

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Senator Wayne Morse, November 25, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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November 25, 1947.

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

Dear Mr. Morse:--

Let me thank you sincerely for your letter of the 19th., which I have just received. I think I appreciate to some degree at least the position you are in as a member of the committee that is to have the hearings on the universal military training bill.

If I had thought of the use of my letter as a part of the record of the hearing, I should probably have worded it a bit differently; but perhaps the very fact that it is a bit informal, written to a man whom I'd like to consider my friend as well as my senator, may make it quite as effective as if I had tried to put it into more formal words. I have no objection to its use, you may be sure, for I feel as you do that every man and woman in Congress ought to be able to face and answer the questions I raised.

You may be sure that I was not intending any blanket indictment of those who favor this bill. I have as little doubt as you have that many of them are as sincere and conscientious in favoring it as I am in opposing it. I have no doubt that some of them would fight for it if it meant the loss of their jobs, instead of the retention of them. The fact, if it proves to be a fact, that one general has been guilty of gross breach of trust in using his position to enrich himself does not mean that there is such corruption anywhere else but right there. But I do believe that no small number of military men are favoring this bill because it will insure the holding of their jobs.

Of course you must have the best military, naval and air men before your committee; and of course they will speak for the bill. I had nothing of this sort in mind, even if it may sometimes border on "Government Lobbying." What I was thinking of was press releases, gatherings of leaders of one sort and another from various organizations in Washington for the purpose of impressing them with the government's attitude on this matter, etc. I have been told that such proceedings are contrary to law.

I still feel that universal military training is not the way to secure the safety of America, even if that security could be guaranteed by military power, which I do not believe. Not being the way to secure national safety, it is, in my judgment, unnecessary. Being unnecessary, it is to my thinking inexcusable, in view even of conditions in America, to say nothing of the starvation so widespread in the rest of the world.

But my objection is still deeper. To me it is un-American and undemocratic to compel citizens of this country to prepare

to kill the people of another country. I feel that America should be served, in every department of her life, by those who are willing to do the service needed. Should men be compelled to be policemen, aldermen, mayors, sheriffs, state prison guards, managers of state liquor stores, executioners of condemned criminals, judges of courts, United States Senators? All these are as definitely services of the government, quite as definitely as serving in the army; and if compulsory military training, why not compulsory training for any or all of these government tasks? To me the democratic, American way is to have any and all services to the government on a voluntary basis rather than compulsory. I do not lose sight of the fact that the government, local, state and national, does many things for the citizen, and has a right to expect certain things of him; but compulsion in such a vital thing as military service seems to me still undemocratic and un-American, fit perhaps for nazi-ism, fascism, the government of a totalitarian state, but not the thing for America, where government service, from the president down, should be on a voluntary basis.

With the hope that America may escape this system of universal military training, which has proven a curse to so many other governments, I am

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.