

MARStar

Newsletter of the Middle Atlantic Region, American Friends Service Committee

Spring/Summer
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“Only when we root out the very causes of war, the poverty of man’s body, the privation of his spirit, the imprisonment of his liberties, will there be a final surrender of violence itself.”

– LYNDON JOHNSON

The disaster at the Upper Big Branch mine

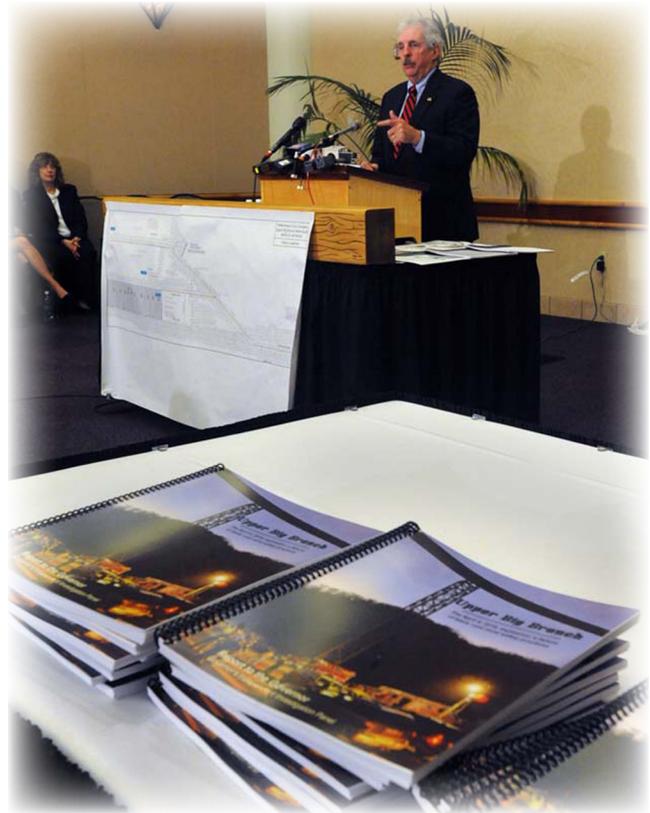
BY RICK WILSON

Just after 3 p.m. on April 5, 2010, a series of explosions ripped through Massey Energy’s Upper Big Branch mine that ultimately claimed the lives of 29 coal miners and seriously injured one. It was the worst American coal mining disaster in 40 years.

Mine workers knew that conditions were bad, and a report released on May 19, 2011, by the Governor’s Independent Investigation Panel poignantly opens with Gary Wayne Quarles expressing his fears in the days before he died. The 33-year-old miner was the tail side shearer operator on the longwall of the Upper Big Branch mine. “Man, they got us up there mining, and we ain’t got no air,” he told a friend who later talked to investigators. “I’m just scared to death to go to work because I’m just scared to death something bad is going to happen.”

As news of the disaster spread around the world, then West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin asked Davitt McAteer of Wheeling Jesuit University, who served as assistant secretary of Labor during the Clinton Administration, to head an independent investigative team to look into the causes of the explosion and prepare recommendations to prevent further loss of life.

This was not the first time Manchin tapped McAteer for such a role. He had done the same in the wake of the Sago disaster that killed 12 miners and a fire at Massey’s Aracoma Mine in Logan, both of which occurred in 2006. As was the case in 2006, Beth Spence of AFSC’s West



Davitt McAteer speaks to the media about his team’s report. Beth Spence is in the background. Lawrence Pierce photograph, used with permission from The Charleston Gazette.

Virginia Economic Justice Project was called upon to join the investigation.

What followed was more than a year of exhaustive investigations by state and federal officials and McAteer’s team, including more than 300 interviews, reviews of documents and other records, visits with family members and journeys underground into the mine.

The Governor’s Independent Investigation Panel concluded that, ultimately, the responsibility for the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine lies with the management of Massey Energy. The company “broke faith

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In praise of 'angelic troublemakers' in our region

"We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers." – Bayard Rustin

In the lead quote for this spring 2011 issue of *MAR Star*, Lyndon Johnson states that 'we must root out the very causes of war in order to achieve peace' and by "we," he probably meant the citizens of this country and of the world. Those who are part of the AFSC community would add that the process of 'rooting out the causes of war' — or, in Quaker terms, 'taking away the occasion of war' — begins with 'a group of angelic troublemakers' who seek to eliminate the conditions of material poverty, spiritual privation and imprisonment. And, further, that among those troublemakers are the program staff members in the Middle Atlantic Region.

This issue of *MAR Star* provides stories about some of the people who have been directly touched by the work in this region. I assure you that there are many others who have stories to tell in addition to D.J., Maya and KaTia. Here, for instance, is one of my own stories.



Howard Cell
Interim Regional Director

On Friday 18 March I had the pleasure of attending a graduation exercise for prisoners at the Jessup Correctional Institution south of Baltimore who had completed an intensive six-month mediation training course. What struck me immediately when I walked into the room where the exercise was to be held was the cheerfulness and camaraderie of the graduates — hardly surprising among persons who were experiencing a genuine sense of personal and collective achievement and yet something I hadn't expected to find in a prison where there is a lot of spiritual privation.

I sat next to Marshall "Eddie" Conway, a lifer at Jessup who has been incarcerated for some 40 years. After the ceremony concluded, we had a very pleasant chat about his experience taking a college course in my field. His instructor seems to have taken exception to Eddie's contributions in class, which sometimes took the form of passionate arguments for a point of view contrary to that of the instructor. If only more of my students had been willing to do that! I now look forward to reading Eddie's memoir, *Marshall Law: The Life and Times of a Baltimore Black Panther*. I fully expect it will contain a good many

passionate arguments. His memoir was co-written with Dominique Stevenson, director of AFSC's Maryland Peace with Justice Program, who is one of MAR's 'angelic troublemakers.'

During the weekend of 20-22 May, I attended a meeting of the AFSC Board Program Committee, which focused on economic justice work across the organization. I had the opportunity to hear Beth Spence talk about the role of AFSC in providing support for miners and their families in West Virginia since 1922 and about her own role in helping to write the report of the Governor's Independent Investigation Panel on the Upper Big Branch mine disaster a year ago. (This report is available on line at: <http://www.nttc.edu/ubb/>.)

Rick Wilson talked about his application of martial arts principles in his economic justice advocacy work in West Virginia over the past 20 years. Presentations also covered historic economic and other justice advocacy and direct service work in West Virginia. I was not alone in realizing how important it is for our staff to develop long-term relationships with allies and program beneficiaries in order to respond to the needs of particular communities — coal miners and their families, low income and working families and people of color in West Virginia.

I am very grateful for the work that all of the program staff do in this region, MAR's small group of 'angelic troublemakers.' I urge you to support their work by sending back the enclosed envelope with a generous contribution and by sharing the stories of AFSC's continuing efforts to eliminate poverty, spiritual privation and imprisonment and thereby 'root out the causes of war.'

In Peace,
Howard Cell
Interim Regional Director

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When things are uncomfortable or distressing, how do you react? On a recent spring afternoon I sat down and talked with one student who tries to take the “not quite as easy” path when things get difficult. I talked to her about mediation at the Baltimore

Sometimes students just want to be heard

BY BROOKE MCDONALD



KaTia Moses helps mediate peace at the Baltimore Civitas School.

Civitas School: ones that go over spectacularly well and ones that flop even with the best intentions.

We entered the school as students were changing classes – screams and pounding feet echoed through the hallways. I saw students tussle with each other, pushing and laughing and teasing. It was not hard to imagine that a few conflicts might erupt out of the mayhem.

AFSC’s Youth Empowerment program has been an almost constant presence at the Baltimore Civitas School this school year. Director Mia Jones works with two peer mediators four days a week in addition to teaching a fifth day elective class to a larger group. In the first semester the mediators-in-training practiced, observing some mediations conducted by AFSC and Civitas staff members. Starting in January, the students successfully mediated eleven conflicts on their own. Eight of the mediations allowed participating students to avoid suspension and three circumvented violent incidents. I sat down and spoke with one of the mediators, KaTia Moses.

First we talked about the mediations that were hard. The ones that didn’t go exactly as planned. KaTia told me that a lot of mediation participants have trouble focusing, changing topics and wandering off subject. She said, “We have to keep bringing them back, bringing them back. We don’t ever take sides, we aren’t supposed to, but we break down the entire argument.” According to KaTia, most of the problems are such small things that in the end, after everyone talks for a while, the issue doesn’t seem to matter any more. But even when the conflict doesn’t come to a simple resolution, KaTia said “I never think it is a losing battle because we always seem to make progress.”

It was obvious that KaTia was proud of her work. When I asked her about the best experience she had so far this year she got excited and settled back to tell me a story. “Now, my best mediation is also my worst mediation and I will tell you why. There was a young man who was bothering a young lady and they end up just boom, clashing. It got so bad that a teacher was injured.” This is how KaTia started.

“They were sitting [in mediation] and they were both uninterested in what the other person had to say – narrow-minded. The young man was going off topic. But we finally ended up working it in a way that they both saw how they were wrong.”

KaTia is only in eighth grade but she has a lot to say about the work she has been doing and it seems to have made a deep impression on her – in addition to keeping some of her classmates from being suspended. She told me why this mediation was her best. “It was really cool how we started from the bottom but we ended up making progress. The students agreed to apologize to the teacher and help in her classroom for the rest of the year. [As for their own interactions], they decided to avoid each other but also respect and be civil to each other.”

On my way out of the school I ran into Ms. Turner, the Behavioral Interventionist who has worked closely with AFSC to make mediation at Civitas a success. Using different words, Ms. Turner echoed the sentiment that KaTia had expressed about why she kept doing mediations even when they were not always easy or ideal. “Sometimes students just want to be heard and to have their feelings acknowledged. Pass or fail, we are always going to use mediation because it opens that door for growth.”

Pittsburgh declared Human Rights City

Staff members in the Middle Atlantic Region are spread out and spend a lot of time working independently. But behind the scenes they collaborate in order to get maximum impact out of limited resources. One example of this teamwork started with the D.C. program's Human Rights Learning project. After working to get Washington, D.C., declared a Human Rights City in 2008, the program has been using the resolution framework to teach and advocate for justice. In 2010, the Pennsylvania State program initiated a youth project. Focusing on the complicated issue of racial equity, the program adopted the D.C. program strategy by using a human rights lens.

Throughout the past school year the Racial Justice Through Human Rights youth group has been meeting to learn together, discuss community issues, and talk about making an impact on greater Pittsburgh. AFSC staff from D.C. visited to work with the young people. As the first group to participate in the project, they were trailblazers, helping to develop a curriculum and advocating for

Pittsburgh to become a Human Rights City. Students realized, just as they had in Washington D.C., that the human rights framework could be a powerful tool in working for lasting peace and social justice.

Maya Rosen, one of the youths, wrote to her Councilman: "A Human Rights City is one whose residents and local authorities participate in ongoing discussions and creative exchange of ideas in order to more fully understand human rights. Human rights are central in bringing forth a viable vision and mission for the 21st Century."

On April 19, 2011, the Pittsburgh City Council passed a resolution declaring Pittsburgh the 5th Human Rights City in the country. A number of the Racial Justice Through Human Rights participants, together with 40 high school youths from the Pittsburgh Young Leaders Academy, gathered to be part of the proclamation ceremony. As part of their pledge to the ongoing discussion around justice, the young people spoke about a need for better transportation, more jobs and safe communities.

D.C. students participate in Model United Nations Conference

AFSC Human Rights Learning project participants, shown at right, were among the diplomats at a Model United Nations Conference hosted by the U.S. Department of State in April. More than 600 students from 34 schools in the District of Columbia were in attendance.

The AFSC students, from Friendship Public Charter School, helped draft a resolution in committee.

The interactive simulations gave the young people an opportunity to think analytically and creatively while also tackling problems and issues collectively.





Students convince the Pittsburgh City Council to declare Pittsburgh the fifth Human Rights City in the country.

The partnership between the D.C. program and the Pennsylvania program did not languish after Pittsburgh was declared a human rights city. The following week Pittsburgh youths were on their way to join the D.C. AFSC youths to participate in a Global Classrooms Model United Nations Conference at the U.S. Department of State. In this setting they got to learn about cooperation on an international scale and yet, many of the lessons were applicable on a community level.

The day started with Opening Ceremonies. Speakers implored, “really listen to what others are saying” and lectured, “we need to work together if we are going to have a safe and just world” and challenged the young people, “we count on the fact that your work will not stop when you leave here...that you will work for what is right for the good of humankind.” AFSC program participants responded by taking the day seriously but some of the Pittsburgh youths drove home feeling frustrated. Even though they had tried to listen, work together and do what was right for humankind, they were not successful in getting all of their resolutions passed.

A few weeks later the group debriefed. Many responses about the overall experience started with “I liked it but...” The comments that followed highlighted the complexity of social change. One youth said, “I felt personally attacked by all of the questions,” another pointed out that “people got to be controlling and didn’t

want to see others’ points of view.” The Pittsburgh group had represented strong countries like Germany, as well as weaker countries like Angola. They observed powerful countries trying to make decisions, frequently leaving others out of the process. As they talked over the experience, they encouraged each other. “You need to keep voicing your opinion. No matter what, you should keep on pushing for what you want.”

In the end, just like our news headlines and even this *MARStar* newsletter, the conversation was dominated by the effect of money and economic vitality. The students observed that richer countries had more power at the Model UN but they also saw a way forward. “Obviously, if you feel strongly about something and people are backing you up and supporting you, eventually you can make a difference. Like the Civil Rights movement – they weren’t rich, but they kept on working nonviolently, and they were persistent. That’s what you need to do to make change. Money is just something that helps.”

As the session continued, the conversation drifted in many directions, “maybe it’s like the rich are trying to harness the Angolas of the world...” but one thing was clear – the opportunity to participate in the Model United Nations Conference was enlightening for this group of young people. The first AFSC Racial Justice Through Human Rights youth group was ready to go out and keep working for the good of humankind.



'I learned how to channel my anger'

D.J. Jones was released from prison eight days ago. May 11, 2011. He spent five years and eight months thinking about what he would do when he got out and now it boils down to one thing: what is he going to do with his time?

In the wider world, unemployment is nine percent. Politicians are creating plans for putting people back to work. Some experts say that the economy is getting better; other indicators don't seem very promising. While the U.S. Department of Labor and the Department of Justice don't track employment data specifically for the formerly incarcerated, most experts agree that the unemployment rate is higher for people with a criminal record. Like the majority of those released from prison, D.J.'s immediate needs are money and employment.

D.J. got involved with AFSC's Maryland Peace with Justice Program while he was at Maryland Correctional Training Center (MCTC). By his account, "an older cat, Mr. Soldier" introduced him to the Friend of a Friend conflict resolution group because he was "acting out and behaving badly." While he was at MCTC, D.J. participated in three Friend of a Friend mentoring cycles – first as a mentee and later as a mentor. "I learned how to channel my anger, do something with my time" he said.

In the eight days since his release, D.J. has been looking for a job. He wants to start his own business, but he is open to almost anything to put some money in his pocket and help his family. When (D.J. put emphasis on the "when" to indicate that it is not an option!) D.J. starts his own business, it will be in food services. He wants to provide food for local college employees to eat on their lunch break. And the leftovers? Those go to people who are without. His policy will be no food in the truck at the end of the day.

"I get frustrated a lot when things don't go my way," D.J. explained, "but what I learned in our group is that instead of acting out I need to find alternative routes like a real man." There are bound to be a lot of frustrating situations for anyone returning to the community after a period of incarceration, but Maryland Peace with Justice Program staff members are continuing to work with D.J. and he is positive. "I am trying to lead by example."

In the meantime, while he is looking for a job and planning his future company, D.J. has decided to spend a little bit of time mentoring young people. He believes that someone has dropped the ball and too many kids are on a bad path. "I don't want to see people go through what I went through," D.J. related, "I acted out in the streets and ran with the wrong crowd. I think I can help some of these young people so that they don't go through what I went through."

D.J. believes that he can find a job and have a positive influence on his community but he also has another thing to add to the to-do-list. Cook a meal for his grandmother. "She is with it, she is just amazing and she wants me to do good things."



The Middle Atlantic Region of AFSC partnered with Alpha Delta Kappa in April to sponsor a conference for teachers: Preparing Our Children for Peace. AFSC's Mia Jones worked with Middle School teachers using the Help Increase the Peace curriculum. The high school breakout group was facilitated by Jean-Louis Peta Ikambana and Sara Ramey from the D.C. Peace and Economic Justice Program; they focused on Human Rights Learning techniques.

Coal mine disaster...

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with its workers by frequently and knowingly violating the law and blatantly disregarding known safety practices while creating a public perception that its operations exceeded industry safety standards,” the report stated.

According to Beth Spence, “It was difficult to watch people grieve, to sit across the table from the parents or children of the men who lost their lives and know that you couldn’t do what they most wanted, which was to bring back their loved ones. It was also difficult to listen, day after day, to people tell their stories about the conditions in that mine, to hear stories told from many different experiences and to know that the explosion at Upper Big Branch could have been avoided.”

A native of Logan County, West Virginia, Beth grew up in coal country and worked with McAteer during the aftermath of the Buffalo Creek Disaster of 1972, when a waste dam owned by Pittston Coal broke, killing 125 people and leaving thousands homeless. She was the lead writer of the report on the Aracoma fire as well as the recently released Upper Big Branch report.

The message of the report is clear: the disaster was man-made and entirely preventable had Massey followed basic safety procedures. It was the result of multiple systems failures which “can only be explained in the context in which wrongdoing became acceptable, where deviation became the norm.”

As the report concludes: “The story of Upper Big Branch is a cautionary tale of hubris. A company that was a towering presence in the Appalachian coalfields operated its mines in a profoundly reckless manner, and 29 coal miners paid with their lives for the corporate risk-taking. The April 5, 2010, explosion was not something that happened out of the blue, an event that could not have been anticipated or prevented. It was, to the contrary, a completely predictable result for a company that ignored basic safety standards and put too much faith in its own mythology.”

Beth’s work on the investigative team is only the most recent episode in a tradition of AFSC work in Appalachia’s coalfield communities that began in the early 1920s, when the organization was asked to help feed and assist the families of unemployed miners. AFSC was heavily involved in both administering relief and advocating for better policies during the Great Depression. Friends were involved in health related projects in the coalfields from the 1930s into the 1950s. In the late 1970s, the organization established New Employment for Women, now known as the Appalachian Center for Equality. In 1989 the WV Economic Justice Project began.



Left, destruction in the Upper Big Branch mine. Below, miner Gary Wayne Quarles, who lost his life in the explosion.



The American Friends Service Committee’s role in the Upper Big Branch investigation was a quiet one. Our focus was on the men and women who work hard every day to provide our nation with energy. As the report states, they, too, are a national resource whose lives, safety and health must be safeguarded.

AFSC and many others in and out of West Virginia, particularly the families of those who lost loved ones, hope that this report will help lead to justice for those who played games with the lives of working people, encourage companies to adopt better safety practices, and push national and state leaders to enact more stringent safety regulations.

In Beth’s words, “All you can hope is that the work you’ve done prods the industry and the country to do better for those who mine coal, that it honors the men who were lost on April 5, 2010, and that it helps protect the lives of miners who are still on the job.”



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ACE visits Sandy Spring

Participants in AFSC's mentoring group program in Logan, WV, are accustomed to seeing work teams doing service projects. Many even feel entitled to this help. None of the young people who traveled in late March 2011 to Sandy Springs, MD, on a reciprocal visit had ever gone into another community on a mission of service. For all of them, it was a new and eye-opening experience. A few of the young people actually found themselves enjoying the manual labor, and the entire group was amazed by the diversity of the student body at Sandy Spring Friends School as well as the passion of these students for protecting the environment.



Members of the ACE mentoring groups complete a work exchange with the Sandy Spring Friends School.