

Conscientious Objector

New York, N. Y., August 6, 1943

300

Bennett Admits Murphy, Taylor Put in Strip Cells; Probe Asked

Villard Urges Appointment Of U.S. Inquiry Commission

Oswald Garrison Villard, reached in Thomaston, Conn., urged appointment of a commission, similar to the commission appointed by President Wilson in the last war, to inquire into the general treatment of conscientious objectors in prison.

In a statement to *The Conscientious Objector*, issued in connection with the cases of Murphy and Taylor, Villard declared:

"It seems to me of the utmost importance for the good name of the government and in the name of simple humanity and decency that the cases of these men be thoroughly inquired into by an impartial inquiry. It seems incredible that the men, who have shown extraordinary mental and spiritual power in enduring their hunger strike, could possibly be accused of being mentally infirm and be subjected to such treatment as they are now being given.

"I most fervently urge upon authorities in Washington that they take a leaf out of a book of the last war, when Wilson appointed a commission to report upon the status of conscientious objectors in prison, headed by Judge Mack, and constitute a similar commission to inquire immediately into these cases and the general treatment of conscientious objectors in prison."

Comments from other individuals:

Norman Thomas:

"Mrs. Murphy's story of the treatment of her son and Taylor requires full investigation and the end of a system of abuse of power in the name of psychiatry, behind an indefensible veil of secrecy which the prison administration imposes. Maybe we have misjudged Nero and Hitler whose cruelties perhaps were merely measures of psychiatric treatment of the abnormal.

"Long experience has taught me to seek positive confirmation of all government denials, as of Mrs. Murphy's story, and to demand assurances that the ill

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Murphy-Taylor Defense Fund

The National Committee on Conscientious Objectors has taken up the case of Stanley Murphy and Lewis Taylor and intends to bring it to court. But it cannot do this without the help of every believer in freedom of conscience and justice for all men.

A fund must be raised NOW if this case is to be won. Send your contribution TODAY to the address below. Pass this release on to your friends and urge them to contribute.

Remember: The fate of these men rests with us. We CANNOT let them down.

Make all checks payable to:

Evan W. Thomas, Treasurer of the NCCO

Mail to:

Murphy-Taylor Defense Fund
American Civil Liberties Union
170 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

treatment denied has not merely been temporarily interrupted till the storm of protest blows over. This storm must last long enough to blow away all disguises, evasions and distortions of the truth about the treatment of prisoners, whether they are conscientious objectors or others."

Evan Thomas:

"I intend to do everything in my power to fight the situation pertaining to objectors in prison and to get the country to realize that objectors who refuse to co-operate in prison must be accorded humane treatment.

"Although vigorous protests were made to the Bureau of Prisons about the transfer of Murphy and Taylor to the federal prison hospital at Springfield, I was assured by both Mr. Gill and Mr. Bennett of the Prison Bureau that the purpose of the transfer was to prevent the possible breakdown of morale in the regular prisons. I was assured by Mr. Gill that he did not regard either man as a psychiatric case.

"I have suggested on several occasions that the solution found in the last war, when objectors who refused to co-operate in prison were finally placed in a detention camp behind barbed wire, seemed to me as good as any. Within the confines of the camp, they had complete self-government, prepared their own food, and had full freedom to read and write as they chose.

"I insist that objectors who refuse to co-operate in prison from principle belong in a very different category from the great majority of other prisoners. Therefore, I insist that unless the Bureau of Prisons recognizes this fact and acts accordingly further atrocities will occur. There may be a difference of opinion as to what we consider to be atrocities, but I consider holding such men in bare cells by themselves with only a hole in the floor for human excreta an atrocity."

Both Stanley Murphy and Lewis Taylor have been confined in strip cells at the federal mental prison at Springfield, Mo., it was admitted in Washington Aug. 4 by James V. Bennett, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Mr. Bennett's admission followed charges by Mrs. Elizabeth Murphy, mother of one of the imprisoned objectors, that her son was in a strip cell and Taylor had been transferred to an insane ward in the prison. Bennett had, on the same day, denied her charges in a statement to the public press.

These revelations aroused an immediate and widespread demand among pacifists and non-pacifists alike for a full and impartial investigation into the treatment, not only of objectors, but of all prisoners in the Springfield institution.

Action was immediately started by the American Civil Liberties Union to bring Murphy and Taylor into court on a writ of habeas corpus to determine whether or not they are sane. Roger Baldwin, ACLU director, wired a Springfield attorney to commence action.

"If they are not insane they should not be confined at Springfield," he said. "Any court would regard that as improper. I think they were only sent there because the prison people did not know what else to do with them."

Bennett and other officers of the Bureau of Prisons have repeatedly said that the men were not regarded as mental cases.

The case of the two objectors—who were sentenced for walking out of Civilian Public Service camp and transferred to Springfield after ending an 82-day hunger strike at the Danbury, Conn., prison—blew wide open after two visits to her son by Mrs. Murphy.

Kept in Solitary

After a visit over the week-end of July 26 she charged that both her son and Taylor had been kept in solitary confinement since their arrival at Springfield. She said that Taylor had been examined by prison psychiatrists who told him they would let him know if he was crazy. Her son, she said, had refused psychiatric examination at Springfield. Both had been examined and pronounced sane while at Danbury.

Mrs. Murphy said the pair were transferred in shackles and a locked bus from Danbury June 12. "If there had been an accident," she wrote, "the men could not have gotten out."

She said that 60 other objectors, including 40 Jehovah's Witnesses, were in Springfield. She said that one man of 22 had been kept naked in a strip cell for 17 months and received periodic beatings.

She passed on her son's description of the cells as perfectly bare rooms, without furniture of any kind and with only a hole in the floor for toilet facilities. Prisoners are confined in these cells without clothing, her son told her.

Following a second visit to her son Aug. 1, Mrs. Murphy wired Dr. Evan

W. Thomas, chairman of the War Resisters League, that Murphy was in a strip cell and Taylor in an insane ward.

Public Press Gets Story

Her story was published in a New York newspaper Aug. 4. Reached in Washington by the paper, Bennett said:

"The men are not on psychotic status and not in solitary and not in a strip cell and not under punishment." He said he did not "propose to debate this case with Mrs. Murphy in the newspapers."

On Aug. 5, the day after Bennett's denial, Dr. Thomas received a letter from him, dated Aug. 4, in which the prisons chief said:

'Solicited' Strip Cells

"Murphy and Taylor . . . have made it clear that they wish it to be known that they will continue to be obstructive and have even solicited assignment to strip cells. . . .

"My information is that for a short period the institutional authorities acceded to the requests of these prisoners in this respect, believing this to be the best method of therapy. When it became obvious that their behavior was merely for the purpose of gaining publicity for their cases, the program was changed, and they have now been transferred to ordinary hospital rooms."

Dr. Thomas said that Murphy and Taylor, who had been in solitary cells directly across from the strip cells, had protested the use of the strip cells and the treatment of men who had been thrown into them. He said that he had been informed that Murphy had told guards that they might as well put him in a strip cell too as to leave him out to know of the sufferings of the men already there.

Bennett said that neither man was in solitary but both are "being held in separate rooms."

He said that both men had refused to co-operate with prison authorities, but that despite that fact had not been denied dietary, visiting or other privileges. He said they apparently hoped to obtain publicity and to further a campaign for unconditional release and absolute exemption from the provisions of the conscription law.

AN EDITORIAL

We Must Act Now!

The charges of Mrs. Murphy and the damaging, though evasively-worded admissions, of the Bureau of Prisons speak for themselves. Action, in the form of an immediate, impartial, thorough and long-lasting investigation is urgently necessary NOW. Every believer in freedom and justice owes it to his conscience to make an immediate and effective protest and to press for such an investigation.

Write at once to your Congressman, to your Senators, and to Senator Robert M. LaFollette, chairman of the Senate Committee on Civil Liberties, urging them to demand an investigation.

And make your contribution, as generously as you possibly can, to the Murphy-Taylor Defense Fund.

But DO IT NOW.