

# UNIVERSAL MILITARY TRAINING

A Social Document of the  
ULCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## A Series of Statements of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1944, 1952

**1944: Minutes, 14th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 347, 354.**

Since the future military needs of our country will be known better after the war and when peace plans have been adopted, be it Resolved, that the Church petition the government to postpone action, until after the war, on universal military training of males, between the ages of 17 and 21 years, for one year. The Convention further resolved:

That the Church protest any proposal by our national government to conscript women as being conducive to the further demoralization of the home and the family.

**1952: Adopted by Board of Social Missions. Reported in Minutes, 18th Biennial Convention, ULCA, pp. 786-88.**

In the present critical international situation, the United States has deemed it necessary to rearm in order that it might be able to negotiate with the communist powers from a position of comparable strength. Also in the event of further aggression the United States having re armed would be able to fulfill its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. To this end the Selective Service Law was extended and is known as Public Law 51. The 82nd Congress named this the Universal Military Training and Service Act.

In continuing the draft the Congress of the United States provided for a new program of universal military training. Congressional approval of the broad outline for a UMT program drawn up by the National Security Training Commission is necessary before it can be put into effect. The Congress must act within 45 legislative days after it reconvenes in January.

The Board of Social Mission on November 13, 1947 recorded its opposition to the then pending Congressional Bill Hr-4278 on UMT for the following reasons: "(a) that it will not contribute to the real defense of our country, (b) that the exorbitant cost could better be used for other means of national defense, and, (c) that it is contrary to the best interests of democracy."

It is important now to examine the new proposals submitted to the 82nd Congress

and make recommendations on them to the people of our Church. To this end we present the following judgments for the guidance of the Church.

1. We believe that at the governmental level the best hope for peace lies in strengthening the United Nations as an instrument of collective security and of creative development in world health, agricultural and industrial life, and moral and political strength.
2. We recognize that in the present world situation the United States has decided to rearm in order that measures of collective security may be undertaken by the United Nations. Some form of draft appears to be necessary to achieve that end.
3. We are convinced that universal military training is not the best way to advance the above policies.
  - a. The decision to raise and maintain standing military forces of from three-and-a-half to four million men will make it impossible to undertake UMT on anything more than a token basis. All available young men will be required for the regular maintained if it has to be regularly referred to Congress for action. We prefer the calculated risk of a failure of public and congressional responsibility to the dangers of military bureaucracy services. Each of the armed services is planning its UMT program on the basis of one instructor to every two trainees. Again an existing manpower shortage will be complicated by the initiation of this program. In a time of shortages of building materials and military material, UMT will create a further drain for its new facilities.
  - b. The training program outlined by the National Security Training Commission continually emphasizes that the six months of UMT can only serve as an orientation period for military life, inculcate the sense of responsible citizenship, and lay the "elementary" basis for further detailed training in the reserves. In itself it will be ineffective as a strictly military measure and depends upon its completion in the reserves for its justification. However no effective reserve program is in existence, and Congress is still struggling with legislation in that regard. It is unwise to depend for long-range military power upon a program still to be formulated and enacted.
  - c. The history of permanent universal military training in other countries (i.e. Germany in World Wars I and II, Japan and France in World War II) indicates that this system is no guarantee of military victory. The military asks for it because it will provide them with a sustained source of manpower without the necessity for justifying its need as in the case of the selective service feature of the present law which must be renewed by Congress. Admittedly, the fluctuations in public sentiment that forced the rapid demobilization of our armed forces after World War II made the formulation and execution of national policy very difficult. Nevertheless, we believe a more vital and dynamic national policy will be.

d. Another doubt persists in our minds. Will the training given in UMT and the reserves provide us with militarily efficient forces? Some skills will be learned but will these skills be outmoded by technical developments? We note that some military experts disapprove of UMT because it will not produce a military "force-in-being."

4. Above all, as Christians, we are opposed to a permanent system of universal military training because it tends to fasten upon the nation a militaristic spirit that would, in our judgment, undermine our democratic and moral standards.
  - a. The Commission views the adoption of UMT as important in that it emphasizes to all young men that "armed conflict has ever been endemic in the world. ~ In the judgment of the Commission, 'Too often their early education has failed to impart to them a clear awareness of their implicit obligation to bear arms, to pledge their lives to duty and country. Its sudden revelation as a hard fact in time of crisis has caused painful psychological shocks which have often distorted the true relationship of the citizen to the community. This denial to our Sons of the facts of their world, and the proper interpretation of those facts, has been short-sighted and unjust in the extreme, for it has too often left them unprepared, in military skills and mental outlook, to face the most basic of human challenges.'" The implication seems clear that UMT is to accustom our youth to the view that war is "endemic" or inevitable and enduring. We must recognize the inevitability of international disagreements and that our generation faces a long period of international tension. However, that does not mean that war is "endemic." The experience of other nations has been that universal military training results in the establishment of a military clique in government and social life that has often proved subversive of democratic values.
  - b. The Commission stresses that the moral welfare of the trainees could be protected and enhanced by proper leadership and by (1) opportunities for religious worship, (2) a character guidance program, and (3) an information and educational program. We are not impressed with the present programs of this type in the armed forces though they have been improved over the years. We do not believe that, in a coerced military situation, it is possible to inculcate character or religious values as effectively as in a voluntary situation.
  - c. The subjection of the vast majority of the young men of the nation to a six months period of military training and seven-and-a-half years of involvement in the reserve program would seriously disrupt their family ties at an important period. It would tend to foster in them an acceptance of authority rather than a dependence on individual initiative and democratic co-operation. Their schooling in war would tend to destroy their sense of religious and ethical values.
  - d. The establishment of UMT would tend to distract our nation from more

creative efforts for disarmament and peace to military preparations with the dangerous consequence of stimulating a war spirit.

Therefore, we urge the Congress of the United States to consider this report in making their decision on the program of Universal Military Training recommended by the National Security Training Commission and to repeal the section of Public Law 51, 82nd Congress, entitled the Universal Military Training and Service Act, which establishes UMT.

We further urge our people in the United States, as Christian citizens, to study this report and to communicate their views to their Senators and Representatives in the Federal Congress, to the President and to the Chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on the Armed Services, Senator Richard B. Russell, and the Hon. Carl Vinson respectively. Because Congress may act at any time after it convenes on January 8, this must be done immediately.