

424:217

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

In the armed struggle that is developing on our borders and could easily spread internally a grievous situation arises for all who are concerned about the use of violence. On the one side the conviction grows in a significant sector of the oppressed majority that only violence will bring liberation. On the other the minority in power sees itself threatened by indiscriminate violence supported by international Marxism. Communism.

In these agonising circumstances we can only promise with God's help to give leadership in an ongoing Christian examination of this tragic situation. We <sup>intend</sup> hope to publish reflections from time to time as incentives to Christian prayer, thought and commitment and we hope to be able to do this with the representatives of other Christian churches and organisations. In the meantime we have resolved to say something about conscientious objection.

According to the teaching of the second Vatican Council, "it seems just that laws should make humane provision for the case of conscientious objectors who refuse to carry arms, provided they accept some other form of community service" (Gaudium et Spes No.79).

In order to understand the issue of conscientious objection, a careful distinction should be made between universal conscientious objection (the pacifist) and selective conscientious objection (e.g. on the grounds that this war is unjust); between combatant military service (carrying arms) and non-combatant military service (e.g. in the medical corps) and between military service (combatant or non-combatant) and national service (which could include services to the community like social welfare, education, housing).

In South Africa the Defence Force Act (Section 67 (3)) makes provision for universal conscientious objectors (those who belong to pacifist sects) to do non-combatant military service. But no provision at all is made for selective conscientious objectors even to do non-combatant military service and no provision is made for any conscientious objector (universal or selective) to do non-military national service. Such provisions are made in some way or another by almost every other non-communist country in the world which has conscription.

Consequently in South Africa the selective objector and the universal objector who does not want to do non-combatant military service can be sentenced to detention for between 12 and 15 months. (Defence Act, Section 126 (1)).

In this matter of conscientious objection we can do no more at the moment than to defend the right of every individual to follow his own conscience. We would therefore defend the right of the individual to conscientious objection both on the grounds of universal pacifism and on the grounds that he seriously believes the war to be unjust. In this, as in every other matter, the individual is obliged to make a moral judgment in terms of the facts at his disposal after trying to ascertain these facts to the best of his ability. While we recognise that the conscientious objector will have to suffer the consequences of his own decision and the penalties imposed by the State, we uphold his right to do this and we urge the State to make provision for alternative forms of non-military national service as is done in many other countries in the world".

**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.