

American Friends Service Committee and Peace Education

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Between the world wars, the American Friends Service Committee established two innovative peace education programs: peace caravans and institutes of international relations. These programs had been designed to address problems related to world peace and nonviolence.

The American Friends Service Committee was organized in Philadelphia in 1917. It was created by Quaker scholar Rufus Jones and other members of the Society of Friends. Its guiding premise was based on the British Friends World War I declaration urging the techniques of conciliation and altruistic service: "The alternative to war is not inactivity and cowardice. It is the irresistible and constructive power of goodwill" (Howlett, "American Friends," 157). In the aftermath of World War I, AFSC assisted English Friends in relief work in war-torn France and aided refugees in Austria. Some 340 American Friends journeyed to Europe after the war. The committee spent more than one million dollars in France alone. There they plowed, seeded, grew crops as well as repaired farm equipment and rebuilt entire villages. By the time its work was finished the Service Committee had received some \$25 million in relief aid that members distributed to those in need of relief.

Between the world wars, the committee also recognized the increasing importance of peace education. The Service Committee hoped to put words into deeds and adopted the wise counsel of America's most noted progressive education professor, John Dewey. The committee followed Dewey's prescription for peace. "Peoples do not become militaristic...because they deliberately choose so to do," Dewey insisted. "Education of youth and the reflex of that education on parents and friends," he continued, "is an important part of the forces which have militarization for their consequence" (quoted in Howlett, *Troubled Philosopher*, 71). Committee members believed, like Dewey, that social and cultural attitudes could be changed, and that "since war was thought to be largely a state of mind, the peace crusade became a 'battle of opposing ideals'" (Chatfield, 136). The Committee established a Peace Section branch in 1923-1924, in an effort to promote intelligent concern for international affairs and to develop popular educational techniques challenging the culturally entrenched notions of patriotism and militarism.

Hoping to capitalize on the disillusionment following the failures of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and a growing body of literature critical of war and militarism—Erich Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, and Harry Elmer Barnes' *Genesis of World War*—the Friends Service Committee organized two distinctive educational programs in 1926. The creation of traveling peace caravans and institutes of international relations represented the committee's attempt "to foster grassroots social change" in the name of peace and justice (Frost, 22). Both efforts proved remarkable in terms of durability and persistence.

The peace caravan program started in the summer of 1926, when a few college students were hand picked to travel about the country and hold lectures on the subject of peace. From 1926 to 1941, close to 1,200 college-age students devoted their summer to work on behalf of peace education. Ray Newton was in charge of the program. He lost his teaching job at Phillips Exeter Academy in Massachusetts during World War I because of his pacifist beliefs. Newton subsequently served with the AFSC's relief work in postwar Europe; he also had been executive secretary of a postwar youth organization, The Young Democracy. Articulate, bright, energetic, and thoroughly committed to the cause of peace, Newton began his peace education work by conducting a three-day training institute on the campus of Haverford College in Pennsylvania. There twenty-one college students were provided with educational brochures, leaflets, and other teaching materials related to world peace and current events. These enthusiastic peace educators

were paired off, hopped into second-hand model-T fords and traveled the countryside. They went all over the country from California to Colorado, the Midwest as well as New England. Driving from town to town, they “distributed peace literature. And talked to clubs, and churches wherever they found an audience” (Chatfield, 137). Their goal was not to proselytize, but rather educate. The information provided addressed topics such as the World Court, League of Nations, the role of the Committee on Militarization in Education (challenging the post-World War I creation of the Reserve Officers Training Program in colleges and universities), outlawry of war, the plight of non-unionized industrial workers, the importance of nonviolence in social relationships, and interracial relations. Much of their teaching and lecturing relied on Dewey’s progressive education views—views challenging traditional conceptions of nationalism and patriotism. Peace caravanners, in particular, employed Dewey’s ideas on how the teaching of history and geography could promote world peace.

The growing militarization of Japan in the Far East and the increasing fears of fascist militarism in Italy and Germany by the early 1930s increased the popularity of the peace caravan program. A Student Peace Service was established within the Friends Service Committee; it began operating year-round. During the winter months, it sent field secretaries to colleges, principally as recruiters, to set up study groups and elicit summer volunteers for the caravans. In 1930, it was estimated that the peace caravan program of twelve teams had met with almost 6,000 willing listeners. The economic effects of the Great Depression resulted in a cut in finances for the program, but many of the itinerant peace educators raised much of the necessary funds to keep the program going by conducting campus fundraisers and eliciting donations from the nearby communities. In 1938, for instance, each peace caravaner brought \$100 with him or her to help supplement the cost of the trip. In 1940, a year after World War II started, a peace caravan involving 119 students from fifty-five colleges and twenty-six states formed twenty-three teams of traveling peace educators. These teams conducted peace schools throughout the country where they lectured on the war in Europe and international relations. They also volunteered some of their time to the Committee’s Work Camp project that organized relief programs in the “blighted Allegheny coalfields of Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia and helped build subsistence homesteads in the Tennessee Valley region” (Howlett & Lieberman, 256). Such action was an extension of their peace education philosophy that words should also be translated into good deeds.

Overall, the caravan program reached thousands of people. It was in the rural Midwest, an area hard hit by the effects of the Great Depression, where the program had its largest impact. Many farmers still held a warm spot for the Populist ideology of the late 1800s and questioned the aggressiveness of capitalistic, industrialized societies. Perhaps, the program’s most important contribution to peace education was demonstrated by the enthusiasm and interest aroused by the volunteers themselves. Many were convinced that distorted ideas of national sovereignty and security led to increased militarization and war. They believed that people have to be aroused to fight. Only through education can people come to a full appreciation of the benefits of lasting peace.

While the peace caravan program represented one innovative strategy, the institutes of international relations came to symbolize another novel approach to the committee’s peace education efforts. The institutes actually grew out of the caravan program. During the summer of 1930, Newton conducted a two-week conference where over sixty people discussed and studied the “political, economic, social, and religious aspects of peace” (Chatfield, 137-138). The faculty consisted of Henry T. Hodgkin, one of the founders of the British Fellowship of Reconciliation (F.O.R.), Clarence Pickett, executive secretary of the AFSC, Devere Allen, author of *The Fight for Peace* published earlier that year, Frederick Libby of the National Council for the Prevention of War, and Reinhold Niebuhr, the eminent theologian. Both Allen and Niebuhr were co-editors of the F.O.R. magazine, *World Tomorrow*. Throughout the 1930s, numerous teaching institutes

were conducted each year. The noted Quaker and leader of the American Peace Society, E. Raymond Wilson, was selected as dean of the institutes and grants from various national foundations supported the peace conferences. Several thousand people came each year to listen to the various lectures on issues involving peace and social justice. Many of the registrants were teachers, leaders of civic organizations, college students, and ministers of various Protestant denominations. Faculty who lectured and taught at the various institutes included pacifists and non-pacifists. The primary objective of these institutes was to arouse an intelligent awareness for international and domestic problems in order to cultivate nonviolent solutions to economic, social, and political problems.

The institutes were many and varied. In 1933, for instance, a Haverford institute focusing on labor problems in America was organized in cooperation with the Central Labor Union of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor. The following year another institute was held mainly for labor leaders (Howlett & Lieberman, 256-257). In 1934, an interracial institute led by Claud Nelson of the F.O.R. was held in Atlanta. In 1940, eleven institutes were conducted in which some 2,282 people attended. A year later, some 1,542 people attended for a week or more. In 1941, moreover, the popularity of the institutes led to six of them being placed on a yearly schedule with the purpose of creating an informed, articulate public opinion for world peace and social justice (Pickett, 389-91).

The outgrowth of these peace education efforts continued after World War II. Building upon the peace caravans and summer institutes, the Friends Committee "commissioned groups of experts to produce a series of books with policy recommendations on major issues of foreign and domestic policy, including the cold war, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Vietnam, the arms race, abortion, and AIDS" (Frost, 22). Among the earlier peace books published were *The U.S. and the Soviet Union* (1949), a foreign policy analysis of cold war issues, and *Speak Truth to Power* (1955), a peace education work addressing the issues of world poverty, colonialism, stronger world government, disarmament, and criticism on the use of organized mass violence to resolve disputes. It represented the pacifist organization's desire to continue to educate the public about the importance of social reform in constructing a nonviolent world in the name of justice and peace.

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