

CONSCRIPTION

The following extract is from the notable book "Why Don't We Learn From History," by B. H. Liddell Hart (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1944). The author, a distinguished British military authority, is the Military Historian and Critic for *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

We learn from history that the compulsory principle always breaks down in practice. The principle of restraint, or regulation, is essentially justifiable in so far as its application is needed to check interference with others' freedom. But it is not, in reality, possible to *make* men do something without risking more than is gained from the compelled effort. The method may appear practicable, because it often works when applied to those who are merely hesitant. When applied to those who are definitely unwilling it fails, however, because it generates friction and fosters subtle forms of evasion that spoil the effect which is sought. The test of whether a principle works is to be found in the product.

Efficiency springs from enthusiasm—because this alone can develop a dynamic impulse. Enthusiasm is incompatible with compulsion—because it is essentially spontaneous. Compulsion is thus bound to deaden enthusiasm—because it dries up the source. The more an individual, or a nation, has been accustomed to freedom, the

more deadening will be the effect of a change to compulsion.

These logical deductions are confirmed by analysis of historical experience. The modern system of military conscription was born in France—it was, ironically, the misbegotten child of Revolutionary enthusiasm. Within a generation, its application had become so obnoxious that its abolition was the primary demand of the French people following Napoleon's downfall. Meanwhile, however, it had been transplanted to more suitable soil—in Prussia. And just over half a century later, the victories that Prussia gained led to the resurrection of conscription in France. Its re-imposition was all the easier because the renewed autocracy of Napoleon III had accustomed the French people to the interference and constraints of bureaucracy. In the generation that followed, the revival of the spirit of freedom in France was accompanied by a growth of the petty bureaucracy, parasites feeding on the body politic. From this, the French could never succeed in shaking free; and in their efforts they merely developed corruption—which is the natural consequence of an ineffective effort to loosen the grip of compulsion by evasion.

It is generally recognized today that this rampant growth of bureaucratically-induced corruption was the dry-rot of the Third Republic. But on deeper examina-