

The Case of John Milton Ratliff

Ever since I was a little tot, General Lewis B. Hershey has been in charge of that selective slavery system known as the draft. The man seems ageless and, as in the case of that other seemingly Indispensable Man, J. Edgar Hoover, General Hershey's retirement rights were waived for the greater good of us all, and he rolls on, presumably immortal, ever calling out his creed of Draft 'Em All. The latest effusion of our Simon Legree was to urge the local draft boards to draft those youngsters who interfere with the workings of the Selective Service System. There is good ground to think that this edict is unconstitutional, since we are all supposed to be equal before the law, and the draft system is not supposed to be able to single out anyone it does not like for punishment.

But, in its wisdom, the Selective Service System has gone beyond the simple draft of those who illegally interfere with the draft process; it has now proceeded onward to drafting someone because, and *only* because, he is a member of an anti-war, anti-draft organization. If this act is allowed to stand, freedom of speech or of opposition to government policies in this country will be but a mockery.

Here is the story: On November 13, 1967, Local Board No. 76 of Tulsa, Oklahoma sent a letter to Mr. John Milton Ratliff of Norman, Oklahoma. It told Mr. Ratliff, a freshman at the University of Oklahoma, that it was rescinding his 2-S (student deferment) classification and classifying him

1-A, because the Selective Service regulations provide a 2-S for anyone whose “study is found to be necessary to the maintenance of the national health, safety or interest.” The local board then added that is “did not feel that your activity as a member of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society, an anti-war, anti-draft organization) is to the best interest of the U.S. government.”

So now it is not just illegal activity, but any determined opposition to U.S. policies that makes one subject to conscription. How can free speech be said to exist when this sort of oppression goes on?

Lt. Col. Charles Humphrey, manpower specialist at the Oklahoma Selective Service headquarters, conceded to reporters that Ratliff’s reclassification was due to his anti-war activities. “You’re aware of General Hershey’s statement,” he told a reporter. “He said because of their activities maybe they shouldn’t be deferred and maybe we should look at it. So that’s what the boards are doing.”

So maybe *we* should take a look at the conscription system!