

Levi Pennington

People

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## Pennington to Raymond Wilson, August 19, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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August 19, 1948.

E. Raymond Wilson, Executive Secretary,  
Friends Committee on National Legislation,  
2111 Florida Avenue, North West,  
Washington 8, D.C.

Dear Friend:--

Your letter of the 13th. is before me, and I appreciate it very much. It was kind of you to go into so much detail in explaining the way in which this statement came into being. I still feel that some of the statements in it are unfortunate leading to certain misunderstanding and misrepresentation. You understand that this is the statement of a purely unofficial group, but the public does not and will not so understand it, and the press, out this way at least, does not so present it. You understand that refusal to register is not urged, even in this unofficial statement, but to the public Friends are recommending that their young men should not register. You understand what civil disobedience means, and the force of the phrase "under divine compulsion," but ~~the~~ the public Friends are advising disobedience to the law, violation of law -- they have become anarchists, according to the belief of some folks. I still do not see what was the reason for so carefully avoiding the words of the law itself, and for stating the matter in a negative way when instead of urging disobedience to the law of the land it would have been so much better, in my poor judgment, to have urged obedience to the law of God.

And with my feeling of my obligation to government for all it does for me, I should have no compunctions against registering in this case. I am registered in the county seat for jury duty; I have to register before I can vote; and I registered in the first world war, as we were asked to do, though I was far beyond any age when I should have been drafted for military service.

And it still seems to me that the man who refuses to register is not making any clear testimony, while the man who registers as a conscientious objector is doing so. There will be communists who will refuse to register because they are against this government; there will be anarchists who will refuse to register because they are opposed to any government; there will be cowards who will refuse to register, hoping thereby to escape conscription and danger; and there will be Quakers who will refuse to register, and so far as I can see will not be giving any definite testimony. Then there will be other Quakers, and in my judgment many more, who will register as conscientious objectors, and they will be giving positive testimony. If I were a young man, it seems to me I'd rather be in that class. I'd want it understood that I was for my government in anything that I could do in obedience to God, but that I could not and would not bear arms nor participate in war in any way.

Our friend Kelsey Hinshaw, who attended the conference from this meeting, has pressed the non-registration issue so hard that he has created no little dissention in the meeting, which I

hope has begun to subside. He and the executive committee of the yearly meeting Board of Public Relations, which includes the peace department, have prepared a statement, after a conference here, in which that paragraph is reworded which contains the "civil disobedience" clause, and they have omitted the taxation paragraph.

I suspect all that I have written might as well have been left unsaid. With most of the statements made I am in very hearty accord. And if you imagine I am not ready to stand by the man who feels that registration is a part of the war system and he cannot go even that far, ask Edwin A. Sanders. I know where, with no more light than I have, I should draw the line. But if another man draws it somewhere else, or perhaps I should say if his understanding of God's will determines his decision that does not coincide with mine, I'm for him. You ought to obey your conscience, not mine. It is your understanding of God's will that should determine what you do, not my understanding.

I am heartily glad that you and Miriam are to make this trip to the west. Do hope that it may work out with entire success. Hope Joseph Reege will reply more speedily than he sometimes replies to me, and that he may cooperate as fully as possible. There is a small group of Friends at both Eugene and Corvallis. I should think it might be possible for you to get to both places, even if you had to do both in one day. Maybe a luncheon meeting at one place and an evening meeting at the other. That could be worked out later, with Robert Dann at Corvallis -- I am not sure who would be the man at Eugene. I shall be glad to cooperate in anyway I can. It may be that by that time my wife will be well enough so that we could have you in our home, as we should both very much desire. But Rebecca was taken ill in early May and gave me the fright of my life. She is much better, but it seems to both her and the doctors ~~better~~ that she should not make the trip with me to Glens Falls, New York, for the marriage of our granddaughter and to Indiana Yearly Meeting, with visits to relatives between those two events.

With best wishes always, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.