



A Friendly Letter

Issue Twenty-Five

Fourth Month, 1983

Dear Friend,

I recently read a new Pendle Hill pamphlet, *The Study of War as A Contribution to Peace*, which ought to be required reading for all pacifist Friends, written by Wolf Mendel, a British Friend and scholar of war. Among other points of great merit, he insists on "the value of developing a dialogue with those who do not share our approach to peace. One of the less attractive characteristics of 'pacifists' is their tendency to shut themselves up in an intellectual and emotional ghetto and to glory in their self-righteousness." He adds, "...if we take the 'non-pacifist' seriously, then we must accept the validity of his premise that in international politics there are such things as threats and aggression, and problems of security. Once we accept such 'realities,' even if they are often realities based on perceptions rather than facts, then we might make progress in the process of taming and eventually abolishing war."

To which I can only say *Amen*, this Friend, at long last, speaks my mind! In doing so, he also has spared my readers the task of plowing through a sermon on this same topic by yours truly, which I had planned for a future issue. So I urge readers to get Pendle Hill pamphlet #247 (write to them at Wallingford PA 19086, if you can't find it elsewhere), and ponder its message carefully. I believe he is 100% correct.

Speaking of publications, let me also pause here to pay brief tribute to two of my elders in the Quaker publishing business: Olcott Sanders, who has not only made an amazing struggle against cancer while serving as editor of *Friends Journal*, but has also simultaneously turned the *Journal* into the best publication of its sort in American Quakerdom. And Leonard Kenworthy, the dean of independent Friendly publishers, whose list has recently been expanded to include a new collection of modern Quaker quotations, in which he was generous enough to include several of ours. (You can get a copy from Quaker Publications, Box 726, Kennett Square PA 19348.) These two Friends set a fine example for such a venture as mine to emulate and a high standard to meet.

Finally, a quick update: Issue #20(11/82) reported on the conflict that has pitted Western Yearly Meeting against a dissident monthly meeting in an Indiana court. The latest report from there indicates that the parties are seeking the services of the Christian Legal Society to mediate the dispute, and have put off the latest court date which was set for last month. The CLS mediation process is an elaborate one, involving Bible study and communications work. But it is by no means clear that it will be able to break the impasse and keep the dispute from being settled by the court.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

As private employers, Quakers have piled up an admirable record of progressive and innovative personnel practices, from pioneering health and pension programs to developing employee ownership. Yet when Quakers become employers through their religious committees and groups, their record seems less distinguished, dogged by an apparently endless string of personnel failures and even outrages.

So at least it has seemed in my observation, over more than a decade; and evidence is not hard to point to. Consider, among other recent examples, these items:

**Friends United Meeting*, whose 1981 Triennial was dominated by angry protests against the manner in which two senior staff people had been abruptly dismissed, unceremoniously and without warning, after years of faithful service.

**Friends General Conference*, where a former executive secretary and other staff were all but driven from their jobs by covert committee carping and sabotage.

**William Penn House* in Washington D.C., which has gone through four directors in five years, and is now struggling to find yet another.

**Friends Journal*, which was virtually paralyzed for months a few years back by the feuding between two misplaced, coequal editors, a paralysis that ended only when both resigned.

**The AFSC*, about which, if only because of its size, horror stories are seemingly endless. One I particularly recall from a term on a regional executive committee was the harrying of the executive secretary out of his post by protracted staff and committee guerilla warfare; when he had finally, and graciously, resigned, one committee member burst into tears of shame over his shabby treatment at our hands, a sentiment I fully shared.

Caveats, Qualifications and Still, a Dismal Rule

To be sure, there are exceptions to this gloomy recitation: *Friends Journal*, for instance, has rebounded splendidly under the editorship of Olcott Sanders; and *Friends General Conference* also seems to be on the mend since Lloyd Lee Wilson took the helm. Nor are the other groups mentioned above to be regarded as specially egregious offenders, or without redeeming features. Yet, even after all the appropriate exceptions are noted, the appropriate qualifications and allowances are made, it still seems regrettably too often the case that a person taking a job in a Quaker organization is setting out into something too much resembling a personnel jungle.

Why is this so? Answers are not easy to find. It is not clear, for one thing, whether this is a specific Quaker pathology, or one common to small, issue-oriented groups. Nor is there any systematic research to draw on, so conclusions must be tentative and less than scientific. Nevertheless, my own experience and observation, supplemented by numerous interviews, has produced some strong suspicions about answers--suspicions which hopefully readers can elaborate, correct and refine.

The Crimes of Quaker Committees

I suspect, first of all, that much of the difficulty springs from the fact that most Quaker employers are committees, committees largely composed of amateurs, in both the good and bad senses of the term--good, in that members are drawn together by concerns and leadings; bad, in that they may not know much about the committee's field of work and the tasks it entails. Now in a field as broad as, say, peace work, such amateurism may at worst make a committee irrelevant; but when staff and their work lives are involved, it can easily become downright destructive.

Thus, the responsibility for many Quaker personnel horror stories seems clearly traceable back to poor committee performance: hiring or promoting the wrong person into the wrong job for the wrong reasons; and then failing to face up to the mistakes, settling instead into a passive aggressive war of nerves which can drag on for years and in the process drain the staff, the committee and the group of all its vitality.

But committees aren't the only ones to be faulted. A close look at many unhappy situations leaves another strong suspicion, namely that very often the staff involved

are largely responsible for their own plight.

This seems particularly true of two groups of persons: First are many young people, full of idealistic determination to *do something* about stopping war, ending injustice, or eradicating some other evil. But many young people are not well aware of the need to be good stewards, not only of the earth's resources, but also their own personal resources. And they very easily work themselves into a state of exhaustion and alienation--the well-known phenomenon of "burn-out," and are thereafter lost to the group, and not infrequently to Quakerism as well.

The other type of person is typically older, and smuggles in with their concern for an issue a hidden agenda--an unspoken plea for refuge from the demanding world of secular employment. For whatever reason, they are looking not so much for a way to change the world as a place in which to hide from it; they want a Quaker sinecure. Once installed, such people can become masters of self-preserving manipulation, often at high cost to other staff and to organizational efficiency.

Seeking A Way Forward

In most actual situations, of course, both poor committee action and personal staff problems interact: a committee permits a young staffer to burn him or herself out, falling victim to pleas of the urgency of the world's crises, until some personal crisis finally overtakes the staff person. And there are few Quaker sinecures which are not upheld by equally guilt-ridden or lackadaisical committee members. In many, it becomes a proverbial chicken-and-egg problem--which came first?

But is there any way out of such relationships? Can we figure out, at least, how to reduce their frequency? Again, answers are hard to come by, and I can claim no special expertise in these matters. But again, my own final suspicion is that the way to begin to reduce the toll is at the committee level. In theory, at least, it is the Quaker chicken, the committee, that comes first, and then, pardon the pun, lays a programmatic and personnel egg. There are Friends with personnel expertise; perhaps the major Quaker groups should seek them out and form a working party to write a set of queries and advices for committees with personnel responsibilities. An excellent model for this is the handbook, *Living With Ourselves and Others*, produced several years ago by a dedicated task force in New England Yearly Meeting for use by marriage committees and persons contemplating marriage and divorce. Such a handbook could be the basis of training sessions for committee members, offered through yearly meetings or centers such as Quaker Hill or Pendle Hill, as is now occasionally done for new clerks.

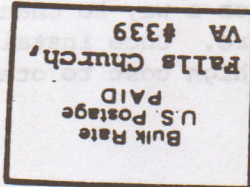
Should We Also Begin to Hire Experts?

Some similar process seems indicated for new staff as well, especially executives. A case in point is Friends General Conference: Its new Executive Secretary, Lloyd Lee Wilson, besides being bright and dedicated, also brings to his post an MBA degree, with considerable study of the dynamics of organizational management. Such a background is all too rare among our staff, and yet its relevance seems self-evident. Among other well-regarded Quaker executives, Kara Cole of Friends United Meeting and Sam Caldwell of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting both had achieved success in business before taking their present positions.

None of this means that we should abandon the Earlham School of Religion, George Fox College and other indigenous institutions as the major source of new Quaker leadership; but it does suggest to me that here as in many other areas it could be said that the "Children of darkness" have much to teach even the self-styled "Children of Light."

There are undoubtedly other and better ideas out there for making Quaker groups better employers. I hope they can begin to be voiced, perfected and heeded, because, friends, in this area we truly have a problem that is real, widespread and serious.

INSIDE: WHY DO QUAKER GROUPS SO OFTEN
MAKE SUCH LOUSY EMPLOYERS?



From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter
P.O. Box 1361
Balleys Crossroads, VA 22041

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

This month, 4/1983, may become one for the record books, if a proposal by several Pennsylvania members of Congress succeeds. The Honorable William Goodling, joined by Senators John Heinz and Arlen Specter, on 4/13 introduced a joint resolution which would bestow posthumously the "full rights of citizenship" as Americans to William and Hannah Penn. "This truly good man," Goodling told the House of Representatives when the resolution was introduced, "spent a lifetime promoting peace and liberty and helped to establish the foundation for our great country. It is only appropriate that we pay this one last tribute to William Penn and his wife--citizenship in the country he loved so dearly."

But is it really appropriate? I wonder. Penn worked hard for peace and liberty, true enough. But his "Holy Experiment" was never meant to be a separate country; it was expected by its founder to remain part of Great Britain's empire, its citizens loyal, if religiously eccentric, subjects of the crown. I wonder what Penn would have thought about their descendants' notions of secession and rebellion. Most of the weighty Friends in Philadelphia in 1776 wanted nothing to do with such radicalism; and even most of those who did declined to fight for its emancipation. Would William Penn really feel honored to be made a citizen of such a breakaway nation? Or would he be saddened at the violence which made the break possible and necessary? I wonder.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Further Light on the Subject

We heard earlier about the difficulties in changing a meetinghouse lightbulb. But has thee also heard how many Quaker feminists it takes to change such a fixture?

The answer is: Only one--and that's not funny, friend.

That Friend Spoke Their Mind

At a midwestern yearly meeting not long ago a group of Friends gathered round an evening fireplace to share in singing old hymns. The fellowship was precious, and time slipped away in song, until someone noticed that it had grown very late. One Friend wanted to continue til midnight; but the suggestion was laid aside when another Friend, looking at the text of his favorite Whittier hymn, quoted the Quaker poet's opinion thus: "Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire." And so they did.
