

Scientists Meet Coal Miners

New York. When the coal miners arrived at the posh Starlight Lounge of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, the speaker at the conference inside was discussing the atomic absorption spectroscopy of coal dust, but the miners had other things to talk about. Some 40 of them, all residents of Appalachia and all suffering from pneumoconiosis—the dreaded black lung disease caused by years of inhaling coal dust—paid an unexpected visit on 13 September to the New York Academy of Science's International Conference on Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis to press demands for adequate diagnosis and just compensation for black lung victims. Their action was sponsored by the Black Lung Association, a grass roots miners organization that sustained a month-long strike of West Virginian coal mines in 1969 to force the state to pay higher compensation to victims of the disease.

At first, conference officials tried to turn the miners away: "It's a pretty high-level scientific conference . . . you'd be bored . . . and anyway, the program is full."

But the miners persisted. "Us being coal miners," said Hobert Grills, the chairman of the Black Lung Association in Harlan County, Kentucky, in a soft mountain drawl, "We think we know as much about the disease as the scientists."

Indeed, the complaint of the miners—that the disease is often not diagnosed properly—closely paralleled one of the principal scenes of the conference. For the scientists, the problem, discussed at length at the conference, is the complex etiology and physiology of black lung, including its interrelation with the other ailments afflicting miners that often make it impossible to say for sure whether a man has this disease. For the miners, the problem is that they cannot get compensation, even when they are short of breath and unable to work.

Once allowed to address the meeting, Grills said that "the majority of doctors in the coal-mining areas are not on the miners' side. The coal miners have been done wrong by crackerbox breathing tests and snapshot x-rays." Grills was referring to the two types of tests used by the Social Security Administration to test miners for benefits under the 1969 Coal Health and Safety Act. All of the miners and a good number of the scientists at the conference believe that the two tests often fail to detect serious cases of pneumoconiosis.

Another speaker from the Black Lung Association, William Worthington, a veteran of 34 years in the mines, told the conference that the miners "don't want anybody to give us anything. We're proud of our identity as coal miners, even if we're disabled. But if we have the disease, then we deserve to get paid." Both speakers called for special miners' clinics near the coal fields to test men for black lung and a replacement of the x-ray and breathing tests with more sophisticated blood-gas tests. The miners quietly left the conference after making their presentation.

The reaction of the scientists to the intrusion of some of the men whose problems they were discussing varied from disgust to jubilation.

Conference Chairman Irving J. Selikoff, of Mount Sinai Medical School, said that the working population was really the constituency of the conference. "It's good to have them here," he said. "By upsetting the scientific calm, they should impress on the scientists the immediacy of the problem."

At a press conference held at the conclusion of the meeting on 17 September, Selikoff announced that the consensus of the delegates at the conference was that the "x-ray as the sole determinant of black lung disease will have to be reevaluated."

Because the conference was "a group of individuals," he left off there, and the conference made no specific recommendations for government action.—ROBERT J. BAZELL

cians figures heavily in the final disability decision.

Social Security has been accused of giving lung impairment tests that are very unlikely to turn up CWP-induced disability. A West Virginia specialist in pulmonary disorders contends that miners suffer most from an inability to transfer oxygen from the lungs to the blood stream—a defect that shows up in lung tests more complicated than the simple "breathing tests" ordinarily required by Social Security which only evaluate the ability to breathe air in and out. Many miners, spokesmen say, repeatedly score well on "breathing tests"—thereby having their benefit claim rejected—while they are found to be totally disabled on the more complicated tests for lung function.

These findings have caused Social Security to undertake a "pilot project" to find out whether "additional methods" and better medical facilities can be set up in Appalachia for the evaluation of total disability. Meanwhile some miners will continue to suffer from officials' difficulty in reconciling the letter and spirit of the law.

—JOE PICHIRALLO

APPOINTMENTS

Robert E. Keohane, acting dean, Shimer College, Illinois, appointed dean of the college. . . . **Egon Brenner**, dean of graduate engineering, City College, City University of New York, to dean, School of Engineering at the college. . . . **Arthur Grad**, dean, Graduate School, Illinois Institute of Technology, to president, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. . . . **Richard R. Bond**, vice president and dean of faculties, Illinois State University, to president, University of Northern Colorado. . . . **Wharton Shober**, president and chief executive officer, Joshua B. Powers, Inc., New York, to president, Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital. . . . **Elliot H. Weinberg**, director, physical sciences division, Office of Naval Research, Department of the Navy, to director of research, ONR. . . . **J. Leonard Azneer**, professor of education, Youngstown State University, to president, College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery, Iowa. . . . **John O. Eidson**, president, Georgia Southern College, to vice chancellor, University System of Georgia.