



The MOUNTAIN EAGLE

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South-East seeks new UMW pact

A spokesman for South-East Coal Co. said today the firm hopes to negotiate a new contract with its employees which would retain present hourly wage scales but contain changes to permit the firm to operate profitably.

It is not true, the spokesman said, that the company wants to break away from the United Mine Workers of America union.

The company, he said, would like a new contract with the union -- "one everybody can live with."

South-East, the spokesman said, is willing to continue paying its employees their present wage rate but can no longer afford to pay the 40-cents-a-ton royalty on coal used to finance the UMWA welfare program.

The spokesman said he did not know whether the UMWA would be willing to negotiate this type of contract with South East. He said he recognized South-East is asking the UMWA to break its national pattern of contracts.

South-East is in a difficult coal marketing situation. It finds itself about the only remaining union mining operation in the Kentucky River valley. The company must sell its coal on the open market in competition with coal produced by non-union operations which do not pay the 40 cents royalty and in many instances pay wages equaling half or less than half the wage level maintained by South-East.

"Our non-union competitors are able to mine and sell coal for a price that in many instances is \$1.00 a ton or more lower than our cost of production. During the past few years we have lost numerous contracts which would have kept our mines running a full five-day schedule because of this price differential.

"Our problem is simple but nonetheless serious. We must be able to cut our price on coal if we are going to meet competition and stay in business.

"Our company has made every possible effort in recent years to economize and maintain the lowest possible per ton cost on production. I might say that we have done well in this respect, but despite every economy we can achieve, we continue in a very difficult competitive situation when it comes to selling coal.

"It was only after we explored every other possibility and exhausted every other possible economy that we decided to ask the UMWA for a new contract containing more realistic provisions.

"We took this step with the greatest reluctance. We are not non-union in outlook, but to the contrary we feel that we have benefitted about as much as our men from the UMWA contract. We have known what to expect from the men, and the men have known what to expect from us.

"We feel that if we can negotiate a new contract containing the necessary changes, we will be able to market our coal and operate our mines on a full five-day week schedule, assuring full pay envelopes for our workers and a reasonable, although not large, profit for ourselves."

South-East wrote each man on its payroll January 15, telling each that circumstances had compelled the firm to notify the UMWA that it was terminating its labor contract 60 days after January 4.

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Estill Blair heads seal sale

Estill Blair of Whitesburg, will serve as chairman of the 1962 Easter Seal appeal for crippled children in Letcher County.

Contributions received during the annual campaign, which opens on March 22 and continues through April 22, will be used for care and treatment given physically handicapped children by the Kentucky Society for Crippled Children.

DEATH DELAYS PAPER

Publication of this week's Mountain Eagle was delayed because of the death in Lexington of E. A. Burnett, father of Mrs. Thomas E. Gish.

Mr. Burnett, 58, died Monday night at Good Samaritan Hospital in Lexington. He had been ill since October and critically ill for the past two weeks. Funeral services and burial were at Lexington.

Jasper Pigman dies

Funeral services were conducted Tuesday at Thornton Regular Baptist Church for Jasper Pigman, 71, of Whitesburg. The Rev. Ray Collins, the Rev. Robert S. Owens Jr. and the Rev. Charles Carter officiated. Burial was in Thornton Cemetery.

Mr. Pigman died at his home, 8:20 p. m. Feb. 24. He had been ill for a long time. He was born at Pine Top in Knox County and was a son of Hiram and Salie Franklin Pigman. He was a retired coal miner. He was a member of the Regular Baptist Church. Survivors are his wife, Mrs. Myrtle Martin Pigman; six sons, Delmas, Audra and Paul Pigman, all of Whitesburg; Ray Pigman, Melton, and Walker and Bill Pigman both of Neon; four daughters, Mrs. Newton Comett, California; Mrs. Bethel Frazier,

Whitesburg; and Mrs. Emma Jean Kenny and Mrs. Arbadella Franklin, both of Cincinnati and a sister, Mrs. Sinda Swisher, Whitesburg.

Craft Funeral Home handled funeral arrangements.

Library supporters will meet Monday

Persons interested in the growth of the Letcher County Public Library will meet at 7:30 p. m. Monday at the library to discuss ways of improving the book collection and library service.

Mrs. Harry M. Caudill, chairman of the library board, said Whitesburg residents especially are invited to attend.

The meeting is open to the public.



This river of mud, carrying huge trees and boulders, pushed down the side of Black Mountain at Blair, forcing the Fred Jones family and their son to leave their homes, which were in its path. The mud came from an extensive strip mining operation higher up the mountain. (Eagle photo)

Family flees strip mine slide

By TOM GISH

Mr. and Mrs. Fred B. Jones and their son, Haskell, were forced Friday to move out of their homes at Blair in the Cumberland River valley by a giant slide of trees, rock and mud from a U. S. Steel Co. strip mine high on Black Mountain.

"Fred and I have worked hard all our lives, and we've put everything we had into this place," Mrs. Jones said. "I don't know what we're going to do."

Furniture from the two Joneses' homes was loaded into trucks, with destination uncertain. Mrs. Jones said a coal company official had told her the firm would find a place for them to store their belongings in Lynch and said the firm would try to find a house for them.

Hundreds of tons of mud and giant trees up to two feet thick roared down on the Jones residence during an avalanche that started at noon Thursday and continued several hours.

"It sounded just like a jet airplane," Mrs. Jones said.

Mrs. Jones said this is the third and worst in a series of slides from the strip mine that has threatened her home since Dec. 22. Bad as it has been, the Joneses fear the slides so far are nothing but a warning of things to come.

The Joneses and their neighbors agreed there is a section of debris from the strip mine covering more than two acres that threatens to burst loose at any moment and come roaring down upon their homes.

Residents of the area said that if the threatened big slide comes enough trees, dirt and stones will roar down the mountain to cover the Joneses' home, cover U. S. Highway 119, and dam up the Cumberland River.

"We're going to have a dam across the river whether we want one or not," one observer said.

Residents also fear that if the threatened big slide does occur, it might have enough force to open up sections of the underground mines which honeycomb

Black Mountain, loosening millions of gallons of water which has accumulated in the mountain.

The homes of the Jones family are located at the mouth of Wolfpen Creek at Blair, near Cumberland and just across the Harlan County line from Letcher County. The usually wide Cumberland River valley narrows considerably here, so that the valley contains room for the Joneses' home, the river and the highway -- and not much else.

The creek extends about one and one half miles from the rear of the Joneses' place up to Black Mountain, which towers in the background.

The swiftly descending creek is clogged with small, dam-like accumulations of logs and mud, each some 15 to 20 feet wide and from five to 20 feet in height and each holding back temporarily another slide. Looming several hundred feet above it all is the gigantic accumulation of o-

verbunden from the strip mine which threatens to break loose.

Mrs. Jones said she had not had a good night's sleep since the first slide in December. She never knew when she went to bed, she said, whether she and her home would be swept away during the night.

She said a representative from U. S. Steel had been inspecting her property and the threatening slide twice daily since December. Each morning he would tell her whether it was safe for her to remain at home during the day, and each evening he would tell her whether she could spend the night at home.

Friends and neighbors by the dozen stopped by the Jones home during the day to inspect the damage. There was general agreement that similar slides threaten at numerous points along the river.

"Fred and his wife are just the first to go. One by one we'll all have to move out," said one neighbor.



Mud oozes into the back door of the Fred Jones residence at Blair. Workers moving the family's belongings had to wade in ankle-deep mire, which surrounds the house. (Eagle photo)