

Are We Being Fooled by a Cure-all?

ROGER N. BALDWIN

COMPULSORY MILITARY TRAINING after the war for all youths, and with auxiliary training for girls, is highly desirable if we are going to prepare for World War III. I assume its desirability from the universal need of conscription to build modern armies; and nothing in World War II indicates that other means of combat will replace it. The sole reason for embarking now on plans for postwar military training is the prospect that the peace will fail, as it did after World War I, to create a warless world, and that another holocaust faces the next generation as it has the last two. All other reasons for universal compulsory military training are secondary, and in large part phony.

It seems peculiarly unfortunate to raise the question to the level of serious public debate at this time when every pronouncement of Allied statesmen and all the efforts concerned with the peace are headed in precisely the contrary direction. From the declaration of the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter to the most recent declarations of Allied policy, the

clearest and most definite goals are those of a warless world, disarmament, international action to curb aggression, and economic arrangements to strike at the causes of war. Are millions of American boys fighting only to defeat an enemy now and to leave unchanged the world that made the war? Is it any service to them to give up hope of a warless world and accept in advance of trying the inevitability of World War III? Any conceivable war for which universal military training is necessary is bound to be a world war; and there is no argument therefore for preparing for minor wars.

Utopian Concepts Delude Us

But it is maintained by the military training advocates that there are other reasons besides preparing for another war to justify the program. Some maintain, irrespective of the prospects of another war, that universal training is beneficial to our youth in improving physical standards, pointing to the appallingly high rate of rejections for physical defects in the present war. Others stress, with less relevance or evidence, the probable effects in reducing crime through subjecting boys at a formative age to rigid military discipline. Education will be served, say other enthusiasts, by reducing illiteracy, promoting trade training and thereby adding to the numbers of employables, and by teaching the obligations of citizenship in its most basic form—preparing to defend one's country. So highly is this training

Roger N. Baldwin, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, is convinced that compulsory military training would lead us head-on into World War III. All arguments for military training for any reason other than preparation for war are "in large part phony," writes Mr. Baldwin, and to say that universal conscription would automatically improve health, reduce illiteracy, promote education, and turn out good citizens is to indulge in "utopian concepts."

in citizenship prized that some, notably Mrs. Roosevelt, advocate a period of compulsory training, military and other, for all boys and girls as part of their normal educations.

These are utopian concepts in relation to a process to be confined to a year or a year and a half in the lives of our youths. None of them can be achieved in that time, and some not at all. Every educator knows that they require long years. Physical standards are to be achieved only by constant application of health practices and hygienic living from the earliest years. A boy at 17 or 18 with a history of physical sub-standard equipment is not to become in a few months of military life a perfect specimen of healthy young manhood. Military discipline is not going to cure the evils of anti-social conduct already established in young delinquents, as any juvenile court worker or psychiatrist well knows. It may make him conform outwardly for a while to the demands of good behavior, but the record of military academies in dealing with such boys and of the Army and Navy themselves, hardly offers ground for optimism as to success.

The illiteracy argument is even weaker.

Boys who are illiterate at 17 may get some rudimentary education in an army, but the problem is clearly one that should be tackled long before. So, too, with trade training. What a boy would get in a year or year and a half of some trade in an army, with his primary concerns in military proficiency, would hardly qualify him for a job. Trade training is an obligation of the school system long before 17, and for more than a year and a half.

The Army Is No School for Democracy

But the strongest argument of the advocates rests upon a more intangible claim, that of training in citizenship. But I had supposed that citizenship meant, even to these advocates, the ability to function as a citizen in a democracy, and that the art of democratic living would be the necessary preparation for that. Whatever may be said of a military establishment it is not democratic, and cannot be. Discipline and unquestioning obedience to authority are its essence, for without them armies cannot be effective. The obligation to defend one's country all men accept, and compulsory military training cannot make the acceptance greater. What, then, is left to

This Is a Ballot—

In this issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP we have attempted to present the pros and cons of a matter which will affect the lives of millions of young men of America for years to come. We believe, and we think you will agree with us, that the subject of compulsory military training is of major importance to us as educators and citizens.

We want to know what you think about this matter. On the reverse side of this page you will find a ballot for expressing your opinion. You are urged to check this ballot and return it to the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

the claim of training for citizenship? The contrary argument would appear to be the stronger, that military training is opposed to democratic practice and tends to undo whatever training for democratic citizenship a youth may have had.

Surely it will be admitted that education in democracy should mark our educational system from the earliest years; not only in the content of studies in history and civics but in the relationships established in the school system by the very organization of school life itself. It cannot be segregated for boys only. It should, and does in the best of our schools, mark the habits of behavior of both teachers and students from kindergarten through high school.

Educators who espouse compulsory military training have, I venture to say, been taken in. They cannot in their more deliberate moments reconcile it with any of the claims made for it on social or educational grounds. They can reconcile it only with the tragic necessity of preparing for another world war if the arrangements among nations for avoiding war fail. Let us accept it then, if we must, for what it in fact is, an undesirable, anti-demo-

cratic process of training our youth for inevitable war, and refute the buncombe that attempts to make of it a panacea for all the ills of our social and educational system.

Our clear obligation now in the present state of the world is to defer until after the war and the peace all consideration of future military policy. When we see what kind of a world we are going to get it will be time enough to plan for it. World War III won't come in a hurry, and if we are to get ready for it we can take our time doing it. Meanwhile the job of school people is to promote that understanding of the professed aims of the war which may lead us to disarmament, international organization, and an ultimately warless world. If we mean to teach democracy, we cannot confine its concept and practice to our country alone. We have the duty and high purpose to share with the peoples of the world the hopes that the human race can so order its affairs and so resolve its conflicts that conscription may everywhere be abolished, the nations disarmed, and international agencies alone exercise such policing as the world may require.

OPINION BALLOT

Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA
1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

Do you favor compulsory military training for all young men after the war?

Yes..... No..... Uncertain.....

Do you agree with the statement of the Executive Committee on pages 2 and 3 of this issue of
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Yes..... No..... Uncertain.....

Have you written your Congressman expressing your opinion on this matter?

Yes..... No.....

If not, will you do so soon? Yes..... No.....

If you have further comment, we hope you'll write us.

Signed.....

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