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Selective Service Changes

In a technologically advanced nation the selection of men for military service cannot be handled satisfactorily unless the related problem of selecting other men for deferment or exemption is considered simultaneously. The recent report of the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service deals fully with the first of these problems, but inadequately with the second. Briefly, the commission proposes: that (with a few exceptions) no further student or occupational deferments be granted; that younger men be drafted first, rather than older ones as has been the practice; and that draftees be selected by chance from the I-A pool. Lotteries were tried in the Civil War, in World War I, and in the early years of World War II. Under some circumstances they can select satisfactorily the men who enter military service, but they failed before, and cannot be expected now, to select effectively those who are of greater value in the civilian sector.

There are two categories of men who should not be inducted. The easier category to handle includes men excused for personal reasons, chiefly hardship cases, and those who do not meet minimum mental or physical standards. The harder category to handle includes those who should be deferred or exempted for reasons of national interest: persons necessary to maintain civil government; persons of greater value in civilian than in military positions; and persons who will be of greater military value after completion of training as officers, physicians, or other highly trained specialists.

This "national interest" category causes difficulty because inclusion can be subject to abuse or favoritism; because deferment seems to confer special privilege and sometimes leads to de facto exemption; and because white men have qualified more often than Negroes. The fear of abuse and special privilege, the desire to minimize the number in the "national interest" category, and the desire to achieve greater Negro-white equity in the percentages of the physically and mentally qualified who are called for induction seem to have determined the proposals of the National Advisory Commission.

Changes are necessary, for some of the selective service machinery has grown rusty and there has been too much variation in the application of standards for selection and for deferment. In the debate about proposed changes, conflicts of value and emotional appeals can be expected. There will be talk of discrimination and of rich college kids. Significantly, the National Advisory Commission entitled its report *In Pursuit of Equity*, and the lottery system proposed by the President was given the acronym FAIR.

The solid political and social reasons for the commission's proposals must be considered. But so must their effect on national strength and welfare. Minimizing deferments and inducting men earlier would make it easier for the services to get manpower, but more difficult in a few years to get officers, doctors, and other trained specialists. Abolition of student and occupational deferment would damage industry and education. Some of the bills before Congress and the report of the Civilian Advisory Panel to the House Committee on Armed Services are framed to try to avoid these consequences.

In attempting to resolve the conflicts involved, it will be necessary to listen to the emotional arguments and to pay attention to the goals emphasized by the commission, but it will also be necessary to give more consideration than the commission did to the "national interest" category if we are to preserve the fundamental principle of a selective service system—the optimal deployment of available manpower resources.

—DAEL WOLFLE