

the Objector

NOVEMBER 1992



(pic: A.Welz)

Defiance is now the norm...

- Alan Storey burns his call-up at a campaign launch

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- * ...and more!

The South African state has managed to keep its system of racial conscription going, despite high hopes to the contrary in recent times. The antimilitarist movement has become more defiant than ever, but in focussing so much on conscription, particularly the unfairness, "schlep", etc., it risks neglecting other aspects of militarisation which will persist when conscription goes.

The Transvaal Supreme Court's decision upholding racial conscription was concerned with preserving the intention of the legislature (Parliament). As such it underlines an unusually large gap in opinion between the electorate and its ostensible representatives. This situation creates as a major opportunity for non-cooperation etc. but while such mobilisation may be necessary, is it sufficient?

Could it be that the present mass disregard for call-ups is less of a threat than we may like to think? In the event of an escalation of our civil war which seriously threatened white lives and property, would the state rely on a rush back to the laager by generations of militarily trained white men? Is this why it stubbornly clings to conscription laws, although not enforcing them? If so, is it possible, in the light of the state's record of destabilisation, that such an escalation is an option should negotiations "fail" (i.e., should the state and its allies be unable to obtain the degree of compromise they want)?

The point of evoking this worst-case scenario is not to elicit despair, but rather to suggest that we must go beyond trumpeting the 57(-thousand) varieties of non-collaboration, and seek ways of criticising and resisting the local, particularly nasty, form of militarism which might help to disarm it pre-emptively.

SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC MEETING

Durban COSG and CAS hosted a public meeting on 6 October, and the packed-out venue proved that unwillingness to be conscripted has reached new heights. Addressed by Mandy Taylor, instructing attorney in the Richard Rule/ECC case, and by Richard Steele, local conscription counsellor and

activist, the meeting was marked by lively participation from the floor, with conscripts and family members bearing witness to their tribulations and their resistance. Such meetings are to happen regularly, as long as the CAS lines continue to be besieged by callers.

"Women Overcoming Violence"

We will be represented at the War Resisters' International's "Women Overcoming Violence" conference in November in Bangkok, by Patty Geerds, Nozizwe Madlala and Adelle Kirsten. They will join 150 delegates from 50 countries, representing regions as well as W.R.I. affiliates, for a total of 45 workshops dealing with analysis and strategy, under the headings "Violence Against Women", "Women and Militarism" and "Development and Women". The conference will also serve as the women's forum of People's Plan for the 21st Century or "PP21", an "Asia-Pacific Network" (an unintended pun).

Better late than never...

Alert readers may have noticed that the front page of the last **Objector** referred to an article inside, on "COSG input to CODESA" - which never appeared.... well, here it is; CODESA (Conference for a Democratic South Africa) may be gone but if and when negotiations or constitutional bargaining resume, this is what we'll contribute (unless we change our mind):

Assuming that there might be working groups similar to those of CODESA, the working group which deals with constitutional principles will receive a reworked version of last year's submission to the ANC's Bill of Rights team, supporting the inclusion of the right to C.O. in a Bill of Rights separate from the constitution.

A working group which dealt with transitional arrangements would be sent the following suggestions:

- * Immediate suspension of conscription and prosecutions

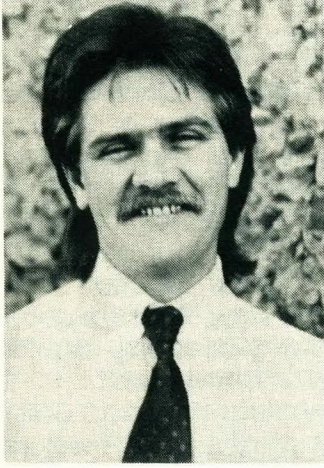
of objectors, and immediate disclosure of secret security funding;

- * As soon as an interim government is established it should ensure that there is no expansion whatsoever of the defence force; that policing duties be confined to a demilitarised police force; and that manufacture and distribution of arms are strictly controlled, while the export of arms ceases immediately.

WAR TOYS

For the umpteenth consecutive year, an anti-war toy campaign has been launched in Durban for the Christmas season. This year it is convened by the local Children's Rights Committee, but as always COSG and ECC members are involved.

A survey has already started, and preliminary results reveal that most stores have as many war toys as ever.



Merrick Douglas (30), a computer workshop manager from Krugersdorp, having completed the standard 2 years-plus-a-few-camps military service of his generation of white S.A. men, failed to report for a further camp in November '91. Possibly due to having had "words" with his Officer Commanding, he was singled out from many non-reporters and in March '92 was charged with refusing to serve.

After the stress of months of court appearances, his trial was due on September 2. Two days before this, the SADF announced a one-off amnesty for all conscripts who had failed to report or refused to serve prior to August 31 - ostensibly to allow them to apply to the new Board for C.O.

Merrick, however, wasn't interested in applying for a status which would make him liable for civilian government service - he felt he'd done his "bit". So he and his advocate arrived in court prepared to fight the case on the basis that Merrick believed that the repeal of the Population Registration Act made racial conscription invalid - only to be told that charges were withdrawn on the instructions of the Attorney-General. Once again, the state backed out of a public exposure of the contradictions in its strategy.

**Congratulations, Merrick!
How much longer can the farce
be maintained?**

UPDATE ON S.A. WAR RESISTANCE

July

- * The Defence Amendment Act passed after its worst clauses are removed, due to a lobbying campaign spearheaded by the ECC, and widely supported by business, churches etc.
- * The SADF claims 100% of "expected" turnout for the July national service intake. Antimilitarists have evidence that the figure may be less than 30% - for instance 691 of the possible 3000 report at 1 SA Infantry Bn, Bloemfontein. The ANC urges conscripts to defy call-ups.
- * "Religious objector" Luis Mitras arrested for failing to complete "community service" - which he left in July 1991. Reports received of harassment of others who did likewise. (Case pending; December 10.)

August

- * Combined ECC, COSG and CAS conference in Jhb; ECC decides to defy the law by encouraging conscripts not to serve and to institute a register of "non-cooperation".
- * A Cape Town court martial fines four Commando and three Citizen Force members amounts between R100 and R500 for failing to report.
- * The SADF announces a one-off amnesty for conscription offences prior to Sept 1, claiming that this is to allow offenders to take advantage of the Defence Amendment Act by applying to the new Board for Conscientious Objection, which replaces the Board for Religious Objection.
- * 35 Johannesburg advocates launch a roster to provide free legal representation to those charged with conscription-related offences in the region.

September

- * "Camper" Merrick Douglas has charges of refusing to serve withdrawn despite his insistence that he won't apply for C.O. status (see story alongside).
- * SADF Chief of Staff Lt Genl. Pierre Steyn announces that racial conscription will probably be phased out in the near future.
- * The SADF-led Ciskei Army kills 28 ANC protesters and injures 200 at Bisho, sparking world outrage.
- * 120 families at Khosis in the Kalahari desert face eviction by the SADF as their homes are on land allocated to a "battleschool".
- * The Transvaal Supreme Court dismisses with costs the ECC/Richard Rule application for a ruling that racial conscription is illegal (see p4).
- * A confidential SA Police report estimates AWB Wenkommando (a right-wing private army) strength at 15000.
- * SADF Head Lt Genl. George Meiring announces a "rationalisation drive" to be completed by March '93, involving at least 3000 Permanent Force retrenchments.
- * Camper John Downie of Vanderbijlpark arrested after writing a letter to the press, and released after being charged with refusing to serve. (Case pending; 24 November.)

October

- * The ECC's Non-cooperation campaign launched simultaneously in Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Grahamstown; a register of non-cooperation announced; conscripts publically burn call-ups; the ECC breaks the law by encouraging conscripts not to serve.

(continued overleaf)

WRI & WRL - Paul's U.S. Tour

by Paul Goller

In July I represented COSG at the 1992 War Resisters' International Council meeting in New York. The following week I attended the American War Resisters' League national conference in Eugene, Oregon, near the West Coast.

COSG has the status of Associate (not a full member) because its members do not necessarily subscribe to the WRI Declaration against all war. This meant that I could participate in discussions but could not vote. I did not feel excluded on the few occasions when matters came to a vote.

Lower attendance than usual and the meeting being held in the US meant that simultaneous translation was not used. This led to allegations of English-language imperialism, an unfortunate development in a meeting otherwise run by consensus.

A balance between business, discussion and entertainment made for 6 varied, exciting, challenging days in New York. One day was devoted to a seminar on **500 Years of Resistance** - a powerful celebration of resistance throughout the Americas by Native Americans from Canada, the US and Guatemala. A morning was taken up by a guided tour of sites in Greenwich Village which are important in labour, civil rights, student, feminist and neighbourhood activist history. This fascinating experience was enlivened further by a second commentary by an anarchist WRI member.

The business of the Council meeting was mainly to review the work of WRI in the last year, to deal with ongoing matters, and new matters raised by Sections (full affiliate members). WRI's substantial involvement in former Yugoslavia was reviewed extremely thoroughly; then

finances came under close scrutiny (perhaps we spend money too freely when one compares how tight a ship is run in London!).

Preparations for November's "Women Overcoming Violence" conference in Thailand were reviewed. This conference is a very important to WRI for its recognition of a world outside the North whose needs should be addressed by WRI, for its grappling with issues such as the exploitation of women and the denial of proper weight to women's participation in public life. One

WRL National Conference: This was a gathering of US activists to share their experience in the last two years and to recharge their batteries for the next two years. From that perspective it was a great success; from my point of view, it was exposure to the vitality of a long-established peace movement. C.O., anti-nuclear work, anti-hate campaigns, conflict resolution in prisons, environmental issues, support for psychiatric treatment survivors - you name it, some group in the States is doing something about it. Yes, we probably have something to

COURT UPHOLDS APARTHEID CALL-UPS

The Transvaal Supreme Court in late September entrenched racial conscription by dismissing, with costs, an application brought by the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and conscript Richard Rule, asking that the whites-only call-up be declared invalid. Judges Eloff, van der Walt and van Dyk found that it was the intention of parliament, inscribed in law, that the current conscription system continue until specifically amended. The ECC immediately announced its intention to petition for leave to appeal, and denounced the retention of such laws as hypocritical when the government is calling for the disbandment of Umkhonto weSizwe and other "private armies". It also took the opportunity to encourage unwilling conscripts to defy call-ups.

participant, Maggie Helwig of Canada, turned the spotlight on us men delegates by showing that men (who outnumbered women 2 to 1) were also talking at least four times as often as women delegates.

One of the discussion sessions looked at the issue "what counts as war?" and the nature of WRI's opposition to war and militarism. Did it mean that WRI could not address issues such as liberation struggles, native peoples' rights, hate campaigns (eg. homophobia) etc? Other discussions looked at the U.S. role in the world in the 1990s (still likely to be pretty destructive) and the world-wide resurgence of nationalism.

learn from the United States.

Conclusion: I am grateful to COSG for the opportunity to be exposed, however briefly, to the international peace movement. We have a lot to learn from the experience of others; we also have a lot to contribute - if we can become financially self-sufficient and develop peace-movement links with neighbouring countries.

Quotable Quote:

"That to seize and operate successfully a modern industrial economy is a more difficult task than simply to seize one's neighbour's land...has yet fully to penetrate the military mind."

- J.K. Galbraith

International briefs

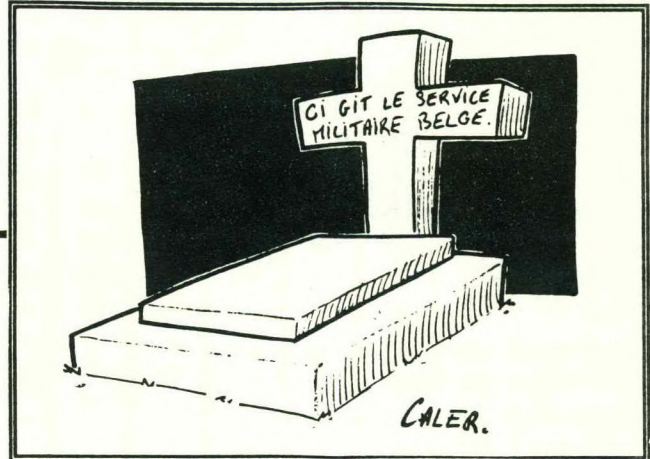
(Information from Peace News Bulletin)

* A November referendum in Panama could make it the second Central American state to abolish its army - Costa Rica led the way in 1948, but has a somewhat militarised police force.

* The Belgian government announced its intention to end conscription by 1994 (but without corresponding reduction of military spending); other European governments are likely to follow suit as the New World Order comes into effect, with industrialised states relying on high-tech professional rapid-deployment forces to protect their interests.

* For the first time, an Austrian objector is to be allowed to join Germans who have been able for some years to do alternative service at the Auschwitz memorial site in Poland. Georg Mager says he wants to atone for some of the Austrian contributions to fascism - an attitude not well received by many Austrians who like to depict their country as a victim of Nazism.

(Source: Tygodnik Powszechny - via Beatrice!)



July's National Meeting

A COSG national meeting took place in early July. The decision to separate COSG's meeting from the broader antimilitarist conference proved wise, as the day-and-a-half allocated was fully taken up by COSG business, after regional reports on activities of COSG, ECC and CAS - which revealed a worrying decline in some areas, such as the formerly very active Western Cape.

Analysing and speculating upon the call-up system and its persistence, delegates agreed that state strategic thought as seen in the original Defence Amendment Bill had failed to accommodate shifts in the political situation. The strong reaction encountered from a wide spectrum had caught the state off guard.

Various strategies were considered, whereby COSG and other organisations could harness the growing opposition to conscription, reflected not least by the increasing number of unwilling conscripts. Options

included another public stand by objectors (or a variation, eg by VIPs), publicity around court cases and the already successful series of public meetings to empower previously isolated individuals.

The last part of the conference was spent preparing representatives for the WRI (War Resisters' International) Council and ICOM (International C.O. Meeting) that they were soon to attend (see reports elsewhere in this issue). Their briefing focused on three main questions:

* What would COSG do when conscription ends?

* What can be done internationally to help COSG?

* What is COSG's position on a UN (or OAU/etc.) peacekeeping force?

A useful conference, not only for business but for fellowship and for getting back to some of the "esprit de corps" of the challenging days of the 80s.

Letters

Lawrence Bransby of Box 331, Ixopo, 4630 (RSA) writes:

Dear COSG

Thank you for all your good work! Please would you be so kind as to publish the following letter in your next letter?

For the past 3-and-a-half years I have been working on a novel with C.O. as its theme. Now the New Testament basis for pacifism is reasonably clear and unambiguous; however, this cannot be said for the Old Testament. Accepting the fact that the Bible as a whole is God's word to us, the violence (seemingly God-sanctioned) in the O.T. is something of a problem.

Please would readers of this letter who have worked through this themselves contact me so that the dilemma can be reflected in an intellectually acceptable way, by the protagonist in my book.

I can also be contacted at (0336) 341165 in the evenings.

(see also p6)

Letters

Mathew Blatchford of Mtunzini writes:

Dear Comrades, thinking about COSG made me nostalgic enough to shell out R20, which I enclose. However, nostalgia isn't enough.

Is there really room for a CO movement, or an anti-militarisation movement, or both, in S.A.? I'm not quite sure, and probably the question can only be answered once it is tried. I left the ECC in 1990 because it seemed to me that the organisation had lost its way and was not likely to pursue the objectives that interested me. But what are those objectives? To me the main thing is in the interim to weaken the security arm of the NP state, and in the longer term to struggle against the danger that a future state, an ANC-dominated government, might also have its anti-democratic securocrats, and that they might seek power. We also need to make trouble for the military because the less good PR they have the less confident they will feel about a military coup.

The first of these tasks is being partly addressed by the ANC, but rather ineptly. They do have a Military Research unit but the productions of this unit strike me as unimpressive. Indeed the most useful thing for a COSG/ECC to do would be to feed information through the ANC; we could work independently but there wouldn't be a massive lot of attention, even to COs, I suspect; the white community is too paranoid and numbed by racist government propaganda to be in a good state to judge; I suspect we're in an early-80s mode in terms of most of the white community. The main thing would be to plan ahead and be ready to head off future securocrats. The problem here is that COSG/ECC tends to be white-centred. Can this be got around? Hard to judge the



GOURDON

“What's up with the call-up?”

As promised in the last **Objector**, a look at the conditions facing C.O.s after the Defence Amendment Act (and, subsequently, the dismissal of the ECC/Richard Rule application to the Supreme Court):

The first consequence of the introduction of the Board for C.O. was the one-off amnesty on all pre-August 31 offences. This got rid of the backlog of objectors who hadn't been processed, and it has still to be seen whether new ones (already lining up, as it were!) will be brought to trial; quite possibly the state will still avoid trials in which the defence centres on the racial nature of conscription, as the Supreme Court ruling concerned strict, technical legality, while the real

community moods. On the whole there does seem to be a role for an anti-militarisation grouping, but only one, initially small but (one hopes) growing slowly as disillusionment grows. 1990 is long ago and the Millenium hasn't arrived yet.

*** Readers are reminded that COSG has invited contributions on the topic of the future of/for peace movements in S.A. (address on back page).**

issue at stake is the state's sincerity and public legitimacy in engaging in reforms and negotiations, while maintaining what amounts to a private army. In other words, it's probably still a good strategy to object on grounds of racial discrimination.

Short of that confrontational gamble, the other options are:

* Failing to register - the Amendment Act provides new, stiffer penalties for this, but how it could be enforced in racially mixed schools is anybody's guess.

* Applying to the Board for C.O. - a wider version of the old Board for Religious Objection; successful C.O. classification makes you liable for civilian government service of one-and-a-half times outstanding military service, at troopy pay. NB: If you refuse to do the service once classified, you are liable to a mandatory prison/DB sentence under the new Amendment Act.

* Trying for deferment - you have nothing to lose.

* Ignoring your call-up - and seeing if anything happens. The Minister of Defence admitted that only 8% of "national servicemen" and 6.3% of

(continued on the back page)

ICOM '92 - Millau, France

by Michael Graaf

The 1992 International C.O. Meeting took place at Le Cun ("The Wedge") du Larzac - Larzac being a plateau near Millau in southern France. Le Cun is a centre for research and action for "another defence" - non-military security; it was started at the end of the 70s as part of a (successful) campaign to block expansion of a nearby military base and is fairly famous in France.

ICOM consisted of 90 people from 19 countries - alas, other than myself, all European (except for an American who works in Germany). Two Turkish delegates failed to get visas at the last minute. Among the more interesting delegates were two British Gulf war objectors, one of whom was still in the process of being discharged and had to go back into uniform after ICOM I - the other being Vic Williams whose imprisonment was widely publicised last year. There were also two Croats and two Serbs, and a very conspicuous contingent from Spain, particularly the Basque and Catalan regions, which seem to have the most dynamic antimilitarist movements in the world - for example, in the Basque country, there is a campaign against the Red Cross, because it is the only organisation to resist public pressure to stop collaborating with the conscription system by accepting community servers!

ICOM '92 was a little different to previous ones - coming from the relatively non-existent S.A. antimilitarist movement I was shocked to realise that I was witnessing the first major assertion of feminism in this international forum, and to see that many delegates lacked democratic culture, in terms of not interrupting others, not shouting, etc. The outcome



Above: Meals and discussions were outdoors at Le Cun

was that the link between militarism and patriarchy was recognised by ICOM, and that ICOM '93 (to be held in Turkey) will include, early in its programme, at least one session on group dynamics, democratic skills etc.

Conscription per se was somewhat downgraded from absolute priority, in favour of a more sophisticated analysis of militarism. Hence, we avoided getting bogged down in debates such as "total resistance" vs "alternative service"; it's more or less accepted that in European countries at least, alternative service is a pillar, if a minor one, of militarist states. This shift follows the arrival of the New World Order, in which it seems the wealthy sector won't need large conscripted armies to protect its interests, but will rely on global policing, by means of technological superiority and highly trained professional soldiers. The governments of Belgium and the Netherlands have already announced their decisions to end conscription, and others are expected to follow.

As a result of the possible demise of conscription in most of the countries represented, and of the presence of the Gulf War objectors, attention was given to peace work with, such as supporting objectors in, professional armies. This will no doubt become more relevant to SA in future.

The war in the territory of former Yugoslavia (TOFY for short)(one of the Croats present insisted that "Yugoslavia" no longer exists) cast a considerable shadow over ICOM. The four ex-Yugoslavians present humbled the rest of us - after them I was the delegate from the most violent country, but at times there seemed little comparison. To illustrate: in a single month more civilians died in Bosnia-Herzegovina than in 14 years of Lebanese civil war.

A hotly debated topic was the suggested foreign military "peacekeeping" intervention. On the one hand, it was argued (mostly by the "hardcore", purist German and Austrian elements) that the stage was being set for another Global Police action, and that the appropriate

(Continued overleaf)

ICOM (from p7)

response should be at the level of supporting victims of the war while exposing the vested interest of arms traders etc. On the other hand, one of the Croats passionately insisted that people were dying, that the majority in the peace movement of Croatia and of civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina supported foreign military intervention - in fact, saw it as the only salvation. I was reminded, witnessing people polarising around these two positions, of the days when the ECC had to respond to calls by township residents for protection from the SADF. I pointed out the resemblance to others and suggested that just as the ECC had found constructive ways of engaging (eg. monitoring), without really endorsing or condemning "peacekeeping" by "security forces", so ICOM could support nonmilitary interventions. This was helpful in breaking the deadlock that had emerged. TOFY was chosen as the focus of next year's International C.O. Day.

A definite highpoint of ICOM was our Bastille Day action, aimed at recovering some of the spirit of spontaneous popular action originally associated with this French national holiday which is

celebrated in ever more militarist style by the establishment. Delegates went into the ancient nearby town of Millau and nonviolently occupied its main tourist attraction, hanging banners saying "LIBERTE", "EGALITE" and "INSUMMISSION" ("total resistance") from its tower. This was well covered by the press and marked by the absence of police.

JHB NATIONAL ANTI-MILITARIST CONFERENCE

About 50 COSG, CAS, and ECC delegates attended an August conference on the future of antimilitarism in S.A., held at Bobolink, a rambling house in Sandton, Johannesburg.

Keynote speaker Gavin Evans, journalist and activist, suggested that the role of antimilitarism in transforming our society has been, and is, more important than usually granted.

Rocky Williams of the Military Research Group gave detailed scenarios for a new Defence Force, from a democratic nationalist perspective.

Human rights lawyer Mark Phillips analysed the Defence Amendment Act, and delegates brainstormed the future of the movement.

"WHAT'S UP?" (from p6)

campers failing to report were prosecuted last year.

* Inform your Officer Commanding (for campers) or Registering Officer (for "national servicemen") by detailed affidavit of your position. Campers might also follow up with a personal appointment with the O.C. This strategy may prevent either a call-up, or follow-up when you fail to report.

Most conscripts (even those with no formal objection) are in fact ignoring call-ups these days. Where there is any follow-up, it's usually by phone. If any new cases of refusal to serve come to trial, the sentences will almost certainly be suspended on condition of unpaid community service (in any non-profit organisation, in your spare time) probably of around 800 hours (if you've never served) or much less (for campers).

The main thing for unwilling conscripts to remember is to connect with support networks like the Conscription Advice Service and COSG. CAS advertises in various newspapers and will refer you to lawyers etc. as necessary.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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The Objector is produced by the Conscientious Objector Support Group, Box , Durban 4000, South Africa. A year's subscription is valid for four issues.

A year's subscription costs R20 or US \$20.

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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