

Levi Pennington

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Pennington to Raymond Wilson, January 6, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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January 6, 1948.

E. Raymond Wilson, Exec. Secy.,
Friends Committee on National Legislation,
2111 Florida Ave., N.W.,
Washington 8, D.C.

Dear Friend:--

A bout with a flu bug and the press of other work such as promotion of gifts for the Christmas Ship, the packing and shipping of clothing for overseas relief and matters of this sort have prevented until today my careful reading and rereading of the provisional draft of legislative policy for 1948. I regret this, not that any comment I might make would have serious effect in changing the draft, even if I were anxious for change.

If I were going to make a general comment, it would be that this draft comes too near to an effort to cover everything from here to the millenium and back. It seems to me, doubtless because I am not close enough to the considerations of the entire committee, that fewer commitments, on which Friends would be in more complete agreement, or at least on things that are unquestionably in line with the Quaker tradition, would have been a bit better. But this, as I say, is probably due to my own ignorance rather than to the actual covering of too much ground.

The general statement on the first page I think I unite with completely. It is when the statement goes into details that I begin to question, and in one or two cases where it seems to me we go rather beyond our title, at least, in recommending state action -- we call ourselves the committee on national legislation. I do not wish to quibble.

We recommend voluntary saving of food, but also propose rationing, involuntary control; and then we propose action on the basis of confidence that the United Nations will succeed, without what most folks would consider the alternative, adequate preparation for national defence. If we are going to infer that the United Nations is going to succeed and that therefore we should scrap our national defence, destroy our atom bombs and all the rest, why must we infer that voluntary saving of food is not going to succeed and we must provide for rationing? To many folks that will seem like straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel. Folks get very sick of rationing, at least out in our part of the country, and they did not believe that it conserved food to any great extent.

I confess my ignorance of the International Children's Emergency Fund -- if I were well informed I doubtless would favor it. And I am not sure that all the money earned by conscientious objectors should be used for overseas relief without the consent of most of these c.o.'s. Maybe that has been agreed upon by them. There are cases among these conscientious objectors where either they or their families need the help that this money would give quite as much as some who would get it overseas.

Just how all enforcement by the United Nations can be directed against individuals rather than nations I do not fully

understand. Is there no possibility that nations will forsake their duties and obligations under the United Nations? And just how the United Nations can raise revenue directly without tremendous changes in world government I do not see.

And until there is this tremendous change, it seems to me that any attempt to internationalize strategic bases and waterways will be like ramming ones head against a stone wall -- it will be hard on the head, but won't damage the wall much. Not that I do not favor such control by the United Nations if and when that organization becomes strong enough; but I wonder what is the advantage of recommending it when in my judgment most thinking people would say that there is no such possibility now, and many fear there never will be. My guess is that England would be much more likely to surrender the Suez Canal and Gibraltar than the United States would be to turn the Panama Canal over to the United Nations, under present conditions or under any conditions that most students think likely in the near future.

The same thing would apply to our giving to the world (which means specifically Russia at the present time) all our atomic secrets (if they are still secrets) and destroying our atomic bombs without any assurance that they would not be used against us later. "Nations must surrender the right to make war" sounds good; but I do not know of any that have thus far surrendered that right, nor how under present circumstances we could prevent their resumption of the right if they had surrendered it and chose to take it again.

On page 7, paragraph 8, I do not know just what is meant. If Congress should forbid the shipment of liquor into a dry state, would that be "discrimination in interstate transportation"? If not, why not? Or suppose they were to forbid all transportation of liquor across state lines, but should allow the transportation of tobacco, and bread, and bibles? I do not understand just what the paragraph means.

When it comes to "Welfare and Social Security" we get into a field where Friends will not all agree, by any means. "Development and extension of the Social Security System", "nation-wide provision for medical and hospital benefits, with safeguards for the individual's free choice of doctors and institutions", a blanket endorsement of this sort seems to me to cover a lot of ground, some of which is as yet unexplored and may be undesirable. "Federal aid to education with a view to equalizing educational opportunities and under proper safeguards of state and local independence in the control of public schools" just how both are to be secured, federal aid and local independence, I have not yet seen. Usually the provider of the wherewithal finds a way to control the way the money is used. I still greatly fear that if federal aid to education becomes a fact, while the local authorities will be free to manage the schools as they see fit, the government will see that they do not get federal funds unless the schools are managed as the government sees fit. "If you have military training in your school you get the federal appropriation, otherwise not." Local independence in the control of the public schools, surely; the local authority is free to put in military training or not, and take the consequences.

Well, a lot too many words, especially coming as late as they do. Wish I could be at your meeting day after tomorrow, though if I were there, getting action as late as I am I'd probably not stir up a riot.

There is so much of the statement with which I wholeheartedly and completely agree that it seems ungracious to have expressed the criticisms I have put on paper, probably for no eye to see but yours.

With best wishes for the success of the committee, and with the wish that my letters of appeal for its support by Oregon Yearly Meeting might bring you much more financial assistance than I really expect, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.

P.S. I should have said that I approve of the names suggested by the nominating committee, even those named from Oregon Yearly Meeting, though I am a bit surprised that our Friend Geil accepts such an appointment.