

WALTER OI AND THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

My responsibility tonight is to convey something of Walter Oi's role in the elimination of conscription. Before I turn to that, however, I want to tell a true story that, to me at any rate, captures the real Walter with a minimum of words.

When the Graduate School of Management of the University of Rochester decided that Walter would be a valuable addition to its faculty, we opened our recruiting campaign by inviting him to come and visit. Rochester weather, of course, is one of the great impediments to recruiting. For Walter's visit, Mother Nature served up the worst weather I experienced in the nineteen winters I spent there. On subsequent occasions more snow was recorded than in that particular storm, but the snow was never distributed so unevenly. Gale force winds blew the snow into massive drifts which subzero temperatures promptly froze into icebergs so solid that snow ploughs could not penetrate them.

The Rochester airport was closed shortly after the storm began, the very day that Walter was due to arrive. By nightfall, I was snowbound at home; the telephone rang, and it was Walter advising me that he was at the train station in Chicago, had abandoned his flight plans, but was preparing to board the train for Rochester. Despite my description of conditions in Rochester, he insisted that he could make it. The next morning I had another call from him originating at a motel adjacent to the campus. I couldn't get from a suburban home to the campus, none of the faculty could get to the campus, but Walter had gotten there from Chicago.

I first met Walter twenty-five years ago on one of his regular visits to the Pentagon where he was a consultant on personnel matters. In vintage Oi fashion he was provoking officials at the highest levels in the Department of Defense by openly advocating the abolition of conscription. In order to answer those who ridiculed voluntarism as wholly impractical, Walter had committed his considerable talents to estimating the budgetary implications of such a move. That work proved to be a watershed in the cause of voluntarism. It transformed the conscription discussion from dogmatic assertion to careful study of the consequences of abandoning conscription. Competent scholars in both academe and the military research community took up the challenge, and over the next five years they produced

an impressive array of analyses of military personnel requirements, the supply of volunteers and various historical and social aspects of conscription.

On March 27, 1969, newly inaugurated President Richard Nixon announced the formation of a Commission "to achieve the goal of an all-volunteer" force. The Commission (thenceforth known as "The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Force") was directed "to develop a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription." The Commission was chaired by Thomas Gates, former Secretary of Defense, and CEO of Morgan Guaranty Trust Co., and the list of fifteen members included two former Supreme Allied Commanders in Europe, Generals Gruenther and Norstad; two university Presidents, Allen Wallis of the University of Rochester and Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame University; Noble Laureate economist, Milton Friedman; Alan Greenspan, currently Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; Crawford Greenwalt, former CEO of E.I. duPont de Nemours and Co.; and Frederick Dent, President of Mayfair Mills and subsequently Secretary of Commerce. In brief, the Commission had its share of self-reliant and independent thinkers accustomed to positions of great authority and responsibility.

In his formal announcement the President had instructed the Commission to develop a plan for eliminating conscription. He did not ask them to consider the merits of its elimination. Unfortunately, that message was not conveyed to prospective Commission members when they were asked to serve. Almost without exception they believed that their primary charge was to decide whether conscription should be abandoned; and, at the outset at any rate, there was nothing like a consensus on that question. The Commission staff was confronted by an imposing collection of prominent personalities all prepared to do battle over conscription. The contributions of Walter Oi and of Harry Gilman, who is also here tonight, to the elimination of conscription can be properly appreciated only in light of these circumstances.

Not surprisingly, since the Commission staff was dominated by economists, research responsibilities were divided into "supply" and "demand." Walter Oi was responsible for demand, or as the military liked to call it "requirements," and Harry Gilman was responsible for estimating the supply of volunteers. Lines of authority within the staff, however, were very blurred, and both Walter and Harry contributed across the board. Between them they knew virtually everyone who had produced respectable research relevant to conscription. That knowledge and the respect that their names generated enabled the Commission to enlist the aid of a

remarkable research team. Walter displayed his singular talents by engaging a young lady as a research assistant who was not only very competent but in her spare time performed as an exotic dancer.

The Commission staff confronted two tasks which, though related, required very different talents. One was the conduct and supervision of research, the other was persuading skeptics that an all-volunteer force not only was feasible, but also a good idea. While the Commission was divided on the merits of voluntarism, the staff was of one mind, conscription was "bad." Opponents of voluntarism produced a long list of objections from "exorbitant costs" (infinitely inelastic supply) to the charge that voluntarism was a violation of tradition! All of these objections were voiced at one time or another by members of the Commission. The staff was, therefore, more or less compelled to undertake a series of studies including: (1) the role of women in an all-volunteer regime; (2) black participation in an all-volunteer army; (3) requirements for special skills such as medical doctors; (4) the scope of substitution of civilians for uniformed personnel; (5) the effect of voluntarism on reenlistments and training costs; (6) the history of conscription, not only in the United States but also in the Western World; (7) the size of the tax imposed on conscripts; and finally, (8) the central problems of: (a) estimating supply, and (b) specifying a realistic range of requirements.

It will come as no surprise to this audience that Walter Oi was extraordinarily effective as a manager of research and as a researcher. What some of you might find surprising, however, is how effective Walter was in marketing the All-Volunteer Force not only with members of the Commission but with military and civilian personnel in the Department of Defense. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff visited the Commission, they were treated to Walter's compelling and incisive logic and exposed to his awesome knowledge of the facts. There can be no doubt that they left with changed attitudes about an All-Volunteer Force. Walter's persuasiveness was not only important in the work of the Commission but also in the subsequent acceptance of the Commission's recommendations in the Congress. By the time Congress got around to considering legislation eliminating conscription, many key military and civilian leaders in the Department of Defense were already convinced that was the way to go. In the end, Congress adopted the Commission's recommended pay schedule,

abolished conscription, and voluntarism has prevailed ever since. Walter Oi should take much satisfaction from his part in bringing about that course of events.

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