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1. an overview of the Finnish alternative service, how it works and how it has developed

-Military service in Finland is mandatory to everyone, whose legal gender is male between ages 18-29. Those who don't want to serve in the army can choose alternative service, also translated as civil service ('siviilipalvelus' in Finnish). Some medical conditions can result in a person getting freed from military service and alternative service. Service is voluntary for the residents of Åland Island. Alternative service is 347 days in length while military service is 165, 255 or 347 days depending on the recruit's interest in different training paths. So it is roughly twice the length of the shortest possible military service in a system where recruits have some autonomy on the length of their service. People in alternative service can't decide the length of their service while army recruits can. Serving in the military but not using any weapons results in a minimum service length of 255 days. Switching from the army to the alternative service is possible and doing so decreases the amount of days you have to serve in alternative service according to the time you already served in the army. (The exact number of decreased days can be calculated by a specific mathematical form that takes into account the training path you were on in the army.)

-Refusing to serve in any official service methods, aka total objection, results in a prison sentence of half the remaining time you have in alternative service, so a maximum of 173 days. (Becoming a total objector in the army transforms the remaining service days to the amount of alternative service days using the form mentioned earlier, and that result is then divided by 2 to find out the days in imprisonment.) Total objection is most commonly carried out as a house arrest and doesn't leave a mark on the person's criminal record.

Instead a marking on the courts information system is made, which may in some circumstances affect the person's security clearances. Some government jobs might require such clearance. The record filings cannot be used if they are older than 10 years.

- For those who choose to declare total objection, it is more common to apply for alternative service first and then for discharge from service. This is partly due to the procedural difficulties of having to be tried by a military court if you declare your intention to do so from the outset, but it is also a political choice to highlight the punitive nature of alternative service. In recent years, there have been instances where alternative servants

have declared their intention to opt out on the last day of reporting to work, thus avoiding any actual punishment for the purposes of calculating the prison sentence.

-There are roughly 35-55 total objectors per year and roughly 2000 people who choose alternative service per year. The number of people exempted from military service altogether, usually due to medical reasoning, is roughly one fourth of all the people liable to military service. Some people use this as a method to avoid military service. (Although, during war time, there is a legal possibility for the military to order these exempted people for a new draft event.) But it is the Finnish military itself, and the civil service center, that accept these requests for exemption, so the military deliberately lets these people go. There is a reason why the Finnish military doesn't want to train these people that would become unmotivated soldiers. In Finland, the reserve of soldiers at suitable age for war is roughly 870 000, but the amount of soldiers actually deployed in a real combat if it was to happen, the ones Finland has equipment, other resources etc. for, is about 280 000. If a country of 5 and a half million residents has almost 1 million soldiers ready to fight, but has the capacity to deploy only a bit over a quarter of a million, then some thousands of people per year refusing war training isn't posing a major threat to national security.

-At the start of the alternative service there is a 4 week long training phase in the Civil Service Center that includes practical and theoretical teaching according to alternative servant's own interests, including the training paths 1. civic participation, 2. fire and rescue services and civil protection, 3. environment and society, 4. violence prevention and 5. everyday safety. This training has after covid become largely digital, and most civil servants only have one week of live training. After the training phase, alternative servants work for 10,5 months in a workplace of their choice. Alternative service can be initiated by contacting a list of available jobs in your area, and you can commute to work from your own home. While it is mainly carried out in public institutions such as day care centers, hospitals, nursing homes, (university) libraries, and even in a peace organization, the Civil Service Centre mentions a need to increase the number of sectors where alternative service is available.

2. an introduction to the Finnish conscientious objection movement

-peace activism existed in Finland already in the early 20th century. The honor of being the first total objector belongs to Arndt Pekurinen whose resistance led to the forming of the

alternative service. Sadly, during that time alternative service exempted the people from military service only during peacetime and when he refused to grab a weapon in 1941 during World War II, he was executed by the army.

-there are several peace organizations in Finland but only some of them criticize compulsory military service. One of those is my organization, the Union of Conscientious Objectors, which was founded in 1974. We hold a variety of events, share information about the alternatives of military service, help people who don't want to serve in the army on legal issues, keep an eye on the Finnish military so that they don't make any gross violations of our national law, lobby politicians to respect the rights of conscientious objectors and take part in governmental bodies that prepare laws.

3. what efforts have been made to improve the Finnish alternative service system

-all improvements to the rights of conscientious objectors have been achieved through activism

-in 1931 the first non-military service law was established, thanks to Arndt Pekurinen and many other pacifist activists.

-in 1969 political arguments started being accepted as valid reasons to refuse military service alongside religious and ethical arguments.

-In 1987 the board of examination on the conviction of conscientious objectors, which used questionable methods trying to determine if a military refuser was a so-called "real pacifist" or not, was abolished in peacetime.

-in 2008 the right to be a conscientious objector even during war time was accepted, alternative service was shortened, new workplaces were made available for alternative servants to spend their service at.

-Nowadays there are several laws protecting alternative servants. If a military recruit wants to switch to alternative service, the application must be handled by military staff without delay. (An officer was recently fined for not handling a recruit's alternative service application.) Employers and educational establishments can't treat applicants who have completed the army better than other applicants who have not.

4. what challenges or difficulties the Finnish conscientious objection movement is facing and how they are being overcome.

4.1 The (still existing) stigma against those who choose alternative service.

-some of the general public still are hostile towards those who have completed alternative service, been total objectors or dodged the military service in some other way. For example strangers and people I've known for many years have ridiculed and intimidated me for choosing alternative service. This situation has gotten a bit better over decades, especially in big cities.

4.2 Gender equality as a pretext for expanding conscription

-The military service system's equality problems become more and more obvious to the general public. The common solution politicians keep suggesting is to make everyone liable to military service regardless of their gender. Conscientious objection movement knows that this would only be wasting money and resources, because the reserve is already so much bigger than the planned amount of soldiers actually deployed in war time. Even some officers within the Finnish military acknowledge this and are against expanding the number of people obliged to serve in the military. Conscientious objection movement has tried to slow down the talks about expanding the draft by spreading information and taking part in governmental committees that investigate these sorts of changes.

4.3 Problems when applying to non-military service - Lack of information available to conscripts

The Union of Conscientious Objectors has been collecting experiences from the participants who have not got enough information in the call-ups. In draft events the officers are legally obliged to share information about the alternative service, but many officers break this law constantly. The Union is also sharing leaflets that inform conscripts about the alternatives for military service. This campaign has continued for decades.

Lukukesto: 13 minuuttia (100 sanaa≈1 minuutti puhetta)