



YOU READ IT HERE FIRST DEPARTMENT: In "Downscale Consumers, Long Neglected, Start To Get Some Respect From Marketers," *The Wall Street Journal*, 5/31/1990, reported: "...middle class consumers may respond to down-to-earth pitches in growing numbers because more are feeling squeezed. Since the early 1970s, family incomes have hardly managed to stay ahead of inflation."

A Friendly Letter

ISSUE NUMBER 110

ISSN #0739-5418

SIXTH MONTH, 1990

Dear Friend,

This issue is late getting finished and in the mail; my apologies. The pressure of finishing the second Friendly Bookshelf Catalog, which is enclosed with subscribers' copies of this issue, combined with the labor of sorting out a pile of material on South Africa, pushed me past my normal deadline.

Also delayed is the arrival of **Reclaiming A Resource: Papers From the Friends Bible Conference**, which was due on 5/15 and which many of you have ordered. In this case I don't know what the problem is; the book has been at the printer for over a month, and completion is expected imminently. I appreciate your patience.

Another delay that is worth noting is the much-anticipated departure of Popeye the Quaker Man. You may recall from AFL#108 that a Quaker Oats Company spokesperson assured Friends that the sailor's appearance in their instant oatmeal packages was aimed only at the hot cereal "season", which ended with Second Month. But as of two days ago, there were still lots of Popeye packages piled on the shelves of my nearby supermarket. So if you or your meeting was thinking about writing to William Smithburg, Quaker Oats' CEO at P.O. Box 6001, Chicago 60604, but thought the brouhaha was over, you might want to think again, because it isn't.

On the upside, though, the Popeye story has made international headlines since then, in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Canadian Broadcasting, the Ecumenical Press Service in Geneva, a spate of pieces in the Philadelphia papers and elsewhere. For the sake of truth it must be admitted that the headlines were mainly small ones, printed in obscure corners of neglected religion pages; but hey--when was the last time the big media paid us any attention at all?

Something that is on schedule is the upcoming Gathering of Friends General Conference at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Reports from the FGC office indicate that once again, for the fifth year in a row, the conference is likely to be filled to capacity, drawing close to 1600 Friends. The significance of the enthusiasm the Gathering generates was underscored for me recently when I pored through the membership and attendance statistics from the latest yearbooks of most programmed yearly meetings some weeks ago. Most of them showed

declining membership, or only small growth despite large investments of energy and money. I wish some of the church growth-oriented pastoral Friends would swallow their squeamishness about weirdo Hicksites and come see what FGC is doing; you could learn something, Friends, and we don't bite. (*What, never? Well, hardly ever.*)

Finally, in AFL#102 we recounted the tale of Central Philadelphia Meeting's struggle over and with two homeless men who camped out on their porch in public view for several weeks last summer and fall. The whole incident seemed to be an almost biblical sign of the times; and this impression has since been confirmed by items in the recent newsletters of two other large urban meetings, excerpted here as food for thought and reflection:

Cambridge, Massachusetts, First Month: *The clerk gave an interim report on a meeting of representatives of our various committees to discuss the Meeting's response to the homeless people who have been coming to the Friends Center on First Day and other days....In recent weeks, approximately twelve homeless persons may have been present on First day, often drawn by the warmth and food available; at times the gathering at lunch time has seemed to split into two groups as members and attenders separate from the homeless people. Two persons have been asked to sign up for each First day...to be with visitors. [Proposed recommendations for dealing with these persons included] having the Center not available to homeless people outside these [specified] hours [on First Day] except to use the phone and bathroom. The Meeting House is open for worship. [Another recommendation was] barring persons whose behavior is not under appropriate control.*

Friends Meeting of Washington, Fifth Month: *The Personnel Committee is concerned about the feelings, the safety and the well-being of office staff who, during the work week, are faced with demanding and abusive panhandlers. Friends Meeting of Washington members and attenders can help discourage this behavior by responding to distress stories in ways other than by providing cash....*

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

AMERICAN QUAKERS AND SOUTH AFRICA: HEARING A NEW MESSAGE

Two notable visitors are coming to America from South Africa this summer. One of them, Nelson Mandela, you will hear a lot about. He is touring much of the West, and early reports indicate that he is delivering a clear message to supporters: If you want to help speed the end of apartheid, economic sanctions against South Africa should be continued.

The other visitor will come and go without fanfare. His audience will number a few hundred at best. Yet his message may be as important as Mandela's, particularly for Friends. This second visitor is Hendrik van der Merwe, a white South African, who grew up in an Afrikaaner farming community. Once active in the Dutch Reformed Church, he was educated with men who are now in top government positions. But Hendrik van der Merwe didn't follow that route. For one thing, he has long opposed apartheid. For another, he is now a Quaker, having come to Friends in the early 1960s. And while he maintains links with his elite white classmates, he is also a friend of Nelson and Winnie Mandela. In fact, they made him the godfather of one of their children, and grandchildren.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Van der Merwe is Director of the Center For Intergroup Studies in Cape Town. The Center is unique in South Africa, sort of a think tank-plus, developing the theory and practice of conciliation and mediation in its society. Needless to say, the Center has had rather a full plate in recent years; and van der Merwe has earned his stripes as a mediator: he helped negotiate a ceasefire in a round of bloody black infighting in Natal. And he set up the first meeting between a white establishment delegation and exiled leaders of the African National Congress, in 1984.

His message to Americans sounds different from Mandela's--at first hearing perhaps even contradictory. But in fact they are complementary. Above all, van der Merwe says it is possible to work for both justice and peace in South Africa today, but to do so most effectively, we will need to outgrow partisanship and what he calls the

"boycott mentality."

Does this mean van der Merwe is against sanctions? Not at all: "Conditional sanctions, strikes, boycotts, and other withholding actions are valuable and efficient strategies in the political struggle," he affirms in his book, **Pursuing Justice and Peace In South Africa**. (Routledge, 1989; available through the Friendly Bookshelf Catalog inserted in subscribers' copies of this issue.)

WHEN MEANS BECOME ENDS

But there are boycotts--and there are boycotts; and "when a boycott becomes an end in itself, a principle and not a strategy, it no longer constitutes a constructive approach to the accommodation of conflict....Moral commitment to universal human rights has been replaced by moral indignation about injustice and anger toward the oppressors, with resultant punitive action to give expression to this indignation and anger. This tends to give the boycott an *expressive* rather than an *instrumental* character. It becomes the goal itself, rather than the means. Commitment to boycott as a strategy tends to over-simplify the issues, to narrow the scope of operation, and to increase intolerance. Moral indignation shapes a negative short-term goal--that of destroying the object of indignation." (Pages 81,83)

While black South Africans are justly indignant and angry, this destructive boycott mentality is more common, in van der Merwe's experience, in foreign countries. He reports that "In my mediation efforts on an international level my role as mediator has invariably been more warmly acknowledged by South African leaders of liberation movements in exile than by spokesmen of anti-apartheid and boycott movements of other nationalities." (Page 69)

This total boycott mentality has been evident in much American anti-apartheid activism, including among Friends. Its most vigorous advocate in our midst has been the American Friends Service Committee, as expressed in its book, **South Africa: Challenge and Hope** (Hill & Wang, revised edition, 1987). While the authors avoid the

term "boycott," calling instead for "economic disengagement," this is defined as "the termination of all profit-making activities, including the sale of products or distribution of goods and services (directly or through third-party arrangements), franchising, collection of royalties, consultant arrangements, and such, in addition to withdrawal of all capital assets." This demand is laid on "all individuals, organizations and corporations." (Pages 128, 129)

The basis for this demand is "a moral one....To be engaged in making a profit of any sort in South Africa is to be making a profit from an immoral and unjust system of oppression. The same argument is true for other economic relationships, such as the purchase of South African products." How this differs from a "boycott," which the book defines as "refusing to buy or sell to South Africa selected products or all products," is not clear, except that "disengagement" seems meant to be even more total. (Page 143)

MAKING BOOK ON BOYCOTTS

As Hendrik van der Merwe pointed out, such a total boycott strategy is bound to produce some counter-productive effects. Take for instance the case of American book publishers. They clearly fall within the sweep of AFSC's call, but the Association of American Publishers (AAP) is against book boycotts, on the sound principle that "books are among the most effective agents for change in the world..." as their board said on 1/14/1988. Yet despite this noble stance, many U.S. publishers face a Catch-22: a growing list of their domestic customers--colleges, cities, libraries, etc.--have adopted the boycotters' demand not to do business with any companies "making a profit" in South Africa.

As a result, most U.S. publishers have been forced to abandon their principles in South Africa to preserve their sales at home. But has this really helped the blacks' struggle? Last year a racially mixed AAP team went to South Africa to study the impact of this boycott on blacks, and gauge South African reaction. The results of their research were striking: Of 75 South Africans they interviewed, "not one

supported the inclusion of books and educational materials." (Emphasis theirs.) Their conclusion was searing: "...by embargoing the sale and shipment of U.S. books to South Africa, Americans are unwittingly abetting the South African government in its 'systematic starvation of young black minds.'"

Other existing boycotts have also had mixed results. A careful new study by the respected Investors Responsibility Resource Center in Washington suggests that the boycotts of South African imports mandated by the U.S. sanctions law appear to have moved some moderate whites toward willingness to compromise; but they have had the most negative impact on black incomes, because they are of products (e.g., coal and farm products) mainly produced with black labor.

WHO SAYS THEY LIKE TO SUFFER?

U.S. activists, however, have repeatedly assured us that South African blacks don't mind these deprivations. Witness AFSC: "Constant suffering and continued uncertainty, according to many blacks, make additional suffering almost irrelevant and even welcome, if the right change can be brought about by it. The majority of blacks urge divestment and disinvestment, stressing their willingness to take the consequences." (P.136)

No sources are cited for this last sweeping conclusion, and this makes it highly suspect. Available survey data does not confirm it: polls of black opinion about the boycotts, one by Gallup, found black support for boycotts diminished rapidly as the prospect of black suffering increased. These polls have been attacked as unreliable, and perhaps they are technically flawed. Yet their trend was certainly confirmed by the unanimous rejection of a book boycott in the AAP survey.

To be sure, anti-apartheid activists can cite Nelson Mandela and other leaders as supporters; but do they support the total boycott mentality? Not necessarily. Take books again: just when the AAP team was visiting South Africa, the African National Congress endorsed their position, and now urges exemption of books from the boycott.

Moreover, there are in fact many other black leaders, some with large

constituencies, who reject sanctions and boycotts. These divisions have much to do with the mass violence that has recently racked black areas of Natal, and the widespread black terrorism against suspected collaborators. While racist whites clearly exploits and even incites such violence, these divisions are not simply a white creation.

As if to confirm van der Merwe's comments about the narrowing and oversimplifying of issues, these black dissenters are typically either ignored or derided as tools of apartheid by U.S. activists; AFSC's book quotes Winnie Mandela calling such leaders "puppets" which the white government uses "to oppress their people." (P. 187) Considering the shocking accounts of Winnie Mandela's involvement in beatings of youth who were kidnapped and later murdered by her own body guards (whose leader was recently convicted on homicide charges), such comments, I believe, should be taken with reserve.

WARFARE BY ANY OTHER NAME

In sum, while virtually all blacks despise apartheid, it is a fact that there are sharp conflicts over *how* to end it and *who* should lead the struggle. There are parallel conflicts among whites, with government reformers under relentless, and growing pressure from far right groups. Hendrik van der Merwe's survey of this complex and dangerous flux is far more nuanced and even-handed than those of the partisan presentations. He shows sympathy toward all the groups, and he argues that all must be included an agreement to end apartheid if it is to last.

Considering the terrible toll of black infighting (many more blacks killed in recent years in internecine warfare than by government forces), van der Merwe raises a question about the boycott mentality which ought to weigh especially heavily with Quakers, whether such a total boycott is a kind of warfare, "an obvious form of institutional violence." (Page 84) Other Friends have voiced this concern before: Jack Powelson, an economist from Boulder, Colorado Meeting raised it in articles and his book *Facing Social Revolution*; S. Francis Nicholson, the longtime manager of investments for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, objected on

similar grounds to similar proposals there, as he recounts in his new Pendle Hill Pamphlet (#290) *Quaker Money*.

My own belief is that the Peace Testimony **can** be reconciled with limited and carefully-targeted economic sanctions, such as the UN-sponsored arms embargo. This, incidentally, is the position of the Friends Committee on National Legislation; and van der Merwe thinks so too. I was anxious to see AFSC's response to this concern, but was startled to find that their book does not even consider the question of whether its total "disengagement" is a form of violence anywhere in its 235 pages.

For most of the 1980s, Hendrik van der Merwe and these others were swimming hopelessly against the stream when it came to questioning the boycott mentality among Friends. Now, however, there are signs that this tide may be cresting, if not beginning to recede a bit, at least in the Society.

A TURN OF THE TIDE, MAYBE

For instance, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, in the wake of its long struggle over divestment (South Africa-related stocks were ultimately sold) has established a South Africa Working Group, which is making connections between Philadelphia Friends and the small but active group of South African Quakers, which sponsors several peace and service projects. And during a visit this spring, Hendrik van der Merwe was for the first time invited to address AFSC staffers in its Philadelphia headquarters.

Van der Merwe is a quiet but dogged optimist about all this; he believes there will be a majority rule government in his native land soon. And he interprets these few signs of response from Friends to his concerns as portending a warming of American Quaker interest in the risky, unglamorous work of bridge-building in South Africa that has been his vocation.

I hope he is right, because it's about time. Even in the best scenarios, those who labor for both justice and peace in South Africa will have plenty to do for many years to come. As they continue their work, American Friends ought to be stand firmly with them, helping them build those bridges.



INSIDE: RETHINKING QUAKER WITNESS ON SOUTH AFRICA

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

An integrated school in Cape Town South Africa? Yes, there was one, for forty years. And, that's right, it was founded and supported by Friends.

The key figure behind the school was a British Quaker nurseryman named James Backhouse, of a redoubtable clan of Friends in York, who spent nine years in the 1830s and early 1840s traveling the world under various concerns, both religious and botanical. On Sixth Month 27, 1838, he landed in Cape Town with another Friend, an Australian named George Washington Walker.

The pair spent two years traveling through the growing colonies, visiting missionaries of various denominations, holding public meetings for worship, spending time with the handful of isolated Friends they found living there, and reporting back to London Yearly Meeting on their experiences, observations, and opportunities for service.

Their first open meeting in Cape Town drew 150 interested persons--and a number of "rude young men" whose disturbances had to be restrained by the police. Another milestone was an integrated missionary service

celebrating the end of slavery in the Cape Colony. When a Temperance Tea meeting was held the following evening, Backhouse and Walker paid for the tea out of funds they were carrying on behalf of London Yearly Meeting, and both signed the total abstainer's pledge.

Back in Cape Town in Sixth Month 1840, the two Friends drafted a lengthy document entitled *A Word of Christian Counsel to the White Inhabitants of South Africa*, which urged readers, among other things, to see that the abolition of slavery was a great blessing, to train their African servants in Christianity, and, above all, to forswear the partaking of spirits. Several weeks later they issued a similar address to *The Black People of South Africa*.

At the same time, they had begun work on founding their school, "for children of the poorer classes." Backhouse wrote home optimistically that with the end of slavery, color prejudice was now dissipating. While he was clearly wrong about that, the school was underway before he left for England in Twelfth Month, 1840, with 50 pupils. In 1843 its enrollment was 128, including not only various races but also both boys and girls. With British Quaker support, the school continued until 1879.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Query: If thee had looked closely at the **New York Times** of 10/5/1989, thee would have seen the headline: **Reeling Lions to Be Fed to Quakers**. Can thee guess what section this was in, and which institutions were referred to? (Answers at the end of this section.)

A British Friend in the early nineteenth century was persuaded to accept a high appointment in an African colony, in hopes of doing good to the benighted natives. When he arrived at his post, he asked his top assistant to

gather the local chieftains to hear his inaugural address. As the Friend's pledges of probity and fair treatment were translated, the gathered elders frequently interrupted with upraised arms and shouts of "Hoo-rah! Hoo-rah!"

Afterward, the gratified Friend shook hands and headed back to his carriage. As he did so, his driver pointed to the ground and said, "Sir, please to watch out. Don't step in the hoo-rah."

(Answers to Query: *The Sports Section, a football game between Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania.*)