

Matter of Fact By Joseph Alsop

SLAB FORK

Slab Fork, W. Va. — This place hits the unprepared outsider between the eyes, like a blow. You wind down a deep-pocked road into a cramped, pit-like hollow in the hills. And there is Slab Fork—the hundred or so decrepit-looking houses; the tipples of the two mines; the bare minimum of shabby schools and board-built churches; and the company store and office, all bleak, graceless and scurfy with coal dust.

Look beneath this surface, however, and you discover why the minister of the white Protestant church, the Rev. Mr. Charles Eastwood, calls Slab Fork "just a wonderful community — for a mining camp." The point is that the small, independent, long-established Slab Fork Mining Company has quality coal, first-class local management that stays on the job, and a remarkable employment record.

Lately, mechanization has reduced the payroll by about a fifth. Yet the remaining 400 employees of the Slab Fork Mines are decidedly better off than the people of almost any other mining camp in this part of West Virginia. They have steady work. Their houses, such as they are, rent for ten dollars a month. Their wages average \$100 a week. And on this, as will be seen, a careful man in Slab Fork can even give his children a college education.

THE comparative advantages of life in Slab Fork need to be noted, because they perhaps gave Sen. John F. Kennedy a special, local advantage over "the poor man's candidate," Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. The other points to note about Slab Fork are rather simple.

If this place were not sternly, even grimly Protestant, the scrubby hillsides would probably have at least one ornament, in the form of a shrine to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He is a saint here. Since his day, every white voter has been a Roosevelt Democrat. The few Negroes, in contrast, are mainly Republican, perhaps because the ruling majority votes the other way.

The white miners also form as purely Anglo-Saxon a community as you will find in the whole United States. "The names," said a bewildered member of the Kennedy staff, "sound like nothing but the membership list of the Somerset club" — which is Boston's citadel of rich Anglo-Saxon privilege. And although the Slab Forkers are not privileged by any reasonable standard, they are proud, hard-working, friendly, and generally intelligent people.

THIS reporter spent a long and deeply interesting day in Slab Fork with Lou Harris, the professional pollster who tests opinion for Senator Kennedy. We polled an enormous sample for such a small place, over 80 people in all. The result showed 30 votes for Kennedy, 27 votes for Humphrey, 10 undecided, and the rest either not registered, or not interested enough to vote, or unable to vote in the Democratic primary because they were Republicans.

Slab Fork is in southern West Virginia, which is supposed to be Humphrey territory. Hence this result, showing a Kennedy lead, looks very good indeed for Kennedy, at least on the surface.

But as with the town, so with the poll! one must look beneath the surface. We got our first glimpse at the very first house we went to. This was the hillside-perched home, shabby without and cozy and neat within, of Slab Fork's secretary-treasurer of the United Mine Workers, Ernest Martin. A disabled miner, Mac Norris, was also there to talk about his pension.

Ernest Martin and his wife, both church-going Presbyterians, were enthusiastic for Kennedy. They discussed the issues in striking detail. They compared the candidates judiciously. They declared their choice with warmth. They were supporters to be proud of. But Mac Norris and his wife, when intercepted on the porch, proved to be people of another stripe. They too had seen Kennedy in action on TV, and they "liked his talk."

"But we ain't never had no Catholic," said Mrs. Norris angrily. "And that's one thing we're against and we'll always be against." . . .

NEXT door, was the neat, sharp-eyed Mrs. Aubrey Nicely, wife of an electrician who had worked 30 years in the mine. She and her husband had sent four boys through the state university — "it's hard on the old man, but our youngest boy is in graduate school now, and we both think it was worth it." Mrs. Nicely said proudly. She too was enthusiastic for Kennedy.

In contrast, the coal-grimed, slatternly, barefoot wife of another mine-electrician in a house further down the hillside, was very strong for Humphrey, and for the same religious reason as Mrs. Norris.

The pattern these contrasting pairs of voters suggest was by no means universal. Not all Kennedy's support was credible. At the mine, for instance, H. J. Sturgill explained that "being a Baptist," he would "normally be for Humphrey"; but "the guy wants a colored man in the Cabinet." Therefore he chose Kennedy. Two Kennedy voters were Slab Fork's only Catholics, moved by religious prejudice like so many of the Protestants. And Kennedy lost votes, too, because "he's a rich man, and Humphrey was born a working man like us."

Yet it is still fair to say that the majority of Kennedy's Slab Fork support was composed of the serious citizens, who had studied their choice and chosen without prejudice. By the same token, it is fair to say that a majority of Humphrey's support were people who were influenced by religious prejudice. By actual count, 13 of the 27 Humphrey voters frankly admitted as such.

FOR these reasons, this critical West Virginia Democratic primary looks like being an ugly business, in which Hubert Humphrey can only win if he does win for ugly reasons. In Slab Fork, alas, one heard enough un-American prejudice to be downright glad when William Sturgill announced a Kennedy vote with the defiant statement: "I'm a Baptist, but I don't think religion should have anything to do with it. By God, this is a free country, isn't it?"

The young shop fireman was coal-blackened from head to toe. He gave his verdict when the shift changed, standing by the cage, where the entrance of the mine yawned darkly, like the portal of hell. But a vote has not been better justified in the well-dusted confines of the Somerset club itself.

Gates Hints Ike May Further Revamp Defense Program

Philadelphia — (AP) — Defense Secretary Thomas S. Gates Jr. has hinted that President Eisenhower may further revamp the nation's defense program to bolster U. S. military might.

Gates said the United States already is the strongest military power in the world. But he said rapid changes in modern technology require shifts in weapons planning if the nation is to maintain its position.

He cited Eisenhower's action in altering the military budget to put more emphasis on missiles, military satellites and missiles submarines. "There could be other" such changes, Gates said without elaborating.

Russia Said Legging
Although he recognizes Russian power as formidable, the defense secretary repeated his oft-stated contention that the Soviets have not caught up with the United States in military power. He said any such impression was "simply not supported by the facts."

Gates also said the Geneva Disarmament Conference has no reason yet for expecting agreements that will ease America's arms burden. "At this time, we cannot assume the negotiations will result in any substantial agreements that will ease our de-

In the Days News
By FRANK JENKINS
In Geneva, the United States offers to negotiate an immediate agreement to BAN PRODUCTION OF FISSIONABLE MATERIALS FOR MILITARY PURPOSES.

U. S. Ambassador Frederick M. Eaton told the ten-nation disarmament conference the U. S. is willing to throw open its nuclear plants to international inspection and control if the Soviet Union does likewise.

An international control would supervise the conversion of military fissionable materials — including nuclear bomb warheads — to EXCLUSIVELY PEACEFUL PURPOSES, Ambassador Eaton said.

WHAT happened there? Well, what happened was by no means unexpected. Soviet Delegate Valerian N. Zorin promptly arose in his place and REJECTED THE PROPOSAL, saying it contained "more control than disarmament."

DOES that end it all? Of course not. What is going on at Geneva is a propaganda battle. The United States is seeking to prove that Soviet Russia is the aggressor in a new colonial scheme to conquer the world. Russia is seeking to prove that the United States is the aggressor.

Geneva is simply the forum for the debate. Will nuclear weapons be used in a future ALL-OUT war that could destroy the world?

I THINK it's too early to attempt an answer to that question. We must remember that a poison gas was used as a weapon in World War I. It wasn't too effective then. But the glimpse of poison gas we got during World War I was enough to put in our minds the thought that it MIGHT become effective enough to destroy the world.

Since then, scientific research has confirmed that thought. Already poison gases potent enough to destroy life on earth have been developed.

But — As yet, no nation has been willing to accept the appalling responsibility of using them in all-out war. That leads to the thought that perhaps no nation will be willing to accept the responsibility of using nuclear weapons in ALL-OUT war.

THE last best hope of earth that all-out war with all-out modern weapons will become so terrifying that mankind will have the plain common sense to forswear it. Let's continue to cherish that hope.

United States To Help Save Relics Along Nile River

Washington — (AP) — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has voted to let the United States spend foreign aid funds to help save tombs and temples dating from the dawn of history.

The committee has tentatively agreed to let the United States participate in a major international program to preserve ancient historical treasures along the Nile river in Egypt and the Sudan.

To Be Covered by Lake
The tombs and temples will be covered by a lake 300 miles long when the Aswan High Dam is completed in about five years. Egypt and the Sudan have asked scientists the world over to help unearth the treasures of antiquity before it is too late.

The committee approved an amendment to the foreign aid bill which would permit the U. S. government to contribute up to one-third of the cost of

the big international program. It has been estimated that the proposed explorations and excavations might cost up to 90 million dollars. Other nations are being asked to help also.

DETERMINED SWIMMER
Milwaukee, Wis. — (AP) — Neil Hansen, 31, bet his girl friend Thursday he could swim a half mile through Lake Michigan's icy waters and tried it . . . twice. The first time, two fishermen fished him out. The second time, police retrieved Hansen and charged him with disorderly conduct.

SENATE FEARS SNEAKS
Jackson, Miss. — (AP) — The Mississippi senate Thursday rejected a proposal that sheriffs be allowed to make secret payments to persons informing them of violations of that state's prohibition law.

"Some sneak might turn us all in for having a pint of whiskey in the house," Sen. P. M. Watkins argued. "We

would end up hating maybe 75 or 80 people and not know who it was."

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Parrish Submits Apparent Low Bid

Stanley G. Parrish, contractor, submitted an apparent low bid of \$2,241 Thursday for renovation of the Medford city jail.

The city plans to turn a portion of the existing jail facility into office space for the police department by building a wall across the east section of the jail and turning the enclosed portion into three offices.

The plan was decided on after a report recently submitted by Lt. William Beall of the Berkeley, Calif., police department, pointed out that expansion of present office space here is a necessity. Lieutenant Beall, an authority in police organization, made a study of the Medford department at the request of the city.

City Manager Robert Duff pointed out that reducing the size of the jail for office space was a possibility recommended by Lt. Beall.

Work on the offices will start as soon as possible after the city council awards the contract, Duff said. The council probably will consider the matter at its meeting April 21, he said.

Other bids submitted were from D. M. Blickenstaff for \$2,309, and from Jacobs Construction company for \$2,511. The cost of the project had been estimated by the city at \$2,500.

Money for construction will come out of the police department's 1959-1960 budget, according to Chief of Police Charles P. Champlin.

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