

Disgraceful Conditions at Petawawa. Camp Arouse Indignation

The Observer believes that in a time of crisis it is not the part of a newspaper which claims to be an organ of public opinion to withhold facts from the public. Townspeople know that a couple of weeks ago a warning was issued by the Board of Health to boil all water used for drinking purposes. This warning was issued following the receipt of a test of water samples forwarded by Town Engineer Moore to the Provincial analyst. This report showed contamination in tap water to an alarming extent, and also showed that water taken opposite Petawawa showed contamination in one cubic centimetre, while water taken from the Fort William side of the river showed contamination in only fifty cubic centimetres. This report naturally set the local authorities thinking and there seemed only one reasonable conclusion. This was that the Petawawa military camp was responsible for conditions in Pembroke. Yesterday another report was received from Toronto, and while slightly better it was far from encouraging. After it was received Councillor Bowden, Chairman of the Water Works Committee, Councillor Jones, Town Engineer Moore and Dr. Sparling, Medical Health Officer, went to Petawawa to look into conditions there, and what they found practically beggars description. That such conditions should prevail in a camp conducted under authority of the Federal Government is almost beyond understanding in a civilized community.

It is a fact known to all that in the past few years the local authorities have done everything possible to bring to the notice of the Provincial Board of Health and the Militia Department conditions which have always been regarded as a menace to the health of the town of Pembroke. The Federal member, Major G. V. White, has been asked to take the matter up with the Militia Department, but while representations have been made there by him and fine promises given by those in authority, nothing whatever has been done to improve the situation and The Observer hopes that it will not be accused of political partizanship in saying that the neglect of the Department in this matter has been nothing short of criminal.

Repeatedly representations have been made to the Provincial Board of Health. Its officials have visited the camp on various occasions and invariably have declared conditions there to be anything but satisfactory. Notwithstanding this, beyond some apparently futile correspondence with the Militia Department, no action has resulted. Some six weeks ago Mr Dallyn, Sanitary Engineer for the Provincial Board, visited the camp and did not hesitate to say that the conditions which he found there were a distinct menace to the health of a town of nearly 8,000 people. A report from him was promised forthwith. Mr Dallyn returned to Toronto, and from that day to this not a word has been heard from him.

To-day there are upwards of 5,000 men and probably 1,500 horses in the camp. Pembroke may be faced with a typhoid epidemic. There is no use in mincing words. The lives of the townspeople are of more importance in the eyes of The Observer than the jobs of any officials who are enjoying fat salaries and to all appearances neglecting their plain duties to the people. There are to-day half a dozen cases of typhoid in local hospitals which have developed during the past ten days, and possibly others in private homes. A couple have for the past couple of days been hovering between life and death. The life of one citizen is worth more in the opinion of The Observer than the positions of all the officials connected with the military camp or the Provincial Board of Health, and we have no hesitation in saying that conditions at Petawawa camp to-day are simply outrageous.

The town officials who visited the camp yesterday found a state of affairs almost incredible. It was difficult to secure from anyone connected with the camp any definite information as to how long present conditions have prevailed, but some time ago a break occurred in the sewage disposal system, which proved unequal to the task imposed upon it at present, and the raw sewage ran without treatment out into the river. This failure of the plant was unquestionably due to the lack of knowledge on the part of those connected with the camp of the principles of sanitary engineering, and when the plant failed a temporary expedient was adopted. The Pembroke authorities who visited the camp found the vats and beds out of commission and the raw sewage being run into a large hole in the sand, from which it was being pumped by a gasoline engine on to the beach to filter through the sand into the river. From the wooden carrier the sewage was leaking in its raw state into the old outlet drain and running without hindrance out into the stream, no one apparently having foresight enough to put in a dam to stop it. The place was such that it was almost impossible to stand within a hundred feet of the pump, and this was going on under a Department of the Federal Government! There could be no doubt whatever that Pembroke's water supply was being polluted by the system, yet it had been in such a condition for at least a week, and possibly two weeks, and not a word had come from the camp to Pembroke's health officials regarding it!

Townspeople have no idea of the abominable situation at the military camp, and there is among the officials apparently only complacent indifference to conditions which may easily result in an epidemic of typhoid in the town. The Observer has no desire to assume the attitude of an alarmist or cry "wolf" when there is no danger, but in the face of what a representative of this paper found at Petawawa yesterday we have no hesitation whatever in saying that the danger is very real and that if the Militia Department or Provincial Board of Health allow it to continue a day longer they are guilty of gross criminal negligence.

The Engineer in charge at Petawawa may be a competent man for building roadways and for similar work. He does not pretend to be a sanitary engineer. It is the duty of the authorities to immediately appoint a competent sanitary engineer to first of all provide a temporary remedy for present conditions, and then devise some effective permanent system of sewage disposal which will remove for all time the danger of contamination of Pembroke's water supply.

For years past the Pembroke water works and health authorities have been pleading for protection from this menace. They have been fed up on honeyed phrases and fine promises both from the Militia Department and the Provincial Board. Year after year the situation has become more and more aggravated until to-day it is simply intolerable. We understand the local authorities are making a final appeal for relief. They must act AT ONCE, and there must be no compromise. Only definite and immediate action will suffice. They must have the effective co-operation of the Provincial Board, and must go to the head of the Militia Department for action. Any delay on their part will be inexcusable, and delay on the part of the officials entrusted with responsibility for the administration of the camp must stamp them as absolutely unworthy of public trust. There has been nothing but temporizing with the situation for years past. This can go on no longer, and The Observer, as one of the organs of public opinion in Pembroke, demands from all concerned the application of a prompt and effective remedy for present conditions, which are nothing short of disgraceful and criminal!