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CONSCRIPTION TO MILITARY SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

PROPOSALS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMME SUPPORTED BY THE CHURCHES.

The Churches in South Africa have over a period of many years, addressed themselves to the question of the conscription of white men into the SADF.

Much work has been done over many years to press for a proper recognition of conscientious objectors. The Defence Amendment Act of 1983 was a disappointment. It established a Board for Religious Objection and limited the recognition of objectors to those who are universal religious pacifists. A tiny minority of people hold to this position.

Only those who are recognised by the Board as being universal religious pacifists on religious grounds are offered alternative service. This has done little to solve the dilemma of conscience many young South Africans experience.

There are conscientious objections to the SADF based on the traditional teaching of the church on a just war. There are conscientious objections to conscription into the SADF on entirely non-religious but moral grounds. Many young men deny that they should be compelled to serve in the armed forces in a cause which is unjust. None of these objections are recognised by the Defence Amendment Act in South Africa.

Many young South Africans are resolving this crisis of conscience by leaving the country before the date of their call-up. This is a self imposed exile which cannot end until the political conflict is resolved. A small minority remain in South Africa to declare their determination to resist conscription and preparedness to sacrifice by spending up to six years in prison as a consequence of their obedience to conscience.

Many objectors are seeking ways in which their commitment to their country and the service of the people of South Africa can be demonstrated. They are prepared to do "national service" but they are not prepared to fight, or to support the armed forces, in what they believe to be an unjust cause. They wish to render genuine service to their country and its people.

These proposals for an alternative service programme supported by the churches arise from the churches' duty and obligation to support those who are holding fast to the dictates of conscience and who are prepared to offer a considerable sacrifice as a consequence, and from the churches' desire to persuade the government that conscription to military service in South Africa is not in accord with christian teaching and must allow for the recognition of conscientious objectors on grounds other than universal religious pacifism.

It must be absolutely clear that these proposals for an alternative service programme supported by the churches do not offer any protection to the conscientious objectors from the sanctions of law. It is not a law avoidance or evasion scheme.

Any young person volunteering to work in the churches programme is not seeking protection from the consequences of his refusal to obey the law. He is seeking to demonstrate his willingness to serve, at considerable cost to himself, knowing that his service in the church cannot protect him from the term of imprisonment that could be imposed on him by the courts. (see Appendix 11)

The programme offers a way in which the church can express its unconditional support for him, and a way in which the church can demonstrate its commitment to the cause of freedom of conscience goes beyond words and resolutions to action which is designed to contribute towards changing the law and to terminating any system of compulsory military service in South Africa.

For those objectors who do not feel able or called upon to face

long terms of imprisonment as a consequence of their refusal and who leave the country, the alternative service programme can offer an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment by giving them the possibility of working in the service of the church in Southern African countries and on South Africa's borders.

Conscientious objectors in South Africa are accused of cowardice and of seeking to enrich themselves by avoiding national service in order to fulfil their own interests. Any person who is prepared to volunteer to work for the church wherever the church chooses to send him, is not seeking to enrich himself financially. It is the churches' duty to enable him to give concrete expression to his commitment. It is the churches' duty to preserve its determination to bring compulsory military service to an end in South Africa.

THE PRACTICAL PROPOSALS

The working group has rejected any idea of any kind of Board to test a person's conscientious objection. We do not believe that anyone would be prepared to offer such a sacrifice of time at pay well below the living wage were he to have ulterior motives of avoidance of conscription. A person seeking to evade for reasons other than conscience will not come to the churches for help.

We suggest the following procedure:

1. The programme should encompass all those who cannot or will not apply to the Board for Religious Objection whether or not they hold any religious belief.
2. The various church denominations will identify those geographical regions and projects where they need person power to carry out programmes as well as needs in secular welfare and community development projects. (E.g. volunteers could be placed in rural schools, hospitals or agricultural projects or they could be asked to work in a township with victims of state repression.)

3. Each denomination will commit itself to raising the money necessary to employ conscientious objectors in such programmes at the normal rates of pay and allowances for objectors doing their community service for the department of Manpower.

4. Each denomination will commit itself to regional co-operation with other churches and will appoint a representative to a regional placement committee. This placement committee will receive applications for service from C.O. volunteers and will, in consultation with the objector, place them in projects of either a denomination or a Regional Council of Churches in the area, or in a secular service organisation operating in the area whose aims and objectives are in accordance with the teachings of the gospel.

5. After the placement has been made the church or organisation responsible for the conscientious objector will continue offer him pastoral support in all ways - prayer, counselling, legal advice, legal defence, prison visiting, concern for his family and friends, etc. The objector will be responsible to the church or organisation concerned, which will direct his work and lay down his conditions of employment according to their normal practice for lay workers.

6. In dealing with those objectors who cannot face the consequences of remaining in South Africa and defying the law, but who want to demonstrate their commitment, the regional placement committees will identify places for the volunteers in the churches in neighbouring countries and make all the necessary arrangements for the objector to be received and put to work in ways serve the interests of the people in the country concerned. (For example, volunteers could be placed at a mission station or in an organisation in an area suffering from destabilisation by South Africa.)

The representatives of churches and secular organisations who met on 31 August in Pretoria, request you to present these proposals to your forthcoming assembly or Synod and to seek acceptance in

principle to the plans for an alternative service programme supported by the churches in Southern Africa to be established.

October 1987

Steering Committee for the alternative service programme supported by the churches.

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ALTERNATIVE SERVICE PROGRAMME

The following are the rates of pay for conscientious objectors being paid by the Department of Manpower in 1986 to those doing community service.

The churches should allow for annual increases in the rates of paid when working on the budget required.

(Note : These rates have been increased by 10%)

A person who is unmarried or married with dependents: R10,38 per day.

An unmarried person: R5,19 per day

Extra allowances for graduates.

After a three year degree	R0,50 per day extra.
After a four year degree	R1,00 per day extra.
After a five year degree	R2,00 per day extra.
After a six year degree	R3,00 per day extra.
Professionals	R8,00 per day extra.

Maximum amount of R250 per month for accomodation is paid on production of proof that the employee is not living in any government provided accomodation.

A transport allowance for travel on public transport is paid to those who live more than 3 km from the place where they work.

An additional subsistence allowance may be granted on application to the Minister of Manpower.

No other perks are allowed. There are no bursary benefits.

Promotion may be given only on merit and not as part of any automatic promotion scheme.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONSCRIPT:

It should be noted that participation in the alternative service programme does not free volunteers from their military duties as imposed by the Defence Act i.e. Two years national military service and a further two years of camps.

If a volunteer reports to the church instead of reporting for his two years national military service or his camp he could face charges for:

1. Failing to report

Penalty: Imprisonment or detention for a period not exceeding 18 months, or a fine not exceeding R600.

2. Refusing to serve

Penalty: Imprisonment for a period one-and-a-half times as long as the total period of service still to be rendered, or for a period of 18 months, whichever is the longer.

Similarly if a volunteer is called up while doing his service in a church or secular organisation and he continues to work in his placement he could face the same charges.

Those volunteers serving in a homeland or in a neighbouring country who have not notified the SADF of their absence from South Africa and who have not received a deferment from the SADF could face similar charges.

Although the protection and backing of the church might hinder the government from pursuing charges this cannot be guaranteed. A conscript volunteering should therefore be prepared and willing to face possible charges.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH:

The church should recognise that by embarking on this programme it could be charged under section 121 C of the Defence Amendment.

Act which states that:

"Any person who uses language or does any act or thing with intent to recommend, encourage, aid, incite, instigate, suggest or otherwise cause any person to refuse or fail to any such service to which such other person is liable or may liable in terms of this Act, shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding R5000 or to imprisonment to a period not exceeding 6 years or both."

or under the State of Emergency Regulations.

Although these possibilities exists it is highly unlikely. To date no-one has been prosecuted under either Section 121 C or the section of the Emergency Regulations which make reference to undermining the Defence Force.

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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