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THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE:
PAST, PRESENT (AND FUTURE?)

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As we move toward the decade of the eighties we are becoming increasingly aware of the difficulties and realities of economics on a national level. More and more we, as a people, are faced with difficult choices concerning the services that we either demand of our government or which government deems it necessary to provide.

Although it is an oversimplification, our Constitution mandates that government always follow to some degree a "guns and (not or) butter" philosophy in its preamble provisions dealing with "common defense" and "general welfare." We have though paid dearly, in economic terms, for attempting to follow such a fatal "guns and butter" philosophy during the Vietnam conflict. Faced with the untenability of the above non-choice planners, elected officials, and others must take a hard look at current and future allocation of resources in order to maintain some semblance of "living within our means."

It is the purpose of this article to examine one area in which there could be a re-distribution of financial resources and to advance suggestions concerning the implementation of programs.

It has been my observation that during the last 15 years the Department of Defense has introduced a variety of programs which may be viewed purely as ventures in social welfare. My thesis is that these programs are (a) unnecessary, (b) disproportionate in terms of resources expended vs. benefit received and (c) are not philosophically in keeping with either social welfare values or the values of the military establishment.

I intend to confine my remarks to three programs: Project 100,000, Project Transition, and the Medically Remedial Enlistment Program. While it is true that two of these programs have been phased out (Projects 100,000 and Transition) the precedent for their use has been set and programs of a similar nature could be initiated at any time.

Let us first examine the basic premise which underscored two of the programs (100,000 and Medical Remedial). That premise was a need for additional manpower during the initial stages of the Vietnam involvement.

Project 100,000 was initially instituted in October 1966 in two phases. The first phase was designed to bring into all branches of the armed forces individuals who would otherwise not be qualified for enlistment because of unsatisfactory scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. The second phase which began in February 1967 was the Medical Remedial Program which was designed to enlist those individuals with single correctable medical conditions.¹

What both programs basically offered was an opportunity for individuals who could not otherwise qualify for military service to enlist. However, these programs, while aimed at meeting manpower needs during a critical time, were also social welfare programs. One of the components of Project 100,000 was described as preparation training. This was basically remedial education for the enlistees under this program and was estimated by the GAO to cost 8 million dollars in Fy 70. Additionally, the cost of remedial education in other types of training after basic training for the Project 100,000 personnel in Fy 70 was estimated to cost 3.5 million.² In other words, in one Fy the Department of Defense spent 11.5 million dollars in extra training cost for individuals who did not meet the military's own standards.

The social planner might speculate that this money might have been more effectively utilized in some type of vocational education program, for over 34%³ of the Project 100,000 enlistees ended up in combat arms branches which offered no readily transferable civilian job skills. In other words, the DoD was offering very expensive remedial education in order to prepare an individual to be a combat soldier. We can only speculate as to whether these individuals would have enlisted if alternative training had been available out of the military. This speculation leads us therefore to the "harder" question of whether a social welfare service should be offered as an enticement for military service if it is not available outside of the military alternative. I think not.

Let us pause in our examination of the first category of Project 100,000 to view the second category, the Medical Remedial Program. Although Project 100,000 (category 1) has been phased out, category 2 is still with us. Basically this program allows individuals with relatively minor medical problems, most of which require surgical correction, to enlist in the military, have their problem corrected at a Basic Training Center and then enter a Basic Training cycle. Applicants must be mentally qualified.

One again we are faced with the situation of offering a social welfare service (health care) as an incentive for enlistment. This is an unequitable situation. Many of the medical problems which this program addresses are the type of problems which affect the nature of the work that an individual might perform and I can find no reason why military service should be a contingency for obtaining the service. The Medical Remedial Program is still

with us and will become more expensive to operate as all costs continue to spiral.

Both Project 100,000 and the Medical Remedial Program were initiated during an era of military conscription. While they were not eminently successful, they did provide a pool of manpower. For example, by July 1968, less than two years after initiation, Project 100,000 had enlisted 125,152 men⁴ in all branches of the military and 87,700 in the Army alone. If this type of program had to be offered during a period of active conscription I would conclude that the potential for it, or a prototype, being resurrected during a period of non-conscription and poor recruiting is high.

What would its resurrection mean? First, it would indicate that the Defense Department was embarking upon a program of social rehabilitation, an area in which it has no mandate. Second, it would indicate that "X" amount of national resources were being channelled into this program. Third, I would contend that programs such as Project 100,000 and Medical Remedial are representative of a type of double jeopardy in that individuals who are basically unequipped with key coping skills are thrust into a highly competitive environment in which they will be even less able to cope.

Let us examine each of these contraindications in turn. I would define "a program of social rehabilitation" as any program which is designed to provide individuals with remedial skills or capabilities which they would not be able to obtain without the benefit of the program. In turn these skills or capabilities would enable the individual to achieve or attain something that would not be possible had not the remedial action been taken. Paradoxically the job of the military establishment in this country is to defend the country from all enemies, foreign and domestic. There is no requirement in the constitutional provisions, which establish the maintenance of a standing Army, that this Army also provide its members with benefits concerning remedying of deficiencies which would have prevented them from serving in the Army in the first place. Many years ago the military in this country was literally highly over-worked and grossly underpaid. The professional soldier was viewed by the average citizen as a mercenary, a ne'er-do-well, and generally as an individual who could "not make it on the outside." Therefore it was acceptable since the government was in essence doing the man a favor by permitting him to serve, to pay him less than a living wage and to provide him with a certain amount of in-kind benefits to supplement that wage.

Since 1964 military pay has been on the up-swing and is now tied closely with pay within the industrial sector of the economy and in many respects exceeds pay in those vocations not subject to the federal minimum wage. I therefore maintain that there is no need to offer a variety of expensive and elaborate social welfare type incentives in order for a man to serve his country or to simply choose the military as an occupation.

The military will argue that the elimination of the draft has made recruiting extremely difficult and that were it not for the elaborate system or fringe benefits some of which are admittedly of a social welfare nature, there would be no real incentive for a man to serve in the military since he could obtain the same monetary rewards in the civilian economy and not suffer the potential hardships and dangers associated with military service. However the military, to put it quite simply, has no mandate either constitutionally or statutorily to offer social welfare incentives for military service. The second contraindication concerns the amount of money which is channelled into these programs. During Fy 68, 69 and 70, the Army either spent or proposed to spend some 29.2 million dollars on Project 100,000 alone.⁵ This is an enormous sum when we consider the fact that there is no data to validate that the individuals enlisted under these programs were any better or worse off in the long run than if they had not enlisted. I would contend that this money could have been more effectively utilized if added to Manpower Training, Vocational Rehabilitation or some other existing program, rather than used in a fragmented fashion by the Department of Defense. Based on the rate of inflation and on the 68 through 70 figures, we might reasonably conclude that should the Department of Defense choose to embark on another course similar to Project 100,000, it would entail costs probably double that previously cited. In addition to the actual and projected cost associated with Project 100,000, the cost associated with the Medical Remedial Program could be channelled into already established programs on health care delivery such as family planning, pre- and postnatal care, and early childhood screening and probably attain a much greater cost benefit factor than that associated with simply correcting physical deficiencies in order to make individuals acceptable for military service.

Concerning the idea of double jeopardy, one Department of Defense publication indicates that Project 100,000 permitted the military services to utilize "adequate personnel -- not the optimum or the best -- and assume the additional cost in order to obtain the benefit of upgrading these individuals."⁶ The publication further goes on to state that the individuals who participate in this program will be not only "better soldiers but more useful, productive and self-assured citizens."⁷ That is rhetoric. Let us look at facts. Of the initial study group in Project 100,000, 15.6% were still in the first two ranks of the military hierarchy compared to 7.4% of individuals not taken in under Project 100,000 during the same period.⁸ This figure alone indicates that Project 100,000 individuals were not competing at a level equal to those individuals who entered the military through the normal channels. Additionally a quote from a recent article concerning the performance of individuals who enter a high stress environment such as the military with a proven record of inability to cope in the civilian environment underscores my point. (A resigning company grade officer states:) "So much time and manpower is virtually wasted trying to help people who actually do not want help. This includes criminals present and past and

juvenile delinquents. As an officer I am expected to redeem these people, to erase 17 to 20 years of ingrained dishonesty and apathy often at the expense of worthwhile men."⁹

We know empirically that 24% of the Project 100,000 personnel ended up in the infantry. Another quote from a resigning company grade officer indicates the result of that type of assignment. "The present practice of assigning to the infantry only those recruits who have uniformly low intelligence (must stop). Contrarily recruits with high verbal abilities should be assigned to the infantry, since they will be the most qualified to understand and give orders, and most confident when speaking to a group of men."¹⁰

The military establishment is perhaps the only form of work in which an individual can be severely punished for the commission of offenses which in a non-military job would result, at worst, in the loss of the job. There is no argument with the necessity of discipline, particularly among troops whose exposure to combat is imminent. However, I would contend that individuals who have demonstrated significant difficulty with authority and structure in the past, i.e., high school dropouts, etc., are going to continue to demonstrate those patterns in military service and no effort oriented toward upgrading large numbers of these individuals on a mass scale can expect to be effective in changing the behavior patterns of significant numbers of them. We therefore find that the individual who has exhibited a marginal adjustment to life stress when placed in the military is literally subjected to double jeopardy. The stress situations have not lessened, if anything they will have increased and the individual will demonstrate a parallel correlation in his ability to cope with them.

Before we begin to look more closely at the philosophical issues involved in the military's venture into social welfare, let us examine briefly the final program, Project Transition. Project Transition was established in April of 1967. "The primary purpose of Project Transition (was) to provide educational, vocational and job counseling for enlisted personnel prior to release from active duty."¹¹ The GAO report to Congress concerning management deficiencies in this area indicated that the program was showing too much emphasis on educational upgrading and not enough in accomplishing the original purpose of the program which was to simply smooth the transition from military to civilian life. Granted there is a fine line concerning mandate when it is obvious that transition from military to civilian life is going to be hampered by lack of education, however, the purpose of this program was not to provide remedial education but to assist the individual in developing or repackaging his marketable skills. The hooker in this arrangement is that the training took place while the individual was on active duty and continued to receive his full pay, allowances, and benefits while being taught some usable skill. This is nothing more than a camouflaged form of public assistance. If in fact the purpose of the military is to provide

job training, then substantive changes must be made within the statutes that govern the military. Project Transition was expensive. It was programmed for 16 million in Fy 69 and 19 million in Fy 70.¹² These are actual training costs; this does not include the pay, allowances and supporting funds for those individuals whose services for all practical purposes were lost to the military.

It would seem that once again we find certain social welfare benefits being offered as a contingency for having military service, not on the basis of need. I would contend that if the cost for Project Transition could have been channelled into other programs and the men released early, the same benefits could have been obtained at less cost to the taxpayer.

I have attempted in the previous discussion to demonstrate that the military has increasingly utilized soft social welfare incentives in an effort to entice individuals to serve. I have not touched upon the idea of the combat arms bonus, the G.I. Bill education benefits, or the active duty tuition assistance and high level education opportunities offered to those who remain on active duty. The basic issue in all of this is whether or not military service is so repugnant that we as a nation must attach to it an entire series of elaborate and attractive buffers in order to make it a viable alternative for our young. The entire concept of the draft has been and continues to be a volatile political issue and there are sound arguments both for and against its abolishment and re-instatement. Military conscription is in itself obviously not the answer. However, there have been a number of viable arguments advanced for mandatory national service.¹³ Such a national service could probably be financed at least in part from the abolishment of expensive incentives as a reward for military service. It would strike at a time when many young people are "turned off" to the idea of further higher education and would offer them a viable alternative to initial competition in an overcrowded job market. Military service would be one alternative of national service. Such a program would offer the opportunity for health care services to be provided, for educational remedial work to occur and for young people to solidify those values which will be necessary for a productive adulthood. It is obvious to me that the current course of heaping benefit upon benefit for military service is reckless and will eventually peak out from the sheer force of economics alone. There is no indication that we are receiving better soldiers for more money. The American people are faced or will be faced with hard choices and the type of army that they want will be one of these choices. We have strong empirical validation that massive ventures into social welfare such as Project 100,000, Project Transition and the Medical Remedial Program are, to say the least, not eminently successful in meeting our military needs. Rather, they have channelled off large sums of money and extensive amounts of effort to operate them.

Some critics would argue that these programs are not inordinately expensive when compared to the sums spent on social welfare in general. In a sense that argument is valid but it is not germane. The issue is not money per se, but who should receive and disburse the money. My thesis is that the military has no business in social welfare. If the Pentagon cannot meet its manpower needs on the basis of its intrinsic attractiveness including early retirement, pay, tax-free allowances, etc., then it should go before the Congress and acknowledge its difficulties.

The military's need to pursue social remedial programs as a manpower source speaks to another area of problems which is beyond the scope of this paper but which has major implications for social planners. Those problems were clearly documented in Eli Ginzberg's works¹⁴ in 1959 and indicate that we have come precious little closer to bringing a large segment of the population to a level of health and literacy that they are capable of serving the nation. This failure of all of our institutions to "provide for the general welfare" underscores the futility of the military's foray into the social welfare arena. In the future there must be firm provisions to prevent the military from offering remedial or transitional services. There are existing agencies a plenty to provide these services.

There is nothing dishonorable about military service per se. What has tended to dishonor it are inconsistencies ranging from draft deferments to cover-ups; and social welfare ventures only lead to further tarnishing of an already battered image.

The competition for scarce resources will grow in intensity as our national priorities shift. This competition is, to an extent, necessary given the nature of our politico/economic system. However, the competition can be made more equitable if those of us who are advocates of effective social welfare programs will constantly remain on the alert and speak out loudly against institutional infringement in our area of expertise.

Footnotes

¹Comptroller General, Report to the Congress: Management of the Project 100,000 Program, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

⁵Ibid., p. 16.

⁶Falk, Stanley L. Defense Military Manpower. Industrial College of the Armed Forces: Washington, D.C., 1969, p. 102.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Comptroller General. Op. cit., p. 8.

⁹Hopgood, M.T. Jr., "Leadership Failures," Marine Corps Gazette, Aug. 1976, p. 25.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹Comptroller General, Report to the Congress, Need to Improve Project Transition Management by the Department of Defense, Dec. 1969, p. 3.

¹²Ibid., p. 12.

¹³Myers, Richard L. "Why We Need a National Service," Perspectives in Defense Management. Autumn, 1973, pp. 72-78.

¹⁴Ginzberg, Eli et al. The Ineffective Soldier: Lessons for Management and the Nation. Vols. 1-3. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.