



# OBJECTOR

No.4 November 1983

Newsletter of the Western Cape Conscientious Objector Support Group

## EDITORIAL

This issue sees reports on the highly successful meeting organised by COSG in solidarity with objector Brett Myrdal. An article devoted to the decision to drop charges against Brett also focusses on the implementation of the new legislation.

## KOEVOET ATROCITIES

COSG notes with concern the continuing reports from Namibia of atrocities committed by the paramilitary police unit known as Koevoet. In one recent incident Koevoet, in conjunction with soldiers of the South West African Territorial Force, took a farmer from his kraal after having held him over hot coals, nearly roasting him alive (Cape Times, 8-11-83). This is only one of the more atrocious incidents that have been proved against forces operating under South African command in Namibia. It is precisely because of the perpetration of such atrocities that many people feel they cannot support the conduct of the South African forces in Namibia.

Such feelings were not at all softened by the report that two Koevoet members were fined R30,00 and R60,00 respectively after having been found guilty of common assault following the death in detention of a Kavango man, Mr Kudimu Katanga (Argus, 10-11-83). They had originally been charged with homicide which was reduced to assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm and finally to common assault. The magistrate who imposed these sentences said, "Special methods had to be employed to track down SWAPO insurgents and the court took account that the two policemen acted 'in the heat of the struggle'".

Does the Department of Justice in Namibia agree that the death of a detainee in prison constitutes part of legitimate "special methods" and that people being interrogated are in fact being "tracked down"? Absurdities such as these prove why the vast majority of Namibians have no faith in the South African administration of justice in the territory. They also provide further support for the stand of many objectors that South Africa is fighting an unjust war in Namibia. COSG reaffirms the call for the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia as part of the implementation of a Namibian independence plan.

# SADF BOMBSHELL CHARGES DROPPED



Twenty-four hours before he was due to appear at the Voortrekkerhoogte court martial, conscientious objector Brett Myrdal heard that the charges against him had been dropped.

Three days previously the SADF had announced that charges against all current religious objectors had been dropped, so that they could be re-charged under the new legislation if they again objected. Brett, however, was clearly not a religious objector. Whatever advantages the new system offered to religious objectors were therefore not available to him. The last-minute ruling thus smacks of victimisation of the worst order - an attempt to squash any adverse publicity the SADF might have received during the court martial.

More than that, the dropping of charges seemed to be a vindictive move against Brett, who over the past few months had received standing ovations from thousands of people at a number of public meetings around the country.

But how has the law changed so that the dropping of charges was such a big setback? When Brett and four others com-

mitted offences by failing to report for military service in July this year, the old law was still in force. The maximum sentence was two years in civilian prison or detention barracks. However, the precedent established by the previous few cases suggested that Brett would probably receive a one-year sentence. In addition, he would have received a "dishonourable discharge" from the SADF, making it extremely unlikely that he would ever be called up again.

The new law was hurried through parliament in May this year. It did not come into effect immediately, but was left to the Minister of Defence to decide when it would first apply.

The act attempted to divide religious from non-religious objectors and create divisions amongst religious objectors. Those religious objectors who refuse to render any military service in any armed force have the option of doing "community service" in the public or municipal service. They must notify the Defence Force Board within 30 days of receiving their call-up. The Board, consisting of a judge, three theologians and two SADF representatives, will then establish the applicant's "bona fides" and sentence him to a mandatory period of six years community service (1 and 1/2 times the period of service owed to the SADF).

Those objectors (like Brett) who do not qualify as "religious pacifists" are liable to a sentence of six years in civilian prison - ie. the same sentence given to many rapists and robbers.

There are also many Christian objectors, especially those who believe in the "Just War" theory, who would refuse to participate in the SADF, but would not commit themselves never to fight in any defence force under any circumstances. These objectors, too, would be liable to a six-year sentence.

By dropping the charges against Brett and others, the SADF might just be precipitating the first cases under the new act.





# 400 IN SOLIDARITY

Growing support for conscientious objectors was clearly in evidence when over 350 people attended a Solidarity Night for Conscientious Objector Brett Myrdal On Friday the 11th of November. The event was organised by the CO Support Group, Cape Town.

The focus of the gathering was to express solidarity with Brett and to condemn the devious decision of the SADF to drop charges against him under the old Defence Act.

The meeting began with a report back by those who had accompanied Brett to Pretoria for his court martial. They gave a summary of the main reasons why Brett was refusing to serve in the SADF.

Brett sees CO as the best way in which he can serve all the people of South Africa, in the absence of adequate provision for alternative service.

## BILLY PADDOCK

Billy Paddock who was recently released from Pretoria Central after serving one year's imprisonment for CO (see OBJECTOR, September 1983), expressed his total solidarity with Brett and his opposition to the shifty move of the SADF in withdrawing charges against him. Billy saw the move against Brett as further evidence of the misuse and abuse of the extensive powers now in the hands of the SADF.

The meeting was kept lively by the interspersing of talks and discussion with films, slides and singing. In a discussion of the history of opposition to militarism in South Africa, a theme that emerged clearly was that CO is part of the overall struggle for democracy in South Africa.

## BASIS FOR OBJECTION

While each objector has his own personal perspective and motivation for the refusal to serve, there is an increasingly united voice on the main issues leading to the decision to object. These were summarised as follows:

The war in Namibia and South Africa's continued administration of that territory is illegal and is clearly not desired by the majority of the people living there. The presence of South African troops in Angola only worsens this situation and contributes nothing to the achievement of peace and the settlement of the conflict. The cause of these conflicts lies ultimately in the internal situation in South Africa where the conflict is increasingly becoming a civil war. All the CO's are people who refuse to contribute in any way to the maintenance of this conflict situation and seek to resolve it, by the removal of its causes, the apartheid system in South Africa. These are the basic grounds which are being widely accepted by those who support the CO's.

These views were clearly evidenced in the talk by Dr Ivan Toms, who told the meeting that his witnessing of the actions of Administration Board officials and police in harrasing Crossroads residents had helped him to resolve not to serve in the SADF. He had come to realise that the police and the SADF are both part of a single oppressive machinery aimed at entrenching apartheid and denying black South Africans their rights.

The meeting took place in the shadow of the strong possibility of the extension of conscription of coloureds and indians. Just after the referendum P W Botha announced that conscription would be introduced in "stages" and

some reports have suggested legislation will be passed as early as May next year – before the "new constitution" has even been implemented.

## SUPPORT STATEMENTS

These developments pose new challenges for COSG groups. It was therefore of great significance that representatives and members of the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO), the United Women's Organisation (UWO), the Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO), NUSAS and the United Democratic Front attended the meeting and read statements of support.

The representative of the UWO told the meeting, "The SADF conscripts young white men into its army to defend apartheid. Soon it will not only be white men who will be called on to defend the system. When the government has forced through the new constitution, we expect it to call up coloured and Indian youth to defend the new-look apartheid. We will fight this conscription along with other organisations. By refusing to serve in the SADF, Brett has shown clearly his commitment to a democratic future." She also expressed the UWO's condemnation of the decision to drop charges against Brett.

The representative of CAYCO expressed solidarity with Brett and other objectors and said, "The fate suffered by Brett and others like him will soon become a reality for coloured and Indian youth. The dropping of charges against Brett Myrdal and others are clear acts of victimisation. Our message to Magnus Malan is clear: "We don't want to fight for apartheid."

The meeting closed with a short talk and service by the Reverend Robin Peterson and the singing of the national anthem *Nkosi Sikelel iAfrica*.



# 'WHY I SAY NO'

SPEECH DELIVERED BY BRETT MYRDAL 29 SEPTEMBER 1983 AT NUSAS UCT MASS MEETING

Fellow students, I greet you today in solidarity with all other objectors; with the thousands who have left South Africa rather than serve in the South African Defence Force; in solidarity with Paul Dobson who, after 14 months in the SADF, chose to object and will now join the other conscientious objectors in Pretoria Central.

## EXTENSION OF CONSCRIPTION

Last week I heard a report on Capital Radio covering the Transvaal National Party Congress. A resolution was passed calling for the rapid implementation of the extension of conscription to coloureds and indians. Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, spoke to the resolution.

He explained that the law to extend conscription would, but for shortage of time, have been introduced during the last sitting of Parliament. He said it only remained for the new constitution to be accepted, before the extension of conscription would become fact.

So, as I talk today, introduced as a conscientious objector, I am very conscious of the fact that conscription is fast becoming a reality for a far broader group of South Africans. And it is precisely because of the supposed political rights which are being "given" to the coloured and indian people, that they now face the threat of conscription in defence of the apartheid under which they live.

F W de Klerk, Transvaal Nationalist Party leader, has stated this clearly. I quote: "You can't ask a man to fight for his country if he can't vote. Among the terms of the new dispensation is the guarantee that Coloureds and Indians will get voting rights. It follows that their responsibilities will increase accordingly, which means they will hold obligations to defend these rights."

This is one harsh consequence of the new constitution that we, gathered here as members of NUSAS and the United Democratic Front, reject as we reject all aspects of the government's new deal.

In July, I failed to report to Potchefstroom Medical Services Corps. I was charged at Voortrekkerhoogte and face a Court Marshall there on November 8th. As a conscientious objector, I face a maximum sentence of two years imprisonment.

But I, like thousands of others, had been morally and physically prepared for war. Why then make this choice?

## NATS VS TERRORISTS

I attended a high school in Port Elizabeth. Part of its "liberal" tradition was to train us as officer material for the SADF. The military, in the form of compulsory cadet training, was a part of my life from the age of 13.

Instead of cowboys and Indians, at school we played "nationalists vs terrorists". We drilled with R1's; we were trained to shoot; 600 boys went on parade four times a year for the Eastern Province Command.

Our cadet camp (and I quote from our school year book) "trained us in counter insurgency warfare and attacks on mock terrorist bases".

Then in our last year of school, we all received our first call-up papers. The dilemma then was - varsity or national service? This was the year after Soweto '76 - we had always been told to prepare for the war against an "external communist threat". But it was clear to many of us that conflict existed within South Africa. Many who were opposed to apartheid went in: "to get it done with" - they are still trying to get it done.

They came back, some from the border. Many friends of mine couldn't recognise themselves or come to terms with what they had done.

So I chose to come to university. Here I was exposed to new ideas. Through meetings like these, and the work of organisations on campus, I broadened my understanding of conflict in South Africa and of the role I, myself, played in this.

The question for myself and for all of us was: "What system are we called on to defend?" For me it became clear that it was a system based on the rule of a minority; where unemployment has reached 3 million; where the country is fragmented into homelands; where people from Crossroads and KTC are removed, to face repression of the order that we see in Ciskei at the moment. A country, which calls on its top generals to master-

mind a militarily defensible constitution which it then holds out to the people of the country as democracy.

For me it became immoral to participate in the SADF and defend such an unjust system; immoral to fight against our own people - the youth of Soweto '76 now returning. I could not participate in a war of occupation in Namibia; in cross-border raids; in the suppression of uprisings; and I could not do the work of police in staffing road blocks and resettling people.

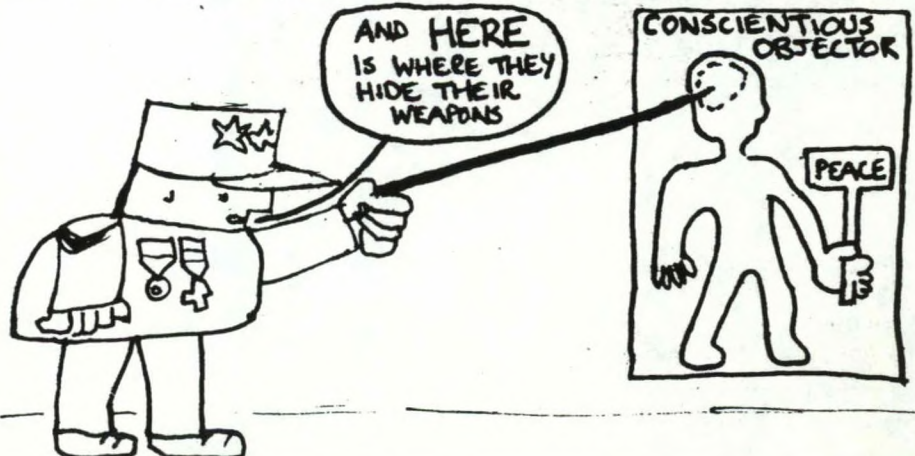
## MY DILEMMA

My dilemma meant that I had to choose sides. And I had to take the side of the people working for a just and free South Africa. For me, commitment to a non-racial struggle has meant that I must refuse to serve in the SADF.

All of you faced with this situation, will have to make an equally difficult decision. On the one hand, the state increases to 6 years the sentence for CO's. But on the other, the constitution it has constructed offers no solution to the conflict. The very foundations of the constitution lie in the Group Areas Act, lie in the maintenance of the homelands.

When we oppose the constitution today, our opposition should not be limited to only those aspects of the status quo that are being modified by the constitution. Our opposition should be directed at every way in which an embattled white minority attempts to preserve its power and privilege: detentions, forced removals, bantustan policy, and the increasing militarisation of our society.

When we demand alternatives we cannot limit ourselves to alternatives to the constitution. Our demands must embrace a profoundly changed society, a society where people are no longer powerless and hungry, and shunted around like animals. A society where young men are no longer called on to fight their brothers in defence of a patently unjust system, a society where the people are in control of their lives - where the people shall govern.





# OBJECTORS VOICE

## BILLY PADDOCK

The Solidarity Meeting with Brett Myrdal was very fortunate to have Billy Paddock to address it. Billy shared some of his experiences in Pretoria Central and gave us an "inside" view of the experiences of a CO.

As important as his "inside" view of Pretoria Central Prison was his understanding of the CO movement. Billy's main feeling on being released was that his stand had not changed at all from having gone to jail, and that on the contrary, he felt stronger and more determined to resist the military in all its forms.

On the decision of the SADF to drop charges against Brett Myrdal, Billy said, "It angers me, I don't think we must stop resisting it, stop being outraged at it." Billy emphasised that CO was only one way of opposing apartheid. The SADF supports apartheid and helps maintain it, therefore any resistance to the military was part of the resistance to apartheid. The two could not be separated. We are all affected by the military because of the way it maintains apartheid and the system of exploitation."

Billy found the whole system in prison to be indicative of the society around us. "It is a microcosm of South African society. The system of controls which operate in prison are very much like the controls which operate in our society - discrimination against different groups of people, the same kind of repression," he said. Despite all the difficulties and deprivations which undoubtedly exist in prison, the important thing for Billy was that: "I survived; I've come through the prison experience and I feel that much stronger, that much tougher than before I went in."

Turning to the new legislation which has just been introduced, Billy asked whether six years imprisonment is too high a price for objectors to pay. Billy said that he did not think that six years was more than the suffering which so many people in this country have to endure all their lives.

## NEWS OF OBJECTORS

### PETER & PAUL

Billy was able to give some news of Pete Hathorn. Pete has been in Pollsmoor Prison since the beginning of August. Before that he was in Pretoria Central Prison and Billy and Pete were together there for two months. Obviously having

another objector around was a great source of strength for both of them.

Billy says that Pete was handling his imprisonment incredibly well and was not letting the pettiness of prison life get him down. When he left for Pollsmoor, Pete was very happy to come back to Cape Town and "was just very together". Pete has study rights and has been studying after working as an electrician in and around the prison.

Latest news from Pete is that he has been taken off the electrical squad and sent back to doing cleaning. Although this means more time for studying or reading, Pete has now lost the variety and change of scene that the electrical work gave. No reasons were given for the change in job. Pete has four months to go.

Billy saw Paul Dobson recently in Durban when Paul was still in Detention Barracks and could receive visitors. Paul was extremely well and seemed to have "taken over" his section of the Barrack! Latest news is that Paul has been transferred to Durban Central Prison. This is a prison mostly for short-term prisoners and does not have work-shop and other facilities. Conditions are believed to be "fair".

# COSG ASSESSMENT

The last meetin of the Western Cape Cosg for 1983 took the form of an assessment of our achievements and failures of the year. There was no doubt that a lot of ground had been covered.

1983 got off to a strong start with Peter Hathorn's articulate statement of his reasons for objecting. Soon the threat of the new Defence Amendment Bill was hanging

over us. It promises six years imprisonment for any not classified as religious universal pacifists. The threat posed by this legislation led to a stepping up of COSG activity and the attraction of new supporters. COSG grew and we restructured into sub-committees, each with a particular interest area.



One of the successful projects of 1983 was the launching of the OBJECTOR. We are rapidly becoming a national COSG newsletter with increasing readership in other COSG centres. If anyone would like to contribute to OBJECTOR, we would love to hear from you; letters, features, news both from here and other centres are essential if OBJECTOR is to flourish.

We would especially like to hear from people active on the military issue outside of COSG groups, e.g. Church groups, etc. Write to COSG, P.O.Box 208, Woodstock. Most important - READ OBJECTOR!



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