



COUNTERING

MILITARY

RECRUITMENT

JOIN THE CIRCUS.
NOT THE ARMY

Learning the lessons of
counter-recruitment
campaigns internationally

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‘Countering the militarisation of youth’ is a huge, complex topic and one of WRI’s major areas of work. In making this resource, we set out to investigate one part of this activism: campaigns to counter the recruitment of young people by armed forces and armed groups.

WRI affiliates working on counter-recruitment had said they would find it useful to know how other groups run these campaigns, and so we wanted to explore what counter-recruitment was, how it was done in different contexts, and to connect counter-recruitment movements to each other.

We started with an assumption that ‘counter-recruitment’ was a meaningful and coherent concept in anti-militarist activism. We thought of it as activities to oppose the recruitment efforts of militaries and paramilitary groups, such as protesting against recruitment, sharing information about the realities of joining the military, and promoting alternatives to military service.

However, as work on the resource began and activists responded to our call out, this assumption was challenged. WRI affiliates in some regions said they knew of no counter-recruitment movements in their area. In other contexts, there were strong movements resisting the militarisation of youth, but counter-recruitment was not seen as a distinct part of them. These conversations challenged our ideas about counter-recruitment, and we realised we must look to the individual contributions to this resource to rethink what counter-recruitment means.

Some examples did fit with our preconception of ‘classic’ counter-recruitment campaigns. Our case study of the US grassroots counter-recruitment movement, developed with the help of Rick Jahnkow, finds that there is a vibrant network of local groups resisting the encroachment of military recruitment into the education system. The case study picks out some strengths of the movement: a combination of local organizing and national networking, savvy campaigning tactics, and well-thought out engagement with young people. This widespread and long-standing movement is perhaps the model that has most shaped the concept of counter-recruitment.

Some respondents from the UK reflected that peace campaigners in the country focus more on peace education and wider anti-militarist campaigning than on opposing recruitment. However, we also found that some groups were tackling recruitment directly. In our case study of local activists Leicester for Peace, the group share the variety of creative tactics and community resources they have used to resist the army’s presence in their city, and offer tips for others. And in their Q&A, Veterans for Peace UK tell us about the unique perspective and contribution that veterans can bring to counter-recruitment in the country.

Many of the responses broadened our concept of counter-recruitment. In particular, several contributors made the case that the nature of militarisation meant that countering recruitment had to start earlier, and go deeper, than the moment of enlistment. To different degrees, these pieces blur the lines between counter-recruitment and wider activism against the militarisation of youth, challenging whether counter-recruitment should be seen as a distinct activity in every context.

David Scheuing of DFG-VK explains that German anti-militarists use a variety of approaches to counter military recruitment: political campaigning against the recruitment of young people under the age of 18; removal or creative reworking of the military’s recruitment adverts; and resistance to militarised logics in education. However, he concludes that to fully resist the

incorporation of young people into violence, peace activists must have their own vision for providing radical peace education outside the school system.

Moses Monday John of ONAD argues that, with South Sudan's history of militarisation and armed conflict, counter recruitment must work to 'demilitarise the hearts and minds' of young people. He makes a powerful case for the importance of training youth in nonviolence so they have the power to change their conditions and the conditions of society; to change the underlying factors of recruitment.

Carlos Barranco of Antimilitaristes-MOC's piece also shows how in Valencia (taking inspiration from the sister campaign in Catalonia), activists have prioritized resisting the military's presence in education and in spaces for children and young people over a direct focus on recruitment.

Some of the contributions reframed and pushed the boundaries of counter-recruitment altogether. An interview with AKL (the union of conscientious objectors) in Finland challenged the idea of counter-recruitment as something that only takes place in contexts with voluntary armies. AKL organiser Esa Norevuo told us that defending and promoting non-military service in the context of conscription can be considered a kind of counter-recruitment. His interview shares tactics and successes that will be inspirational to activists working in conscription and non-conscription contexts alike.

Our interview with Bill Scheurer and Kevin Haake of the Stop Recruiting Kids Campaign in the USA highlighted that not all groups aim counter-recruitment at young people themselves. They reflected that, in a society where militarist values are mainstream and recruitment is aggressive, they need to create 'political space' where recruitment can be challenged. Therefore their campaign aims to shift public opinion, and target politicians, not just youth.

The intervention of Colombian coalition COALICO shows that in some contexts the government is not the recruiter but a key actor in prevention. As non-state armed groups are the forces recruiting youth into violence in the Colombian armed conflict, COALICO aims recommendations at the government to protect children and young people.

From ad-busting to nonviolence training, these contributions provide many ideas for different tactics to counter the recruitment of young people. They also suggest that methods for resisting recruitment necessarily vary across different contexts.

One important issue to consider is the nature and timing of recruitment. Where the recruitment process itself is aggressive and unbalanced, activists find it useful to target the moment of recruitment itself. But where it is the long process of militarisation that is the most egregious, countering recruitment may have to start earlier, and may have many overlaps with peace education and demilitarisation.

The message of counter-recruitment also varies. Anti-militarist messages were not at the forefront of every campaign. Where these ideas might alienate targets or allies (such as young people, decision-makers or veterans), some groups chose instead to emphasise the need for a balance to the military's power and messages. Others found that meaningful counter-recruitment needed a critique of the logic of armed forces or armed conflict more widely.

Given the diversity of these campaigns (where they exist at all), this booklet is not so much a how-to-guide for counter-recruitment as an exploration of the issues in counter-recruitment. We hope it will be a useful starting point for groups wanting to begin this work, and thought-provoking for those already doing it.

THE USA'S VIBRANT GRASSROOTS COUNTER-RECRUITMENT NETWORK

WRI with Rick Jahnkow

The United States has a strong grassroots counter-recruitment movement, made up of many local and regional groups connected in the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth (NNOMY). The strength of the movement is perhaps due to the extraordinary power given to military recruiters in the country: the intensity of recruitment demands strong resistance. Recruitment is especially invasive in the education system. Military recruiters are allowed almost unrestricted access to school campuses, schools are pressured to release students' personal information to recruiters, and pre-military training units that act as a pipeline to the armed forces are hosted in schools (the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, or JROTC). This militarisation of education has race and class dynamics, as working-class and racialised communities are targeted for recruitment, and also suffer most from resources being used for militarism rather than education (such as the cutting of classes necessary for them to access college).

Local but networked

Grassroots counter-recruitment activism in the US has the advantage of being both locally organised and highly networked. Many groups organise in local or regional areas rather than nationally. Counter-recruitment activists say that a local focus can be helpful for campaigning because, while large-scale campaigns might provoke large-scale pushbacks and scare off legislators, local campaigns can win easier victories [3]. As schools are major sites for recruitment, local campaigns can also win important changes in policy: several groups have successfully targeted the board of local schools and the school district.

Even though counter-recruitment groups organise in local communities, they build a strong movement through the wider network. NNOMY promotes cross-sharing of information and tactics developed by its members, such as template policies to propose to school boards, and guides to running specific campaigns. The network also compiles resources for young people that can be shared across the country, like the counter-recruitment video *Before You Enlist* [4] and the websites *Winning the Peace* [5] and *Peaceful Career Alternatives* [6].

Members of NNOMY gather for summits to share their learning and collectively set strategy for the movement. The most recent summit, in 2018, set the following goals as priorities [7]:

- Establish a network of sympathetic teachers and counselors,
- Empower youth,
- Remove JROTC from schools,
- Restigmatise militarism,
- Build and sustain our groups with research, analysis, funding and networking,
- Grow counter recruitment activism through a focus on intersectionality, economic justice and impacted youth.

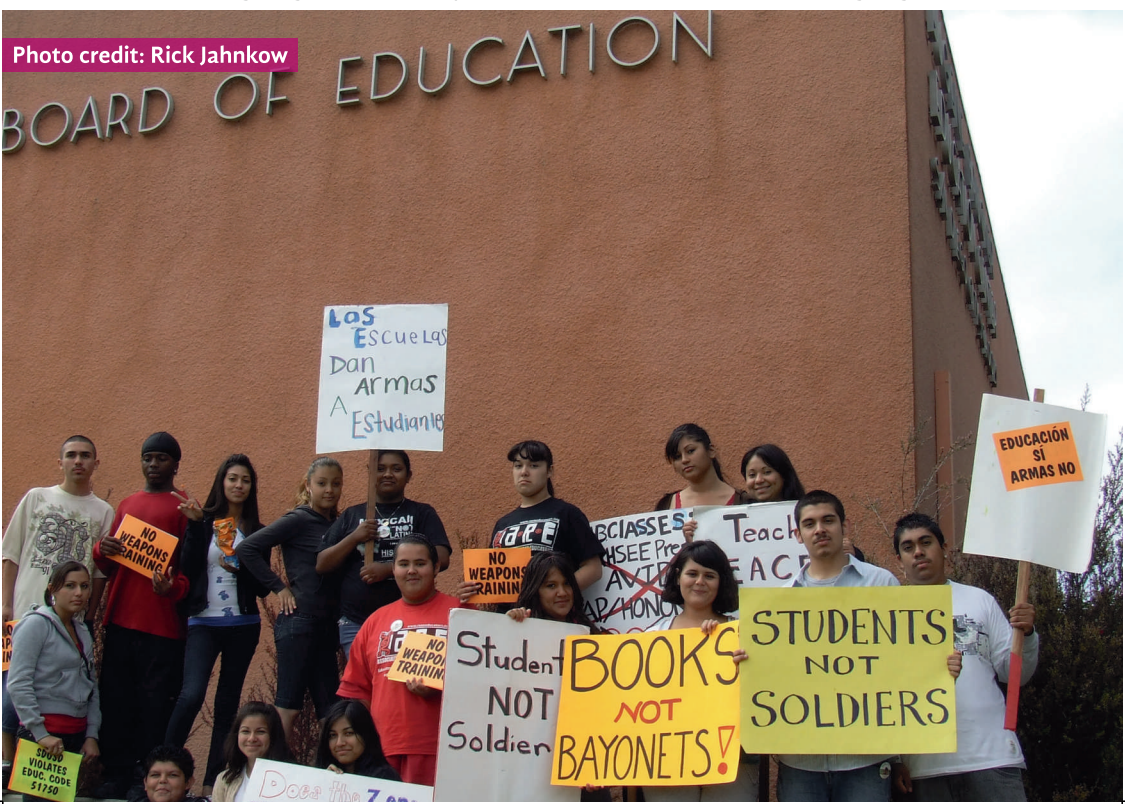
Savvy campaigners

In a political context where it is difficult to campaign against military recruitment ideologically, counter-recruitment groups have developed very strategic campaigns. While much of the law is on the side of military recruiters, activists understand and make use of the limited opportunities the law gives them for resistance. Rather than expressing outright opposition to any military recruitment to decision-makers, they emphasise the need for balance. They pick winnable battles that oppose the worst aspects of recruitment...and win! All these tendencies are visible in a victory achieved by students and parents at Mission Bay High School in San Diego in 2012.

Case Study: The removal of JROTC at Mission Bay High School

The Education Not Arms Coalition was founded in San Diego in 2007, prompted by the introduction of JROTC at Mission Bay High School and the installation of shooting ranges at two schools: the Mission Bay campus and Abraham Lincoln High School. When it was learned that nine other schools with JROTC in San Diego also had shooting ranges, the Education Not Arms Coalition adopted the goal of eliminating three objectionable aspects of the program. These were also factors that boosted the number of students in the unit:

- False claims - students were being misled to believe that JROTC would help them qualify for college. At the same time, college preparation classes were being cut to fund JROTC, impacting especially on the Latino student body.
- Automatic enrollment - in violation of the state education code, students were being automatically enrolled in JROTC.
- Shooting ranges - like in many other US schools, the JROTC unit was going to build a



shooting range inside the school for marksmanship training, despite a zero-tolerance policy on weapons.

After 18 months of organising, including large protests at school board meetings, the Coalition succeeded in these aims. The school board voted to ban marksmanship training and remove shooting ranges at 11 of the district's schools, and the superintendent ordered school principals to stop using automatic enrollment and false claims to boost numbers in JROTC units.

This victory led to declining numbers in the unit. At this point, the protesters made use of a federal law that a JROTC unit must have a certain number of students in it to be maintained. Students, former students and parents wrote to the Mission Bay High School principal and the school board, highlighting that according to the law, the unit at Mission Bay should have been disbanded, and that it was especially outrageous to keep it open at great expense while cuts were being made to teaching in other areas.

When the protesters received no reply, and saw cadets persuading students to sign up for JROTC, they realised that the school might try to keep the JROTC unit open by pressuring more students to enrol. In response, students distributed hundreds of bilingual leaflets informing their peers they couldn't be made to take JROTC, and buttons proclaiming 'Students Not Soldiers' and 'Yo No Soy El Army' ('I Am Not the Army'). After this passionate campaigning, the numbers in the JROTC unit fell even further, and the Mission Bay principal announced that the unit would be discontinued.

Rick Jahnkow said of the successful campaign, 'Much has been learned about how to weaken what has seemingly been an invincible intrusion of militarism in our schools. One of the lessons learned is that expectations must be geared toward a multi-year process. Another is that while a public campaign demanding complete removal of JROTC does not work, it is feasible to mobilise opposition to limited aspects of it that are hard for its supporters to defend and are responsible for propping up JROTC enrollment numbers.'

'But the most important factor in the success at Mission Bay HS was the students themselves, who persevered even when their principal and others tried to silence and intimidate them. They were encouraged and aided by non-students who leafleted at school entrances and gave other support, but the most significant work was done over a long period inside. Through peer education, the students were able to reverse the 'coolness' equation so that rejecting the lure of JROTC became more legitimate than joining it. Once that happened, a de facto boycott of the program ensued that made it impossible to sustain JROTC.'

This case study is a summary of an article by Rick Jahnkow, first published in Draft Notices [8].

Engaging young people

As the Mission Bay case study above shows, counter-recruitment activism depends on engaging not just decision-makers, but also young people. Groups do this in a variety of ways: they hand out counter-recruitment information at school entrances, speak in school classrooms, participate in school career fairs, and set up table displays during students' lunch time. A small number of groups have sponsored high school essay contests or offered small grants for student activism. These activities make use of the legal principle, won by COMD in the 1980s, that schools allowing in military recruiters should give 'equal access' to counter-recruitment groups [9]. As one activist reflects, actions in and around schools are powerful just in their presence: 'recruiters want to have a monologue with America's youth. Counter-recruiters' power, therefore, lies in their ability to create space for a dialogue by asking uncomfortable questions and pointing out inconsistencies in the recruiters' sales pitch' [10].

Engaging with young people sometimes stimulates student activism, which makes counter-recruitment all the stronger, as the student participation in the Mission Bay victory shows. When students organise against recruitment, counter-recruitment groups join with them as allies and provide resources in support of their organising; such as stickers, leaflets, photocopying, transportation to school trustee meetings, and information on students' free speech rights.

To engage with young people, it is important for counter-recruitment to be relevant to their identities, experiences and values. One activist said, 'in order to motivate young people's involvement, especially in poorer communities, we've found it useful to educate them on ways that war and militarism absorb resources that should be used, instead, to support their schools and subsidise higher education. It has also been effective to raise the issue of threats to student privacy when recruiters request student contact information from schools, or when the military is permitted to give its aptitude test at schools. In working-class communities, we've highlighted disproportionate school visits by recruiters, and the corresponding lack of student access to academic courses needed to qualify for university admission.'

This article is based on the archive of the Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft (COMD) [1] and resources of the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth (NNOMY) [2]. Thank you to Rick Jahnkow, an organiser of COMD and Project YANO and a member of the NNOMY Steering Committee, for comments.

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PEACE CAMPAIGNERS TAKE ON THE ARMY'S PRESENCE IN THEIR CITY: LEICESTER FOR PEACE (UK)

This piece was developed through conversations with members of Leicester for Peace, and from the group's resources.

About Leicester for Peace

Leicester is a city in the Midlands of Britain, which is often targeted by the armed forces for recruitment because there are high levels of poverty and because of its cultural diversity. A group of peace campaigners were appalled by the army's presence in the city centre, where they encourage children to play with guns and tanks, and by the army's activities in local schools. Building on the strong history of anti-militarist campaigning in the city, they founded Leicester for Peace. They are a small core group, but they work alongside other peace and justice focused groups in the city - the Quakers, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the National Education Union.

Methods for countering recruitment

The group have different methods for resisting recruitment. They oppose the army's presence in the city by leafleting opposite the army stall. Sometimes they hold a silent vigil, with one person handing out information and talking to the public.



Photo credit: Ambrose Musiyiwa /CivicLeicester

‘Silence is powerful. We have information available about why we are there – and a placard on a table, but standing in a long line opposite the army seems right. It somehow makes the power feel more equal. More people feel they can join us too, thinking it is wrong to have the army there but not necessarily wanting to talk to the public. Sometimes passers by join us for a while and then move on.’ One member of the group reflected on how the silent vigils make her feel: ‘I hold my head high, I make eye contact, I am thinking: “not in my name”; I am a middle-aged woman in an anorak and I too am powerful!’.

When leafleting in the city, Leicester for Peace make use of the positive possibilities of public space. In 2016 Armed Forces Day fell on the same day as the national Street Choirs Festival which the city was hosting that year. The group went round with a pop-up stall, a banner and leaflets about how ‘Music Connects and War Divides.’ They highlighted the contrast between ‘soldiers marching for Armed Forces Day and street choirs from all over the UK coming to sing songs for peace, the environment and social justice’, and used the festival to get people to think critically about militarism and recruitment. On another occasion, the group was countering the army’s presence in town when Leicester had just won the Premier League. ‘There was a tremendous feeling of support from all over the world for Leicester. It was the opposite of what the army stood for and that helped’. This shows how positive sources of community, like sport and music, are opportunities to counter the army’s message and use of public space.

Leicester for Peace have also done creative projects around recruitment. In 2015 they produced a play with a local college on the theme. The play was in two halves, depicting a young man in the kitchen with his family deciding whether to join the army in 1915 and then in 2015. After the two scenarios were acted out, the audience could suggest changes for the actors to improvise; what if family members were of different genders, or what if a member of the family had already been killed in a war? The play was a great experience for both the students who participated in it and the audience.

The group have also campaigned with some success against the army’s access to young people in Leicester. They launched a charter on the militarisation of young people in 2017 with specific asks for the City Council and the City Mayor, and they update the charter with new aims each year. The Mayor has agreed in principle to one of the asks – that children under the age of enlistment should not be allowed to handle guns. This needs monitoring to ensure it is being enforced, but there are signs it is working: at the army’s most recent display there were no armed vehicles, and children were not allowed to handle the few guns on display. The most recent charter sets aims about balancing out the military presence in schools – an aim which the group are working towards with the National Education Union.

‘The charter helps us keep going. By reviewing it every year as part of our International Conscientious Objectors’ Day event, it ensures we don’t lose momentum. We do not agree with military response to conflict and that is a huge thing to challenge. By concentrating on the militarism of young people and the young age of enlistment in the UK, we make sense to the public and we can have specific things we try to achieve.’

Aims of the work

The group is anti-militarist, but their counter-recruitment work is more about offering balance and a critical perspective than trying to persuade people to their view.

‘Our aim is to dispel some of the myths surrounding armed forces recruitment, and to get young people to think critically about the decision to join up. We get them to think about how young people are getting double messages about no violence or knives or guns in schools but it is fine to kill people if told to. We also encourage balanced information – about joining up when we are

at the army displays, and about the role of the army and army life when they are in schools. You can't tell people what to think but you can get them to start thinking and questioning for themselves.'

Successes and challenges

Unsurprisingly, the army don't like Leicester for Peace challenging them in the city, and it can be a daunting task. Army officers don't have any real power to move them on (even though they have tried to get the police to intervene), but 'you do feel their power, and their dismissal of us'. The group have found it helps to work alongside Veterans for Peace: 'they can speak from experience both to the army and to parents and young people.' Other challenges they have encountered doing counter-recruitment work include: the magnitude of the task given the very established culture of militarism in Britain; slow progress as everyone has busy lives; and difficulties raising the issue in schools.

But despite these challenges, it's worth doing something to oppose recruitment. The group said of the impact of their campaigning:

'You never know what impact you are having...More people are thinking about it and are being empowered to stand up to it. We actually found that the public were quite responsive to us. Individual parents we have met in the street have been very pleased to have the information about where to get more information and so there may be some young people who have thought better of signing up. It's also good for people to see peaceful activism taking place – to know that the public don't just have to accept the status quo, they can challenge 'norms' – how else does change ever happen? The fact that our City Mayor has pledged that children under the age of enlistment should not handle guns in these city centre displays is a huge impact even though it needs constant monitoring. The involvement of the National Education Union will hopefully lead to the bigger impact of getting the issues raised in schools. And as we share what we are doing with other groups it may be that our work has impact in other cities.'

Tips from Leicester for Peace

- When challenging militarism, it helps to break it down into specific asks.
- Make use of any local opportunities.
- Use any connections you have to try to get into schools.
- Establish connections with local and national groups with similar concerns or which are doing similar work. Share information.
- When challenging the army presence in a city centre, it is good to have Veterans for Peace with you - the army don't like them and worried parents can talk to them. Have information like Before You Sign Up cards available (<http://beforeyousignup.info/>).
- Use photography to document the interactions the army is having with children in city streets, schools and community centres.
- Monitor any achievements you have made and recognize them, however small. Whatever you do is better than doing nothing.
- Stand together and support each other. Make space to share feelings about any vigils or leafleting when the army are there. They are a powerful force and we have to remind ourselves that we are too.

5 QUESTIONS FOR VETERANS FOR PEACE UK

Who are Veterans for Peace UK and why do you work to counter military recruitment?

In our handbook (available to view on our website - www.vfpuk.org), we have in our statement of purpose a simple statement;

"We veterans of the armed forces, having dutifully served our nation, do hereby affirm our greater responsibility to serve the cause of world peace.

To this end:

(a). We will work toward increasing public awareness of the costs of war"

What kind of counter-recruitment activities do VFP UK do?

VFP UK have become increasingly concerned about the growing levels of militarisation in the public arena. The best examples of this are the government using the rebranded 'Armed Forces Day' (previously Veterans Day) as a pseudo-recruitment tool, alongside millions of pounds being invested by government in promoting 'military values' in schools.

In seeking to counter this, VFP UK attend Armed Forces Day events to interact with the public, offering an alternative perspective on war and its effects. We also look to do the same in schools and colleges, as well as events and meetings of concerned individuals and organisations we are invited to attend.

Of particular concern is the Army now being invited into primary schools, where military 'drill' and other military training activities are taught to young children. This is drip feeding the nation's children with a one sided view of life in the military and requires countering with the balanced viewpoint offered by veterans who have served in all recent conflicts. VFP UK can, wherever possible, provide a very different perspective to the often sanitised version being promoted by the government.

What is Vfp's message for young people and their families about joining the armed forces?

'War is not the solution to the problems we face in the 21st century'.

We have this statement on our t-shirts and sweatshirts worn on all VFP UK outreach events.

The purpose and point of any military is to join with and kill or destroy its enemy. The majority of military training is based on this ethos. If you choose to join the armed forces, no matter what your chosen role, you will be trained to function in that role as part of the overall system designed to achieve this aim, and you will be expected to function within this system without any redress or argument.

VFP UK is not a pacifist organisation, and we do believe that countries have an inherent right of self-defence. We, therefore, believe our country needs a military, albeit in a very different form and size, and trained/equipped to defend and not launch wars overseas.

VFP UK always seek to convey our message with openness, friendliness and respect. We will not assault, verbally or physically, in person or online, those who oppose or disagree with us, even if they assault us.

What kind of impact do you see your activities having? How do people respond to you?

VFP UK are a small organisation with a big aim. We believe, despite our limited resources and membership, we have contributed greatly to raising the issue of peacemaking in our nation (and elsewhere) through positive and nonviolent actions and words.

On the whole, as veterans, we generally receive a favourable response from the public. We do, wherever necessary, challenge government and it is fair to say governments everywhere do not like being questioned about their activities or actions particularly if they are aggressive or costly in lives or economics.

Do you co-operate with others in your counter-recruitment work? What do you think it adds having veterans involved?

VFP UK have and will work with and support organisations who share our vision for peace. We are politically and financially independent, but seek to create strategic partnerships to attain common goals and purposes. Because our membership is made up of veterans from all services who have served in nearly every conflict including and since the second world war, we can bring a perspective and a credibility to the conversation that is balanced and insightful.

We would ask that all veterans consider our message and look to join with us in ending militarisation and the costly arms race.

Thanks to Ian Johnstone, the North-west co-ordinator of Veterans for Peace UK (VFP UK), for responding to these questions.



COUNTER-RECRUITMENT IN GERMANY: LEARNING AND ADAPTING

David Scheuing (DFG-VK).

Since conscription was halted in 2011, the German armed forces (Bundeswehr) and their civil allies have developed a number of ways to attract and to garner youth into their ranks. This new situation of active recruitment and militarised advertising is a mutual learning experience for both the military and for us as activists. The following pages will showcase a number of strategies to counter the recruitment efforts of armed forces in Germany.

Political campaigning against underage recruitment

The German military historically has been able to recruit underage youth into its ranks, but rarely had to do so due to a constant 'supply' of young conscripts. For the last 10 years peace and children's rights groups have been working actively in this field, since the shortage of recruits from 2011 onwards led to a greater reliance on underage recruits in the military. Since 2011, the number of underage soldiers has increased fourfold.

In 2014, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Germany to raise the minimum age to 'straight 18', after critical reporting. In 2016, the childrens' commission of the German parliament followed suit. The federal Defense minister Ursula von der Leyen has been presented with 31,000 signatures on the petition 'Unter18nie' (never younger than 18) in 2017. However, the government stubbornly remains with this practice, citing well needed human resources and downplaying the number of children in arms.

In 2019 German peace activists together with a number of faith groups and unions of educators have relaunched the 'Unter 18 nie!' campaign [1]. It focuses on the parties in the German federal political system with whom the decision to abandon underage recruitment altogether could be made.

Political campaigning is accompanied by a number of actions against targeted advertisement of the Bundeswehr: demonstrations at the annual 'Tag der Bundeswehr' (a newly invented day to celebrate the military), and interventions at job fairs or at school gates where the Bundeswehr do their covert advertising. In parallel, German peace and children's rights activists make use of the global campaign on child soldiers: Red Hand Day, every 12 February [2].

The 'institutional way' of lobbying politicians is necessary, however, as peace activists cannot counter the largest public relations campaign of the German military since its re-inception in the 1950s all by their own resources. Working in unison with other established children's rights activists on this campaign helps it to garner more attention in society and in the media.

Ad-busting

Since 2011, but also prior to this, the military apparatus has expanded to the private advertisement sector. Through campaigns worth millions of Euros, the military targets youth in very explicit and somewhat creative ways. Activists have learned to extensively target these ad campaigns through busting and through re-contextualisation. This includes the removal of

posters (see picture 1), their creative 're-branding' (2), the 'contextualisation' of posters (3), and complete 'fake series' of adverts (4). Recently activists released a multicolor zine with their theoretical considerations and practical use of various forms of ad-busting [3].

The effects of ad-busting mainly work into society, as people learn to understand the tricks of militarised advertisement through the bustings. But the military has reacted to the most prominent ad-busting acts and has tried to re-appropriate them (see picture 5). Therefore activists stress that the more politicised the context of ad-busting is (such as the military) the more content in the bustings matters. So activists need to keep in mind how they can still engender a radical or progressive agenda through their bustings instead of only making fun of the original ads. It remains a challenge to progressively stress one's own agenda in ad-busting to the level at which the repressive organs cannot fully agree any more. Ad-busting needs to go beyond liberal 'values and truths' if it wants to pursue a radical agenda.

Militarised education and responses

A lot older than the active recruitment problem is the problem of the normalisation of the armed forces in Germany. In its self-understanding of being a 'citizens' army', the Bundeswehr understood itself to have an educational duty. Pacifists have criticised the various attempts at classroom normalisation of armed violence through 'education officers' (Jugendoffiziere) since at least the 1970s.

However, in the context of developing into an interventionist army and the increasing normalisation of overt foreign missions since 1991, the Bundeswehr developed a multi-day roleplay for school use to start seeding the idea of a military-civilian cooperative approach to crisis intervention, development aid and outright war. This roleplay goes by the name of POLIS - which translates to 'politics and international security' and has since been developed further.

Typically pupils are invited to a three-day retreat in barracks or other military compounds to play. The Bundeswehr also publicly showcase the game at events such as educational fairs. Peace activists rarely have the chance to get hold of this roleplay, but it clearly follows the logic of normalising the presence of militarised actors in the field of crisis intervention, conflict transformation and development aid.

Peace activists and anti-militarists have reacted in a number of ways. Activists and peace educators have created a similar multi-player role play called 'CivilPowker' which focuses on ways to dismantle 'typical' options of 'crisis intervention' and to look for alternative ways to negotiate conflict beyond the militarised regime. The role play strengthens public belief and trust in civilian actors and stresses ways of nonviolent conflict resolution. One can book this role play from a number of peace educators [4].

To further knowledge on nonviolent ways of conflict, activists from 'Schulfrei für die Bundeswehr' (School free from the Bundeswehr) [5] and 'Bildung ohne Bundeswehr' (Education without the Bundeswehr) [6] offer material, talking points, resources – such as CivilPowker – for pupils, parents, teachers and others in the educational sector. The motto of those actions is: 'zivil statt militärisch' ('civilian not militarised!'). There is an accompanying campaign to push for an understanding which follows this logic [7].

Through means of parliamentary information requests which the government has to answer, the German party 'DieLinke' (the left party in the German federal parliament) publishes the quarterly reports of educational events by the Bundeswehr, so that activists know where the army goes and where counteractions could be necessary. Actions in front of school gates with a lot of material often prove most effective, if other activists offer direct educational elements in those schools or events in parallel to the military. However, countering these measures of the

ADJUSTING EXAMPLES



1.

1. Rebranding: The text reads: 'National mourning means glorifying war and dictatorship. Never fight for people and nation.'

2. Removal: The text reads: 'a Bundeswehr advert was removed from here'.

3. Contextualisation: The text reads: 'Enough! Enough racist advertising!'

4. Fake campaigns: The text reads: 'Senseless death? Come to us!'

5. Reappropriation: The text by the Bundeswehr reads: 'We also fight to give you the freedom to be against us!' It tries to renormalise resistance into its core principle of work ethic.



2.

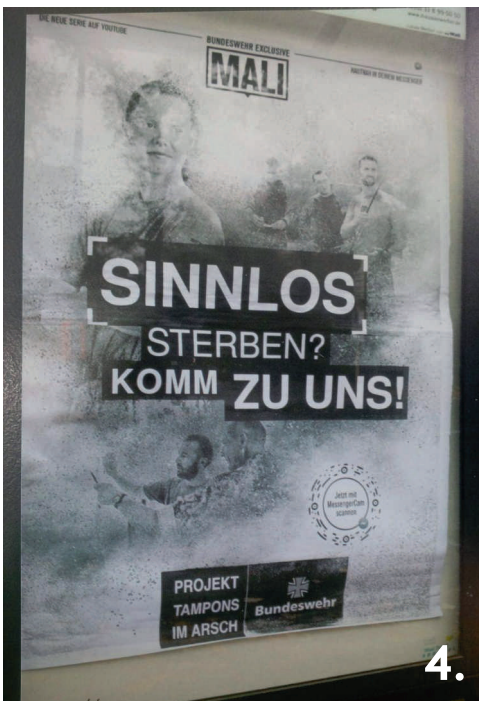
3.



5.



4.



Bundeswehr is always a task of '(Nonviolent) David vs. Goliath': the sheer finances of the army's push into the educational sector outnumbers the peace activism by far.

Looking to the future: Peace Education and Radical/Critical Education

There are many problems to the somewhat shortsighted hope for an end to military recruitment amongst German pacifists (see the critique of Andreas Speck in 'Conscientious Objection: A Practical Companion for Movements' [8]). Among them is the lost hope for a systematic approach to a varied critical/radical education from activist sides – which could be a way out of the problematic incorporation into the schooling system and its violences. What we might strive towards is such a future, with creative workshops in creating counter-recruitment resources, educational lessons, practical actions and the like. But for that it needs more activists who understand the value of counter-recruitment and peace education to be a vital element of their activism.

So far the practices of German peace activists to counter recruitment has been "learning and adapting". This will continue, and each step of learning will increase the chance to finally counter militarised logics.

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DEMILITARISING HEARTS AND MINDS VIA NONVIOLENT CAMPAIGNS IN SOUTH SUDAN

by Moses Monday John (ONAD)

South Sudan's society is highly militarised and so is the country's politics. The society's militarisation has notoriously been influenced by the history of decades' long armed struggle. The illusion that power is centred on the military rather than the governed (people) is influenced by propaganda, misapprehension and belief rather than facts or empirical evidence. Nevertheless, amidst the challenging transitional situation, South Sudanese non-state actors have resisted violence using nonviolent campaigns to demilitarise the minds and hearts of the society and youth in particular.

South Sudan: Country Profile

In order to better understand the magnitude of militarisation of society in South Sudan, it's critical to briefly revisit the history of the country.

Militarisation in the former Sudan

As part of the Southern region in the former Sudan, the system of education was designed to promote and reinforce Islam, Islamic jihad and military ideology. Schools were like paramilitary institutions, students were forced to wear military-style school uniforms, and military science was taught in schools. Military service was compulsory for all male students after completion of senior school and was considered a pre-condition in order to apply for universities; in fact male students applied for university admission from military training camps.

Independence

South Sudan won its independence on July 9, 2011 after more than sixty years of armed struggle with the Khartoum regime in former Sudan. It had suffered two civil wars against subsequent Khartoum regimes; from 1955 to 1972, and from 1983 to 2005. The second civil war ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which paved the way for a referendum for independence in 2011 [3]. It must be noted that the country attained its independence amidst the existence of six armed groups mostly being led by disgruntled politicians and military leaders who failed in the 2010 general elections or felt the results were manipulated in favour of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party.

Inheriting a militarised society

South Sudan in 2011 abolished military service and later replaced the military syllabus with a life skills and peace education curriculum in many schools, which was a very positive gesture. Unfortunately, the country inherited a readymade militarised society, and the culture of creating and tolerating armed groups coupled with ongoing military recruitment made the matter worse. The long history of armed struggle with Sudan and the subsequent internal armed resistance created opportunities for the proliferation of weapons and for military and militia recruitment.

Militia groups have recruited thousands of youth who are not in work or school, allegedly to protect lives, livestock and political leadership from danger. These militia groups include: the Gelweng, Titweng and Mathiang Anyoor in the Bahr elgazel region; the Arrow Boys and Community Protection Volunteers in the former Western Equatoria State; and the 'White Army' in the Upper Nile region. They use machine guns in intra- and inter-communal conflicts often triggered by cattle raiding, theft and abduction of children and women. Armed groups and militia are being tolerated, and co-opted to realise military and political objectives of those striving for power. The military and armed opposition groups have also recruited young people under 18 years of age since December 2013.

Given this background, the recruitment and militarisation of youth is not done by the state alone but individuals and communities as well. Thus, it's normal to see men and women in military uniform in towns and villages across the country. In schools, some students - both boys and girls - have been reported to be coming in with weapons: pistols, knives and machetes. They are often arrogant; disrespectful to their teachers and bullying their peers. Inadequate quality and affordable educational and employment opportunities for youth are the major drivers for their militarisation. The growing economic hardship, poor basic service delivery, zero sum political game and power struggle further continue to force many youth into the military or to join armed and militia group.

Fragile peace deal

In September 2018, a Revitalised Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (RARCSS) was signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The peace deal among others provided for; a permanent ceasefire and transitional security arrangements including unification of the army and formation of a revitalised transitional government of national unity by 12 May 2019 (which was extended till 12 November) and holding of general elections by 12 February 2021. Despite the peace deal, parties trade accusations and counter accusations of forced recruitment.

Response: Demilitarising Societal Hearts and Minds

Peace clubs

The fact that South Sudan as the world's newest country did stop compulsory military service and replace military science with life skills and peace education was positive and commendable. Benefiting from this opportunity, in 2012 the Organisation for Nonviolence and Development (ONAD) initiated peace clubs in primary and secondary schools in Juba. The concept of peace clubs is part of sustainable peace infrastructure and peace education. The clubs are used to educate students (boys and girls) on the principles and methods of nonviolent actions. These activities are followed with nonviolent campaigns, using tactics such as protests, peaceful demonstrations, vigils, poetry, fine arts, petitioning, peace implementation monitoring, research and use of collective social media. For instance, ONAD launched a campaign; 'I stand for nonviolence in South Sudan, what do you stand for?' The campaign used a debate approach, with t-shirts promoting nonviolence as opposed to the military response which has cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Peace club members have resolved conflicts nonviolently and in 2018 marched to the national parliament protesting environmental pollution in the oil rich Upper Nile region where a number of children and animals died.

Other nonviolent campaigns

As the civic space shrinks, alternative means of campaigning such as street theatre and fine arts are being used to communicate opposition to the militarisation of children and youth. Arts-based peace movement #AnaTaban (Juba Arabic for #IamTired) has widely painted on fences in Juba pictures of a father helping his child to read a school textbook, and another of a father teaching his child how to use and fire an AK47 with “NO”.

In December 2017, more than one thousand women and men marched in the streets of Juba protesting ongoing war. They carried placards with messages such as ‘Stop war, bring back our men’; ‘War don’t solve problems - silence guns’; ‘Give pens NOT pistols to your children’ - to mention but a few. These campaigns are debated, and sang about during peace concerts and traditional dances.

In its part, South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms (SSANSA) campaigns about armed violence, civilians’ prevention and combating the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in South Sudan. The campaigns involve dialogue with communities, the police and the army as well as lawmakers. SSANSA is a network of civil society organisations from across the country.

The power of nonviolent campaigns

A recent global study of 323 major violent and nonviolent campaigns between 1900 and 2006 found that nonviolent campaigns were twice as successful as violent campaigns in achieving their stated goals [2]. Nonviolent campaigns attract and sustain larger and more diverse participation than the military can [1].

Demilitarising hearts and minds as countering the military/militia recruitment is much broader than just stopping military recruitment and wars. It’s about providing alternative choices for resistance. Children and youth need to be educated that they are the change they wish to see in their country. Young people need to be trained, mentored and empowered to make sure they have a voice and can respond to whatever impacts their lives today and tomorrow. Lack of empowerment creates space for the manipulation of youth and their potential, including their militarisation. The youth make up about 75% of the total 13 million population in the country. If



we could train, inspire, mentor and unite the youth and have their minds and hearts demilitarised, we would succeed to restore a safe and stable country.

Conclusion

Countering youth militarisation in a country like South Sudan that has emerged from more than sixty years of armed conflict can be challenging. This is because the history of violence overshadows the nonviolent campaigns of civil resisters who work tirelessly to transform the militarised culture into a culture of peace and nonviolence. The experience of ONAD, #AnaTaban and SSANSA are steps directed towards changing the mindsets and hearts of the youth and the whole society through awareness raising, nonviolent collective actions, media and research. Such steps have proven their effectiveness in addressing misconception and belief in the power of the military, rather than of people's power.

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DEMILITARISE EDUCATION IN VALENCIA: THE PATH OF AN INCIPIENT CAMPAIGN

Carlos Pérez Barranco, antimilitaristes-moc

The launch of the campaign

In mid 2017, inspired by the veteran campaign 'Demilitarise education' in Catalonia, Antimilitaristes-MOC launched a call to civil society in Valencia to take action for the demilitarisation of education. The call included a statement that has so far been signed by more than 60 social organisations from different fields, but mainly from the world of education: teachers, parents and students. The statement denounces the influence of militarist values and perspectives in education, which are opposed to the educational principles of peace, nonviolence and dialogue. The government plans to promote militarist values into educational spaces, with an agenda to increase future military recruitment and social acceptance of military spending, all in a context of cuts in educational policies.

Military out of Expojove

But the main mobilising element of the campaign has been a rejection of the presence, year after year, of an army unit stand at Expojove, the popular children's and youth leisure fair held in Valencia at Christmas time.

Before Antimilitaristes-MOC's call, some protest actions had already been carried out sporadically at the fairgrounds, such as an action-performance of the 'disinfection' and protection of the public from the contagion of the 'virus' of militarism at the army's stand. But the campaign represented the first attempt to develop continuous and planned work.

Since then, a campaign group - 'Desmilitaricemos la educación' ('Let's demilitarise education') - has been formed by the most involved organisations, meeting every month. 'Desmilitaricemos la educación' has articulated a campaign with the aim of reaching more people, and ensuring that the city council - organiser of the Expojove fair - does not invite the Ministry of Defense or any armed institution, such as the Police or the Civil Guard, to the event.

'Lack of political will'

The campaign has not only worked to raise awareness through talks, press releases and street actions. It has also lobbied council representatives, requesting meetings with the councillors responsible for organising Expojove and with the various municipal political groups, trying to bring motions to council meetings, and exposing the results of the meetings and the positions of politicians.

The results of this work after two years have been limited. In spite of the good reception of our arguments, the city council did not want to risk a possible harsh response from the local press and remained firm in its previous position of allowing the presence of a military stand at Expojove. However, they did not allow the exhibition of real weapons (just pictures of weapons!). The city council also declared that only elements of the Military Emergency Unit

(UME) would be present. UME is a military unit specialised in acting in major catastrophes such as fires and floods, created a few years ago, which supplants the functions of the Civil Protection units, and which is the central element of the current whitewashing campaign of the Armed Forces. In fact, we have verified that despite the declarations of the city council, the presence of military combat units in the military stand at the fair continues in addition to the UME.

The 'Desmilitaricemos la educación' campaign has also failed to raise a motion to the council meeting demanding educational spaces for peace and free from militarism, after getting no support from any of the three parties that make up the municipal government; not even from Valencia en Común-Podemos, which had previously expressed its criticism of the military presence in Expojove.

This lack of political will led the campaign to intervene in the inauguration of the last edition of the fair. In December 2018, in the presence of municipal officials and the media, members of 'Desmilitaricemos la educación' displayed posters denouncing the city council as a promoter of militaristic values in educational spaces.

Action in the education system

In parallel to this, 'Desmilitaricemos' has tried to set in motion other lines of work related to the military presence in schools. In the first few months of the campaign, a meeting was held with regional officials responsible for educational administration to ask them for information on possible agreements between educational centres and the Ministry of Defence, and for data on school visits to military installations and military visits to educational centres. The campaign has shown its support for some teachers who have refused permission for their students to participate in visits to military exercises, and has publicly denounced an agreement signed between the University of Valencia and the Ministry of Defence, allegedly for the exchange of teachers between university faculties and the military base of the NATO Rapid Action Force in Bétera, near Valencia, although the final text of the agreement has not yet been made public.

Primary school textbooks have also received the attention of 'Desmilitaricemos la educación'. In January, a social media campaign was launched asking teachers and parents to find militaristic content in textbooks, which trivialises or normalises war, or fails to mention its causes and its human consequences.

Achievements and challenges ahead

So far, one of the achievements of these two years of work has been to problematise the military influence in educational spaces and create debate around it, which had not been questioned in depth and with antimilitarist arguments before.

Among the challenges ahead is to ensure that the campaign is really perceived as an effort by a good part of Valencian civil society, and especially by the educational community - not only as the expected and predictable action of antimilitarist groups. It is striking that a section of the press that has clearly expressed its support for the military strives precisely to describe 'Desmilitaricemos la educación' as a matter of 'the antimilitarists'. In parallel with this, another challenge is to achieve real and effective involvement of the educational organisations - which signed the declaration - in the campaign; and in this way to secure the disappearance of the military units from the children's fair Expojove.

Carlos Barranco is a co-organiser of the campaign on the militarisation of youth in Valencia, a nonviolent action trainer, and a member of the WRI Council.

COUNTER-RECRUITMENT IN A CONSCRIPTION CONTEXT: INTERVIEW WITH AKL (FINLAND)

WRI with Esa Noresvuo

Can you tell us about military recruitment in Finland?

In Finland, there is a conscription army and military service is compulsory for males. Recruitment happens once a year in autumn, and every male turning 18 has to attend or they get a fine. It first starts in schools, where they have a health check. Later, they have to attend recruitment events. The events include patriotic content, such as speeches from war veterans, and senior army staff telling them how important the work of conscripts is. During the events they get a lot of information about the army and very little about the option of non-military service.

Can you explain more about what non-military service is?

Every male has a right to choose to do non-military service. They don't have to have any kind of interview about their conscience; they fill in an application form, and then they are no longer under military rule. They have to do one month of training in a non-military service centre, and 10 ½ months of work in some civilian sector workplace. So, the civilian service always takes about one year, but military service can be 6, 9 or 12 months.

Can you tell us about AKL and your campaign?

There is not much information about the alternatives to military service. The army sends every conscript a letter in the spring of the year they turn 18, with information about the army. It's like a little book, maybe 50 pages, and there are only a couple of sentences about non-military service. AKL's work aims to make sure that these alternatives to military service are better understood among the conscripts.

Every year during autumn we start a kind of anti-recruitment campaign. For about 40 years, in front of the recruitment centres, AKL has been sharing leaflets with information about the alternative civilian system and with a critique against the conscription system. This is how we meet young people directly. It's done by volunteers in many cities. However, in the last few years we have been having some problems getting enough volunteers in many cities, so the campaign has started to focus more on the internet.

What tactics does the campaign use?

During the summer we will start thinking about how to run the campaign this year; what the best ways are to meet the conscripts and to make this information available to them. We are open to different ways of doing it. We share information on the internet, and for the last few years we have been targeting adverts at boys aged 17 to 18 with the link to our website, where there is information about civilian service and about how to get an exemption from military service. During the conscription period, when people are googling how to avoid joining the army, our websites get about 30 to 40 thousand hits each year, and our videos about the CO

experience have had about 200 thousand hits over the last two years. I think we manage to reach most people who are interested.

We have also been organising our own anti-recruitment events with information, and sometimes with bands playing. And we have made videos with people who have been conscientious objectors. Once we sent direct letters to all the boys turning 18 in one specific area of Finland, but this is very expensive.

Do you actively encourage young people to choose non-military service, or are you just letting them know it's an option and trying to provide a balance of information?

Both, but we do not use ideologically-based arguments so much, it's more just info-sharing. The idea of the videos is to show that people do choose non-military service, and to give people courage to make this choice. It's still the norm to go to the military, and if you don't you have to explain why, so we are trying to show young people that it's normal to do non-military service.

Who do they have to explain the decision to?

To families, friends, relatives, and in my own experience it was also teachers. We don't know yet what the campaign will be like this year, but at least in my mind the idea is to try to change the situation so that people should have to explain why they choose to go to the army rather than why they choose not to.

You are campaigning in a country with conscription; would you define your movement as counter-recruitment or would you frame it in some other way? And do you think your campaign could be inspiring to contexts where they have voluntary recruitment?

Yes, I think it's clearly a counter-recruitment campaign, as well as info-sharing. And yes for sure our campaign is a good example for others because, while it's not at its biggest at the moment, our action in front of the recruitment stations has been quite widespread at some points. Maybe



Photo credit: Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto (AKL)

40% of Finnish conscripts have had direct contact with the anti-recruitment campaign in many cities in the best years.

Does the Finnish military run campaigns and advertisements to reach out to young people? Or is it already so given and ideologically well-settled in society that young people will go to the military that they don't need to do much?

In the last few years they have started to campaign more and tried to give a positive image of the army and how good an experience it is. They do advertisements like ours on social media, but with much bigger resources. For example, they do promotional videos with the most popular young Youtubers - not direct advertisements but videos in collaboration with defence forces - doing "cool" stuff with fighter jets and similar things. They have a presence in study fairs and in many big youth festivals, and they also do some school visits.

Because the number of young people exempted from military service has grown so much in the last 10 to 15 years, the military have become more worried by the campaign; in the 2000s there used to be about 15% exempt from military service, but in the last 10 years the number has been about 25%.

Is there a tendency in the Finnish military towards being politically correct; such as reaching out to women, or using gender equality discourse? If this is the case, do you have any kind of gender lens in your campaigning?

I think the Finnish army is in general very conservative and traditional, and in Finland this kind of 'soft' army imaginary embracing gender issues and LGBT issues has been visible just in the last few years. In recent years there has been much discussion about the problems that women have in the army, for example, and the kind of abuses that happen in the army.

Also the discussion about the gender discrimination in the Finnish conscription system has become very significant. We argue that equality could be reached by making the whole army volunteer-based, but some political powers and public figures are trying to reach equality by making the army - or some kind of national service - obligatory for all.

We have also been participating in the discussion about the kind of toxic masculinity that the army represents, mostly in our magazine. We haven't done a direct campaign about that, but it is included in our arguments and it is important to the thinking of our members.

What kind of responses do you get from young people?

The most common response is that young people are not very interested in doing military service, but they do it because it's the fastest and easiest option. It's something that other people are expecting of them, and they think 'okay this is the easiest way to get rid of this'. So I don't think most young people are either for us or against us ideologically.

Some of them think that we are trying to destroy the Finnish military system (which of course we are!) and they are against that. But I also think more and more young people are supporting us. A recent poll showed that more than 50% of people aged 16-35 were in favour of changing the conscription system; either to a volunteer system, to a professional army, or to be obligatory for all genders, to solve the discrimination in the current system. The majority of Finns still support the conscription system, but young people are the most critical.

What are the main challenges you face in trying to do this counter recruitment work?

One challenge is that there is now a lot of debate and a lot of will to change the system, but how can we make sure the change is to a volunteer-based system and not to a new kind of forced system? So we need to reach more and more people with our arguments. On a smaller scale, the challenge is how to reach young people in a better way, to make non-military service look cool.

Esa Noresvuo is a Finnish peace activist, a coordinator in The Union of Conscientious Objectors (AKL), a board member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and one of the organisers of Baltic Glory international peace exercises (www.balticglory.org)



CHANGING PUBLIC OPINION IN A MILITARIST SOCIETY: INTERVIEW WITH STOP RECRUITING KIDS CAMPAIGN (USA)

The Stop Recruiting Kids (SRK) Campaign is a public opinion campaign in the United States, currently based mainly online [1, 2]. We spoke to co-coordinators Bill Scheurer and Kevin Haake.

Can you tell me a bit more about when and how the Stop Recruiting Kids campaign started? What sparked it?

Stop Recruiting Kids (as its initial Facebook presence) was started by a local counter-recruitment group in Lincoln, Nebraska called Alternatives to the Military (ATM) back in 2012. At the time, we put together and posted some simple Facebook memes on the ATM page with the familiar Stop Recruiting Kids tagline, and noticed that they tended to get a reaction that was quite a bit larger than average. We then decided to give SRK its own page and started regularly posting memes there. On Earth Peace started sharing these messages with its community and allies in 2012, and became the national sponsor of the SRK Campaign in 2013.

What does SRK see as the problem with military recruitment in the United States - what changes do you want to see?

Military recruiting glorifies militarism in ways that are false and deceptive, overselling the benefits and not fully disclosing the risks. Accordingly, the audiences they are best able to sell are young people. Medical science has demonstrated that young people's brains and mental development are still at a stage where they are not able to accurately assess the risks and consequences of their decisions. This is why our laws set minimum ages for life-changing activities such as using alcohol and tobacco, driving, and entering into legally binding contracts. Plus, the dangling of economic incentives and other attractive promises exert an overwhelming appeal to young people, especially those who come from situations with limited opportunity.

Requiring the military to market to and recruit from only the adult population would go a long way toward protecting our children from the adult risks of these decisions. Plus, offering comparable economic and career opportunities to young adults who enter civilian service as those who enter the military would remove some of the extra pressures on them to make decisions they may regret in later adulthood.

Your goal is “to protect kids from military recruiting”. What’s your strategy to achieve this goal?

The SRK Campaign in part is patterned after the very successful campaign 50+ years ago to protect minors from marketing by tobacco companies. That campaign built broad public support, even with adults who were tobacco users themselves, and resulted in a profound change in our laws and culture. In the most recent stage of the SRK Campaign, we have drawn heavily on the American Public Health Association report finding that military recruiting of minors is a public health problem [3]. Now, we are gearing up to include many more kinds of public figures and voices.

Who is involved in the campaign, and how are you organized?

SRK is a public opinion campaign, not an organization. At present, the campaign mostly works through people sharing our memes and messages in their social media. As we grow the base of supporters, we will move into other forms of media as well. We also have the artwork in place for an SRK online store for t-shirts, water bottles, and pretty much any kind of product, featuring some edgier SRK artwork for the campaign.

We also have a Facebook group for people who want to become more active organizers. Several national and regional groups have joined as campaign partners, and at some point we will make a more concerted effort to add new partners.

What role do you see your campaign as playing within the broader U.S. counter-recruitment movement?

Originally, we saw SRK as a way to target adults; to get people to actually stop and think about the status quo, to question things, about what it is that we (as a society) are doing and are encouraging. From that standpoint, SRK is separate from typical counter-recruitment work. While there are times that we may post counter-recruitment themed messages that are directed toward youth, usually that isn't the case yet. We do look toward a time when an SRK youth movement starts organizing, and hope to work closely with them.

What do you think the strengths of the campaign are?

By targeting adults in this manner at this stage, we hope to eventually create some political space within which politicians feel as if they can act. In the meantime we need to get people to discuss the issues surrounding the deliberate targeting of children by the military, to chip away at the hard veneer of militarism. It is slow work, but necessary.

On the flipside, we think that because our method tends to try to appeal to adults and their natural (and good) tendencies to protect kids, it isn't uncommon for young people to feel that we are being dismissive of what they think and what they can do and accomplish.

Another strength we bring, with On Earth Peace's help, is the additional ability to come at the topic from a Christian standpoint. The message of Jesus was largely a message of nonviolence. The United States has a large Christian population. It's good to remind people of that message, and frame this issue also in those terms. There still is a lot more we can do to actively work with churches in the future.

What are the challenges you face in trying to counter military recruitment in the US?

The United States is very militaristic. The military itself is the government "agency" with the highest public approval ratings, by far, every year. That environment makes it difficult to get

people to question why it might not be a good idea for the military to try to sell itself to children. There is a lot of collective emotion wrapped up in the topic.

Also, the military is able to offer a tremendous economic and career path opportunity to young people which can be very attractive to them and to the public. This is why the SRK campaign also includes building comparable opportunities for civilian service. If young people could get the same level of benefits from signing up for the National Park Service Americorps, or the Peace Corps, as the Army, this would change.

What learning has come out of the campaign so far? Has it evolved over time, and why?

Yes, when On Earth Peace became involved as the national sponsor for SRK, the campaign added the principles of Kingian Nonviolence (Martin Luther King's principles). These principles are very important, because a lot of organizing can tend to diminish opponents. With committed nonviolence, we do not devalue military personnel and recruiters as human beings, we simply want to get them to stop recruiting and marketing to children and minors. Because of this, we have many people with military backgrounds who are able to support the campaign.

We also added a second goal of building public support for investment in public service and development paths for young people in addition to what our nation currently offers those who go into the military. This coincides nicely with the timing of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service at this time.



References

1. Stop Recruiting Kids website: <http://srkcampaign.org/>
2. Stop Recruiting Kids Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/StopRecruitingKids/>
3. American Public Health Association, 'Policy Statement: Cessation of Military Recruiting in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools': <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/23/11/19/cessation-of-military-recruiting-in-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF RECRUITMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH BY ARMED ACTORS

COALICO, translated by Náyua Abdelkefi Zorrilla

About COALICO

The Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in the Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO) has existed since 1999 and is currently made up of 7 civil society organisations [1] with extensive experience in protecting the rights of children and young people in different contexts. COALICO works to protect children and young people exposed to violence in situations of armed conflict, through two main strategies: i) political advocacy; and ii) investigation and monitoring of the impact of armed conflict on children and young people. This article makes recommendations to prevent the recruitment of children and youth by armed actors, based on this experience.

The context

The recruitment and use of children by armed actors is one of the impacts that COALICO monitors and investigates. Recruitment is linked to sexual violence and exploitation, forced displacement, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Despite the signing of the 'Final Agreement for an End to the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace' between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in December 2016, grave violations against children and adolescents continue to occur in Colombia.

Recommendations for countering recruitment

To prevent the recruitment of children and youth by armed actors, it is important - first and foremost - for countries to invest in strategies that protect children's rights, prevent violence, and strengthen environments that protect children, such as families, schools and communities. The implementation of these programs should be independent of the state armed forces and police, in line with the principle of distinction under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) [2].

Another important step is to guarantee good quality public education, reducing the number of children and young people who are out of school. The education system should provide children and young people with tools for peacebuilding, non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflicts, in a way that enables students to identify themselves as the main stakeholders of these processes. Schools and educational facilities are public goods that are protected by IHL and so they must be kept out of armed conflict.

Situation in Colombia

To prevent the recruitment of children and young people, it is vital that the government respects the agreement reached with the former FARC-EP guerrilla to end the armed conflict. Beyond this, the government needs to commit resources and political will to implementing the agreement. It needs to strengthen its presence in regions historically abandoned by the state. Furthermore, it must guarantee the protection of former combatants (including the young victims of recruitment) and of social leaders from the territories, who contribute on a daily basis to peacebuilding but who continue to be threatened and murdered for opposing the interests of armed actors continuing to operate in the territories.

In addition, reparation processes should treat children and other young victims of the armed conflict differently. More than just economic compensation, children and young people associated with armed groups need measures such as timely psychosocial support for emotional recovery, dignified economic opportunities, access to education, family reunification, and restitution of land for those who have been displaced. It is important to take into account the voices of those affected in these processes in order to uphold their dignity.

Finally, we believe that the participation of such victims in the Integrated System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRGNR) must also be guaranteed so that the country is made aware of all the effects of the oldest armed conflict in Latin America. This would also promote actions that prevent the recurrence of war, and would promote spaces where children and young people's voices can be heard.



References

1. COALICO is currently made up of the following organisations: Asociación Centro de Desarrollo y Consultoría Psicosocial Taller de Vida; Asociación Cristiana Menonita para Justicia, Paz y Acción No Violencia (Justapaz); Benposta Nación de Muchach@s; Corporación Vínculos; Defensa de Niñas y Niños Internacional (DNI Colombia); Fundación Creciendo Unidos (FCU); and Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados Colombia (JRS Colombia).

2. It stipulates that parties to an armed conflict must at all times distinguish between combatants and military objectives, on the one hand, and civilians and civilian objects, on the other, and attack only legitimate objectives.

If you need to consult specialised bibliographic material on the prevention of recruitment and other forms of involvement of children and young people by armed actors in situations of internal conflict, you can visit the website www.coalico.org or contact the email addresses coordinacion@coalico.org or info@coalico.org.

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