

# OBJECTOR



## 'End Conscription' is the Call!

Throughout South Africa the call has been made: End compulsory conscription for military service! Committees have so far been established in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, to give coherence to the growing opposition to the militarisation of our country.

The call for an end to conscription was first made at the Black Sash's 1983 National Conference. This call was endorsed at both the National Conference of the CO Support Groups (COSG's), and at the NUSAS 1983 Congress.

The 'End Conscription' committees are not an attempt to merge organisations or to build a new organisation, but a cooperative effort of organisations covering a wide spread of opinion. Involved in the committees so far are a range of church and ecumenical bodies student and womens' organisations, and the CO Support Groups.

### EDITORIAL

1984 has begun with a rapid succession of confusing events surrounding the war situation in Southern Africa. OBJECTOR hopes to continue to provide comment and news of interest to all those concerned about the fate of objectors to military service, and opposed to the militaristic policies of the South African government.

The Board for Religious Objection to military service, created by the 1983 Defence Amendment Act, has begun to hear cases. In this issue we hope to begin a debate on how religious pacifists and others who may be effected by the board should respond to it. While utilising such scope as the Board allows, it is vital to continue the campaign for a wider recognition of the fundamental right of conscientious objection to war.

The call for an end to conscription must be situated in the context of escalating conflict in Southern Africa. Further, the SA state is becoming increasingly militarised. We see that the SADF is involved in all aspects of society, from the level of the State Security Council to that of education.

The SADF is also being challenged both internally and internationally for its aggressive stance towards neighbouring states, and its continued occupation of Namibia.

Also in this issue a summary of the latest invasion of Angola is given, and the reasons behind South Africa's troop "disengagement" offer probed. Any move towards a cessation of hostilities is to be welcomed. However for this to be more than a passing phase, it is necessary for a clear commitment to be made by the South African government to proceed without delay in implementing the Independence plan for Namibia. Such a commitment has yet to be made as part of the "disengagement" process, and all those concerned for peace in Southern Africa should join in a united call for the withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia.

In South Africa today there is a growing conviction that the illegal occupation of Namibia, and the consequent war against SWAPO cannot be justified on strategic or moral and political grounds.

A campaign to end conscription should also be viewed in the context of the immanent extension of conscription to coloureds and indians, and the 1983 Defence Amendment Act. This is a punitive measure which aims to divide CO's by criminalising those objectors who do not qualify for religious pacifist status.

The 1983 Defence Amendment Act offers no meaningful alternative to conscription. Therefore, we say: No to conscription! Forward with the End Conscription Campaign !!

The belief exists that the reluctance of the Botha government to withdraw from Namibia stems from the political embarrassment that it might face in the eyes of some of its supporters, not least in the SADF, as a result of an early settlement. Are hundreds more to die, and thousands be faced with the total disruption of their lives because of the 'border war' to save the Botha government some political embarrassment?

A report on the End Conscription Committee draws attention to the mounting call for the abolition of compulsory military conscription. If Namibian independence were achieved, the fig leaf of the border war with which the continual extension of conscription since 1973 has been justified, would be removed. What reasons would then be given for the expenditure of so large a portion of the country's resources in money and manpower on the military?