

AA.6.4

Union of Conscientious Objectors in Finland  
Rauhanasema, Veturitori  
00520 HELSINKI  
tel. 358-0-140 427  
fax 147 297

Helsinki, 5. April 1990

Dear friends,

We want to inform you about the latest development concerning the situation of conscientious objectors in Finland and the planned protest actions by men currently doing their alternative service.

The Act on Amendment to the Law on Alternative Service (647/85) came into force in 1987. It was initially provided to be temporary for five years, till the end of 1991. In February 1989 the Ministry of Defence set up an Observatory Working Group for Alternative Service, which consisted of representatives from the Ministries of Defence, Labour, and Justice, and the General Staff. This working group has published its report on February the 28th this year.

The Working Group has, besides having made its notes about the application of the act, also accepted recommendations concerning principles for new legislation. In most critical questions opinions were divided. The representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff support the ideas of current act, and the representatives of the other ministries want to change the punitive character of the above named act, which has also been recognized by Amnesty International.

The Working Group admitted that the main goals of the temporary Act have not been achieved. The number of men applying for alternative service instead of armed or unarmed service in the Army hasn't declined. The Act was also planned to connect alternative service with closer links to the concept of 'Total Defence Policy'. This plan has totally failed, because of the refusal of alternative servants for conscientious reasons, and of the reluctance of administrative organs to use non-professional labour force in their activities. The group has also noticed the increase in the number of total objectors, charged and sentenced for their refusal to serve 16 months' alternative service. According to the statistics introduced in the report, there were 40 crimes of refusal reported to the police authorities in 1989 (28 in 1987 and 16 in 1988).

The representatives of defence administration have recommended an alternative service of 14-16 months provided also as a permanent legislation, when the representatives of Ministries of Labour and Justice support a service period of 11-12 months. The basic military service's length in Finland is 8 months. The civil authorities in the working group have also proposed shortening of the time of imprisonment for total objectors, the main rule being half of the service time still unserved at the point of refusal, whereas the military administration also in this question want to continue the contemporary practices. They recommend reducing the maximum sentence from 15 months 20 days till 11 months 20 days (counted on the basis of 16 months' service time), but when the court practice under the current act has been regulated by the Appeal Courts

to standard-like 11-12 months' sentence, this proposition wouldn't change the de facto situation.

The men doing their alternative service have planned strong protest actions against the temporary legislation. A national committee of alternative servants was founded in Autumn 1989. The committee has planned to introduce a nation-wide strike on April the 23rd. An official strike warning has been addressed to the Council of State (the Government) on the 13th of March. The committee demands the government to make decision about the fundamental principles for new legislation of alternative service. The four main demands are:

- 1) The alternative service must not be longer than the armed service.
- 2) The responsibility of preparing the law draft, administration and legal regulation of alternative service must be transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Labour.
- 3) The sentences for total objectors must be reduced.
- 4) The forms of serving in alternative service must be reformed to correspond to the convictions and beliefs of the servants. That means allowing service in non-governmental organizations working for peace and development, etc.

The strike action is planned to continue till an acceptable answer to the above mentioned demands have been given by the state power. The men taking part in the strike may be prosecuted and sentenced for several months. Despite this, some 200 alternative servants have already expressed their readiness to go on strike. Some total objectors currently imprisoned have also planned starting a hunger strike simultaneously with the strike of alternative servants.

The main goal of the planned action is to provide an alternative service whose length would be reasonable compared with the length of armed service. We would like that international opinion will consider the participants of the strike actions as people struggling for their human rights, and in the case of their imprisonment as prisoners of conscience.

In order to give support to our campaign we ask you to send on 23rd April or later a letter or telegramme to:

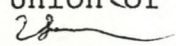
Minister of Defence  
Mr Ole Norrback  
Ministry of Defence  
Et. Makasiinikatu 8  
SF-00130 HELSINKI  
FINLAND

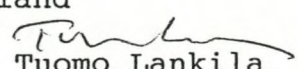
Prime Minister  
Mr Harri Holkeri  
Aleksanterinkatu 3 D  
SF-00170 HELSINKI  
FINLAND

Please let us know if you sent the telegram and inform us about any other possible solidarity action.

With antimilitarist greetings

Union of Conscientious Objectors in Finland

  
Jouni Salminen  
Lawyer

  
Tuomo Lankila  
Secretary



REV. R. J. D. ROBERTSON  
85 Princess Street  
MAYFAIR  
Johannesburg 2092  
TEL: 011-837-6582

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

19th April 1990.

The Secretary,  
Board for Religious Objection,  
Private Bag X 20521,  
Bloemfontein  
9300.

*Copy: Mandy.*

Dear Mr Fourie,

I am writing to confirm the matter I discussed with you last month in connection with the information you kindly send me regarding Category III objectors and also the dates of the meetings of the Board each year.

Since there is now a national office dealing with the concerns of conscientious objectors, my request is that these details be now sent to that office. The address is:

Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) for short)  
Box 591  
Kengray  
2100.

The National Secretary at present is Ms Mandy Taylor and the phone number, if ever you should need it, is 011-836-8423.

May I thank you again for your very helpful assistance over the past six years, and also the help of Mrs van den Berg. Perhaps you could convey my appreciation also to Judge Edeling.

Yours sincerely,

*R J D Robertson.*

R J D Robertson  
Division of Justice & Reconciliation

*I have not circulated the attached list of 19/4/90 Category 3 to regional reps of CSCG.*

*R J D*

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