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 Morrisett, 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.

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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 Stevensons' "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.
Opposing Capital Punishment

Another major goal of the Committee has always been the abolition of the death penalty. The issue has stayed with us throughout the years, with at least two particularly dramatic periods. The first of these came in 1960 when Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown called a special session of the legislature to consider a bill by Senator Farr to abolish the death penalty. Brown had opposed capital punishment as both attorney general and governor but he failed to win the legislative backing he desired to block the execution of Caryl Chessman, who had been convicted of kidnapping but had never committed murder. In retrospect, it seems that the Chessman period brought California closer than it has ever been to abolition.

The second biggest furor over capital punishment came in a much different form in 1973 and 1977. Far from considering abolition of death sentences, the legislature twice reinstated capital punishment after the state laws had been declared unconstitutional by the courts. Whereas in 1960 public opinion polls showed that a narrow majority of people opposed state executions, in the 1970s two-thirds of the public apparently favored it.

FCL Steps Forth

In the meantime FCL had to undergo some organizational changes. Until the early 1960's the North and South served as regional offices for the Friends Committee on National Legislation, attempting to contribute financially to the Congressional effort and allowing FCNL to oversee the policies and administration of FCL. The time came to cut the umbilical cord and develop a new, "cooperative" relationship. Additionally, turnovers of staff and committee members, the need for a more substantial annual budget, and an increasingly active legislature created problems for the growing organization. During these years Ken Morgan began his long tenure as clerk of the Southern California Executive Committee.

The legislature, too, was changing. For our first fifteen years of operation the legislature held regular sessions only in the odd numbered years, with budget and special sessions (when called) in the even-numbered years. This enabled the FCL to concentrate more fully on educational efforts in the months when the legislature did not meet. The most memorable public meetings held during those years included the evening when Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, spoke to a standing room only crowd at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco, the time Eleanor Roosevelt addressed an overflow audience (netting $5,000 the FCL desperately needed), and the night that George McGovern, a courageous Senator from South Dakota, voiced his opposition to the Vietnam War at an FCL-sponsored event.

Many people participated in issue subcommittees throughout the state. Their concerns included labor, immigration, criminal justice, civil liberties and peace. The subcommittees reached out into the community for information and skills and from these efforts assembled an impressive speakers' bureau.

Seeking Peace

Throughout the years, Southern California's number one issue has been peace. Beginning with efforts to resist Universal Military Training, the FCL moved into the issues of disarmament and nuclear testing, playing a major role in the creation of Southern and Northern California offices of the SANE nuclear policy committee. Viet Nam absorbed much of the energy of the Committee in the late 1960's with the major effort directed at California congresspersons, asking them to withdraw financial support for the war. In the early 1960s peace was also a major concern at the state level.

The response of state government to the threat of nuclear attack was to pour thousands of dollars into a State Disaster Office and into the designation of fallout shelters in office buildings, factories, and homes. The opposition by the FCL to such plans was based on the belief that they would provide a false sense of security and take us deeper and deeper into a war mentality by intensifying fear of nuclear attack.

HEADLINES OVER THE YEARS

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Disarming and Converting

In the mid and late sixties we began devoting a considerable amount of time to the economics of disarmament. California faced major defense cutbacks which were bound to have a significant impact on the state's economy. Two studies were undertaken on conversion to peace time industries—one by Assemblyman Robert Crown, who was chair of the Assembly Ways & Means Committee, and a later study by Assemblyman John Burton. At the same time talks were initiated by the FCL and AFSC between labor, business, and community leaders in an effort to re-orient industry toward a more stable, labor-intensive economy. Ultimately these ambitious efforts toward conversion were thwarted when the nation was once again immersed in war. The new war increased rather than decreased California's military contracts.

In 1977 the state again faced military cutbacks. The B-1 bomber termination alone will cost the state many thousands of jobs. FCL, therefore, joined the AFSC and peace groups around the state to begin developing solutions. We hope to convince the legislature and administration to begin long-term economic planning for the state, rather than reacting to crises after the fact.

The "Story of the 1981 Legislature" published by the FCL described the committee's peace efforts as follows:

"Where the FCL works for good laws, it works for peace. This is the long range view, looking beyond the immediate crises in Berlin, Geneva, or Laos: A nation built on violence, economic injustice, racial discrimination, political repression, a nation without freedom of speech and assembly, a nation without firm checks on the zeal of the police cannot remain at peace. This is the job of working for peace which the FCL tries to do in the state legislature. It is always unfinished".

Reforming Criminal Justice

Extending the nonviolent cause to other arenas, the committee pushed deeper and deeper into the problems of the criminal justice system. Here the problems were smaller in scale and less satisfying to deal with. The FCL did develop a reputation among prisoners as a place they could turn to for help and consideration and this has been gratifying. There are three areas in which FCL was instrumental in introducing legislation which had a significant impact.

In 1959 a FCL supported bill was introduced, eliminating the crime of vagrancy and replacing it with specific offenses based on acts committed rather than on a person's status. Prior to the new law, which passed in 1961, a person could be arrested for loitering about without any "visible means of support". It was used primarily to harass "undesirables", public nuisances in the eyes of the law. When it was first introduced the bill was labeled by Senator Donald Grunsky as the "Beatniks' Bill of Rights" and the "Bum's Magna Carta".

Gaining Civil Rights for Prisoners

A second major effort was directed against the ancient "civil death law" which stripped convicted people who were sent to state prison of their rights. The FCL successfully sponsored a bill to create Penal Code section 2600, giving prisoners the right to receive mail and visitors, to correspond confidentially with an attorney or public official, to inherit property, and to purchase, receive, and read newspapers, periodicals, and books. These rights, although still incomplete, have been expanded over the years so that now, as a result of legislation authored by Senator Alan Sieroty, most civil rights of prisoners have been restored.

Finally, the FCL sponsored bills to give prisoners some status as laborers by extending workers compensation and unemployment insurance benefits to them after they are released, if they qualify for such benefits by working while inside the institutions. The first bill to provide laborer's rights was introduced by Senator Farr in 1963. It would have allowed inmates to retain unemployment insurance (u.i.) credits for up to three years while incarcerated. The bill failed and the concept was revised to allow prison work to be credited toward the benefits. It was not until 1976 and 1977 that these efforts succeeded through legislation carried by Senator Peter Behr.

The FCL and Farm Labor

FCL played a big role in farm labor legislation beginning in 1961 with a proposal to require growers to provide toilets and drinking water in the fields for agricultural workers. The bill provoked a surprising display of blatant racism and discrimination against poor people by legislators. The idea was considered preposterous and the legislature rejected it. Health and safety regulations were issued to require such facilities.

1961 brought farm labor under the state disability insurance program. In 1963 the long campaign to include farm workers under the employment insurance program began with intensive research efforts to counter agri-business statistics on the cost of such benefits.

For years the open opposition to the proposal for u.i. for farmworkers was spearheaded by the Associated Farmers whose lobbyist was regularly testified against the proposal as Joe Gunterman (FCL's lobbyist from 1961-1975) testified for it. Later, when he no longer represented the farmers, he told Gunterman, "There is no reason farm workers shouldn't have unemployment insurance. I always felt bad when I had to testify against you". He then gave suggestions as to how the campaign for u.i. could become successful.

A bill to extend u.i. to farm workers was vetoed by Governor Reagan each of the four times it came to his desk. It finally was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in 1975.
Collective Bargaining and the UFW

In the early 1970s farm labor collective bargaining became a legislative issue when growers attempted to cut the throat of the struggling United Farm Workers union by seeking to outlaw the secondary boycott. Each year different approaches were tried, with the Teamsters’ Union adding a third element to the situation—sometimes supplying fuel for the growers and other times joining the UFW to oppose agribusiness. The FCL attempted to alert the UFW at crisis points and to be a message center for the Union when it came to town. Often Joe and Emma Gunterman provided food and floor space in their home for workers who came to protest the measures. An Agricultural Labor Relations Act was enacted in 1975 with the help of Governor Jerry Brown. In 1977 the UFW opened an office of its own in Sacramento to monitor both the legislature and the new Agricultural Labor Relations Board.

The average length of time for FCL legislation to reach fruition in Sacramento seems to hover around ten years. Many issues have taken longer and some of our earliest causes—notably capital punishment—remain unfinished business.

San Diego became the third region for FCL in 1975. With Lynn Skinner as the driving force the committee convinced the Pasadena and San Francisco groups to make the preservation of prime agricultural land a priority of our state program. Later the San Diego group concentrated on the moratorium on prison construction, testifying at local hearings and putting out its own newsletter.

FCL is no longer the only cause lobbying group in Sacramento. We have been joined by more than 30 established groups and scores of ad hoc groups. The legislature has become full time; the volume of measures considered each year has skyrocketed. In the process the role of the Committee has undergone evolutionary changes.

Whatever direction the FCL takes, it will continue to reflect the founding spirit expressed by Ernest Von Seggern and Robert Grinstead in 1961 when they said:

As we have sought to guide the spirit of brotherly love, so also have we sought to conform our lobbying to that spirit which hopes all things and is patient, which recognizes our common imperfection but also the common response to right.

AFTERWORD/FORWARD

The story of our first twenty-five years has been written with its primary focus on issues of FCL concern. It could just as easily have been written about the people who have contributed their time and care over the years.

They know who they are. They are the envelope stuffers, telephone answerers, pancake flippers. They are the people in Los Angeles, Palo Alto, Berkeley, Sacramento, Stockton who have put up jams and jellies, crocheted ponchos, potted plants, or strung beads for FCL events. They are the people who have served on the executive committee since the committee began. They are the ones we could turn to for money in times of trouble. They are the students who spend a year with us in the office and then move on. They are the people who left home at 4 AM to ride to Sacramento in time to attend a committee hearing. They are the people who can be depended upon to write letters even if they do not get a response.

They are the people who make up the FCL.

Where Do We Go From Here?

1977 was a year when “sunset laws” were in vogue in Sacramento. These laws provide for automatic termination of state agencies and state programs after a certain number of years unless the value of the agencies and programs can be proven. On the occasion of our 25th anniversary it seems appropriate to subject ourselves to this same kind of rigorous examination. Can the FCL justify its existence (expansion?) or has it outlived its usefulness?

Times have changed since the FCL’s 1952 birth. We are no longer the only cause lobbying group to have an office in Sacramento. In recent years over thirty nonprofit, “peoples” organizations have opened full time offices in the Capitol. They work on every issue imaginable—from senior citizens to child care, ecology to energy.

The FCL has changed its emphasis as other groups have emerged, but it becomes harder and harder to identify our “uniqueness”. The special contributions we make become increasingly subtle. They tend to reflect a process or approach rather than a particular position.
The Original Purpose

A primary purpose of putting together an organization in 1952 was to assist Friends and like-minded people to contribute effectively toward the formation of decisions by local, state, and national governmental bodies. It is possible that instead we provided an opportunity for Friends and others to delegate their individual responsibilities to an organization.

The founding meeting of the FCL was called "special meeting on political responsibility". There were two fundamental purposes outlined by the Executive Committee at this meeting: to provide moral support for legislators in Sacramento and Washington, and to put Friends religious insights into effect wherever they led us--even into the political arena. The methods employed were not to be the pressure tactics used by many lobbyists but a persistent persuasion, in the spirit of Friends, "endeavoring to win the assent of reasonable minds". The Committee was not concerned with achieving immediate results. It sought to promote the values gained by a slower process of interpreting to people in government, over an extended period of time, a moral and spiritual approach to the problems of government and law.

"Purity's" Problems and Rewards

As a result we are periodically confronted with people who consider us irrelevant--too "pure" to be practical or effective. It is a subject about which we are sensitive. On the one hand we can be proud of our refusal to be brokers in power politics. On the other hand it is sometimes difficult to know when to compromise a position and when to avoid compromise which undermines the basic principles we set out to implement. This dilemma has been particularly acute in recent years when legislative proposals have become complex and contradictory. It is clear from the comments of others that yesterday's "purist" position often turns out to be the wisest, soundest one.

We have declined to participate in that aspect of lobbying that takes place in local bars, at the poker table, or on the golf course. Lobbyists expect that these off-hour social sessions pay off in warmer more relaxed relationships with lawmakers. For FCL, however, lobbying must be a direct, honest interaction in which we argue the merits of an issue in an atmosphere conducive to reason and mutual growth.

In, Of and About the System

We are criticized by our radical friends for "working within the system"--for playing by the rules that govern the legislative process. There are ways in which we bow to that system when our Quaker forebears might not have. We do not routinely address legislators by their full names, opting instead to use the title Senator, Assemblyperson, Governor... We rarely shatter the decorum of committee hearings or answer back to committee members who are rude or disrespectful to us. Though we continually witness against undemocratic procedures in the legislative processes--procedures which tend to exclude the public--we have rarely, if ever, forced our way into a closed meeting.

The question of whether it is possible to work within the system without perpetuating it is a troubling one. For example a major concern of the FCL's since its inception has been the criminal justice cycle. The system itself is base and irreparable. It processes and cages people as if they were animals. It strips them not only of their freedom and dignity, but their integrity as well by making every decision for them--when to shower, what to eat, what jobs to do, what clothes to wear. And at no time in this process are the needs of the victims of crime addressed.

Yet we have worked to change the sentencing laws, to provide civil rights and laborers' rights to prisoners, to insert an ombudsman into the departments that handle offenders. These improvements chip away at the procedures and attitudes that would class people as animals. But only our struggle to declare a moratorium on prison construction can be seen as an attempt to challenge fundamentally the criminal justice system as a whole. And the moratorium is unpopular with many of our supporters.

Representing the Unrepresented

We have said often that our job is to represent the unrepresented. At first the unrepresented were a very large percentage of the population who suffered under the shadow of the anticommunist McCarthy era. Then it became the mentally ill, the prisoners, the members of racial minorities, children.

Our concept of representation has changed as more and more groups take their place in the mainstream. The FCL might work on fair housing now, but it would not do so "on behalf of" black people. We might support a bill to provide Native Americans with access to ancient burial grounds but we would do so side by side with members of the tribes affected. This change is a positive one. It may mean that FCL has outlived its usefulness as an advocate for certain groups. It may mean also that a new role is opening up for us as a "disinterested" third party.

We face all the usual pacifist dilemmas. How can we be consistent without being coercive? How can we be "relevant" without moving within the wealthy and powerful social/political circles? Is it dishonest to go along with some of the trappings of the process in order to participate as fully as possible at a decision making level?

Renewing the Vision

At the very heart of an FCL re-evaluation is a question of vision. In the original concept for the committee we were not truly doing our job unless we were at least ten years ahead of the times. Even when there were no authors in the legislature to carry our proposals we raised the questions by seeking authors. Yet to have vision we must continue to have dreamers in our ranks and courage in our commitment.

In order to remain vital we must re-think the "mandate" of political responsibility that called us into being. Some say the legislative process is no longer the central decision-making force in our society--that it pales in comparison, for example, to the changes that are forced upon us by technology. Still, decisions are made in the Capitol and power is concentrated there. Though our job is no longer a novel one it may be just as important to speak truth to power amid a roar, as to be a still small voice in a silent room.

We will take our anniversary year to consider these questions. We welcome the participation of everyone. Please give us your ideas, your insights, your suggestions.