

**THE ARKLETON TRUST**

***POPULAR EDUCATION  
FOR CHANGE***

***Report to  
The Arkleton Trust on a  
Visit in April/May 1986  
to The Highlander Research  
and Education Center,  
Tennessee, USA***

***by***

***Frank Rennie***

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the greatest good we can do for others is not just to share our riches with them but to reveal theirs to themselves.

E. E. CUMMINGS

People learn of unity by acting in unity. They learn of democracy by acting democratically. And each time they do these things as a result of experiences at Highlander they both renew their capacity to act in these ways again and demonstrate the process of education in action. Talk about this process distorts, and is one step removed from the essential element – the people themselves doing. Writing in words about the process is two steps removed.

FRANK ADAMS (1)

## FOREWORD

Before I begin to illustrate my own perception of the workings of the Highlander Research and Education Center, I would like to say very briefly what this experience has meant to me.

My visit to Highlander was a natural extension of my learning and teaching commitments among a number of community groups with diverse interests and aims. All roads were leading to the need for the type of learning which Highlander encourages – though at this time I was not able to clearly articulate these ideas and the possible vehicle(s) for achieving them. I felt then that I needed to pack away the books, stop talking about it, and go to *participate* in the Highlander idea. I am deeply grateful to the Arkleton Trust and the Ernest Cook Trust for their generosity and foresight which made this experience possible.

When I arrived at Highlander, took part in activities there, and travelled through mountain communities which are associated with Highlander, the mental fog began to clear. Like the pieces of a jigsaw, as the mystique of Highlander began to disappear, the whole picture became more clear. The most surprising thing is that each separate piece was familiar and could easily be identified from past experiences of people, places, and situations in Scotland. Each piece was recognisable and not at all out of place – yet the effect of re-assembling them presented a new picture. Three things in particular stand out. Firstly, the degree of similarity between the problems facing many rural communities throughout the world was re-emphasised. On one occasion, on a mountain farm in Virginia, an Appalachian, a priest-in-exile from El Salvador, an Irish girl and myself discussed the situations in our own countries, and things which we had seen on our travels. The close similarity of the problems of rural housing, subsistence agriculture, education and medical provision, and issues of land ownership and local democracy was both astonishing and exciting. Sometimes we become so involved in our own problems that we cannot differentiate between cause and effect. Sometimes too we begin to think that problems are confined to us alone, or even may be of our own making, and an open-minded look at other communities and other countries is both invigorating and revealing.

Secondly, I was reminded that it is necessary not only to evaluate carefully the received wisdom of that which is often termed 'objective study,' but also to question the entire criteria of values and methodologies upon which these pronouncements are based. We are all familiar with situations where the application of sound 'common sense' makes utter nonsense of so-called 'expert opinion' or bureaucratic procedure. It is not strictly true that only those who

are dispassionately involved can make 'objective' or 'scientific' judgements, nor that these judgements are any more free from bias than those of highly motivated individuals who may be deeply involved, yet lay no claim whatsoever to 'expert' nor even 'academic' training. This is the trump card of Highlander, and in a broad sense of the better community education initiatives everywhere. Few people cannot think of a situation where 'local knowledge' is more useful than academic theories (however logical or well-intentioned). It requires much more effort, however, mentally and physically, to encourage such a system of community development which gives priority to the self determination of goals, and to the methods and values upon which these aspirations are based.

Thirdly, far more than simply being able to reconcile my instinctive feeling that the history and cultural expression of a people are inextricably inter-related to their social and economic well-being, I discovered that the one was a tool to help develop the other. Foremost among the qualities needed for the successful, positive achievement of a community goal, is the development of a strong sense of self-identity, and therefore group unity. Obviously this may be achieved in a variety of ways, and through songs, music, poetry and drama may not always be apparent as socio-political tools to many individuals, there is no doubt that they have a strong emotive force. This unifying and strengthening force has been recognised throughout history by social, political and religious groups from all parts of the globe. Apart from anything else it can be fun. I truly treasure the experience of a cultural workshop at Highlander where I was exposed to country music and bluegrass, with which I was passing familiar, and to the blues – most of which was a new dimension entirely. Through their music I learned of peoples struggles and hopes, and in sharing their troubles we also shared laughter in an increased bond of understanding. Even deadly serious affairs can have their humorous moments. I look forward to returning to Highlander in the not too distant future.

The enduring motivation for my visit to Highlander, before, during and since has been the initiation and development of such a system of non-formal adult education in Scotland. With this end in mind this report deliberately seeks to avoid jargon and academic minutiae in preference to a boldly readable and comprehensible text for the widest possible leadership. Moreover, it is meant to catalyse action.

I will welcome any comments.

Frank Rennie  
South Galson  
28/1/87

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

It would be inappropriate to submit this report to a reader without first acknowledging the influences and the encouragements which have helped to shape it. My thanks to John and Nora Murray who first told me about Highlander and have encouraged me since, to the Arkleton Trust for their open-minded act of faith and to the staff of Highlander whom I have added to my list of friends. My appreciation, also, is extended to the many friends and associates of Highlander, too numerous to mention individually, who gave me their time, fed me and shared their enthusiasm. Thank you to Sheila MacLeod for her meticulous commentary on the draft, and to Margaret Mary Macleod for typing the finished version. Thanks also to Agnes for continually refuelling my pre-occupation and sharing in the Highlander idea.

Frank Rennie



# I INTRODUCTION

## What is Highlander?

### The History

'Through Highlanders programs, many people have been encouraged to find beauty and pride in their own ways, to speak their own language without humiliation, and to learn of their own power to accomplish self-defined goals through social movements built from the bottom-up.' (1)

It is not the purpose of this section to delve deeply into the history of the Highlander Research and Education Center. There are many reports and articles which document this side of Highlander (2) (3). In any case, it is not appropriate to dwell too much on the past, as Highlander is very much an organisation of the present, and an institution which *moves towards* areas in which the controversial new issues are beginning to take place. It is necessary however to acquaint the reader with a little of the previous involvements of Highlander in order to understand the basic idea which underlies its activities, and the evolution of its educational methods.

In 1932 Myles Horton was instrumental in forming the Highlander Folk School in the mountains of Tennessee as 'a school for problems' for the Appalachian mountain people. 'Solving problems, however was not Highlander's purpose, its purpose to *'help people learn to solve their problems in their own way,'* and in its life since then Highlander has always worked with the under-privileged, exploited, relatively powerless communities which have approached it for assistance. It is not, however, an organising school in the conventional sense. It is not a school where people come to attend classes, or lectures, nor to hear from 'specialists' about what they consider to be the answer to community problems. The basic ideas dominating the educational philosophy of Highlander are two-fold. Firstly, that by gathering together common people with common community problems we have an extremely powerful learning tool which enables us to take action upon our problems without the dominating involvement of 'experts' and professional, academically-orientated researchers with their dispassionate 'objective' non-

involvement, and alien criteria of values. Secondly, it is the belief in the need to encourage within community groups and individual activists the continued development of their own cultural expressions, whether in the form of music, poetry, art or drama. This cultural expression is used both as a safety-valve of light, communal entertainment in situations which might otherwise be tense, boring and/or tedious, and also as a tool of protest in itself with which to unify and cement the groups' sense of identity and purpose.

With a mountain upbringing, Myles Horton developed the idea of Highlander in an attempt to come to grips with the problems which were really facing the mountain people of Appalachia and the rural south, the day to day problems which these communities *perceived* as being obstacles to them, rather than necessarily those which planners, developers and politicians were telling them about. Beginning with the organisation of bible classes in the rural communities while he was still a student at Cumberland University, he became disillusioned with the apparent inability of the current educational system to tackle adequately the problems of social and economic mis-development in Appalachia. He went to New York to study at Union Theological Seminary, arriving just before the crash of the stock-market and all the subsequent social and economic turmoil which resulted. During this period Horton studied under Reinhold Niebuhr, among others, and was very much influenced by the works of Edward C. Lindeman, and Joseph K. Hart, both advocates of the potency of adult education as an instrument of social change. 'Hart, in fact despaired over the possibility of producing significant change through traditional children's educational programs. He argued that adults must first learn how to live the new social order before trying to teach it.' (1) From his learning experiences at this time Horton moved to an interest in the Danish idea of Folk Schools which were based on non-formal, largely oral, methods of learning, and which embraced both contemporary political and a cultural side to the education. In 1931, Horton visited Denmark to look more closely at the Folk Schools and their relationships with the trade unions, farmers co-operatives, and other cultural and social movements, and though he was in part disappointed by the fact that the Folk Schools had moved away from their original aims and methods, he was able to speak to many people who were involved in this movement and added another dimension to the idea which was eventually to find its expression in Highlander.

On his return to the USA Horton decided that it was time to try out some of his ideas, and to test them with the light of practical experience. Quite quickly Horton enlisted the help of friends to act as an embryo staff for the new project, and soon after a sponsor was found to donate the use of her buildings in a rural area of Southern Appalachia.

'Horton and West moved into the house. They decided on a name which derived from the people, the place, and the school's purpose. In the 1930s, Highlander was the popular name for Appalachia. A Highlander was an Appalachian, and for Horton, folk was a term that had both a positive anthropological and a political meaning. The Highlander Folk School was created.' (3)

In these early days Highlander worked with people in what we would now term industrial relations and workers' education. Through this vehicle there developed over the next decade a growing tendency to become more actively involved with movements which were advocating de-segregation and black civil rights in the Southern States. In the early 1950s Highlander work shifted to make educational programs on the civil rights issue its major priority. Even before this point Highlander had always insisted on its workshops being de-segregated, though it was actually illegal to have such gatherings under the laws of the state. Now, however, there was a complete change of tack from labour education, to civil rights issues. As a result of this shift of emphasis Highlander soon became involved in an educational experiment in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. The history of the evolution of this project (23) (24), provides a fascinating insight in the way in which Highlander has chosen to work in communities, and seeks to enable them to develop their own solutions to the situations which they themselves perceive as problem issues. It is recommended reading. The reality proved to be that the mainly black community of Johns Island, South Carolina, found that they were unable to improve the situation existing in their communities in terms of the provision of social, educational, or civil amenities, largely due to the fact that they were unable to vote in elections. This, in turn, was a result of the fact that most of the community were illiterate. There was no provision of adult literacy training by the local education service, white-dominated and therefore with a vested interest in the

maintenance of an educational charter where only those who were able to read could register to vote. Through a system of 'Citizen Schools' Highlander slowly helped establish a methodology of non-formal adult education in which the students were able to relate to the subject which they needed to learn – in this case the desire to learn to read for the purpose of being able to vote. They needed to be able to relate their new education to their own experiences of life. It is wholly inappropriate to begin to teach adults to learn how to read by using children's story books when in reality they will be able to relate more to being able to read those by-laws of the state which prevent them from voting. For some the spur may be that it would be more useful to be able to read the health and safety rules of the factory in which they work, or to be able to make sense of the words in the mail order catalogue in which they are required to shop. The success of this initiative came to be measured in terms other than purely personal achievement on the part of numbers of blacks learning to read and write. With literacy came the ability to register to vote, to exercise the right to go to the polls in an election, and to begin to develop their previously latent political power in an attempt to seek their own solution to their problems.

With this increasingly active role which Highlander was playing in the civil rights movement, it was only a matter of time until the reactionary extremism, which the blacks had long been fighting against, began to be directed at Highlander itself. In a protracted series of attacks Highlander was branded as a 'communist training school,' a place where people engaged in 'immoral, lewd, and unchasted practises,' and which Horton 'operated for personal gain.' The upshot of all this was that in 1959 the State of Tennessee ruled to revoke the charter of the Highlander Folk School. There were two appeals against the verdict, which failed to reverse the decision and in the early winter of 1961 a court receiver auctioned the assets of Highlander.

'The investigation, raid, hearing, trial and conviction all took place swiftly, between February and November 1959. The appeals required almost two years. The forced sale was over in a matter of hours. Twenty-nine years after its founding, the Highlander Folk School was finally gone from Grundy County.' (9)

There was some attempt by friends of Highlander to purchase some of the books etc. at the auction but the buildings and most of

the moveable assets were lost. It was a severe blow but Highlander drew its horns in to weather the storm and re-opened under a new charter as the Highlander Research and Education Center, first in Knoxville, Tennessee, and now at Newmarket, some 20 miles out of Knoxville.

Later still, by the mid 1960s when the various organisations within the broad front of the civil rights movements had developed sufficiently to conduct their own educational programs, Highlander changed direction again in the thrust of its educational programs. As had happened before with the labour education programs, the organisations which had been working with Highlander, and which had grown in depth of perspective and experience, took over the running of their own grass roots educational activities. Highlander was thus free to devote time to other issues which had assumed a growing need. Highlander staff wanted to get back to somewhere near where they started from; that is, working with struggling communities in the mountains, helping them to find a voice, to articulate their problems clearly, and in realising the nature of their problems, to take positive action to solve them.

Horton has said,

'Since our major programs lasted for a decade or more, some observers have mistakenly, in my opinion, concluded that Highlander has been a series of schools. In the depression era, we worked in our community and county with unemployed miners, striking wood-cutters, and desperately poor people. With the sporadic organisation of industrial workers, our community programs merged into a labour program. We became known at that time as a labour school and still later, we were known as a farmer-labour school. Beginning in the 50s, we became active in a pre-civil rights movement and were later known as a civil rights school. And in the 70s, we were again working in Appalachia; and in recent years we have expanded our program to again include the entire south.' (18)

The extent of the variety in the educational role of Highlander is confirmed by a look at Table 1, which shows the work schedule for 1985. The over-ridingly important point is made that it is not so much *which* subject is being learned, but rather *how* it is being

learned. It is the learning process itself which is capable of bringing power to those who feel themselves to be powerless, and galvanising them for action on their own terms. The next logical step is to look at the *idea* of Highlander, to see how it operates, and how it differs completely from a conventional school for community organisers.

## 1985 HIGHLANDER WORKSHOPS/ACTIVITIES/TRAVELS/ VISITORS

January	19-20	Regional Meeting of Central American Organizations in Southern Appalachia.
February	23	Small group meeting to discuss Appalachian and International issues. This meeting planned a panel for presentation at the Appalachian Studies Conference in the Spring.
March	9-11	Highlander Video Training Workshop.
March	11-15	Canadian Adult Educators visit Highlander.
March	15-17	Labor Education Workshop.
March	22-24	Highlander Appalachian Culture Workshop at Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Kentucky.
March	25-27	Grassroots Leadership Project.
March	28-31	Appalachian Studies Conference, Berea, Kentucky.
April	5-7	Radiation Research Project Meeting.
April	12-14	Highlander Appalachian Songwriters Workshop and Media Workshop in Prentice, Mississippi.
April	26-28	Southern Appalachian Leadership Training.
May	3-5	Highlander Board Meeting.
May	10-12	Culture Workshop for Knoxville/East Tennessee.
May	13-14	Cultural Staff Participation in the Great Labor Song Exchange in Washington, DC.
May	17-19	Highlander Workshop on Labor and the Electronic Media Highlander Delegation to the Appalachian Conference at the University of Rome.
May 29 –	June 2	The Funding Exchange Board Meeting.
June	7-9	Learning Education Resources Network (LERN), National Conference on Literacy.
June	14-27	Delegation of Educators, Labor Activists from India Association of Community Based Education (ACBE), Southern Regional Meeting.

June	28-30	Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), Leadership Training Workshop.
June	28-30	Young People's Cultural Workshop, Penn Community Center, Frogmore, SC.
July	5-13	Cooperative Children's Camp for Knoxville Area.
July	15-28	Summer Youth Workshop.
August	11-18	Culture Staff participation in 'Songs of Southern Struggle' vocal week at the Augusta Heritage Workshop.
October	13-20	Adult Educators visit from the Netherlands.
October	25-27	Highlander Cultural Advisory Board Meeting.
November	1-3	Center for Popular Economics Workshop.
November	8-10	Appalachian Writers Workshop.
November	22-24	Highlander Toxics Workshops on Proposed Nuclear Facility.
November	28-31	Eduardo Baez, Director of Popular Adult Basic Education, Ministry of Education, Nicaragua, visits Highlander after completion of Appalachian/South tour.
December	6-8	Alliance for Cultural Democracy, Board Meeting.



## WHAT IS HIGHLANDER?

### The Structure

'Highlander is much more than a place or an institution. It is a process which enables people from tiny communities who have important ideas about how to make their communities, the nation, and the world a peaceful and humane home for mankind to translate those ideas into action.' (18)

It may be helpful at this stage to sketch some of the details of the structure of Highlander which enables it to function as an effective, independent centre of adult education. At present, Highlander has a working staff of 15. This can be broadly broken down for descriptive purposes as a program staff of 11, and a support staff of 4. Although in practice the program staff do not strictly adhere to 'job demarcation,' on paper at least it can be further broken down into, Director; 3 Cultural Program staff, 1 Research Program, 1 Research/Library, 1 Workshop Co-Ordinator/Economic Education program, 2 Economic Education staff, 1 Environmental Health/Toxic Waste program, and 1 on the Cultural program staff with especial responsibility for youth work. In practice there is much overlap and all of the above must be taken only as a very approximate guide. The support staff likewise may also wear many different hats, but can nominally be described as an Office-Manager, Book-Keeper/Administrator, Center Manager/Cook, and Estate Manager. This is a practical extension of the 'circle of knowledge' employed at Highlander meetings which has 'the physical connotation that everyone brings knowledge to share' and that 'there are no designated experts' (22). There may also be additional staff employed on a part-time or seasonal basis for particular projects or programs.

Appointment of new staff is not generally advertised, as this has not been found to bring the desired type of candidate forward. It is regarded as being more important that the new appointee be familiar with the aims and methods which Highlander endorses rather than necessarily be able to present the best paper qualifications for the advertised job. Furthermore, there is not a strong tradition of non-formal education within the labour movement in

the USA which might ideally be expected to serve as a training ground for working with Highlander. Normally, a job description for a specific vacancy in a particular program is circulated widely around an extended network of Highlander's friends, associates, and sympathetic organisations. Often a new staff member will already be a participant of several Highlander workshops and as such will already be familiar with the make-up of grassroots community groups, and of the experience-related learning approach of Highlander's programs. If necessary, such a person could then be sent on a suitable training course to learn any technical skills which might seem to be appropriate. Normally Highlander would endeavour *not* to remove local community leaders from their home environment in favour of working at Highlander as a residential staff member, and in fact several staff operate within their own communities, several hundreds of miles from Highlander, commuting into the Center when necessary, (Staff meetings, weekend-workshops etc.). Staff are paid a salary at the rate equivalent to that of a unionised factory worker—in practice that is approximately equivalent to that of a High School teacher.

The Board of Directors of Highlander are drawn from throughout the South and from Appalachia, and are not salaried but are able to claim 'actual' expenses. At present the Board consists of 28 Directors who meet once a year. An executive committee of 5 meet four times per year to keep track of broad policy and budgets. There are other sub-committees responsible for 'Program,' 'Finance,' and 'Personnel' decisions. Additions to the Board are generally made by nominations from existing or previous Board members, Highlander staff, or selected friends and associates of Highlander who are familiar with the educational philosophy.

In terms of the funding for Highlander, revenue comes from three main sources, 1. 'Public' money (Public money in Latin American terms includes funding from Trusts, Foundations etc., rather than funding from Government), 2. Private, 3. Government. The latter contribute a very small amount (less than 12%) of the running budget of Highlander, and even this amount is generally confined to short-term awards for specific projects. In general, Highlander have found that it is unwise to place too much reliance on Government funding for support, subject as it is to political whim and shifts of policy of the administration. Private money tends to take the form of individual donations from friends and organisations associated with Highlander. To help with raising this portion of the

budget, Highlander has a regular mailing list for donations, distributes nearly 7,000 mailed copies of the 'Highlander Newsletter,' and generates a certain amount by 'self-sufficiency' i.e. profits from the sale of records, books, cattle, and from farm produce which is surplus to requirements. The donations from the 'Public' source also form a significant part of the total running budget of Highlander, and this generally consists of awards from Charitable organisations, Trusts and Foundations interested in adult education, leadership development, or specifically sympathetic to the aims of particular programs, (e.g. funding for cultural exchange workshops). Very little support comes from corporate business, but many companies have an associated charitable trust, and in this sense they may contribute substantially.

The task of fundraising for Highlander is shared by the staff, with specific areas perhaps being the responsibility of the staff of particular programs, but the Director has over-all co-ordination and many often make the initial enquiries. Crucial to the financial stability is the fact that Highlander is recognised as a non profit-making organisation, and as such it has successfully applied for and sustained a tax-exempt status from the Federal revenue agency. This is triply important as 1. Many Foundations etc. can only make donations to non profit-making organisations, 2. Individuals who make donations cannot otherwise claim tax-exemption on their contributions and 3. Without tax-exemption status, Highlander would be required to pay taxes on all donations which it received. The tax-exempt status can be challenged at any time on charges of violation of the State Charter (which enables Highlander to operate), violation of the tax-exemption code-of-conduct, or in the event of any local officials pursuing charges of criminal actions involving Highlander (e.g. the use of prescribed drugs on property belonging to Highlander). It is significant however that in Highlander's history, although the State have been able to revoke their educational charter, the school's tax-status has never been taken away. A point worth noting is that when the State of Tennessee issued the order to revoke the charter of the Highlander Folk School, the entire assets of the school were sold at public auction, including the land, buildings, library, stock etc., and having learned this savage lesson from experience, the land and buildings on which the new Highlander Research and Education Center is now located are owned by a separate Trust which is completely distinct from Highlander, and is now answerable for any

of the activities which take place there. This is not just legal nicety—Highlander has in the past been the victim of terrorist attacks, a fact which had led to difficulty in enabling Highlander to obtain a satisfactory insurance cover on the property. This has resulted in the establishment of a self-insurance scheme whereby an appropriate premium is regularly paid into a special bank account as financial protection against future losses. This is becoming a standard practice among many community groups throughout the USA who have property to protect. This is another way in which Highlander has had to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing needs.

### III HOW DOES HIGHLANDER OPERATE?

#### Case Study 1 – Yellow Creek

‘Baffled by education without assignment or examination, without the learned doing the talking and the unlearned the listening, some critics have described Highlander’s residential workshops as anti-intellectual gatherings where the exchange of anecdote passes for education. They overlook the fact that Highlander is dedicated to helping develop the fulfilment of democracy, not to the preservation of academic discipline. They ignore that what is learned at Highlander is usually tested in real life, and under the eye of unrelenting opponents, not in the classroom under the eye of a tutor.’ (1)

While there are many instances which could be chosen to illustrate the method by which Highlander attempts community education and social change, the example of the inter-action of the Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens (YCCC) group with Highlander serves many purposes. The group was formed by the concerted actions of a few individuals in the area of the Yellow Creek, near Middlesboro, Kentucky in an attempt to clean up and prevent further pollution in their local stream which has been contaminated by a local tannery sending the untreated waste from its chemical processing into the sewage treatment plant of the city of Middlesboro. The treatment plan is not equipped to deal effectively with waste of such high chemical toxicity, and so much of it is passed out in the Yellow Creek to be carried away into the Cumberland River, with the result that the creek has become severely polluted. Fish and other organisms have been successively destroyed over large areas of the creek, and surviving fish have become chronically diseased. The problem is not confined to the stream however. Neighbouring freshwater wells have become un-useable, and the smells from the vandalised creek, at times flowing in multi-coloured currents with dyes from the chemical treatments, have at times been so pungent that inhabitants of the area along the banks of the Yellow Creek have been awakened from their sleep at nights with extreme nausea and vomiting. Inhabitants also suspect that the area has a case history of health problems which can be directly related

to the pollution of the creek. There is an abnormally high incidence of cancer and other diseases among families living along the course of the creek. Initially the YCCC group thought (perhaps, in retrospect, somewhat naively), that all they needed to do to solve the pollution was to raise the issue with the local government authority (Middlesboro City councillors), and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency. The situation was more complicated. Due to the fact that certain city officials with vested interests in the tannery operation had given the tannery written permission to send their chemical waste to the city sewage treatment plant, and were openly hostile to attempts by the YCCC or anybody else to raise the subject as a local government issue. There was also, at least initially, an understandable reluctance to pursue the matter by some members of the community because the tannery is a large employer in an area of consistently high unemployment. The YCCC however were able to raise public awareness of the issues involved, and in doing so learned that the only taxes coming from the tannery were those being paid by the workers themselves, that the city was grossly undercharging the tannery for the use of the sewage treatment plant, and that there was a sewer-use ordinance that, if enforced, would solve the problem immediately by cutting the tannery off from the sewage treatment plant. The exercise also helped to make crystal clear that the sympathies of the city officials lay more with the tannery than with their electorate.

Highlander's initial involvement with the Yellow Creek people followed a fairly typical pattern. It arose from a chance encounter at one of the regular community meetings of the YCCC held at a time when they were attempting to reach out to any and all sorts of assistance in solving their pollution problem. A member of the group mentioned that an uncle of his, a retired coal miner, had been telling him about Highlander, and it was suggested that Highlander might be willing to help in some way. Shortly after this a number of the members of the YCCC bundled into a car and drove the several hundred miles from Bell County, Kentucky to Newmarket, Tennessee for an impromptu Sunday meeting with Highlander staff.

At this period in time Highlander had also been working on a community health program, the broad aim of which was;

'to help educate local residents who had suddenly found themselves members of a community health clinic board.

The origin of such clinics was the inheritance of health care – sometimes with a facility, sometimes without – from the health care program of the United Mine Workers (of America), a program that had fallen victim to contract negotiations.’ (22)

By this stage however the program had moved beyond the provision of primary health care and was attempting to address the broader issues on environmental health and safety in Appalachia in response to the realisation of a growing problem.

‘The Southern Mountains are rural, with pockets of poverty that are relatively isolated – ideal ‘dump’ sites for hazardous and toxic chemical wastes. Either because those in power simply underestimated the potential for resistance or simply because they believed they could in the end over-ride such resistance, industrial companies in conjunction with waste disposal firms (and often in collusion with state health regulatory agencies) dumped indiscriminately and with disregard for human health and life.’ (22)

From meetings at Highlander, between other organisations and community groups, an active organisation evolved which demanded more information from state and federal agencies on the contents and safety aspects of chemical dumps, and became involved in ‘more than occasional direct action (in a few cases, civil disobedience) to stop the dumping.’ (22)

The fruits of the YCCC group seeking to make connections with Highlander were almost immediate. Highlander was able to put the YCCC in touch with other community groups in the mountains which had a wide variety of similar experiences of toxic waste dumping in their communities. The rugged topography of the region, the sheer scale of the distances involved, and the fact that each community by-and-large had come to regard their problems as being unique to themselves, had served to significantly play-down the magnitude of the problem of toxic waste dumping. Simply by putting relatively isolated community groups together Highlander is able to convey a sense of purpose to these groups which springs from the confidence gained by the realisation that their problems are not confined to themselves, nor in most cases caused by any

deficiency or fault of their own, but are rather due to outside forces of oppression which are also being used against other people in other communities. Sharing the problem at once halves it, reduces the feeling of victimisation, and helps to establish the larger dimensions of what had previously been regarded as a local problem.

In addition to putting the YCCC in touch with the growing network of communities campaigning against toxic waste dumping, Highlander also invited members of the YCCC along to a residential workshop on video skills. This is a crucial and extremely innovative part of the Highlander education 'system,' and it is worth spending a little time stressing the importance of this. An initial reaction by the Highlander staff to an approach from a new community group may be to show them a video made by another similar community group about their own activities, then possibly video the reactions of the new group to what they have seen. The experiences of other people who are in a similar situation are used to convey to the new group a sense of purpose and to reduce the feelings of helplessness and isolation which are often encountered. Frequently many rural communities are faced with more than their physical and geographical isolation. There is also a cultural and intellectual isolation from those who exercise power through participating in the decision-making process, and the majority who are effectively excluded. As the new group begins to develop a clear idea of its own aims and objectives they might well decide to produce a video film of their own to explain their story. In this case Highlander staff will invite the group to attend a residential video workshop at the Highlander Center. During these video workshops for community groups, the technical training is kept to a minimum; in effect this is how to start the camera, this is how to focus, and this is how to stop. The emphasis is stressed on giving activists the *experience* in using the equipment. On the first night, with the arrival of the various groups, some time will be spent in introducing the participants and getting them to describe their experiences. A 'typical' Highlander workshop may revolve around 25-30 people from 3-6 different community groups who come together, often for the first time, for a weekend residential session at the Center. Workshops are generally conducted with the participants sitting round in a circle of rocking chairs, which dismiss the idea of 'teachers and taught,' and stresses instead that everyone there brings knowledge to share. Participants might then address themselves as to why and how they want to use videos, and what they are trying to do; make an explanatory film



of the group, document important meetings, preserve visual and oral material for community archives etc. The evening will usually develop into an informal session of communal singing in which groups contribute their own original (and adapted) poetry and song about their own struggles etc. Saturday might begin by dividing the participants into small groups of three or four, each composed of people from different communities so that everybody will be encouraged to work together as a team rather than rely on 'traditional' dominant group-leaders. With the necessary minimum of technical instruction on camera and sound work the group then set to work to produce their own video film. Firstly they need to decide what the video is to be about, who is to take the roles of sound recordist, camera, interviewee, etc., and how they are going to tackle their project. Later when the video is finished they will all sit back and view each of the attempts and learn from the mistakes. This also helps to reinforce the idea that each group's efforts is just as good/bad/funny/serious as the next one—it also will often provide a little light relief in the same way as the music and dancing. Extra time may be spent learning the basics of editing, or more advanced camera work etc., or this might be left to develop at a later workshop. At a more advanced workshop, tutors with a professional interest may help explain techniques if this is required, though in the first instance the rough-and-ready style of amateurish video pays off more dividends as it intimidates beginners less than a smoothly polished film, and conveys the sense of 'being there' to the viewers. In every case however, it is necessary to have a clear focal point for the activities, to work towards the communities needs, and for each community to be able, at least crudely, to have an idea of how they wish to use video when they return to the problems of their own area.

In the case of the YCCC, the video workshop so inspired two of the members (a husband and wife), that on returning to Yellow Creek they went out and bought a video which they have since used with great effect in their campaign. I watched many hours of video films while at Highlander, and in various communities in the mountains with which Highlander is associated, and there can be few better examples of the power of video as an empowering and educational tool than some of the footage which the YCCC have taken. At an early meeting of the YCCC with the Middlesboro City Council, the latter having changed the date and place of the meeting several times in order to avoid having to directly face the

group on the issues of the campaign, a staff member of Highlander posed as a member of the press and, with video camera in hand, asked questions on the Yellow Creek pollution directly to the Mayor, and filmed the result. Because he thought that he was dealing with the National Press rather than simply a few local people whom he had been ignoring for a considerable time, the Mayor responded to direct questioning, even if he did not change his colours. The YCCC have made videos of a number of important confrontations with the City Council, and with other State and Federal organisations with which they have had meetings. They also have documentary evidence of the polluted state of the creek, and of lorries leaving the tannery with loads of contaminated sludge for dumping. These videos are archived for future use. It is extremely difficult for officials and councillors to deny having made any such claim, allegation, or threat when the documented evidence is recorded on video for all to view. I even saw one video of a council meeting where an irate councillor, having virtually dug himself into a trench in an attempt to protect his interests in the face of strategic questioning by the YCCC, actually lost his cool and demanded that an old man who was tape-recording the meeting should either stop recording or get out! Yet all the time the video was capturing the proceedings. Some of these recordings are now being used by the YCCC as evidence in the legal actions which they are taking out against the city and tannery, and some of the recordings have been played back to other community groups in similar situations but who have not developed their thinking to the extent of the YCCC. This is the really important point, it is not simply a matter of getting the information onto film, it must then be *used* to bring about a change. The act of producing the video helps to impart courage, self-confidence and a sense of interdependence to the group and encourage them to focus on a clear articulation of their situation. By utilising their collective knowledge of who and what is primarily involved in their problem, and by encouraging the group to pursue its own documentary research the video helps them to legitimise their case. This is important as video evidence of illegal activities etc., can later be used in court to substantiate the groups claims. It can further be used to keep all members of the community informed, and to pass on information to other pressure groups and the general public.

In addition to this, many of the residential workshops at Highlander have been recorded on video, and make hours of facinating

viewing. In my case I almost felt that I was a participant in some workshops which had been filmed ten years earlier. My initial thoughts that the process of filming during the meetings and workshops might inhibit the participants from speaking their minds, was quickly dispelled when I later took part in several workshops at Highlander and discovered (with some amazement), that the camera crew quickly became 'invisible' as people got their teeth into the subject matter.

The role of music, song, and poetry have been important to the YCCC as well, and this too is a central theme of Highlander. The YCCC have always made it a policy to celebrate after each of their victories in the six-year (continuing) battle with the tannery, the city officials, and the Federal and State monitoring agencies. One of the group has written several poems on the events at Yellow Creek, and another has written several songs, a couple of which have been recorded and sold for campaign funds. These songs and poetry have helped the group maintain their spirit of unity, provides some light relief to let off some steam, and helped to convey the message of what they have done and are continuing to do to other community groups in a way which cannot be simply related in written words and figures.

At Highlander, workshops of this sort of cultural exchange play a critical role in reaching across the natural human barriers which we can expect to find when a number of different people from widely different communities, cultural backgrounds, and economic and social circumstances are thrown together for a weekend to discuss their common problems in an attempt to find solutions. My first weekend at Highlander coincided with a residential cultural workshop which was being held there with representatives from community groups from Mississippi, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, Alabama and North Carolina. There was bluegrass music from the mountains and blues from the deep south and a building of bridges between both cultures which hitherto had very little real experience of each other. Laughter is the same language the world over, and the sense of pride and group identity which is engendered when a group tells another about who it is and where they came from is a critical factor in the cementation of the group and fostering of indigenous skills. Lacking the ability perhaps to identify the chemical components in proper scientific vocabulary, the groups may exchange emotions, fears and hopes – and may then go on to decipher the chemical nomenclature together, if it proves

to be necessary, and desirable that they do so. It is the development of this strong group cohesiveness which, almost remarkably, has allowed the YCCC to call all the shots in their campaign. They have not handed over the arguments to be articulated by lawyers and scientists even now that they have taken the city and the tannery to court in a law-suit claim for \$31 million. The major thrust may have been carried by a dozen committed individuals, but when push has come to shove, the YCCC have been able to fill meeting halls for important confrontations, and have succeeded in getting eight places out of eleven on the City Council filled by candidates representing a broad coalition under the slogan 'It's time for change,' which campaigned specifically on local issues. Also, much of the money for the campaign has come from the community itself, and where outside groups have provided assistance, either financially or otherwise, it has been on the terms of the YCCC rather than anyone else. That this cohesiveness has persisted in the face of constant harassment, phone-calls, malicious rumours about YCCC members, threats of violence, and the attempted shooting of group members is all the more remarkable. All of this is a testimonial to the belief that when the emphasis is placed on the practical experiences of individuals and communities rather than on ideologies, and when the grassroots leadership of *people* is developed rather than theories and constitutions, then workable solutions *can* be developed which are adapted for both local *and* the national situation by those people who have to put these solutions into practice at the sharp end of the stick. As Highlander staff member Sue Thrasher has said;

'From these organisations have come community leaders who often were never involved in anything prior to this experience, people who too often believed that others knew better and could make better decisions. One woman from a small East Tennessee community who now regularly speaks before community groups, college classes, and official hearings, speaks eloquently about her own growth as a woman and the liberating effect on her action to take back some control over her own life.'

(22)

## Case Study 2 – The Appalachian Land Ownership Study

'If students have been convinced of the necessity of collective action, gained self-respect and respect for their peers, they will have a message that they can use and will want to spread. The Highlander process of learning from analysing experience is in itself a form of self and peer education. It affirms our faith in working people's capacity to become their own experts, and take control of their lives. We not only provide practice in analysing experiences, but give students a glimpse of a more humane society and urge them to push back the boundaries that inhibit them.' (18)

Another way in which Highlander operates is illustrated by the example of the Appalachian Land Ownership Study, the bulk of which was undertaken from 1978 to 1980, though it is very important to stress that events which promoted the survey, and events leading from the survey, are still matters of community activity. There are several good accounts of both the history and the methodology of the project (5) (11) (12) (15), and though the survey arose out of a very particular set of circumstances which may seem alien to many of us, the underlying values and the problems which spring from the lack of accountability to the resident community of the relatively small set of people who own and control the land has very important lessons for every country. The study did not spring into being overnight of course, and for over a decade a number of community groups throughout Appalachia have tried to combat the worst excesses of a pattern of land-ownership which breeds power without responsibility. In the case of Appalachia, thousands of hectares have been destroyed by strip (open-cast) coal mining, and by the flooding, loss of agricultural land, soil erosion and pollution of fresh water supplies which had resulted from this wholesale desecration and the subsequent failure to attempt proper reclamation. In addition, through a well-established tradition of legislative lobbying coupled with the complete juxtaposition of vested interests, the corporate businesses which largely control the extremely lucrative coal mining industry in Appalachia have ensured that while the profits returned from their increasingly automated 'long-wall' style of mining are being safely accumulated, the mineral taxes which they pay are derisory.

'For example, in Martin County, which is now one of Kentucky's largest coal counties, 86 per cent of the budget must come from state and federal sources because of the inadequate property tax base. The largest owner, Pocahontas-Kentucky (a subsidiary of Norfolk and Western Railroad), owns one-third of the county's surface land and mineral rights to another 81,333 acres (or 55 per cent of the county's surface). Yet, property taxes on Pocahontas-Kentucky's surface land hardly yield enough to buy a bus for the county school system, and the \$76 the county receives as payment on the mineral rights would not buy the bus a new tyre to replace the one worn out on the county's unpaved and rough coal-hauling roads.' (15)

In 1977, the area was hit by massive floods which were made worse by the strip mining operations, leaving thousands of people homeless. Despite the fact that relief trailers were provided for the homeless they remained empty due to the lack of available land on which to site them, yet the government refused to take over corporate land even for humanitarian purposes. From this disaster a coalition of community groups throughout the region was formed, calling itself the Appalachian Alliance, and with these groups placing questions of land ownership high on their agenda for discussion, the issues were raised to a new sense of awareness. In Appalachia, as in other areas of the world which we are increasingly becoming aware of, there has been a growing pressure for small-scale hill farmers to diversify their income with non-agricultural work, or else to sell out and move due to the increasing financial burden of trying to make ends meet. In addition there has been a growth in the promotion of tourism, which with its low pay, seasonal employment, and upwardly spiralling speculative investments, has also brought pressure upon people to leave the land.

'To a great degree, the reason for the contrast of wealth amongst poverty lies in the ownership and use of the land. Who owns the land affects the use to which the land is put, in turn affecting the jobs that develop, the housing available, the environment, the tax base, the very structure of community life. Through the ownership of land and its use, rural communities thrive or are controlled.' (11)

This land-ownership study really owes its roots to a challenge which the Alliance made to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the government organisation concerned with regional development throughout Appalachia. The challenge came when the Regional Land Ownership Task Force, established by the Appalachian Alliance to work specifically on land and taxation issues, discovered that the ARC intended to conduct a study on land in Appalachia. Their hopes were short-lived however when at a subsequent meeting it became apparent that the study was to concentrate on settlement patterns in the region, (a well-worn path taken in an attempt to justify existing policies advocating the centralisation of rural development), rather than the more fundamental questions of how existing patterns of land ownership influence these settlement patterns. The outcome of this meeting however, was that the Task Force not only decided to question the research priorities of the ARC, but also their methodology which typically relied upon research contracts awarded to outside firms of consultants to whom: –

‘The allocation of millions of dollars a year in research funds was an informal backroom affair among compatible technocrats, high-priced consulting firms, and politicians, conducted outside the glare of public scrutiny.’ (14)

Eventually however the ARC conditionally agreed to consider funding the Task Force to conduct its own study, though a string of bureaucratic obstacles were also raised for the Alliance to overcome, including the phased release of funding, requirement of approval from each stage governor, and the development of a ‘mutually acceptable framework of analysis.’

The Task Force set themselves a tall order, comprised as they were of a wide range of largely voluntary community groups diverse experience of land-use issues and perceptions of the problems – spanning local issues to National land-related policies. From the outset however they set themselves the objectives, not only producing a comprehensive study of land ownership in the region which would be of use to local groups and also capable of influencing regional and National land policy, but equally importantly, of reaching these goals through a very specific manner of research. The goals were clearly defined.

‘To provide a model for citizens doing their own research, growing out of their own local people needs and concerns, rather than for professional consulting firms doing research based on the needs and interests of government agencies.’ (12)

Furthermore, the research process was to be used to train locals in obtaining the information they needed, and thereby develop a network of individuals and groups who would express their concern for the land issues of the region by an ongoing commitment to further action at local and National level using the results obtained from the study.

The machinery of identifying and training field workers from among the community groups, and in some areas, college students, of the selection of regional staff and State co-ordinators was set in motion even though the ARC delayed in granting approval for the funding. The assurance eventually came from the ARC literally minutes before the final deadline set by the Task Force for their abandonment of the project, and their promise to publicly disclose their reasons. It was an early re-iteration of the value of their survey and the strength of collective action, and opened the door for official commencement of the study. In each of 80 counties through the states of Alabama, Kentucky, North-Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, local people, community groups, and college students began to sieve through masses of official paperwork on ownership, and taxation of property from the county tax rolls onto specially prepared coding sheets.

The role of Highlander in this project so far had not just been as a catalyst, nor a co-ordinating agency for the network – though this in itself is a vital role – but also as a meeting place for the widely scattered groups which came to the Center to hold regular training workshops. Highlander provided an educational forum where those who were interested in pursuing the idea of a ‘participatory research’ project on land ownership could swap experiences and ideas and together hammer out the details of what was known, what was wanted and how to collect the facts.

‘The goal was to develop a research process that would result in systematic, accurate collection of land ownership data while facilitating maximum participation and potential for follow-up action.’ (12)



As the study progressed Highlander served as the research base for the network of local researchers. The workshop sessions at Highlander which had sought to clarify the types of information which were required led to the production of a coding sheet which research workers could fill in with the individual details, thereby ensuring both comprehensive coverage, and compatibility between researchers. Subsequent workshops were used to train participants in the use of these coding sheets, how to decipher taxation rolls, how to conduct interviews effectively etc. In addition, because of the commitment to long-term action, the Task Force tried to produce and develop plans for follow-up action throughout the region, and to ensure that the results would be used locally. Due to the grassroots attention to detail, and the extensive preparatory groundwork, the field research for the study was completed relatively quickly, several months after the funding was finally approved, and the Task Force turned its attention to the organisation and computer analysis of the data. Several months were spent in the preparation and editing of case study reports on 19 of the 80 counties which were studied. These case studies were largely chosen on the basis of the extent of community involvement in the research and their interest in further land-related actions. The final report, giving the regional overview, case studies, and comprehensive analysis of statistical information took two years to complete, twice as long as was expected, yet the problems of acceptability to the establishment were not over. The ARC was defensive—its own existence being threatened by the Region administration, and was in no mood to rock the political boat by publishing a ‘sensitive’ report, i.e. one which revealed the inadequacies of their own policies, and would incur the displeasure of the corporate investors in the region. This was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that:—

‘The study was not significant because it documented something previously unknown, but because it documented overwhelmingly something *already known*.’ (12)

Now individuals and community groups had the facts at their fingertips to refute the placatory statements of the developers and corporate businessmen, and no longer had to rely on instinctive judgements to support their case.

After another round of serious negotiations the ARC finally agreed to release the report, the hard statistical evidence, but not

the case studies, the interpretation of which they did not consider to be 'objective.' Also they refused to make any press statement on the study, and did not print sufficient copies of the report for adequate distribution on the pretext of financial difficulties, yet promptly hired a panel of consultants and academics to conduct a study of the Alliance's study. Fortunately experience had taught the Alliance to prepare for such an eventuality, and they had standby arrangements for distribution and press coverage which were brought into operation.

The result is one of the largest, most detailed, and most accessible studies of land ownership anywhere in the USA. Highlander was a linkpin in the whole operation, bringing together many people who had been involved in land issues over a large geographical area, schools, community groups, local politicians, academics, and interested individuals. Workshops at Highlander laid the foundations for articulation of the problems and a research methodology for establishing the relative facts and presenting them in a manner which would best suit community requirements. When results began to come in from the field researchers, Highlander served as the collection, organisation and computation centre, and held workshops to allow participants to draw some very marked comparisons and contrasts from the raw data. It was planned from the beginning that follow-up action would be taken by the participants wherever possible, so in the summer of 1980 Highlander hosted a workshop on land reform to which study participants and others from the region were invited. Other workshops have been held to evaluate the achievements of the study, and to draw lessons from it to enable a move towards further action on specific issues such as mineral leasing, and strip mining. Other community groups and coalitions have sprung up from this study, and together with the original organisations which form the Appalachian Alliance, they have taken strength from each other, and from the movement as a whole. The participatory nature of the project has since been copied by other groups in different parts of the USA and many of the original participants have helped to encourage and train new people in other areas of their own states to find out more about ownership patterns in their home areas. Highlander has responded to calls from other groups, and has acted as a clearing house for information and to make connections between interested parties. It would be very easy to become starry-eyed and idealistic about the land ownership study. It was an

experiment in participatory research to pursue, uproot and interpret certain facts by non-specialised research workers who were motivated by a personal involvement in the land-related issues of their home areas, in an attempt to improve the structure of their society. This in reality is only partially true, in that many college students and academics were also involved in the project. The significance however is that the counties where community involvement in the project was strongest have also been the areas producing the most active follow-through. In these areas the collected land ownership results are now being used by local people to help achieve the realisation of local goals in their own communities. There has also in many of these cases been an increasing awareness, not just of the local situation, but of the regional and National set-up, and a clearer vision of the more overtly political values, such as what sort of society communities would really like to live in. Local involvement has been the essence of this project, and the lesson that: –

‘The myth of neutrality serves primarily to obscure partisanship. The requirement that analysis be objective or scientific is often little more than another means of social control. It not only controls knowledge, but also the definition of acceptable knowledge.’ (12)

Most importantly this project is a microcosm of the best of the Highlander ideas – the people who were most disadvantaged pooled their energies into a collective involvement which identified the sort of information which they needed in order to take further action. They then went on to plan, organise, execute, analyse, and document their own survey for this information. They linked widely diverse groups into a network, joined communities facing common problems, educated local leaders, and served as their own spark to fan social change. On a video-film made at Highlander entitled ‘Save our Land and People,’ a variety of these groups speak to each other about their own problems and possible solutions, hopes and fears, and I think it is no accident that some of the most beautiful music and evocative songs which I have heard for a long time comes from these people.

#### IV NEXT STEPS – LESSONS FROM THE HIGHLANDER IDEA FOR SCOTLAND

‘..... they couldn’t stop it by confiscating Highlander. When they first came, they came and padlocked the building, and some of the news reporters that were there, said ‘What are you laughing about?’ I was standing outside laughing, and they took a picture of me standing there laughing. And the sheriff padlocked the building. I said, ‘My friend here, you know, he thinks he’s padlocking Highlander’.....but I said, you know, ‘Highlander is an idea – you can’t padlock an idea.’ (19)

When I went to Highlander I was looking for a way which could help towards more effective participation and the development of better nonformal opportunities in adult education on social issues which affect communities in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. I came away even more convinced that some sort of residential centre, *based* in the Highlands is of fundamental importance. To this centre people would come from different parts to learn from each other about issues which affect them all in everyday life. However, the spread of concern of this centre must not be limited purely by geographical area, and while continuing to concentrate on issues which are relevant to the Highlands and Islands, it will often be necessary and desirable to exchange information and ideas with others in different parts of the country, and indeed with those who are in similar situations in other countries.

Two further things are important; that the learning should be free from lectures and exams, and that a strong cultural and social thread should be embodied within the learning framework. This emphasis upon the need for cultural and social reinforcement, though often overlooked by educationalists, is crucially important if the learning process is to be useful and related to the experience of the community groups so that they feel they can go on to employ practical applications of their learning. Too often, for example, rural communities are faced with an educational system which denies, or at least neglects, many traditional rural values, and emphasises urban values to the detriment of the rural community. The realisation is increasingly coming to planners and administrators that many so-called rural problems and their solutions have been identified by urban-orientated people, or indeed may largely be

created by the effects of urban based interests and decisions. This urban bias creates problems in itself, yet attempts to move away from this situation are often strongly resisted due to the continued adherence to a largely urban criteria of development values. Experience has told us that rural people often perceive their own problems differently from the accepted establishment viewpoint, and it is the development of the perception, whether we consider the opinions right or wrong, which we must cultivate if we are seriously looking for long-term solutions. Two quotes help to illustrate the importance of giving people belief in their own cultural values. They also typify the role of Highlander in such situations. The first is from a publication entitled 'Can Education Change Rural Fortunes?' (6)

'As rural communities have become increasingly marginal to national economies they have been given less political priority.....Rural people in most countries suffer from isolation and lack a sense of solidarity or the opportunity to influence decision making.'

The second quote is from a member of the board of directors of the Highlander Research and Education Center during a board meeting which I attended in May 1986: -

'Highlander's vision is to make people who feel they are on the margins, believe that they are in the centre. It is pro local control and decision making through participatory research and local action.'

This is the essence of the Highlander idea. It provides a coordinating linkage in an extensive network of community groups and activists, and furnishes them with a gathering place. As we have seen, however, the gathering together of workshop participants with similar interests is only part of the idea, for Highlander always aims at helping people to translate their ideas into positive action when they return to their own communities. There is no pre-defined course which participants must follow, no pre-ordained ranking of community priorities, and no monopoly on the possible resulting actions. The authors of the Arkleton Trust publication seem to have this in mind when they state: -

'A framework for establishing rural development goals would include the following elements: appreciation of cultural and ideological value systems, understanding social and political systems, dissection of administrative and political structures, assessment of resource endowment in relation to population density, and recognition of the level of technological sophistication.....and participation of rural people in planning and implementation..' (6)

This broad framework, and more especially the premises to enable such gatherings to be facilitated, seem to be absent in Scotland as a whole, and within the context of the Highlands in particular. I must be careful here, for while the provision for community education in Scotland is generally more advanced at the level of local authority involvement than in the areas of the USA which I visited, and while organisations such as the Trades Unions, the WEA and others do much to orchestrate various adult education projects, there is nothing which approaches the 'schools for problems' which Highlander provides. There is a host of community-related rural organisations in Scotland, many of which are purely social, or purely functional, some of which have broad (non-party) political aims, (very few it seems make any attempt at all to combine social and political aspects even in a semi-structured way), but there has been little attempt to make learning connections between the assortment of community groups. The little direct interchange which has occurred has been largely between compatible representatives of broadly similar organisations, e.g. Crofter's and Farmer's Unions, or between a variety of environmental and wild-life bodies, or among a number of local history societies. For the most part this has largely been along formal or semi-formal lines, and even *within* these individual organisations a formalised structure almost invariably predominates at meetings. That this should continue to be so is curious, as participants in many meetings covering a wide variety of subjects will often, when pressed, agree that the interchange which has taken place outwith the meeting has been at least as useful, and generally more enjoyable, than the actual meeting itself. Anybody who has been involved in community organising will have experience of situations where the (actual or perceived) formality of the meeting has restricted participation by people who may be active and vociferous

before and/or after the meeting. Clearly any method which can encourage greater participation and continued involvement of local people is not only a desirable educational tool, but an essential pre-requisite of healthy community development. It is little surprise to read that: —

‘Rural development has often appeared to consist of little more than the creation of as many plans, programmes, projects, rural centres, and special development agencies as possible. Little, if any, attention has been paid to differentiating between cause and affect, between basic distortions in social, economic, and political systems, and their very visible symptoms.’ (6)

By encouraging an individual to explore their ideas, correct, re-define and re-explore until a workable solution is arrived at, may take slightly longer than simply being instructed in that certain manner by an appropriate ‘expert’ yet the learning experience is infinitely greater and consequently more long lasting. Also, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that the ‘expert’ way is either ‘correct’ or ‘more appropriate,’ nor that the conclusions need always be reached by the same processes of thought and action. There is no monopoly on good ideas, nor any fixed blueprints to which community and individual development must conform. What *is* clear however is that the liberating influence of peer group learning, the facility to discuss with other commonly faced problems, to share common interests, and to relate directly their experiences to our own, *in our own terms*, is a powerful learning tool for social development. Video film of meetings and the interchange of information provides a mobile and often vibrant record of peoples experiences, and when this is used as a stimulus to further discussion, the results can be dramatic. Undoubtedly part of this affect is due to the form of presentation — because of this immediacy television often takes on the appearance of an oracle — but a large part of the value of video documentation is in capturing peoples own experiences directly. Watching several of the video films of Highlander workshops I became forcibly aware of both broad and detailed comparisons of rural problems in Appalachia and the Scottish Highlands. In many instances I obtained flashes of a completely different perspective of Highland communities and Highland problems. An example was the way that community

groups with apparently widely different aims and interests could be brought together to learn from each other. Also it was oddly reassuring to recognise the same issues of non-participation, official steam-rolling, and apathy in case studies from Scotland and Appalachia. Viewing familiar issues in an unfamiliar setting was like fitting together pieces of a jig-saw puzzle which separates individual details and personalities from the root causes and effects of the problems. In a few cases I realised with surprise my growing frustration was due to my inability to interject my own comments into the workshop (which has been filmed several years previously). Later I saw the degree of animation which videos like this can stimulate among activists.

There are many individuals and community groups throughout the Highlands which would benefit highly from gatherings with this type of approach. What is required in Scotland is firstly the structure to facilitate this networking, this building of bridges between communities in a cross-cultural and multi-interest approach. The infrastructure of permanent residential quarters, offices etc. may come later, but it might transpire that a 'floating base' would be more cost effective and enable better geographical coverage. Non-profit-making status would be advantageous from a number of viewpoints, particularly with respect to obtaining financial assistance, and in maintaining a position of independent decision-making by the executive. By the very definition of the system, the detailed direction of the educational programmes would evolve rather than be rigidly pre-established, but some of the broad areas which may attract attention are the educational development of co-operatives, leadership development, community economics, and issues of environmental health and the management of the natural environment.



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