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The Roundup

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The police help to hunt and detain draftees, as if they are criminals.

Boris Kulagin was forcibly drafted into the army straight from his home. This looked not much different from a police arrest: late in the evening, the district policeman and an officer of the Draft Commissioner’s Office came to his home, told him to get packed double quick, and took him first to the Draft Commissioner’s Office, and then straight to the conscription center on Ugreshskaya street. In the haste, Boris had forgotten to leave home his wallet and his little sister was left with no money. Boris is the legal guardian of his sister, who is an orphan. In principle, it is against the law to leave an underage child without a guardian, in this case to draft her only legal guardian. However, the Draft Commissioner for the Butyrka district decided that the girl has a second brother to take up the guardianship. This brother has been recently conditionally released from prison. No court would ever appoint him a guardian, and besides he has stated himself that he does not care about his sister and wants nothing to do with her. In any case, the law says that while a child has only one legal guardian, the guardian cannot be drafted. But the Draft Commissioner is the powers-that-be, and therefore is above law. There is nobody to take him to court: it is unlikely the Child Welfare Board will go into the trouble of defending interests of Boris’s sister, while Boris himself will not have access to a lawyer for a long time to come. Besides, the chances that the court would uphold the law are small. Where the draft is concerned, the courts often give Draft Commissioners their unqualified support, in defiance of both the law and the common sense.

Alvian Djaffarov, a college student, had been rounded up during the spring draft of 2001. Then, in the heat of the battle for quotas, many college students, despite their right to draft deferment, were rounded up on the streets or in their apartments, but it was the Djaffarov’s story that received wide publicity. It turned out that if a student has not managed to escape from the conscription center, it is practically impossible to get him discharged from the army later. The document listing allowable reason for discharge does not mention wrongful enlistment of a college student, since the lawmakers has not envisioned this possibility. Djaffarov’s parents, supported by Union of the Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, went to court. But the Ostankino

District Court ruled against them. The judge decided that since, when being dispatched to the conscription center, Djaffarov did not present the Draft Commissioner with a letter from his college proving his status, he has to serve. Which is absurd. He was taken to the conscription center direct from the Draft Commissioner's Office, to where he had been brought forcibly from home. He did not even have time to pack properly, much less to run to his college to get the paper. But it is not even that. A student is not under an obligation to carry papers confirming his/her status. It is the Draft Commissioner, who, as provided by the Appendix 3 of the Regulations on the Conscription of Citizens of the Russian Federation into Military Service, has the duty to request the form #26 confirming status of the student. But the court decided otherwise, and the appellate Moscow City Court has confirmed its decision.

While the court procedures were dragging on, the boy continued with his military service. With the examination session nearing, Djaffarov's mother traveled to meet with her son's regiment commander and succeeded in persuading him to grant her son a leave of absence to attend the session. After successfully completing the examinations, the young boy returned to soldiering. Then, Djaffarov's relatives, together with Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, appealed to the garrison's military prosecutor to intervene. The prosecutor recommended to the military command to discharge Djaffarov, because, notwithstanding the court decision, he was drafted illegally. The command listened to the prosecutor and let Djaffarov go. However, it was not yet the end of the story: in a couple of months, a new garrison's prosecutor had reconsidered the decision of his predecessor. The boy's name was speedily put again on the list of military personnel and draft officials were sent to bring him back to his regiment. At that point, the poor boy's nerves gave in and he landed in a psychiatric clinic. At least, Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers insists that he is not hiding there from the army, but has really become ill as the result of his misadventures.

During the fall draft of 2002, young men were again getting ambushed in hallways of their houses. The police and draft officers were again invading their apartments trying to catch them at unawares – late in the evening or early in the morning – and dragging them to the conscription center. The young men were often lied to: they would be told that they were being taken only for medical examination at the Draft Commissioner's Office, but, without a word of explanation, they would be driven from there directly to the Ugreshka conscription center.

When a draftee undergoes the regular enlisting procedure, he receives a summons in advance and, if entitled to deferment, has a chance to collect necessary papers to prove his case. He could try to prove that he has been issued the summons by mistake, or get a thorough medical examination, if he is ill. Of course, not everybody gets a chance to argue one's case before a

Draft Commissioner, but at least there is time to get help from Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, or from other human rights activists, or from a lawyer.

The roundup, on the other hand, is calculated precisely to deny a draftee the opportunity to defend his rights. This is why most of those who get rounded up are people like Boris Kulagin and Alvian Djaffarov, who should not have been drafted.

Sasha Vorozheikin got summons for November 11 and fully intended to serve. However, on November 5, he and his friends got into a fight with some grown ups and he received a knife wound of the spine. He was hospitalized and then prescribed two month of recuperation at home.

Of course, his relatives took his medical papers the Lefortovo Draft Commissioner's Office.

Nevertheless, in the morning of December 17, the district policeman and a military officer came to his apartment and literally took him out of bed: "Off to the Commissioner's Office you go, for examination". Sasha showed them his sick leave certificate and the hospital's medical report.

The officer took it: "The surgeon at the Commissioner's Office will look at it". However, Sasha was not taken to a surgeon, and nobody examined his wound. As he has told later his mother, "A women in a red blazer came out, and without even a glance at the papers said: 'You are fine now, you can serve'.

Sasha's mother, Ludmila, works as a kindergarten teacher. She was about to leave for work, when those unwelcome guests came. She was, of course, upset with her sick son being dragged outside, but it never occurred to her that he could be conscripted with the wound in his spine.

Coming back from work she was surprised not to find him home. She ran to call the Draft Commissioner's Office, and was joyously told that her son "is already in the army". For the next few days she tried to contact him, to find out where he is. "Every time I would get a different answer, they would tell me that he was at such and such place, then that he was at another", Ludmila's voice trembles every time she recalls this.

Finally, the Soldiers' Mothers found out that he is in Tushino, near Mosocw, which, at first, the Draft Commissioner was reluctant to confirm.

All things considered, she is lucky to have her son serve close to home. Another soldier's mother, whose son was also taken "for examination" and did not come home, found him a week later in the Far Eastern Khabarovsk region. Law does not mandate draft officials to inform families on the conscripts' whereabouts, and they usually don't.

Sasha tries to keep up his spirits. He tells his mother that he is well, except that his wound bothers him on cold days. Once, after a weekly wash in the bathhouse, he was down with high fever, but it passed.

Maksim Platonov has been drafted despite him suffering from osteoma¹ of the hip. On December 6, he was summoned to the Draft Commissioner's Office. He brought with him his medical report card that listed this condition, and in which it was said that he needed an operation. Actually, his operation had been scheduled for that same month of December. In the Draft Commissioner's Office, the surgeon would not examine him, but sent him to the chief physician. The chief physician took the report card, turned it in his hands a few times, and said: "Get dressed. We're going to the medical examination board". But instead of the examination board, Maksim was taken to the Ugreshka conscription center. Luckily, he had a mobile phone with him and could ask his parents to bring him soap and his toothbrush. Maksim's leg started to bother him from day one. "All the guys run four laps around the parade ground; I cannot make a single one", he complained to his mother. In the end of January, he was hospitalized with pneumonia. There, he managed to get seen by a surgeon, who confirmed the osteoma diagnosis and recommended operation. On January 23rd, he was operated on in the same hospital. Does the Motherland really need the soldiers that require urgent medical attention?

While military officers bitterly complain to journalists that conscripts are all unhealthy, and that it is impossible to make soldiers out of them, and while bad accidents are frequent because of the practice of drafting mentally unstable young people, Draft Commissioners and heads of local administration are responsible for producing numbers, not quality. Maksim's regiment commander would never ask them why he was sent a sick boy. Even if Maksim's parents decided to sue (and this is unlikely, since they would be afraid of repercussions while their son serve), the best they can hope for is for their son returning home (and that is if the judge would be any different from the one who ruled on the Djaffarov case). The Draft Commissioners who has drafted a sick boy will be never punished. In June 2000, the Russian Federation government decreed to reward provincial governors for fulfilling draft quotas: the winner in this headhunting competition gets a medal, and two runners up get monetary rewards. In other words, governors are motivated to draft as many as they can, and bear no responsibility for illegally drafting either those entitled to deferment or exempt from draft.

Unlike Boris Kulagin, Sasha Vorozheikin, or Maksim Platonov, Dmitriy Krivonosov is eligible for draft. His single mother is disabled, but her disability ranking is three, not two, which would have exempted Dmitriy from draft. It does not matter that Tatiana, his mother, is deaf-mute and has on her hands her paralyzed mother to care for. Dmitriy was taken by police to a conscription center leaving his mother in complete despair over her own helplessness: in case of emergency she cannot even call ambulance for her mother.

¹ A benign tumor composed of bony tissue.

Roundups of draftees are now in fashion. A rare draft campaign does without it. The roundups usually start a month or a month and a half before the end of the campaign, and the closer it gets to the end the more ferocious they become. In mid-90th, the boys were hunted with the help of soldiers from nearby military bases. Later, this practice was acknowledged illegal, and nowadays the police are used instead. The Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers believes, nevertheless, that use of police instead of soldiers does not yet make the roundups legally sound. It is not just the clear cut cases of violation of the law, like the Kulagin's case, that are at issue here; the point is that hunting down boys with the help of police and dragging them off to a conscription center is not a lawful procedure. But even if such a practice could be reconciled with the law (the law "On Draft and on Military Service" is so written as to give the authorities maximal powers in dealing with draftees and with those subject to draft registration), it clearly has destructive effect on the society. More accurately, this destructive effect is produced by the draft system that causes these systematic roundups. When those responsible for draft are motivated to produce numbers, and the "targeted segment" views military service as a burden, and tries to avoid it as best it can, the former are tempted to hunt and ambush the latter. While the latter use any means, lawful or not, to escape from the former. Only those who believe they are entitled to deferment or exemption from service, for example those who are on sick leave or have disabled relatives don't make an effort to hide. And they are precisely those who get caught in the roundups. As the result, the boys that are called-up sick sometimes become invalids while doing military service (though, as we know, even those who were drafted in good health return often as invalids, too), while those who depend on their sons or brothers become abandoned or destitute, as it happened to Kulagin's sister. Unfortunately, this practice is not likely to change. The army is catastrophically short of servicemen, while transition to the volunteer army is being postponed again and again. Therefore, the army will continue getting its soldiers through roundups.

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[TO THE CONTENT PAGE](#)