

Nicholas Von Hoffman

Old Kentucky home

WHITESBURG, KY. (KFS) — Twice in its history, 46 years apart, The Mountain Eagle, Letcher County's valiant weekly newspaper, has printed the same public notice. The first time was on Oct. 3, 1918, and the item read as follows:

"EAST KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN LIFE CONFERENCE WILL MEET AT PAINTSVILLE . . . A great program has been arranged and a splendid corps of

speakers will be on hand. The conference of schools, roads, farms and rural churches. Three big, full days of an upward pull for better things. You cannot afford to miss it, as it is your conference, right here in your native hills where you can get to it. It deals with our own, not some other people's difficulties. Come let us reason together for the common good."

As a sardonic comment on how slowly things change in Appalachia, The Mountain Eagle ran the same notice again in 1964. Tom Gish, the paper's editor, might consider running it for a third time, for surely there will be no end of new conferences to discuss the dilemma of the mountains and their people.

Once a Prosperous Area

In fact the last half century has seen changes—most of them bad. In 1918 this was a relatively prosperous area enjoying a wage economy supported by the coal industry; today it is a depopulated region—Letcher County alone has about half the people it had in 1950 and those who remain are heavily dependent on welfare. Even some of the people who live here make sad jokes about how, on the first of the month when the government checks come in, the floor of the bank is covered with those yellow envelopes. It appears that the single largest source of employment is the welfare-antipoverty industry.

That is only fitting because a case can be made to show it was the Federal Government that ruined the area's economy in the first place. This is the argument

propounded by Harry Lavers Jr., the vice-president of the South-East Coal Company. South-East Coal does no strip mining, but tunnels into the earth for the high-quality product indispensable for the manufacture of steel. If Lavers speaks with the voice of the industry, he still enjoys a reputation for running one of the safest and most socially responsible outfits in the area.

He points out that Eastern Kentucky was almost empty of people until the turn of the century when the railroads moved themselves and tens of thousands of people in to mine coal.

"We always had a wage economy," he says. "The farms never supported a large number of people. What we had was an industrial population scattered over several thousand square miles who didn't even know how to farm. Eastern Kentucky was planned, developed and built as a project; and the industry which moved all these people in, then left its employees—and, I might almost say, left them to starve."

According to Lavers, it was two actions by the government that ruined the area's economic ecology. The first was subsidizing the perfection of the Diesel engine and its mass production; the second was building the Big Inch Pipeline from Texas to New Jersey, thus enabling the American home to switch from coal to natural gas as its heating fuel: "We had a tripod—a three-legged stool—and then, bang, bang, we lost heating and the railroads."

None of this was inevitable. The government might have put its money into the perfection of technologies using coal as

a fuel. That, Lavers remarks, is what the electric utility people did. They developed generating plants that could practically burn dirt; that is, the low-quality coal found near the earth's surface. It became economic to burn almost anything and this gave rise to the strip-mining industry.

It's Done Better in Europe

There is better, less polluting coal farther down in the earth; in Europe, where the coal industry has been nationalized for all intents and purposes, a far safer technology has been developed for mining it, but none of this promises to benefit Eastern Kentucky. As long as coal must be mined by companies that have to maximize their immediate profit at the expense of the people and the land here and the air elsewhere, all will remain as it is.

The coal industry could be socialized. Nor would the Federal Government have to do it. It could be taken over by states or even counties that could mine coal with profit and without destruction.

What we have now is a free-enterprise industry and a socialized people. That is what all the conferences and anti-poverty efforts amount to . . . the dole and much talk about quaint quilt-making cooperatives. Quilts, potholders, hand-carved wooden birds and other phony native handicrafts won't save this area. But its coal, gas and oil will. That's what made it, that's what ruined it, and that's what can make it again.

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On the right . . . William F. Buckley Jr.

The limits of decency

It has been frequently quoted about George McGovern that he is "the only decent man in the Senate." Now that quote is the late Robert Kennedy's, and it does, I truly believe, an injustice to the Senate. I am sure that there are other decent men there, not even counting the sainted junior Senator from New York, successor to Robert Kennedy in the affections of New York's constituents. And it is not the purpose of this essay to suggest that Senator McGovern is other than a decent man. It is rather the purpose to suggest that that which is decent about him is expressed other than in his political rhetoric.

But I fear that he has another image of himself than that which collectors of his remarks come up with, and before the

campaign heats up, he should be reminded of it. Particularly before he sets his course to the deploring of the rhetorical excesses of Spiro Agnew.

Here is Nick Kotz of the Washington Post (May 17, 1972), commenting on Senator McGovern whom he had just interviewed. "As he talked in his office, McGovern returned repeatedly to the theme that he had tried to calm rather than incite the public to anger. 'I have sought not to whip up emotions, but to appeal to humanity and reason,' he said. 'There's plenty of anger and tension without our leaders adding to it. I think a conciliatory approach is needed . . .'"

A conciliatory approach is not going to be tempered on McGovern rhetoric, and the gentleman's habits of harsh and un-

charitable overstatement are not purely the accretions of a presidential campaign. Back in 1964, (Sept. 8, Cong. Record, p. 21690) he was saying about another decent man in the Senate of the United States: "I regard Mr. Goldwater as the most unstable, radical and extremist ever to run for the Presidency in either political party."

And about yet another decent colleague—from the same state—Karl Mundt of South Dakota: "I don't know how he (Mundt) felt about me . . . but I know I hated his guts . . . I hated him so much I lost my sense of balance." (Robert Sam Anson, McGovern: A Biography, p. 93).

And one more time on a colleague: "But (Senator Henry) Jackson destroyed

whatever chance he had of becoming the Democratic nominee by embracing racism in the anti-busing campaign, Senator McGovern said." (Chris Lydon, N. Y. Times, March 19, 1972).

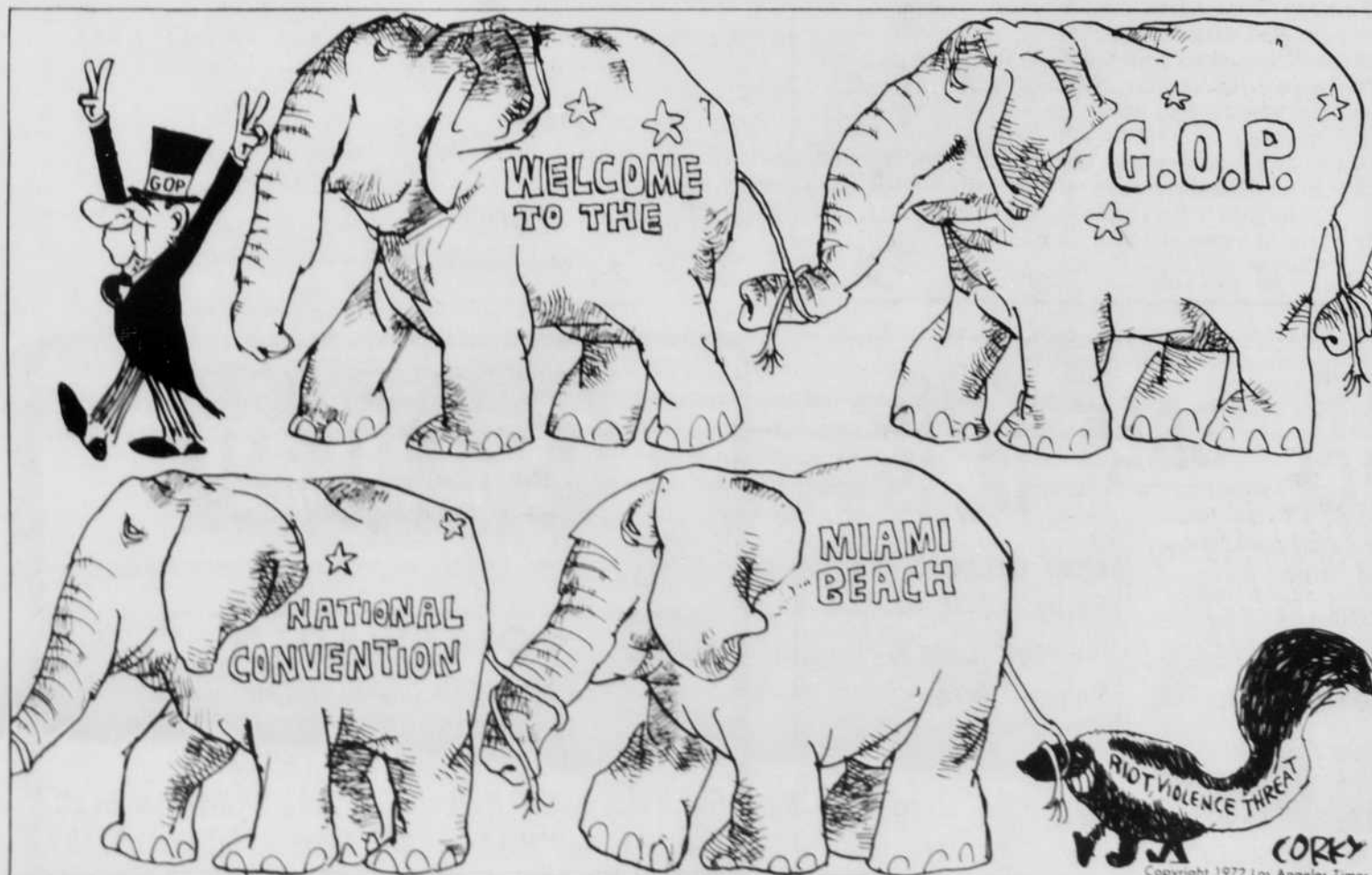
And after J. Edgar Hoover died, McGovern gave an interview. (Life Magazine, July 7, 1972). "Hoover had lived beyond the normal years, so I couldn't feel the pathos I would for a young man. I could feel nothing but relief that he was no longer a public servant."

On the Indochinese war, it is hard to think of Senator McGovern as stable. "I think the reelection of Richard Nixon in 1972 would be an open hunting right for the man to give in to all his impulses for a major war against the people of Indochina." (Speech, Catholic University, April 20, 1972). And, "I've said many times that the Nixon bombing policy on Indochina is the most barbaric action that any country has committed since Hitler's effort to exterminate Jews in Germany in the 1930's." ((Interview with Gregg Herrington, AP, June 29, 1972.) To liken Richard Nixon (and Lyndon Johnson) not only to Hitler but to the worst that Hitler ever did is, well among other things, perverse.

But that is characteristic when touching on the subject of Vietnam. President Nixon "has descended to a new level of barbarism and foolhardiness for no other reason than to save his own face and to prop up the corrupt regime of Thieu." (AP, April 16, 1972). And speaking of Thieu, he is a "corrupt dictator who jails opponents, a despicable creature who doesn't merit the life of a single American soldier or for that matter a single Vietnamese." (UPI, April 7, 1972.) And "I want to be blunt about it," says Senator McGovern. "(Nixon's) playing politics with the lives of American soldiers and with American prisoners rotting in their cells in Hanoi. He's putting his own political selfish interests ahead of the welfare of these young Americans and ahead of the taxpayers of this country who are bearing the burden."

I want to be blunt about it. Senator McGovern's animadversions on his fellow human beings are—indecent.

Wednesday, August 16, 1972



Elephants' walk