

Draft Law To Expire

Debate Sharpens

Dave Wheeler

1967

The draft law (Universal Military Service and Training Act) will expire in July of this year. Because this country is supposedly run democratically, there will be debate on the renewal of the bill in Congress. Because there is a war being waged in Viet Nam, the flow of men to Southeast Asia will not be hampered.

It is very difficult to take seriously the different alternatives being offered to the present form of the draft law. The contortions of various politicians to appear liberal and still maintain the defense of Premier Ky are laughable as political acrobatics, but are also dodges to avoid facing the fact that men are still needed to die.

Senator Ernest Gruening (D., Alaska) will offer the Congress the only honest proposal it is likely to hear this session on the draft. He has already stated that he is prepared to propose that the Universal Military Service and Training Act be repealed. It is possible that this motion may be silenced even before it reaches the floor to avoid embarrassing debate on the war and the coercion, discrimination, and arbitrary power inherent in the draft.

The official administration position on the draft problem was included in the President's State of the Union message. In his speech LBJ promised to wait until a report came in from his own Advisory Commission on the Selective Service System before making any proposals. The commission is headed by Burke Marshall, a vice-president of IBM.

Recommendations from the commission included ratification of the Kennedy lottery proposal, ending of the II-S student deferment, and drafting the youngest men first.

There is speculation that these are actually measures to achieve a more democratic and objective draft system. But it is interesting that this policy would also make available a new sector of young men and allowing the Selective Service to set the quantity of men needed without problems of draft quotas.

Defense Secretary McNamara has offered his own alternative to the present scheme. His model would provide "universal national service" for those who couldn't serve in the armed forces by making mandatory service in the Peace Corps or some other function "in the national interest."

The sport, Teddy Kennedy, has a democratic alternative to the present draft system. He would have the armed forces staffed through a huge lottery among all eligible men. Brother Bobby feels the Selective Service system should be reformed, although he has not stated specifically how. It is very difficult, however, to envision him offering concrete backing to his criticisms of the war in Viet Nam.

Even more hawkish than the President, however, are some elements in the Congress who are proposing a system of "Universal Military Training." This would require that all the men of the country undergo a period of basic training and an extended service in the Reserves.

Does it appear that the Congress is holding out much hope? The political realities that make manpower necessary to the government also point up the ludicrous nature of the proposals to modify the means of selection. The war in Viet Nam that must be supplied is more expensive than most of us guess. Several months ago the 400,000 mark was passed in the number of military personnel. Last month we learned that the death figures given out by the military included only combatants killed. This month we found that the US has lost twice as many planes in

raids over North Viet Nam as previously announced. The full loss in men and material must be matched to keep the war going.

Because the government sees it in the United States' diplomatic and economic interest to support dictators around the world, the international situation is unstable elsewhere for the United States. Threatening postures based on a superior cache of bombs and missiles must be retrieved by men fighting in limited wars. A strong military must be maintained to meet threats like that posed by the Dominican Republic that was met with immediate American intervention without even time for advice and consideration on the event.

In the face of our foreign policy it would appear that the only change in draft policies for the next several [years would] be quantitative. And this will not be due to any maneuvering in the Congress, but due to the fluctuations of the situation outside the boundaries of the United States.

Related

See *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.

fifth Estate

Dave Wheeler
Draft Law To Expire
Debate Sharpens
1967

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/24-february-15-28-1967/draft-law-to-expire>
Fifth Estate #24, February 15-28, 1967

fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net