

Professionalisation of the military – end of conscientious objection in Europe?

15 May – International Day on Conscientious Objection



Action against military presence and military recruitment in Germany.

In recent years many European countries abolished conscription, or suspended conscription in times of peace. Presently, out of the 27 European Union member states only 10 maintain conscription, and it is expected that of those ten some more will abolish conscription in the near future – Poland is expected to abolish conscription in 2010–2012, and Sweden is just now in the process of abolishing conscription. But even in countries that maintain conscription, “voluntary” pro-

fessional soldiers generally have a more important role, i.e. within NATO or other foreign operations or the European Union battle groups. The reasons for maintaining conscription are often more ideological than military.

Almost unnoticed there is a parallel development: the right to conscientious objection for conscripts, which had been widely recognised within the European Union, is being undermined; professional soldiers generally do not have the right to conscientious ob-

jection. While all 27 present EU member states recognise the right to CO for conscripts, only two states – Germany and Britain – also recognise the right to CO for professional soldiers.

CO and professional soldiers

The European Union – generally proud of its human rights standards – is itself violating international standards here. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights, and Article 10 of the European Charter on Fundamental Rights) logically also includes the right to change ones beliefs at any time. Consequently the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe demanded from member states on 24 March 2006 in a decision on human rights in the Armed Forces to “introduce into their legislation the right to be registered as a conscientious object-

or at any time, namely before, during or after implementation of military service, as well as the right of career servicemen to obtain the status of conscientious objector”. Already Council of Europe recommendation 1581 of 2001 suggested to member states to recognise the right to conscientious objection also for professional soldiers.

However, in practice nothing much is happening, and there is a lack of political pressure to implement this right. It is often argued that this is not a problem, because there are no or few cases of known conscientious objectors. However, this is wrong. As the right to CO is lacking, potential objectors will attempt to use other ways to get a discharge from military service – often a discharge for medical or psychological reasons. Or they fall within the statistics on “desertion” or “absence without leave”, and because of the complete lack of a support

Editorial

15 May is International Day on Conscientious Objection. This issue of *The Broken Rifle* introduces War Resisters' International's theme for CO day 2008: conscientious objection for professional soldiers and countering military recruitment. Both issues are closely related: with the trend to abolishing (or suspending) conscription, at least Western militaries increasingly rely on professional, “voluntary” soldiers. To achieve recruitment targets, the military has to promote its “job” more than in the past: the military is present in schools, at recruitment fairs, unemployment offices, and generally in public spaces. It might sound paradox: the abolishment of conscription leads to a militarisation of all aspects of everyday life in the name of military recruitment.

No surprise then that military does not always tell the truth, or the full picture, when it comes to recruitment. Wars, and the prospect of dying in a war, or of killing others, do not sell that well, and generally turn into a problem when professional militaries try to recruit.

Based on those military lies people sign up for contracts which are very different from normal employment contracts. For a start, you can't get out when you want. Conscientious objection is therefore needed as much for professional soldiers as it is for conscripts, but very few countries recognise this right. They argue that nobody is being forced to join, so why should people have the right to conscientiously object?

It is important for us as conscientious objection movements and war resisters to recognise that it is important to support those who conscientiously object to war, even though they might have joined the military voluntarily previously. It is therefore important that we do offer our support.

Andreas Speck

The Broken Rifle

The Broken Rifle is the newsletter of War Resisters' International, and is published in English, Spanish, French and German. This is issue 78, May 2008. This issue of *The Broken Rifle* was produced by Andreas Speck. Special thanks go to Oskar Castro and everyone else who contributed to this issue. If you want extra copies of this issue of *The Broken Rifle*, please contact the WRI office, or download it from our website.

War Resisters' International,
5 Caledonian Road,
London N1 9DX, Britain
tel +44-20-7278 4040
fax +44-20-7278 0444
info@wri-irg.org
http://wri-irg.org/pubs/
br78-en.htm

Scribus Made

15 May: International Day on Conscientious Objection

Since the 1980s, 15 May is celebrated as International Day on Conscientious Objection. Conscientious objection movements all over the world use 15 May to promote the right to conscientious objection, and conscientious objection as an antimilitarist action and perspective.

This year, War Resisters' International wants to highlight the new challenges for conscientious objection as a result of a changing military landscape: the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers, and the need to counter military propaganda and military recruitment wherever they take place.

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1000 activists close down NATO 1000 participants and 500 arrests at international action day NATO GAME OVER

About 1000 people from 17 European countries went to the NATO headquarters in Brussels on 22 March and took part in the international nonviolent action NATO GAME OVER. Five years after the start of the Iraq war and 10 days before the Bucharest NATO summit, peace activists from all over Europe showed that preventing war starts in Europe.

The Belgian WRI section Vredesactie had been working on the action for almost a year. The action was not only a powerful public action against the increasing European and NATO cooperation of the military, it was also a milestone for the European cooperation of nonviolent direct action groups against militarism and military infrastructure.

Over Easter – the two days following the action – the groups discussed the military developments, past, present, and potential future military interventions, and the role of nonviolent direct action in preventing and/or stopping those developments.

It is clear that wars are increasingly fought based on the international cooperation of military forces – in terms of logistics and infrastructure, but also including multinational military units (such as some of the European "battle groups"). The military infrastructure of the US, NATO, or the European Union does not stop at borders – and so shouldn't the nonviolent resistance.

An important task for nonviolent direct action groups will be the mapping of the military infrastructure – a task that was begun with the website McMilitary.org. A better knowledge of this infrastructure and better international cooperation are the basics that will – hopefully – make a more powerful nonviolent resistance possible.

To get involved, contact international@bombspotting.org, or War Resisters' International at info@wri-irg.org.

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structure such as the GI Rights Hotline in the USA these cases will generally not become known to the public.

Working with professional soldiers: counter-recruitment and soldiers' rights

The European CO movements so far did mostly not develop a response to the challenges posed by the end of conscription. There is neither structured and coordinated work on countering military recruitment, nor exists a visible support structure for soldiers who – for whatever reasons – want to leave the Armed Forces. This is a problem, as critical soldiers have nobody within the peace movement to connect to.

Differences in the educational and class background between potential recruits and most members of the antimilitarist movement complicate matters further. While the military often targets its recruitment efforts on disadvantaged groups – low education level, immigrants, neighbourhoods with high unemployment – most activists of antimilitarist groups come from a middle class background with higher education. This often makes it difficult to even find a common language.

The experience from the USA however shows that the work with (former) soldiers and against the recruitment efforts of the military is very important and promising. The US counter-recruitment movement campaigns against the presence of military recruiters in high schools and universities, which makes it more difficult for the military to achieve its recruitment targets. In this work, veterans from the Vietnam war and the Iraq wars, often former deserters or conscientious objectors, play an important role, as these veterans know the military from the inside, and are more easily able to deconstruct the myths a lies of the military recruiters.

Outsourcing: conscientious objection and private companies

The increasing trend towards "outsourcing" of services for the military opens up a completely new field. In a smaller and "professional" military non-central tasks are often contracted out to private

companies: from catering and the laundry within the barracks to the maintenance of tanks and combat aircraft. While in conscription armies its mostly conscripts who will be responsible for some of these tasks, professional soldiers are often to expensive and are needed for more central combat duties.

While these tasks don't require the carrying of arms, they also cannot be called "civilian". They wouldn't qualify for a "genuinely civilian substitute service" for conscientious objectors.

But what happens when a civilian employee develops a conscientious objection, and wants to terminate his contract? While he or she – unlike a professional soldiers – does not face criminal proceedings or a court martial, the outcome will still be unemployment, and – as it was the employee who ended the contract "voluntarily" – quite likely at least

for a certain period without any unemployment benefit. There is no legal right to demand a transfer to a civilian department of the same employer.

Similar problems can arise when a "civilian" employer receives a new contract from the military: for some of the employees this can mean that they suddenly have to do the laundry for the military, or have to work on catering in the barracks. They have no right to refuse this "deployment".

Regarding these issues, we are at totally at the beginning. There has so far not been any discussion within the CO movement, or within the trade unions.

Closing remarks

It is high time that the European CO and anti-war organisations face up to the challenges of a changing military landscape. While more and more of the European military forces take part

in war operations abroad – so-called "peace enforcement" or "humanitarian" operations – and this usually mostly with professional soldiers, the CO movement so far did not develop a response. For how long can we afford not to do so?

I think it is high time to learn from the US experience, and to create a strong counter-recruitment movement in Europe too, which does not ignore those who are already in the military, but offers those who want to leave – for whatever reasons – its support.

Andreas Speck

War Resisters' International would like to know more about "voluntary" recruitment for the Armed Forces. Please send us information on how the military promotes its "jobs" in your country.

Table: Conscription and conscientious objection in the European Union

Country	Conscription	CO for conscripts		CO for professional soldiers
		before military service	during/after military service	
Austria	Yes	Yes	No (1)	No
Belgium	Suspended	Yes (2)	No	No
Bulgaria	Suspended	Yes (2)	No	No
Cyprus	Yes	Yes (3)	No	No
Czech Republic	Suspended	Yes (2)	No	No
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes	No	No
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
France	Suspended	Yes (2)		No
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	Yes	No	No
Hungary	Suspended	Yes (2)	No (4)	No
Ireland	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Italy	Suspended	Yes (2)		No
Latvia	Suspended	Yes (2)		No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes (5)	No	No
Luxembourg	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Malta	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Poland	Yes (6)	Yes	No	No
Portugal	No (7)			No
Romania	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Slovakia	Suspended	Yes (2)	No	No
Slovenia	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Spain	Suspended	Yes (2)		No
Sweden	Yes (8)	Yes	Yes	No
The Netherlands	Suspended	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	No
United Kingdom	No	n.a.	n.a.	Yes
Candidate countries				
Croatia	Suspended	Yes (2)	Yes (2)	No
Macedonia	No	n.a.	n.a.	No
Turkey	Yes	No	No	No

Notes:

- (1) Applications of reservists are possible, but only three years after the beginning of their military service
- (2) Conscription is only suspended. Conscientious objection will be available should it be reintroduced
- (3) Northern Cyprus does not recognise the right to CO
- (4) In case conscription will be reintroduced, CO is only possible before a conscript takes the oath
- (5) Although conscientious objection is recognised, a genuinely civilian substitute service is not available
- (6) Conscription is likely to be phased out in 2010-2012
- (7) It is not clear whether conscription is suspended or abolished
- (8) Conscription might soon be abolished. Substitute service for conscientious objectors will be abolished by the end of 2008.



Climbing the fence during NATO—Game over

Photo: Bombspotting.org

Counter-recruitment in the United States

With a seemingly endless war on terrorism gnawing away at the possibility for a lasting peace many activists in the United States are finding that they are drawn to a form of activism that deals with the relationship that young people have to militarism. The work is called, counter military recruitment or counter-recruitment for short, and its primary focus is to demilitarise a nation by attempting to first demilitarise the minds of its youth.

Often maligned and misunderstood by those outside of the peace & justice movement counter-recruitment has a roughly thirty year history which began shortly after the end of the US involvement in Vietnam which led to the suspension of the military draft. The ending of the draft meant that the military needed to adapt in order to recruit people into the "all volunteer" service and this heralded in the wide variety of incentives and recruitment tactics used to entice people to enlist. Many of these are still in use to this day and the primary concern with military recruitment is that young people aren't getting all the information they need from military recruiters to make an informed decision about enlisting. While it may seem difficult to comprehend that young people in the US are able to be deceived by military recruiters, the reality is that militarism is that which can cloud the minds of masses. In this respect, many young people never question the sales pitch the men and women in uniform use to recruit them.

Knowing that militarism is the leverage used to sell the military, counter military recruitment is a direct response which counters the perceptions of the military as a sacred cow, or a pillar of our society, and that which keeps us free. Counter recruitment activists often work behind the scenes to change school policies on military recruiter access to young people rather than holding high profile campaigns and demonstrations. The core message associated with counter-recruitment is that one should be able to make an informed decision especially if it is a life altering decision that they are bound to for eight years of their life. Thousands of people and hundreds of groups are now engaged in this work, but a quick look at the past reveals that this was not the case thirty years ago.

Early beginnings

Most of the groups and individuals working directly with youth during the Vietnam War Era were working as draft counselors and were assisting young men who were drafted. Their main task was to help these draftees figure out what options they had available to them if they felt that serving in the military or participating in a war was in contradiction with their principles. When the draft ended many of these anti-war activists melted back into their normal lives or took up other forms of activism, but very few paid attention to the militarization of young people. Those who did worked with TFORM (Taskforce on Recruitment and Militarism) which was



an early anti-draft/counter-recruitment organising body that started in 1976 and was made up of the *Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors*, *American Friends Service Committee*, the *War Resisters League* and the *National Inter-religious Board for Conscientious Objectors*.

In the early 1980's the US Federal Government dusted off the Selective Service Registration System which it had used to collect the data on millions of men in order to implement the draft lottery. While there was no "major" war being waged the United States reinstated the Selective Service System to serve as a Cold War threat against the Soviet Union. Naturally, anti-war activists quickly restarted draft counseling services, but ultimately it was realised that the way young people were lured into enlisting in the all volunteer military was a much bigger problem than the possibility of a draft.

By the mid 80's local counter-recruitment work was popping up across the country with activists studying the way military recruitment occurs, and how young people were being taught militarism. The current context in which we now understand counter-recruitment was also formulated at this time.

One of the most important footnotes in this line of activism came when the *Committee Against Registration and the Draft*, a San Diego, California based group, was prevented from purchasing an advertisement in a local high school newspaper. CARD merely wanted to do what the military was allowed to do in order to reach young people and filed suit. They lost their case in the lower courts, but appealed to the Federal court which ruled in their favor setting the precedent that military recruiting is a controversial activity in schools and if a school allows military recruiters in the school they are then setting up a "limited public forum" and cannot censor one side of that controversial conversation. This Federal decision allowed counter-recruiters access relatively on par with the access given to military recruiters in order to share information in the high schools about their types

of things military recruiters would be loathe to share for fear of losing potential recruits. While this decision was most relevant to those who operated in the Federal court jurisdiction where the decision was rendered, it is often cited by activists around the country when negotiating policy changes in public school districts.

The 1990s: the First Gulf War

In the mid 1990's the focus shifted to the First Gulf war, which in turn sparked a lot of work against the Junior Reserve Officer Training Program in the high schools. Many counter-recruitment activists, fearing a draft, also began working on contingency plans for how to counsel young people if the draft returned. Though the draft was never implemented, there were many military service members who, for reasons of conscience, felt that their participation in the military was no longer inline with their core values and activists struggled with how to help this new group of conscientious objectors and war resisters. This period of time gave birth to two organising bodies: *The GI Rights Hotline* and the *National Coalition to Demilitarize our Schools*.

From the end of the Gulf War

to the very beginning of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 counter-recruitment activism had waned significantly. The anti-war/peace movement hadn't sufficiently latched onto the concept that building peace and preventing war could be accomplished via counter recruitment work and so there were only a few national and grassroots groups tirelessly doing the work. Then the invasion of Iraq occurred.

A new wave of activism

The millions of people who had rallied to oppose the invasion could not prevent it from happening, but the invasion served as an unfortunate catalyst to boost attention to what has come to be known as the poverty draft which is a term used to define how the least privileged of US society are forced to serve in the military because there are few other options for them to earn a paycheck, acquire health benefits, or obtain other fringe benefits such as money for higher education.

Now there are thousands of people waging peace by doing counter-recruitment. Some are working on getting school policies changed to allow students the opportunity to hear everything they need to in order to make educated decisions. Others are attempting to show young people what alternatives they really do have. Still others are mounting campaigns to get military sponsored programs out of their classrooms and it is this array of activism that many see as one of the most important ways to alter the nation's trajectory when it comes to war. Will this activism be the catalyst to end the current wars? Maybe... maybe not, but many believe it has the potential to transform a nation and we expect to be doing this until the need no longer exists.

Oskar Castro

Oskar Castro works with the AFSC's Youth and Militarism programme. See <http://www.youth4peace.org>

War starts from Europe

14-15 November 2008: European day of action against military globalisation

Europe is at war. The bombs are not falling in Europe but several thousands of km away in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet nevertheless war is waged from Europe. Europe serves as a launch pad for military interventions worldwide. The framework can differ: NATO, EU, US coalition of the willing, UN. The targets vary as well: Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Chad, ... But the departure points don't: military bases and civilian airports and harbours in Europe. Europe hosts a large military intervention machinery.

The Iraq war made this very visible when the US and the UK waged war from their European bases. In 2003, there were 54,000 Europe-based US military personnel who were deployed, or worked in direct support of, the war against Iraq. The US Army was deployed out of Germany and Italy, while bombing flights departed from UK bases and aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean. Marines were inserted into northern Iraq from Crete and Bulgaria. (...)

European countries themselves participate in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. More than 25,000 European soldiers fight under NATO command in Afghanistan. Under the EU flag they are intervening in Africa. Both NATO and the EU are developing rapid intervention forces. Several European countries have military bases outside Europe to support their interventions (...)

When war starts from Europe, prevention of war must also start in Europe. We call for a European day of nonviolent direct action against war on 14-15 November 2008. Take action at your local military bases and installations! Resist Military Globalisation!

This is a preliminary draft for the call for action. More information will be available at <http://wri-irg.org> and <http://europeanpeaceaction.org>

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ISBN 978 0 85283 266 0

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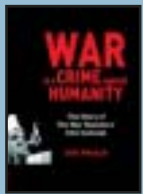


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Recruitment elsewhere

How do armies outside Europe/North America recruit?



An Indian Army display at military barracks in Bangalore, South India.

Although Europe and the United States might have their armies all over the world – and if not their armies, they surely use economical "cooperation" and development "aid" backed by their military force to maintain their political and economical influence – they are not the only countries with Armed Forces. In fact, most states in the world maintain Armed Forces. How then do other major military players recruit for their Armed Forces?

China

China in theory maintains a mixed system of conscription and "voluntary" recruitment. According to the law, "it is the glorious duty of the Chinese citizens to serve in the armed forces and join militia organisations". The Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China stipulates that male citizens who reach the age of 18 by 31 December each year are eligible for enlistment for active service. Those who are not enlisted that year remain eligible for enlistment until the age of 22.

The People's Liberation Army has a peacetime strength of 2.3

million soldiers. However, more than 13 million men reach military age each year. In practice, conscription is therefore almost irrelevant, and military service with the PLA is entirely voluntary, because of China's large population and therefore the large number of individuals who volunteer to join the regular armed forces. All 18-year-olds have to register themselves with the government authorities. The main exception to this system applies to potential university students (male and female), who are required to undergo military training (usually for the duration of a week or more) before or, more often one year after their courses have commenced (Article 43 of Military Service Law).

India

India boasts the third largest armed forces in the world, with 1,3 million active troops in the Indian Army alone. While recruitment is voluntary, the economical situation in the country – with more than a quarter of the population officially living under the poverty line – guarantees a high number of potential recruits.

According to information provided by the Indian Army, an infantry private (sepoy) receives a starting salary of between Rs. 3050 and Rs. 4650 (80-120 US\$). The main recruitment method are so-called "recruitment rallies", held regularly at different cities. And there is no shortage of potential recruits: Twenty-one-year-old Ghulam Ahmed said he had no option but to join the army to support his three sisters and mother after a road accident killed his father. "I've no job and this recruitment rally has given me hope," Ahmed said, struggling to recover his breath after being put through a gruelling physical endurance test by recruiters.

In fact, major problem is not the lack of recruits, but corruption. Potential recruits try to bribe their way into the army, and fake recruiters prey on those desperate for a job with the military.

According to the Annual Report of the Indian Ministry of Defence, "there are eleven Zonal Recruiting Offices, two Gorkha Recruiting Depots and One Independ-

ent Recruiting Office in addition to 47 Regimental Centres which carry out recruitment through rallies in their respective areas of jurisdiction. Efforts are made so that each district of the country is covered by recruitment rallies at least once in a recruitment year. During the recruiting year 2005-06, the recruiting organisation has enrolled 27911 recruits for the Army."

Similar to other countries, India too maintains a National Cadet Corps, covering 8410 schools and 5251 colleges in almost all districts of the country. In total, 1,3 million Indian youth participate in Cadet Corps.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported in 2004 that joining the Indian Armed Forces is possible from 16 years on. Presently, the website of the Indian Army gives 17 1/2 years as minimum age for certain ranks and professions.

However, while there is no shortage of recruits for non-officer rank, the Indian Army faces a shortage of officers. According to official information, there is a shortage of 11,371 officers in the Army which is mainly in the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and below. Recently, there has been a debate to introduce conscription for people of higher education or government jobs, but this has finally been ruled out by the Indian government.

Poverty draft

While antimilitarists talk about a "poverty draft" when discussing the military recruitment of the USA or Britain, this term is even more appropriate in the cases of China or India. While the political elite of India would presently not allow any antimilitarist propaganda, the problem is different in India. In the land of Gandhi antimilitarism does almost not exist. Potential counter-recruitment activists would face a poverty draft that would make it almost impossible to deter people from joining the armed forces. A clear hint that the development of economic alternatives is crucial in our fight against militarism.

Andreas Speck

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