



War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.
War Resisters' International declaration, 1921

THE BROKEN RIFLE

Newsletter of War Resisters' International

No 64

November 2004



Prisoners
for Peace

Conscientious objection in Finland

1 December – Prisoners for Peace Day

Kaj Raninen

Finland still maintains a very extensive conscription system. About 80% of all male Finnish citizens perform military service, a bit more than 10% are exempted from service and about 7% apply for conscientious objection. Exemption may only be granted for medical reasons. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, are an exception: they are exempted from all service in peace time based on a separate law, which came into force in 1987. The inhabitants of Ahvnanmaa islands (an autonomous, demilitarized area belonging to Finland, also known as Åland islands) are the other exempted group.

Substitute service

Finland introduced a law on conscientious objection and a substitute service in 1931, and with the exemption of the period of Second World War it existed ever since. The then existing – as well as the current – Civilian Service Act guaranteed the right to conscientious objection only in peace time. The number of people performing substitute service stayed at a relatively low level until the end of the 80's. On average only 800 conscripts applied annually. In the early 90's the number started to grow rapidly and since the mid-90's it has stabilised at 2 500 per year.

The current Civilian Service Act came into force in the beginning of 1992. According to the law every conscript may, after he has taken part in enrollment, apply for conscientious objection at any time before or during military service. The applicant must declare that serious religious or ethical reasons of conscience prohibits him to serve in army, but this conviction is not "examined" at all and every application is accepted automatically. If the application is made while the applicant is performing military service, he must be discharged immediately. Substitute service lasts 395 days, which is twice as long as the most common military service (lasting 180 days). It is organized by the Ministry of Labour. Hospitals,



Action in support of imprisoned conscientious objectors in Finland

Photo: AKL

administrative offices, homes for the elderly, kindergartens, schools, universities and cultural institutions are among the most common service places. It is also possible to perform substitute service in some private non-profit organisations accepted by the Ministry of Labour. During the service the CO is entitled to daily allowance, free accommodation, food and health care, paid by the service place, although in practice these are not always realised. Besides the punitive length of substitute service and the restriction of the right to conscientious objection only to peace time, there are many practical problems inherent in the Finnish substitute service system, which are in the first place consequences of the poor organisation of substitute service. As a consequence of the growing number of COs there is a lack of service places and many of those which exist neglect their legal obligations by, for example, refusing to give free accommodation to those serving in their institution. The Finnish substitute service is not "integrated" as effectively as in some other countries. Many political decision-makers see it rather as a "necessary evil" which is a threat to the military than as a source of cheap labour, or even

something positive. The basic reason is probably the historically high social appreciation of the military and the extensive conscription system.

As a consequence it is very difficult to achieve the acceptance of any improvement of the civilian service act: since 1998 the Finnish Parliament has voted on the reduction of the substitute service period twice, but it has always been rejected.

Total objection

Leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses aside, there were very few total objectors in Finland until the mid 80's, at most a few annually. The total objector movement arose at the end of the 80's as a protest against the Civilian Service Act, which came into force in 1987 and lengthened the service period to 480 days. Between 1987-91 over 100 Finnish conscripts refused to do either military or substitute service. They were "conditional total objectors", their protest was focused on the defects of this law. After the current Civilian Service Act took effect in 1992, total objection became more infrequent although it never disappeared, and the arguments of total objectors changed too. More and more total objectors announced their opposition to the entire conscription system as such, not solely to abuses of the Civilian Service Act, and refused to serve within the limits of conscription in any case. In the late 90's total objection became more common again. In 1999 a total of 53 total objectors announced their refusal to the authorities, and 2002 the number was already 76, which is the highest number since Jehovah's Witnesses have been exempted. This growth is partially explained by the aggravation of problems within the substitute service sys-

tem (the service period of conscripts was shortened in 1998, but the substitute service period has remained unchanged) but not entirely: the "unconditional" total objection which protests against the conscription system as such seems to be growing noticeably too.

Total objectors are sentenced to unconditional prison sentences. The length of the prison sentence is derived from a simple formula: it is half of the unserved time counted as a substitute service time. If a total objector has not done any service before his refusal, his sentence will be 197 days. The prison sentences of total objectors are normally executed in open prisons, where there is a possibility to work or study outside the prison on weekdays. However, sometimes total objectors have been transferred to closed prisons, where they have to serve their sentence or part of it literally behind bars. Since November 1999 Amnesty International has adopted 49 Finnish total objectors as prisoners of consciousness, because it regards the length of Finnish civilian service as punitive. There have also been a few cases where a total objector has also refused to take part in enrollment, which takes place in the year the conscript turns 18 years. However, according to Finnish legislation, total objection will be recognised only after the conscript has been enrolled and declared fit for service. In this cases the total objector receives a fine and a new order to enroll. If he still refuses to go, he will be fined again. This "vicious circle" may go on for years.

Kaj Raninen is an activist with the Union of Conscientious Objectors Finland

Editorial

Welcome to the Prisoners for Peace special edition of *The Broken Rifle*. The focus of Prisoners for Peace Day 2004 is the imprisonment of conscientious objectors in Finland. Finland, a member state of the European Union, continues to imprison conscientious objectors who refuse to perform a substitute service which is punitive in length. And the number of imprisoned conscientious objectors is growing – now standing at about 70-80 annually.

As Kaj Raninen from the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors points out, Finnish militarism is a heritage of the Second World War, a heritage that lives on even 15 years after the end of the Cold War. It is therefore important not only to demand from Finland to bring the law on conscientious objection in line with European and international standards, but also to support Finnish COs and antimilitarists in their struggle against the special Finnish variant of militarism, which is caught in the past.

The Prisoners for Peace Honour Roll lists prisoners from many different countries, but at it is certainly far from being complete. The main purpose of the list is to raise awareness for the continued imprisonment of peace activists and conscientious objectors all over the world, and to generate support. Please take a few minutes on 1 December to write greeting cards to prisoners – and give generously to War Resisters' International, so that we can continue to support prisoners for peace.

Andreas Speck

The Broken Rifle

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War Resisters' International,
5 Caledonian Road,
London N1 9DX, Britain
tel +44-20-7278 4040
fax +44-20-7278 0444
pfp@wri-irg.org
<http://wri-irg.org/news/2004/pfp04-en.htm>

Upcoming War Resisters' International events

15 May 2005: International Conscientious Objectors' Day
Focus: conscientious objection in Greece. WRI and the Greek Association of COs are organising an international seminar, nonviolence training, and action in Thessaloniki from 9-15 May 2005. Contact WRI for more information.

June 2005: Seminar "Peace in North-East Asia"
In cooperation with South Korean groups, War Resisters' International is organising an international seminar "Peace in North-East Asia" for the end of June/early July 2005. After the seminar, WRI will hold its annual Council meeting. Contact WRI or check on the internet at <http://wri-irg.org/news/2005/council2005-en.htm> for more details.

Militarism in Finland

Kaj Raninen

In its own way, Finland is a very militarised country, although it might not look like that at first sight. Finnish militarism does not mean that the military is strikingly visible in society or that it necessarily has more influence in the society than in other Western European countries. It is rather a state of mind, a historically constructed way of thinking, according to which Finland is always under military threat – even when no one has got any idea who might cause this threat or no one can imagine a situation where it might materialise. But because of this threat, Finland will always need an army which is based on a very extensive conscription system. Finnish militarism is the result of a historical heritage created by events during the Second World War. During the war Finland fought twice against the Soviet Union (in 1939–40 and again in 1941–44). Although Finland lost in both cases, and during the latter war was in fact allied with Hitler's Germany, the wars were seen as "defensive victories" with the army as a rescuer who saved the country from Soviet occupation and Stalinist tyranny. Historically this might be partly true, although the Finnish participation in WWII might have been possible to avoid by adopting a wiser foreign policy. But more importantly the wars, especially the Winter War (1939–40), when Finland fought against the Soviet Union without allies, are still affecting people's mentality and are still politically used. The remaining veterans of WWII, normally represented by military or right wing politicians but sometimes even representing themselves, are presented as a "role model" for young people (for example, the annual collection of money for veterans' health care was advertised this autumn under a slogan "would you have had the guts to do the same"). In the Finnish political debate concerning military matters, a quite common right wing argument is "what would the veterans think about this" (of course they are normally not asked what they really think, but the modern military and its backers think they have an authorisation to speak for them). One of the most widely respected public figures in Finland in the 1990's was the last surviving major officer of the war years, general Adolf Ehrnrooth, whose somewhat oddly extremist opinions decorated the Finnish media regularly during the decade. When he died in spring 2004, over 20 000 Finns



Performance in front of a prison – digging a tunnel into the prison

Photo: AKL

gathered on the streets of Helsinki to pay their respect. A quite common opinion of a young Finnish male reaching conscription age is "I go to military service because I owe it to the veterans" and there is no CO in Finland who has never been asked a question like "what would you had done in 1939" or "what had happened to us if everyone was like you in 1939". The last 15 years have been a good time for Finnish militarism, especially among older people. During the Cold War Finland, although it was a parliamentary democracy with a state controlled market economy, had a special political relationship with the Soviet Union. During those years Finnish politicians practised some kind of "self-censorship", and critique of the Soviet Union and the negative aspects in history between the two countries were more or less avoided. This situation changed when the Soviet Union collapsed and those who felt themselves humiliated and limited during the years of "finlandisation" felt that their time for compensation had arrived. The result was a rebirth of Finnish militarism; suddenly it was again possible to openly recall and praise the Finnish struggle in the Second World War – and use its memory for one's own political aims: the "war veteran myth" described above was created and the military started to take a more

open and visible position in society. During the 90's it increased the cooperation with different institutions of civil society; with schools, sport organisations etc. At the moment the military is even sponsoring one of the biggest Finnish rock festivals. Since the Second World War the very extensive conscription system has been the cornerstone of Finnish militarism (see article on page 1). According to the recently published "Defence White Paper 2004" (by the Finnish Foreign and Defence Ministries), conscription won't be abolished or even reformed in the near future. The proportion of those who do military service will diminish a bit from the current level but will still remain very high. This is officially explained by the fact that Finland is a large, thinly settled country and "conscription is the only way to create a military reserve big enough to defend the whole country". This is not, of course, the real reason and no one can really imagine a situation where Finland might need its vast reserve of almost half a million soldiers. According to this report "At the same time this creates a foundation for the strong will of citizens to defend their country and for commitment to national defence" (see box on the left). In other words, conscription is needed so that people have a positive attitude to the military.

COs in the depths of Finnish militarism

The attitude of Finnish authorities towards conscientious objection has always been more characterised by "punishment" and "marginalisation" than by "integration". The main aim of the policy has been, and is, to keep the number of COs on a relatively low level and prevent it from endangering the existence of the conscription system. And that is the main reason why it has always been very difficult to improve the Finnish CO legislation. The ongoing discussion on Finnish CO legislation, which has mainly focused on the length of service, started in 1998 when the length of

military service has been reduced. At the same time the Finnish cabinet started to prepare a government bill according to which substitute service was to be shortened to 12 months. However, suddenly it changed its mind, probably because the generals had suffered a major setback few months earlier when parliament refused to accept a delivery of military helicopters and the cabinet did not see it appropriate to hurt their delicate minds again. In the autumn of 1998, despite strong protests of COs, the Finnish parliament rejected a parliamentarians bill to shorten the service time to 12 months. In 1999 the cabinet again started to prepare improvements of the CO legislation. In the end they decided to propose a one month reduction of service time, but parliament rejected it in autumn 2000. On both occasions substitute service divided the Finnish political field sharply: greens, leftists and almost all social democrats but only a handful of more liberal representatives of centre and right wing parties supported the reduction. And on both occasions the majority of centre and right wing parliamentarians went totally frantic. One MP stated his opinion during the parliamentary discussion: "The independence of our country cannot be taken for granted. In my opinion we have a debt of honour to the men and women who have defended our country during war and that debt obligates us to at least preserve the service system we have now. Shortening the period of civilian service does not serve the needs of general conscription. Civilian service is only an option for those whose conviction prevents them from carrying out military service. Convictions for convenience or laziness are not weighty enough reasons for exemption from military service. Therefore civilian service should not be made more attractive as an alternative. In such a case we might start to have too many young men with a 'conviction'. And another one said "During the weekend a veteran said, when he heard that we would be discussing this, that remember in the parlia-

ment, that if there was an invader or somebody thinking about invading, they would definitely not count how many men with brooms we have at our border, but they would have to count how many trained armed men we can place at the border."

Although conscientious objection has always been a very controversial question in Finland, all Finnish parliament has accepted improvements to the CO legislation in the past, lastly 1992 when the current Civilian Service Act came into force. However, today the situation seems to be even more difficult than before and there are many reasons for this. Firstly, because of Finnish "neo-militarism" people's attitude towards COs is even harder than before – or at least some politicians think it is and act accordingly. Secondly, after substitute service was shortened from 16 months to 13 months in 1992, the amount of applications started to rise quite drastically (from 600–900 per year in the 1980's to 2500 per year in mid the 90's). And the military is sure this was because of reduced service time and because substitute service had become "on the whole less challenging" than military service. The reduced service time was probably not the main reason for the increase – at the same time the number of applicants to substitute service rose dramatically in many other Western European countries too – but the military is sure this was the reason and they most certainly do not want the same to happen again. Finland's position in international politics has changed dramatically during the last 15 years and this seems to play to our disadvantage, too. In the 1980's Finnish politicians were very sensitive about Finland's image in the West and it was a noteworthy thing – even to those right wing politicians – if for example Amnesty International adopted imprisoned Finnish COs as prisoners of conscience and Finland was mentioned in the same list of countries with prosecutors of consciousness such as, say, GDR (Eastern Germany), Poland or the Soviet Union. Nowadays Finland is a member of the EU and unquestionably one of the "Western countries" and no-one seems to care anymore, although Amnesty International has adopted 49 Finnish COs since 1999.

And finally, we have had some bad luck too. If the cabinet would have proposed a shorter service time in 1998 the parliament would probably have accepted at least this inadequate improvement, but when the cabinet finally did so in 2000 the composition of parliament was less favourable than it was two years earlier. In 2000 the parliament's discussions on the Civilian Service Act were held at the same time when parties were campaigning for the municipal elections. The conservative party, those days a minor partner of the social democrats in the cabinet, obviously used their strong opposition to improvements of the Civilian Service Act as a means to sharpen their image without really endangering their relations to their mightier coalition partner.

Kaj Raninen is an activist with the Union of Conscientious Objectors Finland

General conscription

The defence of the entire country is only possible if general conscription is maintained. The high educational standard of conscripts makes it possible, with the current periods of service, to provide conscript training in even the more demanding tasks, and to recruit high-quality personnel for international crisis management tasks and for the professional personnel posts in the Defence Forces. Due to conscription, the obligation to defend the country can be met equally throughout society. At the same time this creates a foundation for the strong will of citizens to defend their country and for commitment to national defence. It also guarantees transparency of the Defence Forces' activities in society at large. By training conscripts of a similar young age in each intake, it is possible to maintain the age structure of the operational forces at a low enough level and at the same time ensure a sufficient reserve in staff, support and local defence duties.

Prisoners for Peace Honour Roll 2004

How the list works

First are **prisoners' names** (in bold), followed by their sentence, then their place of imprisonment with *≠* and, finally the reason for their detention

Information about countries where prisoners have had their sentences suspended, or where sentences have been served or completed during the year are in *italics*.

Armenia

Although Armenia passed a law on conscientious objection during the year, the country continues to imprison conscientious objectors. 13 conscientious objectors were in prison at the time of going to press.

Ashot Torosyan (08/12/03 – 08/06/05)

≠ Central Hospital of Erevan

Vardan Sahakyan (05/03/04 – 05/09/05)

Melsik Sargyan (15/04/04 – 15/10/05)

Mikael Mkrtchyan (05/05/04 – 05/05/06)

Ruslan Avetisyan (26/05/04 – 26/05/06)

≠ Kosh Penal Institution

Aram Manukyan (16/08/04 – 16/08/06)

Samvel Voskanyan (26/08/04 – 26/08/06)

Karen Akopyan (07/10/04 – 07/10/06)

Arsen Sargsyan (08/10/04 – 08/10/06)

Mher Mirpakhatyan (13/10/04 – 13/10/06)

Ovanes Bayatyan (14/10/04 – 14/10/06)

Artur Manukyan (arrested 06/09/04)

Grisha Kazaryan (arrested 17/09/04)

≠ Nubarashen Penal Institution

In addition, two Jehovah's Witnesses are presently not in prison, but had to sign a written undertaking not to leave their home town Erevan. These are:

Asatur Badalyan, sentenced to 1 ½ years

Nshan Shagiyan, awaiting trial.

Belarus

Yuri I Bandazhevsky (01/06/01 - 01/06/09)

≠ Prison Minsk, ul Kavarijskaya 36, PO Box 36 K, Minsk

Chernobyl researcher and whistle blower fraudulently convicted of corruption

Eritrea

**Paulos Eyassu
Negede Teklemariam
Isaac Mogos**

≠ Sawa Prison, Eritrea

Jehovah's Witnesses, imprisoned since 24 September 1994, for refusing to perform military service. All three have never been charged

for their "crime". The maximum penalty for conscientious objection is 3 years.

Finland

Juha Lehtonen (31/05/04–17/12/04)

Pyry Rechartt (20/10/04–07/05/05)

Hannes Vartiainen (21/06/04–05/01/05)

≠ Helsingin työsiirtola, PL 36, 01531 Vantaa

Joni Airaksinen (28/06/04–)

≠ Laukaan vankila, PL 55, 41341 Laukaa

Pasi Sivula (13/09/04–28/03/05)

≠ Naarajärven vankila, Linnatie 25, 76850 Naarajärvi

**Sami Pikkarainen
Jukka Antikainen (01/06–19/11/04)**

≠ Juuan avovankilaosasto, PL 26, 83901 Juuka

Israel

Mordechai Vanunu, a regular on WRI's Prisoners for Peace Honour Roll for 18 years, has finally been released on 21 April 2004. However, he is still not allowed to leave Israel.

After the release of "The Five", there are no long-term conscientious objectors in prison at present. However, COs are imprisoned regularly, so please check for updates at <http://wri-irg.org/cgi/news.cgi>.

Puerto Rico

José Vélez Acosta 23883-069 (33 months – out 27 Jan 06)

≠ USP, POB 1033, Coleman, Florida 33521-1033.

José Pérez González 21519-069 (5 years – in 5 Sep 03)

≠ Atlanta USP, 601 McDonough Blvd SE, POB 150160, Atlanta, GA 30315.

Néstor de Jesús Guishard 21716 069 (14 months – out 09 Dec 04)

José Montañez Sanes 26317-069 (18 months – in 15 May 05)

Andres Santiago 19829-069 (out 10 Dec 2004)

≠ MDC Guaynabo, PO Box 2147 San Juan, PR 00922-2147.

Jorge Cruz 26318-069 (18 months – out 06 Jun 05)

≠ FPC Edgefield, P. O. Box 725, Edgefield, SC 29824-0725.

Conspiracy, damage to federal property, &/or probation violation 5/1/03 - resisting U.S. military bombardment of Vieques, Puerto Rico Please send economic support for prisoners and families, and any returned letters to: May 1 Arrestees Support Committee, P.O. Box 191792, San Juan, PR 00919-1792.

South Korea

After both, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court, ruled against the right to conscientious objection in July and August 2004, hundreds of cases that had been adjourned are being processed now. While there were 436 conscientious objectors in prison as of 30 June 2004, this number is expected to rise to 1 000 by the end of the year.

Turkmenistan

**Mansur Masharipov (18 months)
Vepa Tuvakov (18 months)**

≠ Turkmenistan, Lebapsky velayat, 746222 g. Seydi, uchr. LV-K/12, Zaklyuchennomu [add name of prisoner here], Turkmenistan

Jehovah's Witnesses, arrested in May 2004, and sentenced to 18 months in prison on 28 May and 3 June 2004 for refusing military service.

USA

Greg Boertje-Obed, 08052-016 (3 months, out 21 Dec 04)

≠ FPC Duluth, POB 1000, Duluth, MN 55814.

Repeat trespass at StratCom headquarters, Offutt AFB, Nebraska, 3/04

Jackie Hudson 08808-039 (30 months – out 06 Mar 05)

≠ Federal Prison Camp, Victorville, POB 5100, Adelanto, CA 92301.

Carol Gilbert 10856-039 (33 months – out 23 May 05)

≠ Alderson FPC, Box A, Alderson, WV 24910.

Ardeth Platte 10857-039 (41 months – out 22 Dec 05)

≠ FPC Danbury, Pembroke Station Rt. 37, Danbury, CT 06811-0379.

Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares disarmament of Colorado nuclear missile silo, 6 Oct 02; convicted of sabotage.

Helen Woodson 03231-045

≠ Bates County Jail, P. O. Box 60, Butler, MO 64730.

Anti-war protest at the federal courthouse, Kansas City, Missouri, 11 Mar 04 violates parole following 09 Mar 04 release from prison. Plead guilty to violation and four new charges, 18 Jun 04 - Awaiting sentencing 05 Nov 04.

Pvt. Camilo Mejia (One year – out 3/05)

≠ Building 1490, Randolph Rd., Fort Sill, OK 73503.

National Guard member, went AWOL after 2003 Iraq duty, turned himself in as conscientious objector on 15 March 04, and was subsequently sentenced to 1 year imprisonment.

Abdullah William Webster (14 months)

≠ Box 339536, Fort Lewis, WA 98433-9536, USA

Refuses to participate in the war on Iraq based on his Muslim beliefs. Sentenced on 3 Jun 04.

Camilo Mejia and Abdullah William Webster are two of many US military personnel who refuse participation in the war on Iraq. Many US soldiers fled to Canada, or did not return from "Rest and Relaxation" in the USA, or in Germany. It is presently very difficult to get an overview of the numbers, and WRI would welcome any information on the issue.

Action

- ≠ On 1 December, put aside at least one hour and write at least four cards to prisoners;
- ≠ Get your peace group or class or meeting place to organise a card-writing session;
- ≠ Set up a stall in your town centre, perform a bit of street theatre, or do whatever else it takes to attract attention and interest.

Sending cards and letters

- ≠ Always send your card in an envelope;
- ≠ Include a return name and address on the envelope;
- ≠ Be chatty and creative: send photos from your life, drawings;
- ≠ Tell prisoners what you are doing to stop war and war preparations;
- ≠ Don't write anything that might get the prisoner into trouble;
- ≠ Think about the sort of thing you'd like to receive if you were in prison;
- ≠ Don't begin, "You are so brave, I could never do what you have done";
- ≠ Don't expect the prisoner to reply;
- ≠ Remember—next year it could be you...

Support our future work

For 46 years, War Resisters' International has publicised the names and stories of prisoners of conscience. Help them keep up the tradition:

- ≠ Send in a special PIP donation to WRI to help fund next year's research.
- ≠ Give a Peace News subscription to a prisoner on our list (or provide us with the name and address of someone not on our list).

Send contributions to: War Resisters' International, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, Britain (tel +44 20 7278 4040; fax 7278 0444; email office@wri-irg.org).

Your outreach to prisoners does make a difference. **Show your solidarity!**

Donate online, and/or visit WRI's new webshop, where you can order WRI publications and Broken Rifle badges using your credit or debit card, at <http://wri-irg.org/en>

Online version: <http://wri-irg.org> for all four language versions of the PIP 2004 pack.

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WRI merchandise

You can order merchandise from War Resisters' International by filling out this form and sending it to War Resisters' International, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX, Britain – together with a cheque made out to War Resisters' International in £,€,US\$. Or order online at <http://wri-irg.org/shop/shop-uk.htm>. All prices include postage.

No	Description	UK	Europe	World
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_____	10-90 badges per 10	£8.80	€14.00	US\$18.25
_____	100 plus badges per 100	£76.10	€117.50	US\$144.00
_____	 <i>Housmans Peace Diary 2005 and Housmans World Peace Directory</i> ISSN 0957-0126, ISBN 0 85283 260 5	£7.95	€12.00	US\$12.00
_____	CONCODOC report: <i>Refusing To Bear Arms</i> (1998) A World Survey of conscription and conscientious objection to military service.	£55.30	€87.00	US\$115.25
_____	Emily Miles: <i>CO Guide to the UN Human Rights System</i> (WRI and Quaker UN Office Geneva, 2000)	£11.40	€19.00	US\$25.50
_____	<i>Resistance and Reconstruction</i> (Institute for Total Revolution, Vedcchhi 1988)	£3.50	€7.25	US\$11.50
_____	Devi Prasad & Tony Smythe: <i>Conscription: A World Survey</i> (WRI, London 1968)	£3.30	€7.00	US\$11.00
_____	Brian Martin et al: <i>Nonviolent Struggle and Social Defence</i> (WRI, London 1991)	£5.95	€10.50	US\$14.00
_____	 Mitzi Bales, ed: <i>Opening Doors to Peace: A Memorial to Myrtle Solomon</i> (WRI, London 1991)	£3.85	€7.00	US\$9.25
_____	Peter Brock: <i>Testimonies of Conscience</i> (privately printed, Toronto 1997)	£3.85	€7.00	US\$8.75
_____	Donation	£ _____	€ _____	US\$ _____
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The "case Hermaja" Finnish CO applies for asylum in Belgium



Photo: For Mother Earth

In July 2001, Jussi Hermaja was sentenced by a Finnish court for total objection – nothing special, just one of about 70 cases per year. However, unlike most other conscientious objection, Jussi Hermaja did not report to prison, but fled to Belgium in October 2001, and applied for asylum. This was the beginning of a very special asylum case. Belgium was well chosen. It is the only country of the European

Union which recognises citizens of other EU member states as possible asylum seekers. However, the Commissioner General for Refugees rejected Jussi Hermaja's asylum application, stating that the length of substitute service in Finland is not punitive (although it is twice as long as military service). The Belgian High Court upheld this decision, following an appeal by Jussi Hermaja, in March 2004. It now remains to be seen if Bel-

gium will take measures against Jussi Hermaja and deport him to Finland, where he would face 197 days in prison. Jussi Hermaja also appealed to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg against his sentence in Finland. However, a decision is unlikely in the near future.

Andreas Speck

More information:
<http://www.hermaja.org>

WRI report on conscientious objection in Finland



In October 2004, War Resisters' International released a report to the United Nation Human Rights Committee, titled "Imprisonment of Conscientious Objectors in

Finland". WRI's main concerns are:
 * The right to conscientious objection is only recognised in peacetime. This means that at a time when it would be most needed – at times of war – conscientious objectors will not be able to act according to their conscience. As the right to conscientious objection is derived from Article 18 ICCPR, and Article 18 does not include national security as a reason for limiting the rights guaranteed in Article 18, the non-recognition of the right to conscientious objection in times of war is in breach of Article 18 ICCPR.
 * The imprisonment of total objectors (conscientious objectors to both military and substitute service) is an attempt to use the judicial system to break or change the conviction of a conscientious

objector, and is therefore against the spirit of UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2002/45
 * The punitive length of the substitute service in Finland is contrary to the standards set out in numerous resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights, and is also contrary to the Decision on the merits of complaint 8/2000 to the European Committee of Social Rights in the case of Greece, which can be compared to the present situation in Finland.
 * In practice conscientious objectors is discriminated against in relation to their economic situation during their time of service, contrary to numerous resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights.

The report is available on WRI's website at <http://wri-irg.org/news/2004/un-finland04-en.htm>

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Conscientious objection in Finland: Contacts

Several groups and organisations work to support conscientious objectors in Finland

1030 Brussels, Belgium
 tel +32-2-2157908
 fax +32-2-2456297
 email ebco@ifias.net
www.ebco-beoc.org

Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto
 Union of Conscientious Objectors
 Peace Station, Veturitori
 00520 Helsinki
 Finland
 tel +358 9 140427; fax 147297;
 email akl@aseistakieltaytyjaliitto.fi
www.aseistakieltaytyjaliitto.fi/

War Resisters' International
 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX
 Britain
 tel +44-20-7278 4040
 fax +44-20-72780444
 email info@wri-irg.org
www.wri-irg.org

For Mother Earth
 Maria Hendrikaplein 5
 9000 Gent Belgium
 tel +32-9-242 87 52
 fax +32-9-242 87 51
international@motherearth.org
www.motherearth.org

European Bureau for Conscientious Objection
 81a Avenue Jan Stobbaerts, B-

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