

**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SUPPORT GROUP
JOHANNESBURG**

A77.45

BROADENING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE NATIONAL SERVICE

The Johannesburg Conscientious Objectors' Support Group has been in existence since 1979, and has been involved in

- moral and legal support for men whose consciences forbid them to fight in the South African Defence Force;
- a counselling service to help worried conscripts clarify their positions;
- lobbying for changes in the Defence Act to enable genuine objectors to serve the country in a non-military way.

This letter deals with the last-mentioned point, namely the provision of an alternative to military service for conscientious objectors.

Before 1983, some conscientious objectors were imprisoned for refusing to undergo military training. The Defence Act Amendment (1983) now allows for the recognition of religious pacifists, whose grounds for objection have been tested and accepted by the Board for Religious Objection which was established by this legislation. Applicants can apply for non-combatant service in the SADF, or, if they totally reject service in any armed force, they may be referred by the Board to the Department of Manpower for so-called "community service" in a government department or local authority for a period of up to six years (i.e. one and a half times the length of the total outstanding national service commitment of the applicant).

Not only does the existing law fail to make any provision for genuine conscientious objectors who are not religious pacifists, but the provisions for community service, we believe, are too narrow.

In many countries where objection has been recognised as valid, the objector is assigned to alternative service. This service is a compromise between the interests of the government and those of the conscientious objector. This compromise differs in nature from country to country; sometimes it is weighted in favour of the government and sometimes in favour of the objector.

For the government, the provision of alternative service fulfils two purposes: one is to impose a burden on the objector, so as to deter those who out of pure expediency seek to be released from military service; the other is to obtain from the objector a service useful to the public interest, even if it is not military service.

In many countries in Western Europe (and North America before the suspension of conscription) a wide range of alternative services has been developed. Widely used means are medical institutions and hospitals, and church, welfare, research and development agencies.

In some countries, conscientious objectors can perform an alternative service directly related to the promotion of peace. This service can be accomplished within peace movements or associations, or take the form of assignment to peace research. It gives the conscientious objector an opportunity to deal with issues directly related to the ethical aspirations underlying the objection to participation in the armed forces. This is probably the solution most favourable to the objector.

It is with the aim of broadening the possibilities for community service in South Africa that we are addressing the attached questionnaire to you and your organisation, to see whether, in the event of such a change in the law, you would be able to offer any placement of this kind. Some of the advantages of such a broadening would be

- the speeding-up of the placement of recognised objectors, some of whom have had to wait more than a year before being allocated to a post by the Department of Manpower;
- the use of professionally or technically skilled people in real service to the community: at present some people's skills and motivation are being wasted in unskilled routine jobs in government departments;
- while the increasing militarisation of our society is contributing to raising the level of civil unrest, we feel that the use of conscientious objectors in genuine community service can contribute to the positive work needed to bring about a peaceful and just society.

Your help in completing the attached questionnaire will be much appreciated.

_____ representing the Johannesburg
Conscientious Objectors' Support Group

Address _____

Telephone _____

**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SUPPORT GROUP
JOHANNESBURG**

**BROADENING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE NATIONAL SERVICE
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name of organisation _____

Address _____

Telephone number _____

Name of contact person _____

1. Do you, as a representative of your organisation, agree that men with conscientious objection to serving in the South African Defence Force should be entitled to do non-governmental community service instead?
Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No
2. Would your organisation be willing and able to employ such a person in a full-time position?
Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No
3. What kind of skills would you expect of such a person? (For example: professional, technical, administrative.)
Please give details: _____

4. Give a brief job description.

5. The Act at present provides that alternative service must be one and a half times the length of military service still due, with a maximum of six years, served in one continuous period. For how long would your organisation be willing to employ a conscientious objector?
1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years
6. Where would your employee be based? _____
7. Current rates of pay for conscientious objectors doing "community service" range from R5,19 per day for unskilled single men (plus a living-out allowance of R250,00 per month) to R18,38 per day for professional married men. Would your organisation be prepared to pay these rates?
Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No
(There are extensive regulations under the Act with regard to conditions of employment. These can be made available to you on request.)
8. In the event of the Conscientious Objectors' Support Group wishing to make use of this information, for example in approaching the government to make further amendments to the law, would you agree to the name of your organisation being mentioned?
Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SUPPORT GROUP
JOHANNESBURG**

POSSIBLE USE OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

Some conscientious objectors to military service are now doing 'community service' instead of military service. At present, however, such objectors may only do their 'community service' in a government department or local authority, and they are administered by the Department of Manpower.

The Johannesburg Conscientious Objectors' Support Group believes that welfare organisations could make use of the person-power offered by these objectors, and it is with the aim of objectors being allowed to do their service in non-governmental agencies that we are addressing the attached questionnaire to you and your organisation, to see whether, in the event of such a change in the law, you would be able to offer any placement of this kind.

Only religious pacifists whose grounds for objection have been tested and accepted by the Board for Religious Objection qualify for community service at present. Their period of service is one and a half times their total outstanding national service commitment (i.e. up to six years) and is served in one continuous period. If a change in the law enabled you to take on such objectors, they would (in all likelihood) be employees paid by your organisation, and not volunteers.

Your help in completing the attached questionnaire will be much appreciated.

representing the Johannesburg
Conscientious Objectors' Support Group

Address _____

Telephone _____

**BROADENING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE NATIONAL SERVICE
QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name of organisation _____

Address _____

Telephone number _____

Name of contact person _____

1. Do you, as a representative of your organisation, agree that men with conscientious objection to serving in the South African Defence Force should be entitled to do non-governmental community service instead?

Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No

2. Would your organisation be willing and able to employ such a person in a full-time position?

Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No

3. What kind of skills would you expect of such a person? (For example: professional, technical, administrative.)

Please give details: _____

4. Give a brief job description.

5. The Act at present provides that alternative service must be one and a half times the length of military service still due, with a maximum of six years, served in one continuous period.

For how long would your organisation be willing to employ a conscientious objector?

1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years 6 years

6. Where would your employee be based? _____

7. Current rates of pay for conscientious objectors doing "community service" range from R5,19 per day for unskilled single men (plus a living-out allowance of R250,00 per month) to R18,38 per day for professional married men. Would your organisation be prepared to pay these rates?

Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No

(There are extensive regulations under the Act with regard to conditions of employment. These can be made available to you on request.)

8. In the event of the Conscientious Objectors' Support Group wishing to make use of this information, for example in approaching the government to make further amendments to the law, would you agree to the name of your organisation being mentioned?

Place an 'X' in the applicable block: Yes No

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

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