

Exploring southern labor



Women jailed during Brookside mine strike

HERE COME A WIND—LABOR ON THE MOVE
Southern Exposure, Vol. 4, Nos. 1-2, \$3.50

The rise of Jimmy Carter has created a hungry market for accounts of "the real South," as baffled Yankees confront stereotypes and seek to understand the new president. Over the past four years—long before the current vogue—*Southern Exposure*, a quarterly produced by the Institute for Southern Studies in Chapel

Hill, N.C., and Atlanta, Ga., has published some of the most perceptive writing on the region today.

Here Come a Wind, a special double issue on the southern labor movement, lives up to this standard. Important features include a comprehensive bibliography on southern labor history and detailed profiles of labor in 13 southern states. These profiles survey each state's main industries, trends in its economy and in wages, labor laws, and union

strength. Each includes a brief discussion of recent state history affecting labor unions and working people.

The profiles are fleshed out by 26 articles, offering a rich blend of interviews with workers and union leaders, sketches from labor history, and examples of current organizing.

Labor's weakness in the South has made the region a haven for runaway industry in search of cheap labor. "Runaways: A Call to Action," by Don Stillman, offers a case study of this continuing process and explains how weak labor laws aid companies determined to crush union efforts to follow them South.

This lesson is underlined by the case of J.P. Stevens, the nation's second largest textile firm. Over 13 years Stevens has compiled a massive record of labor law violations in fighting off organizing efforts by the Textile Workers Union of America. "Stevens vs. Justice" describes this struggle and how sanctions available under the National Labor Relations Act have been powerless to halt the company's intimidation tactics.

►A new coalition needed.

A theme running through the magazine is that victory for the labor movement in the South will require new tactics and the creation of broad coalitions embracing "consumers, academics, journalists, young activists, religious leaders, and community groups." A number of specific cases of new coalitions and new victories are taken up.

In Arkansas, the right to work law—one of the main barriers to union growth—was unsuccessfully challenged in a referendum in November. While the vote was lost, the basis for future victories may have been laid. A broad coalition—ranging from labor unions and the NAACP to the Council of Churches and elements in the Chamber of Commerce—that supported the challenge may have significant impact on the climate for future organizing in Arkansas.

A special section, "Harlan County, 1931-1976," concludes with an interview with Bernard Aronson, one of the main strategists for the United Mine Workers in the 1974 Brookside mine strike. He describes how the union initially faced a weak position at Brookside, with a strike at one mine whose production could easily be replaced by the mine owner, Duke Power Company. The union overcame this through a combination of aggressive media tactics and alliances with consumer groups.

At the same time that the Brookside miners were striking, Duke Power began facing increased consumer opposition to rate hikes. The UMW then formed a coalition with North Carolina consumer groups. Common ground was found around the fuel adjustment clause, a product of the 1974 "energy crisis" that let power companies pass fuel costs on to consumers. The adjustment clause became a vulnerable target after it became clear that Duke Power was using it to make consumers bear the costs of the Brookside strike.

►Lessons of civil rights struggle.

Many of the new possibilities for southern labor flow from the civil rights movement. Jim Grant, a North Carolina civil rights organizer, explores the ties between labor and the black movement in a perceptive essay. To succeed in the South, he concludes, unions must employ tactics that encourage mass participation and must go beyond narrow trade union issues to become a vehicle for broad community goals.

"Victoria sobre Farah" by Bill Finger offers an account of tensions between the Chicano community and the leadership of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union (drawn largely from northwestern white ethnics) during a 22-month strike against Farah textile plants in Texas (1972-74). Finger's article, together with case studies of the Textile Workers' efforts at Oneita Mills in South Carolina and J.P. Stevens, reinforces Grant's conclusion.

"A Woman's Work" by Elizabeth Tornquist explores the impact and potential of the women's movement for labor in the South. The article contains important information on differences between the conditions of women working in the South and in other regions. It is weakened by an absence of the kind of examination of specific cases that enriched Grant's essay on the black movement and labor. A planned issue of *Southern Exposure* on women may explore this topic more fully.

Here Come a Wind set out to explore the roots from which a new labor movement may emerge in the South. It will itself be a valuable resource for those engaged in building that movement.

(Single issues of *Southern Exposure* may be ordered from the Institute for Southern Studies, P.O. Box 230, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. A year's subscription costs \$8.)

—Bob McMahon

Bob McMahon is a reporter living in North Carolina.

Health In Short

Birth Control Warnings Due

The Pill will soon become even harder for many women to swallow when the Food and Drug Administration releases its revised warning labels for oral contraceptives. Doctors are scheduled to receive the final version from FDA within the next four months and a patient booklet will be available within six months.

The new warnings say: Women over 40 should not use oral contraceptives because of the increased risk of heart attack found among women in this age group using the pill; use of the pill should be stopped at least one month prior to any planned major surgery because the risk of dangerous post-operative blood clot formation is four to six times higher among pill users; benign liver tumors that may rupture and result in internal bleeding have occasionally been associated with oral contraceptives; and patients on the pill should be monitored for breast tumors and abnormal bleeding from the uterus.

The new patient booklet will also say that short of sterilization, the pill is still the most effective form of birth control.

A racist, sexist disease?

A new study released by the National Center for Health Statistics shows nearly 23 million people, or one-fifth the adult U.S. population has high blood pressure. The disease, medically known as hypertension, is a common cause of heart attacks, strokes and kidney disorders.

But the study also shows your chances of being afflicted with the dreaded ailment are much greater if you are a woman, poor, black or elderly.

White males, on the other hand, had the least incidence of hypertension.

Only 12 percent of white males surveyed suffered from the disease compared with 17.7 percent of white women, 17.4 percent of black men and a whopping 25.4

percent of black women. Among the elderly the differences were even more startling, with 60.5 percent of all black women over 65 suffering from some degree of hypertension as compared to only 25.4 percent of white males over 65.

And while we're at it, we might as well point out that hypertension is also a respecter of class distinctions. Using age-adjusted totals, the study showed that only an estimated 13.3 percent of adults with annual incomes of at least \$10,000 were hypertensive as opposed to 22.0 percent of those with annual incomes of \$5,000 per year or less.

And if that weren't bad enough, the study showed southerners had a slightly higher incidence of the disease than northerners or westerners. So if you're a woman, poor, black or elderly, you now have something else to worry about. And if you're an elderly black woman living in the south, walk (please don't run) to the nearest doctor for a checkup.

Beauty is a jar of Vaseline

Despite the \$50,000,000 women spend annually on skin creams, the best moisturizer is a thin layer of petroleum jelly applied over a wet face. According to New York dermatologist Dr. Ronald E. Sherman in a recent issue of *Science Digest* magazine, the expensive creams are no better and only "make the skin feel nicer and look less dry and papery."

"When the skin ages," Dr. Sherman said, "the connective and elastic tissues start to degenerate.... The skin's subcutaneous fat begins to atrophy and the result is sagging skin and wrinkles. There is no way to retard that." The skin aging process can be accelerated, however, chiefly through sun and wind—exposure to the hostile elements. Moisturizing creams and ointments only help to retard the acceleration—not the aging process itself.

—Compiled by Bonne Nesbitt

Classified



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LIFE IN THE U.S.



Photo by David Wright

Jessie Lloyd O'Connor: one of the foot soldiers

By Judy MacLean
National Staff Writer

In 1919 a young girl named Jessie Lloyd made a bet with her high school classmates that the U.S. would have socialism within five years. "After I lost that bet," she says, "I began to see why it wouldn't be so immediate."

"Jessie's life hasn't been so glamorous," says a friend, "but she's always been there, one of the foot soldiers of the movement. Hers has been a life consistently dedicated to peace, socialism, democracy and integration."

Jessie Lloyd O'Connor comes from a family long known for radicalism. Her grandfather, Henry Demarest Lloyd, shocked America with the first exposure of Standard Oil in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine in 1881. He expanded it to a book, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, and was close to the socialist party of that era.

Her mother, Lola Maverick Lloyd, a pacifist who helped found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, came from the family whose last name has become American slang for both unbranded cattle and nonconformists. Her father was a socialist when she was young, although he later turned conservative.

The Lloyds lived in Winnetka, Ill., a wealthy Chicago suburb founded by people of radical and socialist leanings. By the mid-twenties, when her father gave the town a statue of an unemployed working man emblazoned with quotes from American radicals to the effect that private property is theft, the town had grown more conservative. A tall hedge was planted around the statue and there is talk of removing the statue altogether.

► Couldn't understand why.

"The thing that hit me as a child," she remembers, "was that riding into town we passed children playing in dirty streets and on coal piles. I said, 'Daddy, why don't they play on the nice green grass?' I didn't understand why the poor had to live another way. He was a socialist then, and he explained as well as he could."

Later, she and the shoemaker's son were the only students in the Winnetka grammar school who supported Socialist party candidate Eugene V. Debs for president.

At college, she studied conservative economics, "to see if I could believe it, and I

couldn't. I stuck to my old ideas, that we needed socialism," she says.

She spent the year 1927 in the Soviet Union. There were a lot of hardships, but "I was very impressed with the spirit there. They hadn't yet forced the collectivization of agriculture. I thought it was quite a healthy place, then." She wrote stories for the *London Daily Herald* and sent carbons to the Federated Press, a radical U.S. labor news service.

When she returned, she met and married a young man who also worked for Federated Press, Harvey O'Connor. Together, they decided to go to Pittsburgh. "At that time we figured it was the most hard-boiled anti-union town in the country and we wanted to see what we could do."

They wrote newspaper stories, and did support work for labor organizers. "Every Saturday night in the poor district, on the Hill, there would be a meeting of the unemployed councils, and the police would move in on them, beat them up; and the next week they'd be back, just the same," she recalls. She and Harvey would observe and publicize the meetings

and try to get better known people to do the same.

► Moved to Chicago.

These activities continued when they moved to Chicago where she and Harvey adopted two children. They lived at Hull House, the famous settlement house founded by Jane Addams in a very poor Chicago neighborhood. "A lot of radicals brought up in comfortable environments think they're living austerely, but they aren't really," says a friend. "But Jessie has lived in working class neighborhoods and endured the same conditions as everyone there."

During World War II, Jessie's pacifist and socialist heritage made for conflicts. She'd been part of an anti-fascist group since the mid-thirties. "I was torn. I don't really believe in war, and on the other hand I wouldn't oppose the war against Hitler," she says. She settled the conflict by doing war relief work.

During the fifties, Harvey was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and Jessie's passport was seized. She says the Un-American Activities Committee was based on "a fallacy of trying to counter radicalism and commun-

ism by that kind of witch hunt and vengeance. People don't become radical and communist just for pleasure, or from wickedness, but because they don't see any hope for the human race without changing the system," she says. "If HUAC wanted to fight communism, they should have proved that the system can be decent for people."

She was an early opponent of the Vietnam war and thinks the movements of the sixties were "just wonderful."

About the women's movement, she says, "As in any movement, there have to be some people who are more extreme, prickly, more of a nuisance than others. Then the respectable people say to them, 'Oh, well, you're just hurting your cause.' But somebody has to be the one that needles them; otherwise it won't go as far as it should."

► In the background.

"Jessie's shy and people have always paid more attention to Harvey, who led the resistance to HUAC for many years," says a friend.

I asked Jessie if women had been held back in the many movements she's been part of. "Oh, absolutely," she answered, "and it's a habit that's got to be changed." Harvey, who had been listening to this interview, mentioned that Jessie had been a great help in his writing, screening him so he had time for his work.

She said with a wry smile, "As some woman said, every woman needs a wife to answer the door, answer the telephone, to take care of the details of the house. It makes me mad when they say women don't have the talent for composing that men do. I'm sure it has a lot to do with the fact that they never have the long stretches of free time."

In retirement now, Jessie's still hopeful about socialism for the U.S. "Some of my conservative relatives say, 'You wouldn't preach the class struggle, would you?' And I say, I don't preach it; I see it happening all around. I saw it way back in Pittsburgh, every time the workers tried to stand up for themselves, every time the companies chiseled on their wages."

Socialists today, she believes, need to "look back in American history, not only at Marx, to see things like movements toward cooperation, and American leaders that preached in the name of socialism, like Debs, and realize that it's a perfectly American idea."

From

What Next?

By Jessie Lloyd O'Connor

Some radio commentators picture socialism as a bugaboo waiting to pounce on us from abroad. But an American, Eugene V. Debs, was preaching socialism 80 years ago, long before there was a Soviet Union. If Americans turn to socialism, we will certainly do it the way we want it. It is a happy fact that we have many citizens now who enjoy working for the public good even though they could make more in their own business. Working for each other can be a lot of fun, as church supporters and barn raisings have proved. We could have more of that kind of spirit if we controlled our own workplace, and it might help ease modern loneliness.