the sides of nearby hills. Perhaps local operators can maintain personal relationships with their employees which the executives of huge corporations cannot, but the sharp contrast between the tremendous wealth enjoyed by the coal operators and the poverty endured by their miners is not lost on the people of east Kentucky.

If a major difference does exist between the mines owned by coal men and the huge monopoly corporations, it is that the mines run by "native Kentuckians" are more dangerous and dusty than those run by Bethlehem or U. S. Steel. The smaller operators generally operate nonunion, pay lower wages, offer no hospitalization plans, and have poor retirement plans for their workers. When Black miners find jobs, it is almost always at the large union mines, operated by "ab-

sentee owners." Some people persist in thinking that the local owner is "closer" to the people than the absentee owner. Yet these "native Appalachians" spend months out of every year in Florida and Europe—and would never dream of associating with the Tom Cornetts and Orville Isons.

The often-repeated statement that east Kentuckians hate outsiders is another myth. Miners and poor people are much more concerned in knowing how much a man will help their struggles than they are in knowing where he comes from. Poor white people in the mountains are also learning more and more that they must discard their racism. Black people are much too important an ally in their battles. Racism is by no means eliminated among poor white people in the mountains, but when it is actively stirred up, it is usually done by the coal operators. The millionaire Whitfield urged his workers to vote for George Wallace in 1968; the millionaire LaViers family made special efforts to hire Black miners as strikebreakers in 1962. Never before had LaViers, Sr. employed a Black man in his mines. According to the old-timers around Seco, one of South-East's company towns, a sign used to be posted along the main highway there. Sanctioned by LaViers, the sign read: "Niggers! Don't never let the sun go down and catch you in Seco!"

Poverty and hunger are synonymous with east Kentucky throughout the United States. Most people are surprised to learn that the region is one of the richest in natural resources in the country, with its deposits of high-quality bituminous coal, oil, natural gas, and shale. The coal industry is booming today. More coal was mined in east Kentucky in 1970 than in any previous year in its history. But while the coal operators (both "native" operators and "outside" operators) are benefitting from booming coal markets, the people of east Kentucky aren't, except for those relatively few men who scratch out a living from what the scab operators pay them in wages.

Attempts to Break the Union

The operators began their systematic offensive to bust the union in the early 1950s. As coal markets sagged, many coal mines shut down. Some never reopened. Some operators leased their coal holdings in pieces out to smaller operators to open truck mines (which invariably operate nonunion). Many operators mechanized their mines in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They would shut down a mine which had employed 800 or 900 men; when it reopened with continuous miners and modern conveyor belts, only 200 or 250 miners would be needed. Every operator in the area—with the exception of large companies like U. S. Steel, Bethlehem Steel, and International Harvester and a very few medium- and small-sized companies—broke the miners' union. Some miners fled from one mine to the next as the operators' offensive engulfed entire counties, finally to be left with the choice of working nonunion or not working at all.

During these years, the operators created an atmosphere of terror everywhere in east Kentucky: thugs ran pickets down with trucks, state police and company gunmen killed and wounded miners, tipplies and coal trucks were dynamited, and strikers were framed on all sorts of phony charges. The most far-reaching means of terror were those operators have always used: they evicted strikers and their families from company-owned homes; they fired men who complained about wages and conditions; they blacklisted strikers from every

other coal mine in east Kentucky—including the union mines. The last straw for Kentucky miners fighting for their union was when the UMW International and District officers refused to assist them in their struggle and withdrew Welfare Cards from all men who worked for companies which were refusing to meet royalty payments. Union officials abandoned the men to fight the companies by themselves.

When a man is forced to work nonunion, he no longer has any protection whatsoever against his employer. His wages drop, sometimes to as low as \$10 for a shift of nine or ten hours; nonunion operators rarely pay their men for travelling time to and from the coal face. He has no seniority; the operator can move him around to any job in the mine at will and can lay him off regardless of how many years the man may have put in at any particular mine. No Mine Committee or Safety Committee can be elected to take up his grievances or challenge practices which violate federal and state safety regulations. When a man or a member of his family gets sick, his company may pay a small part of his medical and hospital expenses or none at all. When the miner becomes disabled or he retires, the company takes absolutely no responsibility for him. Union miners from West Virginia and Pennsylvania often say, "When a man can't work in the mines anymore, the operator has no more use for him and his family. He throws the miner out on the slate heap to die." In Kentucky's nonunion mines, it's much worse.

The operators launched their offensive to destroy the UMW throughout east Kentucky back in the early 1950s. After it had become clear to the miners that their union officials were refusing to protect them, the "roving picket" movement sprung up in 1959 and 1960. The roving pickets began shutting down the mines which were going nonunion in Perry, Harlan, and Letcher counties. In 1964, the miners leading the roving pickets formed the Appalachian Committee for Full Employment. Berman Gibson, Jason Combs, Lola and Charles Moore, and Everette Tharp were elected its leaders. The Committee demanded a decent standard of living for every east Kentuckian. If a man works in the mines, he should enjoy union working conditions and benefits; but if he is unemployed, the federal government has the responsibility to see that he and his family don't starve. When a group of these unemployed miners went to Washington, D. C. in January 1964 to demand federal assistance, they got the first \$1,000,000 appropriated for east Kentucky in the "War on Poverty".

The coal operators and their courthouse machines didn't sit passively as resistance to them was organized. They shot up the office of the Committee for Full Employment in Hazard. Berman Gibson and nine other miners were indicted on charges ranging all the way up to murder, although no convictions were ever obtained. When 200 students who had supported the striking miners were invited to attend a conference in Hazard during their Easter vacations in 1964, local papers printed the headline: "Communists Have Come to Eastern Kentucky". As members of the Committee pointed out, "This Communist accusation became the operators' chief weapon of heaping abuse upon our Committee. . . . It was very effective in hindering the Appalachian Committee from organizing the unemployed of this area and prevented many of the hungry children from receiving a hot Federal school lunch." Red-baiting has historically been a common tactic of the operators in their continual fight against coal miners and their unions.

What east Kentucky miners are looking for is a United Mine Workers of America with a new philosophy, a new ideology. In July 1956, the cover of the UMW *Journal* depicted a boat in the shape of a coal scuttle labelled "Coal Export Corp." This boat carried three passengers with their arms wrapped around each other—the UMW, the coal operators, and the railroads! This drawing certainly gives an accurate picture of union-operator relationships in eastern Kentucky. These rela-

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tionships are precisely the reason why Kentucky miners are looking elsewhere than to the incumbent union officials for help.

Union Reform Movement

The reform movement within the union has not yet appealed to these miners very effectively either. Miners for Democracy has two stumbling blocks which it must cast aside before they can hope to help Kentucky miners and before Kentucky miners will actively support MFD. First MFD expends nearly all its energies in attacking Boyle and his cronies, thereby letting the coal operators off the hook. East Kentucky miners don't like Boyle's corruption any more than miners anywhere else do. But they are not attracted by a program which focusses almost exclusively on *what is going into Boyle's pockets*, rather than on *what is not going into theirs*. All the personal corruption within the union today is minuscule compared to the extra profits companies make from the labor of miners who don't have a union local to fight for them and who have no contract to work under.

Miners for Democracy must begin to direct its energies primarily against the coal operators rather than against the union leaders who sell out to those operators. Second, Kentucky miners feel MFD must also modify its policy or relying so heavily upon legal cases. While they support using legal channels to the fullest, Kentucky miners have learned to be skeptical of how much the government in this country is ever going to give them. County and state government officials have been sending gunmen against their picket lines for years and arresting their leaders. The federal government has never done a thing to prevent corrupt courthouse machines from illegally administering federal relief funds and poverty programs as if they were the private pork barrels of the coal operators. Men and women who fight the operators rarely get any financial assistance, regardless of their need. Kentucky miners share Malcolm X's feeling when he said: "How can you go to the government seeking redress? The government created the problem. You don't take your case to the criminal, you take your criminal to court!"

Miners in east Kentucky also credit the federal government with a major role in breaking their union over the past twenty years because of the policies of the Tennessee Valley Authority. As Lee Eversole, fired by Blue Diamond in 1964, explains it: "The TVA is the one that busted the union here in the Hazard coal field with their low prices. TVA came in asking the operators for bids on long-term contracts to supply coal to their power plants, the big contracts going to the lowest bidders. Coal operators around here were falling all over themselves, trying to undercut each other. The Kelly and Sturgill Coal Company, which operated in Perry County before it went out of business, bid \$1.25 a ton to supply coal to TVA! Who loses when all this happens? We do—the coal miners. As the operators bid lower and lower, they cut our wages and busted our union. Seems to me like the government took men out of the coal mines and forced them to go on relief." When the federal government set up its poverty programs in east Kentucky, benefits were meager and they only went to a relatively small percentage of the poor people. Many of these programs served the operators further, for they began turning those poor people who didn't get anything against those who got a little.

Since John L. Lewis took the UMW out of the CIO in 1942, coal miners have been organizationally isolated from the rest of the American labor movement. MFD has of yet done nothing itself to reverse this process. The strength needed to rebuild the Miners' Union in areas such as east Kentucky can be gained only when the miners' reform movement forms alliances with progressive and Black caucuses in other unions such as the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers, and with leaders of militant unions like Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers and Local 1199, the Drug

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Some of our friends send a dollar a month to help maintain our budget. A business reply envelope is enclosed if you wish to assist in this way. And you may use this envelope if you have not yet subscribed or contributed in this current year. Thank You!

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Coal Miners

and Hospital Workers Union.

When east Kentucky's miners do become actively involved in the reform movement within the UMW, the movement will be greatly strengthened. Miners who have faced so many difficulties and fought so hard to preserve their union will rank among the most effective organizers and very best leaders coal miners can have, much the same as Black miners will when they are more actively recruited into the ranks—and leadership positions—of the miners' reform movement.

Though their personal futures look bleak to many coal miners living in the Kentucky mountains, they continue to fight. For they want their children—and everyone's children—to have it better than they have it today. Cecil Collins of Carbon Glow, another miner blacklisted by Blue Diamond who suffers from total lung disability today at age forty-six, puts it this way: "I know what the future holds for me. I've seen so many of my friends and neighbors smother to death from coal dust in their lungs. I can see it just around the corner. Soon I'll be setting there gasping for breath. I know it can't get any better for me now. I can never plan what I'm going to do on any particular day, until I know how I feel that morning. Now I don't have anything except this damn old body. But I still stick up for what I think is right. It don't pay you dividends like a savings account. But it gives you a good feeling knowing you *don't take a back street to nobody!*"

1972 P.E.P. Tours

Promoting Enduring Peace announces two summer tours: **July 18-August 9:** Warsaw, Leningrad, Moscow, Bucharest and London. Leaders, Rev. and Mrs. William Justice, experienced tour leaders, 5 Kim Lane, Hackettstown, N. J. 07840 (201-852-5438).

July 17-August 8: East Berlin, Leningrad, Moscow, Bucharest and Sveti Stefan, Yugoslavian resort on the Adriatic Sea. Leaders, Dr. Jerome Davis and Rev. Roy W. Pfaff.

Conferences, interviews and sight-seeing make these tours educational experiences long to be remembered. The fee for each tour is \$1,090 per person. For detailed information or brochures write Promoting Enduring Peace, Inc., P. O. Box 103, Woodmont, Conn. 06460.

1972 National Meeting

Our California Chapter hosts our National Meeting at the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, San Francisco, July 7-9. Our hosts will provide free housing for those who request it. Registrants will be invited to contribute to a travel fund, from which it is hoped one-half of the travel for those from the East and the Mid-West can be paid.

Five concerns will be considered, in panels and discussions: (1) The future of the MFSA, (2) The World Situation, (3) Economics, (4) Change in the U. S., (5) On Sunday morning July 9 the exciting experience of attending the Worship Celebration in Glide UMC, then a concluding luncheon.

We ask all of our friends who possibly can to come. Add some vacation experiences to the trip to California—visits to Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon. Notify the National Office that you are planning to come!

Harrisburg April 1

Lee Ball was among the 10,000 people at the rally before the Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg April 1, in behalf of the seven defendants charged by J. Edgar Hoover, and in behalf of Angela Davis and other political prisoners. Ruby Dee, Bella Abzug, Ralph Abernathy, Daniel Ellsberg, Dan Berrigan, William Kuntzler, Fania Jordan (sister of Angela Davis), Sister Elizabeth McAlister, and Mrs. Beulah Sanders of the National Welfare Rights Organization were among the speakers. Their word was that the (war) criminals (and those who repress civil liberties) are not the seven Harrisburg defendants, but Nixon, Laird, Westmoreland, J. Edgar Hoover, John Mitchell, Kleindienst.

Harrisburg April 1

MFSA friends whom Lee Ball saw were Edwin Walker, Mrs. Abe Zuckerman, Dorothy Martin, Arnold and Clara Ghinger, Elaine Urbain, Gustave Gamauf, Kay Nielsen, May Morgan Robinson, Joanne Robinson, James Best (NY), Mr. and Mrs. Harry Gottlieb, Mary Kochiyama, and Robert Horton (Pa.).

April 3, the jury has been deadlocked five days, having deliberated even on Easter Day. But still the judge sent them back to bring in a verdict, after having charged them March 30 in blatantly biased manner in what one of the defense lawyers said was "a summation for conviction". Of the ten counts in the indictment, the jury had brought in a verdict (guilty) on only one count, against Philip Berrigan for smuggling a letter out of prison, carrying a maximum penalty of ten years.

American-Soviet Youth Conference

The Committee of Youth Organizations of the Soviet Union invites 100 selected young people of the U. S., 19-30 years of age, to meet 100 young people of the Soviet Union in the USSR June 18-July 2, 1972. Complete hospitality in the Soviet Union will be extended by the C. Y. O. Transportation to and from the Soviet Union will be paid by the U. S. delegates, estimated at \$430 from New York.

It is hoped representative American youth will avail themselves of this opportunity—students, employed, unemployed—representative geographically, ethnically, politically, and a fair balance of young men and women. It is hoped some religious young Americans, who feel that religion is relevant to social issues, can be included. There will be a full interchange of views.

The Conference will be for the first week in the student camp at Petrozavodsk, capitol of Karelia, on Lake Onega. The agenda will be agreed upon by the young people of both countries. There will also be recreation—sports, cultural programs, special excursions.

Following the first week's conference, the second week will be given to a tour of Leningrad and Moscow.

Young Americans who are seriously interested, who are persons of open mind and friendly spirit, who believe they are good representatives of the U. S., are invited to send information about themselves, and an application, to the Young People's Division, National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 304, NY 10010.

Boycott Wonder Bread!

Because it is baked by the Continental Baking Company, which is owned by the conglomerate ITT. ITT makes sensors that relay information about human movements on Indo-chinese trails to a U. S. computer base in Thailand which dispatches pilotless bombers into the air, programmed to drop their deadly bomb loads on designated target areas. These sensors cannot tell the difference between troops and children. These sensors are the key to the dreadful anti-personnel automatic air war with which the U. S. is devastating Indochina and its people. And don't buy Hostess Cupcakes either, or Twinkies, or Morton Frozen Foods, or Profile Bread. They are all made by the Continental Baking Company. Ask your neighbors to join the boycott. Write to the Vietnam Peace Parade Committee, 13 E. 16 St., NY 10003 for Boycott leaflets to distribute.

The Rev. Edward L. Peet, our vice president, contributes an article in the Winter 1972 *New World Review* on "Anxiety-Free Old Age in the Soviet Union." In the summer of 1971 he and Mrs. Peet studied the Soviet program of *second careers* for retirees, on their second visit to the USSR. There is safety on the streets—mugging is virtually unknown. There is free health care from cradle to grave. There is income sufficient for need—rent 4% of income; and part-time employment in later years. Ed Peet is director of the Glide UMC Senior Center in San Francisco.