

ms of **AGGRESSION**

*gime attacked Maputo, capital of Mozambique,
Mozambican citizens.*



STOP REPRESSION

On June 6th, 1983, 73-year-old trade unionist Oscar Mpetha was found guilty and sentenced under the Terrorism Act. SECHABA reprints an article by R. Matojo, which first appeared in DAWN, the journal of Umkhonto We Sizwe.

Comrade Oscar Mpetha was born at Mount Fletcher, Transkei in 1909. His parents, at great sacrifice, sent him to Adams College in Natal. During the hungry thirties he came to Cape Town and worked as a waiter, docker, hospital orderly and road worker. Whilst in Cape Town he attended classes to learn

Afrikaans, and at the same time taught Xhosa to his Afrikaans tutors.

In 1945 the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU) organisers went to Vredenburg, Veldrift, Laaiplek and Berg River Mouth hamlets to organise the workers in the newly opened fish canning and processing factories. At that time the FCWU had already organised the workers on the Namaqualand coast, Saldanha Bay, St Helena Bay and Pater-noster. The Union had won higher wages, better working conditions, housing, clinics and schools, by the militancy and unity of the workers. When the FCWU organisers vis-



INCREDIBLY BRAVE MEN

Below is an extract from a letter written by the late Comrade Bram Fischer, who was leading defence counsel in the Rivonia trial. The letter is dated 24th June, 1964, and was addressed to a young comrade in exile.

"I must tell you of one important event. Some days before the end of the argument in court, Govan, Walter and Nelson came to an early morning consultation to tell us of a decision they had taken with regard to the sentence if it turned out to be capital punishment. They had made up their minds that in that event there was to be no appeal. Their line was that, should a death sentence be passed upon them, the political campaign around such a sentence should not be hampered by any appeal for mercy ... or by raising any vain hopes ... We lawyers were staggered at first, but soon realised the decision was politically unassailable. But I tell you the story not because of its political wisdom. I want you to know to what incredibly brave men you and others will have to be successors."

OF TRADE UNIONISTS

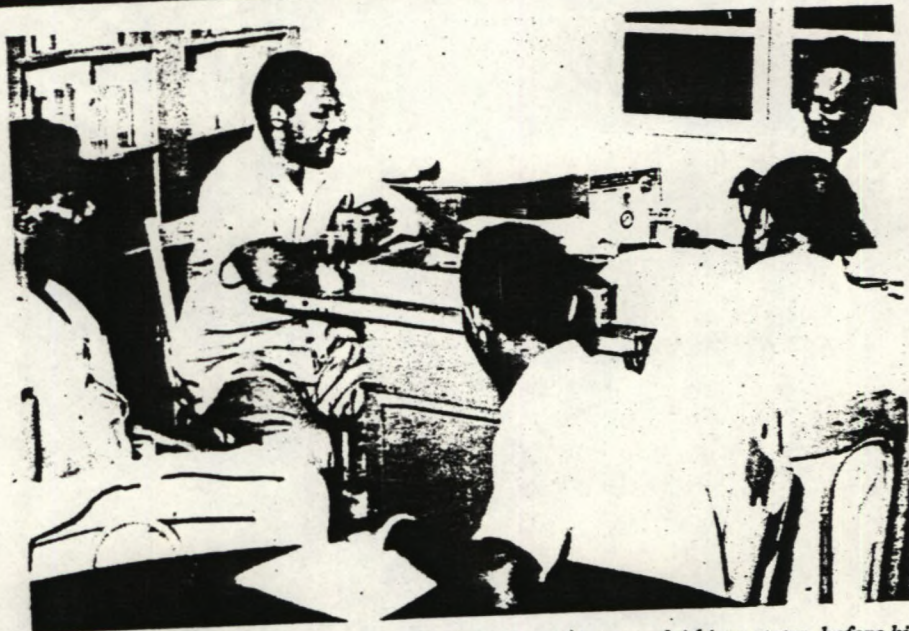
ited Laaiplek during the long week-end in October, most of the men workers had gone to a football game in Paarl. The union organisers went from house to house, talking to women workers and housewives; left leaflets with application forms and the union constitution, and urged them to have a meeting and resolve to join the union.

About two weeks later, the FCWU head office received a letter in response to the union's appeal, expressing the desire of the workers to join the FCWU. This letter was signed on behalf of the workers by Oscar Mpetha, who asked for more application

forms.

The union not only sent application forms, but sent him money to attend the next NEC meeting. At this meeting a full discussion took place on conditions in the factories and ways and means of organising the unorganised workers. The Union grew. Branches of the Union were established, with functioning factory committees. Comrade Oscar Mpetha was elected branch secretary at Laaiplek.

There were many complaints in the factories, such as contravention of the Factories Act of 1941, and Wage Determination. Not



This photograph of Nelson Mandela was taken during his tour of African states, before his return to South Africa and his subsequent imprisonment.

only did the Union demand that these complaints should be corrected, but demanded higher wages and better working and living conditions. In January 1947, the employers felt the workers' restlessness and called in the Department of Labour inspectors. The employers called in Comrade Oscar and the factory committee to meet the inspectors.

Employee

The FCWU, though registered, had defied the definition of employee in the 1927-37 Act that AFRICANS ARE NOT EMPLOYEES., it was one Union of all workers irrespective of race. The then Smuts government had appeased the Nationalist Party; it brutally shot down African miners during the historic African miners' strike in August 1946. It had exposed itself during this strike as the enemy of African workers. It arrested and prosecuted the central executive members of the Communist Party, and members of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions who led the African miners' strike. The Smuts government generally began to harass the people's organisations - the ANC, Indian Congress and progressive trade unions. It demanded that the FCWU should abide by the Industrial Conciliation Act. The Union refused, and the Department of Labour threatened to deregister the Union and to turn down all the Union's applications for Conciliation Boards. The FCWU has never had an Industrial Council. The Union had forced employers by united strike action to sign with the Union private (gentlemen's) agreements.

For six to seven months the Union debated the threat by the Department of Labour at factory, branch and at the National Executive Committee meetings and quarterly branch delegates' conferences. Finally, at a Branch Delegates' Conference held on 27th November, the decision was taken to establish the African Food and Canning Workers' Union, and that the two unions were to work in complete unison in their relentless struggle against the exploiters, for higher wages and better working and living conditions. It was a bitter decision to

take, but the membership regarded this as a necessary step to retain the unity of the workers. In fact, Ray Alexander, the General Secretary of the FCWU, was elected also the General Secretary of the A-FCWU.

Following the National Party victory in 1948, the oppressed and exploited black people faced a vicious government bent on suppressing the trade unions, particularly the African trade unions, and the people's organisations fighting for democratic rights. The Nationalist regime introduced the Suppression of Communism Act and a host of other oppressive legislation.

At the Annual Conference of the unions in 1950, the conference agreed to empower the incoming NECs to select and train new office bearers in the event of the regime's banning Ray Alexander and others from the Union leadership. Comrade Oscar Mpetha and Lena Avontuur were chosen to work in the HQ. On the 1st of September 1950 both came for training in the HQ. In 1951, Oscar Mpetha was elected as a paid general secretary of the A-FCWU, with Ray Alexander as the Honorary General Secretary. By September 1953, no less than 12 leaders of the FCWU were banned from holding office, or in any way assisting in the work of the union. Among those banned were S V Reddy (late Durban branch secretary), Betty du Toit (Johannesburg branch secretary), Sarah Wentzel (Worcester), general secretary Ray Alexander and other branch leaders.

The union carried on with new officials. By then Comrade Oscar was the most experienced of them all, and a great deal of responsibility rested on him.

ANC

He was elected President of the Cape Western Province ANC in 1959. He was detained in April 1960, banned and forced to give up his trade union work. He then opened a laundry depot.

In 1976 and 1977, during the Cillie Commission of Enquiry on Soweto, and after the death by torture of Comrade Elijah Loza, Chairman of SACTU's Cape Town



Oscar Mpetha (standing) is seen here in 1952, when he was General Secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers' Union. With him (from left to right) are Bettie du Toit, Ray Alexander, Maria Williams and David Jaantjies.

Committee, he came forward. Not only did he make an indictment against the regime to the Commission on the death of Elijah Loza, but demanded to investigate its cause.

In 1978 the FCWU/A-FCWU asked him to return to the Union as national organiser. The people needed his leadership, and he came. He participated in 1979 in leading the Fatti's and Moni's strike. The strike, which introduced new forms of struggle, gained wide national and international support, combined with a successful boycott of all Fatti's and Moni's products. This strike was followed by other successful militant strikes led by the two unions, with Comrade Oscar in the leadership.

The people's militant mood was expressed in the struggle against rent increases, and in 1980 there was a successful boycott of the city tramway buses in Cape Town. Oscar was Chairman of the Nyanga Residents' Association, which led the struggle.

On the 11th August 1980, fire was set to some vehicles by a group of protesters, injuring two whites, who later died.

On the 13th August, Oscar issued a statement to the press in which he condemned the role of the police in the unrest. He was detained, together with 18 young African freedom fighters. He was held incommunicado in Pollsmoor dungeon, the place where

Comrade Elijah Loza died, and where today our great leaders like Comrades Mandela, Sisulu and the others are incarcerated. In March 1981 they were charged in the Cape Town Supreme Court on two counts of murder and terrorism.

Whilst in prison, Comrade Mpetha has had two main illnesses: diabetes, and he has had to have an operation to remove a prostate gland. He is 73 years old and his life is in danger. The regime knows this. The union lawyers have asked the attorney-general seven times to let Comrade Oscar out on bail. This request has been supported by trade unions, and community, church and women's organisations, and international pleas have come from the World Federation of Trade Unions, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the International Labour Organisation. He has now been in gaol for two and a half years and has not been found guilty of any crime. The regime wants him dead of 'natural causes' and 'old age.'

The oppressed and exploited people want and need Comrade Oscar alive. He is one of our great leaders of the struggle in our country, despite all the government's attempts to break him over the past 38 years - by banning orders, detentions and trials. They have not succeeded to break his fighting spirit. He remains undaunted, defying the brutal white racist regime.

We urge our people at home and our friends abroad to renew support for the immediate release of Comrade Oscar and the 18 others, and to give support to all their families. Let the accused and their families know that they have friends at home and abroad!

PRETORIA'S

On the few occasions when commissions have produced reports which could come up with no other conclusion than that government policies were untenable, or come up with conclusions out of line with policy or with recommendations too extreme, they were simply put on the shelf and forgotten.

Besides giving justification to planned policy changes, inquiries also serve as a deceptive device aimed at appeasing critics. When criticism becomes too loud, the government can call for patience until the commission has completed its work. In this way, a commission of inquiry is often used as a substitute for genuine change. By pointing out that 'something is being done' the regime can actually postpone change, and in the interim step up repression, and root out the most vociferous critics. If this requires a long period of time, submission of the report is delayed until the government decides that the time is right - for carrying out its recommendations, or when its recommendations have become irrelevant.

Since 1948 the racist government has called many commissions of inquiry. A number of these were cast aside when they came up with suggestions which did not correspond to the Nationalists' preconceived ideas. There are too many of these to consider here, so the emphasis will be on the period from 1976.

The apartheid regime responds to crises in one of two ways: it steps up repression or it institutes a commission of inquiry. Over the years the Nationalist government has launched dozens of commissions of inquiry, always in response to a crisis and always to strengthen their grip on power; never to benefit those who are being inquired into.

COMMISSIONS OF ENQUIRY

Devices to Support Pretoria's Policies

The crises which the apartheid government responds to with the announcement of a commission of inquiry are not only social crises, such as the Soweto uprising of 1976, but crises of policy. From the moment the Nationalists came to power in 1948, the architects of apartheid have used inquiries to justify their actions. The commissions are used to give new policy or change in policy a 'scientific' legitimisation — to make it seem that new legislation is justified in terms of the findings of thorough research by a group of erudite and respectable professors.

It is doubtful whether in fact any commission has ever been responsible for any major policy shift. The appointment of a commission by the government at a particular time, and the issuing to it of a brief, is sufficient to indicate what sort of result is expected. Major changes in policy are contemplated at much higher levels, and usually prior to the appointment of the commission anyway. The appointment of a commission, however, is often a pointer that the government is considering new legislation. The findings and recommendations of inquiries are for the most part highly predictable, if consideration is taken of the shortcomings of existing policy, and the events leading up to the appointment of the commission.

Of course, commissions are not policy-making bodies. They can at most influence the policy-makers. But looking at the people who are appointed to commissions it is clear that they are appointed because they know what to produce. Every Pretoria commission of enquiry is no more than a 'think tank' composed of intellectual supporters. Even on the very few occasions when black mem-

bers have been appointed, they have been the most extreme sell-outs, who are paid handsomely not to come up with anything too radical.

Cillie Commission

From 1976 when apartheid entered its most severe and final phase of generalised crisis, the number of commissions appointed has increased drastically, as the regime seeks justification for zigzags in policy in an effort to find a way out.

Just one day after the police massacre of school students in Soweto on 16 June 1976, the government announced the appointment of a one-man commission to investigate the 'disturbances.' The person appointed was the Judge President of the Transvaal, Justice Cillie. Demands by the Soweto Parents' Association for the inclusion in the commission of one or two people nominated by Soweto parents were contemptuously rejected by the government, which declared that the commission would limit the inquiry to the 'riots' and would not include an in-depth inquiry into socio-economic factors.

When the uprisings spread to all corners of the country, the scope of the commission broadened somewhat. The commission sat in all the major centres, and ended its hearings on 30th June 1977. The report was not presented to parliament till 21st January 1980.

Blame for the uprisings was not attributed to apartheid as such, but was placed at the feet of officials and police, for failing to foresee the eruption. Because of this, the police were unaware of 'preparations' for the 'riots' and were therefore themselves not

properly prepared to control the 'rioters.' It was the duty of the police to maintain 'law and order,' but, due to their unpreparedness, they overresponded to the initial events. The police were not found to be responsible for the continuation of the 'riots' — this was the doing of 'agitators.' The police were acquitted of all charges of brutality, and of shooting indiscriminately. Where this did happen, it was attributed to individual 'errors of judgment' and 'overreaction.'

Most of the recommendations implied by the report were carried out long before it appeared. These related to improvement of police riot-control capabilities. The report was used to back up measures already taken.

Theron and Viljoen Commissions.

A number of politically significant reports were tabled by commissions in 1976. The most important of these were the reports of the Theron Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the 'coloured' population group, and the Viljoen Commission of inquiry into the penal system.

The Theron report is possibly the classic example of a report which came up with recommendations too far-reaching for its time, and which consequently ended up in Pretoria wastepaper baskets. Amongst its most important recommendations was a call for the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act and/or the clause which prohibits intercourse between whites and others.

The Viljoen Commission's report resulted in a more rigorous Criminal Procedure Act being passed, but did little if anything by way of penal reform. It recommended that the pass laws should be 'depenalised' — meaning that offenders should be dealt with administratively rather than be sent to prison. Pass law convictions are still the main cause of prison overcrowding.

Wiehahn, Riekert and De Kock

1977 saw the appointment of a spate of commissions. The most important of these were the Wiehahn Commission to investigate legis-



ert Commission to inquire into all other legislation relating to the utilisation of manpower, the De Kock Commission into monetary policy and a Cabinet Committee to investigate the position of urban Africans.

The Wiehahn Commission tabled its report in seven stages from 1977 to 1982. The recommendations made by this commission have been followed by a number of 'changes' in the labour and trade union fields. While the regime likes to pretend that these 'changes' followed directly from the Commission's recommendations, they were introduced as a result of working class struggles, especially from the early 1970s. In no way have the fundamental structures of the apartheid cheap labour system been altered — the migrant labour system remains intact, the pass laws remain in force, and the bantustan programme is going ahead at full pace.

The one-man Riekert Commission's report was also hailed by supporters of the racist regime as a 'breakthrough' and a move away from rigid apartheid traditions. As with the Wiehahn report, the laws that were changed as a result of the Commission's recommendations were designed chiefly to benefit employers, to streamline the apartheid-capitalist administrative apparatus which controls the movement and status of black labour. No African workers are better off under the new legislation, which has placed much stiffer controls on migrant workers, and others living outside the 'white urban areas.'

Erasmus

In 1978 only one commission of political importance was appointed. This was the Erasmus Commission of Inquiry into malpractices, which investigated unauthorised expenditure by the Department of Information. The 'Information scandal' was instrumental in deepening rifts in the Nationalist ranks, but most of the exposure were made by investigative journalists rather than by the Commission.

A Year of Commissions

1979 saw the appointment of more commissions than in any previous year. The Viljoen Committee was appointed to inquire into higher education for Africans in 'white areas.' Nothing much was heard of the enquiry after a number of organisations had made contributions, and it appears to have been superseded by the 1981 De Lange Committee (Human Sciences Research Council) report on education. Clearly, the commissioning of these committees was brought about by the severe shortage of trained labour in industry, and by the school boycotts up to 1980.

After two bantustan areas had been declared 'independent,' puppet groups in other areas were clamouring to be given 'independence' too. The Quail Commission was announced to investigate the viability of 'independence' for the Ciskei area, and it produced its report in February 1980.

The commission found that chronic health problems existed in the area, especially malnutrition. There was also a severe housing shortage, overcrowding of land and high unemployment. It found that the majority of people in the area did not favour bantustan 'independence,' but universal adult suffrage in a unitary political system. Overall, it could not recommend 'independence' unless certain (impossible) conditions were met.

Megalomaniac Chief Lennox Sebe ignored the Quail recommendations, held his own referendum in which — miraculously — he recorded a result opposite to the Quail findings, and opted for 'independence' in December 1981.

Also connected with the bantustans, a commission was established in 1979 to inquire into the consolidation of these areas. The commission was called the Central Consolidation Committee (Van der Walt Commission). Its main recommendation was that bantustans should not be viewed as autonomous pieces of land, but as economic regions integrated into the overall economy of the country.

The Schlebusch Commission was set up to look into and report on the introduction of a new constitution for South Africa; the National Manpower Commission (recommended by Wiehahn) to make recommendations on labour matters; and the Du Preez Commission to investigate the Coloured Representative Council's view on constitutional matters. This latter commission, composed of Coloured members, produced a report which, for all intents, rejected totally the constitution being drafted by the apartheid government. It is strange that some of those consulted, who had earlier rejected the new 'white' constitution, have now accepted it.

Two commissions on security-related matters were appointed in late 1979. These were the Rabie Commission on security laws, and the Steyn Commission, reporting on the security forces.

The Rabie report appeared in February 1982, complete with a new Internal Security

Bill in its appendix. This Bill became the new Internal Security Act in July 1982, and is now the major piece of security legislation. It replaces practically all the previously existing security laws, and, instead of limiting the powers of the security police, as some hoped it would, it extended them. Like its predecessors, the Internal Security Act is the regime's response to the stepping up of the revolutionary struggle to overthrow apartheid.

As a result of Rabie, two other new security laws were introduced in 1982. These were the Intimidation Act and the Demonstrations In or Near Court Buildings Prohibition Act. The former was designed to be used against trade unionists and school boycotters, while the latter was aimed at preventing demonstrations in support of political trialists.

The Steyn Commission's report recommended controls over media reporting of 'security' matters. It analysed the imagined external threat to South Africa, and concluded that the freedom of the press was subordinate to the promotion of the national interest - which it implied was apartheid, and assumed had the backing of all the people of South Africa.

Steyn was a clear example of a commission being used by the regime to sell its ideology - in this case, the ideology of the 'total onslaught.' Steyn, pretending to stand above partisan interest, was used to promote the idea that the 'onslaught' was against the interests of everyone in South Africa.

1980 Commissions

The following year, 1980, saw several more commissions getting off the ground. The Hoexter Commission looked into the structure and functioning of the courts, and made several recommendations in 1981 relating to the streamlining of court procedures to overcome the chronic staff shortage in the courts. Again, a plea was made to the commission to 'decriminalise' the pass laws, but since 1981 the number of such convictions has increased dramatically.

Chief Gatsha Buthelezi rejected the recommendations of the Schlebusch Commission on the constitution, and produced his own proposals (Buthelezi Commission). The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) held two inquiries, one into education and one into sport. The Browne Committee of Inquiry into the financing of local authorities, and the Yeld Committee of Inquiry into the establishment of autonomous local authorities in coloured group areas, both produced reports. The Browne Commission commenced an inquiry into the health services. All of these were promoted, because of the crises in their various spheres of reference.

A new Bill, the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill, designed to tighten the pass laws, appeared in 1980. The outcry over its proposals led to its being referred, along with two other bills, to a select committee, the Grosskopf Committee, for further changes.

The Committee reported in May 1981, but details were not made public. It appears that its main proposals have been ignored by the government. Some sources claim that these were, amongst others, the abolition of passes, and their replacement with controls at the place of work and residence.

De Lange, Steyn, Eloff.

In 1981, two major inquiries were launched, while in 1982, no inquiries of relevance were started, although reports were submitted by several which had begun the previous year.

The De Lange Committee (HSRC) report on education in 1981 has yet to receive any practical response from the government, which claims to have accepted the main principles. Most of these principles are nebulous, such as equal educational opportunities for all; easy to agree on, but difficult to implement within the framework of apartheid. The gulf between expenditure on black and white education remains as large as ever.

Another Steyn Commission, this time to investigate the mass media, began its work in 1981. It produced a massive three-volume report in February 1982, along much the same



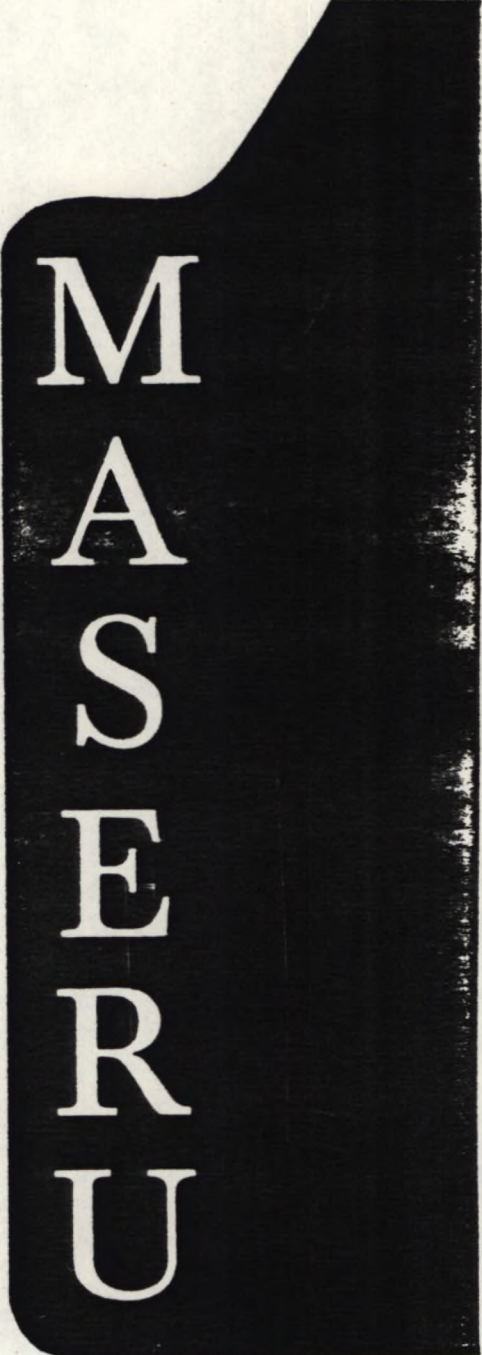
lines as the earlier report. It recommended the establishment of a council to control the enrolment of journalists. The report was strongly condemned by leading newspaper editors, as a threat to press freedom.

Steyn looked at all the imagined threats to South Africa — i.e. the apartheid regime — and considered how the press portrayed these threats. The controls on journalists it proposed are aimed at making it more difficult for them to portray the course of events in any terms other than the official version.

The Eloff Commission of Inquiry, appointed in 1981, began an investigation into the finances of the South African Council of Churches in 1982. While claiming merely to be investigating financial irregularities, this commission was instituted as part of the racist regime's campaign against the SACC, which has shown itself over the past few years to be a staunch opponent of apartheid. The SACC also runs a fund to help pay for the defence in political trials, and prisoners' upkeep, and to assist the families of political prisoners.

Can Pretoria Afford Such Luxuries?

There is no doubt that the apartheid regime will set up more commissions of inquiry in the future, in an attempt to fool South Africans and the world into thinking that it is moving away from hardline apartheid and the use of open repressive measures to eliminate political opposition. However, in future, the regime will have less time to call its phoney commissions into existence, as the forces of national liberation, headed by the ANC, exert increasing revolutionary pressure in the regime. The niceties of having 'scientific authorisation' for actions will fall away, as the apartheid regime will resort to more dictatorial methods of introducing its panic 'reforms.'



*To King Moshoeshoe II, Leabua Jonathon,
and the people of Lesotho.*

*What I am teaching
My white oppressor
In my country
Is his right
To be human like myself.*

*I am teaching him
To be beautiful at heart
To have a heart
As white as mine
To be just, accommodating
In the wide open arms
Of my Freedom Charter.*

*I am teaching
My white oppressor
To sing the song of freedom
From the rule of capital
The way we
Freedom fighters
Do
By dancing in the sun.*

*What I am teaching him
Is to let him see
The beauty and joy of life
The value of human life
Why we love life so much
Why it has taken us
So long to shoot at him*

*What I am teaching
My white oppressor
In my country
Is to let him do things
The way we do
For the love of all
Like Luthuli
The man of peace
Who loved life so much:
'Let my people go!'*

*It is a pity
That to let him
Drink deep
From the spring of life
The fountain of life
To let him regain
His lost humanity
He should
First see his own blood flow
When deep
Down in our hearts
We value human life so high.*

*I don't
Want to turn to him
The other side of my cheek
To be a lamb among wolves
Not my last cloak
Shall I give unto him
No! No! No!
I do not love my enemy.*

— James Pitse

BOOK REVIEW

"War and Conscience in South Africa: The Churches and Conscientious Objection," published by CIIR, 1982, price £2.95.

This book deals with the growing confrontation between many South African churches and the state and its military apparatus. It covers the period between the 1960 Cottesloe Conference and late 1982, when an Anglican seminarian publicly objected to conscription into the white racist army "on the grounds of a commitment to the liberation of South Africa."

Within the context of South Africa's militarisation, it deals largely with those "liberal" denominations, mostly English speaking "from which many black Christians draw their political themes." The increase in the number of black ministers and church officials has forced these denominations to confront the causes of "the humiliating lack of political and human rights experienced by all blacks." Confrontation with the South African Defence Force was inevitable.

However, it was not until 1974 that the South African Council of Churches (SACC) adopted a resolution on selective conscientious objection or war resistance. The resolution did not concern war or violence in general but "the particular context of apartheid." This stemmed from "an analysis of the purpose and consequences" of fighting for the racist South African state.

The state responded to the SACC initiative more harshly than was expected, making it an offence punishable by up to six years' imprisonment to encourage an individual to conscientiously object. Plans were also drawn up to double the size of the Permanent Force over the following four years. However, over the next few years the Methodist, Anglican and Congregational churches all passed resolutions supporting war resistance — albeit not in as strong terms as the original SACC motion — and

took firmer stands against apartheid.

But reactionary elements in the churches remain strong, especially among Defence Force chaplains. In May 1976, black Christians in the SACC urged all churches not to recognise chaplains whom the SADF appointed and paid, and to appoint ministers also to individuals involved in the liberation struggle. However, in 1978, the SADF chaplains declared that "the uniformed chaplain performs the more effective ministry." Such divergences restrict the churches' capacity for progressive action.

This is the situation in which war resisters such as Moll, Steele and Paddock, who oppose conscription into the SADF on political and religious grounds, have acted. They have exposed as heresy the religious basis of the South African 'national security state,' and have forced white youth to examine its role in the SADF.

In answer to a question in Parliament, General Magnus Malan reported that on the 22nd of March 1983, there were 355 men in detention for refusal to undergo training in Citizen Force or commando units.

But the advances in this field are still limited, and serve to show how far the churches must progress before they meet the needs and wishes of the majority of their members. In this regard, the book is too concerned with resolutions and individual statements rather than analysis of the democratic forces within the churches and the barriers that must be overcome.

Despite this shortcoming, and some uneven editing, the book is an encouraging history of an important aspect of recent church-state conflict in South Africa. As the book concludes: "The church cannot and must not seek a 'third way,' reconciling oppressor and oppressed, without removing oppression."

G.C.



SOUTH AFRICA



A
THREAT
TO
WORLD
PEACE



STOP



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