

*The Society of Friends, or Quakers, have long been active in movements for social work, prison reform, education, and international relief. Recently, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an agency which grew out of Quaker social concerns, filed suit (AFSC v. Thornburgh) in an attempt to invalidate the employer sanctions portion of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). AFSC has also created a working group that drafted this statement on national borders. With AFSC's permission we reprint the report, which they remind us is not an official publication of the AFSC. Copies of the booklet are for sale at the Immigration Policy Issues Working Group, American Friends Service Committee, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA, 19151. We follow this report with commentaries on it by Kenneth Boulding and Gerda Bikales.*

## **BORDERS AND QUAKER VALUES: REFLECTIONS OF AN AFSC WORKING GROUP**

### **BORDERS, BOUNDARIES AND HUMAN BEINGS**

As we considered questions of borders, we were confronted by two realities: the deep-seated tendency of human communities to affirm their own identity by establishing boundaries between themselves and others and the fact that such boundaries may be arbitrary and in their implementation often do harm to human beings and communities.

Existing national borders are in fact only one such kind of boundary and are the product of a long historical process. For millennia small human groups migrated over vast territories. Even after the concept of a place of permanent residence arose following the emergence of agriculture, movements of people continued. The rise of European city states, the emergence of the nation-state, and the post-colonial emergence of new nations in the middle of our own century all indicate that national borders themselves are not timeless features of the human condition but are a historical phenomenon. Indeed, this process is still taking place today, as the AFSC has witnessed in Mali, where historically migratory peoples have been adopting a settled agricultural way of life. Moreover, national borders, in general, are culturally relative: aboriginal and native people understand land and property in their own ways which differ from those of Western nation-states.

Existing national borders have often been established by war, conquest, and violence; relatively few follow geographical features and they often conflict with other kinds of boundaries arising from culture, ethnicity, language, history, and family bonds. In addition, other kinds of relationships established by voluntary community, such as participation in the worldwide scientific community or membership in the Society of Friends also establish important kinds of boundaries. While national borders are the primary concern of this document, we remain mindful of these other kinds of boundaries.

Borders, like all human institutions, should be seen as instrumental, that is, they are meant to serve human beings. Rather than being sacralized through the nation-

state, they should be assessed by how well they serve human needs, both of those living within them, and of those outside.

Problems arise not from borders themselves but from the use made of them and the implementation of border policies. Borders tend to manifest and perhaps intensify what is already present in society and in relations between nations. In a heavily militarized world, and in societies built on age-old oppressions and the domination of women by men, it is not surprising that borders are operated in ways that replicate militarism, sexism, and domination. Some border officials, for example, who are themselves relatively powerless, nevertheless feel free to abuse those even less powerful.

Issues of borders arise not only where two nation-states meet but within existing nation-states as well. This is especially the case where native peoples are struggling for recognition of their own sovereignty and rights vis-a-vis national governments. Other such examples are those of national or linguistic groups (Azerbaijanis in the USSR, French-speaking Canadians). Conflicts may also arise along state or provincial lines within nation-states.

Although border issues generally concern people, often those fleeing war or disaster, it should be kept in mind that it is not only people that cross borders. Goods flow across borders and patterns of international trade are established. Money flows toward countries (investment) and away from them (capital flight). Indeed, the flow of international finance is beyond any existing mechanisms of regulation. Likewise, ideas cross borders despite the efforts of authoritarian governments. Drugs flow to where consumer demand is, but the effects overflow into the culture of supplying nations. A foreign military presence within the borders of a country, even when there by prior agreement, can diminish the sovereignty of the host country (e.g. US bases in the Philippines).

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Ultimately, however, it is the impact of borders on human beings that we must keep in the forefront. In recent years we have seen large numbers of people fleeing war, political and religious persecution, or economic conditions that made it impossible for them to have a decent life.

It is symptomatic that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that all people have the right to leave a country and to seek asylum in other countries--but it does not assign a duty to particular states to receive people. In pursuing their rights, some groups of people have been made stateless, even for decades. Others are striving for recognition of their sovereignty. It is these people--Central Americans, Haitians, Indochinese, Palestinians, Afghanis, Soviet Jews, native peoples in the Americas, to name a few--that we have in mind as we offer these reflections.

#### POSITIVE FEATURES OF BORDERS

In their operation, borders have both positive and negative consequences. Indeed, the two are often interconnected and seem to be opposite sides of the same coin. For example, within the European Economic Community national borders no longer impede individual Europeans from migrating to other countries within the region. Yet non-Europeans remain excluded: a new border, just as firm, encircles Europe.

The following are some primarily positive aspects of national borders.

\* **Identity and self-determination**

Within borders people are better able to establish their own forms of social organization, maintain their unique identities and culture, and pursue their own path to development.

\* **Protection from harmful forces**

Borders provide an opportunity for peoples to protect themselves, e.g. from drugs, agricultural diseases or pests, disruptive alien cultural influences.

\* **Stability and peace**

Mutually recognized borders are an essential ingredient in peaceful relations among neighbors. The establishment of national borders in Europe marked the end of warfare between feudal lords. Many nations that once fought over borders no longer do so. Governments that respect each others' borders and authority can negotiate over issues in dispute.

\* **Rational and ecologically sound administration**

Administration requires manageable units--it is impossible to manage the whole world. More specifically, a national authority enables peoples to protect their resources and use them to meet their own needs.

Seen this way, borders are congruous with a number of values prized by Friends. One of these is that of variety within a common humanity. Borders enhance that variety by enabling people to conserve and develop those features that make them different. By analogy with natural evolution, it seems important to respect, retain, and enhance that variety. Within this implicit evolutionary strategy--that is, for its own survival--the human race must maintain a variety of ways of living, thinking, feeling, and speaking.

The stabilizing and peace-enhancing qualities of borders relate to the Quaker peace testimony. Friends understand peace as more than mere non-warfare between human beings. Peace entails a sense of stewardship and indeed a kinship with other creatures and the earth itself.

#### NEGATIVE FEATURES OF BORDERS

As noted, most negative features of borders are the converse of the values embodied in them. The following is a short catalog of some of these.

\* **Impediment to human solidarity**

National and local borders often have been established by violence. Consequently they may divide people who, without the border, would be able to mingle freely. Thus they may serve to increase xenophobia, racism, and the general separation of people from each other.

\* **Source of instability**

Borders drawn with little respect for the boundaries of ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups fuel conflict.

\* **Different concepts**

Indigenous peoples' assumptions about property, land, and boundaries usually differ from European concepts. Yet within nation-states their values are often disregarded.

\* **Strong vs the weak**

Relationships along borders are often unequal, e.g., US-Mexico border. Peoples' ability to move across borders typically is closely related to their wealth. Some groups are confined to locations whose lack of resources make them nonviable, most notably South African blacks confined to white-designated "homelands." Some people are left stateless and others made refugees.

\* **Mistreatment**

Border officials often have a great deal of discretion, can use force freely, and are not accountable to those whom they mistreat. These are not simply the arbitrary actions of individuals; they manifest

the implicit attitudes and policies of governments, which are often racist and exclusionary.

**\* Shielding abusive practices**

National sovereignty sometimes serves to protect those responsible for environmental damage that affects others or for the exploitation of cheap labor. Similarly, governments often invoke the inviolability of borders when they prevent their citizens from leaving or otherwise violate human rights.

The experience and conviction of Friends are challenged by these negative aspects of borders. As they function today, borders clearly prevent many individuals from developing their potential. Where this happens, Quakers feel impelled to speak truth to power and to call authority to accountability. Thus, contemporary Quaker involvement with immigration and other border-related issues stands in a long tradition of solidarity with the excluded and the dispossessed (e.g., prisoners, Indians and Blacks in the US).

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Borders and their enforcement are frequently the focus of conflict, violence, or violation of human rights. In such circumstances, Friends are called by their peace testimony to seek nonmilitary management of borders and nonviolent resolution of conflicts arising over borders.

The actual functioning of borders often violates the Quaker sense of the right sharing of world resources. Although Friends may not always be in agreement on the policy implications of this value, they agree that the existence of vast disparities between nations and people--enormous accumulation of personal wealth while others lack basic necessities--is dehumanizing, first for the poor but ultimately for all. To the extent that borders reinforce these disparities they are a challenge to Quaker values.

Similarly, the functioning of borders may conflict with the contemporary awareness that we live on a single planet with limited resources. Our Quaker values of simplicity and harmony require responsible use of the world's resources regardless of borders.

**DILEMMAS**

For the above reasons, some Friends conclude that borders as such are inimical to Quaker values and urge that they be abolished or become completely open: from this perspective individuals should be free to move to pursue their own fulfillment, unconstrained by

limitations imposed by states. That position would seem to be consonant with a vision of a common humanity advanced by some Friends.

Such a view, however, may overlook the positive values outlined above, such as self determination of peoples, and may fail to come to grips with real dilemmas.

Even when values are shared, tensions may arise in the implementation of policies, as reflected in the following questions:

- \* How can the protective functions of borders be maintained so as to serve the weak vis-a-vis the strong, while still removing undesirable barriers between peoples?
- \* How can there be greater communication between peoples while diversity is maintained and enhanced?
- \* If in fact there cannot be completely free movement of peoples, on what basis should choices be made and limits set?

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Such questions underscore our sense as a group that we are not in a position to offer definitive answers. Rather we believe we can point to some of the major questions that must be faced in present policies and to point toward a longer range vision of the role and function of borders.

**POLICY PROPOSALS**

As noted above, we believe the central question is not whether or not borders should exist, but how they should function so as to serve human beings. In that spirit, the working group made the following observations on policy matters related to borders.

\* In the management of international borders, we would urge support for the following policies and the values that underlie them: respect for human rights and international law, equal protection for citizens and non-citizens, priority consideration for those under duress or fleeing natural disaster, family unity, non-discriminatory application of immigration laws, the right to preservation of language and culture, and uniform enforcement.

\* We urge that border issues be resolved with the widest possible participation of those involved.

\* We insist that the welfare and interests of human

beings take precedence over political considerations in border questions. For example, family reunification and the wider interests of people in Cuba and the United States are human needs that should be given primary weight in considering the renewal of trade and diplomatic relations between these countries.

\* We urge that existing mechanisms for conflict resolution be utilized and strengthened. Here we have in mind regional organizations, the United Nations and its agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Abundant experience now indicates the positive benefits that flow from common scientific and cultural ventures by nations (e.g. the Arab League) and joint peace-making efforts (Contadora and Central American Peace Plan). As an ultimate authority for disputes between nations, the World Court should be supported and respected. Weaker parties should be able to make the stronger accountable.

\* We urge that the superpowers cease fueling conflict through proxy wars, military intervention or threats of intervention, arms sales, and political or diplomatic manipulation. The present period seems to offer opportunities for international agreements to curtail such actions.

\* We urge support for current promising approaches to resolving the conflicts between native peoples and nation-states. One such possibility which holds promise if it can be respectfully and successfully negotiated, is the current discussion and experimentation with limited autonomy in the negotiations between the people on the Atlantic coast and the Nicaraguan government. Another is the current constitutional negotiations in Canada which embody a movement toward self-determination and sovereignty by indigenous people (e.g. in their own health system). However, care must be taken not to apply the concept of autonomy to frustrate aspirations of peoples in situations of competing nationalisms and national identities, as in the case of the Palestinians.

\* We urge the establishment of transnational regulatory mechanisms to deal with problems that are beyond the capacity of national governments. These are especially needed in dealing with the environment where the actions of individual governments and of corporations (which are frequently transnational in their scope and influence) can affect the lives and fates of all, and especially future generations (Chernobyl, toxic and nuclear waste, tropical rain forest).

\* Could even today's borders be cooperatively administered by the countries on the two sides of a border? At first glance such a proposal seems odd, since the very maintaining of a border station is an assertion of national sovereignty at a country's entry point. Yet travelers would certainly welcome streamlined, jointly administered border crossing procedures. More importantly, such cooperation at points of border crossings would itself be a powerful statement and a

hint of future possibilities.

#### LONG RANGE VISION

Our vision for the future is not so much one in which there are no borders, but one where borders are the product of mutual agreement and are mutually acknowledged, are jointly administered and are disarmed. Such a vision, like any deep vision of peace, points toward a different kind of world.

We look forward to a time when individuals and families can reach their potential in their own land and are not driven elsewhere by intolerable conditions. That would entail a level of development where all have work or land and income sufficient to assure food, shelter, education, health care, and basic security. The conversion of human and natural resources from arms races to the meeting of human needs would be an essential element in such a shift.

In such a world, people would not be forced to migrate by a desperate need to survive.

Our vision is not that of a world without borders, but rather one in which nation-states no longer have absolute claims over individuals. One element in such a vision is an enhanced role for local government so that people would feel and act as citizens not only of their nation, but of their region, city, town or neighborhood. At the same time, we envision the further development of supranational authority to resolve equitably issues that transcend national borders.

Although these last observations are visionary, and intentionally so, we believe the seeds of such developments have already been sown and are sprouting to life even now.

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