

The Training School
Vineland, New Jersey
March 27, 1944

MAR 29 1944

Dear Mr. Byler,

A week has elapsed now since Bob Kreider was here. In that time there has been much jostling around in which the institution has attempted to discover what our attitude really is. Last Monday, for example, four of us met with Mr. Nash and Mr. Davies, the Boys Supervisor, in a very frank discussion of what our criticisms were. The boiler house situation was cleared up when they definitely admitted that it was all wrong and had the man whom Merrithew turned down for the Colony available to put in there. The rest of the objections were denied in spite of the fact that there was much discussion of who had "told" us these things on which we based our criticisms, from whence all this information "leaked", and to whose files we had had access! Also during the discussion the question was asked what business it was of ours. We were accused of gossiping, digging up dirt, and rumor-mongering.

On the basis of that feeling I sent Mr. Nash a short note instead of the written statement I had prepared. I said, in effect, that since our motives were doubted, anything which I had said or done should be forgotten as the operations of a foolish young man foolish enough to think that his ideals could have practical value. It seemed inconceivable, moreover, I said, that anyone who worked under the circumstances I did should remain loyal to the institution and ~~fixxxxx~~ and still be intelligent enough to criticize the institution and fit the criticism into a constructive framework. Would he be assured of my continued cooperation (and) I only meant to be helpful.

Sunday then Mr. Nash, being desirous of regaining the confidence of our group, called Krause in for a long talk. In the process he revealed that he had been to the powerhouse and checked into conditions there and was properly shocked. He also intimated that in some areas of his operations he was hamstrung by other officials. We all feel sorry for Mr. Nash because he isn't responsible for conditions, but he is our only door to the institution. He has been in such a difficult position that he has gone to Ellis who, he reports, had a first reaction of "What business is it of theirs?"

I am writing this letter and enclosing a copy of the statement with the proviso that it not go farther than your office or wastebasket. Mr. Nash, I feel, has given sufficient evidence of good intentions that we can work with him, and while he may be unable to do anything because of inter-institutional relationships, if he frankly admits ^{them} there is still plenty of time to go farther if it is thought advisable.

The only ~~valid~~ valid basis for this action is its strong spiritual aspect. Wenger has presented a statement similar to mine of which he is sending you a copy. He feels as I do that we are being forced to almost compromise our whole view of the divinity of the human personality--upon which, in my case at least, my whole conscientious objection to war rests. The difficulty has been to convince those in charge that our criticisms are unselfish and expressed for the welfare of the Training School. Incidentally, Mr. Nash read Krause a note from Mr. Davies to whom I gave a copy of my written statement saying that at least some of my criticisms were well-taken and could well be used "from time to time"!

I hope that by taking this action I have not done anything which counters MCC policy or invalidates MCC relations or operations in any way.

Sincerely yours,

Boyd H. Nelson

Boyd H. Nelson

Statement of Concern

March 21, 1944

From my highschool days I have prepared for service. It was to be my only source of happiness and to account for every area of my activity and thinking. That service has been intended to be carried on under the flag of an ideal--an ideal both for the individual and for the aggregate of humanity. It has dictated my choice of service in war as in peace time. It served as a source of power through the twelve months of comparative social work in activity in camp. It served as a motive directing me to the Training School when the time came for me to leave camp. It has impelled me as I carried on my work through the ten months I have been here. It drives me now in giving voice to a set of attitudes which I have been compelled to meet and form for myself through the ten months of my work here.

Needless to say I present these attitudes humbly and frankly, realizing that they may be wrong and hoping that wherein they are wrong, they may be shown so for the benefit of all concerned. With the present evidence now available to me, these attitudes are inescapable. It is hoped that more evidence will be opened which will give me a clearer view and also that a frank statement of my present views will facilitate a more frank, self-analytic view on the part of the institution if such is needed. In turn a frank appraisal and discussion of my work stressing its weak points cannot but aid me both as a personality and in my work.

From time to time I have been under the impression that the institution has been interested in retaining the services of some of the CPS men after this "emergency" is over. For that reason it would appear that we have a legitimate concern for the institution and its welfare. It is in keeping with the whole democratic philosophy of this great country of ours that a laborer be given an opportunity to exercise his initiative in the performance of his duties and in the formation of his employer's views. Moreover, I myself have developed an interest in the institution and a strong feeling of loyalty for it and feel that it and all it stands for should continue. But I cannot with my present point of view see how it can continue what appears to me to be its present policy. To me its present policy leads to certain death in an institution of this type and because I am interested in the Training School and its high ideal I feel that the expression of these deepest concerns is not only relevant but imperative for the Training School's best and longest range interest. The fact that I cannot accept the institution as it is in carte blanche does not minimize my feeling of loyalty for it. Expediency is never a life-giving policy; it leads to certain death. The death may not be immediate, but then neither does hardening of the arteries cause immediate death in the human body. With this too long protest of my sincerity, I now list the items which give me grave concern--the basis of which may be either well or ill founded and for which I shall be only too glad to accept evidence to the contrary.

There is no such thing as a bad boy. This famous statement by Father Flanagan, founder of Boys' Town in Nebraska, has long been a favorite axiom of mine. In this instance it points up a serious lack in the school's material and organization. If there is no such thing as a bad boy, then when a boy goes bad, his environment is wrong. One of the strongest elements for good or bad is the boy's choice of recreation. It seems that there are not sufficient resources for a good recreation program. In Mills, for example, there are twenty-four of the brightest boys in the school. They are confined on rainy days and in winter to one small room for all their out-of-school activities. In summer there is a large --but very barren--playfield with no equipment but a see-saw and a sand box. A bat and ball complete the full list of the available play materials for out-of-doors. Indoor play materials are table games only and those are the Christmas gifts of all the children pooled for variety. It is obvious that such a quota of

materials is all too small to give such children an adequate and developmental program. Given a dearth of recreation facilities in older age groups of this type boy and the results are all but disastrous as we have all seen. I shall, however, confine my discussion to Mills on the assumption that other cottages have similar problems and similar outlooks and that I know Mills best.

The only bright ray of light in an otherwise gloomy picture is the swimming pool. Difficulty with unruly boys disappears as if by magic in the all too short period of its summer time operation. It does, however, point the way to a solution of most of the so-called "discipline" problems. The expense of its construction is no doubt considered as being well worthwhile by all who are touched by its benefits.

Immediately brought to our attention at this juncture will be a large and well-organized club and scouts program, and the facilities of the school with its excellent program of classes and entertainments. While they do have their place, there are many hours of the week when the child's activities are not and should not be organized for him. To point out the large degree of regimentation (necessary it is for the smooth operation of the institution), I will carry Mills cottage through one day of its routine. At 6:30 the rising bell rings; the boy rises, dresses, folds his bed linen just so on the foot of his bed; washed and lines up quietly to march to breakfast. At seven he eats in a dining room in which he isn't allowed to whisper. At 7:25 he returns to the cottage and goes through his routine housework; making beds, polishing floors, cleaning bathrooms, or dusting. At 8:45 he's washed again, lined up quietly (supposedly) to march to school in the same two by two line. Until noon he carries on his activities still conforming to the pattern set by his group.

At noon he marches to and from dinner in line again. So it goes the rest of the day; school from two to four, supper at 5:15, and any evening activities. A child subject to such a rigid routine (indeed! how many adults could stand it?) needs in free periods such as those in Mills from 12:30 until 2:00; from 4:00 until 5:00; from 5:45 until 8:00 all day Saturday, and all day Sunday (nearly), not more regimentation and organization, but play as free from supervision as possible and still be free from misconduct. That entails equipment. Entertainment doesn't develop one's powers, but activity does. Activity is what all expanding youngsters seek. It's necessary for growth of muscle, growth of self-reliance, and growth of self-discipline. While there may be room for doubt of this type of child's ability to utilize such opportunity, the basis for such treatment is essentially a spiritual one. The aspects of the human personality which distinguish it from the animal are present in these children, and because they are, demand for the child recognition of his personality as an individual in his play opportunities as well as in his work schedule.

To put the whole problem quite simply; the school's entire program must be, if the institution is not to lose its reason for existence, child-centered. Certainly the income is large. Where it goes is not easily seen. Perhaps too much stress is being placed on keeping the institution financially sound, even to the point of losing sight of the whole original purpose of the Training School as it was conceived by its founder and carried on so ably by its present director. The recreation problem mentioned above is, I believe, an example. To carry on the large club program mentioned, the sponsors have been given no materials. All have furnished the materials out of their own pockets. Fortunately they are interested people and willing to do so. There have been many items necessary for good housekeeping and good clothes keeping which have been denied us over periods of weeks on the excuse that

war has curtailed their production. Most people who put up with these shortages feel that the war is being used as an excuse to cover up unwillingness to purchase these supplies from any other than the usual low-cost source. The burden of these shortages is thus placed on an already overworked employee population.

It seems that there are hardly enough employees to carry the active program of the cottage with the children for their best interest. No one doubts, for instance, that the heads of the Boys' Department are very much overworked though they make no complaints. In my cottages there is only one person to carry on an active recreation program, a full-time Keep-the-cottage-clean campaign, and a good-clothes-room-and-clothes-salvage policy for twenty-four boys. This, in spite of the fact that good club work standards call for one leader to fifteen boys for such a short period as a two-hour session only. And in such a session the leader's entire activity is taken up with only the direction! I make no complaint, but I often wistfully think how much better job I might do if I were only two.

And finally it would seem that the Training School's labor policy, especially for an institution whose motto is "Happiness First", seems rather short-sighted. (It should be understood that these criticisms are based upon the experience of the "regular" or non-CPS employee and should not be considered otherwise. That applies to the outlook of the whole paper.) Still and all there is a large percentage of very, very fine people here who hang on, not because of the policy but in spite of it. I know that the base wage for the cottage attendant is fifty-five dollars per month. In the power house up until only a short time ago some of the employees received only about fifty dollars a month. Low wages don't usually attract the best people, especially people one would care to have around his children. The effect of such people is all too noticeable-- even where boys like these in Mills get the attitudes and ideals second-hand.

Long hours may not make the work more attractive either. Several employees work seven days a week and some of those have twelve hours on duty. The tragic results of such conditions are plain to be seen when one looks on the anemic faces of most of the men in the power house and remembers one not too long dead. A few more men, a few more dollars (few where there are so many for other, larger salaries) and the men who are here would seem more light and shed more and better light. Such working hours are directly at odds with natural and spiritual law. "Six days (only) shalt thou labor," was not spoken idly. It is fraught with scientific and timeless meaning.

A much more intangible thing, but one none the less important, is the official attitude toward the employee. Often he is treated with a condemnation not even exhibited to a child of the institution. While I, myself, have in my job been accorded a better opportunity to exercise my own initiative than most employees, even in some areas of my own department, I have had any exhibitions of my interest in a phase of the work shut off. An outstanding incident illustrating this principle occurred to a person who had been here some years. I was told by the person himself about it, and I have no reason to doubt his integrity since he is a very fine person in ~~my~~ every respect. The difficulty came when he arranged his working materials in a manner which saved him much time and effort. When he returned from his vacation all the materials had been re-arranged according to the former arrangement in spite of the fact that his vacation was the only time during the year when anyone else had anything to do with his materials. The same type of thing has occurred to me more than several times. It makes one feel that constructive suggestions are not welcome, thank you.

Oftentimes one feels that he is being deliberately misled either by direct falsehood or worse yet, half truth. If an unusual circumstance requires understanding and care on the employee's part, it would seem that all the cards should be laid on the table instead of using half-truths to elicit co-operation. Moreover, I have felt that the same tactics were employed in dealing with the public and one begins to wonder if he wants to be associated with an organization which finds it necessary to resort to such means. In many more than one instance the laborer has been unscrupulously used to ~~in~~ the benefit of the institution. Assigning him to a job which it was agreed specifically he was not to do, giving him duties which were not agreed upon, not giving time off unless specifically asked for, and other subterfuges (rather obvious ones, I'll admit) are common practices which defraud the timid employee, the employee who knows no different, or the employee who is unwilling to ask for anything. Just as an example I might cite the instance in my own department where the attendant is to have an evening a week. There is one attendant who gets his evening every week in the month except the week of his forty-eight. He doesn't ask for it and consequently he's never given it. It shouldn't be necessary to ask for something like that, however. An evening a month isn't much, but I's told that more than one attendant isn't getting the full number of evenings a month--which counts up. This sort of thing may be due to some idea of over-zealous person, but it seems to me that there should be curbs which protect the employee.

And finally the institution doesn't always live up to its commitments to its employees. It may do so when forced to do so, but it cannot produce anything but hard feeling to have a situation forced. The employee who is worth his salt deserves every consideration. Not the least of which would be prompt attention to his requests. How disheartening it is to have to force someone continually to get something done. I know because I have a boy who brushes the steps twice a day. He's spend an hour and a half doing ten minutes work if I didn't keep him at it. Here's what one person I know did. Eight months ago he cast some bad linen which hasn't been replaced yet. It seems obvious that the thing that someone wants him to do is to buy his own in spite of the fact that the in titution has agreed to furnish it. As a matter of fact I have new boys' blankets and a boy's bed spread on my bed and I have been in Mills some eight months. I don't mind at all, but it isn't fair to the boys.

All this seems to add up to one thing: there isn't very much concern for the individual in the monds of the key people who decide from day to day how we shall live. This concern, both for the child and for the employee, is the important thing to keep the institution running--not only upon a level with what it has done in the past or is doing now, but what it can do in the days to come. It is just as important how the worker thinks as how the child thinks because the worker-child relationship is the drucible in which is ultimately decided the child's refinement within the limitations of his own abilities.

I realize that this picture is a composite of many small and petty details. The fundamental attitudes, however, are nevertheless distinct. It may seem to one who reads this paper to be a queer mixture of tangible and intangible. It is the intangible which concerns me most. In other words the non-material aspects of the Training School are the ones which I would stress because the material we cannot take with us when we leave this earth. It is the "intangibles" which become real then. For every such instance noted there are many others both remembered and forgotten. They are common to all.

I would reiterate that this paper bears no claim, no complaint in my own interest. It is out of my concern for the Training School and what it stands for that I give voice to my own troubled thoughts. No part of it should be construed as criticizing my own department head. If every employee were to receive as kindly instruction, as able assistance, as understanding an ear, and as generous backing as Mr. Davies has given me and likewise exhibits toward the boys themselves, there should be no need for all this----.