6-4-1965

Pennington to William Matchett, June 4, 1965

Levi T. Pennington

JuMay 4, 1965.

William Matchett,
Chairman Executive Committee,
American Friends Service Committee,
814 North East Fortieth Street,
Seattle, Washington, 98105.

Dear Friend:--

Your note of May 27, Colin Bell's memorandum of May 21, the pronouncement of the AFSC of April 21, 1954 and the Saturday Review article about Clarence E. Pickett of April 24, 1965, have all been read carefully. I wish I could feel that I have the wisdom needed to determine whether the AFSC should issue another statement on Viet Nam or not.

If such a statement is made, it would be difficult to avoid a "told you so" note, and personally I doubt the necessity of that avoidance. We'd need to avoid any "cockiness" about it, but counsel from somebody who was right before I believe has more weight that that of somebody who was hopelessly wrong before.

Just what would we hope to gain by a pronouncement? Do we hope to influence our own government to change its policy? We tried that, without any appreciable success when the adoption of what we suggested would have been far easier than it would be today. Still it might well be worth the try. Do we wish to put ourselves on record before the world? That might be worth while. The form of our statement, if we make one, should be determined in large measure by what we are seeking to accomplish. Maybe we want to do it to give some ease and a bit of satisfaction to our own souls, and that, too, might be worth while.

The document issued eleven years ago urged "cease fire" and we were for it then and we are for it now; but any move that America might make in that direction now woul have less chance of success than it might have had a year ago. We retaliated for Viet Kong attacks, but we have given them ample reason, it seems to me, to want to do a much bigger job of retaliation.

If honest confession is good for the soul, I'm ready to do my soul some good, though it might do me several other kinds of things that could hardly be classed as good. I confess that I am not as completely "sold" on the advisability of admitting red China to the United Nations as some of my friends. are. Neither China nor her friends expect to stop with having that country in the Assembly; that would be the first big step, but the aim is no less than another communistic power of veto, and Russia has blocked enough of worth while efforts of the UN. Do we need another communistic power to veto things that UN ought to get done?

I'm for cease fire; I'm for free elections; I'm for turning the Viet Nam problem over to impartial forces that can reach juster conclusions than can be reached by "fighting it out"; I'm for economic help, especially the kind that will help them to help themselves.

If our leaders think that a statement from the AFSC now has any chance of doing any good, I hope they'll make such a statement; and when they make it there's one man I know who will read it carefullu.

Hoping to see you not later than the 19th, and with best wishes all the time,

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.