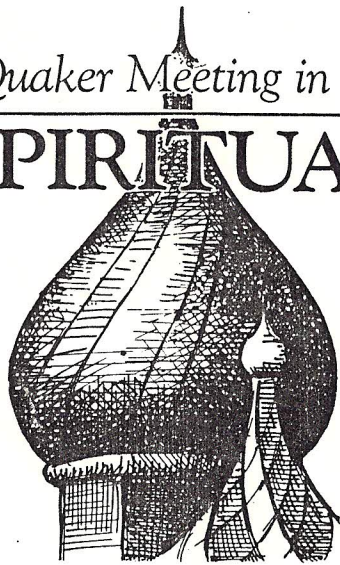


# A CALL FOR SPIRITUAL LINKAGE

For many Friends and others, nothing is on our minds more of late than the nearness of nuclear war. The sickening downward spiral of American-Soviet relations has awakened a yearning in us to respond in a deeper way than through the usual channels. The foul international air of hate and accusation prevents us from walking cheerfully over the face of the earth; dims the radiance of our meetinghouses; mocks our Peace Testimony; and chokes the life from our children and grandchildren, both spiritually (now) and physically (then).

This is not the first time that Friends have lived under strain. In earlier eras, the strain of outward events breaking in upon what we were trying to nourish and protect has sometimes led Friends to make radical changes in their lives. There are two directions—ideally closely interrelated—that Friends have historically taken: one outward, to confront nonviolently the warmakers or otherwise take direct action; the other inward, to seek the extraordinary light and guidance required to transform us and illuminate our path under circumstances that are so complex and demanding. The one is a rational process in which we study outward things and give arguments for why they should be different; the other is a mystical process in which we are essentially seeking to move in concord with the power that created us and that flows through all the universe.

Kent Larrabee, who could have been any of us, was engaged in outward action in Moscow toward better U.S.-Soviet relations in 1982 and was feeling "the strain," when he was awakened one night by a vision that told him to start "A Quaker Meeting in Moscow" (FJ 5/1/83). Such a project, of course, if taken literally, would have put him in conflict with all the ongoing, rational programs and negotiations with



by France H. Conroy

the Soviets that Friends from both Philadelphia and London had been pursuing. Indeed, as our committee of oversight to look into Kent Larrabee's vision soon found out during our year of meetings and inquiries, Kent Larrabee and those who took his vision seriously and literally were soon considered a major threat to years of patient work by Friends in promoting Soviet dialogue. It seemed quite inappropriate and ill-timed for Kent Larrabee to have had his vision at all!

Most of us on the committee are used to operating on the rational plane, and indeed some of us tend to be rather skeptical toward mystical experiences. And yet we know that the roots of Quaker tradition lie deep in mysticism, and that mysticism has been a special quality in the social concerns of such outstanding 20th-century Friendly philosopher-activists as Rufus Jones. ("The greatest things in the world," Jones wrote in *The Radiant Life*, "are not reached by argument.") Therefore, we have searched, inwardly and outwardly, not for some sort of compromise between ongoing Quaker programs and Kent Larrabee's vision but for an understanding of that vision that might contribute a new dimension to Quaker work toward the Soviet Union, enhancing rather than diminishing ongoing work.

Going back to the two poles above—the outward and the inward—it seemed to us that the essence of the vision was toward involving more Friends, and Soviets, in the latter. Through whatever forms we might come up with, we could

direct the thrust of what we promote away from the political and controversial and toward dialogue on what we and the Soviets share at the most basic level as human beings: our experience of life in this universe and the cares and questions with which this experience fills us. We want there to be not a trace of the missionary mentality in any of this. We do not have as a goal, either directly or indirectly, to make Quakers out of Soviets. And we no more seek to establish a literal Quaker meeting in Moscow than to have the Komsomol establish a Communist Ethical Society in Philadelphia.

Instead, the kind of linkage that we seek with the Soviet people involves *spirituality in its broadest sense*. For some of us this spirituality may take religious form. For others it may find expression in literature, art, music, ethics, nature, nonviolence, or in the way we raise our children. In fact, it is in our care for what we pass on to our children—the concern of one generation for the next—that we find a promising starting point, a common ground that transcends political and ideological differences. We can exchange children's stories, poems, peace posters; discuss values that parents want to pass along as they consider how best to bring up their sons and daughters; share our problems with guiding our teen-agers.

But we seek to be more than just an organization that promotes children's exchanges. Our fundamental purpose remains deeper. It is to have religious and nonreligious people from both societies sitting down together to discuss what it is to be a child of the universe. It is a vision of human beings gathering quietly, whether amidst birches of Moscow or pines of New Jersey, to share our thoughts, dispel the poisonous atmosphere that has kept us from knowing each other, and lay the foundations for a peaceful future.

We are just beginning our work. Other Friends who would like to become a part of this can write the Committee for Spiritual Linkage Between the Soviet and American Peoples, Jay Worrall, clerk, Box 6, Keswick, VA 22947. □

*France (Rusty) Conroy of Moorestown (N.J.) Meeting is a member of the Committee for Spiritual Linkage Between the Soviet and American Peoples, a committee that originated as the Committee of Oversight to Explore the Idea of a Friends Meeting in Moscow.*