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Science and Reservists

IN 1952 Congress passed the Armed Forces Reserve Act, which stipulates that ROTC graduates and Selective Service inductees shall constitute a military reserve, upon completion of their regular tour of military training and service, and that the armed forces will have first call upon them for a period of eight years. This reserve will soon total more than 10 million men, or approximately one-sixth of the nation's labor force.

The need for a reserve of trained men who will constitute a seasoned bulwark of defense is so evident as to need no argument in its support. Less obvious, perhaps, is the equally imperative need for the highly skilled engineers, scientists, technicians, and mechanics who keep the armed forces supplied, mobile, and powerful. Numerically, we face the possibility of being inferior to our presumed adversaries; hence, we must counterbalance numerical deficiencies with technological superiority. To this end we must marshal our brainpower and our skill even more shrewdly than our limited physical manpower. But the Armed Forces Reserve Act of 1952 is concerned primarily with the physical strength of the combat forces.

Approximately 25 per cent of the scientists in the reserve occupy key posts in essential industry. Quick mobilization could wreck vital industrial operations if these men are withdrawn from production and research. From the standpoint of the military, fewer than three per cent of the 10 million are key men elsewhere in a national emergency, whereas these same people add not skill but mere numerical strength to the military reserve. With modern wars utilizing every technological device that can be invented and produced, it is a simple act of national self-preservation to use the individuals with special knowledge, skill, and experience to keep our armed forces at peak efficiency and effectiveness by providing the best technological equipment that ingenuity can devise.

To meet this situation, a bill was introduced into the House (H.R. 3893) by Representative Johnson (Calif.) on March 11 and into the Senate (S. 1551) by Senator Flanders (Vt.) on April 2. This bill proposes that there be established in the Office of the President a National Manpower Board, to advise the President on problems relating to specialized personnel and to serve as an appeals board to assure the most effective use of reservists who are recalled to military duty. The board would be composed of nine persons appointed by the President, and not more than three of them would be members of the armed forces. The appointees "shall be persons who by training and experience are thoroughly familiar with the needs of the Armed Forces, defense production, and the national health, safety, and interest; and familiar with the functions of specialized personnel including the professions, such as engineering and the physical sciences, but not including the healing arts."

The bill has taken the customary course of new legislation: It has been referred to the appropriate committees and subcommittees in the two houses of Congress and it has been referred to the Department of Defense for comment. It is known that the Department is reluctant to relinquish any of its control over reservists, but the fact is that it will retain control under this amendment, because the proposed National Manpower Board will have jurisdiction over appeals affecting substantially less than three per cent of the total reserve.

To the engineering and scientific organizations of the country a policy that concerns itself solely with physical manpower is an anachronism, and the amendment is a move that scientists should support, because military and national policy must be revised and adapted to modern technology if our nation is to survive another major conflict.

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SCIENCE, founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the Business Press, 10 McGovern Ave., Lancaster, Pa. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Lancaster, Pa., January 13, 1948, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at the special rate postage provided for in the Act of February 28, 1925, embodied in Paragraph (d-2) Section 34.40 P. L. & R. of 1948.

All correspondence should be sent to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington 5, D. C. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors. Four weeks' notice is required for change of address, and an address stencil label from a recent issue must be furnished. Claims for a missing number will be allowed only if received within 60 days from date of issue.

Annual subscriptions, $7.50; single copies, $.25; foreign postage, outside the Pan-American Union, $1.00; Canadian postage, $.50. Special rates to members of the AAAS.

The AAAS also publishes THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY. Subscription and advertising rates on request.

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