

THE SOUTH AFRICAN A.N.S. CAMPAIGN :

written for a West German total resister magazine

At. 7. 6. 6

May I first of all convey thanks to you for the support you have given us around May 15, International CO Day, to those who participated in the cycle tour, to those who engaged in actions of solidarity inside Germany, and to those individuals and organisations who sponsored an advertisement of support which appeared in our press. Every small and big action contributes in some way to the advance of our struggle. Thank you!

I have been asked to write about why the war resistance movement in South Africa has decided to embark on an Alternative National Service (ANS) Campaign. The reasons are quite simple, and there are two main ones.

First, apart from any strategic or political considerations, we are dealing here with an issue of human rights. We have conscientious objectors at the moment locked up in prison for between 18 months and six years. Others are living in a shadowy underground, having to continually move address and be on the lookout for the military police. Others have gone into exile, never again able to return to the land of their birth. We need these people, their skills and consciences, to prepare for and build our post-apartheid society. This situation is intolerable for the objectors themselves, their families and friends, and the community. If the type of alternative service which we are demanding can be introduced, these people could live freely with their families and friends and contribute towards the betterment of our society. This would alleviate a lot of suffering many people are currently experiencing. It would be a victory for human rights. This alone is good enough reason to embark on the ANS Campaign.

The second main reason for this campaign is a mainly political and strategic one. A campaign to bring about social change must be geared to the consciousness and context of the target group at which it is aimed. It must be able to make an authentic connection with the minds and emotions of the people it is wanting to influence and change. In other words its message must be something with which its constituency can identify.

Our constituency is the white community, which is essentially conservative in its socialisation and is exposed to relentless state propoganda. Our experience in the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) showed us that our constituency did not easily identify with our call to "end conscription". We found a great deal more success, support and sympathy in our call for the right of conscripts to perform alternative service. We found that we could draw a lot more people and sectors in our constituency with this less radical call. At the time of ECC's banning in August last year we were in the middle of a major ANS campaign. Our message was probably at its most 'conservative' ever, and we were enjoying our most support ever. This was more threatening to the state than our earlier, less popular 'end conscription' call, and the state banned us! Our experience on the ground has therefore proved to us the correctness of this strategy in the particular context in which we have to work.

Our demand is for non-punitive, non-military national service, of

equal duration to military service. It should be available as a right to all conscripts who for moral, political or religious reasons do not want to do military service. It should be done in non-government organisations such as welfare, development, church and human rights organisations.

Whether we succeed in our demand or not, we win either way! If our demand is met, then we have won a significant human right. In addition, we will legally be able to challenge every single conscript as to why he is entering the South African Defence Force (SADF) and why he is not doing alternative service. If our demand is not met, then the government has given us an ongoing issue around which to conscientise and mobilise our constituency against apartheid.

However once, or if, our demand is met, then we need to be aware of the dangers of co-option into the state's militaristic strategy. It is at this point that we can learn a lot from your experiences. At that point we would value getting together with you for a serious discussion about these dangers, and strategies to overcome them. But we are not there yet! Until then, strength to you in your struggles!

Rob Goldman
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