

What Are the Issues?

HOWARD E. WILSON

IN EUROPEAN NATIONS during the early periods of American colonial development, as Charles and Mary Beard point out in their recent *Basic History of the United States*, "the actual snatching of men for wars and the fear of being snatched made life a genuine terror for innumerable men of military age, their families, and young marriageable women." Hostility to compulsory military service drove thousands of early settlers to an unsettled America. In all the decades of our

history, desire to escape the enforced service which is characteristic of European ways of life has been a powerful force in sending westward across the Atlantic the groups which now compose the population of the United States.

Deep-rooted in our tradition is opposition to compulsory, peacetime military service, to a huge standing army, to the rise of a military and naval caste. To abandon this tradition entails potent alteration of American faith and policy. To adopt compulsory military service for peacetime America—and, no matter how hard it is to realize it now, peace is our ordinary way of life—is not an act to be taken lightly or hurriedly.

We are at the moment engaged in war and our thoughts and feelings are deeply involved in the conflict. These war months are no time to fasten upon our children and their children a system of enforced service, personally costly to them

The outstanding issues in the compulsory military training debate as they are brought out by this month's authors are analyzed here by Howard E. Wilson, who prepared this article after reading all of the material for the October EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP. Mr. Wilson is associate professor of education at Harvard and was recently in Washington on a temporary assignment with the American Council on Education as director of the Committee on the Study of Teaching Materials on Inter-American Subjects.

We Must Decide . . .

— at club meetings

— in cracker-barrel sessions



and financially costly to an already over-debted government. Even if we should ultimately decide in favor of military service for all youth, let us do it in moments of calm consideration. The hysterical generalities of many proponents of service and of some opponents of service—generalities from which the pages of this issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP are not entirely free—offer little basis of wisdom for an action so profoundly affecting all the children now in American homes or yet to be born into American citizenship.

*Is Conscription an Investment
in National Security?*

The policy of waiting for days of sounder judgment is strongly bulwarked by the fact that we do not yet have the information upon which judgment should be based. We are fighting this war in the hope of a better world. Why adopt a practice which is characteristic of the regime against which we fight until we know the result of the fighting? The testimony of veterans returned to civilian life will be of pertinence. The kind of international arrangements to be developed in the months and years immediately ahead must inevitably condition our decision. We cannot know what our military needs are to be or what specific measures of preparedness are likely to be most effective until we have more information about the post-war settlements than we now possess.

Such training as can be given large numbers of men in a single year, especially when that training may be hopelessly outdated before it is put to use, is not likely to be our best possible investment in national security. Perhaps an army substantially larger than we have had in past times of peace, recruited by voluntary enlistment, and with training kept up to date over a period of years is our wisest

course of action. Or training in industrial laboratories, in machine shops, in university research, in actual business enterprise, in geographical study, in languages, with stronger focus on the requisites of national security and world peace may be our better course. Warfare today, and even more in the future, is of machines and technicians rather than of reservist armies of men. All these are factors which must be long pondered before we take a step long unwanted and unwarranted in the unfolding story of American life.

Let's Attack Our Ills Directly

The argument for delayed decision rests on questions of military and security measures, which are the real bases upon which compulsory military service must be examined at any time. As pointed out elsewhere in this journal, other arguments for or against compulsory and universal military service are irrelevant or subsidiary. One author seems to argue that such service would eliminate the 4-F group from American society, disregarding the fact that compulsory service even in wartime has failed to do that. Broader medical and social services freely available to all the nation's children rather than health services for post-adolescents who can pass a physical examination for entrance into military service are a more direct and fruitful attack on ill-health and military unfitness within the nation.

If there is to be a "year's service for democracy" as a phase of education for citizenship—and there is much strong argument favoring such a "moral equivalent of war"—there is little evidence that such service should be military in character. A year's service in forest conservation, in social service, in slum clearance, in public health projects, in adult education, in rural and urban rehabilitation would be much

more constructive educationally in the development of democratic citizenship. And the investment in such enterprises would bring early social return. Such activities, as well as prolonged education suited to the needs of young people, would contribute alike to reduction in juvenile delinquency and to employment of youth in constructive enterprises.

All of these considerations lead inevitably to the conclusion that we should not at this time adopt a policy of universal, peacetime, military service in the United States. What the future holds no

one knows, but there cannot now be drawn from its long vistas or from the successful achievements of our own past, any clear mandate in favor of peacetime conscription. We need to be less neglectful of our own defense and of our international responsibilities and commitments than we have been in the past, but alertness and strength are not synonymous with compulsory military training. France had such training, and it helped lull her into lethargy. The road to America's future is not guarded by compulsory military service for all its citizens.

Pattern for Tomorrow?

Is this the pattern we want for the tomorrows of young Americans—guns and men in uniform? Is it necessary? Is it wise? We, the people, must decide. We hope that you will read the articles in this issue of **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP** carefully and thoughtfully; that you will form an opinion, as free Americans can and must; that you will write your Congressman expressing your views; and that you will let us know what you think. You will find an Opinion Ballot on page 28.



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