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A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Ninety-Eight

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Sixth Month, 1989

Dear Friend,

Here's a scoop, about one of my favorite non-Friends, Garrison Keillor. He took part in a Quaker-sponsored conference of Soviet and American writers, held last month at Friends Meeting of Washington. It marked the publication of *The Human Experience*, the fine book of Russian and American fiction of which we spoke in detail last month. While there I cornered him for a few moments and asked a question that had long gnawed at me: What did he do about the draft?

You see, Keillor is my age, which means Vietnam-era, yet in all the biographical sketches I have read, there was nothing about how he dealt with Selective Service. His answer is my scoop: The bard of Lake Wobegon was almost a draft resister.

Here is what he said: At the University of Minnesota, he joined a group called Students Against Selective Service, some of whose members went to jail as resisters. In 1969, after taking his pre-induction physical, he said, he wrote his draft board and told them that if actually drafted, he would not report. The outcome was typical Wobegonian anticlimax: Keillor never got a draft notice, so his bravado was not actually tested. "It wasn't very heroic," he told me. Maybe not; but it was close enough.

There is more news on another topic mentioned last month, Kenya. A committee will shortly be gathering in England to plan a 1991 international Quaker conference in Kenya. The repeated reports of serious human rights violations in Kenya can't make their task any easier. And unfortunately, more bad human rights news from Kenya keeps coming in: Last month the government banned a popular weekly business magazine which had raised questions about government economic plans. Another national magazine, *Beyond*, published by the Kenyan Council of Churches, was suppressed in 1988 after questioning the fairness of some parliamentary elections. Asked about this, the

Assistant Minister for National Guidance and Political Affairs told the *Times* that while there is press freedom in Kenya, "editors should not be left to write whatever they like."

Another Quaker gathering, that of Friends General Conference at St. Lawrence University next month, faces more pleasant problems: the pace of registrations is well above this time last year, which points toward another record turnout. Or rather it would, except that, as also happened last year, registration will likely be closed soon, because the carrying capacity of the campus, and the staff, will be reached. Thus the total attendance could well be below last year's 1900-plus, and there will probably be latecomers turned away again. This continuing surge of enthusiasm for the Society's largest annual assembly is further evidence of the unruly vitality of liberal Quakerism.

And speaking of Friends General Conference, here is a disclosure for the record: Last year Baltimore Yearly Meeting appointed me as one of its representatives to the FGC Central Committee. Inasmuch as FGC is also part of my "beat" as a Quaker reporter, this is a conflict of interest. I point this out so you can take it into account, and help keep me honest as need arises. After all, such conflicts are probably unavoidable, since I am now actively involved in Quakerism at the monthly and yearly meeting levels as well as this national one, in each of which potential journalistic subjects abound. But when it comes to Quakerism, while I aim to be truthful, I can't claim to be detached.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

When the great Quaker investigative reporter Drew Pearson launched his national political column in 1932, he called it the *Washington Merry-Go-Round*. It is an apt evocation of the cyclical, ingrown and often carnival atmosphere of politics and culture in the nation's capital. But a better title for the career of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) would be something like *Shooting the Rapids*. That's because repeatedly in its remarkable 46-year history, FCNL has had to negotiate tricky shoals in order to stay afloat and on course. It now faces some major stretches of rough and even uncharted waters as it navigates into the 1990s.

STEPPING OUT OF RAYMOND'S SHADOW

The most visible challenge before it is the replacement of FCNL's longtime Executive Secretary, Ed Snyder, who plans to retire early next year. This change takes on added significance because it will mark the end of continuity with the organization's founders.

FCNL was begun in 1943, in the depths of World War Two, as a successor to the Friends War Problems Committee, and the "first full-fledged, full-time religious lobby in the United States." For almost twenty years, though, its work was largely the lengthened shadow of E. Raymond Wilson, its Executive Secretary, who was unmistakably a giant among Friends in the middle of this century.

Wilson not only labored full-time and more pressing Congress on issues such as universal military training and disarmament; he also performed as a low-key but hard-driving entrepreneur to put FCNL on a firm organizational footing; and he worked the Society of Friends like a candidate campaigning nonstop among a demanding constituency, building its base of Quaker support. How well he did this work shows up in numerous ways even today.

Take, for instance, money. Not long ago Ed Snyder told the staff that a respected Washington-

based peace group was in trouble; half its staff faced layoffs and it was seeking to merge with another group. There have been other such casualties recently. A little-known but major shock to capital activists came last fall, when the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, a fixture since Vietnam days—and of which FCNL was part—abruptly crashed into bankruptcy. There would soon be, Snyder said, a "shakeout" among peace groups. Why? Because the foundation money people had decreed it. The defunct Coalition, and the sinking committee, both depended on their grants, and priorities had changed. Evidently they may soon be joined by more such casualties, as priorities are realigned.

SAFE HAVEN ON SECOND STREET

But FCNL will not be threatened by such changes of foundation fashion, because it receives very little foundation money. Its constituency consists of representatives from 26 yearly meetings, contacts in over 600 monthly meetings, and almost 12,000 individual contributors, whose average donation is less than a hundred dollars a year. While hardly wealthy by Washington lobby standards, FCNL's income growth has modestly outpaced inflation during most of the 1980s, and it is much healthier than many of the church and issue groups, especially those who depend on the caprices of the foundations.

While this nationwide constituency was largely built by Raymond Wilson, it is loyal because its members feel FCNL has provided an authentic channel for Quaker witness in politics. Their concerns are regularly surveyed and are the basis for FCNL's legislative agenda, a process which centers on its week-long annual meetings. Each Eleventh Month, more than two hundred Friends gather to explore and thresh issues and their perspectives on them; every other year this process yields a set of legislative priorities to guide the staff's efforts; and every six years it produces an overall policy statement.

These statements are forthright where Friends are generally united, as on peace and equality; they are less bold on economics, where Friends' testimonies are not so unequivocal in their policy implications; and on matters such as abortion and homosexuality, they respect our deep divisions, and take no specific positions. I know of nothing to compare with this policy process among Quaker action agencies.

PLAIN SPEAKING, AND NON-SPEAKING

Even this process has not always protected FCNL from attack among Friends: In 1959, a group of conservative Friends circulated a letter challenging FCNL's legitimacy as a Quaker lobby. FCNL had no right to speak on legislative issues for Friends, the critics asserted, unless and until there was virtual unanimity on these issues among monthly meetings. Such a requirement, of course, was a recipe for paralysis. Besides which, FCNL was and is careful to say that it does not speak for all Friends. Ed Snyder recalls that this challenge spurred FCNL to broaden its consultative process somewhat, but the controversy soon died out.

There was a similar flap in Iowa YM in 1981, raised by a handful of Friends who wanted FCNL to come out against homosexuality, abortion, pornography and the Equal Rights Amendment (see AFLs #2 and #14 for details); they did not prevail.

Thus, FCNL's consultative process, which was another of Raymond Wilson's achievements, has largely protected it from the storms of politics that have occasionally swept some corners of the Society. Indeed, if he had a major defect, it was an outgrowth of his virtues: he never quit. His "retirement" in 1962 was something of a palace coup; and while yielding the position to Ed Snyder, who had been his understudy for seven years, Raymond stayed on around FCNL, pursuing his passion for disarmament as a fulltime volunteer until ill health forced him out. Even then, in his last years at Friends House in Sandy

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Office of the
Central Plains
Regional Coordinator

American Intercultural Student Exchange

A non-profit tax exempt educational Foundation

May, 1989

TO THE READERS OF A FRIENDLY LETTER
& to Quakers & to Quakers at heart in the U.S.A.

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DEAR FRIEND,

Each of us in the Society of Friends does in each's own small, but hopefully SIGNIFICANT, way whatever can be done to further the cause of international understanding, brother & sisterhood, and the global community, in order to spread more Peace, more Justice, more Understanding in a more Tolerant World. Sounds idealistic---but it CAN be done!!!

Kathy and I are both secondary teachers who have used our "after hours" time to approach these goals--through bringing FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENTS to the Midwest to live a school year with an American family. We have personally hosted six (6) students ourselves (Sweden twice, Norway, Finland, Denmark, West Germany) and have "matched up" many hundreds of families and students over the last 8 years--- and supervised them (and laughed with them, cried with them, listened to them, shared with them) as "AISE AREA REPRESENTATIVES", overseeing the sharing and the adjustment and being liason for the students, family, school, church, and community during the student's 10-month home stay.

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P.S. THANKS!!! to Chuck
Fager for helping to pub-
licize this opportunity
for "Quakerly" service!

Missouri Valley Conference
of Friends looks forward to
Chuck's being the resource person for our
Sept. 15-17 Missouri Valley Conference (Lawrence, Kansas)!!!

WE ALSO HIGHLY RECOMMEND (!!!) to you the AMERICAN INTERCULTURAL STUDENT
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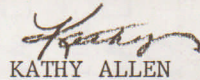
Kathy and I have "worked" and "interacted" with them for nearly 9 years.
Kathy is the Central Plains Regional Coordinator (see stationary) and I
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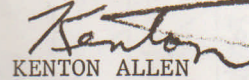
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vice Committee, University
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AISE STRUCTURE

AISE maintains its national headquarters in La Jolla, California. There are 15 regional offices throughout the United States, 48 state coordinators and over 800 area representatives that support a worldwide network. The area representatives interview host families and coordinate the successful matches between students and families. AISE offers qualified American and overseas high school students the opportunity to live with a host family and attend a local high school for one academic school year.

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representative.

WHO IS AISE?

AISE is governed by a Board of Trustees including representatives from related fields such as education, business, law, plus host families and individuals who have personally participated in exchange programs.

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AISE is also accepted for listing in the current advisory booklet distributed by CSIET Council on Standards for International Educational Travel. AISE is a member of the NAFSA National Association of Foreign Student Advisors and NASSP National Association of Secondary School Principals.

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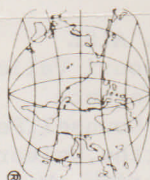
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Spring, Maryland, he was busy organizing forums and challenging congressional aspirants about their commitments to peace and justice, almost without a break until his death two years ago this month. "He never stopped til he dropped," Ed Snyder says with a note of awe.

Thus the transition from being the extension of one person's mission to a group with its own identity, while bumpy, was managed. Ed Snyder, by contrast, is not staying around. He plans to head for Maine with his wife after retirement. And his successor will not come from among the current staff; none wanted the job. So now, after forty-six years, FCNL faces a break in the continuity of its leadership.

REPLACING THEIR MAINE MAN

Will this break mean big upheavals in FCNL? At one level, probably not: One of its strengths, under both Raymond Wilson's and Ed Snyder's stewardship, has been an ability to attract some weighty and astute Friends into its parent committees; and the other lobbyists are well settled in their positions and fields of work. These add up to what can only be called a "corporate culture" more likely to mold a new executive to its shape and direction than vice versa. Conversations with several of the staff turned up an air of expectant uncertainty about the appointment, but no real anxiety; whoever it turns out to be, is the message, FCNL can handle it.

No doubt they are right, in the short run at least. The more basic challenge to FCNL, it seems to me, is more subtle, and less a matter of personalities. It is the long-term tendency of almost all Washington activist organizations to become staff-dominated, and for the staff in turn to operate on what is called here an ITB, or "Inside The Beltway" mentality. In its most insidious form, the official guardians of the group, the lay boards and committees, hardly know what is happening, because the staff becomes accomplished in massaging and manipulating them. This evolution is hastened when such committees fall out among themselves.

While in many respects FCNL seems to have escaped this destiny, it is not immune. Thus as one of his last initiatives, Ed Snyder wants to build into FCNL a permanent place—actually several places—for released Friends, so they can come to Capitol Hill and work for limited periods on issues of concern, which fit within FCNL's priorities.

To be sure, there has been a long succession of volunteers at FCNL; Raymond Wilson was only yhte best-known. When I visited last month there were two: Don Irish from Minnesota, a retired professor just back from another trip to Central America, calling on congressional staffers to tell them what he had seen; and Ralph Kerman of Baltimore, a retired teacher working on environmental issues. And each year a class of young interns comes to work with the lobbyists. But Snyder wants such volunteerism made a formal and sizeable part of FCNL's ongoing program. The Executive Committee has agreed, and several desks have been set aside on the third floor for this purpose.

A WORK RELEASE PROGRAM FOR FRIENDS

Such an emphasis would serve several purposes simultaneously: It supports a venerable and characteristic form of Quaker witness, that of the knowledgeable but non-professional Friend released to labor under a concern; it would also cement the ties between volunteers and their home meetings. But perhaps most important, it is hoped that such a stream of active lay volunteers, working alongside the fulltime lobbyists, will help keep FCNL from climbing on the Washington Merry-Go-Round and succumbing to an ITB mentality.

That's the theory. The new Executive Secretary will have to make it work. And what sort of person should he or she be? A search committee has been working for more than a year, and plans to narrow its list down to three candidates this month, for extensive interviews over the summer. They hope to present their nominee to the Annual Meeting in Eleventh Month, and expect the person to start in 2/1990.

Their job description acknowledges that they seek someone with "an unusual combination of personal qualities", which, as more than one FCNL staffer commented, George Fox and Jesus Christ would be hard pressed to offer: A person of deep Quaker faith, wide Friendly contacts, strong administrative experience, intimate familiarity with the legislative process, the ability to communicate with those of opposing opinions, and a good writer who is able to travel—doubtless, when need be, by walking on water and leaping tall buildings with a single bound....

WHEN IN DOUBT, BUILD THE BASE

Of these skills, it seems to me that those involved with maintaining FCNL's broad Quaker base are the most crucial. This is not only because FCNL runs the gamut from the most liberal yearly meetings to the edge of the Evangelical Friends Alliance: EFA's Mid-America YM sends representatives to the General Committee, and there are reports that Northwest YM, a pillar of evangelical Quakerism, will soon consider a proposal to do so. It is also critical because it is this base which gives FCNL its stability, and its ongoing consultations are what maintain its legitimacy among Friends.

If, as I believe, we are entering a time of "ecumenical detente" particularly between some of the Evangelical YMs and the rest of Quakerdom, one of FCNL's incidental functions, that of serving as a crossroads institution where members of various branches meet and learn from each other, will become even more valuable. This makes me think the search committee would do well to prospect among the more progressive segments of the pastoral branches (yes, liberals, there are some). It is from here, I suspect, that the tendency toward domination by staff and an ITB outlook can best be resisted. And thus will FCNL also be kept out of the fickle clutches of foundations.

Is there such a person out there, who can guide FCNL through the many rapids which the 1990s are almost sure to present? Stay tuned.

INSIDE: BIG CHANGES COMING AT
THE FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Address Correction Requested

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

If big anniversaries are your thing, get out your Tricentennial buttons. It was early in Sixth Month of 1689, three hundred years ago this month, that the Toleration Act received the royal assent from William and Mary and became law in England. Passage of this law marked the end of official persecution of Friends, and is a landmark in the history of religious freedom. It had taken almost fifty years of struggle and suffering, not to mention a coup by Protestant nobility against the Catholic James II, to bring it about.

When it came, Toleration was no blank check to Dissent: Anglicanism remained the established church, supported by taxes which Friends still resisted; Catholics and Unitarians were excluded from the Act's protection, though in practice persecution of these groups also diminished greatly; and Friends and other Dissenters were still barred from universities, government service and Parliament by required oaths of allegiance to the established church. In addition, Dissenters were required to make declarations of

loyalty to the crown, against the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, and in favor of the Trinity and the Bible.

Lobbying by Friends managed produced revisions in these statements to suit Quaker scruples: For one thing, they did not have to swear, but could simply affirm the statements; and secondly, the section on the Trinity did not use that specific term, which Friends had always insisted—correctly—was unscriptural. Most intriguing, though, was the passage dealing with the Bible. The original draft would have required agreement that "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the revealed Will and Word of God."

But the final version, which Friends accepted, asserted only that the Scriptures were "given by Divine Inspiration." This may seem like a minor revision, but it is not; much of later Friends history would fall into the gap between the two conceptions of biblical authority thereby revealed.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

Three weighty Quaker elders walked into an elevator during a break at a large Friends conference. They had just listened to a stirring message on the importance of confession of sin to the health both of the individual soul and a religious community. All were still under the weight of this theme as the elevator began to rise, and then stopped abruptly, stuck between floors.

After some investigation they found that there was no danger, but it would take awhile for the elevator to be fixed; so the three settled into a

period of quiet worship.

After awhile, one elder spoke up: "Friends, I have a confession to make," he said. "I have been secretly gambling at the race track with meeting funds. I want to stop, but I'm not yet able to." Soon the second elder acknowledged that she was having an affair, which she too was unable to give up. These two then looked to the third elder, who flushed and said, "Yes, I have something to confess too: I'm addicted to gossip, and I can't wait til this elevator gets fixed!"