

OUTRAGE OF THE MONTH: THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY SPENDS \$7.5 MILLION PER DAY IN ADVERTISING, AIMED LARGELY AT YOUTH, WOMEN AND MINORITIES; THE FEDERAL ANTISMOKING BUDGET IS \$3.5 MILLION PER YEAR. SHOULDN'T HEALTH AND LIFE GET EQUAL AD SPACE AND \$\$\$?

# A Friendly Letter

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Second Month, 1989

Dear Friend,

Quakers who want to take their Peace Testimony's proscription of war seriously have always had trouble with "good" wars. From the English Revolution of the 1650s, to the U.S. Civil War and World War Two, when there seems to be a clear moral distinction between the forces of good and those of evil, the record shows that it has been hard for Quakers to stay out.

In our time, the case that most strained my commitment to nonviolence was Cambodia. When the bloody Khmer Rouge were forced out of power by the communist Vietnamese army in 1979, there's no denying it, I was at least relieved, and not able to see any clear peaceful alternative. Now the Vietnamese are pulling out of Cambodia; and the question of how to prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge to power is heating up again.

Among those spotlighting this issue is Friend Ed Lazar, a staff member of Humanitas, the human rights group formed by another Friend, Joan Baez. In the latest Humanitas newsletter (P.O. Box 818, Menlo Park CA 94026), he urges pacifists to pay attention to the rapidly changing situation in Cambodia, and in particular to work to keep the Khmer Rouge from regaining power.

Lazar is especially anxious to avoid a repetition of the events of 1975-78, when many in the American peace movement shamefully ignored and dismissed reports of the Khmer Rouge's systematic slaughter of its own population. "Whatever we do," he writes, "there is no certainty of success, but this time let us do all we can. Last time, people outside Cambodia said they just didn't know. This time we know."

The situation, in sum, is this: The Khmer Rouge were driven from power in 1979 by the Vietnamese army, acting with Soviet support. The Vietnamese have occupied Cambodia ever since. But now, faced with a wasted economy of their own, a

lessening of Soviet support, and high casualties, the Vietnamese are withdrawing. The question is, who or what will take their place?

Diplomatic maneuvering over Cambodia's future is intense, complicated and confusing. China has backed the Khmer Rouge against Russia and Vietnam, as has non-Communist Thailand for similar reasons. There is much talk of power-sharing and the cutoff of outside support for the Khmer Rouge once the Vietnamese are gone.

But will all this mean anything, as they say in Washington, "on the ground"? Some reports indicate the Khmer Rouge have large weapons caches inside Cambodia; how well the Vietnamese-established Heng Samrin regime can resist them without direct Vietnamese support is doubtful.

And if the Khmer Rouge recapture Phnom Penh, what then? No outside army seems ready to take Vietnam's place; but if one were, the temptation to suspend one's pacifism and support them would be strong. Could it be worse than a return to the killing fields?

Such theorizing aside, Lazar calls for pacifists to help avoid this outcome by appealing to Congress to keep the pressure on, to the Chinese to stop supporting the Khmer Rouge (the Chinese Embassy: 2300 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008), and to the U.N. (New York NY 10017) to take an active role in monitoring a Cambodian peace settlement. It doesn't sound like much; but it may be the best we can do. Even if this time we know, and speak, it might end only in increasing our sense of impotence and agony.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager

What does it mean to be a Quaker today? Since the first issue, this question has turned up in these pages as much as, or perhaps more than any other. It has been approached from many angles: examining efforts to define our faith, as in the Richmond Declaration (AFL#72); in terms of authority, as when Elizabeth Watson was deemed unsound as a speaker (AFL#44), or when an entire Kenyan Yearly Meeting was treated as if it did not exist (AFL#32); and as the basis for group identity, as in the case of the American Friends Service Committee (AFL#66).

Such discussions become concrete in the matter of membership. What does membership mean? Do we even need it? What does, or should it require? Who gets to decide?

#### MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

Only the last question has a clear answer, perhaps because it is a procedural one: For most Friends, clearly, the local meeting makes those decisions. We have seen (in AFL#76) one liberal meeting, proud of its tolerant spirit, move to disown a member who was an active pedophile. And last Seventh Month (AFL#87), we looked at my own Langley Hill Meeting in Virginia, as it began consideration of an application from an attendee employed by the Central Intelligence Agency.

As usual, reader responses to this report were invited, and several lengthy letters came in. I was anxious to share them, but felt a need to wait until there were further developments in the situation to report as well. This has taken awhile, but that isn't really surprising. At Langley Hill we knew that proper consideration of this application would take some time, and it has. For that matter, we are far from finished with it even now. But there is something to report.

First, though, a background summary: The applicant, George

Thomas, has been attending Langley Hill for over six years. He has been active in our First Day School, Peace Committee, and other meeting projects. He describes his work at the CIA as mainly translating Thai and Cambodian news reports and broadcasts. These are published in an unclassified form by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a non-clandestine arm of the CIA. George is also a member of the Army Reserve. George strongly opposes such covert military operations as the U.S. aid to the contras.

Questions were raised about George's application in three areas: The peace testimony, the avoidance of oaths, and involvement in a "secret society," against which our Baltimore Yearly Meeting still speaks in its *Faith and Practice*. But underlying these items of witness was the more basic issue of the meaning of membership, on which we had little clarity as well.

#### TAKING IT SLOW, TAKING THE HEAT

The meeting was determined to address all the ramifications of the application carefully and deliberately, not least because when a similar case came up about three years ago, it was acted on hastily and by evading these issues, and produced great division within the group. As is our custom, the application was referred first to the Overseers Committee.

As I said, the report on this application in AFL#87 evoked numerous strong responses. Several expressed considerable skepticism, not to say ridicule, of the whole proceeding. Thus, for instance, Christopher Hodgkin of Friday Harbor, Washington: "'I certainly hope that you have in Langley Hill Meeting no politicians of any stripe, no congressional aides, no lobbyists, no employees of advertising companies. All of these unquestionably 'regularly [mix truth] so skillfully with lies that one may never know the

difference.' In fact, their success depends on their ability to do so....I think you are applying an extreme double standard to George Thomas...If debating this application ad nauseam is an example of how Langley Hill Meeting interprets its commitment to pursuing Friends principles, you are in a sorry state."

But some others, like Jeremy Mott of Ridgewood, New Jersey, declared to the contrary, "...I agree completely with your sentiments on the incompatibility of Quakerism and any sort of secret society of conspiratorial politics or organized dishonesty of any kind....I just can't see how the Friends of Truth can knowingly accept into membership someone who is a willing member of the CIA or any similar conspiratorial organization...even if the individual attempts to stay clear of personal dishonesty and violence."

#### ON THE ONE HAND, ON THE OTHER

Other writers spoke of difficult membership cases in their own meetings. For instance, Nadya Spassenko of Hughsonville, New York, described how a Central American diplomat and his family applied after attending her meeting for over a year. They were cultured and attractive individuals, but in their membership interview it emerged that they were also members of their country's aristocracy, and defended the large amounts of military aid being sent to their government by the U.S. "to keep the status quo in place," against "the uprisings of the people—who, we were reading in our newspapers, needed land to grow food to survive." The application was rejected. Nadya Spassenko added that "I was so proud of the committee for coming to this decision, because I, myself would not have been able to arrive at it. My thoughts continued to be plagued by the belief that every soul is redeemable, and who are we to

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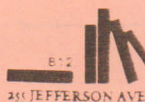
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- Abandoned the Quaker Peace Testimony
- Adopted an uncritically pro-Marxist and pro-revolutionary political perspective
- Ignored the protests of many concerned Friends
- Become essentially a non-Quaker body

Much of Lewy's critique can be challenged; and the AFSC's own response to his book is included in full in *Quaker Service At The Crossroads*, along with essays by other present and former AFSC staff members. Yet Lewy has highlighted important issues regarding Quaker service and the relation of AFSC to the Society of Friends today, issues which have long concerned many thoughtful Friends. *Quaker Service At The Crossroads* will offer the fullest and most wide-ranging exploration of these issues yet attempted by Friends.

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The book will include a rejoinder by Guenter Lewy to his Quaker critics, and an introduction by Chuck Fager, who edited it.

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condemn any one seeking for salvation? Aren't we allowed our mistakes in understanding? God knows, I've been allowed mine, and I have been forgiven."

From Illinois, Ken Ives recounted another such case involving Chicago's 57th Street Meeting at the beginning of World War Two. Their member, Paul Douglas (later a distinguished U.S. Senator), had been a pacifist and socialist, but he became convinced that the threat of Hitler demanded a military response, and he joined the Marines.

"Twice," Ives said, "Senator Douglas offered to resign his membership in Meeting if we felt it was an embarrassment to us. Ministry and Counsel considered these offers at length. They concluded that, tho we differed on his military service and related issues, his integrity and concern for human welfare were strong, and recommended to meeting that his membership be continued. Meeting concurred.... I remember a time or two when he spoke in meeting against the naivete of some pacifists—but not against their basic orientation. I felt his cautions were well taken."

#### ANOTHER WAR, ANOTHER JUDGEMENT

(This brings to mind a notorious case in California in the early 1970s, involving East Whittier Friends Church in California, and one of its more prominent non-resident members, who happened then to be president of the United States. East Whittier received many appeals from other meetings to disown this member for offenses against the testimonies of peace, truthfulness and honesty. I recall a statement by the pastor there, on behalf of its Ministry and Counsel Committee, declining to do so, on the grounds of general forbearance and clemency. Readers will recall that Congress, being a non-Quaker body, was not so forgiving.)

In our case, most writers felt, on balance, that we could accept an applicant despite such connections.

As Sue Lamborn of Nottingham, Pa., put it: "George Thomas may be a seed of 'light' in the CIA. I don't think we should decide his job. God does that. Therefore he should wear his sword as long as he canst. Yes, let him join Friends." After a summer break, and some lengthy threshing sessions, Langley Hill's Overseers Committee came to the same conclusion, recommending to the Meeting in Eleventh Month that George's application be accepted. With the recommendation came a formulation of the committee's views on the meaning of the membership itself. A draft of this statement out these conclusions this way:

"In our view, to become a Friend means to respond to a divine calling, and this response has both an inward and an outward aspect; that is, it includes both faith and practice.... [W]e believe George has wrestled more directly with the questions involved in relating Quaker testimonies to his work than some of us, and has taken many actions that are in accord with them. We recognize also that God's calling often puts persons into conflicting and contradictory situations, the resolution of which may be neither quick nor easy; and none of us on the Committee is without struggle or shortcomings in bearing our Quaker witness."

#### RISKING A RISKY DISCERNMENT

"In George's case, we conclude that while these particular associations remain problematical and perhaps risky for the meeting, his roles in them do not go beyond the bounds of our Quaker fellowship. Nor, for that matter, do we believe the Meeting should avoid all risks.... [Also, his] record of routine involvement reinforces the sense we have gained... that his commitment to a Quaker religious path is genuine. This is the faith side of the equation. For... [us] it is not a matter of doctrine, or anything we can measure objectively; ours is, again, a task of discernment, of recognizing others called by God to follow the Quaker

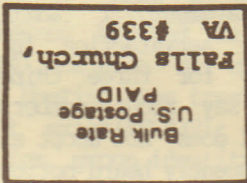
way of faith and practice in a manner similar to ours and in company with us.... In George Thomas we believe we recognize such a fellow pilgrim on Langley Hill['s] spiritual journey. Thus we are recommending that his application for membership be accepted."

As a member of the Overseers Committee and a principal drafter of this statement, I admit to taking some satisfaction in it, particularly for three things it does not say about membership. That is, it does not adopt either of two frequently heard notions of membership, namely that sincere seeking is all that counts, or that membership is essentially self-determined, i.e., whoever wants to be a member, is. Neither seems to me adequate to the Society of Friends. Rather, it affirms the granting of membership as a community decision which has a real relationship to such things as Quaker faith, process and testimonies. Yet at the same time it does not suggest that these decisions can be made by set outward standards; discernment and risk are involved.

#### A BREATHER AND A GIFT

However pleased we were with our recommendation, however, the meeting has not been able to find unity on it. Since its presentation we have spent five (count 'em) long business sessions in three months on this matter, without being able either to accept or to reject it. At the last session, with patience wearing thin and tensions rising, we agreed to lay the application aside for several months, so we can take a breather, and then consider the underlying issue of the meaning of membership in an ongoing threshing process before taking it up again. Thus far, George Thomas has been remarkably patient with us and our agonizing. This is, to my mind, a great gift to the meeting, and a sign of the sincerity of his commitment. Whether that faith will ultimately be recognized with the token of formal membership remains to be seen.

Address Correction Requested



From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter  
P.O. Box 1361  
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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

On 2/22/1956, a remarkable episode in the Montgomery Bus Boycott began at the county court house: Boycott leader E.D. Nixon walked into the sheriff's office and said to a startled deputy, "Are you looking for me? Well, here I am."

Nixon and dozens of other boycott leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr., were facing criminal indictments as part of the white leadership's effort to crush the protest. But by volunteering to be arrested, instead of cowering at home waiting to be hauled away in handcuffs, Nixon turned the tables on the authorities psychologically. Word spread of his action, and soon other defendants, mostly respected and dignified ministers, began reporting to the courthouse. A large crowd soon gathered, and the arrestees were greeted with hugs and handshakes when they went in, and cheers and laughter as they emerged on bail. The sheriff, exasperated by the exuberance over what was supposed to have been intimidation, finally came out to shout, "This is no vaudeville show!" but to no avail.

Nixon's bold stroke had not been his idea, however. It was the suggestion of a mysterious newcomer to boycott strategy sessions named Bayard Rustin. Rustin had arrived in Montgomery only the day before, and though a stranger he had almost immediately joined in tactical discussions.

This was not an accident. Rustin was then an official of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a devotee of Gandhi and a veteran nonviolent activist. He was operating, however, almost undercover, because his career had been long and controversial: once a communist, and later a World War Two draft resister, Rustin was also a homosexual who had been arrested a few years earlier on a "morals charge." And he was a lifelong Friend, though this was perhaps the least of his worries in Montgomery. When the police discovered his identity a few days later, Rustin had to be smuggled out of Montgomery hidden in the back of a car. But this visit was the beginning of a decade of work for Rustin as one of the civil rights movement's key strategic thinkers and tacticians.

### QUAKER CHUCKLE

Lehigh Valley (Pa.) Meeting's newsletter recently noted that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting wanted to know of concerns that ought to be raised at the next Yearly Meeting sessions. "Two issues mentioned," the report said, "are the possible decentralization of the Yearly Meeting organization and the abolition of war." Reading this, one Lehigh Friend commented, "Oh heck, let's stick to something easy, like the abolition of war."

Meanwhile, Woodbury (NJ) Meeting held a discussion of how God moved Friends to speak in

worship. Friends told of inner pressures, even temporary backaches, which were only resolved by speaking. But then a Friend who is a lawyer said that as a reason, meditation and examination of ideas are tools of his trade, he speaks when, after reasonable meditation, something seemed appropriate. "But then," he was asked, "how do you know your message comes from God?" "Oh that's simple," he answered, "I just wait until I get home, and my wife tells me."

—Thanks to Phil Harnden and Charles C. Thomas

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