

WHAT A GOOD IDEA: Representatives from the seven yearly meetings in the western U.S. met at Reedwood Friends Church in Eleventh Month, and agreed to ask their parent bodies to co-sponsor a gathering of all seven yearly meetings in 1992. They wrote that "Since all...bear the name Friend... we each grapple with the problem of what it means to be a Friend." They think dialogue and fellowship will be mutually helpful; and they are right.

A Friendly Letter

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Dear Friend,

Quakers working in Centra America have not, thank God, paid a price in blood like that of the six Jesuit priests recently murdered in El Salvador. But neither have Friends escaped the wave of repression aimed at those who would, however, peacefully, promote change and uplift for the poor. Three recent incidents deserve mention:

* Carmen Broz, a member of Palo Alto Meeting in California, who has worked in various development and educational projects in El Salvador for several years, fled San Salvador in Eleventh Month. The same night the Jesuits were killed, a woman who headed a project Carmen had worked with to set up a day care center was also assassinated. Carmen's home then came under surveillance for the first time, and the office of a project she worked with was ransacked, which she said was one of the sure signs of more violence to come.

* Meredith Larson, the daughter of a member of my own Langley Hill Meeting in Virginia, was attacked by men wielding knives in Guatemala in Twelfth Month. Larson was in Guatemala working with Peace Brigades International, whose members accompany local persons who are in danger. The PBI team had received death threats last spring, and grenades had been exploded near its office last summer. Meredith's arm was badly cut in the attack, and she has returned home to obtain neurological treatment of the wounds.

* Danilo Lopez, an Evangelical Friends pastor from Guatemala, fled his home last spring after receiving death threats. Lopez was pastor of the Guatemala City Friends Church, and had been organizing a project to help poor neighbors who lived on the edge of the city's huge garbage dump. Friend Jerry Sazama of Storrs Meeting, Connecticut, which had helped raise funds to support this project, told me that it was unclear who had made the death threats: Lopez had been a union organizer before becoming a pastor, and could thus have been targeted by the far right; on the other hand, it could have been nonpolitical local thugs

hired by the absentee landlords who charge the dump residents high rents for the privilege of living in tiny shacks at the edge of a mountain of garbage; or it could have been leftist guerrillas, who wanted Lopez to raise money for them. Take your pick; there's plenty of violence to go around.

Whatever their source, the threats worked: Danilo Lopez is now in Canada, and the Guatemala City Friends' Dump Project has been abandoned.

On the Richter scale of Central American bloodshed, these are minor, otherwise invisible tremors. But they show just how pervasive the use of violence and intimidation is in the region, and that there is no exemption for those who wish to seek change peacefully. These are dark years in that part of the world; those Friends who have worked in the Light there deserve our gratitude, and those who remain, our prayers and support.

Yours In The Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. I dislike mistakes, especially my own. But it appears that in last month's articles on the "Gray Nineties," there were three errors which need to be corrected. The least of them, in terms of substance, was the statement that the MacArthur Freeway in Oakland had collapsed during the recent California earthquake, when in fact it was the nearby Nimitz Freeway that fell. This is still embarrassing to a former Bay Area resident like myself. Corrections of the two other, more serious statistical lapses are found inside, along with some further reflections on the basis for my notions about the "gray nineties," including reader feedback. Further comments are, as always, welcome.

One night in 1967, a young Ohio schoolteacher carried a letter to the corner mailbox. It was his birthday; he was 22. At the mailbox he pulled the metal handle, and listened to the envelope drop. The schoolteacher was Joe Volk. The letter was addressed to his draft board, and, against the advice of both his family and his pastor, it said he was giving up his draft deferment. "When I heard the letter hit the bottom of the mailbox," Joe Volk recalls, "I didn't know what was coming, but I felt more at peace than I had."

What was coming was a pilgrimage that, 23 years later, led to Joe Volk's selection as the new Executive Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, one of the key jobs in Quakerdom. "The Vietnam War had a big effect on me," he says. "It put choices in front of me that I might not otherwise have made." Many other Americans his age could make such statements. And that letter marked one of the key choices of those years.

THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

Joe Volk had been raised in the small town of Blanchester, Ohio. The family was Methodist, and Joe was active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship in high school. He thought about becoming a pastor, and studied religion, theology and ethics at Miami University of Ohio. After college he began teaching school. In normal times, he might have stayed a teacher, or perhaps become a pastor. But as he said, Vietnam intervened. It made him reflect on his religious beliefs and the escalating war. He grew increasingly convinced that a draft deferment was not right for him. "I finally came to feel that it was not enough to just study Scripture," he recalls. "You also had to take risks for your faith. For me, that came to mean giving up the deferment."

Not that Joe was an active peacenik. In fact he didn't really consider himself a pacifist then. Thus, when the clerk of his draft board answered his letter by suggesting that he file for CO status, Joe thought some more, then declined. He could imagine a just war,

he replied; but Vietnam did not qualify, and he wouldn't go there.

When his draft notice came, there were more choices to make. Maybe he could enlist in the Air Force, on the theory that it was less a tool of unjust violence than the Army. Or should he refuse induction? But what about the chance to work with other GIs, educate them about the war's evil, and their own moral responsibility in the face of it? In the end, he submitted to induction, and was sent to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina for combat training. At Ft. Jackson, he did spend time talking to other GIs about the war. And he performed well as a rifleman. But when it came time for bayonet training, he found himself facing another realization, and another choice.

TO GO OR NOT TO GO....

Bayonet training itself was bad enough, with the new soldiers shouting, "The spirit of the bayonet is to kill!" as they stabbed dummies hanging on posts. But what was happening to the youths who were doing it was most troubling to Joe. "I saw people crying as they shouted the words," he says. "And I realized that the very thing we think we have an army to protect is being sandpapered off people as we prepare them to be part of it."

This experience put a new wrinkle on his evolving convictions. "I could see that there were things worth dying for, but after this experience I was convinced that there wasn't anything worth killing for. The use of violence destroyed what it was supposed to protect." So he quit training. His commanding officer, at first, was more embarrassed and puzzled than angry at Volk's apparent malingering. But such "disciplinary problems" made him look bad. And he didn't like the reports of Volk's discussions about Vietnam with other recruits. He tried coaxing Joe back into training, and when that didn't work, told the men Volk was "a general fuckup," and to ignore him.

Volk was stung by these barbs enough to show up for his riflery qualifying test, where he won an Expert

rifleman's badge. But when orders came for his unit to go to Vietnam, he refused to go, and he was court-martialed for being AWOL. In 9/1968 he was convicted and sentenced to six months confinement. He only served several weeks, at Fort Carson, Colorado. The guardhouse was so crowded, he says, that the army let most people out before their sentences were finished.

When orders came sending his new unit to Vietnam, Volk again explained that he wouldn't go. His new commander, seeing no point in another court-martial, finagled a slot for Volk at the base hospital, where he was given social work duties and taken off the roster headed for the war. And there, with neither a bang nor a whimper, his military career finally ended. Despite his record, he got an honorable discharge, and a Good Conduct Medal. "That's the way the clerks were running the Army by then," he says. "A lot of them were quietly sympathetic to my stand; even some officers were."

GOOD CONDUCT AFTER ALL

He returned to Miami of Ohio to pursue a master's in religion. But he didn't finish the degree. Instead, he got married, taught school for a year in Maine, and was drawn to Cambridge, Massachusetts and social activism. He spent most of 1971 working nights as a fry cook and volunteering days for the United Farmworkers Union.

It wasn't until the spring of the following year, after he was hired to do nonviolence training for the American Friends Service Committee's office in High Point, North Carolina, that Joe Volk became acquainted with the Society of Friends. Enroute from Cambridge to High Point, he and his wife stopped off in Washington to join a silent Quaker peace vigil outside the White House. From there, Joe Volk's career path was straightforward: he has been with AFSC ever since, moving from High Point to offices in Ohio and Michigan before becoming National Peace Secretary in Philadelphia in 1982. That will change in Fourth Month, when he moves to Washington and FCNL. There he will take

New Quaker Writing on the Bible from the Friends Bible Conference

The first Friends Bible Conference for unprogrammed Quakers since the 1920s was held in Philadelphia last November. More than 250 Friends attended, and most found it exciting and enriching. The Conference featured more than twenty workshops led by Friends actively involved in the study and use of the Bible as a spiritual resource for Friends today.

Now you can share the excitement and enrichment, in *Reclaiming a Resource: Papers From the Friends Bible Conference*. Among the essays and writers included here are:

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Jim Corbett: The Bible and Covenant Communities
Carol Conti-Entin: Using the Written Bible to Hear the Bible Within
Gracia Fay Bouwman Ellwood: Divine Judgment and the Near-Death Experience
Chuck Fager: From Detoxification to Godwrestling: Three Stages of Bible Study
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Herbert Lape: Dangerous Memory: The Bible as a Cloud of Witnesses Claiming Our Lives for God
Patty Levering: Approaches to Understanding Scripture
Kate McCrone: Curriculum for First Day: To Be or not To Be
Patricia McKernon: Children's Bible Music: A Discography
Ann Miller: The Bible as a Resource for Spiritual Growth
Arthur Rifkin: The Common Visions of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures
Jean Semrau: Retelling Biblical Stories
Mary Snyder: Children and the Bible: Experiencing, Discovering, Interpreting
Joanne Spears: Bible Study in Small Groups: a Method; and Translating the Bible for Children
Using Inclusive Language
Cynthia B. Taylor: Finding Sophia (Divine Wisdom) in Scripture and in Ourselves
Elizabeth Watson: The Gospel According to the Woman; and The Bible and Continuing Revelation
John Yungblut: The Bible and Archetypes in Jungian Perspective
Diane Bonner Zarowin: The Not-So-Bad Good Book: A personal Testimony

Reclaiming a Resource will be an important addition to Meeting libraries, and valuable reading for any Friend's spiritual journey. Only a limited number will be printed, so order soon. *Reclaiming a Resource* is edited by Chuck Fager, and will be published by Kimo Press; publication date is May 15, 1990.

Reclaiming a Resource / Friends Bible Conference

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over as only the third Executive Secretary in FCNL's 45-year history.

In preparing for his new job, Joe Volk has read minutes and documents from FCNL's first years, in the midst of World War Two. There he found Raymond Wilson, FCNL's founding Executive Secretary, repeatedly reminding Friends that the war would soon end, and they should consider how to address the problems of peace that were sure to follow. Joe Volk sees many parallels today with that era. "The post-world war order is collapsing, mostly nonviolently. How can FCNL and Friends have an effect on the shape of what follows?"

One current example suggests the general outline of the answer: Visiting Washington during the last congressional recess, Volk sat in on a meeting of lobbyists who were talking about how to get ready for hearings examining the prospect of a "peace dividend" resulting from reduced defense spending. As Joe recalls it, the lobbyists fell to arguing about some of their own intramural issues, and the meeting soon descended into pointless squabbling.

QUAKER PROCESSES, DAY BY DAY

But then FCNL's retiring Executive Secretary, Ed Snyder, quietly spoke up: The congressional committee, he said, needs to hear how an economy like ours changes from one that is military-driven to one that is civilian-driven. How do we enable them to hear that? With that question as a focus, the arguing stopped, and the lobbyists began making concrete plans about issues to raise and witnesses who could raise them. The session got back on track.

For Joe Volk, that exchange is a major example of what FCNL is about on Capitol Hill: quietly applying Quaker processes and testimonies in the legislative arena, day after day. But there is another side to FCNL too, one that looks out "beyond the Beltway" to its broad Quaker constituency.

FCNL is widely-respected for being representative of, and meaningfully accountable to, a Quaker constituency that includes Friends of both unprogrammed and programmed sorts, and

of both liberal and more conservative political views. This constituency's loyalty is shown year after year as FCNL manages to meet its frugal budget while other Washington peace groups run into serious financial problems. Preserving, expanding, and involving this base is the flip side of the task Joe Volk will soon assume. Volk himself says the next couple of years will be very important to this effort, and expects to do some traveling among Friends to this end. FCNL is also planning to expand its "Friend in Washington" program, which makes available office space for Friends released to work temporarily on legislative concerns in Washington.

The impact FCNL has on legislation is always difficult to measure, because there are so many actors and forces swirling around the Capitol at any given moment. But it is possible to gauge the depth of its continuing ties to Friends. So the most concrete measures of Joe Volk's performance in his new job will probably be taken "Beyond the Beltway", in terms such as these: Is FCNL maintaining and broadening its Quaker base of support? Do its lobbyists travel widely among Friends "beyond the Beltway?" Are its priorities still rooted in the hard-won unity among the rank-and-file Friends involved in its committees? Is it actually becoming a vehicle for helping release ordinary Friends to work on legislative concerns?

Joe Volk brings a lot of confidence and faith to these questions. We wish him well in pursuing the answers.

* * * * *

I regret having to end an upbeat profile on an unpleasant note. But a letter received not long after AFL #102 disclosed Joe Volk's nomination to his new post requires some attention. The letter was from Eleanor Brooks Webb of Baltimore, and reads as follows:

"I find myself unable to go about my own business without expressing to you my objection to your gossipy 'reporting' of a matter that does not lie in my own area of responsibility at all. I refer to your 'NEWS FLASH' in the top right corner of your Tenth Month issue.

"If it were in my area of responsibility--if, for instance, I were a member of FCNL's

Executive Committee--I would be furious. To spread in print the recommendation of a search committee before that recommendation has been acted upon by the employing body is not only undignified; it is potentially damaging to the appointment and to all the complex supervision-staff-public-etc.-etc. relationships which ensue.

"I have cared deeply about [FCNL] and its service to Friends and to the world--God's world--for 10 these many years. FCNL does not deserve to have its major staff appointment treated as a horse race. For that matter, it seems to me that a Quaker journalist with the best interest of the Religious Society of Friends at heart would show any Friends organization the courtesy of allowing it to announce its major appointments when they are in fact made, when it can support such an announcement with the appropriate information about the background, qualifications, and aspirations of the appointee.

"Have the speculations and gossip about FCNL's staff search which you have included in several previous issues of your so-called FRIENDLY LETTER, as well as in this one, served any purpose except your own sense of self-importance?

"Believe it or not, I make a real effort to find common ground with you, Chuck; and I often do find it. I greatly appreciated the 'It doesn't have to be like this' piece about drugs which you circulated with the Tenth Month issue. I am sorry to conclude once more that you cannot be trusted to know when not to publish a piece of information; that yours is a self-serving, irresponsible press of which Friends need to be wary. I wish I thought you might be willing to change.

Sincerely yours...."

Response: Eleanor Webb is right about one thing: No changes are planned in the journalistic approach she finds so offensive. A Friendly Letter's mission remains what it has been, to report and comment on major Quaker events, issues and personalities, especially those not adequately covered elsewhere. To me this seems a very responsible role, which does serve the Society's best interests. FCNL's selection process was among the most momentous in Quakerdom in the 1980's--but one otherwise entirely unreported. Those who find coverage of these topics infuriating are wise to be wary of the Letter, for there will be more such reporting as long as it continues.

As several sharp-eyed readers pointed out, there were two important statistical goofs in AFL #105's piece on the "Gray Nineties." Did these errors invalidate my thesis about the new decade? Two readers, one a trained economist, say they did; but I am not so sure. Let's go over them, and some further data, and you be the judge:

The biggest mistake involved figures on inflation and household income: I noted that the total inflation for the 1980's was about 50%, while average household income, in constant 1988 dollars, had increased only 1%. My error here was concisely stated by Friend William S. Samuel III of Maryland, who noted correctly that I "apparently did not understand 'constant 1988 dollars'." What this means is dollars adjusted for inflation."

Indeed, I did miss this, and concluded that costs had risen 50 percent over income. As Samuel adds, "To then consider the inflation rate in comparison with the income increase double counts inflation and leads to a totally erroneous conclusion." Ouch; but he's right.

MIXING UP THE FIGURES

Next, as Samuel also noted, I "miscalculated the percentage increase" in the income figures reported (from \$25,426 to \$27,225). "In fact, it is not 1% but more than 7%."

This last was particularly upsetting. How did I make such a blunder, I wondered. The answer is that I collected more than one set of income figures in my research, and another set, published in *USA Today*, did show only a one percent increase. And I mixed up the two sets when writing the piece, without reconciling the rate.

How much difference do these errors make to my argument about the "Gray Nineties"? Friend Samuel concluded from them that "Your thesis of downward mobility, therefore, is simply wrong...." Rather than downward mobility, he believes that "The much more significant economic change in the

1980's was the steadily increasing share of national income in the hands of the wealthy, while that in the hands of the poor shrank. This trend in distribution of income will tend to lead to greater conflict in American society."

A more sanguine view of the future was that of economist and Friend Jack Powelson of Boulder, Colorado: "Cheer up ol' boy!" he wrote. "The nineties may not be so 'gray' as you think." He likewise noted the two mistakes, and pointed out that average income and consumption levels had increased in the '80s, as had the housing supply.

Powelson then argued that, "...if one misinterprets the data, however unintentionally, one misinterprets the problem. If one thinks that income has been falling, one concludes that people have to work harder to keep up. But if one concludes that income is rising and still people work harder, then the problem lies elsewhere, like the person who said, 'I have always thought of joining Workaholics Anonymous, but I never could fit it into my schedule.'"

WE ARE NOT AMONG THE LOSERS

"I believe your analysis errs," he continues, "when you tell us that middle and upper middle class Quakers are going to be among the [economic] losers [in the 1990's]. There is no indication of that in the data. But our society has real problems which you have skipped over...." Among these, he says, is "income distribution. In 1980, 3.7% of families had incomes under \$5,000 (in 1987 dollars); in 1987 it was 4.4%. At the other end, 17.5% of families had incomes of \$50,000 or more in 1980, but that figure had risen to 22.9% in 1987. The increasing maldistribution is surely related to homelessness."

In Powelson's view the sources of this increasing maldistribution are threefold: "(1) a decline of commitment, which makes both marriage and divorce easier and less demanding, with less thought for children's welfare; (2) drugs; and (3) materialism and greed. The common feature of all these is that they are personal failings more than

societal. To me, your analysis with faulty data implies that the problem is societal more than personal." He adds that our savings rate also needs to be increased, and this will require some cut in consumption.

I appreciate this feedback, especially the clearing up of my embarrassing statistical gaffes. And I agree with much of it: Powelson is surely right that destructive personal habits contribute to our problems; and both he and Samuel agree that maldistribution of income is a trend.

But does this mean my thesis that middle class Quakers face "the substantial erosion of our own economic status..." is completely mistaken?

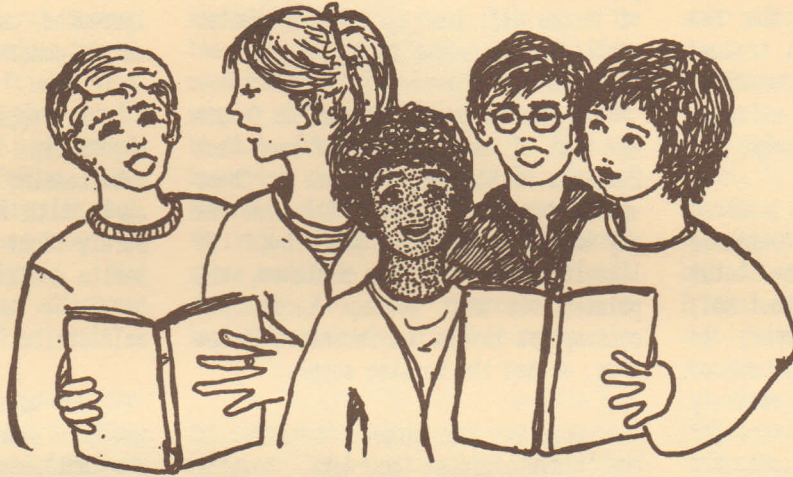
I'm not so sure. It may need some refining, but I am not alone in believing it still has meaning even after adjusting for these errors.

DOCUMENTING A U-TURN

Seeking authoritative statistics on this issue, I asked Howard Wachtel, an economics professor at American University, for help. He steered me to the Economic Policy Institute. EPI has published two excellent papers on this issue, *The State of Working America*, and *Family Incomes in the 1980s*, using top-quality statistics, carefully interpreted. I recommend these papers (\$9 from EPI, 1730 Rhode Island Ave. NW, #812, Washington DC 20036) for readers who want a fully documented overview of this data. Another excellent source is the book *The Great U-Turn*, by economists Bennett Harrison and Barry Bluestone (Basic Books, 1988).

What does EPI's data show? While average income for all families rose in the 1980's, the actual increase was concentrated at the top of the economic ladder: "In fact, average annual earnings for the bottom 60 percent were lower in 1986 than in 1979...." (*Family Incomes*, p.8.) Overall, "In 1987, the typical family's real income was about the same as it was in 1979 and in 1973, comparable years of relatively low unemployment. Moreover, the families who

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Friends Music Camp, now preparing its eleventh season, is for young people aged 10 to 18, of any race or religion, who wish to pursue musical excellence and increase their acquaintance with Quakerism, while participating in a caring community.

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were able to maintain their 1979 standard of living did so by working more hours and by having more members work. Families had to work more just to stay even. Those families that could not or did not send an additional adult into the labor force experienced income declines of from 4% to 6.5% since 1979." (Working America, p.iii.)

Harrison and Bluestone put this trend in another way, based on research by the respected Urban Institute: "[T]he typical young male baby boomer in the 1980's has not come anywhere close to enjoying the same rising living standards as his parents did when they were the same age. The 25-year old in 1950 could expect to see his real income more than double by age 35. The same was true of 25-year olds in 1960. But in the 1970's, the gain in income between the ages of 25 and 35 was a mere 16 percent. [The] forecast is for negative income growth among this cohort in the decade of the 1980's." (U-Turn, p. 134.)

THOSE NAGGING NUMBERS

Ballooning housing costs have been a big part of these declining prospects: "...in 1973, the typical 30-year old male with average earnings required 21 percent of his salary to finance the mortgage on the median-priced home. In 1983, a similar 30-year old needed 44 percent of his monthly pay to afford an equivalently priced house." (Ibid, p. 136.) No wonder home ownership has declined steadily among this group.

Overall, inequality in family income, after declining until 1965, has also increased drastically: "Put in its starkest terms, every bit of the progress made toward American equality during the first twenty years after World War Two was wiped out in the next decade-and-a-half." (U-Turn, p. 130.)

Another expression of this trend was published in the Washington Post in 12/89, based on Census Bureau data. They divided the population in fifths, or quintiles, according to their shares of the national income. This breakdown showed clearly, as the Post put it, that "only those in the top 20 percent increased their share of the nation's

income" between 1980 and 1988. Those in the second and third "quintiles", where most Friends are located, lost ground.

The important point here is that, "income maldistribution" is another name for downward social mobility. One could think of income growth as like a horse race: The wealthy, bunched at the front, have been pulling away from the pack, while a growing number of families have fallen many lengths behind.

The meaning of the many statistics in this field, as any reader of Op-Ed pages knows, is debatable. Economics may involve exact measurements, but it is hardly an exact science--especially when dealing with the future. Does this data show that the cup of middle class incomes is half-full and filling, or half-empty and draining? Economists differ sharply in their interpretations.

BLAME IT ON THE YUPPIES?

Take for instance the Louis Harris Poll results I cited about the increase in the work week and corresponding decline in leisure time; in the Wall Street Journal of 1/4/1990, two scholars argued vehemently over whether the poll was describing anything real. And Jack Powelson feels that what reality it does express mostly reflects rampant materialism. He wrote scornfully of "the yuppies who tell us they must have two incomes to make ends meet, and they neglect their children to do so. Even with one income they would have much more than their parents did. But their material aspirations (euphemism for greed) have outrun their increased incomes, and they want more, more, more!!! To rationalize this, they say life is impossible otherwise."

That's his interpretation, and I'm sure there's some truth in it. But it's not unarguable, and the Harris poll and EPI's data supports other views. The reports of more work and less leisure certainly fits my non-yuppie reality, and that of most other midlife, middle class Quakers I know. Are we materialistic? Mea culpa; but I don't think it is just rationalization to see in this as well the disproportionate impact on middle-income families of drastic rises in such items as health,

education and housing costs.

I doubt that it is simply self-indulgence which drives more of us to work two jobs today, by Census Bureau reckoning, than ever before since they started keeping track in the 1950's. Finally, if things have been so good, and are likely to keep improving, why are so many Americans so gloomy about the future? This anxiety shows up in both anecdotal and scientific samples: Anecdotally, a Friend from Oregon called to order several copies of AFL#105 for his meeting, where, he says, the "Gray Nineties" notion really struck a chord among them and they want to use it as an aid to discussion of their condition.

WELCOME TO THE TREADMILL

More scientifically, a brand-new Washington Post-ABC News Poll (1/21/90) reported that, while most of those surveyed "pay lip service to traditional American optimism, closer scrutiny suggests they don't mean it...a majority of voters said they expect their lives to improve in the next 10 years. But by far more lopsided majorities, they also said that it will be harder for young people to buy a house, get a job, go to college and save money--and that on matters from drugs to crime to pollution to homelessness, things will get worse in the next decade, not better." Health care was another major concern--and well it might be: a survey released on 1/29 showed that employee health insurance costs increased by 20.4% in 1989 alone.)

This latest Post-ABC poll shows that, if my idea of the "Gray Nineties" is overly pessimistic, it is not unusual. Nor is it without basis. Most of "America's families today," Harrison and Bluestone conclude, "find themselves on a treadmill. They must run as fast as possible--and work harder than ever--to sustain a standard of living no greater than that which prevailed in 1973." (U-Turn, p.138.) Some causes of this decline are still in dispute, as for that matter are proposals for what to do about it. Even so, it would seem that the suggestion made in AFL #105, that in such a climate, deepened involvement in religious communities has survival value as well as spiritual merit, is still sound advice, both economically and religiously.

INSIDE: FCNL'S QUAKER OF THE YEAR;
QUAKERS AT RISK IN CENTRAL AMERICA;
AND MORE ABOUT THE GRAY NINETEENTIES

Address Correction Requested

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

"What," asked the rich young man in Matthew 19:16, "must I do to be saved?" Christians have been arguing ever since about the proper reply to this question. Was it simply "Keep the commandments," as Jesus answered in verse 17? Or was it "Sell everything" as he added a moment later? Or was it something else besides?

For Joel Bean, as for many other 19th century Friends, being saved involved a lifelong struggle to mind the Light of Christ, with real progress slow and difficult. But in Iowa Yearly Meeting, of which he was Clerk in 1877, another view was rapidly gaining ground.

This was the Holiness theology of the wave of revivals. By this view, salvation need not take a lifetime; once a sinner accepted Christ, there was a "second work of grace" to be sought, which would instantly cleanse the soul of every tendency toward sin, and make one perfect. This second work was called Sanctification.

To Joel Bean, this Holiness theology was ridiculous,

especially since it was accompanied by all the paraphernalia of revivalism--singing, mourners benches, altar calls, and long emotional sermons by evangelists--which a true Quietist Quaker wanted nothing to do with.

But In Second Month, 1877, the waves of revivalism which were sweeping over Iowa Friends hit Bear Creek Meeting full force. Two evangelists began holding meetings there, and soon were calling on Friends to come forward and seek the Sanctification experience. One evening about twenty people responded so enthusiastically that some even climbed over the benches in their eagerness. Those who hung back were then surrounded by loud, importunate prayer groups. Horrified at the hubbub, many tradition-minded Friends walked out. One elderly woman, as she left, paused to climb on a bench and proclaim, "The Society of Friends is dead. This has killed it."

The report was surely exaggerated. But if she had said instead that revivalism had thrown the Society of Friends into deep turmoil, none could have gainsaid her.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

According to Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln delighted in telling a story about a Quaker boy, Sam'l, whose father wanted to stop him from taking the Lord's name in vain. So he sat Sam'l in front of a rathole with two blacksmith tongs and said: "Now Sam'l, thee will sit here until thee has [caught] a rat. If I hear thee swear, thee will sit here till thee has [caught] another."

Sandburg said Lincoln impersonated the boy by leaning over, holding two umbrellas, and went on with the tale:

"And Sam'l sat there for hours, snipping the tongs a few times, but no rat caught. At last one came out of the rat hole, the whiskers peeping up, then the black nose, and the eyes blinking. And the two umbrella tongs snapped together in a flash. And Sam'l yelled, "By God, I have thee at last!"

"And Lincoln with a shaking, swaying frame let out a squeal and stood holding an imaginary wriggling rat between the two umbrellas," Sandburg wrote.