

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK UP



Courtesy Pittsburgh (Pa.) Public Schools

Pittsburgh seventh-graders discussed compulsory military training over station KQV (Blue Network) during a Junior Town Meeting of the Air last May 20. Published here is the major portion of that broadcast, which was prepared under the supervision of R. O. Hughes, director of citizenship and social studies, Pittsburgh Public Schools. Mr. Hughes also served as moderator for the program.

MODERATOR: This is the first of a short series of Junior Town Meetings for the discussion of current problems of importance in the field of good citizenship. Those who take part in this discussion today are not yet old enough to vote according to the laws of Pennsylvania, but the decisions that a voter makes when he is 21 or older will be based on the knowledge and understanding, or the lack of them, that have resulted from the habits of thought and study that he has developed during earlier years, whether in school or out.

In the studio at this time is a group of students from the 7A class of Frick Elementary School. The question for today is “Should a Year’s Military Training be Required of all Young Men Physically Able to Receive It?” I will recognize as the first speaker in this Junior Town Meeting, Nancy Russell.

NANCY RUSSELL: Today people are asking, “What will our postwar world be like—what changes will it bring about?” These questions can be answered most easily by first understanding the problems that we will have to face. One of these problems is whether all young men should receive a year of military training. In my opinion, the young men should receive the training to protect us from future aggression and give us security as a nation.

In introducing such a proposal I recognize that many questions may arise. First, you may ask, "When should the training be taken?" The training should begin at the close of a student's high school course and continue for one year. This would be a satisfactory time for many young men, as they will not have had time to establish a business and, therefore, will be able to leave without business difficulties. However, if the young man has a good reason for not wanting to take the training at this time, he may be given his choice of any period of one year between the ages of 17 and 24.

Would there be exceptions? In certain cases, yes. Young men unable to take the full year of training because of physical illness should be given training in some other related branch of the service which they could handle successfully. Many of the choices would include engineering and mechanical work.

The training should be given in connection with colleges and universities willing and able to provide the necessary facilities for it. The training should correspond closely to the Army routine of today. Army officers or other qualified persons would be in charge. As the young men would not be in service long enough to receive a commission, they should be paid about the same amount of wages as a private in our regular Army and receive similar equipment.

By the adoption of this measure, our country tomorrow will enjoy protection and assurance of safety in life, property, and national well-being that have never been known in the past.

MODERATOR: We hear next from William Winterburn.

WILLIAM WINTERBURN: Nancy gave you a general outline of the plan for compulsory military training which she advocates for all young men who are equal to it. I want to devote my time to the desirabilities of the plan from a national standpoint. Our country would need this military training to protect our people from future wars. Not only would this program deter a possible enemy from gathering up enough strength to start another war, but it would give our boys much needed training which would teach discipline and respect for law and authority.

At Pearl Harbor we were unprepared, and it took us quite a while to regain our mil-



Signal Corps Photo

itary and naval strength in the Pacific and the Atlantic. If we had had proper training, our troops could have moved at once into active service and shortened the war a couple of years. Thus, we might have saved thousands of lives, billions in value of materials, distress and worry, and many of the other discomforts of the war.

The cost of establishing this training would be repaid by the prevention of a World War III. It is all right to talk about peace and plan for obtaining it, but the fact remains, just as true of a country as of a person, that the surest way to enjoy security is to be able to take care of oneself.

MODERATOR: Continuing the discussion of today's topic, we next recognize Marilyn Simon.

MARILYN SIMON: I strongly and firmly believe that a year's military training after the war would benefit our young men in these ways. (1) It will build them up physically. Army training will strengthen the bodies and minds of our young men, for they are put through a basic military training period that may seem heavy to lazy people, whose muscles are soft, but is fine for those who have real stuff in them.

(2) It teaches a soldier cooperation and good citizenship. By strict military cooperation soldiers would learn to work with each other, as in Army maneuvers, and find out by experience that "no man liveth to himself alone." After their military training is over, the soldiers will continue to see the need of cooperation with their families and friends, thus helping people to live together peacefully, regardless of race, color, or creed.

(3) Another good reason for military training is that, in the course of training, many young men will have a chance to learn a useful trade which will prepare them for a better job in the future.

(4) A year's military training would also be educational for these young men. They would be learning things that they ordinarily wouldn't take in high school and college. They would be taught skills and ideas, the teaching of which would cost hundreds of dollars in colleges, but *these* young men would be getting them without any cost to themselves.

Some people think that military training would give these men a military point of view and make them want to solve national and world problems by the use of force instead of trying to meet them by discussion, cooperative study, or other democratic methods. But I disagree with this. The knowledge that our country will not be unprepared in future years will give them assurance that they will be, not only safe from enemies, but free to make the most of themselves.

MODERATOR: Now we turn to Pearl Sobol for her viewpoint on the question for today.

PEARL SOBOL: I have listened with much interest to the presentation of the plan for compulsory military training for our young men as Nancy has outlined it. I have been deeply impressed by the thought that boys should have military training of that kind. In fact, I would go further and assert that it would be fine for girls as well as boys to render a year of service to their country at some time before they take up

their permanent life work. As a girl, I myself feel that an experience of that kind would make me better equipped for the life ahead of me.

What does such training mean? It provides a new experience and a chance to learn the real meaning of life. In their camps the young men learn obedience and discipline and cooperation. Why not a camp where girls can learn to obey orders and develop sportsmanship and, above all, learn something that would help them in their later life and also help their country?

It may take a little more time to convince the general public that compulsory training should be extended to girls, but right now I believe we shall have little trouble in making it clear that the country needs compulsory military training for its young men. When experience has proved its value for our young men, we can then work for the extension of it to include all citizens.

MODERATOR: Our speakers thus far have favored the proposal which is under discussion. Let us hear from Herbert Caplan.

HERBERT CAPLAN: The argument for compulsory military training might sound appealing to the average American citizen; but if a little thought is given to the subject, its disadvantages will soon outnumber its advantages. If we were to establish compulsory military training during peacetime, we would be defeating our purpose in fighting this war. Instead of establishing world peace as intended, we would be building up a military nation. Our reason would be to protect ourselves from war. All the other nations would take it upon themselves to do the same. If every nation is ready to fight at the drop of a hat, where is peace? Ancient Sparta gave its boys military training and was constantly participating in wars.

What are the benefits of military training? Physical education? Aren't we receiving that in our schools and play after school? Obedience? Aren't we receiving that from our parents and teachers? In case of war, what are the benefits? Knowledge of tactics? Once in battle, new tactics are adopted. Sergeant Kelly had no previous training; yet once in battle he turned into a machine of war.

If this training was established, a permanent set of commanding officers would be required. Then we would have the problem of assigning these positions to reliable persons, for if a person with ideas of aggression got control, we would be in danger of his seizing the government and starting another war. We see that we are receiving now the so-called benefits of military training. We also see that this training would only bring about complications. I conclude by saying our country would be much better off if compulsory military training is not adopted.

MODERATOR: Our next speaker is Charles Sciulli.

CHARLES SCIULLI: I am not yet convinced that we should adopt this far-reaching proposal which is so contrary to our national customs and ideals. It certainly has disadvantages as well as advantages.

Certain disadvantages stand out so plainly that we must not overlook them. (1) If young men are compelled to take this training, many would enter into it with the wrong attitude, thus causing unfavorable relationships. (2) With this continued dis-

satisfied attitude they would not obtain the alleged benefits of the training. (3) This compulsory training would cause hardship in many homes where there are large families and the parents are dependent upon their sons for aid financially. (4) This training would interfere with a young man's school training because his military age would occur at a time when it would, in many cases, conflict with his educational advance. (5) A year of military training would take many young men away from their trades and professions.

In addition to these disadvantages, we must remember that conscription and compulsory military service in peacetime are contrary to our democratic ideals. If the United States, which is the leading democratic power, arms its young men, then other nations would feel that they have the same right. Thus, we would be defeating the very purpose of this war and we would be reverting to what we have condemned in the totalitarian nations.

I personally have not reached a solution yet; for too little is known of the exact setup of this military program; how it will operate, how long it will last, and of what value it will be in the postwar world.

Do not misunderstand me. If the plan, or something like it, is ever adopted by the free choice of the American people, I think that all good Americans will take part in it. But it must be given full and free discussion by our people. It would be an awful mistake for us to become so hysterical over our present difficulties that we would rush into the adoption of this program. It would not only involve a complete break with all our past customs and traditions, but would upset our family life and social relations for uncounted years. "Look before you leap" is the best possible advice on a matter like this.

MODERATOR: We must now bring to a close our consideration of the plan which has been suggested for compulsory military training for our young men. In the words of one of our speakers, I believe that if the American people should, after proper deliberation, adopt this policy, our young men will meet the challenge at least gracefully, if not with enthusiasm; but that there is room for difference of opinion in regard to this proposition, the speakers of this afternoon have demonstrated.

When You Write to Your Congressman About a Bill

Remember that congressmen listen carefully to opinions from "back home" and they want to be kept informed about conditions in their districts. Base your letters on your own experiences and observations.

In writing to a Senator address his letter to the Senate Office Building, Washington 25, D. C.; and if to a Representative address him at the House Office Building, Washington 25, D. C.

Describe the bill you are interested in specifically. There are thousands of bills before Congress and unless you designate the specific bill your letter may be wasted.

Timing is very important. A letter to committee members should go to them while the bill is before the committee.

Remember that short letters are most effective. Ordinarily, such letters should be limited to one typewritten page or two pages in script.

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