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## NATIONAL SERVICE BILL

HC Deb 31 March 1947 vol 435 cc1671-782

1671

Order for Second Reading read.

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3.50 p.m.

§

**The Minister of Labour (Mr. Isaacs)** I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a Second time."

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In asking the House to give a Second Reading to this Bill, I propose, briefly, to explain the need for it, and then to go, in a little more detail, into the methods and conditions set out in the Bill itself. Primarily, the need for the Bill arises from the fact that the regular components of our Forces have seriously run down, owing to the fact that there has been no regular recruitment during the war. At the moment we are faced with the position that the number of men in the Army, serving under a regular term of enlistment, is something a little over 100,000—probably 110,000, or somewhere in the region of that figure. In the regular Air Force the number of regular Servicemen is now down below 70,000. In both cases, those figures contain a large number of men who will shortly be coming to the end of their engagement, and unless some steps are taken to fill up those gaps. we shall find ourselves in a very difficult position. In the Royal Navy the position is, admittedly, much better; but even so, it is not satisfactory. In the Navy there were regular Service intakes during the war, and voluntary recruiting has been a little more successful.

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Some time back the Government realised that there would be this probable shortage, and they embarked upon an extensive recruiting campaign, by a periodical Press campaign, by advertisements in the Press, and, in many cases, by the support of hon. Members of this House in making appeals to their constituents. Results in recent months have shown an improvement, but they have been by no means all that we should desire. For example, in the three months to January of this year the volunteer intake into the Forces was 22,349, compared with 13,298 which we had in the three months up to June. But even that improvement, welcome as it is, is insufficient to meet the need, and to build our Forces up even to their prewar strength. The position which confronts the Government is, that unless we can continue the present arrangements for the call-up of men, the regular element in the Services is likely to be insufficient to meet even a fraction of our minimum defence requirements. Therefore, if the defence Forces are to be maintained in a sufficient state to enable the defence of the country to be undertaken, should it be necessary, we must have a Bill of this kind. It is the view of the Government, quite definitely, that that gap can only be met by a scheme of National Service. The voluntary scheme has not proved

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sufficiently effective, despite the attractions of improved conditions, and the prospects of advancement that are open to the voluntary Serviceman now as compared with before the war. That is not sufficient to encourage the enlistment of the number of men that are required.

There is, however, a second reason, and that is the need for the nation to build up efficient, well-trained reserve and auxiliary Forces. We must maintain a reasonable state of preparedness in case we should be engaged in a future war. I am sure it is the very sincere and earnest hope of every one of our people that we may not be faced with a future war. There is no idea and no intention in the mind of any of our folk to engage in a fight with anybody. On the other hand, somebody may want to have a fight with us—we do not know. For that reason we have to be prepared to stand our ground, and to defend our country and the principles in which we believe. If our Armed Forces are to be capable of operating efficiently at the beginning of an emergency they must be backed up with efficient and adequate reserve Forces; otherwise, all that we shall be doing will be saying to the volunteer force, which is inadequate to meet the strain: "You go into battle. We will sacrifice you, and will wait a few more months while we train the others that are to come on." We think it is absolutely essential that we should have efficient and well-trained reserves to enable those necessary requirements to be faced. We do not think it is possible to get that reserve by purely voluntary service. Now, before the war the Territorial Forces were staffed with a number of enthusiastic men, who were willing to give their spare time to train for the defence of the country. But the training that can be given under those circumstances 1674 does not produce a sufficiently efficient individual to take full part in the defence of his country, and, in all probability, not sufficiently well trained to look after his own personal defence.

**Air Commodore Harvey (Macclesfield)** Does the right hon. Gentleman mean that the §  
Battle of Britain pilots, who trained in the Auxiliary Air Force, did not play their part when the war came?

**Mr. Isaacs** It is most unreasonable for the hon. and gallant Member to try to put into my §  
mind any such thought or suggestion. I think that everyone of our people, who so willingly responded in the war when they had the clarion call from the then Prime Minister, deserves credit for the way they devoted themselves to the job. To pick out any one as against another, and to try to draw a distinction between them, is not reasonable or fair. Even the "footslogger" did his bit, with the training he had—[HON. MEMBERS: "'Even'?" ]—Some hon. Members opposite seem to be anxious to pick up a word here and there, and to make something out of it. Perhaps I might go back to what I was trying to say. I was trying to say that everyone of those people who volunteered for any kind of service did his best. But those people could not do as well as they might have done, because they did not have the facilities for full and complete training, which we hope they will get under this Bill. This is no time to

draw distinctions between one and the other. We have to bear in mind that the training required for our Forces today is a much different training from which was required before the outbreak of the war which has just closed: there are new weapons; scientific weapons of different kinds; technical developments of all sorts, which require a very complete training to enable a man to be efficient at his particular job, and we cannot rely upon that kind of training being given after an emergency has arisen. On that matter, in relation to emergency and the need for speed in action I will, if I may, quote to the House, if they will be considerate enough to listen, a passage from the Prime Minister's speech on the Loyal Address on 12th November last, which I think clearly sets out the Government's point of view. My right hon. Friend then said: "First of all, the development of modern warfare has made this country more vulner- able. We are now part of the Continent. We can be 1675 reached by attack from the Continent. While in the past we always had a long breathing space on which we could depend, that breathing space is most unlikely to be available should any war arise in the future. The logic of that is that while we keep our front line forces as low as we can consonant with efficiency and the jobs they have to do, we must have trained reserves who can take their part right away without waiting for six months' training."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 12th November, 1946; Vol. 430, C. 40.] We consider that compulsory National Service is not only necessary to ensure speed, but is also the most democratic way of providing the Forces required. In the old days, between the wars and before the wars, recruiting statistics show that we had a greater intake into the Army in days of serious unemployment, when men turned to that kind of opportunity of getting their livelihood, when no other means were open to them. We think today, that the responsibility, the duty—I think one might almost say the privilege—of taking part in the defence of our country should be spread over the whole of our young men, irrespective of their class or their occupation; they should all come along and play their part in this service. We consider it is a national duty that everyone, when required, should come to the defence of their country, and individuals should give sufficient time to making themselves competent to undertake that duty.

This Bill provides a method for carrying out that duty. It amends the existing National Service laws. It is an amending Bill. It provides for continuous compulsory military service from 1st January, 1949. I will explain the detailed changes as between the existing laws and this Bill a little later. I want to emphasise, first of all, that all the existing safeguards for personal hardship cases, for conscientious objectors and all the other reasonable requirements for postponement and deferment, have been maintained, and in some cases have been slightly extended. These arrangements worked exceedingly well during the war. There may, of course, have been cases where somebody did not get a postponement, who thought he should have got it, but in general their work gave satisfaction as fair and reasonable and we consider that the hardship committees and conscientious objectors' tribunals and other similar bodies for dealing with these cases should continue to take part in the 1676 administration of these provisions, as they have done in the past.

Until 1st January, 1949, men will be called up under the existing arrangements set out in detail in Command Paper 6831 under the title, "Call up to the Forces in 1947 and 1948."

Under these arrangements, young men called up during this year will serve for two years, and those called up from the beginning of next year will serve a gradually shorter period, the period of service being reduced, so that those called up at the end of the year will serve 18 months, thus bringing them into line with what the Bill provides. This Bill provides that the National Service Acts shall cease to have effect on 1st January, 1954, unless a later date is fixed by Order in Council. In other words, this new Bill means that military service for the nation will continue to exist for five years definitely, but can be extended by Orders in Council. Such Orders in Council must have the consent of both Houses of Parliament. That means that young men who have not reached the age of 18 by 1st January, 1954, or any later date, will not be liable to be called up, but that at that date, the liability at once disappears. But it must be clear that there must be some men called up just before that date, who will then be in the Services, who will have to continue their service, although the period of it will not end until after the date on which compulsory enrolment has expired. Parliament itself will have complete control over the extension or otherwise of this liability to service; it will be for Parliament to determine it, as it seems necessary in the light of the circumstances existing at that time.

Now as to what we may call the field of the call-up. The Bill gives authority to call up young men between the ages of 18 and 26; but I must make it clear at once that the usual call-up age will be the age of 18, and that the extra age limit is put in—for the purpose that I will explain a little later on—so as to give facilities to the Ministry for making deferments and postponements. The total period of service is seven years, 18 months' full time service with the Forces, and five and a half years with the Reserve Services. Under the present Acts, men up to the age of 46 are liable; and their liability to serve, when called up, is until the end of the present emergency; and that is to be fixed by some date. But under the Bill men 1677 will be called up definitely for the stated period of 18 months. Therefore, they will know, once they leave their civil employments or student courses, that they are going in for a fixed and definite period.

Primarily, the reason for the 18 months' full-time service is determined by two factors. First, there must be an adequate period of initial training. That is not to say that the full 18 months will be taken up by training. Many of the Forces, or sections of the Forces, may be able to complete sufficient training by the end of 12 months, and the young men may then do a bit of soldiering. Men may finish training, and then go to do garrison duty or some other work to take the place of some of the men coming out at the end of their normal time of service. Whilst the period of 18 months may not be required for complete training, it is required for service. Secondly, it is necessary to have a marginal period so that extensive training may be given and the fullest opportunity taken of the time in which the Services have the young men at their disposal. But it has to be borne in mind that this, in itself, will bring about an added demand upon the normal full-time soldier because it will be regular components of the Forces who will have to undertake the training of the young men coming in; and, therefore, there will be less men available in the active lines should any requirements arise for their services.

I should like to mention here that the Government are not using the word "conscript" in this

Bill. We are referring to these young men as "national service men." There are many who prefer to think they will be coming in to do their service willingly, although called upon, and who do not like the connotation of the word "conscript" and its reference, not to circumstances in this country, but to circumstances in which others have used it, and which have become associated with the word. I make that point for what it may be worth.

I want to refer to one or two other factors. We hope that it may be possible—as I shall explain, there is power in the Bill—to shorten the period of service. There are two ways in which that may be achieved. First, we may find that the campaign to attract young men will be more successful than it has been. Many of the young men called up to do their 18 1678 months' service may find the Services so attractive to them that they may desire to continue in them, and to continue for a fixed period longer than their 18 months. Secondly, our overseas defence commitments may be so changed that to make it unnecessary for us to have the Forces which we now think are going to be necessary; but this is too indefinite for the Government to assume for the purposes of national planning. Therefore, there is power in the Bill, in Clause 1 (1, a), for the Government, by Order in Council, to reduce the initial period of the 18 months' whole time service; and I have authority to say, that at the earliest opportunity at which this is found to be practicable it will be done. It must be borne in mind that there may be cases in which a man may find himself called upon to serve more than the 18 months period. It will be entirely his own fault if he does; if a man deserts, or is absent without leave any time, he will be called upon to make good that time of absence by continuing his service after the 18 months have passed.

There is also power in the Bill to reduce the period of 18 months in certain cases. It will be used for exceptional purposes. For example, we are informed by the Royal Air Force that a man being trained as one of an air-crew, may reach a certain part of his training at the end of 12 months, and that the time left to him is not sufficient for him to go right through the next stage; and that it might be better to release him, and to carry on with his part-time training, at the end of 12 months. We have taken power in the Bill to allow that, should it be necessary; but if a national service man is released for any of these reasons from full time service before the 18 months expire, he will be expected to make good that time by a little extra time in the part time service training programme, and so to make up, to some extent, the full time lost.

The age for calling up is 18 years, but there is provision to allow young men who apply to be called up earlier, but not earlier than the age of 17 years and six months. The provision is made quite deliberately, so that young men going up to a university, or to some other training course, may choose to be called up a little earlier, enabling them to come out of the Forces a little earlier in time than if they had waited until they were 18 to be called 1679 up; and in time to start their university or other scholastic careers. It may be a very hard thing indeed for a young fellow in certain circumstances to be called up one year after starting his scholastic work, and finds himself pushed back and he may prefer to do his service first. There is a similar slight variation with regard to doctors and dentists. In normal circumstances, doctors and dentists will find themselves called up round about the age of 25; but there will be many in the field of call-up, who are taking specialist courses and want



to become specialists in one branch of their profession; and when an individual requests that it should be done, his call-up may be postponed, and he will be liable to be called up, up to the age of 29. That has been done to meet the needs of the professions, so that men will get their additional training. At the same time, it is an advantage to the Services, because they will have within their ranks men with higher qualifications to assist in the professional work of the doctors and dentists in the Forces.

**Mr. Kenneth Lindsay (Combined English Universities)** Has the Minister any idea of the § spread as between the ages of 17½ and 26? For instance, does he imagine that 20 per cent. or 30 per cent. will opt at 17½?

**Mr. Isaacs** I could not say without notice, but I will endeavour to get the information for § the hon. Gentleman if he wants to use it in the Debate. We think that a young man of 17½ is physically not so different from the young man of 18. I should like to mention the question of deferment. By having the field of call-up ranging from the age of 18 to that of 26, with the normal intention of calling up at 18, we have a long field in which to plan deferments. But this must be said right at the outset, that it is the intention of the Government under this Bill that all young men liable and medically fit shall serve their time in the Forces—all of them, with the exception which I shall explain and of which the House has already been informed. We are anxious not to interrupt training, whether for the professions or for the arts or for industry, or whatever it may be, and, therefore, the option is given to the young man to defer being called up until his apprenticeship or training has been completed. 1680  
Therefore, a student going to the university, or a young man going to an apprenticeship in industry, can decide whether he will do his service, and get it over and done with, or whether he will continue his training and do his service afterwards.

That will be his option, but this is being tied up with one or two very stringent provisions. First, a young man will have to satisfy the district manpower boards or the recruitment committees that there is a genuine and satisfactory learnership, studentship or apprenticeship in operation. It must be genuine. It is not going to be allowed, that a firm finding that their young men are to be called up, suddenly rushes to get indenture forms for them. The apprenticeship must be in existence at or before the time of call-up, and must be a satisfactory apprenticeship. I can speak only of experience in my own industry. I have known of a case of a printer in South London with six young lads as apprentice compositors. He had drawn a premium of £25 from each of them, yet after their apprenticeships, they did not know enough even to print a winkle bag, let alone get a job in the trade. That is going to stop. The manpower board has to be satisfied that the apprenticeship is a genuine apprenticeship.

I ask the House to see the great advantage in this, in that it should, in fact, encourage genuine systems of apprenticeship to be developed throughout the country, and end the haphazard methods of teaching that have developed. There must be a genuine and

satisfactory studentship, apprenticeship, or learner-ship in existence. With the exception of underground miners, no deferment will be allowed on industrial grounds—deferments will be allowed on other grounds, as I have explained—but the Government have recently announced that underground coalminers will not be called up to the Forces for the next five years. Young men already engaged as underground coalminers, when they become due for call-up, will have their call-up deferred as long as they remain underground coal-miners. By this means we are protecting that very important industry at the moment from the loss of its manpower. It is not intended that there shall be industrial deferment in any other industry.

There is, then, the question of postponement of liability to serve in the Forces. 1681

Postponement has existed under the Acts now in force. It rested on exceptional hardship, and so on. I think the Hardship Committees, in the main, have done their work exceedingly well. There is every reason to believe that they will do just as well under this Bill, when it becomes an Act. Unless a certificate of postponement is granted by the Minister, the matter will be referred to a Military Service Hardship Committee, and there will be a right of appeal allowed from the decision of that committee. The appeal can be made either by the Minister or by the applicant against the decision of the committee, and the matter can be taken to an umpire. I must point out that, where a postponement has been given in that way, that postponement does not itself automatically exempt the person from serving, or allow him to pass out of the field of service, because should he reach the age of 25, when he would normally pass out of the field of call-up, and the hardship qualification should disappear, as it might easily do, he would still be liable to do his service. In other words, opportunities will not be made so easy that some form of postponement can be continued from month to month, enabling complete evasion, unless there is absolute need for it.

**Mr. Stephen (Glasgow, Camlachie)** Up to what age? §

**Mr. Isaacs** The age of call-up, 18 to 26. §

**Mr. Stephen** The right hon. Gentleman said that if a person received a postponement right up to the age of 26, he might be called on after 26 for service. Up to what age? Might it be 30? §

**Mr. Isaacs** It is difficult for me to give specific answers on detailed points at this stage. §  
If, when he reaches the age of 26, and the condition justifying postponement still exists, it seems to me that further postponement will be granted, and he will not be called up immediately. From what we have seen of these cases, they are most likely to be cases of students at universities who, because of failure to pass an examination, have had to

continue on a little longer and have not come out until they reached the age at which they would pass out. This is only a safeguard to make sure that nobody will manoeuvre the postponement opportunities in such a way as to evade the service which it is felt should be given.

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**Mr. Wilson Harris (Cambridge University)** I would like to put one question about §  
universities. Is deferment optional for any undergraduate, or only for scholarship holders or persons of a certain standard?

**Mr. Isaacs** The option will be for any person. Any person going through any kind of §  
tuition—university, industry, law, and so on, where there is a genuine contract of training of some sort—has a right to ask for the deferment of his call-up. It is made as wide as possible so as not to interfere with training. I would like now to say something about part-time service. At the end of 18 months, the men who have served will go into a Reserve. In the Royal Navy they will go into the Royal Naval Special Reserve, which is being created for this purpose. If they serve in the Army, they will go into the Territorial Army, or the Army Reserve. If they are in the Royal Air Force, they will go into the Air Force Reserve. Power has been taken in the Bill to transfer men from one of those Reserves to another, and there are four main reasons why that is done. It can be done either by the Forces themselves or at the man's request. The main reasons are as follow:

First, a man may have obtained during his part-time service knowledge, capacity and efficiency that would make him more useful in another branch of the Services. May I give as an example a man who may have served in the Army and who, on coming out of the service in the Army, has worked in an aircraft factory and become an expert aircraft fitter; it might be of advantage, therefore, to transfer him from the Army Reserve to the Air Force Reserve. It is that sort of thing which makes it desirable for this power to exist. Secondly, there may reasonably be a change in the balance of the various Forces. One might find that one Force had far more men than might be needed, and another Force fewer men. In that case, it would be desirable to have powers to make transfers. Thirdly, a man may live in another area. He may have been living on the sea coast and have been in the Royal Naval Reserve. He might then go far inland where there were opportunities for him to have training in some other branch of the Reserve. Fourthly, a man might, for personal reasons, wish to change from one Reserve to another; it might suit his convenience to do so because of the location of his residence, his employment, and so forth. We are taking power to permit that §  
sort of thing. 1683

The period of overall service is seven years—18 months full service, and five and a half years part-time service. That part-time service also may be extended in the case of men who have deserted or failed to fulfil their obligations, and who will be expected to continue in service. Part-time service has been devised in a form which it is hoped will cause the least possible interference with industry. In the five and a half years a man will be required to do 60 days,



and he cannot be compelled to do more than 21 days in any one year. It is also intended, although this may not be specifically mentioned in the Bill, that there will be conversations with industries with a view to arranging the best periods of the year in which the training can, take place so as to provide the very minimum of interference with industry. A man will have a call-up notice giving him 30 days' notice of being called up for his Reserve training. It is possible that, having come out of the Forces after 18 months, he may not be called upon to do any part-time service perhaps until a year or so has elapsed, but the maximum period of 60 days remains absolutely fixed. An attempt is being made to interfere as little as possible with industry and with the ordinary domestic conveniences of the Service man by allowing him to commute each day by a number of hours of evening attendance. Four periods of one hour's attendance, or two evenings of two hours, will be equal to a full day's training. In other words, it is the introduction of a four hour day for part-time trained men. The Services will make arrangements by regulations to cover that.

It must be pointed out also that if a man wishes to do so, he can volunteer to do his part-time training in the Volunteer Reserve, but it is clear that if a man volunteers to do his Reserve service in the voluntary section, he does not escape the liability of being required to do 60 days' training, towards which he may not count more than 15 days in any one year. If that provision were not there, it would be possible for a man who volunteered under contract to give voluntary service for, say, for four years, to put in more than his 60 days in the first two years, to draw his gratuity, and then to stay away and avoid further service. The main purpose of the Reserve is not only to keep the men's training as far as possible up to 1684 pitch, but to have the men available should it be necessary. Therefore, voluntary service in the Volunteer Reserve does not allow a man to evade whole-time service as such in the ordinary Reserve.

**Mr. Christopher Shawcross (Widnes)** Can my right hon. Friend give an estimate of how § many men will be in uniform when this scheme is in full operation, say, in five years' time? How many will be in uniform at any given time, allowing for those who are to be exempted, and so on?

**Mr. Isaacs** I could not give a figure at this moment, but I will get a figure. I would like to § know what my hon. Friend means when he says "in uniform." Does he mean those who are serving 18 months, or men in the Reserve?

**Mr. Shawcross** Those who are in the Reserve and others, excluding those in regular § service.

**Mr. Isaacs** I will see whether those figures can be obtained. I want now to speak about §  
reinstatement in civilian employment. The [Re-instatement in Civil Employment Act, 1944](#), when one considers that four million men and women have come out of the Forces, has worked with amazing satisfaction. It is true that there have been a number of difficult cases, but they have been a ridiculously small percentage of the whole. Therefore, we propose to continue those arrangements, but with the following slight change. Under the existing Act, however short the employment was, the employer has to reinstate the man for not less than 26 weeks. If he has been in employment for more than 52 weeks, the employer has to guarantee reinstatement for 52 weeks. Owing to the changes in the period of service, and so on, the following alterations are proposed—that if the employment was for less than 13 weeks, reinstatement should be guaranteed for 13 weeks; if employment was for more than 13 weeks, but less than 52 weeks, the reinstatement must be guaranteed for 26 weeks, and then, as before, if employment was for over 52 weeks, the reinstatement should go on for 52 weeks.

Under the Act as at present, the employer has an obligation to reinstate a man only if such reinstatement is reasonable and practicable. This necessary safe-guard will continue. 1685  
I know that some of my hon. Friends will wonder how a lawyer might interpret "reasonable and practicable," but it has given rise to little difficulty, for out of four million people who have come out of the Forces, the vast majority have been re-employed, and where the term "reasonable and practicable" has been referred to the various tribunals, in the main the matter has been settled satisfactorily. We propose to continue the machinery which has proved satisfactory.

There is one other minor change. Under the existing Act, an employer is not under an obligation to reinstate a man after six months have elapsed after the end of the present emergency. Obviously, that condition will have to be changed. Therefore, the employer will not be under an obligation to reinstate a man after six months from the end of his whole-time service. In each particular case, the liability remains on the employer to reinstate the man for the six months after the man comes out of the Forces. Under the [Reinstatement Act](#), volunteers who volunteered for the Forces have the same right of reinstatement as men called up and sent compulsorily into the Forces. This Bill preserves that right for the volunteers who joined under the old Act. Under the new Bill, as volunteers who volunteer for the Forces will probably serve five, seven or even more years, it is not felt reasonable to compel an employer to take back a man after he has been away for seven years, and who volunteered to go away, as against a man who was called up only for a limited period. There is that change in the Bill.

There is a slight change in the period in which a man must apply for his reinstatement in civilian employment. Under the old Act, he had to make his application on the fifth Monday after his release and to be available for employment on the ninth Monday. Under this Bill, he has to make his application on the second Monday and to be available for employment on the fourth Monday. It is obvious that there is a reason for that. Under the old Act men have eight weeks' demobilisation leave; under the Bill a man will get from 18 to 24 days according to the length of their service. They will have the option of enjoying that leave without losing

their right of reinstatement.

Another slight change will be necessary for we have to pay attention to the 1686  
reemployment of men who have been called up for part-time training. We do not wish to see growing up an opportunity for employers to say that they will not take men back because of the operation of the Bill. There will be sufficient safeguards against that happening. A man will have the right to go back to his job after his part-time training. If there is any question about a man not being reemployed, he can go to a reinstatement committee where the onus of proof will rest upon the employer. If I am asked about the penalty, it will be in some of the compensations to which the man will be entitled, according to the period involved.

**Mr. Sydney Silverman (Nelson and Colne)** Can we have an example? §

**Mr. Isaacs** It might be a month's salary. §

We are now entering a sphere in which other factors begin to operate. Tomorrow we shall have raised the school-leaving age, and we are coming into a field where more extensive educational facilities are open to the young people of our country. Therefore, it is intended that those who come into the Forces shall not lose the advantage of the extended education which they would have had, if they had been following their normal employment. The Services have made arrangements for such continued education and the Bill places a general duty upon them to do so. They will provide education, and the cost will be met out of the Service Estimates. Local education authorities will be asked to co-operate with them in carrying out the duty, but that authority will be relieved of the general obligation of finding facilities for the large number in the Forces who may happen to be in their area.

Finally, I would refer to the conscientious objector Clauses. The arrangements under which conscientious objectors may now be registered are three. One is unconditional exemption. The second is conditional exemption, upon the applicant's undertaking to do civilian employment. The third is non-combatant service. Those three forms of exemption will remain, with slight changes. As regards conditional exemption, the Minister may direct the objector to undertake work of the kind specified by the tribunal. It may be necessary 1687  
for the objector to submit himself to medical examination in order that we can ascertain that he is fit for the work.

**Professor Gruffydd (University of Wales)** Can the Minister tell us whether any provision §  
is made for objectors who refuse to submit themselves to medical examination?

**Mr. Isaacs** If a man is registered unconditionally he will be quite free, as he is now, and §

he will be out of the field of employment. There is one other condition. If a man had gone into the Army he would have served for 18 months and he would have been liable to serve 60 days in the reserve. As a conditionally registered objector, he will continue for 60 days beyond the 18 months, so that he will be called upon to give to the State exactly the same number of days as if he had gone into the Service.

**Mr. Rankin (Glasgow, Tradeston)** The right hon. Gentleman has missed the point of the question put to him just now by the hon. Member for the University of Wales (Professor Gruffydd). What is to happen in the case of objectors who refuse to submit themselves to medical examination? §

**Mr. Isaacs** Exactly the same as has happened under the Acts which are in operation at the moment. The only changes that are being made in the conscientious objector arrangements are those which I have explained. It is felt that they worked satisfactorily, generally speaking, during the war and they will continue now as then. §

**Mr. S. Silverman** Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that under the Acts now in force, a man who conscientiously felt that it was wrong to submit himself for medical examination was punished again and again for what was, in fact, only one offence? Do I understand that it is proposed that that shall continue? §

**Mr. Isaacs** I want to make it clear, as I did try to do just now, that if that is the arrangement that operates now, the Bill does not make any change in the arrangement. It may be that it is thought it ought to do so, and it may be that when the Committee stage comes these matters can be discussed and argued out. I want to make it clear to the House that there is no change in that arrangement. 1688 §

I have nothing further to explain to the House. I would finish by saying that the Government believe the Bill is necessary. Otherwise, they would not have introduced it. They believe that it is fair to all. They think it is fair to the State and to industry, and fair to the men who have borne the heat and burden of the day in the last four or five years, that we should now try to carry on the work for which they have struggled. We think the terms of the Bill are reasonable and can be carried out without hardship upon the community. The Government also believe that the period of service is fair in existing conditions and that the period for which the Bill is intended to operate is appropriate in all the circumstances. For those reasons, and because we believe that the Bill is required and is fair, I ask the House to give it a Second Reading.

4.38 p.m. §

**Mr. Churchill (Woodford)** I think the House is indebted to the Minister of Labour for his § extremely lucid and careful description of the Bill, and particularly for the attention he has given to points which cause anxiety here or there. He has evidently carefully mastered the details of the Measure and was able compendiously to give to the House a very full account of it.

On this occasion we support His Majesty's Government. We shall try to do so when they stand for national as apart from party interests and sectarian themes. We even go as far as to compliment them on the courage they have shown in resisting the subversive and degenerate elements in their midst—and elsewhere. Below the Gangway opposite, we see representatives of those conceptions and ideas which nearly brought us to ruin in the late war, and have gone far and are going further to pull us down after our victory. Therefore I congratulate the Government on standing up to them. It is always difficult for Ministers in contact with reality to resist those feckless and crack-pate elements to which they have pandered in their thirst for power, and on which they largely depend as a Government for their life and office. We shall vote with the Government on the Bill, on all occasions when they are challenged by the crypto-Communists and pacifists and other trends of Left-wing opinion, which they have exploited to the full in bygone days, and which they now 1689 very naturally and healthily resent.

The Minister of Defence has not made things easier by his aggressive speech the other night, when he went out of his way to attack us on this side of the House. Old and experienced politicians will understand his difficulties. We realise that he was trying to gather up in advance a little credit for his own party, for the work which he had to do for the country by showing how well he could be rude to the Tories. After all, that cost him nothing. On an issue of this kind he can be sure that he will get our support any way and at any time when he is doing his duty. To my friends here who were angered the other night I would say that small petty episodes must not be allowed to deter convinced and determined men from their path of duty. I say also to the Minister of Defence—quite appreciating the state of mind he was in—that it is sometimes better, on the whole, to do things not quite so nakedly. *Ars est celare artem*. For the benefit of the Etonians on the other side I will translate that as "Art is to conceal art."

We shall support the Bill in all its stages, but that does not mean that we shall not try to shape and modify it as well as we can, to fit it to what we conceive to be the national need. Here I may say that the Bill has evidently been very carefully shaped and considered. We shall do nothing to endanger its passage into law. We shall be careful to be present in good strength to support the Government. Moreover, we shall take no points off them in the constituencies, on the ground that they have gone forward and done this thing. We have quite enough to pick on without that. I will, however, permit myself to make some comments on the past.

The Prime Minister is not here. I have no doubt he has many other things to do. But it is



certainly an irony of fate that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence should be the men to bring a conscription Bill before the House now, after two years of peace, when all our enemies have surrendered unconditionally. Why, these were the very politicians who, four months before the outbreak of the war, led their followers into the Lobby against the principle of compulsory military service, and then had the face to accuse the Conservative Party of being "guilty men." I and a handful of others have a right to criticise and 1690 censor the lack of preparation for the late war, but the Prime Minister and his friends have no right to do so; the whole effort of their party was designed to make every preparation for defence of the country and resistance to Hitler so unpopular, that it was politically impossible. Now, in the long swing of events, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence, who refused in May, 1939, to vote for conscription against Hitler and Nazism, when that was proposed by Mr. Hore-Belisha in Mr. Chamberlain's Government, come forward in a time of peace and victory, to ask us to support conscription against some other danger, some other dictatorship, which I do not propose this afternoon precisely to define. This performance this afternoon encourages me. I do not despair of the party opposite. It is never too late to mend; we all may live and learn, and they may live and learn, but the question is whether, when they have learned, we shall still be alive.

I turn now to the Liberal Party. They, at least, are consistent, and they are united, but they have not the task of organising and disciplining such large forces as those which occupy the hourly attention of the Government Whips. I remember well the day when my right hon. Friend Sir Archibald Sinclair, who is not with us at the moment, marched his followers into the Lobby, with the Prime Minister and with the Minister of Defence, to vote "No" to conscription against Hitler and Nazism in the spring of 1939. In this world of human error and constant variations, usually of an unexpected character, the Liberal Party can range themselves in party doctrine, few but impeccable. They have no need to recur for safety or vindication to that well-known maxim, or dictum, that "Consistency is the last resort of feeble and narrow minds." They are quite entitled to say that they have always been against compulsory service. They were against it before the first world war, and, in spite of some considerable pressure from Mr. Lloyd George, they were against it after the first world war. In the interval many things have changed, but here today the Liberal Party are ready to sacrifice themselves in the constituencies, and face any amount of unpopularity, fearless of by-elections, however they may come, and ready at this juncture to stand firm by the old theme and the old flag. It is no part of my policy to pick unnecessary quarrels with 1691 the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Clement Davies) and those whom he leads, and I shall, therefore, content myself with paying this well-deserved tribute to their rigid and inflexible consistency.

I shall venture to present to the House some of the reasons which lead the Conservative Party to give their support to this Socialist Government on the Second Reading of the [National Service Bill](#). First, let me refer to one or two points of detail. Since the war stopped, the mismanagement of our Armed Forces has been remarkable. For a whole year, there were three Service Ministers who have since been dismissed or moved because they were either incompetent or absentees. One was promoted. He was not promoted because he was

incompetent, but because he was an absentee. At any rate, the three great Service Departments have had to drift and flop along as they might. I criticised the demobilisation policy of the Government early in November, 1945, at the very beginning. I still think that it was not carried out with proper speed, down to the limits which were required by the public safety. We know that the Government were forced by a wave of public opinion to change the plans they had prepared, but still they kept hundreds of thousands of men and women waiting about needlessly doing nothing, when they were urgently needed in civil life. In these matters, time passes and draws a sponge across the past, but I should have been ashamed not to have demobilised down to the necessary figure at a very much greater speed than was attained. But the past is no more. I must register the point that perhaps a year was lost in the case of many men who could have been giving our country the necessary fillip at that time, in getting industry to work, but were retained in the Services doing what we now conceive to be perfectly useless tasks, not only abroad, but, in very large numbers, in England.

**Mr. James Glanville (Consett)** rose—

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**Mr. Churchill** The hon. Member seems much disturbed about this matter today. He must not endeavour to direct on me any criticism which should rightly be attributed to his leader. We have next the White Paper by the Minister of Defence. I must again remind the House that the right hon. Gentleman used very hard language about the arguments of his political opponents, the other night, and about their style. No more barren, dismal, flatulent, platitudinous document than his White Paper—if you can call it "his" White Paper—has ever been laid before the House of Commons. His friends—and I am certainly a wartime friend—hope that it is to his credit that he had nothing to do with writing it. It was one of those rigmaroles and grimaces produced by the modern bureaucracy into whose hands we have fallen—a kind of vague palimpsest of jargon and officialese, with no breadth, no theme and, above all, no facts. 1692

I think I shall be speaking for everyone in all parts of the House when I say there is a broadly spread feeling that our manpower in the Forces is being wasted, muddled and mismanaged. There has been no administrative thrift, and there has been insufficient good housekeeping. This applies to all three Services. There never was a time when the effective fighting strength of the Army, Navy and Air Force bore a smaller proportion to the total number of men taken by compulsion. The Estimates, which have been presented to the House and debated fully in the recent weeks, gave us no clue to the fighting strength of our Armed Forces. The Navy Estimates, for instance, do not dare to specify the ships and fleets the Navy have in commission. That was invariably done before the war, and I see no reason why it should not be done at the present time. Nor have we the slightest idea from the Estimates of the numbers in the Navy afloat, and the numbers ashore.

I believe that the Minister of Defence is to wind up this Debate, and perhaps he will be so

good as to answer this particular question. The Navy have around 200,000 men today—maybe a little less—and according to the Estimate they are reducing the numbers to 182,000 by this time next year. Out of these 200,000 men, I want to ask how many are sleeping afloat tonight, and how many are sleeping ashore. I think we might be told that. I do not think it would endanger the safety of the country, although it may stir people up a little at the Admiralty. I should like to know the answer, because, after all, the Navy is a thing which is in various ways associated and often connected with the sea, and a sailor is always supposed to have something to do, at some time or other, with salt water. Perhaps I may have an answer to that question when the time comes. Nor do the Royal Air Force venture to state the number of fighting squadrons they have. Finally, the War Office give us no indication of the number of divisions or mobile brigades which are formed out of a total establishment of about 750,000. 1693

We are told by the Government, "Oh, we cannot do it, because foreign Powers will gain an advantage," but I thought that all our enemies had surrendered unconditionally, and the House may remember that we went in procession to St. Margaret's to return thanks for the victory. It appears now that we cannot do what we did in 1939, and in 1914, namely, state in broad terms what foreign Powers know perfectly well, the broad outline of our naval and military organisations. Apart from your war against the Jews in Palestine, I thought there was peace. At any rate, the House may be sure that the Soviet Government know perfectly well what we have got in the Navy and in the forces in Europe, and that they have got a lot of good friends moving freely about in this country, who will not hesitate to tell them about any little points on which they may be short.

Perhaps in the air there may be a little more mystery, because the air is a "kittle cattle" kind of service. Whether a squadron is in the first line, or the second line, or in training or in preparation, and what is the exact grading of the various machines and pilots—all that affords an infinite field in which confusion may be created and statistics multiplied and spawned in vast quantities and varieties. Therefore, I am not pressing so much in regard to the air, but believe me, nothing is gained by refusing to tell the House what ships we have in commission, and how many broad organisations of troops we have in the field. What we have to keep secret is not that, but our mobilisation plans, and equipment, and the potential rate at which our Forces can be manned.

I hope we shall not have this humbug of saying, "We cannot say how many ships there are in commission, because we do not want foreign nations to know." I have never heard such a pretence presented to the House before. The reason why the facts are not disclosed in the Estimates is because the Government do not dare to expose themselves to criticism for the little they have to show, compared with the great numbers they have and the vast sums of money they are spending. We reserve to ourselves the fullest right to examine and criticise the policy and the Bill which is now brought before us, from the standpoint both of its quantitative and qualitative results. Nevertheless, when all is said and done, even if we do not get satisfactory answers, we shall unflinchingly support the principle of national service for the Armed Forces of our country. 1694

Before I sit down I will, very briefly, give a few reasons, broad reasons—

**Mr. Scollan** (Renfrew, Western) Will the right hon. Gentleman allow me? §

**Mr. Churchill** —which have led us to this conclusion. I am explaining why I am going to §  
support the Government, and perhaps find myself in the same Lobby as the hon. Gentleman.  
If I give way to him, perhaps he will bear that in mind, and mitigate his ferocity.

**Mr. Scollan** Would the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to tell the House why §  
conscription, by a Government which is responsible for the muddle in the Forces which the  
right hon. Gentleman has described, would alter the muddle or help the position?

**Mr. Churchill** That really is a question which should be addressed to the Front Bench §  
opposite. As I say, I stand here confronted with this proposal to have a National Service Bill.  
I and my Friends, after careful thought, feel bound to give it loyal support. That does not at  
all deprive us of the full right to point out how very badly other things have been managed,  
and how much one is in agreement with the feeling the hon. Gentleman has just expressed.  
Compulsory military service is not necessarily a problem for a regular standing Army; but  
the only way of making us a nation of fighting men in time of war is by national service in  
time of peace. As all our habits in the past have been to live in a peaceful manner, we have  
entered all our wars unprepared or ill-prepared, and the delay before we are able to place an  
army in the field at the side of our Allies has been a very serious weakness, not only in the  
physical but in the moral sphere.

There is nothing contrary to the spirit of democracy in the principle of compulsory § 1695  
national defence, provided it is universal, provided that rich and poor men of every class and  
party have to pay their due at the same time. On the contrary—

**Mr. Cove** (Aberavon) All in the ranks, not in the officer class? §

**Mr. Churchill** Certainly. I am much in favour of national service being on a basis of §  
absolute equality. There used to be a period when it was possible to hire substitutes—it was  
so in the American Civil War—but these practices have long passed away. There is nothing  
contrary to the principles of democracy. On the contrary, it emphasises the principle of  
equality of sacrifice, and by mingling all classes together, in common duty and honourable

service, it is a favourable agent for diminishing class differences which exist in a free and varied society. It has been defended and practised by all the most advanced democratic countries in Europe since the French Revolution. Reliance for the defence of the soil on national armies rather than on long service professionals, or mercenaries as they were called, was, in the 19th century, at any rate, a strong barrier against reaction in a rapidly changing and, upon the whole, advancing and progressing world.

It is quite true that conscription for prolonged foreign service presents itself in a different light, and cannot be maintained as a permanency. The maintenance of garrisons abroad raises problems and requires qualities and conditions which are not reconcilable with the short-term service characteristic of national compulsory armies. That is found by every country where the army is raised by conscription and yet requires a certain proportion to be provided for foreign garrisons. Now, at this time, after a war in which the whole people took part has been waged and extraordinary confusion reigns in the world, it is necessary to have compulsion for service overseas—a hard thing for any Government to maintain. But that is not a basis on which our Army or any other army can indefinitely be maintained. The loss of India and Burma are lamentable and melancholy events, and they signalise, in striking manner, the rapid decline of British power and prestige. But living at a more humble level does, in fact, relieve us of some strain in this military sphere. The maintenance of an 1696 Army in India has been a great burden. To keep 50,000 or 60,000 men permanently in the Service entailed the maintenance of a professional Army, based upon long service. It is like holding the dumbbell at arm's length—quite tiring, very different from if it is held here. For several generations that has prevented the development of an effective national Army in this country, which for much the same expense could have been made far stronger than was possible.

I do not intend to go into the Cardwell system. Every one knows that foreign service required seven years with the Colours, five with the Reserve, or even eight with the Colours and four with the Reserve, which leaves a very small reserve to be built up; whereas, if we had not had to maintain this large force abroad, we could have developed two years with the Colours and two with the Reserve, or 1½ years with the Colours and 1½ with the Reserve, or, as the Government are doing, 1½ with the Colours, and 5½ with the Reserve. Had such a system been possible before the war, we could have had, at the outset, three or four times as many divisions ready to go, with results that cannot be measured; because as we now know from the German figures, very different conditions prevailed at Munich time, and even at the outbreak of war, from those which prevailed in May, 1940, when Hitler had reached the moment when he could strike.

Certainly, our power to keep the peace in the 20th century has been greatly hampered by the fact that we did not possess a national Army. We were in a position which laid us open to reproach from European countries, not only potential foes, but Allies and neutrals, that we would use everybody else's blood—every one has heard the taunt—to pursue our policy and gain our ends, and would content ourselves with implementing their efforts by sea power and money, and latterly, of course, by air power. It is arguable even that we tried to play too large a part in European affairs between the wars and before the first war, while not



being able or willing to accept the same conditions of service, or put up the same manpower as our Allies or potential Allies were forced to do. We should have carried far more weight in the councils of peace if we had had national service. 1697

There is no doubt that the passage of this Bill now, in this hour of dark depression, will help to sustain our otherwise failing influence in world affairs, and particularly in the United Nations organisation. That influence is being steadily reduced by the policy of the Government, both at home and abroad. It is remarkable that this curious Administration should step aside from its broad downward path to take this single solitary step towards a more hopeful national policy. We welcome the step all the more because of the contrast in which it throws so much else they have done. "So shines a good deed in a naughty world." It has long been recognised in this and other countries that there is a great gulf fixed between national service for military purposes and what is called industrial conscription, or the direction of labour, in time of peace. There is a great gulf. In the war we leapt that gulf, but never before has it been, and we earnestly trust it will not be, dreamed of in time of peace. There is no need to confuse the two.

Service to save the country has always from ancient times been considered the first duty of the citizen. It is however questionable, in my mind, whether any exemptions of young men from military service should be made in time of peace for particular industries. I was glad to hear the Minister of Labour say that it would be only for underground coalmining. Yes, away from the light of the sun, that is a different kind of sacrifice which is made. But even this seems, in a way, to reflect both upon the character of military service and the character of mining. It is one thing in wartime to stop miners from going to fight as soldiers, sailors and airmen, as they frequently wanted to do, and quite another to encourage a particular kind of young man to go into mining as a means of avoiding military service. It may be necessary in this crisis, but it is not a healthy basis for the State or society as a whole. Both services—the Armed Forces and mining—are honourable, and nothing should be done which seems to reflect upon either. It would certainly be a most unfortunate expedient to have, as a permanent matter, to try to increase the manpower in the mines by a class of youths who dislike military service. I should be sorry to see that develop over a long period of 1698 time.

The fact that we support the Government on the broad principle of national service for the Armed Forces in no way weakens our intention to censure the waste of manpower by those Forces. On the contrary, it should strengthen us in our duty to do so. I say without hesitation that the present condition of all three Services, as a result of Ministerial incompetence since the war, is disgraceful I hope that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff is to be at his desk giving his whole mind to this matter, and that he will be able on all occasions to give the fullest possible assistance to the Minister of Defence, in order that the matter may be viewed from a central point of view. General Montgomery is a very gifted man, and I hope that he will be close to the Minister of Defence in all the months that are to come.

I am very grateful to the House for giving me so much of their attention. [Interruption.] As we are all going to work and vote together, we may as well be on friendly terms, so that the

House may be responsible for insisting on the proper use being made in the Forces of young men taken from so many important industries and walks of life, and upon a proper proportion of fighting strength being developed as a result of so much sacrifice and expense. It seems to me that all parties and sections of parties might join in this with equal earnestness. If Parliament did its duty, and if the Government allowed Parliament to do its duty, there would be set up a Parliamentary committee of all parties, similar to the National Expenditure Committee, which did such useful work during the war; or even a joint committee of both Houses to investigate, with full power to call for persons and papers, the use of manpower in the three Forces, and with power, by leave of the House, to sit in secret from time to time. Such a body would be of the greatest value, not only to the country as a whole, but to the Service Ministers, and to the Minister of Defence, none of whom is able, apparently, to cope with the problem himself.

**Mr. S. Silverman** On this matter of Parliamentary control, the right hon. Gentleman may or may not have noticed the proviso to Clause 24 which provides that this Act shall remain in force for five years, but, thereafter, can be extended by Order in Council. The right hon. Gentleman's party in this Parliament, whenever a Bill has been put forward with such an arrangement, have always opposed it in the interests of Parliamentary control. Do they intend to oppose it on this occasion? § 1699

**Mr. Churchill** I cannot possibly endeavour to look forward to so long as five years. For anyone who is so far advanced in age of life as I am, it would appear to be presumptuous. Even if this serious obstacle did not present itself, I should not be anxious to face more difficulties and troubles than those by which we are surrounded at the present time. §

**Mr. Silverman** I feel certain that the right hon. Gentleman is taking far too pessimistic a view. In any case, that has not prevented his party from opposing this provision in a number of other Bills introduced since the beginning of this Session. §

**Mr. Churchill** The hon. Gentleman knows as well as anybody that Parliament is master. If there is a Parliament which is against the prolongation of such a Measure, no such Measure can be prolonged, whatever the provisions in the Bill. On the other hand, if there were a general feeling that it was in accordance with the national interest and not in disharmony with the characteristics of our British life, it might be that the House would be content to see it passed through without it being a great cause of dissension. §

I must return to the point, which is my last one, that I believe that there are many scores of millions which could be saved from the present immense total of f000 million demanded this

year on the Estimates of the three Services. I would very much like to have had a chance to get loose upon them with my red pencil. I am perfectly certain that we could have had a very considerable saving, and I am perfectly certain that this could be achieved simultaneously with a positive increase in the fighting power of the Services. Therefore, we shall support His Majesty's Government in the Lobby tomorrow night, and on other occasions, when necessary, throughout this Bill; but let no Minister imagine that we do not regard their wasteful, inefficient and incompetent administration of the fighting Services as a scandal of the first order. 1700

5.20 p.m.

§

**Mr. Hopkin Morris (Carmarthen)** The right hon. Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) has, in his matchless way, made great play with the position of those of us who sit on the Liberal Benches. In the name of consistency, we must stand by the same flag and the same view, and I think that that is the best tribute that can be paid. By what flag are we standing? We are not standing by any pacifist flag. That has never been our flag. We have favoured conscription in time of national emergency and in time of war, and I think that we are entitled to do that, because conscription in time of war is the best system. There are other coercions besides the coercion of law that can be brought to bear—there is the coercion of opinion. Anyone who remembers the state of this country at the beginning of the first world war, will remember that the issue of white banners and similar devices made the position of the young men in the country subject to far greater oppression than conscription. Conscription is the most free system in time of war, but equally it is the most oppressive in time of peace. §

The right hon. Member for Woodford is one of the great figures of the world. It is because of that, that I would draw his attention and the attention of his party to what happened during this last world war. In the first world war, the Government of which he was then a distinguished Member led the country into war and led it through successfully because they commanded the universal moral support of the country. Does that count for nothing? In the last war, which the right hon. Gentleman led, his broadcast speeches, when we were standing alone in 1940, were worth battalions of men in themselves. Why? Because, spoken with his power and eloquence, they commanded the full and universal support of this country. That was a moral factor in itself. So powerful was that moral factor that when one examines countries like Russia, France, Germany and Italy—every one of which had conscription—we find that every one of them, at one time or another in the two world wars, was defeated—the only country that came through two world wars undefeated, triumphantly, was this country. Today the Government are introducing a Bill of conscription in peace time, in 1947, when, as the right hon. Gentleman has said, all our enemies have surrendered unconditionally. That is a remarkable situation and would have been impossible but for the free spirit of this country. It is perfectly true that training counts, that arms matter. I am not disagreeing with that; but there is something far more important than arms; there is something far more important than training—and that is the spirit of the men 1701

behind the arms. That is the spirit which the right hon. Gentleman expressed and commanded; that is the spirit which was missing from those other countries.

It is interesting to note how conscription came to be fastened on the neck of Europe. It was fastened on the neck of Europe by Napoleon out of ideas of the French Revolution, and under the dictatorship of Napoleon. It was Napoleon who lost Waterloo. France abolished conscription, and it came back again with Napoleon the Third. The Treaty of Versailles imposed a voluntary system upon Germany. That voluntary system, I suggest, was largely contributory to making the German Army, between the war periods, what it proved to be. If we examine the German forces more closely, the voluntary part of its forces, the S.S. men and the Air Force, they were the strong part of those forces, but the conscripted part of the forces was its source of weakness. France had conscription, and France was defeated. It would have been better for us in the last war if the Treaty of Versailles had provided for a voluntary system in France and conscription in Germany. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head; but he is the greatest witness of the march of events during that period. He himself knows that better than anyone else in the world, because he was the champion of the free spirit. I wonder if he had been leading this country in a world war of 20 years after conscription had been introduced whether this country would have gone down like France? Would he himself have commanded the free spirit of the country and have been the free leader that he is?

I listened with amazement to the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Labour. He dealt, as the right hon. Gentleman said, lucidly and clearly with the provisions of the Bill, but he said not one word about the principles of the Bill; not one word why we should 1702 bring in a Bill of this sort in peace time—the greatest departure from the traditions of this country which one could imagine taking place in this House. I hope that the House will allow me to say what I have in my mind about this subject. I make it quite clear that I am speaking for myself. I have already indicated that I am not a pacifist, but we are very fond of talking of the civilisation of the West as being a Christian civilisation. What do I mean by that? Leaving aside all form of religion, merely interpreting it as a form of life in the West, if we examine the whole of ancient civilisation, so far as I am able to examine it, we find no trace of the doctrine of the person or the doctrine of free will anywhere. It is the doctrine of the gods ruling the man and using the State as an instrument. That is the whole doctrine of the ancient world in all its forms so far as I am aware.

The modern Western world, exclusive of Russia, which I treat for all purposes as part of Asia, has grown up on the bases of the doctrine of free will and a free personality—a distinction between the man and the State. It has grown up on that separate doctrine. It has affected the views on education; it has affected the whole of the commercial arrangements of the commercial world. Instead of the law of status characteristic of the old world we have the law of contract of the modern world. Instead of the education of a class in the ancient world we have the education of man as man's right in the modern world. It was not by extending that development between the two wars but by negating it that Germany and Italy reverted to the views of the old world by making the citizen a completely subservient being to the State with the State having complete control over the whole of life. That is reversion

and that is what we are faced with at the present time. When I speak of this civilisation being in danger I mean by that the reversion to the old world form of slavery in one form or another. Right hon. Gentlemen on the Government Front Bench are today taking their share and responsibility for that reversion. They may be doing this instead of providing for the safety of the country or the realm in time of war, because they may be imperilling this country in time of war. That is why we stand by the old flag. We stand by the old flag because we are interested in the maintenance of civilisation represented by this country and we stand by the safety of this realm in time of war. 1703

**Mr. K. Lindsay** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. and learned Member, but he should remember that Germany and Italy did not introduce national service by a vote of a free people, whereas Switzerland, Sweden and many other countries did consult the interests of the people by a free vote of the people. That is the difference between Parliamentary democracy and something else. §

**Mr. Hopkin Morris** I am not at pains to justify conscription on a democratic basis but I would point out that a democratic basis is not a sufficient justification, because democracy can be as great a form of tyranny as any other tyranny unless we ask the question, What is the form of democracy? §

**Mr. Churchill** That in Switzerland? §

**Mr. Hopkin Morris** I am not sure judging by the sign of the times in this country or in any other country where democracy is prevailing but democracy might become a tyranny. §

I do not propose to enter into details of this Bill, because I hope on the Committee stage to deal with them, but let me take one class in this Bill for whom I hold no brief at all—the conscientious objectors. The conscientious objectors are the touchstone of liberty in this Bill. That is why they are important. What are the provisions? The provisions in this Bill are precisely the provisions for exemption that were incorporated in the Acts during the war. They deal with conditional exemption, unconditional exemption, and provision for non-combatant service on the assumption apparently that conditions in war time and conditions in peace time are the same. That is an idle comparison. In war time we can easily distinguish between those entitled to conditional exemption and those entitled to unconditional exemption. Unconditional exemption means that the conscientious objector opposes war entirely. He says, in effect, "I will neither serve with the Armed Forces nor engage in any industry during the war which will further the war." Whether we agree with him or not, that is his position. In those beliefs he was entitled to unconditional exemption under the 1704



law.

Conditional exemption—and here is the crux of the whole position—means that a man says, "I object to killing, I object to serving in the Armed Forces, but I do not object to doing any civilian work for the furtherance of the purposes of war in the interests of the safety of the State." Under those conditions we give him conditional exemption, but he engages so far as he can in accordance with his conscience to carry on the work of the State. In other words, in time of war the State can direct men in that way in the interests of its survival. Upon what principle are the Government now going to give conditional exemption to a man? What work are they going to say a man is to do? The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition said that he hoped that this Bill would not be looked upon as leading to conscription of labour. Does not this Clause of conditional exemption provide the bridge for it and introduce conscription of labour by the back door? What is the answer to that?

Take the case of the deferred people, the miners. There is nothing in this Bill to say what the liability of the miner is. He will be deferred while he remains working in the mines. If he remains there until he is 26 or over 26 or any age after 26 the liability for military service, whether he is called up or not, is not discharged. That remains. Is not that a veiled direction of labour? If not, what else is it? For the Minister of Defence I have a very great respect. I believe he is a conscientious man, and I have not bothered to look up the innumerable splendid speeches that he and others in the Government have made in other times, but every one of the arguments they used then are valid today.

**Mr. Yates (Birmingham, Ladywood)** More so.

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**Mr. Hopkin Morris** Yes, more so. They opposed conscription in 1939, but in 1939 this country was in peril. That is a very different position from what it is in today. I have already said that in times of emergency and war conscription is a totally different proposition. I hope that the House will give very serious consideration to this Bill before they give away the greatest bulwark of the safety of the realm—the spirit of a free man. I hope that this Bill will be rejected, for I have never heard a Bill of this magnitude introduced into this House with lesser justification and merely with a lucid explanation of the provisions contained in it.

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1705

5.38 p.m.

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**Mr. Rhys Davies (Westhoughton)** I beg to move, to leave out "now," and, at the end of the Question, to add, "upon this day six months."

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The Amendment which I am moving, and which I think is appropriate at this stage, is, in effect, that this Bill be rejected by the House of Commons. Before I come to that, however, I

should like to turn for a moment or two to the remarks of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition. I hope that my hon. Friends on this side of the House will see that his support and that of the Conservative Party of this Measure, is the best condemnation of it. The mere fact that the Tory Party support a Conscription Bill presented to this House by a Labour Government ought to mean that the Bill should not be passed into law. The right hon. Gentleman taunted some of us on this side of the House for ruining the country by not supporting conscription previously. He then taunted the Government with changing their tune. The right hon. Gentleman is the last person in the world who should taunt anybody about changing their politics.

**Mr. Churchill** I would remind the House that only three weeks ago the Prime Minister §  
reproached me for having the same views on India for 50 years.

**Mr. Davies** I remember the right hon. Gentleman contesting an Election many years ago; §  
he was then the Liberal candidate for the Exchange Division of Manchester and he was being opposed by a Tory, the late Sir William Joynson-Hicks. The tune he was playing then was certainly different from the one he is playing here today. I know what the working classes think of the right hon. Gentleman, but I dare not quote in this place the language they employ in coal mines and factories about him. Nevertheless, he is a man whom I respect for his genius, but I say also that he has brought more ruin upon this country and upon Europe than any other statesman of our time [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Well, he asked for our views.

1706

**Mr. Churchill** It is only the truth that wounds. §

**Mr. Davies** I cannot forget his escapade in Russia at the end of the first world war; the §  
repercussions of that escapade by the way are being felt even now in the Moscow Conference.

Having said all that, I will now come to the Bill. I am a sad man standing here tonight. This is the most tragic day for me during the quarter of a century that I have been in this House. I have worked for years with many of my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench to build this party and I know their personal views. I hardly think that their hearts are in this business at all. I believe that they would all say that they do not like this Bill; and if they do not like the Measure I should like to know who it is that does, and what compels them to bring it before the House. As I said, this is a very sad day for me. I was there when the Labour Party was formed; and having spoken at street corners and on platforms a thousand times preaching the exalted gospel of the Labour Party when we were a few, I never thought I would live to

see the day when right hon. Friends of mine would stand up in this House to introduce military conscription in peacetime, especially when I have heard some of those same right hon. Gentlemen denounce conscription more fiercely than I will ever be able to do.

Right hon. Gentlemen who are in the Government damage democracy, Parliament and Socialism in imposing conscription in peace-time. It is no use criticising a Government for doing this when we are in Opposition, if when we come over to this side of the House we do the same thing. The people will not be deceived by such somersaults. I have been here long enough to see—and I hope my Liberal Friends opposite will not mind me saying this—a party as strong as the present Labour party wiped clean out of public life except for a few who are the most intelligent of them. I have no illusions about what damage can be done to the cause of the common people by a few statesmen.

The Bill imposes conscription for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the war. Incidentally, I cannot understand my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench always comparing the number of men in the Forces as between 1947 and 1944, as if that 1707 were a proper comparison. The real comparison, of course, is the strength of the Forces as between 1947 and 1937 when we were at peace. Let me say, therefore, that there must be some power behind somewhere that has induced the Government to introduce this Bill. I should like to know what those powers are; and I shall be forgiven if I am suspicious of secret powers behind Governments, especially after what happened at Yalta which was disclosed over a week ago in Moscow.

I am terrified just now of the rise of a third party in this State; a party that is not elected, a military party to whom Ministers of State play marionettes as is manifest by the introduction of Bills of this kind. Some of our military generals have recently been announcing policy in public, but surely the right person to announce policy publicly are the right hon. Gentlemen who represent the Government. It would be well for the younger men in our party to realise that the Labour movement emerged into public life in this country to challenge the military mind—the mind that always thinks in the terms of its profession; and seeks to create fear among the people that there is constantly an enemy at the gates. The military chiefs have apparently convinced my right hon. Friends that there is even now an enemy at the gates, and they have introduced this Bill. I sometimes wonder—now that France cannot fight, America, I suppose, will not fight us, Italy cannot fight, Japan cannot fight and Germany cannot fight—who are we going to fight next. Who is now the enemy at the gate? There is only one country left that we could possibly intend to fight. Let me say with great sorrow that, having been recently in America, I was amazed and dismayed at the deep hatred and antagonism towards Russia in the United States. Let me express the hope that this little country of ours, these glorious islands, are not by some secret agreement, to be turned into a base for American operations in Europe. I would not like to think that that would happen to our native land.

This Bill violates all our traditions, not only of the Labour Party but of all parties. May I make it clear that no Government—Liberal or Conservative—has at any time ever imposed conscription in peacetime on the people of these islands? This Bill is a challenge to the 1708

whole conception of international Socialism that a Labour Government should be the first in the history of the British people to impose military conscription in peacetime. I do not know whether the Government realise exactly the implications of what they are doing. We are told that the main reason for this Bill is our commitments. Before we pass this Measure is it not a fair question to ask what are those commitments which have made it necessary? We are coming out of India, and the right hon. Gentleman opposite said that we have 60,000 troops there. We are leaving Burma, we are leaving Egypt, we have come out of Indonesia and we are coming out of Greece shortly. I suppose, too, that some day soon we shall come out of Austria and we cannot remain very much longer in Germany because Germany is sucking the whole of the economic life of Europe down into ruin. As an American statesman once said, "If you want to keep a fellow in the ditch, you must remain down in the ditch with him." That is exactly what is happening to our people in Germany now. Therefore, I ask, "Where are these commitments that warrant the maintenance of all these Forces?"

**Mr. Leslie (Sedgefield)** The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned Palestine. §

**Mr. Davies** But surely we do not require all these troops in Palestine? §

**Mr. Leslie** The hon. Gentleman did not mention Palestine. §

**Mr. Davies** If the hon. Gentleman wants a real quarrel on that issue perhaps we had better have it out now. §

**Mr. Leslie** I merely pointed out that the hon. Gentleman had not included Palestine. §

**Mr. Davies** The other stock argument in favour of this Bill is that we must have new recruits in order to relieve the boys who have been abroad for so many years. I admit that that is a very powerful argument, but to those who argue thus I would say, "Why on earth should any British soldier be stationed on foreign soil?" We can never police the world; we are too small a nation for that. I have had no education beyond that of an elementary school but I have learned that the first world war destroyed one-half of our coat industry which has never recovered, and one of the reasons for destroying it was to conscript 70,000 miners for the last war. That is what conscription does. Half the Lancashire textile industry was also destroyed by the first world war. That is what is wrong with this country. The economy of the nation has been damaged beyond repair by the heavy weight of military § 1709

expenditure, and, apparently, our Government are going to add to that weight by this Bill.

The strangest thing of all about this Measure seems to me to be this. Supposing—God forbid—that the Tory Party had won at the last Election and sat on this side of the House now, led by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) and that they introduced this Bill, word for word, and we were all on the other side, all my Labour colleagues would then have talked exactly as I am talking now, and the right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Defence, with his deep Nonconformist conscience and his international co-operative sentiments, would stand and thump at the Box and denounce conscription as the vilest thing man had ever invented. That sort of somersault will not do if this party is to live. If a thing is wrong when the Tory Party is in power it cannot be right because it is done by a Labour Government. It is clear, of course, that if the Labour Government imposes conscription, although they say it will be for only ten years after the end of the war, it will nevertheless be fastened on this nation for good.

I know that some of my younger friends think that the Labour Party has come to stay for good and that Socialism has come to rule the whole of Europe and nothing is going to change that. But there is no finality in politics; and if a Socialist Government in this country descends to militarising this nation, and shackles this free people, another movement will arise to clean the stable and bring the nation back to freedom once again. There is a new conception arising in this connection. It is argued by some that this is not tyranny because it is imposed by a Labour Government—and that slavery imposed by your own colleague is not so bad. A pair of handcuffs is not easier to wear even though it be shining with a Socialist solution. I object to tyranny whether imposed by the Tories, the Liberals, the Protestants, the Catholics, the Socialists, the Communists, or any other "ists." Tyranny imposed upon man is no more acceptable simply because the master has changed. 1710

It is argued that conscription provides equality of sacrifice. What humbug. I know three sons who were of military age during the last war when conscription came in. Not one of them was called up. One was a schoolmaster, another an accountant and the other a civil engineer. They were all exempted. If their father had been a coalminer, and had brought up his sons to be labourers or shop assistants, all three would have been in the Forces and might possibly have been killed. This Bill does not apply to daughters; it is only sons who are affected. There is no equality of service in this. The lame, the halt, the blind, the idiot, the imbecile, the lunatic, the minister of the Gospel and Member of Parliament—all are exempt, and I wonder sometimes which is which after hearing some of the speeches in favour of this Bill.

I was very pleased to hear the hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Hopkin Morris) speaking of the rights of human personality. I am in favour of nationalising everything that is inanimate for the common good, but I do not believe in that form of Socialism which ties man and makes him a slave to the inanimate thing. Yet, that is what we are doing now. There are ex-miners on the 'Government Front Bench. As an ex-miner I would not have put my name to this Bill. "Ah," they say, "so long as you remain down in the pit you will not be called up." I have been a colliery worker myself and I came out of the pit



as soon as I could. The Government now tell the underground worker, "The alternative for you is either the pit or the barracks." That is industrial conscription if you like, and it is a very slippery slope to something worse. The next thing the Government will say is that they will not call up farm workers, because they are essential for the community. Then they would say to the farm worker, "The turnip field or the barracks for you." So it goes on, and as one of the oldest trade union officials here—I have been over 40 years at the job—I protest against the fact that industrial conscription is deeply embedded in the provisions of this Bill. If you accept military conscription you cannot argue against direction of labour; and 1711 any trade union official who votes for this Bill will do so at his peril.

I was in America when the recent election for Congress was on. The Democratic Party were defeated, ignominiously. Why? I know one of the reasons why—the reason that was given to me. When the women of America went to the polls they remembered what the late Mr. Roosevelt had said at the beginning of the war that no mother's son would be sent out of the country to fight. Having been in this Labour movement when some of my colleagues in this Parliament today belonged to the Tory Party, let me tell them that there is political dynamite for the Labour Government in this Bill. This Measure will not frighten the Russians if a war with Russia is to ensue—and I am sorry to think that that may be at the back of the minds of some of the people who have advised my right hon. Friend. If we are going to fight Russia on a manpower basis, we are defeated before we start.

Let me turn back for a while to a point made earlier in the Debate. On military grounds, conscription is of no avail. France invented it and Germany perfected the conscript military machine, and both came down to the dust. The two great nations, on the other hand, ourselves and America which relied on the voluntary system in peacetime came out on top. That is history. What annoys me, above all else, is that we have told the Germans and the Japanese that they cannot have conscription, while, at the same time, we are imposing it on ourselves. What hypocrisy! People call me a pacifist. They do not know me, or they would not call me that and that alone. I am thinking of the welfare of my country. I am a patriot; I love these islands; I have tramped over them for many years. The best part of Britain, of course, is Wales. I like our institutions too. Here is an institution—Parliament—the one place in the world, I suppose, that would suffer a man like me in wartime. I am proud of that, but I am ashamed that Labour makes itself responsible for this Measure.

Let us take the money side of this question; this may appeal to hon. Members. Next year, we shall spend £900 million on the fighting Services. Let us see what that means when reduced to actual figures. It means £20 per head for every man, woman and child in the 1712 country. For a man and his wife with three children, it means that they must find —100 a year, or £2 a week, for the fighting Services. Let us see all this in its proper perspective. It the right hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench do not mind my saying so, we in the Labour Party used to revel in this sort of statistical argument, and they might as well listen to some of it now. Next year, we shall spend on the fighting Services seven times as much as on education, 11 times as much as on health and housing and eight times as much as on old age pensions. Yet, is it not true that the nation is groaning under the weight of taxation while we are proposing to spend this £900 million? We shall spend next year on the fighting

Services nearly as much as the total of the American Loan. By the way, they have altered part of the Lord's Prayer in America since we got the Loan. Hon. Members may be interested to know about it. They do not say now, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"; they say, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." I asked them to put in the word "British" in the appropriate sentence.

**Professor Gruffydd** Does not the hon. Gentleman remember that we say that in Wales, §  
too?

**Mr. Davies** Yes, but the Welsh people are not in debt to anybody. I was taught in my §  
youth to believe the things that I am now saying; and, if hon. Gentlemen criticise and taunt me for what I am saying, let them understand that it was men like Keir Hardie and Bob Smillie were my teachers. When the Government say to us that we are embarrassing them by moving this Amendment, it is pertinent to ask why are they embarrassing us? We cling to the faith; they do not. If we had never preached this gospel which I am now preaching, there would have been no Labour Government; and when we depart from that faith, we must not imagine that the people do not understand what is happening. There is a judgment coming some day, for all that we are doing now.

Let me now say a word about one of the wider implications of conscription. Foreign commitments? Yes. This Measure is being debated during the week in which Good Friday falls. The youth of Britain, under this Bill, will not be crucified between two thieves as § 1713  
of old; they will be crucified instead between three great Powers fighting for mastery over the petrol of the Middle East. That is what this Bill will do, and the right hon. Gentlemen proposing it, I suppose, will know that what I am saying is true.

My last word is a quotation, and the Tory Party always pays due deference to its author—General Smuts—whom they regard as one of the great pillars of Empire. This is what he said about conscription, very much more eloquently and pertinently than anything I could say: "While the Great Powers are allowed to raise conscript armies without hindrance or protest, it will be vain to expect that we can preserve world peace. If the instrument is ready for use, the occasion will arise, and men will arise to use it. I look upon conscription as the taproot of militarism; unless that is cut, all our labours will eventually be in vain." Finally, in moving this Amendment, I would raise a slogan adopting words that became famous during first world war—" This Bill shall not pass."

6.7 p.m. §

**Mrs. Florence Paton (Rushcliffe)** I beg to second the Amendment. §

I feel no elation, but rather a sense of depression, because of the fact that I am doing this.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Members of the Government must have known, when contemplating the imposition of conscription in peace time, that there would be some, at least, who could not violate the principles of a lifetime spent in the Labour movement and quickly attune their ideas and actions to the acceptance of a Measure so opposed to their deepest convictions. We would have challenged any who had dared to suggest that our Labour Government would ask for conscription immediately after a war had been won, in which this country fought against the worst tyranny and despotism that the world has known. We would have challenged any who asserted that, alone among the nations of the Commonwealth, a Labour Government would ask this country to bear the never-ending strain of seeing a large part of its youth forced year after year into the strait jacket of military conscription and the surrender of freedom of choice. We would have declared our faith that no Labour Government would so reverse the long tradition of personal freedom in matters of life and death, with- out, at least, first submitting such a break with the splendid past to the electorate. And we would have evidence to prove that our faith was justified. 1714

One of the arguments brought out by the Prime Minister, by the Minister of Labour and by other hon. Members, to show the necessity for conscription, was the argument that, before the war, poverty and destitution were the recruiting agents, that it is now our purpose to maintain a policy of full employment, and, therefore, these factors could no longer be depended upon to provide the necessary recruits as in the bad old days. Everyone in this House, I am sure, is glad of that. There was an earlier occasion, when, in dealing with this aspect of the problem, the Prime Minister wrote something different. He wrote this about conscription: "The more nations advance in economic welfare, the less effective is hunger as chief recruiting sergeant, and the more do militarists find the resort to conscription." I can only conclude that, in this decision, the militarist minds in the Services and elsewhere have won a great victory.

I want to say something now about industrial conscription. I was very pleased to see what my right hon. and learned Friend the President of the Board of Trade said in a speech at Bristol this weekend, in which he declared that the Labour Government had no intention of introducing industrial conscription, and that the Labour movement would not have it. I want to know what answer the Prime Minister can give to those of us who fear that military conscription in peace time is the prelude to industrial conscription. Indeed, as I see it, industrial conscription is the natural corollary to military conscription, although I am sure that the Members of the Government do not want that. We on this side of the House hope the Labour Government will be in for a long period of office in which to carry out its great programme of social reconstruction, but, in the event of any change of Government and a return of a Conservative Government, it is completely in line with Conservative philosophy and practice, not only to have military conscription, provided by a Labour Government, but the domination of the workers of this country whom they desire to see disciplined to fit into their industrial system. Here, I quote the Prime Minister again on this point: 1715

"Conscription is, in fact, an admirable machine for regimenting the workers; hence its popularity with reactionaries." I now want to refer to something which the Prime Minister

said when he stated that we must have a conscript citizen army: "A few Socialists have at times—" as many of my hon. Friends are doing now—"pleaded for a democratic conscriptive citizen army, but armies and navies are almost necessarily autocratic, and experience has shown that the power of conscription is too dangerous to be entrusted to any man or any body of men." My right hon. Friend has his disciples. We learnt well of our teacher, so well, in fact, that we who are opposing this Bill today still believe that conscription is too dangerous to be entrusted to any man or body of men.

As I understand conscription and what it implies, it violates the personality of immature people. Tomorrow, we celebrate the coming into force of the [Education Act, 1944](#). We are going to raise the school-leaving age to 15, and we are also hoping that we shall develop an educational system far better than that which we have had in the past, in which young people shall have learnt how to think for themselves. As they grow older, by learning how to think for themselves they will surely know how to choose for themselves. When the time comes when they have learnt how to choose for themselves and are decided in their choice, having been helped by an education which is designed for the perfection of their physical, mental and spiritual powers, the State then comes along and says, "We have got something in which you can have no right of choice. We take away your right of choice. We take away your free will, and we say that, whether you like it or not, this State, with all its power, will compel you to do what it wishes you to do, and that is, to learn how to destroy life."

I believe that I speak for the great majority of mothers when I say that it is not for this purpose that mothers bear and nurture their children. But all the military experts are not agreed about this. We are told that it establishes the principle of equality. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) said that this afternoon. I would quote here a military expert whom, I think, anyone would regard as a military expert of the [1716](#) first importance. He says: "There is no true equality in subjecting to the same service men who are temperamentally unequal—those who are instinctively fighters, and those who are too sensitive to make fighting material. The latter will be a danger to the Army. Yet they may be of much greater value to the nation's future. For they are the stuff of which artists and thinkers are made... Conscriptors who cannot see this show themselves barbarians."

**Mr. Oliver Stanley** (Bristol, West) Who is the expert?

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**Mrs. Paton** Captain Liddell Hart.

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On the question of the survival of this country in the event of a future war, it is a generally accepted belief that there is no possibility of this nation surviving in the appalling event of another war. No national armaments, and no conscript army, however large, can prevent this country from becoming the cockpit of Europe, should humanity so lose its senses as to allow another war to break out. For us, as, indeed, for the rest of the world too, there is only one way of salvation from destruction, and this lies in the success of U.N.O. To suggest any

other hope is to deceive ourselves and, what is more, criminally to deceive the innocent masses who rely on us.

**Vice-Admiral Taylor (Paddington, South)** How does the hon. Lady know that U.N.O. would function efficiently unless we had a strong Army, Navy and Air Force? §

**Mrs. Paton** I do not believe that the success of U.N.O. depends upon the adoption of conscription in this country. On the contrary, I believe that, by concentrating on the principle of conscription in this connection, we lose the dynamic force and power which the ideal of peace for the world through U.N.O. possesses. Here I come into line with the hon. and learned Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Hopkin Morris). There is still a deep well of desire for a great service to the world, such as this, among many young folk. I do not believe that our young men are decadent, or that they do not want to respond to a great ideal. The true success of U.N.O. would spring from the voluntary service, freely offered, of young men and women who, as world citizens, are prepared to join up for the task of preserving world peace. Before such an inspiring appeal is properly launched, and while this nation is still war weary and tired after a horrible experience, our Labour Government have concluded that there is no possibility of an adequate response to such a grand appeal—hence this Bill. 1717 §

This, to me, is an indication of defeatism in the mind of the Government with regard to future peace. Whilst declaiming their faith in U.N.O., they vitiate this declaration by adopting a measure of rearmament, never previously accepted by this country except in the direst necessity. Where lies this dire necessity now? Where is the trouble coming from? Who are we opposing, and who is going to attack us? It also indicates a lack of faith in the power of an inspiring ideal to produce the volunteers necessary to fulfil any reasonable commitments.

As to these commitments, I listened to practically the whole of the Defence Debate, and I was much struck, as most other hon. Members must have been, by the almost unanimously expressed opinion, from all sides of the House, that the size of the Armed Forces contemplated in the White Paper was too large. Surely, the world must be astonished that this small country, with less than one-third of the population of the United States of America, should necessarily have to provide Armed Forces as great as those of America. What on earth are we coming to when this little country has to bear such a burden in the defence of the world?

**Vice-Admiral Taylor** We have got the Empire, even though it is fast disappearing. §

**Mrs. Paton** The hon. and gallant Gentleman lives in the 19th century, and cannot get away from it. What defence are a few conscripted men in a future war? When that dastardly §



crime of dropping the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima was committed, 80,000 people, including, no doubt, thousands of conscripts and potential conscripts, were wiped out. What good were the conscripts in the defence of their country? Here, again, I would quote the military expert: "It seems to me that, while there is little doubt whether the atomic bomb will end war or end the world or both, it should, at least, spell the end of conscription, for it makes nonsense of that military system."

**Mr. Stanley** Which expert is that?

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**Mrs. Paton** The same military expert. This country has dedicated itself to peace and freedom, and peace with freedom. Military compulsion and industrial compulsion are denials of that freedom. I believe that peace can only come through the United Nations Organisation, and through international agreement for measures of disarmament. There is no other way. By passing this conscription Bill, we are doing something that is absolutely futile. We must make U.N.O. work, and we must use the power of a great ideal to secure the support necessary to make it work. That is our only way of salvation. Because I believe that conscription is socially, economically and morally wrong, I shall go into the Lobby tomorrow and vote against this Bill.

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1718

6.25 p.m.

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**Major Legge-Bourke (Isle of Ely)** Many years ago my grandfather, who was a Liberal all his life, said to Mr Lloyd George, as he then was, that the trouble with him was that he spent too much time looking at the reflection of Snowdon upside down in the water. I cannot help feeling today that the hon. Member for Westhoughton (Mr. Rhys Davies), who, if I may say so, somewhat resembles Mr. Lloyd George, is, perhaps, looking at the matter from a rather inverted point of view. The last two speeches were made with great sincerity, but with, I submit, a complete lack of conception of what the problems really are, and of what are the ways of meeting them. The hon. Lady the Member for Rushcliffe (Mrs. Paton) said that young men did not need conscription to make them respond to a great ideal. If that were so, I would agree with her. But it is not so. Were it so, I do not believe that His Majesty's Government would have presented this Bill to the House. If we could say that sufficient young men were coming forward to, man our Forces to an adequate extent and to keep our Army, Navy and Air Force as efficient as possible, I do not believe that we should have this Bill before the House today. But the hon. Lady made one remark which I must insist on taking up. She accused the Conservative Party of desiring industrial and military conscription.

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**Mrs. Paton** I said that it was in line with Conservative practice in the past.

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**Major Legge-Bourke** It seems to me that whichever way the hon. Lady said it, it means much the same thing. If that is the case, I would ask her to read the history of the Conservative Party, and to realise that one of the things in which it believes is that the British subject should have the right to refuse service in the Armed Forces. It is perfectly true today to say, as the hon. Lady and the mover of this Amendment have said, that the Government are guilty of political tergiversation. It is sometimes a question for this House to decide whether political tergiversation should be allowed to go by or not. It seems to me that on this occasion it is most important that we should decide to let it go by. I believe that both the hon. Lady and the mover of the Amendment have harped too much on the fact that the Government have not carried out the policy which they and their party have for many years proclaimed. But there have been other occasions in this Parliament when the Government have been guilty of political tergiversation, and when we on this side of the House have allowed it to go by. We intend to allow it to go by this time, because we believe that there are overriding factors which must be borne in mind.

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The hon. Lady said that she was speaking for the mothers of this country. May I also speak for the fathers of this country? [Laughter]. I am sure it must be quite clear to the whole House that the associations are quite clearly distinct. If I may, I should like to take a rather more serious line for a moment. My own father was killed in the first world war, and I have a son. I saw enough of the last war, and I do not wish to see another one. I would ask the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends to appreciate that, just because some hon. Members on this side of the House are supporting the Government on this Bill, we are not doing so merely because we have militaristic minds, and because, as the hon. Member for Westhoughton said, a militaristic mind instils fear. It is not for that reason at all.

It is because we are trying to be realists and weigh up what our commitments are and what depends upon the action we take today and tomorrow. Surely, we have to appreciate from the very beginning that there can be no peace in the world unless there is justice, and who is there in this House who is rash enough to say that in Europe today there is justice? I do not believe that, in the long run, justice is best established by military force, but I do say that when there is in the world any Power which understands only the rule of force, that is the only way to meet it.

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**Mr. Shurmer** (Birmingham, Sparkbrook) Which is the Power?

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**Major Legge-Bourke** I would have thought it was perfectly obvious which is the Power, and I have no objection to saying so.

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**Mr. Shurmer** Tell us, then. §

**Major Legge-Bourke** I consider Russia— §

**Mr. Shurmer** We thought so. §

**Major Legge-Bourke** I consider Russia understands force as the rule today, as other totalitarian States before her have understood it. §

**Mr. Shurmer** Now the cat is out of the bag. §

**Major Legge-Bourke** I should not have thought it was a very closely tied bag. §

**Mr. Shurmer** We know what you will do at the next General Election. The hon. and gallant Member said it—Russia. §

**Mr. Speaker** The hon. Member should not carry on a sort of conversation across the Floor of the House. He should reserve his points until he makes a speech. §

**Major Legge-Bourke** Thank you for your Ruling, Mr. Speaker. Today in Europe there are some people who are still frightened, and one of the things for which this last war was fought was to abolish fear. It is still a long way from being abolished, in my opinion. The hon. Lady the Member for Rushcliffe said she desired the success of U.N.O. So do I, but I believe there is no surer way of guaranteeing its disaster than by allowing this country, of all countries, to become weak in the eyes of those who believe in the rule of force. It is, therefore, with considerable regret that I find myself having to support this Bill. §

I have been a regular soldier all my working life before I came into this House, and I believe very strongly that the ideal form of Army is an Army which has a voluntary spirit predominant in it. But I cannot, in all conscience, come to this House and say that I do not approve of conscription today. I honestly and sincerely wish I could. The fact remains that today we are up against something which requires something more powerful than can 1721

be provided through voluntary effort. We as a country—I am not trying to make any party distinction here—have for many years believed that the citizens of this country should have the right to choose whether or not they should go into the Armed Forces. Let us hope that the days may return when we can do so again.

I believe that it has not been a very easy decision for His Majesty's Government to make, to produce this Bill. They know quite well, I think, that this goes against all that their party has believed in in the past. I congratulate them for taking this courageous step, and I would ask hon. Members who have been very critical of them, and who intend to be critical of them during this Debate, to try to see these things in the light of reality, and to realise that there is no greater freedom in this world than the freedom to change one's mind when one feels one has to. I believe that all parties in this House—the Liberal Party in particular, in view of the Amendment they have on the Order Paper—must say to themselves, "We know what we want; we know what our ideals are, but we know, too, what we are confronted with; we know that that can only be met by taking a line which is understood by the least idealistic." I do not believe that in this world today any greater danger to peace could be produced than to let this country's defence forces sink to the state in which they were between the wars. I believe that the only hope for peace is for Great Britain, with her Commonwealth and Empire, to go to U.N.O. as a joint Power, not as one which intends to use force, but as one which those who intend to use force know would and could use force should it be necessary.

6.36 p.m.

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**Mr. Stephen (Glasgow, Camlachie)** I have been in the House a long time, and I have opposed every conscription Measure that has been brought before the House during those years. Of all the previous Bills, there is none which has filled me with so much dismay and regret as the present Measure. One hon. Member has said that if this Bill had been, introduced by a Conservative Government, every Member of the Labour Party would have opposed it. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes. There might have been a few Mem- bers in 1722 the Labour Party who would have taken a different view, but, from my experience, I can say with truth that in the past there was no division in the Labour Party on this matter, and they went into the Division Lobby as a united party against conscription. It is entirely contrary to the traditions of the Labour Party. Let me quote Keir Hardie's words. I would put them to those hon. Members who are supporting this Bill. He said: "Compulsory military service is the negation of democracy. That is despotism, not democracy. No liberty loving people will tolerate having these old forms of servitude forced upon them. Conscription is the badge of the slave." That is the view of the founder of the party. Let me quote another eminent Socialist, George Bernard Shaw, who said: "Now compulsory military service is the most complete slavery known to civilised mankind. Why does mankind force itself to glory in it? "Certainly, conscription is contrary to the traditions of the Labour Party. I would like to make one more quotation to prove my case. I wish to quote a former Prime Minister, the late Mr. Neville Chamberlain, when he introduced the conscription Measure in the last Parliament, and when he appealed to the Labour Party for support for that Measure. He said on 27th

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April, 1939: "I want to conclude by making an appeal to the party opposite.... I think we fully realise what this word compulsion ' connotes in their minds. They hate it. They have believed, and I dare say do believe now, that once you introduce compulsion it is difficult to stop it. It might spread until it affected every aspect of the national life.... It is a limited measure which is designed only to meet immediate and temporary needs. It will be framed specially to emphasise its temporary character."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 27th April, 1939; Vol.346, C. 1315.] These words make it plain, even to the few Members of the Labour Party who support this Bill, that it is contrary to the traditions of the party. What happened when the late Mr. Neville Chamberlain intimated to the House that the Government were going to introduce conscription? He said: "... Despite the immense efforts this country has already made by way of rearmament, nothing would so impress the world with the determination of this country to offer a firm resistance to any attempt at general domination as its acceptance of the principle of compulsory military service ..." Then the present Prime Minister 1723 rose to his feet, and put this question: "Is the Prime Minister aware that this decision will break the pledge solemnly given to this country and reaffirmed only four weeks ago, that compulsory military service would not be introduced in peacetime ... and that this departure from the voluntary principle will meet with strenuous opposition."—[OFFICIAL. REPORT, 26th April, 1939; Vol. 346; c. 1151–1154.] It was the demand of the Labour Party that the Government should not introduce a conscription Measure without taking the opinion of the country, and I say to the Government today that they have no more right to put through a conscription Measure in peacetime without getting the consent of the country at a General Election. They have no mandate for the Bill which is before the House. When the General Election was taking place, there were two ideas, as I saw it, in the minds of most of the ordinary working people in the country. One of those ideas was expressed in a letter, handed to me by one of my constituents, from her husband pleading with her that she should do everything she could among her neighbours to get them to support a Labour candidate in order to get a Labour Government, because, he said: "If old Churchill gets back again we will never get out of the Army." There was that idea, that because of the internationalist viewpoint of the Labour Party in years gone by, a Labour Government would more speedily bring back the men from the war when peace was secured. Also based upon the internationalist viewpoint of the Labour Party was the belief that, in days to come, a Labour Government would make another war impossible by bringing the workers of the world together in true international relationship. Those were two ideas which helped to give the Labour Government its majority in the country.

This Bill goes in the face of that opinion in the country which gave the Government their majority in this House. I want to consider this question. The Government came into power in the very difficult circumstances which succeed a great war. In those circumstances they find it difficult today to maintain the Services at the standard they believe necessary. Therefore, they say: "We are driven by the logic of events, in order to secure our Services on an efficient basis, to introduce this Measure." Well, I question the statement made by the 1724 Minister of Labour in the opening sentences of his speech today. I question the necessity for this Measure. The right hon. Gentleman said it was necessary in order to get the Forces that we need. I question that the Government need the Forces they say they consider they need



today.

I ask: Against what possible enemy have we to make provision, necessitating the passing of this Measure? The hon. and gallant Member for the Isle of Ely (Major Legge-Bourke) was perfectly frank and pointed at Soviet Russia as the possible enemy. But he will note that when a Member of the Government replies neither he—nor, indeed, any other Member of the Government—will agree with such a contention for one minute. The Prime Minister himself has said that it would be utterly impossible for us to contemplate a war with Russia when our resources are compared with theirs. There is the other possibility, though the Government will not admit it, that we, as the ally of America, might be in a war with Russia. Everyone in the House knows that that is one of the ideas dominating the whole of our circumstances in this country today—the provision of forces. The Minister of Labour knows it, his Parliamentary Secretary knows it, the Minister of Pensions knows it—they all know it. But I do not believe that the people of this country will contemplate the possibility of our going to war with Soviet Russia as the ally of America. The people of this country intend that this country shall not be in another world war; they intend the war that has just finished to be the last, at least so far as we are concerned.

No answer has yet been given to the speech made by the hon. Member for Norwich (Mr. J. Paton) the other week with regard to the impossibility of defending this country in face of the atomic bomb. All these armies, air forces, and navies provide no real defence, so far as this country is concerned, in the new age which we have now reached. If the military minds who are advising the Government do not see it, at least the people who have been trained in Socialism during the past years have, by this time, sufficient intelligence to know that we cannot provide a defence against the atomic bomb, with such a big population in so small an island. I remember in the last Parliament, when the Conservative Party were in 1725 power, before the war came, when we were contemplating how, in this country, we were to get protection from bombing, hon. Members of the Opposition then pressed very strongly the view that people would have to be evacuated from the large centres of population. I say to the Government now, that if we enter another world war, even with America to help us, the people of this country must be evacuated from this island to another continent if they are to be given any chance of life at all.

A force of a million is to be maintained, with another half million to provide them with the munitions of war. That makes a million and a half for whom we have to make provision. Yet the Government are faced with an economic crisis. Do the Government think that the people of this country will be content to produce the necessary increased effort in order to provide for a useless force, which will provide no protection to them in the event of another world war? The working people of this country may be fooled to some extent for a certain time, but at the last General Election they showed that they had learned the lesson of the first world war. I believe it is quite hopeless to expect the necessary increase in production if the Government proceed with a Measure like this.

Who are the young people that the Government will take? Who are these 200,000 young people who are to be made conscripts? They are the sons of those men who are being asked

for increased production. Do the Government think that those men are contemplating the taking of their sons into the Navy, the Army and the Air Force with equanimity? Do the Government think they agree with it? If the Government think they agree with it, then the Government should go to the country and ask them for their mandate. But the Government know that the workers hate the very thought of conscription in peacetime. The Government will ruin this country completely if they allow the Service chiefs to drive them on in this way. I do not believe the Cabinet have come to this decision without being strongly influenced by the Service chiefs. The Government have been afraid to face up to the Service chiefs, because they have been out of office for such a long time. The Government have been easy prey to the Service chiefs, and I am confident that they will fail the people of this country completely by imposing conscription in peacetime. There is already conscription from the war to carry us on to the end of 1948. That is enough to be going on with; that is enough to have at our disposal. 1726

I say to the Government: Adopt a sound peace policy; appeal to the workers of the world at international conferences. The Government have given many instances of their new point of view. There is, for example, the way in which they indicated their willingness to give independence to India and to Burma, the way in which they are ready to hand over former Imperial policy. Go a little bit further; get rid of many of those Forces which will be absolutely useless as a means of defence. If the Government do that, I believe there will be a response throughout the world, and we shall be on the way towards achieving real peace. I do not believe that the workers here or elsewhere are willing to enter a third world war, even though a Labour Government in Great Britain and a Democratic Republican Government in America asks them to do so. The imposition of conscription in this country as a permanent feature of our life is the most shameful thing that a Labour Government could do. I hope that, even at this late hour, the Government will withdraw this Measure and give to the people of this country the opportunity of freedom that they should have.

6.57 p.m.

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**Mrs. Ayrton Gould (Hendon, North)** I do not like conscription any more than the hon. Member for Camlachie (Mr. Stephen). I do not think any democrat likes conscription, and I am quite certain that no member of the Labour Party could like conscription. But I feel, because we have raised the standard of life, that conscription is the most democratic way of maintaining our Forces to the required standard in keeping the peace. I do not agree, necessarily, that we need forces of the size the Government are demanding. However, I do not wish to deal with that particular question today. The question I wish to deal with is the specific one, that if we are to have conscription, or national service, call it what you like—it will not smell any sweeter, whatever it is called—if we are bound to have it, and I accept that we are, as the most democratic method for the time being—and I remind the hon. Member for Camlachie that there is no suggestion, thank heaven, that it should be permanent; it is only for a period—if we are to have it at all, surely, it must be on the most economical basis possible. When I say "economical," I do not mean financially, but 1727

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economical from the point of view of manpower.

The Prime Minister, in his speech on the Address, said: "... whatever forces are allocated to defence is a deduction from our manpower which is available for maintaining and raising our standard of life."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 12th November, 1946; Vol. 430, c. 38.] That is much more true today, since the grim times we have had during the last two months, than it was last November. Obviously, if there has to be training on as economical a scale as possible we must not leave out half the manpower—or, rather, the whole of the women power—of the country. I want to try to persuade the House that it is uneconomical, unrealistic and unfair to exempt the women power from national service, if there has to be national service. There is no need for me to expatiate on the wonderful things that women did during the war. In the Air Force alone—

**Mr. McKie (Galloway)** Will the hon. Lady make a little more clear what she means by compulsory service for the women of the country? Does she mean in the Women's Auxiliary Services, or for industrial purposes?

**Mrs. Gould** I am glad the hon. Gentleman has pulled me up on that. I mean specifically § for the Services. The Women's Auxiliary Services should be expanded. I am glad that that has been brought out, because there has been a sort of suggestion that I am in favour of the direction of women. I am not in favour of the direction of anyone. Indeed, I wish we did not have to have conscription. But what I mean, particularly, is that, if there is to be the expansion in the Forces, women should be called up in the same way as men, for the same kind of training, as far as possible.

It has been estimated, and by experts, that of all the things done in the Services during the war, three out of 10 could be done by women. Women did not only the jobs of 1728 doctoring and nursing, clerical work, and so on; but they did all sorts of technical, highly mechanical jobs. It was even said—I think it was admitted by the Secretary of State for Air—that in some of the precision jobs, particularly in radar, women were better than men. Women were parachuted behind the lines in other countries. They did all kinds of dangerous and courageous work. Young women are in favour of being treated in the same way as men, and of being called up in the same way. I have talked to a great number of them, and I have not found a young woman who has been in the Forces herself and been demobilised, or who comes into one of the age categories of those who could be called up, who was against national service for women, if we had to have it for men.

The vital thing is that we have got to have trained Reserves. Is it for one single moment suggested that, if we have to have highly specialised, trained Reserves, as the Minister of Labour emphasised more than once today, it is not as essential to have the women highly trained, in their specialised occupations in the Forces, as it is to have the men highly trained? At the beginning of the war the Forces suffered as much from the lack of training of

the women as they did from the lack of training of the men. Women have shown themselves as capable of being trained in the most highly technical and specialised work.

**Mr. Walkden (Doncaster)** Does the hon. Lady mean—I am trying to follow her—that she believes in the conscription of women? Does she know the recognised fact that four out of five women marry, anyway? Does she believe in conscription of married women, too? §

**Mrs. Gould** No. I am coming to that later on. One of the things that has been put up to me—and I have discussed this with Members of the Government—is that there would be too many women. The solution of that problem largely lies in the marriage wastage. I would not suggest that married women should be conscripted. I would move the call up for single women. §

**Mr. Walkden** Only one out of five, then, under 25. §

**Mrs. Gould** I do not know. My hon. Friend says there would be only one out of five under 25. But what I want to suggest to him and to the Government is that we should be realistic about this. I do not know what the numbers of the men under 25 will be who will be called up. I do not know the exact ratio. The Minister of Labour had not got the figures this afternoon. But it is clear that the number who will be called up under the age of 25 will be a very much larger number than that of those who will be called up over that age; so if we have a call up of the women we should probably get about the number of women that we want for training in the Reserves—which is what we have been definitely told is the vital thing to have. § 1729

Another point I want very much to stress is this. If, in fact, there should be the need for heavy policing, or if there should be a war of any kind—I do not care whether it is in this country or in another part of the world: I do not propose to go into the possibilities of it—but, if, in fact, this Force, which we are told is needed, should be wanted anywhere, and if it should be necessary for it to exist, then we must have about four, or, at least, three people behind the lines doing the work of servicing, training, ordnance—all the various kinds of jobs that need to be done—in order to put each man into the front line. All of those jobs were jobs that were done, and done very efficiently, by women in the war, especially in the later years of the war when they had been trained. If, however, there should be the need for this Force—and I presume it is being called up for some need—if there should be the danger of the need of this Force, then, obviously, it is just as necessary to have trained women as it is to have trained men; and that is why I am suggesting that they should be called up in the same way.

I wonder why the Government have not included women? The women were called up in the war. Of course, there was an outcry at first; but it was very soon accepted, and everybody was throwing bouquets to the women—and rightly so—for the magnificent job they were doing, and pointing out that the war could not have been won without them. Is it—I hate to think it—but is it that our Government are being thoroughly prejudiced and old fashioned?

**Mr. Brendan Bracken (Bournemouth)** Hear, hear.

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**Mrs. Gould** They are always accusing the Opposition of that. But when someone says, "I may be old fashioned, but I like to think of the girls at home," and when somebody else says, "Well, there would be too many of them," and so on, I do feel that that is all escapism from the realities. There is no need to have too many of them, if we expand the Forces properly, particularly if we take only the single women. It may be said that that is pushing women into marriage. [Laughter.] Well, there is a population problem, and it may go some way to solve that. There is another side and I think it is a vital one. The Prime Minister also said in his speech on the address that citizen's rights are being increased, and rights involve obligations. Those obligations are just as much on women as on men. Women do not wish to get out of their obligations. Women want their rights and opportunities—and I hope we shall have an opportunity here later on of discussing another sort of right—but they are prepared also to undertake their responsibilities.

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1730

Who is against this, apart from what, I am afraid, may be prejudice on the part of some of our Cabinet Ministers? They are afraid it will be unpopular in the country, I presume. It is unpopular among some people. It is unpopular among pacifists, because to them all conscription is unpopular. It is unpopular also among a certain class of parents. But, at this time of need of the highest production, the greatest economy in the use of manpower and womanpower, are we, because there may be a little unpopularity, going to refuse to do the right thing, which is to have complete equality in the whole business of national service?

I want to say to parents that if there is to be a call-up of the boys only, the girls will have an unwanted privilege. I speak of what I know is going on in my constituency, and, I have no doubt, in other places. Employers are taking the 17 year old girls and refusing the boys. In spite of full employment, there is quite a bit of unemployment around London—because the boys will be called up, and the employers do not want to take them on and then have them called away a little later, or to have the obligation to take them on again when their service is finished. The consequence is that the girls are being taken on instead of the boys.

Finally, if there were this training for boys and girls in the age categories prescribed, I do not believe it would be necessary for it to last 18 months. Eighteen months is an extraordinarily awkward time for students and apprentices in all sorts of trades. I believe that if there were complete and adequate training, it would be possible to bring it down to a year all round, particularly if there were A.R.P. training, not in uniform but in civilian clothes,

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all over the country, after the people had come out of the Forces. I urge the Government to accept this. This is no time for us to be Rip Van Winkles. The time has gone when parents said, "Our girls must stay at home with us." Of course, parents are saying that their daughters are not what they were in their young days, as their grandmothers and great-grandmothers used to say before them. I urge that, at this time, when there is need for production and when there is need for complete and effective training of personnel for the Services, the thing should be done fairly and squarely, and that women should be included with men in the call-up.

7.14 p.m.

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**Mr. Price-White** (Caernarvon Boroughs) I hope the House will excuse me if I do not follow the arguments of the hon. Lady the Member for North Hendon (Mrs. Ayrton Gould), who was speaking very largely from the feminine point of view. I feel that, possibly, I have a great deal of temerity in speaking on this Bill tonight, particularly when I say at the outset that, not from any lack of loyalty, I have the temerity to disagree with the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) and to correct him when he said that the whole of the Conservative Party are in support of this Bill. I may be in an unenviable and difficult minority, but it is not my intention to support the Bill. I feel that there are very many troubled consciences and minds on both sides of the House on this very major, very difficult and very delicate national question. It raises for individual Members almost a constitutional issue, one which no doubt the House has debated and settled before, but which I, as a comparatively anew and certainly junior Member, have never had the misfortune or the interest to meet. It is whether we are here to put forward the views of those whom we represent and whose majority vote sent us here, or whether we are to allow our votes to be dictated by our own personal consciences or the arguments that we hear in Debate. 1732

I wish to say, with every respect to my Whips, that I have thought long indeed on this matter, and I have come to my conclusion with great sincerity. I do not speak as a pacifist. I speak as one who was a part-time member of the Armed Forces for 12 years and a very full-time member for six and a half years. Therefore I cannot in any guise be accused of being a fanatical crank of one sort or another. On this subject, I gave an implied promise at the General Election. I have come to the view that it is my duty to vote in accordance with the views of the majority—the sane, and not the fanatical majority—of those whom I represent. The House will know that Welshmen have had a certain reputation for religious observance. I am not a judge of whether we are religious or not; certainly, I agree that the leaders of our religious bodies and organisations are very vociferous in their insistence that religion takes a major part in the life of Wales. I believe sincerely that this issue of conscription is, and has been for very many years, a major issue in my part of Wales. For months past, in my constituency, I have been receiving representations, not only from religious bodies, but from other bodies, which I am satisfied represent the voice of the majority opinion. I feel that the arguments they have put forward to me are Christian, democratic and, in very many

directions, practical arguments. That is the view I have taken in my position as a Member of this House—that it is my duty to represent by my vote their views. I do not make any excuse for the Government in this matter. They have been congratulated upon their courage.

**Vice-Admiral Taylor** Did my hon. Friend, when he stood at the General Election, stand in § accordance with Conservative policy? He is arguing that he has come here to represent what the majority of people in his constituency think, but when he stood, did he not put before them a certain policy, and does he not stand by it?

**Mr. Price-White** I certainly did stand as a Conservative candidate on a Conservative § policy; indeed that is why I am here. A particular question was put to me—not once but on several occasions—whether, on an issue of conscription, I would follow the dictates of party policy or take an individual position. I am proud to be able to tell the House that on 1733 this subject I am still individualistic enough to be able to say what I like, as an individual. I am not holding any brief for a particular body of persons, in regard to the question of conscription in the last war. The Minister of Labour told us that there were three classes of conscientious objector. I respect the first class, who is the genuine conscientious objector. I "hae' ma doots," as the Scots would say about the second class.

I have the utmost admiration for the third class of conscientious objector who came out to the desert and drove ambulances on non-combatant duty. One was forced, with admiration of their actions, to respect their opinions. But I may say that I did not like the type of religious leader who in Wales was actually advising young men, on the question of whether they had a conscience which allowed them to go to war or not in defence of their country and of the democracies of this world. That practice I deplored at the time and I expressed my disgust at what had taken place. I trust that it will never arise again, even at this stage. There was a type of conscientious objector in Wales who suddenly found that he was such a Welsh nationalist, that he could not fight the battles of England, although he could still eat the food which the people of other views brought for him from across the seas. For that type of conscientious objector I hold no brief either and I am glad to record that they were an extremely small minority in Wales. There was even a type of leader or so-called leader of religion who went to the widow of a young R.A.F. flight sergeant near my constituency—I can vouch for this fact—and told her, as words of comfort, that if the deceased husband had listened to him, he would not have been dead that day. That is not the section for whom I am speaking today.

I want to draw the attention of the House to other aspects of the matter. Why are we debating this Measure? Is the memory of this House so short that hon. Members forget what now seem to be the pious and empty proceedings and votes of just over 12 months ago, when we laid our faith for the future, not only of our people but of all the peoples of the world, in a United Nations organisation? What has happened? Is it already true that the United Nations is doomed to failure as the League of Nations was at a similar period 1734

after the 1914–18 war? Have we no confidence in it? Is it necessary for this Government, of all Governments, to introduce measures of conscription, and impliedly admit that they have no faith in an international force to impose sanctions, if indeed force should become necessary? If we are consistent in our desire as a people, as a Government and as a House of Commons, to further true peace, I say that what is right for us to oppose in the first place and in every instance is the idea that this country and other countries should have their own individual armed forces. That is another aspect of my disagreement with this Bill.

I agree entirely with what was a minor point in the very wonderful speech which we heard today from my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford. Unfortunately it is true that a certain type of person in this country takes advantage of the alternatives to conscripted service for the Forces, such as are offered in the Bill. It is no use denying that. I am pleased to acknowledge at once, that their number is small, but they are there, and the tendency will be for them to increase. The right hon. Gentleman cited the alternative of going into the mines as national service, rather than into the Armed Forces. That deplorable tendency would grow. It would produce a miner who would be of less use to the mines than he would be to the Armed Forces, and this very system of compulsion would bring that about.

An hon. Member who spoke earlier mentioned the words of Keir Hardie on this very principle. It may sound strange, coming from these benches, when I say that one of my earliest childhood recollections was that of Keir Hardie having breakfast in my own home. I remember very vividly what he looked like and the discussion he was having with those present. I remember his words. The hon. Gentleman brought them back to me vividly. I remember Keir Hardie saying practically the same thing that the hon. Member read out tonight. Politics and party apart, I feel that he was quite right and that that view should be held by the majority of people today.

We must, after all, be realist. Are we to tackle the problem alone? Are we accepting as a fact that for years we shall have to impose this compulsion so that we may police any part 1735 of the world? Are we, as has already been convincingly said, to accept the view that the Bill is nothing more than a strengthening of the hand of the Foreign Secretary when he is playing a game, which now appears to be a kind of poker, in Moscow? Is that the purpose behind the Bill, or are we indeed forgetting and leaving behind the very idea of the United Nations organisation? What are the alternatives? From my little knowledge of military life, I doubt very much whether we can produce effective soldiers in one and a half or two years. We must let the soldier have his tour of foreign service, which is impossible in two years. He cannot get any upon his reserve service. Therefore, the mechanism of the Bill appears unwieldy and unworkable.

I suggest an alternative. Let the Government make our existing Armed Forces so attractive that the true type of volunteer will come forward and make our Armed Forces into the finest industry or profession in this country. That has not been the case for all too long and as a country we have paid very dearly for it. There lies the answer to compulsion and the salve to many consciences inside and outside the House. Let the Government turn their hands to making service, in all ranks, in the three Services a matter of pride, a matter which is

financially sound and which gives security both before and after service. If they did that, they would very shortly have no need to discuss or to consider compulsion because we should have the finest and the safest Armed Forces—if indeed Armed Forces are to be of any use when the next call may come upon us—which I pray it never will. The right type of Britisher would come forward who would be a better soldier and a better representative of our country than the half-baked type that compulsion will bring to the fore.

All that is needed is leadership. In peace and in war there is no doubt that as a people we have something which we are too reticent to praise. We are always ready when the call comes and we must have a force with that spirit in it. The spirit is there and it was brought out during the years of our travail by leadership of the finest type. I say; Let us put aside the necessity of compulsion by bringing about a similar leadership. That is the answer 1736 for the Government—true leadership, like the leadership that we have had in the past. Let the Government emulate it. Then would go this horrible, un-British, undemocratic idea of national compulsion. Let the Government remember that what some of those who will vote against them sincerely ask for is the real volunteer spirit, a spirit such as was called forth by the leadership which we are seeking and which, I am sorry to say, the Government have not so far displayed.

7.30 p.m.

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**Colonel Wigg (Dudley)** Perhaps the hon. Member for Caernarvon Boroughs (Mr. Price-White) will forgive me if I do not follow him in detail. I wish to make one comment on his earlier argument, that at the General Election I made it clear in my constituency that I supported conscription. I say this because I want to make my position quite clear in the matter. §

I want to turn now to the wonderful knockabout performance of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill). It struck me as very extraordinary that it was not until this Debate that he found there was an inadequacy of information given by the Service Departments in their Estimates. As far as I remember, the right hon. Gentleman was not present at any time during any of the three Debates on the Estimates, and if he had done us the honour of reading the remarks made from this side of the House he would have seen that on the Army Estimates, for instance, we kept the House going until 3.30 in the morning pressing for the information which he now states is absolutely essential. The right hon. Gentleman went out of his way to exacerbate feelings on this side of the House, and in reference to those Members below the Gangway he said he would support us against what he called "crypto-Communists." We are not worried about the crypto-Communists on this side of the House—we can look after them ourselves—but we are worried about our crypto-Tories.

The right hon. Gentleman was less than fair to the Prime Minister when he tried to prove that the issue of conscription now is the same as the issue between the two wars. I listened to the remarks of the right hon. Gentleman and I was extremely amused and grateful to 1737

him for his performance. I was reminded of a book I read between the wars, called, I think, "1066 and all that." I think it was up to the standards of the Tory Party's historical criticism. In the book, everything was judged according to the standard of whether it was "a good thing" or not. The Tory Party decided 40 years ago that conscription was a good thing, and the right hon. Gentleman comes down to the House today and has a wonderful time pointing out that in the light of events what the Tories decided was a good thing 40 years ago, this Government have had to put into operation. But they have to put conscription into operation for very different reasons. The mover of the Amendment quoted words of Keir Hardie, but Keir Hardie was discussing and considering the implications of conscription to the Forces being imposed on an unwilling people. I believe that conscription is a democratic and fair way of placing the burden on the whole community, and that it has been accepted by the overwhelming majority of the country.

**Mr. Stokes (Ipswich)** Rubbish. §

**Colonel Wigg** The hon. Member, with characteristic courtesy, has described what I said as "rubbish." §

**Mr. Frank Byers (Dorset, Northern)** If what the hon. and gallant Member has said is true, will he give us the evidence? §

**Colonel Wigg** I give the evidence of what happened in my constituency. I registered my opinion on the matter, and the result showed that the overwhelming majority preferred to have conscription placed fairly and squarely on the whole of the community, rather than to have the kind of conscription we had before the war. Let us be clear about this. The Tory Party are not supporting conscription for the first time. The best recruiting sergeant before the war was the empty belly, and if one examines the figures it will be found that recruitment ran parallel with the incidence of unemployment. The best recruiting year up to 1939, was 1931. §

**Brigadier Mackeson (Hythe)** Would the hon. and gallant Member say what Government was in power then? §

**Colonel Wigg** The Tory Government were always in power—if they did not operate here, they operated in another place. §

**Mr. Yates (Birmingham, Ladywood)** If, as the hon. and gallant Member says, conscription § is the fairest and most democratic method, would he suggest that it be used as a permanent basis of recruitment for our Armed Forces?

**Colonel Wigg** Perhaps the hon. Member will give me an opportunity to make my speech § in my own way. I will endeavour to deal with that later. I am trying to show that the Tory Party are not entitled to the credit they claim but that events have caught up with them. Conscription is not a new thing; it was a method they used not only for recruitment into the Army, but into industry as well. I want to say a word now about the Liberal Party. During the Debates on the Estimates, they had a 100 per cent. record for absence.

**Mr. Byers** I thought, in this second year of this Parliament, we had got beyond the stage § of making remarks against the Liberal Party and their reduced numbers—reduced through no fault of their own. After all, we did poll 2¼ million votes and returned 10 Members. Is it not time that we stopped this sort of thing?

**Colonel Wigg** The Liberal Party may have polled 2¼ million votes, but if they are not § very careful their numbers will be even less in the future. This country does not like a gospel of political expediency preached by those who; when real issues are being discussed, and when we are trying to extract information from the Front Bench as to the composition of the Army, are completely absent. The first speaker from the Liberal Benches informed the House that they established their case on fundamental Christian principles. He showed, therefore, that this was a matter of first importance. But his party, and particularly the Chief Liberal Whip, must be careful because their role is extremely important. I do not think, however, their party has much future. The Chief Liberal Whip wants to be careful, because the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford is a very skilled body-snatcher, and the Chief Whip should keep a watchful eye on his party, otherwise some may disappear in front of his nose. [Interruption.] I am not very fond of watching political corpses, because after they have been dead for 20 years they are apt to smell badly.

I find it somewhat difficult to make a constructive case in the face of continued interruptions, but I will now turn to the argument of the hon. and learned Gentleman the Member § 1739 for Carmarthen (Mr. Hopkin Morris), who dwelt at great length upon the question of the rights of the individual and the liberty of the subject. It seemed to me that he approached the problem in the spirit and manner of some hon. Gentlemen on this side of the House. Their approach is rather like that of the early Christians, who were able to live in a state of complete grace because in fact they were protected by the army of Rome. In England we have been free from the obligation of compulsory military service because there has always



been an arm of the Service which has enabled us to buy time. But the power of the Navy to buy time for this country is no longer operative, and, therefore, we have so to organise our Armed Forces that they will be capable of undertaking at a moment's notice, any obligations which they may be called upon to shoulder.

It is part of the case of some hon. Gentlemen on this side of the House who disagree with this Bill, that we can, if we will, recruit all the men we need by voluntary methods, by making conditions sufficiently attractive; that if, in fact, we raise the rates of pay, if we provide, à la Montgomery, bedside lamps, and what have you, ultimately we can attract sufficient men to make it unnecessary to conscript men. That I regard as an essentially undemocratic argument, and one fraught with great danger. The Nazi Party was organised precisely on those lines. After the collapse in 1918 there appeared, in German newspapers, advertisements for ex-officers and ex-n.c.os., who were subsequently enrolled in the Freikorps and subsequently in the Reichswehr. They became a military aristocracy.

If there is one thing which any democratic society must not permit it is that the Armed Forces of the Crown shall be exalted to such a position that service within them becomes a privilege sought after by every young man. It is essentially more democratic that the aristocrat of democratic society shall be the miner and the agricultural worker, and those who are engaged in providing the basic needs of the whole community. Therefore, for hon. Gentlemen on either side of the House to argue that we can recruit the Armed Forces 1740 on the basis of giving conditions to attract sufficient numbers of young men is absolutely undemocratic.

At the present time the total number serving in the Army is of the order of 110,000 to 120,000 men. We have been told by the Secretary of State for War that he has set his ceiling at 250,000, in my judgment a fantastically high figure. He has qualified it by saying that to replace wastage and to recruit up to 250,000 would take a period of six years, recruiting at the rate of 4,000 a month. I do not know the wastage figure on 100,000 to 120,000, but I do know that the figure for the Army now is less than it was six weeks ago, and that to have an Army of only 120,000 is worse than having no Army at all, because spread over the whole of the world—garrisons in this country, on the Rhine, in the Far East, etc.—it would be completely ineffective from a military point of view. Therefore, if the argument is accepted that there must be an Army, even if the ceiling is put as low as 300,000, it is obvious that we should have to accept conscription at least for some years, because the total annual manpower increment that is available for all the Armed Forces, so the Minister of Labour has informed the House, is of the order of 175,000. It is difficult to imagine how with recruiting figures as they are at present the regular Army this year can rise above 150,000, added to which a yearly increment of 150,000 would give a ceiling of 300,000.

**Mr. Byers** Would the hon. and gallant Gentleman give us his reasons for supposing that voluntary recruiting cannot be increased? §

**Colonel Wigg** My reasons are that it is commonly thought that the rates which have now §  
 been introduced are exceptionally high. As a matter of fact, when one breaks them down,  
 they are about the rates of pay which were introduced by Army Order 325, of 1919.  
 Although the rates then were very high indeed, they did not attract sufficient numbers of  
 recruits, because recruitment under a voluntary system, as figures show, is directly related  
 to unemployment. As long as the Government are following a policy of full employment, the  
 inducements of home life, of living in a particular locality, perhaps even the inducement of  
 meeting one's best girl regularly, are such that no financial inducement can be offered 1741  
 to overcome that resistance. I would say, on the figures themselves, that it is hopeless to  
 think of recruiting the regular Forces in any foreseeable period of time, in a period of full  
 employment.

I am still worried about the make-up in the Army. There must inevitably be a hangover from  
 the old days, in high places in the War Office, of regarding conscription as a good thing in  
 itself. I do not accept that. Neither do I accept the point of view of hon. Gentlemen who hold  
 the view that conscription is necessarily a bad thing. If this House keeps a watchful eye on  
 the Army, insists upon the Army being organised on democratic lines, and that the call-up  
 shall be fairly operated, if there is no "jiggery-pokery" about the granting of commissions, if  
 commissions are given on merit rather than on the position in life in which one happens to  
 be born, if these and many other things are watched, it may be that the Army will become a  
 real democratic organisation, which will enable young men to do their period of service of a  
 year or 18 months and gain benefit for themselves as well as rendering service of great  
 benefit to the nation thereby.

I want to make quite clear that, in my experience, service in the Army is not necessarily the  
 bad thing that it is sometimes thought to be. I am prepared to admit that there are many  
 young men who because of their mental and emotional make-up will be unhappy, but they  
 are a minority. I am one who has spent most of my adult life in the regular Army, not, as the  
 noble Lord the Member for Horsham (Earl Winterton) suggested in a previous Debate,  
 engaged continually in gallant actions but in just doing my job. My experience in actions has  
 been of being shot at a few times by third-rate shots. But if all the potatoes I have peeled  
 were placed in a heap, there would be no potato shortage; if all the floors I have scrubbed  
 and all the windows I have cleaned were available for occupation, there would be no housing  
 shortage. My time in the Army, most of it in the ranks before the war, convince me that it is  
 not the degrading thing which the hon. Gentlemen who oppose this Measure believe it to be.  
 The Army is rather what one makes it. One can make a great number of friends, and there is  
 the opportunity, at the age of 18, of living the kind of life, which, I understand, the more  
 fortunate members of the community live when they are at public schools; but from 1742  
 what I am told by my public school friends the feeding in the Army is much better. The  
 barrack room and the rough-and-tumble of Army life give a young man a wider experience,  
 and an opportunity to get away from his mother's apron strings. On the whole, it is not  
 necessarily the bad thing which it is made out to be.

If the country is to make its contribution to U.N.O., police those corners of the world still under the British flag, hon. Members, when they go into the Lobby tomorrow night, have to realise what the issue is. They are not voting on the size of the Armed Forces or how they are to be deployed, but whether the country ought to have an Army at all. That is the fundamental issue. If we are to have an Army, and make our contribution to U.N.O., we have to accept the Second Reading of this Bill. We should, however, during the Committee stage, see if we cannot do something to improve some of its provisions.

In conclusion, I commend the Bill to the House and particularly to those Members of my party who have doubts in their minds. There is no escape from this issue. Hon. Members opposite made up their minds 40 years ago that conscription was a good thing, and I am wondering whether some of my hon. Friends, on the strength of the writings of 40 years ago, did not make up their minds that conscription was a bad thing, and have refused to change their opinion. But today they are not in the position of the Opposition; on this side of the House we have the responsibility on our shoulders and on our votes may rest the safety of the country and the happiness and wellbeing of all who dwell within it.

7.53 p.m.

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**Mr. Yates (Birmingham, Ladywood)** I am not sure whether my hon. and gallant Friend § who has just spoken accepted military conscription as being a permanent Measure. If a thing is right, and if it is fair and equitable, I should have thought that there was nothing wrong in suggesting that it should be a permanent Measure; but no one seems to be willing to face up to that. With regard to the voluntary system, I was not at all convinced that he submitted any real case as to why the voluntary system could not be successful. I have not seen any great evidence that it has been tried in a proper manner. It is now little more than 1743 four months since I had the opportunity of moving the Address to the King's Speech, and on that occasion I submitted five logical objections to a permanent system of military conscription. I have not seen any evidence which would indicate that the reasons which I then submitted have been weakened in any way.

Two of the reasons which I gave have, I think, been strengthened since that time. I refer to the developments in the realms of science and economic affairs. No one seems to have faced up to the question of science, although it has been mentioned, I think, by an hon. Member on the other side in relation to atomic energy. Since we last discussed that question, Professor Oliphant, of Birmingham University, in a lecture in Canberra, Australia, on 15th January made, according to the Press, this statement: "The atomic energy situation is one bomb for one city. The Hiroshima bomb was puny compared with what could be made. The present day bombs will be 600 times more powerful." I suggest to hon. Members on this side of the House who argue in favour of this Bill, that they have not faced up to the question as to whether or not conscription can really defend this country in the event of another war. As I said on a previous occasion, it would be much more logical to train our youth as scientists than try to force them into a large Army which will not protect the country.

My second point is on the question of manpower. I do not believe that this Measure can have any other than the most serious effect upon the economic position of this country. We have been told through the White Paper of the necessity for a virile Army of expert workers—half a million—and I submit that the Service Departments alone can make the largest contribution to that manpower. The hon. and gallant Member for Dudley (Colonel Wigg) talked about the necessity for conscription to obtain an Army; but what kind of an Army does he mean? Is it reasonable in time of peace that we should accept the view, as indicated in the White Paper that even by March, 1948, we should still have Armed Forces amounting to 1,087,000 with 450,000 to equip and maintain them, not taking into consideration the amount of labour involved to provide the necessary equipment? I wonder how many 1744 miners are involved in production for the Armed Forces?

We are faced with a cost of £889 million, spent at the rate of £2 $\frac{1}{8}$  million a day, or £1,713 a minute. We should have been shocked if, in earlier times, a Conservative Party had proposed such a thing. The Minister of Defence said in the last Debate that he, together with his colleagues in the Government, have not submitted to the Army chiefs, and that they have pruned all the Estimates. He told us that the Army chiefs came forward with Estimates which amounted to £1,064 million, and he said, in effect, "I have done very well. I have pruned this figure and brought it down by 15 per cent., or by £155 million." The Army Service chiefs said it was a minimum, and it proved to be a reducible minimum. I am going to suggest that this figure is a reducible minimum. We do not accept this figure as one which cannot be still further reduced.

We cannot expect the Service chiefs to submit suggestions to us how the numbers in the Forces should be reduced. Surely that is asking too much from human nature. The larger the Army, the more the number of high grade appointments, and the greater the opportunity for promotion. I think it is quite easy to see that we cannot expect Service chiefs to come forward and submit reduced Estimates and to be anxious to reduce the Forces. We are asked to approve a Measure without having any evidence whatever of what our commitments are or what is the distribution of our Forces. How many men, for example, are there in Germany? It has been estimated by some that there are 250,000 men in Germany. Within 15 months of the end of the first world war, we only had an Army of Occupation amounting to 15,000. We are told that on that occasion we had not completely crushed Germany but that this time we have completely crushed her. Yet within 18 months we find ourselves with this huge Army of Occupation. It is there for an indefinite period; we have no idea of when this Army is to be brought back.

This then is our problem. Here we have these huge Forces and we have a policy of peacetime secretiveness. We do not know where the Forces are or how many there are, for they are stationed all over the world. I understood in my early days in the Labour movement that we did not believe in secret diplomacy, or in secrecy at all. I do not see any reason for 1745 approving this Measure'. Even the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) was asking for information which is, of course, absolutely essential if the House is to make a sound decision on a matter of this kind. It means that my hon. Friends who argue in favour of this Bill apparently want a large Army, and if they want a large Army, it is

difficult—

**Colonel Wigg** I did not argue that we wanted a large Army. What I argued was that we could not have an Army at all without conscription. That is quite different. §

**Mr. Yates** My hon. and gallant Friend did not mention numbers, but it is a most extraordinary suggestion to make that we cannot have an Army at all without conscription. Of that there is no evidence whatever. We might as well say we cannot get the miners. We might as well say "What is the good of trying to make conditions in the mines more attractive, because we will not get the workers?" I do not accept that sort of defeatist attitude in regard to the Army. §

The economic position of this country is such that we are crying aloud for labour. We could employ another 500,000 men in agriculture; we could employ thousands more in the coalmines, in the engineering industry, in the textile industry, all of which are crying for labour, while we are advocating the maintenance of an Armed Force of more than a million men, we are inviting foreign labour to come to this island and do our job. Really it is a most ironical and a most extraordinary position to be in—that we, a Labour Government, with a Labour majority, should be just like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. We are blowing the pipe in order to attract labour from every corner of the globe, and at the same time we are wanting the youth of our country to be conscripted, and sent to all parts of the world. That export and an import policy is surely more like something to emanate from a madhouse.

I venture to suggest that we in this country have produced the highest grade of craftsmanship in the world. I come from the city of Birmingham—the city of a thousand trades, where we are proud of the great craftsmanship of our people. Yet we are frittering away that advantage like the gambler staking all on his last throw. 1746

No case has been made out for this Measure. Apart from what I have said, it is not only a question of imposing conscription for 18 months upon a certain number of men; there is also this method of reserye, the effect of which is that for five years after their period of conscription young men have to perform certain services and are taken away from industry for periods in each year, creating uncertainty in the industrial sphere, which seems to me to be absolutely ludicrous. Before I close I want to make one or two observations with regard to the voluntary system. It was very significant that the present Prime Minister on 27th April, 1939, when he was resisting a Motion on compulsory military training introduced by Mr. Neville Chamberlain, made this statement: "There is no question of the readiness of our people to make sacrifices for the cause of freedom and of democracy, but we are opposed to the introduction of conscription because we believe that, so far from strengthening this country, it will weaken and divide it, at a time when it should be strong and united." Those words apply today. He went on to say: "The voluntary principle is based on the readiness of the citizens to serve their country and its effectiveness depends on the people's confidence



in their leaders and on the efficiency of governmental machinery."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 27th April, 1939; Vol. 346, c. 1353–6.]" Of course, he was talking to the Conservative leaders then and the country had no faith in them. If the country had had faith they would have got their volunteers.

In regard to governmental machinery, I am, of course, an amateur Member of Parliament. I have only a very short experience of the governmental machine, but I do not think much about our Service machinery. It does not seem to me to be the sort of machinery that is capable of organising even the slightest kind of enterprise. What is the mentality behind our present War Office machinery which prefers men to be shovelled into the ranks, rather than taken in through the method of persuasion? It is the easier method and it is also the cheaper. I believe it was Lincoln who once said that keeping his generals supplied with men was like shovelling fleas into a barnyard. When I look at the present governmental machinery, I do not think very much of its prospects for attracting people to the ranks. Indeed, it may sound strange, but when I came to this House I never thought that I should be a kind of recruiting sergeant. Nevertheless, I have been trying for a long time to get some people into the Forces. I had the utmost difficulty, and had eventually to put down a question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for War because a man who had been in the Forces for 12 years and wanted to re-enlist had received a letter from the War Office asking him to give the name and address of a householder who would give him a reference. 1747

A constituent of mine came to me and said, "You are my M.P. and I want to go into the Army. I have already been in as a lieutenant and was discharged on medical grounds. I went before a medical board in June, 1946, and was pronounced fit I then wanted to rejoin His Majesty's Forces but I cannot get anything out of the War Office at all, so you had better try." I had a try, but although the man approached me in October he is still outside—vigorous, young and healthy. I believe he has had two medical examinations and that there is the possibility of a third, and I submit that if the Government are indeed serious about matters of this kind they should show that their organisation can produce better and more speedy results than this.

There is one other thing that I should like to point out. What I think our conscriptionists fail to realise is that an unwilling soldier is a germ carrier of disaffection. There are still thousands of deserters walking the streets, which is not a very good advertisement. I do not accept the view that there is anything democratic about the system of compulsory military service. Quite apart from the important consideration as to whether or not the policy upon which we conscript the individual is right, there is nothing equal or democratic in trying to force people whose national attitude is totally opposed to that kind of pressure. In conclusion I should like to sum up by quoting the remarks made by the Lord Privy Seal when he was winding up the Debate in 1939 for the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman said then: "I am driven to ask, especially after the speech of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Epping, is there something more behind this limited attempt to supplement voluntary service? Is this an organised attempt—and if it is organised it is a dishonest attempt—aided and abetted by full-blooded conscriptionists in this House of Commons, to enforce conscription on Britain for good? ... British labour rejects the Government's policy of 1748



conscription with a full sense of its responsibilities ... It would prefer a Government which had the courage to rely upon what is the real view of our people, that is, faith in freedom and a determination to keep it. You have chosen your way and the responsibility for that lies upon you and not upon us, and if dire consequence should befall, which heaven forbid, our consciences are clear, that we should stand for freedom without serfdom."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 27th April, 1939; Vol. 346, c. 1443–1444.]" That was the Socialist interpretation. Conscription is the cancer of civilisation; it eats into the whole social fabric and as long as I have breath in my body I shall never support in any place whatsoever a system which means slavery. It will come as a boomerang upon the Government Front Bench for the action which they now take. My hon. Friends behind me will remember the books, "Your M.P." and "Guilty Men." We had a lot of propaganda about this. Do not forget it; there is no mistake, the people of this country do not expect people to betray their principles. They look for ideals to be upheld, and as long as I remain in this House I shall oppose the Government at any time they seek to enforce upon the youth of this country a system which is evil and pernicious. This is our Government, and as Socialists we have a duty to see that our Government follow the faith that is traditional and true, in the Socialist spirit.

8.17 p.m.

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**Mr. Lipson (Cheltenham)** I hope the hon. Member for Ladywood (Mr. Yates) was not threatening his colleagues behind him and suggesting that if the Government brought in a Measure, and Members of the Labour Party supported it believing that it was necessary in the interests of the security of the country, they should not vote for it because they might lose their seats at the next election if they did. I hope that whatever view we may hold regarding this Bill we shall be influenced in our attitude towards it only by whether we think the safety and the security of the country demand this Measure, whatever effect it may have on our political futures.

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The hon. Member expressed surprise and, I think, pain that this National Service Bill should have been introduced by a Labour Government. I should have thought that that fact would have given him and his hon. Friends a reason to hesitate before they decided to oppose the Measure. The Government have not brought in this Bill because they are a militarist Government or because they believe in conscription for its own sake. They have brought it in with a proper sense of responsibility as a Government, and I think therefore that the fact that it has been brought in by a Labour Government is one that ought to give opponents of the Bill an additional reason to pause. I can well understand that if it had been brought in by a Conservative Government, who, in the past, have been much more sympathetic towards conscription, even in peace time than a Labour Government, they might have thought that there was good reason for opposing it. I quite recognise that this Bill is not only contrary to the practice and traditions of this country over a very long period, but that it is also contrary to everything the Labour Party have advocated in the past. I am quite sure, therefore, that for that reason they regret the necessity for this Bill as, I am sure, will a large number of those who support it.

1749

What we have to ask ourselves is whether this Bill is necessary or not. The hon. Member quoted Professor Oliphant, for whom we all have a very great respect, as saying that with atomic energy another war would mean one bomb one city. The hon. Member therefore assumed that because of that this Bill was unnecessary. The lesson I draw from what Professor Oliphant said is that we must redouble our efforts to try to prevent war, because if there is to be war obviously the destruction will be too terrible for contemplation. One of the reasons why I am supporting the Bill is that I think that to a small extent it will be a contribution towards the prevention of war because one of the lessons which, I think, many of us learned in the interval between the wars is that so long as this country is militarily weak it is a temptation to would-be aggressors. I think, therefore, that one of the objects of this Bill is to be a measure of insurance against war.

The hon. Member for Caernarvon Boroughs (Mr. Price-White), whose courageous speech I respect but cannot agree with, argued that it was wrong to introduce conscription in 1750 this country because we must rely for our security, not on our own Armed Forces, but on the United Nations and the international police force I agree, but it does not rest with this country alone to create an international police force, and anybody who has read the proceedings in the Security Council knows that it is not this country which is holding up the establishment of that force. Yet, until that force has been established, we must continue to look to our own defences. At the same time, somewhat illogically, the hon. Member advocated making our Services more attractive by offering higher pay and better conditions of service. If there was anything in his argument at all, we ought rather to reduce our Armed Forces, whether they be conscript or voluntary, but the truth of the matter is that, to anybody who looks round the world today, this Bill is necessary.

We are told by the hon. Member for Ladywood that there is urgent need in this country in all our industries for more manpower, and what folly it is, then, to take large numbers of men into the Forces. That is perfectly true, and we all regret that, but what we also realise is that our security must be the foundation on which all our trade and prosperity, and the continued well-being of our people, must depend. Unless we are militarily secure, we shall be undermining the pillars of our prosperity, and we regret that it is necessary, in these days, and after two world wars, still to continue for a time to maintain such large Armed Forces, but it would be folly to reduce them. It is very sad, because it shows that peace is by no means secure yet, and that the United Nations has not yet begun to function effectively.

I assure my hon. Friends who oppose this Bill that the introduction of conscription into this country will not make this country into a militarist nation. The forces which we will then have will not be used for any aggressive purpose, but for what are generally called our commitments. We are told by some that we ought to reduce our commitments, but we are not given any definite information about which of them we should reduce. We have our obligations to the United Nations, and we have to keep open the seaways of the world to maintain our international commerce. Personally, I believe that it is necessary for this 1751 country to play as leading a part as she can in the councils of the nations. I am not one of those who are in any way antagonistic either to the United States or to Russia. I am not

convinced that the one is pursuing a policy of dollar imperialism, or that the other is out to secure world domination, but I do believe that this country, with her experience in international relations, with her strong sense of justice and tolerance, and with the sane and balanced views of her people, has a very great part to play in the affairs of the world and in establishing peace upon a secure foundation.

I want to see the influence of this country not only maintained but strengthened, and I think we have to recognise that those who speak for Britain in the councils of the nations will have their influence definitely weakened unless the nations know that Great Britain is prepared, if need be, to support in a practical fashion the policy for which she stands. We all saw the humiliation to which we had to submit in the years between the wars, and, in particular, in the years prior to 1939, when we not only allowed things to happen on the Continent of Europe that were utterly repugnant to us but when we also saw, in the Far East, our womenfolk humiliated by the Japanese because we were not sufficiently strong, militarily, to defend them. We in this country hate war, and we will not at any time lightly enter into war, but we do recognise that there is something in the world more hateful and loathsome than war itself, and against which we have to be prepared to fight. That is why we in this country have fought two world wars. We all pray to God that this may not happen again, but, for the time being, the whole world is still in an unsettled condition, and we cannot afford to say that we are not prepared to make the sacrifices which are considered essential and are required by this Bill to enable us to help maintain world peace.

I know that there are a great many parents, and mothers in particular, to whom the idea of the conscription of their sons is hateful, and I would say two things to them. First, I would say that this, perhaps, is being done so that their sons, in the years that lie ahead, should not be sent to something even more terrible, and that they may not have to go through what their fathers endured, because many of their fathers found themselves thrust 1752 into war without any kind of preparation for it. I would also say this to them. The Services today provide opportunities for the men to do something besides military training. They give men a preparation for the life which they will lead when they leave the Forces, and there are educational and other facilities and opportunities offered to them, and that is something to which they ought to have regard.

The argument has been raised whether national service is democratic or not. To me, it is certainly not undemocratic. If it is right that there should be for every citizen in this country equal rights of citizenship, then, surely, every citizen must accept an equal degree of responsibility. I cannot agree that, by means of this Bill, conscription is necessarily batted down upon this country as a permanent Measure. I pray that it may not be. It is provided, in the first instance, for only five years, and Parliament will have opportunities of reconsidering the matter—

**Mr. S. Silverman** My hon. Friend says that Parliament may have an opportunity of § reconsidering the matter. It will be a very indirect opportunity, because what this Measure

provides is that it can be extended beyond five years by Order in Council.

**Mr. Lipson** Yes, but surely, if my hon. Friend, who is a very skilled Parliamentarian, was §  
in the House at the end of that time—and I hope he will be here—he and his hon. Friends will  
find some means whereby, if that Order ought to be challenged, it will be challenged.  
Anyhow, personally—

**Mr. Silverman** That argument was advanced with considerable force from the Front §  
Bench on other Bills, and the Opposition never found it satisfactory.

**Mr. Lipson** But I must remind my hon. Friend that I do not speak for the Opposition. I §  
speak as an Independent, and that is one of the reasons why I welcome so much the speech  
of the hon. Member for Caernarvon Boroughs. I welcome independence, even when it comes  
from the most unexpected quarters. But this is not necessarily a permanent Measure. We all  
hope that, in the years that lie ahead, the United Nations organisation may provide that  
collective security which we all believe is the right solution to this problem. But until § 1753  
that happens, this country must have an armed force adequate to its responsibilities and  
commitments, and, for that reason, though regretfully, I have to recognise the necessity for  
this Bill, and will vote for its Second Reading.

8.32 p.m.

**Mr. Pritt (Hammersmith, North)** Although I only want to speak very briefly, Mr. Speaker, §  
I am glad that I caught your eye because hon. Members who have put down their names to  
Amendments to this Motion have done so on miscellaneous grounds, and I should like to  
make my position quite clear. Many of the arguments have already been put forward today.  
We have seen some remarkable disagreement between hon. Members on this side of the  
House, and I feel that I need do no more than summarise the position which I and some  
other hon. Members take up. In principle, I have no objection whatever to conscription, and  
I do not think that, in principle, I ever have had. Conscription is certainly not necessarily an  
anti-Socialist measure. I am one of those who, on the whole, prefer conscription to the  
method of attracting forces—although, of course, I want the Army to have thoroughly good  
conditions—because I agree with several other hon. Members that that is the best way to  
produce a democratic force.

I am not a pacifist; otherwise, I would not be putting forward this argument. Nevertheless, I  
definitely associate myself with the Amendment on the Order Paper for two reasons, one of  
them more important than the other, but both, I believe, worth stating. I do not think that  
we can artificially limit the arguments for or against this Bill or the importance of the system

of conscription by saying that we must not consider this or that. I rest upon the traditional right, and, therefore, the traditional duty of those who disapprove of a foreign policy, which a Measure of conscription or an Army Measure is designed to support, to show their disapproval by putting down an Amendment, and, if necessary, by voting against the method of recruiting the Army, or against the size of the Army because it is designed to support a particular policy. The reason for doing so becomes very much stronger when the policy appears to be one for recruiting an enormously increased Army. That is the reason which has weighed with me most of all.

Another reason, which I think is a substantial one—perhaps some hon. Members will not agree—is that one has a similar duty to protest when the Army has a structure within which the authorities, the War Office and the high officers generally are attempting to continue to run it on lines which are, in, some ways, definitely bad. The other day I gave the House an account of incidents which occurred in the Middle East, and which, though they are not necessarily typical, are certainly not unusual. Throughout we find not a general trend, but an existing habit, of thinking that the men who are recruited into the Army are so many cattle to be ordered about by superior beings. If we are to conscript men, we should conscript them into a Force in which they may be treated as human beings, and in which they should have the democratic right of being commanded by people who are competent to command them. 1754

I do not see in the administration of the War Office, or, indeed, in the administration of the other two Services, any sign whatever of a proposal to abandon that method. Therefore, for this reason, though a minor one, I oppose conscription into that kind of Army. I oppose conscription into the Army for the purpose of supporting the foreign policy at present pursued by the Government.

8.37 p.m.

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**Mr. G. Lang (Stalybridge and Hyde)** Although I am unable to follow my hon. and learned Friend the Member for North Hammersmith (Mr. Pritt) in his speech, it was one which I was interested to hear, and which, like all the statements which he makes, was impressive. and about which one would want to think again. §

Before I state my views, I would like to make one or two things generally clear. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood (Mr. Yates), who, I am glad to see, is still here, in one thing he said. I do not propose to make the slightest suggestion that any of my right hon. or hon. Friends, either on the Front Bench or elsewhere, who differ from me, are betraying their principles. I do not believe that they are. I believe that it is-possible for people to completely change-their minds. Indeed, I should be very sorry if I ever reached the position when I thought that because people changed their minds they had ceased to be either intelligent or honest. After all, in more ways than one, I am always advocating that people should change their minds in certain things. When they do, I do not regard them as retrograde. I do not think that because more people voted for me at the 1755



General Election than did at the previous by-election, that change of mind is necessarily a bad thing. It is not the integrity of the Front Bench that I doubt; it is their wisdom

I should like to express my own personal thanks to the right hon. Gentleman who introduced this Bill in a quiet, effective speech, and who must have suffered great embarrassment because there were no accompanying cheers or rumbles of applause, and who did it without in any way making it awkward for those who he knew were going to oppose his policy. It was, I thought, an excellent example of a statesmanlike speech, reasonably delivered, and without bitterness. I am glad to be able to register my deep appreciation of it, and I hope that nothing I shall say will in any way detract from that spirit.

I cannot quite agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Lipson), whom I am always pleased to hear, and who, territorially, is my near neighbour. I am not quite sure that this little Measure of conscription—little in the sense of what it would produce if we had had it then—would have enabled us to have taught the Japanese manners, and to have made Hitler afraid of us. I do not think that any conscript Army of this kind would have availed us then. When he spoke of talking to the nations, it reminded me of the Psalm which says: "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. They shall not be ashamed, when they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." The idea was that if a man had a troop of youngsters at the gate he could frighten the man on the other side. I do not think that we can speak to other countries like that. I think that what matters is that we should speak as a great and powerful people who are free. And that is why the most intriguing speech today has been that of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition.

What was it that made the right hon. Gentleman's speeches, when he was Prime Minister during the war, so effective, when he called upon us to undergo all kinds of hardships and to fight, if need be, in the streets and elsewhere when we had no weapons, much less any training? It was our freedom, democracy and our spiritual armament which echoed his appeals. 1756

Nothing can gainsay the fact that out of this war, terrible as it was, in which some of our friends, whose great help we have no desire to belittle, and, indeed, we are not likely to be allowed to forget, came to our aid rather late in the day, we, a free people, were victorious. It was this nation, with nothing but its courage and spiritual values, which stood all alone—a most magnificent thing—and, with great respect, if I may say so, to the United States and to the Soviet Union, it was this country which saved the world, and we saved it as a free people who had never in our experience in peacetime been a conscript slave people. That is why I should find it very difficult in the circumstances tomorrow night to follow my right hon. Friends and my hon. Friends who believe in conscription, into the Lobby. Some do believe in it, and they have a perfect right to do so. They think it is a very good thing. If that stood alone, the argument about democracy would not be all together ineffective.

We shall presently hear a little more about how purely provisional this Bill is. Either provisional or permanent it must be. If it is merely provisional, I would have thought that the Government might have left it till later on, and that they might for the present continue



the present system. I might be wrong, but I am frightened that once this Bill is put on the Statute Book it is not coming off, and it is that which makes hon. Members opposite so gleeful when they say that they will have no need to go to their constituencies. The right hon. Gentleman the Member for Woodford (Mr. Churchill) said they would not "cash in" on this question in their constituencies. But the constituents are not likely to forget it. I have heard no evidence that a sound voluntary system would not give us enough men for any purpose for which we may need them. It is all very well to pay lip service to collective security, but any course that we take in the way of a military nature of this kind is not likely to lead to permanent peace, and I would have thought that questions of a federal union of Europe and throughout the world were the only questions which mattered now. It must be upon a basis of federated government that peace is likely to come. 1757

I suppose I shall be regarded as being somewhat of a biased witness if I say something about religious organisations. They are not so popular as they used to be, in this place or elsewhere. That, I suppose, is because it is thought they have not the same powerful effect upon the public conscience, public opinion and public votes. But, at any rate, I do wish to say that in my experience, which is fairly long, of political life, there has been a greater awakening of religious feeling about this Measure than about any Measure which I have known. It is rather late in the day, but I am glad of it. I am an unrepentant Nonconformist, and I am thankful for the time when what was called the Nonconformist conscience used to frighten much more important things even than Cabinet Ministers. If I had no other reason for opposing this Bill, I would be very anxious to do it from the point of view of manpower and woman power. I am sorry the hon. Lady the Member for North Hendon (Mrs. Ayrton Gould) is not here, because any damage that this Bill has failed to do she has seen that it will be done. A more reactionary speech I have never heard. It was an advocacy of conscription for women, and of a continuation of A.R.P. training in the evening. Her only regret seemed to be that she could not reproduce all the most dreadful conditions of war. I am sure that my right hon. Friend was praying to be delivered from his friends. We all do from time to time, of course, and that is one of the prayers which sometimes are delayed in their answer, or else it is thought that a little chastening is good for one. That was a far more chastening speech than any that I should dream of saying or thinking about my right hon. Friend.

I am a bit worried about this exemption business. No one has a greater respect for the miners than I have. I have much more than respect; I have affection. I believe them to be the finest body of men in the country, and the Welsh miner in particular, for he is the man who can discuss with me intelligently the latest issue of the "Hibbert Journal," which I do not think is to be found even in the Library of the House. I have great respect for the Welsh miner, and I am glad that he is exempted from the provisions of this Bill. But is that a matter of principle, or is it a matter of expediency? Is it because we believe that service in the coalmine, with all its danger, darkness and hardship, which I hope now will be relieved, is as fine a service as any man can render to the community, or is it that we are so short of coal that we must get the men by some means or other? If it is the latter, it is a dangerous bargain basement which the Government are setting up, for the textile workers may do the 1758

same and the cotton workers may also come along and ask for exemption. I am not so happy about the rate of our regimentation. There are some things which we are obliged to do because we believe them to be right, but I do not like this regimenting of everything and everybody.

I believe in freedom. I believe that that is what has made this country great and keeps her great. I am not speaking as a pacifist. It may be quite wrong for men as a Minister of religion, but I am not a pacifist. I am not a good enough man to be a pacifist. There are occasions when I would fight, poorly equipped as I am, to the last ditch. If anyone asked me what I would do if anybody came for my sweetheart or my daughter, I know what I would do if I were allowed to do so, and there are other things I would fight for. I would fight, if need be die, for the religion in which I believe; it is the only thing for which I would willingly die, but I would. I am not a pacifist and, therefore, I do not object to the use of force. If I had a little power and force I would use it in the Lobby tomorrow evening. I do not object to the use of force, but I do believe in people having freedom and the right to exercise that freedom. How can we ever again sing that glorious hymn which was sung on every National Prayer day during the war, and which, if another war comes, the nation will sing again, which speaks about our native land and asks: "How shall we love another land so well?" We none of us could love another land so well; at least, I could not. I would not be an internationalist if I did not love this nation better than any other that I know. I think we are the finest people in the world. If that is bad Socialism or bad internationalism, I must 1759 be forgiven. At least, I can afford those peccadillos because I shall not be guilty tomorrow of the great peccadillo. We sing something about "Let our hills and valleys shout the songs of liberty." They cannot shout them any longer if this Bill is passed, because we shall not be a free people. I believe that freedom is worth all the Armies put together. That is why I was glad to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Caernarvon Boroughs (Mr. Price-White). I was glad to think that in that constituency, which was once held by so distinguished a Parliamentarian as the late Earl Lloyd-George, they are still independent there. I like free men, even if sometimes they get in my way when they exercise their, freedom, as I get in theirs.

I have said nothing about embarrassment. Which of us was the most embarrassing just now I do not know, but I do believe in freedom, and I have got it—the glorious freedom of the back benches. If I were packed on the Front Bench, I would have to be a good boy. One could not belong there and not be wholly with the team. That is why I rejoice in the freedom of the back benches. I have no doubt that after tomorrow my tenure of that freedom will be even more prolonged.

At any rate, I have said nearly all I wanted to say about this matter, and I do mean this very seriously. I honestly believe that if we pass this Bill, and place it upon the Statute Book, we shall extinguish a flame that, in our generation, we shall not see rekindled; and that is much more serious to me than all the electoral doubts. The hon. Member for Cheltenham, quite rightly, was in a critical mood about that. Votes do not matter so much; whether we hold or lose our seats does not matter so much. We give our verdict on this Bill tomorrow, and this Bill will be one of the things upon which the country will give its verdict at the next Election.

I believe it to be wrong, and therefore I shall have to be, for a short time, estranged from, I suppose, the majority of my hon. Friends.

Before I sit down I want to say what I said at the beginning. I believe I am right. I have always believed that. For believing that; I once had 15 years in the political wilderness; it never proved me to be wrong in the end. but Drove me to be right. I believe I am 1760 right in this, and I believe right hon. Gentlemen are wrong. Let me say again, that I do not question their sincerity at all. So far as I am concerned, I believe that tomorrow they will do what I do, namely, what, under the circumstances, they believe to be right, with freedom of action. I believe in freedom—freedom to do what one thinks is right. It is a freedom which I would exercise were I the only one in that Lobby tomorrow, in doing what I believe to be right. I would like that freedom to be extended to everybody. In this critical period we are not lacking skill, ability, nor planning: what we are lacking is a great spiritual lead, and a spiritual basis. I believe that if we had somebody who would call to this nation, to give themselves in service of any and every kind, the nation might be reborn, having escaped, as it did, from the awful dangers of war. That appeal would be answered. I believe the people are waiting for it.

Although it may well be a subject of indifference and amusement, if we had some Minister of spiritual propaganda that would be a far more effective thing for the country than the Bill which the Minister has introduced today. We have come through a period of terror. Many men have died—and who amongst us has not suffered? I can speak only for myself. We lost our youngest brother, and our best. He was not obliged to be in the Forces at all; but as a free man he volunteered for the Air Force, as a free man he fought, and as a free man he died. I know very well that it never entered his head that he was fighting to save us from the horror of German invasion in order that we might introduce a form of conscription into this country. We owe something to those men, and I hope that between now and tomorrow night we might remember that, as well as our obligation to our younger generation.

8.53 p.m.

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**Colonel Ponsonby (Sevenoaks)** We have just listened to a delightful speech from the 1761 § hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Lang), and I do not wish to add any fuel to the different kinds of fires raging opposite. I want to ask the Government one practical question in connection with the future of the Territorial Army. When I say "future," I mean the immediate future. I do so because, for many years, I have been a member of a Territorial Association. For many years I have been a member of the Territorial Army, and I have the honour to be the honorary colonel of a Territorial regiment. I am proud of that regiment, partly because of its war record, and partly because the colonel, the second-in-command and two of the battery commanders are going to continue, in order to restart the regiment in the new Territorial Army. Perhaps I might say that in order to encourage other Territorial regiments, the name of the regiment is the 97th (Kent Yeomanry) Regiment, R.A.

On 1st May recruitment commences, and there is no doubt that during the next year or so

quite a large number of volunteers will join the Territorial Army. There is, however, a paragraph in the Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill which reads: "... those called up during 1947 and 1948 will be released after serving for fixed periods ranging from two years to 18 months." Command Paper 6831 is referred to. The meaning of that, applied to the Territorial Army, is as follows. In 1947 recruiting commences; in 1948 recruiting will continue; but there will be no contribution from the national service men. The same thing applies in 1949. It is only in 1950 and 1951 that the Territorial regiments will be made up, presumably, to full strength by the inclusion of the national service men. The plan in its entirety, when it gets going, will be good, and will be for the benefit of the country and all the men who have to do their one and a half years, and then their five and a half years. But, have the Government realised that for the years 1947, 1948, 1949 and, at any rate part of 1950, there will be no increase in numbers in the Territorial units, because there will be no national service men? If my deductions are correct, I would ask the Government to expand what they propose to do. I also ask them to see whether they could make some improvement on what appears to be proposed, because, as we are all aware, it is not for the benefit of any unit that it should, for so long a time, remain nothing more than a cadre.

8.58 p.m.

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**Mr. Swingler (Stafford)** I hope the hon. and gallant Member for Sevenoaks (Colonel Ponsonby) will forgive me if I do not follow him in a discussion of the Territorial Army. I should like, rather reluctantly, to say something about the general principle involved in this Bill. As we have heard this afternoon, I think there is no responsible Member of this House and no working citizen in the country who actually welcomes this Bill. It is an unprecedented step in peacetime for this country, and will involve, during the next few years, the call up annually of between 150,000 and 180,000 young men at a crucial period of their lives. As many hon. Members have said, that will involve a loss of production, greater difficulties in dealing with the manpower position in the country, and, at the same time, an interruption of careers, technical training, education, and so on.

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1762

I believe the Government have made the acceptance of this Bill far more difficult, for two reasons. One reason is the fact that, in my opinion, and in the opinions of many of my hon. Friends, we are today maintaining, and the Government are proposing to continue to maintain 12 months hence, according to the White Paper on Defence, vastly excessive Armed Forces, which are not commensurate with the size of our population, and which demonstrate the fact that there must be a serious reduction in the amount of armed manpower, which the country cannot afford at its present level, and a reduction in commitments.

In the second place, I believe the Government have made the acceptance of the Bill difficult by their failure to announce a definite new programme of reforms to be introduced into the Armed Forces, in order to modernise the Armed Forces and to make them efficient and more democratic. While I welcome certain signs of reform in this Bill, particularly in regard to the

placing of the responsibility for further education on the Service Departments, I would welcome far more signs in the Service Departments of implementing this principle, that they should be responsible for such things as, for example, educational matters, and that steps should be taken to improve the facilities and rights of the men in the Armed Forces.

Nevertheless, I must disagree with those of my hon. Friends, whose convictions I sincerely respect, who believe that the reason for this Bill, the reason why we have got to have conscription in peace time, is that we must maintain very large Armed Forces. I do not believe that that is the case. When we look at the actual facts, the Bill is to involve the call-up of the 18 year olds. It is fantastic to suppose we can maintain very large Forces on 1763 the basis of 150,000 or 180,000 18 year olds every year. It is a question of the ability to maintain Armed Forces of any size or character when there are such severe demands on the manpower of the country in other respects. Certain hon. Members have discussed, without going into any detail, what the actual position of recruiting is now, and what it will be in the next few years under this Bill. The Minister of Labour, in the effective speech with which he introduced this Bill today, gave the fact that in the Army at the moment, an Army of as vast a number as over 800,000, the actual Regular content is somewhere between 100,000 and 120,000.

Last year—these figures can be got by hon. Members by referring to the Debates in this House and in another place—the position was stated, that to maintain in this country in the next few years an Army of, say, 250,000—and I give figures quoted by the Secretary of State for War and other Service Ministers—a monthly intake, of voluntary recruits, would be required of about 4,000, to cover wastage and run out. The best figure so far, in the period since the end of the war, over a period of months, has been the recruitment of 2,690, I believe; but over the months of 1946, the recruitment was anything between 1,200, 1,800 and 2,000—between 1,000 and 2,000; it was less than 50 per cent. of what was actually required, as shown in those figures to cover wastage and run out.

I put it to my hon. Friends who argue this case that, after a long period of war, when there has been conscription to the Forces and a large number of men have been called up, when the country is very short of manpower in industry, and there is not one recruiting campaign in this country but half a dozen campaigns going on—recruiting for miners, recruiting for the iron foundries, and half a dozen other industries—that, in those circumstances, we have to face the question whether we can recruit a sufficient number to maintain even the very lowest level we have ever had of Armed Forces in peace time.

I ask my hon. Friends, therefore, what alternatives they put forward to the House in this respect? What is the alternative? If you say that the problem should be solved by voluntary recruitment, bearing in mind that the principal recruiting officer under the voluntary 1764 system before the war was major unemployment, then you must be prepared to face the fact that the only way to do that is to make soldiering the best paid job in the country and give soldiers the best conditions of any occupation in the country, although it is an unproductive occupation. Is that the alternative that is being put forward? I am not prepared to swallow that alternative. I do not believe that is a policy which we should apply. In all the



recruiting campaigns in this country, we want to recruit the best young men, the most lusty young men, for the coalmining industry, for the iron foundries—productive work—and we should not say, "Let us make soldiering the best paid, the most comfortable, occupation in order to be able to solve the problem of getting a sufficient intake into the Armed Forces by voluntary means." I believe that after a period of long war, and under the conditions involved in pursuing a policy of full employment—not, therefore, having the scourge of poverty and unemployment to drive men into the Armed Forces—the only way to get sufficient recruitment on the voluntary system would be to say, "Let us make soldiering the best paid job in the country, with the most comfortable conditions.

I yield to no hon. Member in asking for improvements in welfare facilities in the Armed Forces and for democratic reforms, but I believe we should not put forward what, in my belief, is a militaristic policy of saying that, in order to get sufficient recruits for the Armed Forces, we should glorify them and so raise their status that we would attract and cream off permanently—to make careers in the Armed Forces—the best young men in the nation. I believe that today, in a period of peace, we want the best young men in productive occupations. That should be the principal recruiting campaign and the principal policy of the Government. For that reason, reluctantly—it is a question of reluctant necessity, for none of us wishes to welcome this Bill, and we all wish to do away with this system when the conditions of manpower shortage, and so on, improve—I believe that, with the qualifications I have given, we should support the Bill. The Government should give assurances to hon. Members that our Armed Forces will be reduced to a size commensurate with our 1765 population. They should face up to the fact that they must reduce our commitments, and introduce a programme of reforms, giving guarantees that they will be implemented. Then, we shall be more prepared—and I shall vote for the Second Reading of the Bill—to accept the inevitable necessity for dealing with recruitment to the Armed Forces in this way during the next few years.

9.8 p.m.

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**Mr. Wyatt (Birmingham, Aston)** I wish whole-heartedly to agree with almost everything § that has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Swingler), but I want particularly to deal with some of the arguments which my hon. Friends who have been sufficiently misguided to move and support this Amendment have been advancing during the Debate. The hon. Lady the Member for Rushcliffe (Mrs. Paton) and the hon. Member for Camlachie (Mr. Stephen) spoke of the large size of the Armed Forces today, but I think there is one thing we should get clear straight away, and it is that this Bill has nothing whatever to do with the present size of the Armed Forces. In the Debates on the Army Estimates and in the Defence Debate we had it quite clearly shown that, through the Government's own action in saying that no man called up after January, 1947, would serve for more than two years, the Forces will automatically fall from their present swollen size to something in the neighbourhood of 750,000 by 1st January, 1949, when this Bill will begin to operate.



The main reason for the Bill is that it is impossible to maintain a reasonable-sized force without some compulsion. It is reasonable to ask why conscription is necessary. I imagine that few of my hon. Friends would disagree that the Armed Forces were not too large before the war, when the Army numbered 210,000. The Army today would require conscription to be kept to that level. We have already been told that recruitment for the Army allows only for replacement and wastage in relation to 129,000 Regular soldiers.

**Mr. S. Silverman** I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had the advantage of §  
reading an article in yesterday's "Sunday Times" by a man who was military secretary of the  
Cabinet during the war. I thought that writer was saying that without compulsion we 1766  
could maintain a voluntary Army of 450,000.

**Mr. Wyatt** I think the writer was saying—I have not the article with me, but I did read it §  
—that we could maintain the Armed Forces, namely, the Navy, Army and Air Force, at  
450,000, and not simply the Army. That is an entirely different matter, and even so he was  
wrong. If we agree that the prewar Forces were not large enough, we must also agree that  
we cannot again have the pathetic business that we had before the war of divisions training  
on Salisbury Plain with a flag saying, "This flag represents three tanks," and another flag  
saying, "This flag represents two brigades." We cannot wonder that our Forces were not  
efficiently trained when the war began. That alone should be a sufficient reason. If we had  
no additional commitments at the end of the war we would still be able to agree that the  
Forces before the war were not large enough.

Several speeches of my hon. Friends have quoted from articles by the military expert Captain  
Liddell Hart. They omitted to quote one serious statement which he made recently to the  
effect that he once made a report to the War Office before the war that our Armed Forces  
were 50,000 to 100,000 men short. That means that he agreed that with our commitments  
before the war we really needed something like 550,000 men in the Armed Forces. That  
leaves out altogether the question of Germany, in regard to which we shall have a  
commitment of 100,000 men for several years, inevitably. If Captain Liddell Hart is right on  
that point he must be wrong on conscription. He cannot possibly get such a force without  
conscription.

I agree that we do not want to create a military caste in this country, but that would be  
inevitable if we made the rates of pay and conditions of service in the Army so attractive  
that workers would leave the mines and textile mills to join the Army. It would mean that  
the Army was priority No. 1, as it was in Germany. We want the Army to be a respectable  
occupation, but not the most privileged. Arguments have been advanced by pacifists who  
know nothing whatever of military warfare that the invention of the atom bomb has made  
armies useless. Has it never occurred to them that one of the features of the recent 1767  
war was the extensive use of parachute regiments? I would remind them that the way in  
which another war will be started in the ultimate will be decided by soldiers. Whatever we

may say about the atom bomb it is the soldier who advises his Government on the best way to start a war. The soldier is much more likely to say, "Do not drop any atom bombs on that territory, because we want to occupy it and use it ourselves. In any case, if you do drop them, they will drop atom bombs on us in return." It is much better to occupy a country quickly with parachute regiments, than to run the risk of retaliation with atom bombs.

**Mr. S. O. Davies** (Merthyr) If the hon. Member was in command of the forces in this country, and if he decided to drop paratroops on the enemy and the enemy decided to drop atom bombs on this country, to what extent would the paratroops help this country to bring the hon. Member's particular war to a successful issue? §

**Mr. Wyatt** The answer is that the paratroops I was discussing would belong to some other Power and not to us. In any case, if another Power decided to attack us, and decided to do it by dropping so many paratroops as to put us effectively out of action, we would not have the means to retaliate by dropping any atom bombs in return. §

**Mr. Henry Usborne** (Birmingham, Acock's Green) Presumably the hon. Member is visualising a war, and presumably he is visualising one in which Soviet Russia attacks us. I take it that Soviet Russia will not attack us for fun, but because she thinks we are going to attack her. If one is realistic, is it not probable that Soviet Russia will not wish to occupy our country, but to destroy it so that we cannot occupy her? §

**Mr. Wyatt** There are so many presumptions in that interruption that perhaps I will be forgiven if I do not follow it. My basic argument is that if we have an Army we must have an Army prepared to meet all possible eventualities of a war from whatever source it comes. It is unlikely that another Power would begin by dropping atom bombs. My point is that it is absolutely essential that we should have enough forces and enough reserves available to repel parachute landings in the first instance, while our other reserves can be mobilised and whatever allies we may have in the war can come to our rescue and unless we have conscription, it is unlikely that we shall have many allies on the mainland of Europe. It is most important that we should be able to repel any such paratroop landings until we can mobilise our reserves. We no longer have the six months breathing space which was given to us by the Navy. That breathing space has gone as a result of the development of air power. I see my hon. Friend is smiling, but this is a serious matter. § 1768

**Mr. S. O. Davies** I was certainly not smiling at his argument. I could not help feeling a little delighted inwardly that I would have won the war by means of the atom bomb before §

my hon. Friend could send over a single paratrooper.

**Mr. Wyatt** I am very sorry to find that my hon. Friend is so bloodthirsty. The invention of the atom bomb makes no difference to the need of having adequate forces at our disposal. I confidently say that for several years to come we shall need an Army of at least 400,000. We will also need an Air Force of something like 220,000 and a Navy of 130,000 in order adequately to cover the commitments which we had before the war, and also to provide sufficient forces to police Germany. It is absurd to imagine that we can go back now into the state of unpreparedness we were in at the beginning of the war. I can remember very well, when I was first called up, the alarm and horror I felt on discovering that the platoon in which I was to serve had no weapons except two out-of-date Lewis guns, and the officers had never been trained with the weapons we hoped some day to get. It is not fair or reasonable of people to ask our Forces to go back to that state of affairs. §

**Mr. Byers** Does not the hon. Member recognise that his argument is an argument for properly equipped Forces, not conscription? §

**Mr. Wyatt** One does not maintain more equipment than there, are men to handle. §

**Mr. Byers** Why not? §

**Mr. Wyatt** What is the point of maintaining more Bren guns than there are men to fire them? §

1769

**Mr. Byers** Does not that show that the hon. Member is living entirely in the past? §

**Mr. Wyatt** I may be learning from the past, but I am looking towards the future. §

It is objected that military discipline is an unhealthy factor to have in a democracy, and it is incompatible with it. But why should that be so? Is it really best to rely on a professional Army, which is put in a very privileged position, with an exaggerated importance, or on an Army the burden of which is fully shared by the community? I feel that there is no need for conscription to have a bad effect on our youth, if the Government concentrate on the educational facilities, which can make a splendid thing out of it. During the war, A.B.C.A. did

a tremendous amount to make soldiers aware of the country in which they lived. I hope that my right hon. Friend intends to extend its activities, and not curtail them, as has been rumoured. By that means the meaning of democracy can be spread in the future.

It is not a bad thing to be moved, in one's life, once or twice to one part of the country and to another country and to meet all kinds of people, at a fairly early age. I should be very sorry if I had not been moved about from one part of the world to another, and there are many people who will never have facilities for doing that unless they have a period of national service. That might seem to some to be a reactionary argument, and it may be unfortunate that we have to have conscription. But if we must have conscription let us look on the good things we can get out of it. There are advantages in such a system. I do not think that any one who has served in the Forces during the war would say that he had, on the whole, not profited from it.

I would ask the Government to make sure that there are adequate facilities for vocational training for men during their period of national service, so that when they return to civil life they will have had a chance to extend their knowledge in the profession or occupation which they wish to take up on leaving the Forces. There is one serious danger in this Bill and in the idea of conscription. It is true that some conscript Armies have failed badly because of bad morale. I think that was true of the French Army, and that the failure there was due to poor conditions and the small amount of pay—I know that ours are to be a good deal 1770 better—and also because reluctant conscripts spread the infection of unwillingness and desertion among their comrades. This must not be allowed to happen in any way in our Army. The first thing we have to do is to keep the Regular Army, as a whole, more or less separate from the conscripts. That is most important. I will give another reactionary argument to support that claim also. I think the German Army was the most efficient, from the military standpoint, during the war—[An HON. MEMBER: "It lost."]—it lost because the odds were so overwhelming against it.

**Mr. Emrys Roberts (Merioneth)** Is the hon. Gentleman proposing to have a separate § regiment for national service men in the Regular Army?

**Mr. Wyatt** Perhaps I might be allowed to develop this argument. I think that the Regular § Army should be maintained as a Regular Force, with its own units and constituted on the same lines for a period of years. The conscripted element should only be added to it in brigades, regiments or companies, quite separate and distinct from it. With regard to those people who have been described by the military expert quoted by my hon. Friends as the sensitive type, the artistic type, as not fit for conscription or employment in the Army. I think they should also be put into separate units quite ruthlessly as a necessity from the military point of view.

The Government would also be well advised to keep a careful watch on the length of service,

and see whether or not they can cut it down from 18 to 12 months. We have to remember that the Service chiefs, quite naturally, are not going to advise savage cuts in the Army, or a shorter period of service. They are bound to ask for the thing which they know will give them the opportunity to do the job most efficiently. I think that it is up to the Government to see that these cuts are made. It is also very important to ensure that there are no delays at the beginning of the training period, and that men are not kept hanging about for three or four weeks in training camps before beginning training, as happened to many of us during the war. They must not waste any part of their period of training, but get straight on with the job, so that the period of training may be cut if necessary.

I would suggest to opponents of the Bill on pacifist grounds that it would be more 1771 helpful if they would stick to their pacifist objections to it. I know that there are people who object to it on grounds of manpower or because they do not like the Government's foreign policy; but those who object to it on pacifist grounds should rely on the somewhat doubtful evidence of the Bible, as to whether it is wrong to fight in war or to have an Army, and not oppose it on military grounds. A number of speeches have been made today and were made on the King's speech last November which gave a lot of rather fallacious military arguments as to why conscription was not a good thing, when the real reason which the speakers had in mind was that they were pacifists. I think that the pacifist ought to realise where pacifism would have taken us if it had been followed through during the last war. We might all at this moment be conscripted in the German Army. I would say to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Mr. Zilliacus), who disapproves of our foreign policy, and who would deny us an Army because our foreign policy was wrong, that one day he himself may become a Foreign Secretary, and he might find it rather disconcerting to have voted himself no Army.

**Mr. Zilliacus (Gateshead)** Our Prime Minister, when Leader of the Opposition, said on 9th § March, 1936: "... you cannot separate foreign policy from defence ... Defence is the result of foreign policy. Very often defence proposals show what is the reality of a foreign policy, and it is so in this case."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 9th March, 1936; Vol. 309, c. 1843.]" Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Mr. Wyatt** I do not entirely agree. But I think it unwise from my hon. Friend's standpoint § to press that point too far. On the whole, I welcome this Bill for its realistic approach to this problem. It does not bind us permanently to conscription. I think that the Government are quite genuine when they tell us that, as soon as possible, when U.N.O. becomes sufficiently strong, they will reduce the period from 18 to 12 months and also do away with the Bill altogether as soon as it becomes possible. Until that time we must have sufficient and adequate forces so that we are not a temptation to other countries, but strong enough to be a deterrent to anybody who may feel inclined to attack us. 1772

9.30 p.m.

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**Mr. Zilliacus (Gateshead)** I rise to support the Amendment, but not as a pacifist. I fought §  
in the first world war, I was a Home Guard in the last war and I accept the principle of  
conscription. I agree that there is a great deal of force in the argument that if we have full  
employment, it is difficult to raise adequate forces by voluntary means. I also agree that  
there is force in the argument that conscription is a fair and democratic means of raising the  
necessary forces. I regard conscription as a military form of direction of labour, and if the  
necessity is great enough, I have no objection to the direction of labour either for military or  
even for civilian purposes. I do object, however, in principle, to the calling up of young men  
to fight for purposes for which I should refuse to fight if I were of military age. I think that  
just as in home affairs it is the duty of the Government to have a policy that will assure the  
people a minimum standard of life, so in foreign and defence matters, it is the duty of the  
Government to assure the conscripts a minimum standard of death, if I may put it that way.  
That standard does not exist today. There is no guarantee that our conscripts, whether in  
Palestine or in Greece, will not have their lives thrown away for a cause which is not worth  
the bones of a single British soldier.

**Mr. Bramall (Bexley)** The hon. Member for Gateshead (Mr. Zilliacus) says that the §  
conscripts should be allowed to have a certain safeguard. Does he mean to say that it does  
not matter if volunteers are allowed to throw their lives away for a cause which he would not  
be prepared to support?

**Mr. Zilliacus** The volunteer is in a different position. When he signs on, he signs on to §  
obey the Government's orders for any purpose the Government want, and if he does not  
want to do that, he does not volunteer.

The real root of my objection is stated this morning in the "Daily Herald." It says: "Only one  
thing, indeed, would justify Parliament in refusing to grant to a British Government today the  
powers now sought; and that would be the failure of such a Government to base its foreign  
policy on support for U.N.O." I am not arguing that this Amendment is an § 1773  
Amendment for the rejection of conscription in principle, or I would not vote for it. This  
Amendment asks the Government to think over the matter for six months, and I want them  
to do that because I believe—and I know it is a grave charge but I make it deliberately—that  
the Government's policy is not based on the United Nations organisation. It is not based on  
the obligations of the Charter.

**Mr. Follick (Loughborough)** The mover of the Amendment said quite clearly that, moving §  
the omission of the word "now" and substituting the words. "this day six months" was, in  
effect, moving the rejection of the Bill.

**Mr. Zilliacus** I am interested in the wording of the Amendment, not in the feelings of the mover of the Amendment. I do not agree with the mover of the Amendment in many respects. I believe the Government have got themselves into this muddle by a practice which in private life is held to be morally reprehensible, namely, to be "on with the new love, before being off with the old." Politicians are rather fond of being on with the new love without being off with the old, and I believe that the Government have got themselves into a state where they have practically committed political bigamy. They have gone through a form of marriage with the United Nations organisation, while still wedded to the policy of the balance of power. Let us suppose for a moment that the Government's policy was really based on the Charter of the United Nations organisation. What is the first thing they ought to do after a great war when they set to work to rebuild the world with the enemy disarmed and prostrate? I suggest that the first thing they ought to do, is to follow the advice of the late Lloyd George in the memorandum which he gave to the "Big Four," at the Peace Conference in March, 1919, when he pointed out to them that unless the great Powers, members of the Council—today we call it the Security Council although then it was known as the League Council—trusted each other in the matter of armaments and came to some agreement with each other—if they once started preparing for war against each other or rearming against each other—the Covenant would not be worth the paper it was written on. The same applies to the Charter a fortiori because the whole Charter is based upon the fundamental principle that the permanent Security Council members must not, in any circumstances, fight each other, and must trust each other. § 1774

There is no obligation in the Charter for the great powers to coerce each other. The only obligation to apply force in the Charter operates when the great Powers agree and in no other circumstances. If any Member on the Front Bench denies that fact I wish he would speak now, because this fact makes it absolute nonsense, humbug and bunkum—to say the very least—to assert that we need conscript Armies or Forces on anything like the present scale in order to do our duty under the Charter of the United Nations organisation.

**Vice-Admiral Taylor** May I ask the hon. Member a question about the United Nations organisation? Does he really consider that when Russia uses her power of veto as she does use it continually any confidence can be placed in the practical application of the Charter of the United Nations organisation? §

**Mr. Zilliacus** I believe that the way to ensure reasonable use of the unanimity rule is to reach political agreements with the Soviet Union based on the Charter. But I do not agree that it is a reason for abandoning the Charter and reverting to power politics. §

**Vice-Admiral Taylor** That is hardly an answer to my question.

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**Mr. Zilliacus** The unanimity rule is, of course, part of the Charter, on the basis of which we are functioning. If the Government mean business, I would remind the House of the statement of the Foreign Secretary on 21st February last year, confirmed by the Prime Minister on 6th March this year, that we do trust both the Soviet Union and the United States, and that there can be no policy or anything else which will lead to a conflict with either of these great Allies. If we are really basing our policy on the United Nations organisation and, within the United Nations organisation, on equal cooperation with both the Soviet Union and the United States, and if we do not apprehend war from either, and do not believe in preparing for war against either, and if, as the Prime Minister said on 18th November last, we do not believe in building up our armies against either of those States, is there any reason at all why we should not do today what was done in 1919? That is, instruct the fighting Services to frame their annual Service Estimates on the political assumption that we will not be engaged in a great war within the next ten years. And could we not add to that an instruction that they should not base our defence preparations on the assumption that we may have to fight the United States or the U.S.S.R.?

1775

I want to make the Government a sporting offer. If a member of the Government can get up now or at any time in the Debate, and state that they have given instructions to the fighting Services to base their Estimates on the ten year rule and on the assumption that we need not prepare to fight either the United States or the Soviet Union, I will vote for the Bill and will withdraw my support from the Amendment. But until they can give me such an assurance, I am voting for the Amendment, because I have a conscientious objection based on the Charter against this country joining either with the United States in fighting against the Soviet Union, or with the Soviet Union to fight against the United States.

**Mr. C. Shawcross** Does the hon. Member think it would be reasonable to base our policy on any such assumption, so long as the Soviet Union, with its enormous population, maintains not only conscription but a very large standing army?

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**Mr. Zilliacus** that question can equally well be addressed to the United States who are now spending 13,000 million dollars on arms, whereas before the war they spent, 1,000 million. Either you trust both the Soviet Union and the United States—in which case their armaments are irrelevant—or you prepare for war against one of them on the side of the other. That was precisely my argument, that at the present time, while professing to base our policy on the Charter, which does call for trusting our permanent fellow members of the Council, we are in fact basing our policy on an Anglo-American balance of power, and an Anglo-American entente and arms tie-up. That is the whole point of my contention. The situation is ominously close to what it was between 1906 and 1914, when the Liberal

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Govern- ment were in power. Then, there were conversations between the General 1776  
 Staffs, leading to joint arrangements, whereas the Government kept on telling their back  
 benchers that they were completely free and uncommitted, just as the present Government  
 are telling us that they are free and uncommitted. The right hon. Gentleman the Leader of  
 the Opposition, writing on this event, said: "This was a step of profound significance and of  
 far-reaching reactions. Henceforward, the relations of the two staffs became increasingly  
 intimate and confidential. The minds of our military men were definitely turned into a  
 particular channel. Mutual trust grew continually in one set of military relationships, mutual  
 precautions in the other. However explicitly the two Governments might agree and affirm to  
 each other that no national or political engagement was involved in these technical  
 discussions, the fact remained that they constituted an exceedingly potent tie." That applies  
 with uncomfortable accuracy to the present state of Anglo-American relations. There is a  
 case, of course, for an Anglo-American balance of power and arms tie-up against the Soviet  
 Union, and it was powerfully argued by the Leader of the Opposition at Fulton. I understand  
 that case. It was a logical case. I feel about it rather as Ernest Renan felt about the theology  
 of a great Church with which he disagreed—he said its doctrine was a logical system that  
 went wrong only in its foundations. The foundation of the Fulton foreign policy is belief in the  
 immaculate conception of the foreign policy of the capitalist United States and in the original  
 sin of the foreign policy of the Communist Soviet Union. That dogma is based on the  
 perfectly consistent and logical belief of the Conservative Party that the world's journey to  
 Socialism is not really necessary. One can say with only a little exaggeration that the Tories  
 of Britain and America are the Irgun Zwei Leumis of civilisation's march to Socialism. They  
 would cheerfully blow up civilisation with atom bombs rather than allow it to move in that  
 direction.

I can understand this argument. But I cannot understand why a Labour Government, basing  
 its belief in world peace on the advance of Socialism, must tie itself up with this crypto-  
 Fulton, Woodford and water, foreign policy, while paying lip service to the United Nations.

I beg the Government to pause, to reconsider and to reflect, and to change their foreign  
 policy while there is still time to change it. I believe they ought to provide the people 1777  
 of this country with a minimum standard of death. It is a fatal mistake to believe that the  
 workers of this country are going to join in fighting the Soviet Union as the junior partners of  
 capitalist America. I think anyone proceeding on that assumption will find he has sown the  
 wind and will reap the whirlwind. I believe that it is disastrous to assume that the people of  
 this country will be content to supply conscripts who will, in fact, be conscripted to serve a  
 policy that is determined in Washington rather than in London. I believe there is a very  
 strong feeling among the people of this country that it is time that history reversed itself and  
 we had a British Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.

I am only asking the Government to do what they profess to want to do, to base their policy  
 on the United Nations organisation, and within that, on equal friendship and co-operation  
 with both the Soviet Union and the United States, and on the assumption that we need not  
 prepare for war against either. If we are going to conscript the youth of this country, they  
 must be fully aware of what they are being conscripted for. I am going to keep on asking

that question. I am asking the Government that they should base their policy on the new morality of the Charter. That is something new and revolutionary, if you like, but we have got to do it. Unless the Labour Government base their policy on faith in our permanent fellow members of the Council, and in the principles of the Charter, of faith in the will to peace and the world purposes of both the United States and the Soviet Union, we are going to have a third world war. Of that, I am absolutely certain. It may not come today, nor tomorrow, but if we allow another armaments race to start, it will certainly come. I am tempted to say that. because we are in a very difficult position in the world, we must make up in wisdom what we have lost in Weight, we must by taking thought add a cubit to our shrunken power—political stature. We can only save ourselves from economic collapse by our own exertions if we save the world from a new arms race by our example.

9.46 p.m.

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**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter (Kingston-upon-Thames)** The, hon. Member for Gateshead (Mr. Zilliacus) made the characteristically mischievous speech which the House, no doubt, expected of him. It would be difficult to imagine a speech better calculated to damage the relations of this country with both our major Allies. I must make my protest, as I am sure most hon. Members will make theirs, at the suggestion which the hon. Member saw fit to make, that the idea of fighting the U.S.S.R. existed in the mind of His Majesty's Government. I have no undue respect for His Majesty's Government, but it is really a monstrous thing that any hon. Member should so abuse his position in this House as to make such a suggestion.

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**Mr. Zilliacus** rose—

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**Mr. S. Silverman** rose—

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**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter** As I have been referring to the hon. Member for Gateshead, and if the hon. Member for Nelson and Colne (Mr. S. Silverman) will allow me, I will give way to him.

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**Mr. Zilliacus** I would point out that I did not assert what was suggested by the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, it would be ridiculous to assert that the Government of this country, or any party in this country, wished to fight the Soviet Union. What I said was that we are basing our defence preparations on the assumption that we may be involved in a war with the Soviet Union within the next ten years on the side of the United States.

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**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter** I am glad to have that assurance from the hon. Gentleman because, whatever he might have meant to say, I think he will find, on consulting the OFFICIAL REPORT, that his words might have led to the contrary impression. No one will appreciate better than the hon. Gentleman how important it is that that impression should not be given. §

**Mr. S. Silverman** If the hon. Gentleman will now give way to me, I would like to say that his hon. and gallant Friend the Member for the Isle of Ely (Major Legge-Bourke) made the very statement which he now says is dangerous. §

**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter** I did not have the pleasure of hearing my hon. and gallant Friend, but I am sure that that was neither the effect nor the intention of his speech. I cannot imagine that any responsible Member of this House would make such a suggestion. §

I should like to deal with the hon. Member for Gateshead's arguments on the subject matter of this Bill. As I understood them, he was not, like a good many of his hon. Friends, opposed to compulsory military service on principle. He was opposed to it simply if it were imposed by a Government with whose foreign policy he did not agree. I can appreciate, and, if I may say so respectfully, respect the attitude of hon. Members who are against compulsory service on principle. That is a respectable position to take up, but to adopt the attitude of the hon. Member for Gateshead, that one will not support compulsory military service because one dislikes the policy of the Foreign Secretary, is really to reduce the principle of democratic Government to a farce. Indeed, it goes further. Presumably, the hon. Member for Gateshead dislikes the foreign policy of His Majesty's Government because he thinks that that foreign policy is increasing the danger of war. If the hon. Member believes that, then, surely, there is an even stronger reason for providing proper military forces. If the hon. Member is genuine in his apprehensions as to the conduct of our affairs by the Foreign Secretary and their consequences, he should be pressing upon the Government not only the carrying through of this Bill but the provision of greater defence forces all over the sphere of defence. 1779

**Mr. Zilliacus** I did say—and I thought I made it clear—that I had a conscientious objection to this country fighting either the United States or the Soviet Union, and I would oppose such a war by every means in my power. I am not a pacifist. I do not believe that a refusal to fight in any war in any circumstances is a useful psychological basis for proceeding in the modern world, but neither do I believe that readiness to be conscripted to fight for any cause against any odds is a good psychological basis for making peace. §

**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter** The hon. Member has not appreciated the full logical consequences of his argument. The foreign policy of a democratic country is, or should be, conducted in accordance with the expressed wishes of the majority of the representatives of the people. Yet the hon. Member is, apparently, prepared to say that such a foreign policy should not be supported by conscripted men. Further, the hon. Member forgot, when he interrupted me just now with his references to the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A., that in this connection his particular reference was to the possibility of a conscripted man being shot at in Greece and in Palestine. We cannot conduct a democratic Government on this principle. We cannot say that we are prepared rather to strip our country of its defences than to permit the foreign policy of the Government to be carried on. That is, surely, not an argument of a sufficiently responsible nature to commend itself to hon. Members of this House. § 1780

**Mr. Zilliacus** Is it the hon. Gentleman's contention that men ought to be conscripted for Palestine and for Greece? Would that be all right?—because those purposes are only remotely connected with national defence. They are something rather different. §

**Mr. Boyd-Carpenter** The hon. Member is good enough to invite my opinion. I would say to him that we cannot argue the matter in this way; that if we are satisfied with the necessity for the provision of adequate Forces, we cannot get out of the obligations to provide those Forces merely by saying that we do not like what is going on in Greece and in Palestine. The hon. Member cannot argue the matter in this piecemeal way. He must face the dilemma; either he is prepared to support the provision of adequate defence Forces in this country, or he is not. He cannot add a kind of conditional support and say that he will support the provision of this country with adequate Armed Forces, provided its foreign policy is such that there is no risk whatsoever of war. §

With reference to certain observations of the hon. Member for Aston (Mr. Wyatt), I will not attempt to follow him in his discussion of high level strategy, but I would offer a comment on his speech, which I am perfectly certain the hon. Member himself would accept were he here, namely, that that speech should have been delivered from the Front bench. The hon. Member for Aston attempted, at any rate, to do what so far has not been attempted from the Front bench, to justify with facts and figures the necessity for this Bill. The right hon. Gentleman the Minister of Labour, in his admirably read speech—[Interruption.] If hon. Members object, I will withdraw the word "admirably." The right hon. Gentleman did not put the House in possession of the facts and figures on which, alone, hon. Members can come to a proper decision on this matter. He has, therefore, asked for the difficulties which he is manifestly encountering from his supporters behind him. Let me put it in this way. I am one of those who believe that the right hon. Gentleman has a good case for this Measure, but he did nothing to help those of us who hold that view, and he did nothing whatever to quieten the doubts of those behind them who doubt the necessity for this Measure. § 1781

It is quite impossible for hon. Members of this House to discharge their duty on this matter—and it is a matter of very great seriousness to the younger generation of this country—unless we are told what are the forces which it is necessary to maintain in order to maintain the position of this country in the world, and unless we are also told, with such approximation as is consistent with security, what are the forces required for different theatres, what are the forces available, and what are the forces which will be necessary in a year or more's time. It is not fair to ask hon. Members—and in particular to ask those of his supporters who, very naturally, in the circumstances, have their doubts about this Measure—to accept this Bill merely because the right hon. Gentleman comes to that Box and says it is necessary. The right hon. Gentleman—and I hope the Minister of Defence may fill the gap tomorrow—must tell the House what are the military calculations and the military needs upon which this Bill is founded. If he does not do so, if he fails to make that case which I and my hon. Friends believe he has, he puts his own hon. Friends in a really intolerable position. He is asking them to go back, in most cases, on their past; he is asking them to repudiate speeches and expressions of opinion which they have made and held, and which, I think, most of them will be prepared to repudiate if they are given a reason. The mere opinion of the right hon. Gentleman is no reason. The House is entitled to be told the facts and figures. That is why I say that the speech of the hon. Member for Aston was, at any rate, an attempt to do what the Minister of Labour did not even attempt to do.

There is one aspect of this matter on which, if I may say so, I can congratulate the Minister. That is the care which he has obviously taken to see that the provisions of this Bill do not interfere unduly with either the system of apprenticeship or the system of education. I was very glad to hear what he said about the effect of the Bill in this respect, and I can only express regret that, as this Bill does not come into force for nearly two years, both apprenticeship and education will have to suffer till then from the manifest imperfections of the present system. The same observation applies to another provision of the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman himself referred to the very proper provision under which a young man who so desires can commence his service at the age of 17½. I understand that that concession is not at present in effect under the present system. Once again, I must express my regret that the provisions which are rightly included in this Bill, which do undoubtedly minimise the hardships and unfairnesses of any system of compulsory service, have to be put off until 1st January, 1949. I hope we may be told from the Government Front bench, that during that interim period it may be possible to put into effect some of those provisions of this Bill, so as to prevent the hardships which these provisions are designed to obviate when the Bill has come into effect. I understand from the—

It being Ten o'Clock, the Debate stood adjourned. §

Debate to be resumed Tomorrow. §

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