

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



224.2.14
SUIDER - AFRIKAANSE
KATOLIEKE BISKOPSRAAD

TELEGRAMS: "CHURCHWEL PRETORIA"
PHONES: 3-6458 / 3-6459
TELEX: 3-0776 SA
P.O. BOX 941
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KHANYA HOUSE
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TELEGRAMME: "CHURCHWEL PRETORIA"
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21 April 1986

Dear Friend

Our Sub-Committee falls directly under the Justice and Reconciliation Commission of the SACBC. Part of our work involves support for young men, who in conscience decide they cannot perform their military service.

Philip Wikinson has recently been refused recognition as a religious objector. He has recently been called up for a camp on the 29th April. He has indicated to the Defence Force that he will not be reporting for his call-up. He will probably be charged for refusing to render service and thus be jailed for two-and-a-half years.

As he is a sincere young Catholic we would appreciate it if you could publish material concerning his plight as we believe that all sections of the Church should show their support for him. You could also appeal for messages of support for Philip to be sent to:

The Philip Wilkinson Support Group
46 St Patricks Rd
Central
Port Elizabeth
6001

Philip's conscientious stand is an important contribution to the cause of Peace and Reconciliation in our war-torn country. I hope this appeal will receive your sympathetic attention.

Yours Sincerely in the peace of Christ

Stephen Lowry
Secretary
Peace and War Sub-Committee

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FOR RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

28 February 1986

Press Release: Philip Wilkinson, Conscientious Objector.

The Church is appalled and saddened by the Board for Religious Objection's decision, at refusing Philip Wilkinson alternative Community Service. He now faces a jail sentence of two-and-a-half years.

South Africa is facing a crisis of unprecedented proportions. Despite the increasing anger of the majority of South Africans against the Apartheid system, the government remains intransigent, and is blindly leading us into a situation of civil war.

Philip's general commitment to non violence and specific objections to the violence of the SADF, must in the light of this situation, be hailed as heroic. His witness serves only to foster peace and justice, and a stand like his demands the full support and blessing of the Church.

When in 1983 amendments to legislation concerning Conscientious Objection were introduced, the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference condemned them as unjust because they were glaringly inadequate.

Our recommendations were, and remain, based on three broad principles:

1. All objectors; moral; ethical, political and religious, should have their beliefs formally recognised and taken into full cognisance when the type of service they are required to render to the nation is determined. Just war objectors should be given equal status to those of religious pacifists.
2. Those granted the option of community service should not have to perform a longer period of service than those serving in the SADF.
3. Community service should not be confined to work within a government department, but should also include the options of work within institutions such as the Church and private welfare organisations.

Because these three broad principles were not adhered to by the government, we

chose not to allow a member of the Catholic Church to be co-opted to the Board when a Catholic applicant was being heard.

We, the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, remain as committed to these principles as we were when we submitted evidence before the Geldenhuys Committee.

Without an end to compulsory military conscription, or at the very least, substantial changes to the terms of reference of the Board for Religious Objection, principled and sincere young men like Philip will continue to suffer unjustifiably for their beliefs.

Statements

Sheena Duncan

The Black Sash supports the courageous stand Phillip Wilkinson has made in regard to his military call-ups.

He, and other principled young men like him, have drawn attention to the fact that military conscription in South Africa does not allow freedom of conscience in a conflict in which white South Africans are armed to fight against their fellow citizens.

Phillip's case has highlighted the total inadequacy of the legislation establishing the Board for Religious Objectors. The Board cannot recognize any conscientious objection other than that of a total pacifist whose objection is based on his religious beliefs.

The Black Sash has called for all conscription to be ended in South Africa. As the government is not yet prepared to heed that call it is a matter of the greatest urgency that the parameters of the Board's jurisdiction be widened to allow for the recognition of all conscientious objection.

Bishop Desmond Tutu

I support your stand because we believe that it is the inalienable right for anyone to follow the dictates of their conscience.

And I want to express my very great admiration for young people such as Phillip Wilkinson, and if there is anything I can do to help in his cause I am at his disposal. Young people like him represent the hope for this country.

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

PRESS RELEASE

E.C.C. SUPPORTS PHILLIP WILKINSON

Phillip Wilkinson has the full support of the ECC in the stand he is taking. His choosing to become a conscientious objector is a show of immense courage.

Phillip's case is a reminder to us of the thousands of young white men who are agonizing about being conscripted into the SADF. They are asking the question, "How can we fight, and possibly die, for apartheid?" The answers aren't always easy. At the best of times it is a most excruciating dilemma. And now as South Africa enters an ever deepening crisis, so the crisis facing conscripts intensifies. Phillip's option is just one example of what conscripts have resorted to. Others have gone into exile, or simply evaded the military by becoming fugitives in their own country, still others enter the SADF against their will.

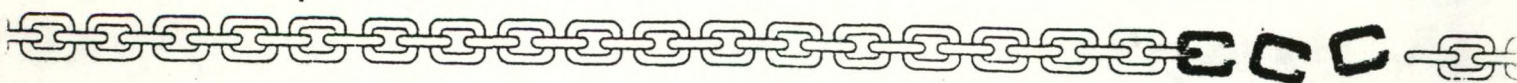
This situation must end. People like Phillip should not have to face a term in jail for having the courage of their convictions. Conscription must end. But it might take a long time for the Nationalist government to do this. In the meantime ECC calls for:

- 1) The rights to conscientious objection be granted on ethical, moral, political as well as religious grounds.

- 2) The length of alternative service be the same as that for military service, not a punitive one-and-a-half times the length.

- 3) Alternative service be available in non-governmental organizations.

Issued by David Shandler (ECC National Secretary - 28 February 1986)



Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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