



GOOD ADVICE IS WHERE YOU FIND IT: "One important function of militaries, though not one often written about, is to keep excess labor off a market saturated by automation....If the Soviet Union doesn't lapse into civil war or revert to Stalinism, we actually may see real disarmament....But...we better think about the social consequences." —Fred Reed in *Army Times*, 11/30/1989

A Friendly Letter

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TWELFTH MONTH, 1989

Dear Friend,

You're familiar with meeting for worship, and meeting for business; but how about meeting for movies? It's an idea that's become a regular and very enjoyable feature of life for me, and it is a modest idea which might enrich your meeting fellowship as well.

It started spontaneously last year, during the big flap over *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Several of us from Langley Hill Meeting fell to talking about it, and decided we would all go see it, then get together over a potluck dinner and work out our various reactions to it in conversation.

Needless to say, we had many opinions about the movie, but by the end of the evening we were in complete agreement about one thing: This was fun as well as mind-stretching, and we wanted to do it again.

So we did. But ever since, we have eschewed the trek to the movie house, with its steep ticket prices, in favor of that newest tool of Quaker economy, the VCR. For a few bucks (or free at the library) we rent a film, pop our own popcorn, then eat and talk, sometimes for hours. The high quality of fellowship such a gathering could engender should be obvious. But in addition, we have also probed some pretty deep spiritual and theological issues.

For instance, we have seen *The Mission*, about Jesuits and peasants being murdered in South America (sound familiar?); and *Elmer Gantry*, which though it was made almost thirty years ago, based on a story about corrupt mass evangelists written more than sixty years ago, seemed right up to the minute. And one of my favorites, *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman.

Not that all the films have been weighty and ponderous. One of the best was Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, a truly hilarious send-up of early Christian origins, but with lots of food for thought amid the

jokes. And of course there was *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and more recently, the offbeat but touching *Torch Song Trilogy*.

Besides being inexpensive, a meeting for movies is easy. There is no advance reading, no discussion questions, no leader. If getting a sitter is a hassle, parents bring the kids along. They watch, wander in and out, make occasional noise; it comes with the territory. We decide on the next month's film at the end of each session. This month we'll see an unusual holiday film called *A Christmas Without Snow*. I can't wait.

To be sure, we've seen Quaker-oriented films, too; *Friendly Persuasion* is not the only one: there is, for instance, *Lady and the Badman*, starring, of all people, John Wayne; and a terrific but hard-to-find thriller called *The July Group*, in which a band of terrorists kidnap a Quaker banker's family and demand \$4 million in ransom, and the banker's little meeting decides to resist nonviolently....

But enough of the capsule reviews. Here the point is that we have stumbled on something easy which I think many other Friends might find enjoyable and enriching. All you need is a VCR and a living room, a film rental place, a table for the potluck, and a bit of patience with wandering kids. Why not give it a try, and let me know how it goes?

Happy holidays!

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. I hope you'll include gift subscriptions to *A Friendly Letter* on your holiday idea list.

Traditionally, the Annual Meetings of the American Friends Service Committee Corporation have been pretty routine affairs. But this year's meeting, held last month in Philadelphia, was not traditional, and definitely not routine.

Normally the annual meeting features presentations by national staff about AFSC programs, and a short business meeting, whose principal agenda item is to approve a pre-selected slate of nominees to the Board of Directors. Although the Corporation legally constitutes the AFSC, it typically did not discuss policy or review budget. More than once I have seen new Corporation members, after their first annual meeting, scratching their heads and asking, "Is that all there is?"

GENERAL FIRST, SPECIFIC LATER

This year, however, stung by growing criticism of various programs and its fading Quaker identity, the AFSC Board of Directors changed the Annual Meeting's format and content: Staff presentations were downplayed, the business session was lengthened to a day and a half, and two major policy questions were added to the usual matter of approving new Board nominees.

Of the policy questions, one—AFSC's relationship with and responsiveness to Friends—was general. The other was specific: What should AFSC do if it loses the appeal of its suit in federal court seeking an exemption from the 1986 Immigration Act requirement that all employers complete I-9 forms on new employees? The suit has been dismissed by a district judge without a trial.

This second is an important, and potentially costly issue. A number of church groups, including Friends General Conference, have opted to defy this requirement, which puts them at risk for hefty fines. But this issue, however timely and significant, never got to the floor of the Corporation; discussion and debate over AFSC's relationship with Friends took up all the available time, and then some.

This was no surprise; Quaker discontent with AFSC has been building for years. (For background, see AFLs #7, #19, #33, #66, & #82; also the books *Peace and Revolution* and *Quaker Service at the Crossroads*, both available from AFL.) This time two formal minutes were presented by yearly meetings, North Carolina (FUM) and Ohio Conservative.

North Carolina's minute was the most detailed, and its introduction summed up the sentiments of many who have felt concern about AFSC in recent years. It noted that in North Carolina since 1980:

"Fewer and fewer Friends were included in the staff; the decision making was moving away from the grass roots level of influence from Friends Meetings to professional staff in Philadelphia; there was decreasing contact between AFSC staff and Yearly Meeting members. Our Yearly Meeting representatives to the [regional AFSC] committees felt rebuffed by the non-Friends on these committees when they sought to introduce their Quaker perspective on issues before them."

NORTH CAROLINA & OHIO—CONCERNS

The minute's specific proposals called for an expanded role for the Corporation, and a review of AFSC's affirmative action policy.

Ohio's minute spoke more generally about concerns over possible defaults on Quaker testimonies, but it had more teeth, or at least a tooth. It was approved, moreover, despite moving testimony from older members about how important AFSC had once been to many Ohio Friends, both in war (many older men were COs in World War Two), and in peace (one member recalled how during the Depression AFSC relief goods had helped clothe his own family).

"Nevertheless," the minute concluded, *"we now find that conditions have changed. We are told that those ways in which the AFSC worked are gone. A number of our members are sorely exercised by some recent activities of the AFSC, which*

seem wrong both by omission and commission. We are particularly uneasy with the absence of Christian witness in AFSC materials and with the diminishing connection of the Service Committee to the concerns and activities of the Religious Society of Friends."

Their conclusion was that despite this long, fruitful connection, something had gone seriously wrong between AFSC and Friends, and that facing this breach honestly required an unusual action, that of deleting AFSC from Ohio's list of corporate contributions. In reaching this decision, Ohio Friends turned aside a proposal to continue their contribution but have it designated for noncontroversial relief work.

SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT

The amount of money was small (\$500), but the symbolism of Ohio's action was substantial. Numerous reports from annual meeting participants make it plain that the concerns expressed in these two minutes were shared and articulated by Friends from many other yearly meetings; no wonder the immigration lawsuit never made it to the floor.

The results of all this discussion were several, and if followed through fully and fairly, they could herald a long-overdue new opening between AFSC's inner circle and the wider sphere of American Quakerism. Among these outcomes, as one might expect from a Quaker body, was the creation of a new committee and the planning of several more meetings.

One set of meetings is to be a series of regional "consultations," which are supposed to enable Friends of various sorts from around the country to speak up about their concerns. Timing, locations and format for these gatherings are as yet unspecified, and left primarily up to National Board Clerk, Stephen Cary.

The new committee will examine AFSC's nominating committee and the way members of the Corporation and the Board are chosen. The North Carolina urged opening this nomin-

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Dear Friend,

Your subscription to A Friendly Letter is nearing its end. If you have enjoyed reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it, I hope you'll renew your subscription now so you won't miss any upcoming issues.

American Quakerism faces more rapid change and growth in the 1990s. Sometimes this growth is not without tension and conflict, but mostly it's exciting and unpredictable. That's what makes it fun and challenging to keep up with. If you read other Quaker publications, you know they don't overlap much with A Friendly Letter, because it has usually been out front on the important Quaker news and issues.

You might not always agree with the opinions voiced in A Friendly Letter. But I'll keep doing my best to bring you the most significant items of Quaker news and discussion that I can in the coming year, plus further glimpses of This Month In Quaker History and samples of Friendly humor in Quaker Chuckles.

If you have priced quality newsletters in other fields, you know that A Friendly Letter is still a bargain at \$17.95 for 12 issues (for USA, Canada & Mexico; elsewhere \$20/yr. airmail).

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ating process up to more Yearly Meeting input from; but the concerns raised went far beyond that.

Nominees to AFSC's National Board, which sets policy, are drawn from the Corporation's members. And since each Corporation member is listed with a Yearly Meeting (YM) affiliation, a newcomer would think they represent their YMs to AFSC. But in fact, most of the Corporation is appointed at large by AFSC's own in-house nominating committee; and almost all Board nominees, it turns out, are at large members.

To many critics, this looks like shady maneuvering to exclude any Friends not in synch with AFSC's status quo; and they want change: more Board nominees should be yearly meeting appointees, and they should include some questioners of AFSC orthodoxy, to bring into its policy councils some of the real diversity that exists among Friends. Working through such diversity on policy issues would, the critics contend, begin to rebuild AFSC's legitimacy as an authentically Quaker body.

AFSC'S BRAND OF INSIDER TRADING

Despite these widely-voiced concerns, this year's slate of Board nominees was more of the same: of 11 nominees, only one was a Yearly Meeting appointee, and three were from the Philadelphia area; none was known as a questioner of the status quo. Faced with an apparent lack of responsiveness to his concerns, one persistent critic, Thomas Angell of New York, stated that if such a slate were presented at the 1990 Annual Meeting, he doubted he could approve it. This frankness shocked some, but also showed how deep the concern runs in some quarters.

The calls to open up the nominating process to the diversity of American Quakerism were paralleled by barbs at another persistent target, AFSC's affirmative action policy, and specifically its inclusion of gays and lesbians among its targeted groups. Concerns about this policy are felt at several different levels, which will need to be disentangled carefully. There is at one level simple opposition to giv-

ing any legitimacy to homosexuality. This is widely felt in the pastoral YMs affiliated with AFSC, such as North Carolina, Indiana, Wilmington and Western, as well as among many in Ohio Conservative.

Another level of concern is procedural: It was adopted by the National Board in First Month, 1979 during a blinding snowstorm which snarled air traffic and prevented many members from other parts of the country from attending. To many, this made the decision look like manipulative sharp practice.

Further, the policy was distributed with an introductory statement that made it sound as if the inclusion of gays and lesbians was the obvious and unarguable outcome of everything Quakerism had always stood for. Such a presentation blatantly ignored the vehement debate on the subject underway then and now in many corners of AFSC's putative constituency, and only added insult to injury. Uneasiness and even bitterness over the way this policy came into being extends far beyond those who oppose its inclusion of gays and lesbians, and has never dissipated; rather it has festered.

THE CONTENT OF QUAKER PROCESS

And there is justice in this reaction. Experienced Friends know that Quaker process is not just a tool, but a central part of our religious witness, to be followed the more carefully and patiently the more difficult an issue is. When the process is corrupted, the community is breached.

And any Friend who was awake in the eighties knows there has been no more difficult issue among us than homosexuality. How does the AFSC leadership justify a process which declared this debate in its own parent constituency resolved? Such a maneuver—and this is the point of the importance of careful Quaker process—cuts off a meaningful relationship with the large sectors of American Friends who have been agonizing and struggling together over it since then. Repairing the baleful effects of this dubious process will be a major under-

taking, if it is possible at all.

A third level of concern about this policy and its adoption springs from what it implies about the actual sources of influence and—yes—power within AFSC. North Carolina's minute expressed the sense of many that this seems to have flowed to Philadelphia, and there to a staff now overwhelmingly, and increasingly, non-Quaker. The policy has had the effect of *de-Quakerizing* AFSC.

NEEDED: AN END TO DE-QUAKERIZATION

But why? There are plenty of women, gay and lesbian, disabled and—outside North America—many thousands of nonwhite *Quakers*, and we are still an intelligent and activist bunch. Yet in AFSC, Quakers of any stripe hardly ever qualify anymore. This phenomenon needs more than analysis; it must be reversed.

Thus the Corporation decided that another consultation should be held, to reexamine the affirmative action policy. The results of all these meetings are to be reported at the 1990 Annual Meeting.

If these processes are pursued openly and fairly, the next Corporation meeting could produce a historic reexamination of AFSC's identity and direction. Several critics told me they intend to keep the pressure on. But two of the most vigorous challenger's of the AFSC status quo, Sam Levering of North Carolina YM and Tom Angell of New York, both came away from last month's meeting with unusually positive reactions. "I think we were actually being listened to there," Levering declared. And Angell, looking ahead to next year's session, said "Clearly, there is an opportunity open to Friends in the next year. The AFSC is a place where almost all the currents of diversity among Friends could come together. Can we really learn to live with each other? Can we seize this opportunity, or will give in again to the Quaker weakness in dealing with our own conflicts?"

Good questions. Like others, we will be seeking answers over the next twelve months.

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

"(T)he soldiers are occupying our meeting house..." wrote Chalkley Gillingham in late 1861, "and it is so dirty we dislike to meet there—yet we do meet there every first day, and the soldiers with us—their swords and guns and knapsacks hanging all around the room." Gillingham lived in a Quaker settlement near Alexandria, Virginia and worshipped at the Woodlawn Meetinghouse. All through the Civil War Gillingham labored to uphold his Quaker testimonies, and maintain a productive way of life.

Alexandria Meeting has recently edited and published Gillingham's *Journal* (\$4.00 from P.O. Box 5623, Springfield, VA 22150), and here are entries from Twelfth Month, 1861 (the punctuation is his):

12th month 1st: First day to meeting house, filled with soldiers and guns. they behaved themselves orderly and had a quiet, comfortable time. I had considerable to say to them by way of testimony.
12th month, 2nd: Took wife and daughter and [son] Warrington to Washington. [They went] on to New

Jersey to attend the wedding of Warrington and Mary Ann Roberts.

12th month 9th: To Alexandria today. Took calf to market and got some wheelwright work done, and prepared to haul wood to town. We hear daily and at almost all times in the day the sound of Cannon and the report of small arms.

12th month, 10th & 13th: This is Warrington's wedding day....We suppose they are all enjoying themselves. Sent one cord of wood to town....I did not go to the wedding, not deeming it suitable to leave home—the family would then consist only of young folks, and this would be unsafe while the troops are all around us. 12th month, 15th: To Meeting at Woodlawn. Soldiers are still occupying the house and attending our Meetings, with their munitions of war. They did not behave very quiet today, talked and went out considerably.

We shall hear from Chalkley Gillingham again.

CHUCKLES FROM THE FRIENDS BIBLE CONFERENCE

Workshop leader: This session is on how the Bible comes alive for us, and I have just had Second Corinthians Chapter Three, Verse Six, "For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," come alive for me—I forgot my notes.

Patricia McKernon, in her concert on biblical themes, reflected on three things that Abraham might have said to cheer up his somewhat withdrawn son Isaac on the way back from the mountain where Abraham had been told (Genesis 22) to sacrifice him: #1. "Isaac, it won't happen again. Trust me." #2. "Think of it

this way, Isaac—God is a good teacher; He never gives the same exam twice." Finally, in desperation, #3. "Look, Isaac, read my lips: No new axes."

Overheard in another workshop:

Leader: "Let's look at the first chapter of Genesis." **Participant:** "That's my favorite part; it's where the Bible mentions baseball." **Leader:** "The Bible mentions baseball?" **Participant:** "Sure, right there in verse one: 'In the big inning.'"