

the Objector

SEPTEMBER 1991

Conscription: The State Retreats



In the last few months, two significant events have occurred in the struggle against racist conscription. On June 17 charges of refusing to do military service against the Rev Alan Storey were dropped, notwithstanding the fact that he had pleaded guilty. At the same time, charges against Wally Rontsch, a businessman who had refused to do a camp, were also dropped. It transpired that the charges had been dropped on the orders of the Attorney General, pending the recommendations of the Gleeson Committee into

Conscientious Objection, appointed earlier this year. Since then, several other Conscientious Objectors have had the charges against them withdrawn, and lawyers acting for COs have been informed unofficially that there will be no prosecutions of COs for the time being.

While the dropping of charges and the *de facto* moratorium on prosecutions of COs is to be welcomed, there is no guarantee that it will become permanent. However, the State has clearly decided that the political cost of Conscien-

tious Objector trials is unacceptably high in the present political climate, and does not want to be seen to be enforcing racist conscription legislation while at the same time proclaiming to the world that all racist legislation has been wiped off the statute books. The pressure brought to bear by the Conscientious Objector movement has thus resulted in a quiet climb-down by the government, at least for the present.

Another significant event was

- Continued overleaf

More Calls to the Conscription Advice Office

One of the volunteer counsellors at the Conscription Advice service writes:

Since the withdrawal of charges against objectors Alan Storey, Wally Rontsch, Wayne Boshier and Clyde Wynter, and the repeal of the Population Registration Act, the Conscription Advice Service has been inundated with enquiries.

CAS in Johannesburg has received some 76 phone calls in the past month, and a further 14 people called at the CAS office, which is open on Tuesday evenings. The majority of enquiries are from people called up for camps. In the past such people usually sought advice on how to apply, or re-apply, for deferment of a camp, but now the trend amongst callers is to refuse to do camps. Some people, after having heard ECC's Chris de Villiers speaking on a Radio 702 talkshow about the implications for conscription of the repeal of the Population Registration Act, are under the impression that they no longer have to do any further military service.

Other enquiries have come from conscripts currently in the army who are considering refusing to continue with their military training, from people wanting to know whether it is "safe" for friends or relatives overseas to return to South Africa when they left with a call-up pending, and from people who simply want to be updated on current objection to conscription. A few have wanted to know when the findings of the Gleeson Committee will be made known.

Cape Town CAS reports that, while it has not had any significant increase in the number of callers, more people are asking about the effect of the repeal of the Population Registration Act on the legality of conscription.

"There is only one way to do away with war, and that is to renounce it as a method, to seek instead the way of reason over anger, of forbearance and tolerance over arrogance and armies."

— Sybil Morrison, *Peace News*

Updates on Objectors

The State Retreats

— continued from front page

the granting of indemnity by the State President to Conscientious Objector Michael Graaf. Although only a few other COs stand to benefit from a similar indemnity, due to the cut-off date of 8 October 1990, President de Klerk has set an important precedent by effectively acknowledging that Conscientious Objection is a political issue, and that COs are political offenders. It is clearly now morally indefensible for the State to resume prosecuting Conscientious Objectors.

The report of the Gleeson Committee into Conscientious Objection is now being awaited with interest. Major players on the political stage, including the ANC, Inkatha and the Democratic Party,

have expressed their opposition to conscription, both in its present racist form and also in the future. Apart from statements by recently-sidelined Defence Minister Magnus Malan that the present system of conscription would be maintained, the government has been conspicuously silent on the issue. With General Malan discredited and relegated to obscurity, the possibility now exists for the government to adopt a more constructive approach to the ending of whites-only conscription and the building of a non-racial professional defence force which is accountable to all South Africans.

— Chris de Villiers

Unravelling closely guarded secrets: Religious Objectors in de Klerk's South Africa.

There has been such a haze of secrecy surrounding the whole issue of Religious Objectors that when I applied to be one of them I really was convinced that, given the changing times, I would be asked to perform some really useful community service. As it is, community service turned out to be the same stale joke that it had been in the time of the great croc.

But then, it was also impossible for me to share these experiences with other ROs because their names and addresses are also closely guarded secrets.

I eventually did discover another RO, Andre, and together, resorting to undercover means, we did procure a list of ROs. It was then that we sent them all letters asking them to do something, start mobilizing, whatever. The only problem was that most of their addresses were wrong, and for that reason still remained secret.

• When however General

Gleeson asked for submissions for another commission on objection our endeavours took on a new urgency. We were determined to penetrate that cloud of secrecy and make a submission on behalf of as many ROs as possible.

The Post Office's info number (10215) was most helpful in this regard. They provided us with many useful leads. Other wise, and maybe because ROs were mainly found in the Cape, far away from us, we had to resort to great feats of detective wizardry.

Ultimately, we were not only able to submit a representation on behalf of fourteen ROs, but we also discovered, hidden under the surface of appearances, a bedrock of anger and frustration. Many ROs clearly were gatvol. And while the State, paying close attention to our recommendations, told a few ROs to go home, others, tired of being treated as subhuman, opted to walk.

— Luis

"I maintain that by far the most tragic thing about war is not its immorality nor its cruelty, but its manifest and colossal futility and imbecility."

— Arthur Ponsonby, *Now is The Time.*

The SADF Investigates Conscientious Objection

The Gleeson committee appointed at the end of May to investigate conscientious objection, is at least the fourth to have investigated this or similar areas. It was as a result of the Geldenhuys Committee that the Defence Act was amended in 1983 to provide for so-called "Religious Objectors" and at the same time impose harsher penalties on all others; and in 1989 came the van Loggerenberg committee whose findings have never been made public. So although COSG, ECC, the Conscripton Advice Service (CAS), The National Community Service Group as well as a group of Religious Objectors,

and individuals such as the Reverend Rob Robertson (founder member of COSG) once again submitted evidence, on the principle that one must keep talking to the SADF, it was done with a certain wariness of approach.

All of these submissions recommended the ending of conscription, and that pending the end to conscription all conscripts should be free to choose community service on demand without having to prove anything before a Board. COSG emphasised that the right to Conscientious Objection needs to be enshrined in the new consti-

tution or Bill of Rights, ECC mentioned the problem of continuing with whites-only conscription while apartheid is said to have been abolished, the community servers (Religious Objectors) emphasised the inordinate length of "community" service and CAS spoke of the "hardship, emotional turmoil and anguish" to the individual resulting from conscription.

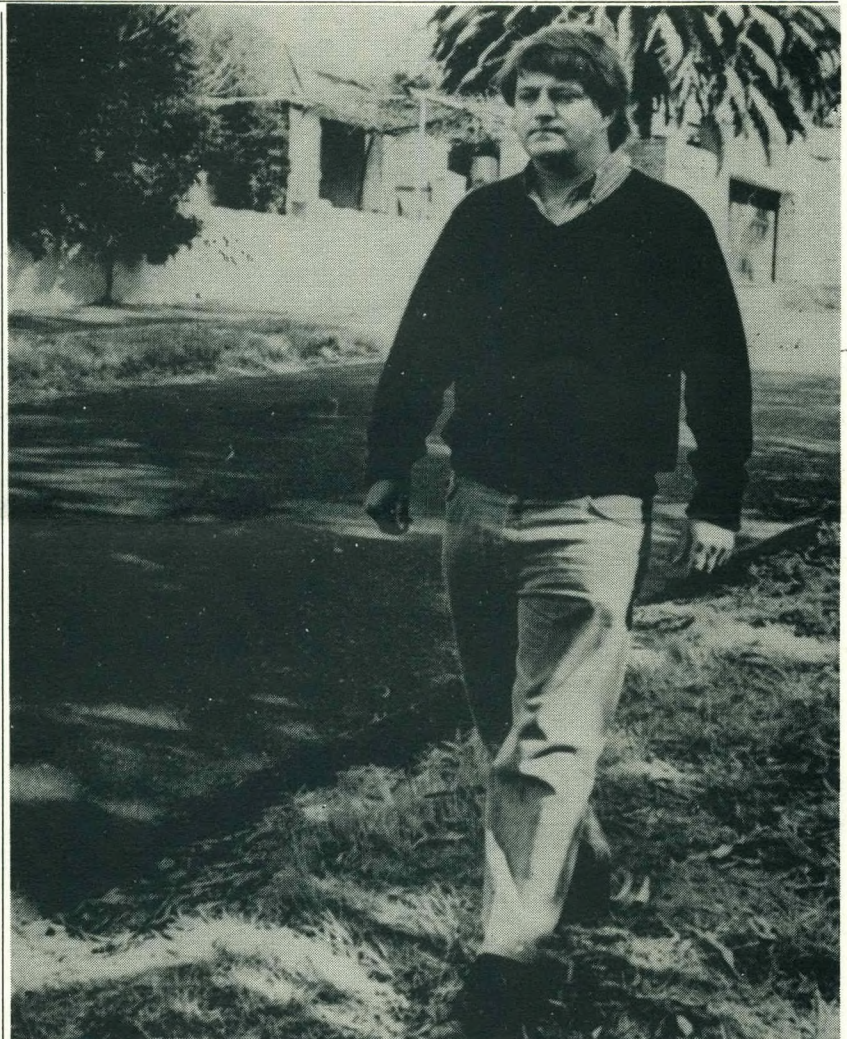
The Gleeson committee has finished its report, which it was due to hand over to the new Minister of Defence, Roelf Meyer, in September. We await the results with interest.

Michael Graaf Gets Indemnity

Conscientious Objector Michael Graaf of Durban was granted indemnity by the State President on August 29th; Graaf's lawyers had applied for political indemnity as far back as November 8 1990, soon after Graaf's trial and sentence to one year's imprisonment, suspended on condition that he render 2400 hours of unpaid community service at a Durban hospital.

This is the second precedent that has been set by Michael Graaf's case. He was the first CO to be given a community service sentence, followed by Douglas Torr, who is also awaiting the result of his application for political indemnity.

Michael comments: "The political status of conscientious objection is now established beyond question. It is therefore timely for all political groups wishing to be part of negotiations to come out clearly stating their position on conscription in the future South Africa"



Wally Rontsch had a charge of refusing to serve in the SADF withdrawn against him on 17 June in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court.

Monitoring the Violence on the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg COSG is one of the members of a newly formed group, Peace Action which was launched after some months of preparation. About thirty church groups, plus human rights organisations, extra-Parliamentary political bodies and other non-governmental organisations are involved.

Peace Action's commitment is to assist in bringing about an end to the violence which started in the Witwatersrand townships in August 1990 and is still continuing. In brief, the aim is to respond effectively to outbreaks of violence by:

(a) intervening when there are rumours of impending attacks, thus trying to ensure that this action is prevented from happening;

(b) being present in situations where violence has occurred, to make the police, the SADF and all political parties, the civics and others connected with stopping the violence accountable for their behaviour;

(c) collecting information and analysing it and making this material available for research purposes in order to discern trends and patterns in the violence;

(d) liaison with relief groups or welfare organisations;

(e) a campaign to promote the right to peace.

Even before the launch, a 24-hour telephone monitoring service was in operation and this is currently being extended into field monitoring as well. The pager number for those needing the service is (011) 339-5674 code 27030 and the office number is 837-4995/4954. A full-time co-ordinator has recently been appointed, but the service badly needs more volunteers. The recent September outbreak of violence has stretched the new organisation to its limits.

In Natal the End Conscriptioin Campaign has had a full-time violence monitor, Haydn Osborn, working mainly in the Midlands area for the last year, working in co-operation with monitors for other bodies such as the Democratic Party, IDASA and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Action and Awareness, (PACSA).

WRI Triennial Conference



South African delegates to the WRI Triennial in Belgium

Andrew Warmback is a member of the Durban Conscientious Objector Support Group and is one of seven South Africans who attended the War Resisters' International 20th Triennial in La Marlagne, Belgium from 28 July to 3 August 1991. These are a few of his impressions of the conference.

The week was inspiring, spent with about 350 other participants from a wide range of countries, including Chile, Brazil, Thailand, Hong Kong, Slovenia and Sri Lanka. What struck me is how strongly

committed people are to working non-violently for change, often at great personal risk.

Workshops on themes such as "A world without armies" challenged me to look more seriously at our South African context and future defence policy.

The formalisation of our link with WRI by the acceptance of COSG as an Associate member will help to ensure that we are kept in touch with the international peace movement.

At the annual **International Conscientious Objectors Meeting** held in Budapest in mid-July COSG was represented by Saul Batzofin. The next issue of *The Objector* will carry a full report on this conference.



Update on South African War Resistance Issues

June 1991

● **Michael Graaf's** Appeal against sentence is heard in the Natal Supreme Court, Pietermaritzburg. The sentence (one year in jail suspended on condition that Graaf renders 2400 hours of unpaid community service) is put aside and the case referred back to the Magistrates Court for re-sentencing. Both the State's lawyers and Graaf's defence team agree that the calculation of time "owing" to the Defence Force was in any case wrong. With the putting aside of the sentence, Michael has been able to stop his long hours of portering at a Durban hospital.

● In the Johannesburg Magistrates Court charges for Refusal to serve in the SADF are withdrawn for both **Rev Alan Storey** (22) and **Wally Rontsch** (40).

● ANC member **Telford Vice** of East London is informed by his unit, the Kaffrarian Rifles that his call-up instructions for a camp from July 2 to August 1 have been cancelled. This follows a letter he wrote to the unit stating the reasons for his refusal to serve in the SADF.

● Charges against two more objectors withdrawn in the Johannesburg Magistrates Court: **Clyde Wynter** who had been charged with refusing to serve, and **Wayne Boshier**, charged with failing to report for duty. During this month a charge for failure to change address is withdrawn against objector **Tony Rutherford** in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court..

● **Repeal of the Population Registration Act** by the three Houses of Parliament (whose racially based structure depends on race classification, as does conscription into the SADF).

July 1991

● At the **ANC National Conference** held in Durban, the ANC resolves to remain a Liberation Movement and to retain the strategies of mass action, international support, MK in "combat readiness", and some underground structures

● **ECC's End Racist Conscription Campaign** gets under way to coincide with the July National Service intake. Actions include: Press coverage about the repeal of the Population Registration Act and its effect on whites-only conscription; a placard protest and public forum on the future of conscription in Johannesburg; distribution of "Know your rights in the SADF" pamphlets to new conscripts at Wingfield, Cape Town; and a mock funeral procession through the middle of Durban to "bury conscription". Posters and pamphlets were used nationally, and in Grahamstown a wide coverage was ensured by using the pamphlets as an insert to the local newspaper *Grocotts' Mail*.

● **Nico Basson**, ex- Military Intelligence Major, reveals more about the hit squads and destabilisation actions of the SADF, and appeals to others to come forward with evidence of covert operations. He launches an organisation called Soldiers of Peace.

● At least eight people, doing alternative "community service" as **Religious Objectors**, are released from their community service jobs immediately. No explanation given, but this might be an attempt to bring all the religious objectors into line with the Jehovah's Witnesses, who had already negotiated a shorter period of community service. Later in the month, two more Religious Objectors downed tools and left their work,

informing the Board for Religious Objection of their reasons.

● The weekly *New Nation* reveals that much of the violence of the last two years, including the Reef train massacres, has been planned and carried out by the **Special Forces of the SADF**, some of whose members such as former Sergeant Felix Ndimene were captured in neighbouring territories and forced to join the Special Forces where they were trained as killers and sent on "missions" as members of 5 Recce Command.

● *The Weekly Mail* in Johannesburg and *the Guardian* in London publish reports of **government funding for Inkatha rallies** as well as the Inkatha-affiliated trade union group, UWUSA. The State President's response to the "Inkathagate" revelations is to move two cabinet ministers to other posts: Magnus Malan to Water Affairs and Adriaan Vlok to Correctional Services. The new Minister of Defence will be Roelf Meyer.

August 1991

● *The New Nation* exposes documents dealing with a **secret government plan to destabilise the Transkei** and unseat Major-General Bantu Holomisa, using the SADF to blockade Transkei military bases. Meanwhile, in Lusaka, Martin Dolinchek gives details of the widespread operations of the **National Intelligence Service** (of which he was a member - remember the Seychelles coup attempt?), which is the successor to the notorious BOSS.

● Conscientious Objector Michael Graaf is granted **political indemnity** by the State President; the application for indemnity was lodged in November 1990.

"The movement to abolish war is likely not only to begin, but to end, as the achievement of a minority which ultimately persuades the majority to accept its views. The elimination of war and the building of permanent peace differ from other great movements for the liberation of humanity from the evil within itself, only because the sphere of action is so much wider and the problems involved far more complicated."

— Vera Brittain, *Humiliation with Honour*.

The Greek Scandal

Greece is still one of the worst countries in the world for Conscientious Objectors. They even arrested one of the CO's, Nikos Masiotis (20) on International CO Day, May 15. He is being held in the military prison at Thessaloniki while awaiting trial.

The following are some of the points made in their joint protest statement, dated 20/12/90, by 277 Objectors in the Avlonas Military Prison (SFA):

"...Although the European Parliament has issued repeated declarations urging EC member-states and Greece in particular to make arrangements concerning the case of Conscientious Objectors, Greek Martial Courts keep passing prison sentences ranging from 4 to 6 years on Conscientious Objectors.....

At present we are 277 Conscientious Objectors at SFA, being packed in areas that have been designed for about 150 persons..."

They also protested the standard of medical care they received. "...in certain cases prison doctors have literally overstepped their oaths by being totally indifferent to imprisoned Conscientious Objectors and their medical needs..."

Finally they said: "...We wonder why, given that sweeping changes have been taking place in East Europe, with Poland, Hungary and, recently, Czechoslovakia letting all Conscientious Objectors free,

Greece, an EC member-state keeps openly violating human rights by sending Conscientious Objectors to prison?"

Following this protest, some of the 277 were transferred to Thessaloniki and Kavala; at Kavala they were told on arrival: "Here your friends, journalists and parliamentarians of the European Parliament will not be able to visit you".

The introduction of an alternative civilian service was announced on the same day as the arrest of Nikos Masiotis but will obviously be long in coming, as it is still under consideration. It is likely to be twice as long as military service and ultimately under the authority of the Ministry of Defence.

Protest letters about the treatment of COs can be sent to: Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, Parliament Building, Athens 10674 Greece, or to the Greek Embassy, 995 Pretorius Street Arcadia Pretoria 0001.

Letters of support for Nikos Masiotis (total resister) can go to him at The Military Prison "Paulos Melas" Thessaloniki Greece.

International News

Soviet CO Aleksandr Pronozin

On July 24 1991 Soviet CO Aleksandr Pronozin was taken to the Kaschenko psychiatric hospital for an examination, as provided for by the juridical procedure for refusal to do military service. On August 14 1991 he was released. The results of the psychiatric analysis will be known later. He will be sentenced if he is considered mentally fit for military service.

Aleksandr's objection to military service is based on a protest against the absence of any legal civilian alternative to military service in the USSR; further, he does not want to be incorporated in a military machine as, in his opinion, nonviolent civilian-based defence could be a much more effective policy of national defence.

War Resisters' International is maintaining contact with Aleksandr and messages of support for him can be sent c/o WRI, 55 Dawes Street, London SE 17 1 EL, England.

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The Objector is edited by a COSG editorial collective and published at least four times a year by the Conscientious Objector Support Group, P O Box 591, Kengray, 2100.

Subscription rates for a year:
R20.00 or US \$20.00.

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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