

Conscription of All Men Up to Forty-five Years?

Senator France, Author of Bill Subjecting Them to Government's Call,
Says It Is the Only Way to Solve War's Industrial Problems

WHILE a considerable and very active group in Congress is insisting upon a reorganization of the War Department, there is a smaller number, with a further look ahead, perhaps, who would reorganize the whole nation. They would do this immediately as a war emergency measure and later on develop the plan into a permanent national policy, whereby the United States might know at all times just what its resources were in man power for every vital industrial activity.

The immediate war emergency project is, in brief, to enroll every man in the country between the ages of 18 and 45 for war service, military or non-military, to be called upon as needed and put to any work which the Government determines he is best fitted to do or which most needs to be done. The development of that plan for the future, permanent system—what its advocates call the ideal system—would involve the enrollment of every man, woman, and child in the country, and a systematic record, from birth to death, showing the education, occupation, and whereabouts of every individual.

Senator Joseph Irwin France of Maryland is the leading advocate in Congress of such a system, and he has just introduced a bill for the needed legislation to reorganize the entire country for the war by bringing all men between 18 and 45 within reach of the Government.

"We must come to it before we can win the war," said Senator France the other day in the course of an interview in Washington. "Without such a system we cannot defeat Germany. Germany has a hideous philosophy but a perfect organization. The United States has a perfect philosophy.

"The inconsistency of our present arrangement is perfectly apparent if we examine just what we have and what we have not in the light of the things that we all agree upon as indispensable to the winning of the war.

"The best and most effective thing we have is the draft law by which we can raise the fighting men we need without the hazards of the volunteer system. So far, so good. But we all realize, we are all proclaiming and reiterating, from the President down, that our fighting men will be useless and helpless unless they are backed up by a 100 per cent. performance of all our agricultural and industrial activities. And in all those industries we are taking all the hazards of the volunteer system. And a volunteer system for getting men for the farms and the shops is far less effective than a volunteer system for getting soldiers for an army.

"In the army you know at least whether you are getting the volunteers or not. If they once volunteer they are enrolled and remain a known quantity of resource to meet military needs. But there is not even that measure of certainty in depending upon volunteer labor in industry or agriculture. A man may go to work if he likes. He may quit when he likes. The country never knows from one day to the next what it can depend upon in the great work which we all admit is just as essential to the winning of the war as the work of armed troops.

"We can draft a man and say to him that he must go to the trenches and fight the Germans, and obedience is his only way out. There is no alternative for him. But we cannot say to another man that he must go into a shop and make the rifle that the soldier has to have to do his fighting. We cannot say to still another man, you must go to the farm where the labor is lacking to help raise the food that the soldier must have if he is to fight the Germans. We cannot compel the railroad men to run the train

loaded with the ammunition that the soldier must have. We cannot mobilize labor and shift it to the yards where ships must be built if the munitions and food are to be transported to the soldier.

"In other words, we conscript the fighters because we realize at last that we cannot get them in any other way, but we cling to the old, inadequate, discredited volunteer system for manning our war undertakings behind the lines and our 3,000-mile-long line of communications. We leave the safety and the efficiency of the soldier entirely to chance. For the lack of the essential service that we have no power to compel, the only man we can and do compel, the soldier, may die of starvation in his foreign camp or become a hopeless and helpless target of the enemy. This is our great national inconsistency, the source of our great weakness as a belligerent and our greatest danger. Because of it we are already breaking down before we are really in the war. Unless it is remedied by legislation the breakdown will be complete.

"Less than a year ago, in fact right up to the time of our entering the war, we were told that the American people would never tolerate military conscription, that it was undemocratic, and a violation of the constitutional rights of every citizen of the United States; that it would be fatal for any public man to advocate it, that a conscription law never could or would be enforced.

All of these threats, warnings, and predictions were forgotten overnight by the very men who had made them in the face of the splendid realization of the thing they had said was impossible. The words 'selective draft' lost every trace of repugnance in the speech and thought of the American people. Our national army, raised by conscription, has the affection and esteem of the public in as great a degree as any volunteer army ever had.

"But why stop there and be content with only half the work of ridding ourselves of the dangers and hazards of a volunteer system? If the soldier in uniform feels no shame in the fact that he is drafted, if the people see no injustice in the fact that he is drafted, why not take the logical next step in organizing ourselves as a nation fully prepared for doing all the work of war, the non-military part as well as the fighting? If we can order a boy into a trench, whether or no, to risk his life and his health for the small pay of the soldier, why can we not order another boy into the furrow of a plow, where his health will be improved and where he will get more than the soldier's pay for doing the work without which the life of the soldier is wasted for nothing?

"There is honor in every form of service rendered to the country, in war or peace; and the honor is not lessened under a system by which the Government itself has the right to determine where the service is most needed and where it shall be given. In our last great war we were told that we could not live half slave and half free. In

this war it is just as futile to try to live with part serving because they must and part shirking because they can.

"In the bill which I have introduced in the Senate to remedy this danger and inconsistency and which is now in the Military Affairs Committee there is, first, a provision authorizing the President to enroll all male citizens and all other male persons, not alien enemies, who have declared their intention to become citizens, between the ages of 18 and 45, according to residence, age, physical ability, nationality, training, occupation, profession, and condition of employment.

"Such enrollment would give us at the outset of our reorganization (or organization, for we never have been organized) a complete and accurate survey of the man power we really have to draw upon, and the knowledge would be classified and usable. In addition to the classification as to occupation and age and training which the enrollment figures would give us, I provide for further classification by the Federal Government with reference to national service.

"That is done in the second section of the bill which authorizes the President to consider all enrolled between the ages of 18 and 20, inclusive, as members of a Federal cadet corps subject to call for military or nonmilitary training and for noncombatant national service. The men between 21 and 31 by the terms of the bill constitute the Federal first line of

defense corps, who may be called into military service in accordance with the conscription act already in force or put into noncombatant national service. A third group is made up of the men between 32 and 36 years of age. It is the second line of defense corps, whose members may be called upon for military or nonmilitary training or for noncombatant national service. The fourth group, consisting of the men from 37 to 45, is the Federal reserve corps, also subject to call for noncombatant service.

"There is, of course, the automatic provision that as soon as a boy in the future reaches the age of 18 he will be enrolled in the Federal cadet corps and he will then pass on through the various grades as he reaches the various ages.

"Furthermore, the act calls for the classification of all this man power on the basis of previous training and occupation in such activities as the following: Combatant military service, non-combatant military service, agricultural and food production work, iron and steel making, navigation, shipbuilding, ammunition making, railroad work, railway equipment making, fuel production work, metal working, all forms of mining and medical service, and all other activities and service which may be useful in the prosecution of the war.

"Now, having classified all this power, the President is further authorized to use it. He may mobilize the men of any given experience or training and put them to work where they are most needed. He can man the farms and the mines and the ships and the railroads and the

factories with the same authority and celerity with which he may now shift a regiment of soldiers from one camp to another or send troops from America to France. The man so mobilized and so assigned to industrial service shall be deemed to be in the service of the United States, shall wear the insignia of his special branch of that service and shall serve until discharged. And he shall receive from his Government an order of merit or recognition for unusual or special fidelity or capacity or valor just as if he were a soldier in the trenches.

"There is no more coercion about such a system than there is in our existing law for raising the selective draft army. One is just as necessary as the other, and the one cannot be maintained without the other.

"As it is now, we have in this country one controlled, regulated reservoir of man power and one vast, uncharted sea of man power of which we know neither the depth nor the extent. That sea must become a known quantity, too, and from it we must draw all the labor and skill and experience that we need in this war in every form of industry. Instead of doing that we are considering the plan of drawing on the smaller reservoir of military strength to provide labor for nonmilitary but war service, such as farming and shipbuilding. Congress is flooded with appeals for a release of soldiers to go home to the farms to help with the Spring planting, and it is proposed to take thousands of men away from their training in the army and put them into the shipyards.

"This shortsighted, ruinous plan of taking troops away from their proper and necessary work is contemplated in face of the fact that we have hundreds of thousands of able-bodied men in the country who are doing nothing or doing things that are not at all necessary to the welfare of the country or the prosecution of the war; also in face of the fact that vital war industries are being carried on only five days a week because there is no control of the labor.

"Practically all of our industrial and transportation difficulties and fuel shortage and ship shortage and the other factors that are contributing to the breakdown of America under the strain of war are due to the fact that we do not know what our man power is and have not the authority to use it to the best advantage for the country and for the world. Bring it home to the minds of the people that this is necessary in the emergency of war and there will be an end of opposition to national organization and service just as there was an end to the protest against military conscription.

"There is another economic point to be considered in this matter of our national breaking down because we have not organized nationally. If we continue to have the meatless days without taking into account the grain factor we are sure to bring about an American famine. Cattle and hogs must have grain. Because of the fixing of the price of wheat and the failure to fix the price of pork the farmers of the West are feeding their wheat to hogs, thereby converting it into pork. If we have meatless days we shall keep the cattle on the farms and the farmers will use the grain to fatten them, and when the emergency comes with the shortage of grain we shall have to eat more meat, and so on in a vicious circle. None of these makeshifts is going to bring us through the war successfully.

"We must produce more. We must produce enough of everything we need for our troops in the field, for our civilian population at home, and for our allies in food and munitions of war, and we cannot do it unless we organize all our man power and control it for national service."



Senator Joseph Irwin France
of Maryland.