

Stupid and Cowardly

An Editorial

Legislative stupidity and political cowardice reached an all-time high in the House of Representatives last night when the alleged guardians of the nation's safety voted to postpone conscription for sixty days.

That would mean that the most important safeguard for the future of democracy, in this country and elsewhere, would be evaded until **after the November elections.**

The implication is too plain to be missed.

Because an election is near, and because the isolationist and obstructionist minority in this country has conducted an organized campaign to defeat the draft, the House has dodged the issue.

From afar, it is almost possible to hear the voice of Hitler as he congratulates his fellow member of the Axis on this new demonstration of "democracy at work" in the New World. The Bundsters and their kind are happy, and the Fifth Columnists smirk with satisfaction.

For a shocked nation, there is only one consolation: the action is not yet final.

The vote in favor of Representative Hamilton Fish's amendment, proposing to give the volunteer system a trial until after the votes have been cast, is subject to final ratification by the House.

But unless the rebellious members of Congress, of both parties, hear from their people immediately, efforts to undo the damage will be unavailing.

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This playing fast and loose with America's safety assumes the aspect of a national scandal.

The men who are aspirants for the Presidency on the Democratic and Republican tickets are made of better stuff than the members of the lower House of Congress. Realizing the immediate need of conscription, both of them have given it their indorsement.

But this gratifying leadership has been ignored in order to follow the course advocated by the worst enemies of democracy.

There is no doubt, in the opinion of this newspaper, that the majority of House members understand the need for conscription, and expect to support it **at a later date.** They have voted for billions with which to turn out the equipment needed for modern warfare. Their patriotism encourages the output of tanks and planes and anti-aircraft guns, and all kinds of machinery for defense. But they have drawn the line at providing for manpower to operate these machines—until after the ordeal of election is over.

Under the Fish amendment, approved by 185 to 155, the volunteer plan will get a "sixty day trial." If 400,000 men are recruited the isolationists will then be in a position to claim vindication. But there is no probability that the number will be reached, and in any case the formation of an army will have been thrown into confusion and delay. The army's plans will be far behind schedule.

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We do not think the required number will enlist, for several reasons, one of them being that the House's example in playing politics with defense is a sorry example of patriotism.

If these men in Washington are not willing to risk an election test when in such a crisis, why should other men volunteer to risk their very lives?

And, furthermore, it is practically a foregone conclusion that conscription will be adopted at some later date if not now. If it is coming eventually, the average man of military age will have good reason to wait for it.

By its action last night, the House of Representatives did serious damage to the cause of democracy. It caused its country to lose prestige in the eyes of South Americans, to say nothing of the European totalitarians. It weakened the President and Secretary Hull in their conduct of foreign affairs when the obvious need was to strengthen their hands.

Unless the House changes its mind when the amendment for final ratification comes up, the members who are on record as having played into the hands of every enemy of democracy, should, and will, we predict, be held strictly accountable by the American people.

(A copy of this editorial will be sent to every member of Congress.)