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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

IN RE SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM IN ITS RELATION
TO THE MANPOWER PROBLEM

It is of course manifest that the job of selecting the manpower which must go directly into our fighting forces is logically connected with the job of securing, preserving and distributing sufficient manpower to carry on our industrial and agricultural life, including the part of industry and agriculture which directly supplies the Army. The problem now before us however, is not a logical or theoretical problem, but a problem of practical creative statesmanship. We face this hard fact, namely, that, while we have already satisfactorily created the machinery which selects the manpower for our fighting forces, we have thus far only just begun to attempt the much more difficult task of creating the machinery which will systematize and coordinate the distribution of our civil manpower behind the fighting lines.

Furthermore, while the first process of military selection is handled by Army officials and local boards who have no other interest than the immediate duty of saving the nation by a victorious war, the second process is inextricably entwined with our ordinary civil life and its social theories, differences and interests.

It seems to me perfectly clear that in such a situation the first principles of prudent statesmanship require that in entering upon this new problem of regulating civil manpower we should first make sure that we did not break down the old successful machinery of selecting military manpower. It seems to me that so far as possible we should segregate the two fields so that the failures and clashes which may arise in our new experiments do not destroy the efficiency of the Selective Service System nor impair the faith of our people in its fairness and justice.

Let me try to make clear the reasons for this course and the line which I think it should follow.

The Selective Service

Our present Selective Service is the result of a long and painful evolution, advancing step by step from the terrible mistakes of the Civil War to a system which today selects men for the Army to the general satisfaction of the people of this country, free from any substantial criticism as to injustice between social classes or individual personnel. It is based upon a combination of the trained organizing ability of the Army and its General Staff, the disinterested and unpaid efforts of the local boards, and the supervision of the Director of Selective Service and his military assistants.

Underlying it all and a vital factor in its success is the patriotic spirit which necessarily pervades its every step. It is engaged in choosing men who are to risk their lives for their country

and this realization necessarily tonics up every element of the system, helping to exclude all selfish political and personal motives. From top to bottom, no element of financial reward enters into this system.

The Civil Manpower Problem

On the other hand, when we take up the problem of regulating civil manpower we at once step into a sphere in which men are working for wages and profits, and where industrial and social relationship are affected. And no system which we can practically hope to achieve will eliminate those considerations. On the contrary, any such system will necessarily be affected by questions of personal reward or compensation to capital and labor, and will be necessarily carried on under the varying political and social theories which affect American human beings when engaged in such activities.

The Incompatibility of the Two Systems

It seems to me beyond argument, that such a system of regulating civil manpower, whether it be based upon legislative compulsion or established by persuasion and voluntary action, will inevitably be so fundamentally different from the Selective Service System in methods and in problems that it must be kept carefully separated from the latter. It will be likely to encounter deep-seated antagonisms and

clashes of feelings and interests. We cannot afford to allow these crosscurrents which necessarily affect the civil manpower problem to disturb the clear-cut task of the Selective Service in calling men to the Armed Forces.

For all these reasons the authority which conducts one system must be separate from the authority which conducts the other.

The One Difficulty and Its Solution

There is, however, one link between the two systems which tends to unite them. That is, that in the last instance they may draw in competition with each other upon the same national pool of manpower. In such an event some paramount authority must decide between their respective jurisdictions. At present this final determination is in the hands of the Selective Service where the local boards determine whether a given selectee, drawn by the ballot, is more important to the nation as a member of the Armed Forces or in some position in civil life.

Under present conditions, when there is not yet in existence any comprehensive and successful system of regulating civil manpower, this precedence given to the Selective Service is undoubtedly in accord with the sentiment of the nation as to the comparative importance of the function of selecting military manpower and the function of regulating civil manpower. But under a system of regulating civil manpower, undoubtedly provision must be made whereby the boards which select our military forces shall act within a pattern of regulations established by a paramount authority.

Manifestly that controlling authority cannot be in the hands of either the one or the other of these two ultimately competing systems. Manifestly that paramount authority can only be the Commander-in-Chief of all the forces of the United States or his specially constituted delegate.

Conclusions

It seems to me that the foregoing analysis tends to clear up several of the problems which are lying on your table today. I hope it does. It seems to me that from it flows the following conclusions:

1. The Administration of the Selective Service System should not be turned over to the Manpower Commission, nor should the problem of regulating civil manpower be turned over to the Selective Service. Either alternative would tend to wreck the successful system of selecting military manpower which we now have.
2. The reason for this is not merely that the two systems are ultimately in competition with each other but that the techniques and social repercussions and problems of the two systems are so fundamentally different. I do not believe that, in this country, they can be successfully combined in one administrative board or person. In this country the prestige of the successfully working Selective Service is a national asset which should not be jeopardized by putting it under an agency engaged in working out a totally different problem.
3. The present power of the local boards of the Selective Service to decide whether a given selectee is more valuable to the nation in the armed forces or in civil life should remain, but it

should be governed by regulations issued or approved by an authority paramount to both systems. That authority should be a special designee of the President of outstanding position and influence.

4. The Selective Service System of the country has become one of our great national assets in the winning of the war. This is largely due to the widespread public acceptance of the fairness and honesty with which 6500 local boards of neighbors have exercised the power to take sons, brothers and friends from their normal lives and put them into the dangerous career of a soldier.

This great asset should not be endangered by sudden shifts in organization or leadership at a time when the System is called upon to provide the largest quotas of manpower in its existence. The attitudes of both the boards themselves and the people must be carefully weighed before radical change is made.

*Given to the President
by S/W at White House
Nov 5/42*

SECRETARY OF WAR.