



QUESTION OF THE MONTH: Will Quakers fill two top jobs at the American Friends Service Committee? Interviews are underway for a new personnel director and a national Peace Secretary. The former Peace Secretary, Joe Volk, was the only Friend heading an AFSC program division; the former personnel director was a non-Friend. Their successors could help re-Quakerize AFSC. **Watch those spaces.**

A Friendly Letter

ISSUE NUMBER 112

ISSN #0739-5418

EIGHTH MONTH, 1990

Dear Friend,

Last month in Bloomington, Indiana, Friends United Meeting(FUM) gathered for the first Triennial session of the 1990s, and of its second century. This Letter has followed FUM's vicissitudes through the turbulent 1980s, when controversies over biblical interpretation, Orthodox Quaker doctrine, and homosexuality pushed it, at its last Triennial in 1987, to the very brink of division.(See AFLs #23, 30, 44, 46, 69, 72, 75 & 89.)

But FUM pulled back from the brink in 1987, when it declined to re-affirm the Richmond Declaration of Faith. FUM thereby tacitly gave up its old triumphalist posture, which maintained the fiction that the Declaration's theology was the authentic, and authenticating, measure of Quakerism, and FUM its authoritative embodiment. In its place, FUM accepted a brief "Two O'clock minute" which, while reaffirming FUM's Christian identity, acknowledged that it was a part of a larger "diverse body" of Quakerism.

The sea-change marked by this new, hard-won ecumenism was evident throughout the public sessions of the 1990 Triennial: There was plenty of the traditional prayer and praise in the programmed-evangelical manner; but its featured Johnson Lecturer, Douglas Gwyn, explicitly affirmed both the pastoral-evangelical and the unprogrammed-universalist wings of FUM. He also offered both groups some sharp and trenchant criticisms. (His talk, "The Covenant of Light," is worth reading in full; write to FUM, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond IN 47374 and ask for a copy.) Similarly, the daily Bible study was presented by Dorothy Reichardt, an unprogrammed Friend from Philadelphia, whose approach to the Scriptures was quite modern, though also quite reverent.

Even more remarkable, in light of FUM's history in the eighties, was the calm with which the unofficial presence of a representative of Friends For Lesbian and Gay Concerns was taken. At the 1981 triennial, even an informal discussion of the H-word was banned; in 1984, the host yearly meeting threatened to cancel its sponsorship if the word was mentioned.

But this year, FLGC held informal worship and discussion sessions almost daily; these were routinely announced from the clerk's table and even noted in the daily bulletin, along with many other informal gatherings. And this occurred without hysteria or disruption of the

gathering's formal agenda, so that a newcomer might well not have noticed it at all; though there was some grumbling about it heard around the margins.

And so change has come to FUM. It is doubtful that among its core supporters many opinions have changed about homosexuality--or, for that matter, about the Bible and Orthodox doctrine. But what was once unmentionable has become at least mentionable, without the sky falling. And that, from our perspective at least, is progress indeed.

There was also a rich undercurrent of irony at the Triennial: In 1987, the case for the Richmond Declaration of Faith was made most vigorously by certain pastors from California, now Southwest Yearly Meeting. But now comes news that some of these same pastors, who head large, community-church style congregations, are pressing their Yearly Meeting to allow communion and baptism services, reviving an ancient controversy that the Richmond Declaration was itself intended to quell.

This switch is a most revealing one. It shows only too starkly how little these pastors care for Quakerism, as compared with their generic version of evangelical Christianity. For while the Richmond Declaration was fuzzy on many topics, it is foursquare and crystal clear **against** the outward observance of such "ordinances". To its authors, this was the last bulwark between Quakerism and complete absorption into a nondescript holiness revivalism. This is evidently a distinction the California Waterite pastors care but little for; the Declaration was a convenient stick with which to beat up on the liberal wing of FUM; but back home, they don't let it get in their way.

These pastors were conspicuous by their absence from the 1990 FUM Triennial; this no doubt had much to do with why the sessions went off as calmly as they did. I hope they and their leaven of the pharisees will stay west of the Sierras, leaving those FUM Friends, pastoral and nonpastoral, for whom **Quakerism** still has real meaning to work out its destiny without their insincere interference.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

QUAKERS AND REPRESSION IN KENYA: FACING THE UNPLEASANT FACTS

It was a shameful, and shameless, spectacle: the top officials of the Southern Baptist Convention, schmoozing last month with President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya, then crooning to the press (as reported in *National & International Religion Report* 7/30/90) about how the president had identified with them, proclaimed himself an evangelical Christian and declared "his love for the Lord." The Southern Baptists were in Kenya for a big crusade, which reportedly was packing them in and winning thousands for Christ. During their presidential visit, the report laconically added, "They avoided political topics."

No doubt the Baptist poobahs' discretion was prudent; after all, the blood had scarcely been washed from the streets of Nairobi after Moi's security forces had opened fire on demonstrators against his repressive one-party regime, killing more than twenty, and then arresting most of the publicly-identified human rights activists in the country. The killings were the high point (so far) of a crackdown that has been underway for months.

MOSCOW, YES; NAIROBI, NO

Do you recall reading about these shootings? Kenyans were being gunned down for simply wanting to talk about having a multiparty system, in the very same week that Boris Yeltsin and others walked out of the Communist Party Congress in Moscow and announced the beginnings of an opposition party. And as this is written, Yeltsin *et al.* are still out of jail and going about their subversive business undisturbed.

There has only been marginal media coverage of the Kenyan crackdown. But for my money the Baptists' courtesy call on Moi, "avoiding political topics", was the moral equivalent of having a cordial tea with the Chinese Politburo within days after Tiananmen Square, or sharing a slice of pumpernickel with Hitler while Berlin's streets still glistened with the shards of Kristallnacht. Not only did they help polish the image of a bloody regime, their stance was blatantly hypocritical: These same Southern Baptist Convention leaders have been pillars of Religious

Right agitation throughout the eighties, hardly ever opening their mouths without repeating the litany of its highly politicized agenda. Not in Nairobi, tho.

But leave that aside; this is a Quaker publication, after all, and what has all this Baptist-bashing got to do with Quakers? Here's what: Many Friends could be put in a very similar situation in less than a year. Last month, in fact, some of them came very close to such a stance in Indiana. And it is time to act now if a much larger humiliation is to be headed off.

This is what happened last month: At Friends United Meeting, several dozen Kenyan Quakers were present when unanimous, hearty approval was given to a strongly-worded minute condemning Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as a violation of human rights, and urging a cutoff of U.S. military aid to Israel.

JERUSALEM, YES; NAIROBI, NO

But then a much more restrained minute was proposed, expressing distress over the killings and repression in Kenya, and urging the government there to observe international human rights standards and democratic processes. After a brief consultation, the New Business Committee Clerk reported that there might be a problem with the minute and so it was being referred to the World Ministries Commission for further advice. It was not really a surprise that the minute might prove controversial. But at the World Ministry Commission's session that afternoon, when the minute was read, the Kenyans' reaction was close to sheer panic:

This cannot even be discussed here, one said urgently, for it might get into the press or a broadcast, and be heard back home, and this could make our reentry into the country very difficult.

Quakers in Kenya are not involved, insisted another.

Without entering into discussion, observed a third cautiously, is someone suggesting that there are human rights violations in Kenya?

Yes, someone was, and here, for the

record, I must acknowledge having written the proposed minute; but most major human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Africa Watch, the Lawyers Committee For Human Rights, the Robert Kennedy Human Rights Foundation, and the U.S. State Department, have been ahead of this writer in issuing statements documenting repression there.) We first took note of Kenyan repression in AFL#92.

Needless to say, the proposed minute went no further; FUM spoke loudly about human rights in Israel, but was silent about them in Kenya. One could hardly blame the Kenyan Friends for being afraid: While I and U.S. human rights groups can throw editorial darts in safety from 5000 miles away, they had to return home. Yet one couldn't help thinking that if this had been, say, 1987, and they had been, say, East Germans, the reaction to a protest against human rights violations in Eastern Europe would doubtless have been very similar.

GENEVA, YES; NAIROBI, NO?

But would we have been proud of having kept our mouths shut about what was happening there? (Leaders of the World Council of Churches, incidentally, have been doing much soul-searching in just this area. They have been denounced by leaders of the new Eastern European governments for having deferred to the wishes of church officials subservient to the old communist regimes, who had too often persuaded them to keep quiet about the rampant abuses there.) Privately, several FUM Friends familiar with the Kenyan situation agreed that conditions there are bad, getting worse, and in need of public response.

How bad is it in Kenya? Here are several items from what could be a much longer list of incidents, which have been thrown into even sharper relief by the amazing events in Europe and Russia in the last year:

* In 1988 the Kenyan government abolished the secret ballot in one-party parliamentary primary elections, instead requiring voters to line up publicly behind pictures of their candidates, while being watched by police.

* Similarly, the judges of Kenya's high courts have been deprived of their independence; they now serve at the pleasure of the president. The impact of this change on justice there was made clear last summer when the nation's High Court ruled that it had *no power* to enforce the Kenya's Bill of Rights, calling it "*inoperative*."

* Arrest of suspected dissenters is increasingly common; and a 1988 law permits persons suspected of political "crimes" to be held for 14 days without charge. In practice, many have been held for months or years, with frequent reports of torture, in deplorable conditions. There have also been several notorious, suspicious killings.

SHOOTING THE MESSENGERS

* Press censorship is widespread and ruthless. When a respected church magazine, *Beyond*, published firsthand evidence of massive vote fraud in 1988's parliamentary elections (in which the few remaining independent-minded members of Parliament were defeated), the government banned the magazine, and made possession of the offending issue punishable by long jail sentences. (Several other magazines have been banned for criticizing the regime. Kenya's largest newspaper, *The Daily Nation*, has been repeatedly harassed for critical coverage; its senior editor and two reporters were once arrested and held without charge for a week.)

* A Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari Mathai, was mercilessly harassed last year because she opposed plans to build a 60-story building for KANU headquarters on Nairobi's most heavily-used public park. The skyscraper was to have featured an 80-foot high statue of President Moi, and was to be paid for with World Bank money. For trying to save the park, Mathai's ecology group, The Greenbelt Movement, was put out of business by government harassment, and she was arrested in Third month of this year. (Financing for the building, incidentally, has since been cancelled.)

* Church leaders who have questioned one party rule and repression have been threatened and harassed. Human rights observers say that churches are the safest places in Kenya for dissenting voices to be raised; but

even they have come under serious pressure. A priest of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa was sentenced to six years in prison this spring for having written two "seditious" entries in his *private journal*. The Kenyan Catholic and Anglican bishops have been sharply critical of government policies, as have Presbyterians and some others.

But conspicuous by their absence from this beleaguered chorus for justice are the voices of Kenyan Quakers. Why is this? For some, no doubt it is simply fear of the ruthless repression that awaits those who protest openly.

But that, unfortunately, is not all. The sad truth is that there are Kenyan Quakers, including prominent ones, who support the government and its policies.

In fact, there are no less than four Friends currently serving in its one-party, fraud-tainted Parliament. And the best-known of these, Elijah Mwangele, is part of President Moi's cabinet, as Minister of Agriculture. Mwangele has been vehement in defense of one-party rule, and has loudly and frequently called for persecution of dissenters.

NOT JUST VICTIMS THERE

How prominent a Quaker is Mwangele? He is the son of the founding clerk of the Elgon Yearly Meeting of Friends; that is pretty prominent. A Kenyan dissident told me Mwangele used to speak well on human rights issues; but now he is a wealthy insider, and will hear none of it.

So the situation of Kenyan Friends is more complex and difficult than we might have thought. And given this compromised stance, it is unlikely that that Friends United Meeting, operating with Kenyan representation, will be able to act corporately to challenge repression in Kenya the way it routinely did in relation to the West Bank.

The same goes for the London-based Friends World Committee for Consultation; and here is where the potential for a real Quaker moral disaster comes clearly in view:

FWCC is planning to hold a Friends

World Conference next summer; but rather than hold it at one site at one time, it will be held in three sites during different parts of the summer. And Kenya is one of the sites. Several hundred Friends from around the world are to gather there.

But should they? We raised this question before, in AFL #92; the wave of repression which produced the killings and arrests last month forces it back into focus: Is it in right order for an international gathering of Quakers, with our long history of opposition to slavery, censorship, and other forms of oppression, to gather in a nation whose government policies now place it among the most repressive in the world?

And if the response is, as is most likely, *Whatever the problems there, it is too late to change the plans*, then another question suggests itself: Can Friends from other countries be expected to come to Kenya in 1991, in the face of its record and policies, and keep quiet about them? I can hear the Kenyans now, echoing the cries at FUM last month: *Oh, you mustn't talk about that, we will all be in trouble, after you go back to your comfortable and safe homes far away*. But if this is accepted, will the visiting Friends not end up helping promote the image of a government that needs to be challenged at every possible turn?

SPEAK UP, EARLY AND OFTEN

There is an alternative, discussed informally at FUM: First, monthly and yearly meetings can, and should, inform themselves and send minutes of protest to Kenyan officials. And we should also see to it that FWCC **guarantees** a place for open discussion and challenge of repression in Kenya, *while Friends are gathered there*. Failing that, do Quakers have any business going there, except to act like Southern Baptist leaders? God spare us from such a humiliating, hypocritical fate.

(Note: For reports on Kenyan human rights issues, write: Africa Watch, 485 Fifth Avenue, NY 10017; and letters of protest can be sent to: President Daniel arap Moi, Office of the President, P.O. Box 30510, Nairobi Kenya; or to the Embassy of Kenya, 2249 R St., NW, Washington DC 20008.)

FIRST CLASS MAIL

INSIDE: THE SHAMEFUL SECRET OF KENYAN QUAKERISM--
COMPLICITY WITH OFFICIAL REPRESSION

Address Correction Requested

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Some months back, in AFLs #102 and #103, we recalled the struggle of Friends and Baptists in the Massachusetts townships of Tiverton and Dartmouth against the colonial authorities' determination to force them to pay the salary of an "able, orthodox, learned minister" educated at Harvard and affiliated with the official Congregational church.

The law mandating town support of such official ministers was passed in 1692. Two ministers were eventually appointed for the refractory towns by the authorities, but the Quaker and Baptist majorities there steadfastly refused to pay the taxes levied by the colony for their support. In 8/1708, Tiverton's appointed clergyman, the Rev. James Marsh, arrived in town.

The same month, the town Selectmen not only voted, again, to refuse to pay £30 in taxes for his salary, but then appointed a committee to "*discourse with the stranger called Marsh and ask what his business is and by what authority he came*" to their town. This implied that Marsh was a vagrant, and subject to arrest for being in Tiverton without visible means of support.

The Rev. Marsh was not, in fact, busted, but his reception in Tiverton was so unfriendly that within a few months he gave up and left town. Colonial authorities retaliated by jailing several Selectmen for a few months, but when the Quakers threatened to appeal to Queen Anne, they backed down and let the dissenters go.

The struggle went on, however, with the colonial worthies continuing to demand, and the Quakers and Baptists continuing to refuse, to pony up for an official preacher. In 1722, the assessors for the rebellious towns were again jailed for their defiance, and stayed behind bars for eighteen months.

This time, the Quakers' threat to appeal to the Crown was carried out, in spades: New England Yearly Meeting sent Thomas Richardson to England. There London Yearly Meeting hired ace lobbyists and lawyers and won their case. In Eighth Month, 1724, the jailed Friends and Baptists were released. It wasn't until 1734, though, that the colony finally exempted Quakers from the "hireling minister" law. (The Baptists had to struggle for another decade before they were free of it.)

QUAKER CHUCKLE

A forward-looking young professional couple moved into a venerable house near Barnesville, Ohio not long ago, and were somewhat amused to find that their next-door neighbor was a laconic older fellow who wore plain black clothes and a broadbrim hat, and spent much of his time working in a large backyard garden.

The old man stopped his weeding when the delivery truck pulled up, and watched intently as a seemingly endless stream of modern appliances emerged from it: There was a big color TV and VCR; a compact disc player and sound system; a big refrigerator with built-in icemaker; an exercise bike, a portable jacuzzi, and more.

That evening, the new residents heard a knock at their door, and found their quaintly attired neighbor waiting with a housewarming basket full of homegrown tomatoes and zucchini. After a cordial conversation, he took leave of them, saying, "--and if anything goes wrong with any of your appliances or equipment, don't hesitate to give me a call."

"Oh, I hope it wouldn't be any trouble," said the hostess.

"No trouble," replied the neighbor, "I'll just tell thee how to get along without them."