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Conference Comment

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CONGRESSMAN WADSWORTH has placed his advocacy of postwar compulsory military training on two principal grounds: (1) its contribution to national defense and (2) its benefit to the individual trainee in the form of physical betterment, vocational education, and the like. Those who disagree with him on other than purely pacifist grounds must recognize the force in these points and, moreover, cannot deny that military ideals and virtues represent certain values which the nation would do well to cultivate. Precise achievement; selflessness and chivalry; and devotion to country and community: these must always be held in high esteem. In some respects they have found their highest development in the armed forces.

There are, however, opposing considerations, most of which have been brought out by other speakers on this program, which in my opinion far outweigh the arguments in favor of compulsory military training. National armed might, measured by the need for supplementing or contributing to future international arrangements for security, must be maintained for an indefinite period. We do not know, however, whether a huge reservoir of fighting manpower should be an ingredient of such a force or whether, indeed, emphasis upon combat training for each individual may not de-

tract from the development of scientific and industrial skills which we shall need to cultivate for military as well as other reasons. The time for decision in these matters clearly is not now. Action should await a calm appraisal of the postwar situation. The United States will not be lacking in armed strength for some years to come in any event; and there is no need to hasten decision upon the character of our postwar force which, it is clearly apparent, can only seem at present to be directed against nations which are our allies.

More important than these considerations, however, and going to the ultimate merits of the issue of compulsory military training, is the question of whether we as a people wish to erect military service as the one form of national service which the federal government demands of every youth. To do this would be not only to stress the military virtues but also emphasize blatant nationalism, group intolerance, subjection of the individual to the mass, and force as the ultimate solvent of human affairs. The underlying policy would go counter to the liberal American tradition, which has asserted the rights and dignity of all people everywhere and has emphasized reason, accompanied by tolerance, as the principal means of achieving decency and progress.

It is not mere negativism which leads to the rejection of compulsory military training. Not opposition to individual obligation to render service to the nation and to humanity, but a belief in richer, fuller service by the individual to the group, lies at the base of the opposition to the training bill which I believe to be valid. It may prove to be desirable to exact an undivided year of national service, which may take many forms, from each individual, as a supplement to a revised and extended educational system. Much could be accomplished by such a program. Under such a plan, military service would find its place; but the plan should embrace not young men alone and not military service alone. Service to one's fellow man and the fullest personal development on the part of each young man and woman, sponsored by the nation in the interest of humanity, is a worthy ideal which should receive full support, and it is far different from the compulsory military training now proposed.

In framing the measures to be taken in order to carry out such an ideal, we must take care to keep our eyes upon the central purposes to be served,

which alone can justify subjecting our young people to the complete control of the government for a year. Compulsory military training as it would now operate would be inconsistent with these not only in its ultimate emphasis upon the use of force but in important collateral respects as well. The caste system as between officers and men, extending to all aspects of their lives; racial segregation; and lack of encouragement to independent thought: these are aspects of military life which still prevail to a large extent. They must be made to yield if all or some of the nation's youth are to be placed under a compulsory military regimen in peace time. Some of these evils, it is true, are attributable to Congress and the country rather than to the armed services themselves; but that fact does not entitle the nation to fasten them upon succeeding generations.

We must conclude, I think, that compulsory military training, as at present envisaged, is undesirable. We must aim at something far larger and better. Let us develop proposals which are adequate to the need, rather than adopt a poor substitute now.