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ABSTRACT

As a leader of social change in the South, Myles Horton (1) unionized southern textile workers and coal miners and advanced civil rights through his Highlander school; (2) conducted Highlander workshops for black leaders; (3) first popularized the song "We Shall Overcome"; and (4) initiated Citizenship Schools to help blacks register to vote. As a youth, he questioned racial inequality. He was dismayed at unfair labor practices in a Tennessee factory and urged workers to organize. Horton wanted to create a school that would serve poor people in labor and racial strife and help them to gain freedom, dignity, and justice. Studying sociology at the University of Chicago in 1930-31, Horton recognized that conflict redirected thinking. Highlander Folk School, inspired by Danish folk schools, was opened in Monteagle, Tennessee in 1932. Horton's wife Zilphia introduced many cultural programs at Highlander. During 1953-61, as Highlander's civil rights activities increased, so did segregationist attacks on the school. Horton is remembered for his efforts to fight for a better world. (A "Myles Horton Chronology 1905-1990" and a 35-item bibliography are included.) (NLA)

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Myles Horton (1905-90) of Highlander: Adult Educator and Southern Activist

By Franklin Parker and Betty J. Parker

Introduction

Who was Myles Horton and why is he worth our time?

As a leader of social change in the South, Horton was significant because:

--his Highlander folk school in East Tennessee helped unionize southern textile workers and coal miners in the 1930s and '40s; and helped advance civil rights in the '50s and '60s;

--early black leaders (Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Andrew Young, and others) attended Highlander workshops before the Montgomery, AL, bus boycott; lunch counter sitins; student freedom rides; and school integration;

--Highlander first popularized "We Shall Overcome," the civil rights song; and

--Highlander-initiated Citizenship Schools helped some 100,000 blacks become literate and thus qualified to register to vote.

To critics he was a rabble rousing "red," a "communist," a threat to American institutions and traditional values. Huge billboard photos in the South in 1965 were captioned, "Martin Luther King at a Communist Training School" (Highlander).

He challenged entrenched power and privilege (like India's Gandhi); helped workers form unions and cooperatives (like labor organizer Saul Alinsky,1909-72); helped empower dispossessed people (like Brazilian adult educator Paulo Friere); and helped people realize and achieve their legal rights (like consumer advocate Ralph Nader).

But what in Horton's background and upbringing foretold what he was to become?

Youth

He was born in Savannah, TN, July 9, 1905, eldest of four children. His parents, Perry and Elsie Falls Horton, were Tennesseans, Scotch Irish, and poor, although a paternal forebear had received the first land grant (c.1772) in northeast Tennessee. His parents passed on to Myles their Cumberland Presbyterian Church's Calvinistic values, independent spirit, belief in helping others less fortunate regardless of race, and a respect for education (both parents, with grade school education, having been schoolteachers).

The Hortons moved from Savannah to Humboldt (near Memphis), where Myles went to high school, and worked summers. Becoming skeptical about religion, he questioned his mother, who advised, "just love people." He majored in English literature at Cumberland University, Lebanon, TN, 1924-28, refused to be hazed himself and

organized other students to resist hazing. Working in a Humboldt box factory in the summer of 1925 and reading about the Dayton, TN, trial on teaching evolution, he supported John T. Scopes to the shock of fellow workers. President of his campus YMCA, in his junior year, 1927, he attended a southern YMCA conference on Nashville's Vanderbilt campus and has his first contact with foreign and black students. He resented not being able to take a Chinese girl to a restaurant or enter a public library with a black acquaintance. Then, Cumberland University trustee John Emmett Edgerton, a woolen manufacturer and president of the Southern States Industrial Council, lectured the student body against labor unions. Upset, Horton, on impulse, went to the Edgerton textile mill in Lebanon, was dismayed at the unfair practices he saw, and urged the workers to organize. University officials threatened to expel him if he visited the mill again

Ozone, TN: Summer 1927

In summer vacations, organizing vacation Bible schools for the Presbyterian Church, Horton, in the summer of 1927, got his assistants to teach the young people at a small Ozone, East Tennessee, church while he invited their parents to discuss their problems. They asked about farming, how to get a textile mill job, how to test wells for typhoid, and other problems. Myles said he'd get experts who knew the answers: a county agent, a health officer, and others. He realized for the first time that he could lead a discussion without knowing all the answers. He sharpened their questions, got them to talk about their own experiences, and found that they already had many answers. Ozone people liked these discussions, attendance increased, and a woman who liked what he was doing said that she would be willing to turn over her home to him for such programs. Horton, grateful, said he would think about it and would return when he had something to offer. "O" for Ozone in his later notes stood for the kind of school he wanted to start. The Ozone experience, he later said, was the genesis of Highlander.

Union Theological Seminary: 1929-30

Crisscrossing the state as Tennessee YMCA organizer, Myles found a sympathetic listener in Congregational minister Abram Nightingale, with whom he sometimes boarded. Nightingale encouraged Myles's intent to establish a school, saying: you need more learning, more experiences, more contact with freethinkers away from the South. He encouraged Myles to attend Union Theological Seminary, New York City, and shared Union Seminary Ethics Professor Harry F. Ward's (1873-1966) book, On Economic Morality and the Ethic of Jesus. Ward held that extremes of wealth and poverty were the Achilles' heel of U.S. free enterprise, that the profit motive hindered Christian brotherhood and equality in "a just and fraternal world."

As the stock market crashed, businesses failed, and the jobless formed bread lines, Myles, at Union, met probably the most social-activist academics in the U.S. Seeking a philosophy to guide the school he envisioned, he took theology courses, read widely at

Columbia University Library near Union, worked in a Hell's Kitchen ghetto boys' club, visited Greenwich House and Henry Street Settlement House, and helped organize an International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union strike. He went to observe a Marion, NC, textile strike; visited Brookwood Labor College, Katonah, NY, which trained labor union leaders (modeled after worker education-oriented Ruskin College, Oxford, England); observed remnants of the utopian Oneida Colony, upstate NY, and the cooperative communities at Rugby and Ruskin, TN, and at New Harmony, IN. He sadly noted that these had turned inward and away from active involvement in society. His envisioned school would be loosely structured and adaptable to involve, serve, and help poor people in labor and racial strife, help them find ways to gain dignity, freedom, and justice.

Unconcerned with credits, grades, or a divinity degree, he read the Fabian socialists, John Dewey, George S. Counts, and others. Observing a New York City May Day parade while unwittingly wearing a red sweater, he was rudely awakened to reality when a mounted policeman clouted him for being a "god-damn Red."

Most influential was liberal theology Professor Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), a passionate advocate of the social gospel. Niebuhr had come to Union the previous year, 1928, from a small Detroit church. His Christian ethics seminar, which Horton attended, was the basis of his 1932 book, Moral Man and Immoral Society. Niebuhr questioned the generally accepted notion of inevitable progress, was sad that the poor were oppressed and exploited by the economic and political system, and headed the Fellowship of Socialist Christians, which wanted progressive churches to ally with labor to achieve fundamental reform. With socialist Norman Thomas, Niebuhr cofounded a journal, The World Tomorrow, dedicated to "a social order based on the religion of Jesus." Niebuhr saw the reformer's problem as how to achieve equality and justice peacefully; that is, how to noinviolently pit the power of the oppressed against the power of oppressors. Niebuhr's thesis fitted the aim of Horton's southern adult education school--to help downtrodden people find ways to solve their own problems. To Horton Niebuhr was sympathetic and encouraging.

University of Chicago, 1930-31

Interested now more in sociology than in theology, Horton went to the University of Chicago. He was impressed by Sociology Professor Robert E. Park's (1864-1944) theory that antagonistic individuals unite when they see they can attain common goals by working together. Through Park, Horton saw that conflict is inevitable; the thing to do is to use conflict creatively to move people away from the status quo and toward a better economic, political, social, and moral position. Horton was also influenced by Lester F. Ward's Dynamic Sociology, which argued that education requires action and that social progress is possible only through dynamic action. He talked with and was encouraged by Jane Addams of Hull House. In the spring of 1931 he met two immigrant Danish Lutheran

ministers who, when they heard him describe his school ideas, said that it sounded like the Danish folk school and urged him to visit Denmark.

Reading about Danish folk school history and accomplishments, Horton compiled a pertinent bibliography for the university library. He also read The Southern Highlander in His Homeland by John Charles Campbell (1867-1919), written with Mrs. Campbell who, in 1925, had established the John C. Campbell Folk School near Brasstown, NC, along Danish folk high school lines. Horton earned enough money for travel to Denmark by returning to New York City as researcher for a professor he had met at the University of Chicago.

Denmark Folk Schools, 1931-32

Visiting Danish folk high schools, Horton appreciated 19th century founder, Bishop N.S.F. Grundtvig's (1783-1872) "Living Word" sermons, and admired disciple Kristen Kold's folk schools, which had awakened oppressed peasants' patriotism and civic responsibility, helped restore Denmark's economic prosperity, and led to cooperatives and a broader based democracy. He liked the newer folk high schools for industrial workers and admired their informality, close student-teacher interaction, highly motivated learning, and clear objectives.

Christmas night, 1931, Copenhagen

Unable to sleep on Christmas night, 1931, Horton wrote about his future school: it should be located in the South; have white and black students and teachers working together; give no credits nor exams; face problems, propose solutions, and try out those solutions in conflict situations in the students' home communities.

Highlander at Monteagle: November 1, 1932

Horton returned to New York in May 1932, outlined his school plan to Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote a finance appeal letter for a school in the South to train "an educated radical labor leadership." At Niebuhr's suggestion, Horton got his school's first $100 contribution from International YMCA Secretary Sherwood Eddy (1871-1963) and had promise of two Niebuhr graduate students as teachers: one who stayed less than a year, and James A. Dombroski (1897?-1983), son of a Tampa, FL, jeweler, who stayed nearly a decade.

Searching for a school site, Horton contacted Will W. Alexander (1884-1956?) of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, who mentioned Don West, who also wanted to establish a southern Appalachian folk school. West (1906-), a rural north Georgian and Lincoln University (Harrogate, TN) graduate, was, like Horton, campus YMCA president, Bible school organizer in mountain communities, and a Danish folk high school enthusiast. Horton learned that this Vanderbilt Divinity School graduate and Congregational church pastor near Crossville, TN, was attending the YMCA's Blue Ridge Assembly, Black Mountain, NC. Horton hitchhiked to North Carolina, met and shared common interests

with West and, by one account, learned through the Rev. Abram Nightingale that retired college president Lilian Johnson (1864-1968) wanted her Monteagle, TN, farm used for community uplift.

This daughter of a wealthy banking and mercantile family had a Cornell University doctorate in history, had been president of Western State College, Oxford, Ohio, was a leading southern suffragist, and a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She had gone to Italy to study cooperatives and returned to spread the idea in the South, working from her house and farm in Summerfield, near Monteagle, Grundy County, TN. Horton and West, with meager financial backing and a small staff, got Lilian Johnson to lease her property for a year and, subject to her satisfaction, perhaps longer. Highlander Folk School, as it was named, opened November 1, 1932. Only eight students enrolled in its first residence term, November 1932-April 1933, a small beginning. But with the Wilder, TN coal mine strike, 1932-33, 100 miles north of Monteagle, Horton and Highlander became involved for the first time in mineworker union conflict.

Wilder, TN, Mine Strike, 1932-33

The Wilder strike began in the summer of 1932. Mine owners refused to renew a United Mine Workers (UMW) contract unless union members took a 20 percent wage cut. Long critical of mine conditions and company store prices (they were paid in scrip redeemable only in company stores), union miners struck, closing the mines to mid-October 1932, when nonunion scabs and some union members resumed work under armed guards. Violence flared. The state governor sent in some 200 national guardsmen, whose inexperience, drinking, and partiality to scabs and mine owners hardly kept the peace.

Myles Horton went to Wilder in November 1932, took notes on the strike, ate a meager Thanksgiving dinner with UMW local president Barney Graham and, waiting for a bus the next morning, was arrested, jailed, charged with "coming here and getting information and going back and teaching it." He was released the next morning.

To Horton the strike was a conflict situation from which Highlander students and the miners could learn. He and Highlander students distributed emergency food and clothing. Some strikers thought him a "Red." Others appreciated his and Highlander's help and good intentions. Violence continued.

Horton heard of and told state officials of a plot to kill union president Barney Graham. Horton's warning was ignored. Graham was shot to death April 30, 1933. Their leader dead, strikers returned to work without a contract and under near starvation conditions. Said Horton, "If I hadn't already been a radical, [Graham's murder] would have made me a radical right then." The strike helped shape Highlander's labor education program, which thereafter examined the roles played in labor conflict by newspapers, churches, the power structure, and other community factors. Wilder also confirmed for Horton what he already knew: the power structure's determination in the 1930s and '40s

(omitting the war years) to cripple labor unions. He later saw in the 1950s and '60s the power structure mobilize to stem the tide of racial integration.

Zilphia Mae Johnson (Mrs. Myles Horton): 1935

She was from Paris, Arkansas, attending a 2-month Highlander winter session. This privileged daughter of an Arkansas coal mine operator and College of the Ozarks graduate, was a talented, classically trained musician. Influenced by radical Presbyterian minister Claude Williams, she wanted to use her musical and dramatic talents to advance labor unions. In this, she clashed with and parted from her father. A friend got her to Highlander to learn about the labor movement. She and Myles fell in love and married March 6, 1935. She then studied about workers' theater at the New Theatre School, New York City. At Highlander, she taught drama, playwriting, public speaking, wrote and directed plays based on labor strikes, and led square dancing and singing.

Zilphia Horton had a gift for using music, drama, and dance to advance labor union concerns and civil rights. She united people, mellowed differences, and lifted spirits. By collecting songs and encouraging Highlander students to collect and sing them, she involved communities around Highlander, helping heal wounds, lessen suspicion, and foster cultural pride. Through Zilphia, Highlander's cultural programs gained national and even international renown when the BBC presented a cultural program from Highlander in March 1937.

She also helped give "We Shall Overcome" national and international renown. Originally an Afro-American folk song, "We Will Overcome" became a Baptist hymn and was sung by union members to maintain picket line morale at a Charleston, SC, CIO Food and Tobacco Workers strike. Two women members from that union sang it at Highlander in 1946. Zilphia recognized its emotional appeal, slowed the tempo, added verses, and sang it at meetings. Pete Seeger (1919-) learned it from Zilphia in 1947, altered its title to "We Shall Overcome," added verses, and sang it at 1950s folk song concerts around the country. Folk singer Guy Carawan (1927-), who with his wife Candie worked at Highlander, further refined it, and added the verse, "We Shall Not be Moved," during a police raid on Highlander, the night of July 31, 1959. It was sung at Highlander workshops, at civil rights gatherings from the 1960s, and became the freedom song heard round the world.

Zilphia and Myles Horton were married 21 years, had a son and daughter, when she tragically died. Reaching for a glass she thought held water, she drank some carbon tetrachloride, realized her error, induced vomiting, and phoned her physician, who assured her that she had remedied the accident. But the poison aggravated a kidney condition discovered at Vanderbilt Hospital, Nashville, where she died of uremic poisoning, April 11, 1956.

Citizenship Schools for Voter Registration: 1957-61

Two South Carolina blacks attended Highlander's August 1954 workshop on "World Problems, the United Nations, and You," comparing discrimination in the South with discrimination elsewhere. Esau Jenkins (died 1972), a businessman and community leader from Johns Island, SC, accompanying Septima Poinsette Clark (1898-1987), a Charleston, SC, teacher, was more interested in adult black literacy than in the United Nations. Esau Jenkins wanted his neighbors to learn to read and write and so qualify to register to vote. Highlander's staff hesitated, then busy training black leaders for the school desegregation movement. Jenkins and Clark convinced Horton that Johns Island blacks needed adult literacy classes. These began on Johns Island, spread to other Sea Islands, and then through the South. It was Highlander's most successful training program and significantly increased black voter registration, black political awareness and involvement, and helped elect black mayors, sheriffs, and other officials in the 1970s and '80s.

Johns Island, six miles south of Charleston, SC, with a 1954 population of 4,000, is the largest of the Sea Island chain along the South Carolina and Georgia coast. Inhabitants, 67 percent black (other islands had higher black proportions), lived just above subsistence. Some owned farms and small businesses. Most worked on large truck farms or in Charleston as servants or as factory and shipyard hands. Gullah was their home language, a dialect from their African slave ancestors. Until the WPA built bridges in the 1930s, they went by boat to Charleston. Jenkins, a Johns Island leader, had supplemented his fourth grade education with night classes. Converting his small cotton farm to truck farming, he learned enough Greek to sell produce to Charleston Greek vegetable merchants. He was PTA president, church school superintendent, assistant pastor in his church, and also ran a small bus line to the mainland. During the 45-minute drive, he distributed, explained, and discussed the South Carolina state constitution and voting laws, thus encouraging passengers learn to read and write to pass voter registration literacy tests.

Black islanders were suspicious and white authorities were hostile to outside do-gooders. Myles Horton decided to train potential black island leaders at Highlander and send them back to conduct Citizenship Schools. The schools were thus all-black, local, and largely self-taught. Septima Clark sent field reports of progress and problems to Highlander, whose staff were seldom seen and thus avoided adverse newspaper publicity for three years.

Horton deliberately chose a black beautician as the first Citizenship School teacher on January 7, 1957. A black beautician with black customers was not dependent on and hence not intimidated by the white power structure. Her parlor was a community center and she was a natural community leader. Bernice Robinson (1917-), born in Charleston, earned her high school diploma through night school in New York City, where she went to better herself. Returning to Charleston in 1947 to help her ailing parents, she actively

advanced race relations through the YWCA and the NAACP and found work only as a self-employed beautician and dressmaker.

Esau Jenkins formed a Progressive Club in order to purchase a building (with a loan from a Highlander grant), sold gasoline outside and groceries inside while citizenship classes were held in the back. Bernice Robinson discarded elementary school teaching materials and child-size school furniture. She taught islanders such practical things as how to write their own names, read and understand a newspaper, fill out mail order and money order forms, and do some arithmetic. The class met two hours a night, two nights a week, for some three months. She tacked up a large UN Declaration of Human Rights poster for all to be able to read and understand by the end of the course.

Citizenship School teaching materials were collected into booklets, distributed in South Carolina, and later revised to fit voter registration requirements in Tennessee and Georgia. Guy Carawan, in Highlander "singing schools," improvised lyrics for spirituals and folk songs that urged people to learn to read, write, register, and vote. Citizenship Schools spread to Huntsville, AL, and Savannah, GA, 1960-61, straining resources at Highlander, in debt in 1961 and about to be closed by Tennessee authorities. In August 1961, Highlander handed over its Citizenship School programs to the Martin Luther King-led Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Septima Clark, who continued working with Citizenship Schools under SCLC, estimated that between 1954-70 they helped some 100,000 blacks learn to read and write.

Highlander Attacked: 1953-61

As Highlander's civil rights activities increased, so too did segregationists' attacks. Fear of communist internal subversion pervaded the U.S., aggravated by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy's communists-in-government charges. Alarmed at the liberal tide, segregationists mobilized state authority and police to try to roll back the effects of the May 1954 Supreme Court Brown desegregation decision; the 1955 Montgomery, AL, bus boycott; the 1957-58 Little Rock, AR, school desegregation crisis; the 1961 black college student lunch counter sitins (begun February 1, 1961, Greensboro, NC); and the 1961 white and black freedom bus riders challenging southern segregated facilities (begun May 4, 1961).

Attacks on Highlander were based on communist conspiracy charges, going back to the 1930s. Paul Crouch told a Chattanooga reporter that while he was Tennessee Communist Party head, 1939-41, Highlander had 25 Communist Party members. Crouch had been courtmartialed in the U.S. Army, served 2 years in Alcatraz, and was a known paid informer for red-baiting groups. In the 1954 U.S. Democratic Senatorial campaign, Pat Sutton, running against Senator Estes Kefauver, cited Paul Crouch's testimony that Highlander's Dombroski and Horton were communists. Sutton lost two-to-one to Kefauver, a friend of Horton's, who avoided mentioning Highlander.

In the spring of 1954, Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland (1904-86), white supremacist planter and Joseph McCarthy imitator, headed the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, investigating "subversive" southern liberal organizations, including Highlander. Believing that a well publicized investigation would help his 1954 Senate reelection and convinced that communists promoted racial equality in order to disrupt and take over the U.S., Eastland tied Highlander to a conspiracy web that included Virginia Durr (Highlander trustee), sister-in-law of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and wife of Clifford Judkins Durr (1899-1975), New Deal official, Progressive Party Senate candidate in 1948, and an anti-poll tax activist. The March 1954 hearings, dealing with alleged communist activities of Highlanders Dombroski, Mrs. Durr, Horton, and others, ended in raucous disorder with Horton physically dragged from the committee room.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) revoked Highlander's tax exempt status three times between 1957-71, restored on appeal each time. Horton believed this harassment was aimed at stopping Highlander's school integration efforts.

In 1954 the Georgia legislature created a Commission on Education designed to resist school desegregation. The Commission used undercover agents to probe Koinonia Farm, Americus, GA, which had jointly sponsored with Highlander integrated children's camps in Tennessee in 1956-57. On Labor Day weekend, 1957, as Highlander was celebrating its 25th anniversary, Georgia Commission agents photographed Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Horton, and a publicly acknowledged black communist who, he later admitted, had conspired with the agents to be in the photo. In October 1957 the Georgia Commission published a 4-page paper titled "Highlander Folk School: Communist Training School, Monteagle, Tennessee," with photos of Highlander's interracial meetings. The Georgia Commission distributed 250,000 copies, and White Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klan distributed over a million copies by 1959. Southern newspapers, including the Atlanta Constitution, published articles on Highlander, labeling it at worst communist and at best pro-communist. The photo of Martin Luther King at Highlander was displayed by Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett, printed as a postcard by the John Birch Society, and appeared on 1965 billboards across the South titled, "Martin Luther King at Communist Training School." When Highlander's fire insurance was canceled in 1957-58, Horton suspected that segregationists were using economic pressure against the school.

Several southern state legislatures formed investigating committees during 1957-59 on the causes of racial unrest. Arkansas' committee, headed by its Attorney General, tied Highlander to the Little Rock disturbances. He offered to supply evidence to the Tennessee legislature to help them close Highlander. On January 26, 1959, the Tennessee legislature appointed a committee to investigate Highlander, using evidence collected by the Georgia Commission. The charge was that Highlander was integrated, promoted integration, was

subversive, promoted communism, allowed free love between the races; that it was not a school approved by state authorities, had no qualified faculty, and awarded no diplomas; that Horton operated Highlander for personal profit, since the trustees had given him his house and 76 acres; and last (after a July 31, 1959, police raid on Highlander which found beer and a little whisky), that it sold spirits without a license.

Horton repudiated each charge. Yes, Highlander was always integrated and this was implied in its charter. No, Highlander was not subversive but allowed all points of view to be discussed, disavowing communism because communism was authoritarian and against Highlander's spirit of open inquiry. No, Highlander did not condone free love, but in square dancing and folk dancing hands were held and bodies sometimes touched. No, Highlander on principle did not issue diplomas and taught by discussing problems and issues, as did many adult education institutions. Yes, Highlander did give Horton his house and 76 acres in lieu of over 20 years without salary for himself and Zilphia Horton. Yes, beer was kept at Highlander because nearby cafes would not serve racially mixed groups and a money kitty was kept to replenish drinks.

Tennessee authorities found Highlander guilty of selling beer without a license and guilty of questionable financial practices (citing the gift of Horton's house and land). Other charges were dropped. The trial sapped Horton's and other Highlander staff's time and energy, yet their programs continued. Appeals delayed the closing of Highlander at Monteagle until August 1961. By then Horton and legal advisers had obtained a new charter meeting Tennessee regulations. A renamed Highlander Research and Education Center began in Knoxville, 1961-71, and still continues at New Market, near Knoxville.

Highlander in Knoxville, 1961-71, was frequently harassed. The City Council, dominated by wealthy grocer, Cas Walker, passed an ordinance that all educational institutions be approved by the Council. Police came with warrants, which Highlander staff ignored, knowing that such legislation was not retroactive and hence not binding. But the KKK marched in front of the school; there were phone threats and crank calls. Once, in a Maryville, TN, restaurant, Horton and a Highlander lawyer were badly beaten while their wives watched. Horton kept on. The lawyer had to close his office and move to another state.

Last Years

Horton retired as educational director in 1971; continued to live and act as consultant at Highlander; traveled to talk about the Highlander idea to adult educators in China, the Philippines, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia, and Nicaragua. He was frequently interviewed, most notably on Bill Moyers' Journal, "Adventures of a Radical Hillbilly," Public Broadcasting System, WGBH, Boston, June 5 and 11, 1981. Still, he remained obscure to the general public, a minor figure except to those who valued him as a

fighter over The Long Haul (title of his 1990 autobiography, indicating the simmering anger he sublimated by a lifelong fight for justice).

Horton died at Highlander, January 19, 1990.

Conclusion

Horton failed to get a fair contract for Wilder, TN, coal miners. He was asked to start a Highlander in New Mexico, which failed, and a Highlander in Chicago, which failed. He later came to see that the Highlander idea fitted third world conditions and succeeded in Appalachia only because Appalachia, exploited and owned by outside business interests, has third world characteristics. He did anticipate two major social movements in which Highlander had some success and made a contribution: unionized labor in the 1930s-40s (Highlander trained early southern CIO leaders); and race relations in the 1950s-60s (Highlander trained major black leaders; its Citizenship Schools helped enfranchise many blacks).

At Highlander, private, small, fervently committed, and with clear goals, Horton taught adults what ought to be. Public schools, which teach what is and so perpetuate the status quo, follow and seldom lead in reshaping the political, economic, and social class systems. In challenging and trying to reshape those forces, Horton was a social reconstructionist like George S. Counts, who wrote Dare the School Build a New Social Order?; Harold Rugg, who wrote social studies textbooks; and Theodore Brameld, defender of a reconstructed education for a reconstructed world. Horton, close to both Counts and Brameld, was a revolutionary reformer who knew that he had not ushered in the secondary American revolution, had not brought full justice and dignity to those denied them. He knew but never condoned that injustice exists in all societies, especially free enterprise ones. But we credit him, honor him, remember him for caring enough to fight for a better world.

Myles Horton Chronology

1905, July 5 Myles Falls Horton born, Savannah, TN, to Elsie Falls and Perry Horton.

1920-24 While in high school, he worked as a store clerk, at a sawmill, and in a box factory.

1924-28 Attended Cumberland University (Cumberland Presbyterian Church), Lebanon, TN.

1927, Summer Organized Bible schools for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Was already skeptical of organized religion. At Ozone, TN, first experience at letting people discuss their problems and find their own solutions.

1928-29 YMCA organizer at Tennessee schools and colleges.

1929-30 Studied at Union Theological Seminary, NY. Won friendship of theologian and social gospel activist Reinhold Niebuhr.

1930-31 Studied at the University of Chicago. Influenced by sociologist Robert Park, Jane Addams of Hull House, and 2 Danish-born clergymen who tc ' him of Danish folk high schools.

1931-32 Studied folk high schools in Denmark.

1932, Fall Returned to TN. He and Don West founded Highlander Folk School, Grundy County, near Monteagle, TN, leasing a house and land from Dr. Lilian Johnson, retired educator and philanthropist. Funds came in response to an appeal letter sent by Niebuhr and endorsed by George S. Counts, Sherwood Eddy, Norman Thomas, and others.

1932-33 Horton and Highlander students aided United Mine Workers (UMW) local union strikers, Wilder, TN.

1933, April 1 Don West left to start a program in Georgia.

1933, June Highlander convened its "First Annual Socialist Summer School." (15 attended).

1933, December Helped form the Cumberland Mountain Cooperative to buy basic foods. Also had a sewing cooperative (made quilts) and a nursery school cooperative for area children.

1934 Resident students involved in strike at Harriman, TN.

1935 Dr. Lilian Johnson deeded her house and land to Highlander. Horton married Zilphia Johnson, a musician and social activist (no relation to Dr. Lilian Johnson).

1935 Summer Labor Chautauqua held at Highlander.

1935 December Began Grundy County, TN, program to unionize and educate underpaid WPA relief workers (taught them such skills as letter writing, petitioning, and contacting Congressmen).

1936 Picket line classes for striking textile workers, Knoxville.

1937-47 Most of Highlander staff time devoted to training members for leadership in CIO-affiliated unions.

1939 Grundy County WPA relief workers "stay-in strike" started Feb. 10, 1939. Entire families occupied WPA offices.

1938-40 Extensive residential courses to develop labor union leadership.

1940-44 Continued large-scale extension programs to train CIO and other union officers, leaders, and members.

1944 First interracial union-related resident course at Highlander (blacks had been welcome at Highlander from its beginning; white unionists were traditionally racist).

1945-47 CIO union work continued. The increasingly bureaucratic CIO formed its own Research and Education Department.

1948-49 Increasing Highlander-CIO tension because of Cold War anticommunist pressures (Highlander, determined to be open to all, refused to be officially anticommunist). Their creative relationship ended, but the CIO held summer schools at Highlander, 1950-52.

1940s Horton and others actively organized Farmers' Unions in the South.

1951 National Farmers' Union withdrew from the South.

1954 Before Mississippi Sen. Eastland's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, Horton answered questions about his own political affilations but refused to answer questions about other Highlander staff members.

1953-56 Highlander workshops trained black and white desegregation leaders.

1956 Zilphia Horton (Mrs. Horton), Highlander singing and dance leader, died.

1957 Highlander 25th anniversary celebration attended by Eleanor Roosevelt, a Highlander financial supporter.

1957-61 Citizenship School Program for literacy/voter registration, Sea Islands, SC, black people.

1960-61 Workshops on race relations for southern college students.

1961, Fall Highlander transferred the Citizenship School Program to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Tennessee authorities closed down Highlander Folk School, Monteagle. Its buildings were burned by arsonists. State of TN granted a new charter to Highlander Research and Education Center, Knoxville (where it remained for 10 years, 1961-71).

1962 Workshops, seminars, and evening classes conducted mainly for Knoxville residents.

1963-68 Highlander's emphasis shifted with the growing popularity of Black Power to civil rights-related projects in the deep South.

1968 Highlander staff participated in the Poor People's Campaign and Resurrection City, Washington, DC.

1969 Horton organized Highlander West in New Mexico, but the project soon closed.

1969-70 Highlander project in Chicago to serve Appalachian and Puerto Rican youth eventually failed.

1971 Highlander moved to New Market, TN, near Knoxville, and increasingly concentrated on southern Appalachian problem. Horton retired as education director but remained active and lived at Highlander.

1970s, late Horton led several trips to China.

1980s Horton believed Highlander imitators not successful in the U.S. except in Appalachia because Appalachia has third world colonial characteristics (owned and exploited by outside corporations). He visited Highlander-type institutions in the Philippines, India, Malaysia, and among aborigines in New Zealand and Australia.

Visited Nicaragua after Daniel Ortega became President (believing socialism could succeed there).

1990, Jan. 19 Horton died at Highlander, age 85.

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