

“King Coal, Queen Coke, & Princess Steel”

By Mary Lou Mills

Don't think the King is dead!!!!

Late in the 19th and early 20th century was the golden age of coal production. You'd think that dirty, outdated practice would be coming to an end, but....

In the local paper this week there was an article about the possibility of a new coal mine in our area. It is set to come to land that is currently zoned residential and conservation use. Coronado Global Resources (an AUSTRALIAN company no less!) wants to mine under several communities locally. The mine would include an area set aside (now it's a woodland area) for a waste dump, a processing plant, and rail & barges to move the coal along the river.

I understand that when people hear coal, they think of energy. Coal for power plants, and to burn in people's houses, etc. But there are different kinds of coal. Coronado specializes in “metallurgical” coal. This coal does not bring any ENERGY to our country! This kind of coal is extracted and sold overseas (often China) for one reason only – STEEL production. The metallurgical coal is refined into coke and then used to make steel. That's it! It will NOT create energy for anyone!

This is just another example of an environmental justice issue for the people in this area of western PA. Coal mines aren't put in wealthy communities. The burden of extraction as usual is born by the poor.

I am reminded of a favorite book/movie, “How Green was my Valley”. It's the story of a mining town in Wales. The book starts off with a memory of our protagonist:

“So, I can close my eyes on my valley as it is today, and it is gone, and I see it as it was when I was a boy. Green it was and possessed of the plenty of the Earth. In all Wales, there was none so beautiful. Everything I ever learned as a small boy came from my father and I never found anything he ever told me to be wrong or worthless. The simple lessons he taught me are as sharp and clear in my mind as if I had heard them only yesterday. In those days, the black slag, the waste of the coal pits, had only begun to cover the sides of our hill. Not yet enough to mar the countryside, nor blacken the beauty of our village, for the colliery had only begun to poke its skinny black fingers through the green.”

I am determined to fight as hard as I can with like minded folk in my community to keep the ugly extraction of coal away from our area.