

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT  
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen  
16th Ill. District

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THE NATIONAL SERVICE ACT

In his message to Congress, the President requested the enactment of a National Service Act, under which every man between the ages of 18 and 65 and every woman between the ages of 18 and 50 (with certain classes of exceptions) would be registered and made available for non-combatant service. The request however was contingent upon the enactment or re-enactment of four other items. These are the continuation of the present law for re-negotiation of war contracts, the national Stabilization Act under which wages, salaries and prices are controlled, a cost-of-food program which would require funds out of the Federal Treasury for the payment of consumer subsidies, and a more realistic tax bill which would produce about 10½ billions of taxes in addition to the 41 billion now being produced.

HOW THE NATIONAL SERVICE ACT WOULD WORK

Males between the ages 18 and 65 are already registered. It would therefore require the registration of women. When a need arose for workers in a certain area, an effort would first be made to secure them by appeal and voluntary action. If the required number was not obtained, the President could then direct the Selective Service System to go thro the file of registrants, secure the required number and order them to report for duty in the area where the shortage existed. Housing, transportation, and other essential services would be provided and seniority rights preserved. Prevailing wages would be paid.

SERVICE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Great Britain and Germany both have National Service Acts. They do not operate much differently than the Manpower rules which are now in effect here. The essential and basic difference is that they are compulsory, they are centralized, and job changes must be handled thro a governmental agency. If the experience of Great Britain can be taken as a criterion there is no guarantee that a National Service Act will prevent strikes because Great Britain had as many if not more strikes in proportion in 1942 than took place in the United States. Whether it will solve the manpower problem depends upon whether in conscripting the person of a worker and sending him to another place under penalty of a fine and imprisonment if he refuses to go, you can also conscript his energy, his personality, and his intelligent and dilligent application to the work which he is expected to do. War production after all lies not in the number of persons who are sent to a given area to work but in the amount of work produced by those who are there.

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER.

The National Service Act which was introduced many months ago by Representative Wadsworth of New York and Senator Austin of Vermont has been pending before the appropriate committees of the House and Senate and no action has been taken. Just what action will be taken now is problematical. It may be that the Chairman of the respective committees will schedule this measure for hearings and take testimony. Thereafter, the Committee must act on the bill and either report it favorably or not report at all. Until this is done, there can be no action by the two Houses of Congress as such. The crux of the matter however, will be the issue of free labor versus conscripted labor.