

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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Ruling the Roost

What's bigger
than tobacco,
more dangerous
than mining,
and foul to eat?

ALSO *The Manslaughter Case
Against Frank Perdue* p. 14

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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Women for All Seasons

The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Catherine Foster



Formed by a meeting of twelve hundred suffragists during the early days of World War I, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has consistently attracted women of vision, persistence, and optimism, women committed to helping nations find peaceful solutions to problems and to creating a world free from war and oppression. In *Women for All Seasons*, Catherine Foster presents a full account of the activities of the WILPF from its feminist founding in 1915 to its aims for the present, offering a glimpse of the broad spectrum of members—from Philadelphia Quaker Mildred Scott Olmsted, to Angela Gethi, who formed a chapter in her native Kenya in 1985. *Illustrated* \$25.00 cloth; \$12.00 paper

The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861

Robert E. May

With a New Afterword by the Author

Robert May explains how the South—through political means and support of filibustering expeditions—sought to gain new slave states in Cuba, Mexico, and Central America during the proexpansion administrations of Pierce and Buchanan. May shows how the frustration of these plans by northern congressmen contributed to the antagonism that brought civil war to the United States. \$15.00 paper

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When Roots Die

Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands

Patricia Jones-Jackson

Foreword by Charles Joyner

"A remarkable book about the life and language of the Sea Islands"—*National Geographic*.

Celebrating and preserving the venerable Gullah culture of the sea islands of the South Carolina and Georgia coast, *When Roots Die* captures folkways and beliefs that have endured, through ocean voyage and human bondage, for more than two hundred years.

\$12.95 paper

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DATELINE: THE SOUTH

GASTONIA, N.C. (March 10) —

Kendall Cribb, a white man convicted of assaulting an interracial couple with his pickup, was sentenced today to watch the movie *Mississippi Burning*. Cribb appealed, saying he's not interested in the film. Judge Larry Langston defended the sentence, citing the film's good reviews. "It's not like I wanted him to see trash," the judge said.



CHARLOTTE, N.C. (March 16) —

A court sided with attorneys for Graceland today and ordered the One-Shot T-Shirt Company to halt sales of a shirt promoting an "Elvis Tour 88/89." The shirt lists recent "appearances" by the King, including "Handy Pantry, Dallas, N.C." and "Walking Around Town, Encino, Calif." D'Etta Leach, owner of the company, complained, "Why is the *National Enquirer* protected by the First Amendment and we're not?"

DALLAS, Texas (March 17) —

Black residents protested the Rameses II exhibit at a local museum, saying it belittles black history by ignoring the Egyptian pharaoh's African heritage. When Egypt's minister of culture denied that Egypt can be considered African, Vivian Johnson of the Dallas Park Board called his remark "comparable to saying Dallas is Texan but not American."

HOUMA, La. (March 17) — A federal judge ruled today that it was legal for Terrebonne General Hospital to fire nurse Kevin Lecklet after he refused to disclose the results of an AIDS test. The hospital ordered Lecklet to take the test after his roommate died of AIDS in 1986. Lecklet said his dismissal violates federal privacy and anti-discrimination laws.

NEW ORLEANS, La. (March 22)

— Nearly 4,000 prisoners have filed a class-action lawsuit against Sheriff Charles Foti and the city, charging widespread abuse by prison guards and inadequate sanitation and medical care. Foti has been sued hundreds of times by individual prisoners, but ACLU attorneys say the class-action suit represents the first effort to correct prison-wide abuses.

ROCK HILL, S.C. (March 24) —

York County businesses are pressuring the state to settle a land dispute with the Catawba Indians, who claim the state reneged on a deal made with the tribe in 1840. The county board of realtors believes the claim is holding up \$200 million in development projects. The Catawba Nation has refused lucrative offers from individual investors to drop their claim, insisting that the state acknowledge its guilt.

JACKSON, Miss. (March 25) —

State senators denied Johnnie Walls, a black civil rights lawyer who had been a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, a seat on the state College Board. One senator said Walls should have mentioned his draft resistance when he was asked if there was anything in his background that would embarrass the state of Mississippi.

ATLANTA, Ga. (April 5) —

Fifteen students occupied the administration building at Morris Brown College to protest living conditions at the school and demand a black studies major. The protest was touched off after a smoke alarm failed to alert students to a dorm fire.

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (April 6)

— Two black state legislators walked out of the House chambers when a Miss Alabama contestant who had been invited to entertain lawmakers sang "Dixie" during a recess in the legislative session. Representative A.J. Blake, who invited the contestant to perform, was pleased by her song selection. "Wasn't that nice?" he remarked later.

WOODBINE, Ga. (April 13) —

Martina Linnehan, 50, was sentenced to three months in jail for protesting the arrival of the first nuclear submarine at

TAMPA, Fla. (April 28) —

Eliana Martinez, a mentally disabled seven-year-old with AIDS, received a warm greeting from her classmates today when she arrived for her first day at the Manhattan Exceptional Center. Eliana was allowed to enroll after a federal judge overturned a previous court order that stipulated she could only attend classes if she were confined to a glass isolation booth.

Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base last January, Linnehan told the jury she participated in the demonstration because "I feel that my life, as well as yours, is in imminent danger" from the threat of nuclear weapons.

DALLAS, Texas (April 20) —

Officials for the Dallas Area Rapid Transit unveiled a plan to convert the Santa Fe rail line to commuter service, breaking a 1983 promise that the railroad would never be used for mass transit. East Dallas residents responded with an anti-DART ad campaign, placing ads with slogans like "DART Speaks with Forked Tongue" on the sides of DART buses.

BATON ROUGE, La. (April 22) —

Honor roll student Aaron Martinez, angered that his school forbids boys to wear shorts, protested the dress code by wearing a bright red pair of his mother's culottes to school. He was sent home. The dress code clearly states that culottes or "split skirts" are permissible, but does not say that only girls can wear them to school.

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (April 10) —

Wade Houston, new basketball coach at the University of Tennessee, won't be allowed to join the exclusive Cherokee Country Club — even though the university provides \$15,000 memberships for its other coaches. Houston is black, and the Cherokee has never had a black member.

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (April 22)

—Elementary school officials censored a science fair exhibit when a seventh grader set up 10 jars containing human fetuses to demonstrate fetal development. The principal deemed the exhibit "too graphic" for students to view. Judges awarded it a blue ribbon before it was removed from display.

AUSTIN, Texas (April 30)

—More than 20,000 Texans marched on the state capitol today to support equal rights for gay men and lesbians. The demonstration — part of a week-long series of events in which the speaker of the house welcomed gay rights lobbyists — was the largest protest march in Texas history.

RICHMOND, Va. (May 6)

—An unidentified student filed a complaint with the U.S. Justice Department today, saying the all-male Virginia Military Institute is violating federal law by excluding women. VMI is one of only two state-supported military colleges in the nation that refuse to enroll women.

NORFOLK, Va. (May 11)

—Michael Bates, a city maintenance worker, was suspended without pay the morning after he spoke at a public hearing to support pay raises for city employees. Bates, a father of two who makes \$13,790 a year, expressed surprise at the suspension. "I thought it was a public hearing where you could speak your mind," he said.

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** (May 12)

—Three state legislators have drafted a bill banning dwarf-tossing in bars and clubs. Dwarf-tossing spread to Florida when Australian circus performer David "Midge" Wilson brought his act to a Fort Lauderdale disco. The bill is supported by lobbyists from Little People of America, Inc.

AIKEN, S.C. (May 13)

—Internal reports at the Savannah River nuclear

**BAYOU SORREL, La.** (April 21)

—A barge carrying waste from an Exxon plant in Houston broke open today, spilling 100,000 gallons of oily waste into a stream that feeds the lush Atchafalaya Basin about 35 miles southwest of Baton Rouge. The spill came less than a month after the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska, dumping crude oil that spread over 2,600 square miles.

weapons plant indicate that instruments designed to prevent accidents and detect radiation leaks have been inoperable or untested for more than two years. Environmentalists and local citizens condemned the safety hazard and called for independent monitoring of the federal weapons facility.

NORFOLK, Va. (May 13)

—More than 300 parents of test-tube babies gathered for a Mother's Day party with their children at the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine. More than 500 children have been "conceived" through the Institute, the most successful in-vitro fertilization program in the country.

ATLANTA, Ga. (May 14)

—Button collector John Zauber was ejected from an Eastern Airlines plane after he strolled onto the jetliner wearing a "Bust Lorenzo" hat and button. Zauber picked up the items in the terminal from striking Eastern employees battling company president Frank Lorenzo. Airline officials claim Zauber was removed from the plane because he was not sitting in his assigned seat.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (May 14)

—General Electric announced today that more than 1,300 workers will lose their jobs as the company closes or scales back

appliance factories in Kentucky, Maryland, and Georgia. GE had considered modernizing one of the factories, but decided instead to build a new plant in Mexico and move all gas-range production there.

AUGUSTA, GA. (May 20)

—The second nuclear reactor at Plant Vogtle began producing electricity at midnight, more than \$2.2 billion over budget and a decade behind schedule. Georgia Power blames increased regulation for the cost overruns, but state officials cited bad management decisions. Georgia Power has asked for a 12 percent rate hike to cover the cost of the new reactor.

HINESVILLE, GA. (May 23)

—Two howitzer rounds went eight miles off course during National Guard training at Fort Stewart and exploded near an Army housing area. The accident came just three weeks after an F-16 fighter from Moody Air Force Base accidentally dropped a 500-pound bomb about 1,000 yards from the tiny community of Brantley. No one was injured in either explosion.

Readers are encouraged to submit articles to Dateline: The South. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give name and date of publication.

RURAL POVERTY HITS SOUTH THE HARDEST

News reports on poverty often focus on the plight of the urban poor — homeless people huddled around steam grates, long lines at soup kitchens, unemployed teenagers on street corners. According to a recent study, however, poverty rates are actually higher in small towns and rural areas than in big cities — and the gap between the rural and urban poor is growing wider.

The private study, conducted by the Washington-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, reports that 16.9 percent of all rural residents lived below the poverty line in 1987, compared to 12.5 percent of urban residents.

Much of the rural poverty is concentrated in the South, where more than four out of 10 people live in rural areas. The study determined that Southern states — which comprise a third of the U.S. population — account for almost 54 percent of the nation's rural poor and 97 percent of all poor rural blacks.

The study also indicates that poverty is more persistent in the South than in any other region. According to the report, all but 18 of the nation's 206 counties that have remained poor for the past three decades are in the South. Nearly half were

located in just three states — Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

"The vast majority of the rural poor do not fit the common stereotypes," said Katheryn Porter, research director at the center and the principal author of the report. Most of the nearly nine million rural poor are white and live in families with two parents, at least one of whom works full-time.

Blacks, children, and the elderly who live in rural areas are particularly hard hit by rural poverty. According to the study, 44.1 percent of all rural blacks are poor, compared to 33.3 percent in the inner cities.

The report also indicates that the gap between the rural and urban poor is getting worse. The difference between per capita income in rural and urban areas widened between 1978 and 1986, and rural unemployment rates jumped by 25 percent.

Other studies indicate that as rural poverty spreads, many poor families cannot obtain decent health care. According to a report by the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition, much of the rural South continues to suffer a severe shortage of doctors and clinics.

In the impoverished counties of northeastern North Carolina, the report indicates, the shortage of physicians is 5.5 times worse than the rest of the country. In rural Northampton County, there is only

one doctor for every 2,800 people — a level comparable to Third World countries like Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador.

The student coalition is working with rural residents to counter the growing health crisis. The group has set up free rural clinics run by medical volunteers, developed a cooperative to provide low-cost prescriptions, and organized a network of community leaders to discuss local health needs and create alternatives for poor counties.

Jen Shradie, resource coordinator for the coalition, called such grassroots work essential to overcoming poverty. "The only way to begin to alleviate the conditions of rural poverty," she said, "is to organize the people of the Black Belt."

—Margie Stude

CROWDED PRISONS FUEL RIOTS AND EARLY RELEASES

For the past eight years, most Southern states have followed a simple formula when it comes to crime: lock 'em up and throw away the key. As politicians from Texas to Virginia have adopted a "get tough" stance, the number of people behind bars has soared to record levels. Now, prisons and jails across the region are overflowing — and state officials are scrambling to find the key before the overcrowded prison cells explode.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, more people are doing time than ever before. The incarceration rate rose 64 percent between 1980 and 1987 — mostly for drunken driving or other drug-related offenses.

Southern states have led the push to imprison people. A recent survey shows that over the past decade, the number of state prisoners has more than tripled in Alabama and Mississippi and nearly doubled in South Carolina and Louisiana.

In most places, more prisoners has meant more jobs. A Census Bureau report released in April shows that corrections is now the fastest-growing segment of government employment. The number of corrections jobs hit 425,000 in 1987, up 61.6 percent since 1980.

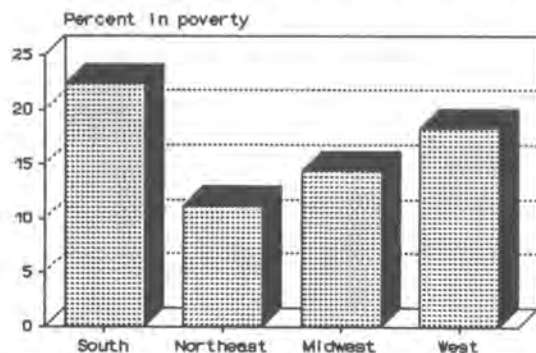
With prisons across the region bursting at the seams, however, many states have nowhere to put those convicted of serious offenses. As a result, thousands of state prisoners are being warehoused in county jails intended to hold people guilty of minor crimes or those awaiting trial. The overcrowding has created inhumane conditions and fueled prison riots across the region.

In Georgia, state prisoners staged an uprising in January at the Rivers

Chart courtesy of Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

RURAL POVERTY BY REGION

The poverty rate for the rural South was 22.4 percent in 1986 — significantly higher than in other regions.





Correctional Institute, where 950 people are crammed into a facility designed to hold 720. In the Fulton County Jail, hundreds of inmates held two peaceful demonstrations to protest overcrowding that has forced 500 people — some of them pregnant — to sleep on the floor.

The Fulton jail grew so crowded that a federal jail monitor called it a tinder box where “only a spark is needed to blow it sky-high.” Federal courts agreed, and ordered the emergency release of 350 county inmates and 3,000 state prisoners.

The plan eased crowding in the prisons but worsened crowding in Atlanta-area homeless shelters. Many prisoners were released with no money, no job, and no place to go. Social workers, furious at the lack of planning, struggled to register newly released prisoners for food stamps and housing. “We are coming to the absolute limit of the private sector’s ability to respond,” said Anita Beaty, co-director of Task Force for the Homeless.

Prisoners also expressed frustration at the sudden release. “I ran out of money this morning,” Larry Kurtz told *The Atlanta Constitution* a day after his release. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. What can I do? I don’t want to commit another crime just to get some money or somewhere to stay.”

Like Fulton County, dozens of Southern states and cities are under emergency court order to release prisoners. Florida freed over 20,000 state prisoners last summer, and 8,000 more are serving time in their own homes, monitored by electronic surveillance. In Broward County, which is being fined \$1,000 a day for exceeding a court-ordered

cap on its jail population, officials have endorsed a plan to build “tent jails.”

Many officials are advocating more of the same “get tough” policies that created the overcrowding in the first place. Zell Miller, lieutenant governor of Georgia, announced that he favors sending first-time, non-violent offenders to remote parts of the state where they would live in tents, work 12-hour days under the supervision of former Marine drill sergeants, and be guarded by “vicious police dogs.”

Most states are also scrambling to build more prisons and jails. Georgia has embarked on a \$150-million prison construction program to avoid a federal lawsuit, and South Carolina plans to spend \$20 million to build new prisons.

At the rate it’s going, however, most states simply won’t be able to build prisons fast enough to keep up. In Georgia, Fulton County officials are building a new jail, but a report by federal officials says the facility “is not a final answer. Even if the new jail were completed and available today, it would be fully double-bunked, and there would still be inmates on the floor.”

The only real solution to crowded prisons, community leaders say, is to address the roots of crime itself — poor housing, unemployment, and a lack of job training and support for low-income families and neighborhoods. “The governor and the legislature will be spending \$108 million on prisons,” said Beaty, director of the homeless task force. “We’re saying \$108 million should have been spent on housing.”

—Kay Robin Alexander

HOUSING PROJECTS STAGE THEIR OWN WAR ON DRUGS

While Nancy Reagan and other national figures urge people to “just say no,” residents in four New Orleans housing projects are waging a more strategic — and dangerous — battle in the war on drugs.

Near the Desire housing project — the largest in the nation and the center of drug activity in the city — the Third Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church has bought seven abandoned crack houses and plans to rent them to local residents to prevent drug dealers from using them. Church members had been contributing to a fund for a new church for 20 years, but when board chair Benjamin Edwards proposed using the \$175,000 to renovate abandoned homes for low-income residents, the congregation approved.

“They all jumped at the idea,” Edwards said. “The vote was unanimous among the membership.”

Residents in three other housing projects have established “drug-free zones” patrolled by tenants and a 24-hour hotline to encourage anonymous tips on drug deals. Signs posted in the projects mark the boundaries of the zones and give the hotline number.

Tenant leaders say the program places responsibility for community life on each individual. “You should and must get involved,” said Julius Wilkerson, founder of the program. “If you don’t, the problem will get worse.”

At the St. Bernard project, activist Endesha Juakali has taken the program a step further, mounting basketball hoops and organizing softball teams to give kids an alternative to drugs. Tenants are also renovating an abandoned building, hoping to open a community center to provide drug education, job training, and a food bank.

The drug-free zones have been criticized, however, for simply moving drug dealing into other, unpatrolled areas of the projects. “The people got the choice,” one St. Bernard teenager told a local reporter. “This project will never be drug free.”

If the drug-free zones do succeed, it won’t be without a fight. New Orleans had the highest increase in crack use in the nation last year, and drug-related crimes are also on the rise. Controversy over the drug-free zones turned violent in

March, when Juakali was shot in the leg and beaten by two youths suspected of drug dealing.

Nevertheless, Juakali and others hope the program will rid the projects of drugs completely, one zone at a time. Juakali was back at work two days after the assault, and community leaders say the shooting will send a symbolic message to the community. "This will make the movement stronger," said Larry Jones, director of the city housing authority. "This will let the drug dealers know they're not going to run us out."
—*Caroline Senter*

AUSTIN FIGHTS TO SAVE ENDANGERED URBAN SPECIES

Most cities are content to let the federal government worry about protecting endangered species. But in Austin, Texas — home to more rare plants and animals than any urban area in the country — local environmentalists have joined forces to save 10 species threatened with extinction by sprawling development.

Local members of the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and Earth First! worked for months to gain support for a city ordinance to limit development in areas where endangered species live. The ordinance — the first of its kind in the nation — was also backed by officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency charged with protecting endangered species.

Located at the junction of the Colorado River and the Texas Hill Country, Austin attracts migrating birds from thousands of miles away. Although huge endangered birds like the bald eagle and the whooping crane usually stop in Austin during their annual treks, the controversy has focused on two tiny songbirds — the black-capped vireo and the golden-cheeked warbler. The two birds migrate to Austin each year to nest and reproduce, but their numbers have been declining rapidly for several years.

The reason is development. According to a study by zoologist Rex Wahl of the Texas Natural Heritage Program, new industrial parks and office towers have destroyed 40 percent of all warbler habitat in the Austin area.

The ordinance backed by environmentalists was designed to severely limit development near endangered species habitat, but it met with stiff resistance from developers eager to build on thousands of acres west of the city where the warbler lives.

To counter the ordinance, developers

proposed a Regional Habitat Conservation Plan, offering to set aside large tracts of land as preserves for endangered species. In return, the city would allow developers to build at higher densities next to wildlife preserves and to transfer development rights to other projects.

Then, just as the ordinance was gaining steam, developers won a victory in the state legislature in May. At the end of the session, state lawmakers shot down the ordinance, saying the city could only protect endangered species through the Regional Habitat Conservation Plan. That could take years — and by then, environmentalists say, it could be too late.

"The question is whether we can wait any longer to protect these rare animals," said Chuck Sexton, a biologist with the Austin Department of Environmental Protection who favored the ordinance. "I don't think we can. If we wait too much longer, there won't be anything left to save."
—*Robert Michael Bryce*

MOST DISTRICTS LOSE MONEY TO PENTAGON

Taxpayers are often told that military spending is good for the economy because it generates big contracts, creates high-paying jobs, and spurs growth. Now, a recent study by an economic consulting firm reports that the opposite is true — the Pentagon budget actually costs most citizens more in taxes than it returns in contracts and salaries.

According to Employment Research Associates based in Lansing, Michigan, taxpayers in nearly three-fourths of all congressional districts pay more to support the Pentagon than their districts reap in military benefits.

"For years, members of Congress would say that even if they wanted to, they couldn't vote against military spending because it meant money coming into their districts," said economist James Anderson. "But we found that the Pentagon budget isn't a boon to most congressional districts — it's a drain."

The study found that 321 of the 435 congressional districts suffered a net loss from military spending. In the South, the Pentagon drained money from 99 of the 142 districts.

Taxpayers in eight Southern states paid the Pentagon more than their districts received — Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. Only five states got a favorable return on their tax dollars — Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia.

The biggest net gain — \$3 billion — came in the 101st District in Virginia, home of the Pentagon. The heaviest net loss — \$1.2 billion — was in the 7th District of Texas, in Houston.

Anderson said the study compared all money the districts collected from defense contracts, military salaries and wages, and retirement pay to the 40 percent share of federal taxes the districts paid to cover military spending.

Official U.S. Marine Corps Photo



MARINES AT CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. PARTICIPATE IN A TRAINING EXERCISE. NORTH CAROLINA WAS ONE OF EIGHT SOUTHERN STATES THAT LOST MONEY TO THE MILITARY.

BANGED FOR THE BUCK

In 99 of the 142 Southern congressional districts, the military budget cost more in taxes than it returned in contracts and salaries.

	Net Gain or Loss (In billions)	Gain or Loss Per Family
Virginia	\$9.4	\$5,800
S. Carolina	1.0	1,040
Mississippi	.6	720
Georgia	.3	180
Alabama	.1	5
Arkansas	-.6	-\$880
W. Virginia	-1.3	-2,140
Louisiana	-1.6	-1,230
N. Carolina	-1.9	-1,070
Tennessee	-2.2	-1,570
Florida	-3.0	-1,040
Texas	-5.3	-1,220

Source: Employment Research Associates

The study also found that 104 districts — nearly one in four — suffered a net loss of \$500 million or more. The big losers included 11 districts in Texas, seven in Florida, three in North Carolina, and one each in Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Even in some states that got a large return on their tax dollars, a majority of districts lost money. In Mississippi, which received the fourth highest gain in the country, only one of six districts got more in military spending than it paid in military taxes. In South Carolina, which registered a net gain of \$1 billion, only two of six districts shared the wealth.

"RENEGADE" MINER GETS GO-AHEAD TO STRIP MOUNTAINTOP

When a coal company called Black Gold came to Lincoln County, West Virginia two years ago, the man who did all the talking was Delbert Burchett. Burchett went from house to house along Sixmile Creek, asking residents in the hollow to lease their mineral rights so Black Gold could strip mine the mountain.

Residents didn't sell. Instead, they came together and organized a group called Home Place to stop Black Gold from destroying the mountain. They signed petitions, held public hearings, and took the coal company to court. Last year, the state supreme court ruled in their favor, saying Black Gold had failed to disclose its complete history of mining violations.

But in May, the state board of reclama-

tion gave Black Gold the go-ahead to strip mine 125 acres. The company has its permit — even though the man who spearheaded the mine is on a federal blacklist that forbids him to mine anywhere in the country.

Delbert Burchett owes more than \$7 million in forfeited bonds and mining fines in Kentucky, and his record of wrongdoing has earned him a "permit block" — a federal ban on mining. Yet because Black Gold is under the name of Sandra Perry, his common-law wife, it remains eligible for permits to strip mine.

"They are giving a permit to mine to a company that is under the control of a renegade miner," says John Salstrom, president of Home Place. "Burchett was the one who came to my house to talk about the mine, and he is the one who will profit from it."

Home Place has succeeded in blocking the mine permit for almost two years by tying the company up in court. Although Sixmile residents say they oppose the mine for spiritual reasons, they took a practical approach to battling Black Gold. They hired engineers to scrutinize the permit application and launched an investigation into water pollution at other strip mines.

Such activities brought bitter attacks from the company. Burchett had to be physically restrained from assaulting an off-duty mine inspector at a public hearing sponsored by Home Place last

year, and Sandra Perry has accused the group of being filled with communists and dope-smokers.

As proof of communist infiltration, Perry told a local newspaper that prominent residents had checked out a book entitled *What You Should Know About Communism and Why* from the county library. A check-out slip in the back of the book later showed that it had been borrowed five times since 1974.

Now that Black Gold has permission to strip the mountain, two dozen families who live within 1,000 feet of the mine are preparing for daily blasts that will spew clouds of coal dust and pollute the local water supply. But Home Place hasn't given up. It has taken the company to court again, saying the permit doesn't name who will operate the mine or provide the detailed mining and reclamation plans required by federal law.

"We've been trying to wear each other down for the past two years," says Salstrom. "It's kind of like a prize fight. We're in the 14th round right now, and we both have wobbly knees. You just hang in there and hope they give up."

News departments compiled by Margie Stude and John James.

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Funding Social Change Since 1967

Dirty Developments

The Atlanta business boom has brought industry and people to Georgia. It has also ruined the water and choked the air.

By Julie B. Hairston

ATLANTA, GA. — When the national press converged on the city for the Democratic National Convention a year ago, few reporters filed a story without noting the phenomenal growth of the metropolitan region.

The business boom was hard to miss, even for out-of-town journalists glued to the convention floor. New office towers and industrial parks are everywhere. Both the Chamber of Commerce and the state department of industry and tourism publish literature proudly boasting that the northern suburbs of Cobb and Gwinnett counties rank among the fastest-growing in the nation. A popular local joke nominates the construction crane as the official city bird.

From the beginning of the growth spurt in the mid-1970s until last year, everything seemed to be coming up roses for Atlanta. Then area residents began to sniff the local water — and they discovered it smelled like something other than roses.

Last year, Cobb and Gwinnett counties had to impose a ban on sewer connections for all new construction because their waste treatment facilities have reached — or even exceeded — capacity. State environmental officials fined Gwinnett for tampering with water quality testing samples and have refused to permit the county to expand its system because of complaints from downriver residents.

Recent tests showed the waste from Gwinnett's Jackson Creek sewage treatment plant to be toxic to water fleas and a small fish called the fathead minnow. Further tests are being conducted to determine whether the waste also poses a threat to humans.

Below the city, fish removed from the Chattahoochee River earlier this year were found to contain PCBs and chlordane, deadly chemicals known to cause cancer in humans. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has warned residents not to eat fish caught in

the Chattahoochee, and the city is working to upgrade its water treatment facility to reduce the amount of phosphate being dumped in the river. Fulton, Cobb, and Gwinnett counties have taken things a step further by banning the sale of phosphate detergents to help curtail the escalating pollution.

“The state is pointing the finger at Atlanta and the metropolitan counties and saying, ‘You caused the problem. You clean it up,’” says Michael Wardrip, chairman of the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club.

THE BOOM GOES BUST

What is happening in and around Atlanta should come as no surprise. Rapid economic development has simply followed the all-too-predictable pattern that beset major metropolitan areas in the boom years of the late 1960s — construction, manufacturing, and population growth have spread like wildfire, creating toxic wastes that blacken the water, choke the air, and threaten public health.

What has surprised residents and local officials is the suddenness with which the environmental dangers have surfaced. Almost overnight, it seems, Atlanta and its neighbors have woken up from a dream of prosperity to morning newspapers filled with stories of contaminated



WITH HAZARDOUS WASTES PILING UP ACROSS THE STATE, ANGER IS RUNNING HIGH AND RESIDENTS ARE JOINING GEORGIA ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS IN RECORD NUMBERS.

rivers, lakes, and landfills. What emerges is a picture of what can happen when economic development goes haywire—and when outraged citizens join ranks with environmentalists across the state.

“There is no way to express how unfair we think it is to be put at an increased risk and not have any input in the process,” says Debbie Buckner, a Talbot County resident who lives near the proposed site of a hazardous waste incinerator. “My boys are the eighth generation of Buckners to live on this land. I want them to have the same clean environment to grow up in that their ancestors had.”

The pollution doesn't just come from Atlanta. According to state figures, pulp and paper mills in Chatham, Glynn, and Wayne counties generated more than 90 million pounds of toxic waste in 1987 alone.

The problem has gotten so bad—and the state has done so little to resolve it—that federal officials are beginning to step in. This spring the federal EPA criticized the state, calling its water quality plan too broad and vague to adequately protect water resources. The EPA has threatened to take over supervision of Georgia's water quality unless the state can meet federal standards. Georgia now ranks sixth in the nation for its level of water pollution. Presently only 519 miles of its 20,000 miles of streams and rivers are classified

safe for swimming and fishing.

Upstream from Atlanta, debate has raged for years over the water quality of Lake Lanier, which supplies water for the city and a host of surrounding communities in northern Georgia. The discharge of sewage into the lake from the city of Gainesville combined with unusually heavy recreational use has many residents and scientists worried about the presence of potentially harmful bacteria in the water.

Downstream, citizens are expressing concern about West Point Lake near Columbus, where algae blooms and unacceptable levels of pollutants are threatening to render the important water supply and popular recreation spot unfit for human contact.

The pollution doesn't stop with the water, either. Atlanta's air quality regularly falls below federal standards. State figures show that Fulton County, one of the most populous counties in the area, released more than 3.7 million pounds of toxic chemicals into the air in 1987.

“NOBODY WOULD LISTEN”

The bottom line seems clear: Georgia has failed to calculate the hidden costs of rapid development, and now the state is paying a high price for its failure to plan ahead. Its neighbors are also being forced to foot part of the bill: Atlanta-area indus-

tries generate so many hazardous wastes each year that they spill over into landfills in South Carolina and Alabama.

Concerned that nearby states may stop accepting toxic garbage from Georgia, Governor Joe Frank Harris has proposed building a hazardous waste incineration and storage facility in Taylor County, Georgia. Harris insists the facility is vital to recruit more industries and maintain growth, but efforts to obtain a site have been stymied by opposition from concerned citizen groups.

An early effort to locate the incinerator was halted when the courts ruled that Taylor County commissioners had violated state law by failing to hold a public hearing when they decided to pursue the facility.

Although the state selection process was repeated, critics say the state plans to locate the facility in an area that could contaminate groundwater from South Carolina to Alabama. A study conducted by a group of Taylor County citizens also indicated two endangered plant species near the proposed site might be threatened by the hazardous chemicals that would be stored and burned there.

Charging that the state has brushed aside legitimate objections and refused to accept their input in the process, a group of 100 angry Taylor County residents disrupted a meeting of the state Hazardous Waste Authority on April 17. The protesters insisted on time to air their concerns before the panel, but when Governor Harris was unable to silence them, he abruptly adjourned the meeting.

Debbie Buckner, who lives near the proposed site, shouted at Harris for going back on his promise to receive community support before selecting a location. “We could prove our points,” she said after the meeting, “but nobody would listen to us.”

As the battle rages over what to do with hazardous wastes, ordinary garbage continues to present a daily problem in the Atlanta area. As existing landfills reach capacity, metropolitan governments are finding them more difficult to replace. Expansion of the urban population has reduced the amount of available land dramatically, and heated debates often break out when one community tries to open a landfill near the borders of another.

Presently, plans for a Fulton County landfill have sparked a dispute with neighboring DeKalb County, and Cherokee County residents are fighting to block

construction of a private landfill which is planning to accept refuse from Atlanta.

THE ANGER SPREADS

Not surprisingly, the mounting ecological hazards across the state have brought new life to the environmental movement in Georgia. Once dismissed as a politically impotent band of outdoors-lovers and '60s hangers-on, the movement now includes a wide spectrum of professions, including developers, bank executives, and teachers.

In the past year alone, membership in the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club has swelled from 4,802 to 6,240, an increase of almost 30 percent. As a result, the group formed three new local affiliates and has plans for a fourth.

The sudden swell in Georgia membership has been mirrored across the South. In fact, the region is home to six of the 10 fastest-growing Sierra Club chapters in the country — Arkansas, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee. Michael Wardrip, chairman of the Georgia chapter, attributes the Southern growth to a "changing political climate" and a "growing awareness of our environmental heritage."

"We had a big increase in membership last year during the political season, maybe because both parties were giving lip service at least to environmental concerns," Wardrip says. "So it became sort of sexy last year for the media to focus on environmental problems."

The increased media attention has not only boosted the ranks of established groups like the Sierra Club, it has also fueled the creation of brand-new environmental groups. One of the more aggressive newcomers is the Georgia Environmental Project. Founded in 1987, the group made its presence felt almost immediately by organizing grassroots environmental protests throughout the state. The project also joined forces with state workers to win approval for right-to-know legislation that would inform workers of any hazardous substances in their workplaces.

Streamwatch, another new group, has announced plans to monitor pollution in creeks and streams around the state, and a group called Georgians for Clean Water has hired a lobbyist to force the General Assembly to do something about the worsening condition of West Point Lake.

The formation of these new environmental organizations and the increased political clout of the Sierra Club has done

Only 519 of the 20,000 miles of streams and rivers in Georgia are classified safe for fishing and swimming.

more than strengthen the campaign to protect air and water resources: it has also shaken up conservatives within the ranks of the environmental movement. Some of the new activists are charging that the Georgia Conservancy, long the most prominent environmental group in the state, is more of a business lapdog than an environmental watchdog. Although some environmentalists belong both to the Conservancy and to one or more of the other groups, critics charge that the Conservancy depends too heavily on support from major corporations like Georgia Power, Georgia-Pacific, and Exxon, making it a mouthpiece for business interests and softening its stances on important environmental issues.

The Conservancy supports the location of the hazardous waste facility in Taylor County, remained silent on the construction of nuclear Plant Vogtle by Georgia Power, and has issued a study

MUDDYING THE WATERS

The latest EPA figures rank Georgia and seven other Southern states among the 10 worst water polluters in the nation. Numbers represent the toxic chemicals each state dumped in its water in 1987, in millions of pounds.

State	Toxic Waste
California	3,834.8
Louisiana	774.5
Texas	659.5
Alabama	605.0
Mississippi	473.9
Georgia	473.5
S. Carolina	340.9
Washington	303.7
Virginia	225.4
N. Carolina	217.1

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

concluding that acid rain is not a problem in Georgia. Its corporate funding rose 96 percent last year.

"They are heavily influenced by business interests," says Patrick Kessing, executive director of the Georgia Environmental Project. "The belief on their board is that what is good for business in Georgia is good for the environment, and that's just not the case. They have gotten themselves in a close relationship with the bureaucrats and find it hard to go against them when the need arises."

"The bureaucrats" in this case are officials with the state department of natural resources who Kessing and others say have failed to enforce environmental laws. Many want to see the Environmental Protection Division removed from the department, giving the agency more clout and making it more aggressive in defending the environment.

"The department of natural resources has spent 10 years telling everybody everything was OK, when actually everything wasn't OK and it was getting worse," says Neill Herring, a Sierra Club lobbyist.

With air, water, and waste-disposal problems pressing state administrators and legislators to some type of action, veteran political observers expect environmental issues to dominate the 1990 legislative session. In counties along the Georgia coast, where sensitive marshes and wetlands have been repeatedly threatened by development, the gubernatorial campaign and key legislative races may turn decisively on concerns over water quality.

All across the state, the new fire in the environmental movement seems certain to keep the heat on state officials. In early June, more than 500 angry Georgia citizens gathered outside the offices of the natural resources department to decry the deteriorating condition of the state's environment and to call for the resignation of Commissioner Leonard Ledbetter. Organized by the Georgia Environmental Project, the assembly represented more than 30 citizens groups united over the last two years through opposition to local environmental threats.

"The attitude among bureaucrats in Georgia is that we need industry and it doesn't matter what kind of industry that is," says Kessing. "People are beginning to understand they can affect that process by organizing and getting involved." □

Julie Hairston is a reporter for Business Atlanta.



Ruling the Roost

Kentucky Fried Chicken. Chicken McNuggets. Chicken and biscuits. From the time we take our first bite of chicken as children, primal instinct and mass marketing tell us that anything we eat with our fingers *must* be finger-lickin' good. We happily abandon the clumsy utensils of modern civilization for the carnal pleasure of holding our own food — without so much as pausing to consider the source of what we are eating.

As consumers have grown more health conscious in recent years, chickens and turkeys have overtaken beef and pork as the main dish of choice on American dinner tables. In 1986, consumers ate more poultry than beef for the first time ever. The average American ate 61.5 pounds of chicken last year — up from only 13.8 pounds in 1955.

The switch to a healthier diet has transformed the poultry business from a barnyard hobby into a giant industry — and the growth has been especially dramatic in the South. Poultry is now bigger than peanuts in Georgia, tobacco in North Carolina, cotton in Mississippi, and all crops combined in both Alabama and Arkansas. The industry is the biggest agribusiness in the region today, employing 20,000 contract farmers and 150,000 workers in poultry slaughterhouses and processing plants.

Yet what appears to be a low-cost, low-fat substitute for beef may not be the healthy alternative we thought it was. As the articles in this cover section of *Southern Exposure* reveal, the poultry industry treats its chickens better than it treats the people who raise, package, and eat them.

Farmers under contract to big poultry companies call themselves “serfs on their own land.” Workers who kill and process chickens — from white women in the Ozarks to black women in the Deep South — describe their work as “modern slavery.” And consumers who eat poultry are being exposed to millions of sick birds every year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that 40 percent of all chickens we buy are contaminated with salmonella, a bacteria which poisoned an estimated 2.5 million people last year — including 500,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths.

Although the poultry industry is based almost entirely in the South, its influence reaches worldwide. The Kentucky Fried Chicken in Beijing rang up more sales last year than any of the company's other 7,700 franchises. Don Tyson — the Arkansas-

based chicken tycoon who supplies McDonald's with most of its McNuggets — expects his exports to Asia to hit \$100 million this year.

Many of the articles in this section focus on Frank Perdue, the chicken producer who has spent millions cultivating a “tough man” persona on television. Perhaps more than anyone else, Perdue has given the poultry business a human face — yet he repeatedly downplays the ways the industry is hurting farmers, workers, and consumers.

In a statement prepared for a congressional hearing in June, for example, Perdue testified that less than one percent of his workers suffer from the crippling hand and arm diseases known as cumulative trauma disorders. Yet federal officials say poultry companies routinely “underreport” the disorders in an industry ranked as more dangerous than coal mining. In a study of skin diseases at Perdue's largest North Carolina plants, federal investigators found “apparent underreporting . . . for workers in all departments.”

In preparing this section, we also discovered that an untold story from Perdue's personal life offers an indication of how he maintains a clean image in the midst of such a dirty business. According to a federal report obtained by *Southern Exposure*, Perdue was charged with recklessly and negligently killing a man in a highway accident 15 years ago — yet he walked away without a trial. The story of how Perdue escaped prosecution and purged court records of all reference to his manslaughter charge appears on page 14.

Although Perdue has made himself a public figure, he is not alone: the industry as a whole has recklessly and negligently injured communities across the region. Some of the largest poultry firms have driven family farmers out of business while reaping huge tax breaks as “family farms.” They have polluted drinking water while pressuring legislators to exempt them from public nuisance laws. They have crippled workers while vaccinating their chickens. And they have fought to cut federal inspection while turning out increasingly contaminated food.

Perhaps, in the final analysis, it is those of us who buy chicken in supermarkets and restaurants who must hold the industry accountable for the sickening way it mistreats our communities, chicken farmers, poultry workers, and consumers.

After all, as the saying goes, we are what we eat.

—Eric Bates and Bob Hall



Chicken Empires

How poultry went from a barnyard hobby to a giant — and dangerous — engine of efficiency.

By Bob Hall

Millions of television viewers have heard Frank Perdue boast, "It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken." Perdue's squawky voice and bird-like face give the slogan a comic appeal. Here's a sincere, down-home guy, we're supposed to think. When he says he puts his chickens through 57 quality checks, or that their yellow tint means something special, we can trust him.

Such is the magic of TV advertising: He plays the clown, and we become fools.

Frank Perdue is nobody's fool — and neither are the 47 other chief executives who manage the nation's \$16-billion-a-year chicken industry. Together, these men have transformed a down-home business into tightly-held empires that stretch from Virginia to Texas and beyond. They now control every step of production, from the corn and soybean mills that feed the birds to the processing plants that slaughter and package 110 million fryers every week.

The system once involved hundreds of competing mom-and-pop farms, feedmills, and processors. But in the space of one generation, Perdue and his fellow chicken kings have taken over the entire process from bottom to top. They call it "vertical integration," and through its power — and the magic of mar-

keting — they've turned poultry into the South's biggest agribusiness and one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S.

"We've gone from a very independent, grower-oriented business to a vertically integrated system," says John Wolford of the poultry science department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. "We've cut out all the middle men in marketing and production."

Thirty years of fierce competition and price-cutting has turned the barnyard into a jungle. In 1960, there were 286 firms selling commercially raised fryers to retailers. Today there are 48. This is survival of the fittest with a vengeance. And Frank Perdue typifies the breed.

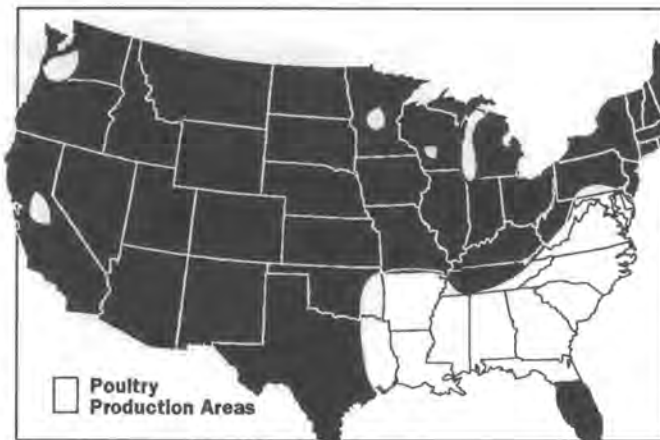
REACHING THE TOP

"I grew up having to know my business in every detail," Perdue told a *Wall Street Journal* reporter. "I dug cesspools, made coops and cleaned them out. I know I'm not very smart, at least from the standpoint of pure IQ, and that gave me one prime ingredient of success — fear. I mean, a man should have enough fear so that he's always second-guessing himself."

Fear has served Perdue well. His company — it's called Perdue Farms Inc., and he controls 90 percent of its stock — is now the fifth largest producer of broiler chickens in the nation, with sales of over \$1 billion and a workforce of more than 14,000. It dominates grocery store meat coolers in the Northeast, and it's locked in combat with Holly Farms for supremacy in the Southeast.

To reach the top, Perdue has learned how to sow fear among his competitors and employees, find friends in high places, and intimidate those who would stand in his way of success. Just how tough is a chicken king like Frank Perdue? Two stories offer a clue:

◆ **All in the Family.**
When the United Food and Commercial Workers Union



POULTRY BELT: HOME FOR CHICKEN FARMERS AND PROCESSORS

(UFCW) began organizing Perdue's largest processing plant in Accomac, Virginia in 1980, the company simply purged its workforce of 55 of the union's strongest supporters. UFCW responded with a national boycott to pressure restaurants and stores in pro-union areas to drop Perdue.

"I guess you can expect retaliation, and I do," Perdue told *The New York Times*. He courted new outlets for his product and waged a bitter legal battle that ultimately stymied the union. He also sought help from an unusual business partner: the Mob.

In a 1985 deposition to the President's Commission on Organized Crime, Perdue testified that when he entered the New York market in the late 1960s, he resisted overtures from Mafia-related food distributors. One of the largest was Dial Poultry, then controlled by Paul Castellano, reputed boss of the Gambino crime family. But as the Perdue label caught on, he reconsidered. "I started saying to myself, 'Why shouldn't I have some of that business that other people have?'"

So Perdue and Dial began doing business together. Several years later, when UFCW targeted his New York outlets, Perdue turned to Castellano for help. "I knew there was a relationship somehow with the Gambino family," he told the commission. "I just thought, you know, they have long tentacles, shall we say, and I figured he may be able to help." Castellano turned down Perdue's requests not once, but twice.

Perdue now says it was a mistake to seek help from the Mafia. The Crime Commission says his actions illustrate how far some businessmen will go to gain — and protect — a competitive advantage.

◆ **Chicken Feed.** During the tax reform debate in 1987, the House Ways and Means Committee considered an amendment promoted by Perdue Farms and Tyson Foods, the nation's largest broiler producer. The amendment — worth \$500 million to the two firms — would allow them to use an accounting gimmick to keep three years of unpaid taxes because their huge businesses are classified as "family farms."

In a closed-door session, committee chair Dan Ros-

tenkowski announced that the amendment had failed on a 10-10 tie vote. But then Representative Beryl Anthony of Arkansas — home of Tyson Foods and the biggest poultry-producing state in the nation — said, "I have Dick Gephardt's proxy. He votes aye." So the amendment passed 11 to 10.

Representatives from farm states less dependent on the chicken kings were furious. "It's a Perdue-Tyson poultry scam," hissed Bill Franzel of Minnesota. "They gave them a half-billion-dollar free ride," added Hal Daub of Nebraska.

Although Perdue is known as a Republican donor, he had given \$1,000 contributions to three key Democratic members of the Ways and Means Committee in the previous election. The Tyson family donated even more to committee members. And on a single day earlier that year, they gave \$30,000 to two Democratic election committees, one headed by Representative Anthony. All told, the Tyson clan gave \$168,000 to congressional candidates and political committees in the 30 months before the vote.

THE PERFECT BIRD

Tax codes and unions are not the only obstacles that have yielded to the power of Frank Perdue and the other lords of American poultry. This is not just another industry that focuses on profits and products at the expense of people. It is, more specifically, a brazen, still evolving enter-

prise that stands in two worlds — one evoking the plantation South, the other heralding space-age science.

At the heart of the industry's phenomenal growth is its never-ending quest for the perfect chicken. Each year it spends tens of millions to reduce what it calls "chicken stress." Assisted by more than three dozen poultry science research centers — most based at tax-supported agricultural colleges — poultry companies focus on creating chickens and turkeys with the most meat for the least cost in the shortest possible time.

Researchers spend years developing the ideal lighting to trick hens into laying more eggs with more uniform chicks inside. They test high-tech feed formulas and antibiotic additives that make the birds get fatter faster, without succumbing to any one of a horde of diseases. They recommend weekly temperature changes inside chicken houses to minimize stress. They experiment with genetics, the most efficient watering methods, quick killing and bleeding procedures . . . they even evaluate which "happy toys" keep the birds most entertained.

Everything is measured in seconds and fractions of pennies. With output expected to reach 5.5 billion broilers this year, an innovation or feed change that saves one-half cent per bird will increase income by \$27.5 million.

In the past 15 years alone, poultry scientists have sliced two weeks off the time it takes to grow a fryer. In 1940, a chick

Photo by Drew Wilson/Virginian-Pilot



HEADLESS CHICKENS NOW WHIZZ BY WORKERS AT 90 PER MINUTE, ALMOST TWICE THE LINE SPEED OF THE 1970s.

needed 13 weeks and 16 pounds of feed before it was ready for slaughter. Birds now reach the same market size (about four pounds) in half the time with less than half the feed.

"Today's broiler industry is recognized as one of the world's most efficient converters of feed to food," clucks a new brochure from the National Broiler Council. "Much of this success results from a

highly technical, vertically integrated industry using increasing efficient techniques in breeding, feeding, management, disease control, processing, and marketing."

"THIS WHOLE NIGHTMARE" — THE MANSLAUGHTER CHARGE AGAINST FRANK PERDUE

When Frank Perdue's company applied for a government-backed loan 14 years ago, the feds decided to take a closer look at the man himself. After all, Perdue owns nearly all the firm's stock — and, as his ad agency says, he's "the persona of the chicken business."

Everything looked fine, until the Farmer's Home Administration (FmHA) received an FBI report saying Perdue had been charged with "negligent homicide." Red flags went up, and FmHA assigned an investigator to dig deeper.

The details of the case have never been publicly released. They come from FmHA's official report and from new research by *Southern Exposure*.

On October 30, 1974, Frank Perdue collided with two cars on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, killing one of the drivers. Investigators say Perdue was speeding and apparently ignored or overlooked warning signs and red lights as he entered a lane reserved for oncoming, detoured traffic.

Perdue was charged with involuntary manslaughter, arrested, and released on a \$500 bail. According to the FmHA report, a magistrate found sufficient evidence to bring him to trial "for recklessly and negligently causing the death." A second judge upheld that decision in January 1975, but the case was dismissed on May 12, the report continues, "because it was not tried within the 180 days as required by Pennsylvania law."

How could a man facing such a serious criminal charge simply walk away without a trial, without plea bargaining or paying a fine, without anything?

According to the report, Perdue hired a Philadelphia lawyer who persuaded the district attorney (DA) in neighboring Montgomery County that the Rules of Criminal Procedure had not been properly followed and that correcting the mistake meant the trial couldn't start before the 180-day deadline expired. In the lawyer's words, "It would be a face saving procedure from the District Attorney's point of view to have the Grand Jury dismiss the case."

On May 12, the assistant DA presented Perdue's two lawyers, who waited outside the grand jury room, with the bill of indictment marked "Dismissed." The trooper who investigated the crash was not called to testify. And the grand jury was never told that, at the time of the accident, Perdue was already on probation in his home state of Maryland for repeated highway offenses, including one for "negligent" driving.

UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos



FRANK PERDUE: A MAN AND HIS BIRD.

Norman Oshtry, the attorney for the family of the deceased driver, didn't learn the DA intended to drop the case until after the fact. "I was outraged," recalls Oshtry. "There was no question about Perdue's negligence." Oshtry eventually won an out-of-court insurance settlement worth about \$250,000 for the widow and her four children.

Not satisfied with the dismissal of the criminal charge, Perdue's lawyers asked the court to destroy everything related to the case. The court obliged. Today, the Montgomery County Annex has a file folder with the name "Frank Perdue" crossed out and the word "EXPUNGED" written in large letters across its face. The file is empty. Everything is gone, including the state

trooper's accident report and the preliminary hearing record.

The two lawyers Perdue hired knew the legal terrain in Montgomery County well. One was George Corson, a former assistant district attorney for the county.

The second — the Philadelphia lawyer who headed Perdue's defense team — was Arlen Specter, the city's former district attorney, later a city council member, and now Republican U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania.

Corson recalls that "Frank Perdue was particularly anxious that the matter not hound him" and made "a business judgment" to ask the court to expunge the record. Corson said he was told "it would be better if this whole nightmare of a thing could be wiped clean."

The case was closed, but not everyone felt justice had been served. One court official who asked not to be identified expressed a particularly strong opinion. "Mr. Perdue had his tit in the wringer," the official said. "There was a lot of grease on the wheel of this one."

When Arlen Specter ran for the Senate in 1986, Perdue ponied up the maximum \$2,000 contribution allowable from individuals. He also gave \$20,000 to the National Republican Senatorial Committee between 1985 and 1987.

Perdue spokesman Steve McCauley refused to comment on the dismissed charges. "I can't imagine how a 15-year-old suit is relevant to North Carolina poultry farmers today," he said. "Your questions imply a slanted story, and the implication is rude."

The highway death 15 years ago hasn't slowed Perdue down. Since then, records show he's been convicted of speeding 16 times in Maryland alone.

Oh, yes. What about Perdue's request for a government-backed loan from the Farmer's Home Administration? The agency approved a guarantee of \$15,250,000 in March 1976. The loan financed construction of Perdue's new poultry plant in Lewiston, N.C., now his largest operation.

—B.H.

The brochure brags about “computer-assisted geneticists,” “pharmaceutical research,” and chicken “nutritionists” who “promote optimum growth, uniformity, quality and even skin color.” It marvels at the industry’s “productivity achievements with clean, modern, mechanized plants.”

But nowhere in the brochure is there mention of the people inside those factories. Indeed, the industry’s obsession with building a better bird stands in sharp contradiction to its blatant disregard for its employees. Companies bossed by white men seem oblivious to a workforce composed mostly of black women.

They worry about stress on the chickens, yet devote hardly any attention to worker disorders caused by the stress of keeping up with a production line moving at 90 birds a minute. The people who handle the birds are virtually invisible.

In truth, the 150,000 workers in poultry processing plants suffer one of the highest rates of injury and illness in American manufacturing. The rate — 18.5 per 100 employees in 1986 — is twice that of textile or tobacco workers and even higher than miners. Most of the problems result from fast assembly lines, abnormal temperatures, and rapid, repetitive hand motions. They include skin diseases, crippling hand and arm illnesses called cumulative trauma disorders, ammonia exposure, infections from toxins in the air, stress, and back problems.

Poultry productivity has outpaced all U.S. manufacturing since 1960, but the industry ranks as one of the 10 most dangerous in the country. Profits have soared, yet wages remain below the average for the food industry. People are eating record quantities of chicken as a healthy alternative to red meat, but the rate of food poisoning from contaminated birds is on the rise.

How could a business that began as a backyard hobby become such an engine of insensitivity and efficiency? The story of Frank Perdue’s meteoric rise to fame illustrates the industry’s development and its continuing obsession with the bottom line.

FROM FARM TO FACTORY

In 1920, Perdue’s father, Arthur — or “Mr. Arthur,” as he was known on the east-

ern shore of Maryland, near the Chesapeake Bay — bought 50 Leghorn chickens, built a coop, and started selling eggs to the populous Northeast. Frank was born that same year; three years later, America’s commercial chicken business officially began when a farmer a few miles further up the Delmarva peninsula sold her flock of 500 birds for slaughter.

Like a lot of peninsula farmers, Mr. Arthur soon shifted to breeding and raising chickens, but store-bought roasters were expensive — a Sunday dinner luxury — and demand remained modest until

Most of the early production was centered in the South, where marginal farming communities embraced the chicken business as a savior. Many still tie together today’s poultry belt — northwest Arkansas, the Delmarva peninsula, northern Georgia and Alabama, Rockingham County in Virginia, and western North Carolina (see map page 12).

Mr. Arthur took advantage of the growing war demand by expanding his chicken operations with the help of son Frank, who had joined the farm in 1939. But he kept breeding his own flocks and, whenever

possible, mixed his own feed rather than depend on the dozens of feed mills that had moved into the Delmarva region to service the booming broiler business. The elder Perdue’s early devotion to genetic tinkering and diet manipulation represented the germ of integrated production — and economic independence — that his son and the rest of the industry would soon emulate.

“He was very frugal,” Frank recalls. “He believed, ‘If I don’t owe money, I won’t go broke.’ He provided a solid foundation on which I could build.”

Frank became president of Perdue Farms in 1950, and in 1958 took a leap forward on the road to “vertical integration” by building the company’s first feed mill. In case after case — from Tyson to Holly Farms to big grain

operators like Cargill and ConAgra — the feed mill became the magnet that attracted farmers and their flocks, and eventually controlled their markets.

Using his mill, Perdue could supply farmers in the region with specially designed feed to grow his breed of broilers. “That was kind of a red-letter day that helped us grow,” Perdue says. “Farmers in this area saw we had confidence in this industry and began to grow for us.”

The post-war years saw fierce competition and a series of booms and busts for the broiler industry. Hundreds of financially shaky family-owned mills, breeding houses, and processors collapsed or merged. By 1967, Perdue Farms’ network of contract farmers and company-owned hatcheries made it the largest supplier of live chickens in the nation. Each week its flocks would be auctioned to nearby

SEEING IS BELIEVING

The poultry industry invests millions each year to keep its chickens happy. “Birds should be free from pain, from fear, from distress, and from long-term discomfort,” reports *World’s Poultry Science Journal*. “They should not be exposed to long periods of boredom.”

To help relax hen-pecked birds, a company called Animalens, Inc. is now marketing the latest in poultry fashion: contact lenses for chickens. The company claims the red-tinted lenses “lower social stress” among chickens, making them easier to handle and “enhancing their productivity.”

“The lenses are easily applied and require no special technical skills,” says a company brochure. “While holding the chicken’s head still, the thumb is used to pull the lower eyelid down. There is a large pocket below the eye into which the lens is laid. The lens is then pushed up and into place under the upper eyelid.”

How long does all this take? “An experienced laborer should be able to install two lenses in approximately 6 to 8 seconds,” the brochure says. “When catching and stuffing chickens into the cages is taken into account, the productivity rate for installing lenses is comparable to that of debeaking.”

Contacts can be ordered for 20 cents a pair from Animalens, One Hollis Street, Wellesley, MA 02181. Minimum order: 5,000.

Robert Amberg



ANIMALENS’ DISPLAY AT THE 1989 INTERNATIONAL POULTRY TRADE SHOW IN ATLANTA.

World War II. Uncle Sam’s huge appetite for a cheap source of protein changed everything. With government-backed research and subsidized growing and slaughter houses, broilers joined a host of other consumer products (from frozen orange juice to margarine) that owe their development to the war.

slaughterhouses like Armour and Swift, where the birds would be killed and shipped up the East Coast.

"I really didn't want the problems of running a processing plant," Perdue recalls. "Finally, we were forced to get into poultry processing in 1968 because we got too many birds and not enough processors."

By year's end, the company was processing 80,000 chickens a day at its first plant and selling 400,000 at auction. "There was more money in processing," says Perdue, "so eventually we added a night shift and were killing 800,000 a week."

HAWKING CHICKENS

In the months before he opened his first processing plant, Perdue began courting grocery store chains and distributors along the East Coast. But his marketing approach differed radically from other suppliers. Instead of treating chicken like apples or beef, which lack brand identity, Perdue promoted his products with his own label. He began with \$50,000 of radio advertising. By 1971, when he opened his second processing

plant (the one in Accomac, Virginia, which was twice the size of his first), Perdue's face was beaming out from television in New York and environs.

He started in New York, he says, because "New York consumers are very willing to pay more for a quality product" and "it was an efficient advertising place." When he learned that Maine growers got a few more cents in New England because their birds' skin had a yellow hue, he added marigold petals and corn gluten to his flocks' diets, then pitched them as more tender and well-fed than his competitors.

"We thought, 'Well, if we can emulate them in producing a yellower chicken, we can get a three-cent premium.' So we started doing that," Perdue remembers.

With his distinctive ads and yellow fryers, Perdue pursued one market after another: New York in '69, Philadelphia in '72, Boston and Providence in '73, Baltimore in '76. Each involved personal visits to distributors and store chains, as well as promotional campaigns that put him up against Cargill's Pearl Bailey in New

York and the popular Buddy Boy brand in what became known in the press as "the Battle of Boston." Perdue soon dominated markets in the Northeast. Sales rose from \$58 million in 1971 to \$500 million in 1983, and his advertising budget increased thirtyfold.

Perdue had succeeded by following the marketing maxim expressed succinctly by his competitor Don Tyson, chairman of Tyson Foods: "Segment, concentrate, dominate." Find your niche and devote your resources to driving out the other suppliers.

"Frank knows the territory, and he fights like hell to keep it," says Ed McCabe, who handled Perdue's advertising account

for years. But competitors say Perdue Farms sometimes fights too hard. The U.S. Justice Department has repeatedly accused the company of threatening to cut off distributors who handle other branded poultry — and of carrying out the threats. Ironically, when Perdue threatened to challenge Justice's jurisdiction on the issue before the U.S. Supreme Court, the department dropped its charges.

McNUGGETS MANIA

Perdue's move to promote brand loyalty spurred a broader revolution in the industry. Before the 1960s, nearly all birds were shipped whole from the slaughterhouse to the grocery store, where butchers cut them up or packaged them whole, sometimes with the store label. Today, poultry giants like Perdue have replaced the neighborhood butcher with huge processing units attached to their slaughterhouses.

Cutting and pre-packaging the birds takes more money, but it yields higher profits. The more processed the bird, the less work the consumer and grocery store have to do, and the higher the profit margin for the company. "It takes a substantial capital expenditure, but the margins are good — damn good," says John McMillan, an analyst with Prudential-Bache.

Today, poultry firms are reaping even higher profits from poultry that is "further processed" into chicken hot dogs, deboned breasts, patties, and other products. In 1980, companies turned one in 10 chickens into processed products. With the dawn of Chicken McNuggets, the number leaped to more than one in three.

Don Tyson is king of the McNuggets market. While Perdue and Holly Farms continued to concentrate on supermarket sales, Tyson Foods went after the expanding, highly profitable fast-food and restaurant market, which now accounts for 40 percent of all poultry sales. Tyson is the chief supplier of McNuggets, and observers say his persistent attempt to buy Holly Farms flows from his need for more birds to satisfy — and dominate — the market for processed chickens.

The change in marketing and consumer tastes has come rapidly. Today, only one in eight birds remains whole when it leaves the processor, down from one in two in 1980. Don Tyson says over 80 percent of his company's profits come from products it didn't produce seven years ago.

"A long time ago, we worked to speed up the processing line so we could produce chickens with less labor," he told *Broiler*

THE BIG BIRDS

More than a third of the chickens Americans eat come from four companies (Perdue is number five). Ranked by birds sold, the big four are:

1. Tyson Food. Family and corporate head Don Tyson likes to take a week off each month to fight deep-sea marlin. He's now trying to hook Holly Farms, continuing a pattern of acquisitions that has given the company amazing growth — 23 percent per year since 1980. Sales hit \$1.9 billion last year from processing 14 million broilers a week. Like Frank Perdue, Tyson took over the business from father, and *Forbes* says the Arkansas chicken king is now worth \$330 million.

2. ConAgra. This Omaha-based grain and food conglomerate makes everything from peanut butter to pet collars. Total sales: \$10 billion. Two divisions process 10 million chickens a week for marketing through the Banquet Frozen Foods, Country Skillet, and Country Pride labels. It has poultry processing plants in eight states, the largest in Arkansas.

3. Gold Kist. Headquartered in Atlanta, Gold Kist was organized as a farmers cooperative during the Depression, but today is criticized for cutting off chicken farmers in the name of efficiency. The company markets fertilizers, seed, eggs, pecans, grains, and pork — but its most profitable product is the chicken. All together, its eight-state empire processed nine million broilers a week last year, many under the name Golden Poultry. Sales jumped 30 percent to \$781 million.

4. Holly Farms. The parent company is located in Memphis, reflecting its Mississippi grain barge heritage, but the poultry division calls Wilkesboro, North Carolina home. The corporation changed its name from The Federal Co. in 1987, a signal that its other food business pales in comparison to earnings from the seven million broilers it sells every week. Three-fourths of its chicken output goes to retail stores, which gives Holly the biggest share of that market. —B.H.

Industry magazine. The emphasis now is to have what he calls "price courage — to make a product the customer needs at a price you can make a profit on."

EXPAND AND POLLUTE

Making a profit isn't always easy, even for poultry giants like Tyson and Perdue. Both have withstood bad publicity about processing plants infested with maggots and roaches. Both have endured their tussles with organized labor. And, like a lot of other processors, both companies have run into trouble for their massive discharge of wastewater.

The industry uses an average of 5.5 gallons of water for every bird processed, making it the largest consumer — and potential polluter — in many rural communities. In northwest Arkansas, where the city of Green Forest built a huge facility to treat waste from a nearby Tyson plant, citizens are suing the company for polluting streams and contaminating well water. In north Georgia, citizens successfully sued several poultry firms as public nuisances — only to have pro-industry legislators exempt the companies from nuisance ordinances. And in Virginia, Perdue has been cited and fined repeatedly for fouling a stream near its Accomac plant.

Industry magazines now occasionally discuss effective waste management, but by all accounts nothing has overshadowed Perdue and his cohorts' biggest worry: how to keep up with America's love affair with chicken. For a decade, the future for chicken kings has looked bright, limited only by their ability to hold on to their established markets while slowly moving into new territory.

"There's no end in sight in the demand for chicken," crows Perdue. "When we have more demand than we can supply, what do we do? Fulfill the demand!"

To meet this challenge, Perdue and other large firms have followed a simple pattern: expand production by buying up existing companies, build new processing plants, and contract with more farmers to grow chickens faster and cheaper. The number of farms raising 100,000 or more birds a year has leaped from 2,254 in 1959 to 13,214 in 1982 — and three-fourths of that increase has occurred in the South.

For Perdue, expansion meant moving into North Carolina in 1976, opening a

giant facility in the state's northeastern black belt, buying a competitor's smaller plant, and convincing farmers to invest in chicken houses. The company also bought out two turkey processors so it could market gobblers under its brand, and opened a high-tech research facility to test ways to shorten a bird's lifecycle with genetic engineering and chemical additives.

In addition to buyouts and biological speed-ups, leaders like Perdue have expanded production by mechanizing parts of their processing plants and increasing the line speed. Workers who handled 50 chickens a minute in the 1970s now find themselves processing as many as 90 a minute.

For the industry, this human speed-up

sion on the Delmarva peninsula. He renovated the factories to the new line speeds, and reopened them as non-union plants. Workers complained about sore hands and not having enough time even to go to the bathroom. But they had lost the union grievance system to challenge the new work rules and arbitrary enforcement.

"He's out to destroy the union," said UFCW staffer Jerry Gordon, noting that the number of union members on the peninsula had declined by half from the early 1970s. "We had to take him on."

Perdue won the fight — even without help from the Mafia — and he defended his anti-union policy by pointing out that he paid his employees 29 cents more per hour than his unionized competitors. At the same time, *Forbes* and *Fortune* estimated

Perdue's personal wealth between \$200 million and \$500 million.

In many industries, increased productivity has provided workers with a higher standard of living. But sharing the profits from the booming chicken business has been one of the last things on the poultry kings' agenda. In 1960, workers received 2.6 cents of the 43 cents a pound that chickens fetched at the store. Twenty years later, they got only 3.3 cents — but chicken prices rose to 72 cents a pound. Their wages still lag behind the rest of the food industry, even though their productivity has skyrocketed and their per-worker contribution to profits keeps soaring — it climbed another 33 percent between 1981 and 1985.

With its gushing flow of profits, one wonders why the industry doesn't have the "courage" — to use Don Tyson's word — to slow down its processing lines, treat workers with respect, give their contract growers a measure

of security, and still produce a product people are happy to eat?

Must Frank Perdue and the 47 other chicken kings treat the world as a competitive jungle forever?

"Perdue showed everybody how to really market chickens," says Tex Walker, an organizer with UFCW during its unsuccessful campaign in Accomac. "Now somebody needs to show him how to treat people like human beings." □

Bob Hall is research director of the Institute for Southern Studies.

Photo by UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos



CHICKEN PARTS ARE BREADED AND FROZEN FOR BANQUET FOODS.

has given well-financed companies greater control over less-efficient processors. As the weak have been absorbed by the strong, consolidation has also picked up speed. The eight biggest poultry firms now control 55 percent of all broiler sales, up from 18 percent in 1960.

For workers inside the plants, however, speed-ups mean less control; they literally become mere appendages to the machines, performing one or two discrete motions over and over. They are also finding it harder to bargain for better shop-floor conditions. In the late 1970s, for example, Perdue bought four unionized processing plants as part of its expan-

From Egg to Table

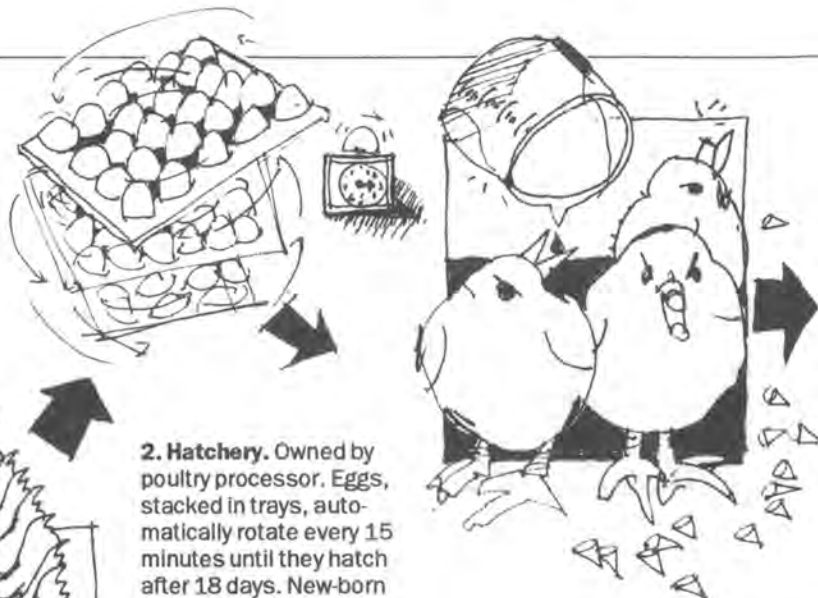
Illustrations by Jacob Roquet

Poultry companies go to great lengths to keep the public from seeing exactly how chickens are raised, slaughtered, and packaged. Here's a look at what happens.

1. Breeder House. Genetically selected chickens (1 rooster per 10 hens) produce fertilized eggs in totally controlled environment. Some even wear contact lenses.



2. Hatchery. Owned by poultry processor. Eggs, stacked in trays, automatically rotate every 15 minutes until they hatch after 18 days. New-born chicks are pumped with antibiotics and de-beaked.



9. Pinners and Draw Hands. Workers cut off the oil sac, slice down from the "butt hole," and use their fingers or a tool to pull out the intestines, squeezing the guts to leave the fat inside. **Inspectors** then "blue tag" contaminated birds, some of which go to a salvage line to be rinsed with chlorinated water and further processed for sale.



8. Mirror Trimmers. Federal inspectors use mirrors to glance at exterior of 72 to 90 carcasses a minute and instruct workers to trim tumors and diseased skin. Discarded meat is placed in contaminated can and recorded.

7. Feet Cutting and Rehanging. Feet are automatically removed, later mixed with blood and feathers, and turned into chicken feed. Carcass carried by conveyor belt to another line, where women rehang them on shackles and remove remaining feathers by hand.

10. Heart and Liver Cutters use scissors to cut off parts for further processing. **Craw Pullers and Long Gunners** remove windpipe and use their hands or a mechanical suction gun to suck out the lungs.

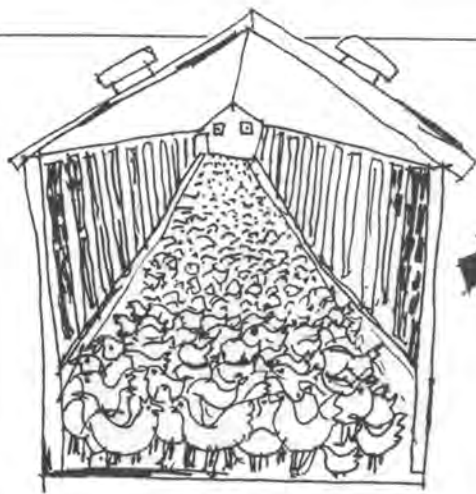


11. Quality Inspectors. Company employees randomly examine carcasses for color and consumer appeal. Birds — still hot from the scalding tanks — are dumped into chillers for 45 to 60 minutes.

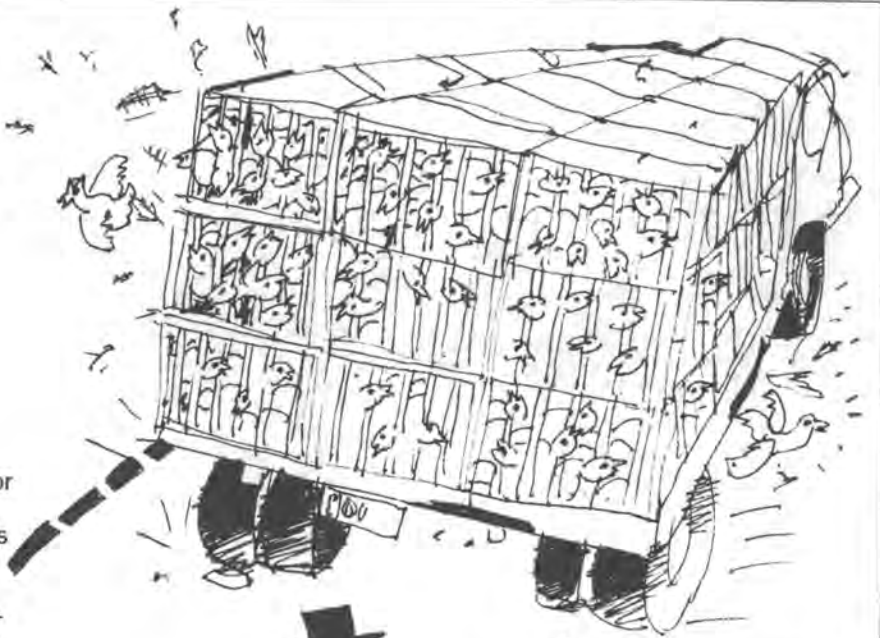


12. Cut-Up and Deboning. Workers grade and package birds whole, use saws and knives to cut up choice parts, or remove bones to make Chicken McNuggets and other lucrative products.



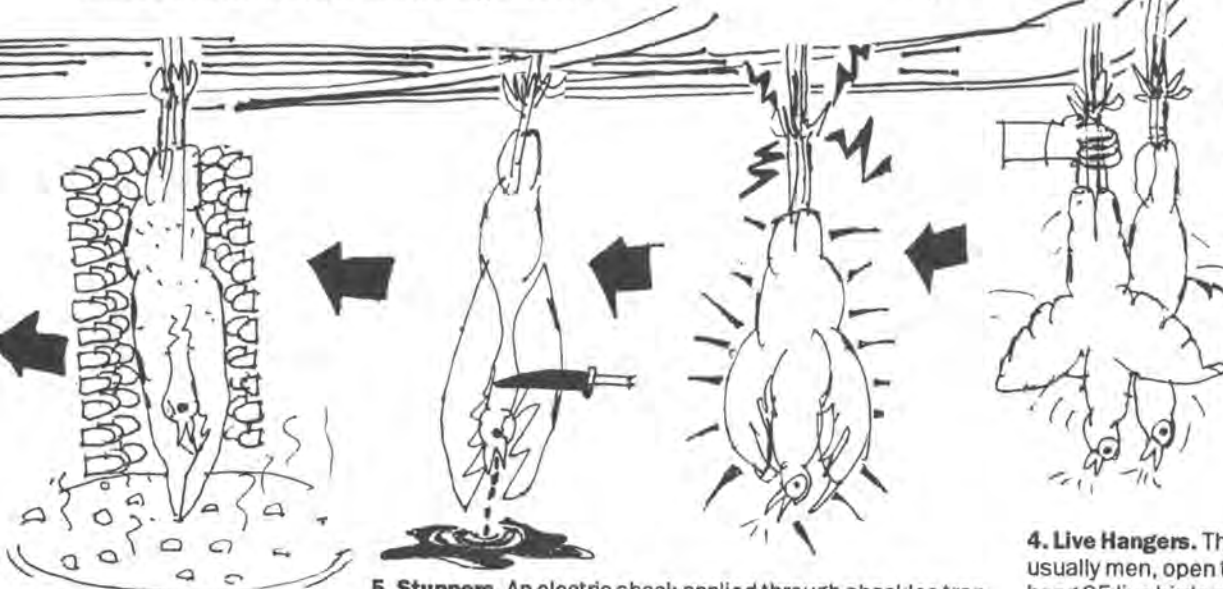


3. Growout House. Owned by farmer, but processor supplies chicks, feed, and rigid instructions on proper temperature, ventilation, and food additives to minimize "chicken stress." Typical house — twice as long as a football field — raises 26,000 birds in 42 days. Chicken catchers hired by processors then arrive to catch, crate, and stack them on flatbed trucks for "live haul" to the slaughterhouse.



PROCESSING PLANT

There are 238 poultry plants in the nation, three-fourths of them in the South. Almost all chickens go to large plants where more than 500 workers perform dozens of highly specialized tasks. The work ranks among the most dangerous of all industries.

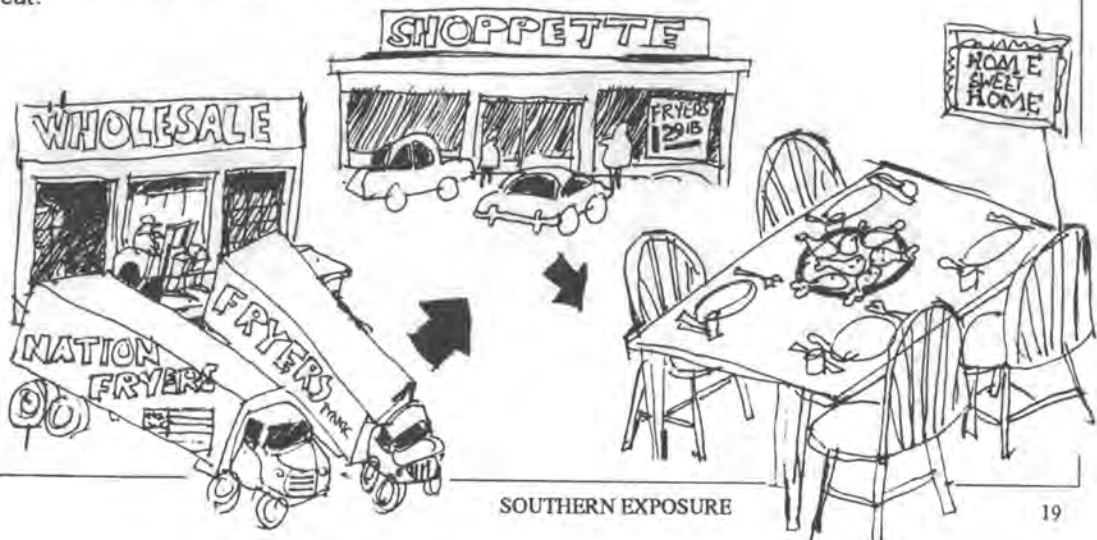


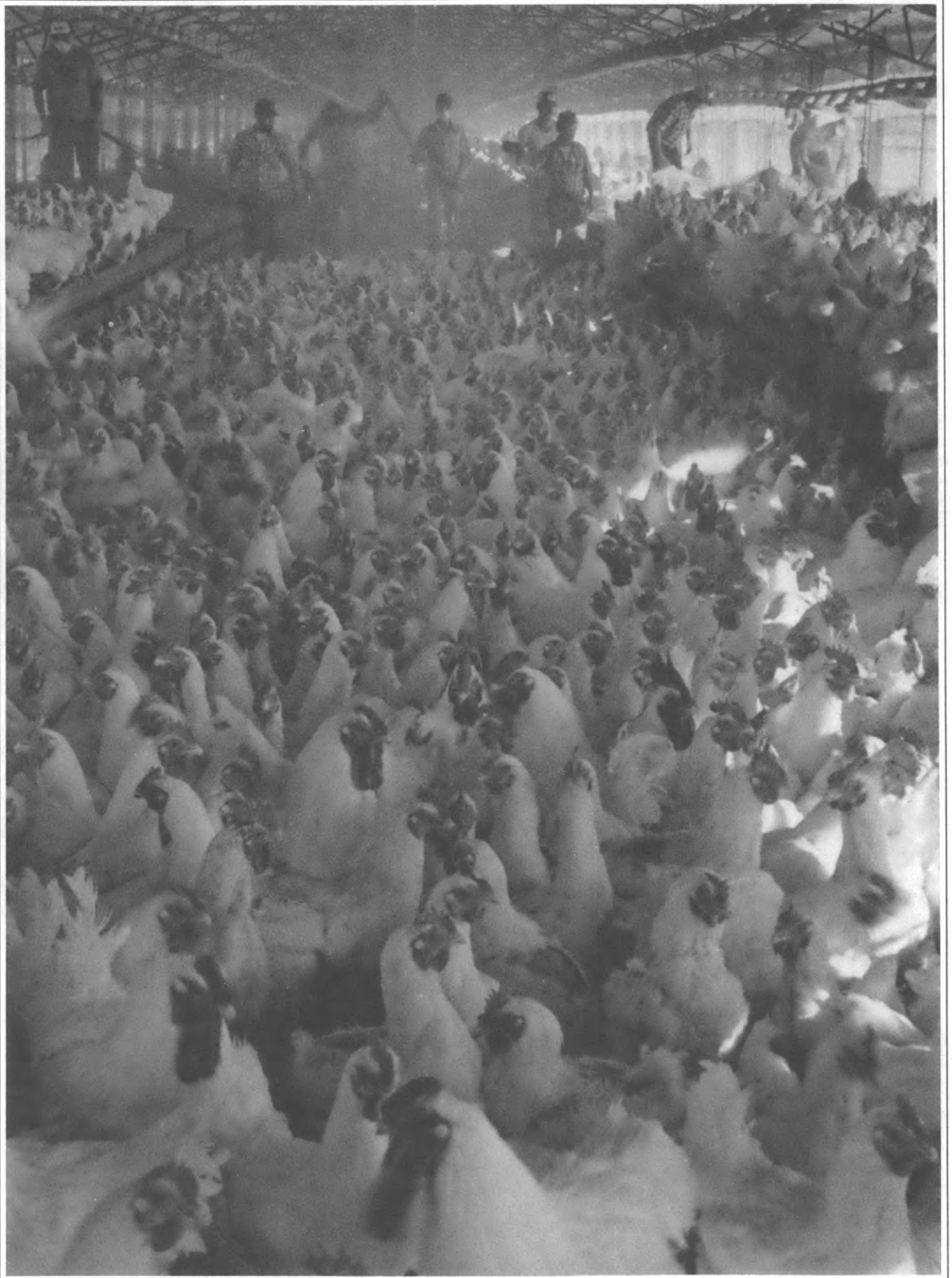
4. Live Hangers. The first workers, usually men, open the crates and hang 25 live birds per minute on hooks known as shackles.

5. Stunners. An electric shock applied through shackles tranquilizes the bird, and a machine cuts its throat and drains blood for two minutes. The process is designed to be quick and bloody, to keep bird from tensing up and toughening its meat.

6. Scalding Tanks. Carcass passes through a hot-water tank; "rubber fingers" remove feathers. The heat helps keep meat tender. As bird emerges, a flame singes its body hair.

13. Bon Appetit. Company ships finished product to restaurants and supermarkets. Time elapsed from egg to table: nine weeks. The industry processes 110 million chickens each week. Federal inspectors estimate that 40 million of those birds are contaminated with salmonella.







Don't Count Your Chickens

Poultry companies promise farmers good money — but some growers wind up with big debts and empty barns.

By Barry Yeoman

Thelma and J.C. Ross couldn't resist the promise of full-time pay for part-time work.

A decent living is hard to come by in Oak City, North Carolina, located two hours east of Raleigh in a rural county plagued by poverty and unemployment. So when Perdue Farms began looking for farmers to grow their chickens in the mid-1970s — and promising good money for a two-hour-a-day job — the Rosses jumped at the chance.

Every few weeks, they were told, they would receive a shipment of three-week-old chickens to raise until the birds were ready for slaughter. The Rosses would pay for the construction of two large chicken houses, as well as all the equipment necessary for poultry farming. Perdue would provide the birds and feed. The couple would be paid at a rate set by Perdue.

"They said, 'This is a joint venture; we're supposed to work together,'" J.C. recalls. More importantly, the Perdue rep promised J.C. that he could raise the chickens without hiring any labor. "I must have asked him that 100 times. Because I

didn't want houses if I had to hire labor."

Convinced they were getting a good deal, the Rosses took out loans from two federal agencies to build their first two chicken houses. For the first year, all went according to plan.

But the Rosses kept hearing rumors that Perdue would stop delivering three-week-old chickens to the farmers, and substitute newborn chicks. Newborns require full-time supervision and are more vulnerable to heat, cold and rain. "We heard it through the grapevine, but they denied it every time we asked," Thelma says.

Then one day, the word came down that the rumor was true. J.C. told a Perdue rep that he couldn't afford to grow newborns. "His response was, 'You would get day-old or you would get nothing,'" J.C. says.

"You've got that loan out from the Federal Land Bank. What are you going to do?" asks Thelma. So she quit her job working the midnight shift at the Carolina Enterprises toy factory, where she had worked for 17 years, to devote all her time to chicken growing. They hired labor, and refitted their chicken houses for newborns.

They rented out their tobacco farm because they no longer had time to tend it. To justify the cost of hiring labor, they went further into debt to buy a third chicken house.

"We had to foot all that bill. Perdue didn't foot one bit," says Thelma.

Thirteen years later, Perdue officials say they don't remember any situation like that ever occurring. Meanwhile, Thelma and J.C. Ross still farm chickens for Perdue — and earn just about minimum wage, they figure. J.C. is now 70, and he plows his monthly Social Security check right back into the poultry operation. They're still in debt, and 55-year-old Thelma says, "I won't live long enough to pay it off."

The Rosses say the promise of working together with Perdue in a "joint venture" never materialized. "If you don't do what Perdue says, you don't get chickens," Thelma says. "Perdue doesn't want you to tell them anything. They give the orders."

If she had known 13 years ago what it would be like to grow for Perdue, Thelma

adds, "I'd have worked at Carolina Enterprises till I got too old that I couldn't see."

"SERF ON YOUR OWN LAND"

It used to be that North Carolina agriculture was synonymous with tobacco. But over the past five years, tobacco has taken a back seat to poultry in the Old North State.

In 1987 North Carolina grew \$582 million worth of broiler chickens and \$312 million worth of turkey. And the state is not alone among its neighbors: The top six broiler-producing states are all in the South — Arkansas, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Texas. Together they accounted for 3.5 billion of the 5.2 billion broilers grown last year. And those numbers are growing as America forswears red meat.

"The consumers' spending habits have changed," says Kim Decker, poultry marketing specialist for the N.C. Department of Agriculture. "They've tended to go to healthier foods, and most of the time poultry is a reasonably good buy."

In North Carolina, 4,200 farmers — more than a fifth of all poultry growers in the South — raise chickens and turkeys. But these are not the independent farmers one associates with tobacco and other agricultural products. Rather, 99 percent of all broilers and 90 percent of all turkeys are grown by farmers under contracts with large poultry corporations.

The companies — Perdue, Holly Farms, Golden Poultry, Tyson, and a few others — provide the chickens, feed, and medication. The farmers provide the houses, which can run upwards of \$100,000 apiece, as well as equipment, labor, and utilities. At slaughter time, the company sends its trucks to the farm to pick up the birds; it pays the farmer based on the number and weight of the chickens, their survival rate, and the amount of feed used.

The poultry industry says this arrangement, called "contract farming," benefits

both the companies and the farmers. "We can assure our customers of a steady flow of the products they want," says Paul Brower, vice president for communications at the Atlanta-based Golden Poultry Co. "And the farmer has a ready market for his product. He is not, then, assuming any market risk."

Some farmers agree. "I'd rather do it than anything I've ever done," says John Tucker of Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, who was forced by lung cancer to retire after 25 years in the business. The work wasn't hard, he says, and he made "good money."

But others paint a far different picture.

equipment) and when to use it. It tells them how many chickens will be delivered, how often, and on what days. Growers are expected to be on call anytime the company wants to deliver or pick up a batch of chickens.

And the growers have no say over how much money they'll get for growing chickens. The company makes an offer — and doesn't negotiate.

"You don't have any bargaining power," Clouse says. "Our choice is to take it or leave it, and that's no choice because we can't leave it. We have a mortgage payment due in six months."

"The farmer pretty much works like a wage-earning worker," says Betty Bailey, an RAF project director. But unlike wage employees, poultry growers can't change jobs because they have often mortgaged their homes and land to borrow tens of thousands of dollars. And unlike wage employees, they don't receive workers' compensation, retirement benefits, health insurance, or paid vacations.

"If I was working for Hardee's, Christ, they'd pay you if you hurt yourself," says David Mayer, an Oak City grower.

"And on the day you retire, [poultry companies] tell you, 'Adios, amigo. You're an independent contractor. You take care of your own self.'"

WORKING FOR CHICKEN FEED

Golden Poultry's Paul Brower describes the

payoff from chicken farming as "a comfortable income. Usually the broiler growers in any community are going to be the best paid in the community."

But according to RAF, that rhetoric exceeds the reality. The organization cites 1984 state figures showing that the average broiler grower could expect to earn \$1,409 per house per year before taxes. Some poultry farmers — like those growing breeder hens — could actually expect to lose money, according to the same report.

"The companies would have you believe you're making a good income," says



Photo by Robert Amberg

THE TYPICAL GROWOUT HOUSE TURNS 26,000 THREE-DAY-OLD CHICKS INTO FOUR-POUND BROILERS IN 42 DAYS.

They say the poultry growers — by entering into a relationship with large corporations — lose all control over their farms. "You are like a serf on your own land," says Mary Clouse, a grower who also works for the Rural Advancement Fund (RAF), an advocacy group for small farmers based in Pittsboro, North Carolina.

Growers have no say over the quality of the chickens or the feed they receive. If they get a flock of sick birds or poor-quality feed, they must absorb the cost. The company tells them what type of equipment to buy (including experimental

David Mayer, who grows for Perdue. "But after you pay your real expenses — pay your note at the bank, pay the utility bill — I would say that you probably, per house, get \$2,000 a year income." At that rate, a farmer working 40 hours a week to tend three chicken houses would average \$2.88 an hour — well below the federal minimum wage.

"What really adds insult to injury," Mayer adds, "is when the state officials talk about, 'Man, oh man, the prosperity of the chicken farmers is unbelievable.'"

Perdue doesn't dispute Mayer's \$2,000 figure. But Larry Winslow, the company's vice president for fresh poultry, calls the number "misleading" because it's a minimum, and it doesn't include the equity the growers build in their chicken houses. "We've got over 1,000 people in North Carolina that are doing it, and that number continues to grow," he says. "At least a large portion of them consider it a good business investment."

BUNCH TO BUNCH

Perhaps what most frightens poultry growers is the complete lack of security contract farming offers. Almost all growers have "bunch to bunch" contracts: There's never a guarantee that the grower will receive more than one more flock of chickens. For a farmer with a 15-year mortgage on a pair of \$90,000 chicken houses, the prospect of being cut off can be terrifying.

So terrifying, in fact, that many growers are afraid to complain when they feel they've been mistreated, for fear they'll lose their contracts. "If you want to keep chickens, you keep your mouth shut," says one farmer who claims he was cut off for complaining too much. "That's what we learned to do."

The poultry industry says that even without long-term contracts, competent growers can expect long-term relationships with their companies. "If they perform up to or exceeding our standards, they will get another flock," says Golden Poultry's Paul Brower. "If, after working with them, we find their production does

not meet our standards, then after a period of time — if they refuse to upgrade their facilities and management techniques — we don't provide flocks to them any longer."

Many farmers say the industry is far more arbitrary than that. "The poultry companies will move into an area, they'll get a whole lot of farmers involved," says Betty Bailey of RAF. "As those houses get older, it's not uncommon for them to go after new growers and abandon the older growers. The farmers are not making enough money to keep their houses upgraded."

Larry Winslow, the Perdue vice president, says the company only drops older

stay home while her husband sells trailer hitches on the road. And she talks about the chickens as more than a crop: "Maybe it's the mother's instinct in me: I like to see my birds tucked in at night. I sing 'Happy Birthday' to them once a week because they only live for seven weeks. I sing lullabies to them at night."

Some day, Mis expects chicken farming to earn her a good profit, allowing her to travel with her husband after he retires. But "so far, everything we've made on the chickens has gone back into the farm."

And she has received no assurance that her aging chicken houses, on which she's spent thousands of dollars in improvements, will still be acceptable after she begins making money.

"The trend is, with all companies, toward new houses," she says. "The mental pressure of 'are we going to get another flock?' is enormous."

NO MORE CHICKENS

In 1968, Richard Yearick sold his three car dealerships and moved his family back to Sturgills, North Carolina, across the road from the log cabin in which he was raised. In that mountain community, just a half-mile from the Virginia state line, "about the only profitable thing was poultry."

So Yearick approached Holly Farms to talk about growing chickens on his 150-acre farm. He says the poultry giant made him a promise: "They would

continue raising chickens in this section as long as we raised the chickens to their expectations." With that vow in mind, Yearick invested \$175,000 to build two chicken houses and buy equipment. He later built five more houses.

Now, five times a year a company truck pulls up to Yearick's farm carrying more than 150,000 day-old chicks. For seven weeks Yearick raises the birds — until a platoon of trucks comes to carry them off to the slaughter. His 31-year-old son Rick dropped out of a business degree program at nearby Wilkes Community



CHICKEN CATCHERS PACK BIRDS FOR SLAUGHTER. FARMERS HAVE NO GUARANTEE THEY'LL GET A NEW FLOCK OF CHICKS FROM PROCESSORS.

growers who can't compete. "If you have a house out there, and it's 13, 14, 15 years old, and you haven't done anything in terms of updating the house, if you've skimped on your maintenance, you can reach a point where you can't be competitive."

Even some farmers who spend thousands on repairs and new equipment fear being dropped. Sandy Mis, for example, has only praise for Golden Poultry, the company with which she contracts to grow chickens in Goldston, North Carolina. She loves the work; it allows her to

Photo by Robert Amberg

College to work alongside him, hoping to take over the farm when Yearick retires.

Yearick says Holly Farms has treated him well over the years. Compared to other companies, he says, Holly Farms pays well and gives its growers periodic bonuses and raises. "A very excellent relationship," he says.

So excellent, in fact, that Yearick didn't worry too much last summer when the company ordered him to install "foggers": high-pressure sprinklers that spray a fine mist when the chicken houses reach 90 degrees.

Yearick thought the foggers were unnecessary; the North Carolina mountains rarely suffer 90-degree heat, even on the August days when flatlanders swelter. But according to Yearick, the company said, "Install it or you don't grow chickens." So Yearick spent \$8,000 on the foggers. He also spent another \$12,000 on a new system to carry feed from the storage tanks to the chickens.

Then, just weeks after he invested \$20,000, Yearick received the news: Holly Farms was cutting him off. He and 55 of his neighbors would continue to get baby chicks until September 1, 1989 — but then there would be no more.

Holly Farms says it could no longer afford to send its trucks across the winding mountain roads of northwestern North Carolina. "Companies like Holly Farms occasionally have to streamline operations to help us remain competitive," says company spokesperson Ron Field. "We were reluctant to make this move, which we think was a prudent business decision."

Field says Holly Farms tried to help the growers by giving them more than a year's notice before the actual cut-off. "I'm sure the company never intended to say it could go on forever," he adds.

Yearick feels Holly Farms doesn't understand the effects of its "prudent business decision." Before they received the cut-off notices, he says, a group of growers approached Holly Farms to make

sure they would continue to get chickens after they invested in repairs and new equipment. "Holly Farms told them, 'Go ahead,'" he says. "Some of the people, they mortgaged their homes to do their repair work."

"There are people that's going to lose everything they own by ill advice from Holly Farms," he says.

Yearick says he's lucky. Though chickens account for 80 percent of his gross income, he also has investments in cable television and real estate. And he's raising 200 or 300 head of cattle, as well as white pine for timber.

Some of his neighbors aren't so lucky.

all to look forward to." He looks down, and spits tobacco on the soil of the farm that was his childhood home. "We put it in the good Lord's hands and hope he'll take care of us."

HOME ON THE RANGE

Losing their chickens has united Brown and the other 55 farmers cut off by Holly Farms. The Mountain Growers Association is exploring the possibility of refitting chicken houses for turkey production, but "to this date it hasn't worked out," says Yearick, the group's leader. Even if it does, turkey farming would still probably mean contracting with a company.

In the state's Piedmont region, other farmers are looking at real alternatives to contract farming. The Rural Advancement Fund and others are studying the feasibility of growing "range poultry": chickens and turkeys raised in the sun and fresh air without hormones or antibiotics. Currently, health-conscious chicken eaters have to import frozen range birds from California.

The study, funded by the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, will survey consumers, restaurants, supermarkets, and other potential buyers. RAF will also analyze how much it will cost farmers to raise range birds.

"This would be returning to a healthier product — the kind of thing people need to be willing to pay a little more money than they pay for the mass-produced

product," says RAF's Betty Bailey. "It would model a real living alternative and improve quality of food and quality of life for both farmers and consumers."

"It could return farmers back to being their own boss, to being the innovative, constructive farm operators they have been in the past, to being able to live in dignity and with a decent income themselves." □

Barry Yeoman is associate editor of The Independent, a weekly newspaper in Durham, North Carolina. This article is a joint project between The Independent and Southern Exposure.

Photo by Robert Amberg



RICHARD YEARICK IN FRONT OF HIS CHICKEN HOUSES: "THERE ARE PEOPLE THAT'S GOING TO LOSE EVERYTHING THEY OWN BY ILL ADVICE FROM HOLLY FARMS."

Across the county, in the community of Fleetwood, Joe Brown has been growing chickens and cattle since he left Appalachian State University in 1963. Without chickens, he's going to have to find another job — but he doesn't think anyone will hire him.

"I've never done anything but mess with chickens and cattle," he says. "There's no industry around here that's looking for a chicken shit sprayer." Brown's cattle won't provide enough money for his survival.

"It's really looking blue," he continues. "We ain't got nothing encouraging at



Inside the Slaughterhouse

Working at a breakneck pace in one of the most dangerous of all industries leaves many poultry workers crippled for life.

By Barbara Goldoftas

At midafternoon, more than 100 workers wearing white boots, smocks, and hair nets enter the windowless brick building at the corner of Williams and Roger streets in Buena Vista, Georgia. Others relax on picnic tables or pass the guard house in groups, joking and jostling. Most are young women. Almost all are black.

This is the shift change at a poultry slaughterhouse. For eight hours or more, the women will work at a furious pace to transform tens of thousands of chickens into chilled, packaged meat. Although the plant wall proclaims, "Cargill: Committed to Quality and Safety," the jobs are hard and tiring, and rank among the riskiest in all industries. The only hints of this at Cargill are the terrycloth wrist supports many workers wear, the "No Trespassing" signs, and the fence topped with barbed wire that rings the processing plant.

In many rural towns like Buena Vista, where factory jobs are scarce, people consider themselves lucky to get work in a chicken plant. Unlike a tobacco field, the



plant has a roof, and the work is steadier than seasonal farm labor. Hourly earnings for the 550 Cargill employees range from \$5.10 to \$5.60—the highest wages in the area and far better than the minimum wage paid by fast-food joints or convenience stores.

But the money earned in poultry plants—about \$40 a day—comes at a high price. According to poultry workers interviewed in six Southern states, conditions inside the processing plants are grueling. Workers stand in temperatures that range from freezing to 95 degrees, sometimes crowded so close together that the bloody

water dripping from co-workers' moving hands splashes in their eyes. Supervisors, few in number and primarily white men, reportedly trade promotions for sexual favors. They yell at workers, treat them "like children or step-children," intimidate them. Many call their jobs "slavery."

Work rules in some plants are so rigid that employees forbidden to take a break have urinated, vomited, and even miscarried while standing on the assembly line.

They get eye infections, skin rashes, warts, and cuts. Worse yet, the speed and repetition of the jobs can injure their shoulders and cripple their hands, leaving them permanently disabled.

"Work in poultry plants by every stretch of the imagination is horrible," says Artemis, a white poultry worker from northern Arkansas. "It's stressful, demanding, noisy, dirty. You're around slimy dead bodies all the time. And it's very dangerous."

Yet many workers are afraid to speak up, fearing they'll be reprimanded or fired. "People are so afraid," says Robert

Ruth, a black man who worked at the Whitworth Feed Mill in Greenville, South Carolina. "The supervisors talk to the women like they're dogs. They'll stand there and cry. I'd try to tell them there was something they could do, but they wouldn't challenge the supervisors."

A COLD SHOULDER

Outside a typical poultry plant, tens of thousands of chickens sit in trucks, cooled by a wall of fans so the heat won't kill them prematurely. One by one, they are hung by the feet on a moving line of hooks called shackles and mechanically stunned, decapitated, and scalded to remove their feathers. In a matter of seconds, workers pick off stray feathers, slice the birds open, and scoop out the guts. They then cut the broilers into parts, package them whole, or direct them to a "deboning" line where other workers strip the meat from the bones.

Poultry processing has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade. In the early 1980s, giant poultry firms like ConAgra, Tyson Foods, Holly Farms, and Perdue bought up smaller plants, installing expensive automated equipment to kill and defeather the birds. They also added the deboning lines to make new lucrative products — filleted breasts, poultry patties, fast-food chicken nuggets. Between 1975 and 1985, production soared and hourly output per worker increased by 43 percent.

As public demand for chicken has increased, work inside the plants has become faster and more simplified. Job titles sound borrowed from Doctor Seuss: gut drawers, liver pullers, gizzard cutters, skin rollers, thigh bone poppers, lung gunners. Each worker does a single, defined movement — one or two tugs, a lifting motion, the same cut with a knife or big scissors. Some say they repeat their tasks as often as 90 times a minute, 40,000 times a day.

Rose Harrell took a job at the Perdue processing plant in Lewiston, North Carolina, a few months after it opened in 1976. She started as a leg cutter, slicing every fourth bird that came down the line. By

1983, she was expected to cut every other bird — and the carcasses were whizzing by at a faster pace.

"When I first went in, the line was going slower, you didn't have so many birds to kill," says Harrell, who asked that her real name not be used to prevent reprisals. "Then they started bringing in machines, and everything got faster."

As the lines moved faster, working conditions grew harsher. "You don't feel like yourself no more," says Rita Eason, who went to work at the Lewiston plant in 1980. "They don't treat you as if you were

a person. They treat you as if you were a machine, plugged in, running on electricity."

Many poultry workers tell stories of working in intolerable heat and cold. Because processing involves both ice and scalding water, temperatures vary from work station to work station. "In evisceration it was about 90 to 95 degrees at all times," says Donna Bazemore, a former Perdue worker from North Carolina. "In other departments people wear three, four, five pair of socks and long underwear all year. And they're still cold."

Photo by Drew Wilson/Virginian-Pilot



BEHIND THE CHICKENS YOU EAT ARE CRAW PULLERS, LUNG GUNNERS, MIRROR TRIMMERS, GIZZARD CUTTERS, SKIN ROLLERS, AND THIGH BONE POPPERS.

At Perdue and other plants, scheduled breaks are minimal. Many workers only receive a 30-minute lunch break and two 10- or 15-minute rests each day — but they must remove and clean their aprons, gloves, and boots after the break begins. By the time they wash off the blood and bits of meat, the break is often half over and the few bathrooms are already occupied.

Workers who return late from a break are penalized under a strict point system. Being late — or missing part of a day, regardless of the reason — brings an "occurrence" or a "write-up." After several write-ups, workers can be "terminated."

"If you had to go to the bathroom more than once in two or three hours, they would threaten to write you up," says Brenda Porter, who worked at the Cargill plant in Buena Vista for 12 years. She says the company introduced an even tougher policy last winter. "If you wanted to go to the bathroom more than once a day, you had to tell what you were going for."

Asked about such restrictions, Cargill spokesman Greg Lauser laughs and says, "I think you're mixing us up with another company. Employees are encouraged to use lunch and rest breaks, but if there's a hygienic need to be off the line, we can accommodate that."

Although it has been nine years since Rita Eason worked at Perdue, she remembers it vividly. "I saw a grown woman stand on the line and urinate right on herself. She was too scared to move. But then she got so cold she walked out and went home."

Sometimes, workers say, harsh conditions are compounded by harassment. Donna Bazemore says some Perdue foremen told female employees to wear tight jeans and other revealing clothes when inspectors visited the plant. "They'll say, 'We want to make him happy so he won't be stopping the line so we can get these chickens out,'" Bazemore recalls.

Bazemore and others describe rows of women busily working while male supervisors passed by, pinching them or slapping their behinds. It was common knowledge, Bazemore says, that you could get ahead by cooperating.

RISKY BUSINESS

Perhaps the most serious threat at the processing plants, however, is the risk of disabling injury. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, poultry workers suffer high rates of illness and injury —

rates that are more than twice the average for all workers in the private sector.

Poultry processing is "more debilitating than any industry I know," says Sarah Fields-Davis, director of the Center for Women's Economic Alternatives, an advocacy group based in Ahoskie, North Carolina. "I have seen women without an arm or fingers, with half a hand."

Other common problems include warts, skin rashes from the chlorinated water used to wash the poultry, and infections from bone splinters. Workers often lose fingernails and toenails.

"Some people react to the blood in the turkey, and they break out in a turkey rash," says Tina Bethea, who guts turkeys at the House of Raeford plant in Fayetteville, North Carolina. "Their arm discolors, and they break out in bumps. Sometimes the skin turns black and peels off."

The most frequent injuries are caused by the speed and repetitive motion of the work. Poultry workers who perform the same task over and over again for hours on end run the risk of developing cumulative trauma disorders — painful nerve and tendon damage that can permanently cripple hands and arms. Found among a wide range of workers from letter sorters to textile workers to typists, the disorders are now ranked by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as the fastest-growing occupational disease in the country.

The most severe disorder is carpal tunnel syndrome. When the tendons passing through a narrow channel in the wrist known as the carpal tunnel are overused, they swell and press on the median nerve, which controls feeling in the hand. The damage can be painful — and permanent.

Mary Smith worked at Cargill for only seven months, but her brief stint at the Buena Vista plant left her with hands that hurt day and night. A quiet, 41-year-old mother of five, Smith trimmed bruises and tumors from chicken skin. Although her husband worried about her going to Cargill — "he heard people got messed up there" — the job offered higher pay.

"I started working there in March 1988, and my hands began hurting in June," she recalls. "At first they would swell. The nurse said it was normal; I had to get used to the job. She told me to rub them with alcohol when I got home and put them in hot water. They started hurting real bad and getting numb, especially at night. I'd wake up, shake them, lay them on the pillow. It didn't do no good."

Although she has not worked since last September, Smith says, "I still have problems holding things. It hurts to wash

dishes, take clothes out of the machine. My arm hurts at night, hurts all day. I get so frustrated sometimes, I feel like just cutting it off."

Smith is hardly alone. Workers at plants across the South suffer from what many call "ruined hands." At least 14 of Smith's co-workers have undergone surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome. Chavulette Jones and Rose Harrell, who both had surgery on their hands after working at Perdue, say they know 14 other women at the Lewiston plant who underwent similar operations.

In spite of her own surgery, Harrell continues to have trouble with her hands. "The numbness is gone, but I'm still in pain," she says. "Sometimes I can hold things, sometimes I can't."

"TAKE THE PAIN"

Plant managers for Perdue and Cargill and the owner of the House of Raeford failed to return repeated phone calls to discuss conditions at their slaughterhouses. But Cargill spokesman Greg Lauser says the company tries to educate workers about health risks and takes steps to prevent cumulative trauma disorders.

"We're like everyone else in meatpacking and poultry," Lauser says. "We're on a learning curve, trying to learn about repetitive motion as quickly as possible."

A Perdue spokesperson refused to answer specific questions, but provided a statement prepared for a June congressional hearing which said, "Perdue believes that some type of responsible industry action should be taken to reduce the incidents of carpal trauma disorders in the workplace."

The statement then went on to minimize the problem, saying the poultry industry has a cumulative trauma rate "well below the rate for such industries as red-meat packing." The statement also said there were only 113 cases of carpal trauma among its 12,000 employees last year — "a rate of less than one percent."

An internal memo from the Perdue personnel department paints a different picture. Dated February 3, 1989 the memo states that it is "normal procedure for about 60 percent of our workforce" at the Perdue plant in Robersonville, North Carolina, to visit the company nurse every morning to get painkillers and have their hands wrapped.

Bill Roenigk, a spokesman for the National Broiler Council, downplayed the role of workers altogether. "Processing

involves more automation now," he says. "There's a systematic handling of birds and parts." By the time chickens reach the supermarket, he adds, they are "almost untouched by human hands."

Rosie Terry is one of 150,000 poultry workers whose hands do touch the birds. Terry, who had surgery for carpal tunnel last year, used to rehang dead chickens on the shackles at the Cargill plant in Buena Vista. When her "hand problems" began, she says, she bounced from doctor to doctor before she was told her condition was work related. One doctor simply said, "I think you're getting old."

"He never told me I had carpal tun-

Cargill when a worker notices her hands are hurting, she'll be given Advil and told that she's just breaking them in," says Jamie Cohen, health and safety director for the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union (RWDSU). "The previous nurse apparently even told some people, 'Go back and take the pain like the rest.'"

Studies show that ignoring cumulative trauma disorders only makes them worse. Untreated, temporary damage can become permanent, and even a relatively short delay can make a difference.

Companies could help prevent further damage by transferring injured workers to less strenuous jobs. Instead, workers re-

says the company ignored a note from Dr. Aguila restricting her to light duty and put her on the line pulling fat. "I think it was worse on my arm than trimming. I pulled so much fat my nail came loose. My hands hurt worse — it didn't seem like no light duty to me."

BLANK LOGS

Unfortunately, companies have a built-in incentive to ignore injuries — it keeps insurance payments down and saves them from reimbursing workers for their lost wages and medical bills. As a result, workers and union officials charge, companies are trying to cover up the growing number of employees who suffer from cumulative trauma disorders.

Poultry companies are required to report work-related injuries and illnesses on federal "200 logs" filed with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Yet until recently, officials say, most companies have recorded relatively few cases of cumulative trauma disorders.

The disorders "are underreported," says Roger Stephens, the sole ergonomist at OSHA. "The reporting just doesn't go on."

Benny Bishop, manager of the Southland Poultry plant in Enterprise, Alabama, says there are few injuries to report. "Every injury that has been reported has been recorded," he insists.

Linda Cromer, an RWDSU international representative, says a review of Southland's logs turned up only 10 recorded cases of repetitive motion injuries from 1985 to 1987, and none for 1988.

But when Cromer and other union organizers visit workers, they frequently encounter injured workers. "We hear about it on every house call," she says. "People with carpal tunnel surgery are working there."

In Georgia, the union has filed a complaint with OSHA, charging that Cargill has "willfully and knowingly" exposed workers to jobs "that result in cumulative trauma injuries."

The complaint also says the company has failed to keep accurate records of cumulative trauma problems. According to union surveys, about 80 percent of Cargill workers report "numbness or tingling in their hands during the night."

Lauser, the Cargill spokesman, disputes the union complaint, saying he is unaware of underreporting. He says the company tries to keep track of injuries and illnesses "in as straightforward a way as possible, so we can head them off. We

Photo courtesy of UFCW



JOBS REQUIRING FORCEFUL, RAPID CUTS WITH KNIVES HELD IN AWKWARD POSITIONS CRIPPLE WORKERS BY THE THOUSANDS.

nel," says Terry, 51. "I heard it from his wife, also a doctor, who I saw one time when he wasn't there. He didn't let me see her no more."

Terry and other injured workers say they often encounter hostile supervisors, untrained company nurses, or doctors who know little about their medical problems. "When you tell people you're hurting, they don't really believe you," says Perdue worker Rose Harrell. "Talking to one supervisor was like talking to a table. He wouldn't listen, didn't care. I told the plant manager that I didn't mind working, but my hands hurt. 'What you telling me for,' he said. 'I can't stop your hands from hurting.'"

Such stories are not uncommon. "At

port being assigned to repetitive tasks that only make their injuries worse.

When Rosie Terry returned to work at Cargill several months after her surgery, a supervisor assigned her to hanging chickens and slicing off livers with scissors. She was told to sweep floors only after a doctor restricted her from repetitive work.

Terry was lucky to be reassigned. Even under a doctor's orders, many injured workers are given some of the hardest jobs in the plant. Dr. Ralph Aguila, who routinely received referrals from Cargill, says he did not have "any problems with the company following instructions" when he recommended a worker for light duty.

Mary Smith tells a different story. She

encourage them to report any symptoms early and often.”

OSHA has launched an ongoing investigation into conditions at the Buena Vista plant. Yet some observers say the agency has been slow to respond to the cause of the problem — the nature of poultry work itself.

According to Steve Edelstein, a North Carolina attorney who handles compensation cases for injured workers, OSHA rarely looks at the nature of assembly-line work, focusing instead on safety standards and exposure to hazardous substances.

Only recently has the agency started paying attention to the dangers of repetitive motion.

“I think there will have to be limits on the physical demands employers can make of employees,” says Edelstein. “People shouldn’t have to feel pain every day just to make a living.”

JOBS VS. HEALTH

Some say a recent OSHA settlement with Empire Kosher Foods in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, may help get to the root of

the problem. Under the agreement, the company must evaluate the effect of posture, tool design, and repetitive motion on each job. The company must also train employees to detect early signs of cumulative trauma disorders and track workers at risk.

Fields-Davis at the Center for Women’s Economic Alternatives in North Carolina cites other changes poultry companies could make immediately. “Redesigning tools and keeping scissors sharp so people don’t have to use their backs to cut doesn’t cost that much,” Fields-Davis says. “Neither does rotating workers” or giving them longer breaks.

The CWEA and unions meanwhile continue to encourage poultry workers to speak out about workplace hazards. Faced with grueling conditions, many poultry workers simply quit. The industry has one of the highest turnover rates in manufacturing — roughly one in 10 poultry workers leave their job each year.

But across the South, some workers are realizing that they should not have to choose between their jobs and their health. In North Carolina, the CWEA is helping workers stand up to Perdue, the area’s major employer. Organizers have offered clinics about repetitive motion injuries and helped hundreds of Perdue workers get medical care and workers’ compensation. Distrust of organized labor runs high in the area, and the women at CWEA say they can reach workers who might not respond to a union drive.

Where unions have successfully organized poultry plants, workers have made health issues a priority. In 1987, the RWDSU organized the Cargill plant in Buena Vista based largely on health and safety concerns. Shop stewards now escort injured workers to the nurse and file grievances over medical problems.

But with fear and intimidation running high, such victories come slowly. RWDSU lost an organizing drive this May at Southland Poultry in Alabama, and the United Food and Commercial Workers lost a recent election at the House of Raeford in North Carolina.

Despite the obstacles, Fields-Davis says CWEA and others will continue to fight for safe workplaces. “We’re not advocating that Perdue leave,” she says. “We just want the company to become more responsive to — and responsible for — the people who are making them rich.” □

Barbara Goldoftas, an editorial associate of Dollars & Sense magazine, teaches science writing at Harvard University.

TAKING ON THE BOSS

Despite the economic and political clout of poultry giants like Perdue and Tyson, Southern chicken farmers and workers have been struggling for decent pay and working conditions since the industry began more than 50 years ago. Here are a few examples:

Texas, 1953. Workers at two poultry plants in the town of Center — one white and one black — vote to join the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union. When the companies refuse to negotiate, the union launches a nationwide boycott and workers stage wildcat strikes. As workers on the picket lines evade car bombs and reckless drivers, the union exposes unhealthy plant conditions responsible for the deaths of workers and consumers, prompting congressional hearings and the first law mandating federal poultry inspection.

Mississippi, 1972. Sixty workers walk off the job at the Poultry Packers slaughterhouse in Forrest and organize the Mississippi Poultry Workers Union. With the support of both civil rights groups and white workers, they win raises, vacation pay, and break time. The union goes on to win a plant-wide election, but the company refuses to honor the contract and conditions in the plant remain bad.

Alabama, 1980. More than 100 chicken farmers go on strike against ConAgra, the largest poultry corporation in the region. The farmers — members of the Wiregrass Poultry Growers Association — close their chicken houses and stop taking birds for six weeks, saying the company is short-changing them on feed deliveries and demanding excessive equipment changes. When the company refuses to negotiate, farmers set up roadblocks and surround ConAgra plants, feedmills, and hatcheries with picket lines. Worried bankers meet with company officials and force them to give growers a small raise.

Mississippi, 1980. Thousands march in Laurel to support 200 workers, mostly black women, who are striking the Sanderson Farms poultry plant over what they call “plantation conditions.” The march is sponsored by the Committee for Justice in Mississippi, a nationwide coalition of over 200 labor, civil rights, and religious groups organized to support the poultry workers. The company is unimpressed. Federal officials order Sanderson to rehire the strikers, but all but five are eventually fired.

Arkansas, 1981. When Valmac, then the largest poultry firm in the state, orders its growers to install costly fans in their chicken houses, hundreds of farmers led by Poultry Producers, Inc. — a statewide organization that includes 1,800 chicken growers — refuse to obey. Valmac cuts the number of chickens allotted to the growers, but the farmers are strong enough to ensure that nobody loses their contract.

Virginia, 1984. Nearly 500 workers strike Marvel Poultry, the largest turkey processing plant in the nation, calling for better pay and working conditions. Organized by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the strike is the first in the state’s \$250-million-a-year turkey industry. The AFL-CIO launches a nationwide boycott of Marvel products and files charges of unfair labor practices, but the company uses the state’s “right-to-work” law to break the union.



"I Feel What Women Feel"

Poultry organizer Donna Bazemore talks about lives on the line — and overcoming the fear.

An interview by Bob Hall

In meetings, Donna Bazemore is usually silent — until someone asks her to explain what life is like for a worker in a poultry processing plant. Softly, steadily, and with growing intensity, she tells why people take the jobs, what happens to them inside, and what they can do to get out.

Bazemore should know. She is the first person ever to win a workers' compensation claim against Perdue for carpal tunnel syndrome, the crippling hand disease. She got a little over \$1200 — not much for a single mother of three children. But in the process, she learned a lot about herself, about fear and freedom, stress and self-esteem, and "serving the cause of low-income women."

Donna Bazemore is now an organizer with the Center for Women's Economic Alternatives, based in Ahoskie, North Carolina, not far from her home where this interview was conducted.

My mother was real strong, and she projected all that on us. She didn't have a lot, and her self-esteem sometimes was really lousy. And it still is. She believes you have

to work hard to survive; she *expects* it to be bad. She will take whatever the system dishes out and say, "Well, it was meant to be this way."

I think I was the black sheep of the family. I was the one that got into mischief. I was loud. And I always got out of the hard work. My grandparents farmed, and tobacco used to break my skin out.

My uncles and grandparents had big farms in Bertie County, lots of land, tobacco, peanuts, corn. Later on, they got into soybeans. My grandfather died, and my uncle took over the farm. But like many black farmers there, they had to stop because it was costing them more than they were actually bringing in.

My uncle is now working at a poultry plant. The farm went under, and now he's on the saw, cutting chicken breasts. He was the first one I ever heard use the phrase "like a closed-in field" to describe the plant. I call it "a closed-in slave camp."

Once you walk in Perdue, once you go through the door, everything changes. Your whole attitude. When you come out, you're like two separate people. It has to do with the stress and pressure they put you under. The treatment. People like my mother have been working in the

plant for 15, 20 years. And they bring in kids fresh out of college or high school, white kids, and they make these young white men the foremen who tell *her* what to do. And here's she been in that plant, and knows everything a chicken ever had to offer you.

I didn't see making a career out of Perdue. When I was in high school, I said, "As soon as I get out, I'm going into the Army." And I'm going to do this, this, and this. I had all these dreams. Then I had this baby when I'm 17.

Hard balls was coming at me, one obstacle after another — things I brought upon myself by not being obedient. You feel trapped into doing what you think is best. So since I had this baby, I thought I should marry her father. And that was like jumping out of the pot into the fire.

I left my mom's house and went to my husband's house, and I had not yet found my identity. And I also had this total attitude that I didn't grow up with my father, so I'm going to make damn sure that my daughter grows up in a house with her father so she can have all the things that I never, never had.

So I stayed in an abusive relationship for a lot of years, a lot of years. Mental and physical and verbal. He would come

home and take out his anger on me. I always felt it was something I had done, that I was doing.

Finally, I asked myself, "Did God really put me here to be miserable?" When I was going through all this, I had no self esteem, no sense of being motivated to do anything. I was like his possession. So I sat down one day and wrote out on a paper, "How Do I Build My Self Esteem?" It was like a memo to myself. I got the idea from watching a motivator on TV.

You have to constantly tell yourself, "You are somebody." Look in the mirror and say something positive about yourself. I'd look and say, "Gee, you got a big nose, but it's cute!" And I began to make sure that I'd say something positive to myself and my daughters, every day, two or three times a day. I also read a lot of articles in *Essence* and *Ebony* about women who have done this or that, and it's very motivating to me.

When I got out of that marriage, I thought I could do anything. Because it took a lot for me to leave. My mom thought I should stick it out with him. I think she was afraid I couldn't raise the kids on my own. And neither did I, so she wasn't far off. But she told me it was totally up to me. She taught us, "If you make a mistake and fall on your face, I'll be there to assist you to get up, but I will not get you up." And that makes sense to me.

My mom also left it up to me if I wanted to work at Perdue, but she never wanted me to work there to begin with.

She's really glad that I came out.

went to Perdue to buy a dress. I was still married then, in '83, and I went to get one paycheck to buy this dress. My daughter had a play she was in, and I needed a new dress to go see her. After that paycheck came in, I said, "Wow, I got money! This could be real useful." And so I stayed on. And then I just got settled back into working.

I liked the money, but I hated the job. My first job was at the rehang table. The chickens fell on the table and I said, "OH MY GOD!" I could not believe all those chickens! My eyes went together. I got dizzy. And I got sick. I threw up.

The man told me, you pick up the chickens at the back and flip them over so the feet slap against the shackles and they catch. You use both hands, just hang them on the line. Well, the blood was gushing all over my face as I hung them up, and I was trying to wipe it off. He says, "We don't have time to be cute, Miss Bazem-

ore." And I was spitting all over the table. Finally, he says, "I don't think this job is for you." And I said, "You got that right!"

But I stayed on that job for about six weeks. Both hands are just going constantly — it's a rhythm you get into — 72 birds a minute. You can actually do it with your eyes closed after a couple of weeks. I actually would sleep doing it, it's so boring and so hot. You're right after scalding, and all that heat is coming at you. It's at least 95 to 100 degrees.

I did everything on the eviscerating

I was depressed. I had tried to go to college at nights. But that was just too much on me, so I had to quit. I wanted to go back, so I asked personnel if I could work nights so I could go to college during the day. When I transferred to nights, my grandmother kept my baby daughter and my oldest was in school. And my mother kept them at night.

I went to school from 8 to 12 noon, some days 'til 2. And I worked nights from 10 'til 6:30 or 7 the next morning. I'd come home, shower and go to school. Some days, I couldn't even shower. I had

Photo by Robert Amberg



DONNA BAZEMORE AT HER NEW JOB WITH THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES: "I WANT TO HELP WOMEN SO THEY DON'T HAVE TO FEEL ALL ALONE, ALL PRESSED AND STRESSED OUT."

line. I began to open chickens. I had to stick my finger in that chicken butt hole and cut down the sides. And I was cutting my fingers because you have to work so fast. I got this scar from opening. And this one from cutting hearts and livers.

I kept complaining and they moved me to trimming. I did that for about a year. And I really liked that. I worked with a good inspector, a young white guy named Cliff. He'd point to the bad part of the bird, and my job was to cut it off. Tumors, bruises, skin diseases, sometimes the chicken head would still be on. He was sympathetic and basically helped me do my work.

to be in school at eight o'clock. Things were tight here, with so little money, and I had not yet learned to budget. So I began to go back out to Perdue at one o'clock and work 'til 4 or 5. And then I would come back home, and go to sleep, get back up at 9, and go back to the plant.

I did that a couple of months. In the day, I was working with Cliff. At night, the inspector's name was Harold. This was during the time when I was having serious problems with my hands. So I couldn't keep up, and that really aggravated this man — to keep stopping the line for me. I couldn't trim the birds fast enough, and I would have to run around

the line to get them. And when he would say something to me, I would say something back.

Every time I'd say, "My hand hurts," they'd give me three or four pills. I knew what an Advil was. But these other ones had no name on them. And it got to the point that I was happy to go to the nurse's station to get piped up so I could do this work and totally disregard the pain. I didn't know what I was taking.

I couldn't squeeze my hand. I couldn't zip up my pants. And this was before the disease had really affected me. I couldn't work the lock on this screen door, using my two fingers. I felt like cutting through chicken bone should have made me

stronger, so why am I having problems zipping up my pants?

I went to the doctor's office and I started to read up on carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis. I learned you could actually lose the use of your hand. And if I lost the use of my hand, I'd be left to sit around waiting for a welfare check. I couldn't see that. And I can't raise my kids on that kind of money. I just kept thinking of that and focusing on what I had to do. I had to raise hell about my hands. I had to overtalk management, because they would try to talk you into thinking that you don't even hurt, that you're just imagining.

It got worse when I went to night shift.

Photo courtesy of USDA



A WOMAN PULLS OUT THE INTESTINES BY HAND. ONE BIRD AFTER ANOTHER, OVER AND OVER.

I couldn't open my car door or turn on the ignition with my right hand. Sometimes it was so bad, I would get up, shower, and get out of here and my hands would still be asleep. I'd hold this right hand up on the steering wheel and shift the gears with my left hand.

When I got to work, I'd get my hand bandaged. You almost had to stand in line and wait to get into the nurse's station to wrap your hands with Ace bandages. Some women would take big bundles home and wrap their hands on the way to work. Some would buy them from stores. There are very, very few people that I know on the eviscerating line that don't have a problem with their hands.

The nurse at this time was a man. And he gave me a hard time. And I gave it right back. He told me one night, "Why don't you just quit?" And I said, "Why don't you just marry me and take care of me." He said, "You think you're so smart and cute." And I said, "Man, you don't know horseshit about me."

Well, he reported that to personnel. He said I was rude and obnoxious. And they called me into Bill Copeland's office, the plant manager, and they had three or four plant supervisors there. And they told me what they were going to do, and what I had to do. It was like they thought they were the sperm that I came from. They actually feel like they own you. It just made me remember, I'm living in the days of slavery all over again. They just took me out of the field and put me in a building.

The next morning, Cindy Arnold and Beulah Sharpe came knocking on my door. I saw this white woman and black woman, and I thought they're selling insurance. I didn't want to listen to them, but I wasn't rude so I invited them in. Cindy told me about the Center for Women's Economic Alternatives, and talked about my rights. They had heard about what I said to the nurse—it got around real fast, everybody in the plant knew about it!

Cindy said that I had the right to file for workers' compensation and the right to go to my family doctor. So I went back to Perdue and I said, "I need a workers' compensation claim to take to my doctor." Bill Copeland said, "We have to make an appointment for the doctor. You don't need to do anything but get your body over there." I said, "Wow, this white woman must know some stuff." He had totally changed. Later that night—at

3 a.m. — he told me I had an appointment to see a doctor in Greenville the next day. So I knew things had changed.

I went to that doctor, he checked my hands, and I went back two days later for nerve tests. He diagnosed me with carpal tunnel syndrome. He put a splint on my hand and told me to wear it for six weeks and it should strengthen my hand. I was still working on the line and the metal in the splint kept pinching my hand. Bill Copeland wouldn't listen to me, so I went back to the doctor. He wrote a letter saying I should be put on light duty. I was put on the salvage department, and I worked there until it was time to report back to the doctor.

He referred me to another doctor, in Little Washington, and he told me I needed surgery on my hand. I thought it would help but it actually worsened. Now I suffer from a different set of problems — severe muscle cramps, bad throbbing pain in the muscle by my thumb, numbness in my fingers, pain shooting up my arm.

When I went back for my last visit, the doctor said, "You have equal strength in both hands." I said, "But I had more strength in my right hand." He says, "They told me you were a troublemaker." I said, "Doctor, I can't order parts from Sears. All of these parts came with my body, and they're not replaceable." He told me the strength would eventually come back even though he didn't do any nerve tests for the deterioration or anything. He told me I was able to work.

I said he was crazy. I never went back to work after that. I knew that if I had gone back, something would have happened and I would have lost my self control and I would have hurt someone. Because I totally felt that Perdue hurt me intentionally. I felt that there was something that could have been done. The abuse that people at Perdue showed me when I went to them with my problem was unbelievable. And their definition of "light duty" was just stupid. I just think they are unsympathetic people that want to be the slave drivers. They like to feel like "this is my block of niggers and I'm going to whip them into line." Even when black men come into what little control or power they have at Perdue, they become oppressive. They get the whipping style, too. And I understand that. They want to keep those positions because it makes their life a little easier. And that's bad.

Several times I stood on the line and said, "If this man says one more damn thing to me, I'm going to stick this knife

in him." That's how bad it was. You actually felt like killing someone. Women shouldn't have to work under those conditions, regardless of where it is.

really want to be able to do something for black women. To help them share their stories so they don't have to feel all alone, all pressed and stressed out. Let them see that there are other women out here who got beat up, who got put out of their house, who were abused at work. Let them know that

They actually feel like they own you. It just made me remember, I'm living in the days of slavery all over again. They just took me out of the field and put me in a building.

there's someone out here that cares, that will offer support.

I feel what women feel. I know how hard it was — and still is — trying to overcome obstacles that seem to just block your whole path, your whole view. You feel so limited, so afraid.

There is so much fear at Perdue. We were passing out leaflets for the hand clinic, and I heard women say, "Aren't you scared that the Klan is going to bomb your house." Or, "Would you tell my story, but not use my name?" They don't want to lose that job. Or face harassment from Perdue.

One way to deal with that fear is to share stories, and know that it's okay to be afraid, frightened. It was real intimidating to go to a bunch of white men and say, "I've got this problem and your job caused it." I was scared half to death to walk into this white man's office that has what I consider to be the keys to Heaven and Hell in his hands.

I go back, because I was raised in the church, to the 23rd Psalm: "Yea though I walk through the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." I've tried to keep that in focus, that the Lord will be there to provide. I've wanted things I couldn't get, but I've never been hungry.

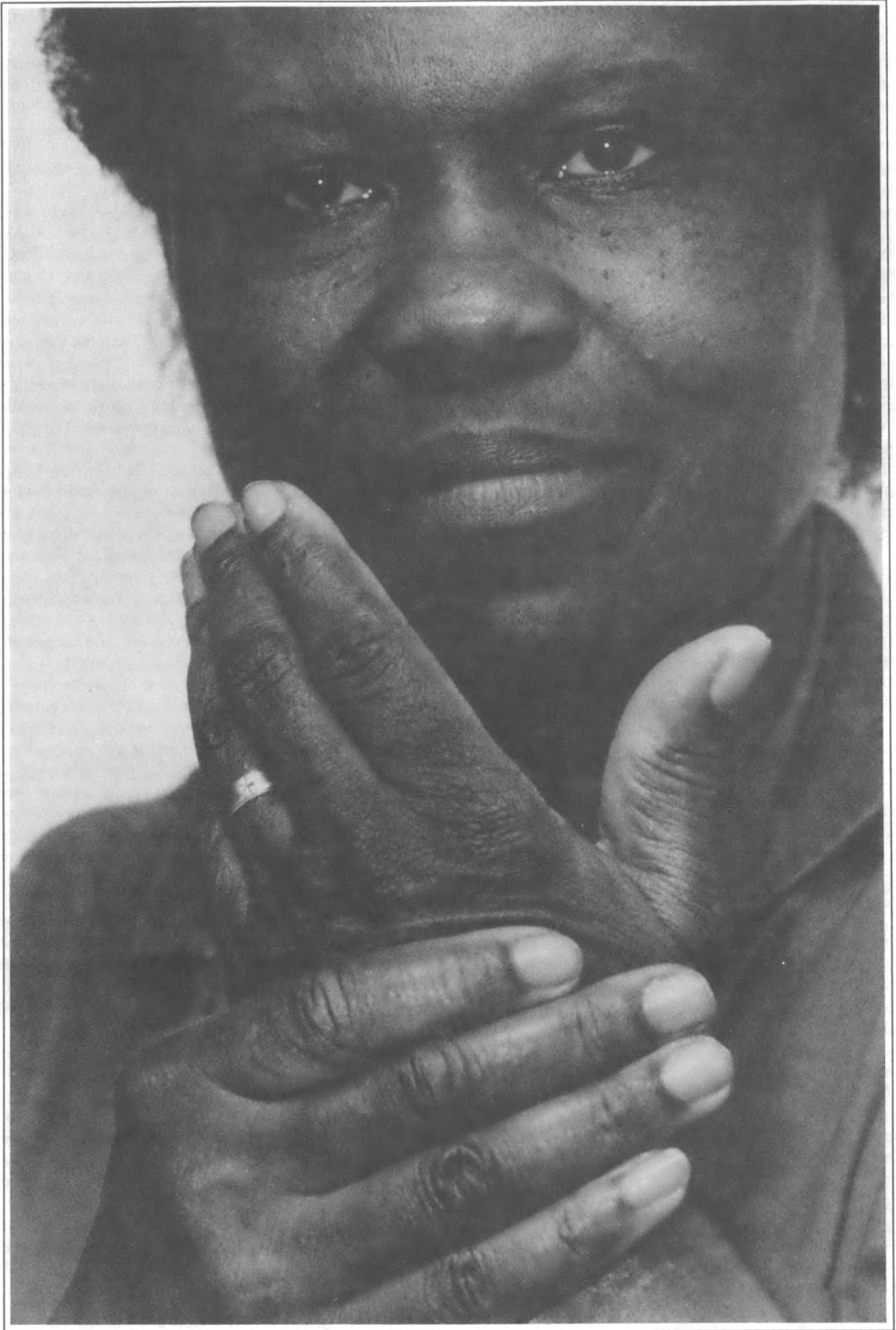
Even if you don't have a religious view, you can keep a positive dream in view. That's how books I would read about other women's stories would really motivate me. Like Sojourner Truth, her life and her sayings. And Martin Luther King's "I have a dream." That just stuck in my mind. I have a dream, and now I have to set my goals and objective. I don't want to settle for what I have caused my life to deal to me. I don't want to wallow in self-pity. I want to get up and get out and do something, and become this important member of society.

I can't honestly say that I'm ready to die for the cause of educating and organizing Perdue workers. But I think I am willing to die for the cause of feeling free and having the sense of helping women find freedom. If I can educate this woman about carpal tunnel syndrome and workers' compensation, and even if she goes back into the plant, at least she knows. She's free from not knowing; that helps her be free.

I can't just tell a woman to step out like I did. I can show her the options and get the facts and figures together. I'll try to steer her in the right direction, but I won't do all the work for her. She has to take the steps for herself.

That's one thing the Center imposed on me. "You take on this leadership position. You do this, this and this for yourself." So I was really educated about the power that anybody has, even low-income women. I found out that if you can talk, you have a lot of power. You can get your message across, open the lines of communication and use them for yourself. I can't impose my values on someone, but I do want to help people before they get to the breaking point. □

Bob Hall is research director of the Institute for Southern Studies.



GERALDINE BAYLOR



All Pain, No Gain

The systems designed to protect Virginia poultry workers are failing. Here's why.

By Joe Fahy

Geraldine Baylor no longer plants flowers.

Warm weather comes, and the beds lie bare outside her one-story, three-bedroom home in Hanover, Virginia. Gone is her stamina for gardening and other springtime chores.

Gone, too, is the job she once held at the Holly Farms poultry plant in nearby Glen Allen. Her life now moves to different rhythms: the incessant throbbing in her left arm, and the painkillers she takes twice a day, without fail.

"One in the morning and two at night," she explains. "That's the only way I can get any relief."

The end to old habits came early last year, when the pain appeared and never went away. Soon, she could barely grasp the chicken carcasses that raced past her on the production line.

Within months she was dismissed — or chose to resign, in the company's view

— from the job she held for nearly 12 years. She never received workers' compensation. Now, both her health and the perennial burst of color outside her home are dim, disquieting memories.

Her experience typifies the way systems designed to protect workers on the job — and compensate them if they are injured — are failing poultry workers in Virginia.

The state's chief guardian of workplace safety, the Virginia Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is only beginning to monitor — much less stop — cumulative trauma disorders, the painful tendon and nerve problems caused by repeating the same tasks for hours on end.

Yet as reports of these illnesses, also called repetitive motion disorders, continue to rise, few workers receive adequate compensation for their injuries. In fact, attorneys and state officials say, op-

position by poultry companies and narrow state regulations are making it harder than ever to win compensation.

"DAGGONE PRIMITIVE"

Workers, attorneys, and labor representatives all identify the hand and wrist disorders as the leading health problem in Virginia's poultry industry, which ranks sixth nationally in turkey production and tenth in producing meat chickens or broilers. They agree that the state's response to the problem has not only been inadequate — it has made the situation worse.

Even Charles Harrigan, an assistant commissioner for occupational safety and health, acknowledges that state enforcement has not kept up with the number of injuries.

"I'm sorry we're so daggone primitive," Harrigan says. "We haven't had a lot of experience, to be quite honest, in addressing cumulative trauma problems."

State OSHA officials are now giving their inspectors additional training, he says, and plan to begin more aggressive enforcement within a year.

Those officials and others are grappling with a problem that has become the nation's leading cause of job-related illness.

In 1987, cumulative trauma disorders made up 38 percent of all occupational illnesses reported in private industry, according to a U.S. Department of Labor survey released this spring. The survey concluded that the diseases struck four of every 100 workers in meatpacking and poultry processing, twice the rate reported in any other industry.

In Virginia, cumulative trauma disorders were also the leading cause of occupational illness in 1987, representing almost a third of the 2,812 illnesses reported in private industry.

But many workers and their advocates claim those statistics are greatly understated. They say poultry companies routinely fail to report diseases on OSHA logs, and many workers suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, and other cumulative trauma disorders either quit without fighting for compensation or simply do not report their problems, fearing they may be fired.

Those who do speak up run the risk of losing their jobs, according to union officials in Virginia and elsewhere.

Company officials deny it happens. But there is nothing in Virginia law to prohibit the dismissal of employees who can no longer perform their duties.

Let go in such circumstances, poultry workers, many of them poorly educated black women, face the difficult task of finding other employment when their most valuable tools — their hands — no longer work well.

For those suffering work-related afflictions, workers' compensation is designed to provide some relief. But despite frequent complaints of cumulative trauma disorders in poultry production and other industries, a relatively small number of Virginia workers receive awards.

Last year, just 292 workers with cumulative trauma disorders received compensation in Virginia. Carpal tunnel syndrome accounted for 259 of those illnesses — an "absurdly low" figure, says Barry Stiefel, an Alexandria attorney specializing in workers' compensation.

Private firms paid those employees a total of \$575,676 in medical and compensation benefits last year — an average payment of only \$2,000 for workers crippled by repetitive, assembly-line motions.

Data on compensation rates for cumulative trauma disorders in the poultry industry have not been compiled. But attorneys say they are winning fewer poultry-related claims than in the early 1980s because the state has gotten tougher on injured workers.

"I handled three cases last year for poultry," Stiefel says. "In the past, it was not unusual to handle a hundred."

William Yates, a state Industrial Commission official who has arbitrated thousands of workers' compensation claims, agrees that the standard of proof needed to win cumulative trauma awards has become more stringent.

For poultry workers, the bottom line is that protection on the job often seems inadequate and workers' compensation difficult or impossible to obtain.

TOKEN PENALTIES

The first line of defense for workers on dangerous jobs is the state OSHA program. It began in 1976, six years after the

federal agency was established by Congress. Virginia is one of 25 states and territories that has devised its own program by agreeing to adhere to standards set by the federal government.

With a \$4.5 million budget, the agency currently has 59 safety and health inspectors responsible for monitoring the state's 80,000 employers. Officials admit they have trouble keeping up with routine inspections, and high-risk businesses can go three years or more without being scrutinized unless workers complain or the agency hears about a serious accident.

Photo by Drew Wilson/Virginian-Pilot



A "DRAW HANDER" PULLS ENTRAILS FROM CHICKENS. THE STRESS ON HER RAISED ARMS AND TWO FINGERS PROMOTES CUMULATIVE TRAUMA DISORDERS.

OSHA can fine employers who violate specific safety standards or breach the so-called "general duty" clause by failing to provide a safe workplace. The agency rates violations as "repeat," "willful," "serious" or "other-than-serious."

Although worker advocates say the Virginia OSHA program offers roughly the same protection as its counterparts in other states, statistics suggest that the agency has been something of a paper tiger to the state's poultry industry, which employs 13,500 production workers.

From January 1982 to May 17 of this year, the agency made only 32 inspections of Virginia's two dozen poultry plants, according to state OSHA records. Employers were cited for health or safety violations in just 17 of those inspections.

Most citations fell in the "other-than-serious" category; no "willful" or "repeat"

violations were listed. There were just 11 termed "serious," resulting in total fines of \$3,580.

Thus, in a period of more than seven years, less than a dozen serious health hazards were found in all of the state's poultry plants, with an average fine of \$325 — amounting to little more than a token penalty.

Some of the most serious problems were found at plants operated by two of the state's leading poultry processors, Perdue and Holly Farms.

In November 1988, Perdue's Bridgewater plant was penalized \$420 for a serious safety violation after a worker's foot was caught in a machine. Two months later, the same plant was cited for four other serious violations and fined \$1,680.

In 1987, the Holly Farms plant at Glen Allen was cited for two serious and nine "other-than-serious" violations. The total penalty imposed was \$500, reduced from an original fine of \$810.

Harrigan, assistant commissioner for occupational safety and health, blames the tepid enforcement on a strained budget and the difficulty of linking cumulative trauma problems to the workplace in the absence of specific safety standards.

Federal and state OSHA officials could invoke the "general duty" clause to improve workplace safety, but many believe standards would be more equitable and easily enforced. Whether safety standards can be developed for the poultry industry, where workers engage in a wide variety of cutting and grasping tasks, is a much-debated issue.

"It's not like walking up and seeing that you need a guard on a saw blade," says Harrigan, clearly frustrated. "I know more can be done; I just don't have answers."

HASSLES AND FEAR

Poultry workers afflicted with the disorders, meanwhile, face mounting obstacles in obtaining workers' compensation. The situation is especially ironic because the system designed to help them has been in place for years.

The workers' compensation program began in Virginia in 1919, part of a movement in many states to give injured workers an alternative to civil suits. In Virginia, workers hurt on the job cannot sue, making workers' compensation their only relief.

Workers suffering occupational injuries must notify their employer and file for benefits within 30 days. Those afflicted with carpal tunnel syndrome or other occupational illnesses must begin the process as soon as a doctor determines that their conditions are job related.

Besides paying for some medical costs, the program partially compensates workers who cannot work at all or must work at lower-paying jobs. Workers also are compensated if they permanently lose some degree of body function, with amounts varying according to the part of the body affected and the degree of disability. For loss of a hand, for example, employees receive two-thirds of their weekly wages for 150 weeks.

But for partial loss of function — a condition typically suffered by cumulative trauma patients — compensation is cut according to the severity of the disability. Poultry workers ruled to have a 10 percent loss of function in one hand, for example, are paid two-thirds of their wages for only 15 weeks.

One of the biggest problems with the program, however, is a lack of information — most workers have simply never heard of workers' compensation. It is not uncommon, union officials say, for employees to confuse compensation payments with disability benefits provided by company insurance plans.

In unionized poultry plants, workers may learn the difference from shop stewards or union literature. But in plants without a union, posters tacked to crowded bulletin boards may be the only information about workers' compensation workers ever receive.

Another difficulty for some workers is knowing where to apply for benefits. For years, workers could only file claims in Richmond. Beginning this July, claims can now be filed at branch offices in Norfolk, Alexandria, Roanoke, and Lebanon.

For the poorly educated women who dominate the labor force in the poultry processing industry, writing a letter or making a long-distance telephone call to state officials can be daunting.

"You're talking about noticing an eight-inch by 10-inch card, the formidable

idea of writing, the hassle factor," says Stiefel, the Alexandria attorney.

Poultry companies have no incentive to promote workers' compensation because additional claims drive up their insurance costs. "If you don't say anything about workers' compensation, they don't tell you anything," says Mary Vines, a worker at the Holly Farms plant in Glen Allen.

Still another stumbling block to applying is the fear of reprisal. Although companies deny the connection, accounts of cumulative trauma victims who were fired after obtaining benefits are not unusual.

To make matters worse, Virginia

To counter such opposition, workers typically seek legal counsel to argue their case before a hearing officer. Many lawyers, however, will not represent them.

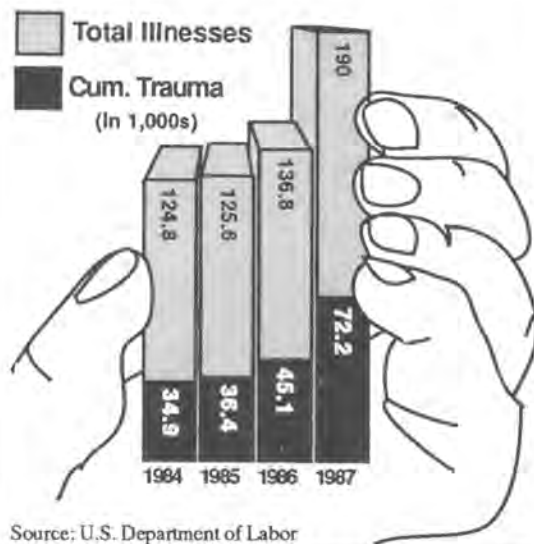
The reason is money. Attorney's fees, which are approved by the state, usually consist of a percentage of the award in cumulative trauma cases. If the workers lose, their lawyers often go unpaid.

"The biggest fee I've ever received in one of these cases was \$1,200 — the biggest by far," says Kenneth Bynum, a Falls Church attorney who handles poultry cases. "Some are \$75."

"In the Midwest, we'd find that every town had attorneys that would fight compensation cases," says one veteran union organizer. "In the South, no lawyers represent workers. The fees are peanuts."

GRASPING THE PAIN

While the total number of occupational illnesses reported by private industry grew by slightly more than half since 1984, cumulative trauma disorders more than doubled.



workers who want to file a claim must choose their doctors from a list provided by the company. Choice of physicians varies from state to state; in North Carolina and South Carolina, the employer chooses the physician.

Even if Virginia poultry workers clear all the hurdles in applying for compensation, they still face the strong possibility that their claims will be rejected. Although four out of five claims are uncontested, poultry companies and their insurance carriers "routinely" battle cumulative trauma cases, Stiefel says.

Last year, private firms in Virginia refused to pay 3,700 workers who filed for compensation, forcing the state to hold hearings on the claims.

THE ONE PERCENT

The biggest obstacle to poultry workers seeking compensation, however, may be a recent change in state law.

The antecedents of the change, Stiefel recalls, began early in the decade, when assembly-line speeds as much as doubled and cumulative trauma illnesses began striking poultry workers.

Experts who came to Virginia and began studying the dynamics of motion on the poultry processing line, he says, became convinced the disorders were work related. They communicated their findings to physicians, whose testimony made cumulative trauma cases easy to win — for a time.

"I'd say that our success rate was 90 to 95 percent for hundreds of cases," Stiefel says.

But all that changed four years ago, when the Virginia Supreme Court heard the case of Brenda Gilliam, who was awarded workers' compensation after her elbow was injured by the repetitive motion of a telephone assembly line. The court decided in favor of the company, effectively ruling that cumulative trauma disorders are "ordinary diseases of life" — that is, not specifically linked to the workplace, and thus ineligible for compensation.

Attorneys representing workers were shocked by the ruling, but poultry companies hailed the decision. Both sides took the battle to the state legislature. The result was a 1986 amendment that made some cases compensable, but only under a

stricter standard of proof that essentially requires physicians to testify that an illness occurred from conditions on the job, and nowhere else.

That is almost impossible for medical professionals to do, because cumulative trauma disorders can result from a variety of causes, or even for no apparent reason.

As a result, physicians who call an illness job-related in private conversation often reverse themselves in testimony, said Don Cash, a vice president of Local 400 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, which represents poultry workers in Virginia.

"The thing we're always running up against is the doctors," Cash says. "They say it's maybe 99 percent certain that the problem is work related. Then the cross examination comes, and they're asked, 'Are you absolutely certain?' And they say, 'No.' It's that one percent that kills us."

BETWEEN THE CRACKS

The combination of obstacles keeps many poultry workers in Virginia from ever receiving compensation.

Geraldine Baylor tried. By her account, her chronic tendinitis was undoubtedly caused by her job.

The problem arose early last year, she says, while she worked as a breast cutter, slicing about 15 birds a minute. It was caused, in her view, by exceptionally large birds that appeared on the production line and kept coming for days.

Soon, she noticed the ache in her arm. Her cutting speed faltered, and she went to the company nurse.

"She didn't want to say it was my job," Baylor recalls. "She said, 'Go back and try.' I'd get back at it. Then they'd switch me to other jobs. Finally in May, it got so bad I couldn't sweep a floor. I couldn't do anything."

She took a leave of absence on May 3, 1988. Company records show she returned October 24, worked for a week, and resigned.

Baylor has a different version of her

departure. She remembers working on the line as a packer, a less stressful task, when she was told to return to cutting. She remembers a superior telling her, "If you can't do your job, I'll give you a leave of absence until you can go back." So I never went back.

"I didn't quit. He just wouldn't give me nothing else to do. I liked Holly Farms. If I'd stayed there three more years, I would have had some kind of pension. Now that's gone."

She says she contacted Kenneth Bynum, the union's attorney, about obtaining workers' compensation, but had no success.

He concedes that the Glen Allen plant has problems with the disorders, "but no worse than any other poultry or meatpacking plant."

PARADE OF PAIN

Workers and labor leaders advocate a variety of steps to improve health and safety in the poultry industry (see box, below). In the meantime, though, the parade of pain continues. Poultry companies keep working faster and faster, trying to beat the competition as they strive to fulfill the national craving for their products.

In Virginia, that competition is likely to increase between Holly Farms, the nation's third largest broiler producer, and Perdue, which ranks fourth. Second-ranked ConAgra is considering a \$1.3-billion buyout of Holly Farms, a move that would increase its ability to compete with Perdue and top-ranked Tyson Foods, says Bill Roenigk, a spokesman for the National Broiler Council.

As demands on the workforce have escalated, however, union membership among Virginia's poultry workers has declined. The reason? "Most of them don't know how to fight," says Stiefel, the Alexandria attorney. "But I don't believe the problem has abated, not one iota."

For workers like Geraldine Baylor, permanently crippled by cumulative trauma disorder, the problem will never abate. Yet Baylor was lucky — unlike many injured poultry workers, she was able to find another job. She now works on the production line at a furniture factory, earning

slightly less than she did at Holly Farms, where her hourly wage was \$5.72.

"I can do the job," the 48-year-old worker says of her new position. "But when I get home, I have to double my medicine." □

Joe Fahy, a reporter for the Indianapolis News, was formerly a staff writer for The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star in Norfolk, Virginia.

EASING THE PAIN

Workers and labor leaders have a variety of suggestions to improve the OSHA and workers' compensation programs in Virginia and other poultry-belt states. Many would cost little to implement. Some of the proposals:

- ▼ Allow employees applying for workers' compensation to choose their own physicians. "Workers caught in a system where they can't go to their own doctor are skeptical," said James Ellenberger, a workers' compensation specialist for the AFL-CIO.
- ▼ Determine disability settlements based on what workers actually lose. Poultry workers in rural areas generally receive only partial settlements for an injured hand, even though the disability makes it impossible for them to find another job.
- ▼ Apply reasonable standards of proof in compensation cases involving cumulative trauma.
- ▼ Enact tougher penalties on large corporations that violate safety standards. In Virginia, maximum fines have not increased since the federal government enacted them in 1970.
- ▼ Mandate more thorough and frequent state inspections.
- ▼ Require employers to report every serious accident or pattern of illness. Companies currently report only those accidents in which a worker is killed or at least five workers are hospitalized.
- ▼ Allow workers and their families to sue employers for job-related illnesses, injuries, and deaths. Shielding employers from lawsuits hinders health and safety efforts by removing the incentives for employers to be safe.
- ▼ Require all employers to establish health and safety committees that give workers a say in workplace safety issues.

"I tried every angle I could think of," Bynum recalls. "Her medical (evaluation) didn't back her up. One general practitioner said it appeared to be work related. The hand specialist never said that. It's a frustration I go through every day."

A Holly Farms official who asked not to be identified calls Baylor a cumulative trauma victim who "fell through the cracks."



The Fox Guarding the Hen House

The feds let poultry firms inspect their own birds — and contaminated chickens kill thousands of consumers each year.

By Tom Devine

Eighty-three years ago Upton Sinclair shocked the public with his description of the Chicago meatpacking industry in *The Jungle*: the slaughter of diseased animals, meat covered with excrement, and workers who fell into lard vats, never to return.

Except for disappearing workers, the current slaughtering practices in the meat and poultry industry today are remarkably similar to those Sinclair documented in 1906. According to poultry workers, federal inspectors, and public health officials, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cut its inspection staff, lowered health standards, and systematically cracked down on employees who try to inform the public about contaminated food.

What's more, observers say, USDA is gradually abdicating the responsibility for food safety it assumed after the public up-

roar over *The Jungle* by deputizing the poultry industry to inspect itself.

The relaxed inspection practices — known as the Streamlined Inspection System — are literally maiming workers and killing consumers. Workers in poultry processing plants are frequently crippled by unsafe machinery operated at reckless speeds, and USDA routinely puts its stamp of approval on contaminated birds. As a result, the number of cases of salmonella, the most serious form of food poisoning from poultry, has risen to 2.5 million a year — including an estimated 500,000 hospitalizations and 9,000 deaths.

THE DRIVER'S SEAT

The roots of the "streamlined" inspection policy can be traced to the early 1980s, when the Reagan administration

began deregulating private industry. Dr. Robert Bartlett, a top-ranking Agriculture Department official, frankly described the new policy in a 1981 memorandum to his staff: "The political climate is such that the special interest groups supporting the meat and poultry industry have won and now have the ear of Washington. They 'paid their dues' and are now in the driver's seat. . . . The consumer base has disintegrated. We must be versatile and adjust to this new challenge."

One of the most obvious adjustments was a cut in the number of inspectors. At the beginning of 1981, the USDA roster called for 5,995 full-time slaughter inspectors. Although meat and poultry consumption has increased since then, the agency's current budget contains slots for only 5,020 inspectors. During the same period, the number of headquarters bureaucrats jumped from a handful to nearly 1,000.

The Agriculture Department also moved unofficially to lower inspection standards, either through word of mouth or informal memoranda. For example, inspectors once condemned all birds with air sacculitis, a disease that causes yellow fluids and mucus to break up into the lungs. Although the law hasn't changed, USDA inspector Estes Philpott of Arkansas now estimates that he is forced to approve 40 percent of air sac birds that would have been condemned 10 years ago.

Other whistleblowing inspectors report similar experiences. In a sworn affidavit, retired inspector Albert Midoux described how he was reprimanded in 1987 for ordering the shutdown and cleanup of a room where the maggots were so thick that workers were slipping

on the floor. Midoux recounted how 10 years earlier he had received a commendation for taking the same action.

The relaxed standards fly in the face of a rising concern over public health threats from food poisoning. In 1987 testimony before the National Academy of Sciences, Dr. Edward Menning of the National Association of Federal Veterinarians warned that food poisoning is rising to unacceptable levels. As many as 81 million Americans suffer from yearly bouts of diarrhea, most commonly caused by contaminated poultry. And those hardest hit by the rise in salmonella poisoning have been the most vulnerable — the elderly, the very young, and those with immune deficiencies.

USDA doesn't deny that food poisoning has increased — it simply advises consumers to treat all poultry as if it's contaminated. The agency recommends extensive precautions in the kitchen: wearing rubber gloves when handling chicken, making sure the bird doesn't touch other food, and sterilizing any surface that comes into contact with uncooked poultry.

In effect, consumers are being told to regard all poultry as a potential health hazard. "It's not fair to expect consumers to behave as if they're decontaminating Three Mile Island when all they want to do is cook their Sunday dinner," said Kenneth Blaylock, president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

GRADE A CENSORSHIP

Given its response to contamination, it is not surprising that USDA has tried to keep secret the real goal of its "modernization" policy — turning federal responsibility for food safety over to the industry itself. The first step in the new program was censorship. USDA reviewers learned they no longer could write reports about contaminated meat that was illegally approved and sold to consumers. Eight veterinarians who persisted were harassed, transferred, or forced to retire.

Gag orders, censorship, and the destruction of documents that contain "bad news" have since become a way of life at USDA. As a top agency official explained in 1985 after the agency was caught destroying a report that revealed massive amounts of contaminated food had been approved, the department wants to maintain a "positive" image rather than examining "every damn little nitty-gritty thing that comes up."

The agency made a mistake, however, when it tried to censor the reports of one review team veterinarian, Dr. Carl

removes the outer filth, but actually embeds invisible salmonella germs into the poultry flesh or spreads them to other parts of the carcass.

Worst of all, Telleen learned, thousands of dirty chickens are bathed together in a chill tank, creating a mixture known as "fecal soup" that spreads contamination from bird to bird. Once the feces are mixed with water it creates what Telleen calls "instant sewage." Consumers pay for the contaminated mixture every time they buy chicken: up to 15 percent of poultry weight consists of fecal soup.

When Telleen wrote an article exposing the scam, the Agriculture Department issued a reprimand and threatened to fire him for breaking its ethics code, which forbids employees from taking "any action which adversely affects public confidence in the integrity of the government." USDA reasoned that by warning the public of food poisoning, Telleen had violated the ethics rule.

Last year, however, USDA released a study that in effect acknowledged Telleen's only crime was telling the truth. The study conceded that washing does not adequately remove salmonella germs left behind by fecal contamination — even after 40 consecutive rinses.

Telleen remains dissatisfied, however, insisting that the only foolproof way to prevent the spread of the disease is to separate contaminated carcasses from clean birds as soon as the filth is detected. "Segregating clean food from the dirty," he says, "has been the law of science, religion, and common sense since the Bible."

"AT THEIR MERCY"

What Telleen stumbled across was only one example of how the technological revolution in poultry processing has actually increased the level of contamination. According to Menning, the federal veterinarian, the poultry industry was forced to begin washing carcasses because



Photo courtesy of GAP

SAMPLE OF CONTAMINATED CHICKENS APPROVED BY USDA UNDER ITS STREAMLINED INSPECTION SYSTEM. THE DEPARTMENT SAYS FOUR OUT OF TEN BIRDS SOLD IN GROCERY STORES ARE INFECTED WITH SALMONELLA.

Telleen. Telleen is a 75-year-old safe food crusader with a grandfatherly smile and a twinkle in his eye that changes to sparks when he talks about filthy poultry. He finally retired this spring, seven years after USDA tried to force him out.

In 1982, Telleen transferred to a do-nothing office job after refusing to tone down his reports. He kept busy researching new inspection techniques — and what he learned disturbed him. Carcasses contaminated with feces, once routinely condemned or trimmed, are now simply rinsed with chlorinated water to remove the stains. According to Telleen, washing

of increased contamination caused by mechanical eviscerating machines. The eviscerators are supposed to rip intestines from carcasses, but often they rip them open and spill feces all over the body cavity.

Part of the reason is the speed of the machines, which run at 70 to 90 birds per minute — nearly three times faster than a decade ago. Contamination is also exacerbated by other modern technologies like feather pickers, machines that use “rubber fingers” to pound off feathers. Unfortunately, the machines also pound dirt and manure into the skin pores.

As a result, salmonella contamination is steadily increasing — from an official rate of 28.6 percent of all USDA-approved broilers in 1967 to 36.9 percent in 1979. USDA has stopped reporting the levels, but other surveys reveal that contamination at some plants has skyrocketed to 60 percent. In 1986 the chief of federal poultry inspection admitted that levels of 58 percent at a given plant did “not surprise” him.

While expensive technology and faster assembly lines poison poultry sold to consumers, USDA is replacing federal inspectors with corporate “quality control” staffers who are permitted to vouch for the USDA stamp of approval. The new program has given the industry a rubber stamp, putting food safety in the hands of employees on the company payroll.

Unlike their corporate counterparts who have replaced federal inspectors in the defense and nuclear industries, quality control inspectors in the food industry are not required to earn professional certifications or receive federally approved training.

They are also denied the freedom to enforce the law. According to federal testimony, companies have fired quality control inspectors on the spot for reporting violations that could slow production or cause costly condemnations.

Earlier this year, quality control supervisor Donald

Henley told a congressional committee how his boss informed him of his job rights after he stopped some 3,000 pounds of spoiled hams from being shipped illegally. “We don’t need you around here,” the plant owner told him. “You’re fired. Now go on and get out.”

“There was nothing I could do,” Henley recounted. “When I worked in the industry, I didn’t have the right to do the right thing.” He warned that industry inspectors “aren’t going to stick their necks out if they can’t defend themselves.”

Intent on keeping inspectors silent, industry lobbyists have vehemently opposed passage of the Employee Health and Safety Whistleblower Protection Act,

a bill designed to protect employees who expose illegal practices. As Bette Simon, another poultry inspector who blew the whistle on the industry, testified at hearings on the bill, “Until Congress gives us some free speech rights in terms of our jobs, poultry companies are the law where we work. The public will continue to be at their mercy.”

ON THE LINE

Opposition to civil rights is not surprising, many inspectors say, since the poultry industry is known for treating its workers as machines rather than human beings. Inspectors witness working con-

LESS IS MORE

THE STRANGE CASE OF DISCRETIONARY INSPECTION

When Lester Crawford, director of food safety for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, announced a plan last November to improve inspection of processed meat and poultry, it seemed almost too bizarre to be true.

Better inspection is simple, Crawford said: just cut the inspection force in half, eliminate daily inspections of food processing plants, redirect the remaining inspectors to check buildings and paperwork instead of food, and put the industry on an honor system by replacing federal inspectors with untrained company employees.

The plan — dubbed “Discretionary Inspection” (DI) — was soon on its way to becoming official policy. Industry supporters in Congress lauded the proposed inspection cuts, hoping to return food safety laws to the days before Teddy Roosevelt and Congress mandated daily meat inspection in 1906.

The plan called for inspectors to spend more time preparing paperwork and less time examining food. In fact, DI would allow most processed food to be shipped off to market before inspectors could examine the records to check for contamination. What’s more, inspection records would be corporate property considered secret documents, unlike USDA reports available under the Freedom of Information Act.

DI also placed a new emphasis on computer-generated schedules with questionable priorities. Inspectors would be required to check plant lockers, bathrooms, and lunchrooms instead of assuring proper cooking temperatures and monitoring lunchmeat additives — traditional functions vital to controlling salmonella and other health hazards.

The computer schedules were so inaccurate that even USDA conceded 31 percent of assignments were irrelevant. Inspectors reported being sent at 3:45 a.m. to plants that didn’t open until 7 a.m. and ordered to check

products the plants didn’t produce. When the computer was instructed to add inspections at plants that abused the honor system, it blew its stack — spewing out an endless pattern of musical notes instead of a food inspection schedule.

In tests at pilot plants, discretionary inspection proved to be a disaster. According to USDA reports, the plants failed to improve sanitation, control pests and rodents, regulate temperatures, provide laboratory samples, and complete records. Inspectors and workers estimated that five to ten percent of all shipped products violated food safety laws, compared to levels of one to two percent under traditional inspection.

In the end, the plan didn’t sell. A safe-food coalition of outraged consumers, workers, inspectors, and elderly citizens led by former Assistant Agriculture Secretary Carol Foreman staged a concerted campaign to defeat the measure. Those who wrote public comment letters to USDA about the proposal opposed it by a margin of 1,817 to 28.

When Crawford, chief of food safety, was unable to defend the plan against challenges from Delmer Jones, president of the food inspectors union, before officials at a congressional hearing in April, USDA backed down. On May 19, officials announced they were withdrawing the proposal.

Although USDA gave up on the plan, it has continued using computers to tell inspectors when, where, and how long to check food for wholesomeness. As a result, USDA estimates that daily inspections at poultry processing plants currently average only 25 minutes, and some inspections consist of little more than five or ten minutes spent glancing at locker rooms. In essence, we refused to buy the car — but somehow we’re stuck with its motor.

— T.D.

ditions at poultry plants first-hand, and whistleblowers describe the work as "modern slavery."

Poultry companies allow nothing to get in the way of production, inspectors report — and the results are frequently tragic. One eyewitness signed a statement describing how a poultry worker who complained of a headache passed out and died after being denied a break:

"Maybe she died right there on the line, or maybe she hit her head when she fell, I don't know," said the witness, who asked not to be identified because family and friends still work at the plant. "All I know is that she had blood coming out of her eyes and ears. It was the worst thing I ever saw. I still cry just to think about it."

Inspectors are also exposed to many of

Some of the hazards to inspectors and workers pose health threats to consumers as well. Since employees are not allowed to leave the line to go to the bathroom, they sometimes have to use the floor. Chickens that fall in the urine and excrement are routinely picked up and returned to the line. At one Southern poultry plant, inspectors reported, management would not stop the line after a pregnant woman vomited on it.

BLOWING THE WHISTLE

Even without protection, enough inspectors have spoken out so that consumers are starting to learn what they're eating. Hobart Bartley is a former federal grader whose dissent sparked a 1987 60

Although poultry prices and stock plummeted in the wake of the report, USDA is now pushing for a program that would cut inspections even further and speed up production lines. When the program was tested at a poultry plant in Puerto Rico, however, the number of contaminated birds was actually greater after inspection. According to former USDA microbiologist Gerald Kuester, the level of salmonella increased from 54 percent when the birds arrived at the plant to 76 percent when they emerged.

After sitting through a briefing on the new modernization plan, Food Inspectors Union vice president Dave Carney told agency officials, "When I started, we used to throw the contaminated bird away. Then, we trimmed the contamination

away. Now, we're rinsing the contamination away. It looks like we're going to eat contamination away."

USDA is also anxious to extend the "streamlined" inspections to cattle, pigs, and "light fowl" — egg-laying hens that are no longer productive. Light fowl that emerged from a pilot plant were often covered with abscesses oozing yellow fluids or were bright red from bruises and internal hemorrhaging. The inspection simply did not allow enough time to detect and remove the blood.

From all reports, it seems clear that USDA and the poultry industry are deeply committed to a philosophy of "see no evil, hear no evil." The trends are too deeply in-

grained for isolated federal inspectors and plant workers to reverse through acts of professional martyrdom. The USDA stamp of approval will be worth its rubber again only if consumers join whistleblowers in denouncing inspection cutbacks and insist on tough federal standards to bring the poultry industry out of The Jungle and into the modern world. □

Tom Devine is legal director of the Government Accountability Project, a non-profit watchdog group based in Washington, D.C.

Photo by Drew Wilson/Virginian-Pilot



THE POULTRY INDUSTRY WOULD LIKE TO REPLACE GOVERNMENT INSPECTORS WITH THEIR OWN "QUALITY CONTROL" EMPLOYEES AND INCREASE LINE SPEEDS TO AS FAST AS 110 BIRDS PER MINUTE.

the same occupational hazards that face poultry workers on the line, such as excessive chlorine in the water used to wash chickens. Bette Simon testified that the company she worked for used solutions of up to 70 percent chlorine to bleach feces it refused to remove from carcasses. Heavy fumes from the solutions made her eyes water and skin peel from her hands. She and other workers developed lung problems, and suffered from chronic headaches and sore throats.

"You just feel sick and worn out all the time," said Simon, relieved to have switched to a job as waitress at a truck stop.

Minutes expose on fecal soup. A 57-year-old farmer, Bartley earned medals for bravery in Korea and Vietnam, where he served in an intelligence unit.

Bartley was forced to retire as an inspector after he caught the Simmons poultry company trying to switch the tags and ship out 200,000 pounds of chicken packed with tumors, abscesses, broken bones, and bruises. Although USDA scoffed at the disclosures, a born-again quality control inspector at the plant described on national television how he had been ordered to falsify records allowing the company to ship products illegally.

Moving Mountains

The Pittston coal company is trying to break the union and uproot entire Appalachian communities.

By Denise Giardina

On February 26, 1972, a giant dam of coal waste created by the Pittston Company broke on Buffalo Creek in West Virginia. Pittston officials and engineers knew the dam was unsafe; so did residents, who complained right up until the disaster. The rushing wall of water blasted the hollow's soil down to the rock, carried away every building in its path, picked up bridges and left twisted railroad track suspended in mid-air. In the space of a few minutes, 125 men, women, and children were killed and 4,000 left homeless.

Pittston's first response was to label the disaster "an act of God." According to the company, the slag dam was "incapable of holding the water God poured into it." My own analysis was quite different. I had grown up in a coal camp in a neighboring county. A slag dam stood at the head of that holler and I could easily imagine it breaking, imagine the communities I had known washed away. Buffalo Creek

revealed the coal industry in all its nakedness, an enemy of the people who live in the central Appalachians, the destroyer not just of mountains and streams but of culture, community, family.

In fact, I did lose my community, not to a broken dam but to coal-field economics. I am an exile, as anyone from the mountains must be after being uprooted by coal. Black Wolf, the camp where I grew up, passed through a series of hands before being torn down. My family resettled near Charleston, severing close ties with uncles, aunts, cousins, neighbors. What I found, to my sorrow, is that once those ties have broken, once the community has been left or lost, it can never be restored or duplicated. The extended family is still alive in the mountains, still provides support, both emotional and economic, for those who remain. It does not easily admit strangers, even strangers with roots.

There is, however, a compensation for

the hillbilly in exile. Although the particular mountain place has been lost, there is now the freedom to belong to an entire region. It is a belonging which makes one vulnerable, for every assault on the mountains cuts deep, and there are many assaults. The latest, and perhaps the most crucial to date, is being launched by that familiar nemesis, Pittston. The same company that destroyed Buffalo Creek with so little remorse has undertaken a policy which, if successful, will devastate a three-county area in southwest Virginia, deal the final blow to what remains of a community on Buffalo Creek, and perhaps reduce the United Mine Workers of America to a shell of an organization with no more than nominal power.

BLAST AND GOUGE

The Pittston Company is the leading coal producer in southwest Virginia, and a major force in West Virginia and eastern Kentucky as well. In 1987, Pittston pulled out of membership in the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association (BCOA), and announced it would not accept the contract the BCOA recently negotiated with the United Mine Workers. The UMW has a longstanding tradition — no contract, no work. It was therefore highly unusual when the union announced its members would stay on the job without a contract, as a good-faith gesture designed to avoid a strike.

Pittston responded by immediately cutting off the medical benefits of 1,500 retirees, widows, and disabled miners. According to Pittston spokesman William J. Byrne, "[A medical card] is like a credit card that expires. Theirs expired."

Pittston is not the first company to try a strategy of abandonment. In 1985, A.T. Massey broke with the BCOA and successfully withstood a strike. Massey, like Pittston, began transferring its mineral reserves — and mining jobs — to non-union subsidiaries. Many fear if Pittston also succeeds, other companies will quickly follow suit. And the final result would not only break the union, it would effectively clear the way for absolute power over a vast energy reservation.

In an interview with the Charleston

Daily Mail, Douglas Blackburn, a supervisor for an A.T. Massey subsidiary, said, "I think southern West Virginia will be restructured, and I think worldwide economics will force that restructuring. I think it'll be traumatic. The coal mining population will be very small. There'll be a nucleus of efficient, effective coal operators. Many of the jobs that have been reduced over the years will never return. The most significant change we'll face is that our communities will be smaller. Our families and friends will move away."

The clear implication is that these efficient, effective coal operations will be non-union. It is equally clear that the industry intends the continued massive depopulation of the Appalachian coalfields, the better to blast and gouge the landscape into oblivion. People complain when their drinking water is contaminated, when a slide from a strip job damages their property, when their house falls in above a longwall operation. People demand better wages and benefits and working conditions. People are in the way. The only institution which stands between coalfield communities and their dispersal, the institution those communities fought for and which has served as a buffer between the miner and the willful neglect of coal companies, is the union.

NAZIS AND COMMUNISTS

After 14 months of working without a contract, giving Pittston ample time to reverse itself, more than 3,000 union miners struck the company on April 5. Pittston had already hired a notorious "security firm," the Asset Protection Team, which recruits from the ranks of right-wing mercenaries and is headed by the ex-Secret Service son-in-law of former president Gerald Ford. Replacement miners were quickly hired and housed in barracks at the mine site, and scab truck drivers were recruited from among those who ran coal during the Massey strike.

Pittston also has mounted an advertising campaign in the region's newspapers, portraying itself as the defender of local

communities. "Protecting jobs and coal-mining communities are reasons why we are working so hard to achieve a new labor agreement that improves the lives of our employees and, at the same time, reinvigorates the coalfields." The benevolent company declares that it will make good the contributions to the United Way promised by workers now on strike, in order to provide "badly needed services to members of the community."

As for the union, it has "failed to adapt to a developing worldwide coal market." Miners are "henchmen" who in the past have been involved in "killing or wound-

illegal 'civil disobedience.'" On a National Public Radio news broadcast, Pittston President Michael Odom says, "This is the same thing the Ku Klux Klan do, the same thing the Nazis do, the same thing the Communists do. They come in and try to overthrow the government."

PUTTING ASIDE HATE

I have twice been to picket sites in Virginia. I have been arrested on the picket line both times, in the civil disobedience which Pittston so blithely links to violence. I have a different story to tell.

I was first arrested with 26 others, mostly miners and their wives, along with a handful of local church people. We gathered at the Moss No. 3 preparation plant near Dante, a site that is key to the strike because of the volume of coal it handles. Almost daily, people are arrested for sitting in front of coal trucks. The trucks are running slowly and are only half full.

There has been one violent incident on the picket line at Moss No. 3. A company security pickup truck ran into a crowd of pickets. One miner was thrown onto the hood of the truck, another suffered three broken vertebrae and was hospitalized in serious condition. Some windshields on company vehicles have been smashed by rocks, but 127 felony counts against pickets for rock throwing have been dismissed for lack of evidence. The number of arrests was itself inflated, since one rock thrown leads to wholesale arrests. And pickets claim the rock throwing, which happens away from the picket line, could just as easily be instigated by company men trying to make the union

look bad. Scab truck drivers and company security have already been seen scattering jackrocks, large homemade spikes, in the roads and around pickets' parked cars. When I have left my car unattended after being arrested, I have always returned to find it guarded by miners worried it would be tampered with.

On my first visit to the picket line I met an old acquaintance, Cosby Totten, one of

Photo by Don Petersen/Roanoke Times



FATHER AND SON AT A MINERS' RALLY IN WISE, VA. MORE THAN 2,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN PEACEFUL PROTESTS AGAINST THE COMPANY.

ing" (according to a Wharton Business School study) and who may be so involved again. A gutted company house is pictured, with no explanation that it burned before the strike. Coalfield residents are urged to "let UMW President Richard Trumka know that you join him in asking striking miners to stop the violence. . . . Tell Mr. Trumka this community will no longer tolerate these acts of

the first women to work underground. We compared broken windshields to broken backs. "There's all kinds of violence," Cosby said. "What mining does to a person's body is violence. What Pittston did to people on Buffalo Creek is violence and tearing apart the community is violence. We've let them say what violence is. That's our fault."

Cosby's willingness to take the blame is typical of the humility of Appalachian mountain people. I was reminded of it when I gathered with others on the eve of my second arrest. This time more church people gathered, including a Catholic nun, six Episcopal priests, a lawyer, a college student. We would be joined by over 100 miners, relatives, and neighbors.

At an evening worship service, people prayed that the hearts of Pittston officials would be changed. During a time of sharing I confessed to a lack of faith and a hatred for coal companies after a neighbor had been killed in the mines, after Buffalo Creek. When the gathering broke up, a new friend, Gaye Martin, approached.

"I understand what you said about hate," she said. She pulled me into a chair, sat beside me with her arm on my shoulders. "My father was killed in the mines. Two years later my brother was killed in the mines. Ten days after that my husband's brother was killed in the mines. I've had reason to hate. But it destroys you so you have to put it aside."

There are many Gaye Martins in this strike and they are its heart and soul. Union organizer Marty Hudson speaks of the wife he sees only once a month. One miner tells of his brother, a construction worker who is crossing the picket line so he won't lose his own job. Another picket has a brother among the state police. The prosecuting attorney for Russell County has a father on the picket line. Fred Wallace, a large man with a gentle face, tapes conversations with people on the picket line because the reasons they give for their presence help sustain him when he gets discouraged. Harry Whitaker is a minister who must sleep propped up on pillows because he is in the last stages of black lung. He recently went on a four-day bus trip to Pittston's headquarters in Greenwich, Connecticut, where company officials made light of his medical problems.

We gathered along the road outside the main gate of Moss No. 3. There was little traffic until a convoy of coal trucks arrived, kicking up swirls of coal dust as they made the turn into the plant. On a hill inside the gates a guard tower stands, and below it men in black uniforms aimed video cam-

eras at us. Some in the crowd jeered the passing trucks; there were also some cat-calls when a wedge of 20 state police moved in. Two local musicians played "Union Maid" and mountain banjo tunes beside a sign that proclaimed THIS IS SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA NOT SOUTH AFRICA. Then a group of miners sat in front of an oncoming truck. The truck stopped, brakes squealing, and the police moved in.

Gail Gentry was paralyzed after his back was crushed in the mine and now has no medical coverage. He rolled his wheelchair in front of a truck and became the 2,000th person arrested on the picket line. As state police surrounded him, a prayer was offered up. Two policemen stopped and removed their hats. After Gale was taken away, the rest of us moved in.

As I knelt, an elderly man came from the crowd and took my arm. "We love you," he said. He was crying. "We love you, we love you." Later, as some of us waited on a prison bus to be taken away, he poked a package of Nabs through the bus window. Then he backed away and held up two fingers in the form of a cross. We shared the Nabs among 15 people.

There is a strong religious strain in the Pittston strike. I bring it up not to convince unbelievers but to show how the values of the community as a whole are bound up in this crisis. The union miners on strike against Pittston are not some lawless minority. Most of them are breaking the law for the first time in their lives when they sit down on the picket line; it is an action they do not take lightly. They are supported by many neighbors and local business people. In a nation that puts a premium on upward mobility, they have given up middle-class salaries to live on \$800 a month in strike benefits. They have put up their homes to bond people out of jail after arrest on the picket line.

The entire community has been disrupted by the strike. The deputy sheriff who drove me to the Russell County jail had worked from five p.m. to five a.m. the

previous night and was in the middle of another long shift. Motel rooms have all been taken by state police so that visitors to the area have no place to stay; the police themselves rarely see their families. Grocery stores dip into their stock to donate food to those in jail. Pittston's white-collar workers, most of them caught in the middle, are estranged from coal-mining relatives; their children feel isolated at school. The architects of all this misery dwell secure in Greenwich, Connecticut, where the average selling price of a home last year was \$791,543 and no one has

seen the coal fields. What gives them the right to disrupt the lives of so many people? What gives them the power of life and death over an entire community? Those are the questions I heard over and over again on the picket line.

A busload of miners have returned from a shareholders' meeting in Greenwich and play a tape of the proceedings. On the tape, some miners object to a company proposal to force work on Sunday, a practice which would keep them from attending church. A Pittston official suggests that the religious issue is being used as a "crutch." A miner re-

sponds: "I use church to get through work during the week." [laughter from Pittston people]

The miner, serious: "That's my crutch in life, the whole meaning of it, because I hope to go to a better place when this is over."

Pittston executive: "Come to Greenwich." [more laughter]

For too long the myth of American mobility has been used to justify corporate policies that show no regard for stable communities, Appalachian rootedness stands square in the way of these policies. Mountain people leave their region with the greatest reluctance and return whenever they can. Pittston President Michael Odom, speaking with a Roanoke newspaper reporter, said of union miners facing layoffs, "They just won't leave, for some reason."

And that is what the Pittston strike is all about. □

Denise Giardina is the author of the novel Storming Heaven.

"There's all kinds of violence," she said. "What mining does to a person's body is violence. What Pittston did to people on Buffalo Creek is violence and tearing apart the community is violence."



Clover

By Dori Sanders

This is excerpted from the author's first novel, to be published next year, about a young black girl's coming to terms with her new stepmother, a white woman from out of town.

They dressed me in white for my daddy's funeral. White from my head to my toes. I had the black skirt I bought at the \$6 store all laid out to wear. I'd even pulled the black grosgrain bows off my black patent leather shoes to wear in my hair. But they won't let me wear black.

I know deep down in my heart you're supposed to wear black to a funeral. I guess the reason my stepmother is not totally dressed in black is because she just plain doesn't know any better.

The sounds inside our house are hushed. A baby lets out a sharp bird-like cry. "Hush, hush, little baby," someone whispers, "don't you cry." There is the faint breathless purr of an electric fan plugged in to help out the air conditioning, the hum of the refrigerator going in the kitchen, a house filled with mourners giving up happy talk for the quiet noise of sorrow.

We take the silence outside to waiting shiny black cars, quietly lined behind a shiny black hearse. Drivers in worn black suits, shiny from wear, move and speak quietly, their

voices barely above a whisper. It seems they are afraid they might wake the sleeping dead. It's like the winds have even been invited. The winds are still.

One of the neighbors, Miss Katie, is standing in the front yard, watching the blue light on top of a county police car flash round and round. She is shaking her head and fanning the hot air with her hand. Biting, chewing and swallowing dry, empty air. Her lips folding close like sunflowers at sundown — opening, like morning glories at dawn.

They asked Miss Katie to stay at the house. Folks in Round Hill, South Carolina, never go to someone's funeral and not leave somebody in their home. They say the poor departed souls just might have to come back for something or another, and you wouldn't want to lock them out.

My breath is steaming up the window of the family car. It's really cold inside. Someone walks to our driver and whispers something. I see a cousin rush from a car with what Grandpa would have called a passel of chaos. They leave our front door wide open. A hummingbird flies to the open door and stands still in mid-air, trying to decide about entering, but quickly darts backward and away.

I press my face against the cold window. Only a few

days back, my daddy, Gatén, raced out that very door, late for something. My daddy was small, but he could solid, natural-born move. Everybody says I'm small for a ten-year-old. I guess I'm going to be like my daddy. Funny, it's only the middle of the week, but it seems like it's Sunday.

They say I haven't shed a single tear since my daddy died. Not even when the doctor told me he was dead. I was just a scared, dry-eyed little girl gazing into the eyes of a doctor unable to hold back his own tears. I stood there, they said, humming some sad little tune. I don't remember all of that, but I sure do remember why I was down at the county hospital.

Things sure can happen fast. Just two days before yesterday, my Aunt Everleen and I walked in and out of that door, too. Hurrying and trying to get everything in tip-top shape for Gatén's wedding supper.

Gatén didn't give Everleen much time. He just drove up with this woman, Sara Kate, just like he did the first time I met her. Then up and said flat out, "Sara Kate and I are going to get married. She is going to be your new stepmother, Clover."

I almost burst out crying. I held it in, though. Gatén couldn't stand a crybaby. "A new stepmother," I thought, "like I had an old one." I guess Gatén had rubbed out his memory of my real mother like he would a wrong answer with a pencil eraser.

Everleen had been cooking at her house and our house all day long. My cousin Daniel and I have been running back and forth carrying stuff. I should have known something was up on account of all the new stuff we'd gotten. New curtains and dinette sets for the kitchen. Everleen said, "The chair seats are covered in real patent-leather." Gatén's room is really pretty. New rug and bedspread with matching drapes.

In spite of all the hard work Everleen was doing, she had so much anger all tied up inside her it was pitiful. She was slinging pots and pans all over the place. I didn't know why she thought the newlyweds would want to eat all that stuff she was cooking in the first place. Everybody knows that people in love can't eat nothing.

Even Jim Ed tried to tell her she was overdoing it. "It didn't make any sense," her husband said, "to cook so much you had to use two kitchens."

"I don't want the woman to say I wouldn't feed her," Everleen pouted.

"I think Sara Kate is the woman's name, Everleen," Jim Ed snapped.

Well, that set Everleen off like a lit firecracker. She

planted her feet wide apart, like she was getting ready to fight. Beads of sweat poured down her back. The kitchen was so hot, it was hard to breathe.

Jim Ed gave his wife a hard look. "I hope you heard what I said."

Everleen put her hands on her hips and started shaking them from side to side so fast, she looked like she was cranking up to take-off. "I heard what you said, Jim Ed. Heard you loud and clear. What I want to know is, what you signifying?"

Everleen was so mad, she looked like she was going to have a stroke. "Let me tell you one thing. Get this through your thick skull and get it straight. You are not going to get in your head that just because some fancy woman is marrying into this family you can start talking down to me.

You better pray to the Lord that you never, and I mean never, embarrass me in front of that woman. Because if you do, only the Lord will be able to help you." She waved a heavy soup spoon in his face. "Another thing, Jim Ed Hill, I am not going to burn myself to a crisp in that hot peach orchard getting my skin all rough and tore up. I'm sure all miss-uppity-class will do is sit around, and play tennis or golf. One thing is the Lord's truth, she is not going to live off what our . . ." She stopped short, "I mean what your folks worked so hard to get. Everleen Boyd will not take anything off anybody no matter

what color they may be. I've been in this family for a good many years, but I sure don't have to stay."

My uncle looked at me. I guess he could see I was hurting. He put his arm around me. "Oh, baby, we ought to be ashamed, carrying on like this. We can't run Gatén's life for him. And we sure don't need to go out of our way to hurt him. Gatén told me out of his own mouth, he truly loves the woman he's going to marry. My brother deserves some happiness. You are going to have to help him, also, Clover. Getting a stepmother will be something new for you to get used to."

Jim Ed turned to his wife. "You always say you put everything in the Lord's hands. I think you better put this there, too, and leave it there, Everleen." Well, that quieted Everleen down. She never bucks too much on advice about the Lord.

Right then I couldn't even think about the stepmother bit. All I could think about was what Everleen said. Maybe she was thinking of leaving Jim Ed and getting a divorce. She called herself Boyd. I didn't think she wanted to be a Hill anymore. If she took her son Daniel and left me all alone with the strange woman, I would die. I knew in my heart, I would surely die.

*They say I
haven't shed a
single tear since
my father died.
Not even when
the doctor told
me he was dead.*

I was starting to not like my daddy very much. Not very much at all. Miss Katie says, 'Women around Round Hill leave their husbands at the drop of a hat these days.' If Everleen leaves it will all be Gaten's fault, I thought. All because of his marriage plans.

Everleen pulled me from Jim Ed to her side. I buried my face against her sweaty arm, glad there was the sweat so she couldn't feel the tears streaming down my face. Her hot, sweaty smell, coated with Avon talcum powder, filled my nose. It was her own special smell. I felt safe.

Finally she pushed me away. "Let me dry them tears," she said dabbing at my eyes with the corner of her apron. I should have known, I couldn't fool her.

I don't know if it was what Jim Ed said about Gaten or the Lord that turned Everleen around. Probably what he said about the Lord, but it sure turned her around. After a few minutes she was her old self again.

"All right, little honey," she said, "we better get a move on. We got us a marriage feast to cook. Now I'm going to put together the best wedding supper that's ever been cooked. Then I'm going to put you on the prettiest dress you daddy has ever laid eyes on." She glanced at my hair. "Lord have mercy, Allie Nell's still got your hair to fix."

Anyway, Everleen was still cooking and cleaning at the same time when the telephone rang. My daddy had been in a bad accident. Everleen snatched lemon meringue pies out of the oven and drove her pickup like crazy down to the hospital.

The sign in the waiting room said 'NO SMOKING' but Uncle Jim Ed smoked anyway. He let long filter-tipped paper jobs dangle from his mouth and almost burn his lips before he remembered to take a draw.

There was an intercom system like the one at school. A voice was repeating, "Code blue — code blue. Room number 192." Nurses from everywhere hurried down the long hall.

Everleen stirred her hand around inside her pocket-book like she was stirring a pot of boiling grits. She pulled out a handful of candy without a piece of paper on it and divided it between me and Daniel. Daniel ate his. I didn't eat mine. I can't stand candy from Everleen's pocket-books. It's the same as sucking down perfume.

It was getting later and later, and I still hadn't seen my daddy. The sun was setting. It had cast its last shadows for the day. Those long, lean shadows, they crept through the windows and clung to the clean hall floors, waiting for the darkness to swallow them up.

A state highway patrolman appeared in the doorway of the waiting room. He inched forward slowly; it seemed as if he was afraid to enter the room. He turned his hat around and around in his hands. My uncle Jim Ed knew him. He had gone to high school with my daddy.

"I was called to the scene of the accident," he finally said.

Aunt Everleen didn't make it easy for the state trooper to tell us what had happened. Her body was shaking and

drawing up like she was having spasms. Although she held Jim Ed's big white handkerchief all balled up in her fist, she did not use it. Most likely because he had blown his nose into it before he handed it to her. I guess with all that was going on, poor Jim Ed plumb forgot what he was doing.

So Everleen sat there, working her mouth back and forth to hold it back from screaming out loud. Tears flowed from her eyes too full to hold them any longer. They ran down her face and formed tiny streams around her neck, that was already dripping with sweat.

"Tell us what happened," she would plead. Then in the next breath, cry out, "No, no, no. I don't want to hear. I can't bear knowing." Then she'd turn right around and beg once again for him to tell her what happened.

The state trooper finally refused to listen any longer. With his hat still in his hand, he turned his back and said, "Gaten Hill's car was struck by a pickup truck when the driver ran a signal light at the intersection of North

Main Street and Highway 74. Police at the scene said alcohol is believed to have contributed to the accident which is under investigation."

He shook his head. "The car was struck on the driver's side. Gaten was driving. It looks bad," he said, "real bad." The state trooper started shaking his head again.

I thought to myself, if the wreck was all that bad, perhaps my daddy needed me. As soon as he left, I sneaked from the waiting room.

It was supper time. I could smell the food. My daddy is always hungry for supper. I've always helped get his supper. Something seemed to tell me he needs me. I had to find



him. When no one was looking I slipped down the long hall.

When a nurse popped out of a room, I hid behind a tall stack of covered trays. The nurse stopped and faced the blank wall, for a long time, studying the blank wall, looking at it as though it was some kind of picture, as though she was trying to make out a face or something. Wide fancy framed eyeglasses dangled from a chain around her neck.

I peered from behind the trays with little round tins covering plates, like an Easter bonnet pulled down too far on a child's head.

While the big fat nurse with the bushy curl studied the blank wall, I studied her shoes. White crepe-soled shoes with heels run-over so far, the shoe touched the floor. She didn't even see me when she took one of the trays from the cart.

A big set of doors swung open. Two doctors dressed in rumpled green started down the hall.

"This is the absolute worst part of it all," one of them said.

The other doctor loosened the mask that covered everything on his face except his eyes. "I understand there is a child. A little girl."

"At least she has one of them."

"I'll talk with the family now."

I hope they don't mean something bad has happened to Sara Kate, I thought. Gaten will be so sad. I waited until they were out of sight and hurried back to the waiting room to hear what they were going to say about Sara Kate.

A nurse led me into a small office. The doctor was speaking in a soft, soft voice, yet it was strong and heavy with sadness. Uncle Jim Ed and Everleen were carrying on like the world was coming to an end.

Then I knew something was wrong. Bad wrong. A nurse offered little white pills in thimble-sized plastic cups

Aunt Everleen buried her face in her hands and covered her ears with her fingers when the doctor tried to explain how Gaten died. For her, it was enough that he was dead.

But Uncle Ed Jim leaned forward in his chair and listened. He listened and cried. Aunt Everleen's face showed she heard the sad-faced doctor explain that my daddy's internal injuries were too extensive for them to save him.

The doctor put his hand on my shoulder. "I want to see my daddy," I said. "I need to see him." But he wouldn't take me to see Gaten. His blue eyes filled with tears. He turned away. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "We couldn't save your father."

The doctor wouldn't let me see my daddy, but he took me to Sara Kate's room to see her. The State trooper sure had been right. Sara Kate was some kind of bad bruised and

cut up. Her eyes were closed. Maybe like her lips, they were swollen shut.

The doctor's voice was soft, like our footsteps had been. Soft like snowflakes falling on the ground. "Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Hill," he repeated until she had slowly opened her eyes. Maybe she was so slow about it because he hadn't gotten used to her new name. After all, she had only had it for a few hours.

She smiled a quick weak half smile and closed her eyes again. I guess there wasn't much for her to keep them open to see. Just a doctor in a rumpled green cotton outfit and me. I still hadn't gotten my hair fixed, and like always, I had sort of messed up my tee shirt a little scraping

the bowl in which Aunt Everleen made the lemon butter creme icing for her fresh coconut lemon layer cake. Plus, I got to lick the ice cream dasher.

Sara Kate bit her swollen lip. And even on a face that messed-up, sadness found itself a place. "Oh, little Clover," she whispered.

The doctor gave me a 'say something' look.

"Hey," I said, "I'm very pleased to see you, ma'am." Then I pulled loose from the doctor's light grip on my hand and backed out of the room.

All I had heard my daddy say about her meant absolutely nothing to me. I still did not know the woman. To me she was a total stranger. How could I know her? It takes time to learn a person.

My aunt wanted to pray for me. With me. I didn't feel like praying. It seemed like all the praying I'd done hadn't helped anyway, not one single

bit. I had prayed for my daddy not to die. I'd prayed for my grandpa, too. Even prayed for my mama to come back to me. I just can't pray no more. It won't do me any good no way.

With a silent owl-like swoop, the cars pulled into line and away. Car engines purring like an arrangement of music. Notes written for a sad song.

At the end of a row of rosebushes, a broken rose dangled down on one of the bushes. Broken, because I tried to break it off to pin on my dress but couldn't. You wear a white rose if your mother is dead. I don't know what color you wear when your daddy dies. I guess it probably doesn't matter.

Miss Katie is waving a big white handkerchief. They didn't tell Sara Kate that Miss Katie was left behind with

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eat all that stuff
she was cooking
in the first
place.
Everybody
knows that
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can't eat
nothing.*

the food just in case some stranger might come by, hungry and in need of a place to rest awhile. Just by chance it might be the departed soul. They only told Sara Kate it was an old custom, handed down through many generations. They did tell her, though, that the reason the hands on all clocks in the house had been stopped at 6:45 p.m. was because that was when Gaten died. People coming in only had to ask if it was morning or evening.

The only time Sara Kate said anything about the funeral arrangements was when they wanted to bring Gaten's body home and have the wake there. They said he should spend his last night on earth at home. "Oh no, oh no," Sara Kate whispered. "I don't think I can handle that." She did let them bring him by the house in the hearse the day of the funeral.

Sara Kate is sitting next to Uncle Jim Ed, my daddy's only brother. Her eyes are closed. She is twisting her new wedding band on her finger. Sara Kate is not old, but she is making the sounds with her mouth that old people make when they are beside themselves and don't know which a way to turn. Quiet, dry-lipped, smacking sounds. Lips slowing opening and closing, smack, smack. Just like Miss Katie.

A group of small barefoot children stand on the side of the blazing hot, hard-surfaced road. So thin, they look like stick figures. Big wide eyes pop out from faces like big white cotton balls on a blackboard. They turn and walk backwards, waving their stick-like arms until the long line of cars is out of sight. I wave back.

Sara Kate is standing alone before Gaten's casket. Her husband. My father. The funeral crowd has been held back. She has her own private time. Just a little stretch of time to be alone with Gaten. Small silent moments to say goodbye to someone already lost to her forever. All eyes are upon her. She is a white woman, a stranger to Round Hill.

Sara Kate is looking down at Gaten. Gaten's necktie is crooked. His necktie was always crooked. There had been that strange connection between them that I could never understand. At least twice that I can remember, there had been a quick look from Sara Kate, and Gaten would give her a slight smile and straighten his necktie. And then smile a smile for her alone. Now Sara Kate looked at

Gaten, but Gaten did not straighten his necktie.

I guess that strange and curious connection between them is gone forever.

People are still filing past my daddy's coffin. Sara Kate is wedged between me and Uncle Jim Ed, squeezed in between us on the crowded bench like vanilla cream between dark chocolate cookies. My daddy is dead. Stretched out in a fancy coffin right before my very eyes. And all I can think of is an Oreo cookie. An Oreo cookie.

My stepmother's body is as straight as a corn stalk. She is not crying. We sit side by side as stiff as painted leaves

on a painted tree. Uncle Jim Ed puts his hand on her arm. But me and my stepmother don't touch. I can count on the fingers of one hand how many times I've laid eyes on Sara Kate. She's been my stepmother for almost four days and all I know for sure about her is, she's not a Mexican. I can spot a Mexican a mile away. Every summer if there's a big peach crop the migrant workers flood Round Hill. We have peaches, but not enough to need the Mexicans.

Chase Porter brings them in all the time. He couldn't get all those peaches picked without them. He's one of the biggest peach growers in South Carolina. Chase is at the funeral. He looks sad because he is sad. He has known my daddy all his life. Like Gaten he was born and raised in Round Hill.

I pick at a thorn in my finger until it starts to bleed. I watch a drop of blood threaten to fall. I

turn my finger into a paint brush. The blood makes a round dot on my white dress. I keep adding to it until it almost becomes a flower. A daisy. The way I'm messing up my white dress, I might as well have held the baby with the stinky diaper. At first there had been just one little drop of blood that a bleeding finger could not leave alone. My dress is a mess. Sara Kate reached for my hand. I put it behind my back. □

Dori Sanders raises and sells peaches in York County, South Carolina on land her family has owned and farmed since 1915. She describes herself as a novelty—"the only black family-owned farm woman" in the county. During winter months she helps run a Maryland motel with friends to make ends meet.





Southern Refugees

By Eric Bates

*Last night I fell asleep in Detroit City
And dreamed about those cotton fields
back home.*

*I dreamed about my mother
Dear old father, sister, and brother,
And I dreamed about the girl I left so
far behind.*

*I want to go home.
I want to go home.
Oh, how I want to go home.*

— Mel Tillis
“Detroit City”

I pulled into Detroit for the first time in my life after a long, hard drive from West Virginia on the Fourth of July. That was eight years ago, but I still remember the man I met at the gas station when I stopped to fill my tank.

It was a Sunoco station on East Jefferson Avenue, about halfway between the burned-out shell of the Uniroyal tire factory and the up-scale neighborhoods of

Grosse Pointe. The owner came out, wiping his hands on his greasy blue coveralls, cast a disgusted look at my German-made Volkswagen, and proceeded to fill ‘er up.

Then he saw my license plate. “You from West Virginia?” he asked in a familiar mountain accent. I said yes, and he suddenly looked like he wasn’t sure whether he wanted to laugh or cry.

“Me too!” he said, grinning and shaking my hand through the open car window. “Name’s Jesse. Whereabouts you from?”

“Shepherdstown,” I said. “How ‘bout you?”

“Bluefield,” he said proudly. “Know where that is?”

“Sure. Home of the Bluebirds.”

“That’s right!” he said, amazed that anyone would recognize the minor league ball club from his home town. My familiarity instantly qualified me as a long-lost cousin. We talked baseball and bad-mouthed a few West Virginia politicians until he noticed my tank was full.

“How much I owe you?” I asked.

“Forget it,” he grinned. “It’s on me.” When I protested, he shook my hand again. “What’s the use of owning a gas station if you can’t pump gas for one of your own?” he asked.

I didn’t know it that day, but my drive from West Virginia to Detroit had followed a trail cut by millions of men and women like Jesse who have left the South in search of work, food, a better life for their families. I soon discovered entire Southern communities in and around Detroit, from the black neighborhoods of the Near East Side to the hillbilly outposts of Cass Corridor and Ypsilanti (known derisively as “Ypsi-tucky” because of its heavy concentration of Appalachian immigrants).

And not just Detroit, but Chicago, Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Pittsburgh, New York — Southerners have settled in every urban industrial center in the North, trans-

planting their values and cultures and communities in a land that often appears strange and hostile. Demographers, journalists, and academics call it "migration," making the mass movement of people seem as natural and inevitable as a flock of geese taking wing. In fact, the term obscures the economic and physical violence that has uprooted homes, families, and entire communities from the coal fields of Bluefield to the cotton fields of the Delta. Jesse and many of the others who have moved North since the turn of the century are not migrants—they are refugees, working people driven from their land to fill factory jobs in Northern industries.

The first mass exodus from the South dates back to World War I. Between 1915 and 1940, hundreds of thousands of Southerners—almost all rural blacks—left their homes in search of better lives in the urban North. The movement became known as the Great Migration.

"The decision to leave the South was prompted by many circumstances," says Spencer Crew, a historian at the Smithsonian Institution and curator of "Field to Factory," an exhibit on the migration. "Among the reasons were the systematic practice of discriminating against Afro-Americans, known as Jim Crow laws, and natural calamities caused by the boll weevil."

Many of those who moved were sharecroppers, locked into an ever-tightening circle of debt to their white landlords. With the start of the war, Northern industries found themselves with a shrinking workforce and increased demand to supply the troops fighting in Europe. Many companies hired labor recruiters to locate Southern blacks and lure them north with promises of high wages. Recruiters also promised blacks a better education for their children and greater personal freedom for themselves.

Freeman Patton was one Southerner who followed a recruiter north. Born in

Paris, Texas, Patton moved to Gary, Indiana with his family in 1911.

"My daddy was working at a high school and my parents felt that the educational advantages would be better in Gary, as well as the social privileges," Patton told Peter Gottlieb, labor archivist at Pennsylvania State University. "Along that time it seemed to be a migration period, so they decided they would migrate to there. A fellow came down sending people there to work in the steel mill and offering them pretty good advantages, home sites and that sort of thing, and so they migrated there."

The push to the North slowed during

in the North told their friends back home, and the refugees kept coming.

Freeman Patton worked with white Southerners when he moved from Gary to Pittsburgh to take a job in a steel mill. "They migrated themselves," he recalled. "A fellow that came from West Virginia, North Carolina, he would come here to Pennsylvania and get a pretty good job. Then he would have to go back home. He would have a friend or a relative, and he'd let them know about the prosperity he was enjoying. It was pretty much the same for black people."

As blacks and whites who found higher-paying jobs in the North told their

Photos courtesy Smithsonian Institution



A PLANTATION OWNER'S DAUGHTER WEIGHS COTTON IN TEXAS TO DETERMINE WAGES. MANY BLACKS HEADED NORTH TO ESCAPE OPPRESSIVE CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH...

the Depression, but it picked up with the start of World War II. Once again, industry found itself short of workers, and once again companies looked South for labor. This time, though, Southern blacks were joined by hundreds of thousands of Appalachian whites looking for work. Blacks and whites who found higher-paying jobs

friends back home, the flow of Southern refugees continued. Two decades after the war ended, Southerners were still making their way to big Northern cities in search of work. Between 1940 and 1970, more than four million blacks moved from the rural South to the urban North.

Though I'll move away into some
 crowded city
 In some Northern factory town you'll
 find me there
 Though I'll leave the past behind
 I will never change my mind
 These troubled times are more than I
 can bear.

—Utah Phillips
 “The Green Rolling
 Hills of West Virginia”

What white and black Southerners
 discovered in the North bore little resem-
 blance to the promised land they expected

were still the boss up North, and the good
 ol' boy network still prevailed.

“Whites were top foremen, from West
 Virginia, Alabama, Georgia, anywhere,”
 said Freeman Patton. “Some of them had
 fathers or brothers working in other parts
 of the mill. They would bring a fellow to
 me who didn't know the first thing about
 gas inspecting, and I would teach him how
 to be my boss. Then after I trained him he
 moves up higher, and someone replaces
 him, and I teach him. They're paying him
 more money to let me teach him.”

Refugees like Patton, however, were
 not passive victims. They had made a deci-
 sive move to change their own lives, and

decent life for themselves and their fami-
 lies as best they could. Migrating offered
 one way to make a significant change in
 their lives.”

The very act of moving changed the
 face of the entire country as well. In 1910,
 90 percent of all black Americans lived in
 the South. By 1970, the percentage had
 dropped to only half. The swelling black
 population in the North fueled white
 flight, creating vast suburbs and altering
 political districts, zoning decisions, and
 the location of highways, subways, and
 bus routes. It also revolutionized urban
 politics as blacks elected mayors in Gary,
 Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Clevel-
 and, and Washington, D.C.

The refugees brought their diverse
 cultures with them as well, breathing new
 life into music, literature, dance, and
 theater. Appalachian whites recorded
 their homesickness and disillusionment
 in countless bluegrass and country hits,
 while Southern blacks transformed the
 rhythms of jazz, blues, gospel, soul, and
 rock 'n' roll.

As Southerners like Walter Reuther,
 president of the United Auto Workers
 Union, took the lead in the civil rights and
 labor movements, the lines between
 North and South continued to blur. Much
 of what passes for Northern culture and
 politics often has deep Southern roots —
 roots that can be traced in the journeys of
 refugees and their families.

I often feel forsaken when I'm
 traveling alone
 Like being in Alberta, Canada, when
 Tennessee's your home
 And the day I got on board, Lord
 It was Sunday, drizzling rain
 And it gets awfully cold and
 lonesome at night on a train.

—Sparky Rucker
 “Cold and Lonesome”



... ONLY TO FIND SIMILAR CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH, WHERE FACTORY WORK WAS
 OFTEN DIVIDED ALONG RACIAL LINES.

to find. There were better schools and
 greater personal freedom, but there were
 also segregated factories, higher living
 expenses, and brutal slums.

Blacks in particular often encountered
 the same racism they had fled. Confined
 to unskilled jobs and inner-city slums,
 black Southerners learned that white men

their quiet determination also transformed
 the cities in which they settled.

“These are not people who are usually
 highlighted in history books or exhibi-
 tions,” according to Spencer Crew, the
 Smithsonian historian. “They did not hold
 powerful elected offices, lead troops into
 battle, or write memoirs. They were quiet
 heroes who sought primarily to create a

These days, developers and industries
 in the South like to boast that the tide of
 migration has changed. Today, they say,
 workers are flocking to the Sunbelt to
 bask in the glow of economic prosperity.

Statistics certainly show that the
 South has been gaining residents for the
 first time this century. Since 1965, ac-
 cording to the Census Bureau, the region
 has netted more than six million people in
 the ebb and flow of shifting populations.
 A century ago, only two percent of those

born in the North resided in the South. Today, 12 percent of all Northerners live below the Mason-Dixon line.

But the numbers don't tell the whole story. Researchers who have taken a closer look at the figures say that many of those moving to the South are the Southern refugees and their descendants returning to the communities they were forced to leave behind. Some have held on to the land they own in the South for years, waiting for an opportunity to return. Blacks in Chicago, for example, reportedly own more land in Mississippi than blacks in Mississippi.

the journey alone, without parents or friends.

Carol Stack, a Duke University anthropologist currently at the University of California, is writing a book on blacks returning to the region entitled *The Proving Ground*. According to Stack, some of what appears to be one-way "migration" is actually children moving back and forth between parents in the urban North and grandparents and other relatives in the rural South.

"When I was a child, I traveled back and forth between my mother's place in Brooklyn and this old house, my grand-

70 percent were either born in the South or were "homeplace movers" joining relatives in the region.

Most of the children returned to counties in rural areas in North and South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi. "Homeplace children are moving to the very communities, urban and rural, which originally accounted for the majority of northbound migrants," say Stack and Cromartie.

Sandra, a young girl Stack interviewed, decided to stay with her grandparents in the South despite her mother's wishes to have her join the family in New York. "I was torn between both, but my grandmother is old and has no one to take care of her," Sandra said. "My parents have each other."

Sometimes children said they preferred to live in the South, much as their ancestors who journeyed North dreamed of returning home someday. "I should stay with my grandparents," Helen told her parents, "because for one, there are many murderers up North, and my grandparents are old and need my help around the house."

Refugees are coming home, looking for work or searching for their roots or bringing their children to live with relatives. But for hundreds of thousands of uprooted Southerners the reunion is incomplete, and families remain fragmented, displaced.

One Southern girl — one of 100 children interviewed by Stack on their experiences in the North and South — wrote a letter to "Dear Abby" about a dilemma she faces. Her words sum up the painful uncertainty confronting Southern refugees and their descendants, torn between two families, two regions.

"Dear Abby," she wrote. "I am 12 and my brother is 10. My mother wants us to go and stay with her in New York City, and my grandparents want us to stay back home with them.

"What should we do?" □

Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure.



SOUTHERNERS WHO LEFT THE REGION RARELY TOOK MORE THAN A FEW PIECES OF LUGGAGE — AND THEIR DREAM OF RETURNING HOME SOMEDAY.

Sandra Headen, a university professor, spent six years in Chicago and eight years in Boston, but returned to her native North Carolina recently when her daughter Irene was born.

"We wanted our daughter to grow up in the South and be near her grandparents in Greensboro," Headen told the *Raleigh News and Observer*. "We wanted her to understand what her heritage is. Roots had always been important to us."

Like Irene, many of those moving back to the region are children. According to a recent United Nations survey, a third of all interregional moves in the U.S. were made by children under the age of 15. But unlike Irene, some children make

parents' homeplace," said Charlotte Copeland, a black woman who spoke with Stack after returning to rural North Carolina. "I would spend school years or summers in either place, but most of my high school years were spent in North Carolina. Going back and forth I gained a skill that has served me well. I can maintain in the city and I can maintain in the country. I can adjust because a part of me knows both places."

According to Stack and John Cromartie, a geographer at the University of North Carolina population center, nearly 350,000 blacks moved to the South between 1975 and 1980. A third of those who moved were children, and more than

Destination Detroit

DETROIT, MICHIGAN — Jim Hatfield, a union representative at United Auto Workers Local 735, was catching a lot of flak during a special election last January at the General Motors Hydramatic plant near Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The vice-president of the local had resigned unexpectedly, and competition for the vacant spot was fierce. After all, the winner would be just a heartbeat or another election away from the top.

Although the 44-year-old Hatfield is a popular guy in his 1,500-member district — he has held his union post for all but three years since 1972 — he was finding it difficult to convince some loyal constituents to support Mike Leslie for the vacancy.

No one was questioning Leslie's qualifications. Hatfield had known him for years; they had both served on the shop committee before Leslie became editor of the Local 735 newspaper. Whenever workers needed help in a struggle with the company, Leslie could always be counted on to ask the right questions, report the relevant facts, take revealing photographs, and write a story so everyone in the local would know exactly what was going on.

Still, some workers had their doubts about Leslie. Whenever he was challenged about his support, however, Hatfield displayed the same quiet determination that a long-lost relative named Sid must have shown 70 years ago as sheriff of Matewan, West Virginia, when he sided with striking coal miners against armed company thugs.

The persistence paid off. Mike Leslie, the son of Detroit autoworkers, became

Southerners in the
Motor City
helped organize
the auto industry
— and their
values continue to
guide the union.

By Sam Stark

the highest elected black officer in the history of Local 735.

And he won with the support of his most trusted advisor and friend, Jim Hatfield, the son of a poor white sharecropper from Tazewell, Tennessee. Even more remarkable, Leslie won in a plant that is three-quarters white, most of whom are also Southern born and Southern bred.

Not quite settled into his new office and trying to carry on a conversation between phone calls and people popping in for advice, Leslie still hadn't come down from his election-night high. "I'm just amazed that I won. By all rights, you could say that I shouldn't have. Especially when you analyze the numbers.

"We have about 6,500 members here at Local 735. Of that number, I'd say only about 1,500 are black. It's obvious that if people came out and voted along racial lines then I couldn't possibly have won. I won because of a lot of white support, including a lot of white Southerners," he concluded.

PARADISE VALLEY

The personal union Hatfield and Leslie have forged between North and South, black and white, is not uncommon in Detroit. The mass migration of millions of Southerners that began before World War II changed the political and cultural landscape of virtually every northern industrial city. The migrants came in search of work — and in Detroit, the work they found led them to play a pivotal role in the struggle to organize the auto industry.

Those who made the long journey north nearly 50 years ago were greeted by resentment and hostility. At a time when Americans of all colors united in fighting fascist armies bent on world domination, whites in the streets and factories of Detroit were fighting newly-arrived blacks seeking good-paying jobs and safe places to live.

Spurred by the rapid expansion of defense work that converted the Motor City into a wartime arsenal, some 500,000 whites and 50,000 blacks left the South for the promise of high-paying jobs in Detroit.

And there were plenty of jobs to go around. However, there weren't always enough decent places for new arrivals to live. The proportion of available housing quickly fell from an eight percent vacancy rate to less than one percent. Consequently, Southern migrants often found themselves squeezed into welfare shelters, empty storefronts, and temporary barracks.

In 1940, a summer camp owned and operated by Henry Ford stood next to the tiny Willow Run stream where the GM

Hydramatic plant towers today. When the federal government began looking for a place to build B-24 bombers for the Army Air Corps, they made a deal with Ford to put up a gigantic, mile-long building on the campsite.

Camp Willow Run was gone for good, but thousands of Willow Run workers found themselves camping out in tents, shacks, and makeshift trailers along roadsides and in open fields near the plant.

Some of the newcomers settled in the nearby town of Ypsilanti. Long-time residents deeply resented the influx of blue-collar, Southern white Democrats into their prim, conservative Republican community. Rather than putting out the welcome mat as their contribution to the war effort, they hung "No Southerner" signs on vacant houses and apartments.

In his book *Working Detroit*, labor historian Steve Babson quotes a state welfare official at the time who spoke about the town's long-term residents. "The children hear their parents refer to the newcomers as 'hillbillies,' trash and the like. Soon they themselves catch this bitter resentment, and juvenile gangs attack and beat up the children of the newcomers."

Most of the 42,000 workers at the bomber plant, though, ended up living in Detroit and commuting six miles or more each day. Commuting became so troublesome and time-consuming that the plant failed to meet its production quota of 432 planes a month, however, and the city quickly constructed the state's first expressway to bring workers from Detroit to the plant's front gate.

While the logistical problems of plant construction and transportation were easily resolved, the city couldn't manage to build housing fast enough to accommodate the huge demand. Instead, housing projects were quickly thrown up across Detroit.

Competition for the new housing was compounded by the city's decision to des-

ignate projects as black or white. The city's black population was largely restricted to a 30-block section ironically called "Paradise Valley." Between 1940 and 1950, the already overcrowded district nearly doubled in population from 87,000 to 140,000.

On February 27, 1942, when one black family attempted to move into new government housing in a Polish neighbor-

workers still had to resort to mass walkouts at Chrysler, Hudson, and Packard to assure its enforcement.

However, when three blacks were promoted by seniority at the Packard foundry on Detroit's east side, 25,000 white workers walked out in protest. Hoping to inflame the situation even further were hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazi-front National Workers League, and the fire-breathing fundamentalist preacher, the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith of Louisiana.

Leaders of the United Auto Workers responded by calling for equality and solidarity. John McDaniel, chairman of the local union bargaining committee, announced in no uncertain terms that the local leadership was "solid in its position that the whites and the colored race were going to work based on seniority and equity of jobs."

But at a mass union meeting held during the white protest, UAW International President R.J. Thomas was heckled and booed when he urged members to return to work. In a desperate appeal to the strikers Thomas declared, "This problem has to be settled or it will wreck our union."

In his history of Detroit, *American Odyssey*, Robert Conot commented on the changing racial relations taking place during the war years. "Southern whites expected Negroes to take back seats. They could not understand how 'inferiors' might have better jobs and higher economic standing than they."

Babson, a professor at Wayne State University, makes a similar point. "For Southern whites, in particular, the union movement's repeated calls for solidarity between the races seemed abstract and alien."

"STOP THE LINE!"

As the union struggled to integrate the workplace over the years, however, many white Southerners took the lead in stressing the importance of solidarity.

Jesse Gregory left his family farm in



MIKE LESLIE (LEFT) AND JIM HATFIELD FORGED A PERSONAL UNION THAT CROSSES RACIAL AND REGIONAL BOUNDARIES.

hood, they were met by an angry mob of 1,200 whites. A cross was burned in a nearby field. Ironically, the housing project was named after the great black abolitionist of the 1800s, Sojourner Truth.

JIM CROW UP NORTH

With the war creating a severe manpower shortage in defense plants, blacks and women hoped to find good-paying jobs for the first time. To ensure that defense jobs were filled, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order banning all discriminatory practices in hiring and promotions.

Nevertheless, out of 185 defense plants in Detroit, 55 hired virtually no blacks. In most others, black workers were confined to tasks whites refused to do, such as custodial or foundry work. Despite the presidential order, black

Photos by Bob Buchta

Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee to work in the Ford stamping plant in Cleveland before finding his way to Detroit. Sitting in his office at UAW Region 1A headquarters, surrounded by photos of his 26 years as a union man, the 54-year-old Gregory reflected on efforts to unite black and white workers.

"Look at that UAW logo there," he said, pointing to a sign on the wall. "We are all holding hands, black and white, men and women, everybody together. I think the union has done a lot to break down the barriers between us."

Many Southern whites who hold key positions in the UAW structure share Gregory's view. Bill Casstevens, financial secretary of the international union, worked in a North Carolina textile mill at the age of 14. Art Shy, retiring this year as director of the union's education and job training programs, was born in Kentucky and raised across the border in Ohio.

Even Walter Reuther, the legendary organizer of the union and fiery civil rights activist, was a Southerner. The son of a West Virginia brewery worker, Reuther grew up in the industrial city of Wheeling before moving to Detroit. He brought with him a strong strain of social unionism that viewed union members not just as workers, but as parents, consumers, taxpayers, voters, and community members.

Most of the transplanted Southerners who came North to find work and found a home in the UAW shared Reuther's strong community values, but had little or no previous experience with labor unions. Peggy Cox, a union leader at the GM Hydramatic plant who campaigned for Mike Leslie in the recent election, was a 29-year-old mother and former bank employee when she came north from Bristol, Tennessee. Although she has served as recording secretary at Local 735 for 11 years, Cox came from a part of the country where, she says, "unions were practically unheard of."

"When I got hired in at Hydramatic in

1966, I didn't even know what a union was," she admits. After three days on the job, though, she learned from personal experiences what unions are all about. "The first job they put me on was inspecting transmissions after they were all assembled. They gave me three sheets of paper with all the things I was supposed to visually inspect.

"There was so much to inspect — and



PEGGY COX CAME FROM TENNESSEE "WHERE UNIONS WERE PRACTICALLY UNHEARD OF." NOW SHE SERVES AS A UNION LEADER AT THE GM HYDRAMATIC PLANT IN DETROIT.

they were coming off the line at about three transmissions per minute — that I apparently missed one bolt that had not been tightened down. Well, this foreman, he was one of them old-time, slave-driving, kick-'em-in-the-hind-end kind of foreman. Well, he came running out of the test room yelling and waving his arms, 'Stop the line, stop the line and get this bitch out of here.'"

With a manner of speech as neat and precise as her hairstyle, Cox continued her story. "Well, I never had anything upset me so bad in all my life. Here I was a mother, a good wife, went to church all the time. I just couldn't imagine anyone talking to me like that. I was shaking and crying so badly that this union committeeman came over to see what was the matter.

"He came up to me and told me, 'Lady, you don't have to take this,' and

then he got into a confrontation right there with that foreman. That day was when I learned what unions are for."

JESUS AND JOHN L. LEWIS

Despite their lack of union experience, many Southerners who made the trek north brought deep-seated values that attracted them to the labor movement. For Steve

Wyatt, the boyish-looking financial secretary of Ford Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, the path to union leadership was marked by the religious training he received as a child.

Raised in a Baptist family that migrated from Arkansas after World War II, Wyatt talked about how Christianity and unionism share a common bond. "I always had this sense of fairness. I was raised with it like many Southern people are. I think it mostly comes from really believing in things like the Golden Rule, that is 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' I try to live by it and it guides me today in my union business."

This sense of fairness caused Wyatt to react to injustices he witnessed while still a young

worker starting out at the Ford Browntown plant. "There was this black guy I became friends with, Paul Struggs. I still remember his name. We'd talk and eat lunch together when we were both probationaries. He was really a hard worker, a good worker. Never caused any trouble. Always came to work.

"Anyways, I noticed that every shitty job there was around, Struggs would be put on it. He was getting dumped on real bad by this one foreman. There was nothing Paul could do to please this guy. It just got worse and worse until finally Struggs didn't come back to work and I never saw him again. I'll never forget what happened to him. It left an impression on me to this day," Wyatt said, his voice trailing off.

There were other Southerners, though, whose unionism became instilled in them as children raised in union households in the South. Richard Smith, a 56-year-old district committeeman at the Ford Rouge

steel plant in Dearborn, remembers the time "Daddy got into trouble."

"My Dad had tried to organize the textile mill near our home in Blue Ridge, Georgia," Smith recalled. "They didn't win and he couldn't ever get another job around those parts. We picked up and we moved to West Virginia. He got a job there in the coal mines."

Smith's childhood experience with unions left no bitter feelings towards them. Instead, he considers unions as essential today as they were 50 years ago. "What have workers ever gotten that they didn't go through hell to get? I've never seen any company yet that ever gave workers anything just because they liked us so much."

What Charles Dotson remembers most about growing up in the coal country around Peter Creek, Kentucky were the two pictures hanging on his family's living-room wall. "There was Jesus and there was John L. Lewis, the president of the miners union, and we were taught to look up to both of them with equal reverence," said Dotson, a 47-year-old staff member at the UAW Reuther Family Education Center in northern Michigan.

Dotson also suspects that a partial reason for his union activism stems from another Southern root: his hometown of Phelps was simply too poor to build more than one school. "Everybody, black or white, went to the same school," Dotson recalled. "There wasn't any other school. We all *had* to go to school together."

DEER HUNTERS AND CONVOYS

The union and the shop floor — not public school and college — were the places where most UAW leaders say their most valuable education took place. Mike Leslie, the newly elected black vice-president of Local 735, talked about the lessons he learned from his campaign. "I was almost terrified about going into certain areas of the plant or to approach cer-

tain people who seem to fit certain stereotypes. What I found out was that I had made a lot of false assumptions.

"After I finally overcame my nervousness about going into the skilled trades area, I went away realizing that white skilled tradesmen and black production workers really do have more in common than not. We're both worried about job security, about whether the plant will still be around 10 years from now, and we're both concerned about providing a good life for our families.

"Then there was this Hi-Lo driver I ran into. He looked like a deer-hunter type. And I wasn't sure whether I wanted to introduce myself. I thought, 'Oh, what the heck' and I told him who I was. He took my leaflet and said he had always read my



THOUSANDS OF SOUTHERNERS WHO MOVED TO DETROIT HELPED ORGANIZE — AND DESEGREGATE — THE AUTO INDUSTRY.

articles in the local newspaper and liked them. When I left, I had to admit that I looked at him quite differently," Leslie confessed.

Leslie had been building alliances with white workers in the plant for years. In 1978, for example, he helped organize a convoy that delivered food and other support to coal miners on strike in Mid-

dlesboro, Kentucky. More recently, he and two other union representatives launched an investigation into the high incidence of brain cancer among Hydramatic workers.

Such activism won him the support of Jim Hatfield, the sharecropper's son from Tennessee who served as his most trusted advisor during the campaign. It was Hatfield who first approached the black caucus in the plant to discuss joining forces in union elections.

"I went to the black caucus and I said, 'Hey look, all these historic differences between black and white should stop,'" he recalled. "It's not doing any of us any good. We need to set all that aside and start working together."

Convincing some white workers to support a black candidate was a bit harder.

"Oh, I'm not saying we didn't have our problems," Hatfield said, describing the campaign in his usual understated manner.

"There's still an element in the plant who — how should I say this — who don't like to see things change. I just tried to tell people to forget about the color of the man's skin and look at his qualifications."

Hatfield said he learned the real value of union solidarity during contract negotiations five years ago. It was a lesson, he said, that he and others in the union will never forget.

"The company was very smart about sizing up the bargaining committee and seeing who they had to take care of," he said. "The old saying about 'divide and conquer' had worked very well for management. But in 1984, the black and white committee members got together and decided we weren't going to let the company drive that wedge between us any more.

"I'm glad we got together," he added. "We got the best local contract we ever had that year. And every time we've stuck together, it's been fruitful. By looking out for the needs of everybody, we've succeeded in everything we've gone after." □

Sam Stark is a writer and video producer in Detroit, Michigan.

The New Exiles

Out of work and out of luck, thousands of West Virginians are being forced farther south in search of jobs.

By Norman Oder

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — In 1973, when Charley Kuhn hired in at a West Virginia coal mine, he thought he was set for life. "There's 80 years of coal here," the company told him. "You can retire here, your son can retire here, and your son's son can retire here."

The job lasted 13 years. Then U.S. Steel closed its Winifrede mine near Cabin Creek and, a few months later, sealed it shut. Kuhn looked for a job around Charleston, but no one had work for an ex-longwall helper with mechanical skills.

Kuhn regularly drove from his home in Bim to a newsstand 30 miles away to buy armfuls of out-of-state newspapers. In 1987 he mailed his resume to a company that advertised in the thick classified section of *The Charlotte Observer* in North Carolina.

Federal training money paid for Kuhn's first visit to Charlotte. A loan from his father paid for his move. Now he wears his metal-topped miner's safety shoes as he repairs trash compactors for a firm just outside Charlotte. His starting wage was \$7.50 an hour, half of what he made underground.

Kuhn never expected to leave West Virginia. He didn't expect to become pen-

niless, either. "I knew it was a big decision," says Kuhn, an easygoing, bespectacled man of 37, "but I just got tired of sitting around the house, never knowing when the coal mines were going to open up."

Kuhn, pausing after a welding job at Container Corporation of Carolina, says he's settling in. His wife has a second job in a doctor's office and his son, in the eighth grade, is wondering about marine biology as a career. "We'll probably stay down here, I figure," he says in his Boone County drawl.

PAYING THE PRICE

Kuhn is not alone. Miners, laborers, hospital workers, engineers — they're finding work in western North Carolina, where Interstate 77 straightens from its snakelike Appalachian path and fog-shrouded mountains give way to plains bustling with commerce.

West Virginians, dependent on a fickle coal economy, have always left home. A quarter-century ago, they moved in convoys to cities like Detroit and Akron, Midwestern meccas fueled by the auto industry. In the schoolroom, as the saying went, students learned "Readin', writin' and

Route 21." Between 1950 and 1970, state figures show, 750,000 people left the state.

These days, West Virginians looking for work are heading south instead of north, to places like Virginia, Florida, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C. Although the current outmigration can't be compared to that of the '50s and '60s, thousands of residents continue to leave the state each year. According to state statistics, 86,000 people departed between 1980 and 1986 — roughly 44 of every 1,000 residents. Over a 20-year period, the current rate would project to about 290,000.

One of the most-traveled roads out these days seems to be I-77, the familiar first leg of vacation trips to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. West Virginians around Charlotte say they bump into fellow Mountaineers every day.

"I went to the motorcycle shop and there were two people wearing West Virginia jackets in the showroom and it looked normal," recalls Don Bailey, county engineer for adjacent Gaston County. "I think half of Charlotte is from West Virginia."

The day Rod Snyder, a recent West Virginia University graduate, moved to Charlotte, he felt a strong case of *deja vu*. Or maybe *deja WVU*. He stepped outside his apartment and saw a classmate. He walked to a convenience store and spotted another. "I was here for 15 minutes and saw two people from Morgantown," Snyder remembers with a chuckle. "I was thinking, 'Yeah, I like this place.'"

To some, this is a land of opportunity with plentiful jobs, good weather, and lots to do. West Virginians hardened to gloomy economic news enter a new world. "When I moved here, it was culture shock — every day on the news, you hear about new businesses coming in," says Donna Cox, a 1983 Marshall University graduate who works as a newspaper reporter in Newton, North Carolina.

Often, however, there's a price to pay. In right-to-work North Carolina, many, like Kuhn, earn far less than they did in mining and manufacturing. Husband-and-wife wages may barely match what the husband once earned on a union job. And many transplanted West Virginians miss their families, friends, and the almost indescribable feeling of home.

"IT'S LIKE FOREVER"

Economists would say Bill Lee made a rational choice when he left home to

find work. But dry economic theory leaves little room for emotion, and it cannot measure the bitterness in Lee's voice.

"A guy over on the corner just moved back to West Virginia," says Lee, who works as a carpenter in Claremont, North Carolina near Newton in furniture country. "It makes me sick to watch someone go home."

When he was 18, Lee left Elkview, West Virginia for a two-year hitch in the Army. "I remember thinking when I got out of the Army, I wasn't never going to leave home again," he says.

Back home in the Kanawha Valley, Lee struggled for 10 years, studying at two different trade schools, finding nothing in those fields, working sporadically at laboring jobs. He spent a year and a half at his last construction job, until the company went out of business in the spring of 1986.

Lee spent a month looking for work around Charleston, "which was a joke," then moved to Raleigh, in central North Carolina, to work construction. He commuted home on weekends, joining the parade of cars with West Virginia license plates that rush north on I-77 every Friday at sundown.

Finally, the six-hour commute got to be too much, and Raleigh was too big a city for a country boy. So Lee moved again in early 1987, joining his brother Don in Claremont, North Carolina. He found a job in six hours, but has yet to find peace. "There's nothing wrong with North Carolina except that it ain't West Virginia," he says.

Lee, a tall, rawboned man, wears his light brown hair in a neat ponytail, the first time he's let it grow in 10 years. He's thinking about not cutting it until he leaves, a personal protest against his two-year-long exile.

Lee understands something basic about being out of work. "It don't do a hell of a lot for your self-esteem," he says softly. "Work gives me a feeling that nothin' else can. I don't do drugs and I don't drink. The only thing I do that feels good is work."

But he doesn't understand why he has

no choice about where he works. "I don't know why it's like that. There's a 250-mile difference, but it's a whole 'nother world." When Lee visited home for Christmas, he thought about writing a letter to the editor about it, but he couldn't find the words.

The uncertainty about returning upsets him most. "I can't see no end," he says. "When I was sent to Germany in the Army, there was a date and a time. Now, it's like forever."

NOW HIRING

If the economy around Charlotte is booming, much of its success is being built on the desperation of displaced workers like Lee. The numbers are simple. Around Charlotte, unemploy-

Photos courtesy Julie Elman-Roche/The Charleston Gazette



BILL LEE WEARS HIS HAIR IN A PONYTAIL TO PROTEST HIS TWO-YEAR EXILE. "IF IT AIN'T HOME," HE SAYS, "IT DON'T MATTER WHERE I 'M AT."

ment is three percent. In several West Virginia counties, the rate is in double digits. Many employers in the area are now advertising for workers in West Virginia, offering lower-wage jobs to the unemployed who are willing to leave their homes behind.

Sam Matheney moved to Charlotte after his West Virginia employer went out of business in 1986. He now works as a security guard supervisor at Stegall Security and Protective Services. He oversees 175 people, but earns only three-quarters of what he made in West Virginia cleaning chemical tankers.

At Stegall, the "Now Hiring" sign hangs near the office's rear entrance. "I guess you could basically call this unskilled labor," says company vice president Harry Stegall. The company competes against fast-food restaurants for workers.

When Matheney told his boss about West Virginia's high unemployment rate, Stegall listened. He placed a help-wanted advertisement in the Charleston Sunday newspaper picturing Matheney and three other men in security guard uniforms. "Unemployed? This Could Be You" read the bold-face type over the picture. "All of these men are from areas of high unemployment and moved to Charlotte. They now have a future."

A week later, Matheney returned to West Virginia to conduct about 40 interviews at the unemployment office in Charleston. He hired eight people who will earn between \$4 and \$6 an hour. "To be honest with you," Matheney says, "most of them didn't want to leave West Virginia."

Tom and Marie Wendell were two who left. With jobs scarce in Montgomery, West Virginia, they had both been taking vocational courses. They couldn't afford car fare to finish.

Why did they leave the state? "We was on welfare," Tom, 23, responds in a low voice, sitting in the Stedall office, filling out paper work. "You can't buy a job in Montgomery."

Now he and Marie, 20, both work at Stegall, with staggered hours so someone will be home to care for their daughter, Savan-

nah. Marie's brother came, too. "We got down here Monday morning," Tom said three days after they arrived. "So far, it's all right."

THE BEATEN PATH

Many families like the Wendells, caught between mining and minimum wage, discover that both husband and wife have to work to make ends meet in North Carolina. "In order to take advantage of living in a place like this, for almost everybody it requires a two-income household," says Bill McCoy, director of the Urban

Institute at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte.

North Carolina is rated seventh in a national business climate survey, but it ranks 43rd in climate for workers, according to a survey conducted by the non-profit Southern Labor Institute. The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce likes to boast about the low wages and lack of unions in the area, proclaiming that the average manufacturing wage in the city is \$7.63, compared with the U.S. average of \$9.71.

"The tragedy is when you go to other states, you can work, but you fall into a whole category of the working poor," says Mike Burdiss, director of lobbying for the United Mine Workers. "You make enough to survive, but you're not really covered by hospitalization and other benefits that you had under a union environment."

Despite the lower wages and homesickness, high unemployment in West Virginia continues to drive an increasing number of people from their homes. A yearly survey conducted at West Virginia University shows that 72 percent of 1988 graduates left the state, compared with 62 percent three years ago. This year, the percentage of those leaving is expected to hit 75 percent.

"I've been saying since I've been doing these surveys that we're losing our best and brightest in record numbers," says Robert Kent, director of WVU Career Services. "As long as economic development remains low, the number of students leaving keeps increasing, edging upwards."

Joe Chandler is head of the WVU alumni chapter in western North Carolina. He is also mayor of Claremont, an industrial town of 1,400 near Statesville. Three years ago, Chandler said, the first annual dinner for ex-West Virginians in the Statesville area drew about 60 people. A year later the dinner drew nearly 200. "We noticed there was an increase of young people coming down," Chandler said.

At the intersection of I-40 and I-77, Statesville is booming — and Charles Welling has reaped the benefits. A few exits south of I-40, Welling runs the Lake Norman Fuel Stop, a truck repair and filling station.

"We're right on the beaten path," says

Welling, who operated a wrecker service and garage in Ripley, West Virginia until he moved three years ago. "The economy and taxes were why I left." Welling sees so many West Virginians at his station that "they have to be all looking" to move.

No North Carolina company is yet recruiting workers from West Virginia in quantity, but everyone has a story about the factory or office that's filling up with West Virginians.

Rich Shrum, service manager at busy Regal Chrysler-Plymouth in Charlotte, says West Virginia is the only place he's advertised for mechanics. Why? He responds with a knowing laugh: "Because I've heard about the economy of West Virginia."

In Greenville, Superintendent of Schools Roy Truby also looks to West

to West Virginia and recruit those people because they are the best workers we have found yet."

SURVEYING THE DAMAGE

The flow of workers from West Virginia to other Sunbelt states does more than add to the personal pain of those who are forced to move. It also hurts the West Virginia economy, gutting its labor force of trained workers and making it even harder for the state to recover.

"I'd like to assess the state of North Carolina for every worker we send," said Ernie Husson, principal of Carver Career Center, a vocational school in Kanawha County, West Virginia. "You can put down all the training you want, but if there's no place for people to work, if they want to eat, they leave."

A few years back, Ron Lowe moved his family from Charleston to Florida, working as a surveyor in Orlando and Fort Lauderdale. The Lowes didn't stay long. "We got homesick and came back to West Virginia," says Ron, 49.

Now Lowe, who once surveyed power plants and hotels in Charleston, is helping turn timber and farmland just north-east of Charlotte into apartment complexes.

Lowe and his sons Gary and Mark use their surveying tools to map boundaries and plot elevations so roads can be designed. Of 25 people recently working at their land survey firm, Ron says, seven were from West Virginia.

Ron wears a belt buckle with the West Virginia seal. "If there was a lot of opportunity in Charleston, I'd go back," he says. "We're still West Virginians."

His son Gary, 25, also wants to return. His wife prefers Charlotte, but they don't argue. Gary boils it down simply: "This is where the work's at, so I'll have to go where the work's at." □

Norman Oder wrote this story as a reporter at The Gazette in Charleston, West Virginia. He will enter Yale Law School this fall on a one-year fellowship for journalists.



SURVEYORS GARY, MARK, AND RON LOWE (LEFT TO RIGHT) SAY THEY HAVE TO GO WHERE THE WORK IS.

Virginia for new teachers. "West Virginia is a very fertile area for us to recruit," he says. Truby should know. He was state superintendent of schools in West Virginia from 1979 to 1985 before he moved to North Carolina.

"I quite often run into people who say, 'I was in West Virginia when you were state superintendent,'" Truby says.

Mayor Chandler tells a similar story. "I was at an economic development meeting recently," he says. "Somebody was crying about not getting enough employees. Somebody stood up and said, 'You're missing the boat if you don't get

THE LAST WORD

HIGHER COMMITMENT

Congratulations to writer Ann Long and photographer Lauri Lawson for vividly conveying the dynamics of Mississippi's state employees labor organizing campaign ("Mississippi Still Burning," SE Vol. XVII, No. 1). As an historian who has written about Southern labor issues, the article had an immediate resonance for me.

The piece does an excellent job of explaining why this fight is happening now by placing it in the larger political context of Mississippi's new "progressive" image. Articles like Long's reinforce my prejudice that the challenges of labor organizing in the South demand a higher level of commitment than organizing in other regions of the country. Perhaps this is why the leaders of the MASE campaign find it so important to connect their effort to earlier Mississippi movements for social justice.

—Janet Irons
Lock Haven, Pa.

NO MORE BACK BURNER

I was appalled by the suggestion made by Bruce Ledewitz that anti-death penalty proponents should join forces with the so-called "pro-life" movement ("Abolitionists Then and Now," SE Vol. XVII, No. 1). While he so graciously acknowledges that many of us who oppose the death penalty are passionately pro-choice, he then turns around to dismiss us because "in order [for anti-death penalty activists to] succeed, we must understand ourselves as part of a larger whole of social transformation; we must seek out common ground with all those who envision a less violent world."

If it weren't so scary, I might find it amusing that Mr. Ledewitz thinks that

"pro-life" advocates seek a social transformation that he wants to be part of. Anti-choice activists have done an excellent job of convincing many that what they are concerned about is the sanctity of human life. What gets left out is the question, whose life and at whose expense? While I readily admit that choosing to have an abortion is a difficult emotional and moral decision, that does not mean that I am willing to even begin to entertain the thought that women should not be allowed to choose for themselves.

The anti-choice movement that Mr. Ledewitz is so eager to coalesce with is not about saving the lives of little babies; it is about limiting the choices of women in our society. It is not about a more humane social transformation; it is about a transformation that would reduce the status of women to that of a human incubator with no rights. It is not about envisioning a less violent world; it is about ensuring the violence that will occur when women are forced to seek illegal, unsafe abortions, or when they are forced to have children because the society has told them that they may have no choice.

I have no patience for Mr. Ledewitz or anyone who is willing to achieve "social transformation" at the expense of women. It is common knowledge that in the early years of civil rights and anti-Vietnam War activism, women's issues, if recognized at all, were relegated to the back burner while we all got on with the really "important" business. Although the women's movement has done a lot to make us all aware that we will not settle for second-class citizenship, Mr. Ledewitz's article is just another reminder that there are many on "our" side who would happily sell us down the river for the sake of their more important causes.

I am passionately pro-choice, and I am passionately against the death penalty. I expect to be a full participant in deciding the terms on which we fight our battles. Mr. Ledewitz, I do not accept your terms,

and I am outraged and saddened that it even occurred to you that I might.

—Tema Okun
Durham, N.C.

LOSING THEIR SHIRTS

I want to thank you for putting together the Q&A on the savings and loan crisis in your last issue ("Everything You Wanted to Know About the S&L Crisis — But Were Too Bored to Ask," SE Vol. XVII, No. 1). I knew nothing about the financial crisis, and the whole thing seemed entirely too complicated, but your article made it easier to understand.

It wasn't until I read your work that I understood the significance of the S&L bailout and realized how poorly the newspapers have covered the issue — nobody ever brought out the facts until your article. I had no idea that Bush's plan called for average taxpayers like me to pay \$1,000 each to bail out rich folks who lost their shirts gambling our deposits on shopping malls and junk bonds. I also never realized that S&Ls were originally set-up as "housing banks." Given the current lack of affordable housing, we certainly need all the financial help we can muster.

You made a complicated issue understandable — I hope you sent a copy to every Senator and congressional representative.

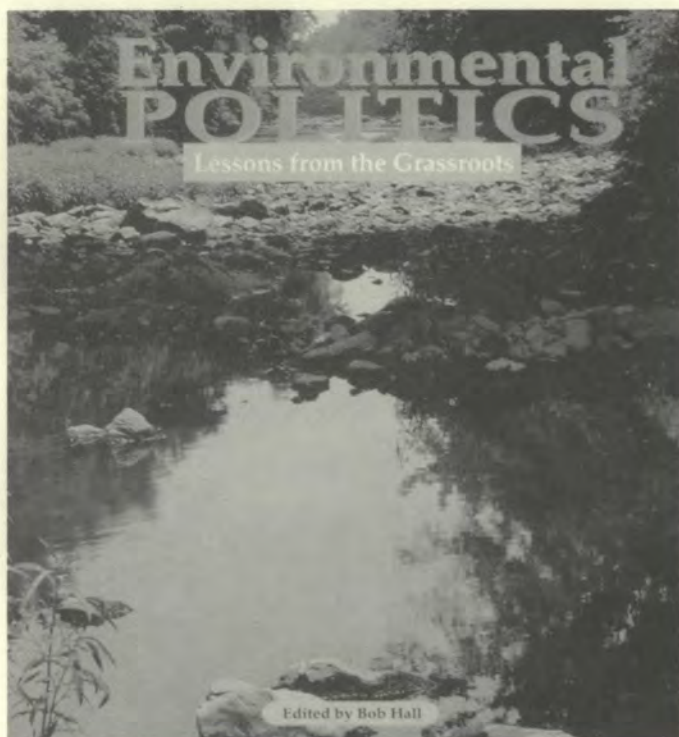
—Carol Anderson
Durham, N.C.

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1 — The key is connecting the environmental issue to its broader public health, economic, and/or recreational significance for a specific constituency.

3 — A moral undercurrent in each campaign sustained its inner core of activists and attracted empathy from a larger body of supporters.

6 — Public education programs were aimed directly at the group's primary constituencies and did not depend on the biased filter of the mass media.

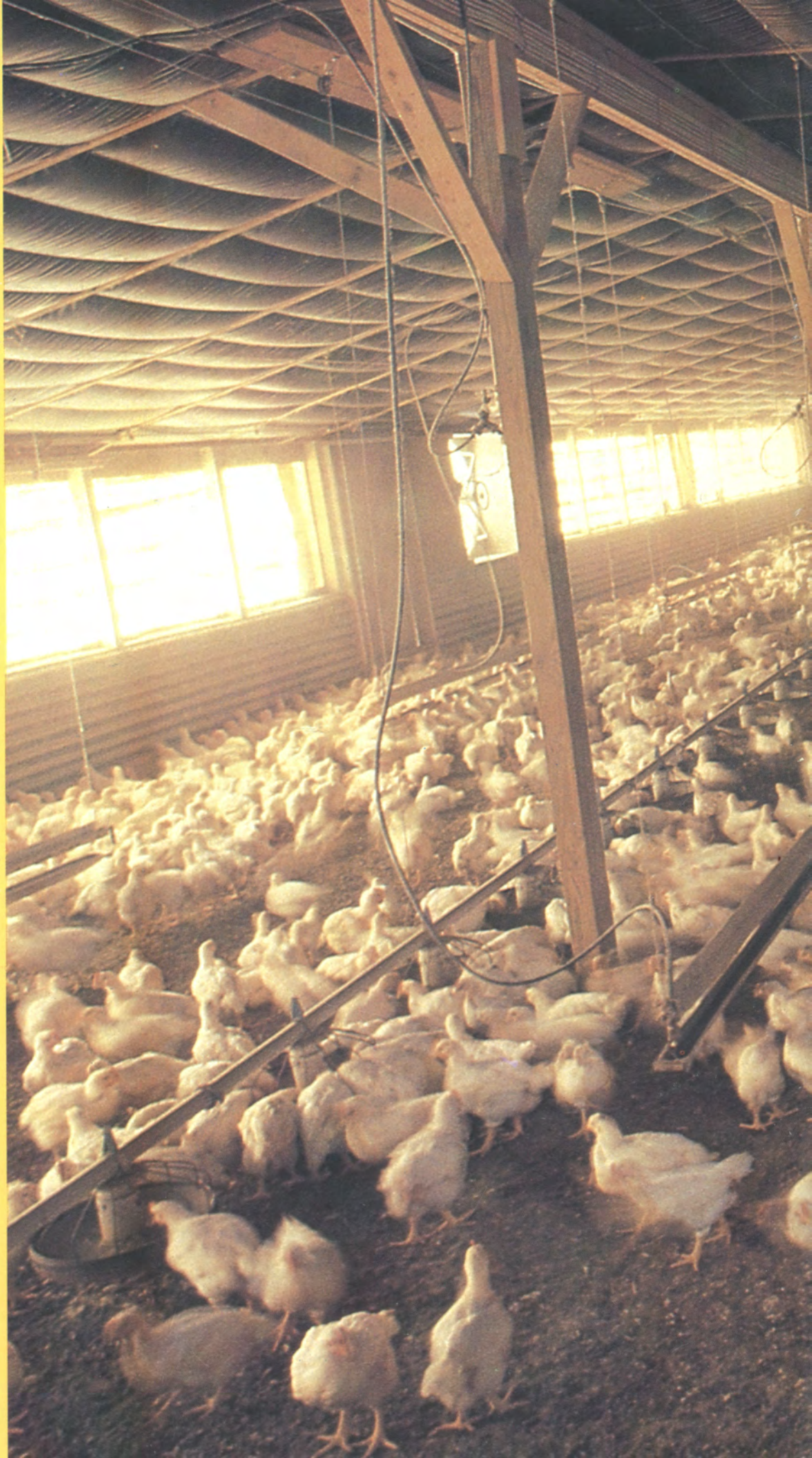
10 — There is no substitute for direct organizing, door-to-door, person-to-person.

14 — Breaking down racism requires developing concrete working relationships over a long period of time.

19 — Activists in issue campaigns inevitably confront the fact that they need better public officials and must learn how to elect them.

21 — Phone banks, canvassing, and targeting of precincts are essential ingredients for identifying and mobilizing sympathetic voters.

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