Proclaiming Peace
LIVES THAT SPEAK

Shane
Paul
O'Doherty
NORTHERN
IRELAND

Rommel
Celeste
and
Che Roberts
SOUTH
AFRICA

Former Terrorist Takes Offensive for Peace

"The uncommon line I promote is that there are three armed struggles going on simultaneously—IRA, loyalist and British. And I'm not promoting one as being worse or better than the other; I'm opposed to all three of them. From that argument, I make what is also the very important point that no one has the high moral ground: Everybody on the three sides is guilty; everybody is involved in violence and that, therefore, there need be no pre-conditions for talks. We're all guilty; we're all responsible; we're all stuck in the mess. So let's talk our way out of it. You cannot be selective and point the finger solely at one faction, because then that faction goes into its corner and says, 'We don't want to know about your talks!' And that's currently the crux of the problem."

- Shane Paul O'Doherty

As a child he loved Irish dancing. He studied Gaelic as one of his many hobbies. At the nearby Roman Catholic church, he was a devout choirboy. His father, a much-respected headmaster at the local Christian Brothers' School, encouraged him to read, which he did, voraciously from a young age.

And he was popular. His warm, outgoing personality endeared him to members of both sides of the sectarian divide in bitterly split Derry, or Londonderry as it is variously known. Indeed, he had many Protestant, as well as Catholic, friends.

Then, at age 20, the hometown where he had been so widely known and liked was left shaken by the news. Shane Paul O'Doherty was arrested for masterminding a notorious international letterbomb campaign in which 14 people were injured, some seriously. His secret was out: He was, and had been since his youth, a member of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). By the time the police nabbed O'Doherty he was, in fact, a key figure in the organization that, to many worldwide, is synonymous with death and destruction.

The trial was swift. It began at London's famous Old Bailey on Monday and finished by Friday. O'Doherty did not contest the charges. Following IRA tradition, he refused to recognize the legitimacy of the court. To emphasize the point, he sat, during the entire proceedings, nose in a book, assuming disinterest by cavalierly using the opportunity to catch up on his novel reading. It was only in

the final moments just prior to sentencing that he deigned to speak, telling the court that its "attempts to apply judicial sanctions to what is a political problem does not deter me, nor does it deter my comrades." He betrayed no remorse for his crimes.

O'Doherty received a staggering 30 life sentences, plus 20 years. Although the stretches were to run concurrently, it was a formidable blow. There was little doubt that he would be behind bars for a long time.

That was 15 years ago. Today, a free man again, O'Doherty continues to surprise. Since being let out of Belfast's Maghaberry Prison last September—after serving a slightly larger portion of his time than is usual according to British penal standards—he has been on the go virtually non-stop; but instead of, as he once did, eating, sleeping and dreaming of decimation, the former IRA bomber is now doggedly working to bring peace to his beleaguered country.

Dr. James Mehaffey, the Episcopal Bishop of Derry, is one of the many somewhat unlikely supporters of the ex-terrorist who, remarkably, is fast becoming a leading spokesman for non-violence in Northern Ireland. Mehaffey, is, of course, the spiritual head of the community that O'Doherty once made a solemn pledge to fight. The two men met when the young Catholic prisoner wrote to the Episcopal bishop saying that he had painted a picture which he wanted to present as a personal gift. The painting, recalls Mehaffey, depicted visions of violence and non-violence, in which death, injury and suffering gave way to peace and a more constructive outcome.

"It was a powerful painting," remarks the bishop. "Shane Paul had contacted me—it was, I think, about three years ago—and had said that he appreciated what I was trying to do for peace here in the city.... He recognized in me someone perhaps who was trying, from the Protestant side, to promote non-violence, reconciliation...and was not being drawn into extreme positions. The gift was meant to be a way of expressing how much he [valued] where I stood. It was a way of saying thank you."

The significance of such an encounter cannot be overstated. Protestant bishops simply do not visit convicted Catholic-nationalist terrorists in Ulster prisons—nor would they normally be asked to do so. "In many ways, he's a very unusual person," concludes Mehaffey. "I [found] him to be very sincere, very intelligent, very articulate, and I enjoyed my conversation with him.... I do believe that he has turned completely from his former violence."

And O'Doherty receives endorsement from yet another unlikely quarter: Brigadier Michael O'Cock, one of the hapless victims who served as a witness at the trial and thus helped to put the bomber behind bars. While in prison, O'Doherty felt moved to write letters of apology—and act without precedence for a convicted IRA man—to those who had suffered as a result of his violent deeds. Although initially skeptical, O'Cock now fully accepts his sincerity. "The more he does to make amends for what he did wrong in the past, the better I'm pleased,"

says the brigadier, adding that "certainly his public repudiation of terrorism is of far greater importance than just a letter."

To be sure, there are other ex-members of Ulster paramilitaries, both Catholic and Protestant, who have over the years, for a variety of reasons, decided to break away from those extremist groups to which they once belonged. Where O'Doherty is different, point out all of those whom I interviewed on both sides of the ideological divide, lies in the completeness of his about-turn, coupled with his courageous commitment to using the full weight of his mounting influence and prodigious speaking talents to publicly push for a negotiated peace settlement that would put an end, once and for all, to the bloody troubles of Ulster.

Ciaran McKeown [pronounced KEERan McKYOen], a prominent Northern Irish journalist and renowned pacifist of long-standing, has in the past few months talked at length with the reformed terrorist. He notes that O'Doherty "stands absolutely out from the pack, in terms both of what he was—the amount of damage he did, being, as he was, a very, very major operator in the IRA—and the thoroughness, now, of his thinking through of his [pacifist] convictions. I mean, you'll find [former members of the IRA], for instance, who will say very quietly, 'The armed struggle is going nowhere—but if you could raise a thousand men, then maybe it would be worth it.' In other words, they might agree that the situation is at a stalemate, but that's not to say they would, by any means, embrace non-violence. Whereas O'Doherty would argue that if you could raise a thousand men, you'd simply multiply the damage by a thousand. So you see, in his case, its a matter of conviction, not simply a tactic."

McKweon is convinced that O'Doherty possesses the kind of charisma and clout to make a significant impact, particularly on those who belong to Ulster paramilitaries or are tempted to join them. "There is a lot of good in him to give," observes McKweon, "and a great desire to give it."

Equally impressed with his public stance is the 8,000-strong student body of the University of Dublin, Trinity College, Ireland's leading Protestant academic institution where O'Doherty, at 35, is currently studying for an English degree—so much so that they recently have overwhelmingly elected the ex-IRA man to be their spokesman on the Northern Ireland question.

The irony of an essentially Protestant establishment selecting a former Catholic terrorist to such a post is not lost on O'Doherty. "I was staggered and amazed," he says, "that the message I had been promoting since my release from prison and the policies I was promulgating against *all* violence and the need for talks had actually gotten across. It has encouraged me to feel there is perhaps a role for someone who believes that a single individual can actually be a catalyst for peace."

Chatting with O'Doherty for many hours at Dublin's Gresham Hotel—where only two nights before he chalked up a first on the road to reconciliation by having arranged to speak on the same platform with Custy Spence, a famous former leader of Ulster's most hardline Protestant paramilitary—it's clear that this is a

man who feels he has a lot to make up for: lost time; lost joys of youth; lost opportunities to work for constructive, rather than destructive, goals. He is acutely conscious of making every minute count.

"I haven't slept in the last four months," says O'Doherty chuckling as he runs a hand through his tousled Celtic curls. He goes on to explain in rapid, cheerful speech, heavily laced with a Northern Irish twang and dry quips, that between all-night sessions writing essays and term papers, he has been freelancing for various Irish newspapers (to supplement the modest student grant that he lives on) and speaking publicly wherever asked on behalf of peace—plus, on a lighter note, helping to organize his college's end-of-term ball. The latter event kept him up yet again the entire night prior to our meeting. Tired, perhaps, but when the talk turns to his country's troubles, O'Doherty's conversation lights up with a kinetic force that would be hard to equal.

Indeed, listening to this affable, uncommonly courteous man speak so passionately of his quest to get his countrymen to lay down their arms, it's difficult to imagine that he once channeled this same passion in a very different way. As a terrorist, O'Doherty's assigned task was simple: to bomb, booby-trap and burn down, without compunction. At his hands, British army vehicles by the score had to be written off, while much of Derry's city center was reduced to rubble. The purpose: to drain the British government of cash wherever possible. Although no one died as a direct result of his many forays, he does not deny that the intent to maim and kill was there.

"The idea that the British troops must go is a total absurdity, since they are not the cause of the problem in Northern Ireland; they were, in fact, originally brought in to defend the Catholic minority. So groups such as NORAID [which helps fund the IRA] in America should realize that 'the British troops must go' is far too simplistic. And it will never happen. Neither the Irish nor British governments would let it happen. And I don't see any person here seriously considering that a million Protestant loyalists are going to be told, 'Look, you go into a united Ireland, or else!' The Protestant-loyalist view that they want to remain British and separate from the rest of Ireland and have their own political identity, even if it is currently at the price of the Catholic minority, is just as valid as the Catholic-nationalist viewpoint, and has to be respected.... Therefore, NORAID and similar organizations are operating on assumptions that pertain to an Ireland of years ago; the situation today is considerably changed. These groups, by their contributions, are only increasing the massive human rights violations in Northern Ireland and the massive suffering, on all sides."

O'Doherty vividly recalls the lure of terrorism. "I grew up in a country that wasn't democratically voted for, but, rather, was born out of extreme violence," he explains. "And for 50 years there was massive discrimination and institutionalized violence against the small community of which I was a member. So we were raised in the knowledge that we were a desperately deprived minority in Northern Ireland. We were treated as second-class citizens by our Protestant, pro-British neighbors in almost every sphere of life. Because of all this, I felt trapped in the six counties of Ulster that had not been freed from the British in the 1918-21 Irish War of Independence. And I couldn't understand why we had effectively been disowned by the rest of the Irish nation and left, for all intents and purposes, to rot in the state of Northern Ireland."

From a Catholic nationalist viewpoint, continues O'Doherty, the original IRA, a tiny band of men who had instigated the War of Independence—bombing, shooting and murdering to achieve their ends—were patriots. "We revered those who fought for the Irish people and won Ireland from Britain," he says. "They were our heroes, our martyrs. In our history books, in school and in our songs, the Irish nation starts with them. So, naturally, they were my heroes, too."

In the late 1960's, Catholic nationalists began marching for civil rights in Northern Ireland. Correspondingly, the Ulster government was putting out feelers for a *rapprochement* with its southern Irish counterpart. Although the IRA quickly rose up to respond in kind, rapidly escalating the troubles, O'Doherty points out that it was the Protestant loyalists, perceiving a threat to the status quo, who were the first to turn to violence. The seventh child in a family of eight children, he observes that, unlike his four older brothers—who had long left Ulster because there was little job opportunity, particularly for Catholics—he came of age at a profound turning point in his country's history.

At 15, O'Doherty's idealism, born of the dramatic events unfolding all around him, prompted him to covertly join the IRA. His parents, after finding makeshift explosives hidden in their home, suspected his membership and warned him not to get involved. The ardent young man replied, "I'm not prepared to have other people's sons do the fighting for me or our country—fighting that we're all going to gain from at some point."

Yet, even while engaged in his bombing campaigns, O'Doherty began to have nagging doubts. He couldn't help but admit to himself that terrorism was at best a clumsy tactic—impossible as it was to focus exclusively on so-called *legitimate* targets. In his letterbombing, for instance, it was often secretaries or postal workers, rather than the military personnel or politicians to whom he was sending his menacing missives, that unwittingly found themselves on the receiving end.

"Everyone here stretches the Christian Doctrine of the Just War to suit their [actions], yet if people were to actually study it, then apply it to IRA, loyalist or British violence, it applies to none of them."

But it wasn't until his trial that O'Doherty came full face with an even more startling truth. While feigning to read his book, he did in fact have one eye fixed firmly on the proceedings. "And it was only in seeing the parade of innocents coming through the court to testify," he remembers, "the innocents who were injured by the violence of mine, that I suddenly realized my own record of human rights violations. Until then, I had been remote from my violence: You just pressed the button, the bombs dropped and you didn't see what they did. From that moment I was severely embarrassed and ashamed that we in the IRA had married our campaign of political change to the tactic of violence. And that shame is something that will live with me always."

O'Doherty credits close scrutiny of Christian doctrine, Quaker literature and secular tracts on human rights and pacifistic philosophy for convincing him that, in truth, all violence is wrongheaded. "There are very basic Christian arguments for pacifism that the main churches here ignore," he cites. "Jesus Christ, for instance, had a sacred cause, a divine cause, an innocent cause...and He wouldn't even allow violence to be used in support of that."

As for those who reject Christian morality, O'Doherty is ready with ample examples of the gross counterproductivity of violence. "I tell those people that from all the evidence, armed struggle and the politics of coercion have failed on every side," he argues, "and will continue to fail. Such tactics simply cannot create the groundwork for the peace and unity they are seeking."

O'Doherty is optimistic that his message will ultimately be heard. He is certain that the time is ripe for people to begin to listen. "The reality is that paramilitaries on both sides are made up of men, flesh and blood, and they are all Irish," he says. "They are talking to people like me, and I talk with them. There's a great deal of contact going on, and people have learned a lot in recent years about the cost of violence and the horror of it. I do believe in the power of individual effort, of every single contribution to talking our way out of violence. You may not see the fruits straight away. You may have to wait three months, or three years—or 30 years. But I'm convinced that talking actually works.

Nourishing the Small Seeds of Social Change

"Friends need to be content with doing the little things and doing them well. And the little things abound. The fact that people need affirmation is clear, people threatened with removal, groups struggling for peace and justice, individual leaders to whom a word of encouragement might make them go that extra mile in time of despair."

- Rommel Roberts
South African Friend

It's good to have a chance to visit with you Rommel. I'm sure our readers, like me, would like to learn something of your background.

I am of Indian/British extraction, a product of colonial pollution which my German name, Rommel, signifies ("rubbish" in Afrikaans). I was actually born in the eastern part of the country, Durban, which is a heavily Zulu and Indian populated area. I never really lived there except during my seminary years when I studied in a part close to Durban. I moved to different parts of the country, largely as a result of a vagabond but likeable father. I probably stayed in Cape Town, the most southerly part of Africa, the longest. I spent something like seven years studying for the Catholic priesthood. My decision to leave was based on a fundamental problem I had encountered with organized religion, where the accent was on structure rather than people. When I left, I did a great deal of hitchhiking around the country, including places like Botswana and Zimbabwe. Filled with religious fervor but having no starting point was a problem, particularly if one has great visions. It was quite a step to realize that great things start small.

So it was that the first starting point became children in a gangland area in Cape Town. The place was Q.town, a flatland. This progressed to working with gangs directly. It proved to be quite a watershed for me in terms of coming to grips with death. I was often out until the early a.m. hours (when 9-11 year olds seem to come alive as they prowl for survival). To make the contact and develop the relationship and credibility, this was necessary. It was quite a challenge. All the work during this time was voluntary. Many organizations would not have me. I was even turned down as a laborer as I sounded too educated to the bosses. This work led me to work with the Muslims for a year where I got to understand

Islam quite well, although I did have some initial grounding. It is ironic that I was trying to stand up for the rights of women (subjected to second and third wife status in a viciously exploitative way) in Islam when—horror of horrors—someone high up in the Muslim hierarchy discovered I had formerly been a Catholic priest! I was dealt with very diplomatically but amazingly allowed office space to do as I saw fit in terms of community organization.

The first three years saw me supporting myself, singing many evenings in restaurants for a living. Many days and nights were spent largely listening and following up complaints. Sheer frustration with the dead-ends that every complaint seemed to produce pointed toward the dreaded legalized apartheid system that would have to be confronted, be it housing, pass laws, group areas, etc. The answer lay in the changing of laws, systems, and attitudes. People needed to be transformed from helpless, cringing beings to dignified humanity. I set about trying to achieve this with a very heavy heart.

The path that followed has made me convinced of the wisdom of the mustard seed concept as used in scripture. I set out with two other people to try to come to terms with these awesome obstacles. "Where two or three are gathered..." means for me literally that a caring church is as few as two or three or as many as millions. The number of people does not determine the value—this is an article of faith and hope. There were only two or three of us working initially, the third person being my wife (she wasn't then; in fact, she was still a nun at the time). Gradually we built a vision which expanded. I remember the time when I couldn't sing in restaurants any longer because night work was quite heavy. We went around to different bush areas. I recall once coming across a family. They were living in dugouts; they had dug caves in the ground in an area where a bulldozer was assigned to do some routine clearing. People in some bush parts were often so terrified when they initially saw us that they would scurry like rabbits. We were not of their own and as such had to be feared since the only other people encountered were those representative of an authority who had been burning and destroying their shacks for a long time. They had nothing left except dugouts. This community was our miracle community. Theirs is a fairy tale based on their own courage with some support.

We literally worked ourselves into the ground working with people in as many as 50 different areas of the country trying to respond to various calls. People didn't think anything was possible then, for the political groups were not as widespread as they are today. Gradually, we built together a group of volunteers. It grew to about 800 at one stage. Many volunteers have since become key figures in major political groups, unions, and community issues. Some have, in fact, written books (e.g., *Crossroads, The Surplus People, Home*). Projects against removals grew out of this period.

When would that have been—what time period?

The time between 1973 and early 1976 was a formative period with a great deal of experimentation and learning: the bus boycott of 1975 (a failure), many legal suits, protests, etc. Then came the incredible period of repression. After 1976, as we got people together in communities, and as they started resisting the forced removals and we won one legal case after another, the government would change legislation overnight. In a period of months we saw squatter right of legal recourse reduced to limited recourse and finally eroded to no recourse, leaving the way for mass demolition. There was an incredible case involving the church of the state. In this incident, the church deeded its property over to the government in an overnight deal in order to legalize the government position of demolishing people's shacks, a devastating denial of the protective mantle of mother church to the poor. This was another watershed. We came face-to-face for the first time with terrible repression while working with a community of about 10,000 families, Modderdam (also a book written by a U.S. citizen, A. Silk), whose shacks were totally destroyed by the government. Various protests were undertaken, people stood in front of bulldozers—days of prayer and fasting were undertaken, together with many other actions. That was the start of a whole mobilization, which had national implications.

The South Africa Development and Coordinating Conference was persuaded to make removals its key issue from 1977 onwards. A shelter fund was started, churches took squatters into church property, and in so doing broke the law. Breaking the law became the *in* thing. It culminated in the struggle for Crossroads. It didn't end there, of course, since there were other manifestations. With a major Crossroads victory, others joined the struggle. People had developed a new resolve which saw a new wave of resistance and resulted in harsher measures by new groups and communities. They were "deported" back to homelands especially created for them—the first time such a measure was used. A new height in people's suffering and resolve was created. Women walked back over 1,000 kilometers—pregnant women sometimes miscarrying on the way. There was immense human suffering. To support the people we would follow the buses that deported the people, for no one knew where the buses would drop them off; some of them would be dropped along the side of the road. We would help people to get to churches and had to educate ministers to the role of the church in this time of crisis. Churches had to be organized to act in support.

Of this time we can speak of incredible endurance and courage, and of the development of a ground swell of movement, which culminated in the abolition of the pass law system in its most vicious form. It is true that authorities now are thinking of something perhaps softer to replace it. But to date they have not done so because people have refused to accept it. People have gone through the worst that the government had to offer, including the use of the army to man roadblocks in order to prevent people returning.

During this entire period I had been director of all operations with various people and committees taking responsibilities for particular sections. A fully representative committee met at different times to review and plan. Needless to say, this was quite tiring, and an occasional bridge game was not unwelcome. As if to relieve the boredom, I found myself roped into a comprehensive involvement in the 1980 boycotts, both student and bus boycott, where I played the principal role of initiator and partial organizer prior to my own imprisonment. There were consequences: to this day I personally owe approximately $20,000 in legal costs and can never hope to pay (so therefore must avoid owning anything). I had to take off time for about two solid years. There were legal cases, everything thrown in, and periods of personal imprisonment as well. I think we probably saw one of the first major nonviolent, completely noncoercive actions where people—old and young alike—joined in. Youths went to fetch parents from stations. Street committees for alternative transport were organized. This for me remains probably one of the highlights in terms of real cooperative action. There was great intransigence, of course, on the part of the bus company, supported by the government. They refused to look at the realities.

To me, these actions are symptomatic experiences of what happens when people become really liberated: ordinary, simple people being at the root of the action, taking responsibility themselves and being prepared to suffer. They determine their strength; they determine how far they will go. In short, they are in control of their destiny—a democratic right. A right of respect. In a sense, in much of the sanctions issues today, these are the elements that I feel are badly lacking in the whole debate. One hears prophetic voices and pontifications but no people's movement and hence no ground swell. The people have been left out. Their participation and cooperation are assumed.

Very few U.S. Quakers have been to South Africa. When you mention Crossroads, I don't think most of us know much about it. What is it? Where is it? Who are the people who live there?

Well, of course, to look at Crossroads is to look at a symbol. It's actually more than a simple little place called Crossroads. It symbolizes the years before when many people had resisted, had had their shacks demolished, had gone for refuge into church property, or been sent to prison. Crossroads is also a physical place within the Western Cape situated at the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Cape Town. It is essentially a shantytown outside of the city. There are about 120,000 to 150,000 people there. But the numbers we're talking about in this whole movement are well over half a million.

What is the detention situation now? We heard a lot about it in the news for a time but we don't hear much anymore.

Well, of course, there is a great deal of restriction on news coverage, new restrictions even now being planned. It's awfully difficult to obtain facts. There are little networks of people who try to assemble the facts about the numbers of people who have been detained. But it's never really accurate because so many get detained and you never know until much later; we also don't have accurate information on releases. Admittedly the numbers have decreased, but there are still people being detained. At one stage there was something like 20,000; then it dropped to 12,000. I would say it's still well over 1,000 if we count the children. The government puts it at 250.

I know that the Religious Society of Friends in South Africa is small. Tell me a little bit about that body. What are they doing to help in the situation?

Yes, it is a very small body. There are a little over 200 now. It has grown a bit in the last three years. It has specific areas in which it functions. The development of a children's meeting has been slow. There's been some concern that the children really haven't been cared for adequately, and I'm always looking for ways to bolster such programs. On the social side we have a service arm, Quaker Service, which funds little self-help programs usually not exceeding about $500. They have a destitution section that tries immediately to alleviate some of the suffering from unemployment through self-help programs and relief operations. It looks to establish programs, etc. Essentially it is a funding arm. Then you have the Peace Action section, which is a subcommittee of the monthly meeting and is concerned on the more active side and would be involved in conflict resolution and direct development work both in the Western Cape and as far as the Eastern Cape, to an extent of 800 miles. We have developed relationships with key people, ministers, local councils of churches. We have, from time to time, undertaken evaluations of projects and brought in short-term volunteers for specific projects. We've been running workshops for the last three years as part of a long-term venture in the Eastern Cape; there are something like 40 different communities involved. Essentially people from rural areas are taken through a process of education, which first affirms their own wisdom in problems and solutions prior to making any input. We first find out where people are at, what they have done; what their visions are; what they have done towards those visions and what the obstacles are; and what they might suggest as solutions. A whole spectrum of wisdom has slowly emerged, which makes it easier from an educational point of view. There are virtually only two of us working in the field, myself and Danile Landingwe, a former Robben Island inmate. It is a major operation. For so many years we've been caught up in one crisis after another within the general movement. And now we're finding for the first time that we can

actually pay more attention to developing leadership, which we have found to be a key factor relevant to our future and thus very important—hence my trip here....

How can Quakers outside South Africa be more helpful and serve as a resource?

I feel that if Friends would be content to do the little things, and do those things well, it would be the most effective way of responding and in keeping with a Quaker spirit. We need to be content with doing the little things and doing them well. And the little things abound. The trouble is we're looking at the big things and we miss the beauty that's around, the fact that people need affirmation is clear, people threatened with removal, groups struggling for peace and justice, individual leaders to whom a word of encouragement might and will make them go that extra mile in time of despair.

Who have been some of the people who have inspired and given you hope?

I would say without a doubt my mother. She is one of the most amazing people in the way in which she has been able to struggle and sacrifice and be of service, even to the extent that her own children would suffer. I found so many more like her. You know, there's a saying that in the poor we have our liberation. And I think it is in this point that I discovered over and over again that the beauty that is around abounds and far supersedes the evil and ugliness. Because our educational system and the media are all geared to the ugliness, they don't see the beauty. In the South African struggle, I can name so many people who have just humbled me beyond words. When a mother, for instance, had been resisting and went on a protest and lost her baby in the process; she bled to death while her five children watched her, along with friends and neighbors. Her neighbor, who is a single parent, without batting an eyelid took on these five additional children. They became her children. Now that is even beyond heroism. There are more similar examples. If I must go on telling such stories of human endurance, endeavor, bravery...to me, it seems almost criminal: it should be those people talking, not me. The trouble is those people don't have access to the corridors that are prepared to listen. People are not prepared to listen to them. They are the little people of our society—they are not *name* people. It doesn't make economic sense, it doesn't make political sense, it doesn't make any damn sense. God bless the little people who do things without ambition but with a gentleness and spirit of being and love.

It is this form of liberation which I feel strongly about as well. It is the quiet revolution that goes on that very few people know about—the quiet revolution that I believe will emerge victorious because by its very nature it is so persistent, it is rooted in people, and that's the kind of revolution I really believe in.

WQF acknowledges grateful thanks to Linda Joffee, a freelance writer in England, for permission to reprint her article, "Former Terrorist Takes Offensive for Peace", which first appeared in The Christian Science Monitor, *March 1, 1990.*

In June 1987 Rommel Roberts—a South African community worker, peace activist, and member of Cape Western Monthly Meeting (Quaker)—traveled among Friends in the United States at the invitation of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. While in Philadelphia, Rommel visited with Friends Journal editor Vinton Deming. "Nourishing the Small Seeds of Social Change" appeared in the January 1988 issue of Friends Journal.

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WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP
a program of the Friends World Committee for Consultation
Section of the Americas
1506 Race Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 USA

8-90 \ 3200