

Remembering the Hammanskraal Resolution: a tribute to Douglas Bax

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South Africans are privileged to have witnessed some great prophets for peace inspired by their faith. Mahatma Gandhi developed *satyagraha*, soul force, on these shores; and Albert Luthuli, led the ANC on the non-violent defiance campaign against apartheid injustice. Many of these campaigns were brutally repressed.

In response to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, a consultation was called by the churches of South Africa at Cottesloe outside Johannesburg. When the Dutch Reformed Church retracted its support for the consultation's criticism of apartheid, the young Afrikaner theologian, Rev Beyers Naude left the DRC and began the Christian Institute in dialogue with other Christians, black and white, who sought to confess their faith against apartheid.

The Christian Institute, together with the South African Council of Churches, led by Anglican Archbishop Bill Burnett then published the *Message to the People of South Africa* in 1967 followed by the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society, or SPRO-CAS.

The final SPROCAS report, published in 1972 and co-authored by a Presbyterian minister, Rev Douglas Bax, carries the first formal reference to Conscientious Objection in apartheid South Africa. It recommended that: "The churches must consider conscientious objection both in terms of the Christian's attitude to engaging in armed conflict and also to defending a social order which does violence to the lives of their fellow men." This theme was picked up by Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley, who in 1974 issued a statement that "to defend white South African society by force of arms was to defend apartheid, and that to defend apartheid was to defend an unjust cause."

Then later in that year, at its annual conference at Hammanskraal north of Pretoria, the South African Council of Churches, adopted what has become known as the Hammanskraal resolution. This resolution was authored by Doug Bax, and it called on Christians to refuse to use violence in the support of injustice, and to consider becoming conscientious objectors. The SACC adopted it.

All hell broke loose. The then minister of Defence, P.W. Botha along with countless MPs attacked the resolution, the SACC was accused by cabinet ministers of being unpatriotic, while at the same time being a member of the World Council of Churches which was accused of supporting terrorists. In response to the resolution, Parliament passed the infamous legislation, *Section 121 (c) of the Defence Act* in November that year, which made it a criminal offence to encourage anyone to refuse to serve in the SADF..

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the End Conscription Campaign, the witness of Conscientious Objectors and War Resisters, and the thousands of people who resisted the apartheid state and the SADF, we therefore take this opportunity to remember those who first raised questions of conscience in a time of violence, injustice and war. We remember the men and women who laid the fertile ground for conscientious objectors, war resisters, non-violent protest and the End Conscription Campaign itself. We remember church

leaders like Bill Burnett, Denis Hurley, Beyers Naude, Rob Robertson, and Douglas Bax, along with many others whose names are forever etched in our memories.

Sadly, many of these heroes are no longer with us, and in a moment we will have the chance to remember them. But here today we are pleased to be able to honour Rev Douglas Bax who, in his life, symbolised what many of these people lived and died for .

Doug continued to be an active supporter of both the CO movement and the ECC from his position as minister of Rondebosch Congregational Church, or 'Rond Cong' as it was affectionately known to activists in Cape Town. While he was not an objector or resistor himself, he was a significant supporter of the movement. By honouring him we remember and honour all those who took responsibility to place the issue of conscience firmly before citizens living under the apartheid regime.

