

Militarism — A Totalitarian Influence in Education

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Obsessive anti-communism since World War II has helped confuse ideological issues by treating communism as the basic ideological opponent of American society. If American society affirms democratic values, totalitarianism is in basic ideological opposition, and the ideological opposition to communism should be based on its totalitarian features.

Value distinctions which help identify totalitarian values can be useful in serving democratic goals. The distinctions between democratic and totalitarian values need not be restricted to the institution of government—they can include institutional structures and interpersonal relations throughout the society. When an institution establishes a pattern which pre-disposes interpersonal relations toward either a democratic or totalitarian system of values, the characteristics of that pattern should be subject to scrutiny.

In this study, "totalitarian" will refer to a process by which individuals are coerced, directly or indirectly, to accept an imposed pattern of belief or behavior. "Democratic" will refer to the process by which individuals are permitted to act (or are aided in becoming) self-directed, socially responsible individuals who participate in the formation of the rules they follow and interact critically with the social environment in which they live. Any complex society would be

expected to reveal varying degrees of both democratic and totalitarian values, yet this analysis will assume that a democratic society is one in which relatively greater emphasis is given to democratic processes than to totalitarian, particularly in the preparation of youth for citizenship in that society.

In the Cold War period following World War II, the United States has developed a permanent and all-pervasive military establishment without questioning the effects of the value implications of military influence on our democratic processes. Former President Dwight Eisenhower, in his Farewell Address of January 17, 1961¹, warned that "... we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex." He pointed out that "... the total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the Federal Government."

Informed people were aware of this "military-industrial complex" long before Eisenhower gave official warning. What is less generally known is that military influence during and since World War II has extended into many sections of society other than industry. While the popular press made grave prog-

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Liberty Is at Stake," *Vital Speeches*, (February 1, 1961), p. 229.



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nostications about "creeping socialism," it was in fact *militarism* that was creeping, sometimes even leaping, into the whole fabric of American society with rarely an eyebrow raised by the popular press.² The influence of the military in and on education is part of the general military-complex which is becoming normalized and therefore institutionalized in American society. Most Americans seem to accept it and to see no danger in it, perhaps because they have not thought about it.

THE EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO AN EXPANDING MILITARY

Because there has been little sign of public awareness of the effects of an expanding military establishment, schools, as well as other institutions, have become permeated with many totalitarian attitudes which run directly counter to the responsibility for teaching democratic attitudes. To document this danger, this study will offer an analysis of various forms of the military influence in and on schools, focusing particularly on the high school ROTC program.

Teachers old enough to have a frame of reference developed before World War II often indicate surprise to find that their students almost universally accept an expanded military and a compulsory military draft as a *normal* part of the American way of life. They sometimes fail to realize that today's student knows life only since World War II. The "warfare state" is his only frame of reference. A citizen living during the 1930's would have been more likely to offer resistance or even to use the label "police state" if he had been asked to give up six to eight years to the military, part in active service and part in a reserve. Current

"peacetime" military requirements call for more years of "service" than those of the period in which most World War II veterans served. In Honolulu, public high schools require two years of compulsory ROTC, then two years more are required at the University of Hawaii, and the student is still subject to the draft. Employers often treat job applicants who have not completed their military "obligations" as second-rate candidates since they could be taken at any time by the military. This "discrimination" produces a coercive economic inducement to complete military service.

Not only has American society become increasingly tolerant of militarism since World War II, but the military has become increasingly idolized and sacrosanct. In a study of high school teachers conducted in the mid-1950's, the statement, "We need to build a stronger military force," was consistently selected among a large variety of potentially controversial statements as the statement which was *least* controversial. The majority of teachers thought they would risk their positions to advocate or even to discuss impartially in the classroom "Elimination of the 'flag salute!'" However, virtually all teachers thought that they could either advocate or use for classroom study the assertion, "We need to build a stronger military force."³

Also, in a study of high school students in a metropolitan area conducted in 1957, students were asked to offer criticisms of the world as they saw it. A wide variety of statements was offered, but none included objections to military conscription.⁴

³ William H. Boyer, "Conformity Implications of Certain Current Secondary Educational Theories." Unpublished Dissertation, Arizona State University, (1956). pp. 194-204.

⁴ William H. Boyer, "Attitudes, Opinions, and Objectives of High School Students in the Milwaukee Area," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, (March, 1959), p. 347.

It is a well-known sociological principle that *means* instituted on a temporary basis, such as an expanded post-war military, easily become institutionalized and treated as *ends*. The emergency measure becomes part of a way of life, fully adorned with myth and rationalization, as those who have read Harold Benjamin's *Saber Tooth Curriculum* so well remember.

THE NATURE OF MILITARISM

The basic military commitment should not be ignored. The military is an instrument of *violence*, and though such an instrument may be needed under certain circumstances, it must be recognized that it is an instrument embracing what is essentially despicable. Violence might be used as an unavoidable last resort in a defensive action against others who use violence, but this is not to condone violence. It is only to make use of it when no non-violent alternative is available. When men defend violence itself, they have taken on the "morality" of the psychopath. Should such sanction become widespread, civilization will have sunk to its lowest depths. The Nazis revered militarism as a means and as an end; it was logical that they should, for their belief that right was based on might led to military idolization.

This does not mean that a democratic state in a non-internationally organized world should be without any armed forces, but it does mean that those armed forces must be recognized for what they are, and their central values must never become the central values of that democratic state. When the military becomes coupled to an educational institution, the essential military commitment is easily ignored. The real goals of institutions are,

²Fred Cook, *The Warfare State* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962).

in effect, determined by what the institutions do. Since that is true, ROTC in the high school or even on the college campus raises serious questions about the purposes of the alleged educational institutions. When ROTC is compulsory, the institution indicates that it has not only accommodated ROTC but has even given priority to military values. To require a course is a way of indicating that it is so high on the hierarchy of values of that institution that it cannot be left to the elective choice of the student.

GLORIFICATION EXAMPLES

Institutions have, in addition, other ways of stressing military values, and some tend to glorify them. An example at the college level can be found in the list of prizes and awards offered in special areas to students. At the University of Hawaii there are 17 such awards listed in the catalogue: one each in creative writing, chemistry, government, playwriting, civil engineering, botany, history, and physics; two each in speech and home economics; and *five* in military. If awards reflect what is considered important, the military has a chosen spot indeed.

A Faculty Bulletin at the University of Hawaii advised the faculty that "The Army and Air Force cadets, the Drill Teams, and ROTC Band will participate in the Parade on Saturday morning, May 18. Approval of this participation is on the usual basis, i.e., students will be excused from class attendance provided there are no exams . . . so that as many cadets as possible may participate." University officials had therefore, in effect, informed teaching faculty that the official *university policy* was that it was more important for ROTC students to be in a military parade than to receive educational instruction.

Other examples of glorification are numerous. The University student newspaper runs advertisements of the "merits" of ROTC. A local newspaper listed the "winners" from Junior ROTC field day which included a student honored for proficiency in the "grenade throw."⁷ In some Honolulu elementary schools a recorded bugle call is amplified so that it reaches everyone on the school grounds and many in the surrounding neighborhood to signify the beginning and also the end of the school day. The symbolism is not without meaning for the children nor nearby residents who are audibly informed that school is underway or is over for the day.

THE MYTH OF CIVILIAN CONTROL

It is often stated that the military is civilian controlled and that military influence therefore cannot override civilian authority.⁸ The argument is based on the fact that the formal structure of government places the Pentagon under the control of the Civilian Department of Defense with the various branches of the Armed Forces under the control of the Pentagon. The argument, however, is legalistic and fails to distinguish between *formal* legal control and *informal* control.

There is ample evidence to show how military influence extends into politics, economics, and education. The military-industrial interdependency is the most obvious, but the network of expanding influence spills into the mass media with Armed Forces sponsored programs and Armed Forces radio stations. Vast amounts of public funds coupled to Madison Avenue techniques are used to sell the Armed Forces to the public and therefore

build up a system of power which already "annually spends more than the net income of all United States corporations."⁷

Our foreign policy is so tied in with military thinking that since World War II it has been centrally concerned with either an arms race or a "balance of terror."^{8,9} The Air Force proudly displays the slogan "Power for Peace" to reveal its conception of the best foreign policy. *Power* could also be moral, intellectual, or spiritual, but the pictures of missiles with atomic war-heads displayed in Air Force publications make the meaning of the Air Force concept of power entirely clear.

Military influence in American life should, however, not be assumed to be solely the result of expansionist tactics of the military itself. Militarism and its connected values are also advanced by some of the civilians in government, industry, and education. In some cases, members of the Armed Forces have been less militaristic than civilian officials.¹⁰

For whatever causes, we have not only come to think more like the military, but the so-called civilian segment of our society has become less civilian. Many of our "civilian" Congressmen are members of the Armed Forces. If they were members of a business corporation, it would be considered obvious that a vote by them which could favorably affect the corporation would constitute a conflict of interest. But no conflict of interest is assumed to exist when a Congressman accepts a reserve military commission, though in his role as legislator he must authorize appropriations for

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⁷ Eisenhower, *op. cit.*

⁸ George Kennan, *Russia, the Atom and the West* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

⁹ Fred W. Neal, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union*. Fund for the Republic, 1961.

¹⁰ Cook, *op. cit.*

⁸Honolulu Star-Bulletin, April 30, 1963, p. 3.

⁸ cf. *The Battle for Liberty*. DOD PAM 5-5, p. 11.