

PENDLE HILL

Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

*(The following words were offered by Daniel A. Seeger as the concluding comments to the Pendle Hill conference **Civilian Public Service Reconsidered: An Extraordinary Paradox**, held November 4-6, 1996 at Wallingford, Pennsylvania)*

It is an awesome thing to face the task of summarizing something so rich and complex as the CPS Camp experience and its legacy; even trying to encapsulate in a few words so intense an experience as we have shared over these last three days defeats the imagination. But I would like to identify some themes which come to my mind as significant ones which have arisen here, while also asserting that I am certain that future pondering of what has transpired among us will bring still further insights into view.

Margaret Fraser and Alex Kern entitled this conference "Civilian Public Service Reconsidered: An Extraordinary Paradox." The aptness of this title, particularly the element of paradox, became clearer and clearer to me as our conversation progressed.

The first paradox arises from the conflict between the imperative, in a democracy facing severe crisis, that the burdens of conscription be perceived as equitable and fair, with all citizens sharing the dangerous task of defending a nation under grave peril, on the one hand, and the American tradition of freedom of conscience and individual rights, on the other. This conflict or paradox was deepened by conscientious objectors' natural desire to make of their alternative service work a kind of public testimony or witness for peace in a world ravaged by fratricide, and the government's equal and opposite conviction that conscientious objectors should be kept out of sight and out of the way, and should not be helped by alternative service programs to do missionary work, to spread "propaganda," to

sew confusion, or to demonstrate a scandal of disunity at a time of peril, undermining the vision of a united front in the face of grave danger to the state.

Clarence Pickett and other peace church leaders who happened to be in office during these tragic times were buffeted by these contending views. They faced bitter and hateful attitudes in Congress, where members were outraged by the perceived inequity of sending C.O.'s to safe jobs while the sons of other Americans were being asked to participate in mortal combat. Chided by veterans and other angry constituents, Congressmen denounced any plan that would allow C.O.'s to learn skills and gain experience that would be useful to their futures when such opportunities were being denied to hundreds of thousands of young patriots by reason of their war service.

The result of all these pressures in a nation caught up in war fever was that peace church leaders finally, after arduous lobbying in Congress, and after bold interventions by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on behalf of the pacifist cause, interventions which considerably fueled the fires of her many venomous critics, settled for the flawed scheme which Steve Cary so vividly described on Monday night. Could anything better have been achieved under the circumstances? I am inclined to agree with a sentiment expressed by George Watson, if I recall it correctly, that given the times, a very messy and unsatisfactory series of compromises was inevitable.

But God cannot be mocked. She confounds human preconceptions and deranges human plans. And so, in spite of Congressional intent to bury C.O.'s in the sticks and in mental patient wards, out of sight and out of the way; in spite of the determination to occupy C.O. energies in futile and menial pursuits; and in spite of the government's determination that C.O.'s should not be sent into conspicuous situations where any heroism on their part might gain sympathy, and where missionary work by them for the pacifist cause could be effected, we have nevertheless seen that all these bad intentions by the Congress were frustrated. Great and noble work in the fields of mental health and prison reform was accomplished. An entire generation of potent leadership was forged which dramatically impacted history in the decades following World War II. What we have referred to here as a "cloud of witnesses" was generated which provided invaluable leadership in post-war reconstruction and in subsequent decades in the peace and social change movements. I remember especially the comments of Eugene Mills and William Yolton as vividly describing these positive outcomes of a maddeningly flawed set up.

So as we consider these various conundrums resulting from the conflicting agendas of the peace churches, the Congress, the War Department and the Selective Service System, we see some of the fundamental realities of the human condition: apart from relatively simple and extreme circumstances, it is very difficult to make unambiguously sound moral choices and to determine clear policies for collective action. Lack of knowledge and foreknowledge, whether we are the govern-

ment or the peace churches, limits our ability to control the outcomes of what we undertake. Moreover, conflicting values and claims, each of which can be ethically defended, cannot always be brought into harmony. Costs are involved in every complex choice; some properly valued ends cannot be achieved because others have been chosen to be pursued. There is, thus, an element of tragedy in human moral and social life no matter what philosophical position one might assume. Certainly, the decision to establish CPS Camps manifests all these conflicts and ambiguities, as did the War enterprise itself.

Finally, another theme which emerged from this conference for me is that conscription and CPS Camps will most likely never occur in quite the same way again. We noted the all volunteer army, otherwise known as economic conscription. We saw that just as jobs are exported from America, conscription, too, can be exported. We might note as well the rapidly changing world, already so different, not only from the conditions which prevailed in the 1940's, but also different from the Cold War era which followed. Some of the worst violence today is occurring in places that seem relatively remote from any American sphere of influence: Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya. A new global economy in which multi-national corporations can manufacture things anywhere and can sell them everywhere is taking shape. In the face of this global economy, geographically bound political communities seem unable to protect the public interest in the territories they are expected to govern. Concentrated wealth collides with extreme poverty everywhere, and where that occurs we see a snowballing erosion of human rights and major threats to peace and freedom. Yet while economic developments seem to be knitting the globe together in a way detached from humankind's traditional sources of meaning and value, with a commercially based rather than a spiritually based global culture, ethnic conflict seems to be advancing chaos and disorder. Both private businesses and governments have become huge traffickers in arms, profiteering shamelessly from this. A confusing militarization of the United Nations is taking place, as the national armies of member states, either directly through the United Nations itself, or via NATO, seek to carry out a kind of policing function in a way which resembles the traditional warfare which we as pacifists abhor.

Now, contrary to what you might have suspected, in gathering you here it was not Pendle Hill's intention to conduct a "memorial service," as some have suggested, nor was it our primary intention to have a sentimental reunion, although there is certainly nothing wrong with a sentimental reunion. But we did have a bigger idea in mind.

We gathered this meeting because we need your help. We need help in the form of the inspiration provided by your example in facing ultimate questions with courage and clarity, in countering the world's business as usual with an alternative vision of peace and justice. Your example can inspire us to persevere to find an analogous bold and faithful witness in the midst of the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. But we also need the help of your experience as we

face the confusing new world I have outlined.¹ This new world is admittedly very different than the one of your youth, yet it is one which you, with your lifetime of work, or experience and of thought can help us address. So we on this concluding panel are not going to monopolize this final session, but will turn the floor over to you to reflect with us, looking back, looking forward, seeing what we have learned and what we can say and do and be.

11/27/96, D:\WPDATA\ DAN\CPS.WP
Revised 12/18/96

¹ In the actual talk much more explicit reference was made to encouraging people to participate in the Pendle Hill Peace Roundtable scheduled for January, 1997, including encouraging them to get their meetings to participate. Thus:

"Now, contrary to what you might have suspected, in gathering you all together here we were not really trying to conduct a memorial service or even a sentimental reminiscence even though those things are valuable and good. We need your help. I think George Leavitt remarks made just a few minutes ago compliment my own sentiments exactly. We need your help and experience as we face this confusing new world, so different than the one of your youth and yet one which the experience that you have had through a lifetime of work and thought can address. George Leavitt had the idea that operating regional CPS camp reunions would be one way to gather this energy and this insight for the future, and I certainly agree that that is true. And to the extent that Pendle Hill in any way can expedite that effort, we would be glad to do so. I would like to mention one other effort before we turn the conversation over to the floor. This coming January, on the Martin Luther King weekend, Pendle Hill is going to sponsor a Peace Roundtable at which members of meetings from all over the United States are going to gather. It will not be here at Pendle Hill. We are too small. It will be held at the Arch Street Meeting House. At this Peace Roundtable we are going to consider all the questions that George has mentioned and I have tried to mention here, and try to see how we should develop an effective Peace witness for the decades ahead. We need you to come to this gathering. It will not be in California, I am sorry to say, it will once again be here in the East. But we need you and the people from California who could not get here today to help us at the Peace Roundtable. There will be people of all ages there, from all the Peace Churches, and especially from Friends meetings. Again, I know that we are not all Friends here, but I would like to say to all of you who are Friends, if you have not heard in your meeting lots of discussion about this upcoming Peace Roundtable, if your meeting has not been deciding which of its members it is going to send, if your meeting has not been conducting discussion groups to find out what the delegates to this Peace Roundtable should be bringing with them in the way of concerns, in the way of experience, and in the way of hope and vision for the future, we hope that you will go back and get them started. So if that has not been happening in your Friends meeting, you have maybe two months, you have November and December, which means two business meetings, to be sure that they are active and getting engaged in this Pendle Hill Peace Roundtable. Chuck Fager is going to be passing out to you something which looks like this yellow leaflet about this Conference coming up. Please consider very carefully your own personal participation, and that of your meeting. Our time is drawing to a close. We on the panel do not want to monopolize this final session. We do now want to turn this discussion over to you to reflect with us on looking back, looking forward, on what have we learned and on what can we say."

**LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD:
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? WHAT CAN WE
SAY?**

(Offered as concluding comments to the Pendle Hill Conference Civilian Public Service

Reconsidered: An Extraordinary Paradox, November 4 – 7, 1996)

**Concluding talk given by
Daniel A. Seeger
Pendle Hill Conference
Civilian Public Service Reconsidered
November 7, 1996**

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