



WHEN HE'S RIGHT, HE'S ***RIGHT***: "...the war for which the neo-cons pant has quagmire written all over it....To stop an Iraqi invasion at the Saudi border could require six divisions. To dig armored Iraqi troops out of Kuwait could require 12 to 18 divisions, i.e., the entire U.S. army. America could find herself in a Korea-style meat-grinder." --Columnist Patrick Buchanan, 8/27/1990

A Friendly Letter

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Dear Friend,

Last month we reported that church leaders in Kenya has been among the most outspoken and courageous critics of corruptions and human rights violations in their country. On 8/14, one of the best-known and most outspoken of these clerical critics, Anglican Archbishop Alexander Muge, was killed in a suspicious automobile accident. He was returning from a pastoral visit to western Kenya, which he made in defiance of a public death threat from a minister of the Kenya government. (The minister later resigned.)

According to the Ecumenical Press Service of the World Council Of Churches, there have been calls for an independent investigation of Muge's death (an unlikely event) from leaders of Kenya's Anglican and Presbyterian churches. Church leaders from several denominations have also recently urged the government to reform the political system to insure secret ballot voting, an independent judiciary, an end to political detentions and press censorship.

As before, however, there was no report of any statement by Kenyan Quaker leaders on any of these issues. Month by month, this silence grows louder and louder.

On a happier note, Friends have definitely not been silent in response to our plea of two months ago for advice for my wife MaryLou about what Quakers of today ought to teach our children about sex in First Day School. Many heartfelt letters have come in, some quite eloquent and moving.

To all who have written, our thanks; the letters have been read and carefully filed for future reference. And if you have not written but wanted to, please yield to the temptation because it is not too late. We'll reprint selections from the most striking and eloquent letters in a future issue. But hurry--we will need to close this file in a month or so.

(Incidentally, the trend of the letters is running toward what could be called a conservatively permissive outlook. We'd especially like to hear from Friends with other viewpoints; we suspect there are some. But no phone calls, please--to the several Friends who spoke up about this at gatherings this summer, our immediate

response, while not meant to be rude, was: "I don't want to hear about it; put it in writing." Otherwise the comments fall victim to our sieve-brain syndrome.)

And we must also pause here to enter a couple of corrections. Hendrik van der Merwe of South Africa has written to point out two errors in our report on him in AFL#110: First, he was not asked to be the godfather of Nelson Mandela's child and grandchildren, as we thought he had said; rather, Mandela asked him to advise them regarding their education and career choices. And second, his talk this Sixth Month with staff of the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia was not his first, as we said; he has talked with staff there before.

Speaking of AFSC, the ongoing examination of its Quaker character and direction by many Friends is once more our subject on the inside pages. This topic has come up in several previous issues; for reference, see AFL #7, #19, #33, #66, #82, and #104. For a broader range of views, see the book *Quaker Service At the Crossroads*; for a critical analysis from outside Quakerism, look at Guenter Lewy's *Peace and Revolution*. The back issues are available from our address for \$1.50 each; the books are also available, postpaid for \$6.95 for *Crossroads*, and \$10.00 for Lewy, and \$15.00 for both.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Did you hear the one about the Quaker headmaster of the Ramallah Friends School in the Occupied West Bank? It seems he wants to teach a course in peaceful conflict resolution to his Palestinian students. But so far, the Israeli authorities, who control curricula, won't give him their approval....I wish this were a joke, with a snappy punchline, but it isn't.

PPS. The "hot cereal season," is almost here, and Popeye "The Quaker Man" is still popping up on oatmeal boxes. Will he soon be punching people out on TV ads aimed at kids again soon? And will Friends let Quaker Oats get away with it again? Watch that space, if thee must.

REFLECTIONS ON AFSC'S SUMMER OF DISCONTENT

There's been a lot of talk this summer about the relationship between the American Friends Service Committee and Quakers. AFSC staff and committee members have been travelling widely to join these discussions, and have done much listening as Friends got a lot off their chests.

This interchange reached a climax of sorts at Ohio Conservative Yearly Meeting last month. Ohio put itself out front in 1989 by deleting its regular contribution to AFSC from its budget, after decades of staunch support. This year AFSC's national Executive Secretary, Asia Bennett, was on hand to listen to concerns and present AFSC's point of view, in hopes of getting it back on Ohio's list.

Near the end of a lengthy threshing session, the Yearly Meeting clerk, Susan Smith, rose to her feet. "Thee spoke of listening," she said to Bennett. "AFSC has been listening this year. Listening is good. Now we know you can listen; but can you change?"

THE QUESTION OF THE HOUR

"*Can you change?*" The question was not asked loudly or belligerently; yet it echoed like a clap of thunder. The scene was richly ironic: Here was Bennett, fresh from downtown Philly and Quakerism's self-described "cutting edge" group, facing a plain-dressed, self-described Conservative Friend, at an old Meetinghouse in small-town Ohio; yet it was Bennett and AFSC who were being called upon to change. It is no wonder Bennett seemed flustered by the query; but she quickly recovered and replied, "Yes, of course we can change," then added, "but I'm not in control of that."

Ohio Friends listened respectfully, but were unconvinced: AFSC did not get a contribution, and there were even proposals that the Yearly Meeting should disengage completely from it, proposals which are likely to be on the agenda of next year's business sessions.

Calls for change in AFSC have come from many other quarters as well this season: Western Yearly Meeting also deleted AFSC from its budget, after what Clerk Lester Paulsen described as a "difficult and painful" debate. Indiana

YM agreed to send what amounts to an ultimatum, a letter telling AFSC that unless it certain specified changes were made by next spring, the YM would consider cutting all ties. North Carolina (FUM) will consider a proposal for major reforms in AFSC at a special committee session later this month.

In these pastoral and heavily evangelical YMs, a major target was AFSC's inclusion of lesbians and gays in its affirmative action program; others objected to its advocacy of abortion. But these complaints were intensified for many Friends by a long-festering sense of being put down by AFSC. Too often, even this year, AFSC's "listening" has succumbed to the old urge to "educate" presumably ignorant and benighted rank and file Quakers about the true issues of the real world as better understood by AFSC's enlightened activists. But many Friends have had quite enough of being thus patronized.

NOT JUST AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Even in such liberal precincts as Intermountain and Baltimore YMs, voices for change were heard. Intermountain did not take formal action, but heard strong calls for a whole new leadership slate in AFSC. Baltimore adopted a minute (in which I had a hand) asking monthly meetings to reexamine their relationship with AFSC; and continuing to send delegates to AFSC's Corporation was questioned.

In Baltimore itself, Homewood Meeting has gone much farther: it cut its contribution by several hundred dollars, and sent a letter to AFSC with a list of grievances over the group's perceived poor treatment of Quakers. Here gays and lesbians were *not* an issue: Homewood has conducted two same-sex weddings, the only Baltimore YM meeting yet to do so.

Thus the demands for change in AFSC continue to gather force. But what sort of change? And how much? Bennett rightly noted, in responding to Smith, that many expectations of AFSC had been stated, not all of them consistent, and not all could be satisfied regardless of what AFSC did. Yet true as this observation may be, it is incomplete. There is, it seems to me, a

consistent insight underlying the plethora of Quaker concerns AFSC faces. It was best expressed by Free Polazzo at Atlanta Meeting, a member of AFSC's Southeastern regional executive committee. He compares AFSC to a tree: "*If you cut off your roots,*" he said, "*the branches will die.*"

That is, what is finally beginning to dawn on some in AFSC is a sense that it *needs* an organic Quaker connection; that somehow, mysteriously, it is from the actual Society of Friends—a diverse, often fractious group of living persons—that AFSC draws whatever distinct identity and legitimacy it has. That this insight may at last be sinking in is due not only to the growing chorus of Quaker critics; they have had a potent, perhaps decisive echo in a spot that cannot be ignored: The bottom line.

LET YOUR BUDGET PREACH

To understand this, consider first a bit of context, from an annual report called *Giving USA*, by the American Association of Fund Raising Counsel. It says that in 1989, charitable giving was up by 10 per cent overall. Plus, giving to *religious* groups was up even more, the greatest increase of any nonprofit category, and well ahead of inflation.

By contrast, a few weeks back an AFSC Regional Secretary lamented during a threshing session that in each of the past several years his office budget has lost the equivalent of one staff member's salary; and his predicament has been a common one in the organization for several years. (In 1970, for instance, there were ten regional offices; now there are eight.) Moreover, this year, informed sources indicate that contributions to AFSC's general fund are significantly down, at a time when inflation is picking up.

Probing for an explanation of this lackluster performance, I was told that, well, the same thing is happening to all major peace groups, as the Cold War winds down. You could call it the "Peace deficit."

It is true that most *peace* groups are having money troubles (though the prospect of war in the Mideast may rescue them just in the nick of time).

But this explanation implicitly points to the heart of the problem: where is it written that AFSC is a "peace group?"

Not in its By-laws, certainly. They set out AFSC's mandate as being to work "*on behalf of the participating Yearly Meetings and other bodies of the Religious Society of Friends in America; and...to promote [their] general objects and purposes....*" (Article 1, Section 3) And not in the view of some of AFSC's most profound observers, such as the Late Milton Mayer. He probably put it best back in 1958, when he told a national AFSC gathering that "the purpose of the Service Committee is the worship of God. God requires nothing of his[sic] worshippers but *their faith and their works*.(his italics)"

QUAKER SERVICE AS WORSHIP

To be sure, AFSC's worship is to be given form in action. But the Quaker religious roots and character are fundamental and central to AFSC's work, for peace and everything else.

This is not just legalistic nitpicking. As the *Giving USA* data shows, it has bottom-line, dollars and cents practicality. As a garden variety "peace group," AFSC is but one among many; its programs are not all that unique. My mailbox (and probably yours, too) is regularly filled with appeals from similar groups. How, then, can AFSC distinguish itself in the donors' marketplace; how does it establish and maintain, pardon the expression, brand identity?

The answer, confirmed by talks with veteran AFSC fundraisers, is simple and inescapable: It is its *religion*, the F in AFSC, that makes it unique, and also makes it bankable. And I am convinced that the bulk of AFSC's current decline is the ultimate outcome of the dilution and attenuation of an integral relationship with Friends at large. This attenuation is far advanced, and has occurred on several levels:

- Organizationally, the low percentage of Quaker staff (about 15%) has distanced it from Friends as both a constituency and a resource.

- Programmatically, its disdain for traditional forms of volunteer involvement, especially by Quaker youth,

widens the gap between AFSC and Quakerism's real "cutting edge."

- In policymaking, its National Board, nominally all-Quaker, is insider-selected and dominated, and reflects only a very narrow slice of Quaker thinking on both issues and spirituality.

- And not least has been AFSC's pale minimalist version of Quakerism, as expressed in many public documents. This comes down to little more than beliefs in nonviolence (more or less), consensus decisionmaking (subject to manipulation by internal power centers), and something called "the spirit." There is very little in it to encourage or even suggest a connection to a living constituency and tradition of an actual Society of Friends. Indeed, reading much AFSC literature one would hardly know such a body actually exists.

COASTING DOWN THE TUBES

AFSC has coasted for a long time on the spiritual capital accumulated by the faithful and creative witness of two generations of Friends, rationalizing its slow financial decline and ignoring the voices of Quaker concern and dissent. But it doesn't take much insight to see that it is on a downward path with little prospect of renewal--unless, by a great act of corporate will, and with no little grace, it can undergo major change.

But there's that C-word again. What sort of change is most needed? There have been many proposals for structural reforms: **hire more Friends; make the Board truly representative; reconstitute work camps and other voluntary service projects, especially for Quaker youth; study Quakerism in a serious way; outgrow its stale sixties leftist outlook;** etc. Most of these are very good ideas. But it would be a mistake to become fixated on outward matters, or for that matter on the issues of homosexuality or abortion.

The central task for AFSC today, the top priority, is **to remember what it is, namely, an organization intended to worship God, after the manner of Friends, via programs of service, on behalf of the Yearly Meetings in America; and once having remembered, to recommit itself to that vocation.** That is to say, what is needed above all is not simply some structural reshuffling

(though that too must come) but a **conversion**, or in traditional Quaker parlance, a **convincement**.

How would such a conversion be manifest? When the dust of structural reform settles, the key signs of hope will be two: First, whether AFSCers continue listening to Friends at large, as they have begun to do this year; and second, whether AFSCers move beyond listening to genuine engagement with Friends.

It isn't that Friends at large know all the answers to AFSC's problems; we aren't smarter than others. Rather, *this is the context in which an authentically Quaker group seeks its answers*; this is where the roots are. And such rooted seeking involves not only listening, but also offering AFSC's experiences and resources, which in turn can help Friends solve their own problems and pursue their own sense of mission. The consultations of this year, the listening visits to yearly meetings, should become regular features. Staff who are uninterested in such extensive interchange should go work elsewhere.

THE CROSSROADS AHEAD

Will such a re-membering and renewal reverse AFSC's financial decline? No one knows, because we are far from knowing the shape of authentic *Quaker* service in the 1990s. But I think it would have the funds--and the Quaker support--needed for its work.

More important, can AFSC's leadership make this shift, and return the organization to its roots? Key indicators will come at the annual Corporation meeting this Eleventh Month. They will show not only in specific proposals, but in attitude and atmosphere as well. Defensive clinging to the status quo, with a few cosmetic changes for public relations purposes, will be the sign that a corporate death wish has triumphed. It will also be a signal to Friends concerned for Quaker service to grieve their loss, and begin looking elsewhere.

But let us pray it will not be so. Let us pray that those in charge will hear and answer the question that rang out so clearly on that Ohio afternoon:

"Listening is good. Now we know you can listen; but can you change?"

INSIDE: THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEES
SUMMER OF DISCONTENT--AND AFTER

Address Correction Requested

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 339
Falls Church, VA

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

For seventy years after its founding in the 1680s, the colony of Pennsylvania enjoyed a unique "Long Peace" with the Delaware Indians in its region. But this peace broke down in 1755, as imperial rivalries between England and France brought war to the western reaches of the colony, populated mostly by non-Quaker Scotch settlers.

As they labored to understand the intrusion of war into their homeland, and to prevent its recurrence, Philadelphia Friends found that the Delawares they spoke with kept bringing up an event that took place eighteen years before, in Ninth Month 1737. This turning point grievance was the notorious "Walking Purchase."

The "Walking Purchase" was a scheme hatched by agents of William Penn's son Thomas. Thomas Penn had abandoned his father's Quakerism. He had also turned away from William Penn's social reformism: Where William Penn had seen a "Holy Experiment," Thomas Penn saw an endless line of real estate deals. And to him, as to so many other colonial bigwigs, the natives were in the way of their profits. The Delawares were a particular irritant in a stretch of lush land north of Philadelphia.

But Penn found a document from 1686 in which they had promised his father to give up as much of this land as a man could walk around in a day, a distance which roughly translated into about thirty miles.

But when Thomas Penn resurrected the 1686 document, he had a better idea: His agents cleared a trail through the woods; they assembled rafts and boats at all the streams; and they hired the 1700s equivalent of marathon runners. So when the actual "walk" was made, on 9/19-20/1737, Penn's men covered more like sixty miles. And then his surveyors gave the boundary line an unauthorized slant to include even more territory.

The Delawares, of course, knew they had been snookered, and refused to leave the land until their Iroquois overlords, who still trusted the whites, directed them to move on. Thomas Penn got his real estate deals, but the French, who were always on the lookout for disaffected tribes, found new doors opening to them in their work of subverting and contesting British rule in America. It took awhile for their efforts to ripen, but when they did the natives' vengeance was bloody.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

A young Friend recently told an older Friend about a newly-married Quaker couple of her acquaintance.

"It's bizarre," she said. "They claim their relationship is so spiritual, their love so divinely led, that they don't have sex. They sleep in the same bedroom, but in separate beds. Can you imagine it?"

The older Friend, himself a relic of the sixties, stroked his greying beard and allowed as how, yes, he could indeed imagine it; he had imagined, and seen, even

stranger things than that among Friends and others in his day.

"But if they're divinely led not to have sex," the young Friend continued, "why do they sleep in the same bedroom?"

The older Friend reflected for a moment, and then said thoughtfully, "Perhaps it's to allow for the possibility of continuing revelation."

--Based on a true story
