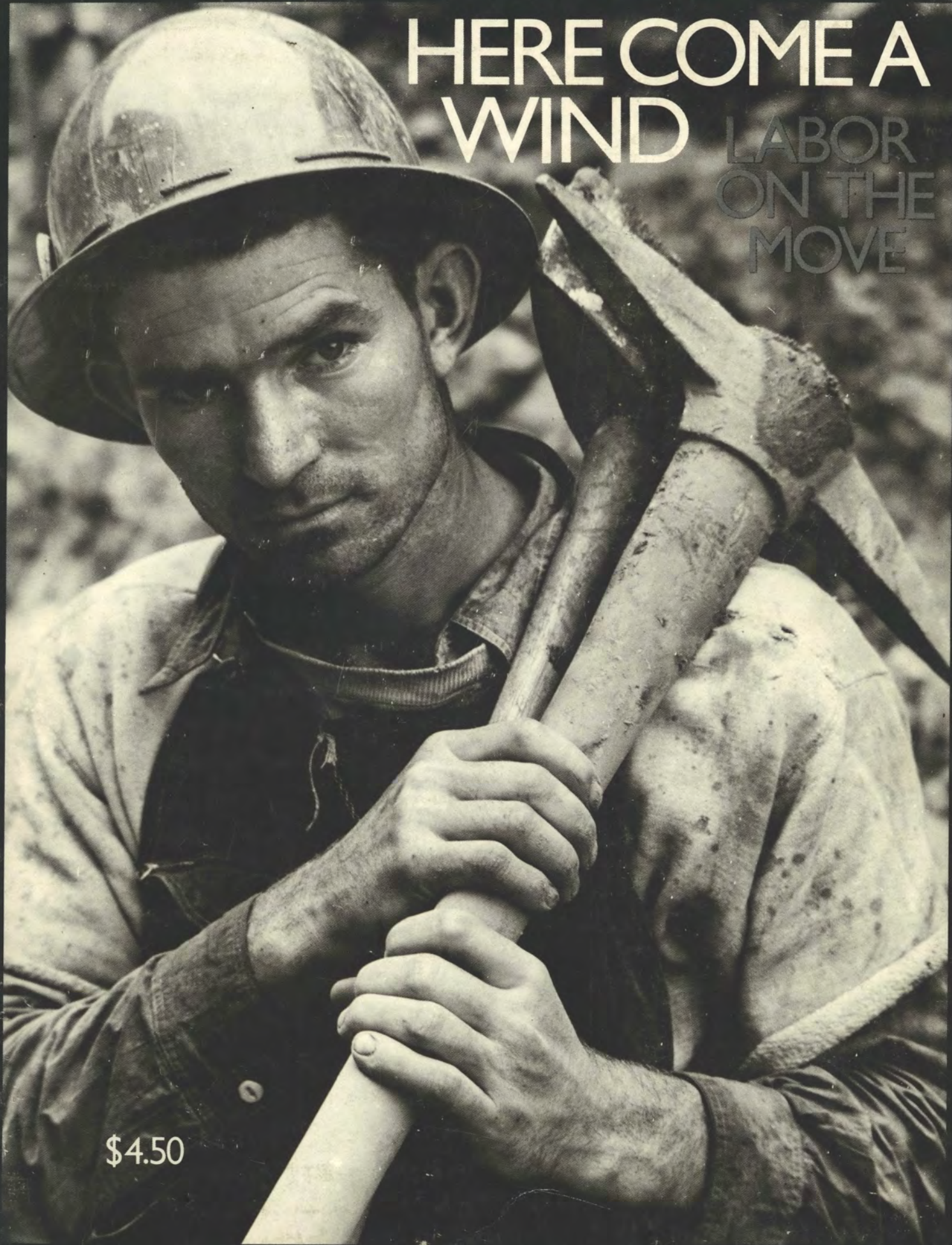


Southern Exposure

HERE COME A WIND

LABOR
ON THE
MOVE

\$4.50



"The coal operators would think they got the union crushed, but just like putting out a fire, you can go out and stomp on it and leave a few sparks and here come a wind and it's going to spread again."

— Hobart Grills
Evarts, Kentucky

Toward the end of 1931, the black dust was settling in the Harlan County, Kentucky, coal fields after one of the most bitterly fought labor struggles in our nation's history. The miners were beaten, their rank-and-file organization crushed. The epithet "Bloody Harlan" survived the day and remained a symbol for that battle and those that periodically erupted for the next half century. But the proper legacy of the Harlan wars, as the veteran Hobart Grills tells us, is not the chaotic violence but the spirit of steady resistance that smolders until the changing times fan the sparks into a new flame.

During the long Depression era, the winds of change blew all across the South — from the coal fields of Appalachia to the tenant farms of Arkansas, from the cotton mills of Gastonia to the automobile factories of Atlanta. It was a period rich in the South's peculiar blend of semi-organized rebellion, individual courage, and rank-and-file militancy; but its lessons were omitted from the history books. To rectify that insult, **Southern Exposure** published a special book-length issue on the Depression, based largely on the oral testimonies of those who were the sparks for that era's struggles. Entitled "No More Moanin'," the collection — now near the end of its second printing — has been a popular source book in union halls, university classrooms, and informal study groups.

For this sequel volume, we turn to the words of Hobart Grills to remind ourselves that in addition to the courage of individuals, it takes the right balance of external forces before a labor movement can flourish. Today, workers and organized labor in the South face an array of complicated, conflicting, nearly incomprehensible pressures. On the one hand, Jimmy Carter promises to resurrect a politics of national unity through Southern idioms of love and reconciliation; on the other hand, **Business Week** announces a second War Between the States caused by the shift of capital, jobs and people to the Southern Rim. Ironically Carter exports the virtue of tranquility as the nation's saving grace at a time when the South is infused with the automation and corporate concentration that brought alienation to the rest of the country.

For Southern workers, these conditions underscore old questions and give rise to new ones. Will the runaway shops and home-grown factories offer the same job protection and income enjoyed by

their Northern counterparts? Will unions really make a difference? What will be the relationship between identity in community and identity as an employee? What sense of personal worth and individual pride can workers expect from their labor? For those who would organize the Southern worker, the challenge to answer these questions has intensified. Trade unions in particular recognize the necessity of organizing the South before that region absorbs more runaway industries and undercuts the economic benefits of union membership in the North. But to succeed they must adapt their strategies to the peculiar strengths and demands of a culture that kept the sparks of resistance alive when there was no union at all.

In this special double issue of **Southern Exposure**, we concentrate less on what work means to Southerners as individuals (an ambitious subject in itself) than on how they respond collectively to the changing conditions of their workplace — through unions, education programs, legal initiatives, health-and-safety committees, insurgent movements, lobbying activities and organizing. There have been many victories, but while organized labor gains a greater foothold in the region, its base remains thin. Again and again we return to the dual themes: the imperative labor is under to organize the South and meet the challenge of the latest movements of capital; and the necessity of understanding and using to its advantage the cultural traditions of the South to meet the demands of Southern workers.

Labor's historic weakness in the region points to one more need which is of particular importance to us in this era of Southern-led coalitions: the need to broaden the constituency of labor advocates. Consumers, academics, journalists, young activists, religious leaders and community groups can help provide the support required for labor's voice to be heard. As with the pre-civil-rights movement activists, the isolation that labor still suffers — in the community, from other reformers, by the media, from useful information — means that each advocate stands alone and can easily be snuffed out.

In this issue, we hear from those inside and outside labor's traditional circle who are a part of an expanding network of those who appreciate and support and/or are involved in the organizing of Southern workers — from telephone operator and union official Selina Burch to historian Melton McLaurin, from safety committeeman James Reese to civil-rights activist Jim Grant, from state AFL-CIO president Bill Becker to textile worker Addie Jackson. We hope this collection will enlarge that movement and feed the wind that now stirs across the South.

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Discovering you gave me one of the finest "highs" I've had about the South since I left Atlanta in '71 after organizing some vets with VVAW. In that I'm now doing work on agribusiness imperialism and nutrition, I especially enjoyed your *Our Promised Land* issue — the best *whole* single issue of a social change periodical I've ever seen. It was organized, written and laid-out nearly perfectly in my opinion. The food, fuel and fiber section was especially well complemented by the interlock charts and the state profiles. Very concise.

Jerry Lund
Dept. of Food Science & Nutrition
Univ. of Mass.
Amherst, Mass.

I would like to subscribe to your quarterly, because we find it an excellent magazine. I am a member of a tenant union; we live in F.H.A. projects.

We are currently involved in an intense struggle to live in housing built for low-moderate income people at rents we can afford. We are members of a coalition of FHA unions in Eastern Massachusetts. Some of these unions are in the city of Boston; some are outside.

Besides being FHA developments, we are also owned and operated by the same landlord. We have successfully blocked evictions up until this year. In January 1976, in Brocton the police violently evicted a family — arresting two of the evicted families' children along with eleven other people. I was arrested last March in Weymouth, but we kept this family in their home. So far to this day they are still there.

We are currently facing conspiracy charges in Superior Court in Boston. The landlord claims tenants have conspired to deny him private ownership, and advocate the equal distribution of the wealth. We are struggling to keep our unions together, but we are being hit heavily in our pockets trying to finance court cases.

We find your magazine inspiring to our struggle, giving the struggle for unions a profound history.

Eugene J. Dailey
Brandywyne Tenants Union
East Boston, Mass.

For an authorized biography of James A. Dombrowski I would be grateful for letters, anecdotes, personal recollections, or any relevant biographical information. All will be properly acknowledged and promptly returned.

Frank Adams
P.O. Box 208
Gatesville, N.C. 27938

Having recently completed my doctoral dissertation on the subject of the coal miners insurrection in East Tennessee, 1891-93, ("The Miners Who Tore Down the Walls," UC, Berkeley, 1974) I was fascinated to read Dombrowski's interviews with people who experienced these historic events in *No More Moanin'*. It was always a mystery to me why this heroic struggle of the Tennessee miners received so little attention from labor historians. Since my field is criminology, I attempted to tell the story, as you suggested, as a history of prison labor as well as trade unionism. The entire subject of Southern prisons as an institutional force might be one which you would like to consider for some future edition.

Robert Mintz
Berkeley, Ca.

It is now approximately 28 hours since I purchased my first copy of *Southern Exposure*; I have read most of it. The experience of "digesting" your *Focus on the Media* was aroused when I saw the article on the *St. Petersburg Times*, because I was employed with the *Times* as an ad salesman from September, 1974 through June, 1975.

I thought your article was most en-





lightening. While with the *St. Petersburg Times*, I had noticed, in a very obscure light, a few of the trends you pointed out in your article. I was aware of the power of the Knight-Ridder chain, the Scripps-Howard, and the New York Times Co. Also, having moved to Asheville just a month ago, I learned that the *Citizen-Times* is a multimedia paper.

But I had no idea that so many newspaper chains existed; neither did I realize the extent to which the chains have come to control the media throughout many cities in the South and other parts of the country. Particularly interesting to me was the contents of page 57, The South's Top Chains, which was very well assembled.

I have felt for a while that those who believe that freedom of the press and dissemination of information and opinions can be ensured by federal government regulation (such as the FCC) are overlooking tendencies of the government to enforce restrictions and censors in the same way that corporate interests do. Case in point: Nelson Poynter, a man whom I admire a great deal, has been repeatedly thwarted by the FCC in his attempts to obtain a radio or television station in the St. Petersburg area.

Potentially, the government has as many, or more, dubious interests to protect as Big Business does. While the government is not motivated by profit-taking like Business is, it is nevertheless becoming more and more restrictive in its effects upon the lives of citizens. Eventually, the United States Government could use the FCC or other agencies to curtail freedom of information to the same degree that corporate interests now do.

Carey Rowland
Asheville, N.C.

Number one on the agenda — many thanks for a damn fine publication. Slowly I'm catching up on reading the back issues — *terrific*. My mother really enjoys her birthday subscription, too.

Number two — I would like to begin to educate myself on my home state and region — Southern Louisiana. I find myself incredibly ignorant of not only its current status, problems and groups or organizations seeking solutions, but also of its recent history. After reading "The South Coast Conspiracy" in *Southern Exposure's Our Promised Land*, I have written to Bill Rushton seeking the same kind of information. Can you put me in touch with any groups or publications that could help me begin to form a picture of S. Louisiana, the economic situation, the problems, the educational situation and innovation, etc.?

Cindy Lutembacher
Clinton, Tennessee

A copy of the special issue, *No More Moanin'*, sits on my breakfast table, partially read. I can only take it in small doses. I pick it up to read and am soon overcome by commingled joy and sorrow. Joy that at last these stories are being added to the public record and that it is our own people who are doing it; sorrow over the years of degradation and impoverishment that Dixians have been forced to suffer.

It has taken little, however, to convince me that the readers of *Southern Exposure* are my kindred spirits. Those who share a concern for the sufferings of their people must also experience a common desire to put an end to the cruelties of the world. In this I am at one with you and your readers.

William B. Simmons
Montreal, Canada



Because of our deep and continuing interest in the South, I have been greatly impressed by *Southern Exposure* with its blend of poetry and practicality — beauty and information. It helps us all to know the South better. I was particularly interested in the special report on textiles in the *Facing South* issue. Our union's future in the South strongly depends on the wide dissemination of information about the industry, its workers and its problems around the country. This report should be most helpful in accomplishing this goal.

Sol Stetin
Sr. Executive Vice President
Amalgamated Clothing and
Textile Workers of America

LABOR HISTORY IN BACK ISSUES OF SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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The Southern Tenant Farmers Union
UAW Sit-Down Strike, Atlanta, 1936
Oral History of Slavery
East Tennessee Coal Mining Battles
The Gastonia Textile Strike, 1929
Labor Education in the 1930s.

Vol. II, No. 1:

Evolution of a Factory-Girl Song
Music from the Brookside Mine
Florida's Farmworkers Organize

Vol. II, No. 2-3:

Alternatives for Small Farmers
Excerpt from *All God's Dangers*

Vol III, No. 4:

Tobacco Workers Face Mechanization
Textile Men: Workers, Organizers, and
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Textile Women: Three Generations in
the Mill
Overview of Changes in Textiles

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The Rebel in Me

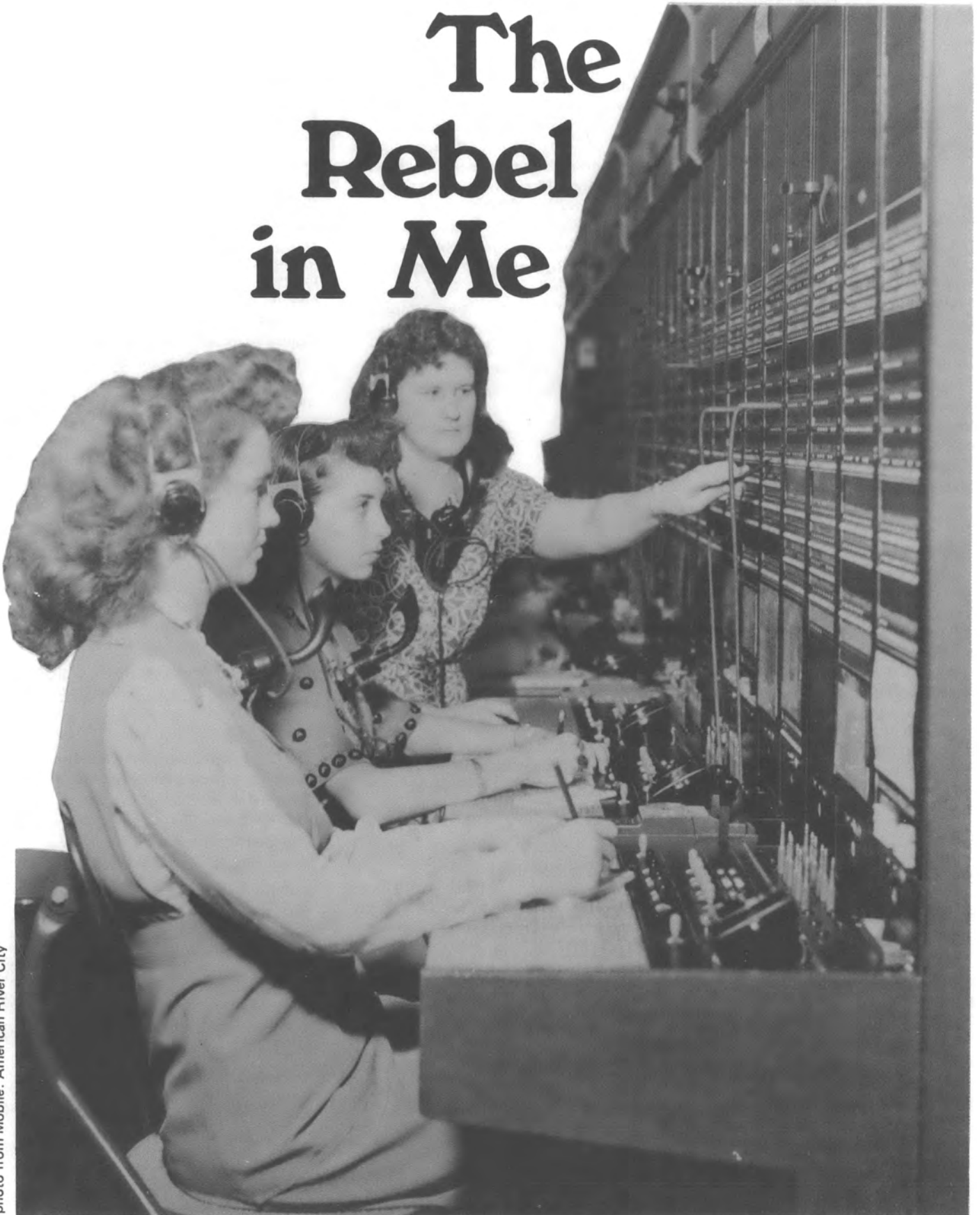


photo from Mobile: American River City

Selina Burch was a 17-year-old switchboard operator in Dublin, Georgia, when she joined the Communications Workers of America (CWA). In a town with only one movie theater, going to a union meeting was a social event, a place to meet the young men who worked in the Western Electric plant. Instead of an antagonist, she viewed her employer as a benevolent parent – “Mother” Bell. Her first strike in 1947 was “like being out of school on vacation.”

By the mid-1950s, Selina had run against the male leadership for the presidency of her local in order to get it “into a position where we would not have to take any crap again.” And she had gone through another strike where she was personally harassed by Bell Telephone and accused of committing an unfair labor practice.

Today, Selina Burch has become a top official in CWA, an administrative assistant to one of the union’s 12 district vice presidents. She regularly pushes Southern Bell to the wall in negotiating sessions, demonstrating the skills that have brought her respect from employers, politicians and other union members. She has learned a great deal about power in the years since she first asked callers, “Number, please.” As a woman, a worker, and a union leader, she learned how power worked, how to get it, and how to use it for her members – and against her enemies.

As she tells new members, the union is like a choir, dependent on no one voice, but deriving its effect from a harmonic, collective force. She believes deeply in her union but also recognizes that her voice, representing the desires of the women and black members who support her, “has shaken up CWA from top to bottom.”

Teaching workers and settling their grievances has been her work; electoral politics, her hobby and avocation. She has, in fact, gained considerable fame as an expert coordinator of phone-bank campaigning. After all, who knows better how to talk to a voter over the telephone than a telephone operator? She knows that a tightly organized union is a ready army to offer a candidate, and a politician’s friend-

ship can be a tool for accomplishing personal and organizational goals.

Her most recent “friend” is Jimmy Carter, who sought her help in the Georgia and Florida primaries and, early on, asked her to be a Carter delegate at the Democratic convention. She accepted largely because she saw that, at the Democratic mini-convention in 1974, “Jimmy Carter just stood out head and shoulders above everyone else when it came to insisting that women’s rights be written into the Democrat’s program.”

In the following interview, Selina Burch tells the story of her education as a labor leader and woman trade unionist; how, as she says, “the rebel in me came out.” It was conducted and edited by Sean Devereux, a former newspaper reporter in Florida and North Carolina and summer intern with the Institute for Southern Studies’ weekly newspaper column, “Facing South.”

I grew up in Dublin, Georgia. My father was a farmer and my mother was a homemaker. My mother died when I was 13, and I moved in with my grandmother and four old-maid aunts – three of them were schoolteachers. There was no labor background in my family at all.

I began work for Southern Bell on August 7, 1945, as an operator. I had graduated from Dublin High School and had worked in a coffee shop for about a year – there’s no labor market in Dublin, Georgia. After a year, I applied for a job with the telephone company. The chief operator had gone to school with my father, so I was put ahead of all the other applications.

In 1946, some people from Macon came to Dublin and signed us up to a union. If you were a female, you paid 75 cents a month to belong to a union, and if you were a male, you paid a dollar, I was an operator and was working eight to five every day, the best shift because of my family’s friendship with the chief operator. Suddenly, I was assigned to that horrible tour of one to ten. Someone had come along and taken my privileges away. I was young and carefree, though, 17, 18, and it really didn’t make any difference to me, that part of it.

You really became shockproof. I had been brought up in the Baptist Church where a child had to go to church twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday, Training Union and Sunday School and all that. Then, to have people that you had admired as a child, deacons that you thought were morally great people, suddenly asking you for dates on the telephone! Of course, they had no idea who they were talking to. I guess that was my first realization that the world was not made of cotton candy.

Also, right away in 1946, we obtained our first wage increase. At that time, I was making \$15 a week as an operator and I got a \$10 increase. It had a great impact on me that somebody had almost doubled my salary, but I did not understand at that time what it was all about. I had no idea what unionization meant. Pay, it meant more pay. But as for any other privileges, all it meant was that I went to the bottom of the list, because I was the junior person there.

At that time, remember, there was a manual board where you said, “number please.” There was no automatic dialing in Dublin. The manual board was what I learned on. If you’ve ever walked into a telephone company, you’ve seen all those cords being put up. It became a fascinating thing to me to see if I could put up all the cords, and then move over to another position, because I was very adept at handling telephone calls. There was one other girl in Dublin who could keep up with me, but only one. This was a challenge to me, to see how fast I could work the switchboard.

I remember the first union meeting I ever went to. Over in Macon. It was during a strike, and we wanted to see what we were striking for, but we didn’t find out. I’m not real sure that anyone in Macon knew.

The strike didn’t bother me because even though my family were schoolteachers, we had a car. I could borrow a quarter to buy a little gas, enough to get to Macon. There was only one movie in Dublin, so driving to Macon was something for us to do. The Western Electric guys were out on strike also. Everybody

would get together at meetings and we'd laugh and talk about the strike, whatever it was about.

We were a close-knit group. I guess that we were friends more because we worked together all day than because we were members of the union. Dublin was a pretty small place. We all stayed together, except for two people. When we returned to work in '47, I remember that we gave the two who had not come out on strike a pretty hard way to travel. I resented them.

It was like being out of school on vacation. In fact, the day we were supposed to return to work, I had a big date that night, what I considered at that time a big date. I called the chief operator and said that I couldn't possibly come to work because I had such a sore throat.

We were so young and naive that we did not even think of picking up the telephone and making calls. You see, with only a manual board there, if we had been militant and had known what we were doing, we could have driven Mother Bell nuts. But we did not want to inconvenience her in any way. We thought we were a big inconvenience just being out on the street. It was part of this Southern upbringing: we respect authority at all costs.

And with Dublin so small, I didn't think of "the company" as huge, nation-wide Bell Telephone Company. I thought of the company only as the people I worked with. My grandmother broke her hip during this time, and the chief operator called me at home — my grandmother's home where I was still living — to assure me that she would make sure that any calls from our number went through, even though they were having trouble keeping up on the switchboard because of the strike.

II

I was married in 1948. My husband was in the Navy, stationed in Charleston, South Carolina, and I transferred there, still an operator. Charleston did not have a manual board; everything was automatic. It was a much larger office. It took time to get acquainted. I had never lived in a town that size before.

The union was much stronger because the local was right there in

Charleston. You personally knew the local officers because they worked with you. The local president and vice president worked in the building with us. The secretary-treasurer of the local was a woman. This was the first time I had seen the union operate. What I remember is seeing meetings being held with management on grievances. With this closeness and knowing the people involved, you would hear the news as soon as the grievance meeting was over; who had won and who'd lost. I got a much better sense of what a union could do for its people.

After we had lived in Charleston for several years, I began to have marital problems. My husband was no longer in the Navy. Through this time, I began to turn more and more to the union for some way to occupy my time. I began to handbill for the local. In 1952, on a dare, I ran for local secretary-treasurer against five opponents and won. All of my opponents were women, because at that time in Charleston, you have to remember, the woman could only be secretary-treasurer. They let the males have the president and vice president — you know, be the spokesperson.

Anyway, I won on the first ballot. I had never even been to shop steward school, so I knew nothing about the technical parts of the contract — how to handle a grievance or any of that. I did know that we were not as well organized as we should have been. From the start, I enjoyed the battle of wits across the table from the company. I was always pushing to see how much I could win.

I was divorced by this time and giving all of my time to the union. I was very dedicated to seeing that we became the best local in South Carolina — having the most political contributions, the best settled grievances, being more active in the community. I saw what you could do, if you just made up your damn mind to do it.

It's a thousand wonders that I didn't get fired, that the people who followed me, that we all didn't get fired. We would do stupid things like going into the company cafeteria and setting all the vacant chairs up on a table so, unless you had a union card, we wouldn't let you sit at our table. I wasn't angry with the non-union people, just determined that they would join. We laughed it off in the

cafeteria, but we still wouldn't let them sit there. The company threatened to fire us all, but we told them that if supervisors could save seats for their boyfriends, we could save a chair for any friend of ours. Except, (laughing) we were saving 20 chairs.

We came from a 55 percent local into a 92 percent, tightly organized local in short of nothing.

By this time, I was no longer an operator. I had been promoted to an "instructor." The company had me teaching new people who came to work as operators. The job meant more money and it got me away from the board. But more than that, it gave me a direct advantage in organizing for the union. Two new people showed up every other Monday morning and, of course, they were eager to learn because they wanted to stay. If they didn't join, they didn't learn.

I didn't come right out and say, "Look, I'm not going to teach you to be an operator if you don't join the union." But I would tell them about the union and tell them that I was an officer and what benefits there were. They'd have to take every break and lunch hour with me. New students always want to get along with whoever is teaching them. To them, I was the authority. So they joined the union.

There was only one girl that ever reported me to the company for my "tactics." She told the chief operator that I had threatened her. I laughed and said, "Yeah, I carry a gun and a knife with me at all times. You believe that don't you?" That ended that. The girl did not last.

I had learned one important thing about working for somebody: be better than everyone else. One thing that I always had going for me was that I was a producer. The company left me alone because of my ability to operate a switchboard, my ability to teach and my ability to get people to follow me. They had no gripes about my work. It has always been my belief that the best steward, or the best local officer, is the person who doesn't have the grievances himself. That person can become a leader without having to submit to anything from the company. Because of my ability to work and my ability to lead, I didn't have to ask the company for anything.

Also, for the first time in the history of the Charleston local, the company came to the officers of the

local and wanted us to help them in the city United Fund Drive. We were able to select people who were the leaders in different departments and we collected more for the United Fund – Community Chest, they called it then – than had ever been collected in the history of Charleston.

I remember that we were having trouble finding a place for the CWA to meet, except in the Tobacco Workers' Hall, which was down by the railroad tracks in pretty dangerous territory. Through working with the Community Chest, I met the man who ran the Jewish Community Center in Charleston. They offered us their hall, free of charge. It was funny, because later, during the '55 strike, after I was gone, the Jewish Community Center became the CWA strike headquarters. They put pressure on the Center, saying they would cut off their Community Chest funds, but the guy at the Jewish Center just reminded them that CWA had collected a lot of that money. So the union kept on meeting at the Center.

III

I guess the rebel in me really began to come out somewhere between 1952 and '54 when I saw that, or felt that, I was doing all the work and a male

was getting all the credit. In 1954, I decided that I would run for local president.

There were no women local presidents in South Carolina, nor in Georgia then. The men in the local came to me and told me that I could remain secretary-treasurer of the local as long as I wanted. They promised always to vote for me for secretary-treasurer, but they said they would never vote for a woman for president.

I said, "I can count also, and I know that there are more women than men in this local so just come along to the election." I won the thing hands down.

That was in the fall of '54, when in this district which then covered nine states, there were three females on the CWA staff. Sometime earlier that year, the guy who was in charge of the nine Southeastern states, Bill Smallwood (he later became the International secretary-treasurer of the union) came to a state meeting in Columbia, S.C. I was the one presenting the local reports. I did not know it at the time, but later on I found out that when he heard me that night, he said to one of his people, "That's my next staff person."

In the early part of '55 when I had been local president for a few months, one of the three females on CWA staff

married some guy and left the union. I had built a well organized local. I had contributed money to PAC (the CIO political action committee) over and above union dues. Our local had a good record of settling grievances. So, I was offered the staff job.

I had never really thought about being on CWA staff. I was just trying to get the Charleston local into a position where we would not ever have to take any crap again, that we would be so well known in the community and so respected that no one would dare say anything to us.

I told the people at CWA headquarters in Atlanta that I didn't know if a staff job was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and that I would go home and think about it. You see how naive I was: people were dying for that job, people had worked a long long, time for a staff job and here I was, asking to think about it. It was an accident. I was in the right place at the right time, when a woman left the staff. I thought it over: I enjoyed teaching and teaching in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana was going to be my assignment. In about a week, I called them and said I would accept. I was 27, the youngest person ever on the CWA staff.

On March 14, 1955, CWA struck the company. I hadn't even moved



photo from Mobile: American River City

into my office in Jackson, Mississippi. I always laugh and say that CWA threw me into the fish pond to see if I would sink or swim. Instead of to Mississippi, I was sent to New Orleans to administer the CWA defense fund. When I arrived in New Orleans, I had with me a check for \$25,000. All the strike funds were being set up in personal accounts, so the company would not find out how much we had and how much we were spending.

The strike went on for 72 days. In that time, I paid out \$699,000 in the state of Louisiana for bread and beans and house payments and car payments. We did not give any money to strikers, but we would not let them lose a house or a car. We had 10 million little problems with the defense fund, like, maybe a local buying something that was not authorized under the defense fund rules of the international union. We'd have to refuse them and spend a great deal of time, explaining why to the local.

I was living in a hotel, not getting much sleep at all. It is terribly hot in New Orleans in March, April and May. I felt very grimy and dirty all

the time. And it was still a male versus female thing. They assumed that women were more adept at doing the clerical work and taking all the garbage from the locals, so that is what I was doing.

But, also, I figured I'd come a long way from saying "number, please" in Dublin, Georgia, just three years before. Working in the strike was exciting to me. I learned that women could get by with more than the males. We could stir the scabs up and police would threaten us, but there was no violence. CWA had it set up where the women would picket from six a.m. to six p.m. and the men would take up the signs at six p.m. to six a.m. The scabs — a lot of them were Tulane students — would come out of the building on the hour and on the half-hour and the women, we were taking the signs at five minutes to the hour until five minutes after.

I decided that we needed some lively things to get the spirits of the strikers built up. We made up songs, like, "Oh, when the scabs come crawling out.... Oh, Lord, I don't want to be in that number, when the scabs

come crawling out," and "Old Ma Bell, she ain't what she used to be... a couple of months ago." We would sing with the police surrounding us. We told the police that we would not get involved with them in violence. One night we had a parade, 10,000 people in the parade. You could see the scabs peering out the windows. The street had been empty when they went to work. They must have been petrified looking out at 10,000 people. But, after the strike, we had only four people fired out of 5,000 members of the New Orleans local. That was because of these kids getting their emotions placed in pranks and singing instead of in violence.

The CWA workers in New Orleans were just looking for someone to lead them and once we got the morale up and the spirits up, there was no problem. You'll find that people will strike over a principle sooner and longer than they will over money. We wanted maternity leave in the contract and we wanted the right to arbitrate any suspension and the right of any union member not to have to cross a *bona fide* picket line. Seventy-two days later we got those things.

There was bitterness left on both sides. After this '55 strike, we had the biggest set of arbitration hearings that have ever been held between a company and a union in the history of the labor movement. Two hundred and forty-eight people were fired from Southern Bell alone. I think there were some 40 fired in Louisiana. There were four arbitrators after the strike and all four were put on a black list by Bell Telephone and not a one of them was ever used in any arbitration hearings again, anywhere in the Bell System. It wasn't like the '47 thing, when I was back in Dublin. There was a real split after the '55 strike. The company and CWA were no longer one big happy family.

I felt the bitterness personally. I watched the company's reaction to the strike. The company would send down supervisors every night to watch us, you know, and say nasty things to us. Their emotions were very high; they didn't even like our singing and joking around. They didn't think our people would last that long. The company had these movie cameras going. They had spotlights on me everywhere I would move in the crowd. They must have reels of movies of me. Of all the



Twenty years later, Selina accepts thanks from Georgia Governor Busbee and Lt. Gov. Zell Miller for the CWA's campaign help.

staff people in the nine Southeastern states, I was the only one accused of an unfair labor practice. The company charged me with not carrying a picket sign correctly, swinging it too fast, turning on my heel too fast. Nothing came of it, though, with the labor board.

CWA asked me to stay in Louisiana after the strike. We had a number of locals in Louisiana that thought they could do without a national union; they were fighting national and district headquarters all the time – Monroe, Shreveport, Lake Charles. The district vice president carved out those locals and said, “Here you are, Selina.” I had the central, northern and southwestern part of the state, but I had to live in New Orleans, because that’s where the company’s headquarters were. It was a big assignment. For example, the Monroe local had 32 counties in its jurisdiction. I had a title, “North Louisiana Director,” and I was going to set the woods on fire.

All the locals in the state had male presidents. There was a certain amount of resentment. No matter how well I did, they were always going to think, some of them, that a male could have done it better.

When I was hired, when I first agreed to come on staff, I’ll never forget, I was taken into a room by the assistant district director. He began to say to me...he was kind of a reserved guy and didn’t really know how to approach what he wanted to say. Finally, I caught his eye and I asked him right out, “Are you trying to tell me about the birds and the bees?” And he says, “Yes.” And I said, “I know all about the birds and the bees.”

He said to me, “But you, with your youth, you are going to be confronted with so many situations.” And I said, “No, I won’t. I know exactly how to handle it.”

He thought that I would be put in difficult situations because all the local presidents then were males, that I wouldn’t know exactly how to handle them. But I did.

I believe the old saying, “You don’t get your honey, where you make your money.” I had one basic thing that I required of a local president. The first time I met a local president, he had one of two options: he could take me home for dinner; or, he could bring his wife and family and

we’d go out to dinner. I did not have a family of my own, but I knew something about families. I had learned that I had to build this type of relationship with the family. If you wanted a local president to really do a job, he had to have an understanding wife and a trusting wife. There were many nights when I was out with that local president until two and three in the morning. I built this type of relationship for myself and for the union. There was a great love and a great closeness between me and the wives of local presidents. I still get graduation invitations from children all over Louisiana.

IV

I had learned early enough that the one thing that made Mother talk was money and whoever controlled the purse strings would have the biggest influence with the company. In Louisiana, the Public Service Commission sets the pay telephone rates, and – what’s more important – the intrastate long distance rates. I decided that CWA should put an effort into electing friendly Public Service Com-

missioners. There were three commissioners, one on our side and one who voted most often for the company. The third man was from near New Orleans and he was not an enemy, but he was not what we considered a friend to CWA, either. That was the race we worked on, the swing vote commissioner’s election. After we had made a difference in the election of that commissioner, CWA came to have great influence with the Commission.

Well, it came about that the company was seeking a \$20 million rate increase. Until that time, Public Service hearings where telephone rates were being considered were attended only by company officials. I got notice to all local presidents and officers in my territory, and we started going to Baton Rouge to attend every Commission hearing. This got the local officers close to the commissioners and it made the company realize that we were to be reckoned with.

So, the Commission voted: instead of a \$20 million increase, the company got a \$10 million decrease. The pay station reverted back to a nickel and is still a nickel today. The guy who



photo by Louis Schwartz

Selina Burch (left) helps present union contribution to Charleston Community Chest, October, 1954.

was in charge of Southern Bell in Louisiana, the vice president, he was shipped back to Atlanta.

The company brought in a guy named Homer Bartee from Kentucky to be vice president. He came with a pretty bad reputation for being hard on the union. Of course, he was going to set the woods on fire, too. Right away, he refused to sit down with us and deal with our grievances.

CWA is neutral in most rate increase fights. But in Louisiana at this time, 200 union members had been laid off, because of the rate decrease. I decided to take a risk: the union was all for the increase, but I wouldn't give a CWA endorsement, until the company came and asked me for it.

Bartee held an executive session and said that he'd never ask the goddam Communications Workers of America for a thing.

"Fine," I told his people. "I hope him all the luck in the world with his rate increase."

We sat through another rate hearing, and he lost it. The company was denied their intrastate long distance rate increase again. They decided that they would appeal to the Supreme Court.

I had an unlisted telephone number, but Bartee managed to find it. He wanted to know what I could do to help him. I told him I didn't know, but we got permission to file a brief in the Supreme Court in support of the increase. The court upheld the Commission, but the CWA brief was the only one mentioned in the opinion when it came down. After that, there came to be a very good relationship between Bartee and myself.

So when emotions died down and I was able to sit down and talk with the company, CWA accomplished new things that could not have been accomplished without building that kind of relationship. My big problem was with the North Louisiana locals. I was learning that it all tied together — your relationship with the company and your relationship with the locals — but I had no idea in the beginning how it would work out. I was playing it one step at a time...praying.

The Monroe local was the worst. You have to remember that from Alexander north is the Bible Belt. In the early 1960's all through that north section, everybody was calling every-

body else a Communist. Chet Huntley, David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite were all suddenly Communists. There was an organization in North Louisiana — a sort of John Birch sort of group — that was taking up money for General Walker and trying to have *Life* and *Look* magazines banned as Communist. You couldn't talk reason with people about integration at that time.

Down in New Orleans, I had involved CWA in several school board elections where integration was a problem. Some of the New Orleans school board members who were liberal were being accused of being Communists. I picked several contests where it meant something to the community and ran a CWA phone bank for the liberal candidate. I did it more for the children of CWA members than for any other reason. So the Monroe local knew where I stood. I had had a rough time at one of their meetings where I talked their members out of donating a thousand dollars to this crazy organization. To them, every liberal thinking person was a Communist.

One of the loudmouths in that local was a cable splicer who had been suspended for falsifying work reports. The local officers asked him if he wanted CWA to process a grievance in his behalf. He told them, hell, no, that he was going to work, union be damned.

Then, the company fired him. Now, he's without a job at all, and the guy wants the union to help him. So the local tried to process the grievance, but they allowed the time limit to expire. Everybody in management all over the state was laughing up their sleeve. Here this guy had been fired and the Monroe local couldn't even get the grievance in the mail on time. Everybody in the state knew about it. Even this crazy John Birch organization was trying to get involved in the thing. The local officers were all excited and didn't know what to do. They were calling me by now.

I called the personnel guy for Southern Bell at Monroe and asked him to tear up the envelope that had the postmark on it and accept the grievance. He wouldn't do it. He was having too big a time embarrassing the local.

So, I called Bartee and asked him if he would take me to lunch. At that

stage of the game, I had decided that I wanted this cable splicer reinstated with no loss of service. I didn't just want the grievance reinstated, because if the union had arbitrated the grievance we could not have won it. The guy was guilty as sin. While Bartee and I were eating lunch, I told him what I wanted.

"Well, hell, no damn problem. Is that all you want?" he asked me.

I told him, "Before you give me a fast answer, Bartee, remember everybody in your company in Louisiana is laughing up their sleeve over this."

He said, "I don't give a damn. I'm the vice president of the company and I tell you that the man will go back to work next Monday morning."

The company personnel man was very embarrassed by all this. He tried to fangango with me, trying to get me to accept something else, anything else in the whole state. Bartee had already told him to put the union man back to work, see, and it made the personnel executive look bad. I just said, "I haven't asked *you* for anything. If that cable splicer's not going back to work on Monday, just tell Homer Gray Bartee to call me."

The man went back to work. That one thing brought the Monroe local back together, and brought them back into the international. I didn't have any more trouble with them after that. In fact, at that time, the president of CWA said that if we had the type of relationship with the Public Service Commission in other states that we had in Louisiana, we would be very fortunate and not have to work so hard. I was riding high then. I was showing the world that I knew a thing or two.

V

I did a lot of teaching. Organizing and teaching comes before politics. You've got to have members supporting you, before you can start involving the union in politics. I was forever going around from one little town to the other, spending the day with the local president, making sure that he knew the members in his town, that he knew their problems, that everybody had a job steward. I had to be sure in my own mind that their job stewards were the caliber of people that would be leading them and not someone that

was using the union to better himself first, just looking for the prestige, because there is a lot of prestige in being a job steward.

Politics was something else beyond organizing, but it all ties together. You had to give the members something that they could be proud of and wanted to hang on to. You see, for most of the members there's only one thing the union does: handle their grievances. That's the most visible thing. It was hard at first to get union members involved in the Public Service Commission election because that is not an exciting race. I had to work with the kids day and night, showing them what could be accomplished if the union was active in this election. I'd sit them down and start in on it, "Look, for you as an operator, or you as a repairman, or service rep., the Public Service election is really the most important race there is." Once they saw that their working conditions and their livelihoods were better, much better, than

they had been before CWA developed a relationship with the Commission, the members became proud and worked very hard at politics.

When I went to Louisiana, the locals that were put under me never contributed to COPE (the AFL-CIO's national political arm, the Committee for Political Education). Every year after I was assigned to Louisiana, I got a plaque at the International Convention because every one of my locals was 100 percent.

You have to show members a reason to give money to COPE. By law, any money contributed to COPE is over and above union dues and must be hand-collected.

But, see, COPE can only do so much. You can have a state AFL-CIO leader like Victor Bussie in Louisiana who's very active, but unless you have the contacts yourself, you can't bring pressure to bear to help *your* people in CWA. The state body president wouldn't understand the interrelations

and inner workings of the telephone company in the way that I did.

Another thing: I realized at that time that CWA had something special to offer a candidate in any election. Many of our people were professionals at one thing — they spent eight hours a day talking to people over the telephone. An operator gets so adept at listening, when she talks to a voter for a few minutes, she can almost tell you how that person is going to vote.

I was looking for a way in which CWA could get the most mileage from its own membership. The phone bank was made to order. A union leader needs to place his people where the candidate can see them. And the union members need to feel a part of the campaign. Having me collect money from members and get my picture in the paper handing a check to the candidate doesn't do either of those things. COPE originally set up the phone bank system, but let me tell you in my opinion what's wrong with

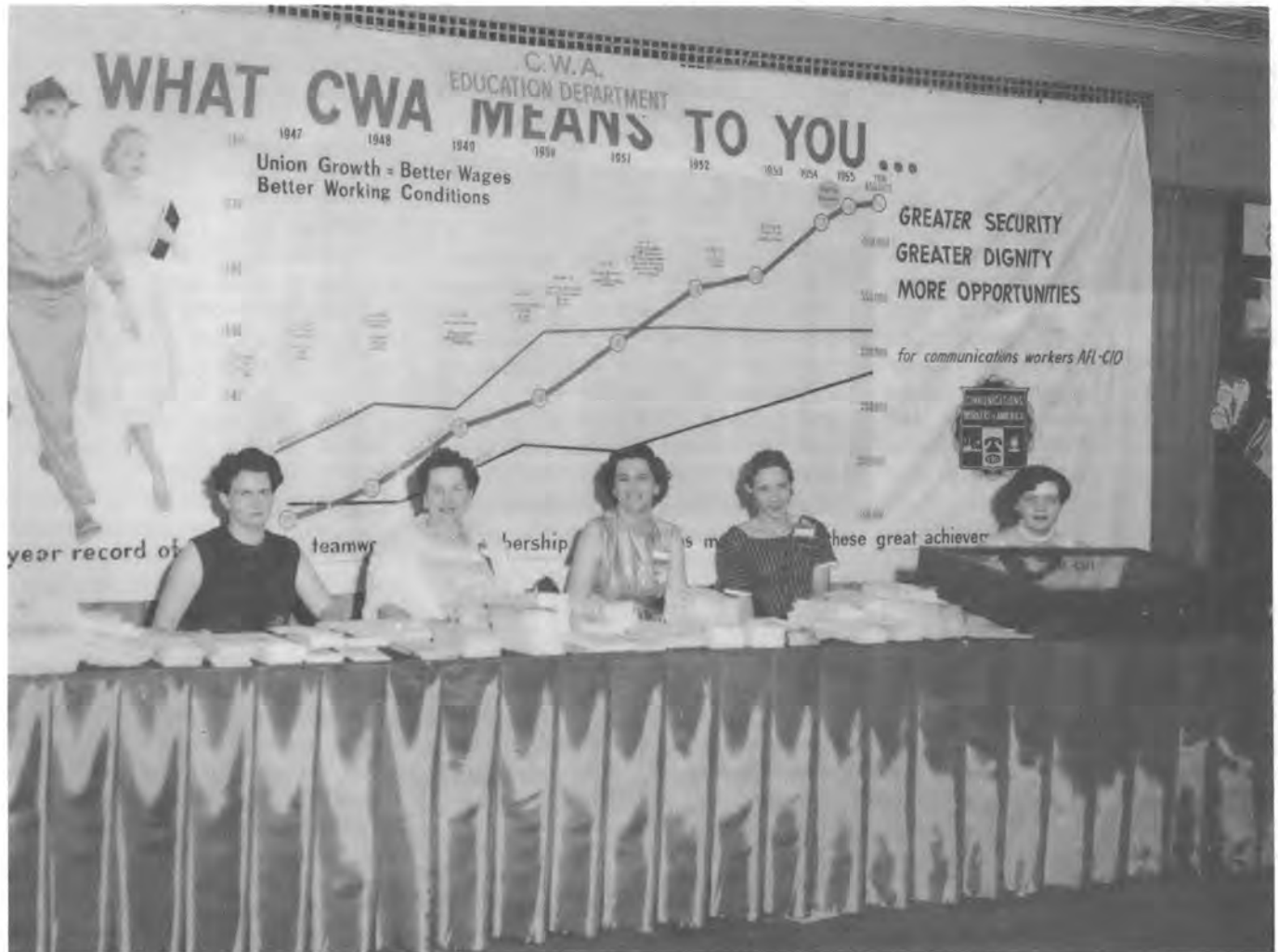


photo by Press Picture Service

Selina (far right) at the CWA convention in 1956.

the COPE thing. They have it set up where union members call only union members. In my honest opinion, you don't get the kind of benefit for your union that you get working directly for the campaign. The members don't feel nearly as close to the campaign. I've tried to tell that to COPE.

When CWA ran a phone bank in Louisiana, we first got a list of every registered voter in the precinct, along with his address and telephone number. You just go down, calling everyone on the list. An operator doesn't identify herself as a union member. She just says, "I'm a volunteer working for the election of so and so. . ."

Where people make a mistake on a phone bank is trying to put too much garbage into each call. And our kids know this. All you need to say is, just a very short thing. I've made it up over the years through trial and error, "Hello, my name is Selina Burch. I'm a volunteer working for the election of Hale Boggs for Congress. I'm calling to remind you that three weeks from today is election day and I hope you can go to the polls and will consider voting for Congressman Boggs. Do you need a ride to the polls to vote for Congressman Boggs?"

That's three times that you've got the candidate's name over to that called person. You've got something into the back of that voter's mind. Somewhere during your little spiel, that person is going to give some indication to the CWA volunteer, "That's my man, I'm with you," or "I have no use for him." Depending on how the person reacts, the volunteer puts a code down on the list beside the voter's name, then the campaign people know what person they want to get to the polls on election day.

There is nothing technical or mechanical about it. Our people were valuable to the candidate because of their ability to listen and understand how the voter is responding. And telephone operators knew how to keep it simple. It's not mysterious. Just telephones in a room where people are comfortable and where they're seated close together so they enjoy the companionship — if they get somebody nasty on the phone, they can turn to the next person and say, "Guess what that s.o.b. said to me?" and laugh it off. I've seen it tried at home and people get too discouraged. It's a team effort.



photo by Ray Airatti

Selina directs the phone-bank operation for Hale Boggs as telephone operators go down the precinct lists of voters.

In 1960, Hale Boggs saw a CWA phone bank in operation. He became fascinated with it. He had never seen anything like it. We started experimenting in that election: we would leave one precinct alone and we would call down the list in the next precinct. The results were astonishing.

Anyway, in 1960, CWA ran a phone bank operation for Boggs and John Kennedy in Louisiana. Boggs was Whip of the House then. CWA always had a big shindig in Washington when the Congressmen were sworn in. Before 1960, Boggs had never been to a CWA function in his life. After we worked with him at home in Louisiana in 1960, he came and he and Lindy (Mrs. Boggs) stayed late until they could see Joe Beirne (then president of CWA) to tell him about how great the Communication Workers of America were. Beirne called me from Washington the next morning to thank me. Boggs and Beirne became very dear friends after that.

I was very active in the Women's Movement for Kennedy, speaking for him at many AFL-CIO programs. Through that campaigning, and working for Boggs, I got to know many community leaders in New Orleans, people who probably had hangups where labor leaders were concerned, but by working together in a campaign, you get to them personally and erase any bad ideas they may have about "la-

bor people."

Through this political and community work, I became friends with a man who owned a brokerage firm in New Orleans and who was on the board of directors of the New York Stock Exchange. In Louisiana, general elections are held on Saturday. Since his offices were closed on election days, then, this stock broker would turn over the brokerage house to CWA, all those free phones. We patched in the switchboard and it would be all ours. All in all, politics became a powerful tool I could use to make a place for the union in the state, for individual members and for the whole organization.

Working for Boggs did not have the direct bearing that working in a Public Service Commission election would have. But the company did have great respect for Boggs. You have to remember, the company also understands power and where the power is. Anyone who becomes Whip is in a very powerful position. Boggs generally lined up with labor on bills we wanted passed. I think that some of the company officials, men I worked with, were envious of my friendship with Hale and Lindy, but they could have gone out and worked for him just the same as we did.

While I was in Louisiana, and even after I was called to Atlanta in 1963, CWA ran phone banks for Boggs every



Rep. Boggs expresses his appreciation to CWA members in 1968 when his civil rights votes almost cost him the election.

time he ran; for Lindy after Congressman Boggs was killed; for Lyndon Johnson; different governors' races; mayors' elections in various cities; state legislature elections. I set up phone banks and gave speeches to the membership in all these campaigns.

I learned many, many years ago, that a union could sit and negotiate a contract and have the best contract that anybody could ever have but one stroke of a pen could take everything away from you. If you did not have some say in political races, if you did not elect the right people, this could happen to you overnight. Congress could pass a law tomorrow, outlawing all unions; the President could sign it. Where would you be then?

VI

I came to Atlanta in 1963 on a temporary assignment. All of my jobs have been "temporary." I came over for a month to relieve a guy who was arguing executive-level grievances with the company. After three months had gone by, at the end of each month they'd ask me to stay another month — the vice president offered me a promotion if I would leave Louisiana and come to the Atlanta office permanently. They started tugging on my heart strings, telling me how much the members needed me settling their grievances in Atlanta. All this garbage

about how the women in the union would now have a spokesperson at headquarters, how it was the first time that a woman had been given the "privilege" of settling grievances at that high a level. What they really wanted was somebody who would work 16 hours a day on all the grievances that had piled up. They were so far behind when I came to Atlanta. I was spending every night in a hotel room, just reading through the backlog of grievances. From March through December, I handled, at the executive level, 510 grievances.

You always have to remember that if you are a woman, it's twice as hard. They want you to work, but only at the job they've got laid out for you to do. If you go beyond that, and get into something on your own, then you are "aggressive." You start hearing, "You're a throat cutter," "You've changed," "You're not what you used to be."

I decided: well, then, if I'm an aggressive bitch, I'm an aggressive bitch. I didn't care. I was aggressive on the side of the members and that's what I was there for. As far as most members are concerned, the union does one thing: fight for their grievances. I honestly feel that any member who has been discharged or suspended or denied a promotion deserves his day in court all the way up through the grievance procedure. That's the only

avenue he or she has. I feel strongly that you go as hard as you can when you are handling grievances.

In June of 1967, a CWA area director named R.B. Porch was elected vice president of District 3. That's when my life took a backward step. I had strongly supported Porch's opponent.

My first assignment under Porch was to talk with the blacks who worked for Southern Bell in our district and bring them into the union. That was fine with me. But for all his trying to portray himself as a free-thinking person, Porch never really wanted me to work too hard at organizing blacks. And he had an assistant, L.L. Bolick, who didn't like it at all. I did the work the vice president wanted me to do, and all I got for it was cut to ribbons.

You have to understand, before 1965, blacks worked as janitors and elevator operators. When Southern Bell started hiring blacks as switchboard operators, the phones in the CWA office were ringing off the wall. Members of the union were demanding that we stop it, hollering that if niggers came to work, they were going to walk off their jobs.

My answer was always the same: you have the right to walk off your job, but the union will not protect you if you do. Then, when blacks began to show up at union meetings and voting in elections, my *home* phone began ringing all night. Members calling to shout "nigger lover" into the phone and hang up. It would have been hard enough, if we had been in it together, if I had been getting any support from the union vice president and his people, but I wasn't. It got to where the first thing I would look for when I came home in the evening would be two double martinis.

Porch had very little vision and his assistant, Bolick, had less. Porch wanted to be a big shot but he never knew how to do the job to get there. He wanted me to build a name for him, but he and Bolick had the idea that you can do union work without ever leaving the office and mixing with the members. They forgot that any power we had *came* from the members. You have to involve the membership in anything you do — not just votes and money, either. The members have to work in it, whatever it is you are doing.

Porch and Bolick would not allow me to go out and teach in the locals,

because they thought that once I had been teaching in a local, that local would belong to me. Union work is not 8:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. work. That's all I heard about, though. "Why did you come in at 9:15, Ms. Burch?" "Where have you been all afternoon, Ms. Burch?" "Why have you not turned in a vacation slip, Ms. Burch?" Have you ever worked for someone who takes pleasure telling you that he is your boss every chance he gets, just to hear himself say it?

I had always been my own woman. In Louisiana when I saw something that needed to be done for the union, I went ahead and did it, never mind if it was 8:45 in the morning or midnight. Now, every time I did something, they struck me down for it. Bolick started slipping memos about my attitude into my personnel file — the secretaries were my friends and they would tell me what was going on. I was threatened with discharge by both Porch and Bolick.

It got worse and worse. By 1969, I was drinking more than was good for me. My health was falling apart. In early 1970, I was in the hospital in Atlanta for a month. These men had no compassion. The whole time I was in the hospital, my secretary was the only one in the district office who called me. The only one that gave a damn. She sent flowers. Those s.o.b.'s went the whole time without calling.

While I was in the hospital, I made up my mind that I was going to do something about it. I could have quit and gotten another job, but I had a lot of benefits built up in CWA, retirement, and fringe benefits. And, I'm not made that way that I could just walk off from it. Maybe it's my craziness, but I felt I should stay and fight them. I felt strongly that one day the members would understand how these guys were and change things.

In the meantime, Lindy and Hale Boggs had told Andrew Young about me. Young had been an assistant to Martin Luther King and was now running for Congress. In 1971, Young asked me to run a phone bank for his campaign. The district office had nothing to do with my work in that election. I worked for Young's campaign, because I liked Young. He is an intelligent man. I worked for him very quietly, though. I had to sneak off time to do it. I wasn't about to bother to sit down and explain to Porch and

Bolick how my working for Young could benefit the union. They wouldn't have cared anyway, unless there was some way they would have gotten credit for it, after all the work was done. It would not have helped me any that Young was black. Anyway, Young won and that was that.

Then, in '73, (then Atlanta Mayor) Sam Massell had taken the check-off away from AFSCME. There was a garbage strike. Most of the union members out on strike were black. While Massell was trying to break the strike, Vice-mayor Maynard Jackson had walked the picket line with the sanitation workers. So, when Jackson announced that he was going to run against Massell, CWA sent a guy down from Washington to meet him and see if CWA wanted to support him.

Porch had decided that I knew how to give a good party. He asked me if I would prepare a cocktail party for Maynard Jackson and the CWA man from Washington. The party was going fine and after a while, Jackson got started talking about his campaign. I had just come into the room, carrying a tray or something or other and I heard him say, "If there is any expert on political campaigning in the world, then she is standing here with us."

I was thinking, "Oh, God, don't say me. I'm in enough trouble already."

Of course, that's who he requested. The union was more than happy to have me work for Jackson's election. He had promised to give AFSCME back the check-off and he did. That was how I came to be assigned to work for Maynard Jackson.

When Jackson won, he appointed me to the Civil Service Board. That's when the fly hit the ointment. The first and third Thursday of every month, I had to be at Board meetings. Bolick didn't like my being out of the office. He wanted me where he could watch over me, where I wouldn't make any more friends. He went to Porch and they decided I was spending too much time with the Board. Two days a month! No thought for the good it was doing CWA, my being there where everybody in the world could see CWA represented on the most politically important board in the city. They decided to try to force me to resign from the Board. Bolick wrote me a formal

letter demanding that I spell out what the duties of a Civil Service Board member were. I told him he could call City Hall. Then, I wrote my own letter: I charged CWA with sex discrimination.

Well, right away, Washington sent down a man to try to smooth things over. But that wasn't going to happen. In the meantime, a group of women — women I had known over the years in the union — had gotten together at a CWA convention in Miami and formed a Women's Movement in CWA. They elected me the chairperson. They didn't know what I was going through, my personal problems in Atlanta. All they knew was that I was a woman with their same point of view who didn't mind telling the men in the union to go to hell when it was necessary. It put the union in a bind that I was head of the women's group.

Before any of this could be settled, it came time for elections. Usually, a regional vice president stays in office for as long as he wishes. Until he is 65, usually. Because he has all the travel expenses and any excuse he needs to visit the local officers and campaign right before the election. That's the only time Porch paid any attention to the locals, and then only to the officers.

Porch, though, had made one *big* mistake. A year or so before all this, he decided that I should take over the educational program, a leadership school that CWA runs at the University of Georgia. He didn't give a damn about the school; he didn't look over my shoulder and left me to run it however I wanted. When I was assigned to run it, the district office was only allowing 45 people into the program from 95 locals. I opened it up to as many members as the classroom would hold, about 135. Most of the members who came to the school were young, and they were tired of hearing about COPE and organizing, community services and so on and so forth. They had heard all that. They were looking for something lively, something that meant something to them. I wanted to give them that, but at the same time, give them some reason to want to work for the union. I moved things around so that the school was teaching psychology, sex discrimination, race relations, things like that in addition to the usual.

I expected that some good would

come out of that teaching, but I had no idea it would turn out the way it did. I was just trying to involve the members.

I may not know much, but I do know a little something about politics. I knew that I couldn't run for district vice president myself. The union wasn't ready for that. CWA members looked upon Porch as *the* politician, back-slapping, "God-damn, how-ya-doing, greatest guy since Seven-Up" kind of politician. Unbeatable. There was a guy who was the area director of Georgia and Florida, Allen Willis. Willis is a very down-to-earth kind of fellow. People who had been in CWA for a long time didn't think that a guy like Willis could touch Porch in an election.

Well, Willis won. The way it happened was funny. It was very close. I bought \$44 worth of buttons and streamers and led a little parade around the convention floor, hoping for, hell, 10 more votes. That's how close it was, right down to the wire. The people who voted for Willis at the national convention, those delegates, many of them were the people from the black locals and the kids who had gone to the leadership school. The women and the blacks made the difference and a friend of mine in Washington told me the other day that CWA is still shaken all the way to the top by that election.

Now, I am Willis' administrative assistant. Bolick reports to me. It kills him just to have to come in to ask me for a favor, or for advice. I guess I could make him punch a time clock every morning, but I'm just not like that anymore.

Porch and Bolick thought I was screwed up, a nut. But crazy or not, I never did forget that little telephone operator out there who is over-supervised to begin with and here the company goes and runs in a speed-up program on her. We just had a meeting today: the company is trying to bring in paid directory assistance in Florida. That'll mean laying off information operators. If I don't do something about that, I'm nothing. I've got no use. I may have gone after power, but I never forgot where it was coming from.

Porch forgot and he's out. For now. But I hear he's travelling around, talking to people about the next election.



A typical class attending the union's week-long education conferences



photo by Merkle Press

Selina addresses the Concerned Women for Advancement Conference



with Bill Turner, pres. of Daytona Beach local, during seminar break

“If I Could Go Back...”

interview and editing by Groesbeck Parham and Gwen Robinson



Fairfield, Alabama, is a company town, one of 17 residential areas near Birmingham built by the United States Steel Corporation. Nearly everyone who lives here works –or has worked – in US Steel’s local mills or mines.

Dobbie Sanders is one of those former employees. Now 85 years old, Dobbie spent more than a quarter century working for US Steel, and the years have reshaped his body. His eyes are blurry; his feet, covered with callouses; his fingers, thick and rough – one with a tip missing.

Sanders lives in a small house on the corner of Fairfield’s Sixty-first Street and Avenue E. Each day, he walks slowly about his yard, dressed in a pair of greasy overalls. A passerby may see him squatting on the ground repairing a broken lawn mower, or leaning underneath the hood of a car, or fixing some electrical gadget. Sometimes, he sits for hours looking through one of the trunks in his yard, searching for objects that take him through his past: his baby sister’s dress from their family farm, a pair of his brother’s old gloves, records of outdated wage rates at US Steel, flyers from the International Labor Defense and various unions, his retirement papers, old insurance policies.

The objects that still fill Dobbie’s life are many and various, revealing his journey from a Mississippi farm to Alabama’s steel factories, from Birmingham to Chicago and back again. Like many black sharecroppers, he left the farm for higher wages and independence near the turn of the century. He found the company bosses instead. He went north looking for a means to advance himself, and enrolled in a school of electronics. He could make good money in the North, he says, but he felt he had to come home. And in Fairfield, he couldn’t find a job that met his new skills. He stayed, though, and persevered.

Today he sits on a yellow quilt, beneath a thin aluminum boat propped up by a single oar, and reads again the papers of his youth.

“Yessir,” he says as he rises from his quilt. “I’m a Mississippi man.”

Born in Bigbee Valley, Mississippi, near the Alabama line, Dobbie grew up with nine brothers and three sisters. They all began working at an early age. “My whole family sharecropped on the land of P.Q. Poindexter, a big white millionaire down in Bigbee Valley,” he recalls. “I worked from the time I first remembered myself. My father died when I was one year-two months old, but Mama told me he was a ditch digger. He dug ditches around the big farm to drain off the water.

“Mama raised us all. She was a mama and daddy too. She did a good job cause we didn’t have nothing. We did all the work and got nothing in return. Poindexter would credit us the tools, hogs, mules, cotton, corn seed and a pair of brogan shoes and jean pants. At the end of the season when it came time to add up, we would always owe him more money than we had to pay him, no matter how big the crop. We would always end up in the hole. We grew and raised everything, but he took it all. Course we had enough food cause we raised it. But that’s all we had.

“Every morning when the bell was rung, we had to get up and go out to the barn. Mr. Poindexter had hired a black man as the bell ringer; he was a wage-earner. When we got out to the barn to get our tools and stuff, it would still be dark. We would take our plows out to the field, and when the sun started rising, we were supposed to be sitting on our plows ready to work. The sun was the sign. And we would work and work and work until it got dark.

“Mr. Poindexter had hired a white overseer who



photos by Groesbeck Parham

rode through the fields on a horse telling us what to do. He never beat us; but Mama used to tell us how, when she was coming up, that the white overseers would beat the people with a whip. Sometimes we'd be out in the middle of the field working, and Mama would just bust out and start cryin and hollerin. She'd say, 'If Bill was here, I wouldn't have to be doin all this hard work.' Bill was my daddy. I was small then, and didn't understand why she was crying. But after I got up some size I understood.

"Lots of times people thought about leaving the farm, but if you tried to, the owner would take away everything you had. Your tools, mules, horses, cows, hogs, clothes, food, everything. But things were so bad that people still left."

I just wanted to wear good clothes

"My oldest brother left home in 1919 and came to work in Fairfield at the US Steel Wire Mill. On May 8, 1922, I left. Mama had died, and I just wanted to wear good clothes like some of the rest of the boys. Hell, if you worked all the time and somebody took all you made, you'd leave too."

Groesbeck Parham, a native of Fairfield, Ala., still lives in the Birmingham area where he is preparing for graduate study. He has gathered extensive oral interviews and written documents on Birmingham's black labor history. Gwen Robinson has taught history in Dartmouth's Black Studies Program and is currently directing a research project in Chicago on minorities in the construction industry.

Appreciation for this interview is extended to the Southern Investigative Research Project of SRC and to numerous individuals: Dr. Glover P. Parham, Emory O. Jackson, Demetrius Newton, Asbury Howard, and above all to Dobbie Sanders, Hosea Hudson, and the black steelworkers in the Birmingham district who created this story.

"After I left, I went and worked in the Delta at a levee camp as a wheeler, helping to pile dirt on the river bank to make a dam. I was paid about \$1.75 a day. I stayed there a little while and then left. I hoboed, caught rides, and walked my way to North Carrollton. That's near Yellow Dog, Mississippi. I worked there for awhile laying 'y' shaped tracks at the end of railroad line until they laid me off. Then I hoboed on trains and walked until I got to Sulls, Alabama, working my way on up to Fairfield.

"In Sulls, I worked in the mines with my brother, Jim. I only worked for a month and had to quit cause I was too tall for the mines. My head kept hitting up against the roof. I told my brother I was going up to Fairfield to get a job in US Steel's Wire Mill and stay with another one of our brothers, William. Jim said OK, but told me, 'Make sure you work enough to feed yourself.'

"And I did. When I got to Fairfield I stayed with William and his wife in Annisburg, next to Englewood.* I started working in September, 1922. William's wife would go down to the company store and get food, and the company would deduct it from my paycheck every two weeks."

When he first entered industry, Dobbie Sanders followed a path beaten by thousands of black Southern workers before him. Even before the Civil War, blacks played a crucial role in Southern industry, and especially the iron business. As far back as 1812, 220 slaves were owned by the Oxford Iron Works of Virginia. In the Tennessee

*Annisburg and Englewood were the first areas built for black families working for US Steel. Although now a part of greater Fairfield, the areas were originally separated from the white neighborhoods by a row of bushes that Dobbie Sanders calls "The Iron Curtain."

Cumberland River region, one iron company owned 365 slaves in the 1840s, and 20 other establishments in that area worked more than 1,800 slaves. In 1861, the Tredegar Iron Co. of Richmond employed the third largest iron-working force in the United States, and half of the 900 men were slaves. Altogether, an estimated 10,000 slaves worked in the South's iron industry.

Before the Civil War, Selma had been the major site of Alabama's iron works, but in 1865 the city fell and its plants were destroyed. Other coal and iron plants were soon constructed throughout the state and began to grow and merge. In 1871, Birmingham was founded as the ideal location for an industrial steel complex which required easy access to coal, iron, water and transportation. Eventually the Tennessee Coal & Iron Co. (TCI) became the uncontested leader in Alabama's steel business, and in 1892, it moved its headquarters to "The Magic City," a name Birmingham soon earned for its phenomenal growth. Fifteen years later, J. P. Morgan absorbed TCI into his US Steel empire.

In 1910, 13,417 blacks were employed in US blast furnace operations and steel rolling mills, the vast majority in the lowest paying, dirtiest, most tedious jobs. At this time, almost three-quarters of all common laborers in the steel and iron industry were black, though they were only 8.2 percent of the skilled workforce and 10.7 percent of the unskilled workers. Of those few skilled black workers,

almost 40 percent were employed in Alabama – 635 men.

Like Sanders, many of these workers had recently come from nearby farms in search of freedom from their hard times. Most didn't find it.

"When I started working at US Steel's Wire Mill, the company owned the houses, food and clothing stores, hospitals, schools, churches, everything. And they deducted everything out of your pay check – food, clothes, rent. Sometimes we'd work the whole pay period and time come to get paid, and we'd draw nothing but a blank slip of paper. That mill was rough. When I started working there in 1922, we were doing 10-hour shifts at \$2.45 a day, as many days as the man told us to come in. Later, they went on the 8-hour day at \$3.10 a day, but we still had to work 10-hour shifts. We had no vacation, no holidays, no sick leave, no pension, no insurance, no nothing. It was rough.

"I went ahead and got married in 1927. Most of the women in town did clean-up work. A lot of them worked in the basements of Loveman's and Pizitz' Department Stores shining shoes and scrubbing floors. No dark-skinned women drove the freight elevators even."

Just got tired of the whole thing

Dobbie Sanders had come to Fairfield frustrated with working long hours and getting nothing for it. Now he found himself in the same situation.

"One day back in '27 or '28, I just got tired of the whole thing and quit work. I enrolled in the L. L. Cooke School of Electronics in Chicago. L. L. Cooke was the Chief Engineer of Chicago. Even though I had only finished the third grade, I was a



good reader. I used to read all of my brother's books. I'm a self-educated man.

"When I was in electronics school, I learned how to make and fix door bells, wire up burglar alarms, wire houses and everything else. I'll even wire you so if anybody touches you, you'll ring. I wired up that old dog pen out there just so it would touch the old dog up lightly when he tried to step over the fence. It'll touch you up lightly too if you try to git in."

Sanders points with pride to a thick, dusty electronics textbook printed in 1927 by L.L. Cooke Electronics School, Chicago, Illinois. Many sentences in the book have been underlined, with numbers from 1 to 10 marked beside them.

"You see, at the *end* of each chapter there are ten questions. The *answers* are in the chapter. I put the numbers of the questions next to the answers. Then I underlined the answers. I made everything in that book, and I read and studied every page of it. That's why I can fix so many things.

"I can fix everything except a broken heart, can't fix that.

"After I left Chicago, I went on to Detroit. I was making good money there, too, just fixing things. But I came on back to Fairfield. You know how it is bout home. You know everybody and everybody knows you. Plus, when I was away I was living with other people. You know how it is.

"So when I got back here, the head of the school in Chicago called the people at US Steel, and told them what I could do. But they said they wasn't hiring no colored electricians. They still made me do electrical work sometimes, but they just didn't pay me for it.

"US Steel is one of the dirtiest companies in the world. And if the working people of this country would ever get together, they could run the whole thing. That's why I like that worker/farmer form of government."

It was all about a higher standard of living

While working in Fairfield, Dobbie Sanders became involved in a number of groups fighting for black and working people's rights. One was the International Labor Defense (ILD), organized by the Communist Party in 1925 to fight extra-legal organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. ILD members had become active in highly publicized campaigns to free Tom Mooney, Warren Billings, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. In 1931, the ILD came south as the main organizers of the Scottsboro Boys' defense in Birmingham. Over the next few years, the ILD was able to turn national attention to the South and to the trial of the nine young blacks facing the death penalty on charges of raping two white women. Blacks and a

few whites throughout the South supported the ILD and the Scottsboro Boys, contributed money from church offerings and attended rallies. At one Birmingham meeting, 900 blacks and 300 whites turned out.

"Yes, the ILD was in here with the Scottsboro Boys, and I was right along with them. I used to pass out leaflets for them down at the plant. I would stick em in my lunch bucket and tie em round my waist and ankles. On the way inside the gate, I would open up my bucket, untie the strings and let the wind blow the leaflets all over the yard. I'd just keep steppin like nothin ever happened. There's always a way, you know."

But he is reluctant to talk much about the organization's programs. He laughs, "You go ahead and talk some. I done already gone too far. Why, I been 75 miles barefoot, and on cold ground, too. But I'll just say this: it was all about obtaining a higher standard of living."

Sanders was also a member of the United Steelworkers of America, which began organizing in Alabama in the late 1930s and joined the state's long tradition of integrated unions. That tradition started with the United Mine Workers before the turn of the century. By 1902, the UMW had organized about 65 percent of all miners in the state, a majority of them black. Racism and social segregation were continual problems for the union, but even in 1899 a few blacks were able to hold the presidency of locals that included white members. A series of long strikes took place in the first decades of the century, one from 1904 to 1906, which weakened the union immensely. But the UMW kept returning — in the teens, in the 20s, and again in the 30s.

Throughout this period, attempts were made to organize the steel industry, but that feat was not accomplished until the birth of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1936. Under the leadership of UMW president John L. Lewis, one of the top priorities of the CIO was the organization of the steel industry. The CIO established the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) for that purpose, which later grew into the United Steel Workers of America (USWA).

Dobbie Sanders joined USWA in its early years. "Before the union came in here in the 1930s," he explains, "it was rough. We didn't have any say in anything. I was one of those who helped get people signed up. We had to slip and sign our cards and pay our dues. When the Steelworkers ran into trouble, they'd just call in the Mine Workers. Them boys would come in here from Walker County with snuff running down their chins, both black and white. And they didn't take no stuff. If it wasn't for Ebb Cox and the Mine Workers, we never would have got a union."

A MESSAGE FROM EBB COX TO HIS BROTHERS IN DISTRICT 36, USW.

— written in 1954

The point I would like to clarify is what our Civic, Social, Economic and Political situation was in 1934. And what is the condition on these problems today.

1. The company was owning all the villages, schools, churches, recreation, and controlled all food and clothing stores. The company was issuing non-negotiable checks. Wages were \$2.33 for 10 hours per day. Wages today (1954) here in the South are the same as they are in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

2. There was no sanitary service at all. No streets were paved. The alleys grew up with weeds and were filled with ashes and cans. Nothing was done to protect the health and safety of the people.

3. The law completely separated whites from Negroes.

4. Less than 2 percent of the Negroes could qualify to vote.

But now, what is the answer? The county controls the schools. The people own their homes. Wages are paid in American Money, the streets are paved. The whites and Negroes are meeting together and working out their common problems.

In 1936, no company would let me sit in a conference, but today I am servicing 20 plants alone. I was disowned by my brothers and Father and my Race. My service the first three years was given free, but today we have improved our race relations greatly.

All my effort was through the United Steelworkers of America, C.I.O. My objective was to build a union and through the union we could solve all problems.



Ebb Cox (seated at left) with friends at a party held in the early 1960s. All these men were among the first workers at US Steel and first residents of Fairfield, Alabama.

Cox was one of the Steelworkers' most determined leaders, encouraging workers to join the union wherever he could — in churches, in the bars and on the streets of Fairfield. Tall and light-skinned, with no formal education, he became one of the staff. He was the object of much anti-union and anti-black violence in Mississippi and Georgia as well as Alabama, but he continued his relentless fight for the union. He was eventually elected the first black member of the Alabama CIO Executive Board.

Dobbie Sanders was also a union leader in Fairfield. "I put food in a lot of women's and babies' mouths by writing out Step One-and-a-Half in the promotion line in the wire mill. Step One was on the broom. Step One-and-a-Half was classified as the "helper," even though you'd actually be doing the work (of the person on the Step Two job). This was so the company could get away with paying Step One-and-a-Half wages even though you'd be doing Step Two work.

"After the union had come in, I wrote a provision that said that after so many hours on the job, a man had to be given a chance to bid for the job and be paid the right wages. I took it to my supervisor, and he couldn't do nothing but accept it. Hell, before this thing was written up, they'd keep a man in Step One-and-a-Half for a hundred years. Yessir, that mill was rough.

"And we had a lot of people working against us too. Not just the company, police and sandtoters (informers), but most of the preachers. Man, them preachers is a mess. Most of em ain't no good. Brainwashing, that's what they all about. They should have been race leaders, but instead they are race hold-backers. And the people who support them are crazy, too. Does it make any sense to pay somebody to hold you in the dark? These preachers go around here charging people to keep them looking back. Goin around here tellin people bout heaven. How you gon git to heaven after you die, and you can't even get to 19th Street in downtown Birmingham when you are alive. When you die you can't even go to the undertaker, they have to come and get you. So how you gon go to heaven?"

Dobbie stayed at the mill for more than 25 years, doing the same work at the end that he had when he started. "I retired on March 31, 1959," he remembers with the precision that he has for only a few significant facts of his life.

Since then he has lived at the corner of Sixty-first Street and Avenue E in Fairfield, surrounded by the memories of his life. "I tell you," he says softly, looking up from his boxes, "if I could go back through the whole thing again, I'd git me one of them easy shootin guns, the kind with a silencer on it. And I'd be a killer."



photo by US Forest Service

The Brotherhood

by Jim Green

The problems facing today's Southern labor movement are not unique. Many of the same difficulties have plagued the region for decades, in fact since industrialization first came to the South. Workers have fought for years, for instance, against the divisive force of racism. And industrialists have fought — usually with more success — to strengthen racism to help keep the workers divided and powerless. But occasionally black and white workers have stood together with community supporters and challenged *as a class*

the giant capitalists that controlled the people and natural resources of the area. Often these periods of unity were ended only when local business interests took their guns and violently attacked the workers. The ferocity of the backlash is testimony to the strength of the laborers and of their unions.

One chapter in this violent story occurred in the piney woods of western Louisiana and East Texas in 1911-1913. During the "lumber war," thousands of black and white timber workers formed a racially unified industrial union, the Brotherhood of Timber

Workers (BTW), in order to battle the "timber barons" and their powerful Southern Lumber Operators' Association (SLOA).

Eventually, the BTW, an indigenous union of Southern-born workers, voted to affiliate with the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World in 1912. The IWW provided important support — especially in unifying black and white workers around militant industrial unionism and a socialist ideology. But the BTW's strength and solidarity was not created by "outside agitators." The Brotherhood developed as a response of Southern workers to

the highly exploitative, extractive industries, which chewed up workers almost as fast as they did the countryside. This remarkable union was founded and led by Southern-born socialists. And it was Southerners who suffered when the BTW was crushed by the lumber operators in 1913.

Life in the Lumber Camps

Industrial capitalism came rapidly to the yellow pine region in the 1880s and 1890s following the repeal of the Homestead Act which had guarded the Southern forests' virginity. It reached its peak in 1910, when 63,000 lumberjacks and millhands were employed by the Louisiana-Texas lumber industry. By 1920, it had left the region ravaged and depressed.

In those forty years, thousands of hill-country whites and Delta blacks poured into the Southern forests, attracted by the relatively high wages offered by industrialists in chronic need of labor. The poor whites generally came from surrounding corn and cotton farms that offered only a subsistence living. In western Louisiana, a large number of the rural refugees were "redbones," a people of "fighting stock," part black, part white, and part Indian who sometimes had a French ancestry like the Cajuns to the south.

Blacks (who formed a majority of the industry's workforce, especially in the lower-paying, more dangerous sawmill jobs) usually came from the plantation areas of the Texas or Louisiana Delta, but some journeyed from as far as the Mississippi and Alabama black belts. Many black fieldhands who fled the plantations of the Louisiana Sugar Bowl and the primitive turpentine camps of Mississippi had experienced gang labor and factory discipline; they also learned about strikes when the Knights of Labor organized in their camps during the 1880s and 1890s. These workers escaped a "slave-like status," but others who came to the pine belt were not so fortunate; they were peons and convicts on lease who were forced to toil in the forests and mills to work off their "debts."

The black workers who migrated from the Gulf Coast sugar plantations had an unusual heritage of militancy. Their ancestors were rebellious slaves brought to the Bayou Teche region of

St. Mary's parish to be "broken." According to a Department of Labor study, the sugar workers were of "bad stock" — the "descendants of a particularly vicious lot." These "dangerous Negroes" added to their reputation for militancy in 1886 when they joined the Knights of Labor and struck during harvest time, provoking a violent response from planters.

Most lumber workers, black and white, knew little of the extractive industries or of labor unions; they came to the pine region from their cotton farms unprepared for the changes life and labor in the industrial uplands would demand. In the face of painful dislocations caused by rapid industrialization, these men clung to older traditions: a leisurely, agrarian attitude towards work and production, a grudging insistence on "squatters' rights" to the land and a "primitive" respect for nature. Industrial capitalism in the Southern pine region challenged all of these traditions and demanded conformity to rigorous and alien standards of time, work, discipline and social behavior.

The extreme danger involved in sawmill work made it especially difficult for workers to adjust to the machines. In 1919, even after state safety regulations had been passed, 125 deaths and 16,950 accidents were reported in the Southern lumber industry. Four years earlier the Texas Commissioner of Labor declared that "a large percentage of accidents" in the sawmills were due "to absolute carelessness on the part of the employers."

Sawmill workers, white as well as black, naturally resisted this demanding, dangerous work routine. Many laborers, especially the blacks who usually lacked family ties in the region, simply moved on when they were exhausted or maimed.

Unlike their fellow workers in the sawmills, the loggers were still close to nature. Occasionally work in the forests was suspended in rainy weather. These respites became less frequent, however, as tram-lines extended into the forests permitting extractive operations even in the wet season. The lumberjacks were no longer agricultural workers. They still worked the soil and harvested its products, but now they were destroying, not creating. Mechanized logging was agriculture in reverse.

Despite their hatred of the corporations and their work, many poor far-

mers found the promise of a \$1.50 cash wage for a working day of eleven hours irresistible. A few workers, like the skilled saw filers, received as much as \$10 a day, but hundreds of sawmill laborers earned as little as 75 cents a day. Comparatively, the Southern laborer received less pay and worked longer hours than any lumber worker in the country. Union organizers did not focus their protests on the rate of pay, however; wages were still higher than those of turpentine and sugarcane workers and greatly exceeded the income of tenants and croppers. The timber workers complained more frequently about the irregularity of their paydays, the numerous deductions for dubious "benefits" and the control the company maintained through paying in scrip (fake money redeemable only at company-owned facilities). As an employee of the Kirby Lumber Company, largest in Texas, explained, the average worker

"is born in a Company house; wrapped in Company swaddling clothes, rocked in a Company cradle. At sixteen, he goes to work in the Company mill. At twenty-one, he gets married in a Company Church. At forty, he sickens with Company malaria, lies down on a Company bed, is attended by a Company doctor who doses him with Company drugs, and then he loses his last Company breath, while the undertaker is paid by the widow in Company scrip for the Company coffin in which he is buried on Company ground."

Historian Herbert Gutman points out that workers, farmers and townspeople in many American localities at this time opposed the new industrial order because they judged the actions of local capitalists by old, "agrarian" values. The Populists in Louisiana and Texas articulated these values forcefully during the 1890s when they led an attack on the "lumber trust." Conservative Democrats, supported by planters, merchants and industrialists, had destroyed the People's Party in

Jim Green is a member of the Radical America editorial collective. He is completing work on a book about the early twentieth-century socialist movement in Louisiana, Texas and Oklahoma.

these two states by the turn of the century, but this powerful agrarian movement laid the groundwork for a more radical kind of opposition to the "timber barons" that encompassed farmers and workers of both races.

Significantly, the first act of resistance to the industrialists' demands came from the most exploited workers in the Louisiana-Texas pine region, the black millhands. In 1902, Afro-American laborers struck successfully for a reduction of the working day against a sawmill company in Lurcher, La.; a year later these men founded one of the few "Negro locals" of the Socialist Party. In 1904 black workers, assisted by radical organizers of the American Labor Union, engaged in a strike against a lumber company in Groveton, Tex.

The timber workers' first mass collective action took place during the "panic" of 1907 when operators imposed a 20 percent wage cut and a "stretch-out" of the working day. Nearly all of the workers in the Sabine pine region walked out in a "spontaneous general strike" that shut down hundreds of mills. Besides protesting the new demands made by the operators, the timber workers had a list of long-standing grievances: "poor wages and hours, 'gouging' in company stores, payment in scrip, excessive insurance and hospital fees, inadequate housing and sanitation, and irregularity of paydays." Promised wage increases when prosperity returned, most of the workers went back to work immediately. But the workers around De-Ridder, La. (later a stronghold of radicalism), held out for several weeks. About this time, "Uncle Pat" O'Neill, a 74 year-old Arkansas coal miner who helped found the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, came to western Louisiana and started publishing a paper called *The Toiler* in Leesville. His efforts to organize a union were unsuccessful.

In December 1910, Arthur Lee Emerson and Jay Smith, Southern-born lumberjacks, founded the Brotherhood of Timber Workers at a damp logging camp in Carson, La., and began recruiting workers — black and white. They knew that black workers held a majority of the jobs in the Southern lumber industry and that these laborers had been the vanguard in the early protest strikes just after the turn of the century.

photo from International Socialist



A.L. Emerson, president of the Brotherhood



photo by US Forest Service

J. H. Kirby, leader of the area's lumber operators, warned his mill managers that Emerson was a "rank socialist with some attainments as a scholar" and that his comrade Smith was a "desperate fellow with a great deal of natural ability but little education." Kirby's spies warned him about the presence of these organizers in the piney woods, but the company managers could not stop them. Moving through the mills and camps disguised as insurance salesmen and gamblers, Emerson and Smith managed to avoid the spies and company guards.

In June, 1911, the union organizers felt strong enough to come out of the woods and into the open. They held a convention in Alexandria, La., and formed a constitution modeled after the Knights of Labor. Blacks would be invited to join the union and organize their own locals. The membership would be "mixed" including women, farmers, friends, and supporters. Most importantly, the new Brotherhood of Timberworkers declared itself an industrial union which would follow the example of the Knights, the United Mine Workers and the IWW in organizing all lumber workers into "one big" and not into separate craft unions like the American Federation of Labor.

Shortly after the convention, the Southern Lumber Operators' Association (SLOA), organized after the general strike of 1907, initiated a lockout designed to destroy the BTW. Employers hired Burns detectives to ferret out union men, but the Brotherhood's umbrella of secrecy frustrated espionage activities. Covington Hall, a BTW leader who wrote an important account of the industrial conflict, recalled: "When the lumber barons began their crushing operation in 1911, they found the Brotherhood everywhere and nowhere. It entered the woods and mills as a semi-secret organization with the usual passwords and grips so dear to Southerners, regardless of race." As the lockout continued into the summer of 1911, the lumber corporations began importing strikebreakers and demanding "yellow dog" contracts in which workers pledged not to join the Union. And in July the SLOA closed eleven mills in the "infected area" around DeRidder, La., laying off 3,000 men.

After a summer of vigilant anti-union activity, the Operators Associa-

tion admitted that it had failed to "break the back" of the BTW. One operator told Kirby that the union had so many organizers in the field (he estimated 500) and had "increased its membership so rapidly" that a more "efficient machine" would have to be designed to combat it. The leaders of the Operators' Association responded by hiring labor spies and by organizing the most efficient "black list" in Southern industry.

Union members who had been shut out and blacklisted managed to survive by picking cotton on the nearby farms of friends and relatives. Manufacturers who were distressed by the lockout's failure to increase demands for yellow pine also worried about the support the Brotherhood received from "lots of merchants, farmers, all kinds of landowners and some officers." They were even more distressed to learn that in September three "red-neck" lumberjacks from the BTW attended the Sixth Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago.

Late in 1911 many mills in western Louisiana reopened, minus hundreds of blacklisted union men. In the dismal winter months which followed, the BTW went underground and nearly expired. A membership reduced to less than 5,000, a depleted treasury and an exhausted cadre of organizers led the Brotherhood to affiliate with the IWW in May, 1912. "Big Bill" Haywood himself came south from Wobbly headquarters in Chicago to sell discouraged timber workers on the One Big Union. One of the most charismatic figures in the American labor movement, Haywood presented a strong case for affiliation by promising the Brotherhood financial aid, experienced organizers, a union newspaper, and a big injection of confidence and militancy.

The BTW-IWW merger proposed by Haywood was effectively supported by Covington Hall, a remarkably articulate revolutionary. Born in Mississippi and raised in Terrebonne Parish in the Louisiana Sugar Bowl, Hall had witnessed the uprising of the black cane workers in 1877. After helping organize the New Orleans general strike of 1907 — where he grew to hate the conservative AFL craft unionists who dominated the Southern labor movement — he joined the Wobblies. When the Brotherhood affiliated with the

IWW, Hall launched a union newspaper called the *Lumberjack*, which combined the Wobblies' revolutionary industrial unionism and inter-racial emphasis with appeals to the Reconstruction legacy of hatred for Northern carpetbaggers and the Populists' legacy of opposition to corporate monopolies. Hall was one of the IWW's most effective propagandists because he could put anti-capitalist Wobbly ideas into the language of the poor people of the piney woods.

In the spring of 1912, the Wobblies were on the crest of a rapidly breaking wave. Haywood had come to the South fresh from a sensational IWW victory over textile manufacturers in Lawrence, Mass.. The militant tactics of the IWW actually seemed to be working and the voice of radicalism was being heard throughout the land. "When we entered the Louisiana Lumber War," wrote Hall, "the great majority of militants taking part were convinced that the United States was ripe for a mass upheaval; that 'The Revolution' was just around the corner; and we acted accordingly."

This "Revolution," they felt, had to take place in the factories: it could not win in polling places controlled by "capitalist parties." The IWW cooperated with the Socialist Party in Louisiana and a few other states because its members believed that political action played an important role in workers' struggles. The Wobblies, however, insisted on the primacy of "directed action" at the workplace. Strikes, demonstrations, work stoppages and acts of sabotage would heighten the class struggle and precipitate an apocalyptic "general strike" which would determine the success of the "Revolution" for the workers' control of all industry — what the Wobblies called "industrial democracy."

The strategy of "direct action" as preached by the IWW appealed to "poor white" farmers who had seen their Populist candidates "counted out" by Democratic poll watchers in the 1890s. It was also attractive to transient lumberjacks who failed to meet local residency requirements and to black millhands who were disenfranchised on account of their race. Voting was just another privilege of the white middle class. The Wobblies took a more "direct approach" to the class struggle, argued Jay Smith, a BTW founder:

It is here on the job, in the union hall, that the working class begins to learn that the broadest interpretation of political power comes through industrial organization. It is here on the job, in the union hall, that the workers will learn that the IWW places the ballot in the hands of every man and woman, every boy and girl who works. It is here that the workers will learn that the IWW re-enfranchises the colored man.

Four days after the Brotherhood voted to join the Wobblies, it presented a list of grievances to ten lumber companies in the DeRidder area of western Louisiana. The operators were "aghast" at these demands and they promptly responded with a lockout late in May 1912. In a short time, employers began importing black strike-breakers so that they could reopen their mills with non-union labor. Since armed guards and stockades kept the union men from talking to the scabs, BTW leaders decided to hold rallies outside the mills. Women and children would accompany the male strikers in order to discourage violence.

On Sunday, July 7, A.L. Emerson led a band of 100 strikers and their families to Bon Ami, La., where the huge King-Ryder mill was operating with scab labor. When the group learned that an attempt had been made to assassinate a socialist agitator in that vicinity, the leaders changed direction and headed for a smaller mill town called Grabow. Arriving at a crossroads near the Galloway Lumber Company, Emerson mounted a wagon and began to speak to his followers and a few bystanders around the town. Almost immediately company gunmen opened fire on the group from concealed positions. As people ran for cover, several armed union men fired back at the gunmen in the Galloway Company office. In the ten-minute gun battle that followed, 300 rounds were fired (largely by the company guards) and four men were killed (two unionists, one bystander and one hired gunman). In addition 40 people, including several women and children, were wounded. The guards' shotguns "did deadly work," the operator's journal reported, "and the brotherhood members went down in rows." That evening hundreds of angry farmers and workers from Calcasieu Parish armed themselves and

gathered at DeRidder; they wanted to avenge those who had been attacked at the Grabow "massacre." After a long night of angry talk, A. L. Emerson and other BTW leaders persuaded the people to disperse and "let the law take its course."

Soon after the gun battle lawmen arrested Emerson and 64 other union men and indicted them on charges of murdering a guard employed by the Galloway Company. The defendants remained in the cramped confines of the Lake Charles jail for two months awaiting trial; they took the opportunity to form a unique "branch local" of the Socialist Party. Meanwhile, experienced Wobbly agitators came into the region to help organize defense movements. The IWW press, with Covington Hall's aid, began a national publicity campaign. *Southwest*, the industry's trade journal, denounced "this frantic effort... to make it appear as though it were a trial of the 'lumber barons' versus the 'workingmen', instead of a case of the State of Louisiana against a crowd of rioters." Nevertheless, the New Orleans *Times Democrat* reported that a "dangerous state of opinion" existed in the pine region because so many farmers and workers were outraged by the course the law had taken following the Grabow "massacre."

On the first day of the trial at Lake Charles, 40 workers in J. H. Kirby's biggest mill at Kirbyville, Texas, walked off their jobs to express their solidarity with Emerson and the other

defendants; they were all fired and ejected from their houses on the same day. This act of defiance symbolized the importance of the Lake Charles trial to the workers of the Sabine region. Their sense of outrage increased when prosecution attorneys, led by "progressive" Democratic Congressman A.J. Pujo, rejected all potential jurors who expressed sympathy for unionism.

The prosecution's case collapsed when its star witness admitted that the gunmen at the Galloway mill had been drinking before the BTW marchers arrived at Grabow. At one point, the mill owner told his storekeeper to "pour" liquor into the guards until the union men came up. Under the circumstances, Congressman Pujo, who was famous for his investigation of the "trusts", closed his case and hoped that his own clients would not be prosecuted.

It only took the jury a few minutes to find the Grabow defendants innocent. When the verdict was announced, the little courtroom erupted with cheers and the audience spilled into the streets of Lake Charles for a victory parade. That night a "jubilation" meeting took place at the Carpenter's Hall that was attended by members of all the unions and by all seven of the farmers who served on the jury.

The Wobblies reached the peak of their influence in the pine region at this time, but the BTW's membership (about 20,000 in the early summer) continued to decline as the lockout wore on and the blacklist lengthened.



photos from International Socialist

Meeting of the timber workers, November, 1912

Racial Solidarity

The BTW realized that the growth of industrial unionism in the piney woods depended largely upon the support of black laborers who held a majority of unskilled forest and sawmill jobs. The Brotherhood's attempt to organize black and white workers came at a time when demands for segregation divided the working class and made contacts between the races less frequent and more violent. The workers lived in separate "quarters" in most industrial towns. Social and religious activities were usually divided by race, especially in the years after Jim Crow laws were passed to prevent mixed assemblies. But in these primitive villages, churches, schools and clubs were weak and few in number. There is no evidence of segregation in places where workers frequently congregated — saloons, houses of prostitution, grocery stores, and barber shops. Jim Crow laws were far more important in cities and county seat towns, where there were transportation facilities and public institutions to segregate and established patterns of residency to maintain.

The Wobblies knew that employers had the upper hand in dealing with the race question; if the BTW integrated, the operators could "nigger bait" and play on the blacks' distrust of "red-necks", but if the BTW stayed "lily white", they could use "black legs" with devastating effectiveness. *Southwest* seemed justified when it

predicted the Brotherhood's failure. "Both black and white laborers are employed indiscriminately," the trade journal declared, "and men of wisdom recognize at a glance how impossible it would be to organize the territory under these circumstances." In the summer of 1911 however, *Southwest* reported that "700 or 800 men and women, a good percent being negro," heard speeches by A. L. Emerson and Cajun firebrand W. D. Fussel. The Brotherhood recruited several thousand members in western Louisiana, the article added, "largely negroes" or white "tenant farmers and loafers about the sawmill places."

Emerson and other union leaders realized from the start that they had to organize the black workers, but they could not ignore the obstacle racism presented. The original BTW constitution provided separate lodges for "negroes" and control of all dues by white locals. The blacks were not satisfied with such arrangements and declared at the second convention that they eschewed "social equalities," but could not "suppress a feeling of taxation without representation." Accordingly, their delegates demanded a colored executive board, elected by black union members and designed to work "in harmony with its white counterpart." But these discriminatory rules against which the blacks protested were later rescinded.

When the Brotherhood affiliated with the IWW in 1912 it added the rhetoric of militant equalitarianism to

its official position on interracial recruitment. When Bill Haywood arrived at the Alexandria convention of 1912, he immediately complained about the absence of "colored delegates." Covington Hall explained that the black unionists were meeting in a separate hall in accordance with state segregation laws. "Big Bill" boomed his response: "You cannot possibly do business this way. Bring the colored delegates in and hold the convention."

Haywood told the white delegates that since they worked with blacks they could just as well meet with them in convention. "Why not be sensible about this," he asked, "and call the Negroes into this convention? If it's against the law, this is one time when the law should be broken." The white workers responded favorably to this plea which was echoed effectively by "Cov" Hall. "The Negroes," Haywood wrote, "were called into the session without a murmur of protest from anyone. The mixed convention carried on its work in an orderly way and when it came to the election of delegates to the next IWW convention, black men as well as white were elected." The black union men expressed enthusiasm for the Brotherhood's merger with the IWW and declared: "We have come this far with the Grand Old organization of the B. of T.W. with a true, sincere and loyal intention of going to the end. If she went down as the great ship Titanic did in the Atlantic waters...we are willing to go down with her." The blacks had some reasons to be encouraged. They elected a delegate to the IWW convention, D.R. Gordon of Lake Charles, and a black executive board. What is more, their protests led to the organization of mixed locals, which actually formed in many localities even though black and white union men went to jail for meeting together.

For its brief period of existence, the union provided a new form of association for workers and a substitute for social institutions weakened or made irrelevant by rapid economic and demographic change. One account — by a hostile observer — tells us something about the social role the Brotherhood played for workers of both races. A traveller gave the following account of a BTW meeting he had seen at Merryville, Louisiana, in July of 1912:

I was informed that it was the celebration of Negro emancipa-



In the Louisiana woods

tion, and that the negroes had given a fine barbecue and that the whites had gone in with them to help out in the financial part and also to celebrate with them as the "Lumber Workers" Union. There were about 2000 or more people upon the ground — about three whites to every two negroes. There was a general mixture of races and sexes, especially when to the sound of the band they collected like a swarm of bees — white, black, male and female — around the speaker's stand.

Then according to the observer, a black minister spoke and introduced A. L. Emerson who related the slaves' struggle for emancipation to the Brotherhood's battle against the lumber trust.

Several conditions prevented racism from destroying the union movement in the piney woods. Firstly, the remoteness of extractive operations in the Sabine region initially created a labor shortage that forced employers to integrate blacks into the work force. Later, this situation hindered the importation of black strike-breakers to a certain extent. Secondly, the Wobblies could apply industrial unionism to an interracial work force that was not seriously divided by craft and wage distinctions. Therefore, white workers were not especially concerned with protecting their privileged job status, as they were in the railroad brotherhoods and the building trades. Finally, and most importantly, the militant industrial unionism of the BTW checked the poisonous growth of race hatred within the ranks of the Southern lumber workers. The organizers of the union, especially the outspoken Wobblies, effectively urged laborers of both races to join together in resisting the demands of the region's industrial capitalists.

The Community Support

In addition to black support, the Brotherhood depended upon assistance from farmers and townspeople. BTW leaders appreciated the importance of rural support. They knew that the Populist movement created a strong anti-capitalist sentiment among many yeoman farmers. They also knew that the lumber corporations forced many of these men and their sons into tenant farming. As one "redbone" tenant

from Calasieu Parish pointed out in the summer of 1912: "There is a great deal of feeling here against the sawmill companies on account of their land-holding policy." Like many tenants, he wanted to force the corporations to open their "cut over lands" for purchase.

In addition to this long-standing grievance over their "natural right" to the land, the hill country farmers reacted violently to the mill managers' attempts to prevent them from peddling their produce in the company towns. Near Fullerton, La., the "red-bone" farmers forced the company to allow them access to the town by sabotaging machinery and sniping at company guards. The superintendent of the Pickering Land and Lumber Company told Sapos, the Industrial Relations investigator, that the "red-bones" (who were a majority of the white workers at his plant in Cravens, La.) were the "backbone of the 1912 strike," and that the farmers in the area, "who came from the same stock, sympathize with them."

The workers received most of their middle class assistance in established

towns not controlled by large corporations. In these older agricultural communities — unlike the newer company towns — the merchants remained free agents, farmers peddled their vegetables in the streets, and professionals served the community rather than the corporation. The workers could preserve ties with their agrarian past and defend themselves against the dislocations caused by industrialization. In some of these towns the people elected officials openly hostile to the corporations.

As industrial strife increased, the corporations supplemented their anti-union tactics with campaigns to undermine the BTW's community support. Company guards and mill managers organized "law and order leagues" to fight the union. These "homespun storm troopers" soon recruited the "best citizens" in the town — doctors, lawyers, merchants and the like — and began to attack the BTW. For example, E. I. Kellie, a candidate for Congress and the leader of the citizen's league, wrote to J. H. Kirby from Jasper, Texas, that he and some of the "boys" had driven Wobbly speakers out of town. "We told them" he said, "this



photo by US Forest Service

was our town" and that we "were the law and we would not allow no one to speak here that preached their doctrine. Kellie's 'old Ku Klux Klan' are not dead, they were only sleeping and were thoroughly aroused the other night." Moved to eloquence by Kellie's deed, Kirby responded: "The American manhood which your act typified is the sole reliance of their Republic for its perpetuity." In DeRidder, a BTW stronghold, the lumber companies used economic pressure to change the pro-union editorials in the local paper late in 1912. Early in the next year socialist mayor E. F. Presley withstood the efforts made by the Good Citizen's League to oust him, but at about the same time this organization of merchants and businessmen successfully drove BTW organizers out of the town. The participation of the "best citizens" in the law and order leagues of the pine region, as well as in the Councils for Defense and the Ku Klux Klan which followed later, demonstrated that the middle classes of this region had a greater propensity for authoritarian activity than the workers.

Repression

The conflict between the BTW and the SLOA reached its climax at a strike in Merryville, La., in the winter of 1913. A large corporation, the

Santa Fe Railroad, moved into this pro-union town and drove a wedge between workers and their white middle class supporters.

The American Lumber Company dominated Merryville, but the workers did not live in a typical company town. Sam Park, the mill manager and part-owner, accepted the Brotherhood and most of its demands. He made his mill at Merryville into a model plant which attracted workers from all over the pine region. The *Times Democrat* estimated that 90 per cent of Park's 1,300 employees were members of the Brotherhood in 1912. It also reported that "public sympathy is decidedly with the B.T.W." and that "many of the business men in Merryville are members of the Union and display B. of T.W. flags in their windows."

The SLOA denounced Park for "treachery" because he refused to follow Association orders to shut down his mill during the lockouts of 1911 and 1912 and because he "treated with the union." The Brotherhood was so successful at the American Lumber Company that the SLOA resolved to do away with Park. The Operators' Association kept applying pressure on the Santa Fe, which owned the controlling interest in the American Lumber Company, and in the autumn of 1912 the railroad corporation forced Sam Park out and

assumed control of the Merryville complex.

On November 10, 1912, only a week after the celebrated Grabow trial, the new management fired fifteen union men who had appeared as witnesses for the defence in the Lake Charles court, hoping to precipitate a strike for which the Union was unprepared. Jay Smith assembled the Wobblies of Merryville on the tracks of the Kansas City Southern and told them that the Brotherhood could not sustain a long strike because of the losses it had suffered since the Grabow "massacre." Smith put the question to a vote and the most militant workers in the pine region moved to the left side of the tracks. The next morning 1,200 union men struck against the American Lumber Company and the BTW began its last battle.

Phineas Eastman, a Wobbly who helped to organize black workers, claimed that racial solidarity in the Brotherhood reached its strongest point at Merryville. "Although not one of the 15 men fired by the company was a Negro," he wrote, "our colored fellow workers showed their solidarity by walking out with their white comrades and no amount of persuasion or injection of the old race prejudice could induce them to turn scab or traitor."

In the first months of the struggle



photo by US Forest Service

at Merryville, the workers held their own; they even formed a communal organization (Hall called it the "first American Soviet") that attracted considerable attention in radical circles throughout the country. In the strike's third month, after the mill had reopened with "scab" labor, the corporation mobilized its community power to crush what was left of the Union. On February 16, 1913, the Merryville Good Citizen's League struck. Organized by the "leading citizens" in the town, led by the company doctor and staffed by Santa Fe gunmen, the League destroyed the Union headquarters, attacked and "deported" several Wobblies, and burned the soup kitchen staffed by female BTW members. The *Lumberjack* screamed "Class War at Merryville" and charged:

Men born and raised in Louisiana have been beaten, shot and hunted down as though they were wild beasts. Our fellow women workers were driven away from the soup kitchen, the only place where hungry children could be fed, at the point of guns. All of the houses of union men were searched without warrant by agents of the capitalist class.

Hall's paper explained later that "about 300 men had guns," and paraded in the streets up and down the Santa Fe railroad tracks. "Some asked about the law in Louisiana." Dr. Knight, the leader of the League, "pounded his chest and said this is all the law we want." Knight and his League had indeed taken "the law in their own hands" as the *Lake Charles American Press* reported. And by mid-winter of 1913 the American Lumber Company had exerted enough pressure in Merryville to completely isolate the small number of Wobblies who were still on strike. Having stripped radical workers of their civil rights and separated them from their white community supporters, employers easily crushed the timber workers' last revolt.

CONCLUSION

Although corporation repression completely destroyed the Brotherhood in 1913, the history of the timber workers' struggle should not be written solely as one of defeat. In fact, as the BTW was being crushed by the region's business men and their vigilante hench-

men, "some of the most obnoxious causes of dissatisfaction, such as payment in scrip, forced use of company stores, and monthly payments were modified and small wage increases and shorter hours were granted," says Vernon Jensen in his *Lumber and Labor*. The great sacrifices of the black and white timber workers in their three-year struggle against the powerful "timber barons" were not in vain.

The history of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers conflicts with the conventional stereotypes of defeat and the myths of passive Southern workers. Despite the lack of support offered from official AFL unions, Southern lumber workers took on the most powerful industrial capitalists in the region and organized their own union. As an industrial union, the BTW broke from the pattern of exclusionary AFL unions and opened its membership to women and blacks. The leaders of the Brotherhood — primarily native Southerners — forced the membership to confront the race question and to abandon segregated locals, though AFL union leaders said they were inevitable in the South. But the BTW members' opposition to segregated craft unionism, racism, and corporate capitalism in general did not cost the union its community support.

The Timber Workers stand in a bold tradition of Southern interracial industrial unionism that goes back to the Knights of Labor and the UMW. But the BTW advanced beyond the nineteenth century trade unionism by adopting the IWW's disciplined, "guerrilla warfare" tactics and the revolutionary vision of industry controlled by the workers. Drawing upon the deeply-rooted hostility to corporate capitalism initially expressed by the Knights and Populists, the Brotherhood won wide support for a broadly class conscious attack on the alien "lumber trust." It threatened the corporations precisely because its brand of unionism was not limited concessions; blacks and whites, skilled and unskilled, even sympathetic townspeople and farmers — all were brought together in "one big union." It had to be destroyed. But even in defeat, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers' indigenous brand of interracial, industrial unionism represents a powerful weapon for uniting workers and supporters against the corporate elite that still exploits the South's people and resources.

NOTES ON SOURCES

The following were the most important primary sources used in this article: The Commission on Industrial Relations Papers, Dept. of Labor, Record Group 174, National Archives; J. H. Kirby Papers, Univ. of Houston; various articles by Covington Hall in the *International Socialist Review*, vols. 13-14 and, most importantly, Hall's unpublished manuscript, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South" in Tulane Univ. Library and Wayne State Labor Archives (Detroit). Also the following newspapers: *Industrial Worker* (Wisconsin); *Lumberjack* and *Voice of the People* (LSU, Baton Rouge) and *The Rebel* (Univ. of Texas, Austin). A full list of footnotes can be found in a much longer version of this article published in the British journal *Past & Present*, No. 60 (August 1973).

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On the Line

Jones Avenue in Andrews, South Carolina, is as unpretentious as its name implies. On the sandy soil along the blacktop strip are settled the homes and gardens of black families — not so long off the farm or piney for-



est — who came to Andrews looking for steady pay. Employment in this coastal plain town of 3,000 usually means Oneita Knitting Mills, a “run-away shop” from Utica, New York, which moved to Andrews in the early 1950s.

Owned by the Devereaux family of New York City, Oneita Mills was locally supervised by plant manager Frank Urtz and a company director, Andrews banker A. H. Parsons. Their large, brick homes were a far cry from the houses on Jones Avenue. In fact, Frank Urtz didn't even live in Andrews. He commuted the 20 miles from the larger coastal city, Georgetown. Meanwhile Oneita's payroll helped Andrews grow, and Parson's white-columned bank regularly made home, car and furniture loans to the Oneita piece-workers.

Before the early 1960s, those workers were all white — except for two black janitors. They enjoyed the relative protection of a union contract which the International Ladies Garment Workers had maintained since it followed the underwear company south from Utica. But in 1963, all that began to change. In that year, the company decided to break the union.

Herbert White, one of the two black janitors, went out on strike with

the other ILG members in a vain attempt to win a new contract. Plant Manager Frank Urtz had told White that he couldn't join the union because his face was black. But White joined anyway. After six long, bitter months, he and most of the other workers went back into the plant without a contract and without a union.

After the strike, several ILG leaders received office jobs from Oneita; the former president of the local became the personnel manager. Needless to say, many workers were disillusioned about unions. But not Richard Cook. He was fired for his union activities, petitioned the National Labor Relations Board, and several years later received his back pay and his former job. Cook, Herbert White, Dorothy Glisson, Effie Shurling, Rena Edy and a few others remained firmly committed to unionization, but they had to wait. They knew that Urtz relied on “pets and spies” to maintain control and spread suspicion through the plant.

Then, in 1964, the Civil Rights Act forced Oneita to hire black workers. Although Andrews had not experienced an active civil rights movement, black people watched the events in Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham and across the South on television. They took pride in their blackness and in



at Oneita

by Carolyn Ashbaugh and Dan McCurry

their leaders. When jobs opened up at Oneita, they gladly moved in. Some black women had previously driven the thirty miles to the resort of Myrtle Beach to do maid service and waitressing for the summer tourist trade. Others had tried to keep small farms going or sharecropped land while their husbands sought work in the steel mills of Georgetown, the nearby paper-pulp mills, or the naval yards 50 miles away in Charleston. The necessity of a steady income brought many of these women into the single story, aluminum-sided sheds of Oneita Mills. At the same time, the South's expanding economy lured away the white, semi-skilled workers with better-paying jobs in other shops.

By 1971, Oneita had opened a second, smaller plant 20 miles away in Lane, and its total workforce of 920 had shifted to 75 percent black and 85 percent women. The Textile Workers Union of America began to view Oneita as an ideal place to organize. The racial mix was a clear plus; and the company was a relatively small, family business that could not shift its production or hold-out with the limitless power of a diversified giant like J.P. Stevens. Furthermore, a base in Andrews would be strategically important for organizing the 20,000 textile workers within a 30 mile radius of the town.

In June, 1971, TWUA sent in its first organizer, Philip Pope, who immediately went looking for his friend Pete Pope (no relation). Instead he found Pete's mother, Laura Ann, and his brother Jesse. Frank Urtz had tried hard to make Jesse Pope one of his "pets," but Jesse knew which side he was on. With his mother and old-timers like Richard Cook and Herbert White, he began signing up people.

On November 19, 1971, the union won the election for bargaining rights. The workers laughed the day before the election when Frank Urtz made a half-hour speech to his "family" telling them how good he'd been to them. That Thanksgiving week, they got their first company turkey.

Negotiations began in February, 1972, but the company offered an impossible bargaining posture known as Blakeney's Formula (named for J.P. Steven's anti-union counsel, Whiteford Blakeney). In effect, Oneita refused to discuss provisions for dues check-off or arbitration of grievances. On January 15, 1973, nearly ten years after the ill-fated ILG strike of 1963, Oneita workers walked off their jobs in protest against the company's bad-faith bargaining. Six months later, the NLRB ruled that Oneita's management, particularly Frank Urtz, had written anti-union letters and in other ways engaged in unfair labor practices. It was a major victory: the ruling preserved the striking workers' jobs from encroachment by scabs once a settlement was reached.

But strikes are won on the picket line and only sustained at the bargaining table. The workers held fast, black and white together, and carried their struggle into the community and into a national boycott of Oneita underwear. Finally, in July, 1973, the company agreed to recognize the TWUA and negotiate a contract with grievance procedures, pension and seniority rights, and dues check-off.

It had been a costly strike, for the union and the community. Women stood on the picket line and yelled "scab" while their sisters went to work. Neighbors no longer talked as one replaced the other in the mill. But the battle also united the strikers and established a firm base for building the union.

The intensity of this experience still glowed on people's faces when we visited Jones Avenue in the fall of 1973. The wounds of a community divided, the ugliness of the company, the enthusiasm for the union, the excitement of becoming friends with blacks or whites for the first time, the sweetness of victory, the lessons of united action — all were fresh in the minds of those we interviewed. The commitment was still there when Carolyn Ashbaugh returned in 1975.

In the edited interviews below, the

strikers and their representatives share what the conflict meant to them, why they went out, how they worked together, and what they won.

Carmela McCutchen: What was it like in there? I'll tell you, working conditions at Oneita were like the nineteenth century. There was no seniority, no protection at all from lay-offs, no pensions, no safety protection, no medical benefits. If you got a needle in your finger, they'd tell you to go back to work.

Rena Edy: They would come around to see if you was doing anything. And if something didn't look right, he'd just tell you off. This boss man hated us. He said we was his family, but he wanted to work us to death.

Carolyn Jernigan: Whenever you'd go into that place, it was rush, rush, rush until you get out of there. Sometimes I get so nervous and tensed up that when I get out of there, I'm just not worth a cuss to live with when I get home. You'd be so tired and irritable, especially on hot days when there is no air conditioning.

Flossie Gibson: They'd give you little green pills to take two times a day because too many people have nerve troubles. That's right, nerve pills!

Laura Ann Pope: There was no seniority. Nothing! If Urtz (the plant manager) decided he don't like you and you don't do what he say — I'm not speaking about the job, I'm speaking about his dirty work — he will bust you down and hire somebody out of the street. He wanted stool pigeons, he wanted Peeping Toms. It didn't matter if it was false or true, just you

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Discussing the schedule of picketing workers are (l-r) Richard Cooke, negotiating committee member; union organizers Louis Washington and Philip Pope; and Herbert White, picket captain.



bring the report to him.

That's why he hated me. Cause I was real cool. My children told me how they operated, and when I went in there, I went standing on my two legs. When somebody say, "I'm going to tell Mr. Urtz," I said, "I was hired here to knit, and I'm knitting, and I'm not takin no junk." The supervisor run back and tell him. Then Urtz called me in the office.

He said, "Mrs. Pope, I want to know. Do you realize who's plant manager down here?" I said, "Yes, I think so. I was told that you were plant manager." He said, "I want you to know that I operate this plant." I said, "Well, I understood that before I came in here to work. That's the reason why when they bring me the order what kind of cloth you want to fill your orders, that's why I fill them." I said, "Now why are you asking me these questions?" He said, "Well, it seems as if you want to take over, as if you want to be the boss." I said, "Oh no, I don't want to be the boss of anybody but myself, and I'm going to do that." I said, "Now you tell me what to do concerning your job, and I'll do it. But I didn't come down here for no other purpose. I have no intention of carrying out any other but knitting your clothes. And when my eight hours end, I'm going to punch my clock and go home."

So he said, "Well, let me —" and they had already warned me about his finger pointing. And when he started one of these numbers across that desk, I said, "Wait a minute; hold it,

Mr. Urtz." And I picked up my bag from beside me, and I took my pad and my pencil out and laid them on my lap. "Okay, Mr. Urtz, you begin. You talk real slow, cause this conversation you're having with me, we might hold it again in Georgetown in the courthouse." He said, "Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Pope, you go back to your knitting machine in your department and you do your job." I said, "Let me tell you something; that's just what I was doing when you sent for me." And from that day he couldn't stand my image...

...Well, Philip Pope, he was the first organizer. And in June, 1971, he came; I was on graveyard shift, so I was asleep. He knocked on the door, and finally he woke me up. He wanted my son Pete. They worked together at Georgetown Steel. He said, "I'll tell you what I'm trying to do. I'm a home boy around here. I have a job with the International. I have a letter here to organize the Oneita Knitting Mills." I said, "Yippee. I work there." He says, "What!" "That's right," I said, "I was hoping somebody would come along to help straighten this joint out. You don't know how happy I am." So he said, "Let me go to the car." And he went to the car and brought back a stack of blue cards. He said, "I know if if you are Peter's mother, you're going to work, you're going to help me."

I didn't sleep any more that day. About 10:30 I started getting dressed to go to work. Started signing those blue cards. My son came home; he got in his car; Philip and I got in mine. We

begin knocking on doors. We took Jones Avenue first. Then we stretch out all over town. Then we went on for days. Jesse was working in the mill and getting cards signed, and that's how I began.

I was getting so many cards signed that they had an idea I was doing it on the job, which I was. I'd call the employees the night before and say I'm going by you to check on your machine and say a few words to you. And I'm going to put a blue card in your pocket or your hand or somewhere. It's going to be in a piece of paper towel. Then I'm going to the restroom and when I come back through, you have it signed and in your pocket or in your hand. And I'd go through, "Hi, fella, how's your machine working today?" with my hands in my pocket. I'd say, "Boy, you better go ahead and try to make production," and I'd put that card in his hand so quick it would make your head swim; go on into the bathroom. And I'd maybe drop off twenty cards on my way going and pick up twenty coming back. And I would eat my lunch before break. While I was working I'd eat my lunch. I could sign blue cards in the mill on break time, so when break time came, I knew that was my time....

...After we won the election, they played this trick on me. The company controls the speed of the machines. They took my set of machines from me and gave it to a trainee and thought they would run me off. He couldn't just fire me, because I had a



Jubilant Oneita strikers celebrate the news of a contract. Scott Hoyman, TWUA Southern director, is in right foreground.

contract to use on him and he knew it, so I stayed in the mill. He knew I could do it (take him before the NLRB). So he took my machine away from me, put me back in training, thought this would belittle me.

One night, I went to work. The mechanic told me, "I'm sorry, you've got to run the swing-top." I said, "I'm sorry, I'm not going to run it." I went and sat on a stool and said, "Good, I'll sit here until seven o'clock in the morning." So I sat there about 30 minutes, and then the supervisor came through. He says, "Laura Ann, what you doing sitting on that stool? Don't you have anything to do?" "That's the way it looks. Sitting down; making easy money." He said, "Why you don't go run your set of machine?" I said, "My set of machine was given to another girl." When he sent me back, I checked the cloth, turned it on, started working. I cleaned off everything. Then I got out my pad and went by each machine and counted every end. I went and set on the stool and added them up. Each machine is supposed to have 144 ends to make production. And he's given me 102 ends.

Supervisor checked things out for me; before I left, he said, "You won't have any trouble tomorrow night." The next night he treated me like pie.

And everybody started clamming up, those pets, those pimps, those supervisors. They started watching me when I go to the bathroom. They wanted to get something on me. They didn't want me to stay too long; they

didn't want me to hold a conversation with other employees as I passed, and I would do it every time.

Rena Edy: They put me wherever they wanted me to work; they wouldn't give me enough machines to make production. And I told them I'd have to quit. He says, "How would you like a job walking around and inspecting the cloth on the machines, the needles?" I said, "Okay, I'd agree to that." So when we walked out on strike, I think he thought I would stay in. But I didn't; I came out.

Scott Hoyman, Southern regional director, TWUA: When you go up against a company this size, a relatively small family-owned company, one of the hard things is that personalities become very important. Frank Urtz, the plant manager, and Bill Smith, their lawyer, are the two people whom I would charge with responsibility for such a long strike. I think they led the top people in the company to believe that, first, the people wouldn't come out. And secondly, when the people did come out, that they wouldn't stay out. And if either of those things had been true, the company's strategy would have been correct. But they were wrong.

Urtz was a smart man and some of his tactics in the campaign were not stupid. He used these things that we may think are silly, like the analogy of the family, "this was all family." Well, that happens to be a pretty doggone effective tactic. And the strikers wouldn't admit to being

members of the family, but it worked for an awful lot of people for quite a long while. You know, Southern whites transfer family concepts to owners and managers. There's a code of personal relationships and responsibilities, in the old style textile communities, between a worker and a man that lives in the white house on the hill and runs the plant. And so, the family analogy is sort of an attempt to project that image. "The father may spank you, but he will also feed you."

Then another negative was this guy Bill Smith that Oneita used as their lawyer. Smith is an old adversary of mine. I spent off and on four years dealing with him for another plant. He has his own peculiar characteristics. You know, whether you like it or not, bargaining between a company and a union is exactly like diplomacy. It has all the suspicions, attitudes, vehicles and devices as relations between two countries. Usually, you have informal channels. But one of the frustrating things was that Oneita purposely did not present us with any informal channels. Bill Smith wanted all the threads going through his fingers. We tried to talk to this banker Mr. Parsons, who was on the board of directors of Oneita. He was also the Democratic county chairman, and we were interested whether that would help. But it didn't.

Smith would only offer us what I would call a highly restrictive contract. He imitates the Blakeney formula (see introduction), which in essence insisted

on a contract proposal which is very unsatisfactory to us, and the union is left with three choices. We have the choice of refusing the proposal and striking. We have the choice of accepting the proposal after long negotiations and finding ourselves unable to make the union work to furnish satisfaction to the members. Then, third, we have the choice of a stalemate, to continue bargaining. And that could go on for years.

So we had a big decision to make. We counted noses and made the estimates and talked to the negotiating committee about what they thought we could do. We had an excellent committee. They were tough, whites and blacks. So that was how we made the decision to strike.

We ran the strike in terms of union structure with a negotiating committee that was fairly large. I guess it had ten or twelve people because we were representing two plants. Then we had picket captains. They were very, very important people. You know, the Bible talks about people who were leaders of tens and those who were leaders of a hundred and then leaders of a thousand and so on. Well, our picket captains were leaders, basically, of twenty and they had a book and they would take attendance and it was a very important activity. We had that in both locations (Andrews and Lane). It turned out to be a good structure. And we had a commissary.

Financial liability would be considerable. I would think we paid out between \$300,000 and \$400,000 from the international union treasury. This is only in terms of direct financial assistance. I'm not talking about staff salaries, I'm not talking about time; this was a major effort by the Textile Workers Union.

Ted Benton, TWUA strike coordinator, now retired: Just before the strike started, another representative and I went down to the local sheriff and introduced ourselves and we told him we wanted to conduct a peaceful strike here. We noticed on the first morning we were overwhelmed with police. There were over 20 cars there. That many was here for 2-3 weeks, and then they reduced them some. On the first morning, I was trying to keep them from escorting the people in; they wanted to drive in 10 or 15 cars at one time. I instructed our pickets to walk between the cars. They had a

right to go in, but they didn't have a right to escort them in such a manner as they was doing. And the sheriff threatened to lock me up. And I said if he was going to lock me up for carrying on legal picketing such as we were doing, then he'd just have to lock me up. He turned and walked away then, and he didn't lock me up. But during the strike, they did escort people in.

We never got hit with an injunction, which is one of the most surprising things to me. Usually they hit you the first few days to limit your pickets and destroy their effectiveness. I do feel that if it hadn't been for this sheriff, that injunction would have hit us and the company tried every way they could to get an injunction. Of course, he read the riot act on us and told us he could bring it down on us any time he wanted to, only if there was not too much violence out there, he would not have an injunction.

That surprised me very much too. We had a little hassle out on the picket line; about two or three of our fellows got into it. And he called me and told me to bring them up to the headquarters, and I did. And he said he had three warrants laying there on his desk for their arrests, but he wasn't going to serve them, and he didn't serve those warrants. He used that to tell us — well, the fact of the matter, to use his exact language, he says, "I'm the toughest man in South Carolina."

We was overpowered with policemen all the time. We knew that he could get the National Guard at any time. He could drive us away from the gates which would break down our people's morale.

Carolyn Jernigan: The one thing that made the strike a success was that you gotta pull together. One or two people can't do it. That's one thing that I've found out. Especially in something like this, Frank Urtz told me himself that we didn't have enough guts to walk out of that mill and go out on strike. But we did and we made a win. It don't make no difference what color you is — black or white — you gotta stick together. You find out one thing, that you got a lot of friends outside, and a lot of people who will stick together. One of our songs says, "United we stand, divided we fall."

Joyce Lambert: My daughter Tammy had gone to school with black kids and white kids: she had learned

that color didn't mean anything. Both of the children really learned it during the strike. More than one time I made the remark in their presence that I would rather know any of those black people out there on that strike was a friend of mine than any five of those white scabs that went along with me all the way to the walking-out point and then they turned their back on me. They learned to work with black people, that was one thing. They agreed to walk the picket line with me and they walked the picket line many a day. When we'd go down to the headquarters, the black and white children would play together; the food was all served in one kitchen. We was just like one big happy family.

Clyde Bush, TWUA organizer: The black and white unity in this strike was very important. You can't take anything for granted anymore. Back a few years ago whenever you went into one plant the first thing that you looked to was how many blacks are there working in here. And if there were 40 blacks you could count on 40 votes. That was back in the late 1960s. Today, you can't count on that. Management some way has got to them, and one of the ways management is getting to the blacks, they're going in and hiring the best-liked, the best black they have in the plant and they're making a damned supervisor out of him, and he's the one carrying the load. To give you a good example of that in the Oneita strike, in the plant down in Lane, South Carolina, when the strike started there was 231 workers at that plant. Very few of them was white; the rest of them was black; believe me, they scabbed us to death. At the end of that strike we had 73 strikers; they had 261 workers in the plant, which 90 percent of them was black. So we had to work very hard on the picket line.

We would tell workers as they would scab into the plant what management thought of them. The blacks on the picket line would say, "Remember the good old days when you had to walk into the back of the restaurant? You wasn't a human being, couldn't come in the front door. Remember the days when you went in and asked for mayonnaise on your hamburger and the restaurant operator put mustard on it and told you to take it? Like it or leave it? Remember the day the plant manager Urtz

wouldn't speak to you because your face was black?" By using these tactics on the picket line, we were able to steal the tactics from management and they couldn't come back and use them.

Carolyn Jernigan: A lot of people were out there on extra picket duty just because they felt the need to be there. We would walk from 6:00 sometimes until 6:00. That's steady walking on those hot, hot days. When one of those scabs would stick their head out for a breath of air we would laugh and cut up and just eat them up. When they'd go through the gate, we'd call them a scab and all that. That's what caused a lot of them to come out; they just couldn't take that.

There was a boy who used to help us out on the farm. We tried to talk to him when he said he was going in to work. But he said that he was going in. He was only 16 — and you're not supposed to go into work that young — but he went in and made two days. Then he came out. And I said, "Julius, why'd you come out." He said that Frank Urtz had told him to sweep that floor and he said, "I'm not going to do it," so he threw the broom down and he came out.

Ted Benton, strike coordinator: We had them where it hurts. It's not a

J.P. Stevens or a Burlington. We had the bleachery strong, and we had the knitting department strong. They couldn't operate without them. When the strike first started we had about 70 percent of the people out. They had a number of scabs in there, but they couldn't get out any production. It was more a liability to them than an asset. They couldn't keep up the quality. We had the skilled workers with us. The ones they had in the plant were mostly flunkies.

We'd hear about all the seconds that were going out, and we'd be out there on the gate and those trucks would come in loaded with rejects from J.C. Penney's. Buyers were saying, "If you can't send me good stuff, don't send me anything at all." That really hurt them. The boycott helped, too, but you see, it was the pickets that kept them from getting and keeping skilled workers. A lot of our people thought the boycott was the most important thing, but it's very hard to carry on a boycott when you don't have a brand name. They made stuff for K-Mart, but they put a K-Mart label on it. You'd go in a K-Mart store and you couldn't tell what was made by Oneita. I think the strike was won on the picket line, as are most strikes.

I kept telling the people, "We have all these forces at work for you, but the strike is going to be won right here on the picket line."

Scott Hoyman, regional director: The boycott was another major decision which was made by the International union. Sol Stetin had only been in office since January, 1972, but he adopted a very aggressive policy in pursuing this target. The International union put more energy into this boycott and strike, I think, than any other activity since the Henderson, N.C. strike of 1958 to '60.

It involved a number of very hard decisions. You always have to have priorities and make choices, and this strike was a priority. We postponed other things so they wouldn't get in the way. Another important decision — and this had to do with the character of your representative on the scene — was the style of the strike. We ran it as a very peaceful strike, although there were some complaints about that. We had black union people coming from Charleston and from Georgetown who said that this ain't the way to run the railroad. And we had a couple of confrontations over this.

One of which, at a mass meeting, I made the offer that if the folks wanted

Oneita Striker Determined to Win Better Life for Children



Wood-burning stove is sole source of heat for Mary Lee Middleton and her family who include (l-r) Linette, 21; Eusephus, 3; Marsha, 2; Larry, 11; Terrence, 1; and Thomas, 10. Two of her children were not present when the photo was taken. Linette is one of strikers.

ANDREWS, S. C.—"What can you do for your family on a \$1.60 an hour. When these kids get sick I can't afford a doctor. When they get a toothache, I can't afford a dentist. We live on rice and biscuits and I'd like to give them a piece of meat now and then. This strike is for my babies and I'm not going back until we win a decent contract."

Mary Lee Middleton, one of the 700 workers who have been on strike for five weeks at the Lane and Andrews, S.C., plants of Oneita Knitting Mills, sits in one of the three rooms which are the living quarters for herself and her eight children. A small wood-burning stove provided the only

warmth from the 18-degree cold which had gripped the South Carolina countryside during a record snowfall.

As she speaks, the tapping of a hammer could be heard outside as her son Larry worked to cover the glazier



Strikers at Lane, S.C. demonstrate solid ranks during march in front of company plant. Oneita workers at Lane and Andrews plants have been on strike for over 1 1/2 weeks in fight to win decent contract from the company.

Are you taking food out of her mouth?

You are if you buy products of the Oneita Knitting Mills.

Nearly 1,000 workers of Oneita Knitting Mills—nearly 700 Black, Black women and 40 members of the Textile Workers Union of America—were so struck because Oneita refused to bargain in good faith with their union.

They've been through the works—a labor battle which, as NLRB investigations, including testimony with the company, an unfair labor practice complaint against Oneita by a Federal Administrative Law Judge.

Now they're making the only thing left: Theirs on strike. **They need your help.**

Oneita's major products are men's and boys' knitted underwear. Its top customers are K-Mart (Kingsley), J.C. Penney, Sears-Robuck, Montgomery Ward.

If you buy men's or boys' knitted underwear from these stores, **make sure you don't buy Oneita-made products which will be carrying the store label.**

You might be taking food out of some child's mouth.

Textile Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO, CLC
3121 Commonwealth Avenue
Charlotte, N.C. 28206

(Self-stake aside for some information)



You Can Help! Don't Buy Oneita Underwear
Bearing the Labels of
Sears, J.C. Penney, Montgomery Ward and K-Mart

to vote for some other union to take over the strike and the other union would pick up the bill and furnish responsible direction to the strike, the Textile Workers Union would respect that decision. And nobody jumped up and so I guess that we retained direction of the strike, and we also kept paying the bills. But that issue, that challenge, or however you want to phrase it, that question which arose as to who should determine this kind of strategy and make these kinds of decisions was over that precise question: were we going to try to preserve a very peaceful atmosphere? And we felt that we didn't have any choices. I'll tell you one effect that it had. It really confronted the company with an unusual problem. You know, usually the company keeps talking about the violence and the disorder and the dynamiting and the homes being shot into, and judges respond to that. But even the sheriff said that there wasn't any base for talking like that.

So despite some complaints, mostly from people far away, that style turned out very well for us. We were also concerned about whether the company would be able to get significant black leadership in the community to take a stand against the strike, or encourage people to scab. The black community pretty well stayed on our side. But in the white community, it was harder — and still is.

Joyce Lambert: I know one girl who was out with us, she was strong union. She was a picket captain and she was strong union. And her sister, who lived in the same house with her; she went in there and worked every day and ate our union groceries. The thing that got me most was some of these people had tried and tried and tried to get a job at Oneita. They had put in one application right in behind another. They wouldn't hire them until we went out on strike and then they start calling in everybody.

Now my husband, he won't let me ride a scab to work. My neighbor right next door worked in the knitting department. Well, I don't hold a grudge. But he said, if she was able to find a ride while I was on strike, she can find her a ride while you're working. She's never asked me to ride again, and I'm glad. I really don't know what I would tell her. I've had some of the women who crossed the picket line to ask me for a ride, and I've just said, "No, I

can't have riders!" So I think really way down deep they know why I said that. The church I went to, there was only two scabs in it. The rest of those were on the picket line.

But another girl that was out with us, she was secretary of the Sunday School at the Pentacostal Holiness Church, and they gave her a hard time. Because somewhere in the Bible it says — I believe in Romans — it says something about "to strike" and we looked it up in the dictionary, and it means to strike with your hands, to hit back. Some of these people, they think it's sin to strike; they tried to have her thrown out of the Pentecostal Holiness church. She really went through holy terror. She had a hard time but she said she prayed her way out of it.

In July, 1973, the Oneita workers won a contract giving them arbitration, a good grievance procedure, a pension, dues check-off and job bidding. They had a contract to defend them from arbitrary power.

In the year and a half following the strike, the union won 41 out of 43 grievances filed; the strike convinced the Oneita Knitting Company to deal with its employees with more respect. By the end of the strike, the company had brought in someone over Frank Urtz. In March, 1975, he was removed completely.

Dorothy Glisson: What affected me really, before we had a contract we

didn't have the job bidding. If they wanted to give a good job or an easy job to someone, they would usually pick who they wanted. Their special ones. So after the contract — I've been here going on 23 years — I got to bid for a job in the mill. About six of us bid for this job which would take me off the sewing machine, off production, which I'd been on for 22 years; And it was doing rework; it wasn't all that much better, but it seemed like it was somewhat easier. Took the strain off me, wasn't quite as harassed. So I bid for the job. But they still, I think, had a little prejudice, because out of the ones that bid it they give it to another lady that didn't have as much seniority as I had. That kind of got me hot, because I figured that's what I wanted a union for, so I filed a grievance about that, on the basis of seniority.

When they checked on the six that had bid for the job, they classed us. They had a merit system giving us points. This other woman was number one, and I was number two, and the other one that was in the corner was number three. We was in there with Mr. Martin; I said, "I want to ask you a question. Why if I'm number two on the paper, why is number three over there in the corner doing the job?" He said, "I don't know, but I'll see." So in just a few days they posted the job again, and I bid it, and I got it.

That's the main thing; the people that's running the mill can't run it just exactly as they please. The union bar-



gains, and we have something to help us out. If it wasn't for that, I'd never have gotten the job. We have grievances, we have seniority, we have job bidding. We have many other things in the contract, but those are the three that really affected me, and if it hadn't been for that I know I wouldn't have gotten the job.

Charlene June: We had one that really stirred up something. We had nine girls who filed a grievance on a quality control job. They had the job up for bid; nine girls bid on the job, and the girl with the lowest seniority and who was a scab got the job.

The eight girls got together and they filed a grievance. They went through all of the steps and they didn't get any satisfaction. The company said that they went by "adaptability," "suitability" — anything unreasonable, that's what they went by. "How the lady's legs looked?" They didn't say that, but that's what it meant. "Adaptability," "suitability" — how she wears her hair and all that. Finally they took it to arbitration. To me, this was an important one; they took it to arbitration and we won. It was a union person that got the job. She got all of

her back pay dating back to the day that they put the scab on her job.

Effie Shurling: I started working at Oneita September 12, 1962, as an inspector. I just want to be there four more years, and I can retire, with a pension, which I didn't have before the strike.

George Justice, Local TWUA representative: We solve a lot of complaints for non-members. If they've had a problem, we took it up. The mechanics came over as a group and asked for a meeting with me. None of them belonged to the union. They came out and said, "We don't feel the company is paying us right; we're entitled to more money. If the union can do anything, we're all going to join." We met with the company and some of them soon got over 50 cents an hour increase. They all went to top pay and now they wouldn't even talk to us about joining the union. Some of these guys are asking over \$5 an hour. Yet they want the sewing machine operators and the people that are on lower rates to foot the bill for them. With dues at \$1.75 a week, the wage increase that they have gotten this year for just one hour would pay their dues. And they work forty hours all the time....

We're not getting very far with the older people who've been there 20 years and who didn't come out on strike. Day before yesterday James Johnson, the president of the local, signed up a woman that scabbed during the strike and would never even talk to us about joining the union. We pick up one or two like that a month. And, you know, the ones we've picked up surprisingly have become active in signing up other people, more active than many who went out with us. They sign up and in turn will pick up another one who worked during the strike, and they'll pick up another one or two.

Take Danny Lambert. He was bitterly opposed to the union and fought us tooth and nail and caused several fracas at the gate and was really vocal against the union. He joined in August this past year, and since then he's signed up six or seven of the other people who were very vocal against the union. You can count on Danny to carry the union message in the plant. In fact, he told the manager right after he joined that all these years he'd been there and all the company did was lie to him and he'd better get on the side that would do something for him.

The union could not stop the layoffs and reduced hours caused by the recent recession. In early 1975, many Oneita workers were on only 21 hours a week — seven hours on three days. TWUA attempted to get a week on, week off schedule so employees could collect unemployment the week they were off and maximize their incomes. The company refused, knowing that many would find other jobs before they were called back.

The recession also slowed plans for further organization in the Andrews area, because layoffs were very heavy at many plants. And the rapid turnover now in Oneita's mills coupled with the open shop law in South Carolina makes building a strong union difficult, if not impossible.

Despite the continuing problems, the Oneita victory was tremendously important for all Southern workers. It showed that a union could organize textiles in the South and that black and white workers could and would stick together — at least in union business, if not in social relations outside the plant. It was the victory needed to take on J.P. Stevens.



Stevens vs. Justice

"J.P. Stevens is so out of tune with a humane, civilized approach to industrial relations that it should shock even those least sensitive to honor, justice and decent treatment."

— *Boyd Leedom, former chairman, National Labor Relations Board*

"With scant regard for the means employed other than their effectiveness, Stevens interfered with, restrained and coerced its employees in the exercise of their rights under the labor act, flagrantly, cynically and unlawfully."

— *Second Circuit Court of Appeals*

On March 15, 1976, Congressman Frank Thompson (Dem., N.J.) settled into his chairman's seat at the House Labor Subcommittee's hearing room in Washington. The Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) was scheduled to testify on amendments to the National Labor Relations Act. He knew that they would focus on J.P. Stevens & Co., the nation's second largest textile company and notorious "Number One Labor Law Violator."

As expected, the union chiefs presented exhaustive documentation to show how Stevens has continued its intimidation and illegal tactics since the beginning of the long organizing campaign in 1963. But the Congressman had a surprise coming.

The TWUA organizing director completed his testimony and turned to Rep. Thompson. "Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce you to Maurine Hedgepeth of Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. She works at the J.P. Stevens Rosemary plant." Maurine, an attractive heavyset woman with teenage children, approached the table "scared to death." Then she heard Thompson comment to the hearing room. "I remember this lady from a meeting in Charlotte years ago. She was having a hard time then, too." Maurine savors the Chairman's remark. "He put me at ease. I felt like I was talking to a friend then."

By the time she finished, Maurine had brought tears to Thompson and

others in the chamber. She told them what it was like to be fired from Stevens because she worked for the union. And she told them how her family lived while she and her husband, also fired, had no income. "During supper, the kids used to ask me, 'Aren't you going to eat?' I always said, 'I ate while I was cooking.' The truth was I went without food many nights. We just didn't have enough."

Rep. Thompson went home that night moved, more sure than ever that the National Labor Relations Act needed teeth to protect Stevens workers. And Maurine, a weaver, went home — to her loom at Roanoke Rapids. She knew all about the law's weaknesses. But she was also committed to the union.

"I learned about unions from my daddy," she explains. "He belonged to the old United Textile Workers local here. When the General Strike broke out in 1934, the union's organizer lived with us. I was just two. Daddy was retired from the Navy and got \$126 a month — a lot of money in those days — plus what he earned at the mill. He bought food for the strikers. Roosevelt convinced him that unions were good. He remembered FDR saying, 'If I went to work tomorrow, I'd join a union today.' Well, I believed that, too. But when I joined the union, they fired me. I got my job back, but we still don't have a union contract here."

Maurine Hedgepeth is one of 3500 workers in the seven-plant Stevens complex which dominates Roanoke Rapids, a town of 15,000 nestled in North Carolina's farm country ten miles from the Virginia border. In August, 1974, a majority of the workers voted in an official National Labor Relations Board election to be represented by the TWUA. Labor leaders hailed the election victory as the milestone climaxing an 11-year organizing campaign among Stevens workers. And they trumpeted their hopes for a quick, breakthrough contract with the most intransigent of the

anti-union giants. But to date no agreement has been reached.

Maurine and thousands of other Stevens workers are still waiting for justice. Unfortunately, the law of the land is not on their side. In fact, the Stevens campaign illustrates how the nation's labor laws can be effectively used by corporations to suppress workers' rights and cripple unions.

It is not the workers' fault that only ten percent of the South's textile industry is organized — anymore than it was the fault of black people that it took them 300 years to get the legal protection they needed to exercise their Constitutional rights. And like the civil rights movement, much of labor's energy has centered on forcing the law to serve the powerless dissenter rather than the well-entrenched status-quo.

Focus on Stevens

Unionism has endured a history of failure in textiles. The militance of the walkouts in the 1920s and '30s was never institutionalized. Industrial unionism, spearheaded by the CIO, marched through oil, steel, auto, and rubber, but was interrupted by World War II before it could reach textiles. In the late 1940s, the CIO launched "Operation Dixie," but its organizers faced the hostile Taft-Hartley Act and reactionary mood of Joe McCarthy instead of FDR and the pro-labor Wagner Act. The union scored significant gains, but employers rapidly learned to use the new laws to isolate and eventually destroy union sentiment. During the '50s, the TWUA suffered internecine warfare and severe setbacks at Henderson, N.C. (where its regional director went to jail on trumped-up charges and a bitter strike was totally crushed), and in Darlington, S.C. (where Deering-Milliken closed its plant when workers voted for the union.) Membership in the South steadily declined from its high of 120,000 in 1948.

When the AFL and CIO merged in



1955, one of the concessions given CIO head Walter Reuther was the direction of a separate division committed to industrial organizing. Through this Industrial Union Department, Reuther hoped to preserve the old CIO technique of drawing organizers from numerous unions to fight holdouts — especially in the South and especially in textiles. The idea still worked. In a one year period from 1961 to '62, the IUD organizers captured a beachhead

on the precarious South Carolina front by winning seven of eight NLRB elections. Bakers and butchers, weavers and seamstresses, steelworkers and paperworkers — all gained the protection of a union. The campaign concentrated in the Piedmont's Spartanburg and Greenville, but the big boy in town — J. P. Stevens — remained untouched.

By the early '60s, the task of organizing the giant textile chains appeared

as inescapable as it did impossible. Every effort was met with highly successful anti-labor tactics, including the ultimate weapon: closing down any plant where the workers voted for a union. To counteract that strategy, the union chose to resurrect the CIO's practice of targeting one leading company to break the industry open for unionism. By organizing at all the company's plants at once, the union could wield far greater negotiating power and prevent the shifting of production to unrepresented shops.

The IUD and TWUA began to consider which textile giant to take on. Burlington, the Carolina-based industry leader, had vigorously resisted unions in the '40s. And Spencer Love, Burlington's founder and an ally of Gov. Terry Sanford, presented a formidable foe. Number Two Stevens, on the other hand, had honored several union contracts in New England and had established their Southern headquarters in Greenville. Word of the '61-62 election wins had spread into their plants, and Stevens workers were openly asking for union protection. But Bob Stevens, the super-patriot, former Secretary of Army under President Eisenhower, led his company with an iron will. Finally after much debate, exhaustive research, and innumerable plant-gate flyers, the IUD and the TWUA made a joint decision to undertake a J.P. Stevens organizing drive. To crack textiles at all costs.

They knew it wouldn't be easy. Stevens had grown from a single mill in Andover, Mass., in 1813 to one of the most diversified and tightly-controlled firms in America. Following his ancestors' advice, Bob Stevens kept the family in charge — even as he expanded into new territory. In the

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late 1940s, Stevens made its major foray south, buying up some 15 separate firms including the Roanoke Rapids complex, several Greenville enterprises, and the Carter Fibers chain. The acquisition policy continued throughout the '50s and by 1963, the company's annual sales topped \$600 million with 55 plants employing 35,000 workers. Steady growth and conservative management spelled predictable profit margins and regular dividends. Bob Stevens didn't think he needed anyone telling him how to run his business or treat his employees — least of all the American labor movement.

The Campaign Begins

During 1963-64, the IUD brought new blood from the IUE, Steelworkers, Mineworkers and other unions to bolster the forces of the TWUA. Some 30 organizers blanketed 20-odd Stevens plants with handbills, built organizing committees, and signed up supporters on union cards, the first step towards an NLRB election.

"I got a leaflet and sent it back to the union," recalls Al Sanders of Greenville, S.C. "I was at the Dunear plant, had been since 1948. I was always for the union. I used to visit my two brothers up in Detroit. They worked for Ford and Chrysler and were in the union. Up there, you were funny if you weren't in a union. And those miners during the Depression — I knew about them."

In August 1963, Al Sanders was fired because his work "was insufficient." Over a hundred workers like Sanders were fired at virtually every plant where organizers were building committees. The pattern became clear very quickly. Stevens intended to fire union supporters rather than allow them to organize. And that was only the beginning.

Jess Cudd, a spinning doffer for fifty years, worked for Stevens in Whitmire, S.C.; his son, Donald, returned from the service and went to work at the same plant. They were the first two employees in tiny Whitmire (3500) to join the union. Stevens fired Donald, but he continued to organize in the mill village. Then they tried to bribe Jess to quit with extra pension payments and guarantees of child custody for his son's kids. Jess recalls the plant manager's appeal. He said, "If

I'd run Donald off, and adopt them two young'uns and quit myself, it'd be all right." Jess refused the humiliating offer to break up his family and stood by the union; he too was soon fired.

During the summer of 1964, Stevens workers from throughout the Carolinas gathered together in Charlotte for the first time. Jess Cudd was there, and Al Sanders, and Maurine Hedgepeth, along with hundreds of others, mostly middle-aged whites and a few blacks (the plants were 85-90 percent white at the time). It was at that meeting that Maurine got the assurances she needed to stick her family's neck out for the union.

"During the first union campaign in Roanoke Rapids in 1959, lots of people lost their jobs," she explains. "I didn't work in that campaign because nobody would offer me any protection. But at the Charlotte meeting, Jim Pierce (IUD Southern Coordinator) told me, 'Maurine, if you get involved, we'll never leave that town until all of you people (who might get fired) are reinstated.'"

That was enough support for Maurine. And it came just in time. The first NLRB hearing regarding abuses against Roanoke Rapids workers were

held in September, 1964. Maurine decided to testify against the company, on behalf of those who had already been fired. "A few days later I went on pregnancy leave," she says. "I was supposed to go back to work in January, 1965. When I went back to get my job, they told me there were no jobs available. And they'd fired my husband the day before Christmas, after 25 years as a loom fixer. A new baby and neither of us had a job. Stevens made it clear that they didn't like me telling the truth to the Labor Board."

At the Bar of Justice

The Union filed charges with the Labor Board to re-instate Hedgepeth, Cudd, Sanders and literally hundreds of others, claiming Stevens had violated the law. Specifically, Section 8 (a)(3) of the National Labor Relations Act states: "It shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer, by discrimination in regard to hire or tenure of employment...to encourage or discourage membership in any labor organization." Despite the clarity of the law, the remedies it provides against offenders are so few and so long in coming



Jess Cudd with his son, Donald, and daughter-in-law, and their son

that they are virtually ineffective. Finding that a worker was fired for supporting a union, the Labor Board has only two basic remedies: it can order the worker re-instated at the same job, and it can award back wages for the time out of work. The company can appeal the rulings into the courts delaying any action until the frustrated pro-union worker has given up. Meanwhile, the Board can not block a flagrant violator from repeating the same offense.

The Labor Board itself has no punitive powers to issue either an injunction or contempt citations. It has to seek enforcement powers through the courts. Furthermore, the Labor Act does not allow workers to sue for civil damages, even though the same Act does permit employers to sue unions for damages from secondary boycotts and to request the court to enjoin picketing.

Four years and 21 days after losing her job, Ms. Hedgepeth returned to work. "Four years is a long time to wait. I had faith and thought I'd get my job back. But it seemed like forever. Jesse Butler, an NLRB attorney, felt responsible. He begged me to testify before the Trial Examiner. He

made sure I got my job back. And the union kept their word. They stayed in town until I got back to work."

"When I got my job back," Sanders explains, "they gave me one of the hardest jobs in the mill. I had to work on the oldest looms; I'm a fixer. But the letter from the NLRB said that I was supposed to get the same job. I told the supervisor to give me back my regular job or I'd call up the NLRB and the union." Mr. Sanders got his old job back and \$27,000 in back pay. But he had to wait for five years. By that time the momentum for organizing the plant had been broken.

Thus rather than protect workers, Section 8(a)(3) functions more like a "hunting license" for Southern textile executives. They can discharge employees illegally, pay peanuts in penalties several years later (if the worker is still around), then deduct the amount as a legitimate business expense. In other words, the law itself makes firing pro-union workers a relatively inexpensive way to stifle individual expression and undercut a union drive. Exploiting that sinister aspect of the Labor Act is exactly what J.P. Stevens has done.

The company literally eliminated the first wave of organizing in 1963-64

by firing Sanders, Hedgepeth and other leaders. Less courageous workers were bought off and intimidated. "Stevens had so many pimps in the mill," Sanders says angrily. "They promised them good jobs, made people afraid they'd get fired. People turned their back on the union. They only want to use the union to get more money."

Faced with a company willing to beat back its workers "by any means necessary," the union offensive shifted from the plant gates to the courtroom. TWUA had to prove to both the workers and the Stevens management that the union would not abandon its commitment to those who wanted union protection. So while organizing continued at a reduced pace, union attorneys fought to get people their jobs back and the right to express freely their union sympathies.

The cases accumulated throughout the '60s finally began to pay off. (See box for details.) To date, a total of 289 illegally fired workers have received \$1.3 million in back pay awards. In addition, the company has been found guilty of such tactics as promising benefits two days before an NLRB election to influence the voting; electronically spying on union organizers; downgrading union members' jobs; firing workers who testified before the NLRB; and refusing to hire workers whose relatives were union members. *Stevens quickly achieved the dubious honor of breaking the nation's labor laws more often than any other company in history.*

As the number of offenses increased, the NLRB became more incensed with Stevens' blatantly illegal behavior. It began going to US Circuit Courts on its own to force the company to obey the law. Before long, the Courts became outraged. In 1972, for example, the Second Circuit Court held Stevens in contempt for failing to obey its *previous* order that the company stop violating the law. The Court's decision read in part, "Our system of justice cannot survive if litigants are seized with the notion that they can ignore the lawful orders of a court simply because they disagree with them. In addition, the record here strongly justifies the inference that Stevens deliberately took their chances in ignoring our decrees because they thought it profitable for them to do so."



Maurine Hedgepeth of Roanoke Rapids, N.C., speaks to a group of Stevens workers who gathered in Charlotte in 1964.

THE RECORD OF A CORPORATE OUTLAW

The unprecedented record of violations of the National Labor Relations Act listed below earned J.P. Stevens & Co. its reputation as the Nation's Number 1 Labor Law Violator. As the cases mounted, the National Labor Relations Board resorted to tagging each case with a Roman numeral. Several pending cases threaten to add even more violations to the record.

NLRB CASES

| CASE | PERIOD OF LITIGATION | PRESENT STATUS OF CASE | VIOLATIONS OF LAW |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Stevens I | August, 1963 to December, 1967 | Company found guilty. 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. Supreme Court denied company request for review. | 71 discharges of union supporters and other violations. |
| Stevens II | June, 1964 to October, 1968 | Company found guilty. 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. Supreme Court denied company request for review. | 18 discharges of union supporters and other violations. |
| Stevens III | August, 1966 to December, 1968 | Company found guilty. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. No further appeals. | 15 discharges and other violations. |
| Stevens IV | August, 1966 to December, 1968 | Company found guilty. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. No further appeals. | 3 discharges and other violations. |
| Stevens V | September, 1967 to Oct., 1969 | Company found guilty. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. No appeal to Supreme Court. | 4 discharges and other violations. |
| Stevens VI | November, 1967 to Feb., 1971 | Company found not guilty. Workers won case through NLRB, but lost decision in 4th Circuit Court. Supreme Court turned down review. | Involved 17 discharges. |
| Stevens VII | February, 1968 to Oct., 1971 | Company found guilty. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. Supreme Court denied company request for review. | 4 discharges and massive violations resulting in bargaining at Statesboro. |
| Stevens VIII | July, 1968 to March, 1971 | Company not guilty. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed NLRB ruling. No appeal to Supreme Court. | Involved 2 discharges and other violations. |
| Stevens IX | March, 1969 to June, 1972 | Company found guilty. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. No appeal to Supreme Court. | 1 discharge and other violations. |
| Stevens X | February, 1970 to July, 1970 | Company not guilty. An order to bargain case which automatically lost when Stevens VI was lost. | |
| Stevens XI | January, 1970 to Dec., 1971 | Company found guilty. 5th Circuit Court upheld NLRB findings. No appeal to Supreme Court. | Company cut pay of 144 workers after union won bargaining rights. |
| Stevens XII | June, 1970 to February, 1973 | Company found guilty. DC Circuit Court of Appeals upheld NLRB findings. No appeal to Supreme Court. | 2 discharges and other violations. |
| Stevens XIII | September, 1973 to Present | Pending. Workers have appealed NLRB decision to 4th Circuit Court. | Involved 23 discharges. |
| Stevens XIV | January, 1974 to April, 1975 | Company found guilty by NLRB. No further appeals. | Interrogation of and threats to union supporters. |
| Stevens XV | November, 1974 to Sept., 1975 | Company found guilty by NLRB. No further appeals. | Interrogation of and threats to union supporters. |

CONTEMPT CASES

| | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Contempt I | August, 1969 to February, 1973 | Company found guilty by 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. Supreme Court denied review. | 11 discharges and other violations. |
| Contempt II | September, 1970 to October, 1971 | Company settled case prior to hearings in 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. | 7 discharges and other violations. |
| Contempt III | September, 1973 to Present | Pending. Recommendations of Special Master appointed by 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals expected soon. | Involved 6 discharges and other violations. |
| Contempt IV | September, 1973 to Present | Pending. Decision from 5th Circuit Court of Appeals on recommendations expected soon. | Involved refusal to bargain at Statesboro, Ga., plant. |
| Contempt V | June, 1975 to Present | Hearing in 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. Pending. | Threats, coercion, interference. |

—prepared by Michael Krivosh, IUD

READINGS ON THE NLRB

For initial background information on the National Labor Relations Act consult the list below; material on recent legislative hearings is available from the AFL-CIO legal department. Attend a NLRB hearing and you can understand in human terms the role of the law in organizing the south.

Division of Information, National Labor Relations Board, Washington, D.C. 20570. General materials available as well as specific sche-

dules of hearings, etc.

"The Genesis of National Labor Relations Board in Historic Perspective," by Elihu Platt, *Labor Law Journal*, January, 1969. Easily understood by layman.

"How 7041 Got Fired: the NLRB Down South," by Ed McConville, *The Nation*, October 25, 1975, V.221 No. 13. Overview of recent organizing; Congressional actions and NLRB.

"A Layman's View of the

National Labor Relations Act," Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO, 815 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

"The NLRB: What It Is, What It Does," Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, Document No. 3100-00133. (costs 25¢)

Turbulent Years, Irving Bernstein, available in libraries. Excellent historical overview. How the Act was born; the weaknesses then and now.

The Court's remedies went well beyond the Labor Board in providing both short term relief and the basis for further union organizing. Workers were reinstated; the union received lists of employees' names and access to plant bulletin boards; and the company had to send letters to its workers acknowledging that it had broken the law many times over.

Two other dramatic court decisions set the stage for significant union victories and the current impasse in the campaign.

In 1971, the Fifth Circuit Court declared that Stevens had committed "massive" violations of the law during the 1968 organizing drive at Statesboro, Georgia. The Court was so disturbed that it chose a novel remedy to restore justice: it threw out the results of the "biased" representation election and awarded bargaining rights to the union.

For the first time, the TWUA had been certified as the legal bargaining agent for a group of Stevens workers in the South. But the victory held a hollow promise, for the company refused to negotiate a contract. Gradually, Stevens reduced production at Statesboro, and by the time the Circuit Court had found the company guilty of "bad faith bargaining," the plant was closed down. It was the old Darlington story: when the union gets in, throw the workers out the door.

"Before we started organizing, it wasn't too much different than slavery," explains Addie Jackson, a young black mother of two, who worked at Statesboro. "No lunch hour. Just eat your sandwich while running your machine. I thought that was the most terrible thing I ever heard of. And then Stevens closed down the plant. They shut us out."

In the other dramatic decision, the Second Circuit Court ruled in 1972 that union officials could make speeches inside the plants at Roanoke Rapids. Having access to company bulletin boards and an audience inside the shop offered the union unique advantages to counter directly and personally the anti-labor propaganda spread by the industry.

With these tools, the Roanoke Rapids drive picked up steam. Bold organizers — a Mineworker from John L.'s day, college-bred liberals, and seasoned TWUA vets — challenged the startled Company officials by



J.P. Stevens workers march in Roanoke Rapids, N.C., on the first anniversary of winning the election, August, '75.



Union officials, workers and students protest in New York at annual stockholders' meeting of J. P. Stevens, April, '76.

conspicuously posting Union notices in the plants and building local committees. N.C. AFL-CIO President Wilbur Hobby traveled to Roanoke Rapids time and again to boost people's spirits with his colorful support, from hard-hitting speeches to playing Santa Claus at the Christmas party. A TWUA cheerleader crew took to the streets and gained community support. In the

closing days, IUD Coordinator Harold McIver went inside the plants and answered Company captive-audience speeches with the bluster and enthusiasm of his youth in the Georgia steelyards. And Congressman Andy Young and others led an optimistic rally in songs and cheers just days before the vote.

The final count was tense. The late

August heat hung heavy over the expectant assortment gathered at the polls. When the victory was announced cheers rang out. But there was a certain hush as well. No one was really prepared for such a clearcut decision. The black vote (the plants were 30-40 percent black by 1974) had carried the day. Union and Company officials caught their breath for the next round of battle. Negotiating a contract wouldn't be easy.

The months dragged on. Black and white workers grew stronger in their resolve for a union, but little happened at the bargaining table. Rather than close down the seven-plant complex, Stevens has turned over the bargaining chores to a professional anti-union attorney, Whiteford Blakeney, creator of the infamous negotiating style known as "Blakeney's Formula." Briefly

photo by Ed Snider



Addie Jackson at annual meeting.

stated his approach gives the semblance of fair bargaining by discussing non-essential points; but Blakeney refuses to even talk about the two keys to building a union in a new plant: the dues check-off and arbitration of grievance. Without these provisions an under financed local would be forced to go out on strike to settle even minor grievances for their members — clearly an impossible position for the new union.

Beyond the Courts

Union leaders have become quite adept at using the latest rulings as levers in the next round of organizing Stevens. But now that they have bargaining rights at Statesboro and Roanoke Rapids, new pressures are needed to actually win a contract for the workers that have survived with them. The courts will continue to be

important, and several other key decisions are possible from cases now in process. But the union knows it can't depend on the courts for a meaningful contract. The laws are simply not strong enough to make a corporation respect the wishes of a majority of its workers.

The Thompson Committee hearings during the past year might have remedied the situation with legislation giving labor laws more teeth. Included in the package of amendments to the National Labor Relations Act, was one informally known as the "Stevens Amendment." It would have prohibited the government from giving federal contracts to flagrant violators of the NLRA, just as those guilty of abusing the Civil Rights Act forfeit their chance for business with the government. Since 1968, Stevens has landed \$106 million in federal contracts, supplying everything from space shields for the moon shots to parachutes for the military. Losing that much income from his buddies at the Pentagon would definitely upset Bob Stevens. But the amendment will probably not reach a vote this session of Congress. With Ford in the White House, the labor movement has all but given up efforts at legislative reform of the NLRB. The union must look elsewhere for help.

After careful planning and lobbying within the AFL-CIO, the union is ready for a new strategy based on the dedication of workers like Maurine Hedgepeth and Addie Jackson and the unified power of their brothers and sisters in the labor movement. On June 2, 1976, the TWUA merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) and delegates at a joint convention shouted approval for a three-fold offensive to force Stevens to sign a contract: a national consumer boycott more extensive than the Farah boycott undertaken by ACWA; a broad-based organizing drive larger than the one begun in 1963 against Stevens; and a sophisticated legal attack to increase access for organizers and penalties against the company.

And the merged Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) is learning from the civil rights movement and coalition styles of the sixties — especially important since many of Stevens' 85 plants are now over 30 percent black. At the 1976 annual meeting for Stevens stockholders a handful of ministers, South-

ern liberals, college students, black and white workers and union officials lambasted the company's arrogance toward the law and its employees, giving the company a glimpse of what's to come in the new StopStevens campaign. Inside Stevens' meeting room, Addie Jackson, still unemployed since the Statesboro plant shut down, rose with her proxy in hand and slowly turned to the crowded room of New York businessmen, slightly nervous, but proud and straight. "I wish you could go back home with me to Statesboro and see that big, beautiful, *EMPTY* Stevens plant that *YOU* own." Her cadence and manner came from the black community, a staunch ally for the union.

In the end, the textile workers themselves will determine whether a new labor movement sweeps the Southern milltowns and completes the old CIO's trek of the 1930s. A legal victory might net a good contract with valuable protections. But unless workers are organized at the same time — at the multiple Stevens plants in the Carolinas — the Company will use the contract in the same way that Burlington manipulates their few plants covered under contract.

Union cards are pouring into the IUD office from Stevens workers in rural Georgia, North Carolina's Piedmont and from Greenville — where things began. The labor movement of the '70s can combine the experiences of Walter Reuther's era with lessons from the civil rights movement, for the constituencies have merged in the mills to include both traditions. Cracking Stevens is like taking on US Steel and Bull Connor at the same time. Only massive mobilization throughout the Stevens chain, combined with a full-scale campaign to garner support of the media, liberals, labor, women and civil rights groups, can allow the deep desires and just demands of hundreds of thousands of people to be expressed and fulfilled.

Maurine Hedgepeth has been through a lot since she first heard about unions from her father. And she's not about to quit. "Now we've voted in the union. It's only when we stick together and show how strong we are that we'll get something out of them. Til then, they'll never change. Money is important and we need it to live. But it's not as important as my self-respect — to have a little dignity."

Victoria sobre Farah

by Bill Finger

In 1905, at the ripe age of 18, Sidney Hillman found himself locked in a Russian prison, caught red-handed in the abortive first Revolution. After two short jail terms, he fled to England seeking freedom from the Czar's rule. He then took a boat to Ellis Island, N.Y., and found his way to Chicago's sweatshops where he combined his revolutionary vision with a job as an apprentice cutter with Hart, Schaffner & Marx. From the shadows of Jane Addams and Clarence Darrow, Hillman emerged as the champion of east European cutters and of the young Midwest farm women who left their rural life for a sewing machine in the city's sickness.

In 1914, at the United Garment Workers convention in Nashville, Tennessee, dissidents from around the country walked out to form a new union. They drafted Hillman as their first president. In a few short years, the Russian immigrant had built a powerful force, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union of America (ACWA), implementing the concept of industrial unionism before its time. With John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman ushered in the most successful period of American unionism: the 1930s, when industrial unions became welded to the CIO.

Through the years, Hillman supported his Southern soldiers — people like Eula McGill and Ed Blair — but he knew his power was in the ethnic cities of the North. The Nashville convention was a fluke in the Amalgamated's chronicle of significant moments. But if he were alive today, he would quickly recognize the power of the new ethnic centers and take another long look at the Southern Rim.

New York and Chicago may still attract the industry buyers, but the actual cutters and sewers have moved from the lower East Side to places like the south side of Texas. Today there are some 25,000 mens-and-boys apparel workers in El Paso alone. Almost all of them are Chicanos. The leaders in the industry — Blue Bell, Levi

Strauss, Mann, Billy-the-Kid, and Farah — all have plants there, though their names are not widely known. But by 1974, after a 22-month strike and boycott, the name Farah had become a household word for millions. And Chicanos in Texas — their home for centuries — had joined Cesar Chavez in etching their culture onto the changing national landscape. Another ethnic wave had swept into its own, and into the leadership of the trade union movement.

I.

Chicanos dominate the sprawling city of El Paso — 58 percent by official figures, but probably closer to 70 percent in reality. Across the border spreads Juarez, Mexico, which together with El Paso forms a metropolitan area of over one million. Surrounding isolated land belongs to the sand, stone and sky, with the exception of a few green ribbons along the Rio Grand where truck farming and the western extreme of Fort Worth's cattle ranches thrive — and an area the size of Rhode Island that belongs to the Defense Department's ill-named Fort Bliss.

Along Interstate 10, the new spine of El Paso, lie the clothing factories where Chicanos work. Levi-Strauss, the world's largest apparel manufacturer (over \$1 billion annual sales) operates four plants in the city, joining several other leaders in this low-wage, predominantly female industry. But the talk of the town is Willie Farah, El Paso's largest employer with five factories and about 95 percent Chicano and 85 percent women.

On May 9, 1972, three-fourths of the shipping department at Farah's giant Gateway plant walked out into the hot El Paso sun. Eventually, 2000 Farah workers joined their friends in San Antonio who had struck seven days earlier. Word spread fast between the shipping and loading departments in the two towns. It was the nature of Farah's production for these departments to be in constant contact. Rank-





and-file organizing had helped solidify their relationships.

Some San Antonio workers had attended a rally in El Paso several weeks before the walkouts. As one El Paso strike leader recalls, "We contacted people in San Antonio to come talk with us and tell us how their organizing drive was going. About seven or eight carloads came. They marched with us, and Farah had two photographers taking pictures. When they went back to work on Monday some of their leaders got fired, the ones who attended the rally. The workers didn't stand for that thing. That was the spark for the strike."

Paul Garza attended that rally in El Paso and made the mistake of telling his supervisor in San Antonio that he was sick that day. They took his picture and he was fired. "We were tired of living on rice and beans. We wanted to live like anybody else." The time had come to end the humiliation of no job security, no maternity leave, an

Bill Finger is Labor Editor of Southern Exposure. Special thanks for this article goes to Molly Ivins, Texas Observer and Eileen Whalen, formerly of the Southern Patriot.

inadequate insurance program and an average weekly take-home-pay of \$69.

Rank-and-file organizing had actually begun years before the strike. Several El Paso workers remember those early rumblings: "In late 1968 and early '69, we had some small meetings, five or ten and then 12 or 15 guys. We were trying to organize. All the people at the meetings were men, and the majority of workers were women. That was our greatest obstacle, getting the women signed up for the union." Many of these men from the cutting, shipping and machine shops had been to Vietnam and to Army bases across the country. They had tasted life outside El Paso, many for the first time, and they learned about Chicano leaders like Cesar Chavez.

"We started talking about these things at athletic events that we sponsored," said another worker. "The shipping department, where I worked, used to have a softball team, and we'd play against the machine shop and the cutting department for some beers. All these departments were mostly men. We'd sit around after the game drinking beer and talk about these things and the union. It was hard to get hold of the women because Farah intentionally had us separated. They

had women starting work earlier and they changed our break routine. They did a good job of isolating us." Young and usually single, these men formed the nucleus for the early organizing efforts. They didn't have to look after kids and could afford to spend time in meetings.

In 1969, the ACWA sent organizers to El Paso to distribute leaflets and gradually spread word about the union. The men had considered getting in touch with the Teamsters but soon gravitated to the Clothing Workers. In October, 1970, the cutting department voted in an NLRB election for representation by the ACWA. But Farah refused to honor the NLRB ruling. He appealed and the organizing continued.

Amalgamated also sent staff members into San Antonio to organize the Farah plant there. They found some good men and women to work with. One San Antonio woman remembered those early days vividly: "I didn't know very much about unions. The company stole three raises from me, every time I got close to a 10-cent raise. There was no chance of advancing myself.

"One day, one of my kids got sick," she continued. "I went to the hospital,

but they wouldn't let me stay. They made me get back to work. And we could be laid off at the will of the Company. There was always the fear of getting laid off. We never had any job security. Plus they were always changing our quotas. We had to do something. It was mostly pride. They tried to step all over us."

II.

The walkouts posed special problems for the ACWA organizers. "On May 3," one witness recalled, "we were sitting in a cafe where we could see the plant. All of sudden 600 or 700 workers start coming out the gate. It was a feeling of pure panic. We were almost ready to file a petition (to the NLRB). The workers took it out of our hands."

When thousands poured out of the Gateway plant a week later in El Paso, the stakes went up. The walkout became a problem not only for the organizers but for the top union leaders as well. The organizing job had not been completed; less than half of the workers were signed up. May was not the big month for shipping pants. It was a bad time for the union to respond.

Union chiefs traveled to El Paso to consult with field staff. They recognized that the future of Amalgamated depended on organizing the South and Southwest. They could not turn their backs on the Farah workers or deny them any of the weapons in the union arsenal. Within the week, Amalgamated decided to undertake their most difficult battle since the East Side wars on their own Union Square in New York City. They had won then and they knew they must win again.

Fighting Willie Farah was no gentlemen's duel. A mechanical genius, cocky, crude, and fanatically pro-American, Farah had built up his Lebanese parents' small shop to the largest private employer in El Paso. By 1971, Farah had 9,500 workers on his \$40 million payroll, including one out of every seven workers in El Paso — a remarkable contribution, he thought, to "the problem of Chicano unemployment." In his own style of paternalism, he offered workers free coffee and sweet rolls as incentive to keep up with his whirling machines. Dissenters were ruthlessly purged, whether they wanted time to go to the bathroom or the freedom to wear

their hair long. To the larger public, Farah remained a loner and social failure. Even his friend George Janzen, president of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, said, "Willie is too wealthy to have ever bothered much over the social amenities."

Above all, Willie Farah despised unions. He did not intend to change. As the battle with ACWA heated up, Farah denounced, blasted and ridiculed the "communists" and "agitators" to anyone who would listen — despite the efforts of his New York PR firm to muzzle him. He soon became his own worst enemy in the eyes of the press. He told one reporter, "The union did us a favor by cleaning house, getting the troublemakers out. With that filth gone, the plant is more cohesive." On another occasion, he said of the union: "My workers have been intimidated and frightened. The management has been vilified, the company's philosophy has been falsified and the public has been deluded."

The stories of police dogs harassing picketing strikers, arrests in the middle of the night, and multiple unfair labor practices added to impressions that Willie was the one doing the intimidating, not the union.

III.

In July 1972, Amalgamated capitalized on this publicity with the announcement of a nationwide boycott of Farah pants — an identifiable product, widely sold and thus subject to consumer reaction against the "villain" in Texas. The AFL-CIO committed the support of its full membership — only the third time in its history for such a move (the United Farm Workers boycotts and the multi-union 1969 GE Boycott were the others). The Catholic Church added more strength. A courageous El Paso priest, Father Jesse Munoz, turned his huge church, Our Lady of the Light, into the strike headquarters. His 25,000 parishioners, many of them Farah strikers, formed the first line of support within the Chicano community. And Bishop Sidney Metzger, based in El Paso, wrote letters of endorsement throughout the national Catholic Church.

As the boycott picked up steam, others offered their help, from city councils to church groups, from leftist organizers to El Paso patriots, from the Farmworkers' Chavez to

1972 Presidential candidate McGovern. US Senator Gaylord Nelson announced the formation of a Committee for Justice for Farah Workers that included Edward Kennedy, Joanne Woodward, Archibald MacLeish, Averell Harriman and a host of other dignitaries. At a Washington press conference, Nelson hammered home the broad appeal of the strikers: "The issues in this strike are basic to our democratic process. At Farah, the issues are not only decent wages and working conditions. The issue is human decency — the rights of American citizens, the continuing struggle of Mexican-Americans to overcome the prejudice and the repression that keeps them vulnerable to exploitation."

The workers on the picket line meant to prove Nelson right. Men and women discussed the issues of the strike and the broader community problems. "We were like one big family," remembered one woman deeply involved in the strike. "We helped each other with family problems. Strikers married strikers. My kids (she has three, ages 10, 11 and 12) learned a lot of things that had to be done. From 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., I left them by themselves or took them to the office. And we were finding out about our protections under the NLRB. I was learning about a union."

The strikers joined in the boycott effort, traveling around the country speaking to labor groups and other supporters. AFL-CIO central bodies worked closely with the Amalgamated's Union Label Department to generate publicity, plan and staff the picket lines, educate the community, and push toward a contract. The boycott gained momentum with large Christmas rallies late in '72 and the publicity given Bishop Metzger's strong endorsement. By April, 1973, Farah's sales for the quarter were down by \$9.1 million from the previous year. ACWA's new President Murray Finley didn't let the press miss the news. "The Farah management can no longer take refuge in its silly argument that previous drops in sales, which coincide with the onset of the boycott, were caused by changes in styles or fabrics."

Willie still didn't buckle. He applied more pressure inside the plants by bringing across the border each day some 600 Mexicans who could not be reached by the picketing strikers. Farah also claimed that a majority of

the workers were content. As proof, he took out full-page ads with a petition signed by his "8,000 happy Farah workers." The phrase stuck, but the "happies" did not. The good Father Munoz counted the tiny signatures and counted only 2,310 names, far short of Farah's 8,000.

"I asked for an open discussion with the happies," Father Munoz says, "but the company said this was unthinkable. The happies would come to me afraid and ask, 'Is this true what Farah has told us about no jobs if the union comes?' The people were so afraid."

Some strikers wanted to increase pressures at the local scene by raising larger social issues in the Chicano community and taking more militant action at the plant gates, rather than devoting so much of the union's energy in the boycott. "The boycott is and it isn't a good thing," explains one worker, critical of the national union's strategy. "See, once they make you depend financially, pretty soon you're going to depend on them for leadership, that's the policy making of that group. If the leadership and policy making had come from our own resources, it would have taken a more militant and social aspect.

"The union will always make it seem an economic struggle instead of a social struggle even though they are yelling social justice all over the country. They were scared because things were getting out of hand, because of the consciousness that was growing here and because of our enthusiasm with other organizations around the country. At first, we didn't think the boycott would be effective at all. Well, we learned so much about the Anglo community outside El Paso and about workers across the country, and many people became conscious of the exploitation of the Mexican-American down here. So the boycott did help."

Amalgamated stepped up efforts to hurt Farah financially. They hired a young activist from Yale Divinity School to coordinate the clergy in cities targeted by the boycott; and they used Alinsky-style organizers and civil rights groups to supplement the muscle of the labor movement in several critical towns. Boycott staff, for example, solidified the strong but disparate labor movement around eliminating Farah products from Alabama, an important market for the

company. Within a month, they had succeeded.

Utilizing the leverage of a highly visible, single label product (Farah slacks), the boycott began to score undeniable points against the company. Farah's stock plummeted from 39½ to below 7 dollars a share on Wall Street. The financial community was clearly worried about Willie's apparent irrational intransigence against the union. At the 1973 annual stockholders meeting, Father Munoz was again on the scene to remind the assembled owners of the company that "the stock market doesn't lie." Finally, the pressures from his losses brought Farah to his knees.

On February 24, 1974, after 22 long months, Amalgamated and Farah reached a settlement. Both sides agreed to drop their lawsuits; and when the mayor of El Paso certified that a majority of workers and strikers had signed union cards, Amalgamated called off its boycott and the company agreed to negotiate a contract.

The union met with the strikers at Our Lady of the Light, the last official gathering at the church; they met with the non-strikers at a separate meeting. A 55-member rank-and-file committee was elected and began around-the-clock negotiations with Farah representatives, finally hammering out a contract which included dues check-off and binding arbitration. On March 6 and 7, 1974, the Farah workers ratified the agreement in the Gateway cafeteria and in San Antonio. The strikers returned to work, and the union settled down to the business of administering a contract covering the

remaining Farah plants.

Criticism arose over the union's actions during those pressured final days. Some workers felt the contract should have been ratified outside the plant by the strikers alone. The union, on the other hand, felt an obligation to supporters who stayed inside, knowing that many of the "happies" were in fact allies. Father Munoz, close to all the workers' factions as well as to the union, put it this way: "For the great majority, there was rejoicing, and thanksgiving prayers that the strike was over. But to a few this settlement appeared to be like a sell-out on the part of both Amalgamated and Farah."

A union born in the Chicago sweatshops had joined forces with the growing Chicano militance to establish a major presence in the Southwest. But Father Munoz once again sounded prophetic words: "Those who have been thoroughly acquainted with the situation from the very beginning know that the war has just begun."

IV.

A defeated Willie Farah softened his public stance, but privately tried new tactics to control the workers. Inside the plant, he found a staunch group of genuine happies to carry on his cause. The strikers quickly realized that a union contract didn't end the harassment from company officials and anti-union workers.

"There are so many things wrong," explains one concerned worker. "I try to read the contract every day."

Another adds with a steely deter-



mination, "There are a lot of problems with that contract. They need to be changed."

The Farah management's maneuverings against Amalgamated are now handled by Dan Cruse, the new head of industrial relations. Cruse, a former executive with General Electric, apparently brings a more sophisticated approach to dealing with labor unions than that exhibited by Willie Farah. Amalgamated Clothing Workers' officials in New York and Texas refused to comment on the latest developments at Farah, a position which the company may appreciate. Reached by phone in El Paso, Cruse also remained hesitant to talk about any union-management business. He adamantly believes that "the normal situation for labor relations is as far removed from national publicity as possible."

It's not hard to understand Cruse's position. On the local level, the company has all the chips on its side. The union faces a cumbersome grievance procedure that helps the company through lengthy delays. In a current dispute, for example, the workers contend that Farah is violating a contract provision prohibiting subcontracting work to other companies if his own employees are not working full time. While the grievance slowly winds its way through the procedures, the workers say they're losing money in shorter hours while Farah continues to get large chunks of business done in

Mexico where costs are lower.

Meanwhile, supervisors have been distributing blank resignation cards to workers, leading to speculation that Farah plans a campaign to decertify the union. Another more likely union-busting tactic might come early next year when Amalgamated has to renew its contract. Company losses continue in the millions and when Willie Farah turned over the post of president to William C. Leone, rumors began to circulate that the company may merge with a larger organization—perhaps a textile giant like Burlington or a conglomerate like City Investing Corp., Leone's former employer. No one outside the inner circle knows exactly what Farah's plans are, but they must certainly involve countering the power of the union.

The union, of course, must be prepared for any tactic. They have come up with some of their own. After the Farah victory, ACWA added Farah strikers and other Chicanos to their staff in the Southwest. They built up their El Paso operation to 22 people, practically all Chicano. The union office handles grievances, helps workers organize the tough-to-reach green-carders, sponsors English classes and other education courses and provides a broad range of social services.

ACWA has also turned serious attention to Levi-Strauss, trying to build on their base in El Paso. They brought in Ed Blair, an organizing veteran of 40 years in the deep South,

into Texas to supervise the team of Chicano organizers in the Levi-Strauss campaign, targeting some 20 non-union shops stretching from Corpus Christi to Albuquerque. As one San Antonio striker explained recently, "More people are beginning to hear about the union. People want to settle into one place, but there are not enough jobs. We want to get one standard contract across the industry."

The ACWA has recently merged their union of 62 years with the Textile Workers Union of America, born from the CIO days in the '30s. The combined Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) membership of 500,000 still is concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest. But the Stevens campaign in the South (see accompanying article) and the Farah/Levi-Strauss struggles in the Southwest loom ahead as the major targets of the combined Union.

A "power shift" has indeed occurred over these last years. Willie Farah still directs his company, but is assisted by the labor relations of Dan Cruse and the new leadership of William Leone. Unions no longer have the luxury of a stable urban membership in the northern garment and textile districts established long ago, and have made major commitments to the Southern Rim.

And above all, Chicano workers have taken notice of what unions are all about. Their frustrations have found some channels of expression. The Farah strike educated a generation of Chicano workers of their rights and of their power in the national consciousness. They know how to lobby Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen on the Humphrey-Hawkins bill, for they understand what employment could mean for their people. They realize that renewing the Farah contract will not be easy; they are bolstering themselves for another battle. And they recognize their limitations and the importance of a trained staff.

The cultural traditions of Chicanos north of the Rio Grande precede Sidney Hillman's trip to Ellis Island. From the sweatshops of Chicago, Hillman embarked on a long journey for the rights of oppressed workers. The road has led to Texas where Chicano workers and organizers carry on the same struggle. Their unique spirit of survival with *dignidad* prepares them for the next challenge.



Runaways:

Even now, years later, almost no one in the sleepy north Georgia town of Hartwell likes to talk much about what happened that day in July.

The folks who have been fighting for 13 years to win a union contract at Monroe Auto Equipment Company's Hartwell plant remember the events quite clearly, though. For they've clung to efforts there like the early morning mists that frequently envelop this rolling, red clay farmland.

July 24, 1964, was steamy hot — much like the election campaign that ended that day, with workers at Monroe voting whether to have the United Auto Workers union represent them or remain non-union.

The company was determined to keep the union out at all costs. It had

moved its shock absorber assembly operations to Georgia from Michigan specifically to avoid UAW. Now the union threatened Monroe's strategy of widening profit margins by running to an area where it could pay workers only \$1.35 an hour instead of \$3-plus.

As the National Labor Relations Board representative Scott Watson began to tally the votes that Thursday, the frowns etched across stone-faced Monroe execs gave way to grins. Their campaign of violence, intimidation, fear and reprisal had worked. It looked like a three-to-one victory for the company.

Even John Tate, the attorney who master-minded Monroe's anti-union battle, broke into a rare smile as plant manager Charlie Gordon quietly

passed the word to hand out the half-pints and beer to the workers on the second shift. By 12:50 a.m., when the union's defeat (466-147) was formally announced, refreshments had provided the momentum for a planned march to the courthouse square. About 200 people gathered in front of the Hart County courthouse, milling around and blocking US Route 29, the main road then between Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C. The mood was surly, rather than jubilant. The group was no longer a crowd — it was a mob.

Shortly after 1 a.m., a company pickup truck drove up and a chunky, crew-cut boss with a tobacco chaw in his cheek dragged a life-like dummy toward a tree on the left side of the courthouse. Grinning, he yelled to the



photo by Betsy Frampton

Eury Nannie holds an anti-union newspaper ad in front of the Hartwell, Ga, Monroe Auto Equipment plant.

A Call to Action

by Don Stillman

crowd: "C'mon boys, let's string up Walter Reuther here and show these communists what'll happen if they ever set foot in Hart County again."

Moments later, the Reuther effigy dangled a foot or so off the ground, swaying slightly in the summer breeze. The mob cheered as a sign was draped around the limp neck: "Notice to all. Here hangs UAW. Caught trying to steal jobs from Monroe employees."

Pistol shots cracked across the square and the dummy recoiled once, then again — six times finally and little dribbles of sawdust and cotton batting fell from the holes. More beer was passed around and more shots fired before the crowd began to drift away. As the man with the crew-cut climbed back into the pickup, he yelled to the stragglers, "Let's go find us some real ones, boys, what d'ya say?"

I

Union organizers Lou Echols and Ralph Crawford were no strangers to violence. They were attacked a year earlier when they tried to leaflet the Monroe plant. The company shut down operations and ordered workers to run off the organizers.

A second effort to handbill the plant included UAW Vice President Pat Greathouse, Nick Zonarich and other top officials of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department. About 150 Monroe foremen and employees armed with crowbars and billy clubs ran the group off while local police looked on. One of the mob, now a UAW supporter, recalls "there were a lot of licks passed." Greathouse, wearing a UAW t-shirt, was attacked. After the beatings, the organizers found their car tires slashed. The mob encircled the car and refused to allow it to be repaired, forcing the unionists to send a tow truck across state lines from South Carolina to rescue the car the next day.

Even though no one would rent a

room to them, Echols and the other organizers kept coming back to Hartwell. "We'd stay in a little ol' motel in Royston; that's where Ty Cobb was born," Echols remembers. "Monroe would send fellas who'd park their cars right in front of our room and shine their high beams on us all night and sling rocks against the side of the place hoping to run us off."

They didn't succeed.

Eventually, enough workers at the Hartwell plant signed UAW cards, and the July 24 election was ordered by the NLRB. Threatened with the very element that initially caused them to move out of Michigan — the union and the higher wages and benefits it would bring — Monroe pulled out all the stops. Court records and interviews reveal the massive campaign of intimidation the company engaged in to fight the UAW. In addition to the violence, Monroe launched a propaganda campaign that in a more refined form, has become the chief weapon of union busting runaway shops across the South. Its centerpiece is the multi-pronged effort to convince workers that the plant would be forced to close and move elsewhere if it was unionized. In effect, choosing the union does not mean job security — it means unemployment.

Inside the factory Monroe hung huge banners covered with pictures of their Hillsdale, Michigan plant that had closed. Across the photo was a big X and the line: "It Can Happen Here." The local newspaper carried articles "proving" that then UAW President Walter Reuther was a communist and that the union gave donations to the NAACP, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Americans for Democratic Action and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Local radio stations day after day echoed the theme as did many of the preachers in the predominantly fundamentalist area. A vote for the union was a vote against God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost and

everything sacred.

Monroe practiced its own brand of brotherly love within the plant, complete with widespread harassment and reprisals against workers who publicly indicated they believed a union contract might bring better working conditions and decent wages. Those favoring the union were frequently moved to the toughest, dirtiest jobs in the plant at lower pay.

In short, it was an outside shot that the Monroe workers would choose the union in the face of such a vicious and illegal campaign.

II

Lou Echols didn't feel very excited about sticking around and engaging in small talk once the votes were tallied July 24th. He wondered why the National Labor Relations Board let the company set up the election so the ballots would be counted late at night.

"A lot of folks was feelin' real strong about things because of the way the company had used the churches and the radio and all to make 'em think we was all communists who were going to steal their jobs," he recalls. "Some of them was good people, but they'd been confused and misled. I knew when we heard the liquor was being passed out and they was getting ready to hang Walter Reuther at the courthouse that it was time to get on our way."

Oddly, it was another act of violence that may have saved them. Several days before, nightriders shotgunned a black civil-rights worker traveling north on Highway 29. FBI agents visited the Monroe plant immediately prior to the elections seeking links between the slaying and the high-pitched mood the company's hate campaign engendered.

Don Stillman is the editor of Solidarity, the United Auto Workers 1.7 million-circulation magazine.

While no links were found, the presence of FBI agents helped Echols and Crawford make arrangements for protection that night. "We took on off out of there fast," Echols recalls. "We'd left two men back in Royston and I'd told them if we weren't back by 1:30 a.m. to call the police and tell them there'd been a wreck on the highway between Royston and Hartwell. I told them to also report a fire there too so we'd maybe have a hope.

"Two cars pulled out after us and chased us about halfway, until state troopers we arranged through the federals and Gov. (Carl) Sanders blocked them off," Echols says. "When we got to Royston, we found they'd beat up on the men we'd left there and run 'em off. I never felt so good as when we got out of there. If they just wanted to whip us, it wouldn't have been so bad. I've been whipped a few times before, but that wasn't what they had planned that night, no sir."

The next day, the plant shut down at noon and about 500 people gathered in the courthouse square for a mock funeral. The effigy of Walter Reuther was cut down from the tree where it had dangled all night.

The local funeral home provided a pine coffin and, as women, children and workers looked on, Carey Thrasher, J.L. Herring and James Boleman placed the dummy in the coffin. Broughton Sanders, the Hart County Coroner, who also worked as a foreman at Monroe, took the microphone and informed the crowd that he as coroner had examined the body and found it to be legally dead.

The funeral hymn "Just One Rose" was sung and a wreath of pine and bitterweed placed on the coffin. The Monroe foremen covered it with sand and placed a grave marker atop the site:

Less (sic) we forget
Here Lies UAW
Born in Greed
Died in Defeat
July 23, 1964
Hartwell, Georgia

III

Indeed it did appear for the moment that the UAW was dead in Hartwell—murdered, in fact, by a massive, illegal campaign by Monroe Auto Equipment Co. The only real conso-

lation was that despite the intimidation and physical violence over the 18 month campaign, no one had been killed.

In Detroit, top UAW officials realized that if Monroe's strategy of running away to an area where it could pay workers half what it did in the North was successful, other companies would begin to do the same thing. Under the leadership of Vice President Pat Greathouse, the UAW and the IUD decided that although company goons had pronounced the union dead in Hartwell, it would, like Lazarus, rise again in health.

Lawyers Morgan Stanford, Joe Rauh, Steve Schlossberg, Dan Pollitt and others documented the numerous violations of the National Labor Relations Act committed by Monroe. Ultimately, the election results were set aside and a second election ordered. Unsure of its support, the UAW informed workers they would have to get cards signed on their own. Within three weeks, more than half of the workers signed cards asking that the UAW represent them.

"I guess we realized we'd done got taken," says Eury Nannie, who has



The Hartwell Sun

Effigy of Walter Reuther hangs from a tree outside the Hartwell courthouse following the union election.

worked for Monroe 17 years. "For some folks this was their first job ever. They was farmers and kept on farming while they worked at the plant — this was the first time they ever seen a paycheck in their lives and they didn't want to do anything to lose it. But while the company put a scare in people, that didn't make 'em like the company much either. They saw the way people got mistreated and all. We're country, but that don't mean we ain't smart."

The second time around, in 1966, teams of UAW supporters — coalitions of blacks and whites, men and women — set about to debunk the company's threats to close down and move away if the union got in. Their efforts paid off. The UAW won the representation election, 342-264. This time

there was no hanging and no mock funeral. Workers expected to be enjoying the benefits of a union contract shortly — a contract that would give them job protection, a grievance procedure, seniority rights, decent pensions, health insurance and maybe even a wage increase that would get them back in the range of what Monroe workers in Michigan had been paid for doing the same work.

The workers were wrong. The battle had only begun with the election victory. For the next ten years, Monroe Auto Equipment ignored their employees' desire by successfully evading the orders of the National Labor Relations Board and a variety of courts. The Labor Act, originally hailed as the "Magna Carta" for American workers, effectively protected the

company from the workers by allowing them to stall efforts to get a contract to death. Like J.P. Stevens, Monroe used the law to make crime pay.

It began the day after the second election. On the election day, both the UAW and Monroe had certified that all ballots were counted. The cardboard box was torn up and the union declared the winner. But the next day, Monroe presented the ballot box, pasted back together with a ballot hanging out of it, and filed a protest claiming all ballots had not been counted.

The NLRB Regional Director found Monroe's claims to be ludicrous and overruled them without a hearing. After months of maneuvering, the UAW was finally certified as bargaining agent for the Hartwell employees. But Monroe refused to bargain and continued to file a variety of appeals. Eventually, in 1967, an NLRB trial examiner found Monroe guilty of refusing to bargain as required by the Labor Act.

Monroe continued its strategy of delay, appealing and losing in both the Fifth Circuit and the US Supreme Court. By then, some eight years had elapsed and Monroe had yet to bargain with the UAW. At the cost of some lawyers' fees and little else, the company saved millions of dollars by evading a union contract over the eight-year period.

After more appeals with the NLRB, Monroe filed a new suit in district court asking for an injunction against the UAW and an order to the NLRB to hold a new election. It lost, but appealed to the Fifth Circuit again. Having seen the case for the third time, the Fifth Circuit judges strongly rebuked Monroe for refusing to obey the law. They assessed double costs and attorneys' fees because the legal maneuvering by Monroe was so clearly just a delaying tactic to avoid the law and previous court rulings.

IV

Finally, in 1973, Monroe attorney John Tate agreed to begin bargaining. Not surprisingly, the company's version of bargaining was to meet at a Ramada Inn conference room, listen to union proposals and respond with one word: "No."

Among the proposals rejected were those as basic and simple as a dues



check-off, any sickness or accident benefits, pensions, seniority protection, grievance procedure, health insurance or cost-of-living protection. "We'd ask this guy Tate why the company could provide those things for the remaining workers in Michigan who had all of them," says Claude Pereira, who led the bargaining team. "What was good enough for those up North wasn't good enough for us."

Negotiations continued every six

weeks or so and were often delayed because Tate, chief negotiator for Monroe, had been retained by Willie Farah to aid the clothing manufacturer in combatting the Amalgamated Clothing Workers unionizing efforts. As bargaining continued without results, frustrations grew among union supporters. "Those of us who grew up in the South were taught if you stole a penny, the federal government would spend a million to track you down and see

justice done," organizer Lou Echols says. "People can't understand how Monroe could evade the law year after year after year. They lose faith in our system."

Echols saw the company's strategy saving management millions, while confusing employees who tired of hearing about legal actions. Uncertain that it could effectively prosecute a strike, the union turned to a boycott of Monroe products. But a high percentage of shock absorbers Monroe makes are sold under 20 or more brand names, making an effective consumer boycott quite difficult.

In November, 1975, a Texan named David Cox arrived in Hartwell and checked into the Ramada Inn. Soon Cox began to solicit union cards on behalf of an organization called the Allied Industrial Union of Auto Workers Independent. The group, with no constitution, no bylaws, and no collective bargaining agreements had never been recognized anywhere. Equipped with the complete mailing list observers believe was supplied by the company, Cox succeeded in getting enough cards to petition for an election. The campaign that followed proved to be, in many ways, a repeat of those of 10 and 12 years before — full of company threats and intimidation.

Tate, by this time a master campaigner against labor unions (now in wide demand for such services throughout the South), recycled old ads about how the company would have to shut down if it went union, just like the Hillsdale, Mich., facility. With the relatively high turnover since the UAW first won 10 years before, the old threats carried as good as new for many Monroe workers, particularly in view of the massive downturn in the economy, and in the auto industry in particular.

Although David Cox's phony union received only 11 votes after he had been revealed as a former labor relations official for the Piggly Wiggly super market chain in Arlington, Texas, the UAW was defeated. The union, as might be expected, has filed a number of unfair labor practices that stand a good chance of ultimately winning an NLRB order overturning the election.

"We are back where we were the day they buried the UAW in the court-



house square" Lou Echols says. "I started trying to organize this plant back before President Kennedy was assassinated. My little girl hadn't even started school and next week she's graduating. It shouldn't be so hard for workers to get the protection of a union contract no way.

"Something's got to give if we have a deal where the guy who builds the shocks for that LTD makes only half of what the guy up North who puts 'em into the car. Either he's got to come up, or the other guy's gonna come down. I'd rather have him come up and that's why I may be sitting in Hartwell talkin union til I'm 65 and they pension me off."

V

What are the lessons of the Monroe story for rank-and-file workers, their labor unions, the South as a region and the country as a whole?

There are many, but among the most important needs are:

- a massive overhaul of the Labor Act to keep it from being the companies' chief tool to repress workers.
- expanded union organizing strategies to deal with the increasing number of runaway shops.
- new legislation insuring a job for every person able to work.
- a major effort toward building an international labor movement.
- and a rededication to the crucial importance of union organizing in the South.

While proposals to repeal T4-B right-to-work provisions of Taft-Hartley have been kicking around for almost 30 years, the time has come for a massive effort by the labor movement for major reform in US labor law. Rather than an aside, it must be a central focus of a united labor movement.

Monroe, J.P. Stevens, Duke Power, Russell Stover and hundreds of other corporations today have economic incentives to violate the Labor Act. "It is widely known that it is more profitable to commit flagrant unfair labor practices to keep the union out rather than pay decent wages and benefits to workers," UAW General Counsel Stephen Schlossberg told a House subcommittee considering proposed labor law reforms earlier this year.

The time has come for labor to mobilize around a program to reform the labor laws and confront runaway companies.

What kind of changes should be made? Here are just a few that would make a good beginning:

1. **Give workers the right to sue for triple damages those companies that violate the act.** Few developments undercut union organizing more than winning a representation election and then being unable to deliver a contract. If a company refuses to bargain in good faith, the only remedy in virtually all cases is an NLRB or court order to bargain. Without stiff monetary penalties, companies have no real incentive to follow the order.

2. **Workers dismissed for union activity should be allowed to bring private damage suits against employers who fire them.** Discharges are frequently a key element in intimidating workers who support unionization; at the present, the remedy is only reinstatement and back pay. The law now makes it possible for employers to sue unions for losses that result from secondary boycotts, yet workers can't sue employers for the loss of livelihood they suffer when discharged for union activity.

3. **The Labor Act must be streamlined and the number of time-consuming loopholes that allow employers to delay for years must be limited.** While employers are entitled to due process protections, the current protections they enjoy are so great that the purpose of the Labor Act is virtually nullified by them. To eliminate the worst loophole the decisions of administrative law judges should be enforceable immediately, rather than allowing them to be postponed by *de novo* review by the NLRB itself. In 1974, the Board ruled on 846 contested unfair labor practice cases against employers, and violations of the Act were found in 82 percent of those decisions — a record indicating requests are made by companies who don't expect to win, but only to delay.

4. **Companies that repeatedly commit unfair labor practices should be denied government contracts.** Other legislation currently in effect, such as the Walsh Healy Act, provides similar types of penalties. Employers who have violated the minimum wage laws, for example, can be blacklisted for up to three years by the federal government.

5. **Employers should be required to bargain with workers for a union contract on the basis of authorization cards showing a majority support the union as their representative.** Before Taft-Hartley, such a procedure was legal in the US and still exists in Canada. Such a procedure would reduce the company fear campaigns so prevalent in union representation elections.

6. **The NLRB should seek court injunctions ordering dismissed workers to be reinstated while the Board is investigating and processing charges filed on their behalf.** More than 2,000 unfair labor practice complaints were issued against employers in fiscal 1973 and many of those involved such dismissals. Yet the NLRB sought federal court orders restraining the unlawful conduct of these companies only five times, while it sought similar injunctions against unions hundreds of times that same year.

7. **Provisions limiting secondary boycotts and hot cargo restrictions should be repealed.** Although it is unlikely that Congress will give unions secondary boycott and hot cargo rights, the growing centralization of corporate power and growth of multinationals that act above the law make it necessary to give labor new rights to partially balance that new corporate power. Repeal of the limits on secondary boycotts would make it possible for other unions to pursue boycotts similar to those conducted effectively by the farmworkers in the UFW

(who are not covered by the federal legislation). If the UAW and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers could boycott, for example, J.C. Penney's for handling Monroe Shock Absorbers and J.P. Stevens sheets, a great new weapon would

exist.

Similarly, if the so-called hot cargo limitations of the law were lifted, UAW workers in Ford assembly plants in Detroit could support Southern organizing efforts by refusing to handle Monroe shock absorbers.

Workers in other countries, such as Great Britain, have the right to refuse to handle non-union or struck goods.

8. All state right-to-work laws should be repealed. Compulsory open shop laws still give workers, particularly in the South, the "right" to work

DIRTY TRICKS

Well, Mr. Lewis, you beat us, but I'm not going to forget it. I just want to tell you that one of these days we'll come back and give you the kind of whipping that you and your people will never forget.

—John Thomas Smith, General Motors chief negotiator during the sitdown strikes, speaking to John L. Lewis after agreeing to recognize the UAW in 1937.

General Motors never did like labor unions much, but following the militant struggles in the mid-1930s, it apparently learned to live with them. It still managed to earn profits and pay dividends, even during the Great Depression. In most years, GM averaged more than a 20 percent return on its investment, a rate almost double that of other manufacturing corporations.

Today, however, although GM continues to make incredible profits (\$800 million in the first three months of 1976 alone), the company has made what appears to be a major shift in labor relations. Put simply, General Motors has adopted its own "Southern strategy." GM has once again decided to actively resist the organizing of its blue-collar workers, more than 400,000 of whom currently are under UAW contract.

GM has opened seven out of its last nine new parts plants in its new Southern battlefield — in or near Clinton and Meridian, Miss., Fitzgerald, Georgia, Monroe and Shreveport, Louisiana, and Limestone County, Alabama, and none of these plants have been organized.

For the record, GM denies any new Southern strategy. But in its first Southern test as a runaway, the world's 2nd largest private industrial company pulled out all stops to keep 1000 workers at its Clinton, Mississippi, Packard Electric Division from being organized. The plant, a runaway from Warren, Ohio, makes

wire harnesses and electrical parts for cars.

In the first election held in 1975, 53 percent of the workers voted against having either the UAW or the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) represent them. In a new election in the fall of 1975, 68 percent voted against the unions. A variety of vicious leaflets portrayed the unions as Communist-inspired, gangster-dominated, Nor-

thern outsiders whose main interest was to steal Southern workers' jobs. Inside the plant, GM officials painted a red circle near the time clock with the message, "Rub this spot and if it turns blue, union promises might come true." Workers were forced to sit through films showing how nice, new factories had been closed when unions won representation.

The NLRB cited GM for such

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO AFTER WE RUN EVERYONE OUT OF BUSINESS?

I GUESS WE CAN ORGANIZE THE GRAVEYARDS



A BIRD IN THE HAND

IS WORTH



TWO IN THE BUSH



VOTE NEITHER ✕

for less. Repeal of 14-B of Taft-Hartley is long overdue. The labor movement must put some vigor into this effort again. The efforts of the AFL-CIO and UAW in Arkansas are an example of growing new interest in eliminating right-to-work (for less) laws.

Although reform of labor law is crucial, there are a number of other areas of legislation that would greatly aid efforts to organize, particularly in the South. Most important are efforts to control runaway shops, such as Monroe. As long as the current econo-

mic system exists, corporations will always seek out areas in which they can produce their products at the lowest wages and with the fewest restrictions on so-called "management prerogatives." Major companies, such as General Motors (see box), have

illegal threats of economic reprisals and for coercively interrogating its employees, but the election results were not overturned. Given the law's weaknesses, such rebukes meant little to returning justice to Clinton. The other six Southern GM new plants are just beginning to near full production, but UAW organizers report strong resistance from the company in initial contacts with them.

There may be reasons for the reversal of GM's policy of accepting unions. The easiest to understand is that in the highly competitive parts area, the simplest way to widen profit margins is to remain non-union. Most workers at the Clinton plant, for example, earn about \$1.05

less per hour than workers represented by the IUE at the Warren, Ohio facility. The gap will continue to widen compared to other UAW workers covered by cost-of-living (COL) clauses that, under the last GM agreement alone, have been fattened by \$1.14 in COL gains.

The upshot: GM saves more than \$2 million a year by keeping the Clinton operation non-union.

The UAW's master agreement with General Motors expires September 14, 1976, and as talks began in Detroit in July, the union made it clear to top GM executives that the UAW regards the corporation's Southern strategy as a threat to its very existence.

"We have had a generally good relationship with General Motors over the years and we've won some of the best labor contracts anywhere from them because of our strength," says UAW President Leonard Woodcock. "But when they kick us in Mississippi and Georgia and Alabama and Louisiana, we feel it in Detroit and, of course, we have ways of kicking back.

"We've got a responsibility to the union, to Southern workers and to ourselves," Woodcock says. "If GM wants to throw down the gauntlet to us, we'll be forced to use every resource at our disposal. In the end, as we did in the '30s, we'll succeed."

the REAL EXPERTS at Kangaroo Courts: IUE and UAW



Here are a few examples of workers who have found out about **UNION "JUSTICE"!**

In UAW, local 488, 185 NLRB 126, the union fined an employe \$100. for crossing a picket line and going back to work.

In IUE, local 767, 186 NLRB 682 the union threatened to fine members \$500 per day if they crossed a picket line to go to work.

In IUE, Local 601, 180 NLRB 168, the union threatened to have employes discharged if they did not sign a Union Dues-Checkoff agreement.

In UAW, Merimont Corp 149 NLRB 482, the union became angry with six employes and forced the company to reduce their seniority by periods ranging from 15 to 21 years.

In UAW, local 229, the union forced an employer to discharge employes who became dissatisfied with the Union dues-Checkoff system.

You have heard the union talk about DEMOCRACY...
IS THIS THE KIND OF DEMOCRACY YOU WANT??
if not...
Vote... **NEITHER X**

NORTHERN UNIONS vs. MISSISSIPPI WORKING FOLK

This election on Nov. 13 will not be just an ordinary union election. For the unions, a Victory means they have helped STOP JOBS COMING TO MISSISSIPPI!

For many years the UAW and the IUE have been fighting against the creation of jobs in the south and in Mississippi.

- As far as they're concerned they would just as soon that we were still working in the fields or doing domestic work.
- As far as they are concerned they would just as soon that we were making \$5 per day or unemployed.

NEITHER The IUE or UAW LIFTED ONE FINGER TO GET THESE JOBS FOR MISSISSIPPI PEOPLE.

IN FACT, the very same unions have done everything they can to prevent your having jobs. They have fought all Mississippi working people getting jobs which provide a Better Quality Life.

Can You Trust them to preserve your jobs NOW??

It's for you to decide. A **NEITHER X** vote is a vote for the future of you, your family, and the folks of MISSISSIPPI!



made significant corporate decisions at the highest levels to open new plants in the South and attempt to keep those plants non-union. Such developments threaten the very existence of the labor movement today. The best remedy, as UAW President Leonard Woodcock noted recently, is to organize them. But what else must be done?

- One major need is for legislation providing workers with new rights and corporations with new restrictions in cases of plant closures and relocations. Very simply, plant relocations affect too many people to be left to a narrow cadre of jet-lagged, alcohol-soaked corporate executives who seldom live in the areas devastated by their decisions.

Most other western industrial countries have recognized this fact and have put some controls on runaway plants. In Britain, for example, a company desiring to relocate or close a factory must be authorized to do so by the government. West Germany, France, and the Netherlands require government approval prior to relocation of plants — and they require advance approval even for layoffs. Japan has virtually eliminated the problem of unemployment due to plant relocation by guaranteeing the worker a lifetime job.

In the US, courts have held that corporations such as Monroe are free to sign labor contracts and then abrogate them merely by deciding to shut down their operations and move elsewhere. When a union signs an agreement, however, it is obligated to live by it until it expires.

American workers and their unions must wage a priority fight for legislation that would make at least minimum requirements on companies that want to relocate. Employees should be entitled at least to notice, major severance allowance, transfer rights and pension protection. Companies should be required to get permission from the Sec. of Labor before relocating, and if the Secretary finds that the primary reason for relocating is to exploit cheap labor markets, then permission should be denied — as it should be if the move would adversely affect employment in the area left behind.

- Another important check on the runaway shop is the control of local grants and various tax concessions to new industry. Frequently, as in the case of Hart County and the Monroe plant there, a local unit of government will offer to build the new plant and lease it back to the company. Railroad spurs, access roads and sewage treatment may also be provided by the taxpayers. The community residents who have the "opportunity" to work at wages 25-40 percent lower than those paid elsewhere, thus also get to subsidize the company that profits from their labor. Major restrictions should be placed on such public giveaways, aimed at limiting the degree to which workers and community residents pay for corporate profitmaking on the part of rogue employers such as Monroe.

- Another need is for the federalization of many key social bene-

cases like Monroe, where the company came South and paid only a nickel over the minimum wage, the impetus to vote against the union to save local jobs would have been greatly reduced.

- Finally, the labor movement must quickly expand its international scope. In this era of multinationals, companies also have little difficulty seeking low-wage areas in other countries. As the South becomes organized, it too will face the problem of runaway shops. Monroe Auto Equipment still produces most of its products in non-union plants here, but in June it imported a major shipment of assembled shock absorbers from Onner de Brazil, S.A. and MAP Auto Pecas, S.A. — two Brazilian companies it recently purchased. Monroe also recently bought interests in plants in Mexico and Venezuela and acquired a wholly-owned subsidiary

"If a little ol' company like Monroe can beat the UAW and get away with treating people the way it does, then our country's in trouble."

**— Lou Echols
UAW organizer**

fits, such as unemployment compensation, welfare and workers' compensation. Allowing states to operate at substandard levels, a particularly prevalent practice in many Southern states, provides an added incentive for corporations to relocate in the South. And it makes possible economic blackmail, with corporations like General Motors stopping construction of a new facility in Michigan until the state legislature refused passage of improvements in workers' compensation.

- Still another key piece of legislation — the Hawkins-Humphrey bill — would strengthen Southern organizing efforts by ordering the federal government to take steps to insure that every person able and willing to work will have a job, at no less than the minimum wage. In

in Argentina.

Efforts must be made to achieve multinational cooperation and solidarity between labor unions, which might seek coordinated bargaining, common contract expiration dates and information exchanges. The UAW, for example, has been instrumental in the efforts to raise wages and improve working conditions both in Europe and Japan through the International Metalworkers Federation.

VII

Given the current conservative mood of the country, many of the legislative goals Southern workers and their Northern counterparts are fighting for may not be achieved in the near future. And workers have known for years that

even well-intended legislation often is subverted and reoriented by corporate interests and their many friends in and out of government. The Labor Act is but one example.

While that's no reason to quit the fight, it must be waged in many other arenas. The most crucial is a rededication by the labor move-

The J.P. Stevens campaign appears to be a sign of new interest in Southern organizing by the AFL-CIO. Moves by General Motors and other auto-related companies to the South also promise to elicit massive efforts by the UAW there. Other unions, such as the United Electrical Workers, have recently and successfully

and elected officials — if the Southern organizing challenge is to be met.

Like the UAW's fight at Monroe, it must be viewed as a long term struggle — one that may take years and years and still not be over.

Corporations, with their tremendous power, will continue to use violence, threats, intimidation, race, sex, politics and everything else at their disposal to break the union movement in the South. But they won't succeed.

Not as long as there are men like Lou Echols.

VI

Echols goes back now to Hartwell about once a week to meet with union supporters. There's a nice freeway now (US 85) instead of the old road company goons chased him down after hanging Walter Reuther in effigy.

He's got a CB radio that provides some diversion on the trips he and UAW Rep. Claude Pereria make. The new Ramada Inn will rent him a room now, unlike the old days when he couldn't get one in Hartwell and had to drive to Ty Cobb's hometown of Royston.

He still makes house calls with pro-union Monroe workers, attempting to convince new workers and old recalcitrants that folks would be better off with a union contract. Many of the kids he'd see on similar efforts in the '60s now have grown up and gone to work in the plant.

"We're gonna bring the UAW to Monroe here in Hartwell," Echols says. "If a little ol' company like Monroe can beat the UAW and can get away with treating people the way it does, then our country's in real trouble."

Echols, angry but still somehow reserved, gazes out the window as the Lavonia sheriff drives up and down outside his room every 15 minutes, something he does from about half an hour after UAW people check in until they leave.

"I don't know how long it'll take us — I've seen four Presidents come and go while I been sittin' down here fighting this fight. But the people here in Hartwell are going to bring the union to Monroe, they sure are."

Somehow, listening to Lou Echols, you know he has to be right.



ment to organizing in the South. As population and plants shift South, labor unions must organize or their power will be severely eroded. Southern organizing cannot be regarded as a futile luxury. The very future of the labor movement is at stake.

followed runaways South and organized them in places like Tampa and Charleston.

New kinds of coalitions must be created between unions and others with community power — the churches, environmental groups, local media outlets, civil rights activists

..worth a thousand words

by Melton McLaurin and Michael Thomason

Until recently, the urban Southern laborer received scant attention from scholars. Historians, journalists and fiction writers concentrated on slavery and tenancy and the textile industry. Northerners hardly could be blamed for assuming that, at least prior to World War II, Southern laborers were either tenant farmers or cotton mill workers. Fortunately, now a number of institutions, including the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University, the Center for Labor Education of the Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham, and the Institute for Southern Studies (publishers of *Southern Exposure*), are engaged in the serious exploration of the Southern worker's past. And historians in increasing numbers are researching this rich field.

Most students of Southern labor, however, are concerned with the development of organized labor, not the larger subject of workers in Southern society.

This emphasis on organized labor results in part from the historians' reliance on printed sources. Yet most Southerners were, and are, unorganized. For this reason, scholars must devote more energy to understand non-union workers and their culture. Lack of organization in no way limited the laborers' contribution to society, although it did reduce their ability to benefit from the society they helped build.

Labor history "from the bottom up" requires the use of non-traditional sources, like oral interviews and a unique record of the past, the photograph. Often used merely to reinforce the text, the photograph implicitly conveys an understanding of the tremendous quantities of human energy consumed in building and maintaining a modern society. They record daily work routines, the conditions laborers experienced, and the relationships between age, race, sex, and class at the workplace. Since for most photographers the workers were simply a part of the landscape—standing there as naturally as a tree or a building—photographs retain an objectivity unmatched by the written word. We see what the photographer took for granted. While old photographs are not easily found, a diligent search of city archives, museums, company files, negative files of established photographers and photo albums of veteran labor activists will yield results.

The following pictorial essay on labor in Mobile, Alabama, from the turn of the century until World War II, illustrates the value of the photograph as a historical document. Although its port dominated the economy, Mobile's general overall development reflects a pattern common to most Southern cities. In the late 1920s, Mobile began to change from a commercial center to an industrial city, a process quickened by World War II. At the same time, labor unions moved from being restricted to skilled artisans to organizing the industrial work force. Throughout the period, blacks performed menial labor; whites held the "better" positions, including industrial jobs. Women entered the work force in positions reserved for their sex, such as textile workers and telephone operators, but the war propelled them into formerly "male" jobs. Collectively, these photographs present an objective, fascinating and alternative view of a city's labor force throughout half a century.

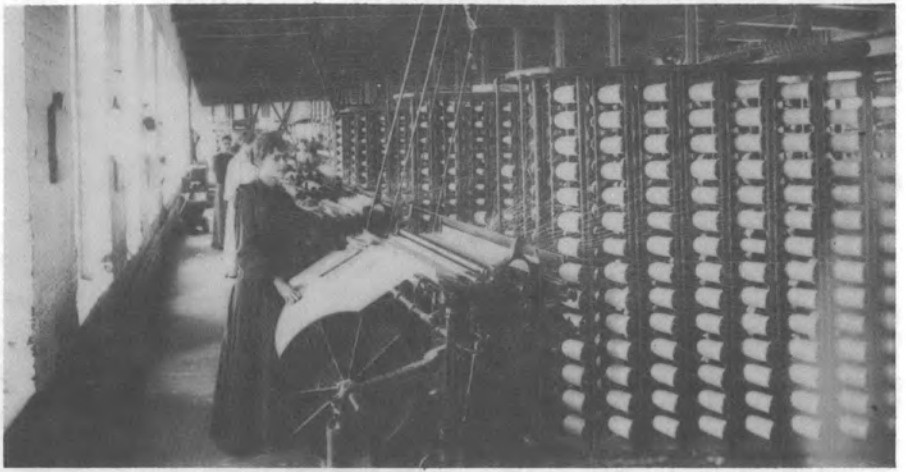
Melton McLaurin and Michael Thomason are associate professors of history at the University of Alabama at Mobile and co-authors of *Mobile: American River City* (Easter Publishing, 1975), a photographic history from which many of these prints were taken.



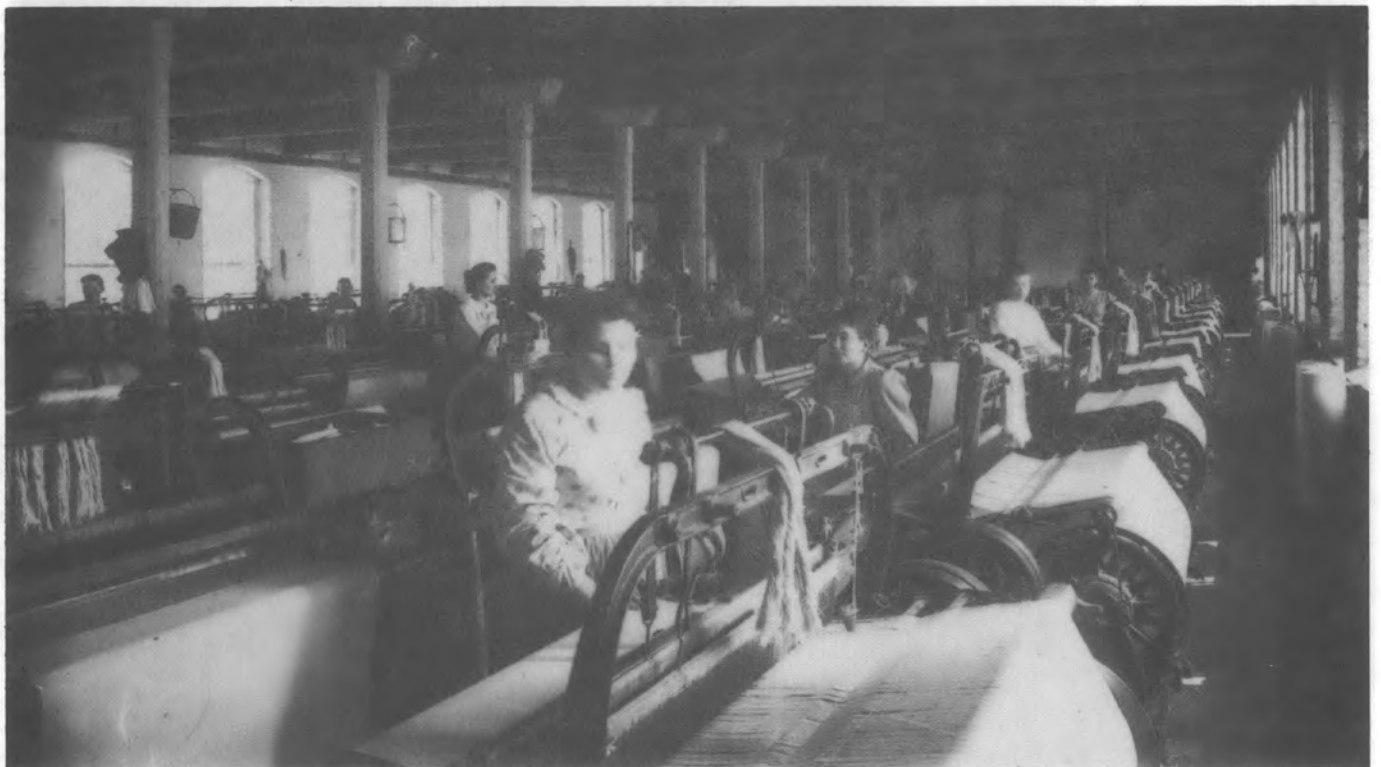
At the turn of the century, only Mobile's skilled craftsmen (cigar makers, typographers, masons, etc.) were organized. Their Central Trades Council was photographed at left on an excursion on Mobile Bay about 1907. The group is relatively integrated despite the rapid upsurge of Jim Crow legislation. Forty years later, the industrial approach of the CIO both increased the ranks of labor, and by representing all occupations within an industry, helped break down racial barriers. The photo below of an integrated meeting of shipyard employees is from about 1944.

All photos are taken from those collected for Mobile: American River City.





As elsewhere in the South, Mobile's textile mills were run by women and children. Blacks were relegated to such heavy labor as "stripping" the baled cotton, a task usually performed in a separate area of the mill.



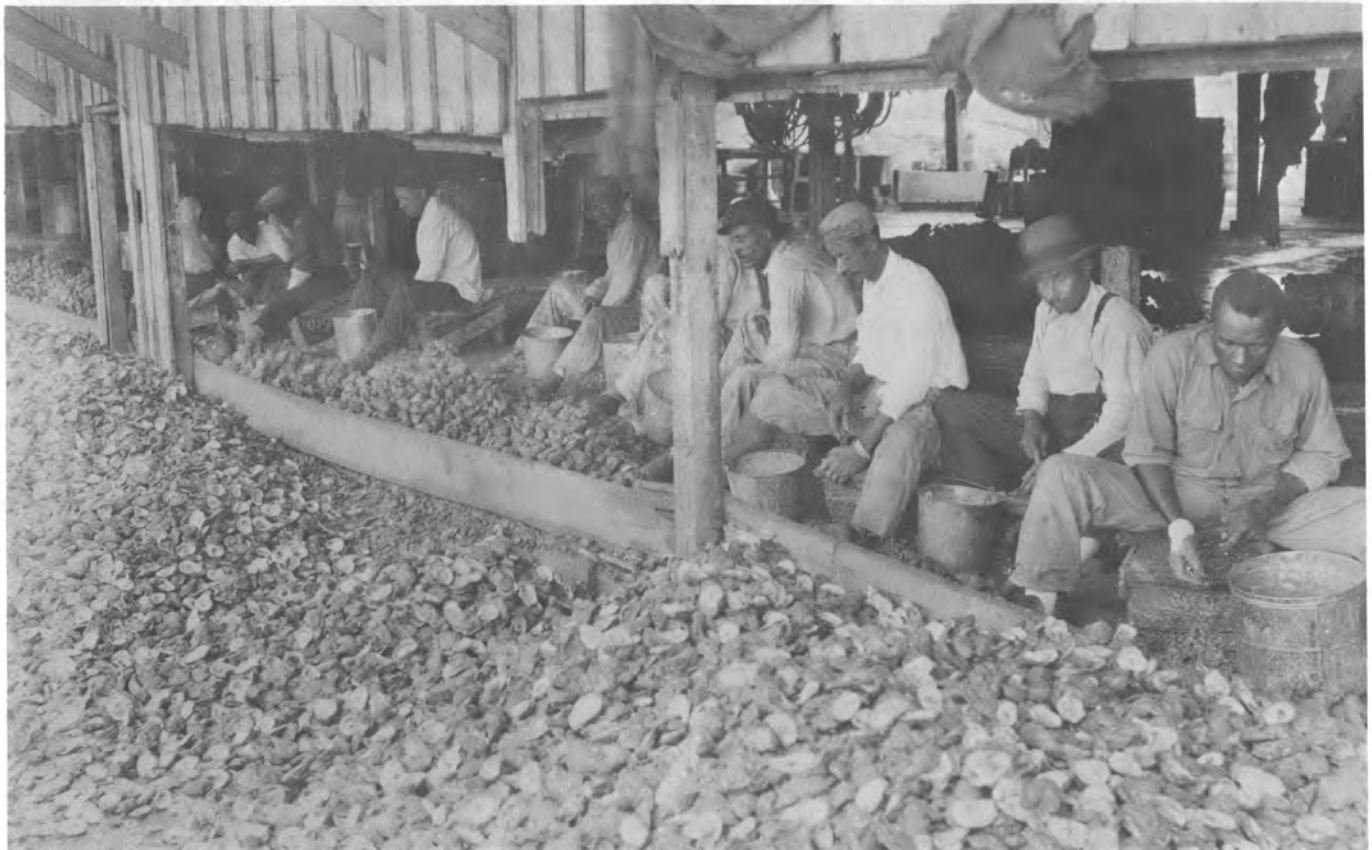


Longshoremen moved goods through Mobile's port with muscle power. Blacks performed the strenuous labor, whether moving case goods or bananas, as whites supervised their work. Black workers, however, did control teamstering until the advent of trucking.



In the saw mills that ringed the city, black and white workers cut pine logs with unguarded circular saws six or eight feet in diameter. The photo at right is from about 1900. Below, a picture from the 1930s shows that black muscle power also moved baled cotton inside the city's vast warehouses. Such labor provided employment for thousands of black Mobilians, for cotton remained a major export product throughout the first half of the century. In the fishing industry, too, race determined employment. Whites worked the boats while blacks cleaned the catch, a policy that held true for decades.



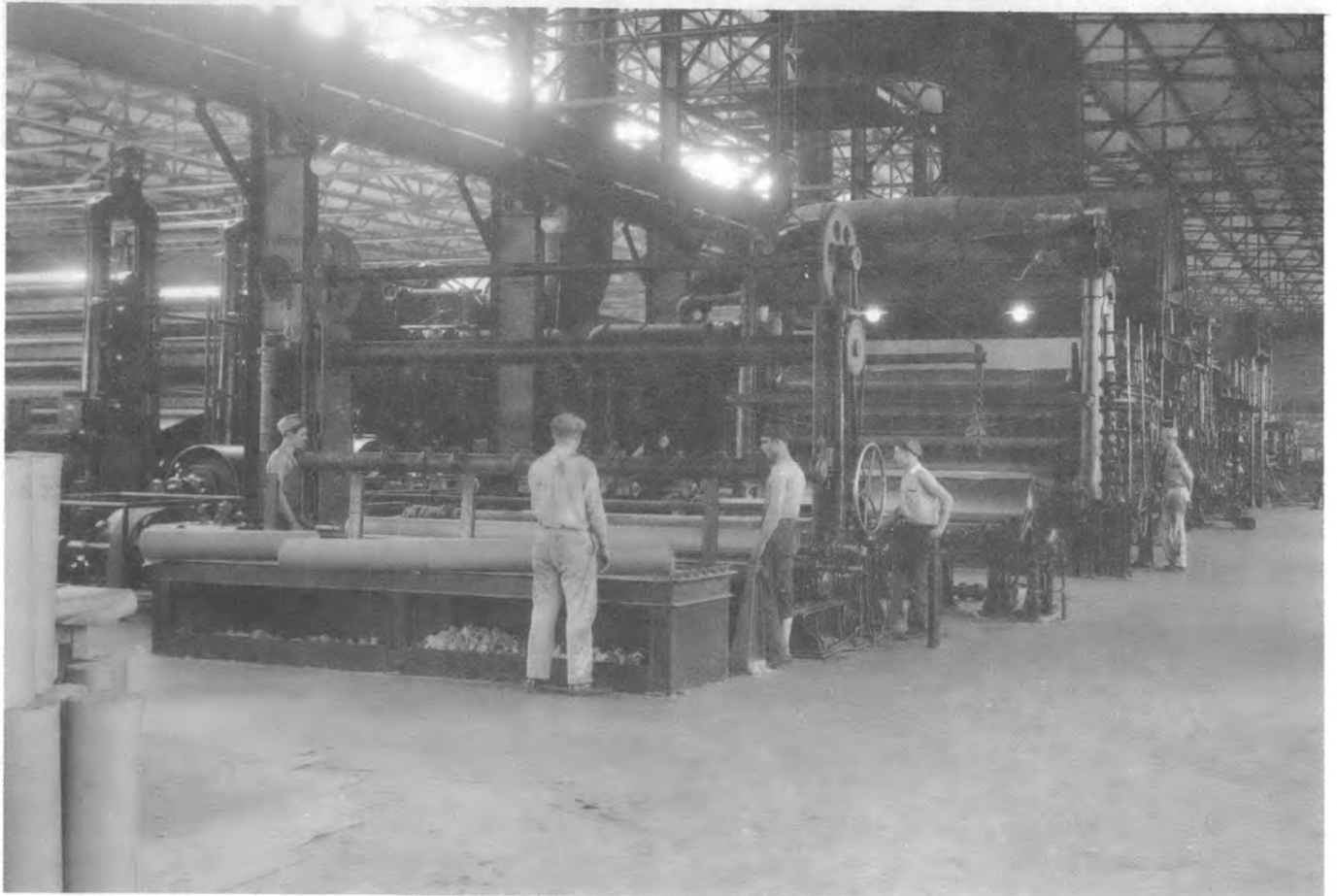




Dredge No. 4
Sou. American G. & P. Co.
Manufactured by
The Ingalls Iron Works Co.
Birmingham-Mobile-Pittsburgh
Feb. 27, 1932

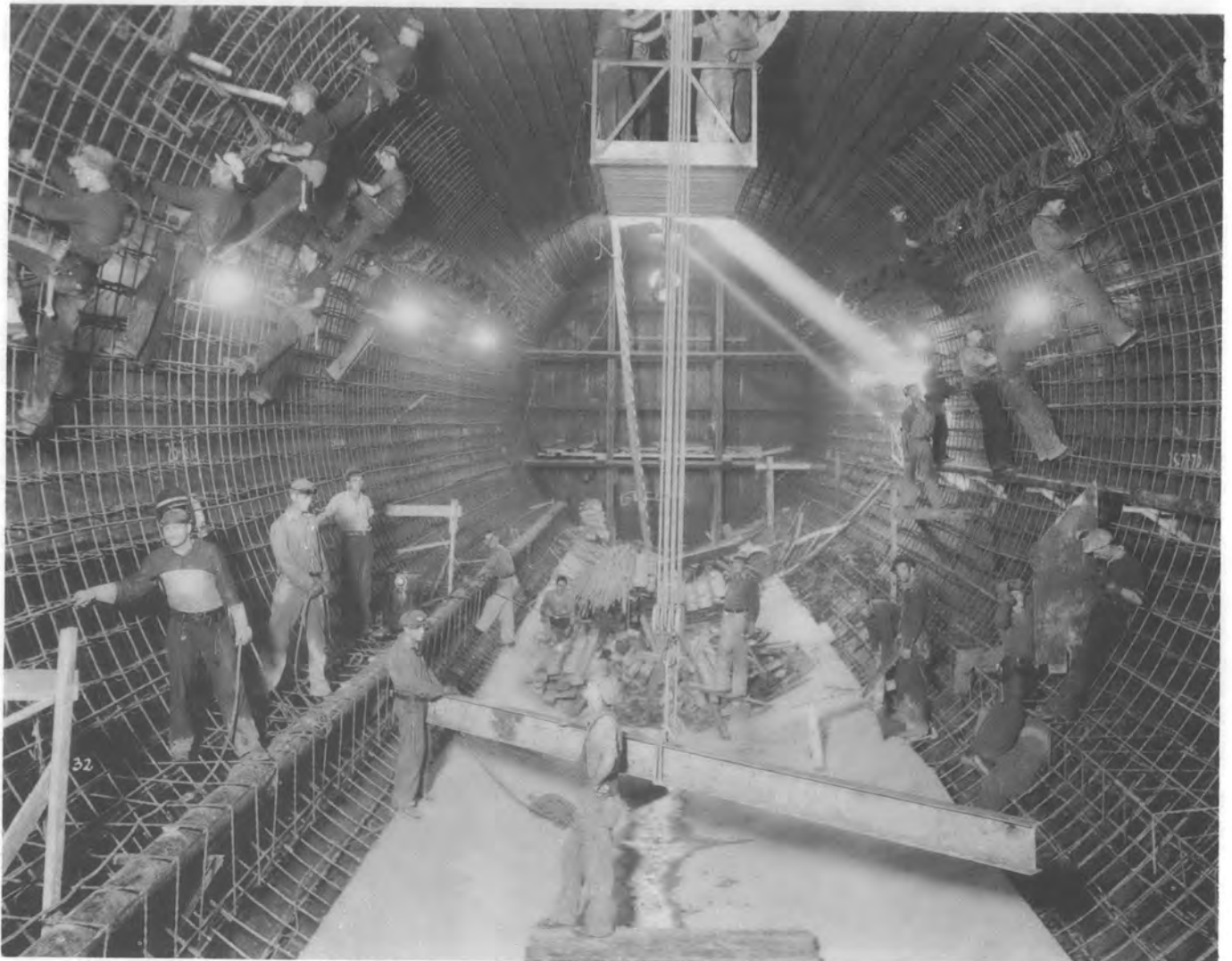


Division of work by race and sex continued at the dawn of the Depression, as indicated in these pictures. In 1928, the completion of a State Docks brought some mechanization of the longshoreman's job, but black workers, under white supervision, still moved the cargo. By the late 1920s, the textile industry had become more sophisticated, but women still ran the machines. Major industrial jobs, like those offered by International Paper in the photo at bottom right, were reserved for white males.





During the Depression, Mobilians of both races found jobs in federal programs. This Works Progress Administration drainage and malaria control project offered strenuous, dirty, manual labor—a far cry from the “make work” reputation of WPA jobs. The WPA also constructed the Bankhead Tunnel under the Mobile River (below). Completed in 1941, the project employed hundreds of construction workers, mostly white.



World War II solved the unemployment problem in a way the Depression never could. 40,000 workers were employed in Mobile's two major shipyards. The Fair Employment Practices Committee upgraded the status of black laborers, precipitating a riot at one of the shipyards in 1943. Women also entered the workforce in jobs previously reserved for men. In these photos, taken between 1943 and 1945, an integrated group of shipyard workers prays for a worker killed on the job, and a woman swings a hammer with a fellow worker.



EEOC: Mandate for Labor

by James E. Youngdahl

John Stewart is a black man who lives in the country near Dierks, Arkansas. In 1959, he was hired to run a "surfacer" machine at a sawmill in Dierks. He stayed on that job until 1972, when the giant Weyerhaeuser Company, which bought the mill, "modernized" it, bringing in a "matcher" to do the work the surfacer used to do.

John Stewart was denied a chance to work on the matcher at \$3.06 per hour, and was demoted from his \$2.73 rate to a common labor job of "takedown operator" at \$2.23.

On January 7, 1974, Stewart filed a grievance under a special procedure set up by the International Woodworkers of America for discrimination complaints against Weyerhaeuser. "My pay rate

was discriminatorily reduced 49¢ per hour several months ago," he wrote, "and when the Merchantizer and Plywood plants were started up, I was not offered a promotion job."

Because of the IWA's efforts, in April 1975, John Stewart was finally promoted to the matcher job with an 83 cents per hour raise to \$3.75. In addition, he received \$8,000 backpay plus \$1,302.11 for five years of interest and the full cost of presenting his case.

John Stewart's gains were more than usual, but he is only one of 1,500 Southern black and female IWA members who have been awarded over \$500,000 backpay under the union's program to enforce the equal employment rules of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Unions traditionally have worked for higher wages, better working conditions, and seniority rights. But recently they have begun to use the equal employment rules as vital tools for correcting the injustices of a prejudiced society. Now tens of thousands of Southern workers like John Stewart have reaped a harvest of promotions, discipline cancellations, fringe payment extensions and other benefits. These successes are the results of the civil rights movement and the labor movement—often supporters of each other, but occasionally enemies—working for the same goals. It is an alliance that can and must remain strong if workers—black and white—are to improve their conditions.

Long Time Coming

Civil rights supporters had fought for a century in support of a ban against job bias before Congress finally passed the equal employment law in 1964.

Jim Youngdahl, an attorney in Little Rock, has been involved in Southern labor struggles since 1948. He worked for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (1948-56) before turning to a career in labor law. He has written extensively in both legal and popular journals, and is recognized as an expert in the field of equal employment. He is general counsel of the International Woodworkers and regional counsel to the UAW.



Beginning in the 1930s, rules against discrimination had been issued by the federal executive branch, culminating in Fair Employment Practices (FEP) committees under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Federal employees and employees of companies doing business with the government were especially affected; but these original policies had little meaning because they lacked real enforcement procedures.

In 1943, US Congressman Vito Marcantonio, a member of the American Labor Party, introduced the first bill which would give statutory power to FEP agencies. At every session after that, a variety of equal employment proposals was offered. None approached passage, however, mainly because of the obstacle of Southern Senate filibusters. Although the 1954 school segregation decision and the surging civil rights movement generated helpful legislation in other fields, nothing happened in terms of equal employment.

In 1961, the Kennedy administration added enforcement power to the program concerning employment practices of government contractors. And with the civil rights movement in full swing, a federal equal employment law finally was passed.

Throughout this period, the labor movement, especially the progressive industrial unions, had fought for FEP legislation with money, mass political action and Washington lobbying as a part of the long-term commitment to civil rights. And at the crucial moment, labor participation in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights helped swing the 1964 vote.

Effective July 2, 1965, it became illegal for almost all American employers to discriminate as to "compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of. . . race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." One hundred and eighty-nine years after the promise of the Declaration of Independence, effective national law made employment discrimination illegal.

Under the new legislation, civil rights leaders, unions and employers expected discrimination to be banned in obvious areas like hiring procedures and lunchroom facilities. But the law's general language invited considerable controversy over how other provisions should be applied. For instance, on an important issue, some unions and businessmen argued that the law allowed them to keep promotion systems based on "departmental" or "job seniority," that is, where promotion was determined by a person's length of employment in the job below, or in the department, where the vacancy occurred. Civil rights advocates contended that such systems were outlawed by the 1964 Act since they "perpetuated the effects of past discrimination": if an employer had discriminated when he hired or assigned a worker, use of departmental

or job seniority would continue to block the disadvantaged person from holding more desirable positions.

As in other cases involving the interpretation of civil rights, it was the courts—not the legislators or executives — that decided how the law would affect real life situations. And Southern judges, who had been taking the heat for their rulings for school desegregation, were not about to retreat into conservatism on employment discrimination issues. In cases arising from a tobacco plant in Richmond, Virginia, and a paper mill in Bogalusa, Louisiana, federal judges completely rewrote the standard union-management's seniority language in favor of the civil rights advocates. When they finished, the only promotion systems permitted were those that used "plant-wide seniority" — the time employees worked in the plant regardless of their job position or department — to determine a worker's right to job openings. Thus, in companies where blacks and whites both had been hired over the years, whites would not get preference for vacancies simply because employers originally assigned them to better jobs.

Such drastic changes in the standard for job advancement, inconceivable to all but a handful of creative and courageous civil rights lawyers, were shocking to labor unions. Seniority, the only "credit" for the "investment" of years that workers



photo by Jack Delano/Farm Security Administration

get, suddenly was undermined not by the traditional enemy across the bargaining table — the boss — but by legal cases coming from the very law which labor unions had strongly supported.

Shock turned to outrage when Southern judges, picked from the business establishments began to assess unions equally with employers for back pay awards. Consider, for example, a sawmill which employs 100 blacks and 100 whites and which assigns the whites to jobs paying \$1.00 an hour more than the blacks. In a case over the promotion system where five years of backpay can be recovered, a million dollar award could easily be claimed. If the IWA union is liable for half of that, it would be required to pay \$500,000 — twice the amount of all IWA dwindling assets. A loss like this would end the international union.

As salt in very deep wounds, the unions that historically had represented large numbers of blacks, like IWA, were the most subject to financial liability. Unions which blatantly discriminated by keeping blacks out altogether, such as in some building trades, had no serious money problem. They had not made discriminatory promotions only because they hadn't permitted the hiring of blacks at all!

Representatives of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency set up to process charges of discrimination, were openly anti-union. When workers sought to charge their employer only, the EEOC frequently insisted that the union be added as a defendant. Traditional civil rights organizations, finally finding a vehicle for ending centuries of employment discrimination, had little interest in making distinctions among the guilty parties. Civil rights lawyers, alert to the crises of the 1960s and 1970s but less aware of the structures and struggles of the labor movement, supported these judgments. They often regarded "giant unions" on a par with "giant employers," as purveyors of evil and controllers of money. One lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, now a prominent EEOC official, told a union lawyer, "Samuel Gompers never did anything for my granddaddy."

The fact that it was the employer's hiring policies which started the discrimination was forgotten. The fact that union dues are used to serve the entire union membership, black and white, not to profit stockholders, was ignored when backpay and attorneys' fees were claimed. In the end, when the civil rights case was over, it fell upon the union to represent all of the workers in day-to-day protection against an employer's discrimination.

Slowly, Southern unions began to understand that plant seniority was an essential bargaining demand for all negotiations. In some cases, union lawyers and civil rights attorneys have joined

together, forcing companies to initiate affirmative action programs for minority workers. Equal employment lawsuits have offered opportunities to advance union principles, and the means to avoid the burden of devastating financial judgments. For many unions, the Civil Rights Act finally became a structural tool for positive change and a vehicle for forging coalitions of working people. The efforts of the International Woodworkers of America illustrate the importance of using the law for both reasons.

ONE UNION RESPONDS

For many years, the wood products industry has been the largest industrial employer of blacks in the South. About 27 percent of all black workers in Southern manufacturing are in lumber operations.

The IWA, although the largest union in the industry, has been kept ineffectively small by vicious employer hostility. Until recently, its consequently weak bargaining position had permitted limited success in achieving equality for all workers.

The IWA has 75 collective bargaining relationships in the Southern states, with 17,000 members. Only a few units contain a thousand employees; a couple dozen have several hundred and the rest are small. It has been a long tough battle for the IWA, or any union, to survive in the Southern wood products industry. Yet because it has survived, it could be threatened with bankruptcy from back-pay settlements.

Affirmative action, with all its perils, has been the only answer. A few charges were filed against employers as early as 1969, but the main program was launched with International Executive Board action in 1972.

The IWA resolution gives some hint of the practical and political problems involved. The traditional goals of worker equality as well as the present threat of union financial liability were among reasons given for "policies and programs which will seek out and remedy instances of discrimination on the basis of race, sex, and other factors" (see box).

Up to now, IWA lawyers have studied 45 of its 75 Southern collective bargaining relationships. No action has been taken in ten because no serious legal question seems to exist. Fifteen are still being investigated or negotiated. Ten cases have been settled, with the backpay and other changes described above. Ten are in heavy litigation; some employers, such as mammoth Georgia-Pacific, refuse to deal with their equal employment obligations and are fighting the union every step of the way.

John Stewart's employer, Weyerhaeuser, furnishes an example of how the program actually

works. Sometime in 1972, just as formal IWA affirmative action was beginning, a small committee of blacks working in a 2,000-employee complex in Dierks sent the company a letter protesting its hiring and promotion practices. A copy went to their union, Local 5-15 of the IWA. Even without specific instructions about such procedures at the time, Local 5-15 President and Business Agent Jim Tudor met with the committee of black workers and offered union assistance to change the discriminatory pattern.

The offer was accepted. Attorneys for the international union were called in, and the entire group met with local Weyerhaeuser management. The response by the complex manager, for two or three meetings, was to name several "boys" who had gotten good jobs, and to give assurance that since he was from the state of Washington, he was not prejudiced. Next, the union filed EEOC charges for itself and on behalf of the black employee committee. The law prescribes that six months must pass before a court suit could be filed. As the time ticked away, word of the dispute finally reached corporate Weyerhaeuser headquarters in Tacoma, Washington. The company pleaded for more time, and, at last, serious negotiations began.

Finally, in the middle of 1973, agreement on all issues was reached. The company agreed to pay \$100,000 in backpay, install plant seniority for virtually all promotions, place blacks and females in supervisory positions, establish training opportunities and otherwise obey the developing case law.

Particularly novel, the Weyerhaeuser settlement included the creation of a special grievance procedure. Grievances over past discrimination, such as that involving John Stewart, had to be filed within six months of the agreement. (Unfortunately, in spite of repeated union urging, very few employees took advantage of this opportunity to complain of historic treatment.) Grievances over current issues could be filed within six months of the time they occurred. All costs of the procedure, including lawyer's fees for the worker, would be paid by the employer.

In three years of operation, this grievance procedure has brought good results. About 125 have been filed, half for race discrimination, close to half for sex discrimination and the rest involving national origin. About \$25,000 more backpay has been collected, dozens of promotions have been awarded and apologies have been forced from insulting supervisors. The company has paid the full cost of a procedure that provides a ready opportunity for individual expression of dissatisfaction with day-to-day discrimination.

And to illustrate the confidence of workers in their union, the grieving employees have each

asked the union officers and lawyers to represent them against Weyerhaeuser, although they could have hired outside spokespersons at no cost. When his case was over, John Stewart wrote his local business agent, "I sincerely want to thank you for the great job you did."

The variety of IWA remedies have been impressive. In Waycross, Ga., maintenance man J. L. Bellamy received a retroactive raise in pay from Champion International and a guarantee that he would receive training to reach the top millwright rate within six months. In Franklin, Va., Union Camp agreed to include among backpay recipients 11 pensioners who retired long before the 1974 IWA settlement, but whose pension checks were based on previous earnings kept low by discrimination.

When Weyerhaeuser admitted that its Mountain Pine, Ark., supervisor used "inappropriate language" and agreed to pay Louise Blevins one day's pay, the supervisor quit. Even management jobs outside the union bargaining unit have figured in IWA cases; Roy O. Martin Co., in Alexandria, La., agreed to hire at least one black for every two supervisory vacancies until the ratio reached the proportion of blacks in the overall labor market. Clearly unions and blacks can work together.



photo by Steve March

LABOR'S ROAD AHEAD

It cannot be said, however, that organized labor has "seen the light" in anti-discrimination law. A great range of attitudes still exists — from the ringing rhetoric of equality to practical recognition of the necessity of affirmative action, from ignorance of techniques to remedy discrimination to open prejudice. One of the largest unions has spent millions of dollars opposing EEOC actions and still has not learned a lesson. A longshoremen's union is fighting to legal death against court orders to desegregate its locals. Most building trades unions still make miniscule black referrals.

Unions in the industries that were targets of the early "test cases," such as tobacco and paper, have come close to disaster by bearing the brunt of the developing law. The Tobacco Workers Union, for example, had to borrow money from at least one employer to help pay off large backpay judgments, an obligation that will undercut bargaining power for years to come.

But things are moving. The International Union of Electrical Workers has made dramatic strides, for both blacks and women, through affirmative action. The Auto Workers and Steelworkers Unions are trying. The Steelworkers consent decree for basic steel, although attacked from both sides, provides for over \$30 million in backpay — the largest single recognition of these legal obligations since the law was passed.

"What affirmative action did for John Stewart is important," IWA President Keith Johnson told the 1976 convention, "and was vital for the survival of our union. But let us not forget what affirmative action for equal employment opportunity is doing for our soul."

The merger of civil rights and labor interests are not always so amiable. In fact, the recession has brought to the forefront a new round of bitter fighting between the old allies over the grotesque question: Who should be laid off first?

Instead of an expanding economy, the total number of jobs began to shrink. Under these circumstances, plant-wide seniority, which satisfactorily answered the question "who should be promoted," became unacceptable to civil rights organizations because it also meant that blacks, as the most recently hired, were the first fired. Was there an alternative standard? Who "rightfully" should be laid-off first: employees with high seniority standing or employees hired under affirmative action programs? Should the white be fired, thereby ignoring the seniority he worked so hard to accumulate? Or should the black go, thereby cancelling progress in eliminating hiring discrimination?

Again tensions arose between civil rights advo-

cates and labor leadership because of the employers' discrimination and power to hire and fire. And again the issue went to the courts with the natural allies on opposing sides. Southern unions, often close to exhaustion after fighting for simple survival against ruthless employers, considered the threat to plant seniority an attack on the last remnant of worker security. Put simply, if unions cannot enforce seniority protection against management's arbitrary actions, they can no longer serve as effective agents for workers. Civil rights proponents argued with equal force that the "last in, first out" principle undermined the concerted effort to end the cycle of economic discrimination.

In March 1976, the Burger Supreme Court handed down a 5-3 decision casting some light on the legal outcome. The decision (*Franks v. Bowman Transportation Co.*) provides that a worker who was not hired because of race discrimination may, when eventually hired, begin seniority standing from the time of that first rejection. The language of the opinions indicates, however, that blacks or women who were not personally rejected would receive no seniority credit. All sides are now altering their strategies to meet this new framework and to prepare for other expected decisions.

As in the past, the final resolution of this problem will require a new level of creativity and cooperation from civil rights and labor leaders. Clear and unified demands must be put to employers to pay laid-off workers — black or white — until they find equivalent employment. This "severance" pay responsibility should be required where discrimination existed in the past and/or where employers couch layoffs behind the smokescreens of "a bad economy" or "needed automation." If the courts can utilize the law to benefit — and harm — groups of employees, the law can likewise be used to place the burden of layoffs on management. And when the employer is not responsible for the layoffs, the society as a whole should absorb the damages — not the individual worker. Supplementary unemployment benefits, job training programs, and public work jobs are traditional remedies.

But we must move toward longer range goals of restructuring work and job relationships so that one class of workers is not pitted against another. In the final analysis, unions, functioning properly with education and organizing programs, must work to bridge these destructive gaps between black and white Southerners by speaking with a collective voice. From this perspective, equal employment laws offer an important means for unions to serve the special needs of a growing number of black workers while revitalizing the strength of their organization. The opportunity to restore the natural alliances, the true hope for Southern progress, must not be lost.

OSHA: Dynamite for Workers

by Chip Hughes and Len Stanley

Next time you open a bag of Fritos or a pack of cigarettes, think about Marvin Gaddy. Marvin has worked in Olin Corporation's Film Division for over 20 years making cellophane wrapping for just about any product you can imagine. He can't see as well as he used to and still gets those nightmares every once in a while. He's watched the lives of many men change after they came off that second floor. Some got eaten up with tumors and cancer. For some, it got so bad they took their own lives. Others were luckier and got out with only minor nerve problems to remind them of what it was like up there.

The second floor is in the Chemical Building at Olin's Film Division near Brevard, North Carolina, on the edge of the Pisgah National Forest. Built in 1951, the Film Division produces viscose which is extruded, solidified and dried to form cellophane. The second floor houses the xanthation process. Twelve massive barettes are kept in constant rotation, each mixing together 700-800 pounds of ripened alkali cellulose (raw wood pulp and 16 percent caustic acid). Marvin used to add carbon disulfide to the rotating vats, which helped to quicken the process of breaking down the raw wood

pulp into a liquid cellophane-like mixture. Nobody ever told Marvin and his fellow workers that the carbon disulfide (CS₂) could harm them. But they finally found out. Only then, it was too late.

"A lot of people would leave," says Marvin. "The younger ones would come in there, work a few days, and then they'd invariably get a big whiff of CS₂. People would act real unusual, get headaches and think they were getting the flu. After a few overdoses, the nightmares would start coming on them. We'd go in and tell the company, 'Dammit, you'd better do something about this CS₂ stuff.' They'd tell us to get the hell out — 'we don't need you. If you don't enjoy your job, then go home.' Course we didn't have a union back then. And we didn't have Jimmy Reese rummaging through their trashcans and filing all those grievances and complaints."

James Reese is a maintenance man at the Olin plant and chairman of the union safety committee for Local 1971 of the United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU). Each morning, James rises at 4:30 a.m. to greet the day with an hour of playing his organ. From then on, he's like a human dy-



namo with an instinct for cover-ups that would put Woodward & Bernstein to shame. If he'd been born a few generations earlier, he would have been side by side with the pioneers, wrestling the hills away from the Indians. But today, there are newer and more powerful adversaries to be fought in the North Carolina mountains — like the Olin Corporation.

"The thing about us mountain people," explains James, "is that we never had to depend on someone else for our livelihood. If a man didn't like it where he was working, he could get his gun and go out in the woods and get him something to eat. Now my daddy, he was what people used to call a 'trespasser.' He'd go out in these government forest lands and get whatever he wanted.

"Some people don't fear losing their jobs no way. They just like to fight and this is what comes out of their tradition. They don't act like mill people, who are always being dependent on the bossman for jobs and food and houses and schools. People around here rely on themselves more. They're more willing to take chances and stand up."

Olin workers had to stand up and fight for more than 30 years before they got the union in at Olin. The battle left a trail of beaten-up organizers, fired union sympathizers, and heart-breaking, one-vote Labor Board election defeats. Finally, in 1971, the union won a contract which included a safety committee to monitor working conditions and the in-plant environment. For the past five years, James Reese has used the committee to help his fellow workers investigate numerous toxic substances: asbestos, carbon disulfide, formaldehyde, tetrahydrofuran, flax dust, noise, radiation, methyl bromide.

"Now this OSHA thing that I'm into, I volunteered for this because it was mine from the word 'go.' I had learned the OSHA standards even before we got our union organized, til I almost had them memorized. I was just kind of interested. It represented a kind of challenge to me because I've seen some of the conditions up there and I've been hurt on the job myself. I'm not sure what set me off. I think it's just the fact that I'm a kind of militant type of character and this way, for once, I had something that they had to listen to. I finally had a law to back me up."

Congress passed the Williams-Steiger Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 in response to escalating on-the-job injury rates and intense

pressure from national unions. The act created the OSHA Administration within the US Labor Department, with the responsibility for inspecting the workplace for hazards and imposing penalties of up to \$10,000 when unsafe conditions were uncovered. In addition, the act gave bold rights to affected workers to assist them in cleaning up their plants. It is these workers' rights which are the most important aspect of the law because unions and employees cannot depend on the chronically understaffed and under-financed OSHA Administration to initiate enforcement. Workers can now file a complaint requesting an unannounced inspection, accompany the OSHA inspector during his inspection, demand an investigation of potentially harmful substances, and even challenge the amount of time given a company to clean up recognized hazards.

For James Reese and the other members of Local 1971, OSHA has become more than another law or bureaucratic agency. It is a tool they can use to take matters into their own hands, a weapon they can hold to the company's head to force them to clean up unhealthy conditions.

"I can just talk about getting an inspector in here and the company safety man will about go to shaking, trying to get things straightened out. Of course, it wasn't always that way around here. Back in September of '72, I heard from people that the company was gonna be doing these noise tests, so I went up there with them to see what was going on. This guy got on me pretty hot. He tried to get rid of me, and we got into a regular cuss fight over it. He says, 'You get out of here, you got no business in here.' I says back, 'I represent all the people in this union as their safety man.' He kicked me out of there, but I filed a grievance on it. In the first two steps of the grievance procedure the company says that the contract does not allow that an employee can leave his work station at any time.

"So, then I got all fired up. I threatened to file charges with the federal government through OSHA on it. Well, that scared them, so they sent it up to the highest corporate levels. Pretty soon, a letter comes back from the higher-ups saying that we can watch any of their tests and also get all the records of what they find. This was just great.

"I was getting a lot of this stuff they were doing. I don't know whether they realized it or not, but I was making a lot of records. That's what I was really after cause records have a way of kinda flying back in your face. And that's what I was doing, getting it down on paper to show what their real attitude is toward safety and health — in spite of those big awards they got plastered all over the cafeteria walls and their reputation as a safe company."

Chip Hughes, a member of the Southern Exposure editorial staff, and Len Stanley have worked extensively on occupational health issues including organizing with victims of brown lung disease in North Carolina.



Chip Hughes of **Southern Exposure** looks over OSHA forms with James Reese.

II.

Although the hazards of carbon disulfide exposure were recognized as early as 1851 in France, little has been written about the chemical in the United States. Both liquid and vapor are highly irritating to the skin, eyes, nose and air passages. This local irritation, however, is overshadowed by the serious long-term effects on the body after the chemical has been absorbed through the skin and lungs. High concentrations rapidly affect the brain, causing loss of consciousness and even death. Lower concentrations may cause headaches and giddiness or lung and stomach irritation.

Prolonged repeated exposures to relatively low levels of CS₂ affect several parts of the body. Brain damage results in mental abnormalities such as depression, euphoria, agitation, hallucinations and nightmares. Nerve injury can cause blindness when the optic nerve is involved or weakness of the arms and legs when peripheral nerves are inflamed.

In 1943, Dr. Alice Hamilton, a pioneer in occupational health in the United States, described the symptoms of CS₂ poisoning in her classic book, *Exploring the Dangerous Trades*. After studying workers in the newly-blossoming viscose rayon industry, she remarked that the men "knew that a distressing change had come over them, one they

could not control. It spoiled life for them, it ruined their homes, it broke up friendships, it antagonized foremen and fellow workers, it made day and night miserable."

The reactions were the same three decades later. Working around the barettes is definitely the nastiest job on the second floor at Olin's chemical building. Nobody likes to do it, but it is essential to making cellophane. After an 800 lb. batch of cellulose (wood pulp) is mixed up with the CS₂ for an hour and a half in the barettes, the syrup-like mixture drops down a floor to be aged. Following this mixing process, a vacuum sucks off most of the CS₂ fumes.

As Marvin Gaddy remembers: *"Sometimes when we'd open those barettes, you get enough fumes to just about knock you out. We'd then take our scrapers and scrape out all that was stuck and there'd still be a lot of CS₂ in it.*

"The company had given us testing machines to measure the fumes, but they would only go up to 50 parts per million (ppm). The OSHA standard was at 20 ppm. I'd know that it'd be a lot higher, but there was no way to prove it. Everytime I'd file a grievance on the CS₂, I'd just mark it '50 ppm+'. No telling how high it went. I filed over twenty grievances on it. Nothing happened.

"One night I was scraping out a barette and a



Marvin Gaddy, Bert McCall and James Reese pose outside the union hall.

maintenance man was cleaning out a tank that pumps the CS₂. So he takes a gallon or so that was in there and dumps it in a garbage can right near me. And there wasn't enough water in the trash can to cover over all the CS₂ fumes. So the fumes is coming out real strong. I was very irritated and went on home. I didn't go to work the next day, cause I thought I'd taken the flu. My family doctor just said, 'Go see the company doctor.' So Dr. Ryan put me on observation for three months.

"They kept me off my job for 16 months after this thing. Management and the safety department said I couldn't go back to work. Now I'm on another floor; I can't go back there because of my eyes, really because of the CS₂. I've been trying for years to prove that my problems come from CS₂, but they've been fighting me. My eyes used to be 20/20. While I was working in there I began wearing glasses, but it got worse. One doctor told me the nerves in my eye started drawing the eyeball over to the side and getting it all out of focus.

"I went to a Dr. Trantham down in Greenville. He said it was the most unusual case he'd ever seen. He said that if it's a cataract I got, then hold

off for three years and the other eye will develop the exact same way the first one did. Well, I've been waiting around for 5 years now and nothing else happened to the other one."

"I went to Dr. Sunderhaus up in Asheville. He's an eye doctor. I said, 'Insurance should take care of all these doctor bills!' He said, 'No, no. We'll do this up as an industrial injury for workers compensation.' Now I guess the company has bought him off. They found out who he was and started sending everybody that had these problems to Sunderhaus. He wrote a letter to the Industrial Commission saying that CS₂ had nothing to do with my eye problems. On April 7, 1976 they turned down my claim. I got nothing and it made me mad."

Marvin's case is far from unusual, and by no means the most mysterious. Take Bobby Roberts, for example. He was in his late 20s and he'd only worked with the CS₂ for about a week. He was also with the voluntary fire department down in Etowah. On the Friday night after his first week at Olin, they called him out on a big fire.

"He just never showed up. They went to his house. They found him lying there dead with his gear half on him. No doctors ever said what caused

it but we know it was the carbon disulfide. He died just before they started the NIOSH study."

III.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) was set up by Congress in 1970 as the research arm for the OSHA Administration. At an employee's request, NIOSH inspectors will determine whether any toxic substance found in the workplace is causing harmful effects. Unfortunately, NIOSH does not have enforcement powers.

James Reese had heard about NIOSH investigations at a union training session in Richmond. He'd also been hearing about more strange happenings up on the second floor from Marvin Gaddy and others. So he filed an official request with NIOSH for a health hazard evaluation survey for the CS₂.

"This just scared the britches off of 'em," Reese remembered. "They are just afraid that somewhere down the line something is gonna get proved on them, and they'll have to spend a lot of money cleaning it up. There's no laws for testing chemicals put in the workplace, like the Food & Drug Administration or EPA. They put things into practice too quick. They should've checked this stuff in the beginning."

On July 27, 1973, Jerome Flesch, a NIOSH industrial hygienist, came to Olin's Pisgah Forest plant to investigate the CS₂. Flesch and his NIOSH team went to the second floor and observed the leaky gaskets and pipes, and the air vacuums that clogged every once in a while.

They also tested to see how much carbon disulfide was in the air when the big barettes were opened for scraping. Like Marvin Gaddy's CS₂ tester, the dials on the NIOSH equipment went up as high as they could — except on their machine the limit read 288 ppm. The OSHA standard for carbon disulfide is 20 ppm.

According to Emil A. Paluch, a Polish research scientist: "From the toxicological point of view a concentration of about 300 ppm of carbon disulfide is the amount which exceeds almost everybody's tolerance in a comparatively short period of time and can produce serious pathological changes within a few days."

The scientists from NIOSH could only mark their test results, '288 ppm+.'

Three months later, NIOSH sent down a physician, James B. Lucas, to do a follow-up medical survey on neurological problems with the workers on the second floor. He reported back that 29 men were interviewed, most of whom complained about recurring nightmares, abdominal pains, headaches,

"They called it epileptic fits for a long time so they wouldn't have to pay workers' compensation."

"Stogie Sellers used to work with this stuff, too, until it got him so depressed that he took his gun and killed himself."

dizziness and insomnia. He summed up his findings on nerve problems with a short statement: "A number of bizarre neurological findings were noted." Among his findings were the following:

A 34-year-old man worked 14½ years in the chemical building prior to his transfer. He has a several year history of numbness, pains, and tingling involving the right side of his face. A neurological consultant for the company diagnosed him with "a typical facial neuralgia."

A 44-year-old man with 22 years exposure. He has been on leave from work for two years with a vague arthritis-like ailment.

A 46-year-old man with 22 years exposure notes numbness in both his legs, which he attributes to spinal problems and pinched nerves.

A 37-year-old man with 16 years exposure had the onset of a convulsive disorder two years ago beginning with a three day period of status epilepticus. His doctor told him his seizure was due to "a swelled blood vessel in the temporal area." An extensive report by a neurological consultant hired by the company indicates no such finding to explain the onset of his epilepsy. He is currently depressed by his downgraded position (janitor). His neurological exam was normal.

"That last guy you read about, that was Jimmy Massey," explained Bert McColl, who suffers himself from a rare form of hipbone decay that makes walking difficult. "Massey got this stuff worse than anybody. They called it epileptic fits for a long time so they wouldn't have to pay no workers' compensation to him. First time it happened, he was just sitting there eating supper with his wife and kids. Then he started having a fit. So the company said, 'If it just happened at home, then it couldn't have anything to do with his work.' Later on, they found all the tumors.

"There was another guy — Herbert Higgins. He was 38, too, in the same shape, started doing the same things. Only they didn't find the tumors in his brain til after he died. Nobody ever laid it to CS₂ though. That was before these studies.

"Jimmy Massey is still barely living over near Canton. They give him a few more months before

the cancer will eat up his brain. His wife just had a baby recently. The family started runnin' out of money with all the medical bills they had to pay, so the company put Jimmy back to work again. They put him on the janitor crew, going around the plant picking up trash. He'd wander round and round not even knowing what he's supposed to do. He'd sit around by the time clock without even knowing when he should punch out.

"'Stogie' Sellers used to work with this stuff, too, until it got him so depressed that he took his gun and killed himself. George Sanders worked with us on the second floor, too. He used to empty all these trashcans full of CS₂. Boy, did he get a lot of fumes! I worked around him the week before he died and you could definitely tell that he was in a

strain. He was awful bad depressed. He wouldn't say nothing to no one. His wife was pregnant at the time. He died of a shotgun wound one Saturday night. Everybody said it was just an accident."

At the end of April, 1974, NIOSH finally released its health hazard evaluation report for the CS₂. The evidence showed that acute exposures to carbon disulfide had been occurring episodically and these exposures provoked the symptoms in the Olin workers. However, the report stated "there does not appear to be sufficient medical evidence at this time to warrant a conclusion that chronic exposure is occurring in a sufficient degree to provoke illness. Without question, several atypical and unexplained illnesses were encountered during the study. Time may eventually resolve these diagnos-

ORGANIZING FOR A SAFE & HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The first step for workers concerned about occupational safety and health issues is to find out what dangerous substances they are exposed to. Many workers, like those in the Olin plant, accept the minor irritations of toxic fumes, dust and noise as a part of their jobs without realizing the effects of long-term exposure. Most workers are also unwilling to take the risks of speaking out about working conditions until they understand the serious harm caused by toxic substances.

If a company will not tell its employees what they are being exposed to in the workplace, an employee has a number of different options. If the plant is unionized, then the worker should first seek technical assistance from the international union. The Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers (OCAW) in Washington and the United Rubber Workers (URW) in Akron, Ohio, both have excellent resource materials on industrial health hazards. An essential book for workers concerned about health hazards is *Work is Dangerous To Your Health* by Stellman and Daum. This paperback book lists symptoms of various occupational diseases and the toxic effects of numerous industrial chemicals. In the South, a number of organizations have begun to assist workers in seeking information about occupational health problems: N-COSH, Box 594, Durham, N.C. 27701; Southern Institute for Occupational Health (SIOH), Box 861, Cayce, S.C.; Occupational Health Studies Group, University of North

Carolina, Chapel Hill (funded jointly by the United Rubber Workers and the rubber industry); and the Institute for Southern Studies, Box 230, Chapel Hill, N.C.

Once a worker has discovered an occupational hazard, there are a number of different handles for fighting the problem. In a unionized plant, the grievance procedure may be the most

A WORKER'S GUIDE TO OSHA



Urban Planning Aid has published a booklet that workers should find an invaluable reference. "How to Use OSHA" is especially thorough in its coverage of complaints, inspections and follow-up procedures. The booklet may be ordered from: Urban Planning Aid, 639 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. Individual copies are 75¢, bulk orders of 15 or more, 50¢.

effective initial arena. Many unions are also strengthening their positions by negotiating safety and health clauses in their contracts specifying the company's obligation to provide information on harmful substances, access to exposure records for industrial chemicals, the right to refuse unsafe work, and equal decision-making power for the union safety and health committee. In a non-union shop, where an employee has no protection in complaining about unsafe conditions, filing an OSHA complaint may be the best tactic.

Under the OSHA law, workers are given the right to file a complaint requesting an unannounced inspection while remaining anonymous to their employers. The OSHA complaint process gives employees an added weapon to bring to bear against negligent employers, but it can only be effective when pressure is also brought to bear on the government to enforce the OSHA laws. When the OSHA inspector visits a plant for an inspection, workers have also won the important right to accompany the inspector and to point out unsafe and unhealthy conditions.

The newly-won right to a workplace "free from recognized hazards" coupled with the unbridled proliferation of toxic substances in the workplace have combined to make occupational health one of the most controversial issues of the 1970s. Education and action by workers on the job present one of the clearest solutions to this continuing national disgrace.

tic problems."

The report recommended that the chemical operators be rotated on a weekly basis to reduce their exposure time. Other workers should be assigned to the area to increase the maintenance of the barrettes and help insure compliance with all safety precautions. Respirators were also recommended, as well as a training program to inform employees about the hazardous properties of working with carbon disulphide. The report concluded with a very disturbing statement: "It is difficult to postulate that such diverse and asymmetric neurological problems are due to common exposure to toxic substances or due to some unusual personal susceptibility. Local problems of this type are probably related to chance distribution."

Marvin Gaddy: *"That's all wrong. We can definitely show you why at least twelve out of these twenty-four people have had all these weird problems. They all worked with the CS₂. You see, it's really a nerve gas, at least that's what they used it for back in the war. The stuff goes about working on the weakest nerves that you got. Now, my nerves and Bert's are different. He can't walk or move around the way he used to; I can't see too good."*

Bert McColl: *"I started going to nerve doctors down at Emory in Atlanta. They said I should never go back to work. But with Social Security and insurance, they say you gotta be 100 percent disabled before they'll do anything. I left Emory in February of this year. I begged em to let me put in three months time to help in paying the doctor bills before I come back. They tell me that my bones are decaying all around the hips. They won't say for sure that it's cancer, but it could be. Otherwise they're just decayed and gone."*

After the NIOSH study was released, some small changes occurred around the Olin plant. At least there were some written records showing what the carbon disulfide had done. The company had to post the report in the plant and some people started reading it and getting their own ideas. Workers started calling James Reese after hours and telling him about health and safety problems that were happening in their departments — fumes, chemicals, machines without guards, trucks without brakes, etc.

Some of the chemical mixers came to James one day with a label that they'd taken off a bag. They said they'd just started using this dusty stuff called Cyclo-Fil, but the labels on the bag had worried them: *"Caution — Contains Asbestos Fibers — Avoid Creating Dust — Breathing Asbestos Dust May Cause Serious Bodily Harm."* James immediately called up the safety department. But the safety man said there was no asbestos in the plant. "That stuff is called Cyclo-Fil," he calmly reassured

James. James persisted and Olin agreed to send the material off to be tested by an impartial party.

Two months later, the report finally came back from the Georgia Tech research scientists. The next day they ordered that all Cyclo-Fil be taken out of the plant. "They also kicked out that purchasing guy who had ordered the stuff," James added with a snicker.

"Another time, some people told me that they'd seen a state inspector in the plant looking over all the company's radioactive equipment. This made me mad cause they'd agreed to inform me whenever they had an inspector come in here. I got into a real darn hassle with Governor Holshouser and others over this. Olin uses beta rays to measure the thickness or thinness of the cellophane as it is being processed. These 'Accuray' scans used to be regulated by the Atomic Energy Commission, but now they're regulated by the N.C. Department of Human Resources. They sneaked a feller in here to inspect these Accurays — that's what I accused them of. I wrote all kinds of letters trying to get a copy of his report. They didn't give it to me till I wrote the Governor. I wanted to get it out of them, even if I had to write to the President of the United States."

"This is all part of it. They thought that they were being real smart. But in my scrounging in the trashcans, I knew the man had already come in here and found all those violations. I had the report before I wrote to anybody."

"They are so dumb. That's all I can figure. Do you think that I'd let this kind of stuff go in the trash can? I'd run it through the shredder, just like Nixon did. Course if there's ever anything that I want to know about this company, I know where all the trash cans are..."

"People have been turning up things, all these untested chemicals, like this kepone thing in Virginia. They had to even bury the plant and the St. James River got ruined. I think it's coming to the stage where industry is gonna have to first prove its point. It's not gonna work the way it's been working. Cause people, when they start to see what's really happenin', then they'll take things into their own hands and start closing these places down."

"The more pressure that's put on them, the more publicity that can get generated, you start to get results from pushing on em, from finding out stuff about kepone and vinyl chloride and asbestos. It's gonna start building, and people aren't gonna stand for it no more..."

IV.

Traditionally, many companies have avoided safety and health problems in bargaining contracts

or arbitrating grievances on the grounds that these areas are 'of mutual concern' to both unions and management. Other companies contend that safety and health is an area of 'management prerogative only.' Joint union-company safety committees have been set up as a 'consultative device' for giving suggestions to management. Consequently, the committees haven't been given any decision-making power for implementing their 'suggestions.'

For most employees in the South, occupational safety and health means little more than wearing masks and ear plugs. Corporate safety programs have mainly been built on the premise that the workers are to blame for the injuries or illnesses they receive from the workplace. As in the Olin situation, the existence of occupational diseases has historically been denied.

With the passage of the OSHA Act in 1970, companies across the country are finding that they can't get away with paying lip service or petty cash for better working conditions. Workers, like the Paperworkers in Local 1971, are learning that they have rights now, too — to question, to be curious, to complain and demand better treatment. Safety and health on the job is an area that has been neglected for too long — a new area for both employees and unions. Of course, wages are still important, if you're going to be around to spend them or if they don't all go to paying doctor bills.

As the American chemical feast continues, the safety and health committee is emerging as a new structure for industrial self-protection. We can expect that the OSHA Administration will continue to limp along without adequate funds or personnel to carry out the laws they're supposed to be enforcing. Consequently, as James Reese has learned, the only way to get laws for self-protection carried out is by vigilantly enforcing the laws yourself. The companies learned this long ago. They are well protected and they know how to use the laws.

James Reese: *"To try and calm me down, the company's now got me sitting around and talking with this Fletcher Roberts guy all the time. I'm his friend when I can use it to my advantage and that's the same way he works it. We know what we're doing to each other."*

"Olin brought Fletcher Roberts in here as the new 'Director for Safety and Loss Prevention' right after we started filing all those OSHA complaints. He's supposed to prevent them from losing money. In fact, he used to be the one who inspected all these companies around here for OSHA. I went to school with him, he used to date my younger sister. I know that OSHA and the companies are working together — this don't upset me — my purposes still get served. This company knows, after all the hell-raising that we've done, that we're not gonna sit

still for some halfway deal.

"It'll scare him to death when I talk about calling in the OSHA inspector, the very people he used to work with. I wonder why? All I can figure is this reason with him. We kept giving Olin such a hard time and I was calling in outside people quite a bit. I wasn't making too many points, but a least things were getting uncovered. Fletcher Roberts has been put in here to soft-soap me and stop all us people because somewhere it's appearing on record in the corporate levels. Somewhere up there in Stamford, Connecticut, somebody don't like it. Cause they figure sooner or later the law of averages is gonna catch up with them and some of this information is gonna get out to the public."

"They worry some about having to spend money for cleaning up, but losing their reputation is what really makes em squirm."

V.

Marvin Gaddy is still going to work in Olin's Chemical Building every day, although he's not up on the second floor anymore. They won't let him go back. Now he's got an easier job — no fumes, no scraping, no fear. "I may have to leave my department though. Especially on the graveyard shift, I feel what I'm doing, but I just don't see it. Like this morning, I had to pull up aside the road on the way home from work. My eyes started watering and blurring... I couldn't see..."

Marvin still goes down to the new union hall on many mornings to chat and joke and catch up on the company/union gossip. The building looks like a church; in fact the members had gotten a church architect to design it for not much money. Everyone treats it with reverence, too. Marvin has watched the union grow out of nothing over 20 years. It's kind of like a kid would be to other people. They mature, put down roots, learn how to do things better, grow up. Something to be savored after you've gone through it.

After he finished talking, he got up and headed toward the door of the union hall. He opened the door, paused and turned back. There might have been a tear beneath his thick-lensed glasses as he spoke:

"All that we've told you is the facts. I've got only four more years to retirement and all I care about is helping somebody else now. What I've said here, I've told all the doctors, all the lawyers, all the company men. But they can't hurt me now."

"When you got a company that's got the kind of money that Olin's got and they go and tell their lawyers to fight on this and we'll feed you — that's the way the world is run. There's some people that get caught and some that don't... Now Nixon, course he got caught."

The Recruiter



interview by Clem Imhoff

Before World War I, American industry—which was almost entirely in the North—had an abundant labor supply to draw from. For 50 years, an annual average of 500,000 new immigrants had offered their services to the expanding US economy.

Blacks were not a major portion of Northern industry; they continued to live in the South, most still fastened to the land by the sharecrop system.

The war and the resulting restrictive immigration policies changed that. A major source of laborers suddenly dried up and industrialists actively recruited Southern black men for their factories. Some of these workers moved to jobs in Southern cities, but a larger stream began a migration to Northern cities such as Chicago and Detroit. For example, according to one estimate, blacks entered Chicago at a rate of 2,800 a month during 1917-1918. A few found their way to smaller Northern towns like Beloit, Wisconsin, where 19-year-old D.W. Johnson moved in 1919.

The new policy of hiring black laborers such as Johnson conveniently fit into the anti-union efforts of many industrialists. Business leaders discovered that a labor force divided along ethnic

lines poses great difficulties for union organizers; by importing blacks, a cheap work force could be gained and unionization efforts weakened at the same time. In the two decades 1910-1930, more than one million blacks left the six Deep South states, compared to only one-fourth that number during 1890-1910.

Most of the new, black industrial workers migrated northward on the recommendation of friends and relatives. Some responded to the powerful, persuasive voices of counterband black newspapers such as the Chicago Defender, which persistently urged black workers to take advantage of opportunities in Northern industries. Others were persuaded by the covert inducements of labor agents who were hired specifically for the dangerous work of penetrating Southern states to recruit blacks. Rev. D.W. Johnson served as one of these recruiters.

Johnson was born in Macon, Miss., in 1900 to sharecropper parents. He first left home to work for the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad when just 17. About a year later, he returned to Macon as a labor recruiter. He made several more trips to Mississippi and neighboring states to offer black men opportunities as line workers for the railroad.

In 1919, he left the South for Beloit, Wisc., and

the foundries of Fairbanks, Morse & Co., a corporation which aggressively recruited black workers from north-central Mississippi during and after World War I. After two years in Beloit, Johnson returned to Murphysboro, Illinois, where he resumed his responsibilities as a labor agent for the GM&O. Railroads were among the most active recruiters of black labor at this time; the Pennsylvania Railroad alone brought 12,000 blacks North to maintain tracks and equipment.

*Agents like Johnson were unwelcome guests in Southern communities during and after World War I. Elaborate legal and quasi-legal mechanisms had arisen in the post-Civil War South to keep blacks tied to the region's plantation economy. In *The Emergence of the New South*, George Tindall cites a licensing regulation in Macon, Georgia, which required each labor agent to pay a \$25,000 fee and to obtain recommendations from 10 local ministers, 10 manufacturers and 25 merchants. Many Southerners were more direct, however, and used guns and gallows to eliminate suspected recruiters.*

Today, Johnson remembers the risks he assumed but he perceives himself as having contributed a measure of opportunity and freedom to many of his people. Besides, he says, he enjoyed riding the trains.

The work that Johnson and scores of other labor agents performed for Northern corporations has been of crucial importance to the nation's labor history. They radically altered the development of industry, unions and especially the South. Yet they have often been invisible characters. Stories of them have been told, references made of their accomplishments, but very rarely have labor agents explained in their own words their actions and adventures. D.W. Johnson is one of the first.

The following recollections have been taken from an interview which Clem Imhoff conducted with Johnson on February 29, 1976, at his home in Beloit, where he eventually resettled. This interview is one of a series which historian Imhoff and others are conducting as a part of bicentennial oral history project on Beloit's black community. The project was funded by the Wisconsin Bicentennial Commission with matching money from several local sources.

*(For an illuminating discussion of the migration of black workers to the North, see Jay R. Mandle, "The Plantation Economy and Its Aftermath," *The Review of Radical Political Economy*, VI, 1, Spring 1974.)*

My father was a devout, old man. He meant to do good. He was a meek man, could just take it on both sides. You could say somethin to him that could be awful nasty, but he'd have a kind word. And I love him for that today.

That old man were recognized for his attitudes and for his knowledge. He was among em all, but that didn't keep him out of meetin little problems. He wasn't eliminated from any of it.

But we were fortunate not to get whipped up. You know, there were people in those days, you dared not to say very much to em. The first thing they wanted to do was knock you down or beat you up or somethin like that, which it did happen. Oh, my God there's unnumbers of times I remember!

Fortunate enough for us, Dad would tell us when we left home how to conduct ourselves. First thing, his word was, "Keep your head up." He meant, stay level. Try to meet people as you want to be met, talk to them as you want to be talked to. And then sometime you have to go a little further. He would always try to teach a method that we could get along and be thought of as a human. We loved Dad for that, cause now that he left us none of us have to beg for bread.

My mother was a clean, old lady. She taught her children to go straight. If I acted up some way, maybe it was just a rumor, she'd take me in and set me down beside her, and begin to read the Bible to me. I believe that Bible, cause Momma taught it to me. Dad was the same way, but Momma was closer to me in a way.

I grew up like other boys. I was tryin to get away from them, but that was the awfulest thing I could do — try to run away. I'd get into somethin every time. I'd get hurt or somethin would happen to me. I'd find myself runnin back there just like a little old lamb.

Well, I do appreciate it now. My parents taught me to be honest. That old lady would tell me, "Son, your behavior will get you where your money won't. Your money'll be counterfeited, but if you practice livin a good life, you'll have a way when you get there."

My father was a minister in Macon, Mississippi, never fortunate enough to have a church large enough to furnish much finance. So, that required all the scufflin that we could do to help him to get along.

As soon as I was about eight or nine years old, I would work for the different people in the little town, whatever I could do to bring in a little somethin to the home. I would get to go to school part time, not too much. I always saw that my sister would stay in school, cause I knew that someday she would appreciate an education.

I can get more money

I was born with a lot of drive and ambition. When I got 17 years old, I were workin then as a man. I was workin for this old man, Asa Lever,



Rev. D. W. Johnson

drivin a team of mules. This job was to haul wood to the light plant. They burned wood in those days.

He'd be out in the woods cuttin it, and then I hauled it in and ricked it up at the light plant. He paid me five dollars a week. That was 1912.

One day he said, "You know as hard and good a worker as you are, you'd be an awful good railroad Negro."

I said, "Is that right?"

He said, "Yeah." Well, he give me an idea.

I had some threats too. I had some threats. Previous to workin for Asa Lever, I'd worked for another one, name a Charlie Bonds, for two dollars a week.

When I drove into town that next Saturday after I quit at Bonds, I ran into this fella's son, Henry Bonds. He was a big stout guy — wanted to know why I leaved his dad. I told him, "I can get more money."

He said, "If you don't come back to Dad by Monday, we'll do away with you."

I knew what that meant. He and his brothers were gonna get me if I drove for Asa Lever on Monday. I didn't dare argue with him, cause maybe he'd got me right then.

There was a recruiter, a fella by the name of Will Parlot, happened to be in town the same time He'd grown up in Macon, then he went to Selmer, Tennessee, with the G. M. & O. He would come back and get men.

I got in touch with him. He explained what it was and what they paid, the livin conditions and all. I was encouraged to go, because it were more than I were gettin. So we left Sunday night for Selmer, Tennessee. I didn't go back to Macon for quite a little while, until I eventually went back as a recruiter.

Quite a few left to come into Tennessee. From there they'd go to St. Louis, Murphysboro, some to Detroit, in fact all over the East. None went as fast as I did though.

I was in danger of my life when I left Macon. It seemed like it was a period when white folks was angry. The Negroes were leavin out, and they were leavin out by numbers. They were comin north because jobs were open. They may not have been the best, but they were far better than we had there.

They were very rough in that period. They beat up a lot of our people, left em out on the road. The flies got in some of em before the people found em. Just because they were tryin to better their condition. It was awful rough in that time.

When they began to leave, if you owed these fellas a quarter, you daren't talk about leavin. They'd say, "You owe me money." And they'd make it whatever they want to, and you dare not leave. So, I beat the rap by gettin out of there that Sunday night.

I never made contact with the Bonds family. I never even had to swap words with em. I guess that's a blessin from the Lord, cause he took care of me.

But I did know the outcome. The Bonds didn't get to be very old men. When I went back, one of those fellas was blind. The other son was crippled up — he couldn't walk. They were kind of a rude family. They didn't come out good. It didn't pay off.

Keep yourself in the clear

I got acquainted with a foreman, Jim Raymond, in Selmer. After I learned the way around, I would go to the foreman or the roadmaster and ask for a book of passes. They'd give me as much as 35 — men I could bring back, you know. So, I was very

successful, but I run into a problem back in Macon.

When I got to Macon, I told the fellas there was a man goin to Meridian – course it were me, but that keep me in the clear – he had passes for 35 men. He'd pick em up if they would have a quarter to buy their ticket to Brookville, Mississippi, which were ten miles from Macon. Then this man had the passes – which were me – but I told em the man was goin to Meridian. They took my word for it.

That night there was others there who had passes at this little old Jim Crow station waitin to go to Brookville. There must have been 40 or 50 men. Train gonna run at 12:30 to bring us out of there.

But about midnight that door swung open, and there were three great big red-faced guys – one was Mac Henry, a farmer, and another was Swans, and I can't remember the other. Now they had a bullwhip on their shoulder, and a rope, and each one a big gun. They said they gonna kill every so-and-so Negro they found that had a pass.

They searched us one by one. Got to me. Said, "Where you goin?"

"Goin to Selmer, Tennessee, sir."

"How in the hell you gonna get there?"

"Well, sir, my partner's goin to Meridian. He got the pass for two of us. When he get back, he'll check me up here in Macon."

"You better be damn sure you're tellin the truth. We gonna kill the son-of-a-bitch we find with a pass tonight."

"Yessir."

And they searched me, all but pulled off my shoe where the pass was. Had they pulled off my shoe, that would've been it for me.

And this Will Parlot, he in there the same night. One of em said, "Anybody here know Will Parlot?"

Will said, "No, sir!" And he swallowed that pass! Boy they wanted that fella that night.

Go in there to recruit

In 1922 I went back to Illinois, to Murphysboro. That's when I did most of my recruitin. I didn't get into nothin as serious then as the first time.

I was just like a little mole. I'd get in there, get a bunch and get out. I had to use a little chicanery, I would say. Maybe a snake. You had to get through without gettin caught. I had a pretty good hitch on it. I could do a good job now.

I'd get in there and I'd tell em that there's a man goin to such-and-such with a pass. And I got the pass in the toe of my shoe. They wouldn't take that shoe off. But they'd search every part of you. Oh, my God. They'd turn down the cuffs of my pants.

They'd say, "Where ya gonna go? How ya gonna get there?"

I'd say, "I got a man gonna pick me up. He got

I did it for the benefit of those fellas, so I could help somebody to have better conditions.

a pass for two of us." Biggest lie I ever told, but I'd get away with it.

You got to know what language to use. You got to tell a little white lie.

You got to make a guy believe there's one thing, to get him you got to tell him the facts about it. I told the men there would be jobs for them in Tennessee and Murphysboro, Illinois. Now Murphysboro was a railroad center and there was quite a bit of work there for laborin people. They hired all that would come.

But gettin out of there with him, you got to find your own method to do that. Cause if he go tell somebody that Johnson's in here with a pass, that's all for you.

You got to tell him some kind of fairy tale about somebody gonna come from here or yonder, and he'll be there at a certain time. Don't ever let it be you! That's what I'm talkin about. You got to tell a little fair lie! You never let it be you in person. You got to always have a dummy over there somewhere. You got to always figure out some way to keep yourself in the clear.

The minute they find out it's you, they may not get you this time, but maybe next trip they'll be all set for you. And they didn't care what they'd do to you. They'd just as soon kill you as see you come out alive, if you were takin the Negroes out of there. It was pretty dangerous, but I got by.

I go all the way in on the G. M. & O. Railroad. I just liked to ride anyway. I had a lot of fun on the trains.

Then maybe I'd go into Mobile. I'd loaf around all day. I'd walk up to a guy and say, "What do you do?" I'd question him – get all I can out of him.

Then I'd say, "I'll tell you what. There'll be a fella on that train. He'll pick you up." And I got him! I did that a lot of times. I'd pick up from one to ten and bring em in. I could never tell em it were me. But all the time I was goin down there, I never did get trapped.

The white guy dare not go in there to recruit either. They'd kill him quicker than they would a

rattlesnake. Damn Yankee comin down here gettin these niggers. No strange white man go to get nobody.

There was another thing. There was a number of people in Macon that I'd known all my life. They was farmers. Some of em had sons my age. All those fellas I was acquainted with. I would tell them a story about better conditions, they would believe it. Only thing they had to do, they couldn't dare tell those fellas they was gonna leave. They'd get in trouble. They'd do em some harm somehow.

Macon was a mean little town. I could tell you some things that didn't seem like human. There was some, they called em the mob crowd. Brother, them guys had blood in their eyes. There was Ku Klux I guess too, but these fellas was known as the mob crowd.

When you say, "The mob crowd will get you," that meant they comin in for you. Shoot you full of holes. Burn your house or do anything to get you. Nothin too bad for those fellas to do in those days.

I had experienced some pretty mean times, but

it seemed that this time they were determined that the Negroes wouldn't leave. If they found a group thinkin they was gonna leave, they were in danger. They might beat em up or even kill em. And that lasted a long time.

I recruited white people to work, too. It was the same. You still had to be a shadow or somethin. Then you could check em on your pass. I didn't bring any of the whites out of Mississippi, but out of Kentucky and Tennessee.

I only got my regular money, three or four dollars a day. Once in awhile I'd get a little bonus. But all I was doin was ridin, so that wasn't too bad.

I did it for the benefit of those fellas, if I could help them to get better. I risked my life to help somebody. I still do. If I can help somebody to have better conditions, I think he's entitled to it. If you don't help the people, maybe they'll never get an opportunity.

Well, I came the hard way. My past experiences have been pretty rough. But all the time I managed to have a clear glass of water, and one I could share with somebody else. Therefore, I'm very happy.

photo by Walker Evans/Farm Security Administration



Challenging the

From the Ozark hills to the Texas border, from the sparsely settled Delta to scenic Hot Springs, energetic Arkansans are gathering signatures for a people's referendum. They plan to put a constitutional amendment on Arkansas' November ballot allowing workers in union plants -- some 100,000 strong -- to vote on whether they want a union security agreement.

The Council of Churches' chief deacon has joined with the young president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Leaders from the CIO, the UAW, Teamsters, and Mine-workers have sealed a pact with the NAACP and the former dean of the University Law School. Small businessmen -- barbers, druggists, and others -- have rekindled the old Populist alliance with the head of the state Farmers Union. They have all joined together and formed Arkansans for Progress.

In simple terms, Arkansans for Progress is attempting to accomplish what no other state has done since 1957: to repeal a state's "right-to-work" law. But the phrase is mislead-

ing. In Arkansas, we refer to the law as the "right-to-work-for-less." Eugene Debs introduced the catchy words as a plank in his Socialist Party presidential platform; "Every man has the inalienable right to work." And Franklin Roosevelt blessed the phrase as well as the concept in his Economic Bill of Rights, calling for "the right to an useful and remunerative job.

But anti-union forces overcame the late FDR with their Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, which included the fateful Section 14B, outlawing the closed shop and enabling states to ban union security clauses. Through a stroke of public relations brilliance, management turned the leverage of 14B into a word-twisting ploy and dubbed the new state laws which sprung up, "right-to-work" laws.

In 1944, three years before Hartley even passed, the voters of Arkansas approved Amendment 34 to the constitution. It was called the Rights of Labor, and it prohibited union security agreements. The state's constitution, in the absence of Section 14B, was actually in violation of feder-

al law. Then, in 1947, after Taft Hartley, the state legislature passed the enabling law, making Arkansas the first state with a so-called "right-to-work" statute.

And right-to-work-for-less has been with us ever since. In 31 states, local unions and managements have the right to agree to union security provisions in their contracts -- a "union shop" or an "agency shop." In the remaining 19 states (including all the Southern states except Louisiana, West Virginia, and Kentucky), a state government provision mandates the open shop, which prohibits either type of union security agreement.

Right-to-work-for-less has taken its toll. In 1948, Arkansas was \$555 below the national average in per capita income. By 1974, the state was \$1,248 below the national average of \$5,448.

Arkansas permits its voters to petition for constitutional reform and changes in the law. This method has been used before. In 1964, groups led by the League of Women Voters removed the poll tax and passed a personal registration law by this route.

Like those reformers of 1964, Arkansans for Progress has a lot in its favor. Some 100 employers in the state -- including major firms like Safeway, Southwestern Bell, and Reynolds Metals -- already have "if and when" clauses negotiated in union contracts. This means that these companies have signed union security clauses into effect IF the majority of eligible employees vote for such a clause and WHEN such agreements are legal in the state.

If the coalition effort proves successful, the amended state constitution would allow union security agreements: (1) where a majority of the employees in the existing bargaining unit vote for a union security provision in a secret ballot election conducted by the Arkansas Department of Labor; and (2) where management agrees -- that is -- whether the contract shall provide for a union shop or an agency shop would be a matter for



"right-to-work-for-less"

by Bill Becker

collective bargaining.

The group has mounted a spirited campaign to get the required 55,000 signatures by the July 2 deadline (10 percent of the votes cast in the last gubernatorial election). But the campaign coordinators hope for a symbolic 106,000 signatures -- 1000 more names than the total vote cast in 1944 for the so-called "right-to-work" amendment. Early ads centered around the simple figure, "\$1.18," the amount Arkansas' hourly wages were below the national average. But the Department of Labor released updated figures to show that Arkansas had dropped to \$1.23 below the national average! United Labor of Arkansas (the four labor bodies involved in the coalition) used the release as a plug for the campaign. "What do you do with 35,000 buttons that say -- \$1.18?" the group asked at a press conference. Meanwhile, the word about the proposed amendment was spreading.

It traveled all the way to Arlington, Va., where Reed Larson heads the National Right to Work Committee and the sister National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation. Noted for anti-union campaigns of all sorts, the group has been pressed by the courts in recent months to disclose a sampling of their contributors. A coalition of liberal unions had sued, alleging violations of labor laws and claiming specifically that the Foundation mainly funnels employers' money into suits by their employees against their unions. The early rulings have favored the unions. Meanwhile, Larson has not neglected other causes.

Ever since he led right-to-work activists in banning the union-shop in his native Kansas, Larson has fought the

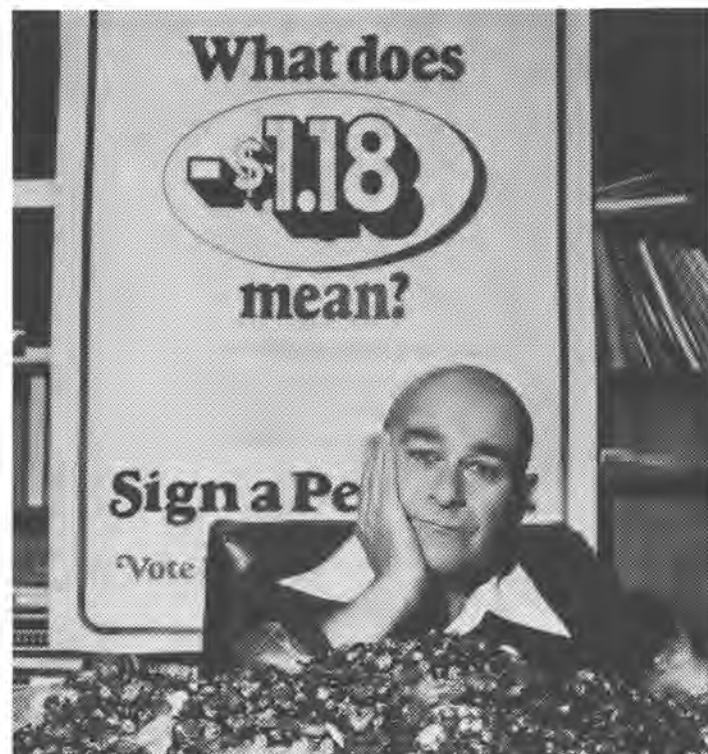
union movement. And now he has directed his attention back into America's heartland, sending money and muscle into Arkansas. Larson recently sent a "Warning Actiongram" to Arkansas Right to Work members claiming, "If Arkansas voters are hoodwinked into approving this outrageous proposal, it will rob workers of their right to earn their livelihood without paying tribute to labor bosses and will also retard your state's economic prosperity."

Larson contended to the *Wall Street Journal* just last year that "we're not against unions at all," but merely against "compulsory" membership. Larson is surely intelligent enough to understand that the amendment to the Arkansas constitution would allow union and management to freely negotiate a union security agreement, *after* the employees have voted on such a provision. But according to his own memo, Larson feels that the prestige of the Arkansas Jaycees, the Council of Churches, and the Roman Catholic Bishop (all supporters of the amendment) "is being exploited to

inflict coercive unionism on Arkansas wage-earners."

The United Labor of Arkansas leadership has succeeded in mounting an unprecedented campaign to rid the state of right-to-work-for-less. Congressman Wilbur Mills has endorsed the effort, and Gov. David Pryor has remained neutral. The liberal coalition realizes that union security agreements would add to the economic buying power of the state and upgrade the attractive features for new industry.

Arkansans for Progress represents a coalition effort that can be instructive to other states. In neighboring Louisiana, for example, a strong right-to-work effort may succeed in repealing their current union security law. Not only can coalition efforts, spearheaded by state labor bodies, be successful in blocking regressive movements like that in Louisiana, but coalition groups can also muster the collective power to regain the positive outlook towards negotiated union security agreements once preserved during the Wagner Act of Roosevelt's day.



Bill Becker is President of the Arkansas AFL-CIO. He came to Arkansas with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. He joined the Arkansas AFL-CIO in 1960 as secretary-treasurer and has served as president since 1964.



Florence Reece: "There is no neutral side."

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

by Florence Reece, 1931

Come all you poor workers,
Good news to you I'll tell,
How the good old union
Has come in here to dwell.

(Chorus:)

Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

We're starting our good union,
We know we're sure to win,
Because we've got the gun thugs
A-lookin' very thin.

(Chorus)

If you go to Harlan County,
There is no neutral there,
You'll either be a union man
Or a thug for J.H. Blair.

They say they have to guard us
To educate their child,
Their children live in luxury,
Our children almost wild.

Gentlemen, can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can?
Will you be a gun thug
Or will you be a man?

My daddy was a miner,
He's now in the air and sun,
He'll be with you fellow workers
Till every battle's won.

I wrote that song when I was 30. I had eight children and my husband, Sam, he was organizing for the union. He had been in the mines since he was 11. My father was killed in the coal mines. He was loading a ton and a half for 30 cents. That's what he got killed for, for nothing. I never knew if Sam would come back when he went to the mines in the morning.

We lived in Molus in 1931 when the union went out on strike. The gun thugs made up my mind right off, which side I was on. The High Sheriff was J.H. Blair. His thugs would come up to our house, searching through everything we had. They'll come in carloads. They all had shotguns and high powers and belts around them filled with cartridges. They'd come looking for Sam because he was working for the union. They took him to jail in Harlan and then to Pineville.

Now, it wasn't the same at Brookside. The people wasn't starving like they was in the '30s because the UMW was giving them some money, was helping them. You didn't get any help in the '30s at all. You still had two sides though. You have to be on one side or the other. There wasn't any

neutral either time. There never is. In their heart, they are one way or the other. Just like with the war when they said, "Oh, I'm not for it or against it." Inside, they're one way or the other. And in Harlan, they was either a union man or they was for the thugs.

The violence is not the same now. Back in the '30s, why the thugs just had the right to kill them. And if the men would go to the High Sheriff to report it, he was always on the thugs' side because they was on his side; they was being paid together. Now the miners is sticking together, so they're not having as much trouble with the thugs as they did back then when they was hungry and the union wouldn't help them. Back then, we couldn't get any news out, and people didn't know that we was starving in Harlan County, you know. So they had to stay there and do the best they could. In 1974, now this Brookside, that got all over the country and that was good cause that got support from everywhere. They stuck together, and I told them, "You got nothing to lose but your chains. Hang in there." And they did and they won.

— Florence Reece, 1976





photo by Russell Lee, 1946/National Archives

Taking the UMW oath: "The union obligation is forever."

Florence Reece's song is still with us. So are the gun thugs and the United Mine Workers. The clashes between the two have occurred with such regularity that even the veterans can't recall which episode happened when. "Was it 1938 or 1941 when the sheriff's deputy mounted a machine gun on the counter in the company store and shot down nine miners as they entered the door? Oh yeah, 1941."

The dates matter less than the painful story of a people so stubborn, so dedicated to life and their place on the planet, that they would not die or move on. They came to the mountains to live in peace, not to be enslaved. When the coal companies began bullying people, it was natural for them to push back. The two sides remained clearly drawn, the monied barons and their agents (thugs) vs. the miners and their families, a class division that consensus America could not ignore. To hold their ground, the poor of Appalachia relied less on guns and dynamite than on an inner dignity preserved by a culture of dulcimers and Jesus, front porches and squirrel hunting. Even if you do not know them, you can feel from the photographs their quiet, timeless strength, as organic to them as it is to the mountains they love.

Much has been written about the people of Appalachia, from the sublime portraits in Guy and Candie Carawan's *Voices from the Mountains* to the insane new theory espoused by Harry Caudill

that mountaineers are poor because of their genetic inferiority. When all is said, one simple truth remains: the people have survived. They have endured the wickedness of America's worst, and kept their anger and joy and gentleness. The remarkable thing is not that they occasionally shoot each other or the goons, but that they have not been *more* violent, that they have not dynamited more company offices and killed more thugs. In 1931, twenty years after coal began leaving Harlan County, the mines in the county were owned by the subsidiaries of J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford, Andrew Mellon, Cyrus McCormick, Samuel Insull, and F.S. Peabody. The miners of Harlan County faced the most powerful men in America, and would not quit until they had established their union. They are still fighting today to keep it strong, to make it a meaningful tool for their welfare and continued survival. The conditions of the battle have changed and so have the weapons. But it remains essentially a war of classes, between people and property, miners and millionaires, workers and owners. It is a fight, like the one at Brookside, that reaches beyond the county lines for its ultimate resolution, that demands a decision from an entire country, that poses the choices so baldly there can be no neutrals. Today, in America, in the South, you are either on the side of the union or the gun thugs. There is no middle ground.

—Bob Hall



Chester "Red" Poore recalls the 1931 strike

1931: The Battle of Evarts

by Bill Bishop

"The coal operators would think they got the union crushed, but just like putting out a fire, you can go out and stomp on it and leave a few sparks and here come a wind and it's going to spread again."

*— Hobart Grills
Evarts, Kentucky, 1974*

William B. Jones came from an old mountain family. Like many young mountain men at the turn of the century, he went to work in the coal mines while still in his teens; in 1902, at age 19, he joined the United Mine Workers (UMW). The coal industry boomed during World War I and continued to do well in the early twenties. For Jones and others, work was plentiful and the pay good.

But by the end of the 1920s, even before the nationwide crash in '29, the coal industry began to fail. The peak price for coal, over \$4 a ton in 1920, steadily declined to \$1.73 a ton in 1929. Late in the summer of 1930, William B. Jones lost his job in the Southern Ohio coal fields and moved his wife and seven children to Harlan County, Ky., in hopes of finding work in the mines. His life would never be the same.

On January 1, 1929, the railroads raised freight rates for Harlan operators who sold their coal on the Great Lakes market. That increase, coupled with the falling price of coal, left the Harlan coal industry in trouble. Producers instituted new wage cuts, sold out, or worked only when orders came in. The big mines, owned by Ford, US Steel, International Harvester, Detroit-Edison, and Peabody, survived while many mines backed with less capital closed down.

When W. B. Jones reached Harlan, he found wages far below normal and jobs almost non-existent. He moved his family from town to town, up the Clover Fork River that cuts through the county, until he finally got a job with the large Peabody Coal Company mine at Black Mountain.

It must have come as a shock to a man who had paid UMW dues for 29 years to find no active union in the Harlan County fields. But if he had his mind set on organizing, he could have picked no better spot than the Black Mountain camp. The Peabody miners were the last to give up their association with the UMW when the union left the county in 1924 after its brief five year stay. It was well known that the men at Black Mountain were the most radical proponents of organization.

In early February, 1931, in the dead of night, 53 men secretly gathered in front of an abandoned mine near the Black Mountain camp. Their purpose was to reorganize the union in southeast Kentucky. Every move had to be carefully planned, for discovery by the operators meant certain dismissal and an instant "blackball" from any mining job in the county.

As Chester "Red" Poore later recalled, W. B. Jones "was the main man trying to organize...he handled the whole damn thing...You'd be screened as you came to take your oath...One of the guys that went in the bunch turned out to be a thug here — carried a gun against us. He took the United Mine Workers obligation same as I did, sure did. Everybody was welcome. Hell, you weren't screened too bad, but they'd screen you.

"We met here in the hollow one night.... Then it seems like we met down around Verda, then the next night we met somewhere else. The next night was the big night at Pounding Mill....Great big place — could have been a corn patch, potato patch or anything. And one stump cut out, about as high as that chair. And Jones stood on that stump, making him taller than everybody else.... They'd bring the meeting to order and tell you to gather up as close as possible, so we could hear every word he said, see....We'd all take the obligation same night, same time.... You're supposed to stick by the union obligation, and that's it."

By mid-February, the men began seeking help from the international union. Johnson Murphy, a black miner from Evarts, wrote UMW President John L. Lewis, pointedly asking what the union would do for his wife and family "if they kill me for organizing." For awhile it looked like the national organization would help. William Turnblazer, president of District 19 covering southeast Kentucky and east Tennessee, and international representative Lawrence "Peggy" Dwyer both issued a call in the February 15th issue of the *UMW Journal* for the 20,000 men in their district to organize. At



photo by Russell Lee/National Archives



photo by Arthur Rothstein/FSA



photo by Ben Shahn/FSA

Bill Bishop is on the staff of the Mountain Eagle in Whitesburg, Kentucky.



The Evarts train station, a popular hang-out for the striking miners in 1931, and major link to Harlan Town, goes unused today.

the same time, Turnblazer distributed a circular in the fields that blamed the miners' hard times on "the insane policy of the coal operators in selling coal below the cost of production" and urged the miners "to fight and fight and fight against this terrible degradation." He called for a UMW "rebirth meeting" in Pineville, Ky., on the first of March.

The bitterness caused by yet another wage cut on February 16, and the promise of national support, strengthened the union's appeal to the distraught miners. Rank and file meetings had expanded beyond Black Mountain into the coal camps following the railroad tracks toward Harlan Town. By March 1, the Black Mountain union had grown from 53 lonely men to a movement involving hundreds of people and an indigenous energy that the international union could not contain.

Two thousand miners jammed into the Gaines Theater in Pineville that Sunday afternoon to hear a speech by Philip Murray, Vice President of the UMW. Hundreds more gathered outside the hall, unable to get seats or standing room for the "rebirth meeting" of the union. But far from being a meeting between the union leaders and the rank and file to discuss organization in District 19, the March 1 meeting produced only confusion. The events of the past month in the county and the past six years in the union made it impossible for the Harlan miners and UMW officials to understand each other.

Reflecting the weakened state of the American labor movement in 1931, Murray called for "a spirit of cooperation" between management and

workers. Ten years earlier the UMW had been the most powerful union in the AFL; now it was in disarray after several years of a depressed coal industry and a wave of rank and file pressure against John L. Lewis' leadership that included John Brophy's challenge campaign for the union presidency and the establishment of a dual union by militant Illinois miners in District 12. In line with Lewis' desire to make peace with the industry while controlling the movement of miners, Murray told the assembled group in Harlan County to go out and organize — but only organize. The union, he said, "did not intend to precipitate strikes."

But the miners had not come to Pineville to hear pleas for only organization. Certainly Jones did not expect to be told to undertake a task he had already accomplished. He wanted concrete evidence of the international's support for the miners' struggle. He knew that once the local organizing was discovered, men would be fired and a strike would become inevitable. With national support, the union might not be starved into submission. However, the national officials, bolstered by the large turnout at the Gaines Theater, left Kentucky feeling serenely in charge of the "rebirth's" orderly growth. The next two months would prove disappointing to both groups.

I.

"We wanted better conditions, and wanted checkweightmen, and pay for the coal



W.B. Jones' house and office as it looks today. The union's office, where he briefed organizers and planned rallies, was in the back; his family lived up front under armed guard.

we dug, and if we worked for a dollar we wanted to spend it where we pleased."

*—William Hightower
Harlan County, 1931*

Harlan County's coal operators reacted swiftly to the surprisingly large turnout at Pineville. Their success — making profits in the Southern coal fields — depended on the low wages paid to workers. Consequently any movement toward organization must be crushed. The day after the Pineville meeting, 49 men and their families were evicted from their company-owned homes at Harlan Wallins Coal Company in Molu, Ky. Sixty more were evicted from the Black Star Coal Company at Verda and 200 families lost their homes at Black Mountain. All were evicted by company guards because they allegedly participated in Sunday's meeting.

In the next few days, more and more mine guards — known as "gun thugs" to miners — were hired and promptly deputized by Harlan County Sheriff John Henry Blair. In March alone, Blair swore in 26 new county deputies and 144 company employees, including the superintendent of Peabody's Black Mountain mine. Peabody's home office in Chicago also ordered the superintendent to institute the "yellow dog" contract system which required miners to promise they would not participate in any form of union activity. In a hundred other ways, from the blacklist to withholding credit at the company store, the mine operators tightened their hold on every aspect of county life. Most miners had no money to leave

the area, and few found it easy to turn tail and run. The choices for the Black Mountain union had fast become quite limited: somehow they must stand and fight.

W. B. Jones, now secretary-treasurer of the Black Mountain local, knew he had enough strength to close down Peabody's operation — but that was all. Before they could finish recruiting in other mines on Clover Fork, the huge Pineville meeting had revealed the potential power of the organizing effort. Yet letters to Lewis from evicted and hungry miners received only the frustrating reply: "Under the laws governing the International union, there are no funds available for individual relief, and it's therefore impossible for me to assist you." Undeterred, Jones and his officers worked overtime in the next week to consolidate power at Black Mountain while reaching into other camps.

On March 9, Jones and his family were evicted from Black Mountain, and like many others, he moved to Evarts, one of the few towns in Harlan County not owned by the coal companies. As organizing continued, the town became a haven for union activity. Meetings that could no longer be held in the small, narrow hollows were moved to the schoolhouse yard in Evarts.

On Sunday, March 15, Jones was ready to make a show of power. Gathering on the school grounds in Evarts, 2700 miners and a few wives marched across the Clover Fork and down the Harlan road toward Verda. The march was peaceful since few would dare tangle with such a large group of armed men. The day ended with 300 Verda miners

taking the union obligation. But the high point came before the march started when Jones announced the date the Black Mountain miners would walk off their jobs.

II.

"We were working and starving, so we might as well be striking and starving."

— *Tillman Cadle
Townsend, Tenn., 1975*

The first shift of the Black Mountain mines moved underground at 7:00 a.m. On Tuesday, March 17, the men on the first shift loaded their tools on the cars and followed them down the main entry on all fours. The miners then branched off to the rooms assigned to them for the day. Normally, by 9:00 the first cars loaded with coal moved back to the surface, and the men enjoyed a short rest before the empty cars returned.

But this Tuesday was different. The cars that appeared at 9:00 carried only the tools of the workers who were crawling back to the surface. By 9:30 Peabody's Black Mountain mine was closed down. Red Poore remembered the day well:

"March the 17th is the day we walked out over here.... Arthur Scruggs was the boss over on this side, and I didn't have no use for him. We were brothers' children, but still he was the boss. He said, 'If you let this damn union grow, it's your fault.' I said, 'Shit, if I sit on my damn fanny and the other fellow sits on his, it won't go no damn where, don't I know that.... I was raised a union man and so was you.'

"I said, 'This is it.' 'What do you mean, this is it.' And I said, 'You just look at the next trip as it goes by here and you'll see whether we're coming out or not.' I sat there. The tram motor come by and every car had a kit of tools on it. I didn't even bring no tools out. I come out of there with a pick about that long and broke off. I was going to stick it tight in his chest, just as deep as I could stick it; that's the way I felt. 'God damn, you better let it go. You'll be out of work all over this damn county.' Well, I was, you see."

The miners knew that the momentary success at Peabody would be meaningless unless their organizing drive could command county-wide support, eventually closing down the other 50 mines at will. "The whole county, hell yeah," recalled Poore. "You don't try to take a piece of the cake; you try to take it all."

Evarts became the focal point for a district wide effort. W. B. Jones opened a UMW office in a spare room in the house he rented in town. Miners up and down Clover Fork came to report on local activities, pay dues, or just get information. During

the day, strikers sat around downtown Evarts and talked; at night, they attended regularly scheduled meetings and occasional mass rallies in the school yard. Eight armed men stood guard outside Jones' house to discourage any move by the company "thugs" who periodically passed through the town.

To facilitate the creation of new locals in the county, Jones developed his own group of 12 to 16 organizers who moved in pairs behind the scenes, working through leaders in the various non-union camps. "You had guys going everywhere," said Poore. "Finally they went down into Bell County. We're exactly like a damn octopus. We used to get into anything that opened." Avoiding the harassment of company guards was only part of the problem. The new union had to challenge directly the power of the coal operators by showing potential recruits how strong it was. To accomplish this goal, Jones decided on the tactic of highly-visible, yet completely legal, mass marches. Word spread along the Clover Fork, often through a network of relatives, as to the time of the march. Union members and their wives gathered in Evarts before starting up or down the road. Generally, the destination was a particular coal camp where new members received their obligation after a rally. At times, Harlan Town was the target, with marchers passing through coal camps all the way down Clover Fork before gathering at the county courthouse to hear speeches by Jones and others.

Thus, the marches served as a roving picket line that, while not breaking the law, demonstrated strength and built enthusiasm among the isolated camps. "Just keep moving, that's the idea," instructed Poore. "You ain't blocking nobody, you ain't interfering with a damned soul." To set up individual picket lines at each mine would have been ineffective and demoralizing. But the sight of 2000 miners marching behind Jones and his organizers riding in an open car with the American Flag, brought many men into the organization who, otherwise trapped in the loneliness of the company camp, would never have joined the rebel union.

In late March, another 107 men were evicted from Black Mountain. On March 24, some 1500 "keenly agitated" miners gathered around the Harlan courthouse to protest the evictions. A petition circulated by union leaders asked Kentucky Governor Flem Sampson to remove the county sheriff and judge who enforced the union-busting tactics. By mid-April 17,000 had signed the document and marches with as many as 2500 miners were common. Most of the time the marchers were armed. Rallies in front of the Harlan courthouse swelled to massive proportions, hitting 4000 by the end of April. Tensions were reaching the breaking point, and the opposing sides quickly drawn.

Faced with the same enemy, black and white

miners in Harlan formed an integrated union. It was not, however, union policy to end discrimination in housing and public facilities. The racism instituted by the operators when they first brought blacks to the coal fields continued. Black union members took care of their own, with wayward strikers often receiving a "baptism" in the Clover Fork from black leaders.

But in union business, all members had a voice. Preacher C. G. Green, 69 years old and a 30-year union man from Alabama, was one of the regular black speakers at meetings in Harlan and Evarts. At one of these Harlan meetings, recalls Tillman Cadle, "Somebody asked Preacher Green how he thought a sheriff could be elected by the people and to be so closely tied up with the coal companies and do their bidding, the way John Henry Blair did. And the way he described it, he said, 'If you go down to the store and buy yourself a piece of meat and take it home, you can cook it anyway you want to. You can boil it or fry it or cook it anyway you please because it's your meat. You bought it....That's the way the Sheriff is with the coal companies; they bought him and he's their meat.'"

Miners' wives bore the strike's greatest hardships, but had the least control over the union movement. Women were not allowed to attend union meetings and could only participate through occasional marches. The union men viewed the movement "for workers only" and often did not tell their wives where they were going as they left the house late at night. Left at home, alienated from the union, women saw the organizing drive through the eyes of their hungry children. A Bell County woman recounts those days:

"Many of a day I've walked the floor and cried. I didn't know where the next meal was coming from. When I'd see any of my neighbors pass, I was afraid they'd speak to me and I'd bust out crying — every time I'd talk to anybody. I'd go back into the house and make sure they was gone before I'd show up again. I've seen the days when we didn't have a thing to eat, only just one thing, maybe bread or beans. But, I ain't ashamed of it."

Jones set up a relief committee that dealt with this critical problem. Men were sent on foraging missions all through eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, and as far south as Georgia. Wagons and trucks would not return to Evarts until they were filled with food and clothing. Within the locals not on strike, collections were taken up for those in Evarts. Despite the intensity of the relief work, many went hungry. By the end of April hungry miners began breaking into the Evarts A&P on a nightly basis.

Calls for help from the national union continued to fall on deaf ears:

My Dear Mr. Lewis:

Just a few lines to let you know the condi-

tion in Harlan County. We are getting along Fine with the Union men are Joining Fast and the Operators are Discharging thim as Fast as they Join and they are Starving Little Children and Hungry Good women are Bairforred and Hungry and they Cant Stand it Much Longer. Cant you help us Feed thim... if we can Just get something for Our Folks to Eat we will win but it Must come at Once Or I am afraid we will loose again and that means Hardship Heeped up Harder on our People.

III.

"These miners were all expecting Turnblazer, he was the district president, to come down, but he would never come down. It got so he'd send some little field representative there, mostly a guy named Bob Childers. He'd come and talk to these men and they kept asking where Turnblazer was. And one day he said that every time he came up there all he ever heard was, 'Where's Turnblazer, where's Turnblazer? So I'll tell you where he's at. He's exactly where Jesus was when they were all asking where Jesus was. When they found him, he was talking with the wise men.' Turnblazer was up in Frankfort making arrangements with William Sampson to send the troops in."

— Tillman Cadle

"We are having a wonderful time."

— William Turnblazer, 1931
Reporting on the walkout in the UMW
Journal

From the beginning, the UMW had no intention to strike coal operations in eastern Kentucky or to help the insurgents led by Jones. Throughout March, Turnblazer and Dwyer continually tried to get the men back to work and publicly denied any involvement of the national organization in their struggle. Dwyer personally told the Governor, "I wasn't organizing and I wasn't even re-establishing the local unions at the camps." By early April, a conference was arranged between the US Department of Labor, the union and the operators. With problems mounting, the district officers were ready to deal. Dwyer wrote Lewis on April 10,

"Herbert Hoover he just now told me over the phone he is going to see Gov. Sampson, he told me the operators made a proposal... which was the operators said if we make a public statement that we had no campaign of organizing on and for us to keep out of

Harlan County they the operators would put back to work as many of the discharged men as they could and he said that Turnblazer said if the operators would sign up a written statement to him promising to reinstate the men back to work we would go into Harlan County and that we have already made a public statement that we had no campaign of organizing on. And he said the operators refused to make any kind of an agreement with us..."

Eleven days later, after more marches and walk-outs, Dwyer again told Lewis of a possible deal with the operators: "I said if the operators will give me a little consideration (I mean the organization) I will gladly help quiet the men."

As the strike moved into late April and early May, the national union intensified its efforts to discourage organization. In response to a court order prohibiting 400 named union members from entering the coal camps, Turnblazer distributed a

circular urging miners to follow the court's orders. The pleas for order were reiterated in the May 1 issue of the *UMW Journal*.

Indeed, order was the goal of both the national union and the Harlan County Coal Operators Association. Dependent on the same system of industrial mining, both union and management inextricably tied their success to the economics of that system: a failing coal industry meant a failing coal union. The Black Mountain miners refused to accept such a principle of subservience. Consequently, the nature of the Harlan strike, a struggle uncorrupted by compromised institutions, with both leadership and membership in the working class, threatened the industry and the United Mine Workers. Reestablishing order, therefore, meant death to the Harlan organizing drive. The insurgents were on their own.

The level of frustration and violence steadily rose as meetings grew larger, more men walked out, families grew hungrier, and the hope for national

The steps of the Harlan County courthouse were the site of numerous rallies, drawing on some occasions as many as 5,000 striking miners from the Black Mountain and surrounding mines.



photo by Helen Winterritz

photos by Library of Congress

support vanished. A mine guard at Black Mountain was wounded by a sniper's bullet; scabs were publicly whipped and beaten by union men; mine entries were dynamited. A mid-April Knoxville *News-Sentinel* headline warned, "Flare Up in Harlan Expected"; ten days later a machine gun battle broke out between miners and a posse of deputies. Houses were burned and stores looted. On May 1, Jones was forced to establish armed patrols to guard Evarts' businesses.

The daily routine of sitting and waiting on the streets of Evarts bred increased frustration, boredom and tension. "You could tell that there was something in the air," says Poore. "Evidently, it had to be — not knowing where the next damn meal was coming from, see... You'd see a bunch of 'em (company guards) coming, you know, cause you'd see them damn rifles. And when they got out, everyone of them always looked like they wore overalls and them pea jackets. 'Here come the goddamn thugs.' If they suspicioned something they'd get out and check people, see if they had guns on 'em, whoop heads. They done everything, buddy."

Early May found the Black Mountain local larger and better organized than ever. But it seethed with hopes and desires that seemed to move farther from reach as each hour dragged by.

IV.

"Hell yes, I've issued orders to shoot to kill. When ambushers fire on my men, they'll shoot back and shoot to kill. That's what we use guns for here."

— Sheriff John Henry Blair, May 1, 1931

On Monday, May 5, the violence that had been growing in Harlan peaked when three guards and one miner were killed in a half hour battle just outside Evarts. At 9:30 that morning, three cars carrying nine Black Mountain mine guards passed through Evarts on the way to Verda to escort a new mine foreman to the Peabody camp. The union miners, having already seen the company trucks heading down the road two hours earlier, gathered around the Evarts depot and along the highway. A few hundred yards below the road took a bend to the right; a hill was to the right of the road and bottom river land was to the left. Just as the three cars made the turn a shot was fired and both sides opened up. After some 30 minutes of shooting, the fight ended leaving four men dead.

For the strike, the May 5 battle was an important turning point. The struggle now reached a stage Jones had feared throughout the last week in April. The outbreak of violence gave the operators an

excuse to use the full power of the local and state governments. The UMW officials were put in the position of not only defending a strike, but, in the eyes of the nation, a murderous and lawless uprising— a step they would not take. Within two weeks, the inevitable results would be in: the strike would be broken.

The immediate effect of the battle was to increase the number of men on strike until only 900 men were working in the county. Eight or ten thousand belonged to the union. But two days after the shootout, 300 National Guard troops entered Harlan County and camped just outside Evarts. The troops were called in by Governor Sampson with the written approval of Turnblazer and Dwyer under an agreement that the Guard would disarm both miners and company guards.

Within days it became apparent that the Turnblazer-Sampson agreement would not be fulfilled. Blair refused to disarm his deputies while the troops began to confiscate the miners' weapons. On May 12, pickets stopped a furniture truck moving a strike breaker into Black Mountain only to have the soldiers escort the vehicle into the camp.

Local authorities, meanwhile, moved to eradicate the union leadership. On May 9, W.B. Jones was arrested for the May 5 killings. Hightower became the active leader in the movement and made a series of speeches in Harlan and Bell Counties to help rally the slowly faltering union. Hightower castigated the Governor for breaking his promise of equal justice under the troops saying he saw "no difference between working under the guns of 'tin hats' and working under the guns of the 'thug mine guards.' "

Within days, Hightower was also arrested for the May 5 killings. Eventually 43 miners were arrested on charges related to the battle, including the entire leadership of the union. Other arrests wiped out the leadership that filled this first void. Large groups of men returned to work. As tensions in the county subsided, the troops became bored and took to drinking binges and selling weapons to the miners.

The next step for the operator-UMW-government coalition was the ideological destruction of the movement. In mid-May Blair ordered a raid of Jones' house and came up with IWW literature. Reporters in the area believed the papers were planted by Blair, which could well be true since the IWW had been virtually defunct for over a decade. Furthermore the best known IWW member in the county turned out to be a paid informer for Sheriff Blair. Shortly after the raid, Blair denied miners the right of assembly and broke up a Harlan meeting with tear gas.

and other women field workers set up women's auxiliaries alongside the miner's unions. Activities were coordinated through a central strike committee of purely local miners, black and white, and women. The NMU leaders served as advisers to this group. Soup kitchens opened throughout a number of counties and became focal points for the organizing efforts. Meetings were held in secret and under armed guard.

By late summer the NMU found that the poorer and more destitute miners on Straight Creek in Bell County were more willing to join the new union. Most of these men were out of work. For a number of weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1931, the NMU led marches down both forks of Straight Creek and on into Pineville. Scattered picket lines appeared before a few of the small number of working mines in the area, but no operation was closed for more than a few days.

By October, the NMU's strength in the area began to fail. Soup kitchens were dynamited, men and women were arrested on various conspiracy charges, organizers were beaten and sent out of the state, soup kitchen operators were murdered, and the overwhelming need for food and clothing brought many union members back to work. In hopes that national publicity would aid their faltering efforts, the Communist Party arranged for Theodore Dreiser and seven other noted writers to investigate the conditions in the Kentucky coal fields. This November, 1931, excursion by Dreiser's entourage marked the beginning of a flood of writers, professors, students, intellectuals, and theologians to the Harlan-Bell area that lasted well into 1932. It boosted media coverage considerably, fixing "Bloody Harlan" in the nation's memory — but the attention did little for the miners' beleaguered position in the fall of 1931.

Meanwhile, Brooks believed that a strike had to be called immediately, and he wrote the New York office asking for permission to set a strike date. Those making strategy for the strike did not think the ground work was properly laid. They refused Brook's request and withdrew the organizer from the field. Another chief field worker was not sent in for another two months. When a strike was finally called for January 1, the union had lost all semblance of its earlier small support. The strike failed and the NMU was essentially wiped out with the January 4 arrest of nine organizers and the well-publicized February 10 killing of the Young Communist League organizer Harry Simms. The strike was not officially called off, however, until March, 1932.

The primary reasons for the NMU's failure in Harlan were basic and later recognized by the Communist Party. The union's base was composed of four to five thousand men and women who were

either out of work or blacklisted and thus powerless to affect the industry through strikes or walkouts. The structure of the Party also hindered a successful movement. Strategy decisions were made outside the state, not by organizers in contact with the miners.

Perhaps the largest failure of the NMU was its misunderstanding of the miners' reactions to the union's Communist Party affiliation. Few knew the complexities of Marxist ideology, but most believed that the communist label did not fit their way of living. Many objected to the anti-religious stance of the Party while others differed with various perceived aspects of the name. Once the fact was discovered, most everyone had the same reaction: they quit the union. One miner who helped organize soup kitchens until the early fall, remembers when he went to Pennsylvania to help distribute some NMU literature. "I was sitting underneath this cucumber tree, reading this literature and said, 'Uh-oh, what have I gotten myself into.'"

To the Party's credit, a number of men and women, notably Aunt Molly Jackson, Tillman Cadle and Jim Garland, were inspired by the NMU and continued to be involved in worker's struggles throughout the country. These people, however, were only discovered by the Party; all were "revolutionized" by the experience of living in a Kentucky coal camp. Most of those who joined the NMU in 1931 now bow their heads or avert their eyes when asked about the Communists. Men talk of "grabbing at straws" in late 1931, looking for any groups that could and would help. Some even look away and say no group called the National Miners Union ever entered Kentucky.

VI.

W.B. Jones, William Hightower, "Red" Poore, and five others were convicted of conspiracy to murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Despite a 1938 investigation by the U.S. Attorney General's office, urging Kentucky Governor "Happy" Chandler that "justice would be served by an exercise of executive clemency," Jones, Poore, and two others remained in jail. In 1941, labor leaders in Kentucky, knowing that Lt. Governor Rodes Myers would grant pardons to the miners, contacted Eleanor Roosevelt and Senator Alben Barkley in hopes of securing an invitation from the President for Kentucky Governor Keen Johnson. Johnson was reluctant to turn over the power of the Governor's office to Myers, and in fact, had turned down two previous presidential requests. In December, however, the Governor left the state and Myers reduced the sentences of the unionists and granted immediate parole. The miners left the prison on Christmas Eve, 1941.

Chandler Orders Guardsmen Into Harlan County As Mines Over U. S. to Reopen Monday



Carrying guns and ready for action in a county where men shoot at the driver of a hat, these two workers are shown as they return to their homes near Tolt. The man at the right is John Hickey, former deputy sheriff and one of the defendants in the Harlan county coal conspiracy trial last year. Scattered pickets watch them walk past toward the mines.



AS SOON AS TROOPS ARE STATIONED ON GROUND

HARLAN UMW TO NEGOTIATE INDIVIDUAL

Agreement With Operators Association as a Whole Call Impossible.

TURNBLAZER COMMENT

No Preference Over Other Fields To Be Shown; Conference Deadlocks.

HARLAN, Ky., June 18.—Operators and miners representatives were still "hopelessly deadlocked" today after a three-day conference in Gov. A. B. Chandler's office at Frankfort. William Turnbull, president of District 18 United Mine Workers of America, said his union would negotiate with individual members of the Harlan County Coal Operators Association for the pure coal tax, now recognized by the state as 28 per cent of the price. "The union is convinced from experience of the

THEY WERE TARGET OF BULLETS IN HARLAN TILT



Troops On Guard After Hours of the night. Troops in ambush early today fired at the Harlan Co. miners, twenty miles from where returned the fire and routed the assailants, are

BAYONETS SAY "NO!"

...And It's Bayonets That Rule Warring Harlan

WILL IT BE "BLOODY" HARLAN AGAIN?

This picture perfectly characterizes state of near-warfare in "Bloody Harlan," Ky., where operators still won't sign union contracts with miners. National Guardsmen were called out to let men go to work if they wish, keep strikers at bay with cold steel. Men obey the Bayonet Law, but they obey it unwillingly. —Story on page 28



The War Continues, 1939: On April 1, 1939, the 340,000 miners covered by the UMW contract with the Bituminous Coal Operators Assn. (BCOA) walked off their jobs when a new agreement could not be reached. Most owners did not try to reopen their mines until May 15, when the BCOA came to terms with John L. Lewis' demand for a closed-shop contract. But Harlan Co. was still different. The Harlan Co. Coal Operators Assn. (HCOA) urged owners to reopen their mines with scabs and refuse to sign the new UMW contract. By May incidents of violence occurred almost daily. Gov. Happy Chandler ordered 1000 National Guard in Harlan, but violence continued. In one incident, 150 miners were arrested and marched to the courthouse (lower left) after a shoot-out killing one miner and wounding a Guard captain and three more miners. The charges were finally dropped and the HCOA renewed the contract after threatened with another federal investigation and trial similar to the one in 1938.

TROOPS RETURN FIRE FROM PEAK AT HIGH SPLINT

United Mine Workers of America Promise Full Financial Support of \$2,000,000 Treasury to Locals.

VICTIM OF SHOOTING, WIFE, MOTHER



John Podgett is shown with his wife, left, and his mother, standing after he was shot in his hip at Harlan yesterday. John Podgett, said to be a nonunion miner, held by National Guardsmen. McLaughlin is a union worker.



This picture of the labor violence at Harlan, Ky., yesterday also was National Guardsmen bringing in more than 150 United Mine Workers pickets who were arrested at Harlan, Ky. The pickets are lined up for arrest as they were being put in jail. National Guardsmen are on the alert in the town of Harlan, Ky., and trucks jam up Central Street in background, and a crowd of the jail yard in the jail itself, the scene of the violence. Harlan, Ky., before the scene was unagitated during strike and two more were taken.

1946: Day by Day

THE SERGENT FAMILY, PHOTOGRAPHED BY RUSSELL W. LEE



*The Sergent family:
(left to right)
Franklin D., Louis,
Lucy, Mr. Blaine
Sergent, Bobbie
Jean, Mrs. Rhoda
Sergent, Wanda
Lee and Donald.*

John L. Lewis was not in the habit of being pushed around by anybody. Not even the President of the United States. In the height of World War II, when the whole country mobilized to fight the Nazis, John L. pulled his miners out on strike and threatened to stop the engines of America's war production. The Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) would not renew their contract with the United Mine Workers, and war or no war, Lewis was not about to be denied the greatest weapon organized labor (and particularly industrial unionism) has against recalcitrant employers — the ability to withhold in unison the workers' labor and shut down an industry. The pressure against Lewis was enormous, but not even the pleadings of President Roosevelt that the strike jeopardized the war effort would change Lewis' position. He was determined that this national crisis would not, like the Depression, cripple the union that so many had fought to build. Finally, in mid-1943, the federal government used its powers to seize the nation's mines and force the operators to sign an agreement with the UMWA that, with a series of further strikes, brought the wage changes Lewis wanted. It was an impressive victory that Lewis would not let the industry or the government forget.

In the spring of 1946, the short, post-war contract with the BCOA expired and again the owners refused to sign an agreement with the UMWA.

They considered Lewis' demand for an unprecedented industry-sponsored Welfare and Retirement Fund to be outrageous. But to Lewis, the Fund's ability to provide miners adequate medical care and pension benefits was a long-overdue necessity in the nation's most dangerous industry. In his typically florid style, he lambasted the coal operators:

"You aver that you own the mines," he told the operators. "We suggest that, as yet, you do not own the people...We trust that time, as it shrinks your purse, may modify your niggardly and anti-social propensities."

The confrontation that resulted dwarfed even the 1943 skirmishes. For fifty-nine days, the miners remained on strike until the government again chose to intervene on the grounds that "basic industries, such as steel and electric power, were threatened with paralysis" and the war recovery effort jeopardized. Again Lewis had timed his move perfectly, winning a tremendous victory for the union. Under the novel agreement between the United States and the United Mine Workers (which the industry eventually signed), Union-appointed safety committees and the Welfare and Retirement Fund were established as vehicles for the protection and health care of the miner and his family.

As a part of that unique contract, the govern-



The Sergents' oldest son, Rufus, lives next door with his wife and young son. Like his father, he works in Harlan Co.'s PV&K mine.

ment agreed to undertake a massive survey of existing health and welfare conditions in the mining towns from Wyoming to West Virginia. The study lasted 10 months and involved teams of doctors, engineers, social service specialists and photographers in exploring everything from outhouses to churches. The end product appeared as a 300-page collection of charts and commentary entitled "A Medical Survey of the Bituminous Coal Industry." What brought the report to life, however, was the photography of Russell Lee.

Russell W. Lee had already made a name for himself when the government commissioned him to photograph the coal camps of America. With Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein and Marion Post Wolcott, Lee had documented the nation in the Great Depression for the Farm Security Administration, perfecting in the course of his work, a style of photography that lets the details of simple life express its deepest meaning.

On the suggestion of historian Barry O'Connell, who knew we were preparing this section on Harlan County, we traveled to Washington, DC, to explore Lee's photo files in the National Archives. What we found was truly astounding. Some 8,000 photographs took hold of the miners' lives, moment by moment, revealing the anxieties, the harshness, the easy-going humor, the hard work, the hopes and needs, the good times with friends, the bonds

of brotherhood that would make a union strong. There seemed no better way to dispel the monotonous character conveyed by the Bloody Harlan stereotypes than to present in these limited pages Russell Lee's portrait of one family.

Blaine and Rhoda Sargent let Lee stay with their family for several days in Harlan County. They lived in the camp of the PV&K Coal Company, shopped in their company store, worked in their mine. The Sergents' oldest son worked in the same mine and lived with his wife and son (pictured above) just next door to his parents. Another married son lived in the coal camp in Verda and worked in the mine there. Rhoda Sargent spent her days doing chores around the house, handicapped by the lack of running water, refrigeration or electricity. The children each had their daily responsibilities but always managed to find time for the simple games their dirt front yard would allow.

The life of the Sargent family contrasts sharply with the excitement and glamor of John L. Lewis' high-level negotiations. But without them, Lewis was nothing. His power depended on their everyday dreams and devotion to his judgement about the way to achieve them. John L. Lewis might be able to face down the President of the United States, but ultimately it was up to miners like the Sergents to create the means of surviving day to day, generation to generation.



Bobbie Jean, age 4, plays on the Sergeant's front porch with a friend, while her mother goes about her daily chores. The company-owned house has only one electric outlet for a light bulb and the all-important radio.





Views of the Sergeant's camp from the road, the street leading to their home, and the buildings that can be seen from their front porch. In 1946, 87 percent of Harlan County's working males were miners and most lived in camps like this one in Lejunior.





Rhoda Sergent cooks the family's heartiest meal for breakfast, consisting of a slice of fried ham or piece of chicken with plenty of biscuits and potatoes and hot coffee. When her husband leaves for the mine, she begins her long day, getting the older children off to school and giving her blind daughter, Lucy, and Bobbie Jean smaller tasks.





Blaine Sergent, a coal loader, rises at 5 a.m. to enter the PV&K Coal Co. at Clover Gap. A union-elected checkweighman records the miners' production to assure them full pay, a reform won by the United Mine Workers in 1941. At the end of the day, Mr. Sergent puts up his check (lower left) indicating he loaded 17 tons.



Recreation means playing in the house or dirt yard since no playgrounds are nearby. The company owns the store where the Sergeants, who have no refrigerator, must shop daily. Work around the house is full time, with every member taking part. Donald draws water from the camp well, while Franklin brings up some coal for the household stove.





When the men come home, they are covered from head to toe with coal dust. The company does not provide a bath house, so Blaine Sergent must clean up in his home with water heated on the stove.



After work, Rufus Sergent, like other men in the camp, looks forward to hunting with his favorite dog. On Saturdays, the miners dress in clean clothes and go collect their pay-checks; later, they attend the union meeting held in the local church.



Sundays provide the biggest social occasion of the week. Rhoda Sergent and her married sons' wives eat the noon meal with their children while the men trade stories, play cards and nurture their separate traditions. The same church where the union meetings are held comes alive with the spirit of the Pentecostal Church of God. Laying on of hands and snake handling, in Russell Lee's words, "provide an emotional release" that the miners' families can not easily find elsewhere.





1974: Contract at Brookside

"In Perspective"

by Tom Bethell

Early in 1861, the coal miners of southern Illinois walked out of the pits, out on strike against operators who persistently cheated them by short-weighting their coal at the tippie. It was not the first strike in the coalfields, and there were thousands more yet to come. But this strike had something new; the miners won it with the help of public relations.

They took their battle to a moderately sympathetic press and a moderately sympathetic state legislature, and if there was one single turning point, it was the day when the Belleville *Democrat* published Daniel Weaver's letter.

Weaver was a miner like the rest -- but different. He knew that the strike would not hold together solely over the immediate issue of short-weighting;

he knew also that short-weighting was not the type of problem that the public at large would identify with. He never even mentioned the problem in his letter to the *Democrat*. Instead, he wrote of a philosophy.

"Union," Daniel Weaver wrote, "is the great, fundamental principle by which every object of importance is to be accomplished."

For clarity, content, and brevity, that sentence can stand with the best efforts of 1776. But Weaver had more:

"Man is a social being," he continued, "and if left to himself in an isolated condition would be one of the weakest creatures; but associated with his kind he works wonders. Men can do jointly what they cannot do singly; and in the union of minds and hands, the concentration of their power becomes almost omnipotent.

"Nor is this all. Men not only accumulate power

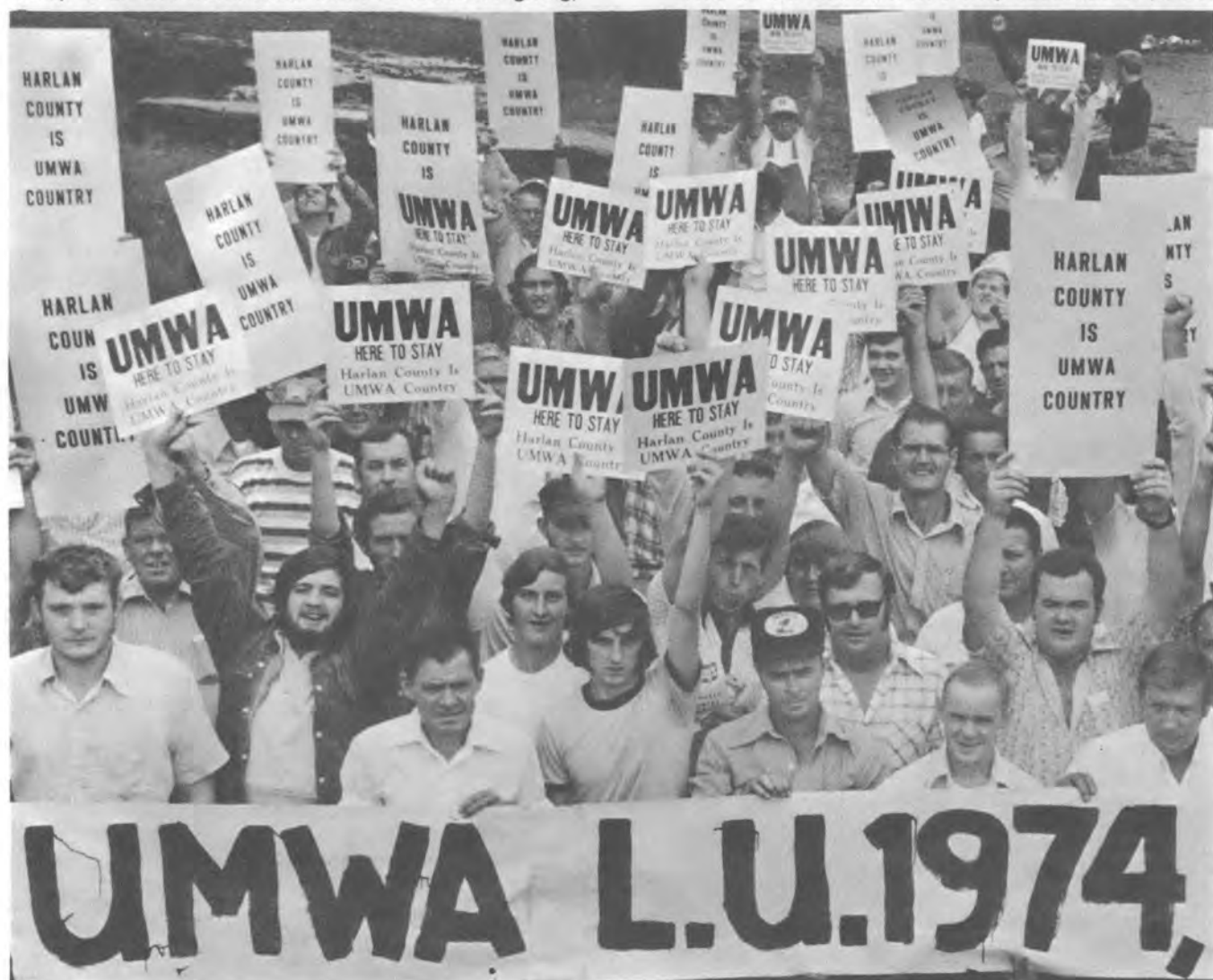


photo by Earl Dotter

by union, but gain warmth and earnestness. There is an electric sympathy kindled, and the attractive forces inherent in human nature are called into action; and a stream of generous emotion, of a friendly regard for each other, binds together and animates the whole....

"To accomplish this, we must organize. Our remedy, our safety, our protection, our dearest interests and the social well-being of our families, present and future — all depend on our unity and our regard for each other."

The words were irresistible; they inspired the miners, they established Weaver as an extraordinarily shrewd strike leader, and they touched a sympathetic chord where it counted — among the public and in the Illinois legislature. Moreover, the strike was notably well timed: the Civil War was imminent, the coal operators could already smell the profits to be made from fueling the engines of war, and they were not in a mood for a protracted shut-down. The strike ended with Illinois adopting the first state law requiring the use of impartial checkweighmen at the tippie. The miners gained their immediate objective largely by elevating it to the level of a crusade for a principle.

Jump ahead now 112 years to Harlan County, Kentucky, in the summer of 1973, to the coal camp at Brookside, where the mine supplies coal to Duke Power Company's plants several hundred miles away in the Carolinas. Six months ago, the leadership of the United Mine Workers of America changed hands. Tony Boyle is on his way to jail, soon to be convicted of ordering the murder of his opponent in the union's 1969 election, and Arnold Miller has won election to the presidency of the union on a platform promising sweeping reform. He has promised, among other things, to dust off the union's grand old slogan — "Organize the Unorganized!" — and carry it proudly to the portals of every scab mine in America.

Harlan County is full of such mines, Brookside being one of the bigger ones. In the collapse of the coal industry after the boom years of World War II, a long depression had swept across the Kentucky coalfields, and in a flood of joblessness and mine closures and tumbling prices, the United Mine Workers had lost its grip on the mines. Some men said the union was gone forever. When, in the midst of depression, a mine goes down and a picket line goes up across the road; when the operator puts the word out that jobs are available; when, in that county, ten men are out of work for every man working; when those ten men have families to feed and no prospect of another job in sight — when all that happens, you do not do much organizing of the unorganized, not without inspired leadership and a lot of help from your friends.

The leadership of the 1960s in the UMWA was

not inspired, and the friends were not there — not in government, and not in the press, and only very thinly scattered through the rest of the labor movement. Within the union there was restlessness, men here and there willing to take a chance to salvage what they and their fathers had spilled so much blood to win. The leaders of the union told them, on the one hand, to go out on the limb — "Boys, you gonna lose your medical cards unless you sign them operators" — and then, when they were all the way out at the end, the leaders lopped off the limb, refusing to commit the International's resources to the fight.

But now, in 1973, everything had changed.

Coal, the long-forgotten fuel, was in demand again, and in a few months would command the highest prices in history, thanks to the Arab oil embargo and the machinations of the oil industry. Old mines were expanding, new mines were opening. The new leadership of the UMWA had promises to keep. Miners at Brookside, chafing under the notably hard-nosed management of Duke's subsidiary, Eastover Mining, sent word to Washington that they wanted to join the UMWA. They had switched from the Southern Labor Union by a vote of 113-55, but Duke would not sign the UMWA contract. A month passed and the picket lines could not keep the scabs out. The men needed support.

The union was in no position to deny them. But it was not, in fact, fully prepared to help them. The transfer of power from Boyle to Miller had been bitter and chaotic; reform leaders with no previous administrative experience were already stuck fast in the molasses of bureaucracies old and new, discovering with horror that it was hard enough to get the mail answered and the dues processed, let alone launch new programs for an uncertain constituency.

Miller's 1972 mandate had been by no means unanimous (45 percent of the vote had gone for Boyle) and he shared the leadership of the union with an executive board divided against itself: some of its members were old Boyle men, some were reformers in spirit but not in practice, some were neither, some liked Miller personally, some resented his quick sprint to power while they were taking a more laborious, painful and traditional route through successive levels of the hier-

Tom Bethell is research director of the United Mine Workers. He is the author of a book, The Hurricane Creek Massacre (Harper & Row, 1972), an investigation into the causes of the Finley Coal Company mine explosion that killed 38 Kentucky miners in 1970; edited Coal Patrol, a newsletter, until he joined the UMWA in 1973; and has been a contributor to The Mountain Eagle in Whitesburg, Kentucky, since 1963.

photo by Paul S. Conklin



photo by Rich Sunly/Harlan Enterprise



photo by Earl Dotter



On the picket line at Brookside and Highsplit

archy. The UMWA's outward image of shiny reform masked a troubled interior — whole departments such as safety and organizing were in turmoil; policies, to the extent they existed at all, were subject to change without notice.

Under such circumstances the union would not have won the strike at Brookside without the benefit of public relations. Eastover Mining could have withstood the union for a long time, backed up by the Harlan County Coal Operators' Association — the same association which had fought the UMWA in Harlan County, generally successfully, for half a century.

But these things had changed: first, the coal operators could no longer settle the strike with sheriff's deputies and machine guns, could not count on the governor of Kentucky to send in the National Guard, could not effectively intimidate the reporters and television crews; second, the UMWA as a matter of honor had to pour in millions of dollars, if necessary, to sustain the strikers, and did; third, and far and away the most important, Duke Power was vulnerable in its home territory. Duke could be and was subjected to a barrage of propaganda in the newspapers of North and South Carolina about conditions at Brookside — conditions that gave the lie to Duke's carefully nurtured image as "your friendly neighborhood power company," whose linemen were so busy rescuing kittens from trees that you hardly even noticed when your rates went up. Proposed rate increases came in for new publicity, thanks to the UMWA; citizen groups joined forces to oppose them. Duke found itself fighting an unfamiliar kind of war on too many fronts at once.

The lines deepened and hardened in Harlan County; there was bitterness to spare, and violence, although the violence was nothing in comparison with the battles of thirty years before. Duke Power could keep its plants running with coal from other mines, but gradually the company came to realize that the UMWA was not going to let go of its ankle — as long as the strike continued, there would be citizens' commissions holding hearings, reporters asking awkward questions, embarrassments on the evening news, full-page ads over the breakfast table, bad times in front of the commissioners deciding rate increase applications.

It was not worth it.

When finally, the violence brought the inevitable result — the death of a striking miner, Lawrence Jones, shot to death by a mine foreman — Duke had already been defeated. The company had already been forced to the bargaining table, and a contract with the UMWA was still being resisted but was in fact inevitable. The murder was too much; there was too much blood on the coal and the UMWA had been too successful in getting that

fact across.

That was 1974. The members of the new UMWA local at Brookside posed proudly with their banner — “Local Union 1974” — and were photographed for posterity, looking confident. To the outsider, it seemed clear that the UMWA had regained its foothold in Harlan County, that it would not and could not be driven out again. It seemed equally clear that decades of injustice were over; miners denied their pensions by Lewis and Boyle would receive their checks now, signed by Miller; the slaughter of men in the mines would end as the UMWA brought new vigilance to mine safety committees and the rank-and-file.

It has not worked that way. In Harlan County most of the mines that were non-union in 1974 are non-union today. Old miners still watch the mails, waiting for justice that does not come. More men died in the mines of Kentucky last year than the year before. And the union’s most recent organizing effort, at the Scotia mine where 26 men had died in two explosions earlier this year, went up on the rocks and sank within weeks after it was launched.

What has happened? The situation baffles and bewilders. There is a tendency, both within and outside the union, to seek a scapegoat—to say that UMWA reformers have lost their zeal for reform; to say that they have sold out; to say that the union’s much-publicized in-fighting has drained it of purpose and robbed it of a sense of direction. All of which may be true to some extent. But there are circumstances far more profound which have much more to do with the UMWA’s seemingly stalled drive to re-organize the non-union mines of Kentucky, and these circumstances ought to be looked at carefully by union members and outsiders alike before any more judgements are passed or myths perpetuated.

Harlan County is still Harlan County. For every miner who looks to the UMWA for his protection, there are two who are older and remember being abandoned. Men who gave the best years of their lives to the mines and to John L. Lewis are not so easily stirred again now. The union owes them something; it owes them a commitment to come back to the mountains, not just for one organizing drive or even a dozen drives, but to stay to put down deep roots, to settle in for the long winter of building better houses and schools, making its resources available to finance mortgages, using its muscle to clean out corrupt county courthouses.

It owes the younger miners something too. It owes them its support and a chance to climb upward through the union hierarchy on the basis of merit rather than who-you-know. It owes them education in their history — the history of their union as a central part of the labor movement and the history of the coalfields they grew up in.



photos by Paul S. Conklin



The Brookside mine overlooks company housing

The schools don't teach this history; if the union doesn't, who will?

The coal operators of Harlan County are denied their machine guns now, but they have an equally powerful weapon: money. They have it to burn. They have lived all their lives in a never-ending cycle of boom and bust, and these days it is all boom, and they can pay wages high enough to keep the UMWA at bay. A union miner's paycheck is, in effect, diminished by the amount his employer pays into the UMWA Health and Retirement Fund — a high-cost insurance plan, which pays out a million dollars a day in benefits. His employer pays that cost, along with the cost of numerous other contractual benefits, and it is no difficult thing for the coal operator down the road to calculate the cost of the union's benefit package and offer the equivalent to his workers up front, in their paychecks, to keep them happy and the union out. It happens all the time; with a younger and younger workforce — miners who are 30 or 40 years away from worrying about a pension — cash up front turns out to be a better union-busting weapon than a gun.

Thus the dilemma: the union, struggling with

internal problems, must deliver on past promises, while the operators are uniquely equipped to divert the attention of miners who are less and less part of a union tradition. For the union, the odds are rough. The spirit of union democracy is very much alive in the UMWA, but it is less dramatic and visible than dissension. The dedicated mine safety committeeman, taking time to learn a bewildering array of federal regulations and then enforcing those regulations in the face of company threats, is far less obvious to the world than the pensioner denied justice by the narrow interpretation of eligibility regulations.

They say in Harlan County

There are no neutrals there.

You'll either be a union man

Or a thug for J.H. Blair!

Sheriff Blair is gone; the coal operators remain, well armed. The union men, arrayed against them, are still strong; the same battles remain to be won, although tactics have changed and will change; but the UMWA, like most of the rest of the labor movement, still moves uncertainly, needs more blood, must still find the key to what Daniel Weaver understood so well in 1861.

photo by Earl Dotter



photo by Frank Blechman

Tensions rose when Duke challenged the UMW picket line. Eventually, miner Lawrence Jones was killed.

"We Had A Victory" interviews by Bob Hall

The Brookside strike, coming on the heels of the insurgent Miners For Democracy campaign, enjoyed more press coverage than perhaps any strike of its size in history. It was no accident. Planning events to attract favorable publicity was itself part of a sophisticated union strategy that brought national pressure against an insignificant electric utility in the Carolinas. The Duke Power Company had thought getting into the mining business

would be a good investment for the second largest private consumer of coal in America. Its subsidiary, the Eastover Mining Company, had signed a sweetheart contract with the Southern Labor Union (SLU) a few days after purchasing the Brookside mine in 1970. Everything seemed to be going smoothly for the company — until mid-1973 when the Brookside miners voted 113-55 to throw out the SLU and bring in the UMW, setting in motion the innovative, yet little analyzed strategy which ultimately brought the country's sixth-largest utility to its knees. These excerpts of

interviews conducted by Bob Hall outline that journey to victory; other works offer a fuller portrait of the miners and their wives during the strike (see particularly, Bryan Woolley and Ford Reid, *We Be Here When the Morning Comes*, University of Kentucky Press, 1975).

Darrell Deaton, vice president of the Brookside UMW Local: *We went out because we wanted a better future, you might say. Coal looked like it was going to be good for the next 15 or 20 years, and we wanted a good future. Mostly for security reasons. The UMW is a good organization for a coal miner. For the health and safety program, for better working conditions. And job security is what I really was after. Without a union, a company can move you around. They can put you on any shift they want to. Or any job. Or lay you off.*

And then, too, I been raised in the union, in my family. My dad retired at Brookside — this same mine, under different owners — as a United Mine Worker. I was always what you'd say a pro-union man. Then we worked under the Southern Labor Union for about three years. It wasn't really nothing. We had no future working through them. It was what you call a company union, a yellow-dog union. So we voted them out.

We had a couple meetings with the company after we won the election. They looked encouraging, so we kept working even without a contract. Well, it became pretty obvious what they was doing. They had no intention of signing the UMW contract. It wasn't anything to do with specific issues, really. In my opinion, the company just didn't like the idea of the union having any say in how to run the mine. To a certain extent, the union can dictate a whole lot to them. I mean as far as where you can place a man and such as that. They wanted it all under their control and the SLU let them do it.

James "Goat" Thomas, UMW organizer: *I had read about Harlan County. I'm from southern Illinois and in the mines 8 years. My dad and granddad were miners. I was active in the Miners for Democracy, and so some of the people I knew in the union asked me to go down and take an organizing job there. Brookside was my first campaign; it was a real experience, you know. It brought me in contact with lots of different types of people and things which I never did understand before. You could read about it, but you really couldn't believe that people lived that way in Appalachia, and I went down there and seen and it's still kind of hard to believe. The coal camps, they've been non-existent around this part of the country for 35 years. Company house, company stores, things like that, you just don't realize it's still happening.*

People were really looking for something to help

them out. Of course, that Brookside mine was very, very bad. It had bad top, and no safety at all in the mine. There was no ventilation. They was under SLU which they never really got to vote on anyway — it was just a set up deal, more or less forced on them. There was two generations there. There was the younger ones who wanted change. And there was the older ones who had been there in '64 when the UMW pretty well abandoned them. They had gone out on strike, but the union only gave them \$25 a week for relief, and the district office kept part of that. Harlan County had been 90 percent UMW in the 1950s, but after that there was a lot of mistrust toward the leadership. That was one thing the new UMW had to combat. When the union sent organizers in, half the miners were out on strike and half were in scabbing and it wasn't working. So the first job for Houston Elmore and Tom Pysell, the organizers, was to get that stopped. Things started moving, and the pensioners, they saw how the union was keeping up the families, and they got on board. It became a real revival sort of thing. You know, "The United Mine Workers is back."

Things really picked up momentum in the county. But I believe that the outside work was what made the difference. That was the big thing that got them to sign a contract. I don't think that as big a company as Duke Power is, that the little pressure that we could apply to them at the mine would have much effect.

Bernie Aronson, UMW publicity director and top strategist for the Duke Power Campaign: *It became clear that if we were confined to Harlan that we were at a real disadvantage given how insignificant the production of that mine was to Duke's overall needs (only 4-5 percent) and given how militantly anti-union the coal operators in the county were. It was the bastion of independent coal operators. More than a third of the non-UMW coal mined each year comes from eastern Kentucky. And the anti-union forces had plenty of resources: money, political officials, in some cases the police, the courts...So that began us looking at Duke Power Company and trying to figure out where they were vulnerable.*

We started by going to Charlotte, North Carolina, where Duke was headquartered. We set up picket lines there and began to get publicity in North Carolina. Then in researching the company, we found they had a 17 percent rate increase pending before the N.C. Utilities Commission, so I did up thousands of bumper stickers saying "Stop Duke Power's 17% Rate Increase" and we started handing them out in the state. We took out full page ads in the Charlotte Observer and other papers which talked about two points: One, the conditions miners worked under, emphasizing the medical, safety and housing conditions and showing what

they were actually fighting for, so that even in a state like North Carolina, which was not friendly to labor, the issues would be understood. It wouldn't be seen simply as a union trying to gain more power but as individual people, coal miners, working people, trying to do something for their families, trying to better themselves. The second point we made was to suggest to people in North Carolina that they too were being victimized by Duke Power in terms of the pending rate fight.

We also began speaking to groups around the state. We went to Duke University, which was largely supported from money earned by stock in the Duke Power Co., and miners spoke to students there, and they in turn started pressuring the university officials and trustees. And we contacted groups that were fighting the rate increase, the Institute for Southern Studies and N.C. PIRG, and they began to see us as an ally and offered their support. We ran more ads as the increase case came up that more directly tied in what was happening in Brookside with the rate increase. Then we put coupons in the ads urging citizens who wanted to learn more about fighting the rate increase to write in to Carolina Action, which was a citizens' organization formed in Durham initially around the rate fight. So we began recruiting for Carolina Action, basically. And when the case was held in the Utilities Commission, they won the right to have a series of hearings around the state, and from those names, they were able to organize huge public meetings against Duke Power.

We expanded the fight to Wall Street because as a utility, Duke was continually trying to raise more capital. Disrupting their ability to sell stocks and bonds was serious business to them. We had miners go to Wall Street and pass out leaflets at the New York Stock Exchange. We used full page ads in the Wall Street Journal to warn any potential investors against Duke Power. We went to their annual meeting of stockholders with miners and consumers and made the Brookside strike the issue to be dealt with. We urged various institutions to boycott the stock and got commitments from 66 union pension funds that they would not buy any Duke bonds or stocks. We found out that the seventh largest stockholder of Duke was the Ohio Public Employees Retirement Fund, and we made a presentation of our case to them. We went there and found the Duke Power people in the hall with their slide projector to present their case. But the directors of the fund in fact voted not to buy any more of Duke's stock. We kept that kind of pressure up, and the stories kept appearing in the business and general media about Duke's "problems."

It was described by Forbes recently that that year was the worst year of Duke president Carl

Horn's life. What we had done was make an obscure strike in an obscure coal mine that probably none of Duke's directors knew much about into the most pressing issue that confronted them. We forced them to move from their original position — which was that Eastover ran its own affairs and they couldn't interfere — to taking the personal initiative to end the strike. So all these tactics were a way of giving our home base in Harlan leverage and making Duke Power feel it. When the negotiations were going on at the last day, the Harlan Co. Coal Operators still wanted to fight it out, to not settle, but it was Duke Power that gave the word that they had to settle. The real decisions were made outside the county and we had the job of making them be accountable for what was going on locally....

The experience of the Miners For Democracy movement helped in that it had set the precedent for going outside the narrow lines of traditional labor tactics and involving other constituencies. In fact, most of labor resisted the MFD movement, with the exception of the UAW and the AFSCME. We had separate funding and volunteers and journalists and young public interest researchers all involved in that campaign, too, and they were critical to getting the MFD candidates elected. These same skills from the MFD were used in Brookside — reaching miners, organizing, press relations, literature, photo documentations. The parallel also works in that we used both public relations and organizing, keeping both sides strong. That was essential. In Harlan, the traditional organizing work continued, keeping the picket lines up, dealing with the courts and the law, keeping the mine closed, keeping spirits up, doing community work. Then coupled with that, we had the Duke Power rate fight campaign. Neither substituted or diluted from one another. The campaign outside was an extension of the miners' base in Harlan. It translated their power into something that the company could feel. It also helped to keep morale up in Harlan at the same time that it generated national publicity. They would come to Charlotte and meet with people and see people they didn't even know saying "We're with you." They saw their press; they got a sense of their own power, that Duke Power couldn't sit back, but was vulnerable.

Darrell Deaton: I would say the publicity played the biggest part in winning the contract. We got so much publicity; that kept the men kind of interested. It built morale up, made them want to do things they probably wouldn't have done. If it had been a low key thing, with no publicity, it would have been hard to win, I guess. Normally, people in small towns and in counties can't get away with too much like you can in these cities,

like a lot of demonstrations and things that wouldn't be tolerated in a place like this. But this thing got so much publicity that it turned the tables, you might say. Instead of all the pressure being on us, the company had to watch out what it did. It was put on the defensive, and anything it did could be blown up. We had a lot of press coverage and television people coming through all the time.

Some of the press got a little out of hand, I think. All the references to the 1930s and Bloody Harlan, and saying things were coming back like then. But it never really got that bad. Back in the '30s, it was just a do or die thing. They weren't making nothing, starving to death. They didn't have no choice. They had to do it. We did have a choice, as far as wages and benefits. Most of us chose to come back here. This is a fine place to live. Of course, I might be a little partial. I was born and

raised within 100 yards of where I live now. I've been all over. I've been to Korea and Japan. I worked in a shipyard in Norfolk just before I came back here. I've worked in Detroit and Dayton and Cincinnati. But I wouldn't give up here for nothing I've seen nowhere.

Goat Thomas: The publicity was overall very important. It did cause a little friction between the men, some petty jealousy over who was covered, but I think you would more or less find that anywhere. They were thrown into the spotlight for the first time in their lives and had cameras in their face all the time. But when it came to the nut cutting, they were always together. They held together exceptionally well, really. The spirits were very high throughout in Harlan. We had local meetings every week. We'd have rallies and bring people in. We'd publicize things around whenever anything

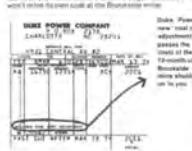
"The purpose of the Duke Power Campaign was to translate the power of the miners in Harlan into tactics the Duke management would feel directly."

Bernie Aronson, 29, coordinated the strategy outside Harlan that included newspaper ads, picketing at Wall Street (at right, Aronson is in center), and demonstrating with Duke University students in North Carolina against the rate increase.

\$1 million dollars a month

That's what you're paying for the Brookside strike.

Sounds like a lot of money? Well, it is. Duke Power has lost over \$10 million since the strike began because it won't make enough coal at the Brookside mine.



But Duke Power isn't the real killer. You know if you're a customer of Duke Power all these millions are being passed on to you in higher electric bills and rate rate increases.

Duke has raised \$87,000 for "security and maintenance" payments to the mine during the past 12 months. But the company hasn't even a ton of coal. And Duke's sales are down \$17 million from the year before.

But the real cost is coal. According to Duke's own records to the Federal Power Commission, Duke could have sold for \$1.4 a ton at the Brookside mine which produced almost 10,000 tons a month before the strike.

But because Duke Power isn't a high cost coal producer, Brookside's cost is \$1.4 a ton. Duke Power has to buy coal at the open market for \$2.4 a ton.

So Duke Power is paying more than 70 percent of your money every month.

Duke claims it will begin a coal strike in 1976. The amount of the Brookside strike is an indication. That's why you should be in a hurry to get your money back from the National Labor Relations Board.

Justice Bush criticized Duke Power's negotiators. He said they "didn't" or "couldn't" negotiate. He said they "didn't" or "couldn't" negotiate. He said they "didn't" or "couldn't" negotiate.

Abandonment (even on any sort of contract) is a violation of the agreement.

Just Justice Bush made it clear that he was the Duke Power's attorney. He said that he was the Duke Power's attorney. He said that he was the Duke Power's attorney.

It was the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) that took the Duke Power's negotiators to court. It was the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) that took the Duke Power's negotiators to court.

Justice Bush made it clear that Duke Power had some of the best in private negotiations.

But why protest? Coal is a public utility. It is a public utility. It is a public utility. It is a public utility.

And if you want to protest, write a letter to the Chairman of the South Carolina Public Service Commission. They will take care of you. They will take care of you.

Mr. Henry G. Vance, Chairman
South Carolina Public Service Commission
P.O. Box 11646
Columbia, South Carolina 29211

If you're against Duke Power's rate increase, write to the Chairman and tell him. He will take care of you. He will take care of you.

Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____



photo by H. Scott Heist/File:17 Group

good happened. You could go up to the courthouse and you talk to people and the word would spread and in two hours you could have a meeting of everybody.

Harlan is like the hub, with all the towns in the hollers out from it. You've got like 5500 pensioners in the county. They have a really strong union spirit, probably more so than anyplace in the country. It was giving them something to do to spread the word, and they did it. It was a really county-wide type of organizing. We had a very strong base, and it was with the old and young, the women as well as the men — which was very important.

You see, Byrd Hogg, the Harlan County judge, put out an injunction to limit the number of pickets per entrance to two men, and as soon as he done that, the next day Duke scabbed the mine. The women got together and they just went up there and put up their own picket line. They weren't covered by the injunction against the mine-workers, you see. Well, they carried clubs and sticks up there, and when the scabs came through, why they beat the hell out of a couple of them. And that turned the tide. The men had done what they could. It's a hard thing when you're on a picket line and the law's there, to know how far you can go without bringing too much trouble on yourselves. Well, those women they just didn't give a damn. They just took it over and that fired the men up. I never seen anything like it. That stopped the Eastover people. The second time they tried to bring scabs in was February, 1974, and the women

came out in full force. They trapped twelve scabs who had gotten through in the mine and wouldn't let them out. They chased them back in the mine. And then when we had Eastover's Highsplint mine out, they came out again. And the pensioners were there, too, helping keep the mine shut down.

Bessie Lou Cornett, treasurer of the Brookside Women's Club: We kind of organized ourselves and got to talking to each other about how these scabs were crossing the picket line. The first weeks of the strike, the miners — you know, our husbands, sons, our fathers — were able to stop the scabs, but then Duke Power got an injunction against the miners and it limited the miners to three pickets on an entrance. So, with two entrances at Brookside, that was six miners and as many as seventy-five scabs were crossing every day. Six miners couldn't do that much. And the six that were going down there, they were taking shifts, and the scabs were spitting on them and cussing them and calling them names, and they would come home and they'd be talking about taking their shotguns down to the picket line. How they were going to stop the scabs and that was the only way to do it.

We wanted to be able to help the men stop the scabs and get a contract without all that violence. And so what we did was we talked to each other. We had a march and said, "Why don't we just go down to the picket line ourselves. We can stop the scabs. The court don't have an injunction against us." We saw that as a tactic for getting around this injunction. So, that's what we did.

We didn't stop them by asking them not to cross the line. We whipped them with switches and with whatever we had. At one point, we laid on the picket line. That was when there was so many state police there that the state police were ready to escort the scabs through. We had tried all tactics, but we didn't want to get arrested. So, we thought if we were peaceful — by laying down — instead of whipping them as usual, then we wouldn't get arrested. But as it turned out, several women were arrested — my sister, my mother, and a couple of other women. But the scabs were stopped. They turned on back because the police could see they were going to have to arrest everybody there if they let the scabs in. So what they figured they'd do is they'd get off a few key people. Take them to jail. And the rest of us would leave. But we didn't. We stayed and stopped them. Some friction developed because the men started saying, "Well, our women belong at home." But overall, the men were pretty good. They could see that their hands were tied. They were afraid that we would get hurt. But as long as we were stopping them, there was no violence. There wasn't that much friction over it. We kept going down there. We were organized and together for the duration of the strike. There were

photo by Earl Dotter





Darrell Deaton talks with UMWA President Arnold Miller (at right)



Jim "Goat" Thomas with Harlan County striker, Carl Noe (on left)



Betty Eldridge, Lois Scott and Bessie Lou Cornett in jail (l-r)

photos by Earl Dotter

times when Duke Power would just give up, when they couldn't get enough scabs to come through. Then we would just stay home. We set up fundraisers and ways to make extra money to help buy children Christmas presents, to help pay for the medicines the strike benefits couldn't cover. And we did those things while we weren't on the picket line. But as soon as the scabs would start to cross, we'd go down there.

Darrell Deaton: *The women was a real important factor. Women can get away with more than men – as far as the law is concerned. Course they got manhandled a little bit, but they came out real well. We had real good women on the picket line. They was brave women. They weren't necessarily mean women. They was pushing their luck a whole lot. They done a real good job. It could have possibly saved some violence. A lot of times when the women came to the picket line, the men were better off. Every time you get men confronting each other, there's a danger that somebody'll get hurt. There was a lot of guns carried during that period, too. Of course, there was men there to back up the women. Men would be all up and down the road or railroad track. But the women took it on themselves to keep down the violence.*

It did get hot when we picketed at Highsplint, Eastover's other mine there in Harlan. We had it shut down for awhile. That's where the scabs from Brookside was working. Tempers did get pretty hot there. That's when Lawrence Jones got shot. One of the bosses from Brookside who knew Lawrence, he lived near him, he shot him down. And he died. That brought things to a climax. Things were building then, and I think Arnold Miller and Carl Horn were already meeting, but that got them down to business. That's when Duke signed the contract.

Bernie Aronson: *The shooting was in a way proof that our strategy was right. Miners have been killed in organizing drives for 40 years in Harlan*

County, but this time it was different. Had not there been a year of organizing, of publicity and pressure tactics, of bringing the strike to North and South Carolina, had not that all happened, the death of Lawrence Jones would have been just one more miner killed, and nobody would have heard of it. But Duke felt it was one more level of pressure that they would feel directly. They were told by the UMW that we would bring Lawrence Jones' casket to their doorstep in Charlotte. And bring the miners with it, and hold a national ceremony there. It would be another escalation of pressure on them. We had just had a march with 4000 miners in Harlan after declaring a week's memorial that closed down all the union mines in the nation. We finally had the President's top labor negotiator at the negotiating sessions, for this obscure coal mine, and here he was twisting the arm of Duke Power to settle.

No single event turned Duke Power. They saw constant escalation, a series of events, from pickets to intervenors at their rate increase requests, then interference in their stock sales, then increasingly bad publicity and a damage to their image and demands on their time to answer more and more of the charges, then the pickets moving on their other mines, then there were lawsuits threatened from stockholders. They knew they had to step in and settle it.

It was a very important, historic victory. It helped the people at Brookside and really changed everybody who was involved in it. It showed that there can be a real, effective, working and productive alliance between groups which are not traditionally viewed as allies—consumer, students, church groups, and labor, in this case all worked together. It helped give life to an organization in North Carolina – Carolina Action – which is still going, and helped other organizing for people there in the Carolinas. It had the immediate effect in the rate increase case of forcing Duke Power to restructure its rates in such a way that the large

corporate users got the burden of the increase. And it helped the union's credibility throughout the mine fields, although we couldn't turn that into election victories easily.

We actually believed that once the Brookside mine fell, that all the other mines in Harlan County would just capitulate and wave the white flag, but like some other domino theories, this one didn't seem to be true. In fact, in some ways, the victory had the opposite effect. It stiffened the resolve of the coal operators. They recognized that the union was going to stick it out, and they had to develop their own sophisticated techniques. They formed an organization called Keep Informed Neighbors, and they started using our tactics. They started taking out ads, and using public relations techniques against us. So in addition to the



photo by Rich Sunly/Harlan Enterprise

Brookside women lie down to block strikebreakers. standard practice of buying off people and intimidation, they got tougher. We lost some important mines in Harlan County as a result.

I think we learned how difficult organizing is. We have won more victories in the last three years than this union won in the last 30 years. We've won over 35 mines. But organizing is very, very hard. And the NLRA and the way it is enforced makes it easier for companies to beat unions than the other way around. I think these non-traditional techniques overall will be increasingly used because the companies are larger. They're able to withstand the economic effects of a strike. Take the Clothing Workers against Farah. They moved into the boycott. If the struggle was confined to a strike at the plant, they didn't have a chance. They had to get the labor movement to deal with Farah as a giant corporation, to countervail the pressures that it had. With Duke Power, the rate case fight and the investment strategy were partly dictated by the nature of that company. And I think that

will be increasingly necessary: to identify the kind of company that the labor movement faces, determine its weaknesses where it can be pressured, where consumers and support efforts can make a difference, and go after those areas.

In developing these strategies, I think there are a number of lessons we learned from Brookside that are helpful. One thing to remember is that it's very important to humanize a strike to people. People don't respond simply to terms like wages, pensions and cost of living, they respond to people. So if you're trying to run a boycott or whatever, it's important to put your people out front — not the New York officials, but the rank-and-file people themselves, the people you want others to identify with, to get to know and appreciate and want to join. Pictures of people, quotes, get them on TV and the like. It's too easy for people to hate the union as an institution, but when you see Joe or Mary Jones and get to know their story, then people can respond to them individually.

Secondly, you should take your case to the public and learn how to attract the press, how to develop picket lines and demonstrations that can be media events, how to use the press in the same way that a politician does to get your message across. Sending a press release is not enough. We would always have the miners dress in their mine caps and knee pads because that caught the press' attention.

Third, you have to adapt to the peculiar characteristics of the company you're dealing with, the way they feel pressure. It may be how they raise money for their expansion, or who their suppliers are, or their public image, or their management's sensitivity to community pressure, or a consumer boycott.

Fourth, the union should be involved in fighting for other issues that are not directly related perhaps to bringing in membership. For example, with the textile workers, it would be very important for the union to organize around the issue of brown lung, not to get them in the union, but to do something concrete for textile workers. If they saw the union as the only organ or institution that was caring about protecting their lungs or seeking legislation to keep dust down, or getting them compensation, then they would understand concretely what the union was about, rather than simply having it continue to be a situation where the union came in and said we're going to win you a contract. They would respond better if they had already seen what the union could do. We need to publicize the fact that unions are not a narrow type of institution. In fact, unions are doing many things like tax reform and getting benefits for the unemployed and civil rights and lobbying for senior citizens. All these things labor is doing, but it's not getting the message across very well.

A WOMAN'S WORK . . .

by Elizabeth Tornquist

If you're a woman in America, your chances of enjoying the benefits of a union contract are only one third as good as that of a male worker. If you live in the South, you're almost twice as likely as your sister in the North to be either an unskilled factory worker, farm laborer or domestic servant. And if you also happen to be black, you can expect to earn — for the same number of hours worked — about four-fifths the income of women in general and only one-half the income of men.

No group has been so consistently overworked and underpaid as women. That is the central fact any discussion of the woman worker must begin with: if you are born a woman, anywhere, anytime, you can expect to be exploited more than if you happen to be male. In the South, largely because more of us are black and our economy is poorer, you can expect an even rougher time when you put yourself in the competitive labor market: given your skills, education and social "value," you will get less for giving more on the job.

There are at least two directions for women in general, and Southerners in particular, to go in this situation. We can push and shove, and make demands and raise hell, until we establish that we can be as skilled and tough-minded as men, until we win equal pay for equal work and gain the conditions (free child care, unfettered education, etc.) that will make it possible to compete equally with men in the workplace. For want of a better term, I'll call these *demands for equality*.

On the other hand, though perhaps

not in contradiction to these demands, we may also move in the direction of humanizing work for men and women by adapting certain traditional female roles and work habits which can liberate us from the competitive labor market as much as possible. We may, for example, demand that just as we once performed a variety of life-supporting functions, so today we must redirect our understanding of work from specialized 9-to-5 production to a diversified mix of survival arts. Fixing automobiles is balanced with canning which is balanced with caring for the kids which is balanced with making money at the factory four hours a day. None of the jobs are that oppressive, because none are that restricting or intensive or demeaning. Men and women can share and interchange their responsibilities. And the measure of whether things are properly balanced is not the amount of pay awarded, but whether the unit, however big or small, from family to nation, is surviving in relative peace and joy — not unlike the measure used for the old-style, self-sufficient family. The idea, of course, is that this type of sharing and balancing can be done, given our present technology, without these chores becoming burdensome; that, in fact, we can survive more humanely and in better relation to our environment through a diffusion of the intensive work-relax pattern into simpler, less tedious, decentralized routines. I'll call this direction *demands for balance*. It might include demands ranging from job pairing (sharing one job between two people), to government subsidies for remaining

on the farm.

Before exploring the relation between the demands for equality and demands for balance, and exposing my own biases too clearly, we must give a little more attention to where women workers have been in our society and where they are in fact moving now.

Women have been the backbone of economic growth in the country for decades now. Since 1920, the number of women workers has risen so fast that they have jumped from holding 1 out of every 5 jobs in America (unpaid housework aside!) to 2 out of every 5. Put simply, they have been the largest pool of cheap labor available for business expansion. Where the economy is growing, there you shall find women workers. While employment in the male-dominated manufacturing industries like auto and steel is stagnating, the service sector of the economy, where women are the majority, has grown at a remarkable rate. Businessmen have learned that there is money to be made in shuffling papers from desk to desk, and women will do the work cheaper than men. Between 1964 and 1973, the number of women on payrolls in nonagricultural industries increased from 19.1 to 27.9 million, and three fourths of these 8.8 million new women workers found jobs in three industrial divisions: services, government, and wholesale/retail trade. Within these broad categories, the super-growth areas of medical and related

Elizabeth Tornquist is a free-lance writer, a lecturer in the UNC School of Nursing and sidekick to her 10-year-old daughter, Amy.



services, and state and local non-educational government have experienced a near doubling of the number of women workers. Even in the few areas where industrialists are hiring large numbers of new workers, they are turning increasingly to women to fill their demand for cheap labor. Having proven themselves in the traditional female-intensive industries (apparel, textiles, food processing) and saturated other fields (telephone operators, public school teachers), women are now in demand from such new labor-intensive employers as the makers of electrical equipment and instruments, from calculators to television sets.

The story is the same in the South, but the details are quite different. Unlike the North, significant expansion is still occurring in basic factory employment, and in most Southern states, women lead this growth by increasing their numbers in manufacturing jobs at two or three times the rate of men between 1960 and 1970. Service, government and trade employment is also increasing in the South, but in most states factory employment is keeping up. Consequently, women who work in the South tend to be blue-collar operatives more often than their sisters in the North, where clerical positions continue to prevail. At least one of the top three industrial employers in each Southern state is majority female except in the more diversified economies of Florida and

Louisiana. A black woman is three times more likely to be a private household servant in the South than elsewhere in the country, and three times less likely to hold a clerical job.

The differences of race and region go back many decades. Southern women have begun work at an earlier age, continued during marriage, more often supported their families by themselves, and, in general, held jobs as a necessity rather than for "supplementary" income. All this was — and is — especially true for Southern black women. In 1920, two-thirds of working women in the South were confined to jobs in agriculture and the domestic and personal services, with only 14 percent employed in manufacturing, up from 10 percent in 1890. Meanwhile, the national picture was changing as women moved out of manufacturing into clerical jobs. This trend continued in the North, but in the South the industrialization process was only beginning, and textile manufacturers found in the female employee exactly what they wanted. By 1940, a larger portion of working women in the Southeast were in factory jobs than non-Southern women, and in many cases, than men in the same states. The absence of unions, educational opportunities and legislative protection continues to make the Southern woman a favorite target for the most exploitative employers — and thus the mainstay of industrialization

in the region.

Northern white women who eliminated many of the stereotypes of "the female worker" during war production, reentered the workforce at an astonishing rate in the post-World War II period. Nationally the proportion of married women who worked almost doubled between 1950 and 1974, from 23 percent to 43 percent. Today, more than half of all women between the ages of 18 and 64 are working. The differences between region and race and marital status have now become submerged in the overriding fact that women everywhere are seeking jobs outside the home, and whether they are secretaries or factory workers or waitresses, they still face barriers to get what they deserve.

Consequently, for both Southerners and non-Southerners, the battle of this generation has been one of achieving equality with men, to gain equal pay for equal work and the conditions that make it possible to do equal work. Like the civil-rights battles of the 1960s, this is a long and tedious struggle to make up for past discrimination; it must be fought over and over in every quarter so women can enter the American mainstream. Like union organizing, the battles will be harder in the South. But there is evidence that the women's movement is making a difference nationally both in a changing consciousness and in new legal protections and educational opportunities for women.

Statistics on the work patterns of women are fast becoming out-of-date as women move into traditionally male occupations. The number of women in medical school doubled from 1959 to 1968 and doubled again from 1968 to 1972, while in each period the enrollment of women in law school tripled. Women are already directing traffic, preaching sermons and bossing others at the office. They may still not have the top jobs, they may still have trouble borrowing money to start a business, but with more time and more battles, that will change, too. Victory, some victory, is at hand. The demands for equality are winable.

For many black people who were involved in the civil-rights movement, victory has gone sour. Instead of seeing the black masses gain new controls over their lives, they have watched a small trickle of blacks rise into "the system" to become indistinguishable

from the whites they once fought as the enemy. The same problem, I believe, exists for the women's movement as long as we are preoccupied with demands for equality. Insofar as we win, we allow women to enter the competitive labor market and begin climbing over each other just as men have done for centuries. Little *positive* change has occurred for the great mass of American women.

One simple indication of this fact is that the average wage for women relative to men has actually declined in the last 20 years, from 63 percent of what men earn to 58 percent. Thus, while a larger number of women are making it up the income ladder, an even larger number are rushing in to fill the bottom rungs. A few women have advanced into positions where they enjoy and find real meaning in their work, but for most women, getting a job has become a mechanism to get the money to pay for the necessities and conveniences (including day care for the children and a summer vacation) promised by the American dream. The economy as it is now structured will continue to pull women in at this marginal level of reward until another group of cheap labor is found, perhaps abroad. Women in the mainstream will go off to work in their particular business suit on Monday morning to stay until Friday, while outside the mainstream, the poor will spend their time in the streets and the welfare offices. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Obviously, this is no way for human beings, men or women, to live.

To change this future, women must demand more than the right to compete equally with men in an increasingly bankrupt political economy; they must demand the reordering of society so men and women can live in harmony, in mental and physical comfort. These are my demands for balance. They coincide with the imperative to limit self-destructive economic growth and to restructure our lives into rhythms which promise long-term survival. We need to opt out of a system that wastes human beings the way it does old cars. We must depend less on energy- and capital-intensive systems and more on our creativity. Most of us would be happy working less, spending more time fishing or gardening or learning to fix the leaky plumbing ourselves. The trick is to keep this vision



photo by Steve March

from becoming so utopian that it fails to deal with people who lack enough goods and services to survive today.

There *is* enough material wealth to provide a decent life for everybody in this country. The problem is that it's presently organized to benefit only a few people: most of us are pushing at full speed to keep up with inflation while the fruits of our labor are reinvested in larger machines which will make our work even more boring and make more profit for our boss.

The possibility of rearranging our patterns of work and leisure may be, oddly enough, less remote for us because we are women and live in the South. Before we ever entered the industrialized treadmill, our traditional work habits showed us how to survive from year to year, day to day, not how to acquire the gadgets that would bring momentary delights. Women in the South planted gardens, did seasonal work for the farmer down the road or shift work in the factory around the schedule of caring for their children. The exact details of traditional life may not fit into today's world, but the guiding principle of balancing work that produces money with work that directly satisfies our basic needs is still valid.

Southern small towns with their rural conservatism and provinciality may not be fertile ground for efforts

to pass the ERA, but they may offer more advantages for combining part-time nonfarm employment with life on the land and reasonable leisure. It may be easier here for two people to work three days a week and take turns with children and garden instead of one working all week long and the other taking the kids forever, or both working all week long and spending the surplus money for day care. It may be possible here to use land trusts both to halt the exodus of small farmers from the land and to experiment with new forms of energy use and conservation, new architecture, new versions of education, new communities.

In any case, it is time to examine what our programs of liberation look like over the long range, what the implications of our demands are in a world that requires a change for its own physical survival. Shall we abandon our traditions and special talents for a place in a rich, ruthless economy? Or can we turn the discriminations of the past into advantages for the future? And how will these questions be raised to the people who count — the women and men in those small towns, who go to work in the mills and mines and hospitals and warehouses? These are the issues that women in the South and elsewhere must begin to consider, even while we fight for a better pension plan, pregnancy leave, and union contract today.



photo from Library of Congress

WILL HE OR WON'T HE?

by Ed McConville

"I don't want them," snaps an Atlanta Steelworker when questioned about unions. "I do alright for myself and I don't need any union taking my money to settle somebody else's problem."

At the opposite extreme, a textile worker for J.P. Stevens & Co. explains that the same kind of stubborn individualism drove him to join the union. "The main thing I want," he says, "is my freedom of speech. Even if the union don't get us any money or benefits at all, I'd pay them dues just to know that I got my rights to speak in the mill without getting run out the door."

The difference between these two men illustrates the problem with typical generalizations about Southern white workers. Academics have concluded they are hopelessly racist, while many radicals embrace romantic stereotypes of plain, proud workers. Even blacks reflect the overall confusion. A Black Muslim factory worker, for instance, recently denounced the racism of whites who served with him in Vietnam. "But, man," he mused incongruously, "those Southerners were real men. When they get their minds made up to do something, they don't let anything stop them."

What *is* the true character of the Southern working man? What bearing do his basic values have on his attitudes toward unions? In considering such a ponderous and emotion-laden topic I have enlisted the aid of a previous student of the subject, Wilbur J. Cash, the

noted journalist and agonizer of the Southern spirit. Though published in 1941, Cash's *The Mind of the South* is still the most accurate written account of white Southern wage earners. Many union and community organizers have read it and agree with its perceptions. The book has serious limitations, perhaps best expressed in an earlier *Southern Exposure* essay by Neill Herring, "The Constancy of Change" (Winter 1974). Cash, for instance, included only minimal reference to the female and black minds, and he spoke with a class bias that clearly revealed his "place in the world." But probably better than any other writer, he suggested answers to the questions that — 35 years after publication of *The Mind of the South* — we are still grappling with.

The Southern Mind

In his description of the Southern character, Cash emphasized the rigid adherence of all classes in the region to "the old brutal individualistic doctrine that every man was, in economics at any rate, absolutely responsible for himself, and that whatever he got in this world was exactly what he deserved." It might be argued that this rugged individualism is properly an American, rather than simply a Southern, trait. But Cash contended that it has left a particularly strong impress on the Southern character. He saw, in the economic dislocations following the Civil War and continuing

into our own century, the preservation of primitive frontier conditions long after the region's physical frontier had been subdued. And, said Cash, "the essence of the frontier — any frontier — is competition" and the stern attitudes it evokes among the competitors.

Closely related to the white Southern worker's fierce individualism, according to Cash, is his extremely personalized view of the world: the certainty that any difficulty he faces is attributable purely to the meanness of the individual immediately confronting him. Cash felt that this personalization sprung from a lack of detachment, a nearly complete inability to stand back and analyze the social and economic forces affecting one's life — an inability, Cash might have added, to develop a sustained class consciousness.

Acting together, individualism and personalization would contribute to the development of another, more widely recognized trait of the Southern working man. For Cash, he "would be far too much concerned with bald, immediate, unsupported assertion of the ego...which was full of the chip-on-the-shoulder brag of a boy — one, in brief, of which the essence was the boast, voiced or not, on the part of

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Impersonal corporations have eliminated the paternal bond between the Southern worker and his boss.

every common Southerner, that he would knock hell out of whoever tried to cross him. . . being what they were, simple, direct, and immensely personal, conflict with them could only mean fisticuffs, the gouging ring, and knife and gun play."

Some will dismiss the notion of Southern violence as nothing more than just another paranoid stereotype. But in this case, the intuition and personal observation of Cash is corroborated by sophisticated public opinion research techniques. In his study, *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society*, University of North Carolina sociologist John Shelton Reed used a variety of statistical surveys to document the region's greater tolerance for private violence. For example, he found Southerners more likely to own guns and to favor corporal punishment in the schools. Union organizers verify that workers often release their frustrations with low wages and abysmal working conditions by beating each other up or by venting their anger on "socially-accepted" targets, namely blacks and women.

When combined with individualism and personalization, private violence diverts Southern workers from considering an organized response to corporate injustices. "Historically, white Southerners do not think in terms of group problem-solving beyond the family," says Scott Hoyman, Southern regional director for the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA). "They're more inclined to think, 'If the boss doesn't treat me right, either I'll quit or I'll meet him outside the plant on Saturday night and beat the hell out of him.' This is changing today," continues Hoyman, who has been organizing Southern workers for 25 years, "but it's a starting point we can't afford to forget."

Cash was less equivocal: Southern-

ers, he asserted, make bad union men. Their impetuous militance has triggered numerous spontaneous walk-outs, but these have had "the character of unstudied mass action rather than of unionism"; they lack the consistency, discipline and long-range commitment which build permanent unions. "The Southern worker," wrote Cash, "is an impatient figure when it comes to paying dues to a union, wants to see swift and spectacular results, and is likely to fall away if he doesn't get them."

The Southern Mind Revisited

Despite his insightful descriptions, Cash's conclusions may be dated. He correctly identifies the chief characteristics of white working men, but he casts them in the negative context of the South's resistance to social change. I would argue that many of the traits, including individualism and personalization, are essentially neutral, rather than inherently evil or anti-union.

While the social and economic patterns of the Southern past have in fact reinforced their sinister potential, changing conditions like the influx of impersonal corporate employers and spread of unions might bring their more positive aspects to the fore.

Consider, for instance, what these developments have done to a good ol' boy like Jack Eudy.

Eudy once seemed almost a caricature of the rugged individualist. "I don't need a union or anybody else to represent me," he said, "cause I'll struggle and make my own way." Eudy, 34, took pride in the way he had worked his way up to a foreman's job at the Florida Steel Corporation's Charlotte, N.C. mill. He still speaks wistfully of an attention to detail and an insistence on quality. Yet he was liked by the men under him because of what Cash would consider a highly personalized way of looking at things. "I have a feeling for people," he says. "I like to get to know them and how they think. When a person came in in the morning, I could tell by looking at him whether he was going to have a good day or not."

Like many Southerners of his generation, Eudy was genuinely excited by the prospect of joining the newly-expanded middle class created by the scores of flat, neatly-manicured industrial plants springing up all over the

South. But his life was complicated in the spring of 1973 when organizers from the United Steel Workers of America (USW) began signing up his employees. With a union representation election scheduled, Florida Steel began firing union supporters.

"My instructions," says Eudy, "were to start building disciplinary cases against young people under 25 and against black people, because these are the easiest groups for the union to get to. My boss gave me a list of names and said, 'Something's got to be done. We don't want these people around when it comes time to vote.' And I said, 'What am I going to terminate them for?' He looked at me hard and said, 'That's up to you. You work with them eight hours a day. You find a reason. And if they don't give you a reason, invent one.'"

Eudy's highly personalized view of the world led him to fix the entire blame for the firing strategy on two local plant officials. He could not conceive that a removed, almost abstract entity like a corporation could plot something so "low-down."

Yet this outlook also produced another kind of reaction, one which Cash did not foresee. "Fighting the union didn't bother me back then," recalls Eudy. "That seemed like part of the job. The thing that really got to me was the tactics, having to fire people I knew were good workers. It kind of works hard on a man. It eats away at you on the inside." Then shifting to an analogy from the Vietnam War where he served, he continues, "You know, when you talk about war just in terms of two big political regimes fighting each other, people don't care much. But when you get down to the part where you're looking across the rice paddies, looking the man you're going to shoot in the eyes, then it gets on a personal level."

Eudy's individualism, which supported his fight to share in the South's new affluence, also shaped his response to the company's orders. "You always speak out when you know you're right," says a popular chewing tobacco commercial extolling the hardy virtues of the Southern working man. That characteristic compulsion to say what's on one's mind, and damn the consequences, proved Eudy's undoing. When he refused to fire a black worker with a large family, he was fired himself for having "a poor management

attitude." But he didn't stop there. He took a job as a production worker for Cannon Mills and became active in the TWUA organizing drive in Kannapolis. And he went to the National Labor Relations Board where his forthright testimony against Florida Steel brought the verdict that 12 employees had been illegally fired for their union activities.

Eudy's story clearly demonstrates that characteristics like individualism and personalization can cut both ways. Cash's complicated analysis of the baleful effects of the Southern working man's "puerile" tendency to personalize is quite convincing as far as it goes. But it was just such an inability to follow impersonal instructions that motivated Eudy's courageous act.

A New Day

Those who assume that Southerners are improved insofar as they are *less* Southern can learn from Jack Eudy. In fact, the best hope for unionism in the region may come from an appeal which joins the traditional values of the South — from stubbornness to personalization to a friendly openhandedness — with the progressive qualities of organized labor. At a time when gigantic impersonal corporations employ an increasing portion of the workforce, Eudy's determined resolve against dehumanized work relations and the J.P. Stevens worker's demand for free speech may demonstrate that Southerners have a special capacity for grasping the seeming paradox that lies at the core of trade unionism: a wage-earner's individuality is best asserted and protected through collectivity.

The difficulties involved in bringing large numbers of Southerners to this recognition cannot be overlooked. A George Wallace supporter-turned-union organizer echoes Cash's pessimism and points to one tendency among workers that has consistently been turned to their disadvantage. "Whenever I think about the Southern worker and my own efforts to organize him and change his thinking, I have a deep feeling of frustration and despair," he says. "They are determined to work against their own best interest because of a strong traditional identification with certain political and economic labels. There seems to be a willingness to accept the fact that they can only hope for a way of life that provides

the bare necessities. They will continue to accept this, unless somebody tries to explain to them that it doesn't have to be that way, even at the risk of being called a radical or a race traitor."

Overcoming name-calling has been a constant problem to those who would unite the workers' interests. And the demagogue's special weapon has been the divisive tool of racism, dividing one group of workers against another and forcing them to settle, as the organizer says, for fewer rights and privileges instead of demanding more. As Cash pointed out in his typically florid style, the special appeal of demagogues to Southerners came from their brilliant use of rhetoric, their ability to exude "bluster and gasconade" and exhibit "great skill in using high histrionic gifts to body forth the whole bold, dashing, hell-of-a-fellow complex..."

But oratorical skills, the ability to project concern for people's problems and the capacity to get them to identify with one's self are not pernicious things in themselves. Again, they are neutral skills which have most often been used against workers' interest, but which might hold potential for the future. Organizers and modern-day populists will be successful in the South not only to the degree that their proposed programs meet people's real needs, but also to the degree that they are able to cultivate an inspiring style which brings traditional enemies together.

Few have understood the importance of rhetoric better than George Corley Wallace. "Wallace's speeches of several years ago are recorded in our minds and hearts," says the organizer. "There's a small part of me that still loves the man, even though I realize now that he's manipulated and used us. It's difficult to put into words why we like Wallace so much, but I think it has something to do with the fact that he was the *first* to articulate working people's grievances, before it became fashionable, and many of my people will vote for him for that reason alone."

Although stark realism forbids an unbound optimism about the swift organization of Southern workers, several recent developments give cause for hope that the positive side of traditional traits is gaining ground. A new generation of workers has entered

Rugged individualism could support a new appreciation for unions as instruments of protection.

the South's industrial workforce. "Young people are smarter today," says Jack Eudy. "They're taught about unions in school. They see on TV where people in Detroit are making five and six dollars an hour, and they say, 'Why can't we earn that much down here?'" Civil rights legislation passed in the '60s has brought another generally pro-union group into the Southern workplace. "Most blacks have already learned to think in collective terms before the union comes to town," says TWUA's Hoyman. "They've learned they can make certain minimal improvements in their lives by getting together and organizing." Blacks today constitute about 30 percent of the workforce in many textile mills. Finally, white people's general acceptance of their new black co-workers and the proliferation of integrated locals in the South represents one of the most hopeful — and unreported — news developments in recent years.

But in the final analysis, the outcome of the struggle to organize the unorganized may depend far less on the character of the Southern working people than on external factors over which they have little control. Companies like J.P. Stevens continue to use outrageous, illegal tactics against union sympathizers, while the NLRB and other government agencies hand out inadequate penalties. Congress ignores the need to strengthen the National Labor Relations Act to protect the rights of pro-union workers. And the American labor movement, after several notable failures, has been hesitant to commit the manpower and money required for Southern organizing efforts. Combined, these factors may determine, as much as any feelings held by the workers, whether or not Southerners get the chance to prove they can be loyal and conscientious union members.

THE ORGANIZED UNORGANIZED

by Jim Grant

The South remains the last area of the country largely untouched by organized labor. Industries have left the unionized North in search of lower labor costs, better tax subsidies and other advantages that have in recent years given the South its well-deserved reputation as a corporate paradise.

Unions are slowly penetrating the South, especially those areas where the black worker is in the majority or where black and white coalitions are forged. If unions are going to survive and be successful in building a vibrant labor movement in the '70s and '80s, they must integrate their efforts with those of the entire black community. Past successes, from the Gulf Coast timber workers in the 1910s to Piedmont millhands in the 1970s (see other articles herein), have depended on the involvement of blacks in organizing drives and the black community's support. Plainly speaking, the future of organized labor in the South will hinge on the fortunes of the black worker.

I

To prosper in the region, unions must become viable institutions for the advancement of black people, instruments of liberation consistent with a tradition that translates economic and political interests into broad community issues. To understand why this is the case, it is necessary to probe history, tracing black people's fight for freedom and use of collective action

that began when the slave traders unloaded thousands of Africans on American shores, deliberately mixing the different tribes to prevent cohesive rebellion. Thrust into an alien environment, black people developed a sense of community and togetherness which transcended natural barriers of language, customs and religion. When drums were prohibited by the slave masters, other survival mechanisms developed: hymn singing in the fields and Sunday afternoon gatherings where escapes were frequently planned.

Finally, slaves were only allowed to assemble in church on Sunday. These meetings became councils of rebellion. Black preachers like Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner led revolts in 1800, 1822 and 1831. Noted historian Herbert Aptheker has documented 306 major slave revolts prior to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. And there were many other minor skirmishes, mass escapes and uprisings. The spectre of rebellion and retribution haunted every plantation, every farm, every place where black people were being held against their will.

In the Reconstruction legislatures of the Deep South, blacks helped pass progressive reforms, like free universal education and universal suffrage, which expressed their concern for the entire community. The power of blacks in the state houses faded quickly, along with their freedom, as the moneyed interests and the Klan regained control. Without an economic base, and with a new framework of social and legal regulations under Jim Crow, blacks were once again

forced to rely on their own institutions for survival.

By 1919, Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, which sought an organized response to segregation and related oppressive conditions, counted many Southern blacks among its two million adherents. At the same time, others like W.E.B. Dubois, William M. Trotter and Bishop H. M. Turner demonstrated the varieties of black protest and organization. Even black unionism was not without its proponents: 1925, A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. During these years following World War I, when many blacks had tasted a measure of equality for the first time on the war front, the momentum for organized resistance increased. But militant protests in cities like Chicago and East St. Louis brought violent repression. The incidence of lynchings rose everywhere. In one case, during a riot in Tulsa, black neighborhoods were actually bombed by government airplanes.

In the South, some blacks turned to the rapidly developing labor movement to improve their lot. They found the best help in those unions which placed their demands in a large social context rather than in the narrowly conceived wage-and-hour issues. In the rural areas during the 1930s, blacks and whites joined together to form the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi. A few industrial unions, especially the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and the Food, Tobacco and Agricultural Workers had limited success in organizing urban blacks. But the labor



movement was not yet ready to challenge institutionalized segregation. Jim Crow quotas in the workplace were challenged as well. When World War II depleted white manpower, blacks — like white women — fought for and began to get jobs in industry.

The most important history for the Southern labor movement to learn from is the civil-rights era of roughly 1955-1970. For it is in this period that the masses of black people were successfully and effectively mobilized in ways which labor unions must adopt for today's struggles. When Rosa Parks refused to sit in the rear of a Montgomery bus, her act of defiance and the Montgomery Boycott fanned the smoldering spark of freedom that burned within the heart of every black person. The level of upsurge and expectation rose in the entire community, not simply among a handful of leaders. The technique of non-violent resistance pioneered by Martin Luther King, Jr., welded those on the forefront of the fight with others at home by emphasizing the moral correctness of the struggle and by placing demands within a widely-accepted, yet highly principled framework (The Bible and the Bill of Rights); tactics were designed to allow and encourage mass participation — another critical lesson for labor today.

As the rhetoric of civil rights and the techniques of mass protest spread from community to community, a genuine movement developed. It was a time when thousands were involved in the fight to desegregate public accommodations from lunch counters to swimming pools, in voter registration drives

throughout the old Confederacy, integrating schools, and in forming the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and other organizations that could carry the battle into new areas.

It was a time of high hopes, when barrier after barrier fell — or seemed to fall — when black people expected to participate fully in the life of their country. The courts, the press, the churches, all institutions of the establishment appeared to support the civil-rights demands. People began to think heady thoughts — maybe, just maybe, the revolution was just around the corner.

The tide of reaction and resistance has snuffed out much of the hope that this society is capable of peaceful reform. In 1968, an assassin's bullet killed the Dreamer, and for the most part, the dream of a non-violent transition toward a more humane and egalitarian society. Yet the legacy of mass action, community organizing, and inspiring, yet concrete rhetoric remain for the activists of today to learn from and use.

II

Toward the end of the civil-rights era, Southern labor campaigns did draw heavily on the black community for their successes. Two particular struggles — the Charleston, S.C. hospital workers' strike of 1969 and the Charlotte, N.C. sanitation workers' efforts of 1969-70 — illustrate the strengths of the civil-rights/labor coalition. Both campaigns, though employing different methods, had several common factors: 1) the overwhelming

majority of the workers were black; 2) the black community, largely through techniques gained from civil-rights campaigns, was mobilized to support the strikes; 3) the campaigns did not involve industrial unions, but those in the fast growing public sector, where working-class consciousness was strong because of the large numbers of national minorities within the ranks — Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Native Americans.

In Charleston, some 500 workers, almost all black, worked in the lowest paying jobs at the state teaching hospital. In the late '60s, the workers developed local committees to improve their poverty wages of \$1.30 per hour and their generally powerless position. They had heard of the militant hospital workers' union based in New York called Local 1199, and they asked them for help. Hampered by a South Carolina law that prevented state employees from bargaining a contract, 1199 officials knew that it would be difficult and would demand creative tactics and community pressure.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and 1199 had close ties, each having supported the other in previous battles including the Memphis sanitation workers' strike,

Jim Grant, active in the Southern movement for many years, writes regularly for the Southern Patriot. He participated in the Charleston hospital campaign and the Charlotte garbage workers strikes. Grant is currently a political prisoner in North Carolina, one of the "Charlotte 3." His case is being appealed.

IT ADDS UP

— by Tom Coffin

"What's that for?"

I glance up and push my hard hat back, rolling the heavy brass instrument back and forth. "Tests the amount of entrained air in the concrete."

"Yeah?" His dark eyes quicken with interest. "What's entrained air?"

"Well, there's a chemical added to concrete to increase its durability, especially for when the temperature changes. It puts millions of tiny bubbles in the concrete to give the water someplace to expand when it freezes." I prop my rollometer on a rock to quicken the bubbles and turn to my questioner.

He is young and black, with a slim muscular build and a soft voice. His white hard hat is pushed back on his head. A blue insignia on the front identifies him as a shop steward, Laborers International Union. He leans on his flat-nosed shovel and surveys my equipment: scales, slump cone, rollometer, unit weight bucket, tools of the trade for a concrete tester. "How long you go to school to learn that?"

I laugh. "Off the street, man, off the street."

"How much you make?"

"Four dollars and seven cents an hour."

"Shit. You non-union? We start at five seventeen. Your job would be worth seven if you were union."

"Yup."

A concrete truck roared in the drive and my inquisitive friend swung to meet it, backing it up to the waiting buckets. The driver, a large black man they call Cowboy, gives me the power fist as he cranks the mixer full speed. I return it. Dumping the dirty gear into the wheelbarrow, I head for the truck



photo by Tom Coffin

to wash up.

There is a lull after Cowboy pulls away. Just running two trucks at us now, and the going is slow. "Where you from?" I ask.

"Newnan," he says. "About 40 miles from here."

"Yeah, right." I know several people from Newnan, all young, all black, all construction workers, all laborers, mostly in concrete. I mention some names, and he knows them all. He tells me a story about himself and his friends in Newnan, Georgia.

"I played football in high school." he begins. "Halfback. I was good, too. All-State in my junior year. . . for black kids, that is." He examines his shovel and rakes the concrete off in the dirt.

"I was part of the first class to integrate the Newnan schools. They closed down our school and sent everyone to the white school. Most of the black teachers, they were fired. Our coach, who was better than their coach, was made assistant under the white guy. Until he quit, when none of us got to play. We all sat on the bench. We had

the best black high school team in the state for three years running, and we all sat on the bench watching the white kids play. We played them in practice and whipped their asses."

The winter sun was bright, the day growing colder. We could hear the next truck, shifting gears at the corner. "Been working for Hardin now five years. Can't complain. The money's good." He waved the truck into the muddy ruts of its predecessors.

"That was my way out. I was going to play college football, and maybe the pros. I may be as good as O.J. But I didn't play in a single game my senior year."

I hang up the hose and watch him pull the heavy bucket into place. "Pour it out," he shouts, and the engine roars in discharge. He is relaxed. He grins and jokes with the driver as the crane lifts the bucket high overhead.

"I get bitter, tho, sometimes."

Tom Coffin, a founder of *The Great Speckled Bird*, is currently a concrete tester and photographer in Atlanta.

where Dr. King was killed after he marched with thousands of supporters.

SCLC made a major commitment to Charleston. Ralph Abernathy and Mrs. King came to speak; Andy Young supervised the operation. The battle spread from the hospital to the churches and into the streets. Church meetings and nightly marches mobilized the entire community behind the fired workers. The national media came to the scene and highlighted the labor-community alliance. And the

city had to construct outside pens for those arrested — workers and friends, mothers and babies, Abernathy and other leaders. Curfews, national guard, peaceful confrontations, mass marches and mass arrests became part of the new Southern labor movement.

But the law said no contracts were allowed. SCLC and 1199 sent out word for a final push. On Mother's Day of 1969, buses poured in from all over the South; people crowded into a hectic office. And the community

turned out as never before. According to one march coordinator, "every able bodied person in the black community was there, some 15,000." Most people saw the campaign as a black-white issue. "White folks messin' over black folk, that's all it is," said many throughout the community. SCLC's leadership made a crucial difference. "If Abernathy's for it, then it must be okay," explained an elderly black man rocking on his front porch.

The hospital administration also

felt the pressure from beyond the community. The national media had taken the Charleston strike across the country, inspiring other organizing. HEW used the weapon of federal funding to encourage the Medical College in Charleston to stop discrimination, and according to a recent account of a former government civil-rights officer, the White House wanted the strike out of the news.

Finally the hospital administration agreed to the union demands. The workers were rehired; wage increases were put in along with other protections. Without the legal right to a contract, however, building a permanent organization was difficult. Even so, the strike had won significant benefits for the workers and had precipitated many community gains, including voter registration drives and the election of black city council officials.

III

In Charlotte, N.C., the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) was organizing the sanitation workers during 1969-70, as part of a statewide effort which included the food workers at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the garbage workers in Raleigh. The North Carolina statutes forbid contracts between municipal authorities and labor organizations. A labor union was in the position of having to force the municipal authority, in this case the Charlotte City Council, to 1) recognize the union; 2) make an informal agreement which both sides would agree to live up to; and 3) hold the council to the agreement with constant pressure, both from the community and from the threat of disrupting services.

Knowing all this, AFSME Local 1127 went out on strike on July 29, 1969. The largely black (85 percent) sanitation workers paralyzed the city by refusing to collect the garbage. Another problem underscored the racial character of the dispute. The courts had ordered cross-town busing to integrate the schools in the joint Charlotte-Mecklenburg County school system. White people were furious. The city quickly polarized, and an explosive situation arose. Sensing that a continued holdout of a practically all-white city council (one black out of seven) against the wishes of a practically all-

black union could set off the conflagration, the council gave in after 38 days and recognized the union.

In this case, community pressure amid the specter of a racial conflict was a major factor in forcing the city to deal with the union. As the *Charlotte Observer* pointed out in its August 5, 1969, editorial, "The union used the thinly veiled threats of racial violence as a lever in negotiations. Several councilmen said they had a choice of giving into union pressure or focusing national attention on the city as racial unrest flared."

The tactic worked only briefly. The city council, influenced heavily by anti-union elements in this most anti-union of states, refused to live up to its agreements. A second and third strike occurred in rapid succession and were quickly settled. A longer and more violent fourth strike began in June of 1970. The city was determined to hold out at all costs, but the workers were equally adamant. During this last strike, several marches and demonstrations designed to mobilize community support took place for the first time. For example, one rally outside the city garage — conveniently located across the street from a nearly all black housing project — drew over 300 people.

The city had another trick up its sleeve. Not long before the fourth strike, the Southern director of AFSME, Jim Pierce, quit. He had provided the spark for organizing Local 1127, but differed with the union's national leadership. The city summoned his replacement to mediate the strike and found a more sympathetic ear. The new Southern director in turn convinced the workers that they had no recourse but to return to the job. The workers went back to work, but disillusioned, they withdrew from AFSME and became a local, independent union. Deprived of national affiliation and financial backing, yet bolstered by community support, the union hung on.

The fifth strike occurred on September 21, 1970, over demands for a dues check-off and dismissal of a supervisor who had fired several union members. Police cars blanketed the area around the sanitation garage, and shots were fired at the building. Inside, the men, led by business agent Eugene Gore and union president Bill Black, attempted to meet with the supervisor,

who remained locked in his office. The men decided to march on city hall. They massed outside the garage and began marching two abreast toward downtown. Spontaneously, people from the Piedmont Courts and First Ward Area joined in as the procession moved through the area. Finally, the march, which had grown to 400 people, reached city hall. Despite the presence of a cordon of riot-equipped police, people continued to join in the rally. Eventually, some 500 people heard an hour or so of speechmaking and then marched back to the sanitation garage. The strike continued ten more days. On October 2, 1970, with their strike funds depleted and no national union's help, the men returned to work without winning their demands. The union has managed to hang on although in a vastly weakened position.

The effects of the union on the black community were far reaching, however. It served as an incubator and a catalyst for the development of militant black leadership which Charlotte sadly lacked. Several former sanitation workers became involved in civil rights activities in the city. In 1969, four black people ran for city council seats in an unprecedented move. All were grass-roots people and all were interested in radical solutions to the problems of the black community. Such a development could not have occurred without the militant labor strike of the sanitation workers.

These experiences illustrate that the black community can and will use new institutions like industrial and public service unions to raise their overall demands for social justice. But the attraction of a solid, well-financed, long-term organization, like a labor union, pales when their agenda appears narrow and compromising of larger concerns. Black people have a cohesiveness and closeness in relating community oppression in both spheres of their lives. To succeed, unions must appreciate this fact; labor drives must demonstrate to the black community that its struggle is labor's struggle, and that labor's demands relate to and can mobilize the community. Likewise blacks must demand and shape a labor movement that can utilize the energy and skills of black workers, that can forge a synthesis of the civil-rights and community-organizing style with trade unionism.

THE BALLAD OF BARNEY GRAHAM



On April the thirtieth,
In 1933,
Upon the streets of Wilder
They shot him, brave and free.

When he left home that morning,
I thought he'd soon return;
But for my darling father
My heart shall ever yearn.

They shot my darling father,
He fell upon the ground;
'Twas in the back they shot him;
The blood came streaming down.

We carried him to the graveyard
And there we lay him down;
To sleep in death for many a year
In the cold and sodden ground.

They took the pistol handles
And beat him on the head;
The hired gunmen beat him
Till he was cold and dead.

Although he left the union
He tried so hard to build,
His blood was spilled for justice
And justice guides us still.

You know the song I wrote. It was published and I didn't even know that until one day my son was up in the shopping center and he found this book. He came in and said, "Mom, did you know that they've got that song you wrote in here when you was a kid." I said I didn't know anything about it. Sure enough, there it was — in an old-time song book. They had took it upon themselves to publish it and just taken for granted that it was alright, but I wouldn't have had that done for nothing.

I was real sad when I wrote that song because we were having a hard time and I was a kid that loved to sing, and I loved to try to play the guitar. I just decided that I would try to put some words together and I did. You, know, the people just really wanted to hear it everywhere I went, wanted me to sing it, you know. I really felt just like the words I put in the song. I felt that very way.

They paid me for the song, though. They paid me fifty dollars for the song, two publishing companies did — *after* they had published it. But I said, fifty dollars is fifty dollars. I signed a contract that I wouldn't do anything about it. I didn't want to get revenge on anybody; I just wanted what was coming to me, that's all. That's what I feel I should have.



—interview by Fran Ansley and Sue Thrasher

Barney Graham, Jr., and his wife, Florence

Two years ago, Southern Exposure published an article entitled “Davidson-Wilder, 1932: Strikes in the Coal Camps” in the Winter, 1974, issue, No More Moanin’. Edited by Fran Ansley and Brenda Bell, and based largely on oral interviews with people still living in the area, it was a grim retelling of the East Tennessee miners’ fight to preserve their union. They did not succeed. The solidarity and toughness of the strikers and their families could not overcome the powerful clout of the coal companies (assisted by the National Guard) and the attrition rate of desperate miners who returned to work in order to feed their families.

One man, Barney Graham, stood firm in his resolve to keep the United Mine Workers in Fentress County. The miners elected him checkweighman—the person who makes sure they get credited with the tonnage they mine. When the men walked out, Graham organized secret meetings in the woods and helped get food and clothing to strikers’ families. To the company, he was the most visible symbol of resistance; to the miners, he was a “stand-

ing up man for the men.”

On April 30, 1933, Barney Graham was gunned down by company thugs in the streets of Wilder—shot 11 times and then pistol whipped, just in case the strikers had missed the message. His step-daughter, Della Mae, age 12 at the time, wrote a song about her father’s death that became known as “The Ballad of Barney Graham.”¹ Like many other struggles of working people, the history of the Davidson-Wilder strike has not been preserved in the official texts; it is remembered primarily because of Della Mae’s song.

At the time the article was published in Southern Exposure, we did not know how to locate Della Mae Graham. We knew only that she had married and moved away from the area. After the article appeared, we learned that she lived in Ohio, and we sent her a copy of the issue. Some months later, we received a note from Barney Graham, Jr. We did not know until that time that Barney Graham had a son; he was three at the time his father was shot down. Another daughter, Birtha, was six.

The years following the death of their father were extremely hard for the Graham family. Della Mae married when she was thirteen, partly because she was “scared to death.” Her husband, Jess Smith, became a second father to the younger children. Their mother suffered from epilepsy and had no medication available for her “spells.” Barney, Jr., was also plagued with illness. Grocery staples that were purchased from the small monthly welfare check often ran out before the end of the month, forcing the younger Grahams and their mother to move in with Della Mae and Jess. The family took care of each other. Each other was all they had, really.

The UMWA, for which Barney Graham had given his life, was not strong enough to offer any real help, and the family still speaks with lingering bitterness and dismay that the union didn’t bother to come around and see how they were making it. One week after Barney’s funeral, Della Mae traveled to Washington, D.C., with Howard Kester to speak on behalf of the miners. She remembers that a great

deal of money was raised that evening. She remembers, too, that she was given only \$5. It didn't go far.

Like many others, Della Mae, Jess and Barney, Jr., moved north in the early '50s looking for jobs that offered steady pay. Like the others, they went where they had kin; for them it meant Dayton, Ohio, where Birtha and her husband had settled earlier.

Della Mae continued working as a housewife and mother to her four children. Her husband Jess went to work in a sheet metal plant, still suffering from black lung, his only legacy from nearly 23 years in the mines. In 1969, he was killed in a car accident. Barney, Jr. went to work for the National Cash Register Company (NCR). It was, he thought, a good job. But as conflict developed between workers and management, he supported the organizing drive of the United Auto Workers. In March, 1975, after 24 years, he was laid off. Once again, he felt the union was not much

help.

Our correspondence with the Graham family in the year following publication of the article led us to request a follow-up interview, and they graciously assented. In July, 1975, we met with them in Dayton where Della Mae is currently living with her son Mike. Barney, Jr. and his wife Florence live in nearby Waynesville, Ohio; Birtha has moved to Florida.

We talked about a lot of things that day: the warm remembrances and deep respect they all share for Jess Smith; the difficulty they had in adjusting to the industrial North and their continuing ties down home; and the ambivalence they still feel about the need for working people to have unions, balanced against their own personal, and mostly painful, experiences.

As the afternoon progressed, other members of the family drifted in. After awhile we found ourselves snapping beans from the garden and listen-

ing to Barney and his daughter Peggy sing some good country music. We heard Peggy speak movingly of the pride she feels in the stories about her grandfather. And finally, after much coaxing, we persuaded Della Mae to sing "The Ballad of Barney Graham." The interview excerpts that follow are mere bits and pieces of that day.

The CIO unions in the '30s were fragile coalitions — held together against tremendous odds by the courage and perhaps the sheer desperation of working people who simply didn't have that many options. The coal camps were organized by the United Mine Workers at great personal costs; the sit-down movement that brought success for the United Auto Workers, likewise took its toll. Today the UMWA and the UAW are two of the most powerful, and wealthy unions in the country. The Graham family has contributed more than its required share to the successful history of both unions.

EAST TENNESSEE

Della: Dad never said a lot. He was a man that never talked much about his family. Nobody knew where he came from. He came into Twin, Tennessee, and Mom and him got together. She was working at the Twinton Hotel at that time, making beds and doing dishes; that's where she met him.

I remember the first time my mother brought him to our home. I was five years old. I liked him very much, but at that time I was a kid that really was a grandpa's girl. Nobody was like Grandpa, you know. My mother lived with her mother and father when I was a little child and Grandpa was very good to me. They must not have wanted her to marry him, because after Mom and him got married, they just dropped us. It was terrible, really terrible.

My grandfather and her brothers separated my mother from my regular father. He left when I was a month old. He never saw me from then on. Mr. Graham was the only father I ever knew, and he was good to me. He did the best he could to provide. Of course, as we said, a lot of times he would take food from our house that we could have used, to help the next door neighbor. That was just the way he was. He would feel he could

photo by David Bell



get food for us.

He was a very proud man, even though he didn't have any money to buy clothes. He always tried to wear a suit, even if it had patches. I could never figure that out — why he wore a suit and a tie and his clothes all patched up. He always wore a gun, that's for sure!

I remember the time they tried to kill Dad. Of course, Junior probably don't remember; he was only 2½ years old at the time. Dad came rushing into the house one night about eleven o'clock and woke Mom and me up. He said, "If anyone comes and asks you about what time I got in last night, tell them I got in about seven o'clock." It was then around eleven. About ten minutes later, we heard guns coming up over the hill — where we lived was called the company farm — and my father got up and went out on the porch. My mother got up and went right out with him, and a kid, being nosy like I was, had to stick my head out the door too. Here's the militia all up on top of the hill! I don't know how many. The moon was shining and you could see them up over the hill. I heard them say, "Get down buddy, get down." One of them comes down all by himself, has his rifle in his hand, and asked my father what time he got home. He said, "Around seven o'clock." And my mother said the same thing. So what had took place before that, I don't know.

My mom was right in there with my father as far as the union was concerned. Let's say if someone called them a name back then — they called them "punkin rollers;" they used that phrase — my mom was right in there busting them in the nose. One time she walked in the store and this woman called her a punkin roller and my mom hit her. That was just the way it was; she was right in there with my father. Another time one of the company men came up and told us to move. I remember that because it scared me to death. She was peeling apples with one of my father's long, switchblade knives, and he told us we had three days to move. My mama shook that knife in his face and said, "We won't move; we won't do nothing." And he took off.

One time, me and my mom was working a jigsaw puzzle on the end

of the table and Dad had a high-powered rifle and an automatic shotgun laying in the middle of the table — you know how that is whenever there is a strike. My sister, Birtha, was looking into the high-powered rifle, and she just stepped over to the side. I was a child that loved guns, because my father had taught me to shoot, and I just put my finger in the trigger and pulled it and it went off. Birtha had just stepped aside. It went right through the walls through a big oak tree....

The day my father was buried, he had a place on his eye where the militia tried to run him over with one of those motor cars. He was walking across the trestle on his way to Wilder and when he saw the car coming, he fell down through the bridge and swung from the trestle till the car got by. Then he climbed down all the way — I don't know how high the trestle was — and walked around the other way.

After they shot him, they busted their gun handles over his head. He was shot eleven times. My husband was at the church when it happened. They were having some kind of meeting, a revival or something. He went right down afterwards, and he said they (the thugs) was out on top of the store with a machine gun and the others were all around. I guess they wanted to help, but they knew it wouldn't work.

There was a lot of commotion down there after he died because everybody was afraid. There were people riding up and down the street. I know that we moved right immediately out of the company house; we had to. We moved into Highland. I think the house had three rooms. I don't even remember who moved us, to be honest, or how we got there. But I know the ones that was for the company would ride with their guns out. They were trying to run off the union; they were afraid the union was really going to start firing.

As far as I can remember, my father was always for the men.

Barney: When I was growing up there, people sort of expected me to be like my father. That was one reason I was kind of glad to get away from there. I was brought up by a different man altogether, Jess Smith, and he had a different personality. He

thought you would be better off to take a little something than to rush into anything and get in trouble or hurt somebody. I was more like him, in a way, than I was my dad. Although I had a certain amount of my dad's temper, and a few times that got me into trouble. I took after my dad when it come to watching somebody push somebody. I never did like to see somebody pushed, especially the underdog. I took after him on that. But Jess, the one that raised me, he was one of the best men I ever knew. There is hardly anyone that would take a kid and treat him like his own and take his last two dollars and go buy him a pair of shoes.

They are all good people down in there. There was some that scabbed. Well, I never did have hard feelings toward them cause they was just trying to get something to eat. You could hardly blame them. They were caught between a rock and a hard place. It was rough.

They all felt pretty strong about Dad's death. I was sitting up there in Monterey one day in front of the barber shop, and this guy came up and started talking to me. He was from Wilder. He asked me who I was, and I told him. He said, "I knew Barney well," and he told me where he lived. He said, "I've got guns at home; I've got rifles and everything. If you ever take a notion that you want to settle that debt, you come down and you can use my guns, and if you want me to, I'll go with you." That's how strong some of the people felt about it. Course I may have felt different about it if I had remembered Dad, but I didn't remember him.

I don't have anything against unions, but I guess I look at it differently than what my father did. He was buried on my sister's birthday which was the second of May. On the sixth of May, I was three years old. So, from the time I was born it seems like every-time I get mixed up with a union that somebody sets their foot on me one way or another. I lost him. So naturally I didn't get any education in that part of the country.

About 19-and-48 they started organizing the mines out at Monterey, Tennessee, and that is where my brother-in-law, Jess, worked. There was about 200 and something people worked there in this big mine. Well, when they finally got the contract settled, there

was only about 75 people that went back to work. The rest of them was out.

Course I realize that unions are essential. Labor would be nothing but slavery without unions; that's the reason they organized to begin with. Like them miners — back before they organized, them guys would come up owing the company at the end of the week. Instead of drawing a check they would owe the company. They would come out in what they called the red because the company owned the house they lived in, owned the store they traded at, and owned the people. The unions changed that. We've got to have unions. But they are kinda like the government; there's a lot of things they could change and it would make them a heck of a lot better.

I think what soured me more than anything else was the fact that after my dad was killed and buried, the union didn't bother to come around and find out if his family was still alive or whether they were starving to death, which we came pretty close to. My mother was sick all the time and even if there had been any work, she couldn't have worked, because she would take a spell and fall wherever she was.

I didn't go to school except once in a while. My sister did; she went to school a little bit, but someone had to be with mama. When I was about seven years old, I was setting on the back porch and my mama took one of those spells. She was fixing dinner and fell on the stove. Someone had been there with a small baby and there was this chair across the door to keep the baby from crawling out. I remember I cleared that chair and pulled her off the stove and laid her on the floor. Then I went to Twin to get some help.

Everytime she would take one of those spells, she would always holler, just let out a scream-like. It was for years after I got away from her that I could hear something that sounded like that scream and I would be on my feet. I never did get over it completely. To me she died a thousand times, because I could see her hitting her head on something. I wanted to run the other way, but I always run toward her.

Della: I got married when I was thirteen. My father died when I was twelve, and the next year I married my husband. When I was fourteen, I had my first child, and when I was sixteen,

I had my second one. We lived together — never separated or anything — for 35 years. He was killed in '69. All that time that he lived, he worked in the coal mines — only when he was on strike or circumstances would come up and they would lay him off — up until the early part of '51. Then we moved north.

He was 23 when we married. We lived together for two weeks, and then my mother and my brother and sister moved in with us. They stayed with us off and on. Mom would get her own place once in a while and then they would move back, or we would move in with her. I could not stand to think that my mother and brother and sister was alone. I was only a kid, actually a kid, and to think that they were alone, or I was eating and they wasn't — that I couldn't take.

My husband Jess worked in the Fentress County Coal mines at Twin. He worked there from the time he was sixteen years old. He went to work with his father in the mines loading coal, and he did every kind of work in the coal mine that can be imagined. I don't know whether he ever run a loader or not, but I know he did all the rest. He coupled. He loaded coal. And he shot down coal. He was all the time in the union. He was in the union when my father died. He was at my father's funeral.

See, when they came out at Twin, my husband was working there then, and he knew my father well and liked him very much. Course I didn't know him at that time cause I was only a child.

He was one of the strikers at the Twin mine. Met with all of them at the meetings, and I've heard him tell tales about my father, and how he would organize them and they would meet in the woods.

I think one reason I got married was because I wanted a home, someone to be with me and my mother and brother and sister. I was scared to death, and I thought it was better to be married to someone than it would be for us to be alone all the time. It worked out good, except it's a wonder it had.

Naturally when I think back on it now, it really makes me bitter to think that my mother is in a nursing home and he's gone. And what's the union done for us. I mean, really, what have they done? Not one thing!

Barney: I worked from the time I was about fifteen. I got a job at a sawmill right below the house. They only worked one day a week, and I was making fifty cents an hour. Then I got a job at a hardwood flooring company. I still only made fifty cents an hour, but I got to work five days a week. I had to lie about my age, had to tell them I was eighteen. I went to work in a coal mine when I was seventeen with my brother-in-law. Then I left Tennessee and came to Ohio.

I came by myself, but my sister and her husband were already up here. My brother-in-law, Junior Bradford, got me on at NCR. He worked there. That was before they was so strict about education. I was lucky to get in. Altogether I didn't go to school two years in my life. I just made it on my own, the best way I knew how.

It was quite an adjustment moving north — from the coal mining camps to the city. I still haven't adjusted. I still got my ways which is different to people in the city. I lived with my sister BIRTHA and her husband that first year. Florence and I got married in '52, the 19th of April, 1952. She's a Buckeye. She's a Yankee! We get along pretty good. That part I would do over again. If I could leave anything out, I wouldn't leave that part out.

I would go down to Tennessee on the average of about once every two or three months, but I didn't run down every weekend; it was too far. At that time I wasn't making much money. But every chance I got, I would go down to Wilder and Twin. I liked those people out there and they liked me.

I found quite a bit of prejudice in the shop itself. I worked there for 24 years, see, and there was these kids that would come in — maybe that wasn't that old. Even though I was working there before they was born, they was wondering why somebody from the South was up here taking their job. That thought run through their mind.

I had a good job at NCR. That was the best place to work in the state of Ohio whenever I went to work there. Notice I said *was* the best place. Over a period of time it got pretty rotten.

When I went to work there, the foremen were just like the men. They



would come around and talk to you, work with you, find out how you did your job. We did good work. Then they started a foreman's school. Someone from high up got this idea to send these guys to school and to teach them not to associate with the workers. So, the first thing you know, this conflict comes up between management and labor. I could feel it, you know, I could see it coming, but there wasn't anything I could do about it. I couldn't tell the president of the company he was making a mistake.

Anyone could go to the foreman's school. They wanted you to sign up for it. Some of the guys that I worked with went. They were the ones that told me how it operated. I didn't sign up because I knew I didn't have the ability to be a foreman without an education. I can do a job with my hands, or with my head, for that matter. I can figure, but when it comes to writing stuff down, I am out. And I know I didn't have the ability to be foreman, although I do have the ability to handle men, because I treat them like myself. I treat them just like I would want to be treated. You can't push men into doing this or doing that, and get a good job out of them.

After a time the foremen really started pushing. It seemed like they were trying to prove that they were the bosses. In other words, *I'm the boss and I want you to know it, buddy*. That was the attitude they had. The men didn't like it, so naturally when this union wanted to get in, they got in. But they couldn't have got in ten years before that. There was no way they could have gotten in, because we had everything that the unions were giving. Whatever contract that Frigidaire got, NCR would come up and meet it and maybe a little better. We had a beautiful place to work until somebody fouled it up.

I worked in what is called the heat treating department, and I also did some welding. I wasn't a certified welder, but I would go back and work with someone who was certified. We treated the metal. There are certain working parts that go into cash registers and adding machines that have to be drilled, and the metal has to be soft so they can drill a hole in it. Then there is certain places on the metal that has to be hard — like where anything hits it — to keep it from wearing. We did all that.

When I first went to work there, I started off at \$1.05 an hour. I was making about \$6 an hour when the union came in. Naturally when the union came the company did everything they could to make the union look bad. Like if you were working on a job that paid \$6 an hour, they would move you off that job and bump you down to one that paid \$4. Then they cut the job down that you were on, so even if you went back on that same job, you would go back at a lower rate than you were making when they took you off. They also had these jobs that they called "non-interchangeables." I was laid off after 24½ years, but they still got guys working there with only 18 years seniority, because they were working on these non-interchangeable jobs. If they had more seniority they could bump you, but you couldn't bump them. In other words, it was a set-up so that the company could hold the ones they wanted and get rid of the ones they didn't want.

One reason I went for the union is because I figured that it was a large organization, and if we are going to have to fight the company, we are going to have to have something to fight with. I figured that when they negotiated a contract the union lawyers would come in and negotiate with the company lawyers. Well, where I think they fell down was, they didn't. They elected officials out of the shop, laymen like myself that worked out on the floor, and expected them to negotiate a contract with company lawyers.

That is how they got in these non-interchangeable jobs and all of that stuff. They come up with about the silliest thing I ever heard of, what they called a "cap" on the cost of living. You see, we had a cost of living that was supposed to go up when the cost of living went up. In this contract they signed, they put what they called a cap on it. In other words, it stopped where it was at. When I got laid off, we were about 61 cents behind on the cost of living, which would have amounted to about \$12,000 to \$15,000 in our pockets during the time of the contract.

It wasn't long after I helped organize the union that I realized it wasn't doing what it should. Anyone that worked at NCR and worked under the union looked down on it. At least with the independent union we could go

in and discuss things with the foremen, and they were on our side too. But with the big union, it got to where you couldn't hardly get a representative to go into the office with you. I think they thought that if one person had a beef or was getting walked on, he was only one vote, and he didn't matter enough to go into a lot of trouble. The only way that you could get anything done was if the whole group was getting walked on. Then they could go in and the union would try to do something because there was a lot of voice there. Now the company got this too, and the company split these groups.

That's the reason the company set up these different jobs. They would set up a job over here and would have five or six men in a group. Then they would have another job over here with five or six men that would be another group. Now the first group would get walked on. They could cut the job or do whatever they wanted to do. The second group wouldn't say anything because it wasn't them that was getting hurt. That was real smart on the company's part. Then once they got it settled and the men quieted down – took the cut or whatever it was they were getting – they could turn around and work on the other group. The first group would say, "Well, they did it to us and you guys didn't say nothing, why should we do anything?" They used psychology. They split them up.

The work at NCR was hard to take and it didn't get any easier. The longer I was there, seemed like the worse it got. It got monotonous; got real hard to take. I just got bored with the whole thing. And the work did change, especially the relationship between the workers and management, and that didn't help any. Before they started pushing so hard, there was time to talk to each other. But after they started pushing, they brought in a work system that some college professor had worked out at the University of Dayton, to figure out how to get more work out of the men.

This was before the union came in. They would stand and time us out like they do on any piece work job. They had it figured right down to the second as to how long it took us to run so many pieces. They started us off in piece work at a reasonable price. Then they kept cutting the jobs until they got it down to where we were not making as much money as we were at

the standard rate. They have you working twice as hard and making very little more money, if any. Besides it is real nerve-wracking. I hated piece work. I would have gone back on my old job for 50 cents less on the hour.

I worked there for 24 years and three months. When they laid me off, they said there was no possibility of ever getting called back. I have five years of seniority rights - five years of recall rights. I was a member of the union for six months after I got laid off. That time was up in September of '75 and I lost all my union benefits. And you know, even though you have the abilities to do a job as good as the next man, whenever you go into make out an application and you put down you are 45 years old, and you don't have any education...well, forget it. So it kind of makes it a little rough.

FOOTNOTES

1. Two other songs helped popularize the Davidson-Wilder strike, "Little David Blues" by Tom Lowry and "Davidson-Wilder Blues" by Ed Davis. Like Della Mae, Tom Lowry did not know that his song had been published until he was interviewed by Florence Reece, (who wrote "Which Side Are You On") Brenda Bell and Fran Ansley. (The interview with Lowry also appeared in *Southern Exposure*, Vol. 1, No. 3-4.) When we talked with Della Mae last year she knew only that her song had been published in books; she did not know that it had been recorded by Hedy West (*Old Times and Hard Times*, Folk-Legacy Records) and by Pete Seeger (*Industrial Ballads*, Folkways).

2. The meeting was the Continental Congress for Economic Reconstruction. Howard Kester was one of the many "outsiders" to offer help to the striking miners. He was at that time working with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, but parted ways with the FOR because he defended the right of the miners to take up arms in self-defense. Dr. Alvah Taylor of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Myles Horton of Highlander Folk School, and Don West also gave active support to the strike. Kester, speaking at Graham's funeral said, "I had no better friend. I loved him as a brother, not alone for his own worth, but for his place in the leadership of America's toiling millions."

"ON THE ROAD TO TAIPEI"

THE MEMPHIS RUNAWAY BLUES

by David Ciscel and Tom Collins



photo by Les Cooper

People in Memphis were excited when, in early 1966, the Radio Corporation of America moved its color television production there from Indiana. Political and business leaders rejoiced at the prospects that new jobs, increased taxes and booming sales for local suppliers would help Memphis' economy. Workers looked forward to union wages, and many black and women laborers saw a long-promised opportunity for skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

Five years later, the new plant was closed; its production had apparently been moved to Taiwan. In rapid succession, 4,000 workers had been lifted from a basically non-industrial lifestyle to assembly line jobs with union protection and then cast aside in favor of cheaper labor in a Third World country. Where poverty had been, RCA brought prosperity; yet when the dynamics of the capitalist economy commanded, RCA left and poverty returned.

The people of Memphis, concerned about these rapid changes, began to blame each other for the loss. Public opinion turned against the RCA workers, who were variously described as uncooperative, inefficient, greedy and — with their "aggressive" union — too demanding on the company. But the city was caught in more than a simple Management vs. Worker conflict. A complex set of cultural and economic forces were involved which few understood, forces far beyond the control of their principal victims — the plant's workers and their union.

For most of this century, the South in general has suffered from an imbalance in the distribution of the nation's industry. The core of America's economy is dominated by large multinational corporations — auto, oil, rubber, steel, etc. — owning most of the wealth, producing the largest share of profitable goods and services, and paying the highest wages. On the other hand, the secondary economy is populated by poorly managed companies,

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neglected by the government and subjected to intense competition. The workers who staff this sector face low wages, low productivity and unstable employment. Since the region is over-represented by secondary industries — textiles, apparel, food, furniture, etc.— Southern workers have had little option but to remain in secondary jobs.

Generations of progressive Southerners have attempted to alter this situation by attracting larger and larger corporations to the region with liberal tax breaks, free services and public subsidies. For the most part, however, they have only succeeded in attracting those corporations which are most subject to severe product competition. From textiles in the 1920s to electronics in the 1960s, the large corporations have moved South and offered new opportunities to the region's workforce at precisely the point when the South provided distinct economic advantages to the companies. If those advantages are eroded (e.g., by increased labor costs or decreased consumer demand), the runaway shop in the South may look for a new site for its production — this time outside the nation's borders.

The story of the RCA plant in Memphis illustrates this problem. Largely because of rapid fluctuations in the domestic consumer demand and the international supply of televisions, the movement of RCA's production from Indiana to Tennessee to Taiwan was telescoped into five short years. Secondary workers in Memphis were hired, trained, made productive, and then replaced with cheaper labor abroad. The long-term benefits to the city of a multi-million dollar employer-taxpayer-consumer suddenly disappeared. In the end, Memphis had no control over RCA's commitment to the region or its people. When the company decided it was more economical to abandon a \$20 million facility and move overseas, no one could stop them. It was just one of the possibilities the people of Memphis had to accept when they became involved with a multinational corporation.

Promised Prosperity

Historically, Memphis developed as a commercial and banking center for the highly productive agricultural region of the Mississippi Delta. Over the years, vast quantities of cotton,

soybean and hardwood lumber, the major products of the region, were shipped from Memphis to national markets. Service industries, headed by a large regional medical complex and an extensive warehousing business, provided employment for a large unskilled and non-unionized working class.

The post-World War II economic miracle offered few benefits for Memphis. In fact, the city suffered a series of economic setbacks. The Ford Motor Company, employing several hundred people, moved its assembly plant elsewhere. Faced with intense competition from carpets and plastics, one of the city's strongest industries, hardwood and cabinets, slowly disappeared. And the local wholesale grocery industry, made obsolete by the rising supermarket corporations, became a shadow of its former self.

By the late 1950s, manufacturing facilities in Memphis were clearly limited. Local banking and real estate interests dominated the city and regional leadership, and the social class structure was a near duplicate of the Delta's rural counties. Members of land-owning families invested their surplus capital in Memphis commercial and banking enterprises, while the untrained and poorly educated sons and daughters of sharecroppers and tenant farmers immigrated to provide an inexhaustible surplus of manpower. Opportunity for inter-class mobility was limited as urban businesses continued a tradition of paternalism in owner-worker relations.

The arrival of RCA, a multinational conglomerate, promised a dramatic change. While known for its electronic products, especially TVs, radios and phonographs, the company also produces space and military equipment, carpets, frozen foods, furnitures and books. In addition, it owns several broadcasting stations and NBC, the radio-TV network.

Following the 1960-61 recession, RCA's profits grew rapidly, reaching a peak of 19.11 percent on net worth in 1966 (twice the level it would achieve in 1970). Net income rose from \$35.1 million in 1960 on sales of \$1.5 billion to \$132.4 million in 1966 on sales of \$2.5 billion. Much of this growth was due to the phenomenal demand for color televisions during the first half of the 1960s. RCA, the primary US developer of color and dominant seller of American television sets, com-

manded the lion's share of the new market. By 1965, the company had also established plants in Chile, Mexico and Taiwan to compete in the low-priced portable black and white television market.¹

In late 1965, RCA announced plans to build a modern, highly-efficient plant in Memphis to replace its aging color facilities in Bloomington, Indiana, and to assemble black and white sets until the foreign plants reached full production. The move promised advantages to both RCA and the people of Memphis — for completely different reasons. RCA gained the convenience of a major transportation center, access to cheaper labor and many of the benefits — sewage treatment, service roads, etc. — offered by Southern development commissions. On the other hand, the Chamber of Commerce said, "Completion of the Radio Corporation of America's plant here will give Memphis a \$27-million retail sales boost." According to the chamber, some 50 companies expressed an interest in supplying parts to the new factory.

Memphis workers were also excited by the new employer's arrival. The \$2.25 per hour offered by RCA for line operatives bettered by at least 30 cents that paid by most non-union shops in the city. Women who came out of domestic service could improve their wages by more than a dollar an hour, and the company announced that its workforce would be well over half women. Black workers, who had been traditionally denied mainstream jobs, were also enthusiastic about RCA's well-publicized non-discriminatory screening and hiring practices. In addition, the company said it intended to let one of two unions (either the International Union of Electrical Workers or the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) represent all wage-employees, thus guaranteeing a package of benefits which few workers in Memphis enjoyed. (Only 23 percent of the city's workforce is unionized.) In short, RCA offered thousands of workers, especially blacks and women, an opportunity to move from secondary jobs, characterized by unstable production patterns, arbitrary work rules and few benefits, to a primary labor market. By February 6, 1966, only six weeks after the company's move became public, the head of the Ten-

nessee Department of Employment Security could predict that RCA would have over 15,000 applications from which to choose its workforce.

"When I hired on at RCA," one woman recalled, "it looked like it was straight from heaven. It was more money than I'd ever seen. The plant was even air-conditioned. And the best thing, it was the first time me and the family had ever had any hospitalization. I thought the world had finally opened for us."

"It was a 50-mile drive each day for me and another couple," said a worker from one of the surrounding counties. "Getting up so early was really hard, but the money was worth it. There ain't no work in this county. When I got the job I went over to my old boss and told him I didn't have to do all the part-time jobs for him no more."²

By June, 1966, one thousand employees had started plant production. An additional 2,800 workers were hired by the end of the year, bringing total employment to just 200 below its peak level. To fill its need for foremen and line supervisors, RCA raided other local plants for experienced personnel and opened the lower-level management positions to women and blacks. But like the operatives, these supervisors had no actual experience on the type of modern assembly line developed for the new plant. Even the foremen, who were mostly white men, were largely unfamiliar with such an operation. Key management personnel were transferred in from other RCA installations, and the skilled electronic technicians who repaired defective sets were recruited regionally, from South Carolina to Texas.

First Problems

The first year of the plant's operation was a study in contrasts. The Memphis *Commercial-Appeal* boasted, "With 3,700 workers, the RCA plant now stands as Mid-South industry's biggest single employer, and still more will be employed in 1967 as the company expands the plant to produce more than one million television sets annually."³ But community pride at having attracted so large a corporation was tempered by the sudden awareness that the plant afforded the local black community a source of financial stability and independence far beyond anything previously available. Appre-

hension increased when the company recognized IUE as the bargaining agent for its employees, making the plant the largest union shop in the area. Meanwhile RCA workers, women in particular, developed an intense dislike for RCA's distant and authoritarian production methods, even though they found the jobs provided an opportunity for upward mobility.

By early 1967, economic problems forced a change in working conditions. The market for color television did not grow as expected during the second half of the 1960s. Sales failed to increase in 1967, remaining stable at about \$2 billion for their industry. And the demand for black and white sets actually began to fall. In addition, RCA paid the price of being first. Competitors such as Zenith and

Magnavox began to eat into RCA sales with higher quality, more reliable televisions. Foreign producers, like Sony, entered the market with cheaper, more compact and easily portable models. American companies, in a move to cut costs, began to transfer portions of their television production to Mexico and Taiwan, taking advantage of those countries' semi-skilled, low wage, under-employed labor force.

In March, 1967, after less than a year of operation, RCA announced it was placing 350-400 workers at the Memphis plant on furlough. Although the layoff was eventually postponed, it signaled the growing impact of low-priced, foreign made sets on US production.

Internal labor dissatisfaction with





conditions at RCA's new facility was also steadily growing. On Thursday, March 10, 1967, a minority of workers walked off the job and set up a picket line outside the plant. By early evening, all production came to a halt. One shop steward explained the complaints: "The production rate has been set so high we can't keep up. They've had a time-study man in here but they stall on negotiating grievances. On and off, they've made us sign up even to go to the restroom."

The union leadership, while sympathetic to the wildcat, officially opposed the walkout. After several arrests and much bitter debate, the strikers agreed to return to work on Monday. The union and the company agreed to name a special committee to work on a list of grievances, including the two chief issues behind the walkout: the production speed-up and the restriction of bathroom rights. But job control issues continued to plague the plant, causing a huge backlog of grievances to build up over the next two years.

On June 6, 1967, the IBEW struck several RCA plants in the US over wage increase and cost-of-living issues. In Memphis, the IUE continued its negotiations with RCA without going out on strike; however, a week later, the plant was shut down due to a shortage of parts from the IBEW plants. One week into the Memphis layoff, the IUE signed a new contract with RCA, but the IBEW continued its strike until early July.

Finally, in August, the plant turned out its millionth television set, marking a production rate of nearly 125,000 sets a month, one-third in color, the rest in black and white. The Memphis RCA plant had reached its production zenith.

Workers Complaints

From the beginning, the production schedules made by the national corporate office were unrealistic given the profile of the Memphis workforce.

Most employees, lacking the skills required for television assembly, attended brief training sessions at the outset of employment. But this training did not prepare them for the mechanized rigors of modern assembly line production. Many workers had no previous industrial work experience, and those who did were used to the relatively undemanding and paternalistic work of secondary employment. In general, workers were accustomed to irregular work habits and considerable social interaction among employees. Many lived in rural areas and commuted to the plant daily.

RCA, on the other hand, demanded a tightly-disciplined workforce. It set up the assembly line for a rapid, mass production system, planning for only a small profit per set produced. Line stoppage or personal interaction could not be tolerated. As one former management official said, "Our policy was to get what it wants at all costs."

This company policy proved to be difficult, even shocking for most of

the new workers. One commented, "I think of a job as a place to meet people, make good friends. In the place I worked before RCA, all the girls were always bringing in food they had cooked to share. There was always a lot of kidding going on. We would double up on our jobs so we could have more breaks and have time to talk.

"RCA had none of that. That line was so fast I could hardly do my own job. It seemed like I was always sitting in the lap of the woman next to me just trying to finish a set before another was coming at me. We got 12-minute breaks in the morning and afternoon but it took you five minutes to walk upstairs to the bathroom. I was there two years and never got to know anybody. It was tedious work. All we had to do was sit there with a pair of pliers and crimp terminals all day long."

Another woman stated, "I quit a job at sewing seat covers. Everybody was really nice there, even the boss. When I got to RCA and was put on the line, I wanted my old job back, even for less pay. The line was just too fast. The foremen really thought they were

somebody. They'd come from plants and they didn't know anymore about the work than we did. I yelled at my foreman a lot. The plant manager would walk through the plant and never speak to anybody.

"I quit after nine months and worked in a grocery store. It didn't pay as much, but I had more freedom."

Worker dissatisfaction showed up in high absenteeism and sloppy work performance. On some Mondays, so few people showed up for work that it was necessary to shut down entire lines. Salaried staff frequently had to fill in. Even giving workers S&H Green Stamps as an incentive for regular attendance didn't solve the problem.

Many sets came off the line defective and had to go through expensive repairs before they could be shipped out. Some workers said that they deliberately skipped units just to keep up with the speed of the line. Others damaged terminals completed by fellow workers just to hurry their own task. Conflicting reports indicate that at any one time from 20,000 to 40,000 defective sets needed reworking by highly-paid electronic technicians.

The speed of the line contributed to

the constant tensions between operatives and first-line management. Frequently inexperienced foremen would not (perhaps could not) make the necessary decisions of when to discipline workers. As a result, problems which could have been resolved on the line were submitted to arbitration through the lengthy grievance procedure. "There was such a backlog of grievances," one shop steward noted, "that we were just a half step from a strike all the time."

Not surprisingly, RCA workers gained a negative image in the traditionally conservative Memphis business community. Stories circulated widely that the operatives did not possess the skills to perform even the simplest of tasks, that they used abusive language toward foremen, and that "the union had spoiled" them. Actually, local businessmen were bitter that RCA had increased wage rates in the area.

By 1968, RCA admitted its own responsibility in the production difficulties they were experiencing. Wayne Bledsoe, who had an impressive reputation in labor relations, took over as plant manager. The supervisory staff began attending sensitivity training



seminars, and several foremen went, at company expense, on weekend retreats where they were drilled in handling personnel and individual counseling. At the same time, the Personnel Department took a greater voice in resolving labor disputes at the first line of management. These policy changes had a positive effect on production. In mid-1968, the Memphis plant finally began operating in the black and turning out sets at a faster rate than the older Indiana facilities.

A Bigger Picture

During RCA's tenure in Memphis, the tense social and political environment influenced plant operation. Prior to the opening, the city had escaped many of the racial confrontations experienced by other Deep South cities. Integration of parks, libraries and public accommodations had proceeded quietly without difficulties during the early 1960s. Voting rights had been extended to blacks by the Crump political machine as early as the 1930s. Thus the black community had been somewhat influential in local politics. For example, the black community had played a major role in electing a liberal mayor in 1963.⁴ This relative calm, however, gave way to racial tensions shortly after the RCA plant opened.

The black community grew increasingly impatient when the so-called liberal mayor elected in 1963 failed to improve the dismal black employment situation. Except for the new jobs produced through RCA, the economic picture for black workers had not been appreciably altered. The mayoral election of late 1967 further fueled the fires of discontent. By splitting the black vote, a white mayor was elected to office without any support from the black community.

The breaking point finally arrived in early 1968, when the city sanitation employees, who were mostly black, walked out on strike. The strike quickly became a focal point for the collective grievances of the black community against the new city leadership.⁵ And while unresponsive officials let the strike drag on for 65 days, the situation escalated into a major civil-rights conflict. Demonstrations and confrontations between young blacks and the police became almost a weekly occurrence. When

Martin Luther King was assassinated in April, the focus of the national media turned to the city and stressed its negative aspects as "a decaying river town."

Relations within the RCA plant became more strained. Blacks were more militant in their stand against the company. They refused to settle issues without proceeding through the long, involved grievance process. Frequently, the disputes were over social injustices and not work rules spelled out in the contract. To gain greater power, blacks bloc-voted in union elections and elected more black local union officials and shop stewards who began successfully working through problems with RCA. By the beginning of 1969, both management and labor agreed that the production problems had been largely overcome. The plant was realizing a profit and production rates topped those in Bloomington.

Other factors, however, began to weigh against the plant's existence. Throughout the late '60s, the demand for color television failed to climb and in 1970 industry sales actually fell by \$300 million. RCA profits peaked at \$154 million in 1968 and began declining. The pressure from foreign producers was taking its toll on the domestic market.

In October, 1969, RCA announced the temporary layoff of 600 of its Memphis workers. In fact, it had no immediate plans to re-hire them. Wayne Bledsoe, plant manager, announced that only black and white sets would be produced in the future in Memphis as a part of the company's overall goal to "reduce inventories." But reducing the level of production in Memphis prevented the plant from operating in the black. In January, 1970, the company said the plant would begin making outdoor antennae for TVs and FM radios, but new products failed to help the situation.

By March, 1970, the combination of the recession and its loss of the television market share forced RCA to close down several plants, idling some 9,500 workers, including many in Memphis. Then one more crisis hit the company. The electrical workers' three-year contract ended, and while the company outlook was bleak, workers had to contend with rising inflation. On June 3, 1970, the IUE went out on strike, rejecting a contract similar to the one recently accepted by the

IBEW at 12 other RCA plants. The strike was long and difficult. When it finally ended in mid-August, only eight of the 12 IUE locals affected voted to accept the new contract.

On October 22, 1970, a local news paper ran the headline: "RCA Officials Recommend Closing Memphis Plant as Aftermath of Study." Tom Bradshaw, RCA public relations official, said the new labor contract had nothing to do with the study's recommendation. The corporate message read in part: "RCA has been studying ways to consolidate certain consumer production facilities in order to meet the rising costs of materials and manufacturing and to respond to increasingly competitive conditions in the industry." The decision called for closing the Memphis plant on December 9, 1970, and concentrating production in Indiana. The union, however, claimed that the plant was moving to Taiwan. Many Memphis citizens even insisted that equipment was put on a barge, sent down the Mississippi and from there shipped to Taiwan.

The Shut-Down

At the beginning of December, 1970, only about 1,200 workers remained on the payroll. After the large layoff during the previous summer, RCA had continued a series of small job terminations each month. On December 31, 1970, as the day shift left the facility, the RCA plant closed its production facilities in Memphis. Needless to say, the closing was a significant blow to the former employees.

Nearly 70 percent of them were heads of households, two-thirds were black, and many faced debts which they had taken on in more secure times. Because of the seniority rules, those who remained at the end had been those most committed to staying with the company, but the skills they had learned could not be transferred to other Memphis industries. They felt bitter toward the company for turning its back on American workers and toward the union for "going too far" in its demands in the 1970 contract. One former line operative spoke of her feelings about the closing:

"We all kinda knew for six months the plant was going to fold its operation here. There just weren't that many working anymore, the place was like a morgue. Morale was really low. When

I got that final notice just before Christmas I was mad as hell. I had more bills then than when I had gone to work. Worst of all, I lost my hospitalization for my kids. All I could think, if I didn't find another job, we'd have to go back down to that City Hospital if anything happened.

"You ask me if I was bitter. Man, I can't tell you how I felt. I felt a lot worse when I tried to find another job. Who wanted a woman that could solder TV terminals? Nobody. The only thing available was a cook's helper in a nursing home paying less money than I got from unemployment."

The IUE, on behalf of its members and for its own defense, carried the case to the Federal Tariff Commission. Under the agreements in the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the union charged the RCA management with shifting its production overseas without compensating US employees. RCA denied the charge, but the Tariff Commission ruled in favor of the union. Because of this, the government had to provide retraining benefits and extend unemployment compensation beyond the maximum time period.⁶ The union had made its point, but the plant was still closed. It remains empty today.⁷

RCA, like other major corporations that look for new industrial sites in the South, considered its profit statement more than the impact of its plant on working people. RCA was willing to deal with big unions, even to send its supervisory personnel to sensitivity training sessions. But when profits declined, product competition increased and a domestic recession ensued, RCA moved to protect its wealth by reducing the costs of production dramatically. Like other manufacturers, they found what they wanted in the cheaper labor of a Third World country. Other electronics plants were making the same decisions in 1970-71: Sarkes Tarzian closed its plants in Mississippi and Arkansas, laying off a thousand black workers, and moved to Mexico. Huge lay-offs at Warwick's plant in Forrest City, Ark., and Advance Ross Electronics in El Paso left hundreds of others unemployed. As in Memphis, the workers were simply sacrificed to the demands of a changing economy.

Ironically, rather than attack RCA's decision for the loss of local revenue and jobs it caused, Memphis leaders —

unlike the corporation — blamed the workers for the plant's departure. The fluctuations of the television market were barely mentioned. Even six years after the closing, it is not uncommon to hear explanations that the employees were sloppy, lazy, low-skilled and poorly disciplined. In reality, they were as productive as most American workers and had successfully made the transition to industrial employment.

The degree of impact of these rumors can be measured by the fact that many employers refused to hire former RCA line operatives even after they had been retrained under federal programs. For several months after the closing, personnel at the state Department of Employment Security were told by employers not to send them any applicants who had worked for RCA. Workers who felt they had finally achieved mobility in the local labor market found themselves branded as "troublemakers" or "pro-union people."

Most male hourly and salary workers eventually located new positions. However, employment at the plant had been dominated by women, and they had great difficulty finding other jobs. Most returned to a crowded secondary labor market, often to jobs similar to their pre-RCA ones. They had made a complete job cycle, and RCA had proven an agent of disruption rather than salvation. In addition, the departure of RCA meant the loss of desperately needed tax revenues for public services and improved facilities for human resource development.

The final result of the Memphis-RCA affair was not unique: the workers and their community were again victimized. Not by an individual boss. Not by a single company. The entire economic system had just moved along, trampling 4000 people in its wake.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Moody's Industrial Manual: 1966, 1970*. New York: Moody's Investors Service, Inc., and *Industrial Surveys; Electronics-Electrical: Basic Analysis*. New York: Standard and Poor's, September 5, 1974.

2. The personal views presented in this article were collected over a three-month period from October through December, 1974. Interviews were

obtained from 15 former RCA employees selected at random from various Divisions of the Memphis Plant (i.e., two salaried assembly line supervisors, one salaried official in labor-relations, six hourly wage repairmen or "trouble shooters," six assembly line operatives). Interviews were also taken from two officials of the I.U.E. and three members of the Economic Development Division of Memphis Light, Gas and Water. All interviews were open-ended, averaging roughly one hour and 30 minutes. Each informant was assured anonymity. There were no refusals and all informants were cooperative.

3. Much of the information for this article was found in clippings from two Memphis newspapers, the *Press Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal*. An excellent file on the plant is maintained in the Memphis Room of the Memphis-Shelby County Public Library.

4. David M. Tucker, *Memphis Since Crump* (Memphis: Memphis State University, Ms.), p.38.

5. Thomas W. Collins, "An Analysis of the Memphis Garbage Strike," *Public Affairs Forum*, Vol. 3 (6), p. 4.

6. The computer output from the Tennessee Division of Employment Security and *Final Report of Women and Girls Employment Enabling Service* (prepared for U.S. Department of Labor under contract no. 88-47-72-02), indicates that 1,125 former RCA employees had signed up for special unemployment benefits as of February 1972. About 90 percent were women and 60-70 percent were black and had completed a high school education. During the next eighteen months about 300 completed job retraining programs. TDES data on 163 of these people gives an insight into the type of employment found by these workers. Forty-seven were trained to be cosmetologists; 29 gained employment in that area; Forty completed clerical programs; 23 had secretarial jobs thirty days later; and 29 out of 39 trained keypunch operators found jobs using their new skills. Of those who went back into production jobs as operatives, very few gained employment at unionized plants.

7. At one point, General Motors purchased the plant to produce recreational vehicles, but the energy crisis forced cancellation of those plans. Presently, Caterpillar plans to use the facility as a warehouse.



Labor Education:

Uneasy Beginnings

by Larry Rogin

In most Western industrial countries, programs for the education of workers as workers were developed along with, and supported by, other workers' institutions: unions, political parties, and cooperatives. Their primary purpose was the reform of society, and they saw education as an important means to this end as well as a way of training workers to take responsibility within their own organizations.

The United States was different. The dominant trade union body prior to World War I, the American Federation of Labor, consciously kept itself apart from the movement for social reform because it feared that such involvement would weaken the unions' goal: increasing immediate benefits for workers through collective bargaining with employers. However, the national unions which composed the AFL maintained their autonomy and some opposed AFL policies regarding education for workers.

The Socialist unions in particular, like the Europeans, stressed the importance of education for providing a broader understanding of society and the workers' role in its change. Support for workers' education prior to World War I came from two other groups, both outside unions: (1) prominent educators who felt that opportunities for workers were critical in any system of education; and (2) individuals, many of them women, sympathetic to the goals of both unionism

and social reform.

Meanwhile, the majority of unions felt that experience was the best teacher for the day-to-day union tasks, and that classes for workers might become an avenue for furthering opposition to the AFL. In addition, many unionists who had supported the expansion of free public education believed that the American school system, more broadly based and open than in Europe, would give workers the education needed to function effectively in society.

Thus, the labor education that emerged in the formative period of American unionism developed outside the official union movement, in many cases by opponents of AFL national policy, and with little relation to the day-to-day problems of trade union activity.

The first classes set up for workers as unionists were probably those conducted in 1913 by the Women's Trade Union League, an organization formed in 1903 by women workers and other women concerned with the working conditions of their sex.

The first union education departments were established by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in 1916 and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in 1919. Both unions were concentrated in New York City and had previously partici-

pated in the educational programs of the Rand School of Social Science founded in 1906 by Socialists. Educational programs conducted by these unions continued to emphasize social issues and individual cultural advancement.

During World War I, the AFL grew rapidly and enjoyed a close relationship with the reform-minded Wilson administration. A new wave of worker activity was reflected in major organizing campaigns, in the formation of a large number of local labor parties, and in the AFL's adoption at its 1919 convention of a "Reconstruction Program" dealing with a wide variety of social programs.

Labor education flourished in this favorable climate. In some areas, it took the form of local "labor colleges" sponsored by central labor unions, using sympathetic faculty from nearby schools as teachers. The classes were usually held in the evening and were concerned primarily with increasing the social consciousness of the workers rather than training in the skills of unionism. By 1922, an estimated 75 such programs were in operation. In 1920, the University of California at Berkeley, in cooperation with the state federation of labor, created the first university labor extension program.

The local efforts attracted a large number of persons not directly involved in unionism who were concerned with social problems and, in particular, the well-being of workers. Support from such people and from unionists

led to the founding in 1921 of Brookwood, in Westchester County, New York, as the first permanent resident labor school in the US. Brookwood offered a two-year program combining general education with training for union activity. In the same year Bryn Mawr, a women's college in the suburbs of Philadelphia, experimented with an eight-week summer session for 100 women workers, setting a pattern which was to be followed in later years by other colleges and universities. While Brookwood and the women's summer schools were set up independently of the labor movement, they drew support from many national unions, central labor bodies and individual unionists.

Even when union strength began to decline in the post-war depression, most local labor colleges persevered and the number of independent labor education agencies, particularly residential schools, actually increased. Other colleges joined Bryn Mawr in sponsoring summer schools for women workers. The school at the University of Wisconsin became co-educational at the request of the state federation of labor, and it has continued to serve as a labor education center since 1925. The moving spirit in the Bryn Mawr women's summer school established a year-round institution, Vineyard Shore, in upstate New York. A new resident school, Commonwealth, was set up in 1923 in Arkansas. Brookwood continued, shifting from a two-year program to one year. The University of California labor extension activity was maintained, and in 1923 the National University Extension Association endorsed co-operation in labor programs and appointed a committee on

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workers' education.

With the decline of the 1920s, unions representing nearly a third of the AFL's membership questioned that body's policies toward craft versus industrial unionism, organizing initiatives, and political activity. Workers' education classes discussed these controversial issues and were generally led by those opposed to the AFL's policies. Sensitive to developing opposition, the AFL took over the funding of the Workers Education Bureau which had been formed in 1921 as a coordinating mechanism for labor education activists. By 1929, the WEB had in effect become the educational arm of the AFL (although it was not formally recognized as such until 1954), and its programs and publica-

Labor education in this country has always attracted the dissidents, the independent-spirited. This was even more true in the beginning because the American labor movement wouldn't support it.

—Larry Rogin

tions were strictly censored by the AFL hierarchy.

The AFL leaders' general suspicion of labor education turned to opposition when the 1928 convention approved an executive council attack on Brookwood as a radical institution. The council urged that all AFL affiliates withdraw their support from the school. This was a *cause célèbre* at the time; significantly, many AFL unions continued to support the school and send students to it. Furthermore, it was not the unions but concerned individuals who had been the prime source of funds for Brookwood, the women's summer schools, Commonwealth, and later, Highlander Folk School.

The Depression had a greater impact on the future of these indepen-

dent organizations than did the disapproval of the AFL. Many could not establish the financial base to continue into the late 1930s and '40s. Brookwood lasted until 1937. The number of independent summer schools declined, and in the end only Bryn Mawr survived at its new location at Vineyard Shore. The coordinating organization of summer schools, the Affiliated Schools for Workers, continued through the period, becoming a program operating agency and changing its name to the American Labor Education Service.

II

Roosevelt's New Deal and the founding of the CIO in 1936 signaled a period of increased union strength. At the same time, the Depression forced even conservative unionists in the AFL to recognize the importance of social reform and the need to press for social legislation.

The rapid growth of unions in the late 1930s created a need for training in the practical aspects of day-to-day union work—especially in the newly organized mass-production unions which depended on volunteer activists for local officers and negotiators. Unions like those in the garment industries, which had supported labor education in the past, expanded their programs and shifted from broad social education to the training of thousands of new local union leaders. Labor education thus became training for trade-union service, and much more of it was carried on by the unions themselves.

Stronger unions had more money as well as greater needs. The unions wanted more direct help for immediate problems and those independent agencies that continued through this period changed their format to accommodate this need. The summer school at the Univ. of Wisconsin School for Workers became a series of one-week sessions sponsored by local unions. When Bryn Mawr became Hudson Shore in 1939, the general summer school became shorter and special programs for individual unions increased in importance. The American Labor Education Service and the Southern Summer School for Women Workers undertook similar changes in format.

It should be noted, however, that the independent labor education organizations always maintained an in-

terest in broader social issues such as civil rights and international affairs. They provided leadership and a source of experimentation in areas of social concern, teaching methods and the use of new materials.

During the early New Deal, the federal government became a supporter, for the first time, of workers' education through adult education programs financed by relief funds. Between 1933 and 1943, the WPA workers' education classes reached one million people in 36 states, including most of those where unionism was growing. Unemployed teachers taught students from unions and the unemployed societies in subjects ranging from literacy to creative arts. Many of the administrators had backgrounds in labor education, and advisory committees with trade unionist representatives related the program to labor's needs.

Immediately after World War II, the growing strength of the unions and the experiences with the WPA workers' classes created a demand for government support of labor education similar to that provided farmers through agricultural extension. The wave of post-war strikes focused attention on the problems of collective bargaining, leading some students of unionism and some legislators to feel that education might improve the possibilities for industrial peace. Between 1944 and 1947, the Department of Labor set up a small program, chiefly for classes in contract administration. Universities received impetus to sponsor similar programs designed to increase worker-management harmony.

III

There were four developments in labor education in the period immediately after World War II. Unions expanded their activities; universities, particularly those that were state-supported, began to offer more programs; Catholic labor education rose and fell; and the independent schools almost disappeared.

Union programs grew in number and sophistication. But those national unions that supported education were still a minority. Both national labor federations expanded their activities: the CIO, by conducting programs directly; the AFL, by encouraging labor education and assisting unions and central bodies. But the work of the federations remained limited compared

with that of the national unions. Any major national union program would reach more workers and offer greater variety than that offered by the affiliated federation.

The post-war interest in university labor education was a reflection of three factors: the growing strength of unionism; the belief among some educators and many unionists that the government should sponsor educational service to workers, as state-supported schools did for other groups; and, finally, the feeling that university programs might contribute to industrial peace. Whatever the motivation, an increasing number of colleges began to provide a labor education service, often in conjunction with an industrial relations center. But in the South, where unions had established only a precarious foothold, no university was bold enough to move into the labor education arena.

In general, unions welcomed the expansion of university activity once a procedure for consultation had been established to assuage fears that business interests would control the programs or that the faculty was unrealistic about unionism. The fears of business control were aggravated in 1948 when an attack by the auto industry ended an experimental workers' education program at the University of Michigan. The attack was part of a successful effort to prevent federal financing for university labor education. But the Michigan example was not followed in other states. The number of programs ballooned, and less than ten years after its early project had been stopped, the Univ. of Michigan began a new one.

Catholic priests had long conducted labor classes following the concepts set forth in papal encyclicals on social problems. In the mid-1940s, the Catholic programs expanded rapidly and were soon operating in most major cities, providing a combination of trade-union training and ideological instruction. In part, the latter was an effort to counteract the influence of Communist unionists. Particularly where unions did not conduct classes, the Catholic schools filled the vacuum left by the termination of the WPA. Catholic labor education continued on a large scale into the early 1950s and then began to decline.

While university and union programs grew, the independent labor education

agencies waned. They were unable to secure a financial base in the unions, among individuals or in the foundations which would allow them to continue. When the Rosenwald funds were exhausted, the Georgia Workers' Education Service ended. Highlander shifted from labor education to civil rights, partly over disagreements with union policy. The American Labor Education Service was the last of the independent agencies to liquidate. Its final programs were financed chiefly by grants from the Fund for Adult Education. Since then, foundation grants have largely gone to university labor centers.

IV

Since the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955, the proportion of total employment in fields where unions were traditionally strong has declined, while the number of workers in white-collar jobs, the service industries, and state and local government has risen steadily. Union membership has only slightly fallen, however, as these new workers gain representation.

Many of the rapidly growing unions of government workers have established education departments to meet the needs of local activists, not unlike the needs of the mass-production unions in the early New Deal. In addition, some unions that had been hostile to labor education began to develop activity, especially in staff training. In part, this reflected a generational turnover among union leaders; in part, the increasing complexity of union work.

At the same time, the number of university labor centers climbed until they now exist in almost every industrial state. Both in unions and colleges, education programs on general social problems expanded to meet the increasing involvement of unions in legislative and political activity. On the other hand, technical training has become broader and more sophisticated in order to develop expertise among the leadership of locals.

Today, labor education is organized in two forms: in the unions and in the universities. The result is fragmented institutionalization. Each national union and each school set up their own program in accordance with their own priorities and with little coordination. The independent workers' education centers and summer schools have all but disappeared.

The Spark that Ignites

by Myles Horton

interview by Mary Frederickson

In the early 1930s, Myles Horton returned to his native Tennessee to begin an educational center that combined the folk school tradition of Europe with his own experience of community meetings in the South. With Don West, Jim Dombrowski and, subsequently, a host of other skilled organizers/teachers, Horton implemented a style of informal education that fostered growth and collective learning for generations of trade unionists, civil-rights activists and, more recently, Appalachians struggling to control the world pressing in upon them.

*In 1972, the Highlander Folk School celebrated its fortieth year of service—and survival through bombings, inquisitions, forced closures and financial threats. For a new account of the center's remarkable history, see Frank Adams' *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander* (John Blair Publisher, 1975).*

*In the following interview, Myles Horton, now retired as Highlander's director, describes the principles of labor education which let people gathered at the residential school learn from each other and connect new concepts to their own experience and to larger social issues. The selections here were excerpted from an interview conducted by Mary Frederickson, a graduate student in labor and women's history, for the *Southern Oral History Program of the Univ. of North Carolina*.*

The only way that you can learn anything is to tie it onto something that you previously know. That's what learning is. That's what labor education has to be.

At Highlander, we took people who were already doing something in their own community, in their unions. They were emerging leaders, people who were just beginning to do something and have a leadership role. If we had our druthers, we would never have had anybody except shop stewards and the officers of small unions who had the

full responsibility for running their unions and worked on the job and didn't get paid. They are the closest people to the rank and file.

When they came to the school they would bring specific problems with them, situations that they wanted to deal with.

We would take those students' problems and have them discuss them. They would talk about their situations and how they dealt with them and

Graham, the president of the University of North Carolina, came to Highlander and he was great. He would just sit down and talk. Then I remember we had Jim Warburg, who is one of the most brilliant people on international affairs and who has written books on international policy. He came down to talk with a group of CIO people. He talked for an hour and it wasn't going across, people didn't ask questions. So he said, "You know, I want to apolo-



Food, Tobacco & Agriculture union members at Highlander, 1940s.

exchange ideas. It was peer learning; they would learn from each other. Then we'd learn from history and other things, but it was always related to that specific thing. It wasn't subject oriented like at most schools, it was situation oriented, problem oriented.

Professional teachers and speakers had great difficulty teaching this way, so we never had on our permanent staff anybody who had been a college professor, for example. We thought it was too difficult to get them to understand that workers weren't containers into which they poured their ideas.

We did have college people and writers come occasionally to speak. And some were good and knew how to do it and others didn't. Frank Porter

gize to you people. Myles tried to tell me, he spent a whole two hours trying to help me understand how to do this thing. I wanted to do it so badly, but you will just have to understand that last night I spoke at Harvard and the night before that I spoke at Yale and I don't have any experience talking to people like you. The reason that I came here is because I think that you are much more important than the other people I speak to. I think that this meeting here tonight is much more important than a dozen Harvards and Yales. So I want so much to talk to you."

He was just begging, you know. This guy had written books, he had been a professor and lectured. He said, "Will

photos by Emil Willmetz

you help me talk to you? I think that what I've got to say, you are interested in. Will you help me do it so that you can understand it?"

Well, of course, that just won them all over and they couldn't resist a guy like that. Well, they responded. They sat up until three or four o'clock, they sat there and talked, they really tried to help him. They would say, "Now Jim I'm down there in a chemical plant outside of New Orleans and most of the people can't read or write and what has this foreign policy got to do with them? You tell me what I should tell them."

Then they would say, "Well, they won't understand that." So they kept pushing Jim and Jim was loving it.



Highlander staff, children and CIO students (Horton family at left).

because he was really getting somewhere. By midnight, they were really talking and by two o'clock, they had drawn up a two-page foreign policy statement that they understood, that Jim thought was important, that they could agree on and they could take back to the union. They not only took that back to their local unions, they took it to the national CIO convention and they knew it so well, they understood it so well, that they got it adopted as the platform of the national CIO and Jim about fainted when that happened.

He said, "Hell, Myles, I could have spent a week with all the top CIO officials and never got that thing looked

at and yet here I am the author of their platform."

Some people won't do it like Graham and Warburg. Some people say, "Why can't I teach like I teach my captive audiences that come to get their degrees?" Well, you can't use people like that.

Union Support

You have to work with people, not use them. For instance, when we started working in our own community, we had mainly night classes and day classes. We had people studying co-ops for six weeks at night, two or three nights a week. Then we started working on a broader base out in the county. A

little later on, the WPA started and NYA and CCC and those government agencies and we started working with them. So we worked with men and women in terms of whatever they were into and we got them from organizations that we worked with. Later on, we started working with the unions on a wider basis.

Labor people as a whole are not prone to understand labor education, but the CIO people in the new unions needed some training for leadership. They had these big locals and they needed people to learn to run them. I remember the president of the Rubber Workers was a Kentucky hillbilly, a man named Dalrymple. His people

were all mountain people who went to the cities — Akron and places like that. All the local officials were mountain people. They were just like people down here. Dalrymple knew that he had to get some local people trained and we had a place down here that he could identify with, because we were in this mountain area like he came from. So he couldn't think of a better way to do it and he would send people down to get some training.

Then there were local directors that we knew. We finally started putting these local regional people on our board so they could work closely with Highlander in an official way, and we would say, "You've got to help with the teaching and the recruiting. You've got to help shape up the program because it is for you." So they were involved with Highlander; it was their school, you know. They weren't sending people to somebody else's school. They would keep saying, "Why can't you take more of our people? When can we have a workshop?"

If we wanted automobile workers, furniture or textile workers, rubber workers, hosiery workers, food, tobacco and agricultural workers, all we had to do was to tell the union how many people they could send and they would do the rest. We couldn't get the steel workers. John L. Lewis supported Highlander, he endorsed Highlander, he would do everything for Highlander except send miners. And the head of Steel Workers in the South, Bill Crawford, he believed in education and was finally the chairman of the board, but he couldn't get the Steel Workers Union in the South or the national Steel Workers to support Highlander.

Most of the people who came to Highlander learned a lot about how to run a union. But about 25 percent of the people were on committees who wanted to learn specific things: how to do political action and community action, how to put out a newspaper, start an educational program.

We felt to run the most useful program we could, we had to offer all of this and more. Unlike most schools, we had a full time relationship with people and we had a field staff that was out in the field. There were people like Zilla Hawes out organizing for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and sending people back to Highlander. If we weren't running a workshop at

Highlander, we were running one out in the field. Maybe two different places at once.

Education has got to be a year-round job, you've got to relate to people on a year-round basis. You've got to be there when they need you, you've got to do other things than educational things. You've got to be known as somebody to have solidarity with, somebody who can be counted on, who will go out in a rainy night when somebody is in trouble.

And you've got to do it from the very beginning. The start is very important because people very seldom get away from their roots. It's hard to. You start the right way, or you don't end up the right way. You still do what you start with to a great extent. You know, this business of children growing up into older people and being like the ones before, you know, there's something to that.

Integration

We made a statement at the very beginning: "Highlander is open to blacks." The first announcement of Highlander said it. So we had a principle established.

Now, we had no takers. Neither blacks nor whites would come on that basis, but our position was clear. We were open. And then what we would do, we would bring black speakers in; the first year there was Charles Johnson from Fisk. We brought people in to establish the fact that we were serious about having blacks and if we couldn't get them to come as students, we would get them to come as speakers or teachers or something.

Now the fact that we couldn't get them to come bothered us because we wanted to get them there, but it didn't bother us as much as it would have if we hadn't established the principle, because we knew that eventually it would help us in working through it.

Then we started working with blacks. We would go to the Chattanooga Central Labor Union meetings and we affiliated with Chattanooga, that was back before the CIO and there were blacks and whites together in unions there. We helped organize a lime plant down in Sherwood, Tenn., blacks and whites together.

We would never do anything except with blacks and whites together. Even though we couldn't get them to

come to Highlander together, when we set up a local union or co-op or got a group together, we would always have blacks as well as whites. Always see to it. So, we were beginning to build a little network of who we were in relation to that problem in the minds of people that we dealt with. That was a strategy. Then we started pushing, trying to get blacks as students. They didn't want to come and they wouldn't come because they were scared. It was a new thing and dangerous and there wasn't any reason for them sticking their necks out. So we finally maneuvered around until we got both blacks and whites there.

Once we got them, we made a big huff and puff about it publicly, and we got the state CIO to make a statement saying that this was an integrated workshop at Highlander and they advo-

Education doesn't have a power base. It has an idea base, but not a power base. If you are going to be in education, you have to know that you are not running the show. We are here to render services.

— Myles Horton

cated that all unions follow that pattern. Actually we just took one statement and parleyed that into a statewide mandate on it.

Then we would go on in and insist on it. We would almost say that you couldn't come if you didn't. We didn't go quite that far. We almost did, but we made it almost impossible for them not to bring blacks. Then we started getting one or two blacks and started a strategy of working through the blacks, saying to them, "Now, you go back and next year, the next time that you send students to Highlander, you have a moral obligation to see to it that blacks are included." So from then on, we had it made because we had our people in these locals, when it came to a question of sending students to Highlander, who would get

up on the floor and insist on it.

Democracy

We believed that there should be real democracy in the unions and that should apply to women and blacks and young and old. I remember when we had some people from Memphis down there, young people, and they said, "Well, you know, the leadership is entrenched in our union. They want us to come down because they want us to be better shop stewards and run better committees, but they are never going to move over and let us have the offices."

I said, "Well why do you want to move them over? They sent you here."

"Yeah, but they are pretty conservative and we would like to have more militant unions."

"Figure out how you do it. Figure out where the power is. Who have they got on their side? What is their support? Which workers? Men, women, black, white?"

"Well, white."

I said, "Okay, get a black working with you. Blacks, women. They've got to have some opposition. Add them all up. Don't just play their game. There is another game that you can play — women, black people, people outside their group."

"Oh, they would work us over. Women? You couldn't have women on there. You couldn't have blacks."

"Okay, then leave things like they are because they've got it sewed up, but don't say that you can't do anything. Just say that you don't want to do it."

Well, before they left Highlander, they began to understand and they went back and did it. They went back and put the combination of women and blacks together and took over the union. It took them about six months, it wasn't hard. Well, there you find democratic principles and tactics that we were helping these people with, practically on a democratic basis. They couldn't have won it any other way because the others were taken up. So we always use these kinds of methods.

We Had a Movement

In this kind of situation, education can be a force, but education doesn't have a power base. It has an idea base, but not a power base. If you are going

to be in education, you have to know that you are not running the show. We are here to render services. At times we are respected and loved and then we are courted when we can help union leadership. And when they don't need us, labor education can just be sloughed off.

We had a movement at one time in the CIO. We worked together. Highlander couldn't have functioned if there hadn't been the unions and the unions felt that they needed Highlander or they wouldn't have accepted us.

There was a social movement that was not just unions organizing for wages and better working conditions and security. It was people organizing to do things in their community, taking political action, learning about the world, carrying on educational programs to start cooperatives, to do a lot of things. Education was a part of that, it was kind of the spark that kept those things ignited. And the union was the thing that held it together, that would be the cement. But it hardened pretty fast and we got so that we couldn't move.

We had literally hundreds of people running their own local education programs throughout the South, hundreds that we worked with at Highlander. We had a network of things going all over the South that involved thousands of people a day. Thousands of people a day were involved in those programs. So it had an element of a movement.

What happened to it is the sad story of institutions in this country, I guess in any country. You know, bureaucracies set in and they begin to ask experts to do things; they stop doing things at the bottom. The rank and file stopped being active, and the top people loved it because they got all the credit and glory, and the people at the bottom loved it because if somebody will do something for them, they won't have to do it themselves. They thought that it could be done better by having experts. And they finally delegated all the responsibility to the top officials. Just like we delegate things in government, you know, we don't do anything about government except every three or four years and

we don't do much then. We don't have much voice unless we take it. Unions in general got top-downish and the rank and file lost its power to do anything and the muscles got flimsy, and people lost interest in everything except just the purest simple trade unionism. We got back to the kinds of things that they had in the AFL before the CIO, with the exception of a few unions which have maintained a little spirit, you know, because of a few people plugging along. Once in a while it gets so bad, like the United Mine Workers, that they have to have a reform movement, and then you get a new life and a new spark and new people and education going.

But if we could have kept control of the unions in the hands of the rank and file and kept people wanting to run their own unions, running their own affairs and insisting on doing it, and keeping an educational base so that they would continue to get new ideas and learn how to do things, then you could have kept the unions strong and fresh.

Reaching New Fields

by Higdon Roberts

Higdon Roberts has been Director of the Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Alabama in Birmingham since 1972. His article intersperses entries from his diary with other reflections about labor education in the South. Although new to this region, Roberts has been involved in teaching labor history and training union leaders for many years. He holds a doctorate in political science, is a former member of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen, and has been in AFT's Workers Education Local 189 since 1965.

Labor education in the South has had only limited acceptance and has developed a relatively narrow base of support through the years. Outstanding efforts in the '30s and '40s by independently-based schools — like the Highlander Training School and the Southern Summer School for Women Workers — added significantly to the

movements of those years. And some international unions were able to supply adequate funds and staff to undertake education among their own members.

Until recently, however, Southern universities have consistently failed to respond to the challenge of education among working Southerners. Today, as unions are expanding in the South, some educational systems are changing their adult education programs to meet labor's specific needs.

Through a combination of history and political expediency, Alabama emerged — together with West Virginia — as the leader in this trend. Through the years, organized labor has been stronger in Alabama than perhaps any other Southern state (see Alabama profile). And Barney Weeks, current president of the Alabama AFL-CIO, has built on the state's tradition with outstanding leadership. For 15 years Weeks raised the issue of university-supported labor education, but with

no success. Finally, in 1971, Weeks and other labor leaders were able to gain the support of Gov. George Wallace for their proposal. Wallace, of course, was courting labor at the time, looking for favors which could add to his stock as the "working man's friend." While Wallace went on to build his national campaign, Weeks joined with leaders at the University of Alabama in Birmingham to begin the arduous process of taking labor education to people throughout Alabama.

In 1971, the Alabama legislature established the Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. Labor's goal, and the legislative intent, was to provide university-level, non-credit continuing education programs, designed and implemented to meet the needs of workers; and to offer consulting, research and information services that carry the resources of the university to workers throughout the state. Formed as an autonomous section

within the School of Business, the center initially received about \$130,000 per year through regular university appropriations. In August 1972, I was named director. We began to establish the center and to conduct workshops throughout the state.

Birmingham, Summer of '72 – *Our first one-day conference on local union leadership, more of a PR operation than a serious educational enterprise. Excellent mixture of unions and people. Forcefully struck by black delegates as they responded to the lectures with "Amen" and "Yes brother," etc., much as they would in a church. Same experience repeated several months later at a conference of Safety Committeemen of Steelworkers.*

Talked with a black man, 44, with two children in college. He had spent 20 years in the "mill." Today he spoke as a middle-level union representative. I asked him why he stayed here when so many anti-black feelings and actions exist.

"I live here," he said, "this is my home. My family and friends are all here. Besides, you should have been here 20 or even 10 years ago. Then it was really rough. Things are better and getting even more so. It's a long way from being real good, but a long way from real bad, too.

"I worked around and I worked some pretty bad jobs, and they treat blacks a hell of a lot worse without a union. People, including blacks, really don't understand what the union can and can't do. The district and national officers have almost always tried to do right. And union politics made a difference, particularly at the local level. I've always been a union man and been better off for it.

"I know I'm almost surely going to stay in the mill because of the money and pension stuff. But I've done hard physical labor all my life and I'm tired of it. I don't think my kids will live here, I think when they get out of school they may go someplace else to work, probably not the North. Atlanta is the big city now, not Detroit or New York. They're going to have it better than we did and that's good."

Until 1972, there had been no extensive university-related labor education conducted in Alabama. Both Auburn and the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa had housed week-long union workshops, but no sustained programs nor any significant

*Southern universities
have consistently failed
to respond to the
challenge of education
among the great mass
of working Southerners.*

—Higdon Roberts

commitment of resources existed. The Center at UAB currently represents the most comprehensive professional endeavor in this field in Alabama, and serves as a model for other university-based programs in the South. (See the accompanying listing and description of other programs.) The center staff now consists of the director and six other full-time faculty and appropriations have increased to \$200,000 per year.

Western Alabama, on the Mississippi Border – *We set up a steward training course, combining five locals of three different public sector international unions. It worked surprisingly well. They were obviously cooperating rather than competing.*

Class was held in Central Labor Council headquarters on an isolated back street in the black section of town, next to a funky grocery store with a shoeshine stand out front. Only a few blocks from KKK headquarters.

Very positive reaction to the film Inheritance from both blacks and whites. The one exception, not really strong, but an uncomfortable reaction, from one of the officers who had been involved on the wrong side during the march from Selma to Montgomery. He's a good trade unionist, just having great difficulty overcoming a lifetime of racist teachings and attitudes. Not an uncommon reaction among local union leaders. Psychologically it's an extraordinarily difficult journey.

A black woman in the class was so anxious for learning that she didn't even want to take our usual break or quit when the time was up. They were very low-wage workers, and both white and black had been consistently exploited. It was obvious that the union gives them a new lease on life.

One white male, 28, an assistant business agent for the largest of the unions in the class, was very sharp and articulate. Born and raised in the area, he was just beginning to learn his job and understand what unions are all about. We talked about how he got his job and his feelings about it.

"I'd been offered a supervisor's job," he remembered, "the same time I was offered this one and I thought this would be more interesting. I like representing the people much more than enforcing management rules, most of which are a bunch of shit anyway.

"I'm not making as much money as I could in management, particularly when you work the kinds of hours we do. When a member has a problem he wants it solved right now and expects you to do it whether it's midnight or Sunday morning. They're paying my salary, such as it is, and expect round-the-clock service. We try to give it to 'em, but it's hard on your family. Also it looks to me like it's kind of hard to go very high in a labor organization. At best it's slow as hell.

"But don't get me wrong. I like my job. I like to get problems solved. I like to win grievances for workers. It gives me a good gut feeling. I just don't know if I'll do it forever, that's all."

During the center's first year, most activities were directed toward planning and organizing the center's operations. Suitable facilities were secured and equipped, instructional supplies and equipment gathered, a labor library developed and consultants retained to aid in determining the role and scope of the center. Labor leaders—Barney Weeks and Howard Strevel, director of District 36, United Steel Workers of America — joined with university officials and myself to develop staff and shape the program.

Jim Goode joined the staff after 25 years with the labor movement in Michigan with the Pipefitters and the UAW Education Center. Coming South was a homecoming of sorts. Jim's father had migrated from Tennessee to Michigan years before to find work. And closer to home, we added Doug Davis, a Church of Christ minister from Mississippi with labor education experience and a doctorate in communications.

Northwest Alabama – *An after work, four-hour class with 15 women and*

one man. Business agent for the union was attractive woman, 45, impeccable attire and make-up. Tougher than steel. Her parents were tenant farmers. Married and deserted at an early age, children to raise, relatively little education, no training. She has never stopped fighting, has organized and serviced locals for 12 years. Very bright, natural wit, articulate and virtually fearless. She had strong feelings about her work.

"I get more problems," she claimed, "from the people I represent than I do from management. The managers know that I know my business. I'm honest with them, but I don't take any ugly mouth and they know they have to live up to the contract.

"Practically all the rank and file and even some of the stewards don't understand that we can't get settlements or problems solved that are outside the agreement. Much of what they want done, or the gripes they have about supervisors, are not covered in the contract. Oh, you can sometimes work something out to please everybody on an informal basis, but not very often. Then they hold me personally responsible and say I'm not doing my job. You can only do so much. I try to let it roll off me and concentrate on the important matters."

Most of the center's offerings are directly related to the day-to-day functioning of trade unions. We offer regular sessions in collective bargaining, grievance handling, communication skills, occupational safety and health, labor law, labor history, economics and politics. The programs vary. Short courses (one night a week, two hours per night, for six weeks) are usually geared to the needs of shop stewards — recognizing grievances, general contract language, parliamentary procedures. Weekend conferences and longer institutes are designed for business agents and full-time union staff — preparing and presenting grievances for arbitration, pre-strike publicity techniques such as how to write a press release, skills in negotiating contracts.

Some of the programs are on the campus at Birmingham, but the bulk of our work is conducted at night and on weekends in union halls, community centers, local college or high school facilities throughout the state. And we work with unions ranging from the Steelworkers to Government Employees (AFGE). By taking the programs to the home areas where they are needed, at a time and place convenient to workers, we feel we are in the best tradition of workers' education.

West Central Alabama — Six-week steward training class, 45-50 people — men and women, young and old, eight different unions. No blacks. Classroom was in the basement of VFW Hall. Woman showed up at fifth session and said she won a grievance the previous week on what she had learned in the class. The possibility of inter-union cooperation in organizing and political activity was apparent — one group of three drove out of Mississippi 60 miles to the class each week. Follow-up classes planned.

North-Central Alabama — Newly organized electronics plant where two previous organizing attempts had failed. Very bitter relations between company and union and many bad memories on both sides. An all-day and evening session on grievance handling and local union administration for 35 workers, men and women. Very responsive and eager to be able to handle their own problems. Only one student with prior union experience.

Many had been working six days a week, ten hours a day for two years. Most of the women were married with children and continue to have full home-maker duties after work and on off-days. Strong feelings of hope for their children to have it "better than



United Steel Workers at a Center training session in Mobile

us."

One young woman, an outstanding natural leader, was fired by the company in all three organizing campaigns. Now back at work and full tilt for her fellow workers.

"It was easy to see we needed some kind of help at the plant," she said. "Management did whatever it wanted and there wasn't anything you could do about it. I didn't know much about unions until I talked with the organizing committee. Then I knew that's for us.

"I've had a lot of problems being so active for the union. The company has tried to run me off plenty of times, but the union supports me and I keep coming back. I'm a good worker and I watch my step — don't give 'em an excuse to fire or discipline me — but I watch that contract and I keep organizing in the plant and doing my union work after hours.

"And I still take care of my family. The kids help a lot themselves, and my husband is a good guy. He may resent my union work from time to time, but he doesn't say much about it and he works hard too.

"I've been plenty frustrated and I might have quit if I didn't believe we were right. Also, management keeps me mad most of the time and that helps keep me fighting."

During the first year of operation, the center provided 35 programs of different kinds for approximately 1,000 local union leaders and active members. After the center's budget was enlarged in 1973 and new faculty members hired, the scope of the program increased. By March, 1976, the number of sessions and participants had more than doubled yearly and virtually every town and city of any size throughout the state had been host to one or more of our offerings. In addition, we provided a significant number of programs in Georgia, Tennessee, Florida and Mississippi. The center has hosted southeastern regional training programs for a number of international unions and the AFL-CIO. This kind of regionally-oriented work is rapidly expanding as the center becomes more well known.

Central Alabama — Saturday all-day steward training class for government employees' local. Beautiful April day. We expected 20 students; 35 showed up and we ran out of material. Good mix of young-old, male-female, black-

white, experienced and uninitiated. Also some eight or nine different occupations represented.

Ten members of one union showed up in classes set up by another union. They have shown an obvious desire for education, fighting against the hierarchy of their own union.

This kind of situation crops up occasionally in labor education throughout the US. It is a result of differences in resources, ability and commitment of various unions. There are some regions, districts or locals of even the best unions that do not provide the kind of service, support and protection that their members are entitled to. And this happens in the rural South where a single business agent or international representative covers widely dispersed small locals within large geographic areas. Fortunately, this attitude is not prevalent in the bulk of union leadership. Quite the contrary. We've found much better "official" support than I had had or observed in the Midwest.

Labor education tends to grow and feed upon itself. As the number of local sessions expand, there is increased pressure for regional projects. These in turn develop new contacts and create an environment within which the local programs can expand further. Several Southern schools — including the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Kentucky at Lexington — found the successful Alabama experience a helpful model on which to build.

The rapid growth and comparative success of the center can be attributed to a number of factors; sufficient financial support from the legislature, a concerned and progressive labor leadership, a dedicated and competent professional staff, a university administration that views continuing education as an integral part of the total urban university thrust, and, of course, student participation that is openly and enthusiastically supportive of relevant programs provided in convenient forms.

Southeastern Alabama, on the Georgia line — We arrived in town late, met by local representative who told us not to eat dinner. We went out to the plant where a strike was on — 30 on the picket line. There's a barbecue pork — whole hog, and a spicy stew, everything in it. Barbecue rack was on old bed spring; five gallon cauldron on bed of

coals. Pick-ups lined the roadside — beer and moonshine under the tarps in the back of the trucks. Shorty, the local cook, concocted a barbecue sauce of lemons, catsup, cranberries, mustard, onions, milk — unknown proportions of each. We ate at midnight. Shorty cut the pork with a very suspicious looking fishing knife. Who cares? Food was wonderful and by this time we're beyond concern. Shorty told us to come back in July for a goat barbecue.

The next day we were to have two three-hour classes for 25 steelworkers. The word had spread and we picked up 15 clothing workers as well. The other instructor developed throat trouble and retreated to the hospital. I did a six hour stint interspersed with frequent trips to the john. Head and stomach were shot forever, but there was no place to hide. Had to hang in there because the students were hungry for the class and were participating like hell. The contracts and procedures of the two unions were different in some respects, but we worked back and forth and kept it rolling. On the second day, second instructor returned to the effort (after we split a quart of Maalox) and finished in a blaze of mutual enthusiasm.

An older woman hugged and kissed me and said, "Nobody ever came here before to help us like this, we just never expected it from the university." It was a long drive back to Birmingham, but it seemed short.

The enthusiasm of the students stirs a certain optimism within ourselves and within the growing labor movement. And concrete successes — like improved contracts and better representation at the local level — indicate some bettering of conditions. But, for the most part, the program really makes only a minor dent.

We are a long way from being the first to labor in this field in the South, yet every day we touch virgin territory. We are in our fourth year of operation and have trained, in one fashion or another, 6,000 local union officers and rank and file workers. We feel good about it, yet it is the merest ripple on the sea of workers. Our program reaches only the organized workforce. That leaves — in Alabama alone — 78 percent of workers without this particular kind of help. It is just one more item on a lengthy list of things Southern workers do without.

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STATE-BY-STATE PROFILES

Profiles on the position of the wage-earning population in the 13 Southern states have not been attempted since World War II. Examining economic patterns, probing into contemporary organizing, grappling with the impact of the law, and developing themes from hundreds of conversations, miles of travel, thousands of government documents, union records, internal memos, Federal Reserve data, standard written sources, innovative oral sources—all have resulted in the state-by-state profiles presented here. The essays and charts suggest a way of looking at, and understanding, your own state, or any Southern state, for insiders and others.

Data speaks to many, quantitatively measuring differences and change, patterns and exceptions, the lowest and highest. We have presented employment in the economic sectors, and in the top three manufacturing industries, for each state, highlighting the position of blacks and women (the growing segment of workers); the charts also allow a comparison of the contribution each sector makes to the state's "Gross State Product" (the total value of all goods and services in the state), and the relation of wages paid in the state's top industries to the national average of wages in those industries. A listing of the top unions and companies further details the opposing forces. And the chart at right capsulizes the key labor laws in each state and the degree of union organization.

The essays flesh out what the data reveals: economic development, capital flows, union campaigns, new organizing tools for workers, historical background and future projections. By closely examining each Southern state, many patterns emerge, most having longer histories and deeper roots than we can chronicle here: angry public employees and runaway shops, legal barriers and in-

transigent employers, racial divisions and pervasive poverty.

Preparing a labor profile is not an easy task in the South. Hardly a newspaper in the region has a labor desk. Few universities have programs even remotely related to the Southerner as worker. Unions are also ill-equipped or too preoccupied to record significant facts (such as the racial composition of their own membership), much less analyze larger trends (such as the movements of particular industries). And few alternative organizations—like those in the public interest or environmental fields—have done the careful research needed to support a program of action for working Southerners.

Bridging the gap between the skilled researcher/writer and the experienced organizer/activist is one of the roles of the Institute for Southern Studies, the publisher of *Southern Exposure*. These profiles represent only in a sketchy fashion the potential of understanding particular labor struggles or statistics within a larger picture of trends within the labor force and the biggest employers in the state. The J.P. Stevens fight, for example, becomes more important when viewed in the context of an industry that has an increasing number of black workers within an overall declining workforce that still constitutes the largest group of industrial workers in the region; and the organizing among service and public employees becomes critical when it is recognized that these are the growth sectors of the South's and the nation's economy. From more detailed knowledge of the weaknesses and strengths of key industries, unions and workers' organization can better determine strategies, and academics and journalists can analyze changes in their proper context.

These profiles were written by the Institute's staff with the help of numerous people. For general background, we thank especially N.C. AFL-CIO president Wilbur Hobby, Marsha Silverman of AFSCME, writer Neill Herring, and Neal Peirce's informative *Deep South States*. Special thanks are extended to Emil Malizia, associate professor at the University of North Carolina, for guidance on the statistical methods used in developing the charts; Lawrence Lynch of the Univ. of Kentucky and E. Evans Brunson of the Southern Growth Policies Board for their study of the region's growth; Jim Overton for untiring research assistance; and the staff of the BASS reference library at UNC. From the Institute staff, Deborah Mercer and Bill Finger coordinated the compilation of the data and narratives that follow with associates Susan Angell, Bob Arnold, Steve Hoffius, Sean Devereux and Jennifer Miller.

photo by Barry Mittan



| LABOR LAWS | Union shop contracts ¹ | Negotiated checkoff ² | State minimum wage ³ | Prevailing wage law ⁴ | Maximum work hours | Workman's Compensation ⁹ | Unemployment Insurance ¹⁰ | Public Employees Rights to Represent ¹¹ | Current OSHA Enforcement ¹⁴ | % Nonagricultural workers in unions in state rank |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Alabama | No | No | none | Yes | none | \$102 | \$ 90 | fire fighters' organizations are authorized to have memoranda with employers | Fed. | 19.1% 26 |
| Arkansas | No | Yes | \$1.90 | Yes | none ⁵ | \$ 77 | \$ 92 | Port Authority has duty to bargain with employees; other public empl. may bargain if employer permits; checkoff permitted | Fed. | 16.8% 31 |
| Florida | No | No | none | Yes | 10 hr day | \$105 | \$ 82 | pub. emp. have right to barg. ¹² | Fed. | 12.5% 46 |
| Georgia | No | No | \$1.25 | No | none ⁶ | \$ 95 | \$ 90 | fire fighters may bargain coll. | Fed. | 14.5% 41 |
| Kentucky | Yes | Yes | \$1.60 | Yes | none ⁷ | \$ 96 | \$ 80 | fire and police in towns over 300,000 can barg. coll.; others may discuss terms, not binding. | State | 25.1% 21 |
| Louisiana | No | Yes | none | Yes | none | \$110 | \$ 90 | no prohibitive state law | Fed. | 16.3% 32 |
| Mississippi | No | Yes | none | No | 11 hr day | \$ 84 | \$ 80 | no state law | Fed. | 12.0% 47 |
| North Carolina | No | No | \$2.00 | No | 10 hr day 56 hr wk | \$146 | \$ 97 | collective bargaining contracts not allowed | State | 6.9% 50 |
| South Carolina | No | No | none | No | 8 hr day 40 hr wk | \$ 95 | \$ 96 | reprsn. allowed in grievance procedures | State | 8.0% 49 |
| Tennessee | No | No | none | Yes | none | \$ 85 | \$ 85 | contracts not allowed, but they exist, esp. in Memphis | State | 18.7% 28 |
| Texas | No | No | \$1.40 | Yes | none ⁸ | \$ 70 | \$ 63 | reprsn. allowed in grievance proced.; fire, police can barg. ¹³ | Fed. | 13.0% 45 |
| Virginia | No | No | \$2.00 | No | none | \$149 | \$ 87 | no law; governor against barg. | Fed. | 13.8% 44 |
| West Virginia | Yes | Yes | \$2.00 | Yes | 44 hr wk | \$173 | \$115 | no state law | Fed. | 38.2% 2 |

—prepared by Charles Jeffress

Key To Charts

The "Total Labor Force Breakdown" chart is derived from Bureau of Census material with the addition of four columns related to the contribution each industrial sector makes to the gross state product (GSP). The GSP is a measurement of "the sum of the value of all goods produced in an accounting period." The concept and the figures used here are developed by Albert W. Neimi in his book, *Gross State Product and Productivity in the Southeast* (UNC Press, 1975); the figures are adjusted for inflation to 1958 dollars. The sectors used in the chart are grouped in obvious ways: manufacturing, agriculture, etc. The trade and distribution category includes transportation, communications, public utilities, wholesale and retail trade (everything from airline pilots to telephone operators to dime-store clerks). Service here includes workers in finance, insurance, real estate; business and repair services; personal services; entertainment

For special help on each state, we thank—
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 Texas: Molly Ivins and Tony Dunbar.
 Va.: Julian Carper.
 W.Va.: Robb Burlage, Betty Justice, and George Hopkins.

1. In Ark. and Miss., union shop contracts have been outlawed by constitutional amendments.
2. In all states, union members may have their dues deducted from their wages if they sign written authorizations with the employer.
3. State minimum wage laws apply to employees not covered under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. Southern states generally exclude public employees, farm laborers, domestics, persons paid by piece-work or commission, and many others.
4. Prevailing wage laws require businesses with contracts from the state to pay their employees wages at least as high as similar workers in the area receive.
5. Limit for saw mill workers: 10 hrs/day.
6. Limit for textile workers: 10 hrs/day; 60 hrs/wk.
7. Limit on public projects workers: 8/day; 40/wk.
8. Same as No. 7 except 48 hours per week.
9. Maximum benefits are tied to a percentage of the state's average weekly wage in the following states: Fla., La., SC, each 66%; NC, Va., each 100%.
10. Benefits are tied to a percentage of the state's average weekly wage in the following states: Ark., La., NC, SC, WVa., each 66%; Ky, 50%.
11. Public employees have been guaranteed the right to join employee organizations (including unions) in every Southern state except Tennessee; however, except as noted, they have no legal standing to negotiate. Where they can bargain collectively, they can not strike.
12. See Fla. profile for details on public employees.
13. Texas firemen and police can bargain collectively if voters in their cities endorse the right by referendum.
14. The 1970 Occupational Safety & Health Act allowed states to enforce their own plans; these plans are monitored by the feds and none have been finally certified as the official OSHA enforcement mechanism.

and recreation; professional and related services; and government (SIC numbers 60-90). An asterisk (*) indicates that fewer than 0.6% of the sector's workforce was in this class.

The "Top Manufacturing" chart gives the state's three largest industries (invariably low-wage, labor-intensive industries long established in the state, like food products, or newer ones, like electrical equipment). Figures for 1950 come from Census data; the total employment numbers for 1974 are from the Southern Growth Policies Board's study by Lynch and Brunson; the proportions for 1974 come from the 1973 EEOC published report of affirmative action data. The average hourly wage for 1950 (where available) and 1974 was taken from the Labor Dept.'s *Employment and Earnings, States and Areas*, and for the national industries' averages for 1974, we used the *1975 Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, International Labour Office, Geneva. The hourly wage as a percent of the industry's national average indicates that Southern workers are in almost every case (where the figure is less than 1.00) paid below the national average for workers in similar jobs. (n.a. means not available.)

The "Top Companies" chart provides data on the biggest single manufacturers in the state as compiled in the industrial handbooks published variously by the state government, Chamber of Commerce, or a university.

The "Top Unions" chart probably has more problems than any here because of the variety of methods used to count union membership, the inconsistency among the international unions in collecting information from locals, and the lack of a central coordinating body to provide uniformity in the statistics (both the AFL-CIO and the Bureau of Labor Statistics depend on the internationals to report their own memberships). Consequently, the numbers here, taken from the 1976 BLS list, should be considered tentative, possibly even misleading in both the ranking of size and the actual number of union members.

alabama

Alabama is still trying to overcome the inglorious legacy of Confederacy, cotton, and civil rights. A courageous civil rights movement revealed the lamentable condition of blacks in Alabama to the nation. But it only took one constant campaigner for the presidency — George Wallace — to direct many people's attention to the general state of working people in Alabama.

Since 1962, Alabama has ranked 47th in per capita personal income; the dollar discrepancy between Alabama and the nation has widened 68%. Alabama has the second highest infant mortality rate in the South and ranks 50th in annual expenditures per pupil for elementary and secondary schools.

The most glaring problem may well be the inequitable tax structure. Indeed Attorney General Baxley called it "the most regressive in the country" to which Governor George Wallace replied, "a regressive tax system, but one where the burden isn't felt" by the working person. The facts support Mr. Baxley. The rich of Alabama pay no inheritance or gift tax and only a tiny estate tax, while corpora-

tions profit from the 5% limit on taxes of corporate income.

The state property tax is 44% higher than the national average and assessments are based on the last selling price of the property. Timber companies alone own over 3,300,000 acres of land — most of it bought decades ago at very low prices. But homeowners are penalized by the relatively high turnover rate in the housing market and the taxes that turn with it. They also bear the brunt of the sales taxes on items like food and prescription medicines which accounted for 66.6% of the taxes collected by the state in 1974.

To top it off, there is no minimum wage law and the notorious right-to-work statute is still on the books.

Workman's compensation laws are a different story, thanks to organized labor. Last year, in a special legislative session, organized labor rammed through raises of 20 and 35% in unemployment and workman's compensation benefits, and maximum benefits for hospitalization, rehabilitation, and death were raised significantly.

Organized labor has been active in Alabama since the 1890s when the Knights of Labor led strikes in the trans-

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | | | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | | | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | | | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|----------------|---|------|----|----|
| | | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 | | | |
| Manufacturing | \$3,355 | 37 | 28 | 31 | 326 | 27 | 25 | 22 | 20.7 | 19 | 26 | 27.6 | 22 | 19 |
| Trade & Distribution | 2,256 | 25 | 25 | 24 | 293 | 24 | 22 | 21 | 15.6 | 17 | 20 | 33.0 | 31 | 28 |
| Service | 2,679 | 30 | 34 | 30 | 390 | 32 | 30 | 23 | 28.5 | 37 | 42 | 57.3 | 58 | 56 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 367 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 44 | 4 | 10 | 25 | 25.3 | 36 | 38 | 11.3 | 9 | 11 |
| Construction | 251 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 77 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 20.0 | 20 | 24 | 5.0 | 3 | 2 |
| Mining | 153 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 23.5 | 25 | 36 | 2.9 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 9,063 | | | | 1,202 | | | | 21.0 | 25 | 31 | 27.6 | 25 | 22 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Apparel | | Textiles | | Primary Metals | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|---------|--------|----------|--------|----------------|--------|------------------------|------------|--------|----------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 51,600 | 8,300 | 49,800 | 53,111 | 46,400 | 46,300 | US Steel | 12,000 | 4 | steel, metal prod. |
| % male | 15 | 18 | 55 | 57 | 95 | 96 | West Pt.-Pepp'l | | 12 | textile goods |
| % female | 85 | 82 | 45 | 43 | 5 | 4 | Russell Corp. | 5,500 | 20 | apparel products |
| % black male | 2 | 2 | 13 | 5 | 28 | 34 | Avondale Mills | 5,000 | 8 | textile goods |
| % black female | 16 | 2 | 9 | 1 | * | * | US Pipe & Found. | 4,500 | 6 | castings, pipe, iron |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$2.61 | \$0.88 | \$3.06 | \$1.16 | \$5.39 | \$1.44 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .87 | .71 | .96 | .95 | .96 | .87 | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | 35,100 | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 11,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Laborers | 11,000 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 10,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers | 9,200 | | |

portation, textile, and lumber industries. By 1902, 65% of the state's miners belonged to the United Mine Workers (UMW), many of them in integrated locals. The coal operators, however, used convict labor, local police and the state militia to crush the union in the great strikes of 1908 and 1920. The union finally won recognition in 1934 and claimed a membership of 23,000 in 92 locals.

The United Rubber Workers (URW), with 1,000 members presently on strike against Goodyear, Goodrich and Uniroyal, have an equally valiant history. A strike earlier in the century (that resembles the current one) ended with the hospitalization of the Gadsden local president and total destruction of the union headquarters. No one expects this type of violence to occur in the present strike, but it is important to remember that labor's strength in Alabama today is the direct result of years of struggle and sacrifice.

The battles bore fruit. Today, Alabama, with over 230,000 union members, has the third highest unionization rate in the South. Though the recession severely curtailed organizing activities, union growth has outpaced the increase in employment; organizing drives have been revived in textiles, construction, and the public employee sector as the economy lurches into a tenuous recovery.

Union membership in "the Heart of Dixie" has always been tied to vagaries in the national economy. The steel, rubber, aluminum, and communications industries form the industrial base of Alabama, and they are controlled by national contracts. These heavy, high-wage industries have given Alabama one of the highest average weekly manufacturing wages in the South, although they are not increasing as fast as in other states.

The industries that aren't highly unionized, like textiles and electrical equipment and supplies, have low-wage scales, and the workforce, mostly females and blacks, suffer the consequences. In apparels, 85% of the employees are female and 20% are black (90% of whom are female). A similar situation exists for hospital workers where the breakdown is 81% female and 30% black, with 76% of the black employees women.

Birmingham has historically been the scene of major organizing drives, such as the United States Steel Workers campaign of 1917. These struggles took a new twist when black union members at the Fairfield works and the NAACP filed a suit against the USW's discriminatory seniority system and won. The seniority structure was scrapped and US Steel, a co-defendant in the suit, was found guilty of discriminatory hiring policies. The USW is not alone in this field. Although no suit has been brought against it, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) has a dubious tradition of segregated locals, and integration has only made modest progress in the past five years. But the union's members are still capable of working together as they proved in 1975 when 3,000 employees of Alabama Shipbuilding and Drydock successfully struck for higher wages and fringe benefits.

Black participation in unions will continue to be an important question as corporations gobble up family farms (the number of farms in Alabama plummeted from 232,000 on the eve of World War II to 72,000 in 1969) and agricultural employment opportunities decline, forcing the Black Belt population to continue their migration to the industrial centers of Alabama or out of the state. A few jobs will develop in the Black Belt as construction on the Tennessee-



Photo by Jeff Jacobson

Tombigbee Navigation System progresses. Six of the nine counties along the proposed system have black populations of 40% or more but the minority hiring quota is only 16%. In addition, blacks were and continue to be grossly under-represented in the planning process.

Tenn-Tom's proximity to major markets and its electrical generating capacity are sure to attract industries such as food processing, chemicals, machinery and primary metals to the nine county area; it remains to be seen whether the local folks or imported skilled labor will be hired for the jobs created. Despite the combined efforts of several black organizations, the history of employment practices in Alabama lends itself to a pessimistic conclusion. In any case Mobile will benefit — the volume of goods flowing through the port is supposed to double once the project is completed, making Mobile a rival to New Orleans.

Critics of the Tennessee-Tombigbee correctly point out that by understating the environmental impact backers of the project have misled people about its true cost-benefit ratio. Nevertheless, the completion of the project will complement the TVA system of northern Alabama, creating the best state water transportation system in the country. That fact, along with a large unskilled labor pool and negligible corporate taxes in the nine county area, has not been lost on international capital. In January, 1976, the Alabama Development Organization (ADO), Governor Wallace, and the Consulate-General of Japan sponsored a forum for 200 trade experts from both governments to discuss the opportunities for expanded trade and investment. British industrialists, escaping "British Socialism," have also been attracted by the state's warm attitude towards foreign capital. That country's Martin Brothers Tool Makers located a \$1 million, 100 employee powder metallurgy plant in Huntsville and by doing so, according to the ADO, found "sanctuary in the still militantly capitalistic state of Alabama."

There is no doubt that Alabama has come a long way from those days when King Cotton reigned and the traveler in late summer would see "mile after mile of fleecy cotton fields, a physical impression like snow in August." But Barney Weeks, president of the Alabama Labor Council, aptly described the condition of most working people in Alabama when he spoke of seniority structures and blacks, "We're making some progress, but we have a long way to go."

arkansas

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$1,696 | 34 | 22 | 19 | 170 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 14.1 | 14 | 20 | 35.0 | 24 | 16 |
| Trade & Distribution | 1,273 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 167 | 26 | 25 | 22 | 8.8 | 11 | 12 | 33.8 | 30 | 27 |
| Service | 1,324 | 26 | 30 | 28 | 209 | 32 | 28 | 20 | 16.7 | 23 | 25 | 57.8 | 56 | 50 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 508 | 10 | 16 | 17 | 55 | 8 | 18 | 35 | 16.1 | 26 | 27 | 10.4 | 6 | 7 |
| Construction | 126 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 44 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 8.3 | 11 | 12 | 4.6 | 3 | 2 |
| Mining | 79 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6.4 | 4 | 5 | 7.9 | 5 | 3 |
| Totals | 5,006 | | | | 650 | | | | 13.3 | 20 | 21 | 37.6 | 29 | 21 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Food | | Electrical Equip. | | Lumber, Wood | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|--------|--------|-------------------|-------|--------------|--------|---------------------------|---------|--------|-----------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 26,900 | 10,700 | 22,200 | 1,200 | 21,500 | 35,600 | Whirlpool Corp. | 5,000 | 2 | appliances |
| % male | 59 | 79 | 55 | 40 | 87 | 98 | Timex Corp. | 4,800 | 3 | watches, camera |
| % female | 41 | 21 | 45 | 60 | 13 | 2 | Georgia-Pacific | 4,300 | 5 | wood, paper pd. |
| % black male | 8 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 31 | 30 | Internl. Paper | 4,200 | 7 | wood, paper |
| % black female | 4 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 4 | * | Emerson Electric | 3,700 | 6 | appliances |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$2.86 | n.a. | \$3.41 | n.a. | \$3.08 | \$0.98 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .68 | n.a. | .82 | n.a. | .78 | .75 | MEMBERSHIP | | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | | 11,300 | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | | 7,800 | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | | 7,000 | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | | 6,700 | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | | 4,200 | |

At the end of World War II, the powers in Arkansas were the Delta plantation owners, the Baptist church, the timber interests, and the Arkansas Power and Light Co., the latter absentee-owned. While those powers still influence the Arkansas economy, the combination of pork-barrel politics, Winthrop Rockefeller, and the national post-war economic boom has considerably altered the state's economy.

The commitment to industrialization in Arkansas began in 1955 when demagogic Governor Oval Faubus appointed Winthrop Rockefeller chairman of the newly-created Arkansas Industrial Development Commission (AIDC). By 1964, the end of Rockefeller's tenure as head of the AIDC, more than 600 new industrial plants had located in Arkansas and approximately 90,000 new jobs were created with an annual payroll of \$270 million.

The growing industrial sector demanded new labor, and the inevitable demographic shift from country to town gained momentum. Today, the urban/rural population mix is 50/50 (still in sharp contrast to the national mix of

77/23) and agricultural employment has steadily declined. Between 1955 and 1970, non-agricultural employment jumped by 200,000, and the number of manufacturing workers in Arkansas grew twice as fast as the national average.

The tremendous surge in non-agricultural employment created the objective conditions necessary for the growth of a strong labor movement in the state. One indication of this potential power is Arkansans for Progress, a labor-led coalition of civil rights, consumer and religious organizations formed to repeal Arkansas' "right-to-work" constitutional amendment. (see Bill Becker's article)

In general, organized labor is on the offensive in Arkansas. The anti-unionism of politicians and the press has moderated in recent years, and unions like IUE, ACTWU, USW, Machinists, and Teamsters have taken advantage of this new climate by leading aggressive drives for new membership. The targets of these and other union drives are generally new national and multinational corporations that

have expanded their operations or located new facilities in the state. ACTWU recently launched an organizing drive at four Phillips-Van Huesen plants and immediately the company retaliated with standard threats of firing, closing the plant, and loss of independence to an "outside" union. (Van Huesen makes its corporate home in Pennsylvania.) The workers and Amalgamated fought back and the company had to publicly announce that no one would lose his or her job for union activities and no plants would be closed if employees won the right to bargain. Workers not only won the right to organize but they also won the constitutionally guaranteed rights of free speech and free assembly. Another target for labor is Whirlpool, Arkansas' largest industrial employer, which just completed a \$3.2 million expansion of their warehouse facilities at the Fort Smith Division. The 307,000 square foot addition will bring total floor space at the distribution center to 621,000 square feet or, as the AIDC boasts, "fourteen square acres of land under one roof." This complex employs 2,500 of the 5,000 Whirlpool employees in Arkansas and during peak shipping periods can fill 75 to 100 railroad cars each day. The AIDC forgot to mention that those "fourteen square acres of land" and 2,500 workers have been organized by the Allied Industrial Workers.

"Older" Arkansas companies haven't been forgotten. 2,500 members of the International Woodworkers Association (IWA) went on strike against Weyerhaeuser (one of the first multinationals to locate in Arkansas) to gain parity with the wages paid to Weyerhaeuser employees in the Northwest. The strike ended in June, 1976, after 20 weeks on the picket lines. Weyerhaeuser workers won an hourly increase of \$1.20 over the next three years.

As in other Southern states, state employees are receiving more attention from the labor movement. Unlike most Southern states, however, Arkansas does not prohibit the rights of state employees to organize and bargain collectively; indeed, state agencies (save the Highway Department) have mandatory dues check-off if the union wins the election. Unions like AFSCME have cashed in on this surprisingly liberal policy, and this union now represents approximately 2,000 employees in state agencies like the University of Arkansas as well as state hospitals.

Altogether, organized labor represents over 100,000



workers in Arkansas, approximately 16% of the non-agricultural workforce. And while this figure is 8 points below the national average, it ranks among the highest in the South. Arkansas has also had the highest percentage of organizing victories in the region in recent years.

In spite of the growth in the industrial sector and organized labor, Arkansas is still beset by widespread unemployment and poverty. The Arkansas Delta (practically all of eastern Arkansas) and the delta regions of Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana comprise the "largest poverty area in the country." And eight of Arkansas' 74 counties have been labelled areas of "persistent" or "substantial" unemployment, suffering an unemployment rate twice as high as the state's overall average. Six of the eight counties mentioned above lie in the Ozark and Ouachita mountain ranges of western Arkansas. In 1969, 22.8% of the families and 58% of the unrelated individuals in the state lived below the poverty level. The comparative situations nationally were 10.7% and 37%. Many of these people are the working poor of Arkansas — people that work in the low-wage lumber, food processing, apparel, and furniture industries — the biggest industrial job providers in Arkansas.

For example, the lumber industry employed 21,500 people in 1974 or 13% of the manufacturing labor force — a drop from 35,600 and 47% in 1950. Productivity per worker has increased since 1950 yet the average hourly wage for workers in the lumber industry is still 22% below the national average — a mere 3% gain on the national standard since 1950. Food processing, employing 26,900 people, pays wages that are 32% below the national average.

The people bearing the brunt of these low wages, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, are women and blacks. In the lumber industry, 35% of the workforce is black (the population percentage is 15%), including 50% of the industry's laborers and 41% of the operatives. The other end of the job spectrum shows blacks holding 17% of the skilled craft positions and only 3% of the managerial positions. This story infamously recurs in most of Arkansas' major industries. (see Youngdahl's article)

The situation is no better for women. In footwear, meat products, apparel and instruments, three-quarters of the workforce is female. Rarely, however, do women hold anything close to *one-fourth* of the managerial positions. But when it comes to clerical or blue-collar work the percentages soar to 70% and 80%. "Instruments" is particularly unique for it is the only industry listed by the EEOC that has a large (28%) number of black women in the workforce. The employment for women in the industries mentioned above is overwhelmingly white.

Arkansas' population has already surpassed 1980 projections for growth by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis; but the absolute and relative population of "Negroes and other racial minorities" has fallen. Between 1960 and 1970 the state's population grew 7.7% while the minority population dropped 7.3%. This drop was due to the out-migration of 109,000 members of racial minorities, the largest portion of them leaving the non-metropolitan areas of the southern and eastern parts of the state. Even though the AIDC claims Arkansas is the "Land of Opportunity," many poor Arkansans have decided to "vote with their feet." And while some of the poorest people in the state leave and the GSP grows, Arkansas remains 49th on the national per capita income ladder.

florida

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$3,560 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 342 | 14 | 13 | 11 | 10.8 | 12 | 21 | 30.9 | 24 | 21 |
| Trade & Distribution | 6,833 | 33 | 30 | 30 | 758 | 31 | 29 | 32 | 10.3 | 12 | 15 | 37.3 | 33 | 30 |
| Service | 8,456 | 41 | 43 | 44 | 1,000 | 41 | 36 | 33 | 16.8 | 22 | 27 | 53.5 | 51 | 49 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 745 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 111 | 5 | 7 | 13 | 38.9 | 47 | 46 | 23.7 | 20 | 19 |
| Construction | 979 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 206 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 15.8 | 18 | 20 | 6.0 | 4 | 2 |
| Mining | 139 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 | * | * | * | 21.0 | 25 | 29 | 6.5 | 4 | 3 |
| Totals | 20,712 | | | | 2,426 | | | | 14.9 | 18 | 24 | 39.5 | 33 | 31 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Food | | Electrical Equip. | | Transp. Equip. | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|--------|--------|-------------------|-------|----------------|--------|---------------------------|------------|--------|------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 49,100 | 26,000 | 42,300 | 1,000 | 31,900 | 3,900 | Monsanto | 5,300 | 1 | chem., phosph. |
| % male | 66 | 76 | 60 | 81 | 87 | 93 | Pratt & Whitney | 5,000 | 1 | research |
| % female | 34 | 24 | 40 | 19 | 13 | 7 | Radiation | 4,800 | 6 | surveillance eq. |
| % black male | 18 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 13 | Martin-Marietta | 4,000 | 1 | space, defense |
| % black female | 8 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 1 | * | Honeywell | 3,500 | 2 | elec. equip. |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.58 | \$1.00 | \$3.55 | n.a. | \$4.42 | \$1.29 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .86 | .79 | .85 | n.a. | .80 | .75 | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Carpenters | 31,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 30,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Laborers | 22,700 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 19,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 17,700 | | |

On March 9, 1972, Westinghouse Electric Corporation and Tenneco, Inc. proposed to the citizens of Jacksonville, Florida, that the two giant corporations build a factory on Blount Island in the St. Johns River to the northeast of the city. The project would manufacture floating nuclear generators and be called Offshore Power Systems (OPS). The elation of the Jacksonville Area Chamber of Commerce knew no bounds. The joint venturers promised a \$200-million initial investment, with jobs for as many as 14,000 Jacksonville workers and an annual payroll of \$100 million. Predictions were that 70,000 new residents would swell Duval County's tax rolls.

Environmentalists balked. The project would involve the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in a colossal dredge-and-fill operation, five million cubic yards of river bottom mud would be deposited, 1350 acres of productive salt marsh would be affected. Citizen groups doubted that taxes from 70,000 new residents would pay for services for those residents, and they called for a cost/benefit study by the Center for Urban Studies at the University of Miami. Florida

Audubon filed suit for an injunction against granting of the dredge-and-fill permit.

Labor leaders responded immediately. "The environmentalists are a dangerous group. The Audubon Society will bring this country to its knees," said the president of Jacksonville's Building Trades Council, who had already declared a no-strike agreement between the construction unions he represented and Offshore Power Systems. "OPS will be a fine thing for Jacksonville," he said.

It was an old Florida story: headlong growth versus the natural beauty and resources that inspired the growth in the first place. The huckster — the hawkker of underwater real estate, the Chamber of Commerce tub thumper, the snake oil salesman — is to the history of Florida what the cowboy is to Texas. Henry Flagler was the first of these visionary pioneers. His obsession was to build a railroad which would transport out-of-state visitors from the Georgia line to Key West at the tip of the continent. Like his spiritual descendants in the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, he advertised jobs as a selling point for his pro-

ject. Flagler got his train track laid, but at large cost: 700 workers and one whole trainload of tourists were washed away by hurricanes for which Flagler's engineers had neglected to plan. The enterprises of P.T. "There's a sucker born every minute" Barnum are permanently quartered now in Sarasota.

The livelihood of Florida has depended upon the ability to talk others into coming to the state and spending money — "keeping Florida green" as the process is known to the Tourist and Convention Bureau. Things may have been overdone. In 1940, less than two million people lived in Florida; in 1972, the state's population had reached 7,441,545 — a cumulative growth rate of 192% in 32 years. In 1972, 282,000 houses and apartments were built in Florida, more new building than in any other state, 13% of all new housing in the country. Retirement and tourism are behind these growth figures — Americans are living longer now than they did in 1940 and have more money to spend. Air conditioning has helped. Military installations at Pensacola, Key West and Jacksonville have brought their share of outsiders to the state. The Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral promised to populate central Florida solid from Orlando to the coast and, for a time in the middle 1960s, this promise kept Brevard County growing faster than any county in the nation. For miles along U.S. A1A in south Florida, the Atlantic Ocean, 100 yards from the highway, cannot be seen through the palisades of high rise motels and condominiums. The hordes made increased demands on the peninsula that had inspired Ponce De Leon to describe the day of its discovery as *Pascua Florida*, "Flowery Easter." As long as the sun shone on the beaches and the tide came and went with some regularity, no one with any real say-so was too concerned — least of all the leaders of the workers who built the motels and condominiums.

Then, in the early 1970s, Dade County (Miami) began to run out of fresh water. It was not an overnight crisis. For 80 years, south Florida land developers had drained the potable waters of Lake Okeechobee through canals to coastal cities. Sea water began to seep into low fresh water wells. No amount of air-conditioned condominium comfort can compensate a tourist for having to drink salt water. And for Miami construction and tourist industry workers turning on their taps during an exhausting workday, the meaning of ecology may have come home.

Labor may read a portent in two recent events: in January, 1970, before even more south Florida watershed could be draglined away, residents managed to thwart plans for a 39-square-mile jetport in the Big Cypress Swamp, just north of the Everglades. Then, in January, 1971, after a decade of hoopla from Chamber of Commerce cheerleaders and pork-barrel politicians, construction on the Cross-State Barge Canal — 25 percent completed at a cost of \$50 million — was ordered stopped.

High rise building is currently forbidden on the Keys. In 1972, under the leadership of Gov. Reubin Askew, the state passed a water and land management act under which any new development would be scrutinized at various levels of government before final approval. The act declared some lands to be "environmentally endangered" and off-limits to developers. The dredge-and-fill permit for Jacksonville's OPS project was granted — the federal judge cited an *amicus curiae* brief submitted by the Jacksonville Building Trades Council and noted the need for jobs for Jacksonville's

underemployed — but Westinghouse and Tenneco were required to buy and deed to the state comparable marsh acreage.

The recession also forced the brakes on Florida's reckless building. OPS used their permit to fill the Back River Marsh just before investment capital ran out and Tenneco withdrew from the project. Now there are no new jobs in Jacksonville, nor any marsh remaining around Blount Island. In central and south Florida, construction has always been tied to tourism. During the fuel shortages of 1973-74, the volume of the tourist trade diminished only slightly, and even more surprisingly, rose during the recession of the following winter. Auto industry workers, laid off into the cold, came to Florida to take that long-delayed vacation. The expansion of capital facilities for tourism, however, nearly ceased and has not revived. The recession has deprived developers of financing and left clusters of abandoned motels along the roads to Disney World.

"People are still coming to Florida but they are coming in camp trailers now," observes Jim Deaton of the AFL-CIO Council in Jacksonville. Whichever the cause — more stringent environmental laws or the state of the economy — the effect has been a slowdown. Migration into Florida, running at a rate of 400,000 a year in the early 1970s, slowed to 100,000 in 1975. Only 150,000 building trades workers are currently employed where 300,000 were working in the second quarter of 1973. The official figure for unemployment in the building trades is 30%; many have simply left the state. General unemployment in Florida was up to 11% at the end of 1975, compared with a 7.5% figure for the nation. (These figures do not include the fact that nearly 15% of Florida's people are over 65 years old and retired.)

Like everything else about Florida, manufacturing industries have grown dramatically (1940 gross output: \$116 million; 1960, \$2 billion; 1974, \$4 billion). But Florida has not become a major manufacturing state. Industry is centered in Jacksonville, Tampa, Miami and is growing in Orlando and Tallahassee; plants turn out food products, chemicals, paper and pulp, metals, cigars, fashions and electronic equipment. The future of the aerospace industry is not as stellar as it was before NASA moved to Houston.

A strong resistance to unionism prevails among the relatively small owners of the motels, bars and amusement parks. Employment generated by tourism is labor intensive and generally characterized by low skills of entry, high turnover and low wages. Consequently, organization is spotty and primarily in craft organizations — Musicians, Bartenders, Actors, etc.

One vital component of the tourist business is transportation which employs large numbers of highly skilled individuals in a variety of capacities. The largest single source of employment in the Miami area, for example, is air transport with Eastern Airlines the area's number one employer. The airlines workers in Florida, with the exception of Delta Airlines employees, are well organized. Employees of the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, both out on the line and in SCL national office building in Jacksonville are also organized. Florida East Coast Railway is run by octogenarian Edward W. Ball, trustee of the Alfred I. DuPont Estate. His ideas about organized labor are not dissimilar to those of most multi-millionaires. Ball has blocked organization of FEC employees, although railway workers

enjoyed a brief moment of retribution in 1966 when they caused Congress to divest Ball of his bank holdings. The non-union, but no less militant, railroadmen pointed out Ball's banks were held by the DuPont Estate in violation of the 1956 Federal Bank Holdings Act.

Although Florida has long had a right-to-work law, the state constitution guarantees public employees the right to collective bargaining. The constitutional provision lay dormant, however, until legislation, effective January 1, 1975, established the Public Employees Relations Commission (PERC) to approve bargaining units, investigate and resolve recognition disputes, and rule on unfair labor practices — more or less a little NLRB for Florida's state employees. The law, unique in the South, has been a boon to organizers. For a long time, three construction trade unions — Carpenters, IBEW and Laborers — have been the largest in Florida with the Communications Workers and Teamsters fourth and fifth in membership. Since PERC, employee union membership has surpassed that of the building trades unions, according to AFL-CIO reckoning.

It has taken some time for public employees to become comfortable with trade unionism. The organization of Florida's teachers provides interesting lessons. For a long time, teachers flirted with both the Florida Education Association (FEA), the National Education Association (NEA) affiliate, and the tougher American Federation of Teachers. The FEA insisted that its members would be professionally contaminated by associating with "mere workers." The AFT, on the other hand, belonged to the AFL-CIO and made no bones about being a trade union. Both groupings, each representing a philosophical view of the profession, remain, although the names have gone through a series of changes: the larger organization, now called the new FEA/United (no longer an NEA affiliate), ironically coincides with the leadership and unionism of the former AFT; those teachers who belonged to the FEA because they were "professionals" and not "workers" have gravitated toward the Florida Teaching Profession, the new NEA affiliate. The passage of PERC has spurred both groups to prodigious recruitment efforts. One big victory for FEA/United and a surprise to traditionally conservative Southern educators, was the victory of its affiliate, the United Faculty of Florida, as the collective bargaining agent for faculty members in the state university system. Learning from its AFL-CIO older brothers, the FEA/United has become much more active politically — electioneering and fundraising in Democratic politics. Its actively trade-unionist publication is a far cry from teachers' newsletters in the

early 1960s.

AFSCME is another union that has blossomed under PERC protection. And the Laborers have been organizing state employees. All of these unions have benefited, as well, from the growth of state employment over the last several years (1972 total government employment in Florida: 437,900; in 1976: 561,700). AFSCME and the Laborers have competed for state employees before, so both unions are proceeding cautiously. It is AFSCME's strategy to organize one sector of state employees at a time, Corrections, then Mental Health, and so on.

As a source of employment, citrus growing is almost unique in agribusiness in offering nearly year-round work for harvesters and other laborers. The citrus fruits—lemons, oranges, tangerines and grapefruits—are ready to pick in different months, and in the off months the groves must be tended. Gradually the labor force of the citrus industry has stabilized at around 25,000 workers, most of whom do not migrate to jobs outside Florida. In fact, there may soon be a shortage of citrus workers, because, while production rises each year, the prevailing wage for fruit pickers (\$1.80/hour in 1975) is not attracting workers in sufficient numbers. A stabilized workforce also offers new possibilities for union organizing. The only contract held by the United Farm Workers outside California and Arizona is with the Minute Maid Company. Minute Maid and its parent company, the obsessively public-relations conscious Coca-Cola, were stunned in 1971 by a half-hour NBC documentary examining conditions in the fruit picker camps. The UFW, which had been organizing Minute Maid workers seized the opportunity to negotiate a contract covering 1200 workers. After considerable trouble that led to a threat by the UFW to boycott Coke, the contract was renewed in late 1975. But the 1200 union members in the orange groves seem a meager group beside the 68,800 unorganized laborers, through Florida's fields. The state's farmworkers now include many numbers of Chicanos who have emigrated from the Southwest seeking higher wages and steadier work. About two thirds of the seasonal farm workers in Florida are local people who travel within the state. Nonetheless, over 14,000 farm workers come to Florida each year from other parts of the country, mainly from Texas. Another 10,000 Jamaicans are specially imported by the sugar plantations in South Florida to cut cane at basically slave wages. Occasionally, news of the unhealthy migrant camps and miserable pay is reported to the outside world, and like the environmental horrors, the other side of Florida's fantasy becomes all too apparent.

georgia

The largest state east of the Mississippi, Georgia has vast acreage in farming and has remained a primarily agricultural state longer than most of its neighbors. The products from these fields still exceed the value of all manufactured goods made in the state. In the midst of this expanse of land sits Atlanta, the thriving boom town of the New South. As a burgeoning service and transportation center, Atlanta contrasts sharply with the southern farm country and the

north Georgia hills.

Commercial farming is concentrated in the lower two-thirds of the state. Peanuts, soybeans, feed grain, cattle, and poultry support fewer, but bigger and richer farmers. A variety of industries including warehousing, fertilizer production, equipment services and financing support the agricultural base — and the New South political base which produced scientist-farmer Jimmy Carter. Timber, both for



lumber and for pulp, is probably the most significant “crop” in the state. Many Georgia lumber mills shut down during the current recession in the construction industry, but the paper plants have continued to operate. Selective breeding, widespread drainage, and automation in planting and harvesting insure continued growth in timber production.

Wages and working conditions in agriculture and timber have improved considerably since the days of cotton and tobacco tenancy and turpentine peonage. The number of workers in the timber industry remained at 40,000 as late as 1940, but has now dwindled to 8,000. Organization in the industry is in the paper and chemical units at the end of production. Isolation and tradition have kept unionization out of the woods, and that tendency is furthered by the organization of the woodcutting business into a myriad of low-capital, low-return, father-and-son units which compete intensively. These independent cutters labor largely at the mercy of woodlot operators who are either directly employed by giant corporations or work under contract relations with them. Potential for unionization depends on altering the present structure of the industry, and resistance to such moves is intense. Some small farmers, particularly those whose cash crop is tobacco, have organized a state unit of the National Farmer’s Organization. But their few engagements with the giant tobacco companies have accomplished precious little.

One of the largest unions in the state is largely composed

of the Georgia Power Company’s line employees. Although basically conservative, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) has a fairly active political program concerned with stronger safety and work rules. The workers last struck the Georgia Power Company in 1938, but the last contract vote (1974) was the closest since that time. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) provide good protection and forward-looking leadership to their members, organized at Southern Bell and Western Electric.

Railroads lace the state, but where there were once scores of companies, today there are only two: The Family Lines System and the Southern Railway. Both systems are among the healthiest financially in the country from transporting the bottomless coal deposits of the Southern Appalachian fields and many of the goods for the South’s era of growth. But the small railroad brotherhoods are not as important to the state’s labor growth as the railroad network is to the economic boom. Trucking follows the national pattern: fleet operators are largely organized by the Teamsters while a growing segment of the business is handled by owner-operators.

Mining is both a traditional activity and one which is expanding. Large phosphate deposits are beginning to be exploited. The largest kaolin supply in the world (which could be important as a bauxite substitute) employs people in a belt stretching from Columbus on the west to Augusta on the east. North Georgia has small deposits of coal which are being worked in only one location while mineral rich Bartow County produces manganese, ochre, nitrites and limestone. Almost all Georgia mining is surface extraction, so output per employee is high. Labor organization in the industry has lagged, although some building stone quarries are unionized.

The majority of Georgia workers are concentrated in manufacturing and service. Textiles, apparel, and other traditional Southern industries maintain a firm foothold in the state, but the booming service sector — based in Atlanta — has taken the lead in employment. Manufacturing now employs only 28% of the workforce while the service sectors, combined with the trade and distribution sectors constitute over 65% of the workers. Blacks have always had the lowest paying jobs, especially in the textile mills, where they were segregated into the cardroom and opening room. By 1973, 88% of the minority workforce were in manufacturing, service or clerical. Only 8% were in professional positions. And women, about one-third of whom work in manufacturing, still have only 17% of their numbers in professional jobs.

Georgia manufacturers have controlled their workers and kept unions out by using the state’s space to spread out their plants. For example, Bibb Manufacturing, third largest industrial employer, has 6,500 people in 15 locations. Number four West Point-Pepperell and number five Union Camp also have their workforce widely dispersed. New plants continue to locate in the white, rural fringes or in small towns, where unskilled and unorganized workers may be recruited at low wages.

Although heroic struggles have from time to time challenged the open-shop bastions, repressive forces in the tradition of Eugene Talmadge’s use of concentration camps

against striking millhands, have usually won in the end. Organization in both textiles and garment production is spotty and weak. Fly-by-night operations, runaway shops, high turnover, and part-time help mitigate against organization. But blacks have poured into the mills since the 1960s. The J.P. Stevens plants, for example, have strongly pro-union workers, with young black leaders.

Other manufacturing in Georgia is highly diversified and expanding. The degree of organization in these industries largely reflects prevalent national patterns with steel, autos, fabrication, aircraft production and chemicals, all well unionized. Exceptions to this trend are not uncommon however, and many manufacturers who bargain with their employees collectively in other parts of the country exploit the anti-union traditions of the region to break the national pattern. This has been manifested in autos at the Monroe Auto Equipment Company in Hartwell, where the company has used the torturous procedures of the National Labor Relations Act to hamstring union organizing for years. (See article by UAW's Don Stillman entitled, "Runaways: A Call to Action.")

One large industry, technically part of textiles, is carpet and rugs. Centered in northwest Georgia, it is a traditional anti-union stronghold. High turnover, seasonal production

scheduling and a lack of union tradition have kept this industry's wage rates only slightly above the minimum wage and its workers totally without organization. The entry of large national corporations into the business may enhance the opportunities for collective bargaining, but as yet no signs have emerged which would indicate that unions are coming any time soon.

Recently, attention has focused on public employees and service workers in Georgia, especially in Atlanta. Georgia's economic future continues to hinge on the growth of Atlanta as a commercial and transportation hub for the region. While the multi-county metropolitan area features a tremendous industrial employment which can be expected to expand with the national shift southward, the bulk of wage labor will continue to be performed in that nebulous category called "service industry," which ranges from janitorial-custodial through media and communications to financial services. Presently, the city of Atlanta, the state of Georgia, the federal government and the US Postal Service are among the state's ten largest employers. But only in the city and the Post Office is there significant organization. Unionization of public workers is spotty and largely limited to larger population centers, where black sanitation workers frequently take the lead. Police and

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$4,039 | 28 | 27 | 28 | 475 | 27 | 26 | 23 | 20.5 | 17 | 21 | 35.9 | 31 | 29 |
| Trade & Distribution | 4,499 | 32 | 28 | 28 | 463 | 27 | 24 | 22 | 16.2 | 18 | 20 | 35.0 | 30 | 28 |
| Service | 4,653 | 33 | 35 | 31 | 607 | 35 | 31 | 25 | 40.4 | 34 | 42 | 57.2 | 57 | 56 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 526 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 76 | 4 | 9 | 22 | 33.1 | 41 | 41 | 14.2 | 11 | 12 |
| Construction | 400 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 118 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 21.1 | 24 | 26 | 5.3 | 3 | * |
| Mining | 108 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 | * | * | * | 27.5 | 29 | 33 | 8.2 | 4 | 36 |
| Totals | 14,224 | | | | 1,747 | | | | 27.9 | 24 | 30 | 39.8 | 34 | 30 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Textiles | | Apparel | | Food | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|----------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------------|------------|--------|----------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 122,600 | 102,300 | 70,200 | 24,100 | 51,900 | 27,400 | Lockheed | 9,500 | 1 | aircraft |
| % male | 56 | 57 | 18 | 22 | 62 | 75 | General Motors | 8,800 | 3 | vehicles |
| % female | 44 | 43 | 82 | 78 | 38 | 25 | Bibb Mfg. | 6,600 | 15 | textile prods. |
| % black male | 11 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 21 | 20 | West Pt-Peopl. | 5,500 | 8 | textile prods. |
| % black female | 10 | 1 | 21 | 2 | 13 | 6 | Union Camp | 5,500 | 9 | paper, boxes |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.20 | \$1.13 | \$2.68 | \$0.91 | \$3.49 | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | 1.0 | .92 | .89 | .73 | .84 | n.a. | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 28,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communication Workers | 19,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 14,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 13,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Auto Workers | 11,400 | | |

firemen are organized in several cities, but the real activity is in Atlanta.

The largest single spur to public employee organizing in Atlanta (or anywhere else) is the fiscal crisis of the government. During the past spring, Atlanta unions, led by the aggressive and seasoned AFSCME local, full of veterans from the civil rights era like Willie Bolden, pressed the city council for better benefits and wages. But the school board and the city council, counted on by labor, approved an austerity budget that threatens the union's demands. The union lost its last strike against the city in 1970, but it backed successful candidates in the last municipal elections. Now the new councilmen say the larger black community will suffer from higher taxes to pay any new wage increases for the predominantly black AFSCME workers who are

from the same black community. City and governmental services will undoubtedly continue to rise with Atlanta's growth; whether organization and more bargaining power will accompany the growth is uncertain. Already, Atlanta is constructing the first subway in the southeast, and an explosion of high-density development is expected around the transit stations.

Overall, Georgia's economic future is bright. With Jimmy Carter the likely successor to the biggest pork barrel in the world, the state can expect to continue to prosper. How well labor fares in this development will have national implications. Unfortunately, there is little in his record to support more than a cautious hope that a national constituency will push him beyond his acceptance of Georgia's open-shop attitude toward unions.

kentucky

No labor story in recent years has captured the attention and concerns of the nation as did the Harlan, Kentucky United Mine Workers strike in 1973-1974. It was especially important to labor in Kentucky because in much of the state, the UMWA stands alone; as its fortunes rise or fall, so do those of many other unions. The confrontation in Harlan was additionally noteworthy because it was the first major battle of the "new" UMWA, the UMWA led by president Arnold Miller, and it represented the renewed militance and determination of the union.

Harlan had been the site of many previous struggles and defeats for the Mine Workers; the new organizing drive faced a tough enemy, the massive Duke Power Company, owner of the Eastover Mining Company. Duke Power, a Carolina utility, is the nation's third largest user of steam coal. It was intent on committing its resources and energy toward defeating the union and keeping eastern Kentucky outside the reach of the UMWA.

Yet the UMWA won. National sympathy for the union was solicited and gained. The miners stood firm, encouraged by their families and friends. Other labor groups supported the Mine Workers, as did consumer groups throughout the region. The combined forces proved too strong even for Duke Power, and the corporation backed down. The miners received their union contract with its provisions for safe working conditions, improved retirement benefits and job security.

A flush of enthusiasm raced throughout the state, especially eastern Kentucky, in the aftermath of that victory. Reports abounded that increased union organizing efforts would begin, not only by the UMWA, but also by the many other unions which had become involved in the Harlan battle. Perhaps, it was thought, these drives could stop the decline in union membership in the state, a slump that had seen labor's representation of 27.5% of the non-agricultural workforce in 1970 (250,000 workers) drop to 24.9% in 1972 (246,000). At the same time, the number of non-farm workers in the state increased by 8.5%.

The UMWA did indeed increase their organizing efforts, but they were only occasionally successful. Though some drives were won, a great many other campaigns were attempted and lost in eastern Kentucky: at the Duke Power

mines in Highsplit, at the Leatherwood mine in Perry County, at the Duke Power Arjay mine in Bell County.

The losses were the result of many factors, including company offers of higher wages to non-union miners. But particularly frustrating were the battles within the UMWA. Increasingly the union was slowed by internal dissension, which became focused in a struggle for power between the forces of president Arnold Miller and vice president Mike Trbovich. Much of Trbovich's support came from the western Kentucky coal fields, while miners in the eastern mountains maintained their loyalty to Miller. There was no unity within the union in Kentucky. Energy that might have been put into organizing went into the fight over internal politics. Visible UMWA activities slowed.

But Kentucky mine workers still faced the same problems that led to the Harlan strike. More than twice as many miners in the state died in coal mines in 1975 than in 1974. More were killed in Kentucky than in any other state. Retirement benefits for non-union miners remained minimal. Health care was inadequate. Miners found they had little job security. High percentages of unemployment abounded.

A number of these points were brought into sharp focus when, on March 9, 1976, a pocket of methane gas exploded deep underground at the Scotia Coal Company mines in Oven Fork. It ripped the mine apart, killing 15 men. The mine was closed for just two days until on March 11, a crew of miners re-entered the mine to search for the bodies. Again the mine erupted, killing another 11 men. It was the worst mining disaster in years and, investigators soon discovered, was caused by the company's refusal to follow required safety precautions and by the negligence of Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration (MESA) officials. MESA had frequently fined the company small sums of money for dangerous conditions, but it never demanded that the Scotia Coal Company make its mines safe. "Safety fines for violations are \$10 and \$30," announced Garland Lewis, former chairman of the mining committee of the Scotia Employees Association. "That's not even a basket of coal to the company." The miners, represented only by the weak association, could do little.

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$3,636 | 36 | 29 | 29 | 279 | 26 | 21 | 16 | 6.4 | 4 | 5 | 30.9 | 27 | 27 |
| Trade & Distribution | 2,432 | 24 | 25 | 24 | 279 | 26 | 24 | 23 | 4.7 | 14 | 7 | 34.0 | 31 | 27 |
| Service | 2,522 | 25 | 27 | 25 | 353 | 32 | 26 | 17 | 9.7 | 14 | 21 | 57.0 | 53 | 57 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 571 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 74 | 7 | 14 | 26 | 5.0 | 5 | 4 | 4.6 | 4 | 3 |
| Construction | 320 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 77 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 4.4 | 6 | 7 | 5.3 | 3 | 2 |
| Mining | 542 | 5 | 6 | 10 | 28 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 2.5 | 3 | 5 | 2.7 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 10,024 | | | | 1,089 | | | | 6.7 | 9 | 8 | 35.8 | 28 | 21 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Electrical Equip. | | Non-elec. Mach. | | Apparel | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------|-----------------|--------|---------|--------|----------------------|------------|--------|-----------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 43,500 | 7,200 | 35,400 | 12,400 | 29,000 | 14,700 | General Elec. | 24,200 | 8 | appli, plastics |
| % male | 69 | 45 | 74 | 94 | 17 | 18 | Ford Motor | 7,600 | 2 | vehicles |
| % female | 31 | 55 | 26 | 6 | 83 | 82 | Brown & Willm. | 6,300 | 2 | tobacco prods. |
| % black male | 6 | * | 4 | 6 | 1 | * | Internl. Harvester | 6,300 | 1 | tractors |
| % black female | 4 | * | 1 | * | 4 | 1 | IBM | 5,600 | 1 | business mach. |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$4.28 | n.a. | \$5.04 | n.a. | \$2.94 | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | 1.03 | n.a. | 1.02 | n.a. | .98 | n.a. | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | United Mine Workers | 25,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 22,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | United Auto Workers | 21,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | United Steel Workers | 16,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 12,300 | | |

With the association contract coming up for renewal July 14 and miners wondering how to prevent future disasters, the UMWA moved into town. The miners were not unfamiliar with the union, however, and their experience with the old Tony Boyle regime remained strong in their minds. In addition, many miners expressed resentment at the union's apparent efforts to organize "on the bodies of the dead miners," as one observer described the scene. Many of the widows of the Scotia victims offered strong support for the UMWA, but it wasn't enough. The drive ended unsuccessfully.

As if to balance that disappointment, miners at the 300-worker Justus mine, owned — liked Scotia — by the Blue Diamond Company, soon voted to join the Mine Workers. Miller claimed the victory showed that they recognized that "only under a UMWA contract can miners stand up for their own safety without fear of being fired."

The UMWA is the largest union in the eastern mountains and western coal fields of the state, but it is not the only one. In the east, the United Steel Workers have successfully organized all but one of the Kentucky hospitals that were once part of the UMWA hospital chain. The only exception is the Methodist Hospital in Pikeville, where an extended strike by the Communications Workers of America ended unsuccessfully in 1974 (see "Facing South," *Southern*

Exposure Vol. III, No. 4.) In November, 1975, workers succeeded for the first time in unionizing a hospital which was not at one time part of the Mine Workers chain. By a two-to-one margin, the employees at the Highlands Regional Medical Center chose to join 1199, National Hospital Union. In addition, the Communications Workers of America have actively challenged the General Telephone Company, especially east of Lexington, with demands for improved workplace conditions, hours and benefits. And the Quarry Workers at the Adams Stone Company in Jenkins went out on strike in early 1976, eventually receiving a sizeable salary increase and many other contract improvements.

In western Kentucky, the economy is sufficiently limited that the UMWA easily stands out as the pre-eminent union. Most people are dependent on either coal mining, tobacco farming or tourism for their incomes. Of these three, only mining is unionized. However, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers have organized the Union Carbide plant in Calvert City. And TVA workers, in great numbers in the west, are represented by a semblance of a union, which has existed since that organization was established in the 1930s. Workers are forbidden to unionize because TVA is a federal project, yet their employees' organization serves many of the same functions as a union.

The workers in the east and west are predominantly rural-based people. Yet in 1970, the state census showed that for the first time a majority of Kentucky's population — 53% — lived in the cities, a statistic skewed by the urbanized central stretches of the state. It is also in these cities — Lexington, Covington, Owensboro and especially Louisville — that the economic sectors employing most of the state's workers are based. Service workers now make up almost a third of the state's workforce, while manufacturing and the combined fields of transportation, communications, utilities and trade each constitute a quarter. Service jobs are increasing much faster than any others. Based in these cities are the state's largest unions: the United Auto Workers and the electrical workers unions.

Like the UMWA, the members of these unions have concentrated much of their energy on internal disputes, especially debating the unions' involvement in Union Labor Against Busing (ULAB), a group whose sole purpose has been to protest the court-ordered school busing plan for Jefferson County. From the beginning, union membership could not agree on this issue. Led by Jack Shore, a local officer of the Sheet Metal Workers Union and president of ULAB, Louisville union leadership was very strong in its support for the group, and organized many demonstrations, rallies and marches. In February, 1976, more than 1,000 demonstrators filled the streets of Louisville on a four-mile march against busing.

Yet the leaders of many national unions involved in ULAB have long been active in important integration and

civil-rights efforts, and they frowned on the locals' activities. And in Louisville, the UAW, IBEW and IUE represent more of the six percent of the labor force that is black than any other unions in the state. Even before that massive march, black unionists had sued their union leadership because of its involvement with ULAB. An IUE member who worked at the Louisville General Electric plant — the company's two plants are large enough to make it the state's number one private employer — sought restitution of \$15,000 in union funds from officers of the IUE local. A Ford Motor employee — Ford is the second largest private employer — sued for his local UAW officers to repay "great sums" to the union. The members claimed that union money was improperly spent for anti-busing picket signs, legal fees for anti-busing demonstrators and transportation to a Washington anti-busing lobbying drive. The issue became heated and embarrassing for the union leadership, especially when it was discovered that extreme right-wing groups including the Klan were also associated with the anti-busing fight. After months of controversy, the determined black employees and their supporters won, and most of the major unions withdrew from ULAB. When they did, attendance at ULAB demonstrations dropped significantly and the group seemed to fade from sight.

The controversy over ULAB has gained most of the attention of the urban unions, but certainly not all of it. For instance, thousands of workers were laid off in the early summer of 1976 at the UAW-represented International Harvester plant in Louisville, and a strike was anticipated. Unemployment was also an issue for IBEW members in the city, where some workers had been laid off for more than a year. And the United Rubber Workers in Louisville took the lead among big-city unions in its concern for workplace environmental issues. The union is attempting to provide health tests for 90% of its membership, in an effort to determine safety conditions at their plants. In fact, the extent to which workers have been successful in gaining union representation in urban areas may be one reason why manufacturing growth during the 1960s was highest in the state's smaller areas.

Throughout Kentucky, in rural areas as well as urban, public employees have attempted to organize, despite state laws which forbid it. In 1970, teachers even showed their unity by joining together in an extended strike. Every session of the biennial legislature finds an increase in support for bills that would legalize public employee unions. Workers throughout the state — fire fighters and police in the west, sanitation workers in many cities, non-academic employees at state universities — have shown great interest in organizing, should a bill allowing it pass the legislature.

Increasingly, then, the major unions in the state are re-directing their energy from fighting over internal disputes to organizing around the important issues facing the Kentucky workforce. There are certainly many issues that demand attention. In 1970, the earnings of Kentucky men averaged just \$6,369, while women's earnings averaged \$3,357. And within those figures, black men and women earned about 70 percent as much as whites. The vast majority of those workers — especially in some of the largest industries such as textiles — still have no representation. Unions in Kentucky have shown that when they focus their efforts on correcting these problems, they can be successful. At last they are returning to that task.

photo by Phil Primack/ Mountain Eagle



Louisiana

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$2,585 | 24 | 20 | 25 | 184 | 16 | 16 | 15 | 24.7 | 24 | 28 | 16.4 | 13 | 13 |
| Trade & Distribution | 3,210 | 30 | 29 | 28 | 341 | 29 | 29 | 28 | 19.7 | 21 | 21 | 32.6 | 29 | 27 |
| Service | 3,067 | 29 | 32 | 30 | 442 | 38 | 26 | 27 | 29.6 | 46 | 37 | 57.6 | 55 | 52 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 387 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 48 | 4 | 8 | 18 | 37.4 | 45 | 46 | 7.8 | 7 | 10 |
| Construction | 429 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 97 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 22.8 | 24 | 26 | 5.0 | 3 | 2 |
| Mining | 1,044 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 47 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5.5 | 3 | 3 | 7.4 | 5 | 5 |
| Totals | 10,725 | | | | 1,158 | | | | 26.8 | 27 | 31 | 35.2 | 30 | 25 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Food | | Chemicals | | Transp. Equip. | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|--------|--------|-----------|--------|----------------|--------|------------------------|------------|--------|-------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 28,500 | 27,200 | 25,700 | 11,000 | 20,600 | 4,700 | Avondale | 8,200 | 8 | drill rigs, ships |
| % male | 84 | 83 | 93 | 91 | 96 | 96 | Exxon | 6,300 | 17 | fuels, polymers |
| % female | 16 | 17 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 4 | Internl. Paper | 4,300 | 7 | paper, wood pd. |
| % black male | 33 | 23 | 13 | 22 | 26 | 79 | Olinkraft | 4,100 | 12 | paper, box prd. |
| % black female | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | * | Crown Zell'bach | 3,800 | 6 | paper, box prd. |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.30 | n.a. | \$6.22 | n.a. | \$4.61 | \$1.46 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .79 | n.a. | 1.25 | n.a. | .84 | .84 | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 15,000 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 12,700 | | |
| | | | | | | | Carpenters | 11,600 | | |
| | | | | | | | AFSCME | 10,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | Laborers | 9,700 | | |

Louisiana wealth is abundant — from its delta soil, timberlands, waterways and rich mineral deposits to its French, Spanish, and Creole heritage. Louisiana also has New Orleans, a great port city that became the gateway for its trade and much of its immigrant population. Prior to the early 1900s, when heavy oil exploration began, Louisiana depended on agriculture and the commerce of its crown city. Today, One Shell Square looms behind the French Quarter of New Orleans, epitomizing the intense oil-based industrialization that has taken most of the wealth away.

Oil and petrochemicals developed an investment stronghold in Louisiana. Since 1940, over half of the new invest-

ments in the state have gone into chemicals, resulting in a "Ruhr Valley" of oil-based plants from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. In 1974, Louisiana produced one fourth of the nation's oil and one third of its natural gas, totaling \$8 billion. The oil and chemical industry continues to receive half of the yearly investments (\$1 billion in 1974), followed by electric power, pulp and paper, and metals. The state's relatively low share of federal contracts go to the areas already supported by private investment — oil, chemicals and shipbuilding.

This capital concentration has not produced a diversified economy like oil-rich Texas. Since the boom period for oil employment between 1947 and 1957, the non-durable

products category has not notably expanded in employment; wages, however, have tripled. The state has not been as cordial to private industry as many of the Southern states. The complex heritage, including Catholic and Protestant, urban and rural has created a populist stance toward out of state business. Louisiana levies a corporate and severance tax, the latter providing 30 percent of its income. The high-wage petrochemical industry has also discouraged labor-intensive companies, like low-paying textile or apparel firms, from locating in the state. There has been no continuous right-to-work law or restriction on public employees' bargaining rights, and workers' unemployment and compensation benefits rate among the highest in the country. Nevertheless, the wealthiest corporations — Exxon, Shell, Texaco, Standard of California — are willing to pay the price to tap the rich supply of energy resources in the state. Since these multinationals replaced agriculture as the economic base, not even colorful liberal or populist politicians like the Longs and Hale Boggs could successfully control big oil.

Seventy percent of Louisiana natural gas leaves the state, compared to 50% in 1950. According to recent FPC rulings, homes and institutions take precedence over industry when there is a shortage of fuel. The chemical industry has begun to suffer from lack of the fuel it came to find. Shell oil, with \$8 billion a year in revenue, continues to pump 250 million barrels of oil a day from its Norco refinery to the Midwest. Meanwhile, almost one quarter of Louisiana lives below poverty levels and Louisiana illiteracy levels lead the nation. The state still ranks 44th in per capita income.

One third of Louisiana workers are employed in transportation, communications and trade. Trade employment (260,000 statewide) coexists with the oil industry in the deep water ports of Lake Charles and Baton Rouge. Government employees, (250,000), bolstered by one of the most unwieldy state bureaucracies in the country, and service employment (196,000) have each tripled since World War II. In manufacturing, most durable goods like primary metal and non-electrical machinery gained workers, but overall employment has only recently reached wartime levels. The capital-intensive oil and chemical industries employ only 7% of the state's workforce. Non-manufacturing doubled, reflecting the largest growth sectors and the lowest wages for their workers.

The absence of industries that typically give Southerners jobs—textiles, apparel, food processing — creates a strange distinction for the state: one of the lowest percentages of manufacturing employment, but the highest manufacturing wages in the Southeast. In another exception to the patterns of the South, Louisiana blacks are increasing rather than migrating from the state. They now represent 1/3 of the population. Many find jobs in the service occupations, particularly in New Orleans, but nearly 1/3 of black workers are employed in low-skill operative jobs. Only 1/3 of Louisiana women work — the lowest percentage in the South — and they remain heavily concentrated in clerical jobs and service employment.

From the timber workers in west Louisiana who were part of the IWW's "unorganized" in the 1910s to the recent labor-environment dispute with Shell Oil in Norco, the state has been the setting for many pitched labor struggles. Union efforts often faced violence from company owners and divisions of skill and race among the workers, but they

contributed to a strength rarely seen in the South. Union membership more than tripled between 1939 and 1953, the period of heavy industrialization, and now represents 19% of the labor force (189,000.) What this figure — still relatively high for the South — does not represent is the extent of labor's political influence. Power can be traced to one man: Victor Bussie, the 20-year president of the state AFL-CIO. Bussie has developed an extremely effective and well-respected lobby, which works overtime during legislative sessions. In the absence of any comparably unified lobby, the state legislature has created a more favorable climate for labor than the neighboring states. The climate is changing, however, by the ominous cloud of the current right-to-work legislative battle. The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry has made a concerted attempt to reinstate the right-to-work measure and offer increased concessions to industry. Taking its lessons from Bussie, the new lobbying group has aided the passage of the bill through the House.

In the past, Bussie has not been afraid to take unpopular stands, even at the cost of union membership. He firmly supported civil rights in the face of school closings in New Orleans and lent AFL strength to the revision of the archaic property tax assessment within the state. In Earl Long and Hale Boggs, Bussie and labor gained important allies in both state and national politics. The story goes that Boggs was once dubbed as Bussie's man in Washington. Within the state, Bussie has been responsible for the high benefits that Louisiana workers enjoy and has organized a democratic state federation of labor. "He leads the best state labor movement anywhere in the nation," according to Selina Burch, veteran CWA leader.

The record of Bussie and his followers represents the bright side of organized labor in Louisiana. There is another side. A dynamic influx of petrochemical industries into Baton Rouge and Lake Charles in the 1950s often meant fierce competition for the construction of these plants. In January, 1976, the Jupiter Chemical plant under construction in Lake Charles was the site of violence between an AFL squadron and workers of an independent — and some say company — union which won the building contract. The encounter led to speculation on what role organized crime, recently receiving much publicity for its New Orleans land-holding, has in organized labor and the construction industry of Calcasieu Parish.

Early labor strength in Louisiana lay in the very craft distinction that prevented many CIO successes in the 1920s. Company-supported unions such as the Independent White, and Independent Colored Longshoremen's Associations were common. With certain important exceptions like the timber workers in the north and west, most union activity has been concentrated in the urban areas of Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Shreveport and New Orleans.

In New Orleans, supported by a foreign trade zone and a \$3 million yearly trade business, union membership is higher than the statewide figure. Since the port supports an estimated 60% of the city's economy, labor activity along the docks has traditionally been critical to the fate of unions. From the days of the elite cotton stowers and stevedores, labor organizations have been weakened by segregated locals. Affiliation in the thirties with the International Longshoremen's associations proved no exception, leading to the white local 1418 and black 1419. In 1973, however, 1800 longshore workers walked out in a wildcat

strike, protesting non-payment of royalties into the union pension fund. The rank-and-file movement continued when three members of local 1419 brought suit against their own local, the white local, and others for racial discrimination. The outcome of their suit could result in a merger of the two locals with a 75% black membership.

In other activities within the city the American Federation of Teachers recently merged with the National Education Association, giving teachers benefits beyond the abilities of a professional association. As increasing numbers find service occupations — now 16,000 — more unionizing efforts can be expected. Already the Service Employees Union has grown from virtually nothing to 1,000 in a ten year period. The Communications Workers with a bulk of their membership in New Orleans, have actively engaged in political campaigns for candidates such as Hale and Lindy Boggs and Earl Long. The election of public service commissioners, who set telephone rates in the state has received the special attention of CWA. (See article on Selina Burch this issue) Since the membership increases have not been marked in recent years, there is much work remaining. Avondale Shipyard, the largest single employer in the state (8,500) and recipient of substantial Department of Navy contracts, remains unorganized despite recent efforts.

The proliferation of offshore drilling — in 1947 came the

first rig, now they number 20,000 — has presented another organizing problem. Oil rig workers are gerrymandered so successfully in organizing drives, the election restrictions so complex and the workers so transient, that only one fourth have been drawn into unions.

The 5,000 cane workers in southern Louisiana have been continually thwarted in their organizing efforts in a long history of violent, unsuccessful struggle. In 1953, H. L. Mitchell's National Agricultural Workers Union sought to improve their impoverished conditions of long days for less than five dollars, poor housing and little security. While the organizing drive among the predominantly black field workers led to a massive strike of 2,000, strikebreakers and court injunctions completely undermined their attempt. Unfortunately, their campaign also collided with the state AFL's fight to remove the state's two-year-old right-to-work law. In the resulting political trade-off, the right-to-work law was removed except, ironically, for farmworkers. The Department of Agriculture, which usually responds only to growers' demands, now sets wages for these workers. While the rate has increased to \$2 an hour, the workers have yet to qualify for unemployment insurance or welfare benefits. As one refinery worker involved in the current organizing reportedly said, "I do this because I am a citizen of the bayou." The fight has not died.

mississippi

"Thank God for Mississippi," they say up North, meaning that no matter how bad things get up there, there's at least one place that's worse.

It's not hard to document. Mississippi has the lowest per capita income, unemployment benefits and welfare payments. Fringe benefits average one-third less than the rest of the country. The state has the highest black population percentage, some of the country's poorest people, worst housing and health care and sparsest social services. Mississippi is the only state without compulsory education.

Forestry products, native to Mississippi since before the Civil War, is the state's leading industry, but it has been declining in recent years. Apparel, the second largest industry, nearly doubled during the '50s, largely as a result of runaway shops from the North. Meat, poultry and seafood combine to employ about 27,000 workers. Bryan Brothers in West Point, the largest meat packer, employs about 1,000; another 1,000 work in seven poultry plants in Scott County; and 19 seafood plants on the Gulf employ about 900 people. What was once the old Ingalls shipyards is now the state's largest employer. Litton Industries, the new owners, expanded the military-oriented business and today 19,800 wage earners work there.

Mississippi was overwhelmingly an agricultural state until after World War II. Then the percentage of the workforce engaged in agriculture began to plummet: 1940, 51%; 1950, 43%; 1960, 22%; 1970, 7%. It is not surprising that historically the labor movement has been weak in Mississippi. But there is another reason as well: from its embryonic forms — antebellum slave strikes and printers' guilds in the 1830s — the workers' movement has been divided by race. This problem is not unique to Mississippi, of course, but it

was an overriding factor here, where oppressed blacks constituted the majority of the state's population for 100 years. There have been, however, rare demonstrations of interracial solidarity. Some were truly heroic and provide noble examples for the workers' movements of today and tomorrow. (see box)

The momentum of the civil-rights movement brought new stirrings of militancy to the labor movement. During the early 1960s, only four tenths of one percent of the labor force went on strike. In the decade following 1964, strike activity of workers nearly tripled. Cotton field hands organized the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union in 1965



Photo by Ralford Ragsdale

and struck for the first time since the 1930s. In 1971, the Gulfcoast Pulpwood Association formed in Laurel, when a change in the measurement system cheated the woodcutters and haulers. By 1974, integrated chapters had been established across Mississippi and Alabama. About the same time, the Mississippi Poultry Workers Union organized at three plants in Scott County, struggling to stabilize the rapidly changing workforce (from white to black). (See Mississippi profile in *Southern Exposure*, Vol. II, No. 3-4 for more on both groups.) During the fall of 1974, 1,000 construction workers picketed the new Hinds County courthouse site in Jackson after the contract was awarded to a non-union firm.

In the early 1970s, the Metal Trades Council, which had for years represented some 17 crafts in bargaining with Litton Industries, turned a threatening situation into a victory. Losing members through a rapid turnover on the job, the Trades Council took the offensive with an organizing campaign and by bargaining a non-discrimination clause into the contract, anticipating future Title 7 court decisions. Federal orders offered an added stimulus, compelling the defense contractor to comply with equal opportunity regulations.

The state makes it tough for unions to survive, however. Mississippi promoters boast that the average hourly wage

rate is the lowest in the country, fringe benefits are lowest in the Southeast, time lost due to strikes is one-third the national average, and right-to-work is part of the state constitution. New companies are advised to avoid unions. The Mississippi Research and Development Center, one of several state agencies charged with luring industry, warns businesses that the "future potential" of counties with a large black majority is "very limited" because this leads to "a high percentage of block votes and unionization."

The recession of 1974-75 hit Mississippi just as it was beginning to recover from the civil-rights traumas of the '60s. At least 26 manufacturers closed up shop permanently; others had layoffs, including giant Litton's shipyards. Black unemployment averaged 2½ times the white rate statewide, and in some areas of the Delta, reached seven times the rate for whites. Official unemployment reached 9.4% But Northern corporations continue to locate in the state.

In 1973, General Motors opened a new Packard Electric Division plant in Clinton, just outside of Jackson. But unions, accustomed to working with GM in the North, have had little success in Clinton. The UAW and the International Union of Electrical Workers have failed to win elections there. Flyers pictured union chiefs as gangsters, and management tactics divided the racially mixed workers. (See article by Don Stillman.)

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state pro- duct (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | | | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | | | % of sector's em- ployment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | | % of sector's em- ployment that is female, 1970 | | % female, 1960 | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--|----------------|----|---|----|----------------|--|
| | | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | % empl., 1960 | | % empl., 1950 | % black, 1950 | % female, 1960 | | % female, 1950 | | | | | |
| Manufacturing | \$1,645 | 32 | 22 | 20 | 186 | 26 | 19 | 13 | 26.8 | 23 | 35 | 34.4 | 29 | 21 | |
| Trade & Distribution | 1,214 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 172 | 24 | 21 | 18 | 21.0 | 22 | 23 | 33.7 | 31 | 29 | |
| Service | 1,442 | 29 | 32 | 30 | 246 | 34 | 29 | 17 | 34.0 | 46 | 51 | 61.0 | 61 | 47 | |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 521 | 10 | 14 | 19 | 53 | 7 | 21 | 42 | 45.7 | 60 | 58 | 8.0 | 13 | 12 | |
| Construction | 150 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 54 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 24.1 | 26 | 26 | 4.5 | 2 | 2 | |
| Mining | 116 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 1 | * | 7.5 | 6 | 8 | 4.7 | 5 | 4 | |
| Totals | 5,089 | | | | 719 | | | | 28.8 | 37 | 43 | 38.8 | 33 | 21 | |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Apparel | | Transp. Equip. | | Lumber, Wood | | NAME | TOP COMPANIES | | |
|--|---------|--------|----------------|-------|--------------|--------|---------------------------|---------------|--------|------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 42,400 | 12,000 | 24,100 | 1,100 | 23,800 | 39,300 | Ingalls (Litton) | 19,800 | 2 | ships |
| % male | 17 | 15 | 89 | 94 | 87 | 97 | Kellwood | 4,500 | 13 | apparel |
| % female | 83 | 85 | 11 | 6 | 13 | 3 | Intl. Paper | 3,400 | 4 | wood products |
| % black male | 3 | * | 20 | 16 | 47 | 51 | Blue Bell | 2,800 | 12 | apparel, furnit. |
| % black female | 20 | 1 | 4 | * | 5 | 1 | Futorian Mfr. | 2,800 | 4 | furniture |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$2.49 | \$0.86 | \$4.09 | n.a. | \$2.97 | \$0.91 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .83 | .69 | .74 | n.a. | .75 | .70 | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 8,600 | | |
| | | | | | | | Carpenters | 5,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 5,600 | | |
| | | | | | | | Boilermakers | 4,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Rubber Workers | 3,700 | | |

Over the years, labor unions have had to struggle. In 1959, there were about 40,000 union members. Today, about 13% of the workforce is unionized, some 85,000 people. Achieving these modest numbers has not been easy. A Rubber Worker organizer had his car shot up in Ripley. An Amalgamated Clothing Worker veteran survived a shot through the stomach. Even the state AFL-CIO president carries a shotgun, wary of the KKK within his locals.

But victories came over time. The carpenters endured a long campaign at the MPI plant in Jackson, stretching from 1960 to 1963. Forty percent of the 1,600 workers were black, and no union was popular in Jackson where tight control of both newspapers and a major TV outlet made the final victory difficult. The Boilermakers worked for years to get a local at the B&W Boiler Works in West Point. The Steelworkers organized in Hattiesburg and in Greenville, where it met the anti-union Delta Council head-on and won, partially because skilled workers came with the plant from Indiana.

Down the river in nearby Jackson, other workers face a different kind of obstacle. Mississippi has no state law

regarding public employees. Hence, a local municipality or the state can use raw power politics to oversee its employees. In 1969, sanitation workers struggled to organize, inspired by their Memphis brothers. But a combination of racism, bureaucratic bungling, and redbaiting broke a bitterly fought strike. (Long afterward, it was reported that the leading "red" was actually on the FBI payroll.) Despite this setback, government workers, fire fighters, police, and teachers have begun to move in Jackson and other towns. But forming unions is difficult where there is no agency to certify bargaining units or to permit contracts.

Working class Mississippi is contradictory. It isn't much of a surprise that unionized workers are concentrated along the heavily industrialized Gulf Coast, including Moss Point, Pascagoula, Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, and Bay St. Louis. But it does seem strange at first glance that the one town in the whole state that is 100 percent union (247 workers in four manufacturing plants) is Leland, population 6,000, located in the delta. The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, the Northwest part of the state from Memphis to Vicksburg, is the old plantation belt, with the largest concentration of black people in the United States. From there in 1966 the

MISSISSIPPI'S UNTOLD LABOR HISTORY

— by Ken Lawrence

One of the earliest unions in the state was the Washerwomen of Jackson, organized on June 20, 1866, by former slaves, at a time when their former owners were trying to re-enslave them with the Black Code. Their founding resolution stated: "We join in charging a uniform rate for our labor, ... the price to be made public, and anyone, belonging to the class of washerwomen, violating this, shall be liable to a fine *regulated by the class.*" (Italics in original.)

In 1869, Mississippi's black secretary of state, James Lynch, sent a telegram to the (black) National Labor Union convention in Washington, D.C.: "Seventy thousand triumphant colored radicals send greeting." Another black leader, William T. Combash, was Mississippi's delegate there. He was killed by a lynch mob a few years later.

In 1869, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers came to Mississippi. The railroad brotherhoods grew until the disastrous strike of 1911 when two bitterly-fought battles were lost at McComb and Water Valley. Three years later, layoffs came and with them the KKK terrorists, lynching and driving out black workers, many with high seniority. For the next half-century, the brotherhoods stayed lily-white and weak.

During the 1880s, the Knights of Labor united black and white loggers and sawmill workers in Moss Point, Pascagoula and Handsboro. When the white mill workers at Wesson started to join the Knights, the company defeated the organizing effort by threatening to replace them all with blacks. The Knights retaliated with a nationwide boycott of Wesson Mills products, but still couldn't organize the plant, Mississippi's largest industry at that time.

After the decline of the Knights and the defeat of the railroad brotherhoods, the timid and segregated craft unions of the American Federation of Labor dominated the labor movement in Mississippi as in the rest of the country. Solidarity was not altogether forgotten, however; in 1915

Fred Freeman organized the Working Class Union, based in Bay St. Louis. Not only did the WCU advocate interracial solidarity as the Knights had done, it also advocated resistance to the draft during World War I. In the 1930s the Southern Tenant Farmers Union had five locals in Mississippi.

The CIO did not make any significant headway into Mississippi until 1946, when Operation Dixie was launched in response to industry's flight to the South. It was a bag of contradictions. When the drive was conducted by top level CIO strategists, as it was at Masonite in Laurel, the CIO's first and largest important Mississippi victory, the result was Jim Crow locals. But when the organizing was done by dedicated militants, as in the Mine, Mill and Clothing Workers' unions, black and white workers were organized together on the basis of equality, at least theoretically.

Frieda Schwenkmeyer, who organized for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (CIO) in the 1940s, recalls that when she was organizing workers at the Reliance plant in Laurel (Jones County) the workers drew strength from the tradition of the Free State of Jones — their ancestors, led by Newt Knight, who pulled Jones County out of the Confederacy and fought a guerrilla war against it. She says that it was a white Mississippi garment worker who first spoke out at a union meeting against a contract provision that he felt discriminated against his black fellow workers.

The CIO drive scored successes up and down Mississippi for three years, tripling the state's total union membership before it derailed where it had started, in Laurel. Two famous trials there stirred up racism to a fever pitch — the frameup of Willie McGee, a black man charged with raping a white woman; and the "miscegenation" trial of Davis Knight, Newt Knight's great-grandson. For the next twenty years the unions were nearly dormant; the merger of the CIO unions into the AFL's state labor council in the fifties represented, as it did nationally, the weakness of organized labor in those years.

Ken Lawrence, formerly staff writer for the Southern Patriot, has gathered extensive source materials on Mississippi's labor and black history.

shout of Black Power was heard around the world. Leland is 57 percent black; its unionization rate is an impressive signal to organized labor to work harder in the rural black belt.

Other contradictions have surfaced on the political front. The AFL-CIO once fought a vigorous and visible losing battle for repeal of right-to-work. Many staunch union folk can remember when candidates sent word to their integrated meetings that they wanted the union votes but could not be present for a public endorsement. Today, labor has accrued some public leverage from the moderate Governor Cliff Finch, whom they endorsed in last year's election. And during the 1976 Legislature, labor managed to engineer significant increases in maximum workmen's compensation (\$63 to \$84) and unemployment (\$60 to \$80) benefits. To have even this success, however, appears to have required some compromise from the spirit of those earlier

meetings. The AFL-CIO never mentioned defeating right-to-work or working for public employee legislation in their 1976 legislative report, yet in the last election against Finch, gubernatorial candidate Henry Jay Kirksey campaigned for such pro-labor legislation. The moderate Finch, however, looked like a sure winner, and labor was ready for some of the action.

Mississippi's workers are young; a majority are under 40 years of age. They are only a generation away from the agricultural past. Women are 38% of the Mississippi work force, and much of the recent militancy — especially among teachers and poultry workers — has been led by women. Only a small percentage, however, have had any experience with unions; fewer still have participated in strikes. Economic conditions are worsening for Mississippi workers. At present they are marking time; some time soon they are bound to move.

north carolina

Lowest in the nation in industrial wages (\$3.42/hr.), lowest in the percentage of the workforce unionized (8%), one of the nation's most industrialized states, number one in textiles, furniture, and tobacco production — North Carolina is a leader... of sorts.

Patterns were established early: low wages, strong anti-union sentiment, sharp distinction in management and workers softened by a multi-layered paternalism, a dispersed and labor-intensive industrial base, no urban centers.

The North Carolina Piedmont spawned an unusually large number of ambitious industrialists early in this century. James "Buck" Duke combined stock manipulation, an unprecedented squeeze on farmers, and advertising for his new pre-rolled cigarettes into monopoly control of the tobacco industry. "Uncle Charlie" Cannon carved out the private town of Kannapolis for his textile center. In 1919, Spencer Love launched his textile giant, Burlington Industries, with a single mill. Two brothers from the noted Baltimore, Md., Cone family established their textile chain with a ring of mills around Greensboro. From his base in Winston-Salem, R.J. Reynolds rivaled Buck Duke's power when the Supreme Court broke up Duke's American Tobacco into competing companies. And scores of furniture builders settled around High Point and nearby towns.

While important changes have come to North Carolina's economy, the legacies of this handful of barons remain intact. Today, Burlington leads the state in industrial employment and the nation in textile production (\$2.3 billion in fiscal 1974 sales). Cannon — still controlling mill houses and mill hands alike in unincorporated Kannapolis — ranks second in employment and produces more towels than anyone. Cone and the New England-based latecomer, J.P. Stevens Co., follow as the state's third and fourth largest manufacturers. Meanwhile, Buck Duke's legacy ranges from the influential Duke Power Co. to Duke University to Durham's tobacco warehouses.

Since World War II, a gradual diversification has come to the state. Western Electric moved major facilities to the

Piedmont, dependent on defense contracts and expanding AT&T power. During the '50s Governor Luther Hodges, later Secretary of Commerce, brought federal contracts and a white-collar dream to the Chapel Hill/Durham/Raleigh area with his Research Triangle Park; today, IBM, GE, Monsanto, Environmental Protection Agency, and other research groups are housed there. Agribusiness, the automatic tobacco picker and rising farm production costs have hastened industrialization in the rural eastern tidewater. (From 1950-70, agriculture's share of the state's total employment declined from 25% to 5%.) Westinghouse has built nuclear turbine facilities in Charlotte and Winston-Salem. Kelley-Springfield, a Goodyear subsidiary, opened a large plant in Fayetteville. The expanded military economy offered numerous civilian jobs on the eastern N.C. bases. And the service economy and white-collar sector have expanded throughout the state. In Durham County, for example, Duke hospital, Duke University, and IBM each employ more people than Buck Duke's tobacco company.

Through the years, sporadic outbursts by the state's workers produced few lasting alternative power structures. The famous textile strikes of the early years — Gastonia and Marion in 1929 and the 1934 General Strike — left memories of machine guns and innocent victims and no strong unions. In the 1940's, laundry and tobacco workers organized in Winston-Salem with the help of the Food, Tobacco, and Agricultural Workers and the Fur and Leather Workers, but neither union survived. In 1958, N.C. textile workers suffered perhaps their worst defeat in Henderson, just 50 miles from the state capital. Contract talks broke down and the workers walked out. Trumped up charges eventually sent Textile Workers Union regional director Boyd Payton to jail, and the bitter two-year strike was totally defeated. The highly publicized conflict was remembered by Carolinians for years to come.

In recent years, however, TWUA has had more success. Black workers have poured into industrial jobs in the wake of the civil-rights movement and offer more union support. In August, 1974, TWUA won a dramatic NLRB election among 3500 J.P. Stevens workers in Roanoke Rapids. The

union, now merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, is still battling for a contract, but the workers have had a first taste of victory.

Then, in the fall of 1974, Cannon mill workers went to another NLRB election, the largest ever held in textile history. The courts ordered two-thirds of the Cannon workers into a single voting unit, but company procedural delays proved costly to the union. The 1974-75 recession brought layoffs before the postponed vote. TWUA lost by a narrow margin (8,473 to 6,801), but the anti-union Cannon officials were disturbed. Many felt the layoffs turned the marginal votes at the last minute.

The recession reached its peak in the first two months of 1975 when unemployment climbed to an unbelievable 30% in textiles, hosiery, apparel, and furniture. The overall 10.2% unemployment rate was the highest since the state Employment Security Commission began keeping records in 1938. Management called the shots during the recession, keeping people on part-time work and sending them to the unemployment office to cushion their depleted checks. Unions had little base through which to counter the layoffs. And the future may not be much better. The economic recovery brought plants back to full capacity, but many

workers were never recalled to their jobs. Technology has taken over where the recession left off. Luther Hodges, Jr., the former governor's son and chairman of N.C. National Bank (the Southeast's largest), recently told Congress' Joint Economic Committee that the Southern textile industry will emphasize automated productivity and decreased manpower. Hodges added that Burlington plans to spend \$175 million for capital investment in 1976, 80% of it for modernizing equipment. "Burlington has fewer workers today than it had when the recession began; some less efficient plants remain closed — yet production capacity and productivity were improved."

The state's industrial mix and wage gap remain an embarrassment. Textiles — still employing almost 40% of the industrial workforce (240,000) — and other highly elastic trades dependent on consumer buying (apparel, hosiery, furniture) are still the underpinning for the state's economy.

In the past, the liberal North Carolina governors have built their careers by supporting educational growth. No political figure has tackled the problem of workers' wages. In the fall of 1975, a controversial study by the University of North Carolina economist Emil Malizia utilized complex statistical methods to document the direct correlation:

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | | | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | | | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | | % female, 1960 | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|--|
| | | % total GSP, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | | % empl., 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | | % black, 1950 | % female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 | | |
| Manufacturing | \$6,795 | 42 | 36 | 36 | 704 | 35 | 32 | 27 | 16.2 | 11 | 14 | 41.8 | 35 | 32 | |
| Trade & Distribution | 3,859 | 24 | 22 | 22 | 457 | 23 | 21 | 18 | 12.9 | 14 | 15 | 33.7 | 29 | 26 | |
| Service | 4,249 | 26 | 29 | 26 | 581 | 29 | 25 | 20 | 15.7 | 32 | 36 | 57.9 | 58 | 54 | |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 916 | 5 | 9 | 11 | 104 | 5 | 13 | 24 | 28.9 | 34 | 34 | 14.1 | 14 | 11 | |
| Construction | 445 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 134 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 17.2 | 20 | 21 | 4.1 | 3 | 2 | |
| Mining | 55 | * | * | * | 5 | * | * | * | 16.0 | 13 | 18 | 7.2 | 4 | 2 | |
| Totals | 16,319 | | | | 1,984 | | | | 16.0 | 20 | 23 | 40.5 | 34 | 27 | |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Textiles | | Apparel | | Furniture | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|---|----------|---------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|---------------------------|------------|--------|---------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 281,200 | 215,000 | 81,100 | 14,500 | 79,900 | 30,600 | Burlington | 37,000 | 72 | textile goods |
| % male | 49 | 55 | 17 | 26 | 65 | 90 | Cannon Mills | 20,000 | 16 | textile goods |
| % female | 51 | 45 | 83 | 74 | 35 | 10 | J.P. Stevens | | 27 | textile goods |
| % black male | 10 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 8 | Cone Mills | 11,000 | 17 | textile goods |
| % black female | 10 | * | 17 | 3 | 7 | 1 | Western Electric | 9,500 | 4 | elec. devices |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.08 | \$1.16 | \$2.58 | \$0.92 | \$3.17 | \$1.00 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .96 | .95 | .86 | .74 | .90 | .78 | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 17,000 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 15,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Tobacco Workers | 8,500 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 5,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Postal Workers | 4,400 | | |

wages were low because unions were few. An obvious conclusion perhaps, but no state leader has yet taken an outright pro-union position. At least, the vocal AFL-CIO President Wilbur Hobby has now clear and sophisticated data to back up his multiple campaigns and coalition efforts.

N.C. ranks last in the percent of unionized workforce. Pockets of the state support strong locals — the Rubber Workers in mountainous Haywood County; the Paper Workers in nearby Brevard and in Roanoke Rapids, where the 1975 precedent-setting decision on equal employment cases originated; Tobacco Workers in Durham; Textile Workers in Eden. And several unions are fairly strong state-wide, however dispersed — the Communications Workers, the Teamsters, and the Meatcutters. But as a whole, unions have no real power base.

And the anti-union sentiment persists. Shortly after Malizia's report, a major state newspaper uncovered a written policy by the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce to discourage unionized industries from coming to town. And the Miller

More recently, police, firemen, nurses, teachers, and hospital workers have turned to collective organization and union tactics. The American Federation of Teachers now has several locals among county school systems and on college campuses. More dramatically, police officers have forced conservative city councils — notably, those in Asheville, Fayetteville, Thomasville, Raleigh — to deal with wage demands, personnel matters, and policy decisions. Because bargaining a contract is illegal, the Raleigh Police Officers Association has used slowdowns, the "Blue Flu" sick call, and other tactics to force city officials to make settlement offers. Significantly, the Raleigh garbage workers (organized in 1968) and the firemen have demonstrated their support for the police.

Public employee groups represent only one new expression of workers' organizations. In the spring of 1975, Lacy Wright, a retired textile worker (see *Southern Exposure*, Vol. 3, No. 4), gaveled to order the first meeting of the Greensboro Brown Lung Association. Suffering from breathing too much cotton dust for too many years, retired and disabled textile workers have pressed for workmen's compensation and questioned the state Department of Labor's loose enforcement of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). Gradually spreading across the state, with the help of a staff of young organizers and researchers, the BLAs are utilizing new leverage points formerly unavailable to N.C. workers — health rights, OSHA regulations, compensation benefits.

Active workers have also discovered the fundamental right to safety and health guaranteed by OSHA. At the Olin Corporation's plant in Brevard, rank-and-file leaders grasped the potential of the OSHA procedures and built up a strong respect for their health and safety committee within the union as well as the company (see article). Workers at the Charlotte Pipe and Foundry Company did not fare as well when trying to organize a union. A 1975 strike — forced by the adamantly anti-union foundry owner — focused on traditional grievances at first, but health hazards quickly surfaced. Open furnaces, silica dust exposure, and back-breaking, hernia-producing labor marked the foundry as a technological anachronism. But OSHA's leverage wasn't enough in Charlotte. Obstacles at the foundry were too deeply rooted; racism emerged as the strike's most distinctive feature. Black workers, in the poorest paying and most dangerous jobs, stayed out on the picket line while the white workers, afraid to abandon their jobs during a recession, returned to work. The foundry's owner exploited the division, called on noted anti-union attorney Whiteford Blackeney and beat the strike.

Discrimination and historical patterns continue to operate to the detriment of the union movement. N.C. women have always worked in large numbers, but continue to hold the lowest-paying jobs. In 1930, 78% of the women workers were domestics, agricultural or manufacturing employees and 10% held professional jobs. By 1970, 69% of the female workforce were in the service, clerical, or manufacturing sector, and only 13% were professionals. Some 10,000 migrant workers travel through the state each year — nobody knows how many for sure — to shoddy housing, poor health conditions, and no guarantees of safe return to home and families. Their lack of legal protection and public attention only highlight the monumental barriers remaining for labor organizers in North Carolina.

photo by Steve March



Brewing Company decided against building a \$100 million plant for 500 unionized workers. A year before, the Xerox Corporation, under similar pressures, canceled plans to locate a facility employing 1500-2000 unionized workers in Raleigh. The Chamber in nearby Smithfield formally resolved that higher wages would be "disruptive" to the local labor market.

The recent fervor of public employees and service workers demanding job protections could add force to the union concept. In 1968, these workers made their first vocal protests — on the Duke and UNC campuses and in Charlotte and Raleigh. But state law prohibits public employees from bargaining a contract, and the movements of the 60s had priorities other than union building. Even so, limited gains were made. At Duke, for example, a vigil for Martin Luther King evolved into the formation of an AFSCME local among the campus food workers which has survived, spurring often heated confrontations with Terry Sanford's administration as the union expands to other campus facilities.

south carolina

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$2,846 | 41 | 36 | 37 | 345 | 36 | 32 | 28 | 15.3 | 15 | 17 | 38.2 | 33 | 31 |
| Trade & Distribution | 1,571 | 22 | 20 | 21 | 206 | 22 | 20 | 17 | 17.3 | 19 | 20 | 33.6 | 30 | 26 |
| Service | 2,091 | 30 | 33 | 29 | 292 | 31 | 27 | 21 | 31.4 | 42 | 45 | 59.4 | 61 | 58 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 231 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 40 | 4 | 12 | 26 | 48.1 | 61 | 59 | 15.2 | 19 | 18 |
| Construction | 220 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 70 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 28.4 | 34 | 33 | 5.0 | 3 | 2 |
| Mining | 24 | * | * | * | 1 | * | * | * | 37.4 | 41 | 49 | 6.3 | 2 | 3 |
| Totals | 6,982 | | | | 955 | | | | 23.0 | 29 | 35 | 40.1 | 35 | 30 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Textiles | | Apparel | | Chemicals | | NAME | TOP COMPANIES | | |
|---|----------|---------|---------|--------|-----------|-------|---------------------------|---------------|--------|-----------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 154,200 | 131,600 | 44,700 | 9,900 | 33,000 | 4,900 | J.P. Stevens | 16,900 | 33 | fibers, carpets |
| % male | 58 | 62 | 17 | 13 | 76 | 84 | Deering-Milliken | 10,900 | 28 | textile goods |
| % female | 42 | 38 | 83 | 87 | 24 | 16 | Lowenstein | 9,600 | 11 | textile goods |
| % black male | 14 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 42 | Abney Mills | 5,000 | 16 | textile goods |
| % black female | 10 | * | 27 | 6 | 6 | 1 | Celanese | 2,100 | 1 | chem, filament |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.22 | \$1.18 | \$2.53 | \$0.88 | \$4.36 | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | 1.01 | .98 | .84 | .70 | .87 | n.a. | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 6,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 4,100 | | |
| | | | | | | | Ladies Garment Workers | 3,700 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 3,700 | | |
| | | | | | | | Iron Workers | 3,200 | | |

For centuries agriculture, trade and gentlemen planters dominated South Carolina. An early mooring port for the curious Europeans put Charleston and the lower half of the Carolinas on the map. The rich cotton, indigo, rice and tobacco yield of the Pee Dee Coastal valley kept dollars flowing from Charleston across the ocean. Blacks who raised these crops and performed skilled trades in Charleston began some of the first organized struggles against their owner/bosses in labor history. For example in 1739, some land owners near Charleston decided more roads were needed and brought slaves together from various plantations to build them. The communal labor activity served as a catalyst for the Stono Rebellion, one of the largest colonial slave revolts attempted in the South. While the uprising was eventually crushed, it illustrated two important aspects of the nature of work in colonial Carolina: 1) the ability of laborers to organize under extremely controlled conditions and 2) the dependence of owners on their slaves to perform essential trades and agricultural tasks.

This pattern of tight control and resistance was repeated even when the coastal gentlemen began to share their power

with the upstart piedmont entrepreneurs in the late nineteenth century. With the addition of water-driven mills, cotton could be grown, ginned and woven into cloth, all in South Carolina. About the turn of the century, mill president J. B. Cleveland explained it this way, "Mills were located about Spartanburg because they had cotton to grow to their doors, water power, tax exemption, encouragement in railroads giving two-thirds rate on machinery and material hauled, and willingness of supply men to take stock."

Local businessmen like William Gregg of Granitesville and Alester Furman of Greenville built textiles into the dominant industry throughout the Carolina Piedmont. White families, many scratching out a living on poor farms, eagerly entered the mills. The paternalism was strong — jobs, steady pay, churches, schools, hospitals, company stores, on and on. But some of these Piedmont workers soon felt the same oppression for selling their human labor as their black brothers and sisters. Early organizing efforts by the Knights of Labor and the textile unions between 1890-1910 achieved few successes in the face of intense opposition. During the Depression, the resisters to milltown

paternalism surfaced again, this time as flying squadrons in the 1934 General Strike. But once again, the Piedmont industrialists, like the Charleston planters, contained the uprising and maintained their hegemony. By 1939, textile workers, still almost all white, accounted for nearly three out of five of the state's manufacturing workers.

On September 6, 1956, workers at the Deering-Milliken mill in Darlington voted 256 to 248 to be represented by the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) despite company president Roger Milliken's threats to close the plant. Milliken, operating the nation's third largest textile company, kept his word; he closed the plant. Union charges wound their way through the NLRB and courts, and even reached the Supreme Court twice. Once U.S. Senator Sam Ervin took his Bible stories and Constitutional wisdom to the Supreme Court bench, pleading the rights of a capitalist gentleman to open and close what plants he wished. Twenty years later, the Darlington workers have not yet received the back pay coming to them for losing their jobs when they voted for the union.

The Darlington case chilled TWUA's organizing efforts for years to come. Workers knew about the plant closing, and the union had real difficulties convincing workers that the law protected their right to vote for a union. But the union kept trying. In 1963, TWUA and the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department mounted a major campaign among the J.P. Stevens workers throughout the Carolinas. Stevens began firing union supporters in Great Falls, Greenville and other Carolina towns. They eventually got lost wages and their old jobs back, but not until after the union drive had been undermined with intimidation and fear. The campaign was lost and with it, any hopes for a real break-through in textiles for another decade.

But things were changing. Sit-ins, voter registration, and mass marches brought a round of equal employment legislation. In 1950, only about 5% of the 131,000 textile workers were black, and almost all of these were in the dirtiest and most hazardous jobs, in the opening and card rooms, where cotton dust is thickest and the pay is the lowest. By 1974, 24% of the 154,000 South Carolina textile workers were black, and the percentage continues to rise.

Integration at the workplace brought blacks and whites together as equals for the first time. But it took a crisis to solidify the races into a positive, unified force. In 1973 at Lane and Andrews, textile workers at the Oneita Mills, frustrated by stalled contract negotiations, went out on strike. 75% were black and 85% were women. After a four-month strike and boycott, when black and white ran soup kitchens and picket lines together, the workers celebrated victory — singing traditional textile songs in the black folk rhythm. (see Oneita article)

Back in Charleston, black workers had also begun to move in the wake of the civil-rights era. Hospital workers at the state hospital there — almost all black and predominantly women — began to meet and discuss their pitifully low wages. In 1969, they invited the militant hospital workers union 1199 from New York to help them organize. Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, and SCLC joined 1199 in a sustained community effort to secure benefits for the hospital workers. After many marches, arrests and much community pressure, they won a significant victory in wages and working conditions. But South Carolina does not permit state employees to bargain a contract, and in the

face of such prohibitive legal structures, no permanent union was built. Today, the hospital workers still have no union protection.

A few black workers in Charleston had managed to build up some power over the years, securing leverage in the critical dockworkers trades. The unionized Longshoremen developed an all black local, like many of the Southern Longshoremen strongholds, and adamantly protected their high wages. The docks are reputed to be the only place in South Carolina where blacks could get union wages. U.S. Representative Mendel Rivers helped restore Charleston's waterfront business by securing ten major military installations for his home district. The Pentagon now accounts for 35-45% of the area's employment, counting the military and civilian personnel (some 35,000 combined) on the DoD payroll.

Charleston's revival and the burgeoning beach trade along the Atlantic brought a thriving tourist profit to coastal gentlemen of recent years. But the money-makers still need to call on the black community for the dirty work. Some even claim that when the summer season rolls around, certain businessmen use black ministers as job brokers, rounding up seasonal help from the poor rural areas. The Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, aware of these shenanigans and the insecurity service workers face, have recently won an NLRB election at a Holiday Inn. They intend to continue their organizing into the chains and seasonal operations.

State planners worried about South Carolina's industrial base have opened recruitment offices in Tokyo and Brussels, and have chosen to boost Charleston with a Foreign-Trade Zone. Between 1960 and 1975, foreign firms invested \$1.4 billion in South Carolina — nearly a fifth of the total manufacturing investment for those years.

Foreign businesses are not the only changes for South Carolina. Chemicals, electronics, and machinery have expanded significantly over the last several years. The turning point came in 1950 when DuPont opened a new nylon-synthesizing plant in Camden. Since that beginning, Celanese, Exxon, Allied, Gulf, Phillips, Monsanto, and others have come to South Carolina soil. Today, the petro-chemical industry thrives with more than 100 plants and \$3 billion investment. About two-thirds of foreign investment has been in chemicals.

With the influx of industry, ironically, has come an out-migration of South Carolina blacks riding the "chicken-bone" special to urban centers of the North. The black percentage of South Carolina's population dropped from 51% in 1920 to 30% in 1970. And, of course, the economic sectors reflected the out-migration. In 1950, the service sector was 45% black; in 1970, 31%. In the manufacturing sector, the decline was more moderate — from 17% in 1950 to 15% in 1970, but considering the enormous increase of blacks working in textiles, a decrease in black manufacturing employment is astounding. The influx of national companies and the changing of discriminatory job patterns came too late to stem the out-migration. Some workers were imported to Northern industrial centers as strikebreakers, but many simply fled the state because there was no way to make a living from low-paying, seasonal work and marginal farming.

Throughout these shifting patterns, unions have remained weak. In 1974, only 8% of the state's workers were

unionized. The Communications Workers lead the state (the telephone company has been organized for years), and other state-wide unions are only moderately large.

But the union movement might begin achieving more successes. In November, 1975, workers at the General Electric turbine plant in Charleston voted in a close and hotly-contested election to be represented by the United Electrical Workers (UE) and to be covered by the GE national contracts. In June, 1976, the Bakery Workers Union won an election at the Russell Stover Candies plant at Marion by a large margin. Significantly, the workers voted for the union in the midst of a national boycott against Russell Stover candy, called because of a dispute at a Northern Stover plant, signaling that South Carolina workers are willing to vote for a union during a boycott. The lesson has not escaped the textile worker organizers who have returned to the J.P. Stevens plants in Greenville. Following a successful union vote by 3,500 Stevens workers in North Carolina, the union has reopened its organizing efforts at other Stevens

plants while also preparing a national consumer boycott of Stevens products.

Greenville has changed since 1963. Black workers now form a minority in the Stevens plants. And Michelin Tire has built a major facility in Greenville, employing some 3,500 at rates like \$6.75 an hour. The Rubber Workers have not attempted to unionize the plant yet but are carefully watching this first move into the U.S. by the French company. Meanwhile loom fixers and especially electricians are leaving jobs in textile mills for the higher Michelin wages.

Finally, South Carolinians are learning a new meaning to their state motto, "While I breathe, I hope." In 1975, retired textile workers in Columbia formed the first chapter of the Carolina Brown Lung Association, demanding changes in the workmen's compensation laws and OSHA regulations so that they can in fact "breathe and hope." Other chapters in Spartanburg and Greenville have been formed and the Brown Lung Association has made its presence known in the 1976 session of the state legislature.

tennessee

The list for Tennessee is long: Union Carbide, Dupont, Magnavox, Firestone, Eastman Kodak, International Harvester, Ford Motor, Levi Strauss, ITT, Alcoa, Armour, Swift, Stokely-Van Camp, General Electric, Goodyear, Maxwell House, Jack Daniels, Holiday Inn. And that's only the beginning of an impressive roll call of major industries in the state. Many other large manufacturing interests, and even more small textile mills, food product plants and mining operations, share the rich human and natural resources of Tennessee.

Tennessee is notoriously attractive to businessmen. Though worker movements are strong in certain areas, industry still skims profits off the state's low wage scales, freely available minerals and abundant energy. In January 1975, for example, Dow Chemical moved to Knoxville after evaluating 90 cities as possible locations. Less than a year ago, a survey by the Industrial Development Research Council, an international business group, rated Tennessee as one of 19 states which give "excellent" cooperation to developers.

Much time and money have gone into the planning of industrial parks and developmental districts. Tennessee highway and river transport systems are top-notch. Governor Ray Blanton has traveled throughout this country and the Middle East, offering TVA's cheap electricity, the state's proximity to major markets, a booming finance and service sector, an antiquated tax system, good recreation and a healthy tourist trade as strong enticements for industry to relocate in Tennessee.

The state, however, has devoted less time to remedying the immediate problems of poverty, or improving schools and hospitals. No statewide legislation has passed for land planning use, revamping tax structures or protecting workers. For years, Tennesseans were grateful for any job, any salary after back-breaking, low-paying agricultural and mining work. Industrialization was a welcome change to many.

Until the arrival of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1930s Tennesseans lived agrarian, often isolated lives.

In 1930, the average personal income of state residents was \$317 a year, 45% of the national figure. At that time, most areas were without electricity; rich farmlands along the state's rivers were frequently washed with floods. Then TVA covered 40,000 square miles with dams and reservoirs, brought electricity to rural areas—yet took land from many farmers. Soon came highways, televisions, nuclear research centers, scientists, businessmen, liberal reformers. Unskilled, footloose farmers and their families became city dwellers, working in factories for low wages. A few national companies drifted in; Memphis hosted Firestone at this early date. But, for years, the majority of the workers were employed in extractive industries: tobacco, cotton, soybeans, coal, stone, metals, timber.

Now the state is changing. The number of farms and farmworkers has drastically declined, and technology has enabled mining operations to employ fewer men. Profits in agriculture and mining are at an all-time high, but manpower has increasingly shifted to service jobs and manufacturing. The once rural-based population of the state has moved, and now 58% of the people live in cities.

With the arrival of international corporations has come a number of international unions. Today, 20.6% of the state work force belongs to unions, one of the highest figures in the South. Many groups are involved in impressive projects. The United Auto Workers, for instance, are experimenting in a joint management-worker self-improvement program at a car mirror plant in Bolivar. Workers there are no longer tied to eight-hour work days for their salaries, have opportunities for special classes at the plant, and take part in regular discussions with management about working conditions. Ford Glass workers in Nashville have a contract not significantly different from those of the company's employees elsewhere in the country, and machinists and electrical and construction workers in other Tennessee plants have accomplished the same in their contract negotiations. In some places, unions have joined together to aid

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state pro- duct (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | | | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | | | % of sector's em- ployment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | | % of sector's em- ployment that is female, 1970 | | % female, 1960 | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--|----------------|----|---|----|----------------|--|
| | | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | % empl., 1960 | | % empl., 1950 | % black, 1950 | % female, 1960 | | % female, 1950 | | | | | |
| Manufacturing | \$4,644 | 39 | 31 | 31 | 447 | 31 | 26 | 21 | 11.0 | 9 | 11 | 35.7 | 30 | 28 | |
| Trade & Distribution | 2,958 | 25 | 26 | 25 | 367 | 25 | 24 | 24 | 10.5 | 11 | 14 | 33.6 | 30 | 28 | |
| Service | 3,300 | 28 | 31 | 29 | 474 | 33 | 28 | 23 | 19.1 | 25 | 29 | 56.8 | 56 | 51 | |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 431 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 62 | 4 | 11 | 22 | 13.0 | 16 | 15 | 7.0 | 6 | 4 | |
| Construction | 321 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 101 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 10.2 | 12 | 15 | 4.9 | 3 | 3 | |
| Mining | 104 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 | * | 1 | 1 | 4.9 | 5 | 4 | 3.9 | 2 | 1 | |
| Totals | 11,758 | | | | 1458 | | | | 13.5 | 15 | 17 | 38.3 | 32 | 25 | |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Apparel | | Chemicals | | Electrical Equip. | | NAME | TOP COMPANIES | | |
|--|---------|--------|-----------|--------|-------------------|-------|---------------------------|---------------|--------|------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 73,700 | 20,600 | 58,700 | 32,700 | 41,300 | 2,800 | DuPont | 9,018 | 6 | plastic,explosv. |
| % male | 24 | 19 | 82 | 84 | 56 | 67 | Genesco | 8,200 | 18 | shoes,clothes |
| % female | 76 | 81 | 18 | 16 | 44 | 33 | Alcoa | 5,600 | 1 | metals |
| % black male | 2 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 5 | 5 | Combustn. Engr. | 5,200 | 2 | genr. equip. |
| % black female | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 6 | * | General Electric | 2,500 | 4 | appliances |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$2.62 | \$0.88 | \$5.72 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .87 | .70 | 1.14 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 25,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | 22,100 | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 17,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | Electrical Workers (IBEW) | 15,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 12,400 | | |

each others' causes. In Nashville, Teamsters offered their help to electric service workers, and the UAW expressed support for that city's teachers in the event of a strike.

Miners are mobilizing for more benefits and control of working conditions. Though Tennessee was once a stronghold for the UMWA, unemployment and destructive national union policies in the 1950s and early '60s led to the union's loss of strength. In 1973, only one UMWA mine remained in Tennessee. A recent organizing drive has netted several mines for the UMWA, but the efforts continue to be plagued by the Southern Labor Union, an Oneita, Tennessee-based organization which enjoys the support of the coal companies. In 1975, the UMWA revealed that the SLU's founder, Attorney Ted Q. Wilson, had personal holdings in several coal companies and charged him with violation of federal conflict-of-interest laws. So far, no action has been taken against him by the Departments of Labor or Justice. With the high profits in the coal industry, Wilson and the SLU have been able to negotiate increased wages for some of the union's workers, but they have failed to provide the safety protection, fringe benefits and job security offered by the UMWA.

In recent years retired miners have joined with medical students and health activists from Nashville's Vanderbilt Student Health Coalition to work for occupational health

and safety legislation and compensation for black lung victims. The Tennessee coalition's success (in cooperation with the Black Lung Movement throughout Appalachia) is reflected in the broad-based support, by both liberals and conservatives, for new health-care legislation. Even Tennessee Republican senators Howard Baker and Bill Brock have supported the cause of 10,000 retired miners who have been excluded by previous black lung legislation.

Increasingly, labor and community people are lending each other a hand. Nashville labor and civil rights groups kept a liberal Democrat in the US House of Representatives for six terms; now Richard Fulton has returned from Washington and serves as mayor of Nashville. Taking his place in Congress is Clifford Allen, enjoying the same support.

The most dramatic alliance of community and labor came in 1968 when Martin Luther King and other national civil-rights organizers marched shoulder-to-shoulder with Memphis garbage workers. The country was shattered when King was assassinated, but the local AFSCME members held firm to the cause they had shared with him. Tennessee law does not authorize collective bargaining for state or municipal employees, but in 1968 AFSCME received *de facto* recognition to bargain. Since that time, AFSCME has become the city's largest and most politically powerful civil-

rights organization, as well as a unionizing force for blue-collar workers, notably the service workers at Memphis City Hospital. It has served as an inspiration to workers in Memphis and other public employees throughout the state. An increasing number of Memphis blacks are moving into formerly all-white occupations, and fear of recurrence of the bitter 1968 strike causes city officials to pay respectful attention to public workers' demands. In 1974, members of the Memphis local operated phone banks and successfully campaigned on the streets to elect black Democrat Harold E. Ford to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Garbage workers in Knoxville were not as organized or as successful in their strike in 1973. A combination of restrictive state laws, a restraining order against picketing, division among union members (both AFSCME and the Teamsters were there), and an effective public relations job by city officials broke the strike. To celebrate his victory, Mayor Kyle C. Testerman gallantly mounted a garbage truck in front of television cameras.

Nashville's metropolitan government (city and county combined) has experienced a more recent jolt of public employee disputes. During the spring of 1976, police, bus drivers, electric service workers and teachers were involved in conflicts, narrowly avoiding strikes. The Independent Police Union demanded higher wages, longevity pay, health benefits and changes in disciplinary procedures. Two local employee associations, Metro Transit Authority Workers and Nashville Electric Service Workers (NES), also discussed salary conditions and workers' rights. Electric workers, however, eventually grew frustrated with their official representatives and walked out of negotiations between NES officials and the Metro Electric Power Board

when they did not receive the salary they demanded. The NES General Manager considered legal action against the employees, calling the incident a "wildcat strike." The walkout soon led to a curtailment of services to the city.

The Metro Nashville Education Association (MNEA) battled the Metro Board of Education for more reasons than the proposed wage increase, though money was certainly an important factor. The Board offered a 5.7% increase; teachers demanded 16% and finally received 10.24% bringing their yearly wage to \$9,150. But they also sought and received a voice in decision-making for school disciplinary procedures and curriculum planning. Hours before a strike vote by over 4,000 metro teachers, with picket lines already planned for area schools, MNEA and the Board allowed a federal mediator to resolve the dispute.

Like the Nashville electric workers, TVA workers (classified as federal employees) have been caught in disputes against both management and labor officials. The rank-and-file movement, led by electrical workers and others, filed suit in federal courts against the Tennessee Valley Trades and Labor Council which is composed of 16 building trade and industrial international unions. Workers claim they want to "democratize" union procedures; as it is, the Council is self-perpetuating, with union representatives not elected by workers, but appointed by the international unions; there are no clear public policies of record keeping.

Workers and community groups are actively seeking a greater voice in a state that has devoted past energies to giving itself away to private industries. But Tennessee has a long way to go. The state retains a right-to-work law. Large numbers of people are employed by small, family-owned textile and apparel plants where unions are strongly opposed. Textile Workers Union of America, particularly, has found organizing difficult in East Tennessee where mill hands easily outnumber the better-known miners. Jobs are highly valued, despite low wages and lack of benefits. In 1975, 24 of Tennessee's rural counties had unemployment in excess of 10%.

As in other states, women and blacks have the lowest paying, unskilled jobs. Of the working women in this state, 65% are clerical workers, operatives or service workers. Forty-two percent of working black women are employed in service jobs, with 25% of those in private households. Between 1960 and 1970, 8.1% of the black population left Tennessee. Many more blacks left rural areas and moved to one of the state's four metropolitan areas. In 1970, 80.1% of Tennessee's black population resided in cities. The largest number went to Memphis where service jobs are most plentiful.

While unskilled laborers in Tennessee find service jobs in the cities, recently displaced farmers work for low pay in rural factories. Poverty still rages throughout the state, especially in the mountains where nine large landholding companies and TVA ruinously strip mine these high altitude counties and pay low property taxes. It's the state policy: Ray Blanton's "Tennessee 2000" plan is designed to push the state to top rank in the nation in business and industry by the year 2000, using the lure of low taxes and cheap resources. State officials claim the advent of big business will remedy the people's poverty, but it's worth noting that from 1930 to 1972 — a period of massive industrialization for Tennessee — the state only moved from the 45th in the nation in per capita income to 41st.

photo by Bill Fibben



texas

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | GROSS STATE PRODUCT (GSP) | | | | EMPLOYMENT | | | | RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION | | | GENDER COMPOSITION | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| | gross state pro- duct (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's em- ployment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's em- ployment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
| Manufacturing | | | | | 765 | 18 | 16 | 14 | 1.1 | 9 | 11 | 24.8 | 19 | 17 |
| Trade & Distribution | | | | | 1,205 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 9.4 | 9 | 10 | 35.7 | 31 | 29 |
| Service | | | | | 1,556 | 38 | 32 | 27 | 14.3 | 17 | 20 | 25.8 | 53 | 49 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | | | | | 195 | 5 | 9 | 16 | 8.5 | 11 | 14 | 9.8 | 8 | 7 |
| Construction | | | | | 318 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 10.2 | 10 | 10 | 5.8 | 4 | 2 |
| Mining | | | | | 103 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2.9 | 1 | 1 | 13.5 | 10 | 7 |
| Totals | | | | | 4,142 | | | | 11.5 | 11 | 13 | 26.9 | 30 | 26 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Non-elec. Machine | | Food Prodctn. | | Apparel | | TOP COMPANIES | | | |
|--|-------------------|--------|---------------|--------|---------|--------|------------------------|------------|--------|------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | NAME | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 96,600 | 26,200 | 89,600 | 58,300 | 73,500 | 22,100 | Bell Helicopter | 11,000 | 10 | helicopters |
| % male | 86 | 90 | 75 | 80 | 20 | 20 | Dow Chemical | 8,000 | 2 | chem., equip. |
| % female | 14 | 10 | 25 | 20 | 70 | 80 | Phillips Petroleum | 7,400 | 47 | oil-based prods. |
| % black male | 12 | 6 | 13 | 10 | 2 | 2 | General Dynamics | 7,000 | 1 | aircraft |
| % black female | 2 | * | 3 | 1 | 7 | 3 | Texas Instruments | n.a. | 4 | digital equip. |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$4.23 | n.a. | \$3.50 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | 0.85 | n.a. | .84 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 40,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 36,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | 31,200 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 30,300 | | |
| | | | | | | | Carpenters | 26,000 | | |

Bigger is understood to mean better in Texas, the state which epitomizes the remarkable industrial growth in size and population boom of the South in recent years. Largest both in size and population of the Southern states, Texas also offers the most glaring contradictions between rich and poor, and the inevitable gains and sufferings derived from that growth. With no taxes on corporate profits, Texas extends a haven to industry. At the same time, it ranks as one of the states lowest in unemployment benefits and rate of unionization. Until 1969 it had no state minimum-wage law. Nearly one-fifth of all Texans live below the poverty level.

The beginnings of the boom can be traced back to the discovery of East Texas oil in the 1930s by "Dad" Joiner. Dad died penniless after the ensuing speculators' heyday, but his legacy remains in the sprawl of Houston and Dallas, as well as the diversified industrial base which sprang from oil. Today even the Rhode Island-sized King Ranch receives more income from oil than cattle. Following World War II, with the help of federal subsidies arranged by powerful friends in Congress and the White House, Texas entrepreneurs expanded into construction, oil exploration, banking and insurance. Political influence peaked during the Johnson presidency, when Texas defense contracts tripled. Today, 8% of the national budget expenditures for

defense and agriculture, and 10% of the space program's funds, go to Texas contractors.

The boom has caused other changes as well. As in much of the South, the rural population and agricultural employment have been declining. However, farm production of cotton, wheat and sorghum grain — more dependent on machines than hand labor — remains important and still brings in over \$5 billion a year. Texas cities have absorbed the displaced farmers, and now hold 75% of the 11 million residents of Texas — the nation's third most populous state. The coastal area, which includes Galveston, Houston and Port Arthur, has experienced the highest growth rate, attracting two million people in 30 years.

Private industry has also moved to Texas cities, seeking what some have called the best business climate in the country. With their arrival the tone of Texas life has changed radically. For example, Fort Worth, once known as a cattle town, is now the site of many aerospace companies, including Bell Helicopter. Employing 10,000 people in the area, Bell officials have learned the benefits of working with Washington. Government contracts in the 60s accounted for an estimated 85% of its business. Neighboring Dallas, which houses an increasing number of corporate headquarters, has become the New South's banker with billions of dollars of assets from the financial, insurance and real estate industries.

In another example of unprecedented growth, manufacturing increased 116% between 1960 and 1970, compared to a national rate of 55%. The latest recession barely affected the growth of this or any other sector of Texas' economy. The statewide unemployment rate has been kept to a low 5.8%, though areas with large Chicano or black populations, including cities such as Laredo and Brownsville, suffer double-figure jobless rates. Approximately one-third of the state's 800,000 manufacturing workers are employed in three industries: non-electrical machinery, transportation equipment and food products. Non-electrical machinery industries, which employ the largest number of factory workers — 102,300 — also registered one of the largest employment gains during 1975 because of the high demand for equipment for oil field exploration and drilling. In Texas, unlike many other states, the lumber and wood products industries, as well as construction, continue to gain workers. The apparel industry, which employs a great many women and more Chicanos than any field (other than farm work), is also expected to grow from 60,000 workers in 1970 to 92,000 by 1980.

Expansion in trade, finance and particularly the service sectors even surpasses manufacturing. Trade and finance accounted for over one million jobs in 1970, and 770,000 now hold jobs that are considered service employment — hospital workers, hotel and restaurant employees — with a 3% increase in the last year alone. By the year 2000 in the coastal region, the service sector will represent an estimated 55% of all jobs. Government workers, also rapidly increasing, number over 820,000.

The main reason for the Texas explosion — and its immunity to recession — is a highly diversified, capitalized economy fueled by vast energy resources. The "energy crisis" only improved the situation. Oil money has gone into new fields of communication, petrochemicals and food processing, while durable goods manufacturing has remained strong in the production of machinery required for new

energy exploration. Reflecting vast amounts of investment, the chemical and petro-chemical industries (now employing 66,900) consume much of the new plant construction and expansion. Installations such as military bases and the manned space program in Houston have also created a network of support jobs in the service area for people dislodged from rural agricultural employment.

Tenneco, the second-ranking Texas corporation with over \$5 billion in annual sales, typifies the new employer. Its multinational activities range from shipbuilding and finance to oil and chemical production, real estate and agriculture. While oil and natural gas provide 68% of total profits, agriculture and real estate are becoming very important, increasing ninefold from 1967-1973. Tenneco now plans to integrate its agricultural operations "down to the dinner table," owning farmland throughout the country, producing herbicides and fertilizers, owning the food transportation systems and manufacturing the final packaging material. Tenneco has enlarged its commercial vessel construction as the demand for large oil tankers increased and continues to receive federal shipbuilding contracts. And the diversified giant owns roughly 6% of a multi-bank holding company with total resources of \$5 billion.

Union struggles have shown that wage earners can rarely compete with the might of billion-dollar corporations like Tenneco. In addition, unions have regularly encountered the obstacles of right-to-work laws, as well as bargaining and picketing restrictions. In fact, with only 10% of over four million workers unionized, Texas claims one of the lowest rates in the country. Employers such as the massive Brown and Root Construction Company, known for its Vietnam tiger cages and immense war profits are viciously anti-union.

Consistently, the highest percentage of unionized workers occurs where industry-wide bargaining exists. The Communications Workers (CWA) maintain the largest membership (41,000) while the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), Steelworkers, Teamsters and Machinists are also well represented by statewide membership. Despite strong management attitudes against labor, unions have gained a foothold. Overall union membership increased 8.8% between 1968 and 1970.

Historically concentrated in industrialized East Texas, particularly the Houston-Beaumont area, organized labor may soon expand to other areas, especially as service employees gain more strength.

As in other Southern states, the '60s brought many organizing drives to Texas public and service employees. The Texas Public Employee Association expanded to 38,000 in 1973, having gained 13,000 members in three years, and has undertaken a determined fight to settle grievances for its members. Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Employees and Restaurant and Hotel Employees are two of the fastest growing unions in Texas; reflecting the same trend the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) increased their membership by 22% in only two years. Another recent development that may spur more activity on the local level is the removal of state restrictions of police and fire fighters to bargain collectively; upon local approval they now have that right. In addition, an Austin local of the Laborers Union, which has strong black membership statewide, has challenged the constitutionality of the law which prohibits collective bargaining

rights among public employees.

Occupational health and safety issues have increasingly become a concern of Texas unions. OCAW (26,000 members), for instance, has utilized traditional channels such as contract negotiations as well as innovative legal and investigative techniques to gain workers' rights in occupational safety and health matters. Former US Senator Ralph Yarborough supported the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970, but Texas companies still balk at the recognition of their workers' health rights. The Pittsburgh Corning Co. closed its asbestos plant in Tyler rather than create safe working conditions after determined OCAW staff uncovered the hazards of asbestosis. Hughs Tool of Houston recently reached a settlement with OSHA over reported threats against those workers who merely contacted OSHA about job-safety protection. Current research suggests a link between the production of synthetic rubber, not uncommon in the Texas chemical industry, and leukemia. At least three people who worked in a BF Goodrich plant in Port Neches have died of the disease in the past five years.

But perhaps the most critical labor group in Texas stands apart — the Chicanos. For years they have been manipulated by Anglo businessmen and often used as strikebreakers. They have been warmly welcomed in the state during wartime, when few native American workers were around, and forcefully sent back to Mexico when they tried to pick in the fields during depression or severe recession times. And they are a familiar target for employers searching for cheap labor.

With blacks, Chicanos form one-third of the state's population and one-fourth of the workforce. In addition these two groups make up almost 60% of the state's poor. They live amidst lush South Texas wonderlands of melons, vegetables and citrus, but the land is not theirs. It is owned by wealthy Anglo farmer/businessmen and agribusiness corporations like Del Monte.

Texas Chicanos are not just victims, however. They are taking bold strides toward controlling their own work and their lives. For years, Tony Orendain led the Texas branch of the United Farm Workers, focusing the local farm worker energy on organizing support for the boycott of

non-UFW lettuce and Gallo wine. This work was extremely valuable for the main body of the UFW in California, but did little to aid Texas farm workers. Now Orendain has taken charge of his own Texas Farm Workers Union, fighting local battles for Texas workers. Different strategies have emerged, and with them new hopes. Orendain reportedly doubts the effectiveness of boycotts, UFW's main tactical strength, for winning a strike in South Texas. Instead, he wants to develop pressures to insure that union elections are held.

Orendain and the TFWU have led strikes, picketed extensively, marched in support of their demands. And repeatedly they have encountered vicious management tactics, faced hired gun thugs and engaged in bouts with the Texas Rangers. In May, 1975, scenes reminiscent of the bitter 1966 Texas battles took place in the wildcat melon strikes of Starr and Hidalgo Counties. A ranch supervisor, claiming a group of marchers was trespassing, started shooting. The man was reported to say, "I didn't shoot at them. I shot *them*." Eleven wounded marchers can testify to the truth of his statement.

In the face of this opposition, the Farm Workers Union has accumulated great support but few victories. The situation is a complex one, for the organizing demands working amidst 1) extremely mobile groups of people with few legal rights, 2) illegal immigrants, 3) legal immigrants who are allowed to work, but not where a labor dispute has been certified. Rarely are illegal workers kept from taking jobs. Growers who provide housing, food or transportation to illegal workers are not themselves violating the law. Only the migrant can be punished.

Chicanos have been active in La Raza Unida, a third party political force with considerable power in South Texas, and in a battle to further democratize that organization. They have formed their own unions, like the Texas Farm Workers Union. And they have added great strength to established unions like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in their famed Farah strike. Chicanos are not the largest force in the state's labor scene, and are certainly not the most powerful. But their determination is an inspiration to the rest. They are the poorest of Texas but have refused to be just another exploited resource.

virginia

Virginia is a border state between the South and the North; even statistically, it rests somewhere between the two. Compared to other Southern states, it is quite industrialized and wages are high. But viewed in a larger context, the same figures place Virginia's average wage, \$3.65, at just 82% of the national average. Like other Southern states, many areas of Virginia are dependent upon low-salary industries, especially textile factories, paper mills, and tobacco farming. But the primary force in the state economy is something else: the federal government. A higher percentage of Virginia residents are on the federal payroll than in any state except Alaska. Federal workers are especially concentrated in two areas of the state: near the District of Columbia and the Norfolk-Newport News harbor.

Beyond this however, Virginia has a well-diversified

economic base. After a phenomenal growth — 50% of the state's employment gains in the 1960s — manufacturing accounts for about 20% of all employment. Textiles, apparel and chemicals combined support about one-third of the industrial workforce, and much of the rest is based in tobacco, food products, and pulp and paper plants. After two decades of stagnation and decline, mining has grown recently, as has tourism which today brings in more than \$1 billion a year. Agricultural employment is much less than in the past, but has leveled off at about three percent of the workforce. It remains important for regions in the lower Piedmont where many blacks work small farms. And, like much of the South, the service sector is becoming the largest portion of the state economy.

Virginia benefited greatly from the national economic

growth of the 1960s. The state created a special Division of Industrial Development to make sure Virginia got its share. Today, the division sends eight specialists throughout the country to woo new businesses and to function as liaisons between prospective investors and local governments. A special Department of Community Development helps local governments float bonds to finance up to 100% of a new or expanding plant, or to raise local financing for new industry. Localities helped attract new businesses with the construction of highways, schools and utility systems.

Their efforts succeeded. From 1962-72, 1,009 manufacturing firms located for the first time in Virginia and 1,007 already there announced expansions, creating some 90,000 new manufacturing jobs — over half for unskilled, rural women. In recent years, more high-wage industries have come to the state as well, manufacturing products like electrical equipment, and the majority of these have gone to skilled men. An increasing number of foreign firms are locating in the state; for example, Swedish investors plan to build a Volvo plant in Chesapeake.

Virginia's diversified economy and dependence on federal

employment have traditionally made the state appear "depression-proof." The Norfolk-Newport News metropolitan area in the southeast contains the largest naval complex in the world, plus 20-odd major defense contractors, including the multi-million dollar Newport News Shipping Company (a subsidiary of Tenneco, the giant oil-producing conglomerate described in the Texas profile). Norfolk's dependence upon the military in past decades has insured a high level of both employment and profits. Similarly, the high percentage of government and trade employees in Richmond and the D.C. area have been relatively immune to layoffs. Still, the 1974 recession caused some uncomfortable times in Virginia. Unemployment climbed to 6.8%, low compared to much of the country, but very high for Virginia. These figures included such stable sectors as government so the hardships of unemployed textile, paper and tobacco workers received less notice than they deserved. At one time up to 1,140,000 workers were identified as jobless.

During the last half of 1975, manufacturing employment gained back about 50% of its 1974 losses, but recovery

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | | | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | | | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---|----------------|------|----|----|
| | | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | % empl., 1960 | | % empl., 1950 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 | | | |
| Manufacturing | \$3688 | 25 | 23 | 25 | 384 | 22 | 22 | 20 | 19.1 | 17 | 20 | 32.1 | 26 | 25 |
| Trade & Distribution | 3975 | 27 | 25 | 24 | 424 | 25 | 24 | 24 | 13.1 | 14 | 16 | 36.5 | 32 | 27 |
| Service | 5863 | 40 | 30 | 39 | 705 | 41 | 34 | 29 | 17.7 | 17 | 28 | 53.4 | 52 | 48 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 374 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 57 | 3 | 8 | 15 | 23.1 | 27 | 28 | 10.2 | 8 | 5 |
| Construction | 501 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 126 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 15.8 | 18 | 18 | * | 4 | 3 |
| Mining | 273 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 17 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4.7 | 4 | 6 | 4.3 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 14675 | | | | 1714 | | | | 21.2 | 16 | 22 | 38.9 | 33 | 27 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Textiles | | Apparel | | Chemicals | | NAME | TOP COMPANIES | | |
|---|----------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|------------------------|---------------|--------|------------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 45,000 | 40,800 | 39,200 | 14,000 | 38,100 | 28,300 | Newport-News | 23,000 | 1 | ship constr. |
| % male | 47 | 55 | 15 | 19 | 81 | 81 | General Electric | 18,000 | 7 | |
| % female | 53 | 45 | 85 | 81 | 19 | 19 | DuPont | 10,000 | 4 | |
| % black male | 11 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 13 | Philip-Morris | 8,600 | 10 | cigaret, razors |
| % black female | 10 | 2 | 13 | 7 | 3 | * | Dan River | 8,500 | 4 | fabrics, carpets |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$3.08 | \$1.23 | \$2.68 | \$0.95 | \$4.56 | \$1.41 | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | .96 | 1.00 | .89 | .77 | .91 | .95 | MEMBERSHIP | | | |
| | | | | | | | Mine Workers | 12,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 12,700 | | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | 10,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Tobacco Workers | 9,900 | | |
| | | | | | | | Communications Workers | 9,400 | | |

concentrated overwhelmingly in the urban centers and little in small towns and rural areas. Commercial construction has only returned to 75% of its previous level, and layoffs continue. Moreover, employment by state and local governments, an important source of new jobs, has been curtailed. Virginians have begun to realize that even their industrial diversity does not guarantee immunity from the nation's economic woes.

Unions have had a hard battle to gain acceptance and political power in Virginia. Many of the South's labor wars have touched Virginia soil, and they left many in the state wary of unions' presence. The Appalachian coal struggles included the seven-county coal pocket in southwestern Virginia; textiles' flying squadrons traveled to mills in Southside Virginia during the 1934 General Strike; and tobacco workers have struggled to unionize in Richmond. More recently public employees have had to fight ambiguous state laws — again, like their Southern neighbors.

For years, one reason for unions' troubles has been the conservative Governor and now US Senator, Harry Byrd. For 40 years, until 1969, the Byrd machine ran Virginia politics. In the face of such power, union members had to play with Byrd or not play at all. In 1961, however, the state AFL-CIO, in an effort to counter the Byrd control, brought suit against the state, challenging a law which required that a poll tax be collected from every voter. The law, of course, was merely a mechanism to hinder blacks from voting, and the courts ruled it illegal. This was one of Byrd's first major defeats, and from that day on the Byrd machine declined. Looking for other tools to chisel away at Byrd's power, labor backed the successful Voting Rights Bill. In 1952, there were about 800,000 registered voters in the state. After the bill passed, the AFL-CIO helped with a voter registration drive that raised the number of registered voters to 1.2 million.

These new voters have proved valuable. In 1973, populist, labor supporter, Henry Howell took on conservative Mills Godwin for the governor's chair. Labor forces from throughout the state came together behind one candidate as never before. It wasn't enough, however, and Howell narrowly lost by 15,000 votes.

Gov. Godwin, long an opponent of unions, took steps toward eliminating what influence unions had mustered. In Northern Virginia, Arlington County attracted his ire when it signed collective bargaining agreements with some 2,700 county employees, mostly teachers. Godwin took the opportunity to ask his attorney general to challenge the legality of the contracts. His intentions are clear: the governor proudly proclaims his desire personally to bust the public employee union efforts in Virginia, and hopes that a successful suit "would establish as a principle beyond any doubt that public employee collective bargaining agreements elsewhere in the state would be illegal."

Public employee agreements exist in about a dozen cities and counties, involving the Fire Fighters, the American Federation of Teachers, the Teamsters (Fairfax and Arlington police) and other unions. Some 200,000 public employees work in jobs that could be unionized by these groups.

These unions are under attack from more forces than just Gov. Godwin. Public employee advocates pushed their cause in the legislature, but a bill which would establish rules for bargaining was defeated in committee, 8-7. The right of public employees to organize has become an

emotional election issue for city councilmen in Norfolk. And the state Chamber of Commerce is planning an extensive "issue awareness" campaign against public employee organizing.

In addition, the Public Service Research Council, an organization established by Americans Against Union Control of Government, has chosen Virginia for its initial efforts to block public employees from organizing throughout the country. Its chairmen are two of the state's most noted conservative politicians, former Governor William Tuck and State Representative Howard W. Smith, until 1966 the chairman of the House Rules Committee.

Though public employees must fight just to establish their rights, Virginia industrial employees have struggled for union representation for years, successfully organizing 13.8% of the workforce. Statewide unions, like the Communication Workers (who have organized the telephone system employees) and the Teamsters are strongest, along with the United Mine Workers in the southwestern coal fields. Tobacco workers have long had a solid foothold in large Richmond plants, and the Steel Workers have established locals throughout the state. The Textile Workers and Clothing Workers Unions have had difficult times in the state's small shops, but some of the larger plants of Dan River Mills and other companies have been organized for some time.

When the spotlight of national media attention was recently turned on Virginia workers, however, it wasn't to cover familiar organizing battles or contract negotiations. It was to explain a newly-recognized worker hazard: their own products. In 1975, workers from a chemical plant in Hopewell announced to the press that they had "the shakes." Many feared they were sterile. They blamed it all on exposure to the insecticide Kepone. Later in the year, the workers gained one small victory when the plant owners acknowledged the dangers of Kepone and shut down their Hopewell plant. But more than half of the 130 workers' families were hospitalized, contaminated at home from Kepone poisoning on work clothes. The James River was also poisoned, and its fishing industry damaged.

The conflict has dramatized the weaknesses of the



national Occupational Safety and Health Act. Neither state nor federal OSHA officials would accept blame for the disaster, claiming jurisdictional mixups and underfunding for lack of action.

The disaster created a wave of legal activity and national attention to workers' health problems. Nineteen former employees have brought damage suits totaling \$170 million against Allied Chemical's Virginia operations for negligence resulting in serious and permanent injuries to themselves and their families. And the state and a group of fishermen are suing for damage to the James River, which has been closed to commercial fishing. Innovative legal rulings may follow. A federal grand jury has already indicted the company for discharging the Kepone into the James. And the grand jury went even further. It accused Hopewell of failing to notify the Environmental Protection Agency of the

Kepone pollution. If convicted, the city will face a \$3.9 million fine in a precedent-setting case which could alter the relationship between corporate polluters and municipalities.

As is so often the case in Virginia, the needs and concerns of the state's workers remained a secondary priority. The devastation to scores of people's health was not sufficient to trigger the outrage of state officials; it took the damage to the state's fishing industry. For once, however, it was clear that a policy of blind industrial growth is not without problems. The corporations that provided jobs also caused immense destruction. "Kepone," announced the state AFL-CIO newsletter, "is just another word for the stupidity of the doctrine that commerce must be made to grow at all costs, as an end unto itself, even if it devours the very people who created it."

west virginia

| TOTAL LABOR FORCE BREAKDOWN | gross state product (GSP) in \$1000, 1970 | % total GSP by sector, 1970 | % total GSP, 1960 | % total GSP, 1950 | total employment by sector in 1000s, 1970 | % employment by sector, 1970 | % empl., 1960 | % empl., 1950 | % of sector's employment that is black, 1970 | % black, 1960 | % black, 1950 | % of sector's employment that is female, 1970 | % female, 1960 | % female, 1950 |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Manufacturing | \$1,681 | 32 | 31 | 28 | 128 | 23 | 23 | 19 | 1.5 | 1 | 1 | 19.7 | 17 | 18 |
| Trade & Distribution | 1,308 | 25 | 24 | 22 | 148 | 27 | 27 | 24 | 2.2 | 2 | 3 | 33.8 | 31 | 29 |
| Service | 1,086 | 20 | 21 | 18 | 174 | 32 | 26 | 19 | 5.0 | 8 | 10 | 57.7 | 35 | 50 |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing | 62 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 2 | 4 | 10 | 1.6 | 2 | 1 | 9.9 | 7 | 4 |
| Construction | 189 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 40 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 1.4 | 2 | 2 | 5.8 | 3 | 3 |
| Mining | 1,003 | 19 | 18 | 26 | 48 | 8 | 11 | 21 | 3.9 | 7 | 12 | 2.7 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 5,330 | | | | 550 | | | | 3.0 | 4 | 5 | 32.8 | 22 | 20 |

| TOP MANUFACTURING: | Primary Metals | | Chemicals | | Stone, Clay, Glass | | NAME | TOP COMPANIES | | |
|---|------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|--------------------|--------|-----------------|---------------|--------|---------------|
| | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | 1974 | 1950 | | WORKERS | PLANTS | PRODUCTS |
| Total employment | 26,400 | 20,200 | 24,900 | 20,700 | 19,600 | 21,900 | Westvaco | 15,000 | 50 | paper, chem. |
| % male | 94 | 94 | 93 | 91 | 74 | 75 | Union Carbide | 10,600 | 6 | chem., metals |
| % female | 6 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 26 | 25 | Kaiser Aluminum | 3,200 | 1 | alum. prods. |
| % black male | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | * | Owens-Illinois | 2,800 | 2 | glass, boxes |
| % black female | * | * | * | * | * | * | FMC Corp. | 2,750 | 4 | chemicals |
| average hourly wage for production workers | \$6.09 prim. \$4.31 fabr. | n.a. | \$5.22 | n.a. | \$4.33 | n.a. | TOP UNIONS | | | |
| hourly wage as a % of industry's nat'l. average | 1.08 | n.a. | 1.04 | n.a. | .95 | | NAME | MEMBERSHIP | | |
| | | | | | | | Mine Workers | 65,500 | | |
| | | | | | | | Steelworkers | 23,400 | | |
| | | | | | | | Teamsters | 9,600 | | |
| | | | | | | | Laborers | 7,800 | | |
| | | | | | | | Machinists | 6,600 | | |

For years people have written of West Virginia as the state that time passed by. And until recently, that description has been all too true — at least in the sense that many of the same forces have been confronting each other for decades. But changes seem to be coming to West Virginia, and with them, improved fortunes for the people of the state.

Certainly much work needs to be done. In the southern part of the state, for instance, nine counties account for 30% of its population and for 70% of the state's enormous coal production. Nine corporations own a third of the land, holding property worth over \$90 million, even at gross underassessments. The state is a model of corporate control, and today outside companies own more of the Mountain State than ever — Norfolk & Western Railroad, Georgia Pacific, Union Carbide, Bethlehem Steel and others.

Coal dominates the state's economy for the rich and poor alike. West Virginia led the country in coal production for over 40 years, until Kentucky became number one in 1973. West Virginia still accounts for about one-fourth of the nation's annual production. New and expanding mines are concentrated in the southern counties because of the high metallurgical-grade coal suitable for steel mills. In contrast, the central mountains area stores high-sulfur coal, not in high demand today because of new air pollution laws.

About half of the state's employees work in mining or manufacturing. Besides coal and the large natural gas industry (the largest east of the Mississippi), chemicals, steel, glass, iron and pottery are important. Many of these are highly unionized, as are state food chains and construction work. Less organized are the retailing, service and government fields, where jobs have increased recently. White collar jobs support fewer workers than anywhere outside of the Deep South and Kentucky. Only 2% of the labor force farm, and the forest industry (only 8,000 jobs) never recovered from cuts made in the first decade of the century. Tourism has come to the state as developers eye the mountains for ski slopes and vacation homes, but primarily low-paying service jobs accompany this industry.

In the west there is Charleston, the capital. Steel and chemical industries dominate the town and its river basin with a heavy cloud of pollution. During the sixties, Charleston lost 17% of its population as chemical factories searched for better harbor facilities and more natural gas in states like Louisiana. Even so, the constant influx of out-of-state technical workers adds a vibrancy to the capital missing in the other eight West Virginia cities. The Kanawha Valley, West Virginia's only region with significant flatlands, is also highly industrialized and has the densest population.

West Virginia is the nation's second most unionized state (38% of the industrial labor force), and it is through these unions that workers in the state expect to improve their lives. This is especially true for coal miners, who have seen the UMWA rise and fall repeatedly. Many of the progressive movements that have surfaced in the union since it was begun had their roots in West Virginia.

The UMWA, one of the oldest and most successful unions, made large gains during World War I, dwindled to nothing during the '20s and stormed into a major American power in the wake of the Wagner Act. John L. Lewis built the Mine Workers Union into the most aggressive and bold representative of industrial workers in the country. He — and they — knew that the country was ultimately dependent on the coal they could deliver. Lewis built a dynasty that ranged from a network of Appalachian hospitals to his Health and Retirement Fund, from the bulging vaults of his Washington bank to enormous political power. Somewhere along the way, he lost touch with rank-and-file concerns, but many retired miners even today are not sure that John L. ever really betrayed them, a tribute to his charismatic power. The direction of Lewis' rule became clear, however, when Tony Boyle, a lesser man, took over the union presidency.

The corruption of Tony Boyle, well-documented today, was scarcely noticed during the 1960s. Union money was spent on outrageous salaries, expense accounts, and pensions for officers. Dissenters were thrown out of office; goon squads patrolled union conventions and polling places; and the leadership encouraged uninterrupted production, good for the per-ton payments to the welfare and retirement fund. Throughout these Lewis-Boyle years, West Virginia was a microcosm for machinations within the union and coal industry.

Then in 1968, West Virginia became center stage for major changes in the UMW. The Farmington mine disaster hastened the rank and file on their road to mutiny. As 78 men lay dying in the burning mine, UMW and government officials made a decision to seal the mine and save the remaining coal. Tony Boyle dismissed the deaths and praised the safety record of Consolidated Coal which owned the mine. Ad hoc committees, made up of kinfolk of the dying miners, realized that Boyle would never protect miners' safety and health, and resolved to do something about it.

The Black Lung Movement grew from the southern coal fields of West Virginia and neighboring states, and later in Pennsylvania and the northern districts. Courageous doctors travelled to tiny mountain hollows; retired and disabled miners, some who had been unemployed since the '50s, came many miles to meetings, and brave rank-and-file UMW members spoke out for compensation benefits and stricter health standards. Union officials did not respond. In 1969, a wildcat strike spread across the state in five short days and 1,000 West Virginia miners marched on the state capital demanding compensation. They wouldn't return to work without their bill. Today, the state has one of the nation's best compensation laws as a result of the workers determined efforts. Later Representative Ken Hechler, a professor-turned-politician, became the first West Virginia official to buck the UMWA leadership and press for federal reforms, culminating in the 1969 Federal Coal Mine and Safety Act.

That year also marked an important election in the coal fields. The Yablonski murders, the rise of the Miners for Democracy, Arnold Miller's election as president, and the eventual indictment of Boyle happened in painful succession (see book review essay). Miller, a rank and filer with black lung, cut salaries, ended the close relationship between companies and the union, set up a Coal Miner's Political Action Committee and initiated other reforms. The UMWA had survived one of the most corrupt periods of American unionism and returned to the visions of John L. Lewis' early days.

But the union members are not those of Lewis' day. Today, some estimate that as many as 50% of West Virginia miners are under 30 years old. Most come from coal mining families, but many have been to Vietnam or have lived outside the region. Their expectations are high and there is a restlessness that some older miners might not understand. Older miners remember that from the late '40s until the early '60s, some 300,000 miners lost jobs in the Southern Appalachian coal fields. The big companies automated, bringing in mechanized cutting machines and long-term contracts (modeled after the TVA agreements). Lewis, afraid that the coal industry would die after World War II, loaned miners' money from his Washington bank to the consolidating giants. He felt the union needed to save the industry if it was to survive; but he felt little compassion for those laid off with black lung disease and no job. The union was weakened in the Southern fields (especially in Tennessee and Kentucky), and miners had to go without work, many for years.

The '60s brought growth to the country and jobs to the coal fields. Older union miners returned to work, but sometimes they found their mines non-union. By the time Miller found himself at the negotiating table in 1974, West Virginia's coal industry was again booming, and the miners — young and old alike — wanted some democracy in action, long overdue from the Boyle days.

The 1974 contract with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association had a number of distinctive features. It included the first cost-of-living increase and provided for an industry-wide safety training program paid for by the companies. But the first national grievance appeals system produced some conflict. The grievance procedure required several levels of arbitration before the men could legally go out on strike. By mid-1975, a number of unsettled grievances had built up and in August an unauthorized wildcat — based in West Virginia — idled some 75,000 miners. It was one of the largest wildcats in miners' history. A review board now gives uniform nationwide interpretation to the contract so that a few key rulings can eliminate time-consuming and backlogged grievances. But the miners, especially the young, are not satisfied. Pockets of dissenters, have formed the "Miners Right to Strike Committee," objecting to the limited strike capability.

Others have joined miners in their efforts to reclaim their rights, if not their land. Health activists, legal defenders, black lung clinics and labor educators have established ongoing programs in the state. Various groups have organized against strip-mining, but the battles are difficult. The environment has been raped, people have lost their homes and the scenic tourist base damaged. Repeatedly, the problem returns to the tight control of the energy-resource industries that turn West Virginia's countryside into profits

for a few. Control of the land is held outside the state; inside, political corruption remains rampant; and now genuine foreign colonizers are on the scene. (King Knob, a leading surface miner, recently sold out to a Dutch firm, Anker Kolen; French and Ferman steel companies have taken an interest in several concerns; a Canadian steel company owns Cannelton Coal, and a Japanese financing firm has made one unsuccessful venture in the state.) Coal company officials cleverly fill the important board positions: the President of Amherst Coal left his job as chairman of the state air pollution control commission, and the former chief of the Reclamation Division of the Department of Natural Resources was also the first director of the West Virginia Surface Mining Association. Conflicts of interest riddle the state, and even Governor Arch Moore was recently brought to trial; he was cleared of extortion charges but a cloud of suspicion remains over his administration.

Meanwhile profits flow to the corporate coffers. The state averages about \$1.1 billion a year in revenues, less than some outside corporations make during a single year in West Virginia. For example, Union Carbide averaged \$3,800 profit for each of its workers during a recent year, a per capita figure higher than the annual income of more than 200,000 families. Instead of taxing these profits, West Virginia maintains a highly regressive tax system, including a sales tax on food and medicine; the first coal severance tax only came in 1971.

As the price of coal climbs, at least the financial position of West Virginia workers has improved. (Per ton price is now stabilized at about \$25 a ton, up from \$8 before the oil embargo.) Incomes are up and unemployment is down in the state. And the outmigration trends have shifted. From 1950-70 (during the automation of mining), West Virginia lost population faster than any other state in the nation's history. Akron, Ohio came to be known as West Virginia's capital.

In the future, less will be written about the saddest state. Land ownership patterns remain difficult to cope with, and anti-trust provisions seem relatively impotent against the energy conglomerates; but West Virginia hosts some of the most determined workers' and citizens' movements in the country. As the value of their resources skyrocket, the struggle to gain control over how the wealth is derived and where it goes will surely intensify.



BOOK REVIEWS

Murder By Contract: The People v. "Tough Tony" Boyle, by Arthur H. Lewis. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975, 323pp., \$10.95.

Act of Vengeance: The Yablonski Murders and Their Solution by Trevor Armbrister. Saturday Review Press, E.P. Dutton and Co., 1975, 334pp., \$10.95.

A Man Named Tony: The True Story of the Yablonski Murders by Stuart Brown. W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1976, 225pp., \$8.95.

Following a June 23, 1969, meeting of the International Executive Board of the UMWA, Tony Boyle stepped out of the union's Washington headquarters and said: "We are in a fight. We have to kill Yablonski or take care of him." Albert Pass, secretary-treasurer of District 19, replied: "If nobody else will kill him, District 19 will."

Approximately six months later, following a turbulent but unsuccessful effort by Yablonski to unseat Boyle as president of the UMWA, Yablonski's son Ken found his father, mother and sister shot to death in their Clarksville, Pennsylvania, home.

Beginning with detailed, sensational accounts of the murder scene (as later revealed in court testimony), each of these books relates the story of Yablonski's challenge, of the sordid plot for his death, and of the unprecedented dragnet efforts of a special prosecutor, the FBI, and the Department of Labor to solve the case.

Gradually, over a period of five years, their efforts unraveled the conspiracy. A series of eight dramatic trials led up the ladder-like chain of command: Claude Vealey, Paul Gilly and "Buddy" Martin, Appalachian refugees to urban Cleveland, did the actual killing. Silous Huddleston, 63-year-old president of UMWA local 3228, a pensioners' local in LaFollette, Tennessee, and his daughter Annette passed union money to the "hit" men. Bill Prater, 54-year-old dedicated field worker, was the link to Huddleston. Albert Pass, known in District 19 as a man "you'd better not get in the way of," conveyed orders from Washington to Prater. William Turnblazer,

attorney and president of District 19, had prior knowledge of the plot and participated in the cover-up. And, ultimately, Tony Boyle, president of the 200,000 man labor organization, was found guilty of first degree murder.

For a gripping story, the books rival an Agatha Christie mystery. Yet, especially for those who have an interest in labor history or who were involved in the reform efforts, that very characteristic makes the books disappointing. Potentially, the story of the Yablonski murders is more than one of cops, killers and courtrooms. More profoundly it could be an account of how an organization once dedicated to change itself became entrenched and responded convulsively to challenge from below, or of how, in this instance, determined, continuing efforts overcame the power of a labor oligarchy. With

thousands of pages of trial records, internal documents of the UMWA, dozens of interviews which were available to the authors and the perspective of time, these books could have asked whether such tragedies must always occur in the process of reform.

Instead the reader gleans little from these descriptions beyond the intrigue and detail of solving a particularly dramatic, terrible crime. Consider, for example, the gist of Arthur Lewis' book, as described by the author himself: "For devotees of crime chronicles, for courtroom aficionados, for citizens who have not lost faith in the democratic process, for those who delight in watching tyrants toppled and murderers brought to justice, the Yablonski case is worthy of strict attention. . . ." Lewis is obsessed with a drama where the courtroom is stage and his fellow Phil-

Book Reviewers in This Issue

Jason Berry is the author of *Amazing Grace: With Charles Evers in Mississippi* (Saturday Review Press). His work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New Republic*, *Nation*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *New South* and a number of regional publications.

Bob Brinkmeyer is a graduate student in English at North Carolina Central University.

Joel Davidson edits a guide for people interested in homesteading in the Arkansas Ozarks. Subscriptions are \$5 per year from *Living in the Ozarks Newsletter*, Pettigrew, Ark. 72752.

Si Dunn is a free lance writer from Dallas, Tex.

Elvira Echols has been a reporter for many Alabama newspapers and is currently a free-lance writer and published poet.

John Gaventa is a member of the *Southern Exposure* editorial staff and has worked for a number of years as a researcher and organizer in the mountains. His dissertation on power relationships in Southern Appalachia will be published by Oxford University Press.

Jennifer Miller is the editor of *Facing South*, a syndicated newspaper column published by the Institute for Southern Studies.

Jolly Robinson is a veteran singer of labor songs and now lives in New York City. This review of *Cotton Mill Blues* was published in *LNS*.

Gwen Robinson directs a research project on minority workers in Chicago and co-edited the article in this issue "If I Could Go Back..." which provides more background on Birmingham black workers.

David Roediger is a Hearst-Evans Fellow in Afro-American history at Northwestern University.

Phil Sparks was southern publicity director of the Textile Workers Union of America and is currently press assistant for the United Mine Workers.

David Whisnant is associate professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland in Baltimore County. His book *Missionary, Planners and Developers in Appalachia* is being published by the University of Tennessee Press.



adelphian Richard Sprague — “the brilliant, merciless, law and order prosecutor who never lost sight of his ultimate goal” — is star. As long as the drama is ongoing, the reading is good, though burdened by the author’s propensity to use long soliloquys from transcripts of interviews. When there are intermissions in the trials, Lewis is forced to the wings for his story, where his details become superfluous and his insights rare.

Brown’s book, too, is full of cheap-pulp melodrama, beginning in the first paragraph: “The house reeked. When the police arrived they were hit with the smell, malodorous, pervasive, of rotten human flesh. . .” Brown does at least lace his accounts of the murder trials with simple though effective background from the history of the union under Lewis, the corruption of the Boyle regime, and the emergence of the reform challenge. Still, two earlier books remain better on these points: *Death in the Mines* by Brit Hume (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971) and *The Corrupt Kingdom* by Joseph Finley, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

Though all the books are somewhat repetitive in content and similar in style, *Act of Vengeance* is perhaps the most complete and informative. Rather than simply telling the trial-by-trial mystery story, Armbrister skillfully and chronologically tells the story

of the campaign, the murder and the prosecution while weaving in crucial themes scarcely mentioned in the other books. The reader learns, for instance, of the significance of the Farmington disaster to the emergence of the reform movement. Insight is gained to Ralph Nader’s role in encouraging the Yablonski candidacy and to the rift which later emerged between the consumer advocate and the labor leader. Questions are asked of Secretary of Labor Schultz’s steadfast refusal to enter the conflict during the first election, following the murder, which did have Labor Department supervision. The book ends with the beginning efforts by victorious Arnold Miller to transform the labor organization.

For Armbrister, characters rather than courtrooms are the point of focus. One comes away feeling as if he might understand the insecurities of Tony Boyle, for whom murder meant the protection of power, or of the tensions of the underclass, white triggermen from Cleveland, for whom the killings meant cold cash. Yet, at the same time, one still suspects that the tragic event cannot be explained by insight into individual characters alone: the Yablonski’s deaths were the vicious, logical outcome of a pattern of arbitrary power that had dominated the union’s style from the early days of John L. Lewis.

Perhaps nowhere are those patterns

of power and powerlessness within the union seen more clearly than in the case of District 19, the southern region of the UMWA which covers all Tennessee and parts of eastern Kentucky, including Harlan and Bell Counties. At the time of the Yablonski candidacy, the miners of this central Appalachian heartland suffered from the negligence and corruption of their union leadership, much as they had done in the early 1930s. The number of UMWA members fell from 20,000 after World War II to 3,000 in 1964. To the injury of unemployment was added the insult of company-sponsored unionism. Elderly miners, veterans of the mine wars of the 1930s, found their valued health and safety benefits being cut back, their esteemed Appalachian Miners’ Hospitals being sold. Correspondence to Washington from the miners of District 19 during the 1950s and 1960s poignantly asks why the organization for which they had fought so hard was once again in decline.

Yet, despite their disillusionment with the union, the miners of District 19 failed to support Yablonski. And, following the murder, the FBI, suspecting the District as a source of foul play, very quickly set up a field headquarters in LaFollette, Tennessee. Two officers, a field worker and a local union president were convicted for their part in the murder conspiracy. Twenty-three pensioners were questioned about their involvement in a mythical Research and Information Committee which had been set up to disguise the \$20,000 murder fund. For over two years the miners stuck to their stories of how they had allegedly spent the money, risking perjury against themselves to protect their union officers. Given the shortcomings of the UMWA regime in the District in the past, why did the miners now offer it their support?

The question cannot be answered effectively without looking back into the history of District 19, something all of the books fail to do. In 1922, shortly after taking office as President of the UMWA, John L. Lewis suspended the autonomy of the district, a trick he used over the next several decades to undercut opposition in 19 of the 24 UMWA regions. In District 19, Lewis installed as president a loyal supporter from outside the area, his former bodyguard, William Turnblazer, Sr.

As long as the union remained weak during the next ten years, the Turnblazer appointment would go unchallenged. However, section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 altered the position of labor in the Central Appalachias, as it did in the rest of the country. In letters to UMWA members, Turnblazer hailed the clause as the "Declaration of Independence for miners and their families." As the bill went through Congress, Lewis sent organizers throughout the coalfields. "The President wants you to join the union," they proclaimed, always remaining vague as to whether the "President" referred to Lewis or Roosevelt. Throughout District 19, the miners joined the union with relatively little opposition from the operators, except in Harlan County where the Coal Operators Association remained hardened by the 1931 conflict.

But this time, though, the miners had learned some difficult lessons from their experience with the UMWA during the previous few years. If this was to be their union, they wanted rank and file control. In the fall of 1933, the men challenged the unilateral power of Turnblazer and Lewis. Upset with the terms of the first Southern Appalachian Contract negotiated in Knoxville, the miners charged that Turnblazer had again "sold out" to the operators. Turnblazer called a meeting for October 29, 1933 to explain his actions. Some 2,000 miners came. But apparently disturbed by the show of opposition, Turnblazer failed to arrive.

In an orderly but angry fashion, the miners took business into their own hands. They voted for the dismissal of Turnblazer. They elected a committee of four men to see to the affairs of the district. They dispatched a delegation to Washington to meet with Lewis and to urge him either to appoint John White, former president of the UMWA, as district chief or to allow local elections to be held. They returned to their newly-formed local branches to ask other miners to endorse their actions. A spontaneous parliament of 2,000 miners in Jellico, Tennessee, had taken over their own affairs.

Lewis was placed in a difficult position. Either he sided with the leadership of his provisional government or listened to the men of the newly-organized District. His quick response re-



vealed the absolute authority and contempt for dissent that he would often exercise in the UMWA. Lewis firmly backed Turnblazer. Letters were sent to locals threatening them with expulsion from the union if they attended meetings planned by the insurgents. Attempts were made to discredit the leadership by accusing them of "dual unionism" or being part of a "Communist bunch." "These Apostles will stop at nothing to poison the minds of our people," Turnblazer wrote, echoing Lewis' warning: "If these men were paid by hostile coal companies they would not serve them better than by creating distrust and confusion in the ranks of the membership."

Lewis demanded loyalty or exit. And to the miners who had desperately fought against the coal companies in 1931 and before to get any union at all, exit was not really an option. They succumbed to Lewis' power. Letters of apology came pouring in to the Washington office. "It is far from us ever to create trouble in the organization," wrote one eastern Kentucky local.

By the next convention of the District in May, 1934, the demands for autonomy had been converted into unquestioning loyalty for John L. The convention unanimously passed a resolution exalting Lewis as "the greatest Labor Leader of all times . . . blessed by a keener and higher perception of the possibilities and needs of the coal miner and the coal industry than the ordinary man . . . He has shown the way with the result that the vision and dreams of the Old War Horses and Pio-

neers of the Coal Miners Union have come true."

For the next twenty years, William Turnblazer, Sr., continued to preside over the affairs of District 19. He was replaced after a brief interim by his son, William Turnblazer, Jr., who remained in power until 1972 — when he was convicted for conspiracy to murder Yablonski, the man who sought, as had the miners of District 19 in 1933, to gain some democracy within the union.

Not only did Turnblazer continue to hold office, but the manner by which power was used to quell dissent in the 1933 incident continued as a pattern. Retired miners in Tennessee, for instance, describe how in the 1940s Albert Pass, also a Lewis appointee, led a group of thugs to silence District 19 dissenters who sought again to propose a motion for autonomy. During the 1950s and 1960s, the letters to Washington complaining about the state of affairs in District 19 often expressed fear of reprisal from the district headquarters. The officers there, miners say, could be ruthlessly arbitrary in handing out relief, or hospital cards, or recommendations for pensions. But, invariably, during the Boyle regime, the letters were referred back from Washington to Pass or Turnblazer, the very men the rank and file miners had sought to avoid.

Given the pattern of loyalty, reinforced by fear, that was gradually instilled in District 19, it was not difficult for union leaders to manipulate the "Old War Horses and

Pioneers" into helping to destroy Yablonski. Certain myths were passed about him, which, in the environment of the Central Appalachias, sketched him as the "enemy." Rumors claimed he was financed by Continental Oil Co., whose subsidiary, Consolidation Coal Co., owned the biggest mines in the Tennessee coal fields; supported by "instant experts", an invective used in Appalachia to refer to middle-class, outside social planners and reformers; and planned to take away miners' pensions. The myths were believed, as for 40 years of following, not questioning, the union insured that the myths would be believed. "If you don't believe your leaders' word, who you going to accept?"

When the FBI and Department of Labor entered the murder investigation, the pensioners of District 19 rallied around their leaders even more, for government involvement had usually been repressive towards labor. Now, as before, it demanded a response of solidarity.

Even after the pensioners realized they were misled, they still lied about what they had done with the Research and Information money. "I've got a hospital card and draw benefits from the union and I was afraid on that account," explained one later. "I was afeared that I would lose my pension check and hospitalization," said another. Given the historical experience with the politics of relief in the district, these fears, too, were justified.

Instead of understanding this history, Armbrister, Lewis and Brown tend to rely on outworn Appalachian stereotypes to explain the crucial role played by the District 19 unionists in the Yablonski murders. Lewis, in particular, exploits the popular images of a violent culture, fundamentalist religion, country dialect, and backwoods overalls to provide journalistic "color" to his writing. (By his own account, he made only one 24 hour trip, escorted by the Knoxville FBI, into the Cumberland Mountains, which he misnames the Clinch Mountains). He fails, as do the other authors to a lesser extent, to comprehend the manipulated loyalties, the patterns of coercion, and the social forces surrounding these mountaineer miners.

John Gaventa
New Market, Tenn.

The Big Gate, by Elma Stuckey. Precedent Publishers, 1976. 96 pages.

Of all the historical myths concerning the South, the most pernicious is that which characterizes the region as the heart of the American consensus — as a land untouched by serious class and social struggles. The archetypal figure of such Southern myth-as-history, the docile slave, has enjoyed an amazing revitalization recently. In Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's 1974 Bancroft Prize winner, *Time On the Cross*, the docile slave takes center stage as an industrious and reliable worker whose eyes do not stray from the rows of cotton long enough to contemplate struggle against slavery. Eugene Genovese's 1975 Bancroft Prize winner, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* portrays the slave as a bit less docile, and much less hardworking, but stresses that a consensus — a web of paternal relations established by the masters — governed the consciousness of the bondsmen. In short, the most touted recent scholarship on slavery ignores the truth of the black folk song which proclaims, "Got one mind for the boss to see; got another mind for what I know is me."

Elma Stuckey's poetry, collected for the first time in *The Big Gate*, focuses on the psyche of the American slave. Stuckey, however, never settles for merely portraying the docile mask of the slave. She penetrates far beyond that mask, taking the reader to gatherings where "Slaves often stood out of earshot of the master, down at the gate...and told tall tales." She probes the private thoughts of the slaves, their pains, their humor, their boasts, their work and their struggle for freedom. In Stuckey's poems, we meet a wide array of slave characters ranging from the syncophantic Tom, who challenges his more militant fellows with the question, "Ole Marse is white, is you?" to the clever Mose. The description of the latter is a classic portrayal of the slave's mask, and of what went on behind it. Mose introduces himself as "A grovelin' black slave nigger, /And after pizenin' Ole Marse /A shufflin' black grave digger."

Resistance, both physical and psychological, runs through the poems like a red thread. Stuckey details such resistance in forms as novel and

various as spitting in the master's soup or kicking a lustful owner "where his trouble is." In the tales they tell each other, the slaves reveal a Fanonesque willingness to contemplate revolutionary violence as a cathartic agent and as an equalizer of master and slave. The hero of the short poem "Rebel" shoots his master and calmly faces death, with resolve reminiscent of Nat Turner:

My time is come and I don't care
If they hang me from a tree,
By bein' crazy like a fox
I sent Marse 'head of me.

The importance of *The Big Gate* lies not only in its insights into the mind of the slave, but also in the source of those insights. Both the historical and the artistic value of Stuckey's poetry derive from her intimate familiarity with Afro-American folk life. While the black literary tradition is sparse where slavery is concerned (with Dunbar and Bontemps as exceptions), oral traditions from the poet's Memphis home provide a base which enriches her verses. The granddaughter of former slaves, Stuckey lived her first 38 years in the Memphis area. There she talked with ex-slaves in the community and began to write poetry. Today, at 69 and after 30 years in Chicago, Stuckey continues to remember the ex-slaves and to write of them. As she recites her poetry, the soft power of her beautiful voice is eloquently expressive of its Southern folk roots. Like Sterling Brown, Stuckey succeeds in bringing together literary skill and folk tradition to form moving Afro-American art.

The Big Gate contains several poems on themes other than slavery: masterful poems dealing critically with the role of the contemporary black preacher, word-puzzles for children, a poignant tribute to W.E.B. Dubois. All these, like the poems on slavery, reflect Stuckey's immersion in the folk life of her people. Taken together, the poems do more than establish Elma Stuckey as a major figure in black poetry. They also establish the continuing vitality of Afro-American folk traditions which began during slavery. As such they are powerful testimony to the powers of creativity and resistance which Afro-Americans kept throughout slavery days.

— David Roediger
Columbia, Ill.

Stars of Country Music: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriguez. Edited by Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975. xii, 476 pp. \$10.00.

It ain't what you got, it's what you put out, and boys, I can deliver.

— Uncle Dave Macon

I had a lot to do with changing country (music), and I apologize.

— Chet Atkins

Between Uncle Dave Macon's "boys, I can deliver" and Chet Atkins' "I apologize" lies much of the story of country music, told here in accounts of careers of (besides Macon and Atkins) Vernon Dalhart, Bradley Kincaid, the Carter family, Jimmie Rodgers, Gene Autry, Bob Wills, Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams, Flatt and Scruggs, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn, Merle Haggard, Charley Pride and Tom T. Hall. A fine introductory essay by Norm Cohen also treats the "early pioneers": Eck Robertson, Henry Whitter, Fiddlin' John Carson, Pop Stoneman, Charlie Poole, The Skillet Lickers, and Carl T. Sprague.

Taken together, the essays in *Stars of Country Music* remind us how far things have come and how fast they are moving. Uncle Dave Macon was fifty-five when he first performed on the Opry; Johnny Rodriguez is twenty-four, and already there are legends about him which Bill and Ann Malone are at pains to correct. Much of the material used by the early stars was traditional and in the public domain; William C. Martin is careful to say that he has permission to quote a single five-word phrase from a Tom T. Hall song.

The quality of the essays is generally high but uneven; those by Wilgus and Schlappi are especially disappointing. The best are Ralph Rinzler's (on Bill Monroe), Norm Cohen's (on early stars), Dorothy Horstman's (on Loretta Lynn), Douglas Green's (on Gene Autry), and Neil Rosenberg's (on Flatt and Scruggs). Rosenberg's essay is an especially well balanced consideration of biography, cultural sources and influences, stylistic development, and repertoire. There are also some small gems of analysis in other essays. Those that come especially to mind are



William Ivey's consideration of Chet Atkins' style; John Atkins' explanation of the interaction between the Carter family's vocal and instrumental styles; and Ann Malone's overview of early black musicians in her essay on Charley Pride.

Part of the pleasure of reading *Stars of Country Music* lies in watching certain unintentional themes emerge, not from individual essays, but from the collection taken as a whole. The richness and complexity of the cultural process that has produced country music, for example, is reinforced by dozens of images: Uncle Dave Macon learning from vaudeville and circus musicians; Pop Stoneman, Carl T. Sprague, and Bradley Kincaid pouring over early printed collections of old songs to learn new "traditional" material; Clayton McMichen's father, a trained violinist, playing Viennese waltzes downtown and fiddle tunes at home; Vernon Dalhart studying voice at the Dallas Conservatory; young Bill Monroe learning not only from Uncle Pen and Arnold Schultz but also from Charlie Poole records and WLS; Merle Haggard riding his bicycle to hear Bob Wills play for dances in Bakersfield. Putting the individual essays together in another way, one can see the influence of Jimmie Rodgers reaching in one line through Gene Autry to Tex Ritter and on to Johnny Cash, and in another through Ernest Tubb to Hank Williams and from Williams to Johnny Rodriguez.

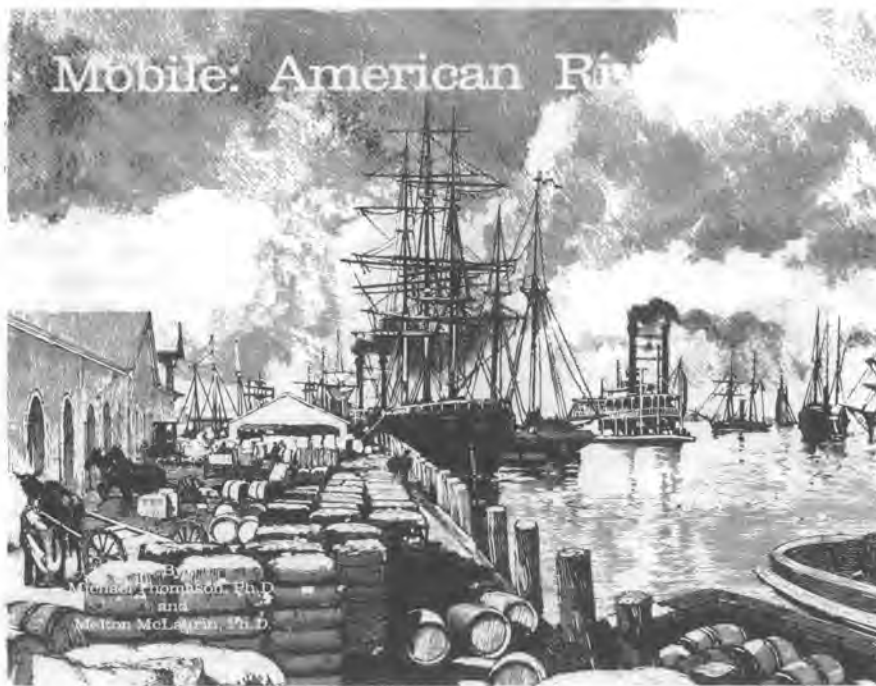
The most difficult challenge Bill Malone and Judith McCulloh faced was to find a group of writers capable of analyzing the country music star

system in terms of its own internal values, aesthetics, and modes of operation, while also considering the larger social and cultural implications of individual careers and the star system itself. To understand, accept, and appreciate, but also to view from a detached critical perspective. It is a tight line to walk (to borrow a metaphor from one of the stars). In a few instances, balance is precarious, and the result approaches fanlike chatter (we learn the cost of too many buses and houses, for example). But overall the results are good, and in a few cases they are exceptional (as in Norm Cohen's imaginative use of census and recording industry data to delineate stylistic and other changes in country music since the 1920s).

As with any book, one is left with some questions, some loose ends, some sense that analysis must be carried further in certain areas. Why no chapter on Kitty Wells, for example, whom several essayists mention in passing as the original Queen of Country Music? Indeed, why only one chapter on a woman, when there were several other likely candidates? The ambivalent relationship between country music and traditional values is a central issue which receives rather scant attention, as does the problem of the politics of country music and musicians. One also longs for treatments of country and western songs that carry their analysis beyond the statement of title. Martin's essay on Tom T. Hall is the only one in this volume to pay any detailed attention to song lyrics.

Not all of the story of country music can be told through the careers of its stars, but much of it can, and *Stars of Country Music* is a most admirable attempt to do so. Coming as it does upon the fiftieth anniversary of the Opry, it is a welcome antidote to the Opry's own slick, thirty-five dollar, coffee table-sized volume, which bids fair to convince one that the Opry may be as sleazy as its harshest critics have said. *Stars of Country Music* is evidence that some people fortunately understand the Opry better than the Opry understands itself. It is a credit to its subject, and to the University of Illinois Press series on Music in American Life in which it is the most recent volume.

— David E. Whisnant
Baltimore, Maryland



Mobile: American River, by Michael Thomason and Melton McLaurin. Easter Publishing Company (P.O. Box 1244, Mobile 36601), 1976. 140 pp. \$8.95.

Like so many things, this book of rare photographs with sociological comment is a by-product of another pursuit. The authors, associate professors of history at the University of South Alabama, received a grant to develop a slide presentation showing the impact of Mobile's economic development on its social and cultural life. They waded through public and private collections of engravings, negatives of crumbling celluloid, drawings and photographs made with glass plates, which were sometimes cracked and always dirty. While preparing their three-part slide show, now much in demand for local presentation, this book seemed a logical outlet for much of their research.

Brown Lung Cotton Mill Blues, by the Mountain Musicians' Cooperative, June Appal Records, P. O. Box 743, Whitesburg, Ky. 41858. \$5.50.

As a longtime singer of labor songs, I am acutely aware that not many have been written for the past 30 years. So when a friend loaned me a new album of songs by and about Southern cotton mill workers, I devoured it with the kind of gusto I'd feel for a bottle of beer in a drought. As far as I know, *Brown Lung Cotton Mill Blues* is the only record in existence that puts together textile mill songs of the '70s with earlier classics and gives you a 32-page mini-history, too.

The Mountain Musicians' Cooperative and June Appal Records collaborated on the album. Two separate but overlapping groups, both are dedicated to producing traditional and new music of the Southern mountains, emphasizing equally the strength and beauty of the culture and the labor struggles that have given birth to it. The Cooperative members, working musicians and songwriters, range from 20 to 80 years old. They've been together less than two years, most are also part of the record company, and they usually plow proceeds from recording enterprises back into making more music. *Brown Lung*

Cotton Mill Blues was produced as a labor of love "to raise money for the Southern Institute for Occupational Health (SIOH) . . . proceeds go toward SIOH's efforts to educate and support Southern workers in their fight for a safe and healthy workplace."

The older songs on this recording represent a sampling from the rich musical heritage handed down by Dorsey Dixon, Dave McCarn and unknown millworkers/songwriters in the 1920s and '30s. Songs like "Weave Room Blues," "Babies in the Mill" and "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues" are indeed hard to live up to. That's why the significance of this album is in the new cotton mill songs and in the songwriters who are carrying on in a venerable tradition — not just by singing the old songs, but by creating new ones out of contemporary Southern textile labor issues and realities. They tell of the occupational hazards, the tedium and the sense of wasted lives experienced by textile workers. They reflect the rising militancy of Southern workers fighting for union organization, the right to a job, and compensation for the crippling brown lung disease.

The songs would have made Woody Guthrie pick up his mandolin and join in with harmony and foot-tapping. They're full of high spirits, poetic

imagery and word-pictures, original and traditional melodies, some fine vocal ensemble work, solos and folk instruments. The language of mountain and mill people, in the hands of these songwriters, brings listeners into the life of cotton mill towns. And happily, there are several unaccompanied songs — squarely in the Southern mountain tradition and a welcome departure from the slick instrumental and tight harmonic treatment associated these days with country music.

"Gonna Go to Work on Monday (One More Time)" (Si Kahn) expresses the "damned if I do, damned if I don't" conflict of having no choice but to work in the cotton mill, against the doctor's advice and with no compensation for ruined lungs. A rousing, spirited song sung by the whole group, this one rolls along a la Lee Hays and is a sure bet to get you singing on the chorus. Charlotte Brody's "Boxes of Bobbins" describes with aching simplicity and haunting melody the hours, days and years ticked off in "thirty years of staring at spinning thread" and sums up a worker's feeling that she is inseparable from the bobbins spinning endlessly before her — "The only sound I hear . . . the only thing I see . . . the only thing that's me."

If a picture is truly worth a thousand words, *Mobile* is eloquent in describing the back-breaking labor required to move bananas, cotton, and timber in another era. Here is the tedium of the treadle sewing machine in the pants factory. Here are men at work in grocery stores, livery stables, and saloons. Here are men shucking oysters, women welders and wartime weddings.

Here are photographs of the Creole Fire Department, whose membership is based on the mixed blood lines of its members.

Here are the changing moods and events of a city from 1699 — clearing swamps, building tunnels, binding up their wounded after an explosion of the ordnance depot in 1865 and drowning in the Battle of Mobile Bay.

Here is a map of French Fort Conde (Charlotte), garrisoned in turn by the British and Spanish, pertinent today as restoration of the area is now in progress.

The most poignant photography, perhaps, is that of Cudjo Lewis, illegally brought to Mobile on the slave ship *Clotilde* in 1859, warming his feet before a fire in his home. Makes you want to pull up the mule ear chair and ask about the gold framed pictures on his wall and how he survived the trip and what happened that the slavers were able to catch him. And how did he manage his life in the era midway between slavery and the civil rights movement?

Unfortunately, there are historical and social errors. For example, Spring Hill College, although now owned and administered by the Jesuits, was not founded by them but by Bishop Michael Portier in 1830. It was first administered by local priests, later by the Fathers of Mercy and then by the Eudists before the French Jesuits of Lyons took over in 1845. The property was transferred to Father Francis Gautrelet in 1847.

The Mardi Gras celebration pic-

ture is not a "real" ball — those extravagant, unbelievable social occasions with elaborate themes and members in costumes and masks. The ball pictured is a new one, for which tourists can dress and mask for a fee. Although the Mardi Gras court appears, it is "not the same," as the natives will tell you.

Many of the errors are obvious: phrases are misstated, streets are misnamed. They suggest that a bit more care should have been taken while preparing this publication. But the book remains attractive and memorable. Many of the illustrations provide unforgettable glimpses into another era. And with the second printing of the popular book, many of the errors have been corrected.

(A selection from the book appears in this issue under the title "Worth A Thousand Words.")

—Elvira Echols
Mobile, Ala.

One of the best songs is "Aragon Mill." The melody tears at your heart, the words etch a ghostly picture of deserted streets in a town where the mill has shut down. "Now the looms have all gone, it's so quiet I can't sleep." The voices in harmony blend perfectly with the mournful lyrics. "Cotton Mill Blues," sung unaccompanied, is a lively chunk of folk humor/philosophy as wry as cider turned to vinegar. Si Kahn's use of word-pictures and storytelling follows in the best folk and Guthrie traditions.

A proud declaration of solidarity between a woman and a man who work in the mill in a company town is Kahn's "Weave Room Woman, Card Room Man."

The year we got married it was sure the worst/ I was on the hoot owl and he was on the first/ I'd finish my shift and start off the floor/ Meet my old man coming in at the door/ But you know love conquers everything/ Now we're both working on swing/ It's the best combination in the whole darn land/ Weave shop woman and a card room man.

The verse strikes me as a good update of "Union Maid" — except that it isn't a good picket line song. Maybe that's a weakness of this album. The songs are reflective, descriptive, warm, musically good; they're not meant for

workers to sing at plant gates or on picket lines. They are for some to sing while most listen. (This distance is also reflected in a kind of politeness and lack of driving force that bothered me on many of the songs. I didn't hear the strength and sureness in the voices that is so integral not only to labor songs but also to mountain singing.) While there is certainly a need for good songs of all varieties, it's disappointing that a collection of labor songs doesn't include a couple of robust marching songs made for picket lines and demonstrations like those pictured in the album booklet. True, you can't beat "Solidarity" or "We Shall Not Be Moved," but we could sure use a new standard or two with universal appeal for mass singing or suitable for adding verses on the spot. Hopefully, such songs will come out of struggles like the J. P. Stevens organizing drive and other rank-and-file movements to take their place with the old standbys.

The generous booklet accompanying the record, put together by Charlotte Brody, skillfully weaves together highlights of textile labor history with song texts and credits, photos and graphics. Except for a few omissions — such as not even mentioning the IWW in connection with the great Lawrence, Mass., 1912 textile strike, and

not enough discussion of the policies of mill owners and unions toward blacks and women — this illuminating companion to the songs make vital connections between past and present, songs and struggles, singers and their lives.

Altogether, *Brown Lung Cotton Mill Blues* — the record and the booklet — demonstrates that mountain singers and songs are alive and well, creating new music with solid roots in Appalachian culture, allying themselves with the organization of the South in the '70s instead of the "country music" establishment.

—Jolly Robinson
New York





Black Worker in The Deep South, by Hosea Hudson. International Publishers, 1972. 130 pp. \$1.95.

The autobiography of Hosea Hudson numbers only a few pages, but it represents a major chapter in the history of the Southern black worker. Hudson's story is not altogether typical because he is a leader, a Communist leader. But the saga of his life enables us to examine in microcosm the basic episodes in the transition of black people from farm to industry, to leadership in labor organizations.

Hudson grew up in what may be characterized as an extended family trying to scratch a living out of Georgia's cotton fields as sharecroppers. He describes commonplace problems for Southern black folk in the early 1900s, explaining what it was like to live surrounded by lynchings, expropriation of land and property, miscegenation, peonage, convict labor, hunger and fear. His uncle Ned was nearly lynched by a mob.

As Hosea grew older, he began to work as a sharecropper. Eventually, as a young husband and father, he saved \$40 from selling nickel bags of peanuts, and in 1923 he moved to the industrial town of Atlanta. He took a job with the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad, where he made 30 cents an hour, working seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. with no overtime pay. Although normally a laborer loading coal, Hosea was sometimes called upon to work as a mechanic's helper. The mechanics were all

white; the helpers, all black. If he worked a full day as a helper, he got a helper's wage of \$4.68 per day; but if he put in a few hours, he was paid the standard labor wage of 30 cents an hour. Whenever a full-time helper was hired, they'd bypass him for a new man. Fed up with this treatment, he moved to Birmingham where he'd heard a Negro could earn \$5.00 a day.

In Birmingham, Hudson was hired at the Stockham Pipe & Fittings plant as a molder in 1924. He found many of the same problems that forced him to leave Atlanta: blacks received less than half the pay of white workers on the same job, and then had to work for more hours. There were other inequities as well. It was not uncommon, for instance, for black workers to find their paychecks "short" in relation to their productivity, and no amount of questioning could produce the deserved payment. A black worker would be labelled a "crazy nigma" if he stood up for his rights.

In these years in Birmingham, Hosea began to be influenced by various political struggles in the area. In 1931, the infamous Scottsboro Boys cases occurred with the defense led by the International Labor Defense (ILD) and William L. Patterson, a Communist. Another case developed in Birmingham around the alleged shooting by a black youth of two white women, the Williams sisters, and a female companion. The year 1931 also marked the founding of the Alabama Sharecroppers Union around Camp Hill, under the leadership of

the Communist Party.

In July, 1931, Hudson met an acquaintance, Al Murphy, who had just been fired for his involvement with the International Labor Defense and who had come to believe that "it's easier to organize than to fight alone." Later that year, when Murphy called a meeting to organize "for action," Hudson responded anxiously. He was surprised to find only eight people there. Murphy "gave us a little pamphlet with a map showing the whole area of the Black Belt. From the beginning, he said, the development of this area was carried on by the slaveholders who raised cotton for the most part. The Black population outnumbered the white. The Blacks built not only railroads and the factories, they had helped to build the material wealth of the entire South with their toil and sweat and blood. Yet we Negroes enjoyed practically none of the rights guaranteed American citizens by the US Constitution. I said to myself, 'This man is a Communist!' I was at a Communist meeting and, though nothing sensational was happening, the idea was exciting."

At the end of the meeting, all eight men signed up, paying a 50 cents initiation fee and "pledging 10 cents a month dues or more, based on our rate of pay." They agreed that the task would be to organize the Stockham plant.

During one of their unit meetings, a Party representative told them to write about their complaints on the job as if they were writing a letter. A few weeks later, they were presented with copies of the *Southern Worker*, a CP weekly newspaper that contained a major article on conditions at Stockham. They distributed copies to all the employees and especially to the company stool pigeons. The result was a plant-wide meeting where the employees were advised that anyone who "put his hand on a machine before seven was fired." Other abuses cited in the article were also corrected by management. It was a great victory for their organizing effort, and both black and white workers rejoiced.

At this time, there were six Communist Party units operating secretly in the plants. Only the unit leaders knew each other. Repressive measures

finally caught up with them, and in January 1932, Hosea Hudson was handed his last weekly paycheck of \$8.00.

In the midst of the Depression, Hudson joined the welfare rolls. On November 7, 1933, he participated in a mass meeting of 7,000 unemployed people which climaxed in the largely white crowd being attacked by the police. "It was the first time," observes Hudson, "for most of them to be treated like Negroes had been treated all along in the South."

Hudson became a CIO man during the '30s, when he could find a job. Black workers, he says, welcomed this new organization; white workers, however, were reluctant to join without the assurance of segregated locals. Their attitude was reinforced by the racist district representative of the Steelworkers.

Interestingly enough, there seemed to be more democracy in the Workers Alliance established in 1938, which Hudson joined when he became a WPA worker. Some 27 locals were established in the Birmingham district, and Hudson was elected vice-president of the largest in the county. They held meetings at the county courthouse with black members occupying the balcony while the whites sat below. When several black officers were elected, they took seats alongside the whites on the main floor, to the consternation of courthouse officials.

In June 1942, Hudson began working in the Jackson Foundry where war materials were being produced. Other employees started to complain about low wages and came to Hudson for advice since they knew he was an experienced organizer. He gave them each five cards and kept five for himself. Two days later, they were all signed. Each of them paid one dollar, and they sent away for a Steelworkers charter. They became Local 2815, United Steelworkers of America, CIO, with Hosea Hudson, president.

"A black man," says Hudson, "had to be a militant in the truest sense to head a union local in Alabama, where a sizeable element of the membership was made up of Ku Klux Klan."

Hudson was also an unrelenting civil rights fighter. He led a battle in the Alabama CIO to have an anti-discrimination resolution adopted, and helped

elect Ebb Cox as the first black member of the state's CIO executive board. Hudson was also active in the Negro Democratic Non-Partisan Voters League, whose primary purpose was to promote voter registration and education.

Finally, the state CIO and the local police and industrial apparatus began to red-bait Hudson. In December, 1947, he was forced out of the union by fraud and subterfuge. Subsequently, Hudson held a few jobs in the Birmingham area, but basically his organizing days had ended. He and his friends were hounded by the FBI. Eventually, he wound up in retirement in Atlantic City, N.J. In summarizing

his life, Hosea Hudson issued the following simple admonition: "Learn, Struggle, Organize, Unite."

Black Worker in the Deep South is a significant contribution to the historiography of labor struggles. Hudson was neither a John L. Lewis, a William Z. Foster nor an A. Phillip Randolph. But he represents a forceful rank-and-file organizer whose contributions have been of great consequence. Like a radio commentary of a championship fight, his account captures events in their natural motion and fluidity, and enables us to better understand processes and how they work.

-Gwen Robinson
Chicago, Ill.

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Crystal Lee-A Woman of Inheritance, by Henry P. Leifermann. Macmillan, 1975. 190 pp. \$8.95.

Roanoke Rapids lies in the eastern part of North Carolina just below the Virginia border. The town has only two major employers: a paper plant and the huge J.P. Stevens & Company textile mill complex. For half a century these textile mills have been the economic life-blood and, some would say, millstone of Roanoke Rapids.

Like many small towns throughout the South, the community is dominated by textiles. With a workforce of 3,600 people, everyone in town is tied in some way to the Stevens mills. Several generations of cotton mill workers have lived their lives in Roanoke Rapids and the surrounding area, isolated from anything but the textile industry.

In 1973, the Textile Workers Union of America began an organizing drive at the Stevens plants in Roanoke Rapids. The union, however, was already well known in town. In fact, the new efforts of the TWUA were the result of federal court orders initiated because of massive law violations by the company during the union's organizing drive in the mid-'60s. Over the past decade, Stevens has been forced to pay out \$1.3 million to 289 workers it has fired for union activity. Still, no Stevens plant works under a

union contract.

An early supporter of the TWUA in 1973 was Crystal Lee Jordan, the daughter of two textile workers. Crystal Lee had lived in Roanoke Rapids and other North Carolina textile towns all her life. She and her parents had seen union organizers come and go.

Crystal Lee recounts her reaction to the 1973 organizing drive and lays out in no-nonsense detail what her life as a Stevens worker is like.

The author describes Crystal Lee's evolution from a young wife to a young widow of an ex-G.I. who drove down a lonely Carolina road too fast, to an active participant in the first successful TWUA organizing drive at a Stevens mill in the South.

Critics of Henry Leifermann's book have claimed the narrative falls short on a number of counts. Some say it is too sensational. Crystal Lee's marital infidelity, for instance, is recounted. Others say that the focus of the book should have been expanded to include the contributions of other mill hands in the TWUA's efforts. Still other critics feel that the book dwells more on the faults of the TWUA than its successes, and that Leifermann's descriptions of union organizing methods are inaccurate.

It is true that Leifermann is occasionally misleading or mistaken about TWUA's workings. For example,

Crystal Lee secretly received money from TWUA after Stevens fired her for pro-union activities. Leifermann suggests that the main reason for secrecy was because other discharged workers were not getting assistance from the TWUA. He fails to mention another reason why the TWUA is leery of publicizing support for discharged workers: any money received over the table between the time a worker is fired and when he or she is later reinstated with back pay by the government is counted against the backpay settlement.

But those who criticize *Crystal Lee* as being a narrow story miss the point. The author apparently never intended to write a narrative of the TWUA's organizing drive at the Stevens plant. The reports of a new organizing effort served as a catalyst for the book, not as its focus. Leifermann doesn't mean to infer too much beyond the main characters. That is left to the reader.

Yet the book describes in graphic detail the life of one Stevens worker. The brutal facts of life in a Southern mill town don't need any embellishments beyond the facts as described by Leifermann. The fact that *Crystal Lee* is not heavily laden with social comment makes it a more powerful weapon than its critics give it credit for. The judgments upon J.P. Stevens are, literally, crystal clear.

— Phil Sparks
Washington, D.C.



Archer Fullingim: A Country Editor's View of Life, edited and with an introduction by Roy Hamric. Heidelberg Press, 1975. 432 pp. \$12.00.

In 1959, a Kountze, Texas, schoolboy wrote a letter to Ernest Hemingway and enclosed a copy of Archer Fullingim's weekly newspaper, the *Kountze News*. Hemingway sent back a friendly, handwritten letter from Ketchum, Idaho, saying that the hunting there had been good and that he was now hard at work on his book. "Thanks for sending the paper," Hemingway added. "The editor sounds like the type of man I could get along with O.K."

Hemingway wasn't alone in that estimation. In his many years of publishing, editor/publisher Fullingim earned a national reputation as an irascible, outspoken defender of truth and political honesty. His readers included Sen. Edward Kennedy, President Lyndon Baines Johnson and book publisher Alfred A. Knopf. Though his 2,000 subscribers included the famous, he never courted them. When LBJ failed one month to pay his bill on time, Fullingim promptly canceled the President's subscription.

Fullingim was a fighter, determined to save those things he held dear. He was, for instance, a major force in having the Big Thicket region of southeast Texas — "the biological crossroads of North America," as one ecologist has described it — declared a national park recently. "The Printer," as Fullingim is known across Texas, fearlessly pitted his ancient hand-fed press against the giant Time-Life Corporation, which wanted to supplant the Big Thicket's rare hardwood forests and wildlife with pine tree farms for its pulp and lumber industry.

Archer Fullingim employed the techniques of fiction in his reporting before the term "New Journalism" became popular. He often used his weekly to chronicle his relationship with the world about him. And much of what he wrote and published about Kountze, the Big Thicket and his boyhood was not simply "news" or "feature stories," but literature. Some of his reminiscences can be read as short stories, particularly "The Love and Wrath of Old Matt," a view of manly pride and death as seen through a child's eyes.

He gave Watergate and Vietnam bold headlines, but he gave equal treatment to such headlines as:

He Knocks Toe Nail Off Getting To Bed

Boy has Favorite Cake for Birthday President of School Board Begs Members Not To Curse In Meetings

"I had a simple rule for writing local news: print the truth as I see it," Fullingim said shortly after he retired in 1975. "I've changed friends in this town, friends and enemies, two or three times. The people who are my closest friends now were my enemies years ago and my closest friends then are now my enemies."

Fullingim recalls his readers' reactions to his national, regional and local crusadings this way: "I supported long hair, feuded with the timber companies, advocated saving the Big Thicket and eventually ran a quote by Chief Crazy Horse on my masthead: 'Man does not sell the Earth upon which the people walk.' But I never got into any real trouble until I took sides in a school board election. Then everybody wanted to whip me."

Early in the 1950s, Fullingim began sounding warnings against Richard Nixon, branding him "Tricky Dick" and "a potential dictator." But right beside his hard-worded editorials, he would place quiet little stories in praise of a local good deed, or a woman's smile or a rare, tiny flower found in the Big Thicket which surrounds Kountze.

There are many facets to this book, even more than are described in the subtitle: *Being a 25-Year Chronicle of Writings by Texas' Most Outspoken Liberal Newspaper Editor, with Irreverent Reflections on LBJ, Nixon & Sundry Political Matters, Commenting on Vietnam, Ecology, Youth & Journalism, with Excursions into the National Conscience, Reminiscences of the Depression Era & Tributes to Poke Salad, Country Pleasures & Other Matters.*

But this is more than a mere gathering of memorable regional journalism. It is a tribute to a remarkable man. Archer Fullingim wrote from his heart as well as his mind, with a maverick spirit that is quickly disappearing from country journalism. He is one of the last of a breed.

— Si Dunn
Dallas, Texas



Hills of Home

The Rural Ozarks of Arkansas

Hills of Home: The Rural Ozarks of Arkansas, photographs by Roger Minic, written by Bob Minick, drawings and etchings by Leonard Sussman. Scrimshaw Press, 1975. 164 pp. \$22.50. Paperback: Ballentine. \$6.75.

Yesterday as I went to the post office for the mail, I was greeted by kinfolk of the people presented in *Hills of Home*. I saw a jenny (a female donkey for those of you new to old ways) sledding a load of manure across the highway to a big garden. "Volunteer" peach trees blossomed along the road among the redbud and sarvis. The new grass of spring again grew high to hide the soda pop and beer cans in the roadside ditch. I stopped to talk with the oldtimers on the bench outside the store.

All around our home in the Ozarks is an incomparable beauty, the kind that was once readily seen in rural America. The oldtimers here are full of stories about barn raisings "jest a few years ago." They encourage the new back-to-the-landers to join in the customs and traditions which make this area so unique amidst the national sameness that the mass media information blight has inflicted upon us.

Hills of Home is a beautiful book of this region combining photographs, drawings and prose. And though many of the book's scenes may no longer be familiar to people from other areas, it is not a collection of the past or a dying present. *Hills of Home* has captured the face and soul of this still isolated and insulated region. The book is alive and vibrant, like the people and the land it portrays.

Last night I read my wife the story of the memorable swapping match between Uncle Abe and Old Man Swafford. Our seven-year-old daughter awoke and sat beside us to listen. Another story was read, this one of

Sister Cora. It was getting late, but it's a hard book to put down. The photographs are magnetic and the stories are both timeless and wonderful. Even the funny, scratchy drawings with their odd angles and unnatural perspectives are realistic in a strange and funky way.

Three years of living in the Boston mountains of the rugged Ozarks, living much of the swapping and story telling and hard work described in *Hills of Home* has taught me that this is the only way to live in this land. Money is scarce here. City ways just eat up what little cash a family can earn and force them to move on. Those who stay are forced by economics to adopt many of the traditional ways. We swap, we trade, we share.

Further north along the Missouri-Arkansas border, things are different. More tourists pass through to leave their vacation savings and no-deposit empties behind. Here along the higher mountain range, things are slower. Still, TV and highways have managed to invade the region. The culture of this region is fragmenting like that of the rest of rural America.

But some have come to the Ozarks in a receptive way and have had the opportunity to learn new ways to deal with reality. My wife and I publish a newsletter for many of these people, trying to define the back-to-the-land resettling. Hundreds have written to tell of their new life in this region they now call home. They write of being "adopted" by the old couple down the road and of the fantastic deals and swaps they have made. They tell of their first horse and plow as if it were the latest glorious product of Detroit. They tell of the openness and love that has been shown them by neighbors, and of the awe they feel for the land.

Are they hanging on to the past? Are they trying to live a life that is no longer possible in this park-and-shop, drive-in world? I think not. I think they have found some things of lasting value in these hills of home and are trying to hang on to them, to perpetuate them, to keep them alive. The friendliness of neighbor willing to stop and "neighbor awhile" is something worth saving. The glory of these unique mountains which "ain't so high, jest that the hollers is so darn deep" and the wildlife that fills them is worth caring for. The slow and sane "take each day as she comes" attitude should

be kept alive.

To a generation fed on war and alienation and urban blight, the rural Ozarks of Arkansas suggest a new significance found from the old. *Hills of Home* presents much of this importance. It is an inspiration and an encouragement.

— Joel Davidson
Pettigrew, Arkansas,



The Raider, by Jesse Hill Ford. Atlantic Monthly-Little, Brown, 1975. 465 pp. \$10.00.

It begins before the Civil War in a pocket of river-bottom wilderness, dense with oaks, sycamores, bears, populated by Chickasaw Indians, one of the last settled parts of the South. Along comes Elias McCutcheon, leading his horse, followed by his dog.

He chooses a site upon which to build and plant, a riverside place which one day will be a prosperous plantation called Oakleigh and, eventually, a burned-out reminder of the havoc wrought by the Civil War.

Elias builds his first fire on his new land, cooks his first few strips of jerked venison. "He says a sort of grace, a thanksgiving, not aloud, but in his head and heart. He thanks God and feeds his dog what's left over."

From this determined man, this first meal, this clearing, Jesse Hill Ford constructs *The Raider*, a story of pioneers in Western Tennessee during an era of isolation which led to turmoil and rapid change. An historian, Ford deals more in events of the minute and hour than the day and year. A novelist, he creates characters as skillfully as Elias builds Oakleigh. And like Oakleigh, they are partly destroyed by war.

Ford took eight years to research and carefully word this historical novel. Some of the individuals of Tennessee were his people. He leads us into the forest and their lives, tells their stories in words as spare and as powerful as the cautious language of people too

involved with survival to waste time in lengthy conversation.

Elias' sphere widens. He makes a friend, takes a wife who bears two sons. He is given a slave. "Never wanted a slave," he says. He prospers. Respected by his neighbors, he is asked to lead them against outlaws. He establishes "law and order." Meanwhile, some Northerners and Southerners cook up a war. Elias has no preference for the Union or Confederate armies. He wants nothing to do with the whole affair. But when his neighbors assemble in his front yard and ask him to go, he complies.

Unfortunately, Elias' miraculous luck and courage in battle are difficult to accept. He escapes even the most hopeless situations; he is renowned and worshipped by the men. He is kind, brave, thrifty, reverent. He carries a cat in his saddlebag when he rides to battle. But it makes a good story, and anyone who knows old mountain people or crafty rural Southern folks can attest to their sometimes unbelievable eccentricities.

Ford's Elias becomes a legend among soldiers, a Southern hero, but members of his family and many of his neighbors are not so lucky. He returns to a homeplace which is no longer filled with family or surrounded by friends and prosperity. After having survived the wilderness and tamed it, married, harvested corn and cotton, raised his sons, he has lost everything. He is old, silent and alone except for occasional visits from his grandson.

Times change; new houses and businesses and towns arise. Trees are felled. Elias' grandson brings a bride to visit. As they leave, they walk through a stretch of high forest which sets them "pondering what it must have been like hereabouts, in the beginning..."

The Raider is a powerful book with strong characters and fine detail. It's a book about people, about changes they can control and changes that come upon them from other places. Ford makes no declaration of disgust or horror when blue and grey-coated men are blown apart by cannon balls. He lets us see the lives of some of those soldiers, and the meandering paths that led them from their Tennessee settlements into range of that cannon. He doesn't need to say any more.

— Jennifer Miller
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Train Whistle Guitar, by Albert Murray. McGraw-Hill, 1974. 183 pp. \$2.95.

For obvious reasons, the black novel is largely a realist tradition in American literature. Only a few novelists (Hurston and Ellison most prominently) have excavated through mental layers of a brutal history to unearth joyous images and sounds of a naturally poetic, musical race. Most Americans have gradually acknowledged the source of jazz and blues to be the raging heart of a people in captivity. Until the civil rights movement, however, the music stood quite apart from the novel. Few novelists could balance the rich oral history, with its elevating sounds, with the hard bitter facts of daily struggle.

In 1974, the prominent black critic Albert Murray published his first novel, *Train Whistle Guitar*, which celebrates the oral-music tradition of black life. Murray's South is a place rooted in memories beneath the racial suffering, a magic history of the mind and tongue his people carry with them, no matter how far they go from native soil.

A boyhood memoir of the '20s set in Gasoline Point, Alabama, *Train Whistle* is an altogether dazzling performance. Murray's stream-of-consciousness combines rhythms of jazz and blues music and intricate associations the young protagonist makes with things around him.

In one section, an old man's way of walking triggers thoughts which appear as a lyrical digression, set to the beat of the man's moving feet:

Which was why when Little Buddy Marshall and I used to mimic Unka JoJo's stick tapping, dicty-rocking, one-step-drag-foot, catch-up shuffle walk we knew very well indeed that we were flirting with bad luck, because doing that you were not only getting pretty close to imitating and thereby mocking the inevitable infirmities of old age which you were supposed to have been born knowing better than to do, but you were also just one step away from thumbing your nose while somebody was praying or saying the Blessing, which was the next worst thing to cutting a caper while the preacher was saying ashes to ashes and dust to dust, something that only the

babylonian people in the voodoo town of New Orleans were said to dare to do.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, the words of a preacher, are not placed in quotes by Murray, because the young narrator says these words in his mind as part of an ongoing rush of sounds that blend naturally with his own words. Murray's language is drawn from the wellspring of black music, America's native art form, a music most whites experience only in borrowed fashion from white musicians. *Train Whistle* has a poetic quality white writers can only envy. (Faulkner's best black characters speak in a fashion which, while credible and elegant of a sort, is rhythmically closer to baroque music than blues.) A dialogue between two small boys, for instance, calling out to a guitar player from Louisiana, fuses the musical and literary traditions:

Say now hey Mister Luzana
Cholly

Mr. Luzana Cholly one time. . .
Mister Luzana Cholly all night
long.

Yeah me, ain't nobody else but.
The one and only Mister Luzana
Cholly from Bogaluzana Bolly.
Got the world in a jug.
And the stopper in your hand.
Y'all tell 'em, 'cause I ain't got
the heart.

A man among men.
And Lord God among women!

Murray has interpreted a subconscious South which I suspect exists in many black novelists' minds, but which has long been suppressed by social outrage. *Train Whistle* is a clear departure from the honorable tradition of the black realist novel. Murray has written a romantic novel about a region most white novelists see as tragic. Certainly this was Faulkner's vision; and Percy's last novel, *Love in the Ruins*, is a modern Reconstruction story.

Murray's present novel differs from the book which preceded it, *South to a Very Old Place*. Published in 1971, *South* is an autobiographical account of a trip through the region with visits to prominent writers and editors. It is interesting as non-fiction, less for journalistic insights than for the struggling prose, a difficult stream-of-consciousness. The problem, I believe, is that rhythms of the prose in that book were heavily influenced by

Joyce (an epigram comes from *Finnegan's Wake*). For instance:

Some self-styled color-blind white Americans who obviously assume that they must pretend to ignore differences in order to avoid conflict only add hypocrisy to already existing complications.

The truth of the sentence is undeniable, but the sentence, like many in *South to a Very Old Place* is needlessly long. It does not draw on the lyrical quality which Murray evokes so beautifully in the novel published three years later.

In *Train Whistle Guitar*, Murray finds his *metier*. He leaves behind the white stream-of-consciousness style, while maintaining the ideas as his fictional foundation. He draws on the black oral-music tradition, which was restrained in the earlier book, and succeeds dramatically. *Train Whistle Guitar* is romantic in the best (i.e., the rebellious) sense. It extends the language and reveals a horizon serious readers should see.

— Jason Berry
New Orleans, La.

William Elliott Shoots a Bear: Essays on the Southern Literary Imagination, by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. Louisiana State University Press, 1975. 279 pp. \$10.00.

Unlike so many literary critics who dissect literature with steel-cold intelligence, Louis Rubin embraces his favorite material, Southern literature, not only with profound knowledge but also with inspirational love. Following his own advice to Southern critics who examine Southern literature, he neither denies his own down-home heritage, nor allows it to blind his critical insight. Instead, he draws on his Southern background to enhance his understanding of the literature which that heritage has produced.

William Elliott Shoots a Bear: Essays on the Southern Literary Imagination is one of Rubin's recent contributions to his ongoing exploration of the Southern writer and his world. In this work he collects a number of his essays, most of which have been published before. The result is not a disjointed, hop-skip-and-jump tour of Southern literature, but a

moving drama showing the struggles of various Southern writers to express their critical artistic awareness of reality.

Rubin shows us how, for the white writer before the Southern Renaissance of the twentieth century, artistic maturity was directly related to the artist's ability to distance himself from the restrictive genteel tradition and the social pressures demanding safe, public literature. The antebellum writers had to contend with a society which demanded uncritical loyalty from its artists as a defense against outside assaults. Literary pursuits were honored (at least in some parts of the South) only when they reflected the *right* parts of Southern life. Rubin uses as an example the career of William Elliott, who in 1846 wrote a hunting saga, *Carolina Sports by Land and Water*, which in theme and motif resembles William Faulkner's later work, "The Bear." But while Faulkner's purpose is to delve into the murky depths of the Southern experience, Elliott's is to reflect the picturesque quality of the life of a Southern gentleman. Rubin demonstrates in convincing detail how Elliott shies away from developing the Faulknerian themes in the plot of his story, and thus gives us an important example of why and how antebellum Southern writing could not achieve the stature of great literature.

During the local color period after the Civil War, Southern writers faced a society now united by the inspiration of the Lost Cause and the horror of Yankee intrusion. Literary realism was still discouraged, and romantic gentility still extolled, at least as desperately as before the War. Consequently, Rubin shows us, Mark Twain could achieve greatness only by distancing himself from his Southern heritage (which Rubin believes was nevertheless essential to his art) and by masking his feelings behind a complex comic persona. Joel Chandler Harris had to use the seemingly genial Uncle Remus folk stories — which are actually piercing commentary on Southern race relations — as an outlet for his creative vision. George Washington Cable could never effectively rise above the popular taste for insipid literary politeness; and Sidney Lanier discovered rich thematic and linguistic possibilities beyond the genteel tradition too late in his short life.



photo by Steve March

The writers of the Southern Renaissance — which began during the first several decades of the twentieth century and is, according to Rubin, still in flower — successfully broke from the bonds of genteel restraint, and openly drew upon the wealth of the Southern experience. As the Old South gave way to the New, the transition (particularly in the raw quasi-industrial piedmont areas) was often tumultuous, and the alienation between the critical artists and their environment often extreme. The Renaissance writers struggled to express the complexities of what they felt about the changing South. Most chose to exaggerate the dimensions of the South's struggles in order to put them on a higher, moral plane. As Rubin points out, Robert Penn Warren's words on Faulkner's achievement apply generally

to all modern Southern writers:

He has taken our world, with its powerful sense of history, its tangled loyalties, its pains and tensions of transition, its pieties and violences, and elevated it to the level of a great moral drama on the tragic scale. We can be proud of that fact.

We can also be proud of Rubin's own intelligent and beautifully written book. Many of the essays were originally read at conferences, and their style is refreshingly conversational. Rubin has given us a wealth of insights into the evolution of Southern writing. We are doubly lucky that they come to us in such a wonderfully readable form.

— Bob Brinkmeyer
Durham, N.C.

CASE STUDY: Who's Getting Rich in the New South

by Bob Hall and Bob Williams

In the midst of the cheery talk about a prosperous New South, few observers have analyzed exactly who benefits most from the region's new wealth. In future issues, *Southern Exposure* will examine various aspects of corporate, personal and government finances to expose inequities and test a number of assumptions about the distribution of income, the elimination of poverty, and the broadening of control over public and private assets.

In the following tables, we present several simple – and startling – comparisons indicating who's getting rich in the New South. Generations of progress-minded Southerners have asserted that the solution to the region's poverty lies in the development of industry and the mechanization of agriculture. In the 1880s, the father of the New South, Atlanta *Constitution* editor Henry Grady, claimed that if Southerners "go to work in earnest to multiply and diversify our products and industries, independence and wealth will be the certain reward."¹

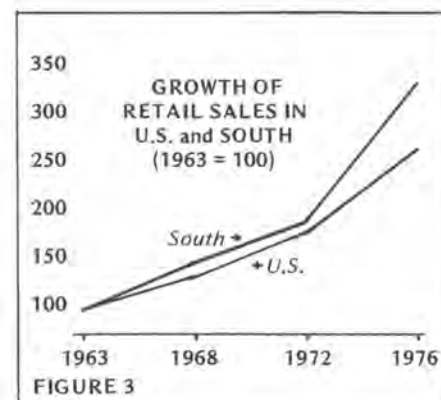
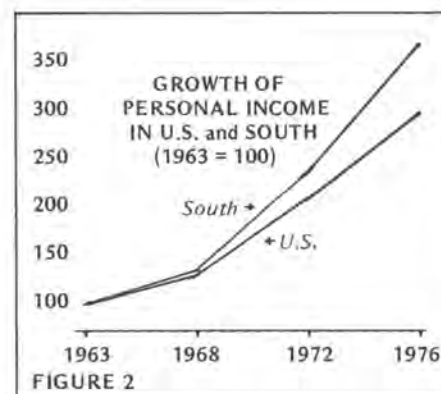
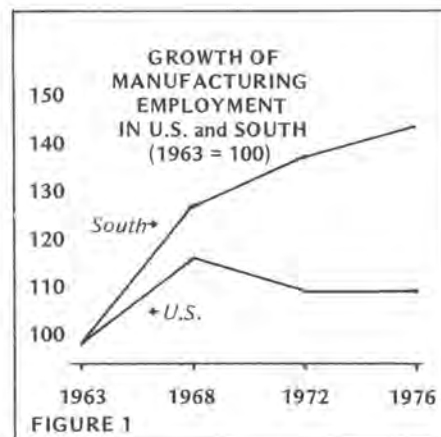
Shortly after World War II, a blue-ribbon Committee of the South of the National Planning Association sent to Congress its seminal report on "The Impact of Federal Policies on the Economy of the South." The 50-member committee – laced with leading liberals, educators and industrialists – declared, "The fundamental means by which the economic lag of the South can be overcome is through the increase of productivity and value of output of southern industry and agriculture."²

Nearly 30 years later, the Southern Growth Policies Board (SGPB) rejoices in the fact that "the South is now the fastest growing region of the country in both population and economic activity." But in its study, *The Economics of Southern Growth*, the group concludes

that "while the growth has been rapid, the level of economic achievement of the South has not yet reached the national average."³ To help eliminate this gap, the SGPB recommends the enactment of government policies which balance the development of higher-paying, more productive jobs and the acceleration of the accumulation of capital in the region with a concern for preserving the "environmental and quality of life considerations" (including an anti-union atmosphere) that attract industry and people to the region in the first place. Figures 1-3 dramatize the success of the South in capturing an ever-larger share of the country's employment, per capita income, and retail sales. There may yet be truth in Henry Grady's prediction about "the steady shifting of the greatest industrial centers from the North to the more favored regions of the South."⁴

From this ambitious perspective, it is not hard to see why today's New South boosters take pride in the region's increasing share of national wealth. Had they been concerned with the relative distribution of resources and income *within* the South, however, the story might be different. By focusing on comparisons of the whole region with the whole nation, and on aggregate data lumping together various classes of income groups, the modern Henry Grady can find encouragement in such general indicators of prosperity as the rapid growth of the South's *total* income and industrial output *relative to the nation's*. But like previous generations, they consistently underestimate ingrained disparities *within* the region and the nation between black and white, poor and rich, worker and investor.

Thus, while it is important to point out that the average Southerner's income



has grown from 84% of his or her national counterpart in 1970 to 88% in 1975, it is equally significant that the number of people in the nation and the 13-state South who live in poverty barely declined during the same period. (In 1975, 10,783,000 Southerners lived below the poverty line, compared with 11,355,000 in 1969.) And while the majority of Southerners now live in urban areas and have jobs in an economy nearly as diversified as the nation's, the unemployment rate remains about twice as high for blacks as for whites and the income gap between the richest 5% of the population

and the rest of the South remains unchanged.⁵

To highlight these and other disparities requires a different perspective from that of the New South proponents, a different juxtaposition of the data documenting regional growth. The following tables reveal the handsome increases in the South's total wealth. But they also reveal that this new money is being absorbed and redistributed along lines that have existed since 1963, if not well before — despite the presidential reign of the South's Lyndon Johnson, the monumental reforms brought about by the civil rights movement, the rise and fall of the War on Poverty and Great Society programs, and the emergence of a new round of New South rhetoric.

The first set of charts shows that the rich are staying richer, receiving as much of each income dollar as they did a generation ago. The second set of statistics reveals that industrial expansion has not altered these inequities since workers are not getting their share of the wealth generated from the New South's factories. The last set of tables demonstrates that instead of correcting the imbalance between rich and poor, government policies are actually preserving the inequities.

I. The Rich Stay Richer

Figures 4 and 5 provide a dramatic illustration of how the gap between the annual income received by the rich and the rest of the population follows the pattern that existed 25 years ago. If all Southerners in 1953 were divided into five equal parts, ranked according to their yearly income, then the bottom fifth received a total of only 3.5% of the South's total personal income, while the top fifth shared 43.3% among themselves. Figure 4 shows that in 1976, the proportions barely changed, with the bottom fifth of the population receiving only 5.0% and the top fifth getting 42.3%. In other words, while the poorest fifth had to live on only a nickel of every dollar made in the South, the richest fifth took in eight times as much, more than 40 cents of every income dollar.

Even the slight improvement at the bottom can largely be explained by the huge migration of poor families out of the South, especially blacks moving to the Northeast. Between 1950 and 1970, over 2,500,000 blacks left the South, many of them displaced from subsistence

Table 4: Percentage Share of Aggregate Income Held By Each Fifth of the South's Families

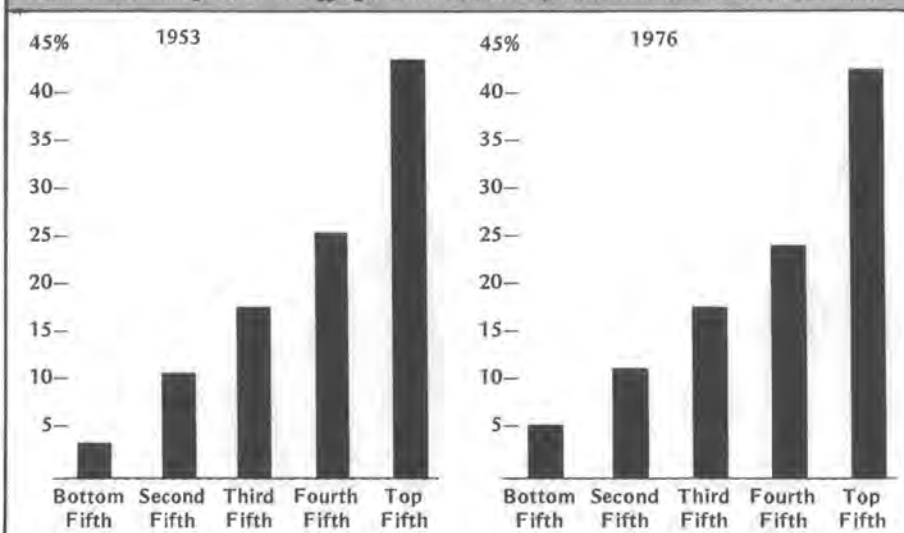
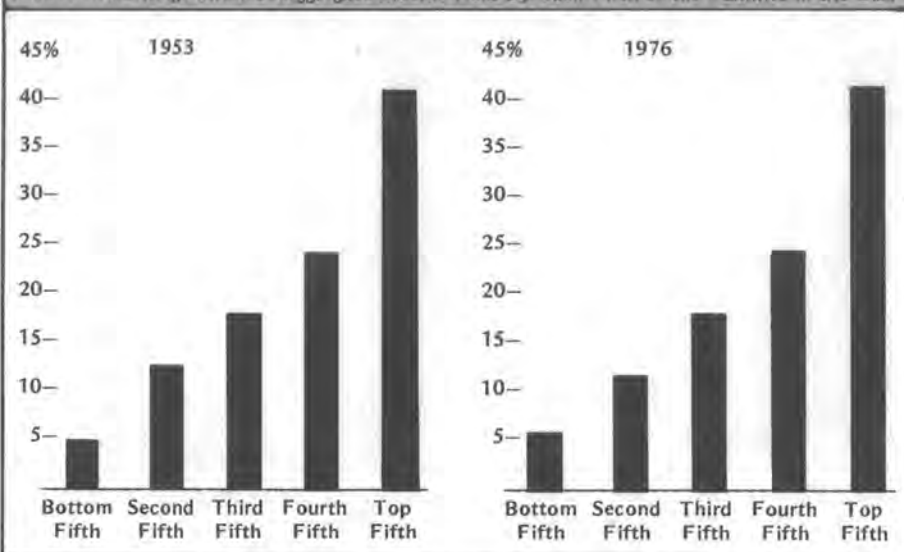


Table 5: Percentage Share of Aggregate Income Held By Each Fifth of the Families in the U.S.



level farms by the mechanization and industrialization called for by the New South advocates. Although for the South the portion of income held by the bottom fifth increased slightly, the relative influx of poor families to the Northeast caused the corresponding portion in that region to drop from 6.8% in 1953 to 5.8% in 1976. The South simply exported part of its problem instead of curing it. Consequently, the national situation for the poorest fifth remained fairly constant (see Table 5).

II. Payrolls and Profits

One reason why the richest fifth still gets 40 cents of each dollar earned is that the average worker doesn't receive the full benefits of helping industry expand and increase its output. Table 6 compares the growth in wages paid industrial

workers with the growth in the value that each worker adds to the raw materials consumed in making the finished product, or the value added by the manufacturing process. "Value added" is a technical term that refers to the additional value created by labor and capital in transforming raw materials, fuel and other production ingredients into goods for sale. For example, if a furniture company sells its products in a given year for \$100,000 and spends \$10,000 on the wood, metal, cloth, fuel, etc., that went into the furniture, then its value added is \$90,000. Out of this \$90,000 comes the payroll for the workers (including the salaried executives), money for merchandising the product, profits for the owners, interest for the creditors and taxes.

The question, of course, is who gets how much. Traditionally, corporate

owners have tried to restrict workers to wage increases that are offset by a corresponding increase in the output or value added per worker, or productivity. Thus, if ten workers in the furniture company generated \$90,000 in value added (or \$9,000 per worker) in 1963 and fifteen workers generated \$270,000 (or \$18,000 per worker) in 1976, then it would seem reasonable that each worker's wage should double since their per worker contribution to the value added also doubled. But Table 6 shows that in reality, Southern industry has not followed this logic. The gains made in improved productivity continue to flow disproportionately to the owners of industry.⁶ While wages per worker increased over 100% between 1963 and 1976, value added climbed more than 150%; the return to capital thus grew considerably more than wages, as illustrated by the fact that the profits of the top 15 manufacturing companies headquartered in the South grew 285% in this same period.⁷ In short, the reward for labor in the New South has not been as great as the reward taken by capital. Or put yet another way, much of the industrial expansion in the region has come at the expense of an underpaid work force.

The increased portion of value added which has gone to corporate owners, investors and lenders has had important effects on concentrating more and more wealth in the hands of fewer institutions and individuals. Not only are the rich continuing to get richer, but the portion of profits retained by corporations for

expansion has fueled the tremendous appetite for mergers and acquisitions of one company by another — but that story will have to wait for another issue. It is enough here to point out that industrial expansion and the New South riches have flowed disproportionately to the owners of capital instead of to the region's wage earners.

III. Public Wealth vs. Public Welfare

The disparity between rich and poor, corporation owner and average worker, is further heightened by government spending and taxing policies. The last set of tables demonstrate the failure of state and local governments in the New South to redistribute wealth and help equalize income between different classes of citizens.⁸

The figures in Table 7 show that, while the total per capita expenditures by state and local governments in the South increased more than threefold, the portion paid for welfare programs dropped in many states and remained fairly level for the region, sliding from 9.1% to 8.9% between 1963 and 1976.

Thus, contrary to popular opinion, welfare is not the cause of increased taxes in the South. On a national level, the portion of state and local government expenditures that went to finance welfare programs did increase, from 8.5% in 1963 to 12.3% in 1976. In terms of actual dollars, the gap between per capita expenditures in the South and nation leaped from \$3 in 1963 to \$60 in 1976, thus indicating that the region's

commitment to the poor increasingly lags behind the nation's.

At the same time, the burden of paying for the expanding services provided by the New South governments has not been equally shared. The ability to pay is generally accepted as the standard of tax equity, but this criterion has apparently had exactly the reverse effect on Southern lawmakers. As Table 8 indicates, the more heavily a tax tends to fall on the rich, the less it is used as a source of income by state and local governments. In fact, in several cases, taxes that heighten rather than lighten the disparity in income are increasingly relied upon; governments not only perpetuate the old inequities, but even aggressively increase them.

For example, most Southern states have minimal estate taxes and no inheritance or gift taxes at all. These laws, collectively called death taxes because they tax the passage of wealth from one generation to another, are possibly the most progressive in making the rich pay more than the poor; but their contribution to the total state and local tax coffers had slipped from an already scant 0.8% in 1965 to 0.7% in 1976. Meanwhile, the highly regressive sales tax continues to provide more than two-thirds of most state revenues; and the sales tax on food, perhaps the most pernicious of all taxes in discriminating against the poor and working person, provides a slightly higher portion of the states' tax receipts, rising from under 8% in 1965 to nearly 9% in 1976. The following comparison illustrates how the sales tax takes a greater chunk of the income from the family least able to pay:

| | | |
|--|---------|----------|
| Family income | \$8,000 | \$40,000 |
| Family purchases | 6,000 | 20,000 |
| 4% sales tax on purchases | 240 | 800 |
| Percent which sales tax takes of family's income | 3% | 2% |

Although not as regressive as sales taxes, property taxes penalize small homeowners and favor commercial and landlord interests which can pass the tax on to consumers and renters. Property taxes constituted nearly 80% of local tax revenues, but the actual levy paid by the typical Southerner falls far short of the \$266 national per capita average in 1976. In California, home of Proposition 13, per capita property taxes went from \$161 in 1963 (51% of state and local government tax revenues) to

| State | Wages Per Worker | | % Change | Value Added Per Worker | | % Change |
|----------------|------------------|--------|----------|------------------------|----------|----------|
| | 1963 | 1976 | | 1963 | 1976 | |
| Alabama | \$4263 | \$8988 | 111% | \$11,680 | \$29010 | 148% |
| Arkansas | 3470 | 7861 | 127 | 10,010 | 27,960 | 179 |
| Florida | 4220 | 8676 | 106 | 15,890 | 36,640 | 131 |
| Georgia | 3700 | 8140 | 120 | 11,220 | 30,640 | 173 |
| Kentucky | 4679 | 9716 | 108 | 18,200 | 41,170 | 126 |
| Louisiana | 5026 | 11249 | 124 | 18,250 | 60,160 | 230 |
| Mississippi | 3391 | 7685 | 127 | 9,420 | 25,840 | 174 |
| North Carolina | 3437 | 7612 | 121 | 10,290 | 26,730 | 160 |
| South Carolina | 3593 | 7963 | 122 | 9,510 | 23,960 | 152 |
| Tennessee | 3898 | 8449 | 117 | 12,360 | 25,790 | 141 |
| Texas | 4826 | 10104 | 109 | 12,690 | 32,410 | 155 |
| Virginia | 4141 | 8819 | 113 | 19,720 | 49,280 | 150 |
| West Virginia | 5447 | 11504 | 111 | 20,760 | 39,980 | 93 |
| TOTAL SOUTH | \$4060 | \$8770 | 116 | \$13,430 | \$34,190 | 155 |
| TOTAL U.S. | 5076 | 10539 | 108 | 15,705 | 39,187 | 150 |

Source: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Annual Survey of Manufacturers, 1976

| Table 7: Welfare as % of Total State & Local Gov. Expenses | | | | | Table 8: Per Capita State & Local Taxes Collected from Own Sources, by % Source Contributes to Total ‡ | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|------|--|-------|------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| State | Total per capita expenditures | | per capita public welfare expense | | per capita state & local taxes collected | | % from all sales taxes | | % from property tax | | % from person. income tax | | % from corp. income tax | | % from death taxes | |
| | 1963 | 1976 | '63 | '76 | 1965 | 1976 | '65 | '76 | '65 | '76 | '65 | '76 | '65 | '76 | '65 | '76 |
| Ala. | \$248 | \$928 | 13.7 | 9.6 | \$171 | \$622 | 48 | 56 | 18 | 13 | 6 | 15 | 2.8 | 3.6 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Ark. | \$243 | \$862 | 13.7 | 11.9 | \$171 | \$455 | 46 | 47 | 28 | 22 | 5 | 16 | 3.5 | 5.9 | 0.3 | 0.2 |
| Fla. | \$323 | 1006 | 6.2 | 5.8 | \$228 | \$566 | 38 | 47 | 38 | 34 | * | * | * 3.8 | 1.1 | 0.8 | |
| Ga. | \$276 | \$971 | 9.1 | 10.2 | \$197 | \$549 | 43 | 40 | 31 | 32 | 7 | 15 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 0.3 | 0.2 |
| Ky. | \$295 | \$937 | 8.8 | 12.8 | \$179 | \$549 | 42 | 40 | 27 | 19 | 8 | 21 | 4.1 | 7.2 | 1.3 | 0.9 |
| La.** | \$357 | 1113 | 15.4 | 9.5 | \$159 | \$610 | 33 | 33 | 22 | 15 | 2 | 5 | 2.8 | 3.8 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| Miss. | \$253 | \$962 | 10.3 | 9.2 | \$180 | \$486 | 45 | 56 | 27 | 23 | 2 | 9 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| N.C. | \$232 | \$926 | 8.2 | 8.2 | \$193 | \$527 | 38 | 41 | 27 | 25 | 13 | 21 | 7.1 | 5.4 | 1.2 | 1.0 |
| S.C. | \$210 | \$966 | 7.1 | 7.6 | \$162 | \$489 | 49 | 47 | 23 | 24 | 9 | 18 | 4.6 | 5.7 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| Tenn. | \$256 | \$935 | 7.0 | 9.7 | \$184 | \$493 | 42 | 53 | 32 | 26 | 1† | 1† | 4.1 | 6.2 | 1.2 | 1.5 |
| Texas** | \$282 | \$960 | 8.2 | 9.0 | \$208 | \$581 | 31 | 42 | 45 | 38 | * | * | * | * | 0.7 | 0.8 |
| Va. | \$275 | 1022 | 4.0 | 8.9 | \$193 | \$609 | 21 | 33 | 36 | 28 | 15 | 20 | 4.1 | 4.2 | 0.9 | 0.6 |
| W. Va. | \$250 | 1044 | 14.4 | 9.0 | \$197 | \$584 | 53 | 57 | 27 | 18 | 5 | 13 | * | 1.9 | 0.9 | 0.7 |
| SOUTH | \$275 | \$965 | 9.1 | 8.9 | \$197 | \$543 | 38 | 44 | 33 | 28 | 5 | 9 | 2.7 | 3.6 | 0.8 | 0.7 |
| U.S. | \$344 | 1191 | 8.5 | 12.3 | \$264 | \$730 | 33 | 35 | 44 | 36 | 8 | 16 | 3.8 | 4.6 | 1.4 | 1.0 |

‡ Does not include portion from federal sources; other state & local sources making total add to 100% not included. * No tax. † Applies only to personal income from dividends & interest. ** States collecting substantial amounts in severance taxes on minerals, etc. Source: US Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Governmental Finances, 1962-3, 1964-65, 1975-76.*

\$415 in 1976 (43% of taxes collected). In the South, only Florida, Virginia and Texas citizens paid even half as much on a per capita basis in either year; for most Southern states, the portion of revenues brought in from property taxes dropped from under 35% to under 25% in the same period.

Every Southern state collects a significantly larger share of its revenues from personal income taxes, primarily because personal income nearly tripled between 1965 and 1976. For the region as a whole, the portion of state and local government tax receipts coming from personal income taxes nearly doubled, jumping from 4.8% in 1965 to 9.2% in 1976. Income taxes are generally considered progressive since they normally take larger bites out of the income of the rich than the poor; but in most Southern states, the tax rates are relatively flat. Only four states in the region require a person with a taxable income over \$10,000 to pay a larger portion in taxes than a person with less than \$10,000. Hence personal income taxes in the South tend to operate like the regressive sales tax and the across-the-board social security tax, rather than like the more progressive federal income tax with its graduated rate structure.

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of Southern tax policy is that the share

extracted from business has actually declined in the last 15 years, in spite of the much ballyhooed industrial growth during the period. State and local governments collect a slightly higher portion of their tax revenues from corporate income taxes — from 2.7% in 1965 to 3.6% in 1976 — but a 25% drop in the largely business-related license taxes (from 7.3% to 5.4%) pulled the net revenues from companies down. So despite the boost governments have given economic development by creating the framework of services for expansion (from sewage disposal to manpower training programs), the owners of businesses have actually pushed an increasing share of the tax bill onto poorer members of the community. (In a later report, we will look at industrial development costs by governments and the impact of incentives offered new companies on the larger society.)

IV. Summary

The various tables presented here dramatize three devastating realities about the consequences of Southern industrial development:

- The gap between rich and poor in the New South remains almost exactly where it was 25 years ago.
- Industrial workers are not getting

their fair share of the increased riches generated from New South factories.

- Local and state government taxing policies discriminate against the poor and the working family in favor of the rich and the corporation. □

Bob Hall is the director of the Institute for Southern Studies which publishes Southern Exposure. Bob Williams is a graduate student in economics at the University of North Carolina.

Notes

1. From Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1970), p. 65.

2. National Planning Association, *Economy of the South: Report to the Joint Committee on the Economic Report on the Impact of Federal Policies on the Economy of the South* (Washington: US Printing Office, 1949), p. 91. The Committee was chaired by E. W. Palmer, president of the Kingsport Press in Kingsport, Tenn., and included Will Alexander, the first director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation; Ralph McGill of Grady's Atlanta Constitution; North Carolina Senator Frank Graham; Charles Johnson, president of Fisk University; Marion Folsom, treasurer of Eastman Kodak; and many others.

3. E. Blaine Liner and Lawrence K. Lynch (eds.), *The Economics of Southern Growth* (Durham, NC: Southern Growth Policies Board, 1977), p. 9 and *passim*.

4. From *The New South Creed*, p. 78.

5. For a detailed study of the persistence of poverty in one Southern state, see Tommy W. Rogers, *The Extent and Distribution of Poverty in Mississippi* (Jackson: Office of Human Resources and Community Services, 1976). For the latest in a long line of studies documenting how the top 5% of America's families control the majority of the country's net worth, see Maurice Zeitlin, "Who Owns America," *Progressive*, June, 1978. A study of the control of income in Texas appears in Julie Ardery and Bill Bishop, "Prosperity for the Few," *Texas Observer*, May 26, 1978. For statistics on black and white families, see Dorothy K. Newman (et al.), *Protest, Politics and Prosperity: Black Americans and White Institutions, 1940-75* (NY: Pantheon, 1978).

6. As Dennis Eckart and John C. Ries write in *People vs. Government: The Responsiveness of American Institutions* (edited by L. N. Riesback, Indiana Univ. Press, 1975), "under our political and economic system, increased productivity does not resolve the problem of redistribution; it merely perpetuates the inequity in income and wealth."

7. The fifteen largest manufacturing companies by sales are LTV, Reynolds Ind., Coca-Cola, Burlington, Dresser Ind., Reynolds Metals, Texas Instruments, Lykes-Youngstown, Ethyl Corp., Genesco, Blue Bell, Akzona, Liggett, West Point-Pepperell, Universal Leaf. Their combined profits leaped from \$351.5 million in 1963 to \$1,352 million in 1976.

8. For a dated, but still relevant study of tax structures in the region, see Eva Galambos, "State and Local Taxes in the South, 1973," a report from the Southern Regional Council.

CASE STUDY: The Sunny Climate of the New South

by Michael Plemmons

Depending on who you listen to, the South is either Rising Again or is being sacked by industrial carpetbaggers the likes of which the region has never seen before.

Manufacturers have created nearly a million new jobs in eleven Southern states since 1968. They are making everything from refrigerator motors to shirt buttons. But it ain't just sunny skies and Southern hospitality that has drawn industry from the North. The reason, according to a recent study commissioned by the manufacturers themselves, is the South's longest standing asset — cheap labor.

Although none of this is big news to observers of the American economic scene, it is interesting to see the Great Southern Migration from a businessman's point of view. A group of the manufacturers' associations from 39 states hired Alexander Grant & Co. from Chicago to determine which states provide the most profitable base for industry — and the answers all point to the South.

The study was limited to the lower 48 states and measured "business climate" by looking chiefly at (1) average weekly manufacturing wage; (2) state and local tax structure; and (3) the percentage of unionized workers in the entire local labor force.

Lesser factors were also computed, such as energy costs in the state, days lost due to work stoppages and unemployment compensation costs, and the result produced a "business climate" index. Generally, states with low per capita incomes, low taxes and few organized workers ranked highest in terms of relocation "desirability." States with long established unions not only ranked at the bottom of the list, but have already been sapped of tens of thousands of jobs because of the move to the South.

Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, Delaware, Illinois, West Virginia and Oregon are respectively the Ten Worst states according to the study's definition of

the best states in which to do business. Not coincidentally, manufacturers have drained these states of 805,400 industrial jobs from 1968 to 1978.

The average weekly wage for factory workers in these ten states is \$277.46.

Meanwhile, the 11 states of the Old Confederacy — with Texas in front — have gained 890,000 jobs and kept the industrial worker's average paycheck at \$210.04 per week. (The 11 states are Ala., Ark., Fla., Ga., La., Miss., N.C., S.C., Tenn., Texas, and Va.)

While in the Ten Worst states fully 35 percent of the work force is represented by unions, in the 11 Southern states only a third (13 percent) are so represented. The authors of the Alexander Grant study do not draw a one-to-one relationship between union

STATE "BUSINESS CLIMATE" RANKINGS

| Rank | State | % Union | State & Local Tax | Average Weekly Wage | Jobs Gained or (Lost) from 1968-1978 |
|------|----------------|---------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mississippi | 12.0 | \$ 527.46 | \$184.63 | 60,300 |
| 2 | North Carolina | 6.9 | 592.79 | 180.29 | 112,300 |
| 3 | South Carolina | 8.0 | 548.90 | 193.73 | 60,500 |
| 4 | Utah | 14.9 | 652.18 | 224.43 | 29,500 |
| 5 | New Mexico | 14.1 | 624.58 | 186.34 | 16,600 |
| 6 | Arkansas | 16.8 | 494.08 | 189.45 | 59,000 |
| 7 | Georgia | 14.5 | 609.10 | 199.08 | 55,200 |
| 8 | Oklahoma | 15.0 | 598.30 | 239.72 | 47,900 |
| 9 | South Dakota | 11.0 | 629.35 | 215.66 | 8,100 |
| 10 | Virginia | 13.8 | 675.39 | 203.78 | 49,400 |
| 11 | Tennessee | 18.7 | 564.09 | 208.17 | 75,100 |
| 12 | Florida | 12.5 | 628.16 | 205.63 | 95,500 |
| 13 | North Dakota | 15.1 | 681.69 | 233.19 | 7,000 |
| 14 | Missouri | 32.3 | 608.93 | 235.07 | (7,800) |
| 15 | Maine | 16.2 | 658.12 | 197.88 | (6,100) |
| 16 | Kansas | 14.1 | 727.56 | 242.95 | 38,300 |
| 17 | Alabama | 19.1 | 506.97 | 230.58 | 51,500 |
| 18 | Nebraska | 15.1 | 773.90 | 239.37 | 11,300 |
| 19 | Idaho | 15.5 | 639.36 | 277.78 | 22,100 |
| 20 | Colorado | 18.9 | 823.82 | 251.83 | 58,100 |
| 21 | New Hampshire | 15.1 | 618.36 | 199.89 | 7,100 |
| 22 | Texas | 13.0 | 637.44 | 243.90 | 243,600 |
| 23 | Vermont | 17.7 | 810.10 | 210.64 | 4,300 |
| 24 | Louisiana | 16.3 | 636.07 | 268.13 | 27,600 |
| 25 | Iowa | 21.2 | 748.60 | 273.34 | 24,500 |
| 26 | Kentucky | 25.1 | 601.25 | 245.31 | 56,000 |
| 27 | Indiana | 33.2 | 625.45 | 297.05 | 21,400 |
| 28 | Wyoming | 18.2 | 988.43 | 247.67 | 2,200 |
| 29 | Arizona | 16.0 | 826.58 | 247.46 | 41,900 |
| 30 | Wisconsin | 28.7 | 870.41 | 273.35 | 57,800 |
| 31 | Nevada | 27.4 | 892.24 | 250.88 | 10,200 |
| 32 | Minnesota | 25.3 | 906.10 | 257.68 | 57,700 |
| 33 | Montana | 25.7 | 765.66 | 338.35 | 4,200 |
| 34 | Rhode Island | 27.3 | 792.82 | 181.51 | 11,300 |
| 35 | Maryland | 21.6 | 891.97 | 265.02 | (36,100) |
| 36 | California | 28.2 | 1,088.92 | 259.05 | 225,000 |
| 37 | Massachusetts | 24.4 | 1,001.87 | 222.15 | (35,900) |
| 38 | Connecticut | 25.1 | 885.10 | 247.70 | (58,300) |
| 39 | Oregon | 26.5 | 793.13 | 276.82 | 53,600 |
| 40 | West Virginia | 38.2 | 622.40 | 270.18 | (5,000) |
| 41 | Illinois | 34.9 | 860.29 | 271.18 | (140,500) |
| 42 | Delaware | 20.1 | 829.36 | 265.15 | (2,800) |
| 43 | Washington | 36.7 | 821.22 | 299.86 | 9,900 |
| 44 | Pennsylvania | 37.5 | 770.01 | 257.44 | (193,300) |
| 45 | Ohio | 33.2 | 640.74 | 305.87 | (45,700) |
| 46 | New York | 38.0 | 1,252.22 | 237.98 | (388,000) |
| 47 | New Jersey | 28.2 | 931.45 | 255.85 | (90,400) |
| 48 | Michigan | 38.4 | 878.17 | 340.26 | (3,200) |

SOURCE: "A Study of Business Climates of the Forty-Eight Contiguous States of America," prepared for the Conference of State Manufacturers' Associations (COSMA), by Alexander Grant & Co., March, 1979.

membership and higher wages, as other economists have done, but it is worth noting that the difference in wages in the Northern states amounts to an annual wage of \$3,500 more than what the Southern worker receives.

An alleged lower cost of living is often cited as the great equalizer in this disparity of earnings. But such an argument is impossible to support with statistics since cost-of-living indices

vary so widely from city to city, much less state to state, throughout the South and the nation as a whole. The Grant study does show that the average per capita state-and-local tax paid in the South is \$603 compared to the average of \$894 in the Ten Worst states of the North. But it should be recognized that these taxes are linked to services provided citizens of these states, and hence higher taxes may reflect a higher

standard of living, not just a higher cost of living.

Michael Plemmons grew up in Mississippi, "went North for the same reasons as everyone else," became a labor reporter for the Milwaukee Sentinel where he regularly wrote about corporations who found the "weather" in the South more suitable, and now has returned himself to Nashville, Tennessee.

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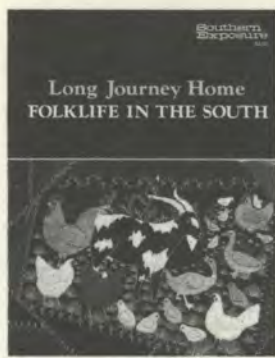
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Vol. V, No. 4 SOUTHERN EXCHANGE. A sample issue of a new publication from the Institute for Southern Studies which digests the best articles about the region's developments appearing in media ranging from *Fortune* to the *Texas Observer* to the *Orlando Sentinel*. Includes articles on "The New North-South War," Bert Lance's future, TVA's new director, urban sprawl, LSU Press, Southerners in D.C.

Vol. VI, No. 1. PACKAGING THE NEW SOUTH. Special sections on the New South politicians (including New Orleans' Dutch Morial, South Carolina's Tom Turnipseed, and Alabama's Bill Baxley) and on Joan Little (including an in-depth interview). Also articles on "red-baiting" Highlander Folk School, the 150-year history of J.P. Stevens, the Federal Writers and Treatre Projects, and Bill Livers, Ky. storyteller.

Vol. VI, No. 2 SICK FOR JUSTICE: HEALTH CARE. A 25-page section on community clinics, articles on brown lung, hospital organizing, healing waters, Meharry Medical College, the Student Health Coalition, the UMW Health Fund, Kingsport's industrial pollution, "People's Medicine of the Early South," "The Great Hookworm Crusade," a report on health profits and interviews on being trained as a health professional.

Vol VI, No. 3 PASSING GLANCES A collection of articles featuring interviews with Beale Street bluesmen, a three-part section on Senate races for 1978, a three-part section on organizing, including profiles of Carolina Action, Mississippi's United League and Virginia ERA lobbyists, a report on "Who's Getting Rich in the New South," and essays on the origins of the Sit-In Movement and on jazz's influence on literature.

Vol VI, No. 4 STILL LIFE: INSIDE SOUTHERN PRISONS. A specially designed reader on the who, what, why, how of prisons, with a mixture of essays, interviews, poems and graphics by prisoners, ex-cons, professionals, reformers, and clergy. Includes portraits of several state prisons, a section on the re-emergence of the death penalty, and examples of what people can do to change the prison system.

PLUS OTHER ISSUES WITH a 20-page case study of anti-union efforts in Greenville, S.C. (VII, 1); a 160-page review of the 25 years of struggle for quality and equal education since *Brown* (VII, 2); a special book on Southern sports from wrestling to surfing (VII, 3); an in-depth analysis of Southern anti-union consulting firms (VII, 4).



**“...think they got the union crushed,
but just like putting out a fire,
you can go out and stomp on it
and leave a few sparks
and here come a wind
and it's going to spread again.”**