



A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Sixteen

Seventh Month 1982

Dear Friend,

There's good news from the American Friends Service Committee this month: a new national Peace Secretary, Joe Volk, has been appointed. Friend Volk will come to Philadelphia from the Dayton, Ohio regional office and Ann Arbor, Michigan Monthly Meeting. He is known to and respected by the leadership of Friends United Meeting, and his accession opens up the possibility of greater communication and cooperation between AFSC and groups of Friends which have been distanced from it for many years. We wish him luck and grace in his new position.

There's bad news, however, about the Law of the Sea Treaty. Most readers will have heard by now that on 6/29 President Reagan announced that the U.S. would not sign the finished agreement. However, the consensus of support for the treaty was so overwhelming that it is very likely to go into effect even despite U.S. opposition. Furthermore, many experts feel that our non-participation will hurt the very industries the president says he wanted to protect. And eventually, the U.S. will probably have to come to terms with the treaty, though no doubt under a different administration.

Two other followups: In last month's issue, we reported that the two women who attend West Elkton Friends Meeting in Ohio and operate a foster home for 13 mostly-handicapped children had had their state license challenged by citizens opposed to their lesbian relationship. Since that issue appeared, their state license was officially renewed. This renewal came after they had been subjected to several extremely thorough state inspections and audits.

The other item related to this issue is about a new small book from England, titled *Meeting Gay Friends*, published by the Friends Homosexual Fellowship; it will soon be available from the Friends Book Store in Philadelphia. I mention it here because one of the Friends who writes an autobiographical "coming out" statement in it is an American, Tom Bodine. Friend Bodine was one of the most distinguished Quakers of his generation: he served as Clerk of New England Yearly Meeting and presiding Clerk of Friends United Meeting as well. In this book, Bodine discloses that he is a homosexual who chose to live out a lie in what he said was often a cruel and heartless heterosexual culture, in order to live out his faith and in hopes of promoting some understanding on the issue. He notes with some satisfaction his roles at Friends General Conference in 1972 and at the Wichita Conference of Friends in 1977 in resolving crises over this issue while still "in the closet." His story is a very thought-provoking one.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

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UNITY AND DISUNITY AT THE KENYA CONFERENCE

There is something ironic about the choice of East Africa Yearly Meeting as the host for the international conference of Friends to be held in Kenya next month under the auspices of the Friends World Committee for Consultation(FWCC). The FWCC, which will hold its triennial business sessions following the conference, sees its mission as an ecumenical one, building contacts and improving relationships among Friends of all types. Yet as the several hundred delegates from liberal, programmed and Evangelical meetings around the world arrive in Kaimosi for what is almost sure to be a vivid experience in Quaker unity, they will be gathering in the heart of the most deeply and bitterly divided body of Friends in the world.

The divisions within East Africa Yearly Meeting(EAYM) go back almost ten years, and have been reported on numerous times in the Kenyan secular press. They were first mentioned in a Quaker publication last summer, in these pages(Issue #4). The divisions revolve around power and property rather than doctrine, and have produced, so far, two separations within EAYM: the Elgon Religious Society of Friends, and the Southern Yearly Meeting. These separations have not been amicable, but have been accompanied by many embarrassingly unQuakerly incidents, including court suits, the use of police and even physical altercations between contending factions. The spectacle has shown Quakerism at its worst, rivalled only by some of the similarly shameful incidents associated with the American separations of the 1820s.

Little Ground for Optimism

Last Twelfth Month, in Issue #9, we published hopeful reports of progress being made toward more Friendly relations among Kenyan Friends, and described the atmosphere there as much improved. Unfortunately, these reports proved much too optimistic: since then, relations among the factions have been as bad as, or worse than ever: two of the groups will face each other in court again before the end of this month; it took the direct intervention of a Provincial Commissioner(the equivalent of a U.S. governor) just to bring the major factions together for a meeting in the late spring--and the next day one group repudiated the agreements reached there; the dispute is even said to have received the attention of Kenya's president, Daniel arap Moi.(This compares with the depths to which relations among Philadelphia Friends sank after the 1827 split, in which one property dispute was only settled by an act of the New Jersey legislature.)

This constant quarreling has seriously delayed and disrupted the local planning for the FWCC conference. The Kenyan planning committee was supposed to include representatives of all three major factions; but through the winter and spring, no such joint efforts ever really got off the ground. The extended presence and dedicated efforts of outside Friends, particularly the Copes of Friends University in Wichita and FWCC's Executive Secretary, Richard Meredith, have been necessary to get logistical arrangements made and local support work underway.

The Problem of the "Invisible" Friends

Beyond making conference planning difficult, the Kenyan Friends' disputes have created another major problem for FWCC. For nine years, since they were recognized by the Kenyan government as a separate group in 1973, the several thousand Elgon Friends have been unrecognized by FWCC, excluded from its directories and thus kept all but invisible among the Society at large.(A very useful letter describing Elgon's development in more detail appeared in *Friends Journal's* 5/15/82 issue, pp.24-26.) By failing to recognize Elgon, FWCC became, perhaps unwittingly, the tool of one party to the unfriendly maneuverings in Kenya. Elgon's lack of FWCC recognition has been used in efforts to discredit and deny their Quaker legitimacy.

This enforced invisibility of a group of Friends larger than most American Yearly Meetings constitutes a serious default in FWCC's ecumenical mission. This default was pointed out in a strongly-worded letter sent to FWCC in London last Tenth Month by members of the Nairobi International Meeting. The letter asserted that "At present we fear that FWCC is inadvertently prolonging the conflicts by treating the parties unequally. In this way it is betraying its mission of reconciliation among Friends....We firmly believe that the FWCC can and should play a reconciling role through its conference here.... To do so, however, the FWCC must make reconciliation a central purpose of the conference. It also must treat the three Yearly Meetings for what they are--equal bodies of Friends. We find it scandalous that the FWCC still has been unable to recognize Elgon Yearly Meeting eight years after its formation."

The Nairobi Friends also pointed out that there is no doctrinal basis for this exclusion. Elgon's members have not become Baptists or Moslems, nor has the Southern group: "All three bodies grow out of the same mission work, accept the same Faith and Practice and are the same in their observance of Quakerism." Elgon has applied for membership in FWCC more than once.

Recognition: An Important Decision to be Faced

This current unequal status of the two new Yearly Meetings can and should be addressed in the business sessions of the FWCC Triennial which follows the larger conference. They, and any future new Yearly Meetings which grow out of EAYM should be guaranteed the same fair representation in FWCC's councils, and listings as Quaker bodies elsewhere.

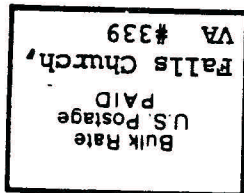
Such actions should not, however, be confused with an attempt to settle the differences among East African Friends. This the FWCC has neither the authority nor the power to accomplish. Rather, it involves the integrity of FWCC's own mission as a Quaker ecumenical agency, and the regularizing of its relationship to these various groups. To be sure, more equitable treatment by FWCC may become a force for reconciliation among East African Friends, in the same way that unequal treatment has exacerbated the divisions; but such an outcome would be a fortunate side-effect of this regularization, not its basis. Let us pray that East African Friends can learn to live together as Friends in less than the 150 years it has taken many American Quakers. But in the meantime, just as FWCC has not made exclusive judgments about the authenticity of the widely-varied and often contentious Yearly Meetings in the United States, it should cease making them in Africa. The Nairobi Friends, in their letter, argued that "The decision that you have before you is one of the most important that will face Quakerism in this last quarter of the century." I am inclined to agree; and if it is not faced in Kaimosi, the opportunity to make it may be missed.

The Importance of Full, Candid Reporting

For many years, there was no reporting to the Society at large by FWCC or other concerned agencies on the difficulties in EAYM, even while we were being solicited to provide financial support for it. During the past 12 months, this curtain of silence has begun to lift, with useful articles appearing in *Friends Journal* and *Quaker Life*. As we look forward to reading and hearing the many reports of the Kenya conference which are sure to appear in the coming months, let us hope and insist that they not neglect these important concerns and whatever actions FWCC takes to address them. The FWCC's mission of ecumenical contact and reconciliation among Friends is a difficult one, which its staff has pursued in a dedicated and fruitful manner. It deserves the gratitude and support of Friends. To inform Friends at large about the evolution of its relationships with the largest constituency of Quakers in the world, with all the ups and downs they have had, is not to display any lack of confidence in FWCC's work. It is simply to take seriously the Quaker Reputation for Truth.

After all, if we can and should speak Truth to Power, should we not even more so speak Truth to ourselves?

INSIDE: COUNTDOWN TO KENYA--
WILL THE FRIENDS WORLD COMMITTEE
RECOGNIZE THE "INVISIBLE QUAKERS"?



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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

It was in this month that the first known Quakers to arrive in America landed in the frontier port of Boston in 1656, aboard the ship the Swallow. The Puritan authorities, knowing heresy when they smelled it, promptly sent the Friends back to England. By the way, these first Quaker missionaries were two women, Ann Austin and Mary Fisher.

It was sometime in this month, too, that George Fox was born in 1624, in Drayton-in-the-Clay, a small British village. Two hundred and twenty four years later, another group of Quaker women was shaking up America: this time, it was Lucretia Mott and several cohorts, who were organizing the first Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York.

The convention took form around the kitchen table of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's house on Seventh Month 13th, and was set for the 19th and 20th in a Wesleyan Chapel. The announcement asked that only women attend the first day's session; but a large number of men showed up as well, and the organizers felt they needed a male to serve as Chairman. James Mott, Lucretia's husband and strong supporter, filled that role. The convention narrowly adopted a resolution supporting women's suffrage--a goal that was not achieved for almost three more generations, something worth remembering in the month after the demise of the Equal Rights Amendment.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

A Seasonable Reply

In the Nineteenth Century London Yearly Meeting still maintained a testimony against "Vain Sports or Amusements," among which was included hunting. One year, when Westminster Monthly Meeting was answering the query on this point, whether all its members were clear of such involvements, the Clerk turned to a member who was known to be very fond of partridge-shooting, and asked, "Any Exceptions, Friend?"

The reply was immediate: "No! 'Taint the season." So the Meeting dutifully reported that all Friends were clear.

Has thee heard a good Quaker Chuckle recently? If so, please share it with us by sending it to A Friendly Letter.
