CONSCRIPTION NEEDED

Mayor Mitchel Urges Support of Administration
So That Country May Be Able to Protect Itself

By Mayor John Purroy Mitchel

With respect to military policy the people of the United States have come to the fork in the road. Will they take the way to democratic and effective self-protection by universal training and service, or the way to waste and futility, and the inexcusable sacrifice of life, through the utterly discredited volunteer system?

Next to the question of entering the war, this is the most momentous question that Congress has been called upon to settle in more than half a century. Upon the answer hangs not alone our country’s successful participation in the present war, but also our permanent safety and self-respect and prestige as a nation.

As I write these words I am encouraged by the news from Washington that a “backfire” has begun to work on the members of Congress—that the shortsighted and dangerous opposition to obligatory service has not the support, as many Congressmen seem to have supposed, of the people throughout the country. It appears that Senators and Representatives with their ears on the ground are hearing, instead of a voice of timid hesitation, a vigorous demand for the enactment of the President’s program. If this is true—and I earnestly hope that it will have been made plain by this time this appears in type—it is a master triumph for enlightened public opinion.

To one who has given even the slightest study to the country’s military history it is incredible that Congress should hesitate an instant in making its decision. With the records of previous wars before it—the record of the most vigorous favoritism, the shifting of the burden from those who should have borne it to those who were often the very men who should have been exempted for the good of the nation—could it be possible that the Congress of this great, free, and enlightened people would deliberately invite a repetition of the evils of the past?

We have heard a great deal in the last few days about “conscription.” The opponents of a really effective military policy seize upon this word and attempt to give it a meaning akin to oppression, or, as they sometimes foolishly say, “Prussianism.” But why should any intelligent man allow himself to be frightened by a word? Of course it is “conscription” that we want and should have. It is only another word for universal obligatory service. And when the term “selective conscription” is used it means nothing more or less than what the advocates of universal service have always wanted—the call to arms of the men who can best be spared and the exemption of those whose dependents or are needed on the farms and railroads and in the factories, or who can be more useful to the nation anywhere else than in the field.

Universal service, as it has been applied in France, Germany and all the countries, has simply been the “selective conscription” that we now hear about. The main difference is that.

Mayor Mitchel in Camp at Pittsburg.