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Selective Service Solution

At the end of the current academic year the pool of men eligible for Selective Service induction will suddenly be swelled by the addition of 1968 college graduates, men who receive graduate degrees in June, and those who complete their first year of graduate work. Under existing regulations the oldest men in this pool must be inducted first. The result will be that the Army will receive very few inductees in the preferred 19-to-20 age range and will find from 50 to 75 percent of draft calls being filled by men with college degrees or with a year or more of graduate work—a prospect that pleases neither the Army, the employers of engineers and other professional manpower, nor persons interested in the continuity of graduate education.

The present regulations must be changed. The changes should be announced soon and should be designed to retain flexibility in the size of draft calls; provide the Army with a better age mix of inductees; and reduce the uncertainty concerning induction that now makes it difficult for young men (and also for others, such as graduate school faculties) to plan with reasonable confidence for a year or more ahead.

There is substantial but by no means unanimous support for the proposition that, when not all young men are required to enter military service, those who are required to do so should be selected by some random method. The President proposed this idea to Congress, but did not spell out the details. Lacking a specific plan, Congress refused to approve, but invited the President to submit new legislation later. It now seems unlikely that new legislation will be adopted in time to be of much help in 1968; there are too many other items on the congressional docket. Legislation, however, is not necessary; the Executive already has the authority necessary to accomplish most of what is needed.

One kind of "lottery" could be used without new legislation. The existing law would permit reversing the present oldest-first method of selection by designating a specific age group—probably the 19-year-olds—as the "prime age group" for induction. Older men who have been deferred—for example, men allowed to enter graduate school this past fall—would be treated when their deferment ended as if they were just reaching age 19. The prime age group would therefore include men who were actually 19 and older men being treated as if they were 19. Selection would still have to be on an oldest-first basis, but the "oldest," under these circumstances, would be those born in the earliest months of the year. Thus the "lottery" of birth dates 19 or more years ago would now be used to determine order of induction.

This system would call a large number of college graduates and graduate students into military duty next year, but would leave a larger number free to continue graduate work or to enter essential occupations. It would provide the Army with a better age mix in 1968 than existing regulations would, and a still better mix in following years. And it would give all of the young men involved a better opportunity to plan realistically, for each could estimate with some degree of assurance whether and when he was likely to be called for induction.

These arrangements would not solve all of the problems; for example, there are still uncertainties as to which graduate students should be deferred. The arrangements may not be permanent in all details; for example, we are unlikely to continue to penalize those with January birthdays year after year. But the proposed regulations would allow orderly planning for the year ahead. They can be introduced quickly and without new legislation. They offer the best immediate solution of an urgent problem.—DAEL WOLFE