



OBJECTOR

Newsletter of the Western Cape Conscientious Objector Support Group

No.3 September 1983

Civic Action teacher objects

Paul Dobson has become the first objector to emerge from within the ranks of the SADF. His stand marks an important development in the progress of the growing concern about militarism in South Africa. Paul is a graduate of the University of Natal, Durban and of UCT where he completed his honours in 1981. He entered the SADF in July 1982 in the Personnel Services division. In October 1982 he was transferred to the Civic Action Programme of the Natal Command. In February 1983 he began teaching at Impumelelo High School, St Francis Mission at Mahlabatini, in Kwazulu. While many people may view 'Civic Action' as a soft option, it was here that things came to a head for Paul. In the following interview, given before his arrest, Paul describes the events leading up to his expulsion from Impumelelo in September and his decision to object.



Paul Dobson

Q: WHY WERE YOU EXPELLED?

A: The official reason was that there had been a report about me to the Colonel, Van Vuren, and he was "not happy", he said that my "military discipline was not up to standard".

The complaint stemmed from a Lance Corporal from Oudtshoorn. I had been distributing a progressive children's magazine called Molo Songololo. The standard 6's loved it. There were more copies in my room and when van Oudtshoorn saw them he freaked out. Ironically, the stories which were most objected to were: - a letter in Afrikaans from a kid in Cape Town. They had no day-care centre and it said: 'ons sal veg vir 'n creche'. The complaint was that although veg means 'struggle', the kids would interpret it as 'fight'.

- Secondly, an article about a woman who was concerned about kids going on Youth Camps.

I was reported last Tuesday (30 August) and today someone from Army HQ (a completely different section) with a degree was transferred to Civic Action. I was told to report to Natal Command tomorrow.

Q: WHAT DID YOU FEEL ABOUT TEACHING?

A: The school was very conservative.

I taught Butulezi's son and daughter and the children of Cabinet Ministers. It was a heavy Inkatha area. The kids often wore uniforms or parts of uniforms. They regard the army as romantic - 'How many have you shot, sir?', that kind of thing. But the kids also saw past the uniform to a like or dislike of the teacher. When I told the matrics I was leaving, they wanted to organise a delegation, demanding I stayed.

Teaching was very rewarding. It was the first time they'd had a matric class. I really enjoyed the work. I loved it. When I came to the school on 20 February, the former teacher had been recalled because he couldn't teach. I was alone at the school until Colonel 'Fires' van Vuren arrived.

What the army doesn't realise is that I was doing good work for them by default. The kids liked me, I loved the work; even if I hated the army I was doing exactly what the army wanted, gaining their confidence and trust.

Q: HOW DID YOU REACH A DECISION TO OBJECT?

A: I had decided long ago that I wouldn't go to camps. But because I had a non-combatant job I was able to avoid the conflict within me. It was able to

remain a convenient non-issue. When my teaching job was terminated and the possibility of conflict about camps remained still, I decided to bring the conflict forward. I made my decision when I knew I was being kicked out of the school.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR ATTITUDE TO THE MILITARY?

A: At school I had a sense of unformulated dissatisfaction with events in society. At university it developed into an awareness of political inequalities in South African society, but I remained fairly uninvolved.

Entering the army was a cop-out decision, an individualistic decision based on the desire not to leave the country. My decision to enter the army was based on prospects I envisaged afterwards.

Although I was a non-combatant, this is not justifiable, as I remain identified with and participatory in the oppressive role of the SADF.

Conscription: SADF's Achilles heel

Paul Dobson has objected to military service after serving 14 months of his compulsory two years national service. After having served in a non-combatant capacity as part of the "Civic Action Programme" of the SADF, Paul has decided that the effects of what he was doing is just as bad as if he was directly engaged in military combat.

In fact, he was involved in military combat. As the chiefs of the SADF increasingly emphasise 'combat' is not only on the battle front. The "hearts and minds" campaign is just as much a military effort as active combat. Paul realised that to go into black areas like Zululand, in uniform and rifle at the ready, under the guise of a teacher or health worker, meant that he was being used to carry out ideological assaults for the Defence Force, just as combat soldiers carry out physical assaults.

In his statement of his reasons for taking this step, Paul spelt out clearly why he was convinced he could no longer continue to serve in the SADF:

- * South Africa's policy of illegal occupation of Namibia;
- * The South African government is itself a minority regime that does not represent the wishes and aspirations of the majority, and the chiefs of the SADF have sworn to support and protect this government;
- * The SADF has undertaken overt and covert aggressive action against neighbouring states such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

The facts as seen by most countries and people in the world support Paul. It is only in South African that the press and

other media is consistently obliged to put forward a false version of the SADF's involvement in Namibia, other neighbouring countries and in South Africa itself. The presence of an effective clamp on the independent gathering of information through the Defence Act, Key Points Act and other legislation, makes the SADF and the Government the only source of "information", most of which is in reality mis-information.

Despite all the difficulties, when faced with the realities of rendering service in the SADF, Paul realised that he was supporting morally indefensible policies. The policies and practises of the Nationalist governments over more than thirty years are themselves the prime source of conflict and violence in Southern Africa. Faced with this reality he decided to object to rendering further service.

What is the significance of the emergence of objectors like Paul, within the SADF itself? The bulk of the manpower of the SADF is recruited through compulsory conscription. Because conscription affects all whites it also inevitably includes an increasing number of those who have found out some of the truth about the policies and actions of the South African government and the SADF.

Before entering the SADF Paul had been an Honours student at the University of Cape Town. Many like Paul are now entering the SADF carrying with them not the official version of events, but an independent knowledge and opinion about the facts of conflict in South and Southern Africa.

Increasingly thousands of matriculants postpone their military service for study in universities and technicons. In this period young people get a chance to emerge from school, where they mostly

receive ready made opinions passed off as 'facts', and begin to form their own opinions. Despite the State's best effort to keep the truth and the facts away from us, other sources of information are available. As the weight of evidence against the policies of the present government and the SADF mounts up, the question inevitably poses itself: Is it right to be conscripted into such a force in defence of these policies?

There is an increasing group of people liable for conscription on whom the SADF cannot rely. The armed force has already begun to loose the battle for the "hearts and minds" of at least some of its own conscripts! This is the significance of Paul's stand. It exposes the deep weaknesses of conscription. The SADF is unable to consistently present itself as a national defence force, representing the interests of the South African nation. It is obvious to many people that it represents the interests of the present rulers of South Africa.

Increasingly students and others are questioning the necessity for conscription. By voicing his objection from within the SADF, Paul has shown that these doubts cannot be suppressed. He has challenged the rest of us to think deeply about the issue of conscription into the SADF and the moral, legal and political consequences of this.

The new legislation on alternative service and conscientious objection to military service becoming operative in October this year, is intended to silence those who oppose the present role of the SADF. Despite the harsh penalties imposed by the new legislation, when confronted by the realities of militarism, many people will still find it impossible to remain silent.

anti-conscription campaign launched

The Transvaal National Party unanimously passed a resolution at their annual Congress last month, calling on the government to implement immediately the extension of conscriptions to coloureds and Indians. Speaking to the motion, defence minister Magnus Malan said legislation to this effect would be high on the government's agenda when parliament convened next year.

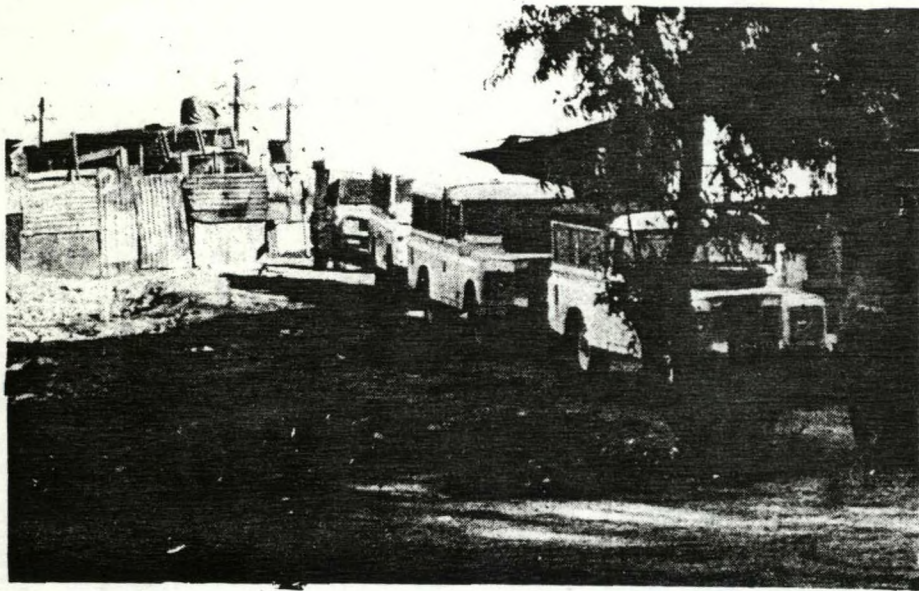
This announcement indicates the importance of the conscription issue, for soon another 3 1/2 million South Africans will be added to the number who are already burdened with compulsory national service.

Universal conscription was only introduced for whites in 1967. Then, the length of service was nine months. Today, all white males serve two years national service, a further two years in camps (spread over 12 years), and finally 12 days a year until the age of 55 (the "Dad's Army" period).

As conscription for whites has been extended, so, too, blacks have increasingly been drawn into the SADF, and into the various homeland units. Unemployment and economic hardship have been major reasons for the rapid increase. By 1982, 40 percent of the forces in the operational area were black, most having been conscripted by the South West African Territorial Force.

As conscription has increased, so a growing number of people have called for acceptable forms of alternative service. The Conscientious Objector Support Group have been at the forefront in voicing this demand. But the government has refused to concede. Instead, in an act passed earlier this year, it dramatically increased the sentence for those who refused to serve in the SADF from a maximum two years, to a mandatory six years. Community service of six years was offered to those who qualify as "religious pacifists".

This viciously repressive law has not deterred the COSGS and others from continuing to oppose vociferously the rampant militarisation of our society. The call o



Pic: TAC A'90

Police violence; 'Symbol of provocation'

Dr Ivan Toms, principal medical officer of Crossroads Empisiliweni Clinic, has decided to refuse to render further military service in the SADF. The events at Crossroads over the past few weeks had a major influence on Ivan's decision.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

In September alone over 1 079 shelters have been demolished in 16 raids on the Crossroads Camp. This has resulted in massive suffering for the people left exposed to the cold and rain. Ivan has described the situation in Crossroads as one of "needless violence being done in the name of the South African Government..."



Truop gets bawled out by superior

SYMBOLISM OF CROSSROADS

Witnessing this violence has made Ivan sure that to serve in the SADF would be to lend support to the structural violence committed by the Government on fellow South Africans. By now the 'problem' of so-called squatters is no longer the main issue for the Government. The heroic perseverance and patience of the people of Crossroads, their defiance, is in fact more worrying to the authorities. Speaking at a Nationalist Party Congress, the Deputy Minister for 'Co-Operation and Development', Dr G De V Morrison, said: "Crossroads is a symbol of provocation and blackmail of the government, and we want to destroy that symbolism at all costs."

REFUSE TO SERVE

In taking his decision to refuse to serve in the SADF, Ivan has shown that the spirit of resistance shown at Crossroads cannot be destroyed by bulldozing Crossroads. For every shack that is demolished the 'symbolism' of Crossroads is ever more permanently established. It is a symbol of the intransigence of the government, its ruthlessness and the lack of democracy in South Africa.

Ivan has informed the Officer commanding Three Medical Services Battalion that his Christian conscience would not allow him to continue serving in the SADF even as a non-combatant medical officer. In an interview Ivan stated: "I'm fully aware that under the new legislation I'm liable to three years in jail but to sit back and remain part of that inhuman system is something my Christian conscience will not allow."

the government to end compulsory conscription is one of the ways opposition to the SADF is being carried forward.

A long term campaign is envisaged, in which a wide range of groups will be drawn in, united in their belief that military conscription should not be compulsory. Such a campaign will relate very directly to the campaign currently being waged against the government's new constitution. Once the new constitution has come into effect and limited political power is extended to coloureds and Indians, they will be called on to defend their "newly-acquired rights". The anti-conscription campaign will then have important implications beyond the confines of the white community.

Anti-conscription committees have already been formed in Durban and Johannesburg, drawing on church, women's, political and other groups. In Cape Town, the CO Support Group has established an anti-conscription sub-committee. A meeting will be held in mid-October, to which a range of organisations have been invited to discuss how the campaign will be taken up.



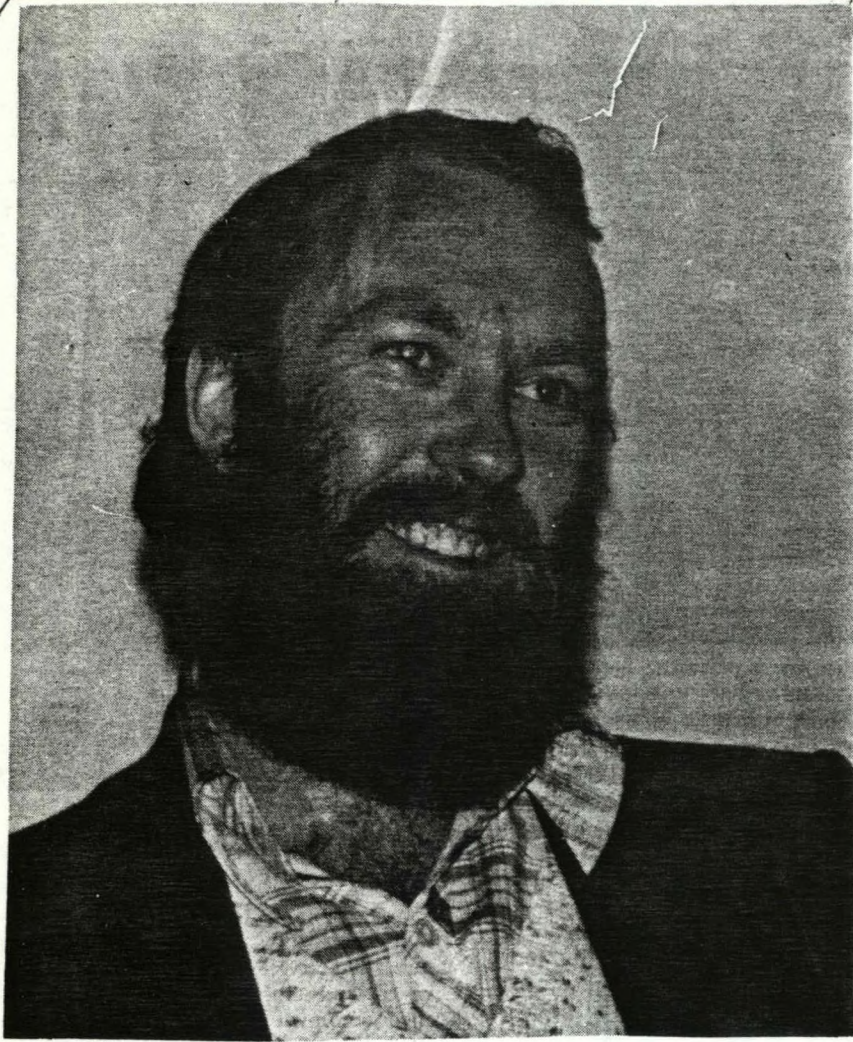
News of Pete Hathorn : Conscientious Objector

Pete has been in Pollsmoor Prison since the beginning of August. He is now doing electricians work which he is enjoying. "We work pretty hard (from digging trenches to clambering around people's roofs wiring houses and fuse boxes) tho' lekker to be learning something practical and to be outside prison" (ie. in the greater prison area).

Pete says the only drawback is that he has no time for studying during the day and is quite tired at night. "Last minute cramming is very difficult on evenings only, particularly when tired," he writes.

Daily routine at Pollsmoor is much the same as at Pretoria Central, although Pete says that his cell is much more pleasant - "Pretty modern, have my own toilet, wash basin and speaker (radio) and a lekker view out over Kaapse Weg."

Pete has six months left to go.



Billy Paddock freed

Billy Paddock, the first objector to refuse to do military service on overtly political grounds, was freed on October 4, after serving 10 months behind bars.

In an interview on his release, Billy said; " If I were called up again, I would still oppose the military.

"I still believe that it was the right decision to go to jail rather than to go into the SADF. Part of my sentence was a dishonourable discharge, so I assume that I won't be called up again. But if I am, I will oppose it again on the same basis.

"The new legislation provides for a maximum of six years imprisonment. While the ten months I spent in prison were very bad, on the whole I think I could cope with six years."

This maximum sentence is out of proportion, he said, murderers and rapists often get less. The imposition of drastic penalties was indicative that conscientious objection was being seen by the state in a serious light, and that the sentence was intended as a deterrent, he said.

With the implementation of the new constitution it was inevitable that conscription would be extended to so called 'coloureds' and 'Indians', he said and he thought that there would be resistance from these groups.

Billy's reasons for refusing to fight stemmed from his religious and political beliefs. He saw the SADF as an instrument in defending apartheid and exploitation in South Africa.

"I believe I have a contribution to make in this country in bringing it to a free and democratic state. I am not prepared to collaborate with the forces of apartheid and exploitation in any way whatsoever, so my only option is to resist."

He said joining the army as a non-combatant was not an option for him, because by doing so he would be supporting the military machinery - "It would be the same as saying "yes" to the new constitution, which would mean acceptance of a system which provided no meaningful change".

The only option he could take with a clear conscience was to go to jail. This he found dehumanising and de-sensitising.

"One of the worst things was feeling so totally isolated and out of touch with reality in the outside world. But there also good experiences - the fact that I could use the time creatively to re-evaluate myself and my commitment to the country. I just feel that much stronger, more determined and more together now", he said.

The C.O. Support Group gives moral and material support to objectors, and publicises their stands. If any readers would like to discuss problems regarding their military service with members of the C.O. Support Group, they can contact us : c/o Rev Doug Bax, Congregational Church, Belmont Road, Rondebosch, OR C.O. Support Group, P O Box 68, Newlands.

In addition, if anyone would like COSG to give a talk or workshop on issues relating to militarisation and conscientious objection, please contact us, c/o P O Box 68, Newlands.

Finally, we would value any comments on, or criticisms of OBJECTOR, as well as advice or ideas for articles. We would also welcome any letters to OBJECTOR.

PEACE LIBRARY and RESOURCE CENTRE

A collection of books and other resources relating to War, Peace and Non-violent Action are housed at the Rondebosch Congregational Church, Belmont Road, Rondebosch

The library is open in the mornings or by special arrangement. Contacts: Steve (65-4793) or Debora (66-6635)

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a collection held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.