

WHAT NEW WORLD ORDER WAS THAT? "Investigators...have found dozens of city bridges that have so deteriorated that gaping holes have opened in their decks and steel beams. Some ...are being supported by wooden pillars that must often be replaced because homeless people are stealing them and using them for firewood."  
--The New York Times 2/27/1991

# A Friendly Letter

ISSUE NUMBER 119

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THIRD MONTH, 1991

Dear Friend,

This will be a month of decision for American Friends. One major decision is the subject of this month's inside pages. And later this month, Indiana Yearly Meeting's Social Concerns Committee will make another fateful decision. They will consider a recommendation to the Yearly Meeting regarding whether to continue affiliation with the American Friends Service Committee, or to cut ties and drop out of the AFSC Corporation.

This assignment came out of the 1990 yearly meeting sessions, which included a searching debate on whether Indiana YM could tolerate AFSC's policy of affirmative action for homosexuals, its minimal number of Quaker staff, and general distance from its Quaker base (these issues are described in AFL#113, among others). The Committee was to assess whether there had been enough progress on any of these issues since last summer to justify maintaining an official connection.

Yearly Meeting sources suggest that prospects for a favorable recommendation by the Social Concerns Committee are not good, for two reasons. Internally, the drive against AFSC affiliation has continued, and the Committee has received letters from several monthly meetings calling for a complete break. Looking outward, they see few signs of movement on AFSC's part.

The Board of Directors, for instance, made clear last summer that while it was prepared to engage in "dialogue" with critics of its affirmative action policy, and in fact did organize an intense weekend retreat on the subject including some of the severest Indiana critics, no changes in the policy would be permitted. This stance was hardly reassuring to concerned Indiana Friends.

Still, the Indian critics may be overlooking an unheralded but important concession AFSC made during its Annual Meeting last Eleventh Month. This has to do with nominations to the National Board of Directors. The Board, and the Nominating Committee which appoints it, have been reproached for being insider-dominated and unresponsive to the concerns voiced by Friends outside a narrow, politically correct constituency. An ad hoc committee which examined the nominating process

pronounced it sound; but then the Nominating Committee announced that beginning this year, it would leave open three slots on its slate of nominees, opening these places up to nominations from the floor of the Annual Meeting.

Such a procedure is rare in Quaker circles, but not unheard of. And while it may sound like a mere technicality, it is much more: It is an offer to open the Board membership up to Friends from outside the usual circle. That is, if Indiana YM could get together and come with a Board nominee to offer, they would have an excellent chance of getting him or her on the Board.

With three such slots per year, in a few years, the presence and influence of new ideological and theological blood on the thirty-plus member National Board could become substantial. And in my mind such a renewal, while it would undoubtedly evoke some controversies, would do AFSC nothing but good in the long run, by bringing it back toward a relationship of genuine engagement with something of the broad spectrum of American Quakerism. It would make genuine dialogue—the kind in which people and policies might actually change—not only possible but perhaps unavoidable.

This opening up of the Board is the most substantive response by AFSC to the recent flurry of discussion and criticism of its directions among Friends, and they deserve credit for making it. But it is not a "sexy" concept; it will require a responsible, thoughtful response; it does not easily lend itself to scoring easy rhetorical points; and it will take time to yield concrete results.

Is it too much to hope that Indiana Friends might seize this chance for real change, rather than settling for a reflexive, rhetorical rejection? We shall see.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager



## "REALIGNMENT": DESTROYING QUAKERISM IN ORDER TO SAVE IT

A determined assault is being mounted against Friends United Meeting. Surfacing in California's Southwest Yearly Meeting, it calls for dismantling FUM and dividing most of its member yearly meetings. If it came to pass, it would mean the most shattering separation among American Friends since 1827. Shocking as the idea is, what is perhaps most shocking is that it is being spearheaded by a member of FUM's own staff.

Shocking, yes, but hardly new. FUM-bashing has been a habit among some evangelical Quaker leaders ever since it began in 1902 and they discovered that FUM in reality would never be the unified phalanx of Orthodoxy it was planned to be, but an ineluctably diverse and occasionally fractious lot.

### DIVERSITY AND DEPARTURES

Over time FUM's diversity increased, especially as several founding YMs--Baltimore, New England, Canadian and New York--rejoined their Hicksite or Wilburite counterparts. This has made FUM the vital middle ground of American Quakerism. But it has also subjected it to bouts of doctrinal criticism. These are typically variations on a theme: *FUM has sold out true Christianity; it is tolerating "liberals" or worse; this backsliding must stop or all will be lost; and if you don't do what we say, we're leaving.*

Some in fact did leave when they didn't get their way: Oregon (now Northwest) YM in 1926, Kansas (now MidAmerica) YM in 1937, Rocky Mountain YM in 1957. They are now part of Evangelical Friends International. Others, especially in Southwest (nee California), some in Iowa YM and a scattering elsewhere, wanted to quit FUM, but couldn't because the strong loyalties of some local meetings kept their YMs from reaching agreement to withdraw. Mostly this is good: diversity is the truth about American Quakerism and tension can be creative. But there are limits; and for Southwest and FUM, the connection has become destructive and pathological. Both would have been better off if this YM

had followed Oregon and Kansas out of FUM long ago.

Reading the FUM minutes of the past two generations yields copious evidence for this conclusion. Vast amounts of time and energy has been wasted, year after year, turning aside California/Southwest's attempts to impose its version of California evangelical-fundamentalism on FUM. No other YM even comes close.

A full chronology of this harassment would fill the rest of this issue; here are a few of the lowlights from the 1980s: In 1987, Southwest called for reaffirmation of the Richmond Declaration of Faith, with the usual *sotto voce* threats to bolt if it wasn't (see AFLs #72 and #75). In 1982 and '83, it demanded a pledge that homosexuality not even be mentioned at FUM's 1984 Triennial, or it would cancel its plans to host it (See AFLs #23 & #30). In 1985 they threatened to boycott the Friends Ministers Conference unless Elizabeth Watson was dropped as a speaker (See AFL #44).

### A SELECTIVE ORTHODOXY

Although less well-known except to veterans and dedicated readers, earlier FUM minutes show a similar pattern; as far back as 1922, California was one of the YMs which insisted that the Richmond Declaration be made FUM's binding creed. (It wasn't.)

Southwest's credibility as a critic is further degraded by the disclosure that in practice, the YM has long been effectively withdrawn from FUM, except for its habit of harassment: It spends large sums on its own missions, but makes no corporate contribution to FUM, instead funneling donations from its few loyalist meetings through the YM office. The amounts are paltry--far less per capita than liberal Baltimore YM. And their noisy devotion to the Richmond Declaration is hypocritically selective: The YM is ultrasoft on the Peace Testimony, and permits water baptism and communion--all of which are directly contrary to the Declaration's clear mandates.

For a brief moment in the late eighties it seemed a new day was dawning in FUM, one in which the guerilla warfare would give way to a time of more respectful and productive dialogue and cooperation. After all, the 1987 Triennial turned aside from the Richmond Declaration of Faith, and instead adopted the brief, inclusive "Two O-Clock Minute," which for the first time formally recognized that FUM was only a part of Quakerdom rather than its defining, triumphalist epitome.

Then last summer, in his major Triennial address, Douglas Gwyn articulated spoke prophetically to both ends of the spectrum in FUM, affirming and criticizing them at the same time. There was a maturity and modesty in these developments that, I felt, augured well for FUM as a bridge institution among American Friends, a place where interested Friends could seek greater understanding and work on programs of common concern.

### A SCORCHED EARTH POLICY

No such luck. Less than a year later, Southwest is back for another round, this time in the form of a minute to FUM's General Board. The minute's rationale is laid out in a letter from Lind Coop, Southwest's Presiding Clerk, to the YM's local representatives, dated 1/7/91:

*Take a moment and prayerfully lift your eyes to the larger picture of Friends across the nation. Those who survey the whole scene see two basic groups. One group is made up of programmed Friends (with pastors) most of whom describe themselves as evangelical, emphasizing the centrality of Jesus Christ and holding to the authority of scripture. The other group is composed of unprogrammed Friends (without pastors) most of whom describe themselves as liberal in theology and non-creedal, rejecting specific doctrinal statements.*

*At the grass roots level these two groups are drifting further and further apart. Each group holds radically different core values. There is less in common in both faith and practice.*



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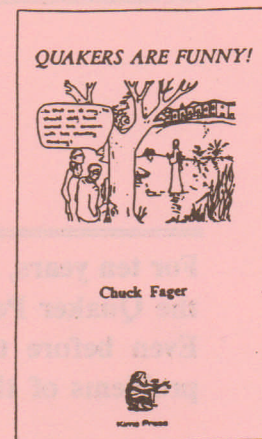
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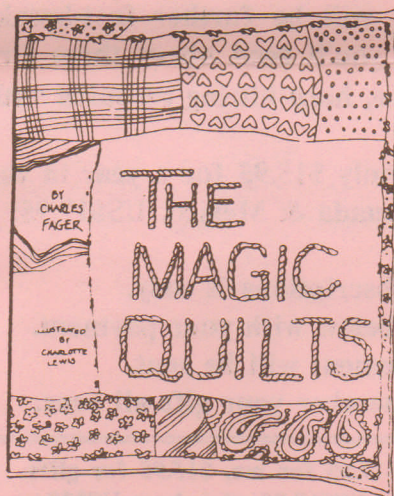
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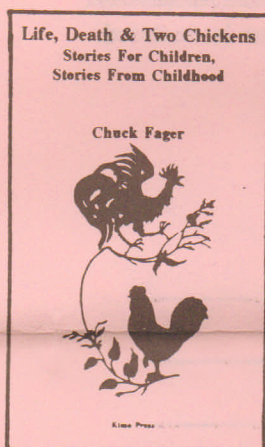
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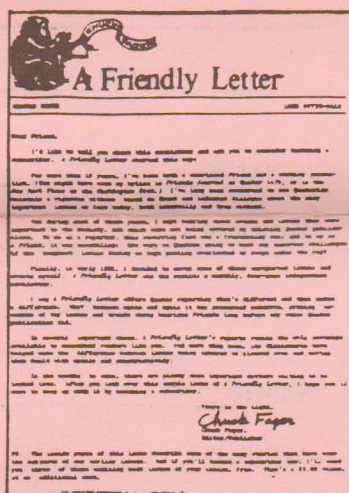
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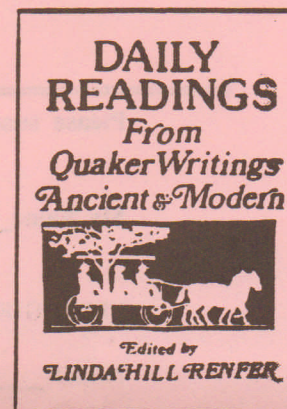


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What to do about this drift? Coop announces a proposal for "realignment" thus: "...all Friends who are Christ-centered and scripture centered would gather together in one organization while others would gather together in a separate organization."

At Southwest YM's midwinter conference later in First Month, a minute was adopted on this topic. The minute the: *Yearly Meeting recognizes that the time has arrived for a realignment among Friends. We believe that Friends who share a Christ-centered faith and acknowledge the authority of Scripture should join together in a new organization that can become an effective witness for our Lord Jesus Christ in this world.*

*We call upon the General Board of Friends United Meeting to appoint a committee to approach Evangelical Friends International to begin joint planning toward this goal...We also call upon other Yearly Meetings within Friends United Meeting and Evangelical Friends International to take appropriate action to promote and expedite the process of realignment among Friends. Our hope and prayer is that the process will be peaceful and positive."*

## FRIENDS UNDER THE KNIFE

Peaceful? Positive? In practice this minute would require FUM to expel its mainly unprogrammed YMs; though some pastoral elements in New York and New England might pass muster, if they could escape the clutches of their parent bodies. Then FUM would merge with EFI, and the middle ground of Quakerism would become an empty no-person's land.

But can they pull it off? *There are two kinds of people*, runs the old gag: *those who divide people into two kinds, and those who don't.* The minute's dualistic, almost manichean outlook is parochial in the extreme: Once you step outside its authors' narrow circle, the idea that American Quakerism could be cleanly sliced into two crisply defined pieces is more than improbable; it is manifestly absurd:

Sociologist David Holden, whose study of Quaker separations was published by FUM in *Friends Divided*,

(1988) sees at least three major Quaker streams: one liberal, one evangelical-fundamentalist, and one in the middle, drawn toward both sides. Others, such as Leonard Kenworthy and Howard Brinton, add two more to this list, making places for the fiercely independent unaffiliated and Conservative YMs. For that matter, in AFL #28 I identified no less than seven distinct strands among unabashedly "liberal" Quakers alone.

But conceptual myopia is just the beginning. Even worse is the minute's presumption that a self-appointed Inquisition is ready and authorized to pass judgment on who is truly "Christ-centered and scripturally sound" among FUM Friends today. Here is where the real nightmare of recriminations and division would begin in earnest.

With this minute, Southwest has gone beyond its tradition and right over the edge. There is indeed a "realignment" overdue in FUM; but this mainly consists of the need for Southwest finally to grace it by its departure for some other body in which it can rest, and leave FUM, in peace.

## WHOSE SECRETARY IS THIS?

One would think that of all people, FUM's own staff would understand just how bizarre and destructive this whole scheme is. But one would be wrong: the chief inspiration for Southwest's minute came from FUM's General Secretary, Stephen Main. In fact, it has for some time been something of a personal crusade for him.

Last fall, for instance, at the annual Superintendents and Secretaries conference in Maine, he lobbied hard for this "realignment" among Friends. At FUM's autumn board meetings, he passed out a memo titled *Question of Realignment* and planned to bring it to the General Board. But the Board Executive Committee told him not to do it. Questions were also raised about the propriety of his pursuing such a concern as a staff member. It would, the committee felt, more properly come from a member yearly meeting.

Very well; if they wanted a yearly meeting to bring it, one would. And the prime candidate was not hard to

identify. So despite the opposition expressed to his advocacy role, Main spent four days in southern California before and during the session that produced the Southwest minute, campaigning for it. The process by which the minute was produced was also a singular one. It was pre-written and presented to the representatives without notice, and hurried through. Small wonder that one meeting, Whittier First Friends, wrote a letter of protest to FUM's Clerk, Sarah Wilson, asserting that the minute had not been properly seasoned or considered.

Nonetheless, Southwest's bulletin, *The Encourager*, claimed on 2/1/1991 that "...Representatives gave unanimous support to Steve Main to pursue realignment of Friends so that all Christ-centered Bible believing Friends would be in one organization." Furthermore, *The Encourager* then declared "We must not relax. The battle is only started. Satan will not take this lying down. He will be turning big cannons on Steve Main as he meets with Friends across the nation. It is imperative that everyone in every church build a wall of prayer around our national secretary during the next few months."

## TIME FOR A CHANGE

So anyone who doubts Main and wants to preserve FUM is manning Satan's cannons, eh? The audacity and arrogance of this performance is breathtaking. Behind it is the chief staff member of an ecumenical Quaker organization, his paychecks funded by all the member YMs, conniving to get several of these same members kicked out and then the group itself absorbed by a rival--and doing so against the explicit admonition of his supervisors!

In 1984, when an FUM staff member was arrested for soliciting male prostitution, FUM's Personnel Committee had him off the staff within a week. The chair of that committee was--Steve Main. How long, one wonders, will FUM's current Personnel Committee tolerate such flagrant sabotage? Or will they let Steve Main's Scud missile of a "realignment" scheme blow the whole organization right out from under them?



INSIDE: FRIENDS UNITED MEETING UNDER SIEGE--  
FROM WITHOUT, AND FROM WITHIN

Address Correction Requested

From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter  
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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

*To attack the justice and wisdom of a popular war while it is still in progress requires more courage than any other act in a political society that has outgrown the assassin's dagger and the executioner's block.* So wrote British historian G.M. Trevelyan of Friend John Bright's opposition to the Crimean War, which England entered this month in 1854. *To perform it well is not only the rarest but one of the most valuable of public services, because to arraign an unjust and unwise war is the only way to prevent another.*

The causes and issues in the Crimean war are obscure now, and have seemed trivial and unworthy to virtually all historians. Still, as 1854 opened, war fever was sweeping British society, with the press screaming for blood, and the government presented the Russian Czar with an ultimatum it knew he would refuse.

Parliament stood with the rush to war almost to a man. But on 3/31, John Bright rose in the House of Commons and gave an eloquent, angry antiwar speech. He argued that no vital British interests were at stake in the war, and that the Turkish empire was a despotism that did not merit defending. England should stop trying to be the "knight-errant of the human race," he insisted, and predicted that the war would cost the country

more in lives and economic prosperity than it could ever gain from it. He concluded with a peroration that sounds remarkably contemporary:

*I believe if this country...had adopted the principle of non-intervention in every case where her interests were not directly and obviously assailed, that she would have been saved from much of the pauperism and brutal crimes by which our Government and people have alike been disgraced. This country might have been a garden, every dwelling might have been of marble, and every person who treads its soil might have been sufficiently educated. We should indeed have had less of military glory. We might have had neither Trafalgar nor Waterloo; but we should have set a high example of a Christian nation, free in its institutions, courteous and just in its conduct toward all foreign States, and resting its policy on the unchangeable foundation of Christian morality.*

For his efforts, Bright was pilloried as a traitor and a fool: *Thank Heaven we are not a nation of Brights and Quakers!* shouted one London paper. The strain drove him to a nervous breakdown, and then to defeat in the election of 3/1857. He thought his political career was over; but he had Friends and friends in Birmingham, and they helped him get back to Parliament soon afterward.

### QUAKER CHUCKLES

A Quaker visiting Czechoslovakia before the "Velvet Revolution" developed laryngitis and lost his voice. Looking for a doctor's office, took a wrong turn in a hallway and found himself in an office of the secret police. Challenged by a guard at the door, the Quaker writes on a pad of paper: "Friend, I have lost my voice. Can thee help me?"

"Don't worry," said the guard. "We will **make** you talk."

Later the Friend visited a cabinet minister to plead for the release of a reporter jailed for calling Brezhnev an idiot. "Was it really necessary to send him to prison for making a personal insult?" asked the Friend. "He was not condemned for insults," the minister answered gravely. "He was convicted for revealing a state secret."