

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Eighty-Seven

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Seventh Month, 1988

Dear Friend,

Here is a brief update of our report in Issue #85 on the status of the Friends schools in Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as of mid-Sixth Month:

Israeli authorities allowed the schools to reopen in stages over two weeks, the elementary classes on 5/23, and the high school classes on 6/6. Their schedule is restricted, however, since the Palestinian uprising's underground leadership insists that all institutions must close at noon. So classes begin early, with extra periods jammed into the morning.

There have also been days when the schools were forced to close completely, in response to calls by the uprising leadership for protest strikes, though it is evident that the school staff, along with many of the students and their parents, chafe at these disruptions. The school year is being extended through the summer into Eighth Month, with classes held six days a week, in hopes of catching up on missed work, with only a brief break before the fall term will begin as scheduled (they hope.)

Staff told Friends United Meeting officials that enrollment does not seem to have dropped as much as they feared it would, an encouraging sign. The FUM emergency fund drive, aimed at covering a school budget shortfall estimated at near a quarter of a million dollars, had brought in by early Sixth month about \$80,000. FUM staff hope that it will ultimately yield over \$100,000. With this, and the proceeds from the sale of some school-owned property in Ramallah, the schools should be able to survive this year financially.

Next year is, however, an open question. The number of students, the parents' ability to pay fees, the availability of staff and the general atmosphere in the West Bank are all

uncertain. For that matter, the deportation from Israel last month of Mubarak Awad, the head of the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence, also casts a shadow over the Girls School. That is because the school head, Nancy Nye, is Awad's wife, and also an American. There have been rumors that an effort may be made to force her out of the country also. Watch that space....

After that, to turn to something as mundane as an index seems anticlimactic. Yet that is the other announcement to be made here, and it does not seem mundane to me. Some months ago I noted that several readers had asked whether an index for A Friendly Letter could be made available, and I asked for help. Sabrina Sigal Falls of Richmond, Indiana responded and took on the job of reading and indexing the first 85 of my issues.

It was a big job, and for my budget and expensive one. But her work is finished, and is now available, and I think readers will be as pleased with it as I am. It is an exhaustive index, not the skimpy kind that drives you crazy because it has everything but the item you are looking for. A flyer in this issue contains ordering information.

One last note: Shortly after this issue is mailed, the 1988 Gathering of Friends General Conference will be underway, in Boone, North Carolina. Reports from FGC indicate that it will probably set another attendance record, for the third year in a row. I hope to see thee there!

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

Here are some questions: First, are there any three initials which spark a more automatically negative reaction in many Friends than these: CIA?

Next, what does it mean to become a "member" of the unprogrammed wing of the Society of Friends today? Are there any recognizable standards which applicants should meet? Should there be? What weight, if any, should the traditional "testimonies" carry in assessing applications? Who should decide? For that matter, what kind of a community is a newcomer joining anyway? And finally, what can we learn about all this from reading a cereal box?

We'll get to the cereal box shortly. But as to the membership issues, responses to our 1984 National Quaker Poll (see Issue #47) indicate there isn't much clarity about them among liberal Quakers. (If it's any comfort, pastoral Friends who responded were hardly more clear.) Yet difficult membership cases keep cropping up here and there, and as they do, these underlying questions bubble quickly to the surface.

Take my own Langley Hill Meeting, for instance. We are facing all these issues as we consider the membership application of George Thomas. That's because George Thomas works for the CIA.

AN INTERESTING CONFLICT

(Before going further, it must be acknowledged that reporting on a case in my own meeting involves an obvious conflict of interest, since I am a very interested party, and even serve on the Overseers Committee which will bring a recommendation on this application to the Meeting as a whole. Yet I'm going to report on it anyway, for three reasons: 1. The issues involved seem to me important, 2. The case one is I would be keenly

interested in if it were happening somewhere else, and 3. As far as I know there is no one else to do it.)

Now to the bare facts: Langley Hill Meeting is in McLean, Virginia, less than a mile from the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency. Usually we don't notice it much, because the complex is shrouded in woods, and the signs pointing to it are quite small. But we know it is there.

Something like 25,000 people work behind its high fences, most of them reportedly doing ordinary government employee bureaucratic tasks. Most of them are also reliably reported to be ordinary people, with the ordinary range of attitudes and outlooks.

Given the law of averages and enough time, it is predictable that a few CIA people would hear about and become interested in Quakerism, as others no doubt hear about and become interested in other religions. Sure enough, there have been a number of Langley Hill attenders, and even a few previous members, who were CIA employees. Indeed, this is the second application that has come before us in my years there.

AN ACTIVE ATTENDER

On that previous occasion the meeting avoided dealing with questions raised about the implications of the applicant's employment, but this proved very divisive. This time we seem determined to face and work them through, devoting as much time and consideration as necessary. It may take some months to achieve unity.

In this undertaking we are favored in the quality of the applicant. George Thomas has been attending Langley Hill since 1982. His has been an involved and constructive presence among us, doing his share of the hard-to-fill jobs, such as teaching First Day

School. He has been active as well on our Peace Committee, urging, for instance that we bear vigorous witness against apartheid and Contra aid.

George has also been candid about his CIA affiliation, at least in summary. His assignment is with the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a CIA unit which prepares and publishes translations of foreign broadcasts and news reports. The Service's regular publications are not secret; you or I could subscribe to them. George's work is based on his knowledge of the Thai and Cambodian languages.

PARALLEL PATHS

George's road to the CIA parallels his path to Quakerism. Coming from an essentially nonreligious background, as a young army recruit in the early 1960s he ended up in Thailand. There he learned the language to pass the time, and fell in love with the Thai people and their country. He later returned to teach for two years at a Thai Christian missionary school.

There he was appalled to hear, as he says, "Thai Christians... taught, with much encouragement from Western missionaries, that it was quite ok to beseech God to A-Bomb the communists as well as the idea that the Jews had it coming in Nazi Germany because of their refusal to accept Jesus."

It is no wonder George was repelled by what he called "Christian fascism," and attracted by the indigenous Thai Buddhism, especially "their shunning of excess wealth, harmony with nature, and a rather scientific approach to creation." But he was disappointed to find that the Buddhist attitude of "harmony with one's surroundings which had initially appeared to me as pacifism usually turned out to be passivity."

George felt clear urges to work actively for peace and justice, the best way he could, and concluded that "I couldn't embrace Buddhism as practiced and taught." But while in Thailand he met an American who suggested he take a look at Quakerism.

Back in the U.S., George remembered this advice when he noticed some of the activities of the American Friends Service Committee. He recalls that "Quakers were speaking out and working for peace, reconciliation with those still held to be enemies (Indochina), ...at a time when much of the rest of society had seemingly gone to sleep after the tumult of the 60s."

MARRYING FAITH AND PRACTICE

He has been a fan of the AFSC ever since. "As a bystander and observer," he says, "it was becoming obvious that the words 'faith and practice' were never spoken separately by Quakers and that people of faith seemed to have the staying power needed to keep going when so many others quit." In 1982 he paid a call at AFSC's Philadelphia headquarters to find out what made such a group tick. There a fundraiser, Bill Taylor, suggested that he visit the meeting nearest his home, which was Langley Hill. He has been "visiting" with us ever since.

In these same years, though, George's views of how best to work for peace and justice also led him into the Army reserve and the CIA. He spoke about this at length in his letter of 3/13/1988 applying for membership in Langley Hill: "No matter how much I respect the truly conscientious objector and pacifist who refuses to participate in any military venture, I still feel we had to stop Hitler and the Japanese (in no way do I condone the use of nuclear weapons) for the sake of life itself. Another example ...is that there would be no Cambodia today were it not for Vietnamese use of armed might. I feel there could be situations

requiring an armed defense of life itself. I stress the word defense. My opposition to any act of armed aggression remains total and unequivocal. Since I feel that there could be a need for armed defense, I wish to be part of that defense to insure that my moral, spiritual and social values are represented in the ranks."

Of intelligence he says: "Dirty tricks, terrorism, and murder should be beyond the pale of foreign policy and intelligence collection and analysis. The latter two are the primary reason for the CIA's existence. That the first three have also been part of its lore is something that we must bring to an end."

Reportedly, George has not hidden his sentiments at the office. He showed an AFSC slide show on Central America to CIA colleagues, and says "I have been in situations where I was asked to do things I felt I couldn't for reasons of conscience. I refused to compromise and was respected for it."

WHAT ABOUT SECRET SOCIETIES?

What are the questions that have been raised about George's application? They have to do with three specific testimonies that are involved in George's case: Peace, oaths, and secret societies; and they will eventually bring us to the cereal box mentioned earlier.

The third testimony is not as familiar as the others, but it is important. Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice still includes a reminder that "Friends historically have maintained a testimony against secret societies...." This admonition goes back to the time of the earliest Friends, who lived in a society seething with conspiracies. Because their views on certain, what would now be called "human rights" issues were similar to those of some of the conspirators, Friends were often unfairly accused of being part of various conspiracies

and suffered much persecution as a result. Yet Fox and others preached repeatedly against plots and conspiracies; indeed, it was Friends' insistence on meeting openly for worship, when most other dissenting groups went underground, that contributed greatly to winning religious freedom in England and in America.

Of course, it has been a long time since high government officials have been so paranoid as to see the Society of Friends as a conspiratorial band. (Or has it? Recall that, as noted in issue #84, J. Edgar Hoover once ordered electronic surveillance of all of us on such grounds). Thus few Friends now remember why the issue was once so important. Hence it appears that Faith and Practice revising committees down the decades have all but forgotten the original purpose of this testimony, and either left it out or construed it simply as a charge to avoid such comparatively minor "secret societies" as the Masons and college fraternities.

SECRETS AND OATHS

Yet considered in relation to the CIA, that brief passage in Faith and Practice fairly leaps off the page. For of all groups in our culture today, the CIA truly fits into its original mold, as the home and parent to a large brood of often quite deadly conspiracies; it seems quite accurately described, both in purpose and method, as a "secret society."

The matter of oaths, another ancient testimony for which Quaker suffered greatly, illustrates this. Millions of American citizens, including this writer, have signed loyalty oaths or affirmations to get jobs. However, these are normally routine and pro forma; whether sworn or affirmed, they mean little and everyone knows it.

Not so the CIA. All its employees sign an oath to protect all its secrets, and this oath is

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(Really, it's all there--articles, letters, Quaker History, jokes and everything! Cross-references, too.)

binding, not only during the term of employment, but for their entire life thereafter.

Furthermore, there is nothing pro forma about this oath: the CIA is relentless and implacable in demanding that every publication by any former employee relating to intelligence be submitted to its censors. And its censors, who wield a heavy pair of scissors, claim jurisdiction over everyone from former CIA directors to—well, to George Thomas, who felt obliged to seek clearance before talking to A Friendly Letter on the record. (This article, however, has not been censored by anyone except me.)

PRACTICING TO DECEIVE

But secrecy is not all there is to the routine of CIA employment. There is also the matter of "cover," or false identities. The use of cover involves the habitual deception of not only colleagues and friends but sometimes even family members and spouses. And it is a device employed by far more than a few rogue CIA extremists. In a recent *Washington Post* interview, a former Agency official, who was a defender of the CIA, estimated that as many as a third of its employees operate under "cover," with false identities. Even employees who are not under cover are expected to maintain the deceptive cover of others who are and whom they know under both their identities. This should not be surprising. Cover and deception are basic tools of the intelligence trade; they are used by the CIA as routine policy.

This practice has important effects both internally and externally. Internally, the intelligence world has been described, aptly I believe, as a "wilderness of mirrors," in which reality often becomes so obscured by lies and deception that truth within it can become all but impossible to determine. Take the case of James Angleton, who was the CIA's longtime chief of counterintelligence, hunting for

Soviet doubleagents within its ranks. His conspiracy theories and witchhunts became so convoluted that many of his peers were convinced that his job had driven him insane.

Or on the more mundane level, consider this: The Agency will not confirm employment information about its staff; indeed, it may, and does, lie about them, for purposes of cover—as may the employees themselves. Hence, for instance, while I happen to believe George Thomas's account of himself and his work, one cannot overlook the possibility that part or even all of it is simply a "legend," a tissue of lies provided and maintained by the Agency for its own purposes.

Let me repeat that these are not minor or fringe features of the intelligence profession. In fact, they are necessities for its operation. This is particularly important, I believe, for a Quaker. To see why, let us turn to the mysterious cereal box.

THE GRAINS OF TRUTH

It contained a new breakfast food from—who else—the Quaker Oats Company. It bore a large picture of their emblematic broadbrimmed, redcheeked Friend. Beneath him was a scroll bearing the motto, "*Honest Taste from an Honest Face*." The word "honest" was used nine times in the brief paragraphs touting the concoction.

Recalling the Bible verse about the wisdom of the children of darkness exceeding that of the children of light, I have pondered the fact that the Quaker Oats Company probably knows better than anyone else what associations the world at large has with its—and our—common name. Market research is a key part of its business.

There is good reason for this popular identification, I think, and not only the historical record, going back to early Quaker merchants who broke with custom and set fixed prices for their goods.

Even more, truth-telling was a matter of central religious conviction: Fox preached that the Light of Christ within would lead the faithful into all truth; one of the first names for the group was the Friends of Truth; the testimony which caused the first Quakers the most protracted suffering was their refusal to swear, and thereby admit that they were not always committed to seeking, and speaking, truth. And today, however short we (and Quaker Oats) regularly fall of this ideal in practice, it remains our goal, and our best-known attribute.

IN SEARCH OF GOOD ADVICE

So when the Quaker Oats Company repeats the word "honest" again and again on its packaging, there should be no mystery about why. They don't have to explain. And we shouldn't have to.

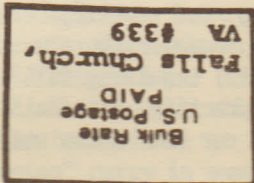
In the whole matter of George Thomas and a Quaker in the CIA, this box highlights the issue which makes me most uneasy. Next to it, George's willingness to join a defensive war is relatively unremarkable. Many Friends, put to the test, have come to feel the same way; and the Society survives. But the cereal box caricature points to a once-living model of what the Society once was, which members sought to embody. Our old-time regulations of dress, speech, and behavior were intended to preserve and bear witness to this model. We have jettisoned the old rules, and I don't miss them. But what about the model itself—are we ready to dump it too? If not, how do we protect and embody it today? What standards does this imply?

How close can "card-carrying" Friends get to the murky world of intelligence, where truth is regularly mixed so skillfully with lies that one may never know the difference, without threatening something essential to our community? And what should Langley Hill Meeting do about that?

What do you think?

Address Correction Requested

INSIDE: A QUAKER IN THE CIA?



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

Speaking of Quakers and honesty, one Charles Coffin of Richmond, Indiana and Chicago made rather full use of just this association. Appointed clerk of Indiana Yearly Meeting, then the world's largest, in 1858, he held the post for 25 years. In 1859, he became president of the staunchly evangelical Indiana Christian Convention, and his inaugural address asked the question, "What Can a Business Man Do For Christ?"

Coffin's answer, in short, was plenty, and he suited action to the word: as president of the Richmond National Bank, he seemed a model of Christian prosperity. His prominence yielded political influence as well, offers of federal appointments as Comptroller of the Currency, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, no doubt due to the long Quaker involvement in Indian concerns.

But it turned out that all was not what it seemed with Coffin and his affairs. In July

1884, the Richmond National Bank collapsed. "Suspended — The City in a State of Wild Excitement," read one local headline, while another bitterly called him "Our Bank Wrecker."

An investigation revealed that Coffin had, as historian Thomas Hamm puts it, "extended large unsecured loans to his sons for speculative purposes, watered his bank's stock, misrepresented its assets, and embezzled funds from estates for which he was trustee." Bankruptcy, litigation, and a contempt of court citation followed, and Coffin ultimately decamped to Chicago to escape imprisonment. He was removed as Yearly Meeting clerk, and disowned by his White Water Meeting.

Yet the Quaker reputation for honesty is a persistent thing. The Chicago meeting happily took Coffin in and made him a minister. Further, a Quaker-controlled insurance company in Philadelphia made him their agent for all of Illinois.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

A fundamentalist who needed major operation came under the care of a Quaker surgeon. The patient spent hours before the operation praying and gazing out the small window in his hospital room. After the operation, the patient awoke, looked around the room, and noticed that blinds had been drawn over the window. When the doctor came in, he asked, "Why are the blinds drawn?"

Well," said the physician, "there's a fire burning across the alley, and I didn't want thee to wake up and think the operation had been a failure."

Two middle-aged Friends were reflecting on the general decline of morals in the Society and society. One was of staunch Wilburite background, down to the broad-brim and suspenders; the other was a third-generation Hicksite.

"Well," said one, "at least I know I never slept with my wife til we were married. What about thee?"

"I'm not sure," said the other. "What did thee say thy wife's maiden name was?"