

MYLES HORTON

To mark the Golden Anniversary of a radical experiment in social change may sound paradoxical, but no more so than the entire career of Myles Horton, which has been one of the most enduring kind of radicalism: in words used of him by Bill Moyers, "helping people to discover within themselves the courage and ability to confront reality and change it." The vehicle for this work has been the Highlander Folk School, whose story is Myles Horton's, and vice versa.

Born in Tennessee, Myles Horton developed an awareness of the problems and poverty of the Appalachian South during his years as an undergraduate at Cumberland University. After a year as a state YMCA secretary and three years of further study in New York, Chicago, and Denmark, he returned to the South in 1932 and began the Highlander Folk School at Mouteagle west of Chattanooga. There an initial emphasis on community self-help was soon supplemented by the development of workshops to help train labor union organizers. Inevitably these missions came to be overshadowed in the 1950s by involvement with the nascent civil rights movement; many of its early leaders partook of the training and vision offered at Myles Horton's establishment. Inevitably, too, his advocacy of civil rights won him enemies, as evidenced by a state prosecution in 1959, on charges of holding integrated meetings, which led to the school's being closed.

A few years later it reopened, on a fresh site east of Knoxville, and with renewed concern for community organizing among the inhabitants of Appalachia. Here Myles Horton continued his work, as Educational Director and, from 1971, Director Emeritus. By that time his enterprise had won widespread recognition, for example being called by the co-author of the report Adult Illiteracy in the United States, "the most notable American experiment in adult education for social change." To such recognition this University wishes to add its own, proud to show that a prophet is sometimes honored in his own country.