

Levi Pennington

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Pennington to Senator Wayne Morse, November 9, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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November 9, 1947.

Hon. Wayne Morse,
Senator from Oregon,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Morse:--

When you last wrote to me you gave me to understand that you had not committed yourself on the matter of universal military training, and would not do so until you had fully weighed the question and knew exactly what was proposed by any bill that might come before the Senate for action. I hope you will find time to read this letter personally, not because what I think about this move is of importance, but because I know I am saying what millions of others would say if they made themselves heard, as I try to do. There are millions of folks who think that the adoption of universal military training would be the worst step that has ever been taken in our history, and I am certainly one of these.

May I mention some of the standpoints from which I think this move is hopelessly objectionable?

MILITARY. If one were to grant that the only force that can save the United States in these times was the military, which I do not at all grant, and that our salvation lay in preparation to destroy on a scale that no other nation could match, still universal military training is not the answer. If war comes, it will be a war of specialists, of air pilots or pilotless aircraft and missiles, and great armies of soldiers would only give greater opportunity for wholesale massacres. There are, of course, two ends to be achieved by universal military training, neither of which is desirable. One is to give employment to an army of "brass hats" who ought to be in productive employment, rather than in employment that is a drain on all the rest of us. The other is to increase the militarism of our country, a thing to be avoided as we would the plague.

INTERNATIONAL. Universal military training could not fail to be provocative to other powers, especially to those who already eye the United States with suspicion. If one wants to know the effect on others, he has only to think what the same move would have on us if Russia, for instance, were as much richer than we as we are now richer than Russia and were to make the move that this proposed law would provide for us if it were adopted. The inevitable answer to such a move on our part will be greater effort on the part of other nations to meet our warlike preparations with the like move, and off we are on another great international armament race that will result, as has always been the case, in another war.

ECONOMIC. There are so few people who have yet realized what universal military training will mean from an economic standpoint that it seems to me that both the foes

and the friends of such a move should feel under obligation to let the people know the facts. It means billions of dollars every year, the loss of millions of years of profitable employment or still more productive years of education, an inexcusable waste of man-power, especially in these days when so many millions of people on earth are dying for the lack of food, clothing, shelter, medicine and the other necessities of life. The money that it is proposed to spend in this military training, and the effort in time and man-power, if spent in the service of humanity would make America safe from any possibility of attack -- nobody would want to attack us. It is not a high plane on which to think, this matter of dollars and cents; but it is a plane on which there is a lot of thinking being done, and a lot more will be done if this measure is passed and goes into effect. People want relief from the burden of high taxes, not the addition of billions for military training in time of peace. I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet in matters economic and political, but if this measure is passed, with the billions of dollars that it will involve, I shall miss my guess if those who favor it do not suffer for it politically in the future. If it were the right thing to support it, even if it meant political suicide, one would want to support it, and we could say of him, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." But I can't feel that the political death that might result from support of this measure would be "dying in the Lord."

MORAL. I do not have to tell you that military life, in training camp or on the field, is not a good place for the development of high moral character. Recently a relative of mine, back from the war in Europe, was with his wife entertaining a lot of young men who wanted his advice, which he gave in these words, "Drink lots of hard liquor, and change your women often." (His wife is not now living with him.) That, of course, you can say is the exception, not the rule. But the increase in drunkenness among the soldiers, the increase in venereal disease in spite of all the prophylactic precautions, and matters of that sort -- I do not need to go into that sort of thing in this discussion. And you are not fooled, I am sure, though some gullible people are, by the "front" that is being put up by the show place of military training, where you'd think that military training was going to make Sunday School boys out of our prospective soldiers. You know that universal military training would not and could not be carried on on any such basis as it is there, and if it could it would cost multiplied billions over what is proposed by the present bills that have been framed.

I've not handled this argument diplomatically. I should have asked you, "Do you think that many military officers are supporting military training on a universal scale in order that they may hold their jobs?" I should have said, "Is it true that the military establishment is using money appropriated for military purposes instead in an effort to bring about universal military training?" I should have said, "What in your judgment would be the aggregate cost of universal military training, and how much would that be per adult citizen of the United States?" But you are too big a man to stand on any mere matter of lack of tact and diplomacy. I hope you'll give this whole matter the thought that it deserves, and that you will come to feel, as I do, that universale military training is

undemocratic, unAmerican, unnecessary, and under present circumstances inexcusable.

We tried, some of us, to see you while you were in Oregon, but before we got so that we could get away, we were informed that you had returned to Washington. What a tragedy it was that brought you out this time. Has any state ever before lost its three highest executive officers at one time? And the present governor was asked to go in the same party. Most of us know so little about Governor Hall that we are by no means sure whether we have a satisfactory governor or not.

With kindest personal regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.