

# Coal Culture

## Jesse Holmes, Academic and Activist

By  
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Holmes, a professor of philosophy of Swarthmore College, possessed impressive academic and activist credentials. His activism took several forms. He professed and practiced pacifism, he toured as a socialist spokesman and ran for state and national offices on the Socialist Party ticket, and he supported labor education and taught classes at the Philadelphia Labor College.

His pacifism drew on a long tradition within Quakerism dating back to George Fox and William Penn, Anthony Benezet and John Woolman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Hicksite Quakers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. World War I, with its death and destruction, provided Holmes with the opportunity to oppose the war as did many Americans and progressive figures through the People's Council and other anti-war groups.

In the 1920's he supported workers' education and served on the teaching staff of the Philadelphia Labor College. Urban labor colleges comprised an important component of the new direction and growth characterized by workers' education in the 1920's. Invited by Paul Fuller, Education Director of the United Textile Workers in Passaic and Patterson (NJ), he spoke at the 1927 labor chautauqua held in Passaic.

One of the important, but neglected, facets of his activism was his role in the Socialist Party. He served as a delegate to socialist conventions, toured in behalf of labor

and Socialist Party candidates, and ran for several political offices on the Socialist Party ticket. His speaking events occurred in Philadelphia, the Reading/Berks County area, and in central Pennsylvania. For example Holmes spoke in Black Lick, in Sykesville, and in Hastings.

The press often commented on his speeches, prowess, and his debating skills. He was credited with having a very good grasp of socialist ideas and programs, and an ability to critique the existing system and to present the socialist alternatives in a plain and effective manner.