

FCL NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION

Vol. 26, No. 11, December 1977

THE FCL'S FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

"Friends believe that there is that of God in every person, and that each person is endowed with worth and dignity. The Friends Committee on Legislation is concerned that the social, economic, and political aspects of life be conducted with the utmost concern for the individual according to the tenets of love and justice.

"We reject the idea that mankind's problems can be solved by violence. The ideals of brotherhood, love, justice, truthfulness, and social concern embodied in Quakerism and other religions are, we believe, realistic guides for human conduct.

"Governments make decisions which result in war and peace, justice and injustice. Mankind's religious heritage and revelation should be brought to bear upon these decisions. While morality and goodness cannot be legislated as such, laws and their administration can provide a favorable climate for their development. . . "

Preamble, FCL Legislative Policy Statements

The Friends Committee on Legislation celebrates its 25th anniversary this Fall, 1977. The founding meeting took place in May 1952 at the Berkeley Friends Church. Those appointed to the "interim executive committee" made October the deadline for raising the necessary funds to open the doors of a new Friends organization, a political counterpart of the AFSC, a state counterpart of the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

The issue that begged for a new lobbying organization was Universal Military Training (UMT), the first attempt at an ongoing peacetime draft. The American Friends Service Committee had launched a nation-wide campaign against UMT, placing staff people in many of its regional offices to concentrate on that issue before Congress. Before long AFSC's tax exempt status was in jeopardy and Friends and friends began looking around for other organizations to take up the challenge.

In November 1952 an executive committee was also formed in Southern California under the leadership of Roscoe Warren who is remembered by many as the real life behind the committee, even paying most of the original executive secretary's salary out of his own pocket. His untimely death in 1954 was a major blow to the committee. Like so many other people who have shaped the FCL over the years, he proved to be unique and irreplaceable.

FCL got "off the ground" in a relatively short period of time with the help of Catherine Cory (now Catherine Lovell). Catherine was the first executive secretary in Northern California, serving until March 1953. She became the executive secretary in the South in November 1954. She was part of an all star cast: Stuart Innerst as chairperson of the South; Trevor Thomas as executive secretary in the San Francisco office; Irving Morrissett, followed by Sam Patterson and later Madge Seaver as clerks of the Northern Committee; and Georges and Marjorie Weber volunteering as FCL's first lobbyists in Sacramento.

Stuart Innerst wore many hats for the FCL over the years as a committee member, interim executive secretary in the Pasadena office, tireless volunteer, and a Pacific Yearly Meeting "Friend in Washington" on peace issues.

Georges and Marjorie rented an apartment in Sacramento which they made available to people who came to the Capitol to attend hearings and visit legislators. Later, when he "retired" from full time service in Sacramento, he commuted long distances by bus or train to attend executive committee meetings. When Weber left California he stayed in a senior citizen's hotel in the heart of Washington, D.C., so he could be close to FCNL.

Defeating the Loyalty Oath

The first big state issue taken up by the FCL was the loyalty oath. More and more public employees were being required by law to sign a disclaimer of disloyalty to the United State before they were allowed to work. The FCL, almost alone and lonely, strongly opposed these measures. The atmosphere in the Capitol was tense and fearful. After testifying at a committee hearing, Trevor Thomas was cornered in an elevator one day in 1953 and physically attacked by a legislator who had to be restrained by the state police.

Because the FCL was willing and able to speak out during this period of anti-communist hysteria, it grew in numbers and in stature. Whereas the legislative successes on loyalty oath questions were few, the Committee earned a reputation for being cool-headed and courageous. Eventually the "loyalty oath" question was resolved by the courts which found such oaths to be unconstitutional.

WASHINGTON REPORT
See Page 7

Eliminating Censorship

Accompanying the fear and distrust that gave birth to the loyalty oaths were efforts to enact book censorship legislation. In 1955 bills were introduced to remove from the schools textbooks and library books which "tend to propagate ideas or principles contrary to, or at variance with. . . the principles of morality, truth, justice, and patriotism. . . and the principles of a free government". Persistent efforts by the FCL and the American Federation of Teachers resulted in stopping the measures but three other attempts were made before the legislature adjourned that year.

In 1957 another censorship bill was introduced. Opponents to the measure were joined by a representative of the California Library Association, who testified that Stevenson's "**Treasure Island**" would be removed from the shelves under the provisions of the bill because of the "immoral acts" of the pirates in the story. Similarly a bill was introduced to outlaw comic books devoted to the publication of "deeds of violent bloodshed, lust or immorality, or of horror". Both bills were rejected eventually.

Securing Fair Employment Practises

By 1959 the American Civil Liberties Union (Southern California) had opened an office in Sacramento and FCL was in a position to move away from some of the civil liberties issues. Formation of a Fair Employment Practices Commission had become a major priority with the FCL acting as the only on-the-spot proponents. 1959 was called "a banner year for civil rights" when the legislature adopted one of the strongest FEPC bills in the country. Governor "Pat" Brown endorsed the measure and went so far as to include \$240,000 for FEPC in his proposed state budget, even before the bill had passed.

Legislating Fair Housing

Even more dramatic was the scene in 1963 when the legislature passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act. The FCL was involved on many fronts. First it worked through its Berkeley support group in an attempt to defeat a local referendum challenging an ordinance similar to the fair housing bill which had been adopted by the Berkeley City Council. The referendum was considered a "test vote" of what was to come in Sacramento. Though the referendum succeeded in throwing out the fair housing ordinance, the vote was close enough to encourage fair housing advocates. Also, the Berkeley experience cued them on the opposition's arguments and strategies when the match shifted to Sacramento.

There are many stories within the story of the passage of the Rumford bill. Most significant perhaps was the fact that it cracked Senator Hugh Burns' hold on the Senate. In both the Senate Government Efficiency Committee and on the floor, enough Senators were willing to stand up to their hitherto all powerful President Pro Tem so that the bill passed in spite of him. This marked the beginning of the end of the kind of power politics that Burns represented--but it was not the end of the fair housing struggle.

In 1964 opponents of fair housing secured the signatures necessary to take the matter to the voters. Defeating Proposition 14 became a major FCL project for the off-year, when the legislature was not in regular session. The measure passed despite our efforts. This meant that the next arena would be the courts--an appeal which resulted in a ruling that Prop. 14 was unconstitutional. The Rumford Act, therefore, remained in force.



FCL Founding Fathers and Mothers Captured for Posterity at the San Francisco YMCA - 1952