

1-1-1968

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NATIONAL SERVICE: ITS RATIONALE AND DESIGN*

By Donald J. Eberly†

Compulsory is a pejorative word today. Unless we intend to damn American education, we speak of universal, rather than compulsory, education. Similarly, the draft is generally referred to as selective service, yet those who have been marched off to jail for refusing to serve think of it as compulsory.

To talk about a system that would help to meet the nation's military, social, educational, and health needs as compulsory service is to place the issue of civil liberties in neon lights and to downgrade other important issues.

This paper will not neglect the question of compulsion but it will place it on the continuum with the pressures and incentives in life with which we are all familiar. And it will place compulsion where it belongs—at the end of the agenda. For compulsion is subsumed under the question of *how* we intend to accomplish something. First we must direct our attention to what needs to be accomplished in terms of national defense, education, health, conservation, manpower, social relations, and the relevance of a youth service program to those needs.

THE DEFENSE PROBLEM

The first societal need—so long as the American people wish to remain a sovereign nation—is the maintenance of adequate defense forces. A large-scale youth service program which exempted its participants and its ex-participants from liability to military service could, in times of major military build-ups, weaken the defense forces and thereby threaten national sovereignty. Granting the case for continued sovereignty, exemptions for youth service activities would have to be ruled out.

A secondary effect of youth service on the armed forces could be that the latter, if dependent primarily on volunteer enlistments, might fail to attract a sufficient number of certain types of young people, *e.g.*, scien-

*Prepared for *Compulsory Service Systems: The Forensic Quarterly*, Vol. 42 (May 1968). Copyright 1968. All rights reserved.

†Mr. Eberly, Executive Director of the National Service Secretariat in Washington, D. C., edited *A Profile of National Service* in 1966. His book, *National Service*, is in the process of publication at this time and will be released later this spring or in the early part of this summer.

tists and technicians. In the absence of exemptions for youth service, it is only a minor problem since the scientists and technicians could be conscripted if needed.

A third effect on the military of a youth service program has to do with the non-military activities presently conducted by the armed forces. An earthquake in Chile, a forest fire in the Rockies, or a flood on the Mississippi will bring in the assistance of soldiers, sailors, and marines. Reasonably so, since they are easily mobilized, well-disciplined, and usually nearby. One of the activities of a national service program would be an emergency relief unit, which would presumably take over this function from the military. This development could be partly negative from the military standpoint, since it would deprive them of the goodwill achieved by coming to the rescue in natural disasters; and partly positive, since it would relieve the armed forces of this responsibility and enable them to proceed more efficiently with their regular military training and operations.

Fourth, in terms of putting one's life on the line, it should be noted that the modern army has a support ratio of about 7:1, *i.e.*, it takes about seven soldiers serving as cooks, engineers, clerks, truck drivers, medics, and so on to support one soldier in the firing line. Thus, there is a descending order of hazardous duty, from the front-line soldier to his support staff in the field, to the support and reserve forces in the United States. It is probable that some activities in a youth service program would produce greater fatality rates than certain sections of the military establishment, such as those at the Pentagon.

NATIONAL SERVICE AS EDUCATION

In the long run, a youth service program would most likely find its greatest pay-off in the field of education. Not the old-fashioned education of one teacher and thirty pupils, where what is "taught" by the teacher may bear little or no relationship to what is learned by the students. Even in so-called homogeneous school groupings, every student learns at a different rate and within a different framework.

The new education to be facilitated by a youth service program would be a one-to-one relationship between teacher and student. Every high school student could spend one hour each day tutoring a pupil in elementary school, the same pupil each day for a year. College students would be tutors for high school students. This would constitute such a profound change in our educational system that not all the consequences can be foreseen.

From the research done to date however, there is one astounding result: While the recipient of the tutoring makes educational gains somewhat in excess of his fellow students not being tutored, *the tutor gains three or four times as much as his fellow student.*¹

Thus, apart from the humanitarian contributions of young people in a service program, those who serve can expect to derive significant educational benefits. A young person wrote to *Look* magazine last year: "What the Establishment can't grasp is that you can get a better education from two years with VISTA or the Peace Corps than from four years in your major universities."² This challenge suggests a major design for a youth service program: It must be articulated with schools, colleges, and universities in such a way as to yield significant learning experiences. For example, a young person serving as a tutor should participate in courses or seminars on child development and educational psychology. Normally among the "deadest" of courses in a school of education, they can be brought to life if each of the students is spending several hours a week trying to help a child to read and write. Again, a person serving in a new cultural milieu should have access to the field of sociology. A person serving as a forest ranger or rebuilding the landscape in Appalachia should be able to study ecology.

Many respected educators said a quarter of a century ago that veterans returning from World War II would be unable to get back their learning habits; they would be distracted by what they had seen and done and would want to get on with their careers and with rearing families. Seldom have so many distinguished people been so wrong! The returning GIs had gained the perspective and experience to know what they wanted from higher education. Unlike the storied college sophomore who is searching to find his place in the universe and seeking a firm frame of reference among the many thrown out to him by academia, the typical GI returned to campus and moved in a relatively undeviating line to his objective. A similar pattern may be expected of young people who have a solid service experience, who have been given real responsibility, who have had to make their own decisions.³

¹ Robert P. Cloward, *Studies in Tutoring* (New York: Columbia University School of Social Work, 1966), Ch. III.

² Joanne Palmisano, Letter to the Editor, *Look*, November 28, 1967, p.16.

³ Psychiatrist Lawrence S. Kubie has suggested in *The College Dropout and the Utilization of Talent* (Lawrence A. Pervin, Louise E. Reik, Willard Dalrymple, eds., Princeton University Press, 1966) that in place of the school as preparation for life, we may have to make living a preparation for schooling through service activities like the Peace Corps.

DIRECTIONS FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

In the fields of medicine and public health, a close examination of needs and a careful definition of jobs reveals that doctors and nurses are not the only ones who can give meaningful service. Inner city medical centers are being established in the hearts of ghettos, and young people can serve effectively by going out to the community and identifying persons in need of medical attention. Also, with a few weeks' training, they can assist in the operating room and in public health information programs.

In the area of public safety, unarmed national service participants might patrol the streets to obtain medical aid for persons in need and talk with bored kids in the streets about constructive things they might do. Possibly by their very presence, they might reduce the crime rate. A program such as this could be jointly sponsored by voluntary youth agencies and the health and police departments.

The field of conservation has enormous needs, some of which could be met by national service participants. A 1964 survey by Senator Gaylord Nelson revealed at least 425,000 man-years of conservation work that could be accomplished by persons in national service.⁴ Continued strip mining in Appalachia and the increased pollution of our streams, lakes, and air suggest an expanded need for vigorous young men wishing to contribute to national development.

Manpower studies indicate a need for much larger numbers of young people to enter such human services fields as health and education than are now doing so. Not only is there a significant backlog of need in these areas at present, but the rate of increase of manpower needs is expected to exceed that in such fields as agriculture and industry, where automation is performing many of the menial tasks.

Experience is the best source of information for young people making career decisions. The Peace Corps has placed many Volunteers not expecting to become teachers in teaching assignments and these experiences have doubled the number of Volunteers deciding to go into teaching as a career. Conversely, a person who spends several years in a school of education before being given any teaching experience may, when he gets his first teaching assignment, decide it's not for him. This represents a loss of money, a loss of teachers, and disappointment for an individual.

⁴ Hearing of the United States Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Conserve Human and Natural Resources of the Nation* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964).

A youth service program in which persons served full time for at least a year would give each participant a chance to try out a field of possible interest. Ideally, he should be able to choose the time. For some it would be after high school, for others in their college sophomore year, and for others after college.

Society's greatest immediate need for a youth service program of significant size and quality—let's call it national service—lies in its potential contribution to helping restore America as a melting pot. When we accepted with open arms and in fact requested the world's tired, hungry and poor, we thought the amalgams being forged in the melting pot were irreversible. But it's happening. Alienation between black and white, rich and poor, and among persons from urban, suburban, and rural areas is on the rise.

Herbert Gans, writing in *The New York Times Magazine* for January 7, 1968, observes that "white voters and their elected officials . . . lack inclination to rebuild the ghetto because they do not want to pay the taxes that would raise ghetto incomes; they are not so impelled because neither the problems of the ghetto nor even its rebellions touch their lives directly and intimately. So far most of them experience the ghetto only on television . . ."

And educator Charles Merrill writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1967, warns, "There had better be a fair number of men and women then who have dealt with the other team (black or white) as human beings . . ."

Intellectualizing a problem is not enough. Handing out charity is not enough. Society's major problems—bigotry, disease, bad education, bad housing—can best be met through genuine understanding and common endeavor. The struggles in which national service men and women would be engaged—to make Harlem a decent place in which to live, to build new towns, to teach all children to read and write, to heal the sick, to set good examples for youthful offenders—would bring together the nation's youth in such an endeavor.

Fundamental to the national service concept⁵ is the service-learning experience. A pure service experience is slavery. A pure learning experience

⁵ "National service as a concept embraces the belief that an opportunity should be given each young person to serve his country in a manner consistent with the needs of the nation—recognizing national defense as the first priority—and consistent with the education and interests of those participating, without infringing on the personal or economic welfare of others but contributing to the liberty and well-being of all." Donald J. Eberly (ed.), *A Profile of National Service* (New York: Overseas Educational Service, [1966]), p. 3.

is erudition. Any activity whose service or learning component falls below 20 per cent would have to be considered marginal. For example, it would not be considered national service to lock up for two years an illiterate 18-year-old in a room full of programmed instruction tools through which he could learn to read and write. It would be national service if the same person spent his mornings partly in the programmed instruction room and partly being taught by a tutor doing his national service, his afternoons on a conservation or construction project at which he is more accomplished than his morning tutor, and his evenings in bull sessions or seminars on such topics as ecology, politics, sex, sociology, and urbanology. This example also illustrates that the learning experience can be formal or informal. In our example, the two persons might have service and learning components on this order:

	<i>Tutor</i>	<i>Tutee</i>
Service	70%	45%
Formal learning	5	45
Informal learning	25	10
	100%	100%

It is by no means suggested that these tasks should be offered only to young people. Clearly there is a role for older persons, possibly in some form of guaranteed employment program, and for retired persons, who have much to give. When we consider the energy and idealism of youth combined with their need for experience and service and human relationships, and the potential impact of this combined service and learning on the way people will live in succeeding generations, it becomes imperative to give first priority to service-learning experiences for young people.

Enough general talk. Where, precisely, will they serve? "Professional jealousy will keep them out of hospitals and welfare institutions; black neighborhoods won't accept white participants; church-related institutions won't join any program unless they can screen out all but their co-religionists," says the critic. Let's look at the specifics of the college youth service program in one city.

In Boston 5000 students at twenty-six colleges and universities give volunteer service of these descriptions:

Tutoring	Big Sisters
Hospital work	Adult Literacy
Scouting	Work with mentally retarded children
Bloodmobile	
Big Brothers	Home visiting

Home improvement group in Roxbury	Physical therapy program
Camp counseling	Psycho-drama at settlement house
Teaching in Africa	Thanksgiving baskets
Prison project	Christmas projects
Viet Nam orphans	Students for the barrio
Visitation of the aged	Upward Bound program
Reading for the blind	Fill needs as they arise

They served at these institutions, among others:

<i>Settlement Houses and Neighborhood Centers</i>	Somerville Guidance Center
Hebrew Rehabilitation Center for the Aged	Cambridge Mental Health Center
John F. Kennedy Family Service Center	Massachusetts General
Dorchester Community Center	Red Cross Blood Bank
St. Stevens Church	Children's Hospital
Newton Community Center	Holy Ghost Hospital
Cambridge Neighborhood House	<i>Housing Projects</i>
Cardinal Cushing Center	Columbia Point Housing Project
South End Neighborhood Action Program	Roosevelt Towers
North End Settlement House	Waltham Housing Project
Spanish Action Center	Lowell Housing Project
<i>General and Mental Hospitals</i>	<i>Prisons and Reform Schools</i>
Metropolitan State Hospital	Massachusetts Correctional Institu- tion, Framingham
	Deer Island House of Correction
	Dedham House of Correction
	Lyman Reformatory

THE ISSUE OF COMPULSION

The foregoing paragraphs suggest the importance of a large-scale program of youth service. A compulsory program would guarantee the involvement of millions of youth each year attacking poverty, ignorance, and disease; it would prevent it from becoming an elitist program like the Peace Corps (97 per cent of Peace Corps Volunteers have attended college) or a poverty program like the Job Corps (only children of poverty families are allowed to join); and it would remove the inequities of a system in which some serve and others do not. Against these arguments have to be weighed the traditional case of the civil libertarian that any form of compulsion is an infringement on the freedom of an individual. My problem with that argument is largely personal: I was compelled to enter the Army but I came out with the feeling of greater freedom than when I entered. I am not referring to the fact that I was free from the

draft; rather, the range of acquaintances, experiences, and travel enabled me to emerge with a much clearer idea of who I was and where I wanted to go. Not every veteran will agree with my conclusion, but it reminds us of the possibility that some of those who are required to serve may emerge with greatly enriched feelings of personal freedom.

My major problem with compulsory service is that it would tend to lessen the quality of service performed and the value of the service experience to the individual. In any area of compulsion—education, insurance, military—one can observe elements of de-personalization and unwillingness to accept responsibility above the minimum required. These characteristics are so antithetical to the national service concept as to argue against any program that would engender them.

The most telling argument against a compulsory program, and again this is a personal judgment, is that it would be superfluous. I believe that a properly conceived, properly run, service program of the kind outlined below will attract millions of young men and women to the areas of society's great needs. It will not be necessary to create the elaborate machinery needed for a compulsory program nor to run the risks of establishing a program that might defeat its own purpose.

AN OUTLINE FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

The only compulsory part of what appears to me to be the right kind of national service lies in the area of information. By the time he is 18, every American—male and female—would be informed of his opportunities to serve. He would be told of the needs in the Armed Forces, the schools, the ghetto health centers, the homes for retarded children, the forests, the new towns, and in the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He would be told that there is no financial barrier to service. He would be told that the mental and physical standards have been broadened to accept 2/3 of the youth rejected by the military. He would be told of the training facilities that would acquaint him further with actual openings and prepare him for a period of service. He would be told that the nation recognizes the importance of his service by guaranteeing him financial support for further education and, in the instance of men, awarding him points that would have the effect of reducing his vulnerability to the military draft.

The last proposal tends to elicit charges that it would encourage draft-dodging. The question then becomes, for those who really want to serve their country as constructively as possible, how can procedures be

established so they are not joined by hordes of draft dodgers with little interest in constructive service?

The best way seems to be by means of a contractual obligation, voluntarily entered into. Thus at age 18, six months before he is subject to conscription, a young man could commit himself to a period of full-time service, say two years, before reaching his 26th birthday. Because he would have made the choice prior to the period of draft vulnerability, people would have little basis for accusing him of being a draft dodger and he could plan his next few years of service, education, work, and matrimony with relative confidence.

Similarly, the 18-year-old could opt for a two-year period of military service within the ensuing seven years and could plan accordingly.

In neither instance would the registrant who had committed himself to service be exempt from the draft. His name would simply be placed toward the end of the order of call, just ahead of those who had completed military or non-military service. Hence the size of the draft pool would not be changed at all.

Because of need and to facilitate advance planning of resources, young women would also be encouraged to register at age 18, or later, and contract for a period of national service.

Such a contractual plan would have the effect of making the service obligation far more equitable. In a period of relative tranquility and low draft calls, a young man who felt little responsibility to serve would presumably enter no contracts and hope to escape the draft. If a subsequent military flare-up and high draft calls resulted in his induction he would have little cause to gripe.

Some would say the system described above is a form of compulsion. I consider it more accurate to list it among the various pressures, incentives, and deterrents that surround us daily. The length of a man's hair or a woman's dress; one's manner of speech; one's attendance at church, movies, and football games; one's enrollment at a particular college—decisions on these matters are not made in a vacuum. They are made in the context of society generally and in relationship to particular friends and relatives. Giving another option to the 18-year-old would give him greater freedom of choice. Higher education, a job for the sake of a job, marriage, military service would not be the only major choices open to the nation's youth. National service would give him a chance, if he wishes to accept it, to serve his fellow man and to learn while serving.

Once the compulsory-voluntary question has been resolved, there are several other important issues and potential danger spots. What's to keep

the federal government from taking over national service and turning it into a nation-wide propaganda instrument? What happens to national service when military needs can be met without the draft?

The answers to both these questions point to the need for a program with a minimum of central control and to one independent of the draft system. The creation of a National Foundation for Volunteer Service, funded by federal, state, local, and private funds and directed by a board comprising a majority of private citizens and a minority of government officials is the first step. The second step is to establish the criteria for approval of participants and of sponsoring agencies. All non-profit agencies, whether public or private, would be eligible to apply. Primarily this means schools, hospitals, churches, conservation units, voluntary agencies, and municipal government agencies. The third step is to establish an underwriting mechanism so that no person wanting to serve, and no agency in need of someone, would be denied. Then come arrangements for training, medical care, contracts, placement, evaluation, grievances, and so on.

A 1966 analysis⁶ of the need for national service participants in the fields of health, education, community service, and conservation suggests that it is of an order comparable with the resources available. Briefly, the report shows an overall need for 4-5 million persons, most of whom could be young men and women in national service, and a "reservoir" of some 3.5 million persons turning 18 each year, of whom military needs are expected to require less than 25 per cent. The report estimates annual costs per participant at about \$4000 per year.

CONCLUSION

Few adults are well satisfied with the kind of world their children are in the process of inheriting. By providing young men and women with opportunities to serve and to learn through meaningful human relationships, a program of national service might provide today's youth with a chance to discover whether they can in fact so direct themselves as to leave the world a more free and peaceful world than that which they were born into.

⁶ Donald J. Eberly, *National Service* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), Appendix A.