

Friends and Coal

By CLARENCE E. PICKETT

What relation has the Society of Friends to coal? More perhaps than we realize. It has to many Friends little significance beyond the heat units it contains. Some time ago, however, studies were made by the Social Order Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting resulting in the publication of a pamphlet on the coal industry.

For almost ten years just past the human problem involved in the mining of coal has emerged as one of the most important social concerns that Americans are called upon to face. Normally America should consume about ten million tons of coal per month. The present consumption is less than two-thirds that amount. That means many miners out of work. Improvement in mining machinery has increased the number of unemployed. Estimates suggest that out of five hundred thousand coal miners in the bituminous coal fields, probably two hundred thousand are largely, if not entirely, unemployed. Suffering for food, shelter and clothing is unavoidable in an industry that is undergoing this kind of change. Representatives of the Federal Children's Bureau and of the President's Committee on Employment in their studies of cases of need due to unemployment came across tragic situations in the bituminous coal fields during the last winter and spring. Southern Indiana, southern and eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, central West Virginia, eastern Kentucky and Tennessee and western Kentucky were most affected. Coal operators

themselves, many of them, are unable to give assistance because of the financial condition of the industry.

This is the kind of a story, coupled with human interest illustrations of children kept out of school because of lack of clothing and food, diseases, due to mal-nutrition, breakdown of family life, general failure of the ordinary processes of law and order—such is the story that representatives of these two federal agencies brought to the Service Committee early in June. They came with the request that Friends should consider undertaking relief work and also a study and demonstration of how men and their families, who probably never could be used again in the coal industry, might be rehabilitated and made self-supporting. The problems were presented to two large successive meetings of the Service Committee in June. It rested as a tremendous weight on many minds during these days of consideration. It was felt that this was a call like many another, the end of which we could not see, but the urge to enter we could not avoid. It was finally decided that the Service Committee should undertake this service of relief and rehabilitation if and when funds were found in sufficient quantities to warrant the undertaking. It was quite clearly recognized that we could make no pretensions of meeting all of the physical need nor of solving the economic problem incident to the soft coal industry. It was felt, however, that it might be possible, through the help of those who had asked our assistance, to secure sufficient funds to meet the neediest cases of relief and to make a demonstration in methods of rehabilitation.

After considerable effort a contribution has been offered and accepted which makes it possible for the Service Committee at least to begin a relief program. The money which has come must be used, however, to supplement funds contributed by the states, by individuals within the states and communities where relief is given. Having provided for the most outstanding physical needs, it is hoped that we can proceed to the more fundamental study and demonstration of some means of rehabilitation of the families and men left stranded by this industry.

To many Friends who attended the meetings when these problems were considered, this seemed like another call to a great service which might lead us into the midst of areas of conflict and the facing of issues which, if we are wisely guided, might have far-reaching consequences for human beings who are the victims of shifts that come about because of changes in our modern industrial processes. It is not only nor primarily a physical, but, even more, a spiritual quest. It will call not only for the resources that come from large gifts, but also for the means that can be provided in smaller amounts by many Friends.

A Committee on the Coal Situation has been at work laying plans for this new service. It is able to announce with deep satisfaction that Bernard G. Waring of the firm of Yarnall, Waring Company, Philadelphia, has been loaned by his firm and has accepted the direction of this work. While this account is being read, Bernard Waring, together with some other Friends, will be making a first-hand study of places where the need is greatest and of the methods of administering relief.

He will also be approaching agencies in the states where relief is given, providing for their generous co-operation.

Time and again the Service Committee office receives confirmation from persons entirely unassociated with Friends to the effect that the work done in Europe during and following the war gave a new turn to the thinking of the world to the possible way in which international relations might be worked out. In conference recently with a former American ambassador to one of the European countries this was deeply impressed upon the Secretary's mind—that Friends must not underestimate the significance of that service and must not lose the spirit and technique which they exhibited there. Once again on a large scale Friends are asked to see whether the spirit of good-will and reconciliation can be brought into a situation that now represents so much of chaos, conflict and bitterness. This cannot be done alone by a few representatives who will work in the actual service in the coal fields. It can only be done as the Society of Friends through many representatives in many localities is lifted to a new level of thinking and acting. As we were called to demonstrate that nothing is simply an international problem but that it is also a spiritual problem, now we are called upon to show connection between an economic situation and the life of the Spirit.

Further information will be forthcoming from time to time. We hope that this call may be much on the minds and hearts of Friends generally.

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