



A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Nineteen

Tenth Month 1982

Dear Friend,

It seems that almost every time I get real news from a major Quaker group in this country, the issue of homosexuality is involved. This is, I have concluded, the issue that will not go away for Friends, and for other religious groups as well.

The latest report, which came to me as I prepared this issue, is in the 10/82 *Friends Bulletin* published by Pacific and Northern Pacific Yearly Meetings, concerning Northern Pacific's gathering at a Baptist college in Oregon in Seventh Month. NPYM has affirmed the presence and visibility of gay and lesbian Friends among its membership; but their gathering at the Yearly Meeting caused such consternation among the college staff that the Yearly Meeting, by the end of its sessions, felt obliged to announce that it would not be able to return to the college for next year's sessions.

This report will sound familiar to readers who attended Friends General Conference at Berea College last year, where similar disruptions occurred and a similar decision was reached. For these Friends groups, a commitment to pluralism of lifestyles has become part of their witness. Yet, only a few days after NPYM reached this decision, Indiana YM gathered and was wracked by long and difficult debate over the issue which issued in a statement condemning homosexuality as immoral and unfit for Friends. This divisive debate was not on the YM agenda, and I had reported in Issue #15 that it was unlikely to come up. But it did.

Then there is the matter of the planning for the Friends United Meeting Triennial in 1984, to be hosted by California Yearly Meeting. It was proposed that the Triennial include a time for informal discussion of these issues; but this proposal was met with threats of cancelation of the Triennial's invitation by its host. Yet the matter has not been settled: my own Baltimore Yearly Meeting, in Eighth Month, for the second year running approved a minute requesting FUM to be more open to informal consideration of such controversial issues. Is this request to be simply ignored?

Perhaps. But it is my judgment that for FUM and for other Quaker groups, the time is past when we could proceed without coming to grips with the differences among us on this issue. Coming to grips with it does not presuppose that we will be able to agree on it. I am sure wide differences of conviction will remain among us for the foreseeable future. But I am persuaded that a major challenge to Quaker ecumenism in the next few years will be to figure out how we can live with, or at least communicate about, these differences without shattering into even more fragments than we are now. It may well be *the* major challenge to our efforts at better understanding and Friendliness. Let us not shirk it.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

The American Friends Service Committee has been made a central target of a nationwide red-baiting campaign aimed at discrediting it and the nuclear freeze campaign it supports. This campaign has been building since last spring, and is evident in, but not limited to, the following items: 1. a major article in *The American Spectator* for Sixth Month, 1982, "The Counterfeit Peacemakers," by Rael Jean Isaac and Erich Isaac; a commentary in *The Wall Street Journal* on 6/10/82, "The Building Blocks of the Peace Movement," by Dorothy Rabinowitz; a major article in the Tenth Month, 1982 issue of *Readers Digest*, "The KGB's Magical War For Peace," by John Barron; and a lengthy insert in the *Congressional Record* on 9/29/82 by Alabama Senator John Denton (See pages S12522ff; the AFSC material is from *Information Digest*, a publication edited by John Rees, the Washington correspondent for the John Birch Society). The theme of all these articles is almost identical, and was summed up best by this campaign's most famous spokesman, President Ronald Reagan, who said in a campaign speech in Columbus, Ohio on 10/4 that the nuclear freeze movement "is inspired by not the sincere and honest people who want peace but by some who want the weakening of America, and so are manipulating many honest and sincere people."

AFSC and The Freeze: The Tools of Foreign Intrigue?

Questioned later as to whom he meant, Reagan said he was not speaking of any Americans. Most reporters took this qualification as a retreat, *but it was not*. It is, rather, the central assertion of this effort that the Freeze campaign is a foreign creation, specifically of the Soviet KGB, operating through front groups and proxies, among which the AFSC is seen as one of the most prominent. "AFSC has been penetrated and used by Communists since the early 1920s..." is how the Denton insert put it; "there is almost no distinguishable difference" between AFSC's programs and those of Communist groups, said the *Wall Street Journal* commentary; the *Readers Digest* identifies the AFSC's former disarmament director, Terry Provance, as an "activist" member of the Soviet-dominated World Peace Council; and so forth. The Nuclear Freeze campaign is similarly depicted as a triumph of KGB disinformation, manipulation and infiltration.

It is possible that this campaign of accusations is intended to affect the elections next month, in which many Americans will vote on Freeze ballot propositions, and thus will fade once it is past; but I do not think so. I have been following the administration's policies and practice in the area of civil liberties and internal security issues for the past two years, and this record is a consistent and chilling one. (For information about my articles on this topic, see the enclosed flyer.) I believe they are looking beyond the elections.

The AFSC and Communism: Evidence of Things Not Seen

Thus I believe also that it is important to look at the evidence regarding the AFSC and possible Communist connections. Such charges are not new; in one form and another, they have been made for decades, almost since the organization was founded.

Much of the truth about these charges has been furnished by the FBI, which along with other federal investigative agencies has investigated, surveilled, infiltrated and spied on the AFSC again and again down through the years. The records of much of this domestic spy activity have been pried out of government filing cabinets through use of the Freedom of Information Act (a law, incidentally, that the Reagan administration wants to gut), and they were summarized by AFSC information staffer Margaret Bacon in an article, "The Friends and the Feds," in the 11/1976 issue of *The Progressive*.

As early as 2/1922, a confidential, lugubriously written FBI memo from the Philadelphia office reported that the AFSC, despite the charges of subversion levelled against it, "is known to be a nonpolitical organization or society (which) has accepted and is accepting funds from any organization or individuals, whether radicals or not, but they do not allow anyone, no matter how big the contribution may be, to invoke or serve their political aims or propaganda through the Friends Committee."

IS MCCARTHYISM COMING BACK?

Dear Friend,

Part of my journalistic work over the past two years has centered on tracking the proposals and practices of the Reagan administration in the areas of civil liberties and internal security. What I have seen has been profoundly alarming. The results of this observation have been published in two articles: The Witchhunt Watch, and The Witchhunt Watch Update. These articles were published in several newspapers, and some readers may have seen them. But if you haven't, and these issues are of concern to you, you may want to consider getting copies.

The Witchhunt Watch has been adapted into an 11 by 17 inch poster listing 25 proposals before the administration on civil liberties and internal security matters. The Witchhunt Watch Update describes the progress over the past 18 months toward these objectives, and offers an interpretation of this process.

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Bacon cites similar reports, with identical conclusions, made in 1943 and again in 1957, not only by the FBI but by Army intelligence and the CIA as well. (In fact, she reports that according to an internal memorandum, the CIA, in 1949, had attempted to enlist the AFSC as a source in its own intelligence apparatus. This effort met with no success. "It is our opinion," reads the CIA's report of its meeting, "that this conference was a failure and that we will receive no assistance from the American Friends Service Committee.")

The Truth Behind the Current Charges

As far as the current charges are concerned, the only concrete "evidence" offered for AFSC links to, or control by, Communist agents is the attendance by AFSC's former disarmament director, Terry Provan at some meetings of the U.S. Peace Council, a Soviet-dominated group. But Provan has affirmed unequivocally in a 9/30/82 letter to *Readers Digest* that "I am not and never have been a member of the World Peace Council nor of the U.S. Peace Council and definitely do not consider myself to be a 'World peace Council activist' as described in your October, 1982 article...."

However, at this point it is necessary to tread carefully in making distinctions. Provan, along with many other AFSC staff and committee members over the years, *did* attend meetings of Communist-controlled groups, including the U.S. Peace Council. The AFSC is and has been a member of coalitions which included such groups; this is no secret, and no doubt AFSC staff and committee members will continue to have such contacts. And in my opinion, it is entirely appropriate that they do so: How else are they to present a direct Quaker witness for peace to the Soviets *without* doing so?

For instance, Terry Provan acknowledges that he attended a meeting sponsored by the U.S. Peace Council in 1979, a fact made much of by several of the articles mentioned above. But he states that, far from endorsing the group and its sponsors, he "attended the weekend meeting for two hours only. I was present in order to urge people to organize against nuclear weapons and nuclear energy and to refute the World Peace Council's accusation that the Mobilization for Survival's campaign against nuclear power plants was funded and directed by the CIA!" (This quote is also from his letter to *Readers Digest*.)

Maintaining A Delicate and Difficult Balance

Yet at the same time, Denton, John Barron, and the other authors of these articles do have at least one important point: Outside politically-oriented groups such as the Communist Party and the KGB (not to mention the CIA) *do indeed* seek to infiltrate, subvert and control other organizations, and have done so in the past with considerable success. Thus, as AFSC has made its many contacts with Soviet citizens and groups, it has had to show not only the biblical harmlessness of doves but also the wisdom of serpents in order to make its witness while maintaining its independence and integrity. In maintaining such a balance, the Quaker traditions of rejecting violence and operating openly are crucially important assets. As the 1949 CIA report noted, one of the major objections raised by AFSC to cooperating with the agency was "that since information acquired by the CIA was limited in distribution principally to Army, Navy Air Force and State Department, and not available to all branches of government, it therefore smacked of secrecy which they could not condone." This report and the others make plain that the AFSC has done a remarkable job of maintaining its independence. In the present work for the Freeze this task is unlikely to get any easier, but it is inseparable from the other scriptural command to be in the world but not of it.

To be sure, over the years the AFSC has included many who sought radical change, including some self-described socialists. But this is no evidence of Communist infiltration: There are plenty of non-Communist radicals and socialists around; I used to be one myself. Nor is radicalism alien to Quaker tradition. Indeed, even AFSC's mistakes and shortcomings, of which it has a full share, seem to me indubitably of its own making, not the KGB's. Some of these have been discussed here before, and will be again. Serious as some of AFSC's problems are, I for one am grateful that they so clearly do *not* include being run by Moscow or CIA manipulators. The American Friends Service Committee, for better and for worse, is no one's organization but ours.

INSIDE: IS THE AFSC A COMMUNIST FRONT?
THE CHARGES, AND THE FACTS

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THIS MONTH'S QUAKER HISTORY

This month is the 300th anniversary of William Penn's arrival in Pennsylvania, an event which is being observed in many places. But it is also the 300th anniversary of fierce persecution of early Friends in England. Some of the most intense harassment came in the city of Bristol, where most adult Friends were jailed and meetings were often kept by children, standing in the street outside their locked meetinghouse and braving the jeers and physical abuse of government spies. The government had two purposes in persecuting Dissenters: First to root out revolutionary plots, of which there were many, and second to impose an official religion on the citizenry. Against this Friends reissued their declaration of 1661, the famous one which begins, "We utterly deny all outward wars and fighting...." Today we think of that document mainly as a peace statement; at the time it was much more a means of distinguishing Friends from subversive groups that, to the authorities, looked much like them. The other major Quaker "tactic" in this struggle for religious freedom was their refusal to go underground. Almost all other Dissenting church groups evaded the government harassment by holding meetings secretly. This the Friends steadfastly refused to do, in the face of enormous suffering.

In Tenth Month, 1682, Bristol Friends who were not in prison called a special weighty meeting at a widowed member's home to wait and pray for strength to keep up their public gatherings. They were clearly all but exhausted by the storm of opposition they continued to face. They found this strength, and kept up their meetings for three more years before regaining full access to their meetinghouse.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

One More Time

Actually, it turns out that William Penn's father had two *other* sisters, reports our Friend John L.P. Maynard, and they were among the early British visitors to the Hawaiian islands. There they began trading with the natives and visiting sailors, and sure enough, they too got in trouble over the poi rates of Penn's Aunts....

With the holidays approaching, I hope Friends will consider sending gift subscriptions to A Friendly Letter. The coupon inside describes the special holiday discount available for such gift subscriptions.