



Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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Civil Liberties / Anti-terrorism Legislation Minutes from Canadian Yearly Meeting

2003

30. Anti-Terrorism Legislation: Jane Orion Smith, Co-ordinator of Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), asked us to consider whether it should be a priority for CFSC to work on defending civil liberties in Canada. Anne-Marie Zilliacus introduced Roch Tassé, Co-ordinator of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (a coalition of non-government organizations, churches, unions, environmental advocates, civil rights advocates, other faith groups, and groups representing immigrants and refugee communities in Canada). He described recent and proposed legislation in Canada which has a bearing on civil liberties. He explained how these laws erode and eliminate due process for individuals, charities and non-government organizations accused of being associated in any direct or indirect way with organizations or individuals labelled as "terrorist". The current and proposed legislation has the potential not only to put organizations at risk financially, but also to act as a deterrent to their legitimate activities. He described how Canada is under tremendous pressure to harmonize our laws and policies with those of the United States.

This presentation was followed by deep ministry from Friends, which included much personal sharing. This sharing raised the issue of fear and courage and we were reminded that courage is the willingness to do what is right even though we may be fearful. These reflections highlighted the importance of this issue to Canadian Friends. We are invited to pursue this in a Special Interest Group this afternoon. We hope that a minute will be proposed for consideration in a later session of this Meeting.

57. Anti-Terrorism Legislation: Margaret Ford presented a minute (below) on anti-terrorism legislation which is proposed by a special interest group that took place at this Yearly Meeting . We approve this minute with the addition of the word "deportation" after the word "harassment" in the third paragraph. We ask our clerk to send a copy of this minute to the Wider Quaker organizations with which we are affiliated, as well as the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Statement regarding Canada's anti-terrorism legislation

approved by Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) during its annual sessions, 2-9 August, 2003, at Montebello, Quebec.

We have more than one reason to concern ourselves with the anti-terrorism legislation now in process. There is an historic and continuing connection between our belief in that of God in everyone, and our traditional work to ensure the equal treatment of all persons. Secondly, as a people engaged in publishing Truth, Friends themselves have experienced their share of arbitrary

arrest, and detention without due process. Lastly, state legislation, because it deals with our relationships with one another and with the social frameworks that support those relationships, is a spiritual concern appropriate to Friends.

We believe that the new Canadian anti-terrorism legislation was developed to appease the anxieties of the present US Administration rather than to answer any evident need within Canada; and that pre-existing Canadian and international law was already more than sufficient for purposes of reasonable security.

The new legislation, both through intention and poor drafting, is likely to have damaging effects. It can be used to criminalize dissent. It disproportionately threatens those already vulnerable as members of minority groups: immigrants, naturalized Canadians, refugees, Muslims and Indigenous peoples. By the threat of unjust surveillance, harassment, wrongful conviction, denial of charitable status, and seizure of assets, it can hinder and discourage the humanitarian work and social witness to which Quakers and many others are called by the Spirit. Of particular concern is the lack of due process for the accused, and the lack of adequate accountability on the part of those given authority under the legislation.

We ask ourselves, "At what point do people lose the power to challenge their government's misuse of authority?" Learning from history, we must have the courage to act despite fear, and call our government to account while it is still possible to do so.

We approve, therefore, that Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) undertake the following actions:

1. The Clerk of CYM write of our concern to the Canadian Government; and also to Monthly Meetings asking Friends to take up this concern individually and together
 2. Ask Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) to undertake work on this concern for CYM.
- We record our concern regarding the particular weight upon our neighbours in the United States who are resisting both infringement on their civil liberties and an encroaching vision of their country as an all-powerful global empire. We hold them in the Light.

70. Canadian Yearly Meeting Epistle:

Rob Hughes read the amended Yearly Meeting Epistle. We approve the Epistle, with such changes as the Epistle Committee makes in its wisdom.

Epistle:

To Friends Everywhere,

We send our loving greetings to Friends around the world from our gathering at Sedbergh School in the beautiful Laurentian Mountains at Montebello, Quebec, for Canadian Yearly Meeting, August 2-9, 2003. Nearly 200 Friends from across the continent, ranging in age from seven weeks to nearly 90 years, were joined in a precious community for renewal of spirit and to labour in the Light, seeking our way in these times of turmoil, trusting our faith and each other.

The theme of Simplicity - Simplicity which springs from Truth - ran throughout our week of worship, work and play, as we conducted the business of our corporate life, and found nurture and joy through building our blessed community. We found community in the attempts to balance the budget and the balancing of human pyramids by the young people as they learned to support and trust one another. We share when we lift the load together, use the gifts we are given, and trust in

God's leading and care. Our Young Friends remind us that the concepts of balance and simplicity are closely related both in use of resources (such as organic foods) and how we lead our lives. Achieving this balance is difficult, but worth working toward.

In Canada, our Yearly Meeting is challenged by financial constraints and by having more tasks than people to undertake them. If unencumbered by excess, we are freer to serve, make choices, look to the future, and care for one another rightly. We look to continuing revelation to guide our steps.

Coming from many experiences and varied perspectives, we struggled with current issues that have direct impact on the Society of Friends, praying and striving together. "Turning the Tide", a project of Britain Yearly Meeting's Quaker Peace and Social Witness, energized Friends to creatively work on justice and peace issues through non-violent direct action. The matter of recognition of same-sex marriage challenges us to hold one another in the Light as we seek Truth. We approved a minute supporting having the legal definition of marriage include same-sex couples. **The threats to civil liberties posed by anti-terrorism legislation, degradation of the environment, growing consumerism, political problems and violent turmoil in the Mid-East and other parts of the world took our attention in Yearly Meeting sessions, in special interest groups, and presentations. We seek appropriate responses in this climate of fear, trusting our faith, where our true security lies.**

We seek simplicity that clears the springs of life and removes barriers and tension, creating spiritual refreshment. Our Bible study took us to the words, revealing fresh meaning. We sought deeply with gathered attention in our worship.

The theme was again demonstrated in the Sunderland P. Gardner Lecture by Tom Findley. His search for a simple life took him, (and us, through his slides) on an epic canoe journey from Long Island Sound to the Bering Sea. Now settled for seventeen years in a cabin in the Northwestern Ontario wilderness, Tom has "never been healthier or happier" than in his life of simplicity, solitude and spirituality. He measures security not by purchasing power, but by stocking his woodpile to meet his needs. We each seek the simplicity right for us, in which our faith and our practice are in harmony.

Friends seek to witness, each following Truth, in local community and world issues, on peace, human rights, the environment, civil liberties, and the economy. These are varied forms of service, but we recognize that all the parts are interrelated, and are thankful for the many leadings as Love is put into action.

Simplicity is the bridge between the two realities, that of the Spirit, and that of the physical world. When we live this Truth, we are able to find inner peace which brings us joy, despite outside turmoil. There were a multitude of joys in this meeting, including receiving the new *Organization and Procedure*. We welcomed new members and visitors from Britain Yearly Meeting, Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting, Ohio Yearly Meeting, Friends World Committee for Consultation, and Friends General Conference, who drew us closer to the world family of Friends.

In this country we are blessed with great privilege and face challenges far less harsh than for Friends elsewhere. We have hope for the future. We hold you all in hope and peace as we know you hold us. May we use our gifts rightly.

May the presence of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2006

74. Statement: Toward a Culture of Peace (re: Minute 71) The revised draft was read. We approve this draft, with minor revisions, as a statement of Canadian Yearly Meeting. The statement will be distributed to all Monthly Meetings, other faith communities, the Canadian government and Members of Parliament, and it will be put on our web site, www.quaker.ca, and sent out as a press release. Friends are encouraged to distribute it widely, as they are led. Friends expressed their hope that we will continue to move towards developing a Minute of Record on this subject. The statement follows:

For more than 350 years, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has affirmed the sanctity of human life. As a Society, we have refused to condone or participate in war. As a result of our witness and that of other historic peace churches, the right of conscientious objection to war has become a right of all Canadian citizens.

Seventy-five years ago, the work of Friends on issues of peace, social justice and humanitarian relief led to the formation of Canadian Friends Service Committee. Since its founding, this service arm of Friends in Canada has extended its concerns to include solidarity with aboriginal peoples, support for refugees, international concerns of development and peace, and abolition of the death penalty.

Since the end of World War II, Canadians have made long lasting contributions towards building a global culture of peace. Canada helped to construct and put into place many agencies of the United Nations, including its major programs for disarmament, development and human rights. Our country contributed to strengthening institutions of international law. And, until recently, Canadians led and participated in almost all of the United Nations peacekeeping missions. Canada has also been a haven for immigrants and refugees.

To our dismay, we witness a change in our country's moral compass, one that points away from a culture of peace, toward a culture of war.

We are witnessing a multi-billion dollar increase in Canada's military budget, despite daily reminders - from Israel-Palestine-Lebanon and Afghanistan - that military solutions simply do not work. Nor did they work in Vietnam, Yugoslavia or Iraq.

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) calls on our government and fellow citizens to turn away from a culture of war toward a culture of peace.

We call on our government to redirect vision and resources into an ecologically sustainable planet Earth.

Let us address the roots of injustice by helping to “make poverty history,” and to eliminate AIDS, malaria and the threats of new pandemics.

Let us reverse the erosion of civil liberties and rebuild trust.

Let us end financial support to industries that produce the instruments of war, and withdraw Canada’s support of NATO’s nuclear weapons policies.

We are part of a great chain of people who care about the Earth. Let us work to protect and restore it again to health. In such ways we will honour and uphold the United Nations’ efforts toward the Millennium Development Goals, and its Decade of Nonviolence for the Sake of the Children of the World. And in such ways we Friends will be faithful to our 350 year tradition. In the words of William Penn, seventeenth century Quaker, “Let us then try what love will do.”