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22 November, 1989

The Editor  
The Star  
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Dear Sir/Madam

re: Troop withdrawal from Namibia

The withdrawal of the last South African troops from Namibia marks the end of a shameful war of occupation by the South African forces. The SWAPO election victory proves the futility of the South African war effort in resisting the territory's independence, and vindicates those who opposed the war. The message for South Africa is clear: it is futile and stupid to wage war against forces which are supported by the majority of the people. To conscript young white men on a racist basis to fight an unwinnable war on behalf of apartheid is indefensible.

We are informed by the government that the returning troops will be incorporated into the standing army within the country. Yet the government continues to speak of reform and of regional peace. Surely this is the time for the government to abolish the system of conscription, or at least to introduce the possibility for all conscripts to serve SA in non-military ways.

At this time, it is also appropriate for us to ask the South African government to release those men who have been jailed for their principled opposition to military service. There are currently three conscientious objectors in jail. David Bruce and Charles Bester are both serving 6 year jail sentences without the prospect of remission, whilst killers and rapists routinely receive shorter sentences. Yet the withdrawal of troops from Namibia and the SWAPO victory clearly vindicates the stands of these courageous men.

We therefore call for the immediate release of David Bruce, Charles Bester and Saul Batzofin and we call for the government to end the system of compulsory military service. The South African situation, like the Namibian situation, demands political solutions and not military solutions. Instead of continuing to call up young white men to defend the immoral system of apartheid, the government should unban all political parties and should begin negotiations with the real leaders of the majority of South Africans.

Yours faithfully

Mandy Taylor

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