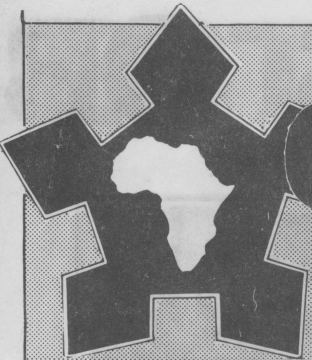


OBJECTOR

newsletter of the c.o. support group. no.1
july 83



editorial why cosg?

In this, our first publication, it is important to state the aims of the Conscientious Objectors Group (COSG) and the Newsletter. These are:

- * to support those young South Africans who have decided to object to military service and help them come to terms with the results of their decision;
- * to raise an awareness of the moral issues involved in going into the SADF amongst the conscripted people of South Africa;
- * to focus attention of all South Africans on the increasing militarisation of our society; and
- * to initiate projects to fulfill these aims.

In this Newsletter you will be able to find news of the latest objectors, articles on militarisation, the latest developments in the law, news of other events that affect conscription and the increasing civil war in our country.

The Newsletter is open to contribution from you, the reader, and we invite anyone to send in their contributions and ideas to the COSG.

BUT WHO ARE WE FIGHTING?

IS THE WAR JUST?

IS SOUTH AFRICA DEMOCRATIC?

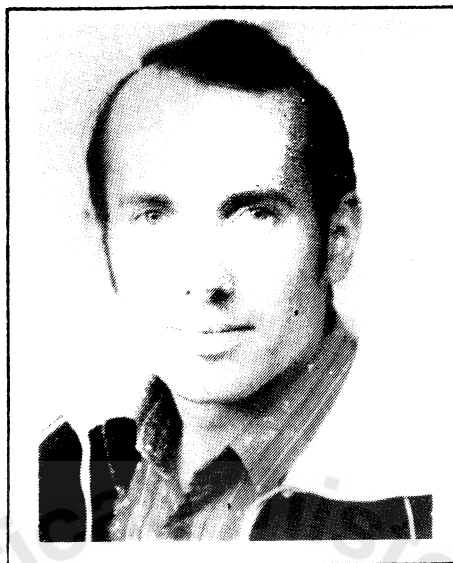
IS CONSCRIPTION NECESSARY?

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

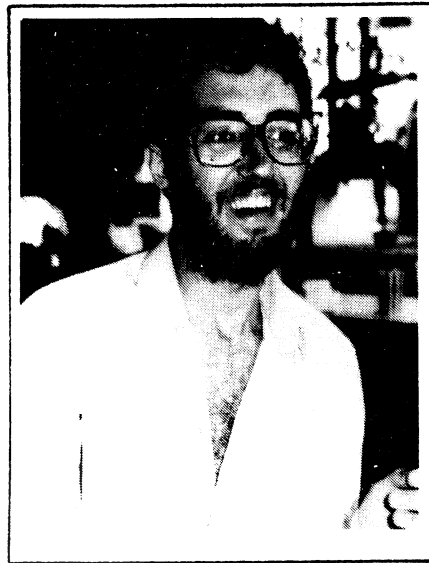
WHO ARE THE COs ?

Most people think of conscientious objectors in terms of the 10 young men who have chosen to spend up to two years in military detention barracks (DB) or in civilian prison, rather than serve in the South African Defence Force.

In fact, there have been many more objectors. A CO is somebody who refuses, for religious, moral or political reasons, to participate in the SADF. The definition includes many of the more than 3 000 people who each year fail to report for military service. It also includes those conscripts who have managed to "dodge" the military within the country. In addition, there are hundreds of members of "peace churches", who each year commit themselves to 3 years in detention barracks.



Peter Moll



Mike Vivieros

EARLY BEGINNINGS IN S.A.

There is nothing new about conscientious objection. During both the 1st and 2nd World Wars many South Africans refused to fight in the SADF. Some, including previous prime minister, B J Vorster, were interned during World War II for being active Nazi supporters. Participation in the Army was voluntary.

COMPULSORY CONSCRIPTION

The current wave of resistance to the military dates from 1967, when compulsory conscription was introduced for all white males. This happened one year after SWAPO launched the armed struggle in Namibia. At the same time the war in Zimbabwe was intensifying.

Many objectors in the early period of compulsory conscription slipped out of the country quietly, choosing to live in Europe or America, rather than to fight in the SADF.

CIVIL WAR

The turning point which led to public resistance to the military was the Soweto and country-wide uprisings of 1976/7. The brutality of the police response to the students' protests for the first time brought home to many white South Africans the evil of apartheid. In addition, as thousands of black South Africans fled South Africa and joined the ranks of the African National Congress, it became very clear that the SADF was not fighting a faceless communist horde from behind the Iron Curtain, but was fighting fellow South Africans.

PETE MOLL

It was at this time that the first public objectors from outside the "peace churches" began to examine the nature of the war in which the SADF was engaged. One such objector was Peter Moll who was tried three times for refusing to attend army camps. On the third occasion he was sentenced to 18 months in DB, which was later reduced to one year. Of that time, he spent 125 days in solitary confinement for refusing to wear military uniform. In the course of his trial, and subsequently, Peter consistently argued that the SADF was not protecting South Africa, but was maintaining a minority ruling regime in power and supporting an oppressive and discriminatory political system.

Peter is one of the objectors who have not been members of the Jehovah's Witness or Christadelphian churches. Members of these churches are recognised as CO's because, by the tenets of their faith, they may not participate in any war. They receive a mandatory sentence of three years in DB and are then never called up again. Over 100 each year are sentenced in this way.

OTHER OBJECTORS

The other objectors who chose to remain in South Africa were not recognised as CO's. Up till this year they have received a maximum sentence of two years in either DB or in civilian gaol. These CO's (there have been 10 so far) can be called up again after they've served their sentences, but usually they are granted an "ignominious discharge" from the SADF.

UNIVERSAL PASCIFISTS

The 10 objectors who have taken public stands against the SADF have based their resistance on differing grounds. Some of them have been "universal pacifists", arguing that they would not join any army, what ever the cause for which it was fighting. Michael Vivieros for example, has said:

"It would be contrary to my faith for me to take up arms and kill a fellow human-being. I have decided to become a CO and to refuse to heed the call-up of the SADF."

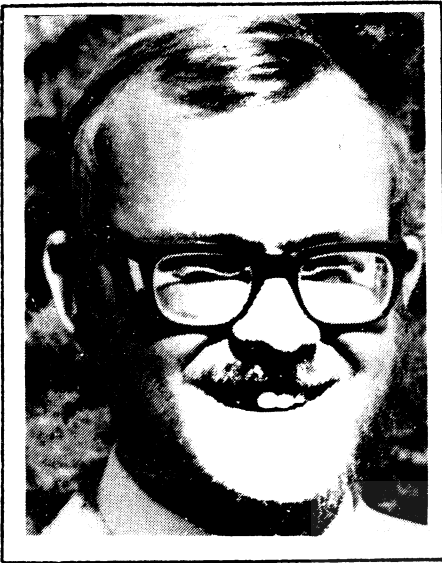
A JUST WAR?

Other objectors have based their resistance on the injustice of the war which the SADF is fighting. They are regarded as "selective conscientious objectors", not opposed to violent action in itself, but opposed to the unjust use of violence. For them the violence of the SADF, and the violent system it defends, falls into the category of an unjust war, because it defends an unjust system.

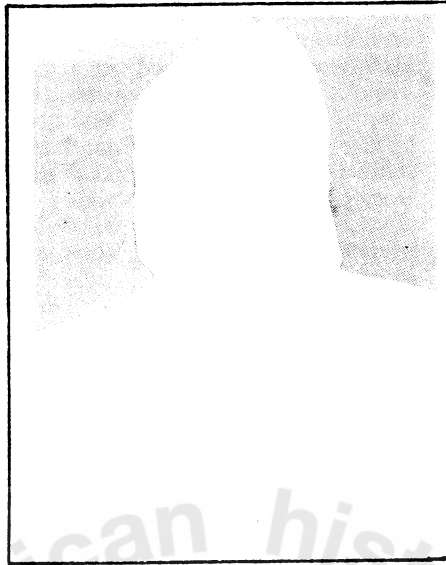
COs UNITED IN OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID

All objectors have been united in their opposition to apartheid and white supremacy. They have all argued that to participate in the SADF would be to take sides in the conflict in South Africa, by actively assisting the continued domination of one group of South Africans over another.

REJECTION: a brief history of the movement in S.A.



Neil Mitchell



Billy Paddock

They have also all consistently argued that they are opposed to all forms of activity in the SADF, whether combatant or non-combatant. Peter Hathorne, who is currently serving a one-year sentence in Pretoria Central Prison, has said:

"Non-combatants, who wear the uniform, who submit to the authority structures of the army, and who perform the minimal duties expected of someone in the military are no less responsible for the actions of the SADF than those who pull the triggers."

HARSHER SENTENCES

Recently, new legislation was passed in Parliament, introducing far harsher sentences for objectors. In a later newsletter we will discuss the new act, which provides for sentences of up to six years "community service" in government departments for "religious pacifists", and up to six years in civilian prison for all other objectors. Given the harshness of these sentences, it is little wonder that they have been outrightly attacked by a wide range of organisations, churches and prominent individuals.

The government has also attempted to clamp down on any people who encourage others to object. In 1974 the South African Council of Churches adopted a resolution at its annual national conference calling on its member churches

"to challenge all their members to consider . . . whether Christ's call to take up the cross and follow him in identifying with the oppressed, does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors."

Within a year of this challenge being issued, a law had been passed making it

an offence to suggest to any conscriptee that he should refuse to comply with his call-up. The maximum penalty attached was R5 000 or six years imprisonment or both.

CONSCIENCE CANNOT BE OUTLAWED

Nevertheless the harshness of all the legislation against CO's has not deterred them from acting in accordance with their convictions. As one objector said recently:

"But even this price (of a period of imprisonment) is small compared with the price of becoming the agent of injustice to others. The moral price of mortgaging one's integrity by defending apartheid is the greatest price of all."

General, your tank is a powerful vehicle
it smashes down forests and crushes a
hundred men.

But it has one defect:
it needs a driver.

General, your bomber is powerful.
It flies faster than a storm and carries
more than an elephant.

But it has one defect:
it needs a mechanic.

General, man is very useful.
He can fly and he can kill.
But he has one defect:
he can think.

When it comes to marching many do not
know
that their enemy is marching at their head.
The voice which gives them their orders
is their enemy's voice and
the man who speaks of the enemy
is the enemy himself.

BRECHT





objector's voice

Billy & Pete
in Pretoria Central

Billy Paddock and Peter Hathorn are both serving one-year sentences in Pretoria Central Prison for refusing to obey their military call-up.

Bill began serving his sentence in December, 1982. Pretoria Central is extremely overcrowded and he was at first sharing a single cell with three other inmates. He was then moved to a cell which he shared with two others who had also objected to military service - Neil Mitchell and Etienne Essery. He is now alone in a single cell.

Pete spent the first two months of his sentence in Detention Barracks at Voortrekkerhoogte. At his review in May his original two year sentence was reduced to one year. After his sentence reduction he was caught making a phone call without permission by a major which resulted in his last two weeks in DB being spent in solitary confinement. His comments on solitary were that it was not unpleasant since he was able to sleep and read a great deal which contrasted with the normal DB conditions.

Following this period in solitary Pete was moved to Pretoria Central where he has found conditions "pleasantly surprising". He and Billy have had a fair amount of contact particularly since both are working in the carpentry section - Billy is making a grandfather clock, Pete sanding.

After July, Billy is hoping to be granted N-grade privileges which will entitle him to increased numbers of letters and visits and also allow him access to newspapers. At present, as C-grade prisoners, they are permitted one 1/2 hour visit per month and two letters per month of 500 words. Billy has commented on how alienating this is as one has such limited access to information about friends and family.

Billy has also been led to believe by the Commissioner of Prisons that he will be eligible for remission in the same manner as any ordinary criminal. Remission can be a reduction of up to one-third of the sentence for "good behaviour".

Pete has been granted permission to study in prison, a privilege not necessarily granted to short-term prisoners. Study provides some occupation during the evenings - prisoners are locked in their cells at 4.00 pm for the night. Billy has not been able to study.

People who have visited Pete and Billy in the past month say they are both well, and each benefitting from the presence and support of the others.



Erick: an objector
defends himself

Erick Binga, a member of SWAPO, has applied for exemption from compulsory national service in a court hearing, on the grounds that South Africa has no legitimate right to pass legislation for Namibia. He told the judge that he had no ties either in the past or now with South Africa. He was a Namibian, he said, and "as such could only identify himself with the struggle waged by SWAPO." The majority in Namibia had no say in the laws which provided for his call-up, and which provided for his arrest and detention.

Erick was called up in November 1982 to do his military service from January 1983 to January 1985. A request for a deferment in December was unsuccessful.

Erick's application was supported in court by his father, Edward Binga, who associated himself with his son's sentiments. In his evidence, he stated that Erick had been a SWAPO member since June 1977, and that he, too, was a member. He said that he saw no difference between the SADF and the SWA Territorial Force (SWATF), neither of which represented the interests of Namibia: "I am convinced that the conflict between the South African armed forces and SWAPO's military wing is the result of the unfair treatment our people are receiving in this country due to the laws of South Africa." He argued that this was the reason that Namibians left in large numbers to join the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN - SWAPO's military wing).

Eduards eldest son, Ismael, left Namibia in 1978, and it was thought that he had joined PLAN.

Erick's case was brought against the Administrator General, Dr Willie van Niekerk, the S A Minister of Defence, General Malan, and the Military Exemption Board. Erick asked that the defendabts show why they should not be restrained from compelling him to commence military service.

The full hearing is due to come before the Supreme Court early next year.

Sources - Cape Times, 6 June 1983
- Windhoek Observer, 4 June 1983

news briefs

Six Citizen Force members were killed in the operation in which they were taken to Defence Headquarters and then

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

- * That the Synod of Bishops of the Church of the Province of South Africa called for the "withdrawal of all military presence from Namibia as soon as possible." The Synod supported the call by the Council of Churches of Namibia for the immediate implementation of UN Resolution 435 to end hostilities because "it was clear to those who travelled to Ovamboland that the large majority of the people there neither want the SADF in their land, nor regard the SA government as representing thier best interests, welfare or protection.
- * Every year since 1976 between three and four thosand men have failed to report for military service. Since 1978 five thousand people have been prosecuted for failing to report for military service. Over two thousand people have been allotted to non-combatant posts within the SADF.
- * Dr Alan Boesak said that it was "thoroughly incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to defend apartheid", and that if he had to perform military service in SADF he would be "compelled to resist the draft".
- * The new Defence Amendment Act makes provision for "alternative service" for religious pacifists only. Other non-religious pacifists and those who refuse to fight unjust wars are faced with six years in jail.
- * The Catholic Archbishop of Cape Town, Owen McCann, has said it is essential to provide for the moral and ethical objectors as well.
- * The father of Cpl Andries Straus - the soldier missing in the Caprivi Strip for than six months - said recently that his younger sons would to to jail rather than join the SADF when they reached army-going age.

Published by Social Action for COSG (Western Cape) Printed on UCT SRC Press, Rondebosch Cape Town.