

" National Service": A Draft in Camouflage

Members of Congress who want the draft, but who are afraid of draft resistance, have for years been calling for a "National Service" program for young people. National service might be compulsory for all young people, or a "voluntary" program that institutionalizes the poverty draft. One version of the plan is to eliminate all Federal educational grants and loans and replace them with aid to reward only those who "volunteer" for military or civilian government "service".

National service is an attack on the educational rights that poor people, especially people of color, won in the 1960s. It's one more step in the militarization of American society. Militarists in Congress will try to use wars as an excuse to take that step. If the militarists win this fight, they'll have a blank check to spend soldiers' lives in the future.

What About Draft Registration?

Draft registration has failed. The government started registration in 1980 to see whether young people would cooperate with a return to a draft. We didn't. Millions of people resisted.

The call for draft registration sparked a grass-roots movement of opposition. Anti-draft groups formed in hundreds of communities and colleges. 20,000 people marched on Washington. Thousands of people picketed and sat in at Post Offices.

So many people refused to register that the government could neither bring back the draft nor prosecute more than a tiny fraction of the nonregistrants. Nobody has been prosecuted for refusing to register since 1986. More than 20 million people have violated the draft registration laws over the last 25 years, and those who have fully complied with the law are in the minority.

Many who registered only did so because they thought they would go to jail if they didn't. They don't want to fight, they don't want to be drafted, and many will resist if there is a draft.

We Can Resist the Draft Now!

People who oppose the wars need to be ready to respond when debate on a draft begins in Congress. We need to make politicians and the public aware that a draft would be so widely resisted as to be unenforceable. We need to convince legislators that voting for the draft could cost them reelection. We need to convince Bush and Congress that neither suppressing nor ignoring draft resistance would be politically safe.

We need to network with each other, make contingency plans, and make sure the government knows we're ready, able, and willing to resist any draft.

Refusing to register, "unregistering" by moving without telling the Selective Service System, refusing to report for induction, or refusing induction are not the only ways to resist the draft. Men in the anti-draft movement forget this too often. Here are some of the other ways that men and women of all ages can resist the draft:

- Don't tell Selective Service where you are. Don't report for induction. Encourage others not to go.
- Encourage and support soldiers who refuse to fight, as well as young people and medical workers to refuse to register or refuse to be drafted. Support those who desert the military, who mutiny, who fraternize with the "enemy". Let your children and other young people and health care workers know that you support their resistance to the draft.
- Organize nonviolent demonstrations, civil disobedience, and other direct actions against Selective Service offices and induction centers.
- Protest or take direct action against your local draft board office. Expose and shame draft board members. (Draft board members have been appointed and trained, and standby offices reserved, since 1980. Use a "Freedom Of Information Act" request to Selective Service to find them.)
- Write letters to Congress and the newspapers. Tell them you'll resist and support others who resist -- whether or not you're drafted yourself.
- Organize an anti-draft group in your school, health care facility, youth or parent group, or community. Hold a teach-in. Hand out a leaflet. Speak out now!

The Draft and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Will there be a draft?

How is it going to work?

What can we do about it?

Why Worry About the Draft?

The draft is a threat to everyone concerned about peace -- not just young men. The more soldiers the generals have, the more soldiers and civilians they can kill -- and without a draft, the U.S. military is eventually going to run short of "volunteer" soldiers and mercenaries!

Some people think that only young men can resist the draft. But that's not true at all. The people most likely to face the draft first are older men and women: doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals.

Some people think they would be safe from the draft because they are college students or plan to seek conscientious objector (CO) status. Actually, a draft would hit students hardest, since most men in college have registered with Selective Service, and student deferments have been abolished. Most people who oppose wars don't qualify for CO status, and many valid CO claims will be denied anyway.

Politicians know the draft would produce widespread dissent and resistance. The higher the domestic costs of the draft look to Bush and Congress, the more likely they are to seek an end to the wars. Fear of the draft will encourage Bush and Congress to get the troops out of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Gulf before the recruiting crisis gets any worse.

Of course, even without a draft the U.S. invaded Panama, Grenada, Afghanistan, and Iraq; tried to send a "rescue mission" to Iran; and sent the "contras" to Nicaragua and the "mujahideen" (who would later become the Taliban and Al Qaeda) into Afghanistan. But with a draft supplying even more soldiers, each of those wars would have been even bloodier.

Sooner or later, the government will need a draft to fight a longer or larger-scale war, or to maintain a permanent occupation force in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Gulf. If enough people resist this attempt to bring back the draft, we can force a long-term cutback in the size of the military, and help bring the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to an end sooner and with less bloodshed.

Does the U.S. Need a Draft to Fight These Wars?

Since the Pentagon has a million "volunteers" to send to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Gulf, why would they want a draft? The answer is: they won't have a choice. Even a relatively brief but bloody outbreak of total war in Iraq would require a "Doctor Draft". Long-term occupations will eventually require a full-scale draft. Whatever happens, these wars may give the government an excuse to create a coercive "National Service" program that channels young people into the military.

A New "Doctor Draft"

The peacetime U.S. Army doesn't have very many doctors, nurses, or medical technicians. Most of those in the military are in the Reserves, subject to call-up for active duty at any time. As early as 2004, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had created a severe shortage of military surgeons: "Many surgeons have been on a second deployment or an extended deployment, and even this has not been sufficient. Planners are having to contemplate pressing surgeons into yet a third deployment." But it's politically difficult to keep reservists on active-duty indefinitely, and extended call-ups of reservists make other potential new Reservists less willing to sign up.

The military can't fight wars without doctors. During past wars there was a special "Doctor Draft" with a higher age limit and fewer deferments. Many doctors have objected to being forced to serve in the military.

People go into health care careers because they want to save lives. But military medical workers are supposed to patch up wounded soldiers, so that they can go back to the front to fight (and perhaps kill) other soldiers. Some doctors don't think that's what their Hippocratic Oath to preserve life is all about. During the 1990-1991 Gulf War, some active-duty and Reserve doctors refused orders to the Gulf, and civilian health care workers began preparing for a draft and organized a health care workers' pledge against militarism and the draft.

The Selective Service System has had contingency plans for a "Health Care Personnel Delivery System" in place since the 1980's. As the wars and the casualties continue and escalate, a doctor draft could start soon. No draft registration will probably be needed, since in the past the AMA and some other professional associations have arranged to provide licensing lists to Selective Service as a pool of potential draftees.

The military needs all kinds of medical professionals, so a new "Doctor Draft" will probably include men and women who are nurses, medical technicians, etc. as well as physicians. Health care workers need to start thinking now about what they'll do if they are drafted -- and what they can do now to prevent the draft.

A "Cannon Fodder" Draft

Since 1980, resistance to draft registration has prevented the draft and forced the government to rely on a "poverty draft" and, more recently, on mercenaries.

The Pentagon now has huge recruiting shortfalls. Under the so-called "stop-loss" policy, regularly scheduled discharges of soldiers from the military and terminations of active duty for Reservists have been canceled for the duration of their units' assignments to Iraq.

Who knows how many more Americans will come home from these wars in body bags. No matter how desperately they need a job, young people won't keep volunteering for the military while this is happening.

Bush plans to continue to garrison the oil sheikdoms with U.S. troops until at least 2008. If the occupations continue, eventually the Pentagon will need a draft.

Resisters.info

This leaflet and more information on the draft and draft registration for health care workers, young people, and parents, are at:
<http://www.resisters.info>

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