

Draft Resistance

LETTER FROM GREEK RESISTER

Dear Friends,

This is the last letter I'm writing from prison. I'll be out in a few days. This happens, not because the government wants to give justice to Conscientious Objectors or in response to the new law but because I've completed two thirds of my sentence, so I have the right to be free under conditions. I am sending you my firm decision to continue our struggle for a just legislative settlement and the ending of persecutions of C.O.s.

I don't want to deprecate our successes, and I am absolutely certain of victory, but in prison there are hundreds of C.O.s and more are still being arrested. The military courts impose the same heavy penalties. My friend, non-religious C.O. Thanasis Makris, is still in prison. The appeal which took place on 10/18/88, decreased the penalty to 18 months. That happened because the government was afraid of the International protest. But that won't change anything because even after the end of this sentence he won't be discharged from the army. There will be a new trial, a new sentence. He must do double time in prison over army time. But that's unacceptable. We must by all means overturn this bad situation.

Unfortunately, the Andrea Papandreu government is laughing at us. Despite their promises, they are trying to win time and not to vote the new law. As long as Greece is president of the European Economic Community, they think they can put off legalizing the rights of C.O.s. They hope that after my release the international protest will retreat and our struggle as well. Your help is the one thing the Prime Minister fears. He is directly responsible for non-voting the bill; pressures must be addressed to him and the president of the Greek Parliament.

I have planned with my friends one big personal protest at the ministry of defense right after my release. The time of alternative service in the bill must be decreased and it must be independent of the military. An adequate compensation must be provided for the dignified survival of the C.O. The bill must be voted before the end of the year and the freeing of C.O.s must be immediate.

People in Greece see our suggestions with greater understanding. It's becoming more and more obvious that the army exists and wars happen so that very few people should have enough economic benefits for a civilized life. I am sure that non-violence is the new great truth which will appear in Greece in future years.

It would be my pleasure if you had a good, continuous communication with my dear friend Thanasis Makris. He needs to feel our love and help. I can't calm down and feel free as long as Thanasis and the other C.O.s are in prison. You can write to Thanasis at the same address that you

write to me. As soon as I arrange my current problems and have a rest, I'll stay and work in Lefkada permanently at the address I'm sending you where I'm waiting for your letters. THANK YOU my dear friends. I wish you Jesus Christ gives you power, health and new successes to your fights. Yours for ever,

Michalis

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DRAFT AND MILITARY IN MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA¹

The following survey provides some preliminary data on Mexico and Central America, and reveals that the methods for maintaining armies in these countries include various forms of "legislated" mandatory service which often, in practice, are applied only to the poor: a pattern all too familiar to anti-draft activists in the U.S.

Mexico has a volunteer army, the lower ranks of which are recruited from the impoverished class in the Federal District and the central states of Mexico. However, all Mexican males must register with the National Military Service in January of the year they turn 18. From this pool an active and inactive reserve force is trained and maintained. Mexico has about 123,000 soldiers out of a population of 72 million.

Guatemala has 34,000 regular soldiers out of a population of about 7 million. In theory all male citizens are subject to the draft; in reality almost all Ladinos (persons of mixed blood; mestizo) and upper class men receive deferments. In addition, following the infiltration of leftist guerrillas into the highlands, virtually all men living in the highlands were forced into the Civil Guard, which may number 900,000. Anyone who refuses to join the Civil Guard is assumed to be a leftist and risks being murdered. There are believed to be about 3,000 rebel soldiers, most of them in exile at this point in time.

Panama has a conscription law but has never used it; its small army is a popular means of economic and social advancement.

Belize has a defense force made of both men and women currently comprised of approximately 600 troops with a target goal of 3,000. Security in Belize is still troops and 4 U.S. military advisers. Available sources did not specify the means of raising the standing army.

Honduras legislation provides for an 18 month period of compulsory military service between the ages of 18 and 32 and for continuing service in the reserves until the age of

55. In practice, most of the ranks are filled by volunteers although with the dramatic increase in strength since the 1969 war with El Salvador, an increasing number of conscripts serve for shortened periods of military training. Honduras has 19,000 soldiers out of a population of 4 million, plus typically 1200 U.S. soldiers, sometimes considerably more.

Costa Rica has about 6,000 troops, theoretically a national guard, rather than a regular army and about 250 American troops. There is no draft in Costa Rica. However, the U.S. is reported to be exerting pressure on Costa Rica to enlarge its army.

Because of the civil war there and enormous U.S. presence, much more information is available about El Salvador. Its population is about 5 million. Its army has about 45,000 active duty personnel. Officially there are 55 U.S. "advisors"; though there are many reports that they act as commanders and engage in combat. Le Nouvel Observateur, a French paper, reports there are really 300 US military advisors, most of them officially civilians. In addition, the US provides about one half million dollars every day (some estimates go as high as \$1.5 million) in military aid, the army now has 200 tank and 70 combat helicopters.

El Salvador relies on the most brutal sort of draft: boys reaching the age of 16 are press-ganged into the army more or less randomly.

The army of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front consists of perhaps 7,000 guerrillas. It has been reported that the rebel army has engaged in forced conscription in areas under its control; these reports have been denied by the Front and its allies.

Finally, there is Nicaragua, the only nation in the region that is not considered a US ally. Nicaragua has an army of about 60,000, though since its reserves are frequently mobilized it is said to have 110,000 troops including the active reserves. US sources claim there are 3,000 Cuban military advisors and 80 advisors from the USSR. There are also about 15,000 contras, who have mostly been resident in Honduras. All of this in a country with a population of 2,700,000.

The US press has been much more willing to report resistance to the draft in Nicaragua than in other countries. Nicaragua now has a comprehensive conscription system. It instituted a draft in 1984, the first draft in Nicaragua's history. The US press reports the 1/3 of draftees refused or deserted at that time. Most recently, in Feb. 1988 in the Indian quarter of Masaya there was an anti-draft riot. Reportedly desertion by draftees was frequent in the Nicaragua army until recently. Partly this may have been due to the rigorouslyness of training and the practice of punishing draftees showing a lack of revolutionary fervor. Now that veterans are given priority for schooling and housing, and the Contras have proven to be afraid of confronting the Nicaraguan army, there appears to be much less popular resistance to the draft. This may also be due to the fact that draft registration cards are now necessary to obtain employment, enroll in school, and to sign legal documents. (Thanks to Draft Notices, COMD, Box 15195, San Diego, CA 92115)

Disarmament Campaigns

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN POLAND

(Editor's note: The following article, written by Jacek Czaputowicz of Poland's Wolnosć i Pokój [Freedom and Peace] was removed from the publication Catholic Review by censors on 10 November 1988.)

THE POLISH PARLIAMENT INTRODUCED alternative civilian service in July, 1988 and freed people who had refused military service from prison. Poland became the first socialist country which recognised conscientious objection to military service. According to a government minister, within several months 764 draftees had applied for alternative service. Out of this number, 480 were approved.

Draftees who refuse to serve in the military for religious or moral reasons are now eligible for civilian service. A written application, stating the reasons for refusal, must be presented no later than the day of receiving the draft notice. The request is reviewed by the regional Draft Commission, the national council and by PRON (Patriotic Movement for National Renewal). An appeal can be made to the Provincial Draft Commission, whose decision is final. The civilian assignment is decided upon by an appropriate government branch (in effect the employment division of the municipal or regional government). Supervision is carried out by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. The length of the alternative service is three years (two years for graduates of higher education), and can include social work, environmental protection, or public works.

There are still problems, of course. It remains unclear what criteria are used to grant civilian service. The lack of board members who are independent of the government causes mistrust among the draftees. This can be seen by the number of people rejected for alternative service in the first month of the new law's enforcement. This problem may be solved by the recently formed independent advisory board, whose goal is to monitor enforcement of the law. This advisory board includes some highly respected individuals. Though the board currently has no legal status, its existence provides some moral support for those applying for alternative service.

THE MILITARY'S DESIRE to create socialist citizens can be seen in its political indoctrination. A young person's first contact with the military occurs in school with civil

defence classes, mandatory for both sexes. In secondary school, there is mandatory instruction in shooting and grenade throwing, and in higher education you must pass a military examination to complete your education. Moreover, political indoctrination is an important element of military training. A military political officer watches the soldier's ideological development. Political lessons in the army are considered important. Obligatory viewing of TV news and daily reading of *Soldier of Freedom* are almost a ritual.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN the army is very restricted despite the fact that the constitution guarantees everyone, including soldiers, the right to freely practice his or her own religion. While watching the daily news programme is obligatory, listening to Sunday Mass on the radio is made extremely difficult. With few exceptions, requests to attend Mass are refused. In the initial service period, it is forbidden to leave the garrison to visit a church. Soldiers do not challenge these denials of rights due to the strong pressure of regulations. More often than not, they give up their religious practices. Professional soldiers and their families do not participate in church life, usually out of fear of their superiors. Religious life is disappearing in the large military residential areas.

In Poland, military service lasts 24 months. This length is not justified by training requirements. In comparison, military service in Finland is only eight months and 13 months in the Netherlands. There is no obligatory military draft in the US and Great Britain. In several East European Countries (East Germany and Hungary) military service is 18 months.

The length of military service in Poland is justified by political considerations: the need for "ideological molding of character." The size of the army is also dependent upon the length of service. In addition, a considerable amount of money is spent on the military: ten times more than is spent on science, and five times more than is spent on culture.

Contemporary international relations are marked by a lessening of tension and disarmament. In Poland, this process is reflected in the decision of to allow alternative service. The elimination of school military lessons and the removal of military studies from higher education should follow. The human rights of soldiers should be respected, including the right to practice one's own religion. The military must reject methods of political indoctrination which originated in the Stalinist era. Military service should be shortened to the time necessary for mastering purely military skills, and expenditures on armaments should be proportional to the economic capabilities of the country. ■



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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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