W.H. Ferry, An Appreciation

by David McReynolds

W.H. Ferry—but we knew him as Ping. W.H. was how you addressed the envelope, Ping was how you addressed the letter. So let me write of Ping Ferry, who died on September 30 at the age of 84.

Many of us think of him as one half of a remarkable couple, Ping and Carol Bernstein Ferry. But Ping already had a long career of constructive controversy before he married Carol Bernstein. He had been at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. He had worked with Robert Hutchins. Ping was a maverick, with sideburns that fluffed out, a bow tie, and dissident ideas.

He wrote a delightfully subversive pamphlet on unilateral disarmament at the height of the Cold War. It was thoughtful, non-dogmatic—the insights of a man trapped in the nuclear age with enough sense to look for an escape hatch. It was typical of Ping.

When he married Carol Bernstein, the two began giving away the substantial sum of money Carol's husband, the late Daniel Bernstein had left. It was large enough that a foundation was set up to process the orderly dispensing of funds. The target was to spend the funds completely and then dissolve the foundation (which, as I understand it, has been done). Money went into the Vietnam anti-war movement; the civil rights movement, the European nuclear disarmament movement; it supported coal miners on strike in England and democratic dissidents in Eastern Europe. It flowed in many directions, most of them not very chic, the kinds of places where big money doesn't flow until it is quite safe.

Ping and Carol knew money could help but could not perform miracles. They helped with no strings attached. Perhaps only one project in ten worked out. Movements work by trial and error—lots and lots of error. I know I was impressed that the checks never came with suggestions on how they be used. There were no letters hinting more money might be had if this were done, or if that left undone. Ping and Carol understood that to have money was a problem if you wanted to help social change groups. So they didn't serve on boards, didn't join many committees. They carefully put up an invisible barrier between themselves and the work they wanted so much to prosper.

For Ping, a man of ideas and action, I think this must have been the hardest part of giving out the funds. There was so much he wanted done, so many of his ideas which had merit entirely on their own, so much impatience. I think of the advertisements that sometimes appear in the *New York Times* where some millionaire has taken a full page to explain their personal views on how to save the world. It is money entirely wasted, but an ego gratified. It was not Ping's style at all.

Did Ping know in what esteem he was held? Or what wonders the money really achieved? I don't know. But it is possible, finally, to say how very much Ping meant to so many. Money can't buy respect and affection—you have to get them the old fashioned way, by earning them. And that Ping did. He accomplished more than he knew, and will be missed very much.

Because she and Ping were so much a team, this is an especially difficult time for Carol. We will all continue to appreciate her presence and the support she has given us over the years.

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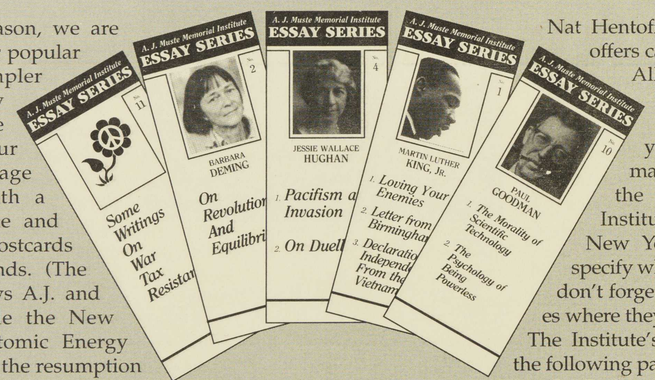

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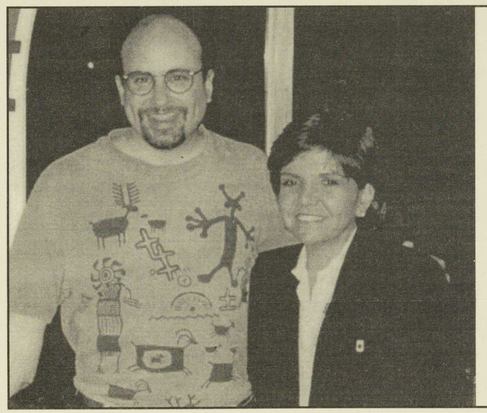
Grantee Profile: Sister Communities for Peace in Colombia

The Colombia Support Network (CSN), based in Madison, Wisconsin, works to support peace and human rights in the violence-plagued South American nation of Colombia. The Muste Institute gave a $1,500 grant to CSN in 1994 to help cover the costs of bringing a delegation of peacemakers from Colombia to Madison, producing a video about the Dane County-Apartadó Sister Communities Project, and publishing a newsletter. Three issues of the newsletter, *Action on Colombia*, have since been published. More funding is being sought to complete the video.



Gloria Cuartas, mayor of Apartadó, Colombia, with Mark Pocan, supervisor of Dane County, Wisconsin. Mayor Cuartas is leading efforts to end political violence in her community; she visited Wisconsin in April of 1994 on a trip sponsored by the Dane County-Apartadó Sister Communities Project of the Colombia Support Network.

The Sister Communities Project with Apartadó is one of CSN's key projects, using people-to-people contact to build support for local peace efforts in Colombia's most violent region. Apartadó is located in the heart of Urabá, Colombia's main banana-growing area. The shockingly high level of violence—averaging more than three political murders a day so far this year among a population of about 250,000—has been attributed to both leftist guerrillas and rightwing paramilitary death squads, sometimes working for drug traffickers or large landowners. The victims are rural union members, squatters, teachers and other civilians.

Leading the peace efforts in Urabá are Apartadó bishop Monsignor Isaias Duarte Cancino and Apartadó mayor Gloria Cuartas Montoya. In April of 1994, Mayor Cuartas came to Madison on a delegation sponsored by CSN. With her was Jesuit Francisco de Roux of the Bogotá-based Center of Investigation and Popular Education (CINEP). Bishop Duarte was scheduled to lead the delegation, but had to cancel at the last minute because his presence was required at a regional peace meeting.

Cuartas and De Roux spoke at several public events in Wisconsin, explaining their peace efforts and the dangers of US military aid and intervention. (Just as in Central America during the 1980s, state repression in Colombia is supported by massive amounts of US military aid and training.) The delegation also took part in conferences at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Milwaukee; were interviewed on the radio; met with technical people, educators, journalists, and civic and religious leaders; and participated in an ecumenical service for Colombia.

As peacemakers like Duarte, Cuartas and De Roux try to step up the pressure for a an end to Colombia's violence, international support and solidarity for their efforts will play a crucial role. The Colombia Support Network is attempting to build this support by reaching out across the country to peace and solidarity activists who know little about the desperate situation of political repression in Colombia. By hosting a national conference in November 1994 in Madison, CSN has also helped revitalize a loose national network of about eight local and national human rights and solidarity groups working on Colombia. For more information, contact CSN at PO Box 1505, Madison, WI 53701; (608) 836-5107; email <csn@igc.apc.org>.

If you are making up your will, we hope you will consider leaving a bequest to the Muste Institute to ensure the continuation of our work in the future. A suggested simple wording to use in making bequests is: "I bequeath dollars ($) or percent of my estate to the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, Inc., a charitable, not-for-profit organization located at 339 Lafayette Street, New York, New York, 10012, to be used for its general purposes." To discuss other types of bequests, such as those directed toward a specific purpose, write or call Murray Rosenblith, the Institute's Executive Director.

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