

F. Raymond Wilson

REHABILITATION



SOFT-COAL FIELDS

[American Friends Service Committee]
[20 South 12th St., Philadelphia, Pa.]

INTRODUCTION

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PROGRAMS for the rehabilitation of the unemployed are claiming the attention of concerned people today as the burden of direct relief grows greater without effecting any permanent solution to the basic problem itself.

This is especially true in the case of the chaotic bituminous coal industry where the American Friends Service Committee has been carrying on relief work for two years; in 1931-32 at the request of the President's emergency organization on unemployment relief and the Federal Children's Bureau; in 1932-33 assisting in 17 counties in the distribution of public funds for relief purposes.

This close contact with the problem has led the American Friends Service Committee to some observations about the future of relief and rehabilitation work in the mine areas. It is the purpose of this brochure to present these observations briefly, together with suggestions for the future and outlines of actual experiments which have been carried out.

Rehabilitation in the Soft Coal Fields

The Chaotic Bituminous Coal Industry

A DECADE ago the bituminous coal industry began a steady downward slide. This decline is not to be confused with the depression which followed the stock market crash of 1929, because, while the industry followed the depression into still deeper difficulties, paralysis had been creeping upon it slowly for many years. In fact, it had been dubbed the "worst functioning industry in the United States" previous to 1929.

Overdevelopment of productive capacity is the root of the difficulty. This overdevelopment is due to wartime expansion and the mechanization of the mining process. Our capacity to produce soft coal has grown steadily, while at the same time the demand for it has fallen off sharply because of the rapid development of substitutes, and because there is such an increase in efficiency in the production of industrial power and its utilization that we require from 10-50% less coal.

While these are fundamental problems, there are many annoying factors which add complications. Chief among these are the differential freight rates, car shortages, price cutting, chronic labor troubles, seasonal demand, and storage problems. The complete picture is summed up well in "Machine Age in the Hills" when the author calls it a "cantankerous industry soured by the bile of insoluble difficulties."

A Two-fold Job Must Be Done

IN the face of heroic efforts by some operators and also miners, the chaos in the coal fields has left the majority of the industry's 500,000 miners and their families in a state of want and hopelessness. About half of this number are technically employed. This means that they work on an average of approximately two days a week. The other half of the population has no work, and studies of the situation indicate that some *200,000 miners will never be needed in the mines again.*

The appalling conditions in the industry make a task that is two-fold. Emergency measures must be taken to ward off cold, hunger and disease. Then reconstruction measures must follow to improve living conditions among those who stay in the industry, and to provide a means of existence for the vast population which will never again dig a living from the mines.

Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds, together with some private aid, are helping to meet the bare necessities of food and clothing in these areas. But to merely ward off suffering is not enough. Unless something fundamental is done relief will be necessary indefinitely. A far-reaching program of rehabilitation must be launched in the immediate future.

Whose Responsibility is the Rehabilitation Program?

IN the re-establishment of a half million people on a basis of self-support there is no precedent. Yet it is obvious that the miners must have understanding leadership, since their chief resources are undernourished bodies and broken spirits.

Operators and former owners are helpless to furnish a way out, especially when camps are closed and abandoned and when the large scale unemployment prevails.

Eventually the Federal government must take a hand. But such steps by the government are usually preceded by experiments conducted by voluntary agencies which show the way. Across this economic and social frontier the American Friends Service Committee is attempting to push its lines.

Rehabilitation of the Unemployed

THE permanently unemployed soft coal miners are as helpless as though they were aboard a raft anchored in mid-ocean. One would naturally expect them to cling frantically to charity. Yet, when offered the chance they are anxious to earn their own living again.

No opportunities are apparent in the near future for the adequate employment of 200,000 men in any existing or even any new industry. The present situation of the world's affairs offers little encouragement to them for even securing life's barest necessities by their own work. But the soil has always been the mother of life, and in spite of everything it seems to offer existence more readily than anything else. Therefore, we look to combinations of farming and mining, farming and home industries, and to farming itself for a subsistence living for these men. In fact, we believe that a combination of practical activity and sober idealism can work out more than a bare existence for these people.

The first cost of projects may seem large, but when compared with the probable cost of direct relief work over an unknown period of years, we believe the expense will be justified and that through self-support the morale of the affected groups will be raised immeasurably.

Experiment No. 1

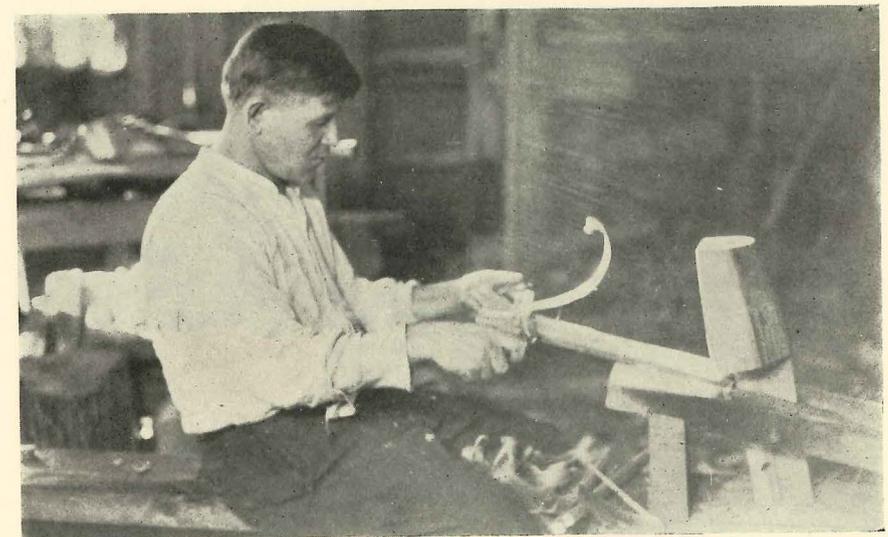
THE MOUNTAINEER CRAFTSMAN'S COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

THE Mountaineer Craftsman's Cooperative Association is an organization of about fifty miners and other citizens living near Morgantown, West Virginia. Through the cooperation of this association and the American Friends Service Committee the men have been taught to do woodwork and the women have learned to weave.

The products of the woodworking shops are chairs, tables, stools, bookcases, cabinets and other small pieces of furniture. The equipment of the shops is largely home-made, and the product which they turn out is distinctly a tribute to fine handicraft workmanship. The women make all types of woven pieces from rag rugs to fine pattern pieces on hand-operated looms. The quality and simple beauty of the work has made it possible to sell several thousand dollars worth in the open markets.

The income from sales has put these men and women on a practically self-supporting basis. It has brought back hope and dignity to life. We believe that for those families involved the experiment has been successful. Also we have learned something valuable to guide us in dealing with the vast population of other unemployed miners who have not yet been reached.

We have learned that, "once a miner, always a miner," need not be so. He can be taught to do other things successfully. We have learned that even in times of world-wide depression it is possible to find work for idle



A former miner with a new trade and a renewed hope

hands that will remove them from the necessity of direct relief with its demoralizing effects. We believe we have also learned that the cost of machinery and materials for handicraft woodwork is low enough to enable us to reach out to a much larger group than we have touched yet.

We believe that many tiny shops can be set up in the miners' homes to provide work for the hands, and added cash income for these miners who may be living largely by subsistence gardening or small farming enterprises.

Two plans for the development of this idea are suggested. First, to make these three existing shops into training centers where miners can come for short training periods and there learn the art of handicraft woodwork. Second, to make these shops into training centers where teachers can be instructed, who could then go out into the isolated mine camps and teach miners this art. Development of these ideas waits only for financial backing.

We believe that coupled with large scale gardening, the production of hand-made furniture and clothing for use by their own communities and to

some extent for the market will restore a creative and joyous life to many people who will otherwise be demoralized by long periods of unemployment.



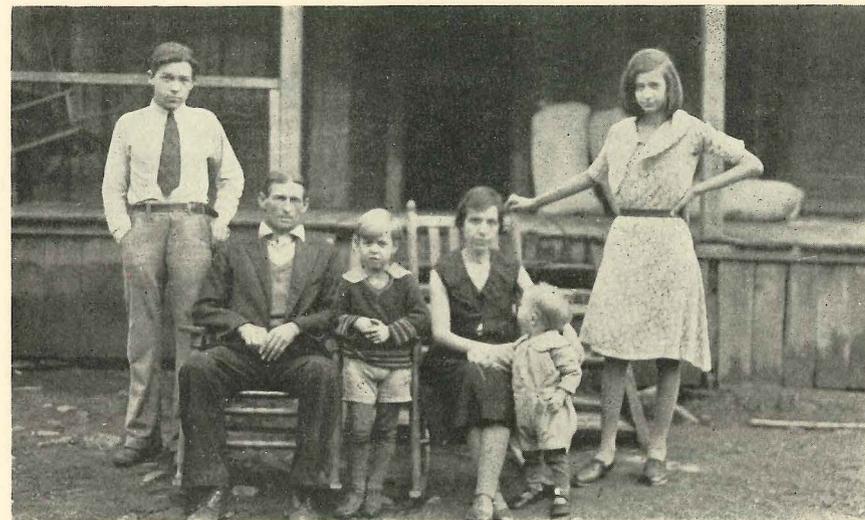
The women help at Crown Mine by weaving pattern pieces on hand looms.

Experiment No. 2

A FARM COLONY IN WEST VIRGINIA

A FARM colony project is being developed in Monongalia County, West Virginia, with the cooperation of the Director of Agricultural Extension of West Virginia University, the Chairman of the Monongalia County Welfare Board, and the Council of Social Agencies.

Eighty acres of land have been loaned for a six-year experiment. Also, fifteen mine cabins have been given for our use in the experiment. The soil has been tested and there is adequate tillable land for six families. The mine houses will be torn down and re-erected on the small allotments of land. Private plots for each family together with a common tract for some large crops, a pasture and woodlot, are available. Six families, who by training and their own desire are eligible, will be chosen from abandoned mine camps. An unemployed engineer is surveying for location of these houses. A shop will be installed to provide for weaving, carpentry and repairs on tools. Barter with other production units is to be the next step.

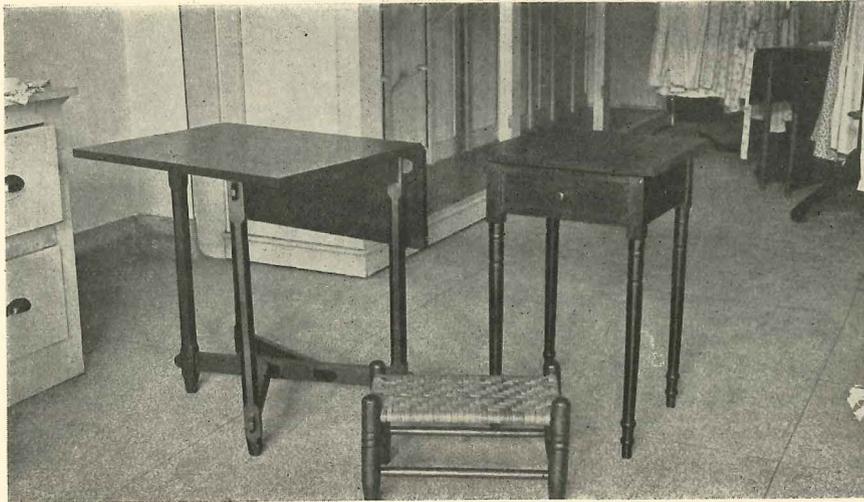


Murphy Baker and his family—the farmer in Experiment No. 3

Experiment No. 3

A ONE-MAN-FARM IN KENTUCKY

SINCE we are experimenting in "back-to-the-land" movements we must try not only colonies, but projects involving single families. This type of work has been started in Kentucky.



Tables and stool made by the miners in shops located at Bertha, near Morgantown

After careful selection a man and his family have been placed on a small farm with essential equipment. The Service Committee holds a mortgage on the land which the farmer is to pay off by working on the farm at the rate of \$1.25 a day. Maintenance wages of \$2 a week will be provided until he can produce crops.

In the end our experiment will amount to giving the man a small farm and maintenance for a year or more, but when a comparison is made between our total outlay, which will be about \$500, and the probable cost of keeping the family on direct relief over an indefinite period of years, we believe our plan will prove the most economical.

In addition to the advantage gained in actual expense, we believe the self-help which the family shows will give it a self-respect that is of vital importance in dealing with any group of unemployed people.

Experiment No. 4

PRODUCTION-FOR-USE UNITS

FOOD, shelter and clothing are the basic necessities of life, and if groups of unemployed men and women can produce these things for themselves they will gain over their fellow unemployed in that they will be active instead of idle, and self-respecting citizens instead of demoralized recipients of charity.

In Clearfield County, Pennsylvania, there are six communities where Production-for-use Units are in operation. Knitting clubs produce sweaters and socks; a carpenter shop is producing and repairing furniture, and farm machinery; one group is making brooms; another is spinning wool and weaving cloth for use and barter; and still another is producing shoes, carrying the process from the raw hide to the finished product.

With the coming of spring elaborate plans are afoot for individual and community gardens. "Off of relief by August 1st" is their slogan. By exchanging products and contributing their one abundant commodity—labor—they are moving rapidly toward their goal.

While the great industrial machine will go on, the huge reservoir of unemployed will continue to haunt us unless we devise simple creative employment for those outside the main stream of the industrial process. Here is one way of approach. And it is a way that puts at the center the mental and spiritual release of latent capacities. These plans are all being developed in cooperation with a committee from the faculty of the State College of Pennsylvania.



Chairs from Crown Mine made after the design of "Bud" Goodlove, a native mountaineer of West Virginia

Possible Developments

MORE communities are ready for such experiments. Continued closing of mines increases the need. Just beyond the present stage one sees:

1. The way prepared for simple development of adult education in communities experiencing this rebirth.
2. Opportunities for study of skills which would make it possible to guide younger men from these communities into other work as jobs are available.
3. The use in this development of socially trained but unemployed young people. Able leaders represent the heart of a successful rehabilitation program.
4. For many people, and perhaps for all of us, there is being dramatized here the goal of a society dedicated not to "earning money to buy things," but "producing for use."

THE following organizations have cooperated with the American Friends Service Committee either in endorsing the rehabilitation projects we are sponsoring, or through financial backing.

FEDERAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

(COAL AREAS RELIEF COMMITTEE OF THE
INDUSTRIAL SECTION, SOCIAL SERVICE
COUNCIL)

ELMHURST FUND

NEW YORK FOUNDATION

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

PENNSYLVANIA STATE EMPLOYEES' FUND

PENNSYLVANIA STATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF WEST VIRGINIA

GOLDEN RULE FOUNDATION

Prepared by the

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20 South Twelfth Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

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