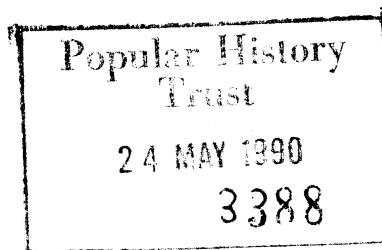


EG.4.3.2

THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR SUPPORT GROUP  
P.O.Box 591  
KENGRAY  
2100 SOUTH AFRICA  
Telephone: (011) 3397613

Friday 20 October 1989

Dear friends and supporters



WAR RESISTANCE UPDATE

Recent developments in SA indicate the importance of sustained pressure on the SA government, pressure that must be maintained internationally as well as locally. What follows is a report on developments that have been taking place in South Africa in the area of war resistance. We trust that this will be useful to all our overseas supporters in helping them with their continued solidarity work.

General Context:

In a weeks time the first Welcome Back rally will be held when hundreds of thousands of people are expected to welcome 8 newly released political prisoners. All of the eight who were released had each been held for over 25 years. Their release represents a victory for decades of struggle against the system of apartheid.

The last few months have been very exciting for all of us living in SA. The combination of international pressure and ongoing internal resistance has had the effect of forcing the government to disregard many of its own repressive laws. In this regard the Defiance campaign was a catalyst. Through mass disregard for discriminatory legislation, the state was placed in a position where it either had to not enforce its own laws (eg hospital and beach segregation), or else be seen by the international community to be still firmly committed to apartheid. It was a highly successful way of taking the initiative away from the state, and placing it in the hands of the people. Similarly with the peace marches, which were initially broken up by the police with many people being arrested. The sheer numbers and breadth of people involved, forced the state into a position where it could no longer justifiably prevent such marches happening, and significant space was won for ongoing peaceful protest.

ECC DEFIANCE:

It is in this context that the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) (along with many other organisations), unbanned itself and began acting in

defiance of its restriction order. In terms of its restriction order, given in August 1988, ECC was not allowed to perform any act whatsoever. However in August 1989, ECC press conferences were held in all the main SA centres, and ECC announced to the public that it would again be acting in building opposition to conscription. ECC banners were again seen flying, ECC posters appeared in Cape Town, and in Durban 10 ECC members were arrested for tying symbolic yellow ribbons around trees and poles and for handing out an ECC pamphlet.

#### REGISTER OF OBJECTORS;

Another very significant act of defiance occurred on 21 September 1989, when 771 men publically stated their refusal to do further or any military service. This action demonstrated the growing strength of the war resistance movement. In 1987, 23 men made a similar stand; a year later in August 1989, 143 men publically stated their refusal to serve in the SA Defence Force (SADF), and it is apparent that the 771 have and will be joined by hundreds of others.

The public statement by the 771 marked the launch of a register of objectors. Anyone who has come to a similar decision, is being asked to add their name to the register. The register has been given into the hands of certain well respected community leaders who will act as custodians of it and it is envisaged that there will be regular press announcements of the growing number of people who have registered.

The group of 771 came from all over the country, and included English and Afrikaans speaking men. Among the group were bishops, priests, doctors, lawyers, teachers, dentists, computer scientists, university lecturers and professors, engineers, journalists, musicians, actors, a company director, students and scholars. The youngest was 17 years old and the oldest 52 years old.

Some of the 771 have done no military service and are therefore liable for 6 years imprisonment, while others have done some training and are liable for 18 months - 3 years imprisonment. Of those who had done some training, 49 were either officers or non-commissioned officers.

The men have indicated that they will all respond to their call-ups in different ways. Some will go to jail, others will opt for religious objector status, while many will choose between a life in exile or constant evasion of the call up within the country.

#### ONGOING WAR RESISTANCE WORK:

Whilst ECC defiance actions, and the stand of the 771 hit the front page of the papers, it is important to draw attention to those aspects of work which do not hit the headlines but are none-the-less crucial. During the last year with the restriction of ECC, we have had to learn to work in more dispersed ways, with different organisations taking on different aspects of the work.

The work of the Conscription Advice Service (CAS) has continued with branches being opened in all the major centres of the country. This non-directive counselling service to conscripts and their families plays a vital role in helping conscripts work through the huge dilemma posed by conscription. CAS has recently produced excellent media to help advertise their service more widely. They have also run very successful training courses for new counsellors. The courses cover basic counselling skills as well as legal and practical details with regard to conscription.

Work in the churches is continuing through the Churches Alternative National Service Programme (CANSP). Having obtained the official backing of the main denominations, CANSP is now seeking to run workshops for local congregations on the issue of conscription. Apart from this educative role, CANSP also aims to help objectors find work in church or service organisations. The purpose of such placements would be to provide a clear visual symbol of the churches demand for a genuine form of alternative service to military service.

A very significant development of the past few months, has been the women's initiative entitled "Give our Sons a Choice". This initiative has grown out of the February stand of 900 mothers who all called on the government to provide a non-punitive alternative service option for all conscripts. In the last few months this initiative has developed into a national organisation. It functions in a low key way, drawing in new people through a system of informal housemeetings, and its potential lies in its ability to reach people who could not be reached through other forms of work.

#### OBJECTORS AND OBJECTOR SUPPORT:

There are currently 3 men serving jail sentences for their refusal to do military service, David Bruce, Charles Bester and Saul Batzofin. They are each being held separately - in different prisons - and are held as common criminals. David and Charles were sentenced to 6 years imprisonment and Saul is serving an 18 month sentence. They are all studying whilst in prison and recent visitors report that they are all in good spirits and coping with the hardships of prison.

Dr. Ivan Toms is currently out on bail, pending a hearing by the Appeal Court of SA. Ivan has already served 9 months of an 18 month sentence, and faces the daunting prospect of having to return to prison should his appeal fail.

The Conscientious Objectors' Support Group (COSG) is playing a very important role firstly in ensuring that each objector and his family is supported during the trying prison years, and secondly in campaigning publically for the release of jailed objectors. The SA public and the government need to be constantly reminded that there are people serving lengthy jail sentences because of their stand of conscience not to serve in the SA Defence Force.

NATIONAL ANTI-MILITARISATION CONFERENCE:

A highly significant conference was held last week end, bringing together people from all the major SA centres, and representing all the different organisations involved in the area of war resistance.

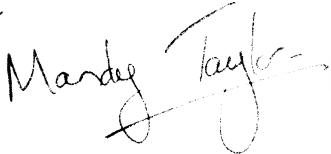
The main purpose of the conference was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the past year (post-ECC), and to consider ways of more effectively taking forward our work. There was overwhelming consensus at the conference that although we had kept the area alive in spite of the banning of ECC, there were none-the-less significant gaps to our work and that we have been negatively effected by ECC's banning. As a consequence of this, we all agreed on the need for a new national organisation focussing on conscription. However, we also agreed that any new organisation must be broader than ECC managed to be, and we have therefore embarked on a lengthy process of consultation with organisations and individuals who were not represented at this past conference. This process of consultation will culminate in a national consultative conference to be held in March of next year.

We are all very excited about the prospect of a new initiative and we will keep you informed of any developments in this area.

CONCLUSION:

As you can see, there has been a great deal happening over the past few months, and the next few months promise to be as exciting and full. We greatly appreciate the support we receive from friends in other countries and will endeavour to send you regular updates on what is happening here. Should you require further information at any time, please do not hesitate to write or telephone. Also, if you have any suggestions about how we can best maintain and build effective links with overseas organisations, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Strength in your work.



Mandy Taylor

COSG NATIONAL WORKER