

100 Years of Canadian Quaker Work for Peace

By Carl Stieren and Murray Thomson

There has always been a tension among Friends between the Quaker peace testimony and the secular or different religious world in which Friends work for peace. In fact, this “tug-of-peace” is often a four-way struggle among the Quaker Peace Testimony, governments, the peace movement of the day, and the victims of violence. When all four were pulling in the same direction, there were some remarkable achievements.

But Quaker peace work is carried out even when it is not popular, when the government opposes it, and when it has a small chance of success. For Friends, making a witness for peace is primary: lighting single candles in the darkness is as important as leading candlelight processions of thousands.

How did Friends work for peace over the past century? The struggles of decades past look surprisingly like those today. There are hundreds of stories we could have told, and those below are just a few of them.

1905-1945: From Wilfrid Laurier to V-J Day

By Carl Stieren

In 1905, some Canadian Friends helped to start the Canadian Peace and Arbitration Society. Elias Rogers of Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) was one of the founders. Rogers' business contacts helped win the endorsements of the Winnipeg, Hamilton, Toronto and Montreal Boards of Trade, and of the Retail Merchants' Association of Canada. Support for the society first came from south of the border at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, an annual meeting started by a Quaker in New York State

in 1895. On one occasion, the Lake Mohonk participants won endorsement by Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier for their work.

After World War I began in 1914, the peace and arbitration movement died. But Canadian Friends kept on speaking out. In 1913, even before the war began, Canada Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) called on the Canadian government to create a Canadian Peace Commission instead of arming for war. In the same year, in a “Protest against all Wars and Fightings and the Spirit thereof,” Canada Yearly Meeting of Friends (Conservative) called on the people of Canada to reject the coming war, including a few secular arguments:

“... Under a pretence of physical and moral training, the art of warfare is taught to those in the tender years of childhood and youth. There is nothing good in this which cannot be taught our children in our educational institutions without the air of anything pertaining to war. The Society of Friends is utterly opposed to military training, in any respect whatever, in any of the schools of the country. Our children can receive physical and moral training on a peaceful principle to better advantage than otherwise: for peace promotes love, humility, submission and condescension; whilst war promotes hatred, pride, and such subordination only as is brought about through fear, not love.”

In 1917, a Friends Legislative Committee was set up by all three Yearly Meetings to appeal to the government. And appeal they did. In 1918, Friends had been granted only limited exemption from military service, and could be conscripted into non-combatant military service. Though only two Friends were ordered to do such service, those two went to jail rather than work for the military. Albert S. Rogers of CYM (Orthodox), Charles Zavitz of Genesee Yearly Meeting, and other Friends appealed to the government for the rights of

all conscientious objectors, not only those who were Quakers.

The end of the war saw a resurgence of work for peace, and Friends were foremost in support of the League of Nations. *The Canadian Friend* in 1919 called upon its readers: "...let us now stand together for the international practice of peace, even though it may be circumscribed by many limiting human circumstances and conditions."

After Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) was established in 1931 by all three Yearly Meetings, one of its first acts was to appeal to Prime Minister Bennett to send Canadian delegates to the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1932.

In 1937, Arthur Dorland, the Canadian Quaker historian, wrote in *The Canadian Friend* urging Friends to keep working for peace and to keep trusting in the redemptive power of love. However, Dorland identified a dilemma faced by Christian pacifists:

"This dilemma is of far greater complexity than just the question as to whether shooting out the brains of an opponent – either individually or in mass – is a Christian or reasonable way of settling a dispute."

When World War Two broke out, CFSC worked with other churches and got the government to extend conscientious objector status to all such objectors, not just to members of the historic peace churches. Later in the war, another appeal of CFSC General Secretary Fred Haslam to the government succeeded: conscientious objectors won the right to work overseas in the Friends Ambulance Unit, established by British Friends in China. Ed Abbott, Joe Awmack, Francis Starr, and others, worked in the Unit, often "flying the Hump" over Japanese-occupied Burma to get to western China. On 10 November 1945, after the end of the war, a headline in the *Toronto Star* proclaimed "50 Canadian Conscientious Objectors China Heroes." 🌱

1981-2005: Peace Teams Come of Age By Carl Stieren

In 1980, Peace Brigades International was founded on Grindstone Island, now run by a co-operative after CFSC ended its Grindstone programs. Murray Thomson of Ottawa was one of the founders, as was Charlie Walker, a Philadelphia Friend. In Toronto, JoLeigh Commandant and Alaine Hawkins established the North American Office of PBI. As CFSC Co-ordinator in the early 1980s, I signed the first successful application to the Canadian International Development Agency for a Peace Brigades International program in Guatemala. Alan Dixon of Ottawa Meeting worked as a PBI volunteer in Canada as well as in Central America. As pioneers of protective accompaniment or "unarmed bodyguards," PBI members managed to save lives and helped bring peace to Central America.

Another peace team, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) was founded in 1986 with support from the Church of the Brethren, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, and Friends United Meeting. Stuart Vriesinga (Attender of Lucknow Worship Group, Kitchener Area Monthly Meeting), and Anita Fast (Attender, Vancouver Monthly Meeting) have served as full-time volunteers with CPT. Jane MacKay Wright (Toronto Meeting) and Eric Schiller (Ottawa Monthly Meeting) have served as part-time volunteers. Judy Gilbert and Laurel Dee Gugler (both of Toronto Monthly Meeting) and Colin Stuart (Ottawa Monthly Meeting) have also served as delegation participants.

As well, Rick McCutcheon and Tamara Fleming spent seven and a half months as American Friends Service Committee field representatives, overseeing several projects in Iraq.

In March 2000, I heard a San Francisco Friend named David Hartsough at a Pendle Hill conference. He issued a call for a new nonviolent peace force to do on a large scale what PBI had done on a small scale, and more. When I returned to Ottawa, I found

that Murray Thomson and my old friend Hans Sinn from Grindstone were already supporters of this initiative. We called a meeting, and Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada was born with the support of Ottawa Monthly Meeting. We were the first “country group” of the international movement for a Nonviolent Peaceforce. On December 1, 2002, Lyn Adamson of Toronto Monthly Meeting and I joined 140 others (including 14 Friends) in Surajkund, India, for the formal founding of Nonviolent Peaceforce. In 2003, NP began its first pilot project in Sri Lanka, led by a British Friend, William Knox.

In February 2005, Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada organized a three-day consultation in Ottawa on a Civilian Peace Service for Canada, with the help of Hans Sinn. Helga Tempel, a German Quaker who had helped to start the first Civilian Peace Service in Germany, spoke to the group, as did Tim Wallis of Peaceworkers UK, where a similar effort is under way, and David Grant of the Washington DC office of Nonviolent Peaceforce. More than 70 attended, including former Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar, Susan Brown of the Pearson Peacekeeping Institute and Ottawa Deputy Police Chief Larry Hill. A mission statement and a Development Committee for a Civilian Peace Service were established. Ottawa Friends Murray Thomson, Sybil Grace and Carl Stieren are serving on this committee.

And the new century has just begun! ☺

In Retrospect: Friends and Issues of Peace and War, 1965 and 2000

By Murray Thomson

Forty years ago, I served as the peace education secretary with the Canadian Friends Service Committee. A major part of that program was the development, in the summer months, of Grindstone Island as a peace education and training centre, to discuss and grapple

with major issues facing Canada and the world.

What were the major issues at that time which we sought to understand and address? It is remarkable, and sobering, how similar they were to most of the global problems still facing us today. They included the following three issue areas, all of which were on Grindstone Island’s many “curricula” during the decade of the Sixties.

1. Efforts to curb and eventually ban nuclear weapons and to prevent nuclear war. And identifying and calling for an end to the many regional civil wars and conflicts, which were aided and abetted by the arms trade in which Canada was actively involved.

With many others we sought to persuade our government to disassociate itself from NATO’s nuclear policies, to stop aiding and abetting Canadian companies involved in the arms trade, and to put real funding into peace research and nonviolent alternatives. At Grindstone Island we sponsored seminars and conferences, and welcomed the formation, on the Island, of the Student Union for Peace Action. We vigilled and campaigned against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war, and sought to prevent the introduction of the nuclear-tipped Bomarc into Canada at La Macaza. We sent medical aid to all three sides in the Vietnam war and accepted thousands of gifts from Americans for that purpose.

What has changed? From the Vietnam War in the Sixties we have now struggled, with millions of others, to prevent the two invasions of Iraq, and Canada’s involvement in ballistic missile defence. We seek, also with others, to preserve the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, in danger of collapse at the 2005 Review Conference, scheduled for New York in early May. We point to the lunacy of both Russia and the U.S. who each maintain 2,000 nuclear warheads on hair-trigger alert, despite the end of the Cold War years ago.

The violent conflicts of the Sixties focused our attention on the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the post-colonial wars and disruptions in other parts of Africa, the East-West struggles involving Germany, Cuba and the US, and the isolation of China. These are replaced by equally disastrous, continuing strife in such countries as Burma, Sudan, Angola and the Congo. In both eras the conflicts in the Middle East have taken a heavy toll.

We faced two nuclear armed superpowers in the Sixties, and just one today, but one with policies of pre-emptive military action, including the militarized control of space, thus weakening the entire regime of international law.

2. Seeking to protect and strengthen the United Nations and international law, while coming to grips with global poverty and the expansion of corporate power.

Friends in the Sixties, such as Alan and Hanna Newcombe, initiated an annual UNESCO International Seminar at Grindstone which continued throughout the decade. It was because of the efforts of Friends like the Newcombes, Kenneth Boulding and others, that peace research became established globally.

Another annual event was the Conference for Diplomats, for which Philip and Janet Martin usually acted as hosts. Many concrete problems were examined by career diplomats from their Ottawa-based missions. We encouraged them to leave their formal clothes and diplomatic roles at home, to help wash the dishes, make their own beds, swim and play volleyball together. And they did. However, the first day of one such conference was the day that Soviet tanks rolled into Prague. Diplomats from Eastern Europe withdrew from the Conference but those remaining carried on, only too aware of the East-West crisis that was experienced in Europe that day.

Today, Friends contribute in a variety of ways to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals

by supporting peace and development projects in the Congo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nicaragua and Sierra Leone. Friends also work to increase transparency and fairness in trade relations, lessening corporate control of intellectual property rights and seeking more equitable economic agreements between the countries of the North and South.

3. Transforming violence at all levels of society through nonviolent action, while expanding human rights in Canada and the world.

Another trend of Quaker concern which has continued from those days forty years ago is the effort to strengthen and popularise the theory, values and practice of nonviolence. The same questions were asked then, as now. Is it possible for a community to withstand, without using weapons, an invading armed force which is prepared to kill or control it (civilian defence)? Can we not replace such armies with nonviolent forces trained to restrain, heal and resolve conflicts?

In the sixties, Friends were involved in helping to form a World Peace Brigade with prominent world leaders (Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Jaya Prakash Narayan, Michael Scott) who sought to rid the newly formed country of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) of the white supremacist president. It failed, but the concept lived on years later in Peace Brigades International, established at Grindstone Island in 1981, and in the Nonviolent Peaceforce twenty years later.

Also in the sixties, our annual training institutes in nonviolence sought answers to the first question by using sociodramas and other methods. The most memorable was the ten day institute in 1965 whose report, "Thirty-One Hours" attracted attention from many others on the continent asking the same questions. Those experiments demonstrated how inadequate we were, how lacking in courage and skills. Yet they pointed the way to more effective training insights and methods.

Are we perfectionists today?

Like many others in those days, we felt that these issues, though diverse, difficult and exceedingly com-

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plex, were open to solution, given sufficient effort, inspiration and will by people all over the world, of which we were a tiny segment. We shared, perhaps without knowing it, what Kenneth Boulding referred to in *The Evolutionary Potential of Quakerism*, a belief in the ability to perfect life, one he claimed was central to Friends' beliefs and practice. "The peculiar Quaker culture," he wrote, "is quite unintelligible unless it is interpreted by this strong perfectionist streak."

Boulding did not minimize the tremendous obstacles facing all who strive for a world of peace and justice. In his last written article, he argued that the world

military system is a single system, depending for its existence on the legitimacy afforded it by the people. As nonviolent organizations derive more legitimacy and organizational power, he wrote, "we may see the end of military power, both offensive and defensive, as losing all legitimacy". Shortly after writing these words, this great Quaker thinker, economist and poet, a founder of the International Peace Research Association, passed away. His work and life bridged the 40 years referred to in this article. His essential optimism is reflected in these words of Robert Mueller, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"Never before in the history of the world has there been a global, visible, public open dialogue (as we are witnessing today) about the very legitimacy of war," he wrote. "We, the world community, are waging peace. It is difficult, hard work; it goes on and on and we must never let up." 🌱

Murray Thomson and Carl Stieren are both members of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.

Report from "The Canadian Friend" 1955 (Volume 52, No. 1)

... From data recorded in later numbers of *The Canadian Friend* it is known that William I. Moore wrote the editorial in the June, 1905, issue, although he did not sign the work.

The Canadian Friend was published for a time, under Louise R. Rorke and Elwood Garratt, in Toronto, but for many of its 50 years, it has been printed where it now is, in the plant of "The Era and Express," Newmarket.

In "The Newmarket Era" of Friday, July 21, 1905 is a note concerning the newly-launched publication: "This week the Friends will issue the second edition of a monthly publication in the interests of their denomination. The first issue took the form of an experiment and was presented to the Friends' conference while in session at Pickering, by Rev. F. Cornell of Newmarket. The conference unanimously decided that it was in the interests of the church to continue the publication of the magazine, and elected Mr. Cornell editor. Several applications were made for the printing of the Journal but it was decided that they could not afford to have it published by any other than the Book and Job Department of the Newmarket Era."

So *The Canadian Friend* begins its 51st year of publication, printed in the same shop that saw its birth, and still, we pray, in the "form of an experiment" and "in the interests of the church". 🌱

May 2005 Editor's note: The William I. Moore 1905 editorial mentioned here is included (except for a lengthy biblical quotation at the end) in the article by Kyle Jolliffe in this issue.