

Testimony of Hon. John E. Fogarty, MC under Committee headed by Representative Clifton A. Woodrum, on the subject of Peacetime Military Conscripti
June 18, 1945

Because I believe the history of our Country demonstrates that the Democratic way is the best way in the long run I am opposed to Conscription in principle. I am particularly opposed to action by Congress on this Conscription proposal at this time.

We have been hearing for many months that this Nation of ours owes a debt which can never be adequately repaid to the men who are fighting for our Country's preservation. They risk their lives - many of them are daily making the eternal sacrifice in the cause of American Democracy. Those men who will return from the battle are entitled to a voice in determining what will be the kind of America in which they live and will raise their families.

These men are fighting against militarism and regimentation. Every Congressman and Senator receives evidence daily that these men, although they know it is necessary for the duration of the war, are violently opposed to regimentation. They find their present military regimentation irksome and we all know it. They are making sacrifices now but they want to be rid of that regimentation just as quickly as possible. I am certain the overwhelming majority of the men in the ranks are opposed to peacetime conscription, and they have a right to be heard before the Congress takes any action.

These men who are the cream of the Nation are fighting against militarism. They have been led to believe that this war is being fought, that all their sacrifices and suffering are for the purpose of crushing militarism for all time.

We have a conference meeting in San Francisco. We believe this conference will have laid the foundation upon which can be built a permanent structure of peaceful cooperation among all nations. We certainly are not despairing of the efforts of the delegates to this conference, yet we meet here and discuss the rearmament of our Country, the building of a powerful military force and the

preparation for war. It seems to me like a lack of faith in the success of our efforts to promote peace.

Not long ago we were listening to the speeches of men who blamed the first world war on an arms race between the big Naval Powers. We certainly can't believe that any Nation is going to stand by and see us develop a powerful military organization through conscription and do nothing about it.

We talk about preparedness - every other nation - selfishly serving the interests of its nationals will prepare against us - and we will have another arms race and instead of striving to do away with war we shall be the inspiration for a bigger and better war. We can't expect anyone to believe we have no selfish ambitions - that we are acting with peaceful intent - while we are building an army that will be the most powerful in the world.

Compulsory Military Service hasn't accomplished a great deal for Germany, although they have resorted to periodic wars in order to exercise their well trained armies. Japan and Italy are other examples of the results to be expected from militarism. Russia, too, seems to have a plan for compulsory military service.

In particular there is one argument used by supporters of this program that I don't like. It is the insistence that such a program will produce discipline.

That is the thinking of totalitarianism. Our Country has been made great because we placed our emphasis on freedom, not on discipline. Discipline is the product of regimentation. Organized thinking and action is the product of discipline and the less we have of such thinking the better off we'll be. Let the Nation strengthen the home and the school. Encourage training, education and proper discipline there and we'll develop better citizens.

Another argument is that such a program is necessary to promote the good health of the youth of the nation. That is ridiculous. Some of those who argue for a conscription program are in the forefront of those who are violently opposed to spending a quarter in order to improve or protect the health of the young

people or the old people of the country.

The people of the land can be healthy and sound, mentally and physically, if they receive some genuine attention from their country's leaders in peace time as well as in war time. Let the Nation devote itself to a genuine program of promoting the health and welfare of all its citizens and we need have no fear about the response that will come from a call to arms should the Nation be threatened by any aggressor.

Conscription to me means conscription of all. All the arguments I have heard on this subject speak only of taking the young men and young women of the country and putting them into camps where they can be instructed in military discipline. Not a word is said about the conscription of the wealth of the country. To my way of thinking the spiritual and mental and physical health of the youth of the country is far more important and far more dependable than the industrial and financial wealth of the country. If there is to be conscription at all then we must conscript the wealth of the country.

If this Committee should recommend specific legislation to set in motion a program of compulsory military service, then I shall be prepared to introduce a measure to provide for the conscription of the wealth of the country whenever the President shall decide that the Nation faces an emergency which may involve our armed forces.

If we have reached the point where the youth of the country must have its education halted while young men and women learn military discipline and become indoctrinated with the spirit of militarism then it is time to regiment all the Nation's resources.

Personally, I don't despair for the Nation. I have confidence in the free institutions of America. No Nation, bar none, has done one half what this free people has done in the past five years.

No people, bar none, has responded more willingly, has made more sacrifices,

in the cause of freedom than has this Nation of ours. Let's make sure that the military establishments we maintain in peace time will not be hamstrung by reactionary, backward thinking officials such as those who refused to believe that aviation would ever amount to anything. Let's have real training for the men who choose a military career. Let's forget the caste system in our armed forces and give every man with ability a real fair chance to demonstrate his ability. Let's put our military establishment on a sound basis and we won't have any need for conscription of the youth of the country.

I have no doubt at all that many of the men who advocate Conscription are sincere in their belief that such a program is necessary. I believe the Patriotic Organizations which support the conscription proposal believe that their experience in the Armed Forces of our Country prove such a program is necessary. Because I believe in their sincerity I think these patriotic organizations should be the first to insist that no action on this program be taken until the veterans of this war have returned home and have had an opportunity to give full and free expression of their opinions on the subject. These soldiers, sailors and marines of today and the men with the most recent experience; they know the countries enemies far better than any of us can expect to know them. They have the knowledge that is important - the knowledge that is gained from today's battles. In this very important decision which influences our way of life for many generations, we need their personal advice. Let me mention this one fact - the boys and girls who will be affected by this conscription program will be - by and large - the children of the present soldiers, sailors and marines. Don't make a decision that will affect their homes so vitally, without their advice.

I would like to insert in the record of this committee's hearings two letters which I have received from responsible citizens of the State of Rhode Island. The first is a letter written to me by: Royal B. Farnum, Executive Vice President, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island:

and the other - from Edward S. Cameron, M.D., 82 Waterman Street, Providence, Rhode Island:

" June 18, 1945

Dear Congressman Fogarty:

National Peacetime Conscription and studied preparation for war has not prevented war for Nations under such programs in the past. Any Nation brought to a high military status is apt to find some excuse for attack herself, or to be set upon by suspicious or jealous contemporaries. Can anyone argue that the United States and Canada would be less liable to have friction if their borders were well fortified and protected by well prepared troops?

The above arguments are rather trite, I confess, yet sane. However, I feel we need something other than universal military conscription to prevent future conflict and keep us fit to fight. By this I mean, that Peacetime Military Training would not have halted the shipments of iron to Japan during the period of years before Pearl Harbor quite evidently, as we had a concentrated, and well trained military force, including aviation, on the spot, during the attack; and it is difficult to see what aid a Peacetime Military Training Program would have had during the period this country was appeasing Japan, while she sank our gun boats in China and seized much industrial property belonging to the United States Citizens, etc. We do not mean to infer that this country should not maintain a strong, well trained military force. The size and strength of this force should be regulated by those competent to judge.

We suggest that an enlarged program of physical education, endorsed by the Federal Government, through the Public Schools, in which Private Schools might share, would offer most for an improved generation

and consequently a stronger Country. It is suggested that this program could well be carried out during the summer months, and may include courses in manual training, farming and health subjects.

Would you be so kind, Mr. Fogarty, as to give me your opinion regarding my suggestion of a program of Government endorsed physical training during summer vacation periods? Do you not think that such a program would make a valuable exchange for the present system of summer vacations without directive supervision? Do you feel that Compulsory Peacetime Military Training would place us on a plane nearer the Prewar German and Italian status, or not?

It is our contention that the endorsement of Compulsory Military Training by Militarists should be considered in an open minded, neutral spirit, because of the natural bias of Military Men for such a program.

In conformity with the policy of permanent conscription in this country, we urge its world abolition as an international objective.

Sincerely yours,

Edward S. Cameron, M.C. "