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April 27, 1944

MARCUS A. CURRY, M.D.
SUPERINTENDENT AND
UNIT DIRECTOR

N. LAURENCE BURKHALTER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

PHONE
MORRISTOWN 4-1800

APR 28 1944

Mr. J. N. Byler
General Director of Hospital Units
Mennonite Central Committee
Akron, Pennsylvania

Dear Bro. Byler:

I began this letter shortly after our telephone conversation of the other day, but have not been able to complete it before. As you are by this time aware, things didn't turn out as planned. I reported the results of my conversation with you to the men, and they felt that they didn't want to wait until next week. I trust that their visit may have been profitable to all concerned.

In trying to keep you informed as to developments here, it is entirely possible that I have rationalized somewhat in order to justify my own position. I have attempted, as consistently as my conscience dictated, to meet every problem in the light of our position as Christian conscientious objectors. I have called the attention of the hospital to grievances when they arose.... perhaps not as forcefully as some would do, nevertheless, informing them what was considered right and wrong. On the other hand, in conversations with the men, and in council meetings, I have tried to point out our own obligation as c.o.s, in facing these problems. I am somewhat puzzled in my own thinking as to where love ceases to be love, and rather becomes false humility. I am very much aware that there is such a thing as false humility, and am also aware that I may have been, at times, guilty of such a fault. All this is more or less on the side.

Some members of the council seem to want to parallel our situation here with that of the disciples whom Jesus enjoined to "Shake off the dust of their feet...." in towns where they were not wanted. The parallel is good to a certain point. Such action calls for pretty rigid self-discipline on the part of those who would do the "shaking". Were we to present a bill of grievances to the hospital, I'm afraid that they could give us a rather disconcerting list of offences of which we are guilty.... offences which have put us on the public "black list", apart from our mere identity as conscientious objectors. I refer to such things as the use of illegal gasoline for pleasure driving, abuse of privileges of maintaining automobiles on the institution, questionable habits of living, consistent dating of nurses in spite of a hospital policy...(admittedly a poor one)...outlawing such practice, lack of discrimination in the use of other privileges.

The situation here was not created over night. It might be well to review the history of its progress from the beginning. You may recall that I once made the observation that I didn't think a hospital unit was the place for those who were dissatisfied with camp and who caused the camp director a lot of trouble. An entry in an early edition of the "Pulse Letter" from Luray, Va. stated that morale had been low because of the presence of some "Professional gripers", but that things were improving as most of them had gone on detached service projects.. It so happened that Greystone Park had been the only project opened up for Luray men previous to that time.

After the unit had been operation for some months, a doctor, (since discharged for disorderly conduct) made the statement that if we didn't "clean house", someone was going to do it for us. The issue at the time was primarily that of dating the nurses. Henry Fast visited the unit from the M.C.C., and after studying the situation, felt that no immediate action was necessary, and made remark that the M.C.C. would not tolerate indiscriminate dating of nurses where adverse public relations were thereby created. No serious outburst of opinion regarding this matter has since occurred. Dating has continued....discriminate on the part of some, and very indiscriminate on the part of others. It has always been considered inadvisable to send a man back to camp without sufficient evidence to prove that he had definitely overstepped. This is only right, nevertheless, some men have continued to live, rather unobtrusively perhaps, on a plain which was not consistent with a Christian profession, all the while slowly adding to the conviction of unfriendly individuals that we were no better than anyone else and had no business being treated better than anyone else. Add to this the fact of the large size of both the unit and the institution, and the fact that the top authorities of the hospital have not always been consistent in their attitude towards the c.p.s. men, and it all presents one of the knottiest problems with which the M.C.C. has to deal.

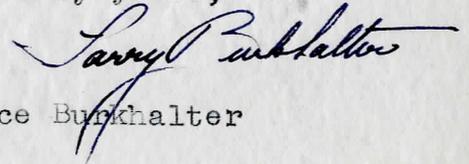
I dare say, you are well aware of all that I have stated. I feel that the growing discontent of the men is due to a long-time process and will have to be met in that light. There will have to be some housecleaning on both sides.

Petition
You have undoubtedly been shown the petition which was circulated here. I am unable to say who set the thing off. It began while the council was having a meeting, and was started outside of the council. It was evidently pretty much of a high pressure affair and a good many of the men signed it without giving their action a great deal of thought. It seems, for the most part, to be the result of general impatience on the part of the men toward the Akron office for no further action in response to the council's letter of some weeks past. It also seems to be the feeling that the action of the M.C.C. should be more than simply replacing the unit director and transferring out those who wish to go. The quite evidently want to have pressure brought to bear on the hospital authorities from some one high up enough to cause them to "change their attitude 100 per cent" toward the conscientious objectors. While I believe that some things should be brought to the attention of the administration, the "100 per cent" ultimatum seems to me to be a pretty big order. I have

repeatedly tried to draw up a list of incidents which would warrant such action, and the list still isn't particularly impressive. Perhaps I have become too complascent in my administrative position. If so, it's high time I'm getting out of it and back down to the place where I see things on the level with the rest of them. I'm ready to admit that working under a constant heckling of those above one is a terrific strain, and it seems to be the lot of some of the men, particularly those working in main building, to be working under that type of supervision.

Whatever the difficulty, I feel more and more incapable of meeting it successfully. It's a pretty distressing thing to look back over the history of a unit which has more or less been under my supervision for a year and three months, and witness a continual down grade process instead of the progress that one would expect, and hope for. How much of it all has been due to my mistakes, only those seeing the total picture will be able to say. At any rate, I sincerely trust that the one who is to take over will be far more capable than I have been and will perhaps profit by seeing my mistakes, and thereby be the more able to correct them.

Very sincerely yours,



N. Laurence Buckhalter

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