

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



24.2.16
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15 March 1986

Dear friend

The Justice and Reconciliation Commission of the SACBC has a War and Peace sub-committee. This committee is responsible for examining issues of militarisation and looking for ways in which the Church can participate in halting the process which is contributing to the developing civil war in our country. The committee members include members of the Clergy, laity, Bishop Adams of Oudtshoorn and Archbishop Daniel of Pretoria.

At a recent meeting of the sub-committee, Archbishop Daniel reported on the conflict enveloping the townships surrounding the Pretoria district. He talked about the urgency of the need for the SADF to be withdrawn from the townships as this was making the situation absolutely intolerable. Many community organisations have listed this need as one of the priorities before peace can be restored to the townships of our country. In talking about the issue, the members noted that the SACBC will be having an extra-Ordinary Plenary Session on the situation in our country in May. In discussing this we thought that it important for the Conference to discuss possible scenarios for action. Action in which the Church at all levels could contribute to the struggle for Peace and Justice in our society.

The Conference of Bishops meeting in Plenary Session in January recognised this when they declared:

" While still open to Dialogue, we see no choice but to envisage forms of non-violent action such as passive resistance, boycott and economic pressure to move our country away from its state of racial conflict and set it firmly on the road to justice and full participation of all its inhabitants in the structure of government. We reaffirm our total abhorrence of the system of Apartheid which is directly opposed to the teaching of Christ and the God-given dignity of every human being and is the greatest single obstacle to peace in our land."

It is for this reason that the sub-committee in conjunction with the Commission, saw the need for the Church at all levels, to involve itself in examining the possible forms of action that the Church could embark on. We decided that as many groups as possible should be consulted about this. From the perspective of the sub-committee we saw the whole issue of the Troops in the townships as very important. We want to ask various groups in the Church:

1. What is the role of the SADF? Is this negative or positive?
2. What can the Church do about it? Specify; Bishops, Priests, Religious, Laity?
3. What can you/your group do in conjunction with others to get the SADF to leave the townships?

As I have been given the task to undertake this consultation, I am intending to travel through the country to discover what the various groups would respond to this. I am hoping to meet with lay organisations, religious congregations, schools, welfare organisations, Justice and Reconciliation groups, parish/pastoral Councils, Bishops, Priests, etc.

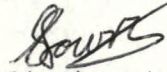
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It goes without saying, that a consultation of this sort must include civic, community, student and political organisations. Often these groups represent the people who experience the brunt of SADF incursion into their dialy lives.

In writing about this I hope that you may see the importance of this work. I will be travelling around in the next six weeks to carry out this task and would ask you to assist me in this. I hope to be in Cape Town from 25 March to 1 April, Port Elizabeth from 2 April to 9 April. If you are able to help, I can be contacted before 25 March in Johannesburg at (011) 643-4689, in Cape Town at (021) 69-1067, and in Port Elizabeth at (041) 23098. I hope to be in Natal for the last week of April, but as yet, no specific plans have been made.

I really do hope that you will be able to help the Church as a whole get involved in concrete action to stop the ever increasing conflict in our country.

Yours in the Peace of Christ



Stephen Lowry
Secretary
Peace and War Sub-Committee

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE CAMPAIGN

The Church in South Africa has, for a long time been aware of the problem facing conscientious objectors, being conscripted into the SADF. In 1977 the Bishops defended CO's right to object to military service. In 1983 at the introduction of the Defence Amendment Act, bringing into existence the Board for Religious Objection, the SACBC, through Cardinal McCann, called for a number of changes, none of which were considered. In May 1985 the SACBC added its voice to the call to end conscription, and later in the year presented again its suggestions to the Geldenhuys Committee. Again it was clear from the 1986 Defence White Paper that the Geldenhuys Committee had completely ignored the evidence submitted by the Church on this matter.

What we have seen happening is that the Church, profoundly competent to pronounce and give advice on such issues, is being completely ignored. We must however continue to call for changes, but perhaps we need to consider a more active response.

On different occasions many people within the Church have suggested that the Bishops should call on Catholics to refuse to do their military service. The Bishops have refused to do this, because of the moral predicament this would put young Catholic men in. Recently, however the Executive of the NCFS suggested that the Church call on Catholics to refuse to do service, and instead to do their service in an alternative form.

This has formed the basis of a possible campaign that could be embarked upon, by all the Churches in SA. Instead of calling on young people to refuse to do military service, this could be framed in a positive way. Young men could be called on to volunteer for an alternative form of national service. Such service could be for a specific length of time, eg. one or two years. It could be with Church schools, welfare agencies or in other types of work. The volunteers would be paid the same wage they would receive doing military service.

The Church would have to make the implications of such service clear, to the volunteers. To the Government the message could be clear:

- You have always disregarded our calls and representations for changes in the law.
- We have thus established alternatives for young men faced with conscription.
- We are convinced that these volunteers have sincere and strongly-held beliefs leading to their refusal to do military service, and thus we have offered them alternative service in which they can positively serve the

community.

- We thus request that you recognise this service and refrain from prosecuting these volunteers for failing to adhere to their call-up instructions.

Although the government has absolute power in this area, they would certainly be loathe to act against the united initiative of the Churches. It would therefore be imperative to get as many Churches involved in this initiative. This united strength coupled with wide public and international support, might stop the government from suppressing the initiative.

MEMORANDUM: ALTERNATIVE SERVICE CAMPAIGN.

1. Representatives of the CPSA, MCSA, PCSA, Congregationalist, Quakers, ELCSA, FELCSA churches need to be invited to attend a meeting hosted by Archbishop Daniel representing the Catholic Church. Observers from the ECC and COSG should be invited. A representative from the SACC should come.
2. The content of the meeting would be to discuss the feasibility of setting up an ecumenical Alternative Service Project, as an alternative to the governments' limited provisions for Conscientious Objectors doing alternative service.
3. A paper concerning the idea could be distributed before the meeting. The paper could be based on the paper drawn up for presentation to the SACBC Admin Board entitled "Alternative Service Campaign".
4. Before the meeting Steve Lowry would meet with and discuss the idea with people from the various churches. These would be:
 - CPSA: Sheena Duncan
 - Congregationalist: Joe Wing
 - MCSA: Peter Storey
 - PCSA: Dr Mike Moore
 - Quakers: Olive Gibson
 - ELCSA: Mr Assur
 - FELCSA: Mr Bodenstein
 - SACC: Dr Kistner and Rob Robertson, both of whom have been spoken to.
5. These discussions would serve to inform the agenda and discussions of the meeting. It would also serve to get specific people from the other Churches interested in pushing the idea in their own Churches.
6. The agenda of the meeting could include:
 - An explanation of the idea and how it arose within the SACBC.
 - A discussion of the idea, including an attempt to clarify the reason, aims and goals, and feasibility of the project.
 - Future, process and structure for co-ordinating an in-depth feasibility study into the project.
7. This outline only suggests an initial process and should be discussed further.

housing, public transport, education, health, employment schemes, welfare etc.

★ that the SACC has publicly expressed its extreme discomfort with the role of the SADF in Southern Africa; and support for the right of conscientious objection.

Believing

★ that to pray for peace and pay for war is a contradiction;

★ that to be consistent in our conscientious objection to military training and war we need to object conscientiously to conscription of both personnel and money;

★ that to object to the conscription of money for military purposes is a way every South African (not just white males as at present) can be involved in expressing opposition to the role of the SADF in this region.

Therefore calls Conference to

★ consider the option of conscientious objection to the conscription of money as seriously as conscription of personnel;

★ request the Division of Justice and Reconciliation to do further research, theological or otherwise on this matter and report back to the next National Executive with proposals on how the churches can educate and involve their members in the dimension of conscientious objection to military training and war."

Conference requests the Division of Justice and Reconciliation to study the theological, ethical, economic and other aspects of conscientious objection to the use of taxation for military purposes and to report to the Executive.

Resolution 20 Spectrum Youth Conference

★ Conference notes resolution 8.1 (appended) of the Spectrum Conference on the SADF and the Church in Southern Africa;

★ Shares many of the concerns expressed by the Conference and

★ commends young people for their efforts to bear a relevant Christian witness in the South African situation.

Therefore Conference

★ encourages member churches to give guidance to their members especially young people on the theological and ethical aspects of war.

★ Requests the Executive of the SACC to organise in cooperation with the Regional Councils, regional workshops to focus on and discuss the role of Christians in a war situation.

Resolution on SADF and the Church in Southern Africa

The South African state does not value human life. It undermines the neigh-

bouring states territorial integrity.

We the youth of the South African and Namibian Churches hold that:

□ The war in Southern Africa is escalating

□ The Church finds itself in a position where its members are involved in a civil war and are fighting on both sides of the border;

□ The Church has tried to make itself clear on the issues which underlie the war;

While at the same time realising that:

□ It is the youth which constitute the largest part of our congregations;

□ It is our youth which is most directly involved and affected by the war;

Urgently requested:

□ Because of the urgency of the situation that the Church gives the matter top priority in its planning for the next years, in order to develop an adequate theological basis and understanding of what its role should be in this war,

□ Youth to organise and mobilise the member Churches about the atrocities perpetuated by the military;

□ The SACC through its regional councils to organise regional conference to focus on and discuss the role of Christians in a war situation.

Resolution 21 The board for religious objection

Freedom of conscience is an inalienable God-given right.

This Conference therefore

★ strongly affirms that the State has a duty to recognise the right of any individual to object in conscience to military service and be given a fair non-military alternative.

★ Notes that the Defence Amendment Act 1983 now grants alternative community service to religious objectors who refuse to serve in any armed force.

★ Notes some positive aspects in the legislation:

- recognition of the principle of non-military national service
- recognises objection to military service is no longer confined to members of historic peace churches.
- the principle that a civilian not a military board be appointed.

★ Nevertheless maintains that the negative aspects of the legislation outweigh the positive and that its ultimate effect is to make conscientious objection more difficult than before.

★ Rejects the failure of the legislation to accept as conscientious objectors all those who are non-religious or who only object to some wars.

★ Rejects the very punitive prison sentence for all objectors not recognised by the board.

★ Rejects the unreasonably long period of alternative service.

★ Expresses concern about the racial composition of the board.

Conference therefore resolves:

★ To urge the Government to provide reasonable alternative service to all genuine conscientious objectors, not only religious pacifists.

★ To urge member churches not to permit a member of their denomination to serve on the board until this has been granted.

acknowledged when doing any action. It is for the only way one can ever tell what a person's real motivation is. He is saying that persons and not ideas are commanded by our Lord's words. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). He added that by merely saying "Lord, Lord" people would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 7:21). Mere protestations of sincerity and belief do not on their own amount to the depth of conviction required to act upon them. It appears, though, that the Board is requiring young men to do the "Lord, Lord" act in order to be regarded as conscientious objectors. Could it be that if they just get the phraseology right and carefully edit out any awareness of the revolution this country is passing through, they will be accepted as "genuine"?

The current arrangement is unavoidably elitist. People with a good turn of phrase and a university training in essay and speech writing (and the requisite degree of self censorship) can be reasonably certain of fulfilling the Board's requirements. People without considerable literary sophistication but with the depth of conviction that would drive them to acting and suffering for their beliefs run the risk of being sent to jail.

Church representatives

The above problems with the Board raise the question of the church's participation in the scheme. There is a Methodist minister, and also an Anglican priest on the Board (the latter in contra-

dition that these two churches also support the proposed legislative changes. This is so asking for those churches to be willing to have their names associated with the proposal yet dissent.

Collaborators

In view of how matters have turned out, the Presbyterian, Congregational and Catholic churches clearly made the right decision. The Methodist and Anglican Board members have effectively become collaborators in a move to limit the amount of conscientious objection as far as possible; their participation on the Board has given the Board a religious and moral legitimization which it does not deserve in terms of their own theology. Both these churches have called upon the state to open the conscientious objection legislation to all sincere objectors, pacifist and non-pacifist, religious and non religious, and have advanced theological reasons for doing so. Yet the two Board members are now participating in a scheme which is steadily narrowing the definition of legally acceptable conscientious objection and making it more difficult for objectors by raising the periods of service and sentence.

The basic aim: exclusion not inclusion

Appalling as the proposed changes are, it should not be forgotten that the fundamental difficulty is that the legislation on conscientious objection is too exclusive.

The public appears to be under the

impression that the Board's intention is to limit the number of conscientious objectors as far as possible without angering the church excessively.

And it has succeeded. The number of

"The churches should make it clear that the Board carries no theological, moral or ecclesiastical legitimization and stress that it is a shabby pretence at liberalism when its real objective is to force men into the apartheid army."

objectors rose when the legislation was first passed in 1983, but to nowhere near the level it would have if all conscientious objectors were accepted. Furthermore the church has remained silent apart from some good statements in that year.

Lethargy

It is time for the churches to set aside their lethargy and take up the struggle of conscientious objectors. The church is responsible for them to the extent that the church's own theological response to apartheid in the past five years compels young men to consider conscientious objection as an option. It is wrong for the churches to conscientize people, pass resolutions condemning apartheid as a heresy, and then remain indifferent to the fate of those young men who take their theology seriously.

The Anglican and Methodist Board members should immediately stand down. All the churches should issue urgent statements urging Parliament not to make matters more difficult for conscientious objectors. They should seek interviews with the Minister of Defence and try to persuade him to open up the legislation further. They should object in the strongest terms to the Board's rejection of men like Don Edwards. Above all, they should declare the whole system of the Board a farce. While not discouraging young men from applying to it if they choose, they should make it quite clear that the Board carries no theological, moral or ecclesiastical legitimization and stress that it is a shabby pretence at liberalism when its real objective is to force men into the army.

"Could it be that if applicants to the Board just get the phraseology right and carefully edit out any awareness of the revolution this country is passing through, they will be accepted as "genuine"? . . . the intention [of the current legislation] was not so much to distinguish between the conscientious objector and the convenience objector, but to limit the number of objectors without angering the church excessively."

dition to the will of the Anglican church). The Presbyterian, Congregational and Catholic churches have refused to send representatives because of their disagreement with the Board's terms of reference.

As mentioned above, the memorandum used by the Defence standing committee states that the Board approved of the proposed changes in the legislation. It is implied (if not in the minds of the Anglican and Methodist Board members, then certainly in the minds of the politicians who formulate the legislation)

impression that since there is a Board conscientious objectors are basically O.K. That is emphatically not the case. The legislation specifies that only religious pacifists may do community service. This excludes non-religious pacifist objectors. The "English-speaking" churches have individually and collectively (through the SACC) called for the extension of community service to these groups as well.

Probably the current legislation excludes many more conscientious objec-

The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth Century Natal

Shula Marks

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In her *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa*, Shula Marks has yet again produced a piece of historical scholarship that is interesting, stimulating and significant. Her scholarly aims are modest enough contained as they are in just over a hundred jam-packed pages. Modest they may well be but Shula Marks's historical and by the same token human concerns in this little book are wide ranging.

There is a disarming sense in which *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* is not only a book about the nature of the emerging South African State, nationalism, class and class consciousness in early twentieth century Natal. It is also a consummate achievement which reveals how the past is in the present and the present in historical terms was initiated and formed in the past. What is probably most seminal about this work is that without consciously setting out to do so, Shula Marks has placed the sign posts for any future significant African historical biography.

She achieved this feat without undue fan-fare and extravagance. The interplay between "actors" and historical events is handled in an even-handed and parsimonious fashion and the narrative is uncluttered. The historical figures: Solomon Ka Dinizulu, John Dube and George Champion are handled compassionately and with a delicacy of touch that makes them come to life. Yet one is privileged to feel that not far from these historical figures and the economic and political terrain in which they lived out their lives is the lively intellect of the writer.

The book is a timely corrective of what the author describes as the "heavy structuralism" of the historiography of race and class in Southern Africa. She has provided ample room for the individual historical actors who are the main concern of the narrative without neglecting objective material and historical conditions.

Although the main part of the book was conceived as three separate essays, a remarkable degree of narrative continuity and cohesion is achieved and enhanced in the concluding chapter which

conflates past and present. Without doubt, this superb little book would have been more remarkable if Shula Marks had taken the intellectual trouble to articulate more clearly rather than insinuate the nature and meanings of dependence.

With its well annotated and useful notes, index and photographs, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* will remain of immense interest and value to both scholars and general readers alike. After reading it, one is left with the distinct impression that the book could have been longer — an inspiring beginning to a future historical trilogy.

N. Chabani Manganyi

Mabangalala: The rise of Right wing vigilantes in South Africa

Nicholas Haysom

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Conscientious Objectors under Renewed Attack

Peter Moll

Plans are under way to further tighten the already stringent rules governing conscientious objection. A Defence standing committee has been asked to deliberate:

* redefining "religious convictions" as (basically) theistic convictions so as to exclude people like Buddhists.

* making the length of community service a mandatory six years, i.e. take away the discretion of a judge to award a period shorter than six years.

* similarly making the length of a prison sentence for military refusal a mandatory six years, and

Mabangalala is essentially a report that was drawn up in response to an urgent request from the National Committee against Removals, the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) and the Black Sash. The report is based on affidavits and statements, reports and interviews.

The report traces the rapid escalation of violence that began in South Africa in September 1984 and culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency in August 1985. During this time and subsequently, the official and other media have given a great deal of attention to what is described as 'black-on-black' violence which is a convenient label that is often used to obscure the emergence of extra-legal violence by right-wing vigilantes. As the author points out:

By referring to all conflict in which both parties are black, as black-on-black conflict, the links and relationships between conflicting parties and apartheid structures were buried.

The book sets out to describe and document the emergence of vigilante groups in 1985. Its primary purpose being to expose the nature of this form of terror. *Mabangalala* is essential reading for anyone who is genuinely interested in the nature of the violent struggle in South Africa. The first edition has already been sold out and a second, updated edition will now have to be prepared.

Michael Rice

* making these mandatory rules retroactive thereby considerably lengthening the periods of service or sentences several men are currently doing. In the "Memorandum on the Objects of the Defence Amendment Bill, 1986" it is stated that the Board for Religious Objection "supports the amendments contemplated because of the necessity thereof".

These legislative plans emerged after three court cases. The first was that of one Hartmann, a Buddhist, who applied to the Board of Religious Objection on grounds of being a religious pacifist. Buddhists do not believe in the existence of a supreme being, viz. they are

not theistic in the Western Judaeo-Christian-Islamic sense. Nevertheless the Board referred his case to the Supreme Court which accepted his petition that he was religious and pacifist, and al-

“... the problem that to convince narrow-minded people that you adhere to a set of beliefs that they have defined narrowly, one has to become (or convey the impression of being) as narrow-minded as one's interlocutors”

lowed him to do alternative service. In response the legislators set about to tighten the law so as to exclude people like Hartmann.

In another court case, a Jehovah's Witness who had been sentenced to a period of six years' imprisonment for disobeying a call-up had his sentence reduced to three years by a judge. In the third court case, a Jehovah's Witness had his period of community service reduced from six years to four years. The argument of the Transvaal judge was that the law requires a man to do 1½ times the normal period of military service. If the period of military service is two years' basic plus two years' camps, then the community service period (or the prison sentence) is six years. But, pointed out the judge, most conscripts do far less than the full period of two years plus two. They do more like two years' basics plus six months' worth of camps, and so the period of community service (or the sentence) should be reduced accordingly.

It was these three cases which led to the drafting of the Defence Amendment Bill 1986 which the standing committee was asked to consider.

To date the standing committee has discussed only the definition of “religious” and decided against the proposed change, on the grounds, for example, that it would be too difficult to define a supreme being, giving Hartmann and others a temporary respite. Parliament was adjourned before the committee could approve the change to

sentences and periods of service of mandatory length, but the committee is expected to meet in December or January and upon its approval the rest of the proposals will be tabled before Parliament. Conscientious objectors, the churches and other interested bodies have therefore only a few months in which to mobilize against these retrogressive steps.

Another objector turned down

Recently a Christian pacifist objector in Durban, Don Edwards, went before the Board of Religious Objection and after two lengthy examinations (four hours each) his application for community service was refused. Apparently the Board was not convinced of his Christian convictions — even though the man's priest was flown in to Bloemfontein to testify on his behalf.

Board members pro-military

This case highlights once again the conviction of this journal and of several church denominations at the time of the passing of the relevant Act in 1983 that the legislation is fundamentally flawed. It requires the Board which is composed of mere humans — including several military people and chaplains at that — to decide on a man's conscience. None of the people who sit on the Board are conscientious objectors. The judge, one trusts, is impartial. However, the military men and chaplains on the Board can

“It is inconceivable that a man with thirty years' military service behind him could ever comprehend the convictions of a conscientious objector, much less come to a reasoned judgement as to how sincere the objector is.”

confidently be predicted to hold strongly pro-military opinions. It is inconceivable that a man with thirty years' military service behind him could even comprehend the convictions of a conscientious objector, much less come to a reasoned judgement as to how sincere the objector is.

Methodology

One might well pose the question given that most of the members of the Board (excluding the president who is a judge) are pro-military, what kind of methodology would they employ when considering an application by a conscientious objector?

Consider, for example, what would happen if (as is possible) there is a clear demarcation in their minds between “political” beliefs and “religious” beliefs. They might then look through the objector's application, and as long as it sounds religious, pass it, but if it starts to sound “political” (read leftist or liberal, not right-wing!), fail it.

Religion versus politics

One might even ask whether their method is not a “key-word search”, i.e. pick out the political-sounding words if there is more than a certain proportion of them then it must surely follow that the man is not really religious because he is political, for religion and politics are necessarily mutually exclusive.

Of course it is impossible for this journal to find out at short notice what is the procedure used, but the evidence seems to point in this direction. The statement laid before the Board by Don Edwards was transparently religious and pacifist all the way through. In addition, Edwards had the misfortune to be honest and open about his beliefs, so he also explained in his statement what his political convictions were. This provoked a storm of protest from the Board which in the end decided he was not a genuine religious pacifist.

One suspects that if Edwards had been sly he would have hidden the fact that he is a thinking, broad-minded intellectual who notices that South Africa is going through a revolution (in fact Edwards is an engineer and runs a journal part-time). He would have been clever to try to convince the Board that he holds no strong political convictions knowing that they would seize on these and deem him insincere. Edwards, like many other conscientious objectors faces the problem that to convince narrow-minded people that you adhere to a set of beliefs that they have defined narrowly, one has to become (or convey the impression of being) as narrow-minded as one's interlocutors.

The impossible

This is not the only problem with the Board. The Board is required to do the impossible. How can any person ever truly know the motives of another? In terms of the very Christian theology which the chaplains espouse “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately wicked; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9) Every person's motive

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