

NEWS

LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 10 No. 2 Spring 1981

Coming Up

Some previously unlisted summertime diversions:

June 29-July 10 Appalachian Regional School for Church Leaders. Write to Conference Office, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va. 26506.

August 2-8 Appalachian Writers' Workshop. Write to Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Ky. 41822.

August 2-8 Cumberland Valley Writers' Conference. Write to P.O. Box 120595, Nashville, Tenn. 37212.

August 9-14 Mountain Heritage Dance Week. Write to Augusta, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W.Va. 26241.

"Power and Powerlessness" Wins Weatherford Award

John Gaventa, a staff member of Tennessee's Highlander Research and Education Center, received the eleventh annual \$500 W.D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia for his book *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. The presentation was made at the annual luncheon, held in Berea on May 19.

The Weatherford Award is jointly sponsored by Berea College's Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library and is given each year to the writer of the published work that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South. The prize is donated by Alfred H. Perrin of Berea in memory of the late W.D. Weatherford, Sr., a pioneer and leading figure for many years in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations.

Gaventa, a Rhodes scholar, originally wrote his prize-winning book as a doctoral thesis at Oxford. The book focuses on the coexistence of wealth and poverty in the Clear Fork Valley of Tennessee, showing how the forces at work in the valley operate in ways not readily apparent in formal American political processes. *Power and Powerlessness* poses general questions about the politics of poverty, working-class consciousness and corporate power; its aim is to show the general theoretical importance of a single local phenomenon. As a political scientist, the author seeks to apply and refine theories about the nature of power.

Past winners of the Weatherford Award have includ-



Gaventa receives the award from Wilma Dykeman of the judges' committee

ed Ben A. Franklin of the *New York Times*; David H. Loeff, author of *Appalachia's Children*; Eliot Wiggin-ton and the student editors of *Foxfire* magazine; the *Louisville Courier-Journal*; Bryan Woolley and Ford Reid, authors of *We Be Here When the Morning Comes*; Kai T. Erikson, author of *Everything in its Path*; Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, editors of *Our Appalachia*; Gurney Norman, author of *Kinfolks*; John W. Hevener, author of *Which Side Are You On?*; Henry D. Shapiro, author of *Appalachia on Our Mind*; and Thomas J. Schoenbaum, author of *The New River Controversy*. Special Weatherford Awards for overall achievement have been presented to Robert Coles, Wilma Dykeman, Jesse Stuart, Harry M. Caudill, James Still, Harriette Simpson Arnow and Cratis Williams.

ARC Fights Back

As everybody knows, Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman has a big black book in which he lists the federal programs he wishes to
to page 4

DISCUSSION

ARC: Would We Miss It?—More Views

In the last issue (Winter 1981) of this NEWSLETTER we posed the question "The Appalachian Regional Commission: Would We Miss It?" We presented two answers to the question. Ralph Widner, president of the Academy for Contemporary Problems and first executive director of ARC, said in essence that because of the stresses produced by the energy crisis, we probably need a regional commission more than ever before. A negative answer came from Steve Fisher, a political scientist at Emory and Henry College: "Good riddance!"

Not satiated by these two answers, we proclaimed our hope of carrying on a continuing discussion in these pages, and we invited responses from NEWSLETTER readers. We're happy now to present three more answers to our question.

First we hear from Cratis Williams, eminent authority on Appalachian culture and literature; formerly dean of the graduate school and professor of English at Appalachian State University, he now serves as special assistant to the university's chancellor:

ARC, despite a few fumbblings and blunders of its own and the misuse made of it occasionally by politicians at state and local levels, has been the most helpful effort ever exerted by essentially outside agencies on behalf of Appalachia.

The road program and other programs that improved the quality of living and lifted the hopes of the ill, the neglected and the aged in the region no doubt accounted in large measure for a turning-around of both the economy and population trends. Almost every measurable aspect of our economic and social life has improved progressively since 1965.

What we really need is support for preparing a generation of our own leaders to assume the economic and political power exercised by outside exploiters/developers in the past. ARC was beginning to address this need by giving more support to those agencies, colleges and universities that are developing programs to prepare Appalachians for leadership roles in their own region. But not nearly enough has been done.

The demise of ARC, I fear, will cripple seriously efforts to realize its final crowning achievement: the preparation of us Appalachians to assume those roles that determine our destiny. Some progress has been made, but at least four years more are needed to achieve this goal.

Our second opinion is contributed by John B. Stephenson, sociologist, director of the Appalachian Center at the University of Kentucky:

Shortly after the Appalachian Regional Commission was created in 1965, Gerald Ter Horst, noted journalist formerly with the *Detroit Free Press*, wrote about this new state-federal experiment under the hopeful assumption that it represented the end of pork-barrel politics in the mountains. Whatever else might be said

about the ARC experience in reviewing the past sixteen years, one would not say that Ter Horst's prophecy has been fulfilled: there's been pork, as it were, in every pot.

But this kind of political overhead has to be figured in to any government program. If we condemned out of hand every program that has a political price tag on it, the evaluators would be out of work. The better question is the simple one of whether ARC has done any good that wouldn't have been done without it, and the answer is unequivocally "Yes." Maybe the price was high (I rather think it has been), but there are nonetheless hospitals, schools, highways, water and sewer systems, and just a phenomenal amount of information about Appalachia to look at as a result of ARC.

I think one of the most instructive aspects of the ARC, one of the things that in fact make it costly in political overhead, is the way its organizational framework reflects the reality of the region itself as a region. Is it possible that Appalachia is not a region at all? That it does not have a strong sense of itself as a place and a people? That Appalachia is an imposed category, a piece of created culture, a piece of romantic history wrapped in a quilt, just as some writers have been claiming recently? If indeed it were a region with a strong sense of itself, would an ARC have been necessary?

The Agency and the Region

What ARC has attempted to do, with only limited success, is to make a region out of pieces of states—the same "backyards of states" noted by observers for decades. The commission is headed by two chairmen, after all, not one: there are both a federal and a states co-chairman. Very little of major importance can be done without considering the interests of the states. In other words, the interests of the region we (and they) call Appalachia are interpreted, represented, filtered through the interests of 13 (count 'em, 13) states. This was the strange organization invented by politicians in a serious attempt to respond to the problems of a region at a time when John F. Kennedy wanted to do something for Appalachia, especially West Virginia, which was so good to him in 1960. No wonder Ter Horst wondered at this creature. No one had seen anything like it before. Perhaps it could work.

Has it worked? Yes, it has worked as well as it could but with the high overhead required to keep the cumbersome wheels well oiled and turning.

Just as importantly, what is the meaning of the ARC as the premier instance of a regional approach to development in the U.S.? Are there any alternative approaches to regionalism and regional development? How else might it have happened here, or in another region or country? These are highly significant, if unanswered, questions.

When I look at a map of Appalachia with all its criss-crossing lines and boundaries and I place beside it an organizational chart of ARC, I conjecture that this agency has fairly accurately reflected the nature of the region itself. Perhaps, that is to say, the region is not

quite so much a region as some of us would like to think. I also believe we need to credit John Whisman and the early ARC designers with possessing an instinctive understanding of this fact (not, by the way, informed by any academic studies), an understanding that led them to put together a funny-looking Rube Goldberg organization that did the best it could, given the crazy patchwork of state lines and county boundaries it had to deal with. The experience of the ARC raises the question whether the region served by it is no less an invention than the agency itself.

Our third voice is that of Milton Ogle, director of the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund, Charleston, W.Va. "I was involved to a limited degree in activities which gave birth to the Appalachian Region Commission," he writes. "In the spring of 1960 I made my first trip to West Virginia as an employee of the Council of the Southern Mountains to urge Governor Cecil Underwood to meet with other Appalachian governors and work out cooperative approaches to dealing with Appalachian problems. The first meeting of Appalachian governors took place in May 1960, and I attended a couple of meetings. Since that time, my direct involvement with the governors' conference and later ARC has steadily diminished."

ARC, born in a period when the nation was in an innovative mood, chose to stick to political tradition, and to the existing state of the art on how to stimulate economic growth.

The ARC leadership was so politically conscious or perhaps naive that it placed off limits any discussion of many issues which were highly relevant to state or regional growth. Such matters as the potential for public hydroelectric developments or the need to eliminate or minimize the depredations of strip mining to improve the growth climate were tossed aside. The need for rural roads was ignored in favor of superhighways. A massive water resources study completed in the late 1960s ignored the potential of hydroelectric plants in Appalachia, giving it only a few pages of print so blurred that it was unreadable. Bluestone Dam in West Virginia is fitted for hydroelectric generators and water rushes through the spillings of other dams, while electric rates continue to rise and consumers pay for construction of more and more coal-fired power plants.

In the late '50's and early '60's, the Corps of Engineers would not build flood control dams in Eastern Kentucky and many other parts of Appalachia because of the cost/benefit ratio necessary to meet their standards; that is, the homes, businesses, and other property to be saved by flood control over a 50-year period would not be worth as much as the facility would cost. Only after many years of discussion did the Corps begin to count recreational value created by a dam as part of the benefit—a victory of sorts. Several flood control projects have been built in Eastern Kentucky only to see the useful life and the recreational value reduced because of siltation from strip mining. Neither ARC nor the Corps of Engineers ever made a sincere effort to curb the damages of stripping.

It was not accidental that the ARC neither took action nor even investigated the impact of absentee

ownership of valuable resources. However, in the Appalachian Conference on Balanced Growth and Economic Development in October 1977 (see *Appalachia*, October-November, 1977) the Jobs, Income and Human Services Task Force was chaired by former Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz. An important recommendation came from that Task Force—"that the ARC review the extent to which unusually extensive ownership of Appalachian land and natural resources by large corporations, and the consequent transfer of profits from their development outside the region, affects the tax base and the opportunities to provide human resources through local programs and institutions." A land ownership study is just now being completed, but it is unlikely that it will be published by the Commission. [However, see "EYE on Publications," p. 4 this issue.—Ed.]

ARC has failed to deal with or even discuss many basic elements essential for economic growth. Such matters as control of wealth, ownership of land, taxes, the quality and availability of human services, are central to any rational discussion, much less planning, of economic growth. Mediocrity was a built-in factor in the Appalachian Regional Development Act and only short-term gains were possible. The term "comprehensive" was used over and over in the '60's, but it was never applied.

As a result, the people of Central Appalachia are again looking at a revival of coal as their one best hope for economic revitalization as more and more coal is strip-mined, providing fewer jobs, and as the industry steadily moves west. Fifteen years of ARC and a few billion dollars have left Central Appalachia in roughly the same position relative to the rest of the country as it was in 1965. West Virginia still ranks around 40th among the states in teacher pay and the general level of public services available to its citizens. The most needy in West Virginia, those who qualify for and receive money assistance payments, have not had an increase since 1974.

Singling Out ARC

The record of ARC is at least as good as those of many other present and former federal programs and private endeavors. The soil bank which paid speculators like the late John Wayne and many public figures not to be farmers; the defense contractors who built the C5A aircraft, less than half of which are flight worthy at any given time, 32 of 72; the shiny \$8,000 automobile that runs poorly and has gaping rust holes in two-and-a-half years; the refrigerator that won't freeze ice; the strip mines that destroy timber, land and water—to name a few. In all the talk about budget cuts there has been nothing to suggest a swing away from the system of planned obsolescence. There has been no recognition or admission that a car every three years siphons off family income and is inflationary when compared with a car that would last five or ten years, or that houses should outlast the mortgage. No efforts are being suggested that would bring back a semblance of quality to consumer goods.

Why should we single out ARC, which is at least as good as Chrysler, Ford, Philco, Frigidaire, GM, Gulf, Exxon, Consol, Island Creek, Merrill Lynch and AEP? I have a 1954 Ferguson tractor. It still works good. □

ARC from page 1

abolish. Prominent on that list is the Appalachian Regional Commission. Not altogether surprisingly, the officers and staff of the commission do not share Stockman's opinion of their agency and its efforts, and they have put together a lengthy background paper in which they detail what they regard as their accomplishments. One section summarizes the "progress toward revitalization of Appalachia and its economy since ARC was established in 1965":

Per capita income has risen from 78 percent to 86 percent of the national average.

More than 1.5 million new jobs were created between 1965 and 1978.

The poverty level has declined from more than 31 percent to 14 percent of the people in the region.

The pattern of outmigration (i.e., emigration) has been reversed.

The percentage of people getting a high school education has risen from 33 to 53 percent.

Although the number of doctors is increasing only slightly, health care is being effectively extended through a network of 260 clinics.

Local government has been strengthened by the establishment of 69 multicounty planning and development districts which serve all 397 Appalachian counties.

Some 700 vocational education facilities are now providing technical and vocational job-related training to more than half of Appalachian 11th and 12th graders.

"ARC does not claim credit for all this progress," the background paper says, "but the commission has made a difference by using its limited resources to encourage public and private investments to support precisely the kinds of progress which has been made." Of particular importance have been the kinds of situations in which ARC has played a leadership role—"in adapting urban service programs to the small towns and rural areas of Appalachia, establishing primary health care delivery systems, getting legislation to permit Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement of care provided by physician extenders [*sic*] in remote areas not served by physicians, and supporting establishment of the local development districts.

"In most cases, however," the paper goes on to say, "ARC is not out front but is providing technical assistance, a joint decision process, and flexible funding..." [*See related story on p. 2.*]

EYE on Publications

After Dark, by Manly Wade Wellman (Doubleday).
Once upon a time the North American continent was

Published by
Appalachian Center/Berea College
C.P.O. Box 2336
Berea, Kentucky 40403

the home of a humanoid race with supernatural powers, but the Shonokins, as they were called, were almost wiped out by the Indians immigrating across the land bridge from Siberia. Descendants of the survivors are still around, however, and they resurface in a small Appalachian town, where they hatch a revolutionary plot.

Folks, by Garret Mathews (Southern Printing Co., Blacksburg, Va.). Columns written in the late 1970s by a staff writer for the Bluefield (W.Va.) *Daily Telegraph*. The folks come in six categories—Good Times, Hard Times, Mining, Determined, Animal and Hard-to-Classify.

Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities, by the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1981 (Appalachian State University—Center for Appalachian Studies). A colossal study covering 80 counties in six southern states. One volume (300 pp. loose-leaf in a binder) gives a regional overview and not only includes the findings but makes recommendations for action that the compilers feel should be taken in consequence and also discusses the methods whereby others can undertake similar studies. There are six other volumes (about 250 pp. each), one for each of the states. Each of these includes listings of major landholders and an analysis of land and tax issues, case studies of land ownership issues in selected counties, and profiles of land ownership and property-tax patterns for each county studied in the state. The states included are Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, but it should be pointed out that not all the Appalachian counties in these states are included in the study. (If your county was one of the 80, you can get a separate profile of it for 75¢.) A leading role in the project was played by Tennessee's Highlander Center, and even though it wasn't exactly an establishmentarian enterprise it received financial support from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Help!

The Red Bird School, operated by the Red Bird Mission of the United Methodist Church at Beverly, Ky., burned on May 19. Lost were the high school building, including the library, and the gymnasium. Rev. Ed Ehresman, superintendent of the mission, announced over the embers that school would be in session, somehow, come fall. Although the buildings were insured, Red Bird will not recover enough from the insurance to build a new school. Donations will be appreciated; also, Ehresman requests books for the library, especially Appalachian-related books, reference works, dictionaries and the like. Send to Red Bird Mission, Beverly, Ky. 40913.

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Berea, Ky. 40404
Permit No. 19