

EMPOWERING ALTERNATIVES:

**A history of the Conscientious Objector Support Group's challenge
to military service in South Africa**

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

M Com

in the subject

Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies

at the

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Supervisor: Professor G. Maré

October 2007

To Nan Cross
who has gone on her way
leaving us a legacy
of bright-eyed, sharp-minded, warm-hearted, fearless activism.

I declare that "Empowering alternatives: A history of the Conscientious Objector Support Group's challenge to military service in South Africa" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the people who have contributed to this study.

To the members of the COSG who had the vision to fund a study like this; my sincere and humble appreciation for entrusting me with this task. It has been a privilege to get to know you and the work you were involved in.

To my supervisor, Prof. Gerry Maré, whose commitment to ensuring that crucial parts of South Africa's history do not get forgotten; thank you for striking the perfect balance between giving freedom on the one hand and urging the need for revision on the other; between challenge and praise. And to Prof. Geoff Harris who has developed and coordinated the Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies Programme at UKZN; I am extremely grateful to you for making a programme of this calibre accessible to us, and for asking me whether I would like to research this particular topic.

Then to all the conscientious objectors and activists from the COSG and/or ECC; I cannot thank you enough for your willingness to spend time talking with me and for sharing your personal archival material with me. It is your openness and honesty that has enriched this study. Thank you especially to Donn Edwards, who set up the email discussion forum, without which the conversations between objectors and activists could not have reached the depth they did. These exchanges have been of immense value to me in this study, and while I am sure that you will not agree with all I have written here, I can only hope that by rekindling the connections between people, the debate, the sharing, the solidarity and the search for a more just and harmonious world order will continue.

Also, a sincere thank you to all who helped coordinate and/or host focus group meetings; Adele Kirsten and Nan Cross in Johannesburg, Rob and Sally Goldman and Richard Steele in Durban, and David and Claudine Schmidt and Anton Eberhard in Cape Town. Thank you also to Janneke Weidema for translating Afrikaans texts into English, to Mike Evans for answering many legal questions and to Ayanda Khumalo, a third-year law student at Wits who helped research the many Defence Acts.

Thank you to my friend in the Netherlands, Tom Schram, who by reading and commenting on the draft of the first chapter I wrote, showed me that the way forward was possible. To my work colleagues, Colin Glen, Jabu Mashinini and Lindi Tshabalala, thank you for so graciously taking over my work load for so long and giving me the time to complete this study. To Mam' Francina; thank you for keeping our home running beautifully while I had no time for anything except this study. And to Mama and Papa, thank you for the many nourishing meals you prepared for Dermot and me, so that I could continue working. Thank you also to my brother, Ronnie, for researching information on the internet, for helping with various computer-related aspects in the final stages of the write-up, and above all for your keen interest throughout this study. To my son Adrian; just knowing that we were both studying and that in our weekly phone-calls you were going to ask me, "How're things going Mom?" gave me

the impetus to continue. And to my husband, Dermot, who in reading a number of South African war literature novels brought important aspects of this topic to my attention; thank you so much for your gentle encouragement and patience with me throughout the three years of this project.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to two of the pillars of the conscientious objection movement; Rob Robertson and Nan Cross, who never grew tired of sharing information, perspectives and insights with me. Thank you also to Rob for your meticulous proof reading of my dissertation. To both of you; your life's work has been an inspiration to me.

Abstract

Conscription of white males to the South African Defence Force between 1969 and 1994 was one of the measures used by the South African government to uphold apartheid and white supremacy. While it appeared that the majority of white males and their families supported the National Party propagated ideologies of the country at the time and felt it was their duty to render military service, there were some for whom this duty provided a conflict of conscience.

Giving expression to this conflict and finding constructive ways of dealing with it was almost impossible within the highly restrictive, repressive political, legal and social climate of that time. Limited options seemed available to the young men who had objections to serving in the military, namely exile, evasion or deferment: personal choices that drove people into physical and emotional isolation, and which did not engage the state in the resolution of this conflict.

Some young men, however, chose to confront the state and object openly. This began a protracted series of negotiations with ruling authorities, debates within state structures, legislative changes and prosecutions that attempted to prevent and quash the presence of objectors. In the face of this oppression, family and friends formed themselves into solidarity groups around individual objectors to support them in handling the consequences of their objection and in making their stance known and heeded by the government.

And so began a movement for change, which over the years learned the skills of nonviolent direct action and constructively challenged the state on issues of conscription and the militarisation of society. This initiative, known as the Conscientious Objector Support Group, although small in scale, ranks as one of the anti-apartheid movements that contributed to South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy. As such it has invaluable lessons to share with movements for change throughout the world that are presently grappling with situations of human rights' violations.

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANS	Alternative National Service
BRO	Board for Religious Objection
CANSP	Churches Alternative National Service Project
CCCO	Central Committee for Conscientious Objection
CCSA	Christian Council of South Africa
CO	Conscientious objection / objector
CODESA	Committee for a Democratic South Africa
COSAWR	Committee on South African War Resistance
COSG	Conscientious Objector Support Group
CSG	Community Servers Group
DB	Detention Barracks
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
ICOM	International Conscientious Objector Movement
IFOR	International Fellowship of Reconciliation
NUSAS	National Union of South Africa Students
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAFOR	South African Fellowship of Reconciliation
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
WASG	Wits Alternative Service Group
WCC	World Council of Churches
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
WRI	War Resisters International

Chapter 1 - Introduction and research methodology

The miracle is that despite all of society's promotion of warfare, most soldiers find warfare to be a wrenching departure from their own moral values.
Mark Kurlansky¹

Conscription of white males from 1967 - 1994 for service in the South African Defence Force was a significant and highly effective pillar upholding apartheid policy - through military service and socialisation. In opposition to this increasing militarisation of South African society an anti-conscription movement was formed, known as the Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG), with the broad aims of defending the right of individuals to object to conscription and raising awareness of the issues surrounding conscription and the role of the military in South Africa. The impact of this movement, along with others such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), led to a tightening of apartheid policy on conscription. This in turn led to growing numbers of conscientious objectors.

While the conscientious objection movement in South Africa has to some extent been documented, with interest in it growing in the last two years possibly due to the appearance of a number of television documentaries and related books (see below), such coverage has often focused on individual objectors. Where the phenomenon of conscientious objection has been examined within the group context, it has focused primarily on the End Conscription Campaign, which grew out of the COSG and engaged in high profiled political lobbying for an end to conscription. In the ECC studies and literature (see below) the COSG is often briefly mentioned, fading into the background with ECC's growth.

There has been a need, therefore, to document the history of this neglected group; the Conscientious Objector Support Group. Three reasons make this

¹ Kurlansky, M., 2006, *Nonviolence - the history of a dangerous idea*, Random House, New York, p 32.

important: firstly, the longer we wait to capture this crucial part of what is already a remarkable struggle for liberation and transition to democracy in South Africa, the greater the chances of it being forgotten as those who were involved in this movement grow older and pass on (indeed, some have already died). Secondly, as a contribution to the growing field of Peace Studies, it is essential to explore the workings of this movement as a nonviolent² movement for political and social change in South Africa. Thirdly, implicit in the story of the COSG are the stories of individual objectors. While a possibility exists that some such individuals may capture their own stories in written form, unless these stories are placed within the context of a broader movement for change, their significance to a larger nonviolent struggle is lost and they remain just the stories of some heroic individuals.

The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to capture the history and work of the Conscientious Objector Support Group in South Africa from 1980 to 1994, and to explore answers to the following questions:

- How did this group define itself?
- What were its aims and objectives?
- How did it go about achieving these aims and objectives?
- What was the extent and effectiveness of the support offered by this group to individual objectors?
- How effectively did the work of this group challenge existing power structures and hegemonic thought patterns amongst the majority of society from which conscripts were drawn?
- How do members of this group now, in retrospect, evaluate the effectiveness of their work?

In summary, therefore, this dissertation explores the interplay between what is essentially a personal act (objecting to military service) and what became a

² In keeping with current Peace Studies' concordance, the term "nonviolence" is written throughout without a hyphen (unless quoted from another source where it was used with a hyphen) to indicate that it is a practice aimed at achieving not only negative peace (i.e. the absence of violence) but also positive peace (i.e. a more just world order based on equal opportunities for all). A similar convention has been used for the words, "noncooperation" and "noncompliance".

group effort in the South African context. To begin this exploration, it might be worth considering Margaret Levi's assertion that:

Conscientious objection is a weapon of protest. It is not, however, a collective protest. It is an individual, but socially informed, act of resistance. It requires no organisation, no mobilisation of others, no group process. It is an action undertaken by single individuals albeit, generally, individuals who are part of self-conscious groups of war protesters.³

Indeed, this dissertation confidently uses this statement as a starting point, but attempts to take it further by asking - how is this individual "weapon of protest" affected if there *is* an organisation, a mobilisation of others and a group process?

When searching for written material on the topic of conscientious objection to military service, what strikes one immediately is the general dearth of such literature.⁴ This is made even more painfully obvious by the overwhelming amount of literature (both written and visual) that has been produced on the philosophy of war, and on military strategies and conquests throughout the ages. One book that tells the story of the beginnings of pacifism as a war resistance movement is *Troublesome people*,⁵ which describes the movement that grew in response to the beginning of conscription in Britain during World War I. The philosophy of pacifism has, of course, a much broader meaning than just the rejection of war, and as such dates back far earlier than the early 20th Century, often having its roots in various religious traditions. This book, however, concentrates on the organised mass movement opposing war, and the extremely harsh consequences that these objectors faced:

It was perfectly true. No one, in the spring of 1916, had any idea at all about what was going to happen. The (British) government, the Military Service Act now finally carried and in force, was counting on an orderly progression towards full conscription. What neither they, nor anyone else, could have expected was the extraordinary vehemence of the protest which was to follow, nor the lengths to which men, once they decided that their conscience

³ Levi. M., 1997, *Consent, dissent, and patriotism*, Cambridge University Press, p 165.

⁴ Even the online encyclopaedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conscientious_objection, contains only a very sketchy history of conscientious objection throughout the world.

⁵ Moorehead, C., 1986, *Troublesome people - the warriors of pacifism*, Hamish Hamilton, Great Britain.

set them against the war, were prepared to go to protect that belief. And as public attitude hardened against these (approximately 2000) men, as their treatment soon became indistinguishable from torture, so that eventually 69 were dead and 39 more went mad, so determination grew among all conscientious objectors to stand firm.⁶

Moorehead's final paragraph of the book, which incisively appraises the significance of the movement, contains at once the aim of the COSG as well as the key motivating factor of those who worked to fulfil this aim, namely, defending the right to freedom of conscience:

In 1916, pacifism was about preventing war; and it failed. In the mid-eighties, it turns out to be less about war than about the relationship between man and the power of the state. The pacifist, the nuclear protesters, all those who take their own individual stand against the machinery of war, are keeping alive that tradition of individual freedom; their importance can only grow. Conscience has not been altered by violence.⁷

Other books that formed part of the literature review of this dissertation were ones more relevant to the South African context under study. One was Jacklyn Cock's *War and society*,⁸ which gives a comprehensive description of what it means to say that South Africa was a highly militarised society during the 1970s and the 1980s. Cock describes how all sectors of South African society, i.e. the economic, industrial, technological, political, social, psychological, cultural, educational and media sectors contributed to the growth of the military or to the spreading of a military ideology. She also mentions the beginning of the movement for change; the COSG.⁹ *South Africa's other whites - voices for change*,¹⁰ which consists of a collection of vignettes of remarkable white people in South Africa who fought against apartheid and contributed to a just and democratic post-apartheid society was also consulted. The section relevant to this dissertation focuses on conscientious objectors and the End Conscription Campaign. Another book

⁶ Moorehead, C., 1986, *Troublesome people - the warriors of pacifism*, Hamish Hamilton, Great Britain, p 9 ff.

⁷ Moorehead, C., 1986, *Troublesome people - the warriors of pacifism*, Hamish Hamilton, Great Britain, p 326.

⁸ Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg.

⁹ Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg, p 309.

¹⁰ Jaster, R. S. and S. K., 1993, *South Africa's other whites - voices for change*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London.

was *War and conscience - the churches and conscientious objection*,¹¹ which traces the response of the Christian churches in South Africa from 1960 for a period of approximately 20 years, to the use of the military in sustaining apartheid. Janine Rauch's paper, "War and resistance"¹² examines the increasing role of the SADF in entrenching the policies of apartheid and in attempting to protect white minority rule by exercising military control in the Southern African region. Rauch's section on the war resistance movement in South Africa focuses more specifically on the role of the Committee on South African War Resistance (COSAWR) and its links with the ECC and the ANC. Further reading on the ECC was provided by *Out of step*,¹³ which tells the story of the ECC and the growing numbers of young men who refused to serve in the SADF. Another book reviewed was the theologian, Walter Wink's *Jesus' third way*,¹⁴ which explores the relevance of nonviolence as a form of direct action against the structural injustices of apartheid and which the COSG occasionally referred to in their debates and training materials. Two publications that were immediately relevant to this study were *Hawks and doves - the pro- and anti-conscription press in South Africa*¹⁵ and Richard Steele's submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "My experiences as a conscientious objector to conscription in the SADF, and as an End Conscription Campaign activist."¹⁶ Finally, Margaret Levi's, *Consent, dissent, and patriotism*, provided a most informative study of the phenomena of compliance and noncompliance (in all their variations), and how these phenomena are affected by such factors as the trustworthiness of government, the incidence of compliance, and the strategy by the state of balancing the consent of citizens with the demands of government.

¹¹ Catholic Institute for International Relations and Pax Christi, 1982, *War and conscience in South Africa - the churches and conscientious objection*, Russell Press, UK.

¹² In Cawthra, G., Kraak, G. & O'Sullivan, G. (eds), *War and resistance: Southern African reports*, Macmillan Press: London, 1994, p 1.

¹³ Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK.

¹⁴ Wink, W., 1987, *Jesus' third way*, The SACC, Justice and Reconciliation Division, Johannesburg.

¹⁵ Graaf, M. (ed.), 1988, *Hawks and doves - the pro- and anti-conscription press in South Africa*, Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa. Michael Graaf was himself an objector.

¹⁶ Steele, R., "My experiences as a conscientious objector to conscription in the SADF, and as an End Conscription Campaign activist", Written statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 30 June 1997, and Oral statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Human Rights Violation Hearing: Conscription, 23 July 1997, Cape Town.

Another very interesting genre of literature that has only recently begun to emerge has been the personal accounts of SADF servicemen or leaders and that of at least one objector, Charles Yeats. The accounts of people who served in or led the SADF fall into one of two categories. The first is that which, in retrospect, provides a different perspective on the SADF to the one that the writer had when he served (or to the one, which the SADF tried to portray through various means of propaganda) and hence one which questions the ongoing impact of this period of a young man's life. Some that belong to this category, which (if novels) in Afrikaans has come to be known as "Grensliteratuur" (Border literature), are; *An unpopular war - from afkak to bosbefok: voices of South African national servicemen*; *At thy call we did not falter*, and the novel *Moffie*.¹⁷ Another contribution to this category is the screening of the television documentary, *Eat my call-up*, which tells the story of four men who refused to serve in the SADF.¹⁸ The other category is one which continues to justify and/or praise the South African military establishment (or a section of it) and its actions. One that falls squarely into this category is that written by the then Chief of the Defence Force and later Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, entitled, *My life with the SA Defence Force*.¹⁹ Another in this category is *32 Battalion*.²⁰ Charles Yeats's book²¹ is a personal life story covering much more than just his experiences as a conscientious objector in South Africa, but providing a revealing and informative account of the factors that led to his decision to object, the process of his arrest and sentencing and his time in detention barracks (more of which appears below).

¹⁷ Thompson, J. H., 2006, *An unpopular war - from afkak to bosbefok*, Zebra Press, Cape Town.

Holt, C., 2005, *At thy call we did not falter*, Zebra Press, Cape Town.

Van der Merwe, A. C., 2006, *Moffie*, Penstock Publishing, Cape Town.

¹⁸ Directed by Naashon Zalk (who was one of the 771 in 1989 (see more of this in Chapter 3)) and screened on SABC 1 on 19 July 2006; the four men are Ivan Toms, Marius van Niekerk, Charles Bester and Andre Zaaiman.

¹⁹ Malan, M., 2006, *My life with the SA Defence Force*, Protea Book House, Pretoria.

²⁰ Nortje, P., 2004, *32 Battalion*, Struik Book Publishers, Cape Town.

²¹ Yeats, C., *Prisoner of conscience - one man's remarkable journey from repression to freedom*, 2005, Rider, London.

On reviewing existing literature on this topic, therefore, it is clear that there is a fair amount of information covering the regional and international political/ideological factors affecting South Africa at the time, the growth, operations and operational structure of the South African military, and the widespread and all-pervasive strategies employed by the South African government to sustain and justify its claim upon the white population. There is not a great deal on the resistance movement that grew in opposition to these strategies. In this regard, however, three theses are of salient interest; that of Laurie Nathan, one of the chairpersons of the End Conscription Campaign, entitled, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - A study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988";²² Guy Lamb's dissertation, "Confronting the military - An analysis of the SADF's relationship with the opposition to conscription; the case of conscientious objection and the ECC"²³ and Merran Phillips' thesis, "The End Conscription Campaign 1983 -1988 - A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid".²⁴ It is clear from the subtitles that, even though each of these clearly focuses on the ECC, they provide valuable background reading to place my study in context.

Reference to the COSG is made in each of the above, even if the information does not always agree. Quoting Law,²⁵ Lamb states that the COSG was formalised as a group in 1978, with branches in all major centres and that in 1978 "the SADF became frustrated...and accused conscientious objectors and COSG of 'undermining national service and frustrating the defence of the country in the long run as a consequence'".²⁶ While Nathan's thesis is not specific about when the COSG started, it does say that "The Conscientious Objector Support Group (Cosg) was formed as friends came together to

²² Nathan, L., 1989, M. Phil thesis, University of Bradford.

²³ Lamb, G., 1995/1996, University of Cape Town.

²⁴ Phillips, M., 2003, UNISA.

²⁵ Law, L. (et al), 1987, "Conscientious objection: the church against apartheid's violence", in C. Villa-Vicencio, *Theology and violence: the South African debate*, Skotaville, Johannesburg.

²⁶ Lamb, G., 1995/1996, "Confronting the military - an analysis of the SADF's relationship with the opposition to conscription; the case of conscientious objection and the ECC", University of Cape Town, p 51.

support the objectors (e.g. Peter Moll and Richard Steele) in prison",²⁷ which implies some time in or soon after 1980, as Peter Moll, sentenced before Richard Steele, was imprisoned in 1980. Nathan also mentions the COSG's support of the call for a campaign against compulsory conscription. Phillips, again by implication, refers to the formation of COSG early in the 1980s. He does, however, go into considerably more detail about the relationship between the COSG and the ECC, namely the COSG's role in supporting the formation of the ECC, the COSG's support of the ECC's activities and the overlap in membership of the two organisations during the 1980s, and the ongoing role of the COSG when the ECC was banned in 1988.

Since very little has been written on the COSG, therefore, most of the sources used in this dissertation are primary sources. In fact, the main body of this work is gleaned from two primary sources: archival material, and interviews. The archival material can be divided into two types: personal depositions of documents by people who were seminaly involved in the COSG to educational institutions such as the University of the Witwatersrand or the University of Cape Town; and personal archives still in the possession of people who were involved in the movement. Archives held by the two above-mentioned universities are the Rob Robertson Pacifist Collection,²⁸ the South African History Archives Database Collection, the End Conscription Campaign Collection,²⁹ the Committee on South African War Resistance Collection³⁰ and the Conscription Advice Service Collection.³¹ One other archival source that was consulted was the SANDF Documentation Centre (also known as the Department of Defence Archive Repository).³² Private archives consist largely of documents, typed or handwritten, kept in files or boxes in storerooms or garages and organised to a greater or lesser extent. While the archives held by the universities have certainly been very helpful in providing in-depth information into the work of the COSG and the context within which it did this

²⁷ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 60.

²⁸ University of the Witwatersrand Libraries, Johannesburg.

²⁹ University of the Witwatersrand Libraries, Johannesburg.

³⁰ University of Cape Town Libraries, Cape Town.

³¹ University of Cape Town Libraries, Cape Town.

³² Pretoria.

work (for example through minutes of meetings, press articles and training materials), it was often the handwritten documents in private archives of individuals that revealed fascinating insights into the debates and dilemmas that faced the activists of the COSG as they grappled with the principles of nonviolent struggle. Also, it is these documents (often with small comments written in margins) that show the warm-hearted, sincere and often humorous humanity of the movement.

Before the interviews began, the researcher engaged in a lengthy process, lasting almost a year, of talking with as many people as possible, who were engaged in the COSG in any way. This communication was conducted mainly through electronic media but consisted of a few face-to-face meetings. The aim of these exchanges was for me to gain a broad understanding of the parameters of the COSG as a movement, as preparation for the in-depth and focus group interviews which were to follow. Large numbers of emails were sent out, explaining the purpose of this study and asking the following basic questions:

- What was the COSG?
- How was it formed?
- Who was involved?
- From when to when did it operate?
- Where did it operate?
- What were its aims?
- What were its activities?
- Who did it help?
- What motivated your CO actions / involvement?

Few people were able to answer all the above questions comprehensively (either because of time constraints, and/or memory or knowledge gaps), but the collective response provided an invaluable overview of the COSG. I made a decision to stop asking these questions as responses to them gradually began to grow increasingly repetitious. In addition to providing this overview, however, there was a secondary, but perhaps equally as important, benefit to these early conversations; almost with every contact made, a lead was given to another one or two connected people. And so, gradually, the researcher

was able to draw up a database, with contact details, of people all over South Africa who were involved in conscientious objection either as objectors or as activists/supporters or both. This in itself will prove to be a very valuable resource for further research on this topic.

As far as the interviews were concerned; two types were conducted; personal and focus group interviews. Over an eighteen-month period, eleven in-depth interviews and three focus group interviews were conducted in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.



Johannesburg focus group meeting - 18 March 2006

*(Back row from left to right: Rob Robertson, Neil Mitchell, Steven Lowry, Simon Connell, Geraldine Connell, Rob Thompson
Front row sitting and standing: Paul Goller, Donn Edwards, Adele Kirsten, Nan Cross³³, Janneke Weidema)*

³³ Nan Cross passed away on 14 July 2007. See Appendix 1 for a press release and two obituaries published in honour of Nan's life.



Cape Town focus group meeting - 20 May 2006

(Back row from left to right: Brett Myrdal, Peter Hathorn, Anton Eberhard, Douglas Bax,

Jim te Water Naude, Neil Myburgh, Mike Evans, Rob Robertson

Middle row: Janet Thorpe, Margot Lynn, Jane Coombe, Chris Giffard

Front row: Jeremy Routledge, Judy Connors, Paula Hathorn, David Schmidt, Ivan Toms)



Durban focus group meeting - 17 June

2006 (From the top, each row from left to

right: Rob Goldman, Judy Connors,

visiting friend of Michael Graaf, Jeremy

Routledge, Alison Warmback, Richard

Steele, Sue Brittion, Andrew Warmback,

Brendan Moran, Beatrice Schofield, Sally

Goldman, Carey Moran, Michael Graaff,

Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Liam and

Jembe Moran)

A further four people completed the interview questions electronically, and while this cannot be classified as an in-depth interview, it did in each case reveal a wealth of valuable and fascinating personal experiences and perceptions. Notes were written during each interview, typed up after the interview and then given to each interviewee to review and amend, if so desired. A similar process was followed with focus group interviews, with one difference; focus group notes were shared with a much wider group of people (in fact, with everyone in the discussion group), but only after all the group interviews had been completed. Signed consent forms³⁴ were used to obtain the permission of interviewees to use their contributions with their names or anonymously, or not at all, in this dissertation.

It became clear early in the research process that the interviews were not always easy for the interviewees. Eight out of the eleven interviewees had been objectors themselves, even if they were also members of the COSG or of (a) particular support group(s). As such, many of them expressed an overt or a covert need to talk first about their experiences as a conscientious objector, and only then as an activist of the movement. Often the process gave rise to a resurfacing of emotions as people remembered times of their lives which had been extremely turbulent, painful, and yet exciting, and which had demanded great sacrifice and courage. This was often exacerbated by the fact that many of these people have never had the chance adequately to reflect on, debrief and process what they went through, either alone or in the company of those with whom they had worked in the movement. In the focus groups even just seeing old friends and activists again, many of whom they had not seen for twenty years or more was an emotional experience. It was impossible, therefore, for the interviews to follow a rigid format; indeed this would have been counterproductive. While there were specific³⁵ questions that the interviewer wished to cover, the format of the interview was kept relatively unstructured to provide a space for interviewees to talk about what was important to them and at a pace that suited them. In using excerpts from these interviews in this study, the researcher felt it was important to quote

³⁴ See Appendix 2.

³⁵ See Appendix 3.

directly from the interviews (or from email correspondence) so as to give voice to the intensity of feeling and passion that interviewees often conveyed. Also, it has been vital to capture something of the sense of a time that is slowly disappearing into a past that younger generations no longer relate to or understand.

To assist in understanding the theory and technique of conducting loosely structured interviews, which contain a combination of conversation and embedded questions,³⁶ the interviewer used the guidelines given by the anthropologist, David M. Fetterman, in Svendsen:³⁷

Informal interviews should be user friendly. In other words, they should be transparent to the participant after a short period of time...The questions typically emerge from the conversation. In some cases, they are serendipitous and result from comments by the participants. In most cases, the ethnographer has a series of questions to ask the participant and will wait for the most appropriate time to ask them during the conversation (if possible).

Waiting for the most appropriate time, however, is not the kind of passive activity that waiting often is; it presupposes a very active mode of listening and thinking, which enables the interviewer to "hook into" and build on what has just been said. In this regard, the following cautionary note about one's own ego proved very helpful:

A crucial element in this method is to - sometimes immediately, sometimes after a long period of ('waiting' or 'waste') time - obtain a relaxed and informal atmosphere between interviewer and interviewee. This is done by *not* rushing but, rather, listening carefully and with concentrated patience, fully forgetting your own ego (but *all the time* thinking however, *strategically*, how to cover the subject areas in the best way by asking the right 'why?' or 'what do you mean by that?' at the right time, and with the right timing).³⁸

³⁶ Svendsen, G.L.H. and G.T., 2004, *The creation and destruction of social capital - entrepreneurship, co-operative movements and institutions*, Edward Elgar Publishing, UK, p 158.

³⁷ Svendsen, G.L.H. and G.T., 2004, *The creation and destruction of social capital - entrepreneurship, co-operative movements and institutions*, Edward Elgar Publishing, UK, p 158.

³⁸ Svendsen, G.L.H. and G.T., 2004, *The creation and destruction of social capital - entrepreneurship, co-operative movements and institutions*, Edward Elgar Publishing, UK, p 158ff.

Another reason, this time a subject-specific one, necessitated loosely structured interviews; the nature of the COSG as an organisation meant that it often worked in the background, somewhat removed from the objector. Even individual support groups³⁹ often engaged in a quiet, unobtrusive style of support; sometimes so much so that the objector was not always fully aware of all the work that was going on behind the scenes, so to speak, on his behalf. A small but pertinent example of this is an objector receiving postcards while in prison without knowing the full extent of the campaigning being conducted on the outside to sustain a supply of mail to him. The effect of this quiet support on the interview process was that an objector had to be given the time and the encouragement to think more deeply about what this support meant to him. Often a certain amount of information-sharing on the part of the interviewer assisted the objector to reflect on the nature of support he was given, for example, "I noticed from the archives how certain support groups would collate extracts of letters from friends and family into a single long document to circumvent the legal regulation that an objector could only receive two letters per month - do you remember any similar things happening with you?" This interviewing technique demanded a level of prior knowledge on the part of the interviewer,⁴⁰ which can be said to have been used in too directed a manner, hence exposing the interviewee to manipulation. In this case, however, I felt it was warranted for two reasons: firstly, sharing information with the interviewee in this way enabled me to verify by triangulation what had already been seen in the archives; and, secondly, it assisted interviewees to dig up faded but associated memories that were concealed under the more dramatic events of that period of their lives.⁴¹ Sometimes, the fact that the interviewer knew some prior information proved very helpful as interviewees were able to recall important but forgotten aspects of their objection. As such, interviews tended to be about twice as

³⁹ The distinction between the COSG and individual support groups is made clear in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Hence the decision not to conduct interviews until enough information had been collected on the basic questions (see above) and some archival reading had been done.

⁴¹ An interesting example of this was in an interview conducted with Loek Goemans on 13 February 2006, in which she shared how the COSG had done some awareness-raising work by giving talks in parishes on the importance of questioning one's conscience in regard to military service. The interviewer then asked what the response had been to this, which led to Loek sharing the dilemma in her own family as there had been a mixed response among family members to the call to heed one's conscience.

long as had initially been agreed upon by the parties, namely two hours instead of one, but all interviewees agreed to this extension of the time as the interview progressed. Many objectors expressed gratitude at the end of the process, as is summed up in this comment by David Bruce:⁴²

Thanks for coming to speak to me.....I think it was good for me to chat about this and reflect on it again - and thanks for reminding me that I had a support group whom I've never really acknowledged!!!⁴³

and this one by Charles Bester:

I have lost touch with almost everyone who meant so much to me then - this is something I regret. Is it just that lives carry on and new priorities arise, or maybe, I worry, that somehow I never managed to convey the gratitude I had for being a part of COSG and ECC, and that somehow I took friendships for granted? Or was it that the circumstances were in reality so intense, that it was too difficult/painful to find another plane on which to continue the friendships, so in effect it became easier to detach?⁴⁴

The three focus groups interviews conducted were extremely successful, not so much in the amount of information they brought to light, but rather in the qualitative depth of reflections of processes and events that had taken place some twenty-five years back. Perhaps the main reason for the success of these focus groups was that people *wanted* to come together to share memories and perceptions of experiences, which had profoundly influenced the kind of people they were today. Another reason is that they drew together people who knew each other well, to discuss what they had worked on with one another, as opposed to the usual kind of focus group that gathers people who do not know one another (or who know one another only incidentally as community members), such as in a study of the incidence and handling of a disease in a community. As such, the researcher was able to learn much from the rich knowledge and experience of the group. This prior relationship between people meant that one person from the group could be the facilitator

⁴² All quotes in this dissertation are taken verbatim from the original sources. This applies also to titles of documents referred to in the footnotes, hence the occasional discontinuity in numerals, bold print, the underlining of words and the use of higher case letters. The only editing done to verbatim quotes is ... for words left out and the use of square brackets for insertions on the part of the researcher.

⁴³ Email correspondence with David Bruce after the interview conducted with him on 29 September 2006.

⁴⁴ Email correspondence with Charles Bester on 13 May 2007.

of the focus group meeting. This enabled the researcher to concentrate solely on listening, which meant that I was able to make interventions when clarification, probing, or follow-up of an issue was essential. Also the intimate knowledge and experience the facilitator had of the issues under discussion meant that she/he, rather than the researcher, was more suited to guiding the discussion.

In two focus group meetings the researcher chose a facilitator, asking if this person would be prepared to take on this role. My choice was based on knowing that the person concerned had done much facilitation work within the COSG and on having the opportunity to meet and talk with this person more than once before the meeting, as a means of preparing for the meeting. Both of these meetings were structured around set questions,⁴⁵ and a process, which included quiet time to respond to the questions individually before the responses were shared and debated in the group forum. This quiet time was felt to be very important in enabling people to first reach into (and write down) their own memories and reflections before being influenced by what someone else shared. In one of these meetings, the questions had been shared via email with the participants some three weeks before the time. It was made clear at the start of the meeting that the researcher would like to collect the written responses of participants at the end of the meeting, which all were very willing to do. In the third focus group, the facilitator was not chosen by the researcher but instead volunteered himself. This facilitator then worked with another objector/COSG activist in his region on devising a structure for their focus group meeting. This in itself proved very interesting as it revealed how the COSG, not being rigidly held by an overarching national structure (more of this below), took on its own character in different regions. Since this focus group did not provide as much opportunity to explore the set questions, these questions were sent to participants via email after the meeting and three out of the sixteen participants responded to them in the months that followed.

⁴⁵ See Appendix 4.

In terms of certain specific considerations ensuring the optimal use of the focus group process, the researcher took the following into account:⁴⁶

- Size of groups - while the recommended size of a focus group is about eight people, the COSG focus groups ranged in size from eleven to sixteen people (some of whom were children or friends of participants). While on one hand this may have had its disadvantage as it limited the time that each participant had to share experiences and insights, I felt I did not want to limit the group size, as I wanted to honour the fact that members of the group had themselves suggested who should be invited. Also, by collecting written responses to questions, I was still able to garner what participants may not have had the time to share in the meeting.
- Objectives of the meeting - the objectives of the focus group meeting were clearly written and presented at the start of the meeting. They were:
 - to explore the context within which the COSG operated
 - to reflect on the aims and activities of the COSG within this context
 - to assess the impact and effectiveness of the work of the COSG, as related to its overall aims.
- Length of meeting - participants agreed to a two-and-a-half to three-hour meeting, with (a) break(s) during and/or after the meeting to allow time to socialise and catch up with one another after so long. While this is somewhat longer than the suggested focus group meeting length (one to two hours), the bondedness of the group, the non-existence of previous opportunities to debrief as a group this period in their lives (see more of this below) and the emotive depth of the topic warranted a longer focus group meeting.
- Range of questions - because the issue of conscription had touched people on such deep emotional levels, the researcher attempted to

⁴⁶ This section draws on the following literature: Chiroro, P. M., 2004, *Critical issues to consider when planning and conducting focus group discussions - a staff training manual*, University of Pretoria, which is based on Dawson, S., Manderson, L., and Tallo, V., 1993, *A manual for the use of focus groups: methods for social research in disease*, UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for research and training in tropical diseases, International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries, Boston MA.

include questions which would provide an opportunity to talk about feelings. The facilitators also agreed, at the beginning of the meeting, to encourage the group to talk not only from a “head space” but also from a “heart space”. Each meeting was started with a gathering of responses on the topic, “How I feel about being here today.”

- Type of questions - the questions followed four broad themes:
 - The work of the COSG
 - The nonviolent underpinnings of the COSG
 - The impact of the work of the COSG
 - A personal response to involvement in this movement

All except one of the questions were open-ended to encourage flexibility of responses and to encourage people to reply at length. This meant that it was not always possible to get through the twelve prepared questions, with the facilitator and the researcher agreeing that it was more important to allow a topic to be fully explored if the group so wished, rather than rush superficially through each question. The sessions were, therefore, not tightly structured. Whatever questions were not verbally discussed in the group would still be covered by the written responses handed in to the researcher at the end of the meeting. An effort was also made not to include “why” questions as these can sound like an interrogation.

- Confidentiality - the process of writing up the discussion, returning these notes to participants for comments and/or amendments, and obtaining consent from participants for the use of personal reflections was explained at the beginning of each meeting. The researcher was also aware that participants may not be comfortable to share in the open forum all their responses to the questions given, hence my request to collect written responses after the meeting.
- Sequencing of meetings and interviews - to be able to make optimum use of the interviews and focus group meetings, it became clear to the researcher that they should not be held until quite a lot of background reading and email correspondence on the basic questions (see above) had been completed. For this reason the interviews and meetings did not begin until the end of the first year of research. While the interviews

and focus group meetings complemented one another in the type of information they revealed (and could hence be carried out simultaneously), the focus group meetings were used more to consolidate and add depth to the interviews, a process which could effectively take place through the group sharing. Hence two of the three focus group meetings took place after all but one of the interviews had been completed.

Early on in the research process, an interesting and exciting suggestion was made by one of the conscientious objectors, Donn Edwards, to set up an email discussion group for anyone who had been involved in conscientious objection in any way or who had any interest in these issues. Below is the opening invitation to join this group, which is included here as an example of the kind of sensitivity and willingness to interact that characterised the approach of the COSG and its proponents (discussed in greater detail below):

Judy Connors will be officially opening this email discussion group shortly, with her first posting. My role has been to set up the group in order to facilitate discussion, recollections and information on the "bad old days" when military conscription invaded our lives.

Judy is doing research on this topic, and I'm sure we all have a few stories to tell. Please bear in mind: there is no "UNSEND" button on email, so make sure you are feeling calm and collected before you hit the "Send" button. If you take offence at anything that is said, please remember that email is a difficult medium to express irony, sarcasm and humour, so please don't take anything personally. It usually isn't intended that way!⁴⁷

While the researcher had made no prior decision to use this as a research method, it struck me as an excellent mechanism through which I could simultaneously be a participant and an observer. Also, it was a medium which provided people with the opportunity to think about their responses before posting them. As it turned out, within the first six months almost forty people had joined what proved to be a very fruitful communication tool in increasing my understanding of both the content and the process of the COSG's work. Some of the insights gained from observing the exchanges between

⁴⁷ Email to the discussion group from Donn Edwards on 15 September 2005.

participants included the following; deep levels of trust between people; dedicated ownership of and participation in the movement hence a willingness to contribute to this study; honesty in sharing feelings; assertiveness in voicing opinions; a sincere commitment to nonviolence as a way of life; a need to express gratitude; humility about one's contribution to the struggle; a willingness to affirm others; and a desire to contribute actively to ongoing debates about controversial issues.⁴⁸ A number of examples of these insights are worth mentioning here, as evidence of the richness and depth that was added to this study through the use of this medium of communication:

- One of the challenges faced in uncovering the exact nature of the support that was given to objectors by the COSG, was the sometimes self-effacing claims made about the value of this support, for example "I didn't do much; I only accompanied some objectors to the Board [for Religious Objection] in Bloemfontein."⁴⁹ On the researcher affirming the great value of this kind of support in an email contribution to the discussion group, the following response was received:

I would support Judy's comments - as one of the young men that you supported both on my trip to Bloemfontein and throughout my community service your input and insight would be valuable to the project.⁵⁰

- When Ivan Toms received the President's Order of the Baobab Award⁵¹ on 20 April 2006, a number of postings were made to the group, two of which are included below:

Hi all,

As some might know I was honoured with the Order of the Baobab by the President yesterday for my contribution to the struggle against apartheid and sexual discrimination.

⁴⁸ For an example of this, please see Appendix 5; an article written by Janneke Weidema in *The Witness*, 27 September 2006. This letter was posted to the COSG email discussion group by one of the COSG activists and objectors.

⁴⁹ Comment made by Loek Goemans in a telephone discussion on 15 May 2005.

⁵⁰ Email to the discussion group by Martin Birtwhistle on 29 June 2005.

⁵¹ The Order of the Baobab was instituted in 2002. It is a South African award granted by the president of the country to South African citizens in recognition of their contribution to democracy, human rights, arts and sciences and community service.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_the_Baobab)

I believe it is as much a recognition of COSG/ECC work done in the struggle against apartheid and militarism. So I hope we can all feel affirmed for the hard work done in the eighties.

Regards

Ivan Toms⁵²

and one response to this was:

Congratulations Ivan!....

I understand what you are trying to get at about the struggle - but unless the COSG/ECC work was named in the reward it continues to strengthen my feeling that the ANC is very uncomfortable with the CO tradition in this country. So, sad to say I don't agree with your exuberant take on the award, and I for one don't feel 'affirmed for the hard work done in the eighties' in the struggle against the military state.

Which is not to say that I don't celebrate the award with you, and the wonderful contribution that you made in the struggle for people's health and against sexual discrimination.⁵³

- The documentary *Eat my call-up* (see above) elicited a flurry of responses, two of which were posted on the same night as the documentary was screened:

I had the privilege of seeing the documentary tonight and what struck me _____ was how grateful I was that the 17 year old sitting next to me doesn't have to face those difficult choices. Thanks to you all for having the courage to stand up.⁵⁴

and:

I had a similar response about my 14 year old. One of the memories evoked by the documentary was of living with a call-up date and place constantly in my future, always there blocking my way. I received two call-ups a year between 1979 and the end, and managed to stay out of the army through study (and some other perhaps less orthodox methods). What I struggled to explain to my son last week was the stresses this placed on my life throughout my late teens and entire

⁵² Email to the discussion group from Ivan Toms on 21 April 2006.

⁵³ Email to the discussion group from Steve de Gruchy on 22 April 2006.

⁵⁴ Email to the discussion group from Pam Robertson on 30 July 2006.

twenties, and how it restricted the way in which I conceptualised, dreamed, and indeed lived, my future.

My son can fantasise about a "gap year" in which he travels our beautiful coastline with his surfboard. He may or may not do this when the time comes, but at least he can dream about it....⁵⁵

- One review of the book *An unpopular war* (see above) that appeared in *The Witness* newspaper led to a series of exchanges on the discussion group and in the press, primarily as a result of a mother's response to this review about the psychological damage inflicted on her son⁵⁶ who was conscripted to fight in northern Namibia and southern Angola. Apart from one objector contributing to this exchange by writing his own letter,⁵⁷ it is worth noting here two of the exchanges that were posted to the discussion group:

I am finding this current resurfacing and engagement with conscription and objection fascinating and at times quite emotional. I like Richard [Steele's] approach⁵⁸ contextualising the individual experiences and shifting the blame, but of course individuals are struggling with their experiences now and carry their own burden of guilt. It would be remarkable to create the space for some sort of apology and reparation. Snippets of conversations here and there have made me realise that there are so many men who don't know where to put that part of their past and don't find it easy to talk about it. Of course that is true for all sides of the conflict, but our connection is with conscription and different responses and experiences of that.⁵⁹

and:

Thanks Paula [Hathorn], Richard [Steele] and others

You are putting in to words stuff that I've been feeling and thinking about for a while, and thought I was rather 'off the wall' in terms of the dominant discussions going on around politics, identity and power in SA. There is something really good and powerful happening here.

Thanks.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Email to the discussion group from Chris Giffard on 30 July 2006.

⁵⁶ See Appendix 6, *The Witness*, 28 August 2006.

⁵⁷ See Appendix 7.

⁵⁸ See Appendix 7.

⁵⁹ Email to the discussion group from Paula Hathorn on 1 September 2006.

⁶⁰ Email to the discussion group from Steve de Gruchy on 1 September 2006.

- At one point the researcher sent a progress report to the group, explaining that this research was taking longer than expected, to which the following response was received:

Your research has been like group therapy to those who were objectors. Why not take another year...⁶¹

So perhaps the biggest contribution of the discussion group is that it created a space for objectors, supporters and activists to speak with and listen to one another, also for those who were part of the group but did not participate actively in it. By sharing these memories and reflections some 25 or more years later - in a context where there has thus far been almost no opportunity for collective debriefing of any kind - it has hopefully helped people talk about these experiences a little more easily and given them a place within themselves where they can "put that part of their past". In addition to the personal benefits, however, there were those who were quick to express how powerful this medium of communication would have been for furthering the aims of the movement:

An interesting website you found...imagine if we had access to such info and networks so easily when we were grappling with this 25 odd years ago!⁶²

Although this was not part of the research methodology, it must be mentioned that the researcher found it extremely helpful and healing to keep a journal, especially during the research phase of the study. Oftentimes the opportunity it provided for "dumping" and reflection helped me to process memories or discoveries that were painful. This was particularly useful in that I was not a neutral outsider to this topic, having grown up with a brother in South Africa. While this personal experience of conscription added a level of understanding that would otherwise not have been possible, it was also important for me to maintain a measure of objectivity in this research; something which was made possible by the use of a journal. Also, in talking with different people about conscription and that particular period of South Africa's history, different responses were elicited, which were too valuable to lose. While a journal is usually a personal document, I felt it may be of value to share some of the

⁶¹ Email from Andrew Warmback on 9 December 2005.

⁶² Email to the discussion group from Rob Goldman on 10 October 2005.

entries, as a sketch of how the experiences of the military still form a deep undercurrent in the psyche of many South Africans:

26 January [2005] - Then it also struck me on the way home that never having been an anti-apartheid activist, and having felt bad about it for so long...THIS CAN BE MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE!! And indeed, even though belated, what a valuable contribution it can be. As Michael [Graaf] said, in his interactions with young black children today, what he is picking up is that the liberation struggle in South Africa was won through the AK47. Whatever truth there may be in this, there is much, much more that was nonviolent, and this more needs to be told. I also thought about the price Ronnie [my brother] paid in choosing to leave S.A. and how this was a very painful and difficult choice, not just for him but for our whole family. I can remember the day I found out he was leaving, I can remember going to Dermot [my fiancé then, now my husband] and saying tearfully that Ronnie was leaving, and he did his best to reassure me that we would still see lots of each other.

28 January - I mentioned to the small group I was working in today at Summer School [University of KwaZulu Natal], what my dissertation was about, and I got a very interesting response from Fr Fana, an elderly Catholic priest who is working with Mennonite Justice and Peace. He affirmed the idea that this is an important study; he remembered how hearing about young white men refusing to do military service had given his people hope in the struggle; not only hope that these white men would not be around to fight them, but hope that there were some people on the other side who did not believe in apartheid.

17 February - Ronnie was shocked by this [Fr Fana's statement above] and asked, "Why? Did all black people think that all whites who went to the army were in it because they supported apartheid?"

21 March - She also shared a horrible story of how the boys who had died in Namibia would be brought back in body bags, and the parents were told by the SADF that they were not to open the bags. One mother refused to listen and opened her son's bag, only to find that he was painted black from head to toe. This is when people began to realise (and the ECC began to publicise)

what was really going on with the SADF in Namibia i.e. that our boys were being disguised as SWAPO members and going in to raid villages etc.

20 April - By chance I landed up having a chat with one of the neighbours in our street today, Adrian (probably in his early 50s), when I was out for the evening walk, and we got talking about the army. So I told him about my study and he then shared with me how he refused to go to Angola when he was in the army. He simply refused; he had seen too much shit, he said i.e. guys coming back in body bags.....it's interesting how all these examples of objection (big or small) surface when you start talking.

23 June - I don't know where this came from, but suddenly out of the blue, while doing my morning meditation, it struck me very forcefully how iniquitous this whole conscription thing was. I mean, to take young men who were at a very impressionable age and overpower their minds in all kinds of ways - ranging from the dehumanising of the uniform and the hair cuts and the yelling, to the brutality of the training, to the glorification of war through all the political bumph about how you were doing your bit vir volk en vaderland, to the softer support through things like "Forces Favourite" and the singers who used to hold concerts at the border, to the inclusion of the whole family thing, like buying Defence Bonds and giving guys in the army a lift etc....how absolutely evil it was to turn innocent youth into machines that would be prepared to kill...and believe it was right to do so!! And then to say that this is good because it teaches discipline and makes them into men!!!

In terms of Eastern mysticism, one would say that through doing all of this, which really is a gross inversion of the natural order of human beings to want to live out of their goodness (Godness) in harmony with one another, our nation as a whole incurred a huge karmic debt....We sowed seeds of such immense violence - we are now reaping them.

I can't say this strongly enough....fine, if you have a trained, professional army that sees defence as their job and that has chosen voluntarily to do this (not exactly fine in terms of the path of nonviolence, but let's not get too idealistic here!), but NOT fine to just FORCEFULLY take young boys, really, and turn them into soldiers. I am really angry when I think about this....I don't know why this anger is only hitting me now.....

29 June - It's funny what Ronnie said today about the video maybe covering my story of trying to retrace my journey from the old South Africa into the new South Africa / into political consciousness etc. because the one question that has been staying with me quite a lot lately is, "What do I remember of this whole army thing (besides trying to deal with a pregnancy with a husband in the army)?" And then, to make things even more weird, Thando and her little brother, Dumi, come over to play the other day, and are messing around in Adrian's [my son's] old toy chest when, what do they discover? I know it's been there all these years - but just seeing it again shocked me.....a little box with Silvio's [my ex-husband's] old pips from his lieutenant's course and the little old margarine tub stripes, which I can remember cutting for him when he needed them for the air force. I must admit, I was quite proud that he had achieved this rank. Now wouldn't that make a lovely cameo of the old vs. the new South Africa; my black neighbours' children coming to play and discovering the army pips which are now playthings.....!

30 July - Had dinner with [friends] last night, and I started talking about my dissertation. Of course, [name] had a lot to say about COs....how they were just "banggatte" etc. He also carried on about how there were many good things about the army and how you didn't go in there with any mind to kill; it was a place where you learnt a lot of things, and made good friends and did things together and learnt about team spirit and discipline and had a lot of fun. It was only when you found yourself in a war situation with bullets flying around you that you realised that this was serious and that you would need to kill. He said that he would really like something like the army for his son now [23 years old]. I tried to gently share my view but he was so bombastic (excuse the pun!!) that I didn't get a word in edgewise. I was glad though that Dermot heard it because now for the first time he could hear in no uncertain terms how most white South Africans viewed military service.

In conclusion, it must be stated that as a Peace Studies student documenting a nonviolent social movement, I was keen to find research methods that resonated with the topic. Broadly speaking, this meant finding ways in which the study could become - and come out of - a process of dialogue and renewed interconnectedness. Hence I tried, without being intrusive, to include as many people as possible in discussions (hence my delight in the

discussion group) and to constantly share new names discovered through archival reading in the hope of reviving connections between people where possible. In this regard, a balance had to be struck between encouraging people to respond to questions (or attend focus group meetings), and accepting that busy lives (or other reasons) sometimes prevented them from participating as fully as they would have liked. It also meant being as transparent as possible in giving feedback on the progress of meetings and of the research. This transparency also at times meant being open to and grateful for the suggestions of participants. This was particularly demonstrated when one of the focus group planning teams devised their own structure for their focus group meeting. And in another region a firm directive was given by one of the participants about the timing of the focus group meeting, which proved to be excellent advice. This transparency also meant not being afraid to apologise and remedy actions when the researcher's slack handling of the discussion group allowed it to become, as one participant rightly noted, "another form of spam".

In essence, therefore, finding nonviolent research methods meant trying to approach the study with open-mindedness and a listening spirit that would allow the truth within participants to reveal itself, rather than having pre-determined outcomes in mind. As such, the researcher has tried hard to honour the experiences of individuals by allowing the voices of those who were involved in the movement to come through in this study. Of course, this presupposes an ability to provide a space where people felt free to show their vulnerability by sharing honestly what was on their minds and in their hearts. I can only hope that by sharing my own vulnerability in regard to this study, rather than remaining the impartial observer that I am not, such a space has been created.

Chapter 2 - Overview

*To kill one man is to be guilty of a capital crime,
to kill ten men is to increase the guilt ten-fold,
to kill a hundred men is to increase it a hundred-fold.
This the rulers of the earth all recognize
and yet when it comes to the greatest crime -
waging war on another state - they praise it!*
Mozi, China, circa 470 - 391 B.C.

*Each one of us becomes responsible for the crime of war
by cooperating in its preparation and in its execution.
This includes the military.
This includes the making of weapons.
And it includes paying for the weapons.*
Father George Zabelka⁶³

As indicated in the overviews of the three theses and other related literature in Chapter 1, much has been written about the growth and changes in the focus of the military in South Africa, particularly from the time of Union (1910) until 1994, as well as about the external and internal factors leading to these developments. The analysis of these phases of growth and change have of necessity also covered the deliberate strategic attempts of South African military leadership to win the support and loyalty of white South Africans, namely of those without whom the growth and operations of the Defence Force would not have been possible. This has often been described as the militarisation of South African society (see for example Jacklyn Cock's book, *War and society*⁶⁴).

It is not, therefore, the intention of this dissertation to repeat what has been written in these works. And yet, the history of the Conscientious Objector Support Group as a movement for change, and its value, can only truly be

⁶³ 17 August, 2005. This article was originally published by Bruderhof.com, and is reprinted with their permission. It is an excerpt of a speech Fr. Zabelka gave at a Pax Christi conference, called "Blessing the bombs". "Father George Zabelka, a Catholic chaplain with the U.S. Air Force, served as a priest for the airmen who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and gave them his blessing. Over the next twenty years, he gradually came to believe that he had been terribly wrong, that he had denied the very foundations of his faith by lending moral and religious support to the bombing. Zabelka, who died in 1992, gave this speech on the 40th anniversary of the bombings."

⁶⁴ Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg.

explored and understood within the broader political and military context of South Africa before and at the time of the COSG's existence.

Up until and even beyond the time of Union, conscription was not an issue in South Africa. Defence Act No. 13 of 1912 established a small Permanent Force, which would be supplemented if necessary by volunteers from the Citizen Force regiments, to be drawn by the use of a ballot system, or by men serving in the "Rifle Associations": "a reincarnation of the republics' commando forces"⁶⁵. 30 days of service was required in first year, with a possible follow-up of 21 days for three more years. Pre-empting the conscientious objector legislation that was to follow many years later, provision was made for anyone whose name appeared on the ballot and who wished to apply for exemption from the ballot to make a written application to the Exemption Board. One of the grounds, which the Exemption Board took into account in considering the application, was "his *bona-fide* religious tenets".⁶⁶ Even during both World Wars the South African government, facing strong opposition from Afrikaner nationalists, was unable to introduce conscription into what was then the Union Defence Force. In fact, "The white parliament's decision to join the Allied war effort in 1939 was taken by a slim margin,⁶⁷ with many Afrikaans-speakers either supporting the National Socialist cause in Germany or wishing to remain neutral."⁶⁸ This all changed, however, when the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. As Kenneth Grundy points out:

The National Party government's initial policy agenda concentrated on the systematic construction of the apartheid state. Questions of racial separation and dominance and an elaborate legal apparatus had to be fashioned to secure what was an inherently inequitable and unpopular regime. Once having set in motion these distinctive racial policies, the government turned to remaking the Union Defence Force and South African Police to eradicate the

⁶⁵ Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 131.

⁶⁶ Defence Act No. 13 of 1912, Section 58(6)(d).

⁶⁷ This does not mean, however, that South Africans did not contribute to the war effort; 334 000 men of all races volunteered for full-time service in the South African army (and some in the RAF) during World War II, fighting in such places as Somalia, Madagascar, North Africa, Italy and against the Japanese. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_South_Africa)

⁶⁸ Rauch, J., "War and resistance", in Cawthra, G., Kraak, G. & O'Sullivan, G. (eds), *War and resistance: Southern African reports*, Macmillan Press, London, 1994, p 1.

vestiges of the imperial mentality and English-speaking dominance in high ranks. All government institutions were converted into apartheid institutions to strengthen the party's hold on the state apparatus.⁶⁹

A useful way of examining the growth of the South African military is to look at the military expenditure over the years (an argument, which COSG and ECC used strategically in their campaigns). However, rather than just looking at expenditure, it is helpful to look at the military burden carried by the country, namely, military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, and to divide the stages of growth into three distinct periods: 1960 - 1973, 1974 - 1988, and 1989 - 1995.⁷⁰ Some significant political occurrences are highlighted in each phase, particularly those that heightened in the minds of South Africa's rulers the perception of external and/or internal security threats against the country. This perception served as the ideological justification to the public, especially to voters, for military policy and expenditure.

Time period ⁷¹	Military burden: % of GDP
1950s	< 1%
1960	0,8%
1960 - 1973	Average of 2,5%
1965	3,0%
1974 - 1988	Average of just less than 4,0%
1987	4,5%
1989 - 1995	< 3,0%
1995	2,1%

It may be worth noting that in the 1950s military expenditure amounted to less than 1,0 percent of the GDP. In 1961, however, South Africa left the

⁶⁹ Rauch, J., "War and resistance", in Cawthra, G., Kraak, G. & O'Sullivan, G. (eds), *War and resistance: Southern African reports*, Macmillan Press, London, 1994, p 1.

⁷⁰ To this end, much of what has been written in the following five paragraphs has been taken from Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press.

⁷¹ This table has been compiled from information provided in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press.

Commonwealth⁷² "after strong condemnation at a prime ministers' conference"⁷³ and the following political events took place:

- Widespread incidents of internal resistance, one of which was Sharpeville in 1960. The government responded ruthlessly, by shooting protesters and declaring a State of Emergency in 1961. The armed struggle against apartheid was launched in 1961;
- The United Nations Security Council decision in 1964 to impose an arms embargo on South Africa (this was a recommended embargo, which was then made mandatory in 1977, as a result of violations of and weaknesses in implementing this embargo);
- SWAPO's launching of the armed struggle in Namibia (then South West Africa) in 1961;
- "In 1963, thirty African heads of state established an African Liberation Committee comprised on nine states, headquartered in Dar-es-Salaam, with the avowed purpose pf overthrowing the white minority regimes in Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, South West Africa (Namibia), and South Africa";⁷⁴
- The presence of Cuban troops in Angola, which led to the South African government perceiving a growing Communist threat in the region:

The intensification of the cold war between East and West which, coupled to the withdrawal by the West from Africa,....resulted in a rapid deterioration of the position of Whites in Southern Africa whilst Communism increasingly exerted its influence in the remainder of Africa....the continent of Africa would play a key role in the strategy traditional to the Soviets, and an attack would be concentrated against the White governments in Southern Africa.⁷⁵

⁷² South Africa also "ceased to participate in the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization...[and] the Economic Commission for Africa, the Council for Technical Co-Operation in Africa, the Council for Science in Africa, and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations....In addition, beginning in 1964 the International Olympic Committee barred South African athletes from Olympic competition." (*Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 138.)

⁷³ Thompson, L. and Prior. A., in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 138.

⁷⁴ Thompson, L. and Prior. A., in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 138.

⁷⁵ RSA, 1971, White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, Department of Defence, RSA in Roux, A., 1997, p. 181.

As a result, South Africa began its own arms production programme, "with the establishment of the Armaments Board in 1964 (the forerunner of Armscor),"⁷⁶ making South Africa not only self-sufficient in weapons production, but also able to export weapons. This was the growth of what was called the military-industrial complex, which included, "industrial magnates sit(ing) on the Defence Advisory Council; over 400 companies rely(ing) significantly on defence contracts and over 800 (being) involved in Armscor contracts."⁷⁷ During this period the military burden increased from 0,8 percent in 1960 to an average level of 2,5 percent during the years 1960 - 1973, with the figure peaking, during the first phase, at 3,0 percent in 1965.

The second phase, 1974 - 1988, saw a concomitant second phase of military expansion, which brought the military burden to an average level of just below 4,0 percent. Below are some of the factors, which contributed to this expansion:

- Angola's and Mozambique's independence from Portugal (1975), both of which "Pretoria (had) counted on as buffers against hostile black marxist forces to the north";⁷⁸
- The 1976 student uprisings in Soweto confirming the fear of growing domestic conflict, which was perceived to have been instigated by external communist forces. The government attempted to quell such internal resistance by deploying SADF conscripts to the townships as assistance to the South African Police;
- A mandatory United Nations arms embargo against South Africa in 1977 (the first-ever mandatory decision by the UN against a member state), before which "South Africa was the recipient of highly sophisticated weaponry from Israel, France and other countries";⁷⁹

⁷⁶ McWilliams in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 182.

⁷⁷ BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, "Report on COSAWR Study Class - February 1980," p 4.

⁷⁸ Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 15.

⁷⁹ Zunes, S., 1994, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the third world", in *Third world quarterly* 15(3) p 409.

- "The increasing range, quantity and sophistication of armaments, as well as military personnel, provided by the Soviet bloc to Angola, Mozambique, the ANC, and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) were seen as conclusive evidence of the USSR's intent to provide the military capacity to conduct a conventional war against South Africa";⁸⁰
- The Soviet bloc's "collaboration with the United Nations, the Organization for African Unity, and certain black African states was seen to be instrumental in effecting the implementation of punitive economic measures (for example, trade sanctions and disinvestment)".⁸¹ This was proof to the South African government of "a deliberate psychological warfare campaign against South Africa, aimed at isolating the country from the international community".⁸²

In response to these perceived threats, the issue of security became all-important to the South African government and the military became a "major force in the country's policy-making process".⁸³ As such, there "was the consolidation of the security and intelligence forces into the centralised command of the South African president,"⁸⁴ with the Cabinet's role in decision-making being reduced. The military extended its influence and control to all aspects of South African society - the political, economic, social and educational structures in the country - ⁸⁵ in what was called a "Total strategy" to face the "Total Onslaught" from Russia, "Communists", hostile border states, and international terrorism:

⁸⁰ McWilliams in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 183.

⁸¹ Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 183.

⁸² Moore in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 183.

⁸³ Jaster in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 183.

⁸⁴ Zunes, S., 1994, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the third world", in *Third world quarterly* 15(3) p 409.

⁸⁵ McWilliams in Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 183.

In 1974 real military expenditures were 26 percent higher than in the previous year, and within four years resources allocated to the military sector more than doubled. As a consequence the military burden rose from the 1965 - 1973 average of 2,4 percent to 3,8 percent between 1974 and 1977. The initial surge in expenditure was followed by an eight-year levelling-off period during which spending was sustained, on average, at 1977 levels.....A brief increase in real spending was recorded in 1987 and 1989 as a result of the intensification of South Africa's involvement in South West Africa / Namibia and Angola, and continued domestic conflict. As a result the military burden rose to 4,5 percent in 1987.⁸⁶

Even at the height of South Africa's military spending, it is important to note that the official figures did not represent the whole picture, as items such as "expenditure on the South West African Territorial Force, the Bantustan armies, the housing of military personnel or the construction of military bases...(were) paid out of other accounts. Nor does the Defence Budget reflect the secret Special Defence Account or revenues from Armscor."⁸⁷

From 1989 - 1995, however, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of South Africa from Namibia and the beginning of significant political reform and peace initiatives within the country, there was a decline of some 50 percent in real military expenditure, with the military burden falling to below 3,0 percent for the first time since the early seventies and to a further 2,1 percent by 1995.

Apart from the significant increase in military spending from the second half of the seventies into the eighties, as shown above, it was ultimately the growing numbers of white men called upon to perform military service that most remarkably shows the immense demands made by the military not only on the economic and political capacity of South Africa, but also on its human resources. Again, this is divided into the three phases mentioned above:

⁸⁶ Roux, A., 1997, "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 184.

⁸⁷ Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 24.

- From 1960 - 1964, the number of Permanent Force members rose from 9 000 to 15 000 and the number of national servicemen, called up by a ballot system, rose from 2 000 to 20 000. "Following the Sharpeville massacre in 1961, the Government raised the period of compulsory military service from three to nine months."⁸⁸ "In 1968 compulsory national service for all young white males was introduced and by 1970 more than 26 000 were called up".⁸⁹
- The devising of the "Total Strategy" in the mid-seventies meant that ever-increasing numbers of conscripts were needed to enable the South African Defence Force to fulfil what it saw as its mandate to maintain security within and outside the country. Not only was the Defence Force used to support the police in suppressing internal unrest,⁹⁰ but also to maintain a strong presence in the then South West Africa so as to prevent a take-over of that country by SWAPO. One way of fulfilling manpower requirements was to raise the length of military service; in 1978 the initial period of military service (Basics) was raised from one year to two years. "At any given time (during this period) the SADF had in excess of 100 000 men permanently under arms (including some 60 000 national servicemen), as well as over 300 000 reservists capable of being mobilized within days, and a 130 000 strong Commando Force".⁹¹ In its attempt to ensure the availability of sufficient numbers of conscripts, the SADF even went so far as to change citizenship regulations; in the Citizenship Amendment Act No. 53 of 1978 any person not older than 25 who was entitled to permanent residence in South Africa and who had been resident in South Africa for two years after he became entitled to permanent residence, automatically became a South African citizen by naturalisation, unless he made an official declaration stating his wish not to become a S.A. citizen. If he became a S.A. citizen, he was liable for service in the

⁸⁸ *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 138.

⁸⁹ RSA, 1971, White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, Department of Defence, RSA in Roux, A., 1997, p 182.

⁹⁰ RSA, 1986, White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, Department of Defence, RSA in Roux, A., 1997, p 183.

⁹¹ Moore and Jaster in Roux, A., "From apartheid to democracy; the economic dimensions of demilitarizing South African society", in Brauer, J. and Gissy, w. (eds.), *Economics of conflict and peace*, Aldershot, Avebury Press, p 184.

SADF; if he made a declaration to the contrary, he would lose his permanent residence permit.⁹² In 1984 the South African Citizenship Amendment Act⁹³ was passed, which required foreign passport holders to either adopt South African citizenship - and hence be liable for call-up - or be denied their permanent residence status.⁹⁴

- National Service Basics was reduced from two years to one year in 1991, and conscription was abolished in 1994. Today the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) operates on a volunteer system.

From a Peace Studies perspective, it is incumbent upon us to step into the shoes of South Africa's rulers for a moment and try to understand what the military developments described above reveal about the states of minds and hearts of significant decision-makers in the South African government or military at the time. While this tentative analysis cannot be held as absolute truth, and could only be verified by speaking to the people who were involved in these decisions (a task, which has not been possible in this study and which holds many difficulties, not least of which is the reluctance of erstwhile leaders to talk and the role of memory that has faded),⁹⁵ it is nevertheless a worthwhile activity from a conflict transformation point of view. Not only will it hopefully help us better understand the impact of the objector movement, COSG, on the South African government as described in the chapters to follow, but it will also place in context the response of significant military leaders at the time as they legislated against, corresponded with or personally met with individual objectors and/or proponents of the movement.

⁹² BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, "South African law and the conscientious objector - a NUSAS MILCOM publication, May 1979", p 1.

⁹³ Act No. 43 of 1984.

⁹⁴ Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 62.

⁹⁵ Informative books in this regard are:

Malan, M., 2006, *My life with the SA Defence Force*, Protea Book House, Pretoria,

Roherly, J.M., 1992, *State security in South Africa: civil-military relations under P.W. Botha*, M.E. Sharpe Inc., New York,

Breytenbach, B., 1994, *The true confessions of an albino terrorist*, Harvest Books, Pennsylvania,

Gilliomee, H., 2003, *The Afrikaners*, Tafelberg South Africa, Cape Town,

O'Meara, D., 1997, *Forty lost years: the apartheid state and the policies of the National Party*, Ohio University Press, Ohio.

There are many models available for analysing conflict, but for the purpose of this analysis, Chetkow-Yanoov's systems model has been chosen.⁹⁶ This is because the four components of conflicts it proposes are all particularly relevant to the conflict under study; and, secondly, because it helps us see how all components impact on and are influenced by all other components simultaneously.⁹⁷

Before applying the systems model, however, it may be helpful to clarify that, while there are two major conflicts under the spotlight in this study, the one that is being examined in this chapter is the conflict between the South African government and those whom it perceived as seeking to overthrow it, i.e. internal black resistance and external Communist enemies (and soon a fusion of the two). The second conflict, namely that between the state and the conscientious objector movement will be examined in greater detail in further chapters. But unless one understands the first, one will not fully understand the second conflict.

The four components of all conflict systems in Chetkow-Yanoov's model, as shown in the sketch below,⁹⁸ are:

⁹⁶ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York.

⁹⁷ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 30.

⁹⁸ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 31.

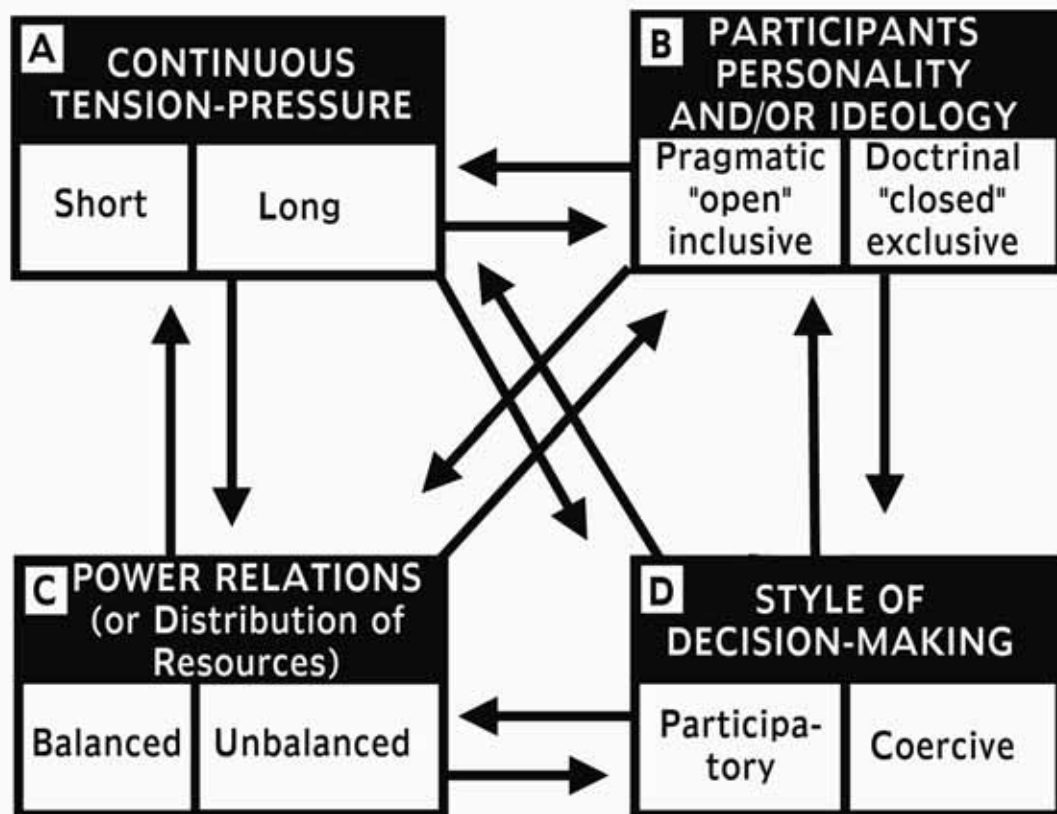


Fig. 1

- Duration of tension and pressure: short conflicts are relatively easy to settle and may even benefit personal growth in that they provide the impetus for searching for creative solutions, but the longer a conflict persists, the more difficult it is to resolve, the more it causes "significant erosion of mental health,"⁹⁹ and the more likely it is to escalate into violence.¹⁰⁰
- Personality or ideology of the participants: "long-lasting conflicts are often accompanied by a change from pragmatic, inclusive, playful, decentralized, open behaviour to a humorless devotion to purity of principles, centralization, exclusiveness, and secrecy."¹⁰¹ Accompanied by emotions such as anger and fear, people often become more and more closed, even to the point of fanaticism. In turn, this shuts down further communication, the lack of which becomes both a contributing

⁹⁹ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 31.

¹⁰⁰ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 32.

¹⁰¹ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 32.

cause and a result of the conflict. "When closed-minded persons also have a great amount of power, they can frustrate most efforts to resolve any conflict in which they are participating, or rationalize the use of violence against a persistent opponent".¹⁰²

- Distribution of power and resources: the hypothesis here is that "The more symmetric the power or resources between participants in a conflict, the less a conflict is likely to escalate into violence....If, however, a strong party is too oppressive, members of the dominated side may become embittered, increase the impermeability of its boundaries, or resort to violent rebellion".¹⁰³
- Style of decision-making: the more ideologically closed the participants are, the more they will rely on a coercive style of decision-making. Such domination usually achieves quicker results than a more cooperative style of decision-making, but it "is more costly to sustain....(and it) generate(s) resentment that contributes to conflict intensification. Domination is usually rooted in suspicion, fear, contempt, and secrecy-conditions for attaining obedience".¹⁰⁴

Each of the above can now be applied to the conflict at hand, noting that an analysis of each component in this model brings to light two factors; firstly, the effect of that component on a human being (in this case a political or military leader in South Africa); and, secondly, the translation of this personal impact into the formulation of macro policies that created the systemic militarisation of South African society. "Indeed, there is a definite link between the exigency of South African conscription legislation and the amount of pressure under which the regime perceive(d) itself to be."¹⁰⁵ Herein lies the strength of this model; that it allows us to move between the personal and the systemic. And while this can be viewed as a disadvantage in that it tends to generalise the

¹⁰² Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 33.

¹⁰³ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 34.

¹⁰⁴ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 34.

¹⁰⁵ Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 130.

thoughts and motivations of all human beings in a particular ruling structure, it also has the advantage of highlighting the fact that rulerships are not political abstracts, but concrete human realities. This last fact is fundamental to the understanding of a nonviolent movement that challenges the power of state, and refuses obedience to this power, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

So, exploring the systems model in relation to the conflict between the South African government and its “enemies” reveals the following:

- Duration of tension and pressure: just looking at the three time periods mentioned above (and ignoring any prior build-up of tension within South Africa before this), it is clear that South Africa’s leaders were dealing with a thirty-year period of conflict (\pm 1960 - 1990). As Chetkow-Yanoov writes:

Human beings, in situations of unceasing tension, often defend their actions by simplifying the world into dichotomous ‘we’ vs. ‘them’ divisions. They tend to abandon the middle group in various continua. As their thinking becomes more and more polarized, their functioning tends to become more closed and they rely on a coercive style of decision-making and tend to project blame onto other participants.¹⁰⁶

This polarised thinking can perhaps best explain the insatiable drive by South African military leaders to increase the numbers of conscripts. From the closing years of the 1970s onwards the SADF could, at any time within a few days, mobilise (or at least attempt to mobilise, as logistically this would probably have been an impossible task) more than half a million white men out of a total white population of 4,45 million people.¹⁰⁷ In reality this would, of course, have been unfeasible as the economy could not have carried the cost of such a withdrawal of manpower for more than a few hours. Years of extended pressure on the regime, both from outside the country (a build-up of military capacity in other Southern African countries and the imposition of punitive sanctions and embargoes) and from within (the growing anger

¹⁰⁶ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, “A systems model for analysing conflicts”, in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 31.

¹⁰⁷ SA Institute of Race Relations, 1981, Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, SAIRR, Johannesburg, p 52.

of a disenfranchised, disempowered, impoverished black population) led to South Africa's rulers entrenching themselves into an intractable isolationist position. It became a stance of "We South African whites against the rest of the world." It is also worth remembering that South Africa was not used to being ostracised by the world community; writes Zunes in 1994:

Despite verbal condemnation of its racial policies, the Western industrialised world has given South Africa consistent support over the years in the form of trade, industrial development, technological assistance, infusion of capital and arms. The nation would not be the economic and military power it is today without the massive aid it received from the West over the past 45 years. Before the launching of the large-scale unarmed resistance in the mid-1980s, there was over \$13 billion worth of annual trade between South Africa and the West, which combined with \$10 billion in foreign investment, supplied the country with the vast majority ofbasic commodities....In addition, the West supported the South African regime through outstanding bank loans and credits totalling \$6.5 billion, much of which went to government entities with no restrictions.¹⁰⁸

It is no wonder, therefore, with the loss of such support and the perceived impending threat of a take-over, that South Africa's rulers should have become hugely defensive, first and foremost in the psychological sense, but then manifesting this in a Defence Force, which was more than double the size of the "estimated combined forces of all black African states and liberation movements south of the equator".¹⁰⁹

- Personality or ideology of the participants: South Africa's leaders' fear of persecution from all fronts and the Christian vs. Communist ideological battle underpinning this fear indeed showed a fanaticism of belief and a perception of the world in oversimplified dichotomous terms: "even bystanders must decide if they are 'for me or against

¹⁰⁸ Zunes, S., 1994, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the third world", in *Third world quarterly* 15(3) p 414.

¹⁰⁹ Zunes, S., 1994, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the third world", in *Third world quarterly* 15(3) p 408.

me".¹¹⁰ Ironically, these leaders had so strongly identified themselves with their position that they were unable to stand back and see their own role in the growing polarisation in the country, as a result of their apartheid policies and practices. This inability to separate person from problem also meant that any criticism of policy was seen as an intrinsic attack on the people in leadership, hence to be prevented at all costs. Interestingly:

the situation worsens if the participants [and here one could also read 'the average white South African at the time'] are also ignorant of the characteristics and the norms of the opposing group. Then both sides fall victim to rumors, generalizations, and stereotypes, and tend to function in a decidedly self-righteous style.¹¹¹

- Distribution of power and resources: considering the hypothesis stated above (that the more symmetric the power or resources between participants in a conflict, the less a conflict is likely to escalate into violence), and then also taking into account the immense military and economic power and resources concentrated in the hands of the South African regime, it is not unreasonable to propose that the regime had very little incentive to resolve its conflict without the use of violence. To the contrary, abandoning their reliance on violent means would to them have been pure folly. The build up of military might described above indicates an unshakeable belief in the inevitability, sooner or later, of being attacked, either by an external or an internal aggressor or both. In its turn, this military might was called upon to suppress internal resistance - so, interestingly, as the conflict progressed it became more and more difficult to distinguish between the use of violence being at once a cause and a result of the conflict.
- Style of decision-making: as stated above, in the 1970s the security and intelligence forces were consolidated into the centralised command of the South African president. As such, coercion and domination became the style of national decision-making, underpinned

¹¹⁰ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 32.

¹¹¹ Chetkow-Yanoov, B., 1997, "A systems model for analysing conflicts", in *Social work approaches to analysing conflict*, Haworth Press Inc., New York, p 32.

by all the elements that accompany such a style: suspicion, fear, contempt, and secrecy-conditions for attaining obedience.

As we examine the work of the Conscientious Objector Support Group in the following chapters, we will need constantly to bear in mind the context described in this chapter. Here was a movement that fundamentally challenged the South African government in each of the four components of the conflict listed above:

- by refusing to participate in the conflict as required by the dictates of the South African government, it must have been seen to be questioning the severity of the pressure which the regime believed it was facing;
- by presenting the stand of individual conscience, it defied the predominant ideology of the time, or more precisely the way in which that ideology was used to justify the use of violence;
- by proposing alternative ways in which it could contribute to the resolution of the conflict, it confronted the existing distribution of power and resources; and
- by asking to be heard, it challenged the dominating style of decision-making that was an integral part of South Africa's governance.

Under these conditions, it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to consider what kind of hearing such a movement for change would be given by the South African government at the time.

Chapter 3 - Conscription, conscientious objection and the COSG

*For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be;
what is once well done is done for ever.*
Henry David Thoreau

As the previous chapter shows, the Conscientious Objector Support Group did not arise in a vacuum in South Africa, nor did it work in isolation. Like any movement for change, it was affected by and it affected the social and, in this case, political scenario of its day. This two-way influence between context and movement impels us to gain clarity on the immediate contextual factors that opened a space for this movement, in this form, to be born. As such, we would do well also to honour any previous attempts to begin a similar movement, because even if there are no (traceable) personal or causal links between earlier and later movements, the thought and energy around these issues had been a reality in some circles for quite some time before the formation of the COSG.

An organisation known as the South African Fellowship of Reconciliation (SAFOR), a branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), was formed in South Africa after World War II.¹¹² Having strong links with the Religious Society of Friends, IFOR was based on the religious principles of love and service and comprised Christians who renounced war. As such, SAFOR pleaded for the recognition of conscientious objectors. Then in 1952 the Christian Council of South Africa,¹¹³ at the request of the World Council of Churches, began to cooperate closely with SAFOR and call for a resolution that "conscientious objectors have the right to have their opinions respected." The government responded cautiously with Defence Act No. 44 of 1957, which provided for a non-combatant option for anyone who belonged to a religious denomination that did not allow him to participate in war.¹¹⁴ This Defence Act, which forms the basis of all further South African Defence

¹¹² This paragraph was sourced from A2558, *Robertson, R., Pacifist Collection*, Historical Papers UWL, a2558/5.1.

¹¹³ The predecessor of the South African Council of Churches (SACC).

¹¹⁴ Defence Act No. 44 of 1957, Section 72(1).

legislation, also established a Permanent Force, a Citizen Force, Commandos and a Reserve Force. "The original version of the Act provided for a three-month period of compulsory military service in the Citizen Force and 21 days in a Commando regiment."¹¹⁵ All males "of European descent" were liable for three months' service and had to apply for registration to the registering officer. The call-up system was, however, still administered by ballot.

The Defence Act No. 77 of 1963¹¹⁶ introduced the provision that any member of the South African Defence Force could be called up "on service in the prevention or suppression of internal disorder in the Republic" or "on such police duties as may be prescribed".¹¹⁷ The option of non-combatant military service was retained but no matter how much the government might have wished this concession to sufficiently accommodate all objectors, this was not to be. There were those who continued to provide the government with a considerable dilemma as a result of their objection, on religious grounds, to all forms of military service. And, already then, the government's intransigence on this issue was apparent, predominantly because of the fear that it would create an uncontrollable flood of insincere objectors from churches other than the "peace churches" or pacifist sects:¹¹⁸

The Minister [speaking in 1964]: "The Honourable member has once again approached me in regard to the question of conscientious objectors. I have no remedy for them,¹¹⁹ Sir...but I can assure the Honourable member that not one of them is kept in prison for ever. But we must make sure that they are conscientious objectors. So we detain them for a couple of weeks and let them out, we make sure that they are conscientious objectors and then you never hear of them again. But we have to make sure first. There are certain churches whose members are all conscientious objectors. But now others

¹¹⁵ Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 134.

¹¹⁶ The full name of this Act and all other Defence Acts mentioned in this dissertation, except the 2002 one, should be "Defence *Amendment* Act No. 77 of 1963" as these Acts amended Defence Act No. 44 of 1957. For the sake of easier readability the word "Amendment" has been omitted. It is, however, included in Appendix 13.

¹¹⁷ Defence Act No. 77 of 1963, Section 2(2)(d). This was, however, not implemented until some years later: see footnote 90.

¹¹⁸ These were churches, whose religious principles did not allow their members to participate in war: Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Seventh Day Adventists, Plymouth Brethren, Suppliant Faithists, and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

¹¹⁹ Four objectors in Cape Town who had chosen to go to prison rather than take the non-combatant option available to them.

approach me, and they tell me that a few of their members are conscientious objectors. Now really, we cannot take that into consideration. Everybody will be a conscientious objector who is a loafer...we must make sure that they are conscientious objectors. After that, we do let them off."¹²⁰

Although the COSG was not to come into existence for at least another twelve years or so, the seeds for its formation were directly sown by the Defence Act No. 85 of 1967, which made it compulsory for all white males between the ages of seventeen and 65 to serve a nine-month period in the SADF.¹²¹ A non-combatant option "as far as may be practicable"¹²² was granted to members of pacifist sects but this provision often worked to the disadvantage of those conscripts who wanted to choose this option: allotment to a non-combatant unit was at the discretion of the registering officer, who alone "decided if the conscript was a bona fide believer and member of a particular denomination."¹²³ Furthermore, until Defence Minister P. W. Botha clarified the meaning of "non-combatant"¹²⁴ in 1970, a conscript could be sent to a combatant unit in a non-combatant capacity. "Even this minimal, highly discretionary practice of limited relief through allotment to internationally recognised non-combatant units had ceased by 1974."¹²⁵ The number of objectors from the pacifist sects who were unrelenting in their refusal of the non-combatant option, increased. As such they made the ultimate sacrifice of enduring repeated prison sentences for their refusal.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ *Hansard*, 15 June 1964, col. 8214.

¹²¹ The use of the ballot system as a mechanism to call up a specified percentage of recruits eased the impact of this Act, just as it had done with previous Acts. By 1969, however, the South African government, perceiving heightened internal and external threats to its security and supremacy (see Chapter 2), abolished the ballot system and called up all white males in an attempt to fulfill its manpower requirements. Furthermore, a volunteer scheme for white women to receive civil defence training started in 1968 and was received with such enthusiasm that the number of applicants (also from Rhodesia and Zambia), soon outstripped plans to accommodate them. At no stage were women conscripted into the SADF and there were no known women objectors. ("Defence training for women now", *Daily Dispatch*, 30 October 1967 and "Plan to give women arms training being revised", *Daily Dispatch*, 5 April 1968.)

¹²² Defence Act No. 85 of 1967, Section 67(3).

¹²³ *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 141.

¹²⁴ According to the Geneva Conventions on War, medical units were officially recognised non-combatant units.

¹²⁵ *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 141.

¹²⁶ Objectors were given three-month prison sentences for refusing to serve, repeatable each time the objector refused. Sentences were served in detention barracks (DB) where the objectors had to follow military discipline. Many Jehovah's Witnesses, not recognising the authority of the State, refused to comply and served repeated fourteen-day periods in solitary

Whether in direct response to the 1969 call-up or not, on 3 October 1970 the Civil Rights League in South Africa convened a conference on conscientious objection to military service in Cape Town, drawing together representatives from SAFOR, a number of churches, the Black Sash, the South African Institute of Race Relations, the National Council of Women of South Africa and a number of young people's organisations, including the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and three members of the press. Three main addresses were made at this conference, each of which highlights a core aspect of the conscientious objection debate that would be the focus of the COSG's work throughout its existence:

- Dr Francis Wilson, who spoke about the morality of war, particularly in a situation where it is used to "preserv(e) evil or violence in society" and the need to defend the right of individual conscience;¹²⁷
- Frank Molteno, a school boy, who "made the remarkable statement that he lacked sufficient courage to be a complete pacifist; he would be a selective objector."¹²⁸ He was convinced that Christ's message of love

confinement with a spare diet. Some served up to four years in DB under very harsh conditions. (taken from *South African Outlook 116(1366)*, April 1985, "Conscription into the SADF - 25 years of resistance", Outlook Publications, Cape Town, p 54). Newspaper reports on the struggle between the state and the Jehovah's Witnesses to have their stance recognised at the time, however, do not corroborate the above statement of "four years" in detention: the worst cases that are mentioned are repeated sentences of two or three 90-day periods, which then changed with the 1972 Defence Amendment Act (see below). ("Youths say no to call up", *Sunday Times*, 14 September 1969, "Two jailed for refusing to do military training", *Daily Dispatch*, 18 December 1969, "Detention spells in camp end romance for Jehovah Witnesses", *Sunday Times*, 31 May 1970, "Objectors: one prison term only", *Daily Dispatch*, 18 February 1972.)

¹²⁷ A2558, *Robertson, R., Pacifist Collection*, Historical Papers UWL, a2558/5.2.1, "Minutes of conference on conscientious objection to military service, held at the Athenaeum, Newlands on Saturday, 3 October 1970 at 9 a.m.", p 4.

¹²⁸ According to definition, a selective objector, sometimes also known as a situational objector, is an objector who refuses to render military service in a particular context, due to objections to the role or necessity of the military in that context. Selective objectors are also sometimes called "Just War" objectors in that they would be prepared to fight in a war they believed to be just or in defense of a just system. In the South African context at the time, selective objectors refused to fight in the SADF primarily because they believed that South Africa was fighting an unjust war and the SADF was used to defend the unjust system of apartheid. Selective objectors can base their stance on religious, moral, ethical or political grounds. The other main category of objector are those often called universal pacifists, who believe that all wars are wrong and who would not join any army no matter what cause it were fighting. This distinction is, however, an oversimplification both in definition (as there are many different types of objection) and in thinking (as it implies that selective objectors are less "religious" or less "moral" than universal pacifists). As shall be seen below in this chapter, it was the continued desperate attempts of the South African government to uphold this broad distinction that served as the legal basis of its handling of objectors.

was correct....He believed he had a duty to his country and referred to the racial oligarchy which is South Africa. He did not feel the Government was South Africa. He felt no obligation to serve the Government of the day, but saw his 20 million fellow South Africans as one nation";¹²⁹

- Mrs D. Cleminshaw who spoke about alternatives to military service.

This conference called upon the government to amend the Defence Act of 1957 "so that such persons as do object on strongly held moral, ethical or religious grounds are permitted to render alternative service in fields completely unrelated to the Defence Force"¹³⁰ and resolved that a deputation led by a Member of Parliament would seek to interview the Minister of Defence on this issue.

It has not been possible to verify if this deputation ever took place, and if it did, what impact it had on policy makers at the time, but in 1972 the government once again amended Defence Act No. 44 of 1957 through the insertion of a new Section 126(a), which effectively accommodated Jehovah's Witnesses (and other "peace church" objectors) by providing a once-only sentence of between twelve and fifteen months for objectors who had been sentenced to Detention Barracks (DB) for twelve months or more.¹³¹ At the same time the length of military service was extended from nine to twelve months, to be followed up by nineteen days annually for five years.¹³² And so began a calculated game on the part of the government that would repeat itself over the years; as a response to mounting church and public pressure, they would offer a concession if necessary on the one hand, but on the other hand,

¹²⁹ A2558, *Robertson, R., Pacifist Collection*, Historical Papers UWL, a2558/5.1, "Minutes of conference on conscientious objection to military service, held at the Athenaeum, Newlands on Saturday, 3 October 1970 at 9 a.m.", p 2.

¹³⁰ A2558, *Robertson, R., Pacifist Collection*, Historical Papers UWL, a2558/5.1, "Minutes of conference on conscientious objection to military service, held at the Athenaeum, Newlands on Saturday, 3 October 1970 at 9 a.m.", p 3.

¹³¹ "Peace Church" objectors were also given conscientious objector status, issued with blue overalls and exempted from military authority and drill in DB.

¹³² This is what became known as "camps". "During the 1975 Angolan invasion, which required a massive mobilization, SADF extended the service in camps to three months." (United Nations Centre against Apartheid, Notes and Documents 9/89, November 1989, *The issue of conscientious objection in apartheid South Africa: growth of the anti-conscription movement* by the Committee of South African War Resistance, 89-32874, p 3.)

ensure by any means possible that the ranks of the SADF were kept filled to the required capacity.

Even though there were no visible “non-peace church” objectors at this point, it would be fallacious to assume that serving in the military was not already causing deep dilemmas for many young men, as is apparent from the following testimony from Paul Graham:

My first camp was in January 1973 at the time of the Frame Strikes¹³³ in Pinetown - we spent the entire month waiting to intervene in these strikes - it meant waking up at two a.m., being handed live ammunition and waiting around at the factories until workers were either at work or not, then going to sleep and doing it again in the evening. I realised then that I would be asked to shoot people I knew.¹³⁴

With the climate within and outside South Africa changing politically (see Chapter 2), some people in the established churches, as opposed to just the “peace churches”, began to question the implications of fighting in the SADF. A motion, proposed by Rev. Douglas Bax and seconded by Dr Beyers Naude, was passed at the 1974 SACC annual conference, urging member churches to “challenge all their members to consider...whether Christ’s call to take up the cross and follow him in identifying with the oppressed does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors.”¹³⁵ The COSG was to draw on this statement many times in its debates and publications in the years to come. For the first time, an unequivocal public declaration had been made that no longer spoke of the morality of war in general terms but rather questioned the legitimacy of the SADF’s role in upholding apartheid. As such, this statement not only triggered the debate in the churches, in parliament and among the public but also helped to move some young men towards taking a stand against military service.¹³⁶

¹³³ A group of textile companies in KwaZulu-Natal, targeted by employees protesting against low wages and difficult working conditions.

¹³⁴ Interview with Paul Graham, 19 April 2006.

¹³⁵ Catholic Institute for International Relations and Pax Christi, 1982, *War and conscience in South Africa - the Churches and conscientious objection*, Russell Press, UK, p 79.

¹³⁶ Email correspondence with Douglas Bax on 21 August 2007.

The opposition to this statement was vehement:¹³⁷ the United Party and the Progressive Party both expressed reservations against the declaration, the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk and the Baptist Synods rejected it outright, and the media, including all English newspapers, except *The Rand Daily Mail*, expressed their dismay at the declaration. In the fifth session of parliament in 1974, Mr H.J. Coetzee, the Deputy Minister of Defence stated:

...in point 5¹³⁸ of the resolution of the South African Council of Churches it is implied or suggested that the so-called freedom fighters on our borders are there because discriminatory practices exist within our borders...there must be a timely warning against this syndrome...Those of us who went to view the exhibition of certain equipment are convinced of the fact that the so-called fighters on the borders are people who are inspired by Red China and, in particular, Russia. We are convinced of the fact that they do not seek the so-called freedom of our Black people; they seek our country.¹³⁹

The Minister of Defence also stated how this resolution was introducing a dangerous new principle into theology; "a theology of revolution,"¹⁴⁰ and warned fiercely:

We are after the blood of those persons who, wrapped in a cloak of sanctimoniousness, are trying to prejudice the security of South Africa.¹⁴¹

Apart from hefty parliamentary opposition to this statement, the government responded swiftly with the 1974 Defence Amendment Act which, in Section 121(c), made it a punishable offence to encourage, aid, incite, instigate or suggest to any potential conscript that he should refuse his call-up, for which the maximum penalty was R5000 or six years imprisonment or both. It is clear that the SACC declaration had touched a raw nerve in the government and would not be tolerated lightly. But what it had also done was open up the debate about conscription and objection to military service. As such, it gave

¹³⁷ Catholic Institute for International Relations and Pax Christi, 1982, *War and conscience in South Africa - the Churches and conscientious objection*, Russell Press, UK, p 29-32.

¹³⁸ Point 5 of the resolution is as follows: "[The Conference] points out that the Republic of South Africa is at present a fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society and that this injustice and discrimination constitutes the primary, institutionalised violence which has provoked the counter-violence of the terrorists or freedom fighters." (Catholic Institute for International Relations and Pax Christi, 1982, *War and conscience in South Africa - the churches and conscientious objection*, Russell Press, UK, p 78.)

¹³⁹ *Hansard*, 15 August 1974, col. 825 ff.

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 29 October 1974, col. 6847.

¹⁴¹ *Hansard*, 15 August 1974, col. 802.

rise to a host of responses in the press, most of which heatedly opposed conscientious objection. In an opinion poll in *The Argus* newspaper, conducted by Market Research Africa, it was shown that 80% of white South Africans felt that South African citizens should not be allowed to refuse to do military service.¹⁴² It is interesting to note the direct link made with the 1974 SACC declaration and the rather patronising tone of this article:

It seems to have been [the] specific objection to serving in particular circumstances that the South African Council of Churches had in mind in its famous call last year to religious ministers to discuss the possibility of conscientious objection with troubled young men in their flocks. There was a tendency to feel that refusal to serve in the armed forces of an unjust State might be morally justified. As the latest Argus opinion poll shows, any young man who does so refuse will need great courage. He will be going against the wishes of the vast majority of his White fellow countrymen and is not likely to get much sympathy or support if drastic action is taken against him.¹⁴³

Even though the SACC churches had taken a stance of historical significance in their 1974 declaration by speaking out boldly against the apartheid regime, this action did not significantly raise the profile of the war resistance movement in South Africa. While it is outside the scope of this study to speculate on the reasons for this, one can only assume that the SACC churches' commitment to educating their members in parishes about the issues surrounding conscription cannot have taken place on the scale that was hoped for by those who adopted the resolution. Another reason can well have been the 1974 Defence Amendment Act, which stifled debate around these issues by the imposition of a considerable fine or jail sentence for inciting people to refuse military service. In fact, "at the 1975 SACC conference a motion proposing new action and thought on conscientious objection was shelved. At the 1976 conference the issue was only referred to in passing."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *The Argus*, 12 March 1975.

¹⁴³ *The Argus*, 12 March 1975.

¹⁴⁴ Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg, p 326.

And yet it must not be assumed that objection to serving in the military for whatever reason had ended. The years 1975 to 1978 saw 3000 to 4000 conscripts per year failing to report.¹⁴⁵ It was, however, largely an “underground” movement, with conscripts finding ways to evade the army¹⁴⁶ or simply leaving the country to live in exile. While circumstances in the country can be said to have contributed largely to this evasion (see Chapter 2), it is impossible to be certain of the reasons for this.¹⁴⁷ What we can be certain of, though, is the government’s response to this: in 1977 a Defence Amendment Act was passed, which doubled the length of initial military service to 24 months, to be followed by 30-day annual camps for eight years, with the possibility of being called up for three months if necessary.¹⁴⁸ This was swiftly followed by the Defence Amendment Act No. 49 of 1978, which increased the (once-only) twelve-to-fifteen-month sentence for “peace church” objectors (in the 1972 Act) to a (once-only) sentence of between eighteen months and three years in duration, depending on whether the objector had failed to report for or render service of less than or longer than twelve-months’ duration. Anyone not from a pacifist sect who refused to serve was subject to repeated call-ups and hence repeated maximum two-year jail sentences or R2000 at a time, until he was no longer liable for military service, namely after 65 years of age.

It is important to note, as an aside, that even though this Amendment made allowance for non-combatant duty, as had previous legislation, this

¹⁴⁵ Hansard, quoted in “Conscription into the SADF - 25 years of resistance”, *South African Outlook* 116(1366), April 1985, Outlook Publications, Cape Town, p 54.

¹⁴⁶ For example, by not informing the army of a change of address, and thus not receiving call-up papers, or by continuous study at a tertiary institution.

¹⁴⁷ In some cases, however, news of an exile filtered back into South Africa, providing incontrovertible evidence of his reasons for leaving, for example, the letter in *NUX*, the student newspaper of the University of Natal, from Chris Dunne, who obtained political asylum in the U.S.: “I will not take a rifle and place myself in a position where I am compelled to kill a man who someone else classifies my enemy...I will not place myself in a position either where I pass the rifle on to another man to do the killing.” (BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, “Dunne gives reasons for political exile”, *NUX* (1), February 1979, p 2.)

¹⁴⁸ “...three-month camp service was retained to meet the regime’s aggressive regional military and political strategy: SADF incursions into Angola and other neighboring States had increased and more troops were required to retain control in Namibia.” (United Nations Centre against Apartheid, Notes and Documents 9/89, November 1989, *The issue of conscientious objection in apartheid South Africa: growth of the anti-conscription movement* by the Committee of South African War Resistance, 89-32874, p 3.)

concession was not always so readily granted by the military officer in charge of an intake:

As far as Conscientious Objection, it went pretty roughly but I made it!! It all started on Monday when we were to draw rifles...I went up to our corporal and told him I was not taking a rifle. He was with three other corporals. One of them was fairly stroppy. He told me to "Kry a geweer [Get a rifle]." I told him I would not. This went on for quite a while and he was getting quite het [sic] up. I told him I would rather go to DB than draw a rifle. He was about to blow up when my corporal broke in and took me off to our company Lieutenant...who took me to the head of Services School, Captain Villiers...(who) hammered me for quite a while...¹⁴⁹

And sometimes the behaviour of the senior officer in camp was blatantly threatening:

With regard to Captain Snyman - I think it was his name - he threatened to actually shoot me. He made absolutely sure we were alone and out of anybody's earshot. We ended up having a bit of a discussion about his threat to put a bullet in me and I'm still convinced that given half a chance he would have as he despised me for my cowardice and thought I was totally brainwashed especially as I had been to Wits [Witwatersrand University].¹⁵⁰

At this time, although possibly unknown to most South Africans, a not insignificant event happened on the international stage in connection with conscientious objection in South Africa: on 20 December 1978, at the behest of the Lawyers Committee for International Rights and the Quaker United Nations Association, the General Assembly of the UN passed a resolution that "recognized the right of all persons to refuse service in the military and police forces which are used to enforce apartheid' and urged member states to grant such persons asylum, safe transit, and the rights and benefits accorded to refugees."¹⁵¹ At around this time, some South African objectors who had gone into exile started an organisation called the Committee for South African War Resistance (COSAWR) in London and Amsterdam. Part of COSAWR's objectives was to "raise international awareness about the SADF's role and to

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Ian Robertson to his parents, 16 January 1979.

¹⁵⁰ Email correspondence with Pieter van Gylswyk on 14 August 2006.

¹⁵¹ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups", p 17.

provide support to South African objectors overseas...[and to] help them apply for political asylum, find accommodation and adjust to living in a new society."¹⁵²

So from both outside and inside South Africa resistance against conscription was growing. This resistance, supported almost solely by certain churches, however, remained very much on the level of lobbying the government to recognise the individual's right of conscience not to be conscripted. As such, it was still a rather limited movement for change. And while the above account of defence legislation changes - leading to a highly effective military machine in South Africa - provides the backdrop for a more significant movement for change, it still does not answer the question; why a support group for objectors? To be able to answer this question requires that we move away from legislation per se and look now to the response of some to this legislation.

In December 1977 the first person from a religious denomination outside the traditional "peace churches"¹⁵³ was sentenced to one year in Detention Barracks for refusing to attend a three-week military camp or to serve as a non-combatant.¹⁵⁴ This was Anton Eberhard,¹⁵⁵ a member of a Presbyterian/Congregational church in Pageview, Johannesburg, of whom the Minister was Rob Robertson, a founding member of the COSG who in January 1979 became the Convenor of the SACC Study Commission on

¹⁵² Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 74.

¹⁵³ There were at least two other objectors not from "peace churches" who made their stand at around this time; Edric Gorfinkel (sentenced in 1978 for refusing to do a camp, after having been refused non-combatant duty) and the poet Johan van Wyk (put into detention in 1977 for refusing to do military service, but sent for observation after collapsing within 24 hours of being detained). Edric subsequently went into exile in Zimbabwe and Johan decided to go back to university as a way of avoiding his call-up. In an article in *The Sunday Express*, 22 January 1978, he is quoted to have said, "When I finish university at the end of next year I will probably go overseas."

¹⁵⁴ United Nations Centre against Apartheid, Notes and Documents 9/89, November 1989, *The issue of conscientious objection in apartheid South Africa: growth of the anti-conscription movement* by the Committee of South African War Resistance, 89-32874, p 5.

¹⁵⁵ Anton had already done his initial service. Ten months of Anton's sentence was suspended, but not belonging to a "peace church" he did not qualify for a once-off sentence and could be called up repeatedly until he was 65.

Violence and Non-violence.¹⁵⁶ Even though Eberhard's stand was an intensely personal decision, and not conducted with a view to furthering the aims of any movement, it was inevitable that people heard about it, and that it provoked further interest. One person who wrote to Eberhard was Peter Moll, both to support him and to find out about conditions in DB, as Moll had already decided in 1976 (after twelve months in the SADF) that he was going to be a conscientious objector.¹⁵⁷

The COSG movement (even before it had a name and before it clearly articulated its purpose) now had what it needed - a reason for its existence. No longer was conscientious objection to serving in the military of an apartheid state merely an abstract theological or ideological debate; it now had a human face in the form of people outside those already accommodated by the government, who had the courage to object and people who supported this courage. One of the earliest documented forms of this support appears in correspondence between two young men considering objection in 1979.¹⁵⁸ In this lengthy letter (written in two stages as the potential objector keeps discovering more about the process of objecting), it becomes clear how crucial the role of support was to become to objectors. Information shared covers not only news of interminable visits and phone-calls to various military personnel, their hostile reactions to the notion of objecting and yet their inconclusiveness in knowing how to deal with such cases, conditions in Detention Barracks, visits to an objector already in detention, what to bring along when announcing their refusal to report for military duty, encouragement to register for a course of study through correspondence, arranging for someone in the family to have the power of attorney on behalf of the objector and a reminder to bring along a letter of support from the objector's church. But it was the personal support that was the most meaningful:

¹⁵⁶ Some time later, due to Rob Robertson's intervention, the word "Study" was dropped from the title of this Commission, as Rob felt there were enough academic papers and debates on this issue; what was really needed in South Africa at the time was the promotion of the practice of nonviolence.

¹⁵⁷ Email correspondence with Peter Moll on 5 March 2007.

¹⁵⁸ "Letter from Richard Steele to Rob Goldman, 25 December 1979", in Richard Steele personal archives.

If you come up a little early, you can stay at my place and we can plan strategy together. This means that we will also be able to actually report together, and so make sure we are put together right from the start - there is no guarantee that we will be together if we report separately. The psychological and spiritual support we can give each other at this time will be invaluable I am sure.

Over the next ten years, the COSG was to refine and deepen what started out simply as this human connection between like-minded people and friends.

In December 1979, Peter Moll was sentenced to eighteen months in DB for refusing to do a five-month camp, and in February 1980, his cousin, Richard Steele was given the same sentence for refusing his initial service.¹⁵⁹ The parents, other family members and friends of these two young men rallied around them and so a unique brand of support emerged (Chapter 4 will deal more specifically with the activities of the movement). This support served multiple purposes:

- to assist the potential objector and his family as they grappled with the dilemmas that conscription per se, and/or conscription within the apartheid state, was causing;
- to assist the objector in preparing legal statements and standing trial;
- to find and sometimes fund legal representation;
- to encourage the objector to feel proud of and remain committed to his stand, often through harsh circumstances in DB;¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Peter Moll's sentence was reduced to twelve months and six months of Richard Steele's service were suspended.

¹⁶⁰ In DB, conscientious objection was not the only punishable offence; both Peter Moll and Richard Steele were further punished with periods of solitary confinement for refusing to wear military uniform and take part in military drill. Furthermore, Richard was faced with another choice of conscience in attending the bi-weekly "Motivation" lectures in DB. In a paper entitled, "Why I am no longer prepared to attend the 'Motivation' lectures presented by chaplains to the detainees in Detention Barracks on two Wednesdays every month", Richard stated, "Up until now I have attended all these periods because I am keen to grow in spiritual maturity. However, I have come to the conclusion that the latter form of 'Motivation' lectures are actually an important part of military training in that they serve to rationalize activities of the SADF in the present political context in Southern Africa and are intended to prepare soldiers psychologically for effective warmaking...Thus, I have decided not to attend these particular lectures for the same reason I have done no military training and not worn any military uniform; I am not willing to participate in any facet of the military effort..." ("Why I am no longer prepared to attend the 'Motivation' lectures presented by chaplains to the detainees in Detention Barracks on two Wednesdays every month", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.)

- to persuade political and military decision-makers at all levels to introduce alternative service options; and
- to support the family of the objector, who often had to endure great anxiety about the circumstances of their son and also severe social ostracism.¹⁶¹

So the embryonic movement began to take shape. Again, it was often the churches and church-related institutions that took up the cause of objectors:

I can remember having our initial COSG meetings in 1979 with Paddy Kearney and Des Biggs at Diakonia's old offices in St Andrew's Street around the time when Richard [Steele] and Peter [Moll] were preparing to go to jail. The way these meetings probably came about is that someone in Cape Town - probably Bishop Philip Russell? - phoned around, asking for support for Peter [Moll] and Richard [Steele], and one of the places he would have phoned would have been Diakonia.¹⁶²

A group of seventeen Church leaders at the time signed their names to a statement, pleading with the government to:

...understand that in the present circumstances in our country, conscientious objection can be based on genuine religious and moral conviction...[and] to provide alternative non-military forms of national service...[and] to exercise in regard to Peter Moll and all other conscientious objectors the humanity and clemency that should be characteristic of a Christian society.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ The extent to which conscientious objection at the time was severely counter-cultural can perhaps best be seen by the following excerpt from *The Rand Daily Mail*, 13 August 1981, in which Minister Horwood announced a R575 million increase to the Defence Budget: "It should be perfectly clear from these figures, also to our enemies, that the Government is in earnest with its commitment to the proper protection of our country. In the uncertain and hostile world we live in today, we have unfortunately little option but to do everything in our power to ensure our preparedness against the threats from outside our borders. I am thankful that South Africans of all races and creeds have invested hundreds of millions of rands in bonus bonds, thus contributing with marked effect to the financing of our defence effort."

¹⁶² Interview with Paul Graham, 19 April 2006.

Diakonia (now called Diakonia Council of Churches) is an ecumenical social action agency of the churches in the greater Durban region, founded in 1976 in response to the growing injustice and oppression in South Africa. Its aim has always been to mobilise local churches to become aware of the injustices and human rights violations in society and to help them to find active ways of working for a more just society by putting their faith into action. Its main work for many years was helping the churches confront the root causes and deal with the results of apartheid. In this process, its White Development Programme helped found the Conscientious Objector Support Group and later the End Conscription Campaign. (Email correspondence with Sue Britton on 7 July 2007.)

¹⁶³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B1 - Moll, "Conscientious objection: Church view", *Cape Times*, 5 December 1979.

In a fascinating, difficult-to-trace, organic process, people sympathetic to the principle of objection found their way to one another, sometimes from groups that were already involved in related issues. Church Ministers who embraced the cause (and there were many who did not) raised these issues in sermons and encouraged people to come together to find ways of supporting objectors in jail. One woman remembered how hearing Rob Robertson ask for prayers for Peter Moll and Richard Steele at a dawn Easter service, led her to join a support group for objectors.¹⁶⁴ Another remembered how she attended meetings at the Methodist Church once a week, before Moll and Steele went to jail, to explore how to support them.¹⁶⁵ In Cape Town in 1978, a Quaker group led by Professor Paul Hare at the University of Cape Town set up a non-racial project that became known as VAS - Voluntary and Alternative Service, with a view to "build(ing) [it] up as a voluntary service corps...that the South African government might eventually recognize...as a form of alternative service for conscientious objectors."¹⁶⁶ It was proposed that the members of this group "would work as ambulance drivers, community health educators, and hospital attendants in black areas". At around the same time the anti-apartheid students' movement in English-speaking universities, NUSAS, formed Milcom,¹⁶⁷ which also sought ways of establishing alternative service options.¹⁶⁸ In Johannesburg in 1980, at the University of the Witwatersrand, a group of students and lecturers joined to form WASG - the Wits Alternative Service Group, aimed at exploring the possibility of setting up national service¹⁶⁹ projects that were of a non-military, peaceful,

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Anita Kromberg, 16 June 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Ines Ceruti, 13 February 2006.

¹⁶⁶ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 57. In December 1979, volunteers in this group, one of which was Richard Steele, attempted to enter the Kavango Territory to provide an ambulance service in northern Namibia. Part of their reason for doing this was to show that they were willing to serve under the same conditions of hardship as military servicemen. They were, however, refused entry by the police and the project was subsequently denounced by the Prime Minister. (This found in: *Conscientious objection*, Occasional paper No. 8, (revised edition), 1984, The Centre for Intergroup Studies, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, p 18).

¹⁶⁷ Milcom was a committee set up by NUSAS in English-speaking universities to raise awareness among students of the SADF's role in the country.

¹⁶⁸ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 57.

¹⁶⁹ The term "national service" has been used here in its broader and more literal sense i.e. projects that serve or build the nation, and is not to be confused with the South African apartheid government's use of the term, exclusively meant as "military service".

constructive nature for those who were opposed to doing military service, but who, nevertheless, wished to remain in the country and contribute to nation-building. Also in 1980, an SACC initiative called the "Pilgrimage of Hope" aimed to take young people out of South Africa and engage them in the debate around issues of violence and nonviolence. One young woman who was part of this remembered how her desire to deepen not only her spiritual but also her social commitment to nonviolence, brought her in contact with Rob Robertson of the SACC.¹⁷⁰ Another was brought into contact with this movement through her work in the Catholic Justice and Peace Department of the Durban diocese, headed by Archbishop Hurley.¹⁷¹

In 1980 a formal invitation was sent to church bodies and organisations and to individuals interested in the issue of conscientious objection for "The initiation of an organisation for conscientious objectors" to be held at Botha's Hill in Durban from 10 - 14 July 1980.¹⁷² Some background was given in the invitation:

During the last few weeks a number of Church leaders, conscientious objectors and others who are closely involved in the issue of conscientious objection, have expressed the need for proper co-ordination to deal with conscientious objection....Since conscription was introduced....a large number of young men have had serious crises of conscience about serving in the SADF or the para-military alternatives. Many of these men for religious or other sincere beliefs have grave misgivings about serving in a military force which they feel is bolstering the unjust apartheid system, whilst others believe that it is wrong to perform any act of violence against another human being....While there may be disagreement with the conscientious objector's stand, the various churches, organisations and individuals involved in the issue are largely in agreement that conscientious objection is a stance which must be legally recognised and provided for.

The invitation was signed by Denis Hurley, Catholic Archbishop of Durban and Philip Russell, Church of the Province of South Africa Bishop of Durban. At this conference, the Conscientious Objector Support Group was formally

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Loek Goemans, 13 February 2006.

¹⁷² This paragraph is drawn from "The initiation of an organisation for conscientious objectors" brochure, in "Charles Bester file", Richard Steele personal archives.

constituted, uniting under a common cause a number of organisations and individuals who had been working with conscientious objection issues for some time. Later on in that same year, COSG members participated in a workshop with the Chaplain General, the Deputy Chief of Staff Personnel, an Advocate, the person who had represented Richard Steele at the review of his court martial and the parents of Steele and Moll, examining proposals for the treatment of conscientious objectors.¹⁷³ This was the beginning of numerous attempts to keep the channels of communication open between the movement and the government over the years.

The second annual national COSG conference in Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, in 1981 was a seminal one as COSG began to coalesce as a national movement and develop connections with international conscientious objection movements:

Jim Amstutz from the Mennonite Central Committee, who was banned from coming into the country but was given a 24-hour visa, came to the conference and that was where some of the international linkages started as well as access to a CO training manual. At that time I wanted to go to a church in Maryland, US, and so linking up with the US CO movement was tagged on (May to June 1982). Rene Rademann and I spent a lot of time with the US groups, for example, the CCCO - Central Committee for Conscientious Objection.¹⁷⁴

Almost as if orchestrated, the work of the COSG was immediately put to the test by the appearance of a number of new objectors. In May 1981 Charles Yeats was sentenced to one year in DB for refusing initial service and then in December 1981 to a further year in civilian prison for refusing to wear the regulation uniform.¹⁷⁵ In November 1981 Graham Philpott refused to undergo training in the use of firearms during his initial training.¹⁷⁶ In February 1982 Michael Viveiros was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for refusing his

¹⁷³ "Workshop on proposals for the treatment of conscientious objectors, organised by Rob Robertson, 22-23 November 1980", in Richard Steele personal archives.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.

¹⁷⁵ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups", p 15.

¹⁷⁶ He was charged under Section 126a1(b) of the Defence Act.

initial service.¹⁷⁷ In July 1982 Neil Mitchell was sentenced to one year in DB for refusing initial service and then in October 1982 to six months in prison for refusing to wear the regulation uniform. In October 1982 Billy Paddock was sentenced to one year in prison for refusing initial service.¹⁷⁸

Defence Act No. 103 of 1982 greatly expanded the annual service periods. The initial two-year basic training period was retained, but the system of follow-up "camp" call-ups was extended from 30 days a year for eight years to 120 days every two years for six two-year cycles, with the duration of these camps being dependent on "the security situation and the operational requirements of the Defence Force".¹⁷⁹ After this twelve-year period, conscripts were to be transferred to an Active Citizen Reserve Force and were liable for service for five years, whenever the Minister of Defence notified parliament of this need. After this, the conscripts were transferred to Commando Units where they were liable for service until the age of 55, usually on an area basis and for a maximum of twelve days per year.¹⁸⁰ All white adult males who had not undergone any military training were conscripted to these units. All white males over 60 years of age were required to serve on the National Reserve until the age of 65. The penalty for refusing to serve remained a maximum of two years' imprisonment, recurring.

At the same time, the Minister of Defence stated that consideration had been given to extend military service call-ups to men classified as Coloureds and Asians and to white women, but that this had been shelved as the Defence Force did not have the financial resources and personnel to do this at that time. He did not, however, rule this out completely, saying that:

¹⁷⁷ His sentence was reduced to one year and he was detained in a civilian jail.

¹⁷⁸ Information on Graham Philpott, Michael Viveiros, Neil Mitchell and Billy Paddock in this paragraph sourced from: BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B11 - Brett Myrdal, "Conscientious Objection in SA", p 1ff.

¹⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 25 March 1982, col. 3630.

¹⁸⁰ This is what became known as "Dad's Army". In an article in *The Financial Mail*, 15 January 1982, Chief of the Defence Force, General Constand Viljoen is reported to have said that these units would "form the first line of defence aimed at containing terror attacks, while the full-time forces (would) form a 'reaction force' to deal with major incidents...(this) was necessary because of the pattern of ANC attacks. Unlike SWAPO in SWA Namibia, the ANC was not planning a border war but an 'area war' of widely spread attacks aimed at creating 'an atmosphere of instability' and at spreading security manpower."

These measures [of conscripting differently classified race groups] must...be seen as an interim step towards achieving that ideal in which other population groups and white women will also have a greater measure of involvement [in ensuring the security of the country].¹⁸¹

The COSG responded to this as follows:

Because COSG believes that the so called external threat and the "Total Onslaught" is in fact a civil war where South Africans are called to fight South Africans, it is calling for a campaign to end the conscription of whites and to oppose the forthcoming conscription of "Coloureds" and Indians.¹⁸²

Another wave of pacifist and selective objectors willing to go to jail followed: in "February [1983], sixty-six Jehovah's Witnesses received three year sentence in the detention barracks - the largest number yet charged in a single month."¹⁸³ Also in January 1983 Etienne Essory was sentenced to four months in prison for refusing to do his third camp.¹⁸⁴ Also, in January 1983 Adrian Paterson was sentenced to four months in prison for refusing to do initial service.¹⁸⁵ In March 1983 Peter Hathorn was sentenced to two years in prison for refusing initial service.¹⁸⁶ In September 1983 Paul Dobson was sentenced to one year in prison for refusing to continue his initial service, after having already served for fourteen months.¹⁸⁷ In November 1983, a day before Brett Myrdal was due to appear before a court martial for refusing to

¹⁸¹ *Hansard*, 25 March 1982, col. 3635/6. This was again proposed with the introduction of the tricameral parliament in 1983, which extended voting rights to people classified as Coloured and Indian, but was fiercely opposed and campaigned against by the UDF, so much so that conscription was never extended to members classified as belonging to other race groups. The SADF did, however, have volunteer, segregated units for members of other race groups; "Coloureds serve(d) in the Cape Corps and Indians in the naval unit SAS Jalsena. Africans (were) allocated to the urban-based 21 Battalion, or to a bantustan army or a regional battalion in a 'non-independent' black area." (Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 54.)

¹⁸² AL 2457, *SABA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups", p 2. Even though the pamphlet is undated it is clear that it was written in 1983 as it refers to "The Black Sash resolution at its annual conference *this year*" (my italics), which took place in 1983.

¹⁸³ Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 163.

¹⁸⁴ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B11 - Brett Myrdal, "Conscientious Objection in SA", p 3.

¹⁸⁵ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B11 - Brett Myrdal, "Conscientious Objection in SA", p 4. Due to a legal blunder Adrian Paterson did not spend any time in prison.

¹⁸⁶ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B11 - Brett Myrdal, "Conscientious Objection in SA", p 4. His sentence was later reduced to one year.

¹⁸⁷ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B11 - Brett Myrdal, "Conscientious Objection in SA", p 4.

serve, his call-up was withdrawn and instead he was called up in July 1984 (more about this in Chapter 5).¹⁸⁸

Up until this point in this dissertation, "the COSG" has been referred to as if it was one body. With individual objectors going to jail, however, local groups formed around each objector with the specific aim of supporting that particular objector. Members of these groups may or may not have been involved in broader COSG work (and may not even have called themselves "COSG", preferring to use the more personal title of, for example, the "Brett Myrdal Support Group"), but it is through these groups that objectors and their families were most immediately and personally supported. This distinction between the national body and the individual support groups sometimes led to confusion between the respective titles; "Conscientious Objector Support Group" and "Conscientious Objectors' Support Group" (and sometimes even the "Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups"), but it was the former that was accepted as the correct name of the organisation.¹⁸⁹ In the early years of the COSG, the struggle to define roles occasionally appears in reports and minutes, for example:

We noted, however, that COSG is not providing individual support and objectors have tended to gather their own support groups around themselves. COSG has mainly tended to give public support for objectors depending upon the individuals own stand. This situation revealed the group's most fundamental weakness to be a neglect of the important role of providing support for objectors...Having identified this weakness, and with a programme to remedy it, the group needs to work out closely, what the correct balance between support work and broader anti-militarisation activity should be.¹⁹⁰

It was clear that the COSG in each region,¹⁹¹ which was acting as a resource to these local groups, providing experience, information, advice (legal and

¹⁸⁸ *Objector 4*, November 1983, p 1. Brett subsequently went into exile.

¹⁸⁹ Even though this title appeared as the official logo of the organisation, occasionally the "s" in "Objectors" crept into headings of minutes, reports etc.

¹⁹⁰ "Report on the Cape Town COSG to National Conference 1983 - This report reflects the proceedings of the midyear assessment meeting, 25 June 1983", in "Conference" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 1.

¹⁹¹ Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg were the first regions to set up COSGs, with further groups being established later on in Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein and Grahamstown, some of which only lasted for a short time and some of which faded and then were later reconstituted, when a specific need arose, for example, supporting the "Stands" (see below).

other) and media contact, did not want to lose touch with its primary aim of supporting objectors, while at the same time continuing the broader work of educating the public around issues of conscription and militarisation. This was also, however, not a static debate, and one which would have taken on different nuances in different regions, as is shown in this minute:

“COSG facilitates sustained support for objectors in prison. Support Groups should not be made up of activists,¹⁹² but be formed around the family and friends of objectors. COSG should provide the experience needed to set up and run these support groups and facilitate contacts between groups...”¹⁹³

The COSG National Executive Committee, as it became known, comprised one member from each regional COSG and acted as a coordinating body of the COSG, organising national conferences, doing fundraising, facilitating the flow of information between centres and dealing with national issues.¹⁹⁴ It was also at around this time that the COSG began to state its constituencies in precise terms, namely; young people, churches and church leadership, parents (especially mothers), families and friends of conscripts and progressive organisations opposed to the SADF.¹⁹⁵

In August 1980, the government had set up the Naudé Committee, whose task it was to formulate a way for the SADF to deal with conscientious objectors.¹⁹⁶ After three years of work, the new Bill proposed a distinction between objectors who were religiously motivated and those who were politically or morally motivated. Eight-year prison sentences were proposed for the latter, during which period these objectors would be forbidden from participating in any political activity, except voting, and from publishing their reasons for objecting.¹⁹⁷ This was the first time the collective lobbying power of the COSG was called into action by means of public meetings¹⁹⁸ and press

¹⁹² Members of the COSG were sometimes referred to as “activists” in minutes etc.

¹⁹³ “Regional report - COSG (Cape Town) - March 1989”, in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

¹⁹⁴ “Constitution of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group,” undated, in “Minutes” file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

¹⁹⁵ “Report on the Cape Town COSG to National Conference 1983”, in “Conference” file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 1.

¹⁹⁶ This was an all-military committee, led by the Chaplain-General, Major-General C.P. Naude and consisting of two Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk chaplains and an SADF law officer.

¹⁹⁷ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, “Reject the new military bill”, p 4.

¹⁹⁸ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, “Reject the new military bill”, p 1.

statements. The result was yet another change in legislation - Defence Act No. 44 of 1957 amended by Act No. 34 of 1983. Three alternative service options were given to "religious objectors", namely religious pacifists within and outside the pacifist sects:

- to serve as a non-combatant in military uniform for the same length of time (four years) as a military serviceman in combatant capacity;
- to serve as a non-combatant, not in military uniform, for one-and-a-half times the length (six years) of a military serviceman in combatant capacity;
- to serve non-military, community service in a government department for one-and-a-half times the length owed to the military.

To be able to be classified under either one of these categories required appearing before the Board for Religious Objection (BRO), whose function it was to determine the "genuineness" of the applicant's objection to military service. The Board comprised a judge or retired judge as chairman, three theologians of different denominations, a military chaplain, a SADF representative, and a co-opted theologian of the applicant's own denomination if his denomination was not already represented. If an applicant was not accepted as a bona fide universal pacifist (or if he chose not to appear before the Board), the provisions of the new legislation increased his prison sentence from two to six years in a civilian prison with no possibility of remission. This was the same sentence "normally given to those convicted of rape and other serious crimes such as manslaughter".¹⁹⁹ In the same year, the government also established the SA Army Non-Effective Troops Section whose sole task it was to track down conscripts who had failed to register or report for duty.²⁰⁰

For religious objectors this Act could have been seen as a victory but for those objecting on political or moral grounds, the 1983 Amendment was no victory at all. In fact, the six-year jail sentence imposed on these objectors was so

¹⁹⁹ Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 166.

²⁰⁰ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 60.

severe that it made political objection largely prohibitive. So the government had found a way of making a concession with one hand and tightening up on objectors with the other. One objector, Charles Yeats, voiced his “deep disappointment” at this legislation as follows:

It seemed just one more evidence of [the government’s] intention to appear reforming, but in fact to be ever more repressive, and so also one more indication that it is leading S.A. to total destruction.²⁰¹

For the objector movement, however, it was not all loss. In fact, it was astounding that after just thirteen “non-peace church” objectors had proved the seriousness of their stance by being willing to go to jail and/or make a public stand, the government had conceded that conscientious objection was not just an issue facing members of pacifist sects. Also, alternative non-military service had been introduced. So while the COSG had not been successful in getting the major distinction between religious and political objectors removed, it did manage to reduce the prison sentences for political objectors from eight years (as had been proposed in the Bill preceding this Act) to six years (see Chapters 4 and 5). As a movement, therefore, the COSG was justified in reflecting as follows in an internal meeting:

We have gained optimism. Our efforts have met with some response...[This] means that some reformation by lobbying and positive criticism is possible slowly, bit by bit. [It is] worth working on these lines...Nonviolent change, therefore, becomes a more viable proposition for all parties [and] puts us in a better position to promote it.²⁰²

The desperate attempt to keep politics and religion separate, as evidenced in the creation of the Board for Religious Objectors was such a fundamentally dividing piece of legislation to the anti-conscription movement, however, that it warrants a closer look. Even more so, because it formed the basis of all judgements made by the Board, some of which resembled self-righteous legal contortions:

²⁰¹ “Letter from Charles Yeats to Rob Robertson, 4 July 1985”, in Rob Robertson personal archives.

²⁰² AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, “Minutes of second COSG workshop (this series) at Quaker House to consider proposed amendments to Defence Act, 12 January 1985”, p 4.

Now the fact that a person holds political views is not necessarily indicative of an absence of religious conviction. We are in this world, and although many of us are not of this world, most of us are enmeshed in it...I suppose the bleak picture that he has painted here of the SA situation is as he sees it. This picture painted on a broader canvas could equally be a very faithful presentation of the global situation of mankind...And although strictly speaking it wasn't necessary for him to digress to the extent that he did here, nevertheless we do not feel that that in any way weakens his application at all...Something that must however be borne in mind by applicants, who are certainly politically motivated, is that whilst it is good to be open with the Board and whilst we welcome an applicant stating his religious convictions and also his political convictions and so showing the way in which the one may reinforce the other, applicants would do well to consider the balance that should be achieved...so as not to create the false impression of a political motivation, whereas in fact the motivation is purely religious.²⁰³

Ironically, this strict division between religion and politics sometimes provided the Board with its own dilemma, as shown by the case of Dominee Krause, a member of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk Afrika (Dutch Reformed Church Africa), who gave as reason for his application to the Board that "he was a minister in a black church and as such could not take up arms against blacks. The Board were split as to whether this was political objection or not. [Judge] Steyn cast the deciding vote and Krause was granted Category 3 [community service]."²⁰⁴

If the COSG needed anything to make it revisit its commitment to opposing conscription, it was this 1983 legislation. Not only was it an extremely harsh punishment for objecting (both in terms of the community service if one were classified a religious objector, and the jail sentence if one were not classified a religious objector), but the obligation to appear before a Board to prove the religious sincerity of one's objection created further dilemmas of conscience for an objector. Why should an objector who happened to have religious grounds for objecting be given a preferential option to one who was not

²⁰³ "Transcript of portions of decision on application of Neil Myburgh to the Board for Religious Objection given by Judge M. T. Steyn, 9 August 1984", in "C.O.'s in South Africa" file in Adele Kirsten personal archives, p.1.

²⁰⁴ "Minutes of the COSG, 20 March 1985 at The Grail", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

objecting on religious grounds, but felt equally as strongly about not serving in the SADF? This Amendment came into effect in 1984, and at the 1984 COSG National Conference, it was thoroughly debated:

The positive aspects of going before the Board are:

1. Can stay in the country.
2. Alternative service is an overt form of resistance to the SADF - although not as powerful as imprisonment.
3. It appears as though there are chances of getting an acceptable form of alternative service.

The negative aspects of going before the Board are:

1. The churches struggled for years to have legislation affecting CO reformed. The Board does not represent reform but rather repression. Applying to the Board legitimates this instrument of repression.
2. By establishing the Board, the Government sought to split the CO movement. If religious pacifists apply to the Board, the CO movement will no longer be presenting a united front.
3. The alternative service in the Department of Manpower will take place within the framework of the apartheid system, the injustice of which is the cause of many people's objection to being in the SADF in the first place.
4. An application undermines the stand (which COSG applauded) that some churches have taken against the Board.²⁰⁵

One objector, David Schmidt, expressed this poignantly:

I went to the Board - you felt the ambiguity very strongly....that you were taking an option that was exclusive.²⁰⁶

while another, Patrick Vorster, described his dilemma after his first application to the Board was rejected:²⁰⁷

I was devastated when I was turned down the first time....I felt that my real reasons were not going to be heard so I would have to strategise and comply and this angered me. I felt I was watering down my objection and it was a bit of a struggle for me to do this. But I decided to do it because I also had my parents who were still alive and for them to have a son in jail was going to be

²⁰⁵ "The report on the fifth National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, July 1984", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 21.

²⁰⁶ Interview with David Schmidt, 19 May 2006, highlighting his (and many others') intense discomfort at making use of a legislative prerogative that artificially divided objectors according to their motivation for objection.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Patrick Vorster, 23 March 2006.

difficult. I had also heard stories of Ivan Toms being beaten and raped in prison and was afraid to go through this.

The COSG voiced its opinion on this 1983 legislation in the media in very strong terms.²⁰⁸ Also, it began work on suggesting changes to this Amendment, which broadly speaking requested a replacement of the words "religious objector" with "conscientious objector", and a replacement of "religious convictions" with "religious, moral, ethical or humanitarian convictions".²⁰⁹ In printed pamphlets, the COSG also used this Amendment to engage seriously with the alternative service debate:

We...appeal that:

- The Law make Alternative Service available to the full spectrum of religious, moral or ethically based objections to conscription...
- Alternative Service be made more acceptable by vesting its administration in a wider range of organisations, e.g.: Church, welfare, development, research etc.
- The length of Alternative Service be equal to (not exceed) the length of National Military Service.²¹⁰

The formation of this Board expanded the scope of the COSG's work considerably. Now, apart from supporting individual objectors in the formidable tasks of preparing a statement and appearing before the Board (see Chapter 4), the COSG committed itself, as part of its awareness-raising work, to keep itself well-informed of the workings and trends within the Board (which often involved a knowledge of the law), and to disseminate this information as widely as possible. This was especially important as the Board did not publish its proceedings. From February 1984 to September 1989, 1890 Conscripts submitted applications to the Board for Religious Objection, of which 124 were withdrawn by the applicants themselves before

²⁰⁸ See Appendix 8 for the "Statement in response to the Defence Amendment Act, 1983, to be implemented January 1984" written by the Durban Conscientious Objector Support Group, in Andrew Warmback's personal archives.

²⁰⁹ "Amendments to the Defence Act - suggestions from Durban COSG, 9 May 1985", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

²¹⁰ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, "The inadequacies of the Board for Religious Objectors", p 4.

consideration by the Board and 44 were refused.²¹¹ The vast majority of the remaining applications that were given religious objector status were Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the light of the present discussion on the government's attempts to close what it saw as loopholes in the objector movement, the case of David Hartman, a Buddhist, is of interest. Hartman's application to the Board was refused "on the grounds that Buddhism does not recognize a supreme being; therefore, it did not qualify as 'religious convictions' within the meaning of the statute. The Board ruled that 'religious convictions' meant theistic beliefs, and any set of beliefs that lacked a Supreme Being could not be considered a religion."²¹² Hartman then appealed this decision and was eventually granted religious objector status. What is interesting though is that:

While *Hartman* was pending, the Government introduced an amendment to the 1983 Defence Amendment Act which sought to restrict the term "religious convictions" solely to "convictions based on faith in a supreme being or beings of a divine nature only."...Significant public outcry followed the bill's publication, and it was subsequently withdrawn.

Some churches continued to express criticism of the Board²¹³ for various reasons: the Board was composed of people, most of whom believed in the Just War doctrine; they tended to view religion and politics as mutually exclusive; community service was limited to working in government departments and was, therefore, not real national service for many objectors. "In view of these criticisms, some churches - Catholic, Presbyterian, Congregational and Anglican - have refused to allow their clergy to serve on the Board."²¹⁴

²¹¹ "Conscientious Objection in South Africa, 30 April 1990, written by The Conscientious Objector Support Group", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 5. One of those who was refused by the Board was Philip Wilkinson, a practicing Catholic, who failed to report for his fourth camp, after having served his initial service and three camps. He was turned down for Category 3 (non-military community service) but was offered Category 1 (non-combatant duty in the SADF), which he refused. As such Wilkinson became the first objector to be tried under the new 1983 legislation. He was in the end fined R600 for failing to report for the camp.

²¹² Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 168.

²¹³ This paragraph draws on Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg, p 332ff.

²¹⁴ Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg, p 333.

So it seemed as if the 1983 Amendment was not achieving what the government had hoped for, namely the appearance of enlightened reasonableness through the creation of a forum that would accommodate religious objectors (and hence not alienate the churches), while simultaneously attempting to stifle what it saw as a political movement, which was using the issue of conscription to raise doubts about the legitimacy of the apartheid state and its practices. Instead, the hypocrisy of the amendment only served to propel the COSG forward to find other ways in which the cause could be furthered. 1983 was a year of much strategic thinking for the COSG:

...the [1983] Amendment has changed the context of the C.O. struggle and likewise points to a needed change in our role as an active COSG. The following are some of the areas that we feel we need to be involved in if we are to be relevant to the context of the C.O. struggle of S.A.:

1. Education...
2. Research group...
3. Contact with other religious leaders...
4. To motivate for Churches to set up counselling Boards...
5. To explore the possibility of Church or para-Church organizations offering employment and safety for families to meet in the neighbouring "independent" homelands...
6. Manual...
7. Aid in helping people with the choice of going into exile..
8. Schools...

At times we're exclusively pacifist which has not allowed / inhibits others being part of the group.²¹⁵

While the COSG would not be able to fulfil all these tasks in the years to come, it certainly does show how a piece of legislation as significant as the 1983 Amendment broadened the way in which the COSG saw itself and its work.

At its fourth annual conference in Durban in 1983, the decision was taken to work towards a national campaign against compulsory conscription. At around

²¹⁵ "The Context of the C.O. struggle in S.A. as seen by the Johannesburg group", in "Minutes - Jhb 82" file, Adele Kristen personal archives, p 1ff.

the same time, the Black Sash passed a resolution at its 1983 conference, including the bold statement that:

If a conscripted army is necessary it will be because of the political failure to respond to the desires of the citizens, and that army will be engaged in a civil war, which is good cause for many to refuse military service....Therefore the Black Sash demands that the South African government abolish all conscription for military service.²¹⁶

Again, it is difficult to ascertain with certainty, how and with whom this call originated, but what is clear is that two women, Ann Colvin and Patty Geerts, who were active members of the COSG in Durban, discussed the idea for an end to conscription with the Black Sash before it made this call.²¹⁷ Once the resolution had been taken, the COSG actively supported it, noting the strengths of an anti-conscription campaign as follows:

- its broad appeal - not everyone within the white community, was affected by conscientious objection, but everyone was affected by conscription;
- it did not fall foul of the 1974 Amendment, which made it an offence to encourage people not to serve in the SADF;
- it sidestepped the attempt of the 1983 Amendment to prevent resistance to serving in the military;
- it had the potential for a far more systematic education and awareness-raising focus than conscientious objection;
- it provided the opportunity for a much more focused collaboration between the broad range of organisations who were involved in anti-militarisation work.²¹⁸

By the end of 1983, End Conscription Campaign (ECC) Committees had been set up in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. A new movement, which was quickly to take on its own momentum, had grown out of the COSG. While the focus and strategies of the ECC were quite different from that of the COSG, the COSG remained an active member organisation of the ECC,

²¹⁶ *South African Outlook*, 116(1366), April 1985, Outlook Publications, Cape Town, p 63.

²¹⁷ This information was corroborated by Sheena Duncan, leader of the Black Sash, in a telephone conversation on 27 July 2007.

²¹⁸ This summary taken from; Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK, p 86.

forming an effective strategic partnership with the ECC throughout its ten-year existence. COSG saw itself as complementing ECC's tasks and membership, as is stated in the following:

COSG would take a CO's perspective to supplement ECC's more political perspective...[and] (t)he personal direct support from COSG would be offered to all CO's, leaving the profiled support to ECC.²¹⁹

In fact, it is interesting to note that the major ECC campaigns taken up over the years²²⁰ were all described in a COSG information pamphlet in 1983:²²¹

COSGs particularly oppose:

- the SADF's illegal occupation of Namibia
- the SADF's role in carrying out the state repression, for example in removals, in cordoning off of townships like Lamontville etc.
- the SADF's role in neighbouring countries which has led to allegations that it is responsible for destabilisation
- The SADF's role in shaping the ideology of "Total Strategy" and its role in propagating this ideology by its involvement in schools²²² and civic action programmes.²²³

From 1983 onwards, in the minutes of almost all COSG meetings, a new aspect of COSG's work was introduced and developed; an aspect, which was to become a major thrust of COSG's awareness-raising work. This was a counselling service for anyone with questions about conscription, the military,

²¹⁹ "COSG Functions, undated", in "Minutes" file in Adele Kirsten personal archives.

²²⁰ "Troops out of the Townships" (1983), "Fast for a Just Peace" (1983), "No War in Namibia" (1984), "Stop the Call-up" (1985), "Working for a Just Peace" (1986). (Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989, *Out of step - war resistance in South Africa*, Russell Press, UK.)

²²¹ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups", p 1. Even though the pamphlet is undated it is clear that it was written in 1983 as it refers to "The Black Sash resolution at its annual conference *this year*" (my italics), which took place in 1983.

²²² "Also falling under SADF area command is the high-school cadet programme. This involves over 200 000 white school pupils in paramilitary activities such as intelligence and counter-intelligence procedures, fieldcraft, drill, first-aid, tracking, camouflage and marksmanship. Some pupils also learn curfew, ambush and bomb-alert procedures, martial arts and commando techniques, use of artillery and anti-aircraft weapons, and receive lectures on the nature of the total onslaught (Evans and Phillips, 1988; Evans, 1983). The system is headed by a central cadet directorate at army headquarters in Pretoria." (Cock, J., 1989, *War and society*, Thorold's Africana Books, Johannesburg, p 25.)

²²³ SADF soldiers were used to teach in schools, often in rural areas, and to assist in medical and agricultural programmes, so as to "win the hearts and minds" of the population, inspire loyalty towards the government and present the national serviceman as a friend of the black population. This is what was known as the Civic Action Programmes of the SADF. (BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, "Report on COSAWR study class, February 1980", p 5.)

the call-up process or any related matter.²²⁴ At first it was called the "Advice Bureau for Conscientious Objectors (ABCO)",²²⁵ then the "Advice Bureau on Military Conscription (ABMC)",²²⁶ but later renamed CAS - Conscription Advice Service. It is clear from COSG minutes²²⁷ that the responsibility to provide a professional, reliable counselling service to the public involved a great deal of internal training, which demanded much personal commitment, both in terms of time and energy, from those who became counsellors.

Another group that was launched from the COSG in 1985 was the Community Servers Group (CSG), which consisted of objectors classified as "religious" objectors by the Board, who were doing community service at the time. This group remained independent of the COSG. In 1987 the churches took up the call for alternative service in the Churches Alternative National Service Project (CANSPP), which aimed to "highlight the limitations of the Board, to provide publicity for broader service and for the churches to support the position held by these objectors."²²⁸ Participating denominations in this project identified community development projects and raised funds to employ conscripts who refused to serve in the SADF to give time to these projects.²²⁹ Soon these and other related bodies began to work together on creating a national coordinating forum for Alternative National Service (ANS) that would lobby the government to change the law in an attempt to address the following anomalies in respect of community service:

- community service was only open to "religious" objectors;
- it could only be carried out in government departments;
- it was one-and-a-half times the duration of military service;

²²⁴ This work is described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

²²⁵ "Minutes of Meeting held 7.30 p.m., Wednesday 14 March 1984", in "Minutes" file in Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 2.

²²⁶ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "COSG functions".

²²⁷ For example, in "Minutes of Meeting held 7.30 p.m., Wednesday 14 March 1984", in "Minutes" file in Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 2, is stated, "3.1.2 Advice Bureau for CO's (ABCO) is arranging a panel of counsellors who will be spending a day training together. A wider grouping would be set up for contact people and the service would be widely publicized."

²²⁸ "Minutes of the National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, 2 - 4 October 1987", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 2.

²²⁹ United Nations Centre against Apartheid, Notes and Documents 9/89, November 1989, *The issue of conscientious objection in apartheid South Africa: growth of the anti-conscription movement* by the Committee of South African War Resistance, 89-32874, p 17.

- the work placements were often punitive, unimaginative and disregarding of the skills of objectors;
- religious objectors doing community service were disadvantaged relative to conscripts in terms of repayment of loans, tax, salary, pension, living allowance, leave, travel, study and promotion benefits.²³⁰

The years 1984 to 1989 provided the conscript with a deepening dilemma as the SADF became increasingly involved in quelling internal resistance in the townships.²³¹ This came to a head when the government declared a State of Emergency in mid-1985, which continued for four years.²³² Although the SADF had for a long time supported the South African Police in the townships, it now became openly violent. Relatively cumbersome vehicles patrolling township streets were replaced with open jeeps with mounted machine guns and highly mobile armed commandos on horseback. A doctor at Baragwanath hospital noticed how unrest-related injuries had changed from sjambok and birdshot injuries to gunshot wounds from shots aimed at the heart.²³³ Interestingly, this issue was also debated in parliament:²³⁴

37. Mr R R HULLEY asked the Minister of Defence:

...what specified types of (a) arms and (b) ammunition have been issued to each member of the South African Defence Force employed in townships during unrest situations?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE:

(a) To individual members:

- 9 mm pistols to Officers and Warrant Officers Class 1.

²³⁰ "Alternative National Service Working Document", undated, in Andrew Warmback's personal archives.

²³¹ "SADF troops used in 96 black townships in 1985 totaled 35 372. Temporary bases were set up in five of these townships as of April 19 1986." (BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, AA1 - General, "Apartheid barometer", *The Weekly Mail*, 12-18 September 1986.)

²³² "...the government instituted a state of emergency [in parts of the country] on 21st July 1985, which remained in place until the 7th March, 1986 (SAIRR, 1986). It was then reimposed [throughout the country] on the 12th June 1986 (SAIRR, 1986) and only towards the end of 1989 were most of the regulations of the state of emergency lifted." (<http://www.csvr.org.za/papers/paplv1.htm>)

²³³ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 22.

²³⁴ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, BB1 - Parliamentary Opposition, "Unrest arms/ ammunition issued, 25 February 1986".

- R1 rifles to Citizen Force and Commando Other Ranks and Officers to the rank of Major.

- R4 rifles to Permanent Force Other Ranks and Officers to the rank of Major as well as National Servicemen.

Per Buffel vehicle:

- 37mm Stoppergun.

- Shotgun.

(b) Ammunition for the abovementioned weapons is issued according to a laid down scale per person and vehicle. Each vehicle is also additionally equipped with shock grenades and tearsnake grenades.

MR R R HULLEY:

Mr Chairman, arising out of the hon the Deputy Minister's reply, did I understand him correctly to say that troops are not issued with weapons that fire rubber bullets, buckshot or birdshot but are issued only with R1 rifles?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER:

Mr Chairman, I have furnished the hon member with a list of everything that the troops are issued with. I can add nothing to it.

It was a difficult time for anyone with even the slightest doubts about his role as a soldier in the SADF, knowing that he may be faced with township duty on the one hand, or that he would need to appear before a Board should he wish to object (if he knew this at all), or worse still, endure a jail sentence should he refuse to serve. Sometimes these doubts surfaced in strangely shocking ways:

As a National Serviceman I did my military service at 113Battalion, 50 km NE of Phalaborwa. On completion of my service I was compelled to do ten camps as a Citizen Force soldier...Members of the Commandos²³⁵ were local; one-men businessmen, your plumber, baker, mechanic and people like teachers, pharmacists etc. who could not be called up for 90 day camps....The State of Emergency was declared and as the Reserve Force who lived in the area we were the first military force to enter the townships of the East Rand. To be honest, at first it was very different and exciting to be in "browns" again as life in a small town can become a bit boring and "hum drum". Our duties in the townships were basically in support of the SAP; patrolling the streets, keeping rival groups apart, checking for suspicious activity. After a few camps we

²³⁵ Reserve Forces were made up of Regiments, that did 90-day border-duty camps, and area-bound Commandos, that did shorter camps of local area "protection".

became disgruntled as the Commandos were becoming more like policemen than soldiers. We were trained as soldiers to protect our country and not to harass our local population. As the townships became more ungovernable, we had to do escort duties at "political funerals" where young activists would be laid to rest. One such occasion made me determined not to do any more township duty....at a "political funeral" in Kwa Thema, Springs....(w)e stopped outside the local Catholic Church. A very vocal crowd had gathered and standing in front of them was their priest Fr Dominic Baldwin. He was being screamed at by some officers and all he wanted was to conduct the funeral in peace. As a loyal Catholic I was upset by the treatment Fr Dominic was getting and wondered why I was in an armoured vehicle pointing a rifle at one of our local priests?²³⁶

The mid-1980s were, therefore, a time when the endurance and perseverance of the COSG were put to the test. Never before was the combined force of the COSG and ECC more necessary, and the minutes of the COSG throughout this period reveal its ongoing commitment to supporting the ECC, while working on its own objector support and awareness-raising initiatives: "ECC (is) more action orientated whereas [the] ongoing care and advice of COSG [is] absolutely vital."²³⁷

Apart from always having detailed news on the latest objectors, the minutes note that three work groups were set up to develop educational materials and run training workshops and camps for youth leaders, teachers and parents.²³⁸ The annual conferences of the COSG through these years focused largely on tendencies within the Board for Religious Objection and on how to disseminate information as widely as possible on this, the only legal forum through which to object.²³⁹ The steadfast counselling forum, CAS, also

²³⁶ Written contribution by Joe Bantich, 22 February 2007. This experience prompted him to ask for a transfer to administration duties within the Commando, where he served as a non-combatant.

²³⁷ "Minutes of CO meeting held on 18 September 1985", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

²³⁸ "Minutes of COSG meeting on 16 January 1985 at Anita's flat", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1. Please note that the different regional COSGs would have chosen different projects to engage in, and so the various initiatives mentioned do not necessarily involve all the COSGs.

²³⁹ "Minutes of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group held in Natal on 12 - 14 September, 1986", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 2 ff.

explored a number of very creative alternative information-sharing options (see Chapter 4). In 1985 too, Richard Steele gave evidence to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, with a view to possibly including a right-to-conscientious-objection clause in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁴⁰

In 1987 a new and ground-breaking form of objection - the "Stands" - began to appear. First, it was the collective stand of 23 young white South African men who issued a joint announcement that they were not prepared to serve in the SADF, saying they had come to realize that:

1. Our country is experiencing civil war, and that whites are conscripted to fight on one side of this conflict;
2. That the solution to this situation of conflict is the destruction of the unjust system called Apartheid prevailing in our country;
3. That fighting in the SADF means taking part in an institution which defends this unjust system; and
4. That it would therefore be against their moral principles to participate in the SADF.²⁴¹

It is extremely interesting to note that the government at first seemed paralysed by this initiative:

The objector stand was driven by Stellenbosch [University]. It was a very interesting synergy with the Afrikaans sector. They were in a sense a lot more militant, defiant....I was exceptionally scared; I thought there is no way the military is going to allow this; everyone is going to have the book thrown at them and the amazing thing was that nothing happened! That was the day the government blinked on objection.²⁴²

A COSG National Conference had this to say about the event:

"The 23"....were visited by the security branch and threatened with prosecution under section 121(c) but the charge never materialised. A reporter approached Geldenhuys for comment and was told that the 23 would

²⁴⁰ "Minutes of the Durban COSG held on 21 February 1985", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 3. This motion was not accepted at the time and was to be submitted again in two years' time.

²⁴¹ "For discussion: Some thoughts on support for COs; a report from 'The Cape Town 23' delivered at the COSG National Conference, 1987", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 2.

²⁴² Interview with David Schmidt, 19 May 2006. David Schmidt was one of the objectors in all three stands i.e. "The 23", "The 143" and "The 771".

be dealt with one-by-one. Some windows and car tyres [of individual members of "The 23" were] slashed.²⁴³

Then on 3 August 1988 another stand followed when 143 men jointly objected, 105 of whom had never done military service²⁴⁴ and hence faced the maximum six-year jail sentence. Ten members of this group were officers in the SADF, one of whom was a former captain who had served in Angola and Namibia.²⁴⁵ The group included professionals, students and priests citing some of the following reasons for objecting:

- the role of the SADF in the townships, for example, in breaking rent boycotts;
- the desire to build a non-racial society by showing that not all whites support the activities of the SADF;
- The SADF's total disrespect for civilian populations (from a conscript who had spent time in the townships).²⁴⁶

Soon after this stand the government banned the ECC. From the case of Tammis Alexander,²⁴⁷ it was also apparent that the SADF had re-considered its approach to objectors, if not in its formal policy then at least in the practical applications of how objectors were handled:

²⁴³ "Minutes of the National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, 2 - 4 October 1987", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 3.

²⁴⁴ *New Nation*, 4 August 1988.

²⁴⁵ Etienne Marais' statement: "Atrocities do occur on a wide scale - and they occur primarily because of the total disregard for blacks that apartheid teaches many young South Africans...In August 1988 P. W. Botha intervened in the legal process in Namibia where he set aside two cases of murder on the grounds that the soldiers were "acting in good faith" in the interests of "national security". A member of my company shot a 13-year old girl dead. Is it in the national interest to hush it up?...I was also involved in Operation Protea in 1981...While I was there, we listened to the SABC news service denying that we were there...To me it is clear that we were waging war without good reason. All this was supposedly on behalf of the Namibian people - but only a few weeks before an old Namibian man had pleaded with my platoon: "Please leave us alone." (BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A5 - Support Groups, "The very least I can do", *Sash*, March 1989, p 28ff.)

²⁴⁶ A statement by Stephen Louw in *The Weekly Mail*, 5 - 11 August 1988.

²⁴⁷ In a paper written by Richard Steele, entitled "Conscientious Objection - Current trends (based on the case of Tam Alexander), October 1988", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, is written, "Tam a member of the 'Durban 19' (a subdivision of the 143), received call-up papers on September 16 to report for a 12 day 'dad's army' camp on October 3rd. He reported, refused to serve, and was held for a day by the Military Police before being released. His trial was due on October 25th. He was facing an 18 month sentence. However, he left the country before that date. There is now a warrant out for his arrest."

In casual conversation with Tam during his custody, the military virtually acknowledged that Tam had been called up deliberately because he was a member of the "143" and that (a)ll members of the "143" are to be followed up. They told him that by the end of August they had already assigned all members of the group to various commands to be followed up.²⁴⁸

This case also revealed the following more sinister tactics used by the military, possibly to try to make objection as difficult as possible:

1. Lessen(ing) the ability of COs to prepare themselves and make publicity through:

1.1 Cutting down the lead time between arrival of call-up papers and date of reporting;

1.2 Speeding up the trial itself;

1.3 Speeding up the time between refusing to serve and the first court appearance;

1.4 Being held in military detention until the first trial. There is no bail from military detention. Access by civilian lawyers is more difficult;

1.5 The possibility exists that the prosecutor could push for the trial going ahead at the first court appearance;

1.6 THE WORST CASE SCENARIO IS THAT THE CO COULD BE HELD IN MILITARY DETENTION WITHOUT BAIL UNTIL HIS TRIAL AND THEN SENTENCED STRAIGHT TO PRISON;

1.7 Possibly introducing legislation preventing publicity of CO.²⁴⁹

In February 1989 about 900 mothers of conscripts made a stand under the banner of "Give Our Sons a Choice", making the following call:

While we support our sons through all these choices [of whether to serve or how to avoid service] we ask ourselves - is it for this that we have raised them?

Instead of watching our children grow up in a land torn by fear and violence, we yearn to see them thrive and take their place in building a strong and lasting peace in a future South Africa.

We publicly declare our support for alternatives to compulsory military service.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Richard Steele, "Conscientious Objection - Current trends (based on the case of Tam Alexander), October 1988", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 3.

²⁴⁹ Richard Steele, "Conscientious Objection - Current trends (based on the case of Tam Alexander), October 1988", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 3.

Commenting on the effectiveness of this resistance initiative, the COSG stated:

In the last few months this initiative has developed into a national organization. It functions in a low-key way, drawing in new people through a system of informal housemeetings, and its potential lies in its ability to reach people who could not be reached through other forms of work.²⁵¹

On 21 September 1989:

(a) total of 771 men...publicly declared - at the launch of a national register²⁵² of conscientious objectors - that they would not serve in the South African Defence Force....the biggest-ever demonstration of anti-conscription sentiment in South Africa. It comes a year after the banning of the End Conscription Campaign, and after three years of Emergency regulations which make it illegal to undermine the system of military conscription.²⁵³

This group consisted of 30 Stellenbosch University students, a soldier who had fought in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola, a lieutenant in military intelligence, businessmen, clerics, senior advocate Wim Trengove, author André Brink and 33 members of the National Jewish Conscientious Objectors. The youngest was 17 and the oldest was 52 years old. They declared their objection to serving in a racist Defence Force that was upholding a racist government.

The phenomenon of group objection contained a number of fascinating developments for the anti-conscription lobby:

- the stands indicated the need for a more organised opposition to conscription; in fact none of those participating in "The 23" had been canvassed before-hand; all had made up their minds *before* the statement was issued that they would not serve in the SADF; and thus

²⁵⁰ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C 2.5 - Miscellaneous, "Give Our Sons a Choice", undated, p 1.

²⁵¹ "The COSG War Resistance Update, 20 October 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 3.

²⁵² The custodians of the Register were Reverend Peter Storey, Dr Beyers Naude, Bishop Reginald Orsmond, Dr Frans Auerbach, Dr Dawid Bosch and Professor Philip Tobias.

²⁵³ *The Weekly Mail*, 22-28 September, p 1.

it was “merely a matter of ‘already existing’ objectors feeling the need to take a public stand”,²⁵⁴

- the diversity of the groups making a stand seemed to indicate much broader dissent to conscription, as opposed to it being perceived as a problem facing a few individuals;
- they took place at a time when it seemed that the maximum six-year prison sentence facing two objectors,²⁵⁵ as well as hefty sentences facing other objectors,²⁵⁶ would have acted as a deterrent to others;
- the Board for Religious Objection no longer seemed a viable option for many objectors;²⁵⁷
- at least one stand was made not by conscripts but by people who were directly affected by conscription, namely mothers;
- they were much more difficult for the government to deal with, not only logistically, but also in a way which maintained its credibility among the South African public;
- they were largely initiated in an Afrikaans-speaking university (Stellenbosch), which had up until this point not been very active in the movement;
- some of the stands were not directly linked to the COSG’s work²⁵⁸ but what is certain is that these stands would not have taken place without the impetus provided by all the years of awareness-raising, publicity and lobbying on the part of the COSG and ECC;
- these stands challenged the COSG to consider how best to support this new form of dissent: to identify objectors before they became

²⁵⁴ “For discussion: Some thoughts on support for COs”; a report from “The Cape Town 23” delivered at the COSG National Conference, 1987, in Richard Steele personal archives, p 2.

²⁵⁵ David Bruce and Charles Bester (see more below).

²⁵⁶ Saul Batzofin and Ivan Toms.

²⁵⁷ Two priests, Alan Storey and Douglas Torr, who would have probably had a good chance of being accepted by the Board refused to appear before it. Alan Storey stated, “I do not believe that religious persons have a monopoly on integrity and conscience....If there were a genuine, alternative way of serving society creatively and within non-violent structures and if this were open to all, I would have no hesitation in offering myself for such service.” (BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B 24 - Cases of War Resisters, “Statement by Alan Storey”, undated, p 1.)

²⁵⁸ Many of “The 23”, for example, did not even know about the COSG and started their own organisation called “OSG” - the Objector Support Group, but as the stands grew bigger, and the need for a national body coordinating support grew, it made sense for OSG to be dissolved and reconstituted as COSG in Cape Town, where COSG had faded away. (“Discussion paper on the objector stands, undated”, in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 3.)

visible, to bring their objection to national visibility, to make clear what options were open to objectors so they could make informed decisions, to consider if they (the COSG) had the capacity to support larger numbers of objectors who may choose prison as a preferable option to exile.²⁵⁹

The COSG, however, was quick to think about how these stands could best be used to further the aims of the movement:

We all agreed that COSG and the Stand need to rationalise their structures and that there should not be two completely distinct organisations working in this area. Regionally we should approach Stand members and begin a process of discussing how this rationalisation process should occur.²⁶⁰

In keeping with this decision, a joint meeting between COSG and the 771 Stand took place on 3-4 February 1990, in which the following proposals were made:

- that the ECC should be revived as the national anti-militarisation campaigning and coordinating body;
- that a Release Objectors Campaign be implemented immediately (see below); and,
- that "priority be given to developing a realistic step-by-step programme for ending conscription and for building a broad consensus regarding a post-apartheid system of national service for reconstruction."²⁶¹

As the COSG grew more experienced in the dynamics of social activism, namely more astute in using the context of its day to further its cause, while simultaneously using its cause to influence the context within which it worked, it began to articulate its aims and roles more clearly. A comparison of the "mission statements" of COSG in three different years refers:

- 1983 - The way COSG understands 'opposition' to the militarisation of South Africa is by a) supporting objectors, and b) educating people about the role the military plays.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ "For discussion: Some thoughts on support for COs; a report from "The Cape Town 23" delivered at the COSG National Conference, 1987", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 3 ff.

²⁶⁰ "Minutes of COSG National Meeting held on 24 - 26 November 1989, Magaliesberg, Transvaal", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 4.

²⁶¹ "Minutes of National COSG/Stand meeting held at Hermanus from 2 - 4 February 1990", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

- 1984 - The Role of COSG
 - (a) A support group for COs, their families and friends.
 - (b) A support group for people facing the issue of CO.
 - (c) A group uniting all objectors.
 - (d) A group resisting the military, militarization and the unjust war.
 - (e) A peace movement.
 - (f) A resource group in militarization.
 - (g) An initiator and member organisation of ECC.²⁶³
- 1988 - (COSG) Aims and Objectives
 - (a) To defend the right of the individual to refuse to render military service.
 - (b) To give support to conscientious objectors and to publicise their stands.
 - (c) To oppose militarisation and conscription in the interests of building a just peace in our country.
 - (d) To educate and advise people of their rights and options with regard to military service.
 - (e) To liaise and co-operate with like minded organisations to promote these objectives.²⁶⁴

While the support of conscientious objectors still remained a central facet of the COSG's work in the 1988 statement, the "bigger picture" of what this support really meant in the political context (especially the increasing SADF violence against the civilian population), was now integrated into the description of the COSG's mission, namely the building of a just peace in the country. Also, the use of the extremely effective lobbying technique of publicising the stands of objectors (see more of this in Chapters 4 and 5), which had been an important aspect of the COSG's work from the earliest days, was now clearly profiled in its aims and objectives.

Towards the end of the 1980s, selective objectors began to go to jail. First it was Ivan Toms in March 1988,²⁶⁵ then David Bruce in July 1988,²⁶⁶ followed

²⁶² AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.7 - Info pamphlets, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups", p 1.

²⁶³ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.2 - National Conferences, "Report on the fifth National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, 19 - 22 July 1984", p 11.

²⁶⁴ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.2 - National Conferences, "Conscientious Objectors Support Group - Organisational Profile, March 1988," p 2.

by Charles Bester in December 1988,²⁶⁷ and then Saul Batzofin in April 1989.²⁶⁸ With the courage of these objectors and the group stands, the COSG gained confidence in calling for the fulfilment of its objectives. Perhaps the change in legislation regarding the length of military service contributed to this confidence.²⁶⁹ In a national meeting in 1989 a campaign to release objectors²⁷⁰ was discussed with clarity, decisiveness and insight:

We all agreed that COSG must call for the release of objectors and not for political prisoner status or remission. Our call must be strong and we felt that including interim demands like remission / political prisoner status weakens our call. However whilst COSG's call must be for the release of objectors, we can also draw attention to the objectors' demands, viz that whilst they are being held the state must choose - either to treat them as security prisoners or to grant them remission of sentence.²⁷¹

Various groups were targeted as potential supporters of this campaign, showing an exciting broadening of the COSG's constituencies: "Democratic Party MP's, Afrikaans church people, conservative Christians, the Mass Democratic Movement, the Campaign Against Political Imprisonment, the

²⁶⁵ Ivan Toms was a founding member of the ECC and was sentenced to 21 months for refusing further service in the SADF, after having served his two years' initial service. He was also the first of "The 23" to stand trial.

²⁶⁶ The first conscript to receive the maximum six-year jail sentence for refusing conscription. (BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B20 - David Bruce, "David Bruce could have avoided army service by leaving the country. He chose to stay and face six years' jail. WHY?", *The Weekly Mail*, 22 July 1988.)

²⁶⁷ The second conscript to receive the maximum six-year jail sentence for refusing conscription. ("Non-violence News, First quarter 1994" in Rob Robertson personal archives, p 7.)

²⁶⁸ Saul Batzofin was one of "The 143" and was sentenced to eighteen-months imprisonment for refusing further camps.

²⁶⁹ In 1989 F. W. de Klerk became State President and two changes were made in the call-up system: initial service was reduced from two years to one year and camps were reduced from 120 days every two years (for six two-year cycles) to 30 days per year for the same twelve year period. This change did, however, not apply to alternative service, which meant that those doing alternative service now served for a longer time than those doing military service. It also did not apply to those serving prison sentences.

²⁷⁰ This campaign was nationally coordinated by the ECC and 7000 signatures were gathered in a matter of days. (AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "The objector movement - lessons from the 80's", p 6.)

²⁷¹ "Minutes of COSG National Meeting held on 24 - 26 November 1989, Magaliesberg, Transvaal", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 4. This distinction would have, either way, benefited objectors serving prison sentences; namely, if they were held as security prisoners they would have been kept away from criminals and possibly together, which would have given them the opportunity to support one another and not be subject to the violence in prisons (Ivan Toms, for example, was the victim of sexual assault in prison), but if they had been held as criminals they could have claimed the parole and remission privileges usually accorded to criminal prisoners. As it was though, they had neither of these benefits.

newly released leaders.”²⁷² Also at this meeting, there was a tentative discussion about the possibility of meeting with the ANC.

At the National Conference in 1989, considerable time was spent evaluating the anti-militarisation movement over the last two years in the light of three important events that had taken place:

- the SADF was out of Angola and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 435²⁷³ was being implemented in Namibia;
- “The 143” had issued their statement and four objectors had been jailed; and
- the ECC had been restricted by the government.

In the light of these events, the COSG members asked themselves, “What impact have these events had on the anti-conscription movement in terms of achieving its stated objectives?” and responded as follows:

We have had to change our emphasis from ending conscription to alternative service.

The ECC banning has meant lost contact overseas and with the white constituency in S.A. Also a certain loss of centre and dynamism.

On the other hand a new base has been created by current objectors, which puts CO in the agenda of black and generally democratic movements.

Alternative service is now a much more accepted concept.²⁷⁴

Once again, the COSG reaffirmed its commitment to:

ensur(ing) that all objectors had personal and political support, (with) the aims of political support (being) to:

- Maximize the cost of each objection to the state (see more in Chapters 4 and 5)
- Develop a critique of militarisation
- Raise the issue in other organizations.

COSG’s political work was discussed and it was decided that objection is BIG and we must GO for it.²⁷⁵

²⁷² “Minutes of COSG National Meeting held on 24 - 26 November 1989, Magaliesberg, Transvaal”, in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 5.

²⁷³ UN Security Council Resolution 435 of 1978, which pronounced the withdrawal of South Africa’s illegal administration from Namibia and the transfer of power to the people of Namibia. (<http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1978/scres78.htm>.)

²⁷⁴ “Minutes of COSG Conference: March 1989”, in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 2.

But, characteristically, the COSG was not satisfied until it had expressed its overall objectives sensitively but firmly in a statement, which encapsulated everything the COSG has ever stood for:

Supporting freedom of conscience does not necessarily mean anti-militarism. The pacifist / Just war distinction still remains but is brought together in the COSG movement.

We oppose apartheid as the cause of conflict in S.A. and want to develop non-racialism.

We also want to develop a pacifist attitude to war as such. We seek to highlight what militarism does to people and especially to conscientious objectors, and to support the latter.²⁷⁶

1989 was another busy year for the COSG, partly due to the banning of the ECC; not only was the COSG aware of its responsibility to uphold the more high-profiled anti-militarisation work that had been the focus of the ECC, but also South Africa had been chosen to be the host country for International CO day on 15 May. Three visitors²⁷⁷ from War Resisters International (WRI) toured the COSGs in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. At the end of the visit an evaluation of the tour was written by WRI for the COSG, noting small but significant details: "Paul [?] puts in a phenomenal amount of work for someone who has a full-time job", and at the same time placing the objector movement in South Africa in its broader context:

Sharing platforms with Ivan [Toms], Martin [Birtwhistle] and Judy [Bester, mother of Charles Bester],²⁷⁸ being at meetings where mothers and sisters have talked about their sons and brothers, where new objectors have come forward, this has given us an even greater sense of what objection means in this country. I used to feel apologetic to my friends at home that in South Africa WRI was really only working with whites....By visiting the townships, seeing the conditions people are forced to live in, hearing what they have experienced from the SADF, and by meeting democratic leaders, I've come to feel in myself what I always knew rationally: that solidarity with you is solidarity with the non-racial movement as a whole - with all those detained

²⁷⁵ "Minutes of COSG Conference: March 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 3.

²⁷⁶ "Minutes of COSG Conference: March 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 2.

²⁷⁷ Howard Clark, Greg Payton and Pieter van Reenen.

²⁷⁸ See more about this in Chapter 4.

and restricted, with all those suffering from the apartheid system and from the SADF in particular.²⁷⁹

In the same year (1989), the ECC began a "Campaign for the safe return of war resisters",²⁸⁰ in which ten men who had left the country rather than serving in the SADF stated; "WE ARE NOW ENDING OUR EXILE AND RETURNING HOME". The campaign brochure, which lists the COSG and the CAS as contact organisations, states, "Over 23000 young white males have left the country since 1980...Lost earnings are estimated to be in the order of R15 000 million each year - or 15% of the Gross National Product." In another article Robert Charlton, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand stated, "General anxiety about the future, and for the young white men the prospect of military service, are the main reasons for leaving."²⁸¹ At around the same time, news appeared of the South African government's attempt to facilitate the immigration of skilled East Germans to fill positions where there was a shortage of skills. The COSG was quick to use this as another opportunity to challenge the government:

Conscription legislation forces many of the cream of our land to leave the country...At the same time the government is taking advantage of the exodus from East Germany to fill the gap which their conscription laws have helped to create.

We suggest a solution which is far less costly...the government should declare an immediate moratorium on persecution of conscientious objectors by suspending all pending prosecutions, releasing those currently in jail, and allowing the safe return of exiled objectors.²⁸²

And so a thriving conscientious objection movement had developed, gaining added momentum over the previous two to three years with defiant objectors both outside and inside the country being unafraid to face the consequences of their actions. New objectors based their objection on grounds that stretched

²⁷⁹ "Evaluation for COSG of the International Tour, written by Howard Clark, 17 May 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 5.

²⁸⁰ "Campaign for the safe return of war resisters", undated, in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

²⁸¹ *The Sunday Star*, 4 June 1989.

²⁸² "Letter to the Editor from Rob Goldman, Spokesperson: Conscientious Objector Support Group, Durban, 10 November 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

state legislation way beyond the original narrow terms of the 1983 Amendment.²⁸³ Once again, the COSG issued a number of press statements lobbying for the abolition of conscription, and in the interim calling again for the provision of alternative, non-military national service options and the release of all objectors from prison.²⁸⁴ In the face of this pressure, both from internal and international sources, the government had no choice but to change the length of sentences facing conscientious objectors. On 29 January 1990, the government announced that objectors could now receive remission of up to half their sentences, at the discretion of the prison commander. Two days later, Saul Batzofin was released after serving ten months of an eighteen-month sentence.²⁸⁵ And even though there was still no legislative change in the actual six-year sentence given, on 5 February 1990, the COSG received a significant letter from the Ministry of Defence:²⁸⁶

...religious objectors who were required to serve the maximum period of Community service and who have completed half or more than half of their service on 1 February 1990, will be exempted from the remaining period. The Minister has also indicated that the period of community service will in future continuously be considered in relation to the period of National Service.

It has also been decided that the sentence for those who are convicted for refusing to render military service, remains unchanged. The Minister of Justice has, however, acceded to a request to amend the Prison Service's release policy regarding this category, in order that those serving sentences for refusing to render military service can, as other prisoners, be considered for remission of their sentence. The remission could, subject to good conduct etc, be as much as 50%.

²⁸³ For example: Andre Croucamp was accepted by the Board even though he declared himself an agnostic, another objector from Earthlife applied to the Board on the grounds of belonging to an Earth Goddess religion, Louis Bredenkamp wrote to the military telling them he was unwilling to serve because he was a member of the ANC; he then received notice that his camp was "cancelled". ("Minutes: COSG National Conference, Woodmead School, Johannesburg, 22 - 23 September 1990", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 1.)

²⁸⁴ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - COSG, "Press briefing on changes in national service conditions, from Durban COSG, 23 January 1990".

²⁸⁵ "Conscientious Objection in South Africa, 30 April 1990, written by The Conscientious Objector Support Group", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 5.

²⁸⁶ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - COSG, "Representation on behalf of Mr C. Bester, from the Deputy Minister of Defence, 5 February 1990".

On 27 February 1990, the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein heard appeals from David Bruce and Ivan Toms on whether the words, "...shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for..." indicated a compulsory prison sentence, or whether these words merely set an upper limit on the sentence:²⁸⁷

...the Appellate Division judgement concluded that the Defence Act allowed for discretion in the sentencing of conscientious objectors, and that the maximum penalties which the objectors had received should be reviewed. This decision, combined with a new ruling that objectors could receive remission and parole on their sentences, meant that Toms, Bester and Bruce were freed.²⁸⁸

In addition to this discretion, another option opened up for objectors:

In November 1990 Michael Graaf,²⁸⁹ an objector sentenced after the release of the three, was granted indemnity under an agreement which had been negotiated between the ANC and the government on political prisoners. This was especially significant because it created the legal precedent for objectors to be treated as political, rather than criminal, prisoners.²⁹⁰

The movement, which had started off largely as a single-focus movement, had been growing in the momentum, knowledge, experience and strength necessary to enable it to begin to make a significant contribution to the broader anti-militarisation work in the country. And the COSG was keen to embrace this. At around this time, in various minutes are discussions about their further role in anti-militarisation work:²⁹¹

Thesis:

- The anti-militarisation movement needs to be broad (mass), political, non-racial...

²⁸⁷ "Conscientious Objection in South Africa, 30 April 1990, written by the Conscientious Objector Support Group", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 6. See Chapter 5 for the outcome of this case.

²⁸⁸ Rauch, J., "War and resistance", in Cawthra, G., Kraak, G. & O'Sullivan, G. (eds), *War and resistance: Southern African reports*, Macmillan Press, London, 1994, p 12.

²⁸⁹ Michael Graaf refused a camp call-up, after having done initial service ten years prior to this where he spent much of this time in Namibia.

²⁹⁰ Rauch, J., "War and resistance", in Cawthra, G., Kraak, G. & O'Sullivan, G. (eds), *War and resistance: Southern African reports*, Macmillan Press, London, 1994, p 12.

²⁹¹ In an invitation to attend a "Regional Anti-militarisation workshop to be held on 30 September 1989, signed by Rob Goldman; spokesperson, Durban COSG", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, is written, "Anti-militarisation work includes: anti-conscription work, conscientious objection support work, conscription advice work, alternative service advocacy, political critique of the role of the SADF, militarization and the economy, psychological and social effects of military service and militarization, peace work advocating political solutions to political problems".

- A focus on conscription or conscientious objection and alternative service alone is too narrow (specific) politically and too white.
- Now is the time to join in and 'build a mass movement for peace' (UDF/COSATU slogan in Natal).....²⁹²

As with all the issues that COSG had had to deal with over the years, they did not lose the opportunity to make effective use of their knowledge; at the 1990 National Conference the COSG, anticipating the creation of a Bill of Rights, issued the following policy statement, neatly summarising all the contentious issues of a decade of anti-conscription campaigning:

We believe that in a post-apartheid South Africa:

1. The right not to be conscripted into an armed force should be entrenched in a Bill of Rights guaranteed by the constitution.²⁹³
2. If there is conscription into military service, a non-military national service should also be available. It should:
 - 2.1 Be available on application to anyone unwilling to do military service.
 - 2.2 Be independent of the defence force.
 - 2.3 Be of the same length as actual military service.
 - 2.4 Allow participants to serve in State or semi-State or in non-governmental (welfare) organisations.
 - 2.5 Those who choose non-military service should not be penalised in any way; this would include pay and service conditions.
 - 2.6 Opting for non-military service should be a matter of simple choice; there should be no enquiry into the motivation of anyone who chooses non-military service.²⁹⁴

Once again, however, the COSG is crystal-clear about its vision for a different, more peaceful future:

COSG wants to emphasise, though, that it would much prefer not to see conscription at all. We are confident that if a democratic South Africa were attacked, enough volunteers would be found to defend the country, either as

²⁹² "Anti-militarisation 'Peace Movement', written by Durban COSG", undated, in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

²⁹³ Section 15(1) of the Bill of Rights, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion." "It would be unusual for a constitution to legislate about conscription in a bill of rights - that would normally be left to national legislation....While [our constitution] does not prohibit conscription, it at least provides a very firm basis for the right to conscientiously object." (Email correspondence with Mike Evans on 17 July 2007.)

²⁹⁴ *Objector*, February/March 1991, p 5.

part of a military force, or by non-violent methods...COSG foresees that conscription, if it is introduced in a post-apartheid South Africa, could be very divisive; and unnecessary division is something a future democratic South Africa can ill afford.²⁹⁵

An interesting development in the COSG meeting minutes from 1990 onwards is the successful connections made, through the cause of conscientious objection to military service, with communities outside their traditional white support base, the lack of which had been a source of concern to the COSG members for many years.²⁹⁶ Three examples of this are:

- A COSG "alternative service project" in Umlazi, during which a church building was repainted and a reciprocal tree-planting ceremony was held to honour conscientious objectors who were jailed as well as township activists who had been detained, restricted or killed in their struggle for freedom:

This was an immensely exciting and rewarding experience for us. But, even more important...the seeds of nonracialism sown and nurtured then, continue to bear fruit after the event..

We were then asked by the Umlazi Youth League to meet for discussions on conscription, conscientious objection etc...The following week we were invited to [speak] at [the] June 16 meeting...

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from these experiences is that conscientious objection is one of the most powerful tools available in the white community with which to resist apartheid, to build nonracialism, and to erect beacons of hope that a just, democratic and peaceful future is possible.²⁹⁷

- the COSG/Umlazi Youth League Peace Rally held in 1990, and
- the printing of 10 000 support pamphlets for Brendan Moran²⁹⁸ in English and isiZulu.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ "Conscientious Objection in South Africa, 30 April 1990, written by the Conscientious Objector Support Group", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 2.

²⁹⁶ See more of this in Chapter 6.

²⁹⁷ "Conscientious objection unites - military conscription divides, 23 June 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

²⁹⁸ After a three-year decision-making process, Brendan Moran returned to S.A. in August 1989 to face the issue of military service. He became the first volunteer in the Churches Alternative National Service Project (CANSP), working at a school for deaf children. On 1 February 1990 he reported that he was refusing to serve in the SADF. (BC 1005, *COSAWR*

Also, with signs of reform and negotiation beginning to promise political change in the country, the COSG began to ask themselves how they could most effectively contribute to this change:

We are programmed into an oppositional mode - we need rather to get into the flow of events, take a positive stance e.g. re objectors, stress their vindication in the light of present developments.....Suggestion that our role is not to create activists only but also to educate and pave the way for change i.e. so that whites understand the change and don't sabotage it.³⁰⁰

Drawing on the events taking place in the country the COSG then made a submission³⁰¹ to the Group and Human Rights working group of the South African Law Commission, for the inclusion of the right to conscientious objection. At around the same time the COSG also made a submission³⁰² to the Van Loggerenberg Committee³⁰³ in 1990. Showing that the present system of conscription was harming the country economically, that continued jailing of objectors in the climate of political reform was calling into question the commitment of government to reform, and that the number of objectors was rising rapidly (with "The Stands"), the COSG called for an end to conscription. In the interim, they proposed that a non-military, non-punitive form of alternative service be made available to all conscripts on application, that jailed objectors be released (or at least be held as political prisoners until such time as their release), that the length of prison sentence be brought in

Collection, UCT Libraries, B 24 - Cases of War Resisters, "Brendan Moran statement", undated, p 1.)

²⁹⁹ "Minutes of COSG National Meeting held on 24 - 25 November 1989", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 2. See more of this in Chapter 4.

³⁰⁰ "Minutes of COSG National Meeting held at Hermanus on 4 February 1990", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 1 and 2.

³⁰¹ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "The Conscientious Objectors' Support Group - Response to the working paper on Group and Human Rights (South African Law Commission), 31 August 1989".

³⁰² This paragraph is taken from: AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "The Conscientious Objector Support Group - Submission to the Van Loggerenberg Committee, 20 February 1990".

³⁰³ This Committee was appointed by General Malan in his parliamentary address of 20 April 1989, mainly to investigate the present system of military service, the management structure of the SADF and the manpower procurement policy of the SADF. Later General Malan stated that this committee would also investigate issues surrounding community service. (AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "The Conscientious Objector Support Group - Submission to the Van Loggerenberg Committee, 20 February 1990", p 1.)

line with the recent reduction in military service, and that there be a moratorium on all conscientious objector trials.

A press article³⁰⁴ in 1991 brings to attention a growing new trend in the grounds for objection:

Over 30000 white South African males began their year's military service this week, while hundreds of others were doing their best to find out how to get out of their call-ups, and three³⁰⁵ informed the defence force of their refusal to serve. According to counsellors from the independent Conscription Advice Service, it is of growing concern to conscripts that at a time when apartheid is on its way out, compulsory military service remains a whites-only preserve....with the Citizen Force camps there are very strong indications that the turnout is becoming disastrously low for the South African Defence Force. One end of the year camp near Johannesburg had only 30 people turning up out of the 400 called up, and in another it was 10 out of 75, with 2 of the 10 immediately being given deferment.

An ECC member in the same article highlights the absurdity of the situation:

We [the ECC]...find it disturbing that at a time when members of Umkhonto weSizwe are likely to be indemnified and released from prison, pacifists like Alan Storey should still face lengthy prison sentences.

Also in this article is one of the first public statements by the ANC supporting objection; that this appeared in the media is a sign of changing times indeed:

The African National Congress has issued a statement commending those who refuse to serve in the SADF for their "courageous stand", and urging "all young white conscripts to follow their shining example. Such principled opposition to apartheid is a clear signal that the South Africa of the future will belong to all who live in it, black and white".

A year after the COSG's submission to the Van Loggerenberg Committee, they again found opportunity to make their stance heard in a parliamentary committee; this time the Gleeson Committee. Apart from the issues raised

³⁰⁴ *The Weekly Mail*, 11-17 January 1991, p 8.

³⁰⁵ The three were Francois Krige, who had returned to South Africa with COSAWR and was never charged (possibly because the government could not afford to enforce whites-only conscription at a time when the Population Registration Act had been repealed and political reconciliation was underway), Warren van Rooyen and Alan Storey. (See more about Alan Storey in Chapter 5.)

with the Van Loggerenberg Committee (see above), the COSG also raised a few more issues that had been problematic for objectors:³⁰⁶

- Objectors opting for non-military service should have the simple choice to do so and should not have to go through an enquiry to assess motivation;
- Objectors wishing to do non-combatant service should be allowed to do so on application to his unit and should not be penalised or victimised in any way for this;
- Any reference to prison sentences for refusal to serve should be deleted from the Defence Act; and
- The criminal record of all conscientious objectors should be annulled with immediate effect.

With the political scenario changing so dramatically in the country and with the SADF's apparent reluctance not only to prosecute objectors, but also to follow up on conscripts who had not reported for service (see more in Chapter 5), it must have seemed to the COSG and ECC that their goals had almost been achieved, as is evident from this message taken by COSG representatives to the War Resisters International council meeting and the International Conscientious Objector Movement conference in 1992:

The Conscientious Objector Support Group expresses appreciation for the wonderful support we, the End Conscription Campaign and the Conscription Advice Service, have received from the international community.

We are glad to report that the end of conscription is in sight! As the negotiation process for the introduction of a new, democratic, government in South Africa proceeds, whites-only conscription is increasingly untenable, and many thousands of conscripts are simply ignoring their call-ups.³⁰⁷

In March 1992, with the negotiations towards a democratic South Africa firmly in progress, the COSG made a submission to Working Group 3: Transitional Arrangements, of CODESA:

³⁰⁶ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "Submission from the Conscientious Objector Support Group to the Gleeson Committee of enquiry into conscientious objection, 24 June 1991", p 1ff.

³⁰⁷ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "Letter from Conscientious Objector Support Group to friends on behalf of the COSG National Conference, 6 July 1992".

Even before any interim government is set up, we request CODESA to use its power to bring about the following immediate changes:

- (i) Conscription should be suspended immediately;
- (ii) All prosecutions of conscientious objectors should cease;
- (iii) There should be immediate full disclosure of all expenditure on security especially secret funding of special projects and special forces.³⁰⁸

Then came the 1992 Amendment Bill No. 112 which once again proposed both concessions and further repressions (see more details of this Bill in Chapter 5). "(A)n attempt to enforce legislation based on this bill as it was originally formulated would have been disastrous. Thousands would have faced jail sentence, and a renewed wave of exiles would have accelerated the "brain drain".³⁰⁹

Ultimately, however, after an intense lobbying effort (see Chapter 5), the 1992 Defence Amendment Act was passed without the most repressive clauses of the Bill. The most significant gain of the Amendment was that it broadened the definition of an objector to include moral, ethical and religious objection. Years of untiring personal sacrifice and group effort had borne fruit.

At around the same time, however, the press reported a "Crackdown on Army Camp Dodgers", in which a court martial was held at Voortrekkerhoogte, fining 23 of the 50 Citizen Force members R400 for failing to report for a camp at the Hillcrest Regiment. "Commandant Piet Venter, a military law officer from army headquarters, said the proceedings were a warning to all men to report or face prosecution..... 'Other prosecutions will follow.'"³¹⁰ In the following months the government repeated this threat numerous times despite ever-growing numbers of defaulters: "...at the July intake of "National Servicemen" only 2600 of the 12000 called up report for duty; General Liebenberg confirms that the SADF is looking at a new recruitment system, but states that those who ignored call-ups will be prosecuted."³¹¹ This

³⁰⁸ "COSG letter to The Secretariat, CODESA, 2 March 1992", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

³⁰⁹ *Objector*, June 1992, p 6.

³¹⁰ *The Daily News*, 17 March, 1992.

³¹¹ *Objector*, September 1993, p 8.

ineffective attempt to hold on to their last vestige of power encouraged the COSG to keep track of whether prosecutions were in fact taking place, only to discover that despite many hundreds having been visited by Military Police, only one had been summoned to appear in court:

Thus, the moral of the story is: the SADF BARK IS MUCH WORSE THAN ITS BITE; DON'T BE INTIMIDATED. The system is collapsing and will soon be gone.³¹²

At a combined conference in 1992, the ECC, the COSG and the CAS, therefore, decided that the time had come to run a campaign of noncooperation beginning "with a challenge to the Minister of Defence to end conscription."³¹³ Understanding clearly that the changing political climate in the country would provide the conscript with even more dilemmas, it was decided at the same meeting that the CAS should retain its separate identity, providing non-directional information to conscripts; a task which would have been compromised if it were linked to a political campaign.

The minutes of the COSG meetings from 1992 onwards reflect a growing exploration of what their role would be when conscription ended. Proposals made included:

- "the need for retaining responsibility for conscientious objection support in a voluntary army";³¹⁴
- supporting conscientious objectors in other countries;
- contributing to the international peace movement by strengthening links with international peace organisations, such as War Resisters International,³¹⁵ the War Resisters League, and the International Conscientious Objector Movement, with some COSG members occasionally attending conferences hosted by these organisations;

³¹² *Objector*, September 1993, p 3.

³¹³ "Summary of the decisions reached at the ECC, COSG, CAS COMBINED CONFERENCE, 7 - 9 August 1992", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 1 and 2.

³¹⁴ These proposals are taken from the "Minutes of the COSG National meeting held in Durban on 4 July 1992", in "Minutes" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 1, and from *Objector*, September 1993, p 2.

³¹⁵ Among other international meetings, COSG representatives Rob Goldman, Michael Graaf and Neil Mitchell attended the WRI Triennial in Brazil in December 1994. (Interview with Neil Mitchell on 13 February 2005.)

- becoming active in the Peace Accord process, possibly acting as a monitoring group such as UNTAG in Namibia;
- further involvement in national anti-militarisation work.

Despite the fact that an end to racial conscription had been announced in August 1993,³¹⁶ conscription per se had not ended yet, however, and the COSG continued to make submissions to the relevant Transitional Government forums:

The Johannesburg branch of the Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) has recently had occasion to examine the sixth report of the Technical Committee on Fundamental Rights during the Transition, dated 15 July 1993.

1. COSG Johannesburg would like to make the following comments:
 - a. Clause 8(1) establishes the right to freedom of conscience. It does not, however, make specific reference to the right not to be conscripted into an armed force....
 - d. We therefore request that Clause 8(1) be followed by a clause such as the following: '(2) No-one shall be required to bear arms or perform military service against his or her conscientious beliefs'.
 - e. Furthermore, we consider it essential that the right to Conscientious Objection be excluded from the suspensive powers of clause 29 as it is precisely in an emergency situation that the right not to be conscripted into an armed force needs to be protected.³¹⁷

On 14 September 1993, after three hours of debate, "Parliament sounded the death knell for white conscription...Once the bill is voted on next week and signed into law by President F W de Klerk it will provide a volunteer army and a ballot system for all males with matric to make up any shortfall in volunteers."³¹⁸ Cadets at school also became optional.³¹⁹ In July 1994,

³¹⁶ *Objector*, September 1993, p 3.

³¹⁷ "25 August 1993, COSG Submission to the Technical Committee, concerning the Proposed Bill of Rights", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

³¹⁸ *Cape Times*, 15 September 1993.

³¹⁹ *The Argus*, 27 November 1993.

Deputy Defence Minister Ronnie Kasrils stated that, "there would be no further prosecution of people who refused to report for military call-ups."³²⁰

But the work of the COSG was not over yet. Even after abolishing conscription, the COSG continued to call for the inclusion of the right to conscientious objection to military service and for the exclusion of any reference to conscription in the new constitution that had been the result of a lengthy process of multi-party negotiations at CODESA prior to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994:

Conscription is unnecessary and undesirable. It is unnecessary because there is no serious threat to South Africa's territorial integrity, and it is undesirable because of the major militarizing effect conscription has on society....It is our contention that conscription as a means of military personnel procurement is logistically, economically, politically and morally untenable.³²¹

It is very gratifying to note that at the meeting where this presentation was made,³²² one of the major issues that had enabled the SADF over the years to become a law unto itself, was scrutinised:

...the main debate...is about civilian control of the military, and how this is described in the constitution. The old SADF was totally controlled and managed by themselves. The Minister of Defence had no independent bureaucracy. The goal of the ANC and NGOs concerned with military matters, is for there to be a Secretary of Defence who is a civilian with primary accountability to Parliament, who will be the chief bureaucrat of the military. This is the case in most democratic states.³²³

One of the last COSG minutes, dated 18 January 1995, states:

³²⁰ *The Argus*, 27 July 1994.

³²¹ "Presentation to Constitutional Assembly Theme Group 6.4 'Security Apparatus' re: Conscription, 8 May 1995", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

³²² Richard Steele made this presentation, at which he had the opportunity to talk with Brigadier de Klerk (the SANDF advisor to the Theme Group); "He is also the officer who presided at my Court Martial in 1980, and sentenced me to a year in Detention barracks! (We shook hands, and recognized this relationship, but had no further discussion on it.)" ("Report on COSG Presentation to a workshop of Constitutional Assembly Theme Group 6.4 'Security Apparatus' re: Conscription, 8 May 1995", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.)

³²³ "Report on COSG Presentation to a workshop of Constitutional Assembly Theme Group 6.4 'Security Apparatus' re: Conscription, 8 May 1995", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 2.

1. As far as conscription and conscientious objection goes, South Africa is now obviously right out of the limelight. There is, however, a lot of solidarity work to be done and in a sense we owe that to the movement, which has supported us over the years.

2. Apart from the solidarity work mentioned above, is our work over? If our view is that the focus of our movement should be freedom of conscience (a la the old ECC slogan "The Right to Choose") then it is. If, on the other hand, our view is that our goal should be the demilitarisation of society, then our work is far from over. In fact there is a long, hard struggle ahead.

If we agree on the latter, is COSG the right vehicle for advancing that struggle, or should COSG disband in favour of a more broad-based organisation? ³²⁴

Shortly after this the last remaining branch of the COSG, Durban COSG, disbanded. While the Durban group continued to meet for social reasons occasionally after this, one of the movement-related decisions they took in later years was to support a bursary for a Peace Studies student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal - the result of which has been this study!

In conclusion, it is perhaps fitting that we should hear from the COSG themselves what the organisation was to them, as they balanced the political tension and gravity of the time with the warmth of human togetherness and support:

What is COSG? ³²⁵

- ❖ relaxing
- ❖ fellowship
- ❖ support
- ❖ low key
- ❖ fun
- ❖ exchange of information
- ❖ non-threatening sounding board for people to develop their c[onscientious] o[bjection] views etc.
- ❖ listening
- ❖ good food!

³²⁴ "Durban COSG Minutes, 18 January 1995", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 2.

³²⁵ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "Durban COSG, November 1988", p 1.

- ❖ spinoffs (launching pad) e.g. ECC, Conscription Advice Service, National Community Servers Support Group
- ❖ a place for those spinoff groups to “report back” to
- ❖ consistent
- ❖ sense of history
- ❖ mixture of strands in the war resistance movement - pacifists, non-pacifists, religious, non-religious, political, non-political, activists, supporters
- ❖ functions as a base
- ❖ no hierarchy, central functions shared (e.g. chairperson, note taker)
- ❖ no age restrictions!
- ❖ caring for individuals - people more important than ideologies
- ❖ sense of mutual responsibility amongst members
- ❖ brings together the political and the spiritual
- ❖ sense of purpose.

Chapter 4 - The COSG as a nonviolent movement for change

*The kind of pacifism that does not actively combat
the war preparations of the governments is powerless
and will always stay powerless.
Would that the conscience and common sense of the people awaken!*
Albert Einstein³²⁶

*The essence of non-violence is love.
Out of love and the willingness to act selflessly,
strategies, tactics and techniques for a non-violent struggle arise naturally.
Non-violence is not a dogma; it is a process.
Other struggles may be fuelled by greed, hatred, fear or ignorance
but a non-violent one cannot use such blind sources of energy,
for they will destroy those involved and also the struggle itself.
Non-violent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love,
is the most effective way to confront adversity.*
Thich Nhat Hanh

The previous chapter has described in detail the more or less chronological development of the COSG in the context of repeatedly changing defence legislation, showing how the COSG's resistance to conscription influenced the law, and vice versa. Capturing the history of this movement has included a description of some of the broad strategies used by the COSG to further its aim of defending the individual's right of conscience to refuse to do military service. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to examine more closely the methods and tactics used by the COSG over the years to oppose conscription and militarisation in South Africa.

What becomes clear when reading both the formal and the personal archival material that exists on the COSG is that even though the COSG was a nonviolent movement, it rarely presented itself formally or overtly in this way. There are no formal definitions, constitutions, or treatises making public statements about the principles of nonviolence, or debating the different theories of nonviolent resistance or showing evidence of strategic planning before the movement began its work. What formal documents there are on the COSG speak largely of the objectives of the movement and the strategies that

³²⁶ Speech in New York, 14 December, 1930.

were already being used to achieve these objectives. In fact, even when a support group formed itself around an objector, it did so quietly and unobtrusively, linking the small groups of COSG members across the country:

Realizing I was returning to Jo'burg before my call-up in August [1988], [Sue Britton] gave me Rob Robertson's number. And that is how I found myself one evening in a sitting room in Mayfair attending what (as I look back now) must have been a COSG meeting.

Up until then I had never heard of this group: ECC yes, but who or what was COSG? In fact if I remember correctly, it most probably took me a month or two to realize that COSG was an organization, and not just a bunch of kind people from ECC who helped CO's. The government helped to clarify the matter for me, as in August they banned ECC, but COSG seemed to sail onwards.

In August [1988] I reported at Sturrock Park, and informed an officer that I wouldn't serve in the SADF. With me were my parents and Douglas Torr.³²⁷ At about this time my COSG support group came into existence. How it happened though remains vague. It was a group of people, some who were friends, and others who, until then I did not know.³²⁸

While this is an account of the formation of one support group, it does in fact carry the blueprint for the entire organisation that came into existence in response to an immediate and specific need: that of supporting objectors who were preparing for possible prison sentences. As such, it was a "hands-on" movement that started small and had to learn as it grew.

And yet, even from the very beginning, there is plenty of evidence that the theory and practice of nonviolent resistance, as both a means and an end, fundamentally underpinned every aspect of the COSG's work; both internally within the movement and in its external work. Written publications by the COSG, the personal interactions of support group members, the support given to objectors, the meetings and correspondences with governmental authorities, the inclusiveness of meetings, the support given to similar initiatives, the time given to personal and group development, the illustrations on documents, the reading sources drawn upon for inspiration and guidance

³²⁷ An Anglican priest objector.

³²⁸ Email correspondence with Charles Bester on 13 May 2007.

are all incontrovertible evidence of the COSG's deep commitment to nonviolence.

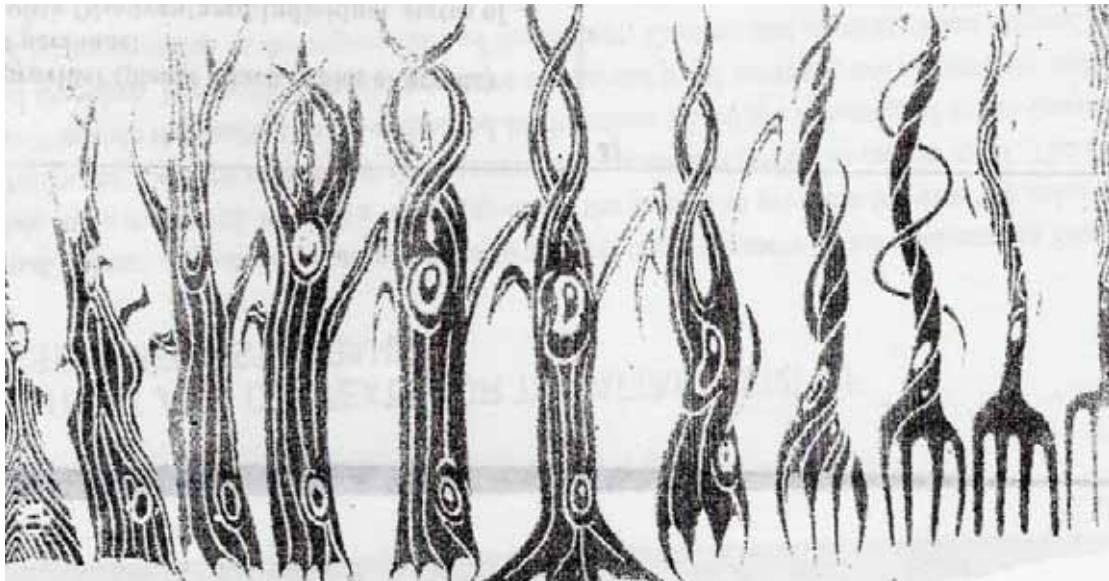


Fig. 2³²⁹ - An example of an illustration on a COSG document, portraying the message that resources spent on destructive warfare and violence could be used more constructively to promote sustainable living.

These, and more, will be examined in greater detail in this chapter, in an attempt to do what the COSG members, often overstretched with juggling the demands of activism, work and personal life, never had time to do; namely to show how the work of the COSG is placed within the growing body of experience in and research on nonviolent movements for political and social change. Locating the COSG within the broader field of Peace Studies will hopefully to some extent also capture the activists' increasing adeptness as they grappled with the practice of nonviolent struggle over approximately ten years.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to comment on the relevance of the definitional distinctions drawn between different types of nonviolent action³³⁰

³²⁹ "Minutes of COS meeting held on 18 November 1992", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

³³⁰ Nine distinctions have been made by Gene Sharp in the paper quoted below, ranging from non-resistance to non-violent revolution, roughly in order of increasing activity.

to the work of the COSG, it is of value to gain clarity on the term “nonviolence”. In this regard, Gene Sharp’s term, “generic non-violence”³³¹ is very helpful, as it broadens what could traditionally have been understood as the narrower Gandhian concept of love of and non-injury to all living beings, to include a wide range of behaviours and/or beliefs, all of which are characterised by an abstention from physical violence:

These [behaviours and/or beliefs] vary widely on several points, such as whether “non-violence” is viewed as intrinsically good or simply as an effective method of action, the degree of passivity and activity, the presence or absence of strategy, and whether the followers of the approach are “otherworldly” or “this-worldly”....In some cases of non-violent resistance and direct action the primary intent is to change attitudes and values as a preliminary to changing policies. In other cases the primary intent is to change policies (or thwart attempts to change policies), whether or not the opponents have first changed their attitudes and values. In other cases the intent may be to change attitudes and policies simultaneously. Included in “non-violent resistance and direct action” are those cases in which violence has been rejected because of (1) religious, ethical, or moral reasons; (2) considerations of expediency; and (3) mixed motivations of various types.³³²

The reason this broad umbrella term - generic nonviolence - is particularly helpful in this study is that it neatly encapsulates not only the wide range of motivations behind objectors’ decisions to refuse military service in South Africa, but more importantly the motivations that drove people to participate in the cause of the COSG over the years. In fact, and there is more of this below, one of the biggest strengths of the COSG is that it found a way of accommodating, even embracing, a huge range of diverse beliefs and behaviours regarding the issue of conscription and the militarisation of South African society.

So while Chapter 3 detailed who the COSG was and how it positioned itself in the military and political context of its day, this chapter will look more precisely

³³¹ Sharp, G., 1959, The meanings of non-violence: a typology (revised), in *Conflict Resolution* 3(1), p 43. See also footnote 2.

³³² Sharp, G., 1959, The meanings of non-violence: a typology (revised), in *Conflict Resolution* 3(1), p 43 and 44.

at what it did and how it achieved its aims. To this end, it is pertinent to recall the 1988 COSG aims and objectives listed above, namely:

- (a) To defend the right of the individual to refuse to render military service.
- (b) To give support to conscientious objectors and to publicise their stands.
- (c) To oppose militarisation and conscription in the interests of building a just peace in our country.
- (d) To educate and advise people of their rights and options with regard to military service.
- (e) To liaise and co-operate with like minded organisations to promote these objectives.

While each of the above statements provides a concise description of a certain aspect of the COSG's work, it would be in our interest to deepen our understanding of how these aims formed part of an effective nonviolent direct action strategy.

The first aim of the COSG listed above can be taken as an umbrella statement of the four *objectives* that follow. In terms of the theory of nonviolent resistance, it is helpful to place the four objectives into the three broad categories of nonviolent direct action *methods*.³³³

- protest and persuasion methods,
- noncooperation methods,
- intervention methods.

According to Gene Sharp, who has classified about 200 specific methods of nonviolent action, the actual action of objection to military service falls squarely in the category of noncooperation methods. Intervention methods include such actions as nonviolent occupation and parallel government. The only intervention method that was used by some objectors and COSG activists was that of fasting (see more below). All the COSG aims listed above, therefore, fall into the category of protest and persuasion methods. Herein lay the extremely effective strategy of the COSG's support of objectors: a strategy that enhanced a noncooperation action (objecting) by turning it into a medium of protest and persuasion against an unjust system. Expressed differently, the COSG brought out into the open what could have

³³³ Sharp, G., 2002, *From dictatorship to democracy: a conceptual framework for liberation*, Boston MA, Albert Einstein Institution, p 31.

remained covert objection (through deferment, evasion or leaving the country, or unpublicised jail sentences). In other words, it converted what were acts of *omission*³³⁴ - I will not serve in the SADF - to acts of *commission* - We will use each case of objection to raise questions in the minds of the public and to challenge the government about the SADF, war, apartheid and injustice (see Chapter 5 for some examples of how objectors expressed these challenges).

What must be borne in mind here is the immensity of the task the COSG set itself by committing itself to defending the right of the individual to refuse to render military service. The might of the South African military establishment at the time and the autonomous political authority it claimed for itself, makes it clear that the COSG was not only challenging the policy of conscription, but also the very legitimacy of the government (which was a challenge posed not only by the COSG, but by every objector objecting on political grounds to military service in the SADF). As such, the biggest obstacle facing the COSG in its work was undoubtedly the deep-seated obedience among white South Africans towards the ruling authority of the day. It is the fabric of this very obedience, therefore, and the COSG's role in making people confront their - questioning or unquestioning - obedience that must now be briefly examined.

What has been made amply clear in Peace Studies research is that the power of the ruler and the obedience of the subject are interdependent. The conferred authority, and hence the power of the ruler, can only be maintained if there is the constant availability of assistance from subjects who are willing to contribute to the smooth running of all aspects of the state system. Their willingness to assist and cooperate in upholding the workings of the state presupposes a loyalty and obedience towards the ruling authority. As Harris succinctly states, "(P)olitical power 'can never be exercised without the acquiescence of the people - without the direct cooperation of the large

³³⁴ Nonviolent direct action methods are sometimes classified into two categories: acts of omission i.e. the refusal to do something that is required of one by law or regulation; and acts of commission i.e. the insistence on doing something one would not normally do or something that is forbidden by law or regulation. This from Sharp, G., 1959, The meanings of non-violence: a typology (revised), in *Conflict Resolution* 3(1), p 44.

numbers of people and the indirect cooperation of the entire community".³³⁵ Ironically, and at the risk of over-quoting, there is no better place to see exactly how this constant availability of assistance from subjects empowered the Defence Force, than in the recently published book of the then Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan:

The Defence Force's successes can be attributed to various factors, among which leadership, the quality of the Defence Force members and their equipment, the support of loved ones and the general public played an important role.

The support and hospitality of the inhabitants of the Karoo town of De Aar serves as an example of the type of support which yielded very positive results for members of the Defence Force. Food, shower and sleeping facilities were offered free of charge to each crowded troop train on their way to the operational area or back. There were many such trains in this very long period, but each Defence Force member was received with Karoo hospitality at a centre specially created for this purpose. This was an enormous community effort which hugely increased the morale of the men.....There was also huge support from various charitable organisations. For example, the Southern Cross Fund expressed its gratitude towards the soldiers in the form of regular food parcels, creating facilities and providing essentials to the value of millions of rands for which there were no state funds. The Defence Force's Women's Association...collected funds for the care of the wounded, injured or disabled Defence Force members. This organisation also cared for the families of Defence Force members on operational duty. One must also mention the SABC, and the various women who broadcast programmes with messages for the troops. All these actions gave the Defence Force members and their families a very important message: "We care!"

These tokens of compassion, combined with the spiritual support offered by the chaplains, particularly on the battlefield, provided excellent support for the Defence Force's morale, and in turn this contributed towards successful operations.³³⁶

³³⁵ Harris, E.E., in Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 29.

³³⁶ Malan, M., 2006, *My life with the SA Defence Force*, Protea Book House, Pretoria, p 259.

So why do people obey? Sharp³³⁷ proposes that the answer to this question is complex, but provides us with a combination of possible reasons:

- Habit - possibly based on a culture or a long tradition of obedience towards authority structures.
- Fear of sanctions - in this case, the fear of punishment should one oppose the laws of the state; this fear engendered either through the enactment of harsh laws or through witnessing harsh punishment meted out to those who disobey. Note that the issue here is the fear, more so than the sanctions themselves; "It is not the sanctions themselves which produce obedience but the fear of them".³³⁸ It was shown in Chapter 3 how the government made repeated and ever more determined use of this strategy by tightening up defence laws and dealing increasingly harshly with objectors.
- Moral obligation - which reaches "the most efficacious of all' restraints, that of 'a man's own conscience'".³³⁹ What follows is a listing of the various considerations that foster a sense of moral obligation, each of which expresses in parentheses the predominant thought patterns and language used by the South African government at the time:
 - the common good of society (it is imperative for every South African citizen to contribute to securing our Christian and Western culture and civilization);
 - superhuman factors (God gave us this country);
 - legitimacy of the command (we are under a Communist attack);
 - conformity of commands to accepted norms, namely, we obey because the behaviour commanded by the ruler is what we already believe to be right (all government comes from God and must therefore be obeyed³⁴⁰).

³³⁷ This section is drawn from Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 19ff.

³³⁸ Austen, in Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 28.

³³⁹ Jouvenel, B., in Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 20.

³⁴⁰ This was the State's interpretation of the biblical Letter of St Paul to the Romans; Romans 13.

- Self-interest, namely through the possibility of reward, prestige and status accorded to power positions. This self-interest can also be negative self-interest, namely the avoidance of social ostracising.
- Psychological identification with the ruler.
- Zones of indifference, namely those orders which subjects indifferently obey because they do not demand too much personal sacrifice nor is the threat of sanction too high if disobeyed. Because of the very high degree of personal sacrifice exacted of young men as they faced military service, even to the point of possible physical injury and death, and the harsh consequences of objecting, this reason for obedience cannot be said to have applied in the case of conscription.
- Absence of self-confidence among subjects - causing submissiveness and an inability to resist authority.

Working with the above as possible reasons for obedience, it becomes clear that the specific strategies of the COSG addressed each one of them by:

- Questioning habit - by publishing articles on objectors, making information on the procedures for conscientious objection accessible, and creating forums like the Counselling Advice Service (CAS) where potential conscripts could come and learn more about their rights and options relating to military service, the COSG raised a very different perspective on military issues than that presented by the government.
- Lessening the fear of sanctions - by publicising the stands of objectors, supporting objectors and their families, doing constant research on the Board for Religious Objection and assisting objectors to prepare for their Board appearance,³⁴¹ the COSG conveyed the message that, despite the punishment, objection was an option and the objector would not be left to face the consequences of his decision on his own.
- Urging an examination of moral obligation - by publishing the personal statements of objectors, explaining their decisions, and by organising

³⁴¹ See Appendix 9 for a list of questions facing applicants to the Board, clearly showing what a harrowing experience it was to appear before the Board and hence the need for preparation before and support during the appearance. Apart from providing objectors with this or a similar list of questions, part of helping them prepare was for a COSG member to pose as a member of the Board, asking the difficult questions and acting as a devil's advocate. (Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.)

events where objectors and their family members could share their views with the public. This time, each parenthesis below expresses in language used by the COSG the given factor fostering a sense of moral obligation:

- the common good of society (let us work together, across the racial divide, for a just peace in our land);
 - superhuman factors (your religious or moral principles are superior to State authority and may influence the way you see military service);
 - legitimacy of the command (the SADF is used to uphold an unjust system);
 - conformity of commands to accepted norms (what is your conscience saying?).
- Promoting constructive self-interest - again by publishing personal statements of objectors, the COSG raised the issues around one's role in the military and how this aligned with personal beliefs and integrity.
 - Questioning one's psychological identification with the ruler - by collecting and disseminating information on militarisation and, through the statements of objectors questioning the role among others, of soldiers in the townships, hence eroding the insidious myth that the military was protecting the rights of all South African citizens.
 - Building the self-confidence to resist - by showing that options to military service did exist and by creating forums where nonviolent resistance techniques could be learnt.

So if obedience of the South African population was at the heart of the success of the SADF, then undermining this obedience was at the heart of the success of the COSG. And by keeping their focus narrow, namely on conscription, the COSG had a political issue that resonated more with the white public than anything else, because almost every white family was personally affected by conscription. While the vast majority of these families would have condemned conscientious objection as cowardly, it was also true that conscription demanded considerable personal sacrifice of them. So the call to accommodate objectors and subsequently to abolish conscription was

arguably the most effective way of attempting to awaken an anti-apartheid consciousness in the white community. As one COSG activist explained, "We were targeting one of the central pillars of apartheid [namely the military] and our constant questioning of the legitimacy of this pillar weakened it in people's minds."³⁴² Hence each public challenge to the authority of the state was not a closed confrontation between the COSG and the state. Contained in the challenge was the opportunity for the man in the street - if it reached his eyes and mind - to rethink his perception of the government and to reappraise his role in serving this government.

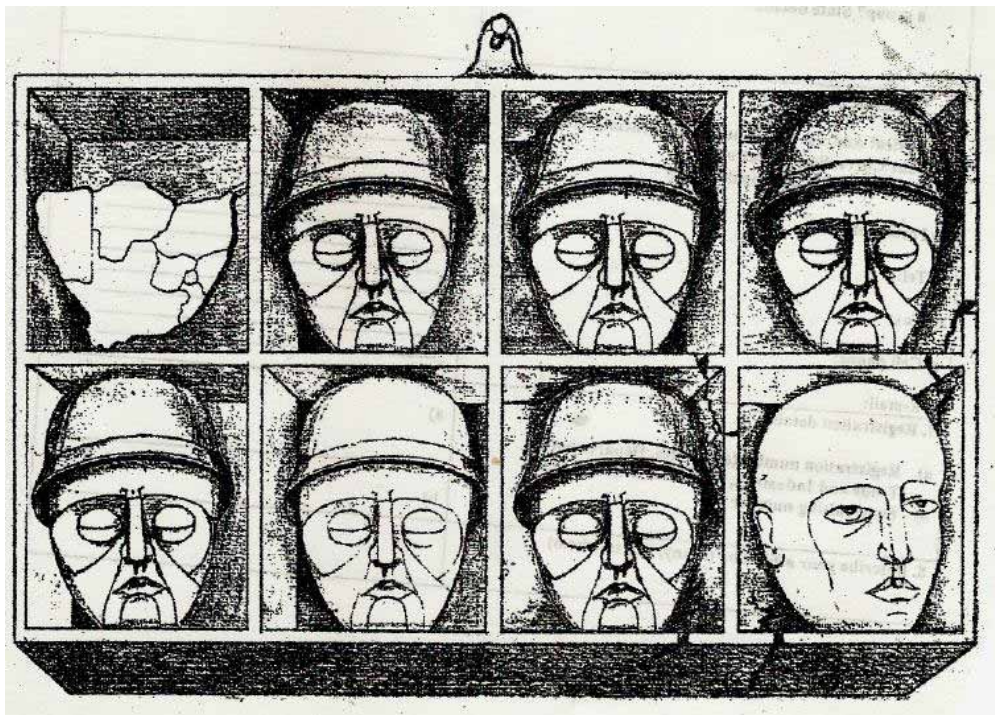


Fig 3³⁴³ - A COSG illustration envisioning the awakening of South Africans from a state of blind support for the military (eyes closed) to one of increased consciousness (eyes open) and a rejection of the soldier's helmet.

Under conditions of self- and legal-censorship the problem remained: how to reach, and challenge the white public. To be able to reach the man in the street, the role of publicity was all-important. While the support of objectors

³⁴² Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.

³⁴³ "Report on the 5th National Conference of the COSG, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, 1984", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 3.

was the primary role of individual support groups, it was the task of publicising the objections that formed the cornerstone of the COSG's nonviolent resistance strategy. While more will be said in Chapter 5 about the impact of the COSG's use of the media, suffice it to say at this point that each press article that appeared increased the pressure on government to meet the demands of the objector movement. As such each press article added to the government's discomfort. This is apparent from the following observation of just one case, the case of Tammias Alexander (see above in Chapter 3):

One of the first things the Commanding Officer asked when (Tam) came to the gate (to report for service), was whether there was publicity about Tam's reporting.³⁴⁴

Indeed, something very significant happened when press articles began to appear early in 1980 on the first objectors who were not from the traditional "peace churches"; a space was created in the collective South African psyche to begin to question obedience. Through the use of the media, the COSG began to legitimise the withdrawal of cooperation from what had hitherto been one of the sacred, untouchable pillars of the apartheid system, the military. While an examination of the extent and nature of media coverage of objection is outside the scope of this study,³⁴⁵ in order to gain an understanding of the impact of such press coverage on the South African public, it is worth examining a little more closely how the newspapers reported on these early objectors. We take as example the case of Richard Steele. On 26 February 1980, three articles on his objection appeared in three different newspapers. None of them condemned Steele's action. On the contrary, *Die Beeld* and *The Rand Daily Mail* (but particularly the former) went to some length to portray Steele as an exemplary young man. They mentioned his being headboy at school, his position as junior deputy mayor on the Town Council, his membership of the Student Christian Association and the Baptist church, his term as Rotary Exchange student, and his professional teaching qualification (with Psychology as a major). In addition, both newspapers gave reasons for his objection, thus again (perhaps unwittingly) causing people to think about

³⁴⁴ Richard Steele, "Conscientious Objection - Current trends (based on the case of Tam Alexander), October 1988", in Andrew Warmback personal archives, p 1.

³⁴⁵ An informative study of this is: Graaf, M. (ed.), 1988, *Hawks and doves - the pro- and anti-conscription press in South Africa*, Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa.

their obedience to the military; *Die Beeld* explained how he was committed to nonviolence and *The Rand Daily Mail* stated that, "he viewed the Defence Force as a major pillar of a fundamentally unjust society".³⁴⁶ Both newspapers also mentioned that Steele was willing to do alternative service and all three mentioned that six months of his sentence had been suspended. All in all, a very successful portrayal of what the reader, if not blinded by prejudice, would have seen as an eminently reasonable and serious young man. Barely two weeks later an article appeared in *The Cape Times*³⁴⁷ entitled, "Protest over solitary confinement".³⁴⁸ It was a statement by a group of "concerned Christians" (33 signatories were listed, nine of whom were clergy), highlighting the fact that Moll and Steele were deeply committed Christians, that Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to wear blue overalls, that this was the third period of solitary confinement for these objectors, and that, "it is unjust to punish these two men, especially by repeated solitary confinement, for an offence for which in principle they are already serving severe sentences." A rather limp SADF response (from an unnamed Defence Force spokesman) is quoted,

We decline to discuss the actions or activities of any soldier under detention with any outside person since this is a personal matter concerning only himself or his relatives, should the person in question choose to have them involved.

Another article appeared in July of the same year about one of Moll's fasts, with a statement by Rob Robertson explaining that "Mr Moll was not protesting against his sentence but against repeated periods of solitary confinement for refusing to wear a uniform."³⁴⁹ Then a month later a very significant article appeared with a large headline stating, "Army rebel wins biggest battle."³⁵⁰

³⁴⁶ *The Rand Daily Mail*, 26 February 1980, p 3.

³⁴⁷ 11 March 1980.

³⁴⁸ This group was protesting the SADF practice of punishing Richard Steele and Peter Moll with periods of solitary confinement because they refused to wear the regulation brown army overall.

³⁴⁹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B1 - Moll, "Another hunger strike by Moll", *The Cape Times*, 9 July 1980.

³⁵⁰ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B1 - Moll, "Army rebel wins biggest battle", *The Sunday Express*, 10 August 1980.

Military rebel Peter Moll has won the biggest battle of his life: the Army has officially recognized him as a conscientious objector - and he's out of solitary confinement.

Members of the COSG also often wrote letters themselves to the press to highlight the plight of objectors:

July 19 [1989] is the first anniversary of the imprisonment of conscientious objector, David Bruce. He has another five years to go. He went in when he was 25 years old. He will come out at 31. We view this unspeakably hard punishment as a travesty of justice, a denial of freedom of conscience, and a tragic waste of potential...We call on the government to legislate as a matter of urgency a non-military form of national service....³⁵¹

Another category of letters written by members of the COSG was that aimed at correcting misperceptions in the press; misperceptions that had understandably arisen due to the complexity and emotion surrounding the issues of conscription and objection. An example of this is a response to an article in *The Rand Daily Mail*³⁵² when Charles Yeats was arrested, entitled "Durban draft dodger held by police". The following day, this response was published in the same paper, written by Rob Robertson:³⁵³

Draft refuser - not a dodger

Your headline description of Charles Yeats as a "draft dodger"...was inaccurate and a little unfortunate for he is anything but a dodger.

Last year he returned from a lucrative job in England to face the July call-up knowing that because of his views on war, he would have to refuse to comply and would face a sentence to detention barracks with repeated periods of solitary confinement.

Examining just this small sample above shows how the press, used as a medium of protest by the objector movement, provided a convincingly different perspective to the commonly-held notion that objectors and their supporters were treasonous. Of course, this did not mean that the readers' perceptions of objectors would necessarily be swayed but the space for a different way of thinking was created; especially when the government was

³⁵¹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B20 - David Bruce, "Letter from Rob Goldman, Durban Conscientious Objector Support Group", *The Weekly Mail*, 21 July 1989.

³⁵² *The Rand Daily Mail*, 19 February 1981.

³⁵³ *The Rand Daily Mail*, 20 February 1981.

depicted as unreasonable, harsh and unsympathetic towards committed Christians, despite repeated emphasis of its role in the armed conflict as the guardian of Christianity. We also gain a sense of how the above coverage must have angered the ruling authorities of the day as their integrity was called into question, and raised fears in them (see Chapter 5) as they contemplated the harmful potential this kind of reporting could have on the obedience and loyalty of the South African public (especially when other South Africans were willing to put their names to campaigns). Indeed, there were those in power who intuitively knew how important it was to maintain obedience:

I remember my parents visiting one army man, and my mother asking him in her usual disarming way what he was going to do about me now. His response was something like this, "We cannot allow him to refuse military service because your boy's undermining of cooperation and consent with the government is like holding sand in your hand; if one grain falls, it is followed by another and another and soon the whole system crumbles".³⁵⁴

Knowingly or unknowingly, this "army man" had touched upon the crux of the matter: a government cannot operate effectively if it is robbed of the loyalty of its conscripts. Many withdrew their loyalty by leaving the country (23000 white men left in the period between 1980 and 1989), but when young men openly began to withdraw their consent from the ruling structures and policies of the time, the government was faced with the stark realisation that its power was being:

cut off at the roots.....not by the infliction of superior violence from on top or outside, not by persuasion, not by hopes of a change of heart in the ruler [although this hope always existed in the work of the COSG], but rather by the subjects' declining to supply the power-holder with the sources of his power.³⁵⁵

Explaining a compelling reason why the movement was well able to challenge state power, one objector stated:

[Conscientious objection] shook the Government's assumption of compliance. They could deal with dodgers and loafers but principled, well-reasoned, articulate resistance forced them to change their mind as in the 1983 Amendment and the subsequent reduction of their intended eight-year

³⁵⁴ Interview with Richard Steele, 29 January 2005.

³⁵⁵ Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 47.

imprisonment - not much of a change but very significant that they gave ground.³⁵⁶

Notice the contrast drawn, in the above quote, between different forms of resistance, and how “well-reasoned, articulate resistance” seems, in this activist’s perception, to have created a psychological difficulty for the state. Hinting at the concept of “moral jiu-jitsu” (named after a Japanese style of wrestling in which the “wrestler uses the weight of the opponent to throw him off balance and subdue him”³⁵⁷) we see how the objector, by neither avoiding nor fighting back with force, “played the game by wholly different rules. [This] confused and unhinged [the state], undermined [its] moral self-confidence and created in [it] a psychological space for critical self-reflection,”³⁵⁸ as is apparent in the changes made to the 1983 Amendment.³⁵⁹



Fig. 4³⁶⁰ - A cartoon depicting the state’s - and the military’s - difficulty in dealing with conscientious objectors, who were clearly using a different kind of “weapon” in their movement for change.

³⁵⁶ Comment made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

³⁵⁷ Parekh, G. B., 1989, *Gandhi’s political philosophy*, MacMillan, p 151.

³⁵⁸ Parekh, G. B., 1989, *Gandhi’s political philosophy*, MacMillan, p 151.

³⁵⁹ Apart from the two-year reduction in the proposed prison sentence, the lobbying efforts of the COSG also succeeded in ensuring open board hearings and an extension from fourteen to thirty days in which to apply for the hearing. (*The Rand Daily Mail*, 26 March 1983).

³⁶⁰ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, “Objector - Newsletter of the Western Cape Conscientious Objector Support Group, No. 4 November 1983”, p 3.

Another activist explained this concept in a similar way and interestingly, contrasts the COSG with the ECC, which many perceived to have been more powerful in the war resistance movement:

[The COSG's impact on the government] was crucial. I think ECC created the challenge and took the flack because it was felt as a political threat - but the actual threat came from COSG in the sense that it raised the very personal moral issue of people being forced against their conscience to engage in the military - which [the government] could never really counter at a moral level.³⁶¹

Indeed, the essence of the "threat" lay in the COSG's ability to demonstrate the power of human connectedness over separation and violence by speaking from deeply personal experiences and in a very different language:

Some tips for the interview [with the military authority] itself:

- i. Be as warm and friendly as possible. Shake his hand when you first go in and when you leave.
- ii. Have no fear: constantly project the love that casts out fear...³⁶²

At this point, therefore, it seems appropriate to explore in some detail the relationship that existed between the individual objector and the COSG. Simply expressed, they depended intimately on one another, but in such a way that neither partner in the relationship overshadowed the other. As one objector, Charles Bester, put it:

What I was doing was important to them...And yet my views were held to be important - and in as much as it was me who was objecting - to be respected. Not everyone in the group necessarily shared my Christian reasoning, but they never discouraged my motives....nor did they push me forward as a campaign piece. Instead they held me up and sustained me.³⁶³

It was, therefore, a cyclical relationship where the actions of one fed into the actions of the other. With each objector who was willing to make a public stand, the COSG could further its overall aim of defending the right of others to refuse to render military service, and with each public statement that was

³⁶¹ Email correspondence with Gary Cullen on 5 June 2006.

³⁶² "Suggested procedure for non-peace church members to follow in becoming a conscientious objector in South Africa, written by a pacifist conscientious objector, undated", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

³⁶³ Email correspondence with Charles Bester on 13 May 2007. See more on Charles Bester's account of the support given him by the COSG in Chapter 6.

made defending this right, individual young men could begin to think about the possibility of objecting. But what exactly made it such a powerful partnership? To gain some understanding of this, it is worth remembering the context of the time; a context where the overarching ideology was one that fostered, urged, supported and praised military duty, and one which derided and punished the refusal to serve; a context where a call for young men to refuse military service would undoubtedly have fallen on deaf ears. Wisely, the COSG never made this call. Apart from the utter futility of such a call, activists would have been fined and/or imprisoned for doing this. And yet, they found a way of working creatively - and legally - within the limitations of the system to convey a very powerful message - despite it not reaching as wide an audience as they would have liked - that *objection was already taking place*, if not always openly, then certainly to a large extent in individual minds and hearts. Herein lies the power of the partnership: the COSG capitalised on the resistance actions of individuals and in giving greater expression to these actions, encouraged others to follow suit:

I think I knew that if I took this stand - because there was a political movement busy with these things - it wouldn't be lost. I wouldn't just sit in a cell. There would be mobilisation and support and political usefulness in it. My understanding is that if I thought I would just sit in a cell, I wouldn't have done it.³⁶⁴

So we now examine more closely the support role of the COSG because unless an attempt is made to delve deeper into the nature of this support, there is a danger that it will remain to be seen as one-dimensional and that, therefore, the multi-faceted impact of this support will be lost. It must be remembered that we are here dealing with a conflict, between objector on the one hand and the state and society on the other; and a rather protracted conflict at that when taking into account the extended period of time over which a young man was due for call-up and the possibility of repeated sentencing.³⁶⁵ Drawing on conflict resolution theory, Maire Dugan's³⁶⁶ "nested

³⁶⁴ Interview with David Bruce, 29 September 2006.

³⁶⁵ The debilitating effect of the extended conflict on the objector is pertinently described in the following letter sent by Charles Yeats to Rob Robertson on 4 July 1985, in Rob Robertson personal archives: "My two years 'inside' left me quite exhausted. Looking back on it now it was a lot longer than two years - the whole business really started in 1976 when I first wrote

paradigm" model is very helpful in providing us with a mechanism to analyse both the narrow and the broader aspects of a conflict.

According to Dugan, for conflict resolution to be effective and sustainable, it needs to focus on four different levels, ranging from most narrow to most broad: issues, relationships, subsystem, and system. The first two are self-evident, but perhaps the last two need a little more explanation. The "system" level "help(s) focus attention on the deeper structural and systemic concerns"³⁶⁷ and involves long-range peace-building interventions. The "subsystem" level, on the other hand, "is a middle-range *locus* of activity that connects the other levels in the system".³⁶⁸ Applying this now to the issue of conscription, it becomes clear that an objector (or potential objector) experienced his conflict on all four levels. And to each level, the COSG provided a possible resolution, as shown below:

- *Issue* - Being called up to do military service creates a conflict of conscience in me. The COSG response: It is legitimate to follow your conscience.
- *Relationship* - My family and friends think I am crazy to make this decision. The COSG response: Here is a "home" where you can meet like-minded people who will not persecute you for the way you are thinking.
- *Subsystem* - I am willing to serve this country in another way, but don't know how to. The COSG response: Let us together explore the alternative service options that exist.
- *System* - I am a South African and would like to contribute to the building of a democratic society for all the people of this country. The

to the SADF conveying my decision to refuse military service. For the next five years that decision dominated my life and the court martial was, in some ways, the beginning of a process of release."

³⁶⁶ Dugan, M., in Lederach, J.P., 1997, *Building peace - sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, p. 55ff.

³⁶⁷ Dugan, M., in Lederach, J.P., 1997, *Building peace - sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, p. 57.

³⁶⁸ Dugan, M., in Lederach, J.P., 1997, *Building peace - sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, p. 55ff. Dugan gives as example a conflict in a school between gangs of African American and white boys; the systemic considerations would be the racial and economic inequality in society, but the subsystem considerations might be an intervention *in the school* around diversity, race relations and prejudice reduction.

COSG response: Your stand is a courageous anti-apartheid stand (which we will publicise as widely as possible), that is contributing to the building of a just peace in our country.

Interestingly, each of the (over-simplified) COSG responses above addresses the external conflict between objector and state *through focusing on the internal conflict* that the objector experienced as he made and lived out his decision. In other words, by holding the individual as the undivided focus of attention, the COSG was able to raise counter-cultural perceptions very effectively. The word, "effective" is not used here in the pragmatic sense, in that the COSG did not cause huge numbers of people to withdraw support from the SADF, but certainly effective in creating a very different perspective of what was being touted as the military and political reality of the day. One need only look at the harsh reaction (especially the legal reaction, as shown in Chapter 3) of the ruling authorities of the time as proof of this "effectiveness".

It was this "holding of the individual" that was the special focus of the support groups. At the time of the objector standing trial and being sentenced to prison sentence, the support group often found very meaningful and moving ways of accompanying the objector in a spirit of deep faith and love:

I received a telephone call at Diakonia from a neighbour to warn me that two military policemen had just called at my parents' home and were on their way to arrest me. After taking the call, I tidied my desk as calmly as I could and then told Paddy [Kearney, the director of Diakonia]. He summoned the multiracial staff of around twelve and told them what was about to happen. When the military police arrived, he invited the staff to join hands with me in the centre. This reception took the wind out of the policemen's sails and, much to my astonishment, they sheepishly joined in the circle. After a short prayer, I was escorted from the building.³⁶⁹

And similarly at Charles Yeats' trial:

The court is not prepared to impose a fine. R50 is inappropriate. We also do not want to send someone of your background and attitude and a first

³⁶⁹ Yeats, C., 2005, *Prisoner of conscience - one man's remarkable journey from repression to freedom*, Rider, London, p 58.

offender to gaol. The only other sentence is Detention. You are sentenced to twelve months in Detention Barracks....

It was as if a door that had begun to open was suddenly slammed shut.

We gathered outside with Charles, offered a prayer with his parents and himself, then in a larger circle sang the Doxology and said goodbye.³⁷⁰

Other more practical tasks³⁷¹ of the support group described below are divided into personal support actions and protest or persuasion actions.³⁷²

- Personal support actions:
 - informing the objector of prison regulations (a document had been prepared by the COSG for this purpose), including the provision of a list of what he should take with him to prison;³⁷³
 - accessing legal advice and counsel where necessary³⁷⁴;
 - accessing financial support where possible (both for legal costs and for family support);³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ "The trial of Charles Yeats, by Rob Robertson", in Rob Robertson personal archives, p 4.

³⁷¹ A comprehensive list detailing 103 ways in which to support an objector was prepared by the COSG. ("Ways of supporting a conscientious objector", in "History - General Information" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.)

³⁷² It is difficult to distinguish these tasks between support group tasks and broader COSG tasks as there was often an overlap in membership between the two. Not all support groups would have engaged in all the support tasks listed above, but would have chosen the tasks best suited to the particular circumstances of the objector they were supporting.

³⁷³ One objector remembers how the advice to take Vaseline along proved really helpful as one's hands got very cracked in the winter. (Interview with Steve Brislin, 28 April 2006.)

³⁷⁴ Some of the lawyers who represented conscientious objector at their trials were Edwin Cameron, Michael Evans, Kathy Satchwell, Peter Crossley and Christopher Nicholson. Arguments made were mostly not regarding conviction but rather sentencing, and witnesses were also called in, in mitigation of sentence. One example is the case of Ivan Toms, in which one witness who had been tortured by the SADF, provided evidence of what the SADF was doing in Namibia and Angola. (Email correspondence with Mike Evans on 17 July 2007.) Another example is David Bruce's case in which his mother, Ursula Bruce, gave evidence on the comparison between racism in Nazi Germany and South Africa. (Email correspondence with David Bruce on 20 July 2007.) In Tom's case too, it was argued (ultimately successfully - see footnote 488) that the words "liable to..." in the Defence Act meant a maximum, not a mandatory sentence. (Email correspondence with Mike Evans on 17 July 2007.) Another example is the case of Peter Hathorn, in which it was argued that it was inappropriate to give a first-time offender the maximum sentence. The argument was accepted and the sentence was halved. (Email correspondence with Peter Hathorn on 23 July 2007.) One case which would have argued regarding conviction was that of Brett Myrdal: "the essence of the case was that this was a civil war, and both my mother and Solomon Mahlangu's mother (he had been hung as an [u]MK[honto weSizwe] fighter in 1978) were to lead evidence that both they and their sons were South Africans - thus the objection was based on rejection of [the] call up to fight in what was a civil war..." The case, however, never took place as four days before the case the Government Gazette published the new legislation (Defence Act No. 34 of 1983). Myrdal made a decision not to be tried under this legislation. (Email correspondence with Brett Myrdal on 20 July 2007.)

- putting the objector in touch with others who had objected;
 - compiling a profile of the objector (containing some of the objector's background and his official statement);
 - providing family support whether they were part of the support group or not (if they were not, part of the task was to encourage them to become part of a group),
 - ensuring the objector was physically (and mentally) fit for prison by engaging in some form of physical exercise with him before his incarceration, for example, running or yoga,
 - ensuring that the only literature allowed in the first phase of incarceration, the Bible, would be optimally understood by explaining the different genres of literature in the Bible,
 - helping the objector prepare for his Board hearing,
 - accompanying the objector to his Board hearing,
 - encouraging the objector to register for a course of study through correspondence. Support group members would often also write to (often on postcards so as to relieve the boredom of DB),
 - visiting the objector in jail,
 - ensuring a constant supply of correspondence to the objector while in prison (see below), and
 - sometimes "arranging" a girlfriend for the objector, who had more visiting access to the objector than other friends.³⁷⁶
- Protest or persuasion actions:
 - arranging a public vigil at which the objector may have been present on the eve of his trial or internment (and possibly to mark significant anniversaries of his internment),³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ The work of the COSG was mainly funded by the Jacaranda Trust, a division of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference and the SACC. Some legal cases were funded by the International Defence Aid Fund based in London. Contributions from individuals were also significant in this regard.

³⁷⁶ Visits were also an opportunity to reach out in compassion to others serving similar sentences, even if for different reasons, and people like Rob Robertson would always make time to see the Jehovah's Witnesses during his DB visits. (Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.)

³⁷⁷ A very moving testimony of one of these vigils is a book that was kept during an Easter vigil for Richard Steele and Peter Moll (who were in solitary confinement at the time), in which people attending any part of the four-day vigil could record their reflections, feelings and

- arranging speaking tours during which the objector would have the opportunity to address students at universities, Christian youth groups, related solidarity movement groups like the Black Sash and political groups,
- ensuring as much ongoing press coverage of the objector's stand as possible,
- providing addresses for supporters to write letters of protest to government officials, for example the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Defence,
- maintaining personal contact with DB officials (for example, phoning them and asking about the welfare of the objector),
- corresponding with Members of Parliament and with human rights' organisations like Amnesty International,
- responding to letters from supporters overseas,
- maintaining contact with the employer,³⁷⁸ and
- combining messages of encouragement for the objector with public awareness-raising.³⁷⁹

From this list of support actions, it is clear that the help given to an objector was of the kind that arose from:

..."*personal community networks*" - supportive ties [which]...supply "*network capital*," the form of "social capital" that makes resources available through interpersonal ties....Network members provide emotional aid [validating one's

messages of solidarity. One entry is as follows: "I am very aware of all the pain and suffering in SA at the moment and I feel inadequate - to cope with it, or to be prepared to suffer with others....praying particularly for Peter and Richard in their isolation - that they will not lose heart." ("Vigil Book, 2 - 5 April 1980", in Richard Steele personal archives.)

³⁷⁸ "COSG National Conference, 2 - 4 October 1987, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 4 and 5.

Sometimes the support function in relation to employment was one of urging noncooperation with the employer, as was the case with Peter Moll: "When Peter was at university, the Old Mutual gave him a loan to finance his studies. Once he qualified he joined this company to work off his loan. When Peter was imprisoned the Old Mutual cancelled the contract and demanded repayment of the loan. If you have an insurance policy with this company and feel strongly about this matter, please write to the Old Mutual and voice your displeasure." (*Diakonia News*, May 1980, "In prison because they won't fight. WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP", p 5.)

³⁷⁹ For example, the Charles Bester support group made a hugely oversized Christmas card on the first Christmas that he spent in prison, and went out into the streets to gather signatures on the card for Charles. Sometimes these Christmas campaigns were combined with efforts to lobby department stores not to stock war toys as Christmas gifts.

worthiness], material aid, information, companionship, and a sense of belonging.”³⁸⁰

In making the stand of the objector as widely known as possible, the support group’s broader aim was to provide a bridge linking the outside world and the objector in prison.³⁸¹ Communiqués from the support group aimed to build up and maintain a large enough group of people that would continue to show support to and solidarity with the objector, after the more dramatic public events of the court case and sentencing had faded. While in detention, information pamphlets were prepared by individual support groups for friends and supporters of the objector, always with the encouragement to write letters of support to a central address. Messages were then collated into bulletins of the maximum number of words allowed by legislation,³⁸² or relayed verbally when support group members visited the objector in prison.

Such information pamphlets also usually carried news of the objector, for example:

Charlie [Bester] was transferred three days later from Diepkloof to Kroonstad prison. At the time of writing he has been visited three times. On the first visit it was a shock to see his appearance transformed by his prison haircut and green uniform, looking young, vulnerable and a little tearful. On subsequent visits his big grin was back in place and we could sense that he was coming to terms with his situation. He looks well and suntanned and is looking forward to starting his B.A. degree by correspondence.³⁸³

and news from the objector himself:

I have now been “inside” for 7 weeks and settled into the routine. It has meant slowing down (NO hectic meetings) and a great deal of re-adjusting but I seem to have handled it well (even getting up early!)...With so much time “to

³⁸⁰ Lin, N., Cook, K., and Burt, R.S., (eds), 2005, *Social Capital - Theory and research*, Aldine Transaction, New Jersey, p 233.

³⁸¹ It must be noted here, however, that the extent of a support group’s publicity was dependent on the objector’s wish to have a high- or a low-profile campaign.

³⁸² Even when this was done, letters sent to the objector in prison were not always received; “Ivan has not received any of the three carefully compiled letters from the Support Group, even though the last two were sent by registered mail. His attorney is looking into this.” (BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C2.5 - Miscellaneous, “Letter from Ivan Toms Support Group, 4 June 1986”, p 1.

³⁸³ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C2.5 - Miscellaneous, “Update on Charles Bester, Conscientious Objector: 30-01-1989”, p 1.

push" I sometimes lie on my bed and review my memories of people and situations - like a re-run of an old movie. Then this warm feeling just wells up inside - Thanks. Many prisoners are unsupported by anybody - yet I am incredibly upheld by so many.³⁸⁴

as well as news of other objectors, and military developments:

On another note we would like to express support to Tammis Alexander who is one of the original 143...Last month we found out that he was no longer in the country having taken the painful decision to leave rather than face jail. From Tam's experience, it appears that the SADF is now systematically calling-up and then charging these individuals.³⁸⁵

Often individual support groups used the case of the particular objector they were supporting strategically to raise awareness about some aspect of the military system, for example the case of Rev. Douglas Torr being used to expose the inadequacy of the Board for Religious Objection and about the issue of SADF chaplains:

He has decided not to appear before the Board for Religious Objection because he believes it creates an artificial distinction between religious and moral or political objectors. He also refuses to serve as a full-time SADF chaplain because by wearing a military uniform and accepting rank and army pay, a chaplain becomes a representative of the SADF rather than the church.³⁸⁶

The case of Brendan Moran was used to highlight the plight of exiles:

Why did you come back?

You can't serve the country by leaving it. I left against my will - this is where I want to live, and where I have every right to live...It just seemed then that there was no alternative....By us leaving the state gets away with not having to deal with objectors...I can't bear to be away from home again....I want to be part of the hopes that we have about the future.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C2.5 - Miscellaneous, "Letter from Ivan Toms Support Group, 4 June 1986", p 1.

³⁸⁵ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C2.5 - Miscellaneous, "Update on David Bruce, 1 December 1988".

³⁸⁶ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B 24 - Cases of War Resisters, "Rev. Douglas Torr, Conscientious Objector", issued by the Douglas Torr Support Group, undated, p 2.

³⁸⁷ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B 28 - Cases of War Resisters, "Brendan Moran, Conscientious Objector", issued by COSG, undated, p 1 and 2.

Gary Rathbone's support group used his stand to call for a dropping of all charges and a release of all objectors. It also used the stand of "The 771" to highlight the fact that there were many other objectors, including those who, like Rathbone, had had to lead a disrupted life by constantly evading the military police.³⁸⁸

One support group that very effectively combined objector support with lobbying and awareness-raising was the Saul Batzofin Support Group. At the time of objecting, Batzofin was a business economics graduate, employed by Liberty Life as a career development officer. His support group used this business link to raise the issue of military service and objection in the wider business community, and

...campaigned actively among business people seeking support for his stand and for companies to guarantee the employment and salaries of employees imprisoned for their refusal to serve, just as they (did) for conscripts serving in the SADF. After his conviction, 14 senior businessmen came out in support of Batzofin and called for non-military alternatives to national service.³⁸⁹

One objector commented on the impact of this campaign, highlighting the lack of understanding that often existed between the generations:

Perhaps it gave some courage to other older people to openly support COs, or at least to understand them better in family, church and work environments.³⁹⁰

Another way in which the COSG publicised the stands of objectors was to arrange for an objector to speak at various institutions (usually universities and churches) around the country if possible, in the time between him officially stating his refusal to serve and his trial and sentencing. At such gatherings, objectors would have the opportunity to explain their stance, and other speakers, for example objectors who had already served prison sentences, would offer public messages of solidarity. One such Solidarity Night, organised by the COSG Cape Town, and attended by over 350 people,

³⁸⁸ "Gary Rathbone - Conscientious objector on trial" pamphlet, in "COs in South Africa" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

³⁸⁹ United Nations Centre against Apartheid, Notes and Documents 9/89, November 1989, *The issue of conscientious objection in Apartheid South Africa: growth of the anti-conscription movement* by the Committee of South African War Resistance, 89-32874, p 17.

³⁹⁰ Comment made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

was held for Brett Myrdal on 11 November 1983.³⁹¹ Usually such events received a measure of coverage in the press the following day. Often overseas newspapers reported on cases of objection in South Africa, which in some instances was the final straw compelling those who had avoided military service by leaving the country to reconsider their stance:

The account of Peter Moll's sentencing for conscientious objection in January this year, reported in the "Times" newspaper, was the first item of disturbing news. When Richard Steele's sentencing for the same offence eventually filtered through, my conscience was troubled.

Richard's witness made it impossible for me to remain abroad.³⁹²

Another resistance action encouraged by some support groups was that of fasting in solidarity with the objector. The nonviolent direct action of fasting, best known perhaps by Gandhi's use of it in his nonviolent resistance to British rule, was used by some objectors as a means of communicating, through the hardship of fasting, a message of solidarity with all those affected by conscription and by the military might of the South African state:

In order to be able to kill another person, you first have to kill a part of yourself...I would rather draw suffering onto myself than cause other people suffering and stress through the actions in my life. Fasting functions as a lightning conductor. Nonviolence does that - it absorbs violence rather than perpetuating it, and then earths it.³⁹³

Objectors sometimes also engaged in a period of fasting in a public place,³⁹⁴ where supporters could visit and accompany the objector in his stance. This was the kind of awareness-raising action, which had the potential to make people who heard about the fast stop and naturally ask, "Why would someone want to do this to him/herself?" Sometimes the fast was linked to a specific campaign or to a date commemorating a specific event, for example, Richard Steele's two-week fast in 1985, which ended on the day when

³⁹¹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Objector - Newsletter of the Western Cape Conscientious Objector Support Group, No. 4 November 1983", p 2.

³⁹² BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B3 - Yeats, "Why I am a conscientious objector to war - Testimony, Charles Yeats, Easter 1980".

³⁹³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B18 - Ivan Toms, "Why we're fasting for peace", *The Weekly Mail*, 27 September 1985. This quote given by Richard Steele.

³⁹⁴ An example of this is Ivan Tom's three-week fast in 1985 at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town.

Defence Force troops first entered the townships the previous year. When asked about the significance of fasting, Steele explained:

I feel fasting is appropriate in terms of the campaign [to get troops to withdraw from the townships] as it's a non-violent means of action. Also, fasting is about choice. Choosing not to eat, a social custom, for a strong reason fits with our campaign about conscripts being given the freedom of choice....A fast evokes an awareness which we hope will help people to choose things for themselves.³⁹⁵

Interestingly, with this fast, about 50 people let Steele know that they were also fasting, and about 400 people joined him in the last 24 hours of the fast,³⁹⁶ donating money to a SACC fund used to assist victims of SADF action in the townships;³⁹⁷ all in all a very strategic use of nonviolent direct action.

In all the nonviolent direct action methods described above, it is clear that the individual objector was very much the locus of attention of the individual support groups. The danger of focusing on the individual is that it could have been relatively easy for the COSG as a broad objector movement to fall into the trap of a polarised polemic - namely, we support those who are objecting and we frown upon, or scorn, those who are performing military duty. This did not happen. Remaining true to the spirit of a nonviolent movement that does not judge or dehumanise another human being but rather focuses on the issues at hand, the COSG was always very careful not to alienate conscripts. Instead, they recognised that fighting in the SADF created a dilemma and that what looked like a willing conscript could be a consciously willing conscript or an unconsciously willing conscript.³⁹⁸ It was to the latter that part of the work of the COSG was aimed; particularly its information-sharing focus, not only about the role of the military, but also about objection options open to conscripts. An excellent example of the non-emotive, yet very direct and

³⁹⁵ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "'Army out' fast is tough on the body but the resolve is Steele", *The Sunday Tribune*, 6 October 1985.

³⁹⁶ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "'Army out' fast is tough on the body but the resolve is Steele", *The Sunday Tribune*, 6 October 1985.

³⁹⁷ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Newly released detainee fasts", *The Sunday Tribune*, 22 September 1985.

³⁹⁸ This borne out by the fact that quite a number of objectors made their decision *after* having served for some time in the SADF.

thought-provoking way in which the COSG approached this awareness-raising task is evident in the following pamphlet:³⁹⁹

As a young man or woman nearing the end of your school career, it is important for YOU to decide where you stand with regard to war and military service BEFORE someone else decides FOR you.....You might ask yourself:

"What do I believe about war?"

"Could I kill another human being?"

"What are the causes of conflict in Southern Africa?"

"Can I believe all I hear about on TV and in the press?"

- For some people war is glorious and serving in the army fulfils high ideals of patriotism.
- For some war is an unpleasant but inescapable fact of life....
- For some war is not thought about and being a soldier becomes an experience of shock and despair.
- For some war and violence are always wrong and their consciences will not let them be part of it.
- For some the particular war being fought by the SADF is unjust and they must resist this injustice.
- For most there seems to be no alternative, no choice.

But there are alternatives, many recognised by the government.

YOU DO HAVE A CHOICE.

[It then explains non-combatant service, non-military service and imprisonment.]

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS

ASK THE HARD QUESTIONS

REMEMBER - THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

While the COSG, therefore, respected individual choice it saw it as vital that people were urged to make a choice, understanding full well the obedience factors (see above) that caused most young men to follow the military system blindly. It must also be remembered that the government and the SADF were extremely reticent in spreading information about the legal options open to objectors, as this letter from a COSG activist indicates:

³⁹⁹ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, E - Books, "Our Education systems must prepare people for war.' PW Botha, 1977", pamphlet, published by Social Action for the Conscientious Objectors Support Group, undated, p 1 and 2.

Yesterday was call-up day again for thousands of young South Africans. It is unlikely, though, that these conscripts know that they are now legally entitled to non-combatant service, or non-military community service if their religious convictions are such...This information is not contained in the "National Service 1984" booklet and the SADF has made no attempt to let them know in any other way.⁴⁰⁰ The Registering Officer assures me that this information will appear in the 1985 booklet, but that it is too late for the present conscripts, which is why I have turned to the medium of this newspaper.⁴⁰¹

As such, the role of the COSG was to disseminate information about options, help people think carefully about the military and then stand by them should they decide to object.

This continuous drive to get people to think about what conscription meant to them was certainly the most relentless, uncompromising tactic of nonviolent resistance used by the COSG. The COSG knew that thinking - or thinking differently - often required some impetus. Some objectors had been fortunate enough to receive this impetus from sources outside the country as is shown by this reflection:

If I had not gone on an exchange programme, I would definitely have gone into the SADF. My best friend and I were called up to the same unit, and I would have gone in with him. Quite probably, once I was in I would have been very uncomfortable, but nobody up until that point had ever suggested I consider the political and moral implications of service in the SADF.⁴⁰²

But the COSG also knew that most young white South Africans at the time had not had any opportunity to be exposed to different perspectives on their country's governance, hence their focus on providing this opportunity. One

⁴⁰⁰ In this regard, it is worth noting that Justice J. W. Edeling, second Chairman of the Board for Religious Objection (aware of the SADF's reticence in publicising information about the rights relating to religious objection), made an effort to visit every military installation in the country to explain to the Commanding Officers, senior staff and chaplains the need to make known to conscripts the statutory right accorded to them if they had religious objections to military service. During his visits, Justice Edeling met some interesting reactions: "One chaplain said, 'Ag, we won't intimidate him; just give me one of those mixed-up chaps for half an hour and I'll convince him it is honourable for him to be a soldier.' I [Edeling] said to him [the chaplain], 'You will immediately refrain from doing so; it is not for you to judge a person's religion - our country is a Christian country, where we recognise people's religious beliefs - and secondly, you are interfering with the duties of the Board.'" (Interview with Justice J. W. Edeling on 30 August 2007.)

⁴⁰¹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A9 - Board, "Religious objectors can be non-combatants", letter written by Richard Steele, *The Star*, 5 July 1984.

⁴⁰² Email correspondence with Richard Steele on 4 February 2005.

example of this is pertinently illustrated in this excerpt from one of their public pamphlets, "Must I fight in the South African Defence Force?"⁴⁰³ Note the rephrasing of what could have been an innocuous question (Must I take part in cadets at school?) into a provocative challenge:

Must I learn to fight at school?

School children and their parents also have a choice about learning to fight. Cadet training is not compulsory.

"Every person domiciled in the republic may, if he is a scholar or student at a school or other educational institution be required between his twelfth and his seventeenth year, both included, to undergo training as a cadet in accordance with regulations, unless -

(a) his parent or guardian has objected thereto in writing."

(Section 57 of Defence Act 1957)

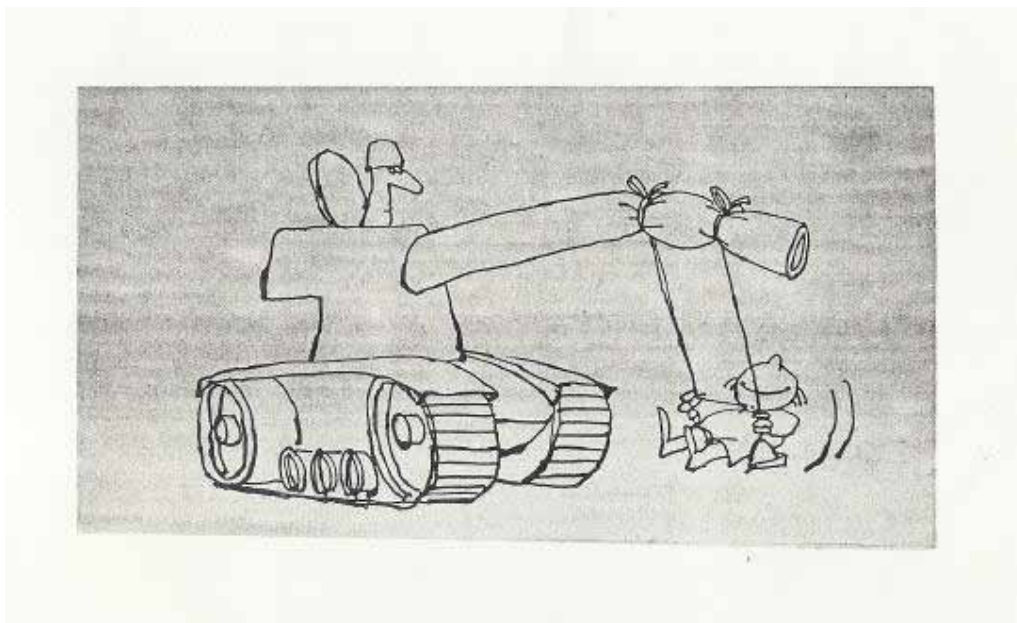


Fig. 5⁴⁰⁴ - Another COSG cartoon depicting the futility of war.

Another successful resistance tool developed by the COSG was the newsletter *Objector*, launched in 1983 by the Western Cape COSG, but soon becoming the national COSG newsletter, with different regions taking responsibility for the production of the newsletter at different times. Length

⁴⁰³ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, "Must I fight in the South African Defence Force?, a Durban COSG publication", undated, p 2.

⁴⁰⁴ "Early information about the fifth national conference on conscientious objection, 2 February 1984", Richard Steele personal archives, p 1.

and regularity of the newsletter were dependant on material and human resources available to complete what must have been an arduous task. Two main items would be a standard feature of most *Objector* newsletters; news of conscientious objectors and reports from each region sharing what they had been working on. Most issues of *Objector* would also contain information about the military, for example, military legislation, the Board, alternative service and the counselling service; and would raise questions about aspects of the SADF, for example, military spending, the military chaplaincy, the role of the media in promoting loyalty to the SADF, and the recruitment of people classified as black and coloured into the Defence Force. Published and distributed for ten years (1982 - 1992), though not always in all regions of the country, it was an effective mouthpiece for the movement, so much so that it began to replace *Non-violence News*, the SACC publication⁴⁰⁵ that had carried news of objectors and objection prior to the publication of *Objector*.

Yet another fundamental aspect of the nonviolent direct action is dialogue. The COSG constantly found ways of engaging with the law-makers of the time, and urged them to make changes in the law. From the earliest days of resistance to military service, individuals talked with the government, in an attempt to show goodwill and a willingness to find common ground. A powerful example of the commitment to the use of the nonviolent tactic of moral persuasion rather than antagonism or coercion was the tireless efforts of Dorothy and John Steele⁴⁰⁶ to meet personally with military and parliamentary authorities in an attempt to get objection recognised and accommodated by the government. This often meant travelling long distances, spending time away from home and sometimes not knowing in advance whether a meeting would be granted; yet the sacrifice was deemed worthwhile in terms of being able to reach out through their humanness to the humanness of those who held a different stance. In a remarkably magnanimous gesture, the Steele's would then always share, as far as possible, through correspondence with friends and supporters what had

⁴⁰⁵ Written and distributed by Rob Robertson.

⁴⁰⁶ Parents of Richard Steele.

transpired from these meetings, taking care to uphold a spirit of peace and hope in their writing:

During our stay we had personal discussions with highly placed members of the Government and military personnel. At all times we were received with courtesy and given adequate time to state our case...We had an overwhelming sense of the presence of the Lord during the whole period...⁴⁰⁷

Communicating in this conciliatory tone not only engendered hope for the cause, but also kept their campaign focus firmly on the issues at hand and not on the personalities involved. This Gandhian description of nonviolence, which "requires one to be respectful, to strive to build trust, and to be prepared to listen",⁴⁰⁸ could not be more apparent than in the work of Dorothy and John Steele:

We fight, practice noncooperation, against systems and methods and not against people; with the result that through actions we look for the heart, for feelings, not only for repression.⁴⁰⁹

The resolute desire on the part of the Steeles to convey the sincerity of their son's stance and to assure the authorities that they were not involved in sinister, unlawful activities went as far as setting the record straight for the Prime Minister:⁴¹⁰

Dear Mr Prime Minister

....Reports have appeared in the press recently referring to a "hunger strike" being undertaken by our son Richard over the Easter period. Furthermore in the Rand Daily Mail (7/4/80) it was stated that Richard was sentenced "to solitary confinement for refusing to wear the blue overalls designated for conscientious objectors in detention barracks". Both these facts are incorrect and a letter to this effect was written to the Rand Daily Mail on 7th April, setting out the true facts. A copy of this letter is attached.

We would like to make some important points concerning this matter:

⁴⁰⁷ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B2 - Moll and Steele, "Letter from Dorothy and John Steele to friends, 29 April 1980".

⁴⁰⁸ Shields, K., 1993, "Building bridges with the opposition", in *In the tiger's mouth: an empowerment guide for social action*, Millennium Books, Australia, p 57.

⁴⁰⁹ Graser, R., 1999, "Nonviolence, philosophy and politics of", in de Cuellar, J., and Young, S., (eds), *World encyclopedia of peace*, Oceana Publications, New York, p 455.

⁴¹⁰ "Letter from Dorothy and John Steele to the Prime Minister, 10 April 1980", in Richard Steele personal archives.

1. Fasting: For many months before reporting for National Service, our son set aside Friday as a day of prayer and fasting for our country and its future....When Richard wrote to tell us of his plan for a three day fast at Easter-time we shared this call to prayer with our friends, and appreciate their warm and loving response before God.
2. Groups: May we assure you we are two open-hearted Christian people, concerned parents...when we meet with our Christian friends naturally we pray for our country and for Richard's situation but this certainly does not constitute belonging to a "group" that would not be favoured by yourself as our Prime Minister.

And while it would have been humanly understandable to engage in prolific correspondence when requesting changes in the law, but then to slack off when changes had been granted, this was certainly not the case with the Steeles:

We would be so very glad if you would write a letter of appreciation to those in authority⁴¹¹ expressing your commendation for the wise, just and humane decision which has led to the acceptance of Richard and Peter as conscientious objectors. So often we appeal for justice...NOW we can say "Thank you"! Will you do that out of a heart filled with sincere gratitude?⁴¹²

Furthermore, the tactic of meeting face-to-face and discussing openly with those on the other side, so to speak, was as constructive for the ruling authorities as it was for the COSG activists. Another person worthy of mention here was Rob Robertson, who throughout the campaign years followed a path of open dialogue with the authorities; already in 1980 he wrote to the Prime Minister,⁴¹³ giving him feedback on the outcome of the 1980 workshop in Botha's Hill, Durban, and urging him to revise the Defence Act to include the recognition of objectors and the provision of alternative national service. While news of this workshop (and other resistance initiatives) cannot have been met with a quiet heart by the ruling authorities, this openness served at least two positive purposes: it communicated a message of active engagement with

⁴¹¹ Five people are recommended, with addresses given, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Chief of Army Staff Personnel, the Chaplain General and the Chief of Staff Personnel

⁴¹² "Letter from Dorothy and John Steele to friends, undated", in Steve de Gruchy personal archives, p 1.

⁴¹³ BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, "Letter to the Prime Minister, 24 November 1980".

government, letting them know that there was a sector of the population, no matter how small (in fact, by its very openness it probably appeared to the government larger than it was), that would not allow defence policies to be passed without constant questioning and agitation, and; while it would be too idealistic to assume that such openness built trust between the movement and the ruling authorities, we can at least assume that it gave the government some measure of assurance that the movement would neither prepare for its campaigns nor conduct its work covertly. In terms of nonviolent resistance, this tactic holds important psychological advantages for the activists in that a ruling bureaucracy, particularly if it is a military state as South Africa was, is far more able and comfortable to quash covert resistance operations than it is to deal with a movement that claims legitimacy upon itself because it is carried out openly in the public eye.

In terms of nonviolent campaign processes, the COSG tried also to be as inclusive as possible in its campaign strategies; a good example of this is their discussions in the late 1980s on the feasibility of campaigning for the release of objectors as opposed to a call for political prisoner status or remission, which were carried out only after the objectors in prison⁴¹⁴ had been visited and consulted on their thoughts and feelings on this issue. A similar sensitivity was shown even towards the "adversary", the government. While frustration at the intransigence of government must have run very high throughout the years of the movement, the COSG constantly took care to use inclusive, nonviolent language in official or working documents. This reflected much more than the use of nonviolent tactics; it reflected a spirit of love and care towards people or groups whose views, despite being vastly different from those of the COSG, were held with as much conviction as the COSG held theirs. We are reminded here of one aspect of the definition of "generic nonviolence" above - the question whether nonviolent direct action is practised with the intention of changing policy or attitude. The COSG, aiming to change policy and attitude simultaneously, succeeded in infusing a language of humanity into its working documents:

⁴¹⁴ David Bruce, Charles Bester and Saul Batzofin.

The (Alternative National Service) working group is motivated by its deep concern that the present system of compulsory military service gives rise to severe economic problems and to profound psychological and moral anxiety amongst many conscripts and their parents. It is broaching the sensitive issue of 'national security', not in an attempt to sow disunity, but out of a love for South Africa and a desire to reduce conflict and polarisation. The group is not opposed to the need for a Defence Force, but believe that in all situations where conscription applies, conscripts should have the right to refuse to do military service on grounds of conscience and be allowed to do a non-military form of national service instead.⁴¹⁵

A similar example of the care taken not to antagonise occurs in the press coverage of the Saul Batzofin campaign carried out among business executives (see above):

Paul Goller...[stated that] the very low-profile campaign is intended to "promote discussion on the issue, not to place anybody on the line."⁴¹⁶

Interestingly, "promot(ing) discussion on the issue" forms part of the nonviolent strategy of persuasion rather than coercion, where:

(t)he attempt is always to educate the opponent (or co-educate him or her along with oneself: in this respect the enterprise really has no opponent), to draw rather than push. To compel another's action without educating his or her will is at best an emergency measure, never part of a truly nonviolent strategy.⁴¹⁷

Returning, however, to the sensitivity shown by the activists in their campaign work, perhaps this was made possible by the fact that almost all the activists in the COSG were people who were themselves directly affected by the issue of conscription. As such, each of them, drawing on experiences and emotions that had touched them deeply, had to grapple with their own personal decisions about how best to respond to conscription and militarisation, as well as give support to the objector (if they were in a personal support group) and

⁴¹⁵ "Alternative National Service Working Document", undated, in Andrew Warmback's personal archives. This group was made up of representatives from the Progressive Federal Party, the National Democratic Movement, the COSG, the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), the Young Progressives, NUSAS, the Black Sash, the National CSG, the CANSP, and the Cape Democrats.

⁴¹⁶ *The Financial Mail*, 10 March 1989.

⁴¹⁷ Nagler, M., 1999b, "Nonviolence", in de Cuellar, J., and Young, s., (eds), *World encyclopedia of peace*, Oceana Publications, New York, p 449.

do broader campaign work. Whether they were earlier objectors or men who were faced with imminent call-up, fathers, mothers, brothers or sisters, girlfriends or friends; many of the COSG activists engaged in their own forms of noncooperation. An excellent example of this is the following, gleaned from a minute of a COSG meeting:

Protesting schools' registration:

2. MILITARIZATION OF SCHOOLS / REGISTRATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE:

A member of the group had responded to the Registering Office in the following terms concerning her son's 'Application for Registration':

'On my instructions, my son is not returning this form to his school for the following reasons:

1. I consider this a matter that should not be handled through the school, but is a matter, between my son and your office.
2. I do not think that my fifteen year-old son should be expected to complete this form without any reference to his parents.'

This protest against the use of schools for registration was seen to be breaking new ground.⁴¹⁸

Another example was that of an objector who had spent time in jail, together with other activists, forming the War and Peace Group; a Catholic Justice and Peace project, which discussed the issues surrounding conscientious objection with Catholic military chaplains and gave talks at church youth groups and schools:⁴¹⁹

....this was very delicate as we were not allowed to incite. So we had to be very careful because we never knew who were informers; we would talk in broad terms i.e. people must follow their conscience and if they had doubts they would need to ask themselves, could they in conscience take part [in the military]. We were met with mixed responses.⁴²⁰

Printed material about the Board for Religious Objection and other military-related issues was also sent to parishes. It must be remembered that even what may have seemed like a relatively easy task, namely preparing information for parishes, held its difficulties, as in the climate of the State of Emergency even printers were reluctant to print material of this nature: "...we

⁴¹⁸ "Minutes of Meeting held 7.30 p.m., Wednesday 14th March 1984", in "Minutes" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 1.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Neil Mitchell, 6 February 2006.

⁴²⁰ Interview with Loek Goemans, 6 February 2006.

had to get it secretly printed in 1985/86 at the time of the emergency - I remember going down to Durban to find a printer who would print it."⁴²¹

A further example of individual contribution to the campaign is that of an objector running a five-session course as part of the University of Cape Town Summer School programme on the political context in South Africa at the time, opposition to apartheid, the rise of the military, conscription, and alternatives to conscription including conscientious objection.⁴²² A similar initiative was an information-sharing course started in 1989 at the University of Natal called, "Coping with Conscription".⁴²³ While these individual campaign efforts can be said to have been a weakness of the COSG in that they diluted what could have been a more united movement, in another sense this individual initiative was certainly one of the strengths of the movement, in that it demonstrates how the movement managed to create an enabling environment which encouraged the spread of the right-to-conscientious-objection message in whatever circles of influence individuals were part of, and in whatever way people felt called to act.

One way in which some COSG activists felt called to act was through the Conscription Advice Service (CAS), a service deserving special attention in this study as it played a fundamental role in furthering the work of the COSG. Recalling that the main aim of the COSG was to defend the right of conscience in refusing military service, it is important to remember that the voice of conscience is not formed in a vacuum, particularly when it is a voice that runs counter to the major ideology of the time. Margaret Levi makes the point that conscientious objection "bears an obvious family resemblance to civil disobedience...(in that) rarely is the decision to engage in either act done in the absence of a social or political context that raises questions about the government's actions and policies."⁴²⁴ Where the COSG "raised the questions about the government's actions," the CAS quietly promoted civil disobedience. Where the COSG supported objectors and profiled their cases in the public eye, the CAS worked behind the scenes to nurture the

⁴²¹ Interview with Steve Lowry, 4 May 2006.

⁴²² Email correspondence with Anton Eberhard on 8 June 2007.

⁴²³ Interview with Patrick Vorster, 23 March 2006.

⁴²⁴ Levi. M., 1997, *Consent, dissent, and patriotism*, Cambridge University Press, p 165.

contemplation of objection. This, of course, is not how the work of the CAS could have been described in the 1980s, or it would have called state action upon its members. And so, under very difficult circumstances, the CAS protected the legitimacy of its work by doing three things:

- concealing its broader aim within the stated objective of “giv(ing) conscripts information and advice about their legal rights and alternatives to military service”;⁴²⁵
- being available to conscripts *who approached them*, rather than going out to solicit the attention of conscripts;⁴²⁶
- giving information *to all conscripts*, even those who came to ask for advice about matters unrelated to conscientious objection (a range of situations for which the CAS provided advice is given below).

The CAS was established in 1984⁴²⁷ as an independent project of the COSG to provide accessible, supportive advice to conscripts and their families. It had become apparent to the COSG that the dilemma of serving in the SADF was growing (possibly due to the fact that at this time the SADF started deploying troops in the townships), and that there was widespread ignorance about alternatives open to conscripts. This advice was provided on a one-on-one basis by counsellors who had been trained in professional, non-directive counselling. Links were made with clinical psychologists, lawyers and ministers of religion to whom specialist cases could be referred, if necessary. The non-directedness of the counselling was crucial to the work of the CAS, in order to remain within the framework of the law, which made it an offence to “encourage, aid, incite, instigate, suggest to or otherwise cause any other person to refuse or fail to render...service.”⁴²⁸ Other aspects of the CAS’s work included putting conscripts in touch with others who were or had been in a similar situation, and educating the public about the options and legal rights of the conscript. This last aspect was carried out by the CAS writing articles in

⁴²⁵ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A4 - Constitution, “Conscription Advice Service - Constitution”, undated, p 1.

⁴²⁶ This, however, changed with the formation of the CAS schools and churches working groups that set up a slide show about the conscript’s rights and held education meetings in schools and churches.

⁴²⁷ The information in this paragraph is taken from: BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A4 - Constitution, “The Conscription Advice Service (Cape Town)”.

⁴²⁸ Section 121(c) of the Defence Amendment Act No. 8 of 1974.

the press about conscription- and objection-related issues, producing fact sheets on issues such as religious objection, Dad's Army, emigration, deferment and non-combatant rights within the army, the placing of advertisements in commercial, university and church publications and producing stickers, posters and pamphlets for general use.

To be able to provide counselling, the CAS set up centres with telephone lines (and answering machines) in the major centres, which were staffed on one or more evenings every week, depending on the people available to staff the centre.⁴²⁹ Also, the personal contact numbers of counsellors were listed on information brochures, which meant that they could receive calls at other times too.⁴³⁰ At times the flow of callers was only a trickle;⁴³¹ a reality, which the counsellors tried to handle with as much humour and camaraderie as possible, as shown in the following comments:⁴³²

A week it comes and goes
The wind outside it blows
For me no valentine's red roses
Just an empty book to close.
(signed) david (vere are the comments!)⁴³³

and:

4 calls, 2 visitors.

Bloody busy!!

Bye

Janet⁴³⁴

and:

⁴²⁹ CAS centres operated in Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, Grahamstown (where they were first known as GRACONS - Grahamstown Conscription Service, before they changed to CAS), Pretoria, Port Elizabeth and East London, with some centres continuing the service longer than others.

⁴³⁰ The policy was, however, not to give out information over the phone, but rather to set up a face-to-face appointment.

⁴³¹ "The office is open 4.30 - 7.00 every Tuesday. They get 1 or 2 people per week. There are about 7 calls per week to individual's numbers." This from BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A6 - Conscription Advice Service History, "Meeting between Johannesburg & Cape Town C.A.S. reps on 14 May 1988".

⁴³² These taken from: BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A2 - Interim Record Book 1988.

⁴³³ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A2 - Interim Record Book 1988, entry dated 15 February 1989.

⁴³⁴ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A2 - Interim Record Book 1988, entry dated 27 September 1990.

Very, very quiet, miserable and lonely!!

Anton⁴³⁵

The CAS centres were constantly aware of the fact that publicity about this service was only reaching a small minority of those conscripted and often felt, as a result, that they were ineffectual. To remedy this situation, the CAS tried to write articles and insert advertisements in local and church newspapers, the liberal press like *The Weekly Mail*, *Die Vrye Weekblad* and on radio stations like *Radio 702* and local campus radio stations. In constant attempts to increase the number of counsellors, as well as to keep existing counsellors up-to-date, regular training workshops were held around issues relating to military service and counselling skills:

The course makes use of talk-inputs, audiovisual material, films, role-plays, and revision exercises. At each of the sessions where we discuss one of the options to military service, we try to have a speaker who has actually chosen and experienced that option.⁴³⁶

A comprehensive training manual was compiled for counsellors.⁴³⁷

While the largest proportion of enquiries were around issues of deferment or going abroad to avoid military service, the complexity and range of situations facing counsellors demanded a level of specialist knowledge of military-related issues, and counselling time, hardly to be expected of lay counsellors. To illustrate this point, a brief list (by no means comprehensive) of advice requests is given below. If ever there was a sketch of how the SADF intruded on every aspect of life for white South Africans, then this is surely it:⁴³⁸

- conscript - not sure about which category of the Board to apply for;
- conscript - not sure about what to do since his deferral had been refused after changing his course of study;

⁴³⁵ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A2 - Interim Record Book 1988, entry dated 1 April 1991.

⁴³⁶ AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.2 - CAS, "Conscription Advice Service - Counsellors' training course". Training courses usually comprised a full-day and six evening sessions.

⁴³⁷ See more about the government's reaction to the publication of such resource manuals in Chapter 5.

⁴³⁸ These taken from: BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A2 - Interim Record Book 1988.

- father - worried about why his son (about to finish school) had not received call-up papers yet;
- mother - wanted to know if her son (who had Std. 8) could go earlier to the army to get out of difficult family circumstances;
- sister - wanted to know if her brother (living in the UK, with British citizenship, but having lived in S.A. for twenty years, and having left four years ago), would be liable for military service;
- conscript - who had a one-man business, extensive student loans and was unhappy with having to do township duty wanted advice on whether to apply for non-combatant duty;
- conscript - wanted to know how to get deferment as he did not want to do a camp; his wife had just had a baby and they had moved to a new house without informing the army of the change of address but the call-up papers had been sent to the new house;
- friend - wanted to know if her friend who was leaving S.A. three days before his call-up date was breaking the law if he did not write to the army for a deferment;
- conscript - had already done two years and some camps, and was refusing township duty, wanted to know the consequences of his going to Botswana;
- friend - asked if it was permissible for the army to call someone up for a 40-day camp and then for a 30-day camp three months later;
- conscript - wanted to know what to do after being refused deferment / exemption (not clear) by the army, despite his application for deferment stating grounds of psychological unfitness;
- conscript - wanted to know if, as a non-theistic Buddhist, he would get accepted by the Board;
- conscript - wanted to know what to do about the SADF calling him at home saying they would charge him for not notifying them of his change of address;
- conscript - wanted to know what to do as he had received a call-up for a camp three days prior to the camp;

- friend - wanted to know what to do about parents of a friend receiving “a large envelope” for their son (which they sent back to the SADF), despite the fact that the son had moved to the Ciskei and had received acknowledgment from the SADF about his change of address;
- conscript - wanted to know if he could renounce his S.A. citizenship as he did not want to do military service;
- grandfather - wanted a contact address in London or the Netherlands for his grandson who had decided to leave the country and seek exile status;
- conscript - wanted to know what to do about the fact that he had not been paid fourteen months after leaving the SADF;
- mother - wanted to know how to get her son out of the army as her ex-husband was not paying maintenance since the son was now in the army, and she was lonely and worried about her son on the border;
- conscript - wanted to know how to apply to the Medical Board for exemption as he had epilepsy;
- mother - wanted to know what to do about her son who had not registered with the SADF when he was sixteen, but was now applying for a study bursary and the bursary form required a force number.

In all of this work there were careful ethical considerations that had to be taken into account because of the strict legal parameters within which the CAS conducted its work, for example:

Unless a particular relationship has been established, or there are exceptional circumstances, [the] principle is not to follow up counselees, even if they have undertaken to come back, and have not;⁴³⁹

and:

If a person intends blatantly lying to the Board (e.g. claiming that he is religious when he is not), we are within our rights to refuse to assist the person (apart from telling them how the Board operates);⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A7 - National Meetings of CAS, “Minutes of the National Meeting of Representatives of The Conscription Advice Service, Johannesburg, 17 - 18 September 1988”, p 7.

⁴⁴⁰ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A7 - National Meetings of CAS, “Minutes of the National Meeting of Representatives of The Conscription Advice Service, Johannesburg, 17 - 18 September 1988”, p 8.

and:

A second counsellor should sit in on all discussions with such counselees (as a witness) in the event of the counselee making any claims to the Board about the advice he received from CAS.⁴⁴¹

From the list of advice requests given above, it is pertinently clear that no other aspect of the war resistance movement had as much potential significantly to influence individual decisions about military service as the CAS. It is no wonder, therefore, that the CAS remained dedicated to this service for nine years and, knowing the power it held and the context within which it operated, carried out its task with integrity and astuteness:

....For although we offer non-directive advice (chiefly because conscripts have to live with the consequences of their choices), we are not neutral. In many senses CAS constitutes the work-face of anti-military work; we are in daily contact with the crisis conscription forces on so many white South African men, their lovers, friends and family. CAS's task is not only to help individuals cope with conscription, but also to assist in resistance to conscription.⁴⁴²

Years of awareness-raising campaign work on the right conscientiously to object to military service began to bear much greater visible fruit with the nonviolent direct action of the joint stands (see more in Chapter 3 above). In terms of the process of nonviolent resistance movements, this was an extremely exciting development, as it marked a point where the scales between fear - obedience to the system - and an unwillingness to continue compromising one's conscience were tipped in favour of upholding the dictates of one's conscience. Whether the tipping of these scales was the result of the fact that objectors objected *together*, or whether their objecting together was the result of a decrease in fear is a question that can only be answered by a study of the motivation of each of the objectors involved in the stands. What is known, however, is that with the tipping of these scales, the power of the South African government towards conscripts as a group was

⁴⁴¹ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A7 - National Meetings of CAS, "Minutes of the National Meeting of Representatives of The Conscription Advice Service, Johannesburg, 17 - 18 September 1988", p 8.

⁴⁴² BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, A8 - Annual Reports of CAS, "Conscription Advice Service Annual Report 1988/89", p 6.

significantly undermined. This in turn directly lowered the government's capacity to enforce conscription laws (see Chapter 5). In the later years of the movement the COSG was able to capitalise on this weakening of government enforcement by, for example, challenging the government at press conferences to charge everyone participating in the 1992 Noncooperation Campaign.⁴⁴³ Needless to say, the government did not take up this challenge; perhaps largely because, as a transitional negotiating body working towards democracy, it was very different to the government it had been two or three years earlier.⁴⁴⁴

As with all nonviolent resistance movements, the outward-focused work was sustained not only by personal conviction but by a desire among activists to make the practise of nonviolence real by infusing it into every aspect of their work. To this end, time was set aside at each annual national conference and at all counsellor training sessions to learn more about and gain practise in nonviolent campaign and resistance methods. Some examples of this are the following:

- simulation of campaigns⁴⁴⁵ - to give the group an opportunity to practise coordinating the different aspects of a campaign, namely, the

⁴⁴³ This campaign, conducted in collaboration with the ECC, gathered together conscripts who had signed the register of people refusing to serve in the SADF as well as all those who had defied Section 121(c). The number of people who had signed the Register of Objectors had grown from 771 in 1989 to 1300 in 1991 (*The Weekly Mail*, 11-17 January, 1991, p 8.). Alongside this register, the COSG started a petition for members of the public to sign, who were in support of conscientious objection ("Petition in support of conscientious objectors", in Richard Steele personal archives.)

⁴⁴⁴ Some of these differences are illustrated by the following facts:

- F.W. de Klerk had assumed the State Presidency in 1989 and cut the length of initial military service by half (back to one year),
- the Population Registration Act had been repealed in 1991, thus removing the racial foundation on which conscription was based (*Objector*, September 1991, p 5),
- Roelf Meyer had taken over from Magnus Malan as Minister of Defence (*Objector*, September 1991, p 3),
- the National Peace Accord had been signed (*Objector*, September 1991, p 3),
- the national Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) had begun its task of negotiating all aspects of the country's transition to democracy (*Objector*, September 1991, p 3),
- in December 1992, nine senior officers of the SADF were placed on compulsory leave or early retirement and a further seven were being investigated for "criminal or unauthorised activities" (*Objector*, September 1993, p 7),
- General Kat Liebenberg was replaced by General George Meiring as head of the SADF (*Objector*, September 1993, p 8).

⁴⁴⁵ "The report on the fifth National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, July 1984", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 16.

organising body, the military (in this case as the theme chosen was related to conscientious objection), right- and left-wing political organisations, the community printer, the press, members of the public and informers;

- a study⁴⁴⁶ of Gene Sharp's "198 methods of nonviolent action";⁴⁴⁷
- the composing of inspirational songs or poems that fostered unity and kept activists focused on their bigger role as a movement;⁴⁴⁸
- training through the use of role-plays in issues such as your rights as a national serviceman,⁴⁴⁹ victimisation in the army and how to counsel someone considering a Board application.

A special challenge faced the COSG in implementing nonviolence when the possible presence of informers became a reality:

We're having a lot of difficulty with the whole concept of "screening". Our experience shows that there is seldom a way of proving people's suspicions about a person. None of us feel able to "investigate" people not known to us who may apply [for COSG membership], or to judge them. We also feel that in doing so we are being untrue to our concept of non-violent action. We are not engaged in any activity which we would not be proud to stand up and defend if need be. Our meetings are clearly known and minutes are available to any inquisitive person who has access to our mail. Our whole way of life is open. We therefore don't feel able to "screen" applicants.⁴⁵⁰

Also, when networking with partner organisations of the anti-conscription movement (and even within their own organisation), COSG members came into contact with activists who did not have the same commitment to the use of nonviolence. In cases like this they were able to learn from each other while maintaining their principles:

What was interesting is that both sides of the argument gave to each other; those coming from the broader pacifist perspective became more politicised

⁴⁴⁶ "The report on the fifth National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, July 1984", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 45.

⁴⁴⁷ Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Part II, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, appendix.

⁴⁴⁸ See Appendix 10 for an example of this.

⁴⁴⁹ See Appendix 11 on two contrasting role-plays, which were used to train CAS counsellors in how to counsel conscripts whose rights in the army had been ignored.

⁴⁵⁰ "Letter to the Conference Planning Group, 26 April 1984, from Durban COSG", in "Conferences" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 2.

and those who came from the political perspective could see nonviolence in practise, which was a very powerful statement in itself.

And while the support, solidarity and campaign functions were naturally better documented, there were occasions when activists looked inward, and wrote about it, as is shown in this article exploring the relationship between militarism and patriarchy, written by Richard Steele and Anita Kromberg;

We can take control of the kind of values and attitudes we display in our everyday lives and in that way rob the military and patriarchy of valuable psychic support. Here, the ECC and the COSG's perform important functions: they are concerned with the broad political scene, but are potentially a community within which individuals can learn and practise on an inter-personal level what we are calling for on a macro level. We must challenge the attitudes and practices in our daily lives, to authentically challenge these patterns more broadly.⁴⁵¹

Sometimes the commitment to nonviolence was put to the test under extreme circumstances, as was the case when activists were detained in 1985 under the Internal Security Act;

'I realised when I started being questioned that those guys [the security police] are just caught up in their own propaganda and they really believe what they are saying. I don't think they are being cruel for the sake of being cruel. I think they are caught in the story that is being fabricated that this country is under threat.'⁴⁵²

Another objector detained at the same time stated that he felt:

...a great compassion for the security police and an urge to reach out to them. They weren't ogres to me, they were just human beings...part of our liberation struggle is to help those people to be free in themselves, free of their paranoia and fears.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Objector - Newsletter of the Conscientious Objector Support Groups, 3(2), May 1985", p 7.

⁴⁵² BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Newly released detainee fasts", *The Sunday Tribune*, 22 September 1985. This statement was made by Sue Britton.

⁴⁵³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Newly released detainee fasts", *The Sunday Tribune*, 22 September 1985. This statement was made by Richard Steele.

For some objectors, Detention Barracks became the testing ground for their commitment to nonviolence.⁴⁵⁴

Each day the abuse of fellow human beings faced me with the question, 'Why am I not doing something about the violence?.....This question began to gnaw away at me as I reflected on the inconsistency that I had sought to oppose the violence outside DB but was doing nothing about the violence within.....A second incident occurred with this same corporal on the parade ground some weeks later. He was abusing and making a public spectacle of a thin, sickly looking conscript, who, lacking co-ordination, found it impossible to march in step. I was working in the nearby garden hoping one of the senior officers present would put a stop to the bullying. When no one intervened, the thought struck me that I was once again allowing the abuse of a fellow human being, without lifting a finger. I realised that the brutality had almost become routine for me and that I was beginning to not even notice. This time though, having cut my teeth in the previous incident, I was less scared. I strode on to the parade ground and insisted the corporal stop.

And for others, DB was the place where the practise of nonviolence could find a very human and intimate face:

There was plenty of interaction in DB with conscripts and Permanent Force officers who ran the DB, and support from fellow conscript inmates who would have loved to resist the SADF but didn't have the know-how, education or support. I remember my very first night in DB; I was locked in my cell and the corporal came in - he had heard who I was and he started chatting to me. He was a non-combatant and a Catholic. He became a good friend and I remember he gave me his missal with his name in it. If his Superiors knew what he was doing, he would have been in trouble so this was a big thing for him to do.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Yeats, C., 2005, *Prisoner of conscience - one man's remarkable journey from repression to freedom*, Rider, London, p 93ff.

⁴⁵⁵ Comment made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.



Fig. 6⁴⁵⁶ - Transforming power:⁴⁵⁷ from violence to peace.

Finally, as a way of encapsulating the work of the COSG over a ten-year period, we look at an example of the COSG putting to use its experience in nonviolent activism in another major conflict in the world at that time; the Gulf War:

One of the primary reasons for the existence of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group is to...promote the recognition of conscientious objection as a human right. In this respect, we are very concerned about the rights of soldiers on all sides of the conflict. It has come to our attention that many soldiers in the United States Armed Forces have applied for conscientious objector status, but these applications are being obstructed by the military hierarchy. We are extremely concerned too about the rights of soldiers in the Iraqi army, especially in the light of reports that Iraqi officers were executed in August for refusing to take part in the invasion of Kuwait. WE CALL ON ALL MILITARY FORCES ENGAGED IN THE GULF CONFLICT TO RESPECT THE RIGHT OF SOLDIERS TO CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION AS

⁴⁵⁶ BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, E - Books, "Our Education systems must prepare people for war.' PW Botha, 1977", pamphlet, published by Social Action for the Conscientious Objectors Support Group, undated, p 1.

⁴⁵⁷ A phrase taken from the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) nonviolence training programme.

CONTAINED IN RESOLUTION E/CN/ 4/1987/L73 OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

The COSG then goes on to suggest a number of nonviolent strategies that could be used to resolve the conflict in the region, as opposed to using violence. In a comparison with South Africa, the COSG places conscientious objection within our broader struggle for democracy and leaves no doubt about the efficacy of nonviolent strategies:

It has taken a long time, but the emerging victory of justice and democracy in South Africa is largely due to the cumulative effect of massive nonviolent actions practised within South Africa by South Africans. These actions include: refusal of cooperation with municipal bureaucracies in black areas, strikes, consumer boycotts, schools boycotts, marches, conscientious objection to military service, alternate media, conscientization programmes etc. The military component of the liberation struggle has always been low, and has never supplanted mass-based civil actions.⁴⁵⁸

While many of the nonviolent actions listed above, namely the boycotts, strikes and marches, were carried out on a scale far beyond that of conscientious objection and "conscientization programmes" like the CAS, it is indeed fitting that the objector movement, by its nature, strategy and focus, should claim its place alongside the other nonviolent movements that led to the political liberation of South Africa.

⁴⁵⁸ "On the War in the Gulf: a statement by the Durban branch of the Conscientious Objector Support Group, 24 January 1991", in "Minutes" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

Chapter 5 - The impact of nonviolence on the power of the state

*States are not moral agents,
people are,
and can impose moral standards
on powerful institutions.*
Noam Chomsky

*I simply refuse to do the master's bidding.
He may torture me, break my bones to atoms and even kill me.
He will then have my dead body, not my obedience.
Ultimately, therefore, it is I who am the victor and not he,
for he has failed in getting me to do what he wanted done.
Non-cooperation is directed not against...the Governors,
but against the system they administer.
The roots of non-cooperation lie not in hatred but in justice.*
Gandhi

After having documented the history of and the methods used by the COSG, it now remains for us briefly to examine the impact of these nonviolent strategies on the South African government's stance on conscription and objection. Two broad sources have been used to assess the effect of this nonviolent movement for change; a study of significant changes in military legislation (with supporting documents often, but not exclusively, written from the COSG's perspective); and documents drawn from the SANDF military archives indicating the perceived threat that conscientious objection posed to the state. The second is a more reliable source than the first as it draws on actual correspondence on these issues; often internal correspondence between various military officials, namely the Chief of the SADF (General Magnus Malan), the Chief of Staff Personnel (Lt Gen. R.A. Holtzhausen who was responsible for securing sufficient conscripts in the SADF), the two Chairmen of the Board for Religious Objectors (Justice M.T. Steyn and Justice J.W. Edeling), and the Heads of the Van Loggerenberg and the Gleeson Committees. These correspondences were written with honesty and passion, and without the veneer of political correctness that was demanded of documents destined for the general public. In this study, however, only limited research of this nature has been conducted and a further, much deeper study

of the military archives (as well as possible interviews with military decision-makers of the time) would yield rich results.

With the first source, namely a study of the legislative changes, it is important not to draw conclusions from what could simply be assumptions about the apparent causal link between government actions vis-à-vis resistance actions. While there are some unquestionable examples of the government making legislative changes directly because of resistance actions, other actions, while chronologically following certain resistance landmarks, cannot conclusively be said to be the result of these landmarks. Which is not to say that these more "indirect" responses are not worth examining; it is simply a matter of not assuming that they naturally - or solely - followed from the resistance actions.

Before beginning this exploration, however, it may be of interest to note the internal struggles of the COSG, as this had a direct influence on the formation and development of the COSG as a body that would commit itself to opposing state power, at least as far as the apartheid elements of conscription and militarisation were concerned, for more than ten years. These internal struggles in the early years of the COSG were very much a microcosm of the broader liberation struggle facing South Africa at the time:

1982 was a watershed year for COSG. NUSAS and the ANC had begun to engage seriously with the issue of conscription as this was considered a good way to mobilise whites against apartheid. There were two factions at white universities; one which said take a [visible] stance against apartheid by objecting - and take the consequences of maybe being sent to jail; the other which said duck and dive as much as you can [and if necessary go to the army] because we don't want activists in jail, we need them to work [for the liberation struggle]. This became a very serious divisive issue. The ANC recognised that there was an existing anti-conscription movement but that it was predominantly religious and a matter of individual conscience. They felt therefore that they should get their people in there to help or to take over this group of religious people. This was an important part of my politicisation and I was completely freaked out because all of a sudden there were 20 people there [at meetings which usually consisted of five or six people] - heavy liberals - with a very different political focus. There was lots of dialectics,

tension, arguments and I was very confused. The issue of nonviolence and Just War dominated.⁴⁵⁹

While it is clear that such a polemic would have generated doubts and dilemmas for the young COSG activist, what is worth noting here is that these opposing standpoints, namely overt vs. covert objection, are exactly what the government too was up against in the years of conscription. And while the COSG resolved the dilemma largely by sharing the initiative in setting up and supporting a complementary movement, the End Conscription Campaign, which could focus on the more politically-oriented anti-conscription work, the government could only rely on its own legislative, bureaucratic and military power in facing this challenge.

Given the context within which conscription was introduced (see Chapter 2) there can be no question that the ruling political and military authorities exercised their power with respect to objection in the pursuit of two main aims: to ensure the continual flow of sufficient numbers of conscripts into the military; and to prevent political embarrassment in the face of the white electorate, the churches and the western world. To these two ends, the movement seems to have elicited what may be distinguished as “softer” and “harder” expressions of state power. Softer responses included meetings with churches and other organisations involved in these issues (including the ECC - see below), offering concessions to objectors,⁴⁶⁰ the placing of informers in meetings and gatherings, press statements issuing warnings,⁴⁶¹ court orders (sometimes verging on the absurd)⁴⁶² and prolific correspondence with

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Adele Kirsten, 13 February 2006.

⁴⁶⁰ For example: “Recruiting Sergeant Flattery had tried on several occasions to persuade [David] Bruce that he could serve in a non-combatant position, after Bruce walked into the call-up centre on August 5 last year and told Flattery he would not serve because he is opposed to apartheid.” (BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A2 - General, “Objectors worry the army”, *The Sowetan*, 8 August 1988.)

⁴⁶¹ For example: “...General Magnus Malan said yesterday [in Parliament] that leftist radicals in South Africa should stop the ‘devilish’ onslaught against the SADF....(as) they were doing the SADF, the country and its people a great disservice. The presence of SADF troops in townships built up trust and confidence among the masses of peace-loving people who were being terrorised by gangs incited by leftist radicals.” (BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, “Malan hits at leftists’ ‘devilish’ campaign”, *The Star*, 19 March 1986.)

⁴⁶² For example: “In his evidence Charles [Bester] gave a moving testimony of his Christian faith...The magistrate interrupted several times. As a token of peace, friends of Charles and

individuals and organisations, both local and international, often justifying the role of the military.⁴⁶³ Harder responses included predominantly legislative changes,⁴⁶⁴ smear campaigns (against individual objectors and against the ECC⁴⁶⁵), attacks on property⁴⁶⁶ and (while this was never applied to the COSG) bannings and detentions; for example, the banning of the ECC and the detention of some ECC members. Why, one might ask, did the government regard this movement in such a serious light? Bishop K. Hallowes gave one explanation by speaking of the personal affront that conscientious objection was to the government:

I personally believe that the real reason for this savage reaction [the proposed Act making it an offence to encourage anyone to refuse military service] is not the fear of the effects of conscientious objection, but rather anger because of a bad conscience, resentment, even a cold fury, roused by being dubbed an unjust and discriminatory society.⁴⁶⁷

An anti-apartheid activist provided a somewhat different explanation:

The reason why the government got so agitated with this whole anti-conscription issue is that they were acutely aware of the need to maintain white unity...and they were right! They knew they could defeat the ANC militarily but they couldn't hold on to their white support base. We must also remember that the top levels of government were highly militarised so any threat to the military was multiplied by ten.⁴⁶⁸

Charles himself were wearing yellow flowers. Just before he passed sentence the magistrate ordered everybody in court wearing yellow flowers to remove them." (BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C2.5 - Miscellaneous, "Update on Charles Bester, Conscientious Objector: 30 January 1989", p 1.)

⁴⁶³ See Appendix 12 for an example of such a letter of justification.

⁴⁶⁴ See Appendix 13 for a summary of these legislative changes and Chapter 3 for more detail on Defence legislation.

⁴⁶⁵ An example of this was the dropping of pamphlets by helicopter at an ECC fair in Cape Town in 1989, which linked the ECC to the ANC and questioned the role of women in the ECC. Despite detailed information being given to the police, the SADF personnel responsible for the campaign were never brought to court (*The Sunday Star*, 27 March 1988).

⁴⁶⁶ Two such incidents later came to light in the following way: in 1994 a former Warrant Officer in the Security Police, Paul Erasmus, admitted on a talk show on SABC that he had thrown rocks through the windows of Rob Robertson's home in Pageview. "[He] said he had the job of covering all my Conscientious Objection activities." And in 1998 Captain Michael Bellinghan applied for amnesty before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, saying that "as head of the church desk of the security police he targeted individuals involved in liberation theology, as well as anti-conscription campaigners. He admitted throwing bricks through windows of offices and vehicles used by church activists including the Rev Rob Robertson and Dr Beyers Naudé." (Robertson, R, 1999, *St Antony's activists*, Salty Print, Cape Town, p 125ff.)

⁴⁶⁷ BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A1 - General, "The case against the further Defence Amendment Bill", in *Reality* 6(5), November 1974, p 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Gavin Cawthra, 16 March 2006.

This last point was cogently elaborated upon by Professor Hendrik van der Merwe,⁴⁶⁹ who gets to the root of how the anti-conscription movement challenged state power:

Why, then, do conservative politicians respond so vehemently to the honest stands taken by these respectable young men? Why are they referred to as "rotters"??...

The most obvious explanation appears to be related to the fact that some of these young men are 'situational objectors' and have taken a specific stand against the present government, e.g. Billy Paddock and Peter Hathorn.

However, this does not justify the emotional stand taken against pacifists. One possible explanation can be that the authorities see pacifists as 'a strain of anarchy'. In the case of a conscientious objector it is an actual refusal to obey an authority, the government. Any government will be concerned about such a response among its citizens, especially if it could take on massive proportions. Pacifists, in the view of the government, refuse to do their share of the protection of the group. They opt out. The person harms the group. His non-membership takes the form of competition. Or, it may indicate to outsiders the limits of the group's power or the dubiousness of its norms and values, which are not accepted by those to whom they should apply; the group's legitimacy is attacked. The pacifist stand, therefore, becomes not only a security risk, but also a threat to the prestige of the group.⁴⁷⁰ To quash it becomes a matter of honour.⁴⁷¹

Perhaps this question of quashing the objector movement places into context, for example, the Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan's vehement condemnation of the anti-conscription movement:

I remember Magnus Malan saying; this country has four enemies (in this order); the SACP, the ANC, uMkhonto weSizwe, and the ECC. When we heard this, we said, ja, we must be doing something right!⁴⁷²

and the detailed intra-governmental communication entered into by Minister Malan to his own colleagues. Two examples of this are directives from

⁴⁶⁹ Director of the Centre for Intergroup Studies at the University of Cape Town.

⁴⁷⁰ See Margaret Levi's reference in footnote 424.

⁴⁷¹ *Conscientious objection*, Occasional paper No. 8, (revised edition), 1984, The Centre for Intergroup Studies, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, p v.

⁴⁷² Comment by Brett Myrdal at Cape Town focus group meeting, 20 May 2006.

General Magnus Malan himself to the Minister of Justice⁴⁷³ and to the Minister of Industries, Commerce and Tourism,⁴⁷⁴ instructing them respectively to ensure that Charles Yeats serve out his full sentence and not be given parole, and that no provision be made to allow Yeats a non-military form of national service.

Whatever the response chosen by the government to counter this movement for change, what is clear is that legislative changes did not happen without internal debates among the decision-makers within the military and governmental establishments. What is interesting to notice is the fears underpinning these debates; fears, which the COSG had understood and exploited throughout the years of the movement. In the excerpt below we see the concern about a church / state conflict, as well as that of credibility being compromised should an unreasonable punishment be meted out. At the same time, here is a good example of the strategic attempt not to give in to these fears, which could then, as consequence, precipitate an uncontrollable objector movement:

Aanbeveling. Na oorweging van die voorafgaande kom dit voor asof die besluit van die VBR om 'n godsdienstbeswaarde wat weier om diensplig te verrig eers te verhoor en te straf tot alternatiewe diensplig, nie prakties uitvoerbaar is nie hoofsaaklik omrede alternatiewe diensplig nie as 'n straf opgelê kan word nie. Hierdie optrede sal ook nie die angel uit 'n moontlike staat/kerk konfrontasie haal nie. Die oplossing blyk daarin geleë te wees dat die godsdienstbeswaarde voor diensplig gekategoriseer word deur 'n ondersoekraad en op hul aanbeveling deur die Registrasiebeampte toegewys word tot die diens waarvoor in die Verdedigingswet voorsiening gemaak moet word (alternatiewe nie-militêre diensplig). Sou 'n lid dan steeds weier on diensplig te verrig, sal hy deur 'n Krygsraad verhoor en by skuldigbevinding gevonnissen word tot die straf wat in die Verdedigingswet daarvoor voorgeskryf word en wat gevangenisstraf kan insluit.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File Opleiding - Gewetensbesware 2.12.80 - 22.10.80, "Letter from Magnus Malan to Minister of Justice, H. J. Coetsee, 16 February 1982", p 2.

⁴⁷⁴ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File Opleiding - Gewetensbesware 2.10.80 - 22.12.80, "Letter from Magnus Malan to Minister van Nywerheidswese, Handel en Toerisme, D.J. de Villiers, 26 August 1981", p 1.

⁴⁷⁵ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80, "Document from Chief of Staff Personnel Lt Gen R. A. Holtzhausen -

[Recommendation. After consideration of the preceding it appears as if the decision of the DCC⁴⁷⁶ first to try and sentence a religious objector who refuses to perform compulsory service to alternative compulsory service is not practicable, mainly because alternative compulsory service cannot be imposed as a punishment. This action will also not remove the sting from a possible state/church confrontation. The solution appears to be that the religious objector is classified by a board of inquiry and on their recommendation is assigned by the Registration officer to the service for which provision has been made in the Defence Act (alternative non-military compulsory service). Should a member then still refuse to perform compulsory service, he will be tried by court-martial and on being found guilty sentenced to the punishment that is prescribed for it in the Defence Act and which can include a jail sentence.]

Another fear of the government, linked to the issue of credibility, is that of the challenge against their integrity:

3. It is, however, important to inform you that this particular group is inclined towards a liberal approach, as regards the recognition of conscientious objectors, which is in principle irreconcilable with the basic viewpoint adopted by the Committee on Conscientious Objection. According to the proposals presented by Rev Robertson, the group is, inter alia, in favour of the recognition of political conscientious objection in South Africa. This category of objectors base their resistance against military service on the doctrine that the South Africa society is fundamentally unjust and therefore morally indefensible.

4. It is consequently recommended that the SADF should not in any way compromise its position towards this group and that The Honourable The Prime Minister should, at this point in time, avoid extensive dialogue with Rev Robertson as regards the proposals involved.⁴⁷⁷

See also Appendix 14 for another example of how the Minister of Defence himself was prepared to put personal time and energy into responding to a challenge to the credibility of the military authorities.

Verdedigings Bevelsraad beslissinge (Defence Command Council decisions), 30 April 1981", p 7.

⁴⁷⁶ Defence Command Council.

⁴⁷⁷ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80, "Letter from Chief of Staff Intelligence to the Chief of the SA Defence Force entitled 'Ministerial Enquiry 16/80: Recognition of Conscientious Objectors', 14 January 1981", p 1.

Perhaps the biggest fear of the government, however, was that of how publicity about objection and the power of the media were contributing to the growth of a subversive, coordinated movement that had the potential, in their perception, seriously to undermine the commitment of white youth towards conscription:

LEDE

6. Stigterslede, uitgewekenes en ander simpatiseerders is onder andere die volgende:

- a. Terence William Scott - 'n uitgewekene.
- b. William Elliott Anderson - 'n droster uit die SAW.
- c. Donald James Alair - 'n voormalige Metodiste predikant van Pretoria.
- d. Joe en Ruth Slovo - gelyste Suid-Afrikaanse kommuniste.
- e. John Coast - 'n 26-jarige dienspligontduiker van Kaapstad Universiteit.
- f. Graham de Schmidt - 'n 26-jarige onderwyser van Kaapstad.
- g. Richard Steele - van die Universiteit van Kaapstad. 'n Brief waarin Richard Steele verduidelik waarom hy weier om vir dienspligopleiding aan te meld, word sonder kommentaar gepubliseer in die September-uitgawe van Diakonia News.
- h. Peter Graham Moll is 'n 23-jarige lid van die "Cape Flats Commando" wat onlangs baie publisiteit verkry het waarvoor kol Bosman meer sal getuig.
- j. Dr Allan Boesak, Prof Paul Hare en Dr James Moulder hou landwyd seminare waarin die RSA se militêre opset veroordeel word.....

8. In die binnelandse veldtog vloei politieke en godsdienstige motiewe ineen. Die argument, soos deur sommige kerke geformuleer, is dat die RSA-stelsel op ingeboude en geïntegreerde geweld berus, dat dit struktureel onregverdig en derhalwe onverdedigbaar is, dat dit die terroriste-geweld uitlok en dat die terroristestryd dus juis geregverdig is, dws "a just revolution against an unjust system". Die propagering van hierdie standpunt deur veral hierdie kerke en hul pogings om die jeug self direk daarmee te beïnvloed, tesame met hulle aandrang om die wysiging van die verdedigingswet, kan daartoe lei dat weerstand teen diensplig in die RSA beduidende afmetings kan aanneem, sodat teenoptrede tans noodsaaklik geword het. Dit moet onthou word dat hierdie organisasie wat bestaan uit 'n onbeduidende groep uitgewekenes se hele bestaan spruit uit die feit dat daar media is wat hulle subversie uitdra. Daar moet 'n bewustheid hiervan geskep word maar daar mag nie onnodige en onverdiende publisiteit aan hierdie organisasie gegee word nie. Wye

publisiteit is reeds hieraan gegee en selfs by geleentheid is in die N[ederduits] G[ereformeerde] Kerk teologiese tydskrif aan Dr James Moulder 'n platform gegee om sy gewetensbeswaarkwessie te stel. Hierteen moet gewaak word.⁴⁷⁸

[MEMBERS

6. Founding members, exiles and other sympathisers are amongst others the following:

- a. Terence Williams Scott - an exile.
- b. William Eliot Anderson - a deserter from the SADF.
- c. Donald James Adair - a former Methodist minister from Pretoria.
- d. Joe and Ruth Slovo - listed South-African communists.
- e. John Coast - a 26-year old draft dodger from the University of Cape Town
- f. Graham de Schmidt - a 26-year old teacher from Cape Town.
- g. Richard Steele - from the University of Cape Town. A letter in which Richard Steele explains why he refuses to report for compulsory service training is published without comment in the September issue of Diakonia News.
- h. Peter Graham Moll is a 23-year old of the "Cape Flats Commando" who recently received a lot of publicity about which Col. Bosman can give more evidence.
- i. Dr Allan Boesak, Prof Paul Hare and Dr James Moulder hold countrywide seminars in which the military system of the RSA is condemned.....

8. In the domestic campaign, political and religious motives merge.

The argument, as formulated by some churches, is that the RSA-system rests on inherent and integrated violence, that it is structurally unjust and consequently indefensible, that it provokes terrorist violence and that the terrorist struggle is therefore really justified, i.e. "a just revolution against an unjust system". The propagation of this standpoint by especially these churches and their attempts directly to influence the youth itself with this, together with their agitation regarding revision of the Defence Act, can lead to resistance against conscription taking on significant proportions so that counter measures have now become necessary. It must be remembered that the entire existence of this organisation, which consists of an insignificant

⁴⁷⁸ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80, "Report from Chief of SADF to the Adjunk-Minister, entitled 'DIE VERSKERPTE AANSLAG OP DIE NASIONALE DIENSPLIGSTELSEL OOR DIE BOEG VAN MORELE EN GODSDIENSTIGE OORWEGINGS' (THE INTENSIFIED ONSLAUGHT ON THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF COMPULSORY SERVICE UNDER THE PRETEXT OF MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS), 4 February 1980", p 5ff.

group of exiles, stems from the fact that there are media which publish their subversion. Consciousness of this must be created, but no unnecessary and undeserved publicity may be given to this organisation. Wide publicity has already been given to this and even on occasion a platform was given in the Dutch Reformed Church theological journal to Dr James Moulder to put his conscientious objection question. This has to be guarded against.]

Almost ten years after this document, a similar sentiment was expressed, but in a somewhat more impulsive manner:

“How can an eighteen-year old take such a decision?” stormed the apoplectic Justice Edeling [Chairman of the Board for Religious Objection].⁴⁷⁹

Interestingly, in the same document is evidence too of the SADF's attempt to counteract the objector movement by maintaining a positive morale among its forces, with among others, the help of the army chaplains:

1. 'n Vraag wat dikwels gestel word is of die SAW enige poging aanwend om die planmatige ondermyning van dienspligtiges se moreel, soos wat anti-Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies dit probeer bedryf, teen te staan. Die antwoord is ja. Daar bestaan binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag 'n doeltreffende direktoraat wat voortdurend toesien dat die motiveringspeil van eie magte, ook op ideologieses gebied die nodige aandag kry....

4. Die hoofogmerk is om die Staande mag-. Burgermag-en Kommandoede asook nasionale dienspligtiges positief in te stem teenoor die nasionale doelstellings van Suid-Afrika. Nadruk word gelê op vaderlandsliefde, 'n weerstandsvermoë teen vyandelikesubversie, nasionale selfbeskikking vir alle binnelanse volksgroepe, gesonde volkereverhoudinge, paraatheid teen die Kommunisme, geloof aan die Christelike waardes en bereidheid tot opoffering....

8. Omdat die een fondamentsteen van die Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskap en lewensbeskouing die christelike godsdiens is, werk die Direktoraat Bevelsinformasie heg saam met die kapelane.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Justice J.W. Edeling's comment on Charles Bester's objection. (BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCTL, A5 - Support Groups, "War Resisters International newsletter, May/June 1989", p 2.) It is not clear in what context Justice Edeling made this comment as Bester did not appear before the Board for Religious Objection (Email correspondence with Charles Bester on 18 August 2007.)

⁴⁸⁰ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80, "Report from Chief of SADF to the Adjunk-Minister, entitled 'DIE VERSKERPTE AANSLAG OP DIE NASIONALE DIENSPLIGSTELSEL OOR DIE BOEG VAN MORELE EN GODSDIENSTIGE OORWEGINGS' (THE INTENSIFIED ONSLAUGHT ON

[1. A question that is often asked is whether the SADF applies any serious effort to oppose the systematic undermining of conscripts' morale such as anti-South-African organisations try to do. The answer is yes. There exists within the South African Defence Force an efficient directorate which continuously takes care that the level of the morale of own forces, also in the ideological area, gets the necessary attention...

4. The main aim is to make the Standing force, the Citizen Force and members of the Commandos as well as national conscripts feel positive towards the national aims of South Africa. Emphasis is placed on patriotism, resistance against hostile subversion, national self-rule for all domestic population groups, healthy relations amongst peoples, preparedness against Communism, belief in Christian values and willingness to make sacrifices....

8. Because the one foundation stone of the South African community and life-view is the Christian religion, the Directorate Command Information works closely together with the chaplains.]

This emphasis on "nurturing" the troops meant that access to troops was also carefully guarded by the military, even with respect to the request of a peer, Judge M. T. Steyn:

Kennis is geneem van u behoefte om 'n paar SA Weermaginstansies te besoek om vir uself te vergewis van die geestestoestand ("state of mind") van die godsdienstige beswaarder, maar ook dat sodanige besoeke eerder die uitsondering as die reel sal wees en dat u aktiwiteite normaalweg in Bloemfontein gesentreer sal wees. Besoeke aan die operasionele gebied was glad nie ter sprake nie en word ook nie as nodig vir die doeleindes van u Raad se aktiwiteite beskou nie.⁴⁸¹

[Cognisance has been taken of your desire to visit a few SA Defence Force institutions to acquaint yourself with the state of mind of the religious objector, but also that such visits will rather be the exception than the rule and that your activities will normally be centred in Bloemfontein. Visits to the operational area were not at all under discussion and are also not seen as necessary for the purposes of the activities of your Board.]

THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF COMPULSORY SERVICE UNDER THE PRETEXT OF MORAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS), 4 February 1980", p 7.

⁴⁸¹ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File MV 61/14, Period 30.3.71 - 29.8.83, "Letter from Magnus Malan to Judge Steyn, 9 April 1984", p 1.

Another method used by the military to counter the objector movement was to use all forms of media at their disposal to highlight the difficulties objectors found themselves in as a result of their decision:

Etlike RSA-dienspligweieraars bevind hulself tans in Brittanje onder besonder moeilike omstandighede. Probleme soos huisvesting, regte and voorregte, werkspermitte, vereensaming en vervreemding staar hulle in die gesig...

a. Binnelands

- i. Die SA TV moet genader word om 'n besprekingsprogram oor Dienspligweieraars aan te bied. Lede van die SAW moet deelneem.
- ii. 'n Gepaste artikel moet in Paratus, Uniform and Ad Astra geplaas word om toestande van RSA-dienspligweieraars in Brittanje uit te beeld en uit te buit.
- iii. Die RSA-pers moet genader word om artikels (moontlik redaksioneel) hieroor te plaas. Die klem moet gelê word op die swak vooruitsigte vir dienspligweieraars buite die RSA.

b. Buitelands

- i. Alhoewel nie afdwingbaar nie moet gepoog word om 'n negatiewe artikel geplaas te kry in koerante in Brittanje. Dit behoort direk gemik te wees teen dienspligweieraars en diegene wat hulle huisves. Hopelik sal artikels in ons lokale pers soortgelyke artikels in Brittanje se pers ontketen.⁴⁸²

[Several RSA objectors find themselves at present in Britain under particularly difficult circumstances. They are faced with problems such as housing, rights and privileges, work permits, loneliness and alienation.

a. Internally

- i. SA TV must be approached to produce a discussion programme on objectors. Members of the SADF must take part.
- ii. An appropriate article must be placed in Paratus, Uniform and Ad Astra to portray and exploit conditions of RSA objectors in Britain.
- iii. The RSA press must be approached to place articles (possibly editorial) on this. Emphasis must be placed on the poor prospects for objectors outside of the RSA.

b. Externally

⁴⁸² *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80 - 12.7.82, "KOMMUNIKASIE OPERASIES TOV DIENSPLOGWEIERAARS [COMMUNICATION OPERATIONS IN RESPECT OF THOSE REFUSING TO DO NATIONAL SERVICE], 30 November 1981".

- i Although this cannot be compelled, attempts must be made to get a negative article placed in papers in Britain. It must be aimed directly against objectors and those who house them. It is hoped that articles in our local press will result in similar articles in the British press.]

While all the measures taken by the government to stem the objector movement, particularly the legislative changes, may seem to indicate that the COSG was unsuccessful in getting objectors recognised and accommodated by government, it is important to remember that movements for change are processes and not events. In other words, they take time, and with each change urged by the movement, the ruling structure is bound to respond with a counter-move. What is interesting to note in the response of the South African government is that with each tightening of legislation, there was also a concession granted. Naturally the work of the movement was to focus more on that aspect of legislation that continued to limit or prohibit objection, and lobby to change that, but this must not detract from the fact that were it not for persistent resistance and lobbying efforts on the part of the movement, the government would have had no reason to make so many changes in legislation over a mere ten years. So, in fact, rather than highlighting failure, the above changes serve as a measure of the success of the movement in constantly and continuously agitating around the issues of conscription.

Having said this, we must also take cognisance of the fact that some political decisions were resounding victories for the movement; both in terms of the unmitigated concession granted, and the direct link the decision had to a resistance action. One of these victories was the government's recognition of conscientious objectors who did not come from the traditional "peace churches". Peter Moll's and Richard Steele's refusal to wear the brown army uniform in DB and be subject to military discipline and drill brought upon them the further punishment of spells in solitary confinement. After ten periods in solitary for Moll and five for Steele,⁴⁸³ the authorities eventually relented:

On the eighth of the eighth 1980 - I remember the date because it was so significant - the army gave in and said they could wear blue uniforms like the

⁴⁸³ Usually between ten and fourteen days in duration.

Jehovah's Witnesses, to distinguish them from other army defaulters. Magnus Malan made this decision with the Chaplain General and the Head of Detention Barracks.⁴⁸⁴

This was a significant compromise indeed; so much so, that the government felt a need to balance it with a word of warning:

The battle won by Peter Moll to be recognised as a conscientious objector after he had spent 118 days in solitary confinement is strictly an exception to the rule.....The (senior SADF) spokesman emphasised: "We still have our doubts concerning him and it was never a question of proving if he was sincere or not - we merely gave him that benefit." The spokesman said the SADF did not want to give anyone the impression that they could pose as conscientious objectors "and then - after simply spending some days in solitary confinement - receive official recognition. That is definitely not the case."⁴⁸⁵

And again in an admonitory tone, a Defence Force spokesperson highlights the distinction between objection on religious or political grounds in an article entitled, "Moll decision a strict exception, warns the SADF": "There is no such thing as political objection - not in a democratic country such as ours is."⁴⁸⁶

Clearly, there was internal confusion about how some of the early objectors, had been handled, as is apparent from this communication:

Generaal

1, Meegaande fotostaat van 'n koerant artikel in "The Chronicle" wat in Zimbabwe uitgegee word.

2. Die feit dat [Peter] Moll nou klaarblyklik erken dat hy nie 'n pasifis is nie wys daarop dat ons gefouteer het deur hom 'n gewetensbeswaarder te beskou en te erken.⁴⁸⁷

[General

1. Attached photocopy of a newspaper report in "The Chronicle" which is published in Zimbabwe

2. The fact that Moll now clearly acknowledges that he is not a pacifist indicates that we erred by viewing and recognising him as a conscientious objector.]

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Rob Robertson on 19 April 2005.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Sunday Express*, 16 August 1980.

⁴⁸⁶ *The Sunday Express*, 17 August 1980.

⁴⁸⁷ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 8.2.80, "Handwritten note from Chief of Staff Personnel Lt Gen R. A. Holtzhausen to General Magnus Malan, 12 December 1980".

Another victory for the movement was the Appeal Court decision to allow magistrates discretion in serving sentences on objectors, rather than having to impose the maximum six-year sentence; a victory because it was a direct consequence of Ivan Toms' stand:

You [Toms] were the first objector with a very high profile; your trial was used to raise a wide range of political issues...When you and David Bruce won your appeal, that then changed the law: it was no longer a mandatory one-and-a-half times' remaining service - the courts were given the discretion to impose lower sentences or even to suspend sentences.⁴⁸⁸

Other decisions were, however, not such clear successes for the movement. Nevertheless, these decisions did indicate that the government was trying hard to save face by accommodating the issue of objection, which was becoming embarrassingly problematic, without allowing their authority to be undermined or attacked through political objection. The most marked example of this was the 1983 Defence Amendment Act (see Chapter 3), prior to which there had clearly been a great deal of discomfort and debate within the military structures. In January 1981, in a secret briefing held by the Chairman of the Committee for Conscientious Objectors, and attended by twelve high-level Defence Force people (one General, three Lieutenant-Generals, two Major-Generals, one Vice-Admiral, two Rear-Admirals, one Colonel and two Commandants) , the following was proposed:

- a. Skeiding moet gemaak word tussen bona fide godsdiensbeswaardes en polities gemotiveerde beswaardes.
- b. Die term "gewetensbeswaarde" moet vervang word met "godsdiensbeswaarde".
- c. Besware moet primêr godsdiensbesware wees.
- d. Selektiewe gewetensbeswaardes wat primêr polities gemotiveer is moet fermer gehanteer word as in die verlede.
- e. Beswaardes moet op 'n individuele grondslag gehanteer word en nie volgens kerkverband nie.....⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ Comment by Mike Evans at the Cape Town focus group meeting, 20 May 2006.

⁴⁸⁹ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW 107/7/5 Gewetensbesware 8.2.80 - 12.07.82, "Top Secret document entitled 'DEFENCE COMMAND COUNCIL: MINUTES OF THE 1/81 MEETING HELD AT 16H00 ON 15 JAN 81

- a. Separation must be made between bona fide religious objectors and politically motivated objectors.
- b. The term "conscientious objector" must be replaced with "religious objector".
- c. Objections must be primarily religious objections.
- d. Selective conscientious objectors who are primarily politically motivated must be handled more firmly than in the past.
- e. Objectors must be handled on an individual basis and not according to church affiliation...]

The meeting then went on to discuss the sentence that bona fide religious objectors should be given:

In hierdie geval kan 'n alternatiewe vonnis opgelê word wat egter steeds moet dien as afskrikmiddel....Die tydperk van nie-militêre nasionale diensplig wat vir bona fide-godsdienbeswaardes opgelê word, van so 'n aard moet wees dat dit kompenseer vir die ontbering en lewensrisiko verbonde aan militêre diensplig sodat misbruik ontmoedig word. Die minimum tydperk moet minstens dubbel so lank as militêre diensplig wees.

[In this case an alternative sentence can be imposed which should, however, always serve as a deterrent... The period of non-military national compulsory service that is imposed on bona fide religious objectors must be of such a nature that it compensates for hardship and risk to life attached to military service so that abuse is discouraged. The minimum period must be at least twice as long as military service.]

As if pre-empting the dissatisfaction that was to be voiced by the objector movement with this sentence, the Assistant Chaplain-General expressed his uneasiness as follows:

Asst Kpln Genl wys daarop dat die komitee se beswaar teen H[oof] SAW se voorstel daarin lê dat die SAW beskuldig kan word van godsdienvervolging. H SAW verduidelik dat die persoon nie op grond van sy geloof aangekla word nie, maar wel omdat hy 'n landswet oortree.

[Asst Chaplain General pointed out that the objection of the committee to the proposal of Chief SADF rested on the fact that the SADF could be accused of religious persecution. Chief SADF explained that the person is not prosecuted on the grounds of his religion, but because he is breaking the law of the land.]

IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM, COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTRE, OPS DIV, DHQ', 22 January 1981", p 12ff.

A year later, the issue of conscientious objection was still being debated; this time with added emphasis on the pressure the churches were placing on the government:

1. Die owerheid word tans in toenemende mate deur kerke gekonfronteer met o.a. die kwessie van die sg gewetensbesware teen nasionale diensplig. Hierdie verset is geen unieke verskynsel in the wêreld nie. 'n Ontstellende aspek is egter dat die kwessie van gewetensbesware omskep word in 'n instrument van politieke weerstand teen die owerheid en dat die dryfkrag agter hierdie pogings om 'n sogenaamde onregverdigde gemeenskap te identifiseer en te verander van SA Kerke kom - die lidkerke van die SA Raad van Kerke.

2. Op hierdie wyse word die godsdiens misbruik as 'n dekmantel vir die politieke beswaar en word die "gewete" gebruik as 'n norm om beswaar te maak. Die betroubaarheid van hierdie norm sal ondersoek moet word en 'n herwaardering van die huidige regsposisie en administratiewe hantering van diegene wat die owerheid daarmee konfronteer het nodig geword.⁴⁹⁰

[1. The authorities are at present increasingly confronted by the churches with amongst others the question of so-called conscientious objection to national conscription. This resistance is not a unique phenomenon in the world. An alarming aspect is however that the question of conscientious objection is transformed into an instrument of political resistance to authority and that the drive behind these attempts to identify and change a so-called unjust society comes from the SA churches, the member churches of the SA Council of Churches.

2. In this way religion is abused as a cover for political objection and "conscience" is used as a norm to make objections. The reliability of this norm has to be investigated and re-evaluation of the present legal position and administrative handling of those who confront the authority with this has become necessary.]

Once a decision had been made regarding the legal position of objectors, and even before the proposed 1983 Act came into effect, it was obviously also decided to find a way of bringing awaiting-trial objectors under the same legislation:

⁴⁹⁰ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection, SANDF Documentation Centre, File Opleiding - Gewetensbesware 2.12.80 - 22.10.80, "Secret document entitled 'DIENSPLIGWEIERING AGV GEWETENSBESWARE, VERWYSING: KD/103/1/6', 9 Feb 1982", p 1.*

The Chief of the Defence Force, General Constand Viljoen, has decided to withdraw charges [two months before the Act was to come into effect] against all those awaiting trial for refusing or neglecting to undergo military training...."These persons will be called up again and, should they still refuse to undergo military training, will be charged in terms of the new legislation on religious objection".⁴⁹¹

The presumably hoped-for result of this was that by accommodating existing objectors under the new legislation the government would be saved further embarrassment in courts martial - and in publicity - that would highlight the inadequacies of its legislation. One objector who was very severely affected by this move was Brett Myrdal, who had his charge dropped 24 hours before he was due to appear at the Voortrekkerhoogte court martial, and who was clearly (by his previous statements) not a religious objector:

Whatever advantages the new system offered to religious objectors were therefore not available to him.⁴⁹² The last-minute ruling [to drop charges] 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 the 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.⁴⁹³

While it is questionable whether the government was indeed "victimising" Myrdal or being "vindictive" towards him, what is irrefutable is that Myrdal's anti-apartheid stance was clearly known and widely publicised, and hence it is reasonable to assume that the government wanted to prevent another political objection. In the light of this assessment of the impact of the resistance movement, however, this incident is a powerful example of the way in which the work of the COSG sufficiently challenged the state and hence evoked an expression of its power through a legislative response. On the individual level, Myrdal chose to leave the country at this point, highlighting the fact that no amount of coercive state power could change the stance of objectors who had made up their minds not to do military service.

⁴⁹¹ *The Cape Times*, 5 November 1983.

⁴⁹² Instead he would now be liable for a six-year prison sentence as opposed to the maximum two-year sentence hitherto imposed.

⁴⁹³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Objector - Newsletter of the Conscientious Objector Support Group 3, November 1983", p 1.

Another attempt by the government to wield its power and keep the levels of objection, in this case covert objection, as low as possible, was to address the issues of evasion and foreign citizenship by introducing the SA Army Non-effective Troops Section (to follow up on defaulters) and the 1984 Citizenship Amendment Act respectively (see Chapter 2), which required foreign passport holders to adopt South African citizenship or be denied permanent residence status. It would be extremely difficult to ascertain the extent to which these two measures compelled conscripts, *who would not otherwise have done so*, to serve in the military. What is known, however, is that:

South Africa experienced a net emigration rate for the first time in 1986. Since then more than 10 000 people have left the country each year. Academics and business leaders attributed the sudden increase largely to the pressure of conscription and the deployment of troops in the townships.⁴⁹⁴

Here once again is an example of the state using its power but with limited effectiveness.

With the 1992 Amendment Bill (see Chapter 3) the COSG (and other related anti-conscription movements) was faced with an urgent and formidable challenge. At first glance this Bill must have looked like a victory for the movement as it broadened the definition of an objector to include moral, ethical and religious objection; a legal acknowledgement for which the movement had been striving for so many years. On a closer reading, however, the Bill contained a number of very repressive clauses:⁴⁹⁵

- the maintenance and entrenchment of the system of whites-only conscription;
- the right to conscientious objection, *except in times of war*;
- a Board for Conscientious Objection to test the conscience of objectors;
- mandatory prison sentences for objectors;
- a long period of punitive civilian service;

⁴⁹⁴ Nathan, L., 1989, "Force of arms. Force of conscience - a study of militarization, the military and the anti-apartheid war resistance movement in South Africa 1970 - 1988", University of Bradford, p 44.

⁴⁹⁵ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "Memorandum from Cheadle Thompson and Haysom to Chris Hani (et al), 21 May 1992", p 1ff.

- the introduction of enforced enlistment in the S.A. Police through the use of the military draft system;
- an attempt to limit the discretion of magistrates and judges in the determination of sentences for objectors;
- increased fines for those who failed to report for call-up.

Needless to say, the COSG (and others⁴⁹⁶) made a submission to the Parliamentary Committee on Security Services in which they described this amendment as “a draconian piece of legislation”⁴⁹⁷ and challenged each of the provisions in turn as well as the legitimacy of bringing out an amendment at a time when all political stakeholders in the country were engaged in transitional negotiations towards democracy:

It constitutes unilateral action on the part of the Government;

It constitutes tinkering with a piece of racist legislation when such legislation should be abolished;...

It undermines the tentative agreements reached at CODESA to place the security forces and all decisions relating to them under multi-party interim control...⁴⁹⁸

This lobbying succeeded in having the most repressive clauses of the Bill removed before it became the 1992 Defence Amendment Act:

All mandatory sentences in the Bill have been removed...conscientious objection is now to be allowed during times of war and no conscripts may be allocated to the SAP without their consent.⁴⁹⁹

This was certainly a victory for organised nonviolent resistance, not only for the COSG but for all those who had stood together to oppose this legislation.

Of all the nonviolent resistance methods used by the COSG (see Chapter 4) to further its cause, the one which can be said to have been the most painful thorn in the government’s flesh was that of the use of the press. While Chapter 4 deals in some detail with this aspect of the COSG’s work, what is

⁴⁹⁶ Including the Religious Society of Friends, the ECC, the SACC, business groups, as well as the ANC who publically demanded the withdrawal of the Bill. (*Objector*, June 1992, p 6.)

⁴⁹⁷ “Representations to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Security Services re: Defence Amendment Bill, B 112-02 (GA), 7 June 1992”, in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

⁴⁹⁸ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, “Memorandum from Cheadle Thompson and Haysom to Chris Hani (et al), 21 May 1992”, p 3ff.

⁴⁹⁹ AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, “Letter from Cheadle Thompson and Haysom to Jacaranda Trust, 8 July 1992”, p 1ff.

worth adding here is that objectors, through the articulation of their stance in the media and through public pamphlets, were able to make some powerful anti-apartheid statements.⁵⁰⁰ And precisely because there was an organisation behind them that would further their cause, it was not easy for the government to silence them. But the government did try to use its power to prevent press reporting as far as possible. An early example of the government's apparent discomfort with press coverage is described by Charles Yeats:

[On my return to South Africa] I immediately wrote to the Exemption Board of the South African Defence Force to tell them that I was back.... I asked to be given a definite date for a trial if it was not possible to grant me an alternative. There had been no reply. I suspect that the silence was deliberate and was intended to make me lose my nerve or patience or both, in the hope that I would quietly leave the country, as I had done before, sparing the military the unwelcome publicity of a trial.⁵⁰¹

Proof of this fear of the coverage objection was receiving in the press is also apparent in military correspondence (notice here again the military's wish to avoid a conflict without losing authority):

Die gevalle wat onlangs voorgekom het van persone wat geweier het om militêre diens te verrig as gevolg van hulle persoonlike "godsdienstige"

⁵⁰⁰ One example is Peter Moll's statement; "Our land is one of vast inequalities - in wealth, in power and in education...This is a situation of fundamental injustice. Until it is the Government's express intention to remove it, I will be unable in conscience to defend it...Young men are being required increasingly to risk their lives under arms. Many, like myself, are already asking: *Just what are we fighting for? Just what are we being required to die for?* Are we going to die for a better society, for a more just society, perhaps even for a more loving society? Are we really defending the last bastion of Christianity, as we are so often told? Is this what we are defending really to be termed 'civilization'?" (Berat, L., 1989, "Conscientious objection in South Africa: Governmental paranoia and the law of conscription", in *Vanderbilt journal of transnational law* 22(1), p 128.)

Another example of this is Gary Rathbone's statement; "By serving in the SADF I feel that one is taking sides in a war being waged against fellow South Africans....As only white South African males are being conscripted, it is clear that the organisation still exists to serve and protect white interest only." ("Gary Rathbone - Conscientious objector on trial" pamphlet, in "COs in South Africa" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.)

Another example is Saul Batzofin's statement; "When I first went into the SADF in 1980 I had no moral objections to going. It was my experience in the SADF that made me question its role. The treatment of the local people in Ovamboland and of SWAPO members made me realise that the SADF was not there for the benefit of the local population." (AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, "Release conscientious objectors", p 3.)

Yet another is Douglas Torr's statement; "From a theological point of view, apartheid is a heresy. Because the SADF supports apartheid policy I can have nothing to do with it." (AL 2457, *SAHA Database Collection*, 6.4.6 - Pamphlets, "Release conscientious objectors", p 3.)

Also see Etienne Marais' statement in Chapter 3.

⁵⁰¹ Yeats, C., *Prisoner of conscience - one man's remarkable journey from repression to freedom*, 2005, Rider, London, p 23.

oortuigings, en wie se sake prominensie in die pers geniet het, is algemeen bekend. (Hier word verwys na die here Moll en Steele met jongste toevoeging ene Charles Yeats). Die vrees is nie ongegrond dat hierdie maar die sigbare gedeelte van 'n ysberg kan wees wat uiteindelik tot groot verleentheid vir die SAW en die Regering aanleiding kan gee indien dit toegelaat word om te eskaleer nie....Ten einde 'n dreigende konfrontasie te voorkom of 'n reedsbestaande een te ontloot, is al heelwat besin oor moontlike oplossings sonder om gesag te hoef in te boet of om die indruk te skep van kapitulasie onder druk.⁵⁰²

[The instances which happened recently of persons who refused to perform military service as a result of their personal "religious" conviction and whose cases received prominent attention in the press, are generally known. (Here reference is made to Messrs Moll and Steele with the latest addition one Charles Yeats). The fear is not unfounded that this could be but the visible part of an iceberg which could ultimately lead to great embarrassment for the SADF and the Government if it is allowed to escalate.... In order to prevent a threatening confrontation or to defuse an already existing one there has already been a lot of reflection on possible solutions without it being necessary to lose authority or to create the impression of capitulation under pressure.]

Another example was the case of Tam Alexander (see Chapter 4). And another occurred at the meeting between two senior SADF officials and representatives of the ECC on 15 June 1988: "(T)he SADF officers demanded that the ECC would not talk to the Press about the meeting, and that it cancel a scheduled Press conference."⁵⁰³

Of course, it was not only the written word in press articles that annoyed the government, but other publications prepared or used by the COSG, for example, the SACC "Counsellor's Resource Manual", which was used by COSG and CAS members to counsel conscripts. In an appeal to the Publications Appeal Board to have this manual declared prejudicial to the safety of the state, the Directorate of Publications states that this manual is:

⁵⁰² *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File HSAW/107/7/5 Deferment /Exemption of National Service: Religious Scruples, 14.6.79 - 11.10.82, "Letter from Lt Gen R.A. Holtzhausen to Direkteur-generaal: Justisie (Director-General: Justice)", 16 June 1981, p 1.

⁵⁰³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A2 - General, "Objectors worry the army", *The Sowetan*, 8 August 1988.

...undesirable within the meaning of section 47(2)(e) because, inter alia, it undermines the task and status of the Defence Force; and weakens and subverts the will of the country to oppose the violence and sabotage of terrorists with their revolutionary political documents.⁵⁰⁴

and goes on to note that:

It is clear that the compilers of the Manual were keenly aware of the Act's contents and the very substantial penalties attached to its violation. They have sought by a considerable amount of ingenuity and verbal sophistry not to fall foul of section 121(c) [of the 1974 Defence Act], but only the very naïve will not read into the Manual a strong support at all costs for conscientious objectors in the form in which it could be most damaging to the country and its Defence Force.⁵⁰⁵

The appeal of the Directorate of Publications to the Publications Appeal Board was rejected largely due to the *pro deo* representation of the COSG and the SACC, under whose auspices the Manual was developed, by Advocate Gilbert Marcus.⁵⁰⁶

Towards the latter years of the movement, a noticeable shift in power begins to appear between the movement and the state. A few examples are given below:

- "The Stands" (see Chapter 3), which used the tactic of group objection to counteract the power of the state as manifested in severe prison sentences. The interesting issue here is numbers; while a few hundred objectors cannot in any way be said to have threatened the strength of the SADF, nor to have reached the scale of a mutiny, a group of this size presented a far more formidable challenge than the individual objectors who had thus far made their stands. And the challenge was much greater than simply a logistical challenge of how to prosecute so many people at one time.

⁵⁰⁴ "Letter from the Directorate of Publications to the Publications Appeal Board, 21 March 1984", in "History - General Information" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 1.

⁵⁰⁵ "Letter from the Directorate of Publications to the Publications Appeal Board, 21 March 1984", in "History - General Information" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 4.

⁵⁰⁶ Written correspondence with Rob Robertson on 16 July 2007.

- Growing interest among conscripts and the public in objection issues, as apparent in the numbers of people attending Conscription Advice Service or other COSG events:

News:

Johannesburg: Successful CAS Information evening on 29 June with over 90 unknown conscripts.

Durban: Good public meeting on July 2 - over 200 people, mostly unknown. Popular Radio personality Martin McKail made good impression by stating publicly his refusal to serve.⁵⁰⁷

- Statements from key government players expressing a very different sentiment to the traditional heavy-handed stance towards objectors (although it must be understood that the statement by Justice Edeling below refers only to religious objectors):

Such people [those who are in favour of conscription or those who put up with it as a necessary evil] tend to regard religious objectors who are allowed to do "community service" instead of military service as "dienspligontduikers [dodgers of military service]" and are often regarded by them as second class citizens. This is not only unfortunate but completely unacceptable. In my view all people called upon to perform a continuous period of compulsory service in terms of the Defence Act whether of a military or alternative nature should be regarded as "National servicemen".⁵⁰⁸

Justice Edeling then went on to give his firm opinion on the length of community service, which was one-and-a-half times the length of military service, admitting the punitive nature of this "concession":

In any event I am of the opinion that the requirement of six years of continuous compulsory service to the State is simply too much to ask in virtually any circumstances. The concomitant delay of six years in the commencement of the religious objector's private career is in the

⁵⁰⁷ "Minutes of the COSG National meeting held in Durban on 4 July 1992", in "Minutes" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

⁵⁰⁸ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File 372 - Gleeson Committee, "Paper read by The Hon. Justice J.W. Edeling at the Centre for Intergroup Studies Workshop in Alternatives National Service, 30 October 1989", p 19.

overwhelming majority of cases simply not justifiable. It smacks of "punishment" rather than "service".⁵⁰⁹

- Pressure against the government to change legislation began to build up also from within government ranks, for example, the Bloemfontein Supreme Court Appellate Division judgement, extensively discussed in the *Toms* and *Bruce* cases, which ruled that the words, "liable for a six-year sentence," meant a maximum, not a mandatory six-year sentence. This, in effect, gave the courts the discretion to choose an appropriate sentence for each objector, which led to the early releases of Ivan Toms, David Bruce and Charles Bester.⁵¹⁰
- Expressions of opposition to conscription, both as a whites-only Defence Force and under a future non-racial dispensation, by major political players, namely, the ANC, Inkatha and the Democratic Party.⁵¹¹
- Growing international support for the objector movement in South Africa, which culminated with the case of Charles Bester:

[Bester's] imprisonment has raised massive international support. A petition signed by 59 000 people calling for the release of Charles was handed in to British Parliament this year.⁵¹²

Other examples of this shift in power, indicating significant gains for the objector movement, are:

- the surprisingly lenient sentence⁵¹³ given to Michael Graaf, despite the fact that, at his trial, he testified about SADF activities in Namibia;

⁵⁰⁹ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File 372 - Gleeson Committee, "Paper read by The Hon. Justice J.W. Edeling at the Centre for Intergroup Studies Workshop in Alternatives National Service, 30 October 1989", p 22.

⁵¹⁰ "Representations to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Security Services re: Defence Amendment Bill, B 112-02 (GA), June 7 1992", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

⁵¹¹ *Objector*, September 1991, p 2.

⁵¹² AG 1977, *End Conscription Campaign*, Historical Papers UWL, H 9.6 - ECC, "The objector movement - lessons from the 80's", p 3.

⁵¹³ Michael Graaf was sentenced to one year in prison, suspended for four years on condition that he performed 400 hours of community service, (*Objector*, November/December 1990, p 1.) He was the first convicted conscientious objector to receive a suspended sentence. (*Objector*, February/March 1991, p 4.) This last fact cannot be held to be conclusively true, however, as there seems to have been a prior case of a Jehovah's Witness objector who faced a six-year sentence. He was defended by Edwin Cameron who succeeded in getting part of his sentence suspended. This case was not reported on in the press. (Written correspondence with Rob Robertson on 16 July 2007.)

- the setting aside of Douglas Torr's jail sentence for five years on condition that he performed 800 hours of community service;⁵¹⁴
- the postponement of Alan Storey's trial,⁵¹⁵ only to be followed by the dropping of charges against him and against businessman Walter Rontsch for refusing to do a camp;⁵¹⁶
- the massive disregard of call-ups and the government's apparent unwillingness to prosecute; "The Minister of Defence admitted that only 8% of 'national servicemen' and 6,3% of campers failing to report were prosecuted last year."⁵¹⁷

This phenomenon of ineffectual enforcement on the part of the government of what had hitherto been deemed a highly reprehensible act is borne out by research done on the relationship between compliance to the laws of the ruling authority and enforcement of these laws. Sharp writes:

Compliance and enforcement...reinforce each other: the stronger the compliance pattern, the more effective the enforcement (and conversely). Also the weaker the compliance pattern, the less effective the enforcement (and conversely).⁵¹⁸

One objector who was followed up on reported on this half-hearted attempt:

In 1991/92 the Military Police came to my father's house looking for me and my father said to them that his son wasn't going to serve in the army until there was a democratically elected government in this country. They meekly accepted what he said and left.⁵¹⁹

Indeed, here were relevant examples of compliance patterns to serving in the SADF weakening and enforcement growing concomitantly less effective.

Then in 1990, a few months before the Gleeson Committee wrote its report (see Chapter 3), a military report labelled "Secret" was sent to Lt Gen J.P.B. van Loggerenberg by Gen Major P.D. Steyn detailing all the

⁵¹⁴ *Objector*, June 1991, p 1.

⁵¹⁵ *Objector*, June 1991, p 2.

⁵¹⁶ *Objector*, September 1991, p 1.

⁵¹⁷ *Objector*, November 1992, p 6.

⁵¹⁸ Sharp, G., 1973, *The politics of nonviolent action*, Boston MA, Porter Sargent, ch. 1, p 15.

⁵¹⁹ Interview with Steve Lowry, 4 May 2006.

recommendations for which the COSG and ECC had campaigned over the years:

In die kort termyn word aanbeveel dat:

- a. Alternatiewe diensplig (in die vorm van gemeenskapsdiens) uitgebrei word om alle gewetensbesware te akkommodeer, en nie net sekere kategorieë van godsdiensbeswaardes nie.
- b. Die Departement van Mannekrag die volle verantwoordelikheid aanvaar om alternatiewe diensplig te beheer en te administreer.
- c. Die lengte van alternatiewe diens, sowel as die straf vir algehele dienspligweiering, in direkte verband tot die werklike lengte van militêre diensplig gebring word. In hierdie opsig moet die wet diskresionêre optrede aan regters oorlaat, in teenstelling met wat die geval vandag is. 'n Minimum tydperk van twee jaar kan egter gestel word...

In die medium / lang termyn word aanbeveel dat:

- a. Militêre diensplig vir Blankes uitgefaseer word.
- b. 'n Voltydse professionele Weermag die kern vorm van die land se verdedigingsmag, en dat 'n buigsame, kortdiensstelsel as aanvullende bron van mannekrag, beide vir voltydse en deeltydse mannekrag bedryf word....⁵²⁰

[In the short term it is recommended that:

- a. Alternative compulsory service (in the form of community service) is expanded to accommodate all conscientious objection and not only certain categories of religious objectors.
- b. The Department of Manpower takes full responsibility to control and administer alternative compulsory service.
- c. The length of alternative service as well as the punishment for total refusal of conscription is brought into direct relationship with the real length of military conscription. In this respect the law must leave discretionary action to the judge, in contrast with what is the case today. A minimum period of time of two years could however be introduced..

In the medium /long term it is recommended that:

⁵²⁰ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File 374 - Gleeson Committee, "Report from Generaal Majoor P.D. Steyn (Voorsitter: Sub-Komitee oor Dienspligaangeleenthede), 30 March 1990 to Lt Gen J.P.B. van Loggerenberg, SA Lugmaghoofkwartier (Major General P.D. Steyn (Chairman: Subcommittee on Conscription Affairs) 30 March 1999 to Lt Gen J.P. van Loggerenberg, S.A. Air Force Headquarters)", p 17.

- a. Military conscription for Whites is phased out.
- b. A full time professional Defence Force forms the nucleus of the country's defence force and that a flexible short service system is operated as supplementary source of manpower both for part-time and full-time manpower.]

It is not known what the immediate effect of this report was, but what is known is that the Gleeson Committee presented a progressive and hard-hitting report shortly afterwards.⁵²¹

There was general agreement that at the least universal conscientious objection should be introduced and that some form of accommodation for selective objectors should be considered. Opinions also included the following:

- a. The SADF manpower requirements in the short term will not decrease, which act could negate the value of any solution perceived to be too lenient.
- b. Notwithstanding the manpower requirements, forcing someone to serve against his genuine conscience, makes him more of a liability than an asset.
- c. Limiting the discretion of the courts is not acceptable.
- d. To be in line with the present democratic processes, the SADF should act pro-actively.
- e. Conscientious objectors create more problems than their numbers justify. Their release, for the performance of community service outside the SADF, would be more beneficial....

As already stated the success of option 5 [legalizing conscientious objection and amending the penal provisions] is dependent on ongoing actions that address the most urgent problems and perceptions relating to National Service. This programme should commence as soon as possible and the following are some of the subjects that should be included:

- a. Clarity wrt the extension of conscription to other races.
- b. Details iro the multi-racial nature of the SADF, the expansion of the volunteer component and future plans in this regard.
- c. A true perspective of the role of the SADF in the black townships.

⁵²¹ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File 101/9/B, "Memorandum from Lt Gen I.R. Gleeson (Chairman Committee of Investigation) to Chief of the SA Defence Force, 30 July 1991", p 8ff.

In the light of the present discussion on the shift of power and the government's last desperate attempts to cling to what remained of their authority, it is extremely interesting to note that the report of the Gleeson Committee - a significant example of how the resistance and dialogue efforts of the COSG and the ECC had educated State/SADF officials - was never published.⁵²²

Ultimately, however, it was the power of the individual to make choices that was the most effective opposition to the power of the authorities. Lest we forget that the objector movement was conceived, driven and sustained by individuals, it is incumbent upon us to examine a few of the nonviolent responses between individuals and how these illustrate a different perspective on challenging power with power. Richard Steele recalled:

The sergeant major might come up and, standing two inches from my face and speaking in a parade ground shout, order me to wear the [army] uniform. And then I would respond, quite gently and simply, "No, sergeant major, I do not wish to wear this uniform. It is against my principles for the following reasons..." I purposely dropped my voice and did not exhibit anger back towards him.

It took him completely off balance.⁵²³

Indeed it was often in this interaction between a person with rank and an objector in Detention Barracks, in this case Charles Yeats, that the struggle for recognition was at its most intense:

On the third day [in DB] I was paid a visit by the Director of Military Law, Brigadier C. J. Pretorius, who informed me that, as soon as my sentence was confirmed, I would be ordered to wear military uniform and, should I refuse, my civilian clothes would be forcibly removed. Then he added chillingly, "In Ireland they are dying of hunger and here they can die of the cold. Like Bobby Sands, it's your choice."⁵²⁴

⁵²² "Representations to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Security Services re: Defence Amendment Bill, B 112-02 (GA), June 7 1992", in Andrew Warmback personal archives.

⁵²³ "A conversation with Richard Steele, pamphlet, printed by the Fellowship of Reconciliation", in "C.O.'s in South Africa" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

⁵²⁴ Yeats, C., *Prisoner of conscience - one man's remarkable journey from repression to freedom*, 2005, Rider, London, p 86.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that Brigadier Pretorius was called to account for his statement and gave the following explanation:

"Die verklaring, soos bewoord, gee nie die korrekte trant van my gesprek met Majoor Krige weer nie. Waar dit gegaan het oor die regulasies wat hy moet toepas, was my verwysing na

Another objector, Donn Edwards, reflected:

I also realised nobody can force you to do anything - you can always choose; they can make the choices really difficult, but you make the choices. This realisation has helped me innumerable times since then, for example, when I land up in situations where I feel compelled to act in a certain way, I remind myself that there are choices and that I am responsible for my own behaviour.⁵²⁵

Whether it was a choice to object by leaving the country, by avoidance, by doing alternative service or by serving a prison sentence, it is a choice that undoubtedly caused each objector untold anxiety, doubt and fear. Once made, however, it was a decision that could not be overturned.

Mev Thatcher, Eerste Minister van Engeland, se houding en uitlatings oor die hongerstakers in Noord-Ierland, naamlik dat wat hulle ook al bereid is om hulle self aan te doen, sy nie van haar standpunt kan afwyk dat 'crime is crime is crime' nie. My houding was derhalwe dat, net soos wat die hongerstakers nie gedwing kon word om te eet nie, ek van mening was dat die applikant en persone soos hy, as hulle nie self die voorgeskrewe oorpakke wat voorsien is aantrek nie, die gevolge daarvan moet dra. [The explanation, as it is worded, does not give the correct gist of my conversation with Major Krige. Where it concerned regulations that he (Yeats) must adhere to, was my reference to the Prime Minister of England, Mrs. Thatcher's attitude and statements about the hunger-strikers in Northern Ireland, namely that whatever they are prepared to do to themselves, she cannot deviate from her stance that 'crime is crime is crime'. My attitude, therefore was that, just as the hunger-strikers cannot be forced to eat, I was of the opinion that the applicant and people like him must bear the consequences if they do not want to wear the prescribed overalls that are provided.]" (*Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, File Opleiding - Gewetensbesware 2.12.80 - 22.10. 80, "Memorandum from Chief of Staff Personnel Lt Gen R.A. Holtzhausen, to the Minister, entitled 'DAGVAARDING: CHARLES YEATS VS DIE MINISTER VAN VERDEDIGING EN TWEE ANDER' (SUMMONS: CHARLES YEATS VS THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND TWO OTHERS), 31 July 1981", p 1.

⁵²⁵ Interview with Donn Edwards, 21 February 2006.

Chapter 6 - Self-evaluation

*We have rescued it
[opportunities to act properly, potentialities to fulfil a meaning]
into the past wherein it has been safely delivered and deposited.
In the past, nothing is irretrievably lost, but rather, on the contrary,
everything is irrevocably stored and treasured.
To be sure, people tend to see only the stubble fields of transitoriness
but overlook and forget the full granaries of the past
into which they have brought the harvest of their lives:
the deeds done, the loves loved, and last but not least,
the sufferings they have gone through with courage and dignity.*
Victor Frankel⁵²⁶

One of the major themes of the focus group meetings and personal interviews was that of evaluating the success of the movement. In fact, participants in these gatherings often expressed gratitude at having a retrospective and collective opportunity to reflect on the impact of the movement and on the relationships they had built at that time, as this is something which they had never had the chance to do. This chapter, therefore, reveals the reflections of how individuals were affected by the work of the COSG, and how these same individuals appraised the impact of the work of the movement on South African society at the time. In examining these reflections, one must remain cognisant of the fact that they are given by individuals whom the researcher was able to contact, namely people who were the most active in the COSG and also those who received the most help from the movement. Others who may have been disappointed by the COSG, failing to receive its support for any reason, or disappointed by the CAS in receiving advice that did not help, may not have come forward or even been contactable.

On an individual level, it was undoubtedly the personal and group support given by the COSG and the individual support groups that had the greatest impact on objectors. This applied equally to the decision-making stage of the objection and to the subsequent facing of the consequences of this decision. While attempts have been made in previous chapters to show the extremely

⁵²⁶ Frankel, V., 1984, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Washington Square Press, New York, p 175.

repressive political and social climate of the time that made objection an enormously difficult choice, it is worthwhile here to revisit this dilemma, as stated by the objectors themselves. The need for objectors, particularly during their decision-making stage, to share the anxiety of their situation, is obvious from letters such as the following:

...So I am now living on borrowed time⁵²⁷ - from day to day feeling very tense - I am having difficulty in coping with the "not-knowing" what is going to happen and when....Please pray for me that I remain calm in my trial and do not provoke or antagonise the tribunal. This is not my intention...Each time I think about the trial or talk about it I get in touch with a lot of fear of the consequences etc. I am very afraid yet I know it is the right decision for me and deep down I can feel my calmness which reaffirms my decision...What really is scaring me is that my evidence and defense, while firmly based on my Christian beliefs, is largely political and according to an advocate they could possibly charge me under the Treason Act or Internal Security Act,⁵²⁸ because they are so broad and vague and my position opens the way for secular conscientious objections with no religious beliefs.⁵²⁹

This was from an objector who had not served any time in the military, but it must be remembered that many who made the decision to object did so *after* having experienced a certain period of military service. In cases like this making a decision to object was compounded by the anguish and trauma of having first-hand experience of the SADF:

If I had gone back for camps I could not have forgiven myself; I was much clearer in my conscience after refusing because this was almost a justification for the two years I had spent there - I needed for my own soul to object to what I had seen in Namibia.⁵³⁰

It is not difficult in cases like this to see why it was so important to have someone to whom one could talk and unburden some of the intolerable memories, doubts, confusions, anger and fear that were being carried:

⁵²⁷ This letter was written two weeks after Billy Paddock received communication from the Defence Force, stating that he would be liable for prosecution if he did not comply with his call-up instructions. As Paddock stated in this letter, he had also been asked to resign from his job, after the military police visited him at work; the Chairman of the Group of companies for which he worked, Barlow Rand, was on the advisory board of the Ministry of Defence.

⁵²⁸ This letter was written before the 1983 Defence Amendment Act, which penalised political objectors with a six-year jail sentence, but did not prosecute them under the Treason Act or the Internal Security Act.

⁵²⁹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B8 - Paddock, "Letter written by Billy Paddock to unknown recipient on 22 July 1982", p 1 and 2.

⁵³⁰ Interview with Patrick Vorster, 23 March 2006.

Through all the support from Loek [Goemans] a friendship developed and we used to go for walks on the beach and talk about things.⁵³¹

Many objectors spoke about this time in their lives as being crazy, turbulent, intense, "living on the edge",⁵³² times filled with inner turmoil, and it must have been at moments like these that a little sanity and peace shone through.

Added to the factors making such a decision unbearably difficult was the fact that probably one's entire circle of support - home, friends and community - expected young men to do military service:

There was huge pressure to serve; pressure of the law, moral pressure, peer pressure and parent pressure to uphold the law. Even white Catholics let you know that their sons were sacrificing their lives and you were being selfish by refusing to serve. Within Church structures too you wondered if you weren't being trouble; even though the statement [that churches should encourage their members to think about conscription] was made, it was a different thing implementing it. So even though I was far out in rural Free State, Rob [Robertson] still supported me and this was enormously meaningful to me, in terms of saying you're not mad, you're not crazy, it's OK to be doing this.⁵³³

If in the unlikely event that family members did support the stand of their son, it was these family members who were then rejected and ostracised by their own communities:

[The mother of Richard Steele, Dorothy wrote that] (w)ithin the four simple walls of St Antony's, with its creaking floor and hard wooden benches, I found a place where I could stand and walk "upright" in a "normal" encounter with a wide spectrum of interesting and loving people...There was a time when only at St Antony's could my late husband John and I feel confident that people really understood why our son Richard was in a military prison....During the year of Richard's incarceration in Detention barracks in 1980, St Antony's provided an environment of support and approval not to be found in our conventional church family;⁵³⁴

or who, perhaps only much later, realised the extent of the turmoil within them:

⁵³¹ Interview with Patrick Vorster, 23 March 2006.

⁵³² Comment by Anton Eberhard at the Cape Town focus group meeting, 20 May 2006.

⁵³³ Interview with Steve Brislin, 28 April 2006.

⁵³⁴ Robertson, R, 1999, *St Antony's activists*, Salty Print, Cape Town, p 63.

I realise, with hindsight, that over the perhaps twenty-four months from Charlie's refusal to his release, I was probably somewhat unhinged. Tony [my husband] held together better than I did. I realise I developed two coping mechanisms: the one was anger. Such a terrible primordial rage overtook me because the government had taken my baby cub and locked him away for being a caring and loving person, who did not want to inflict injury on anyone. I couldn't at that time enjoy a novel or a lighthearted film or watch a comedy - my literary diet was heavy political reading which fuelled my anger. The second mechanism was laughter - finding something funny in all the bizarre and idiotic situations Charlie and we found ourselves in.⁵³⁵

More often than not, however, the attitude of family members towards a son's decision to object was harsh and punitive, often causing a severe break-down in family relationships:

The anguish this response [emigrating rather than serving] may involve should not be underestimated. The fracturing of family relationship is sometimes not only physical. For example in 1988 33-year old computer expert Tammis Alexander went into exile rather than serve in the SADF. He received a hostile and public rebuke from his father.

"I totally disassociate myself from his action; it was uncalled for and not the slightest bit patriotic. I'm very disappointed in him and ashamed of his action. What is wrong is wrong...Military service may not be pleasant but it's a duty and the law of the land. What would happen if everybody did what he did? We'd be in a real mess."
(Quoted in the Sunday Star, 30 October 1988)⁵³⁶

And below one more example of the huge impact of losing the support of family members:

My mother has called me a communist. My brother says the army makes you a man...and visitors' children usually tell me with sagacious judgement that I'm "scared of the terrorists"...Perhaps...it may be easier to take up arms.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵ Email correspondence with Judy Bester, mother of Charles Bester on 10 June 2007.

⁵³⁶ *Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection*, SANDF Documentation Centre, "Centre for Intergroup Studies - Workshop on Alternative National Service, 30 - 31 October 1989, Session 2 - An overview of responses to conscription by Dr Jacklyn Cock", p 47.

⁵³⁷ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A1 - War Resistance, "The call-up debate," *The Sunday Express* (letters page), 9 May 1982, p 10.

Finally, as if the scorn of family members and friends was not sufficient in making the decision to object almost impossible, it must be remembered that the young man contemplating objection was also faced with the regular expression of these sentiments in the press:

Geagte Generaal

...Hier in ons land is baie wat wel die Verdedigingswet se vereistes nakom. Maar daar is ook baie wat dit nie doen nie. Hulle besware, deur hulle kerk of kerke, wil nie hê hulle moet aan 'n geweer vat nie.

Nou hierdie is 'n baie ernstige aangeleentheid. As ons land aangeval word. Is hierdie soort burger 'n baie groot bedreiging vir ons land. (*punctuation as such*).

Wyle Generaal Smuts het met vrywilligers sy deelname aan die oorlog gedoen, maar toe was ons in die Statebond met Brittanje.

Nou staan ons alleen en ons het elke burger nodig. Daardie gewetensbesware burger kan jy net beskou as vyand van ons land...

Dink aan die seuns, wat op die grens sterf en die gesukkel wat hulle het met hul terugkoms om werk te kry.

Terwyl die gewetensbesware op militêre basisse gebruik word om blomme nat te gooi, ensovoorts.

Ek vra u graag om asseblief die Verdedigingswet soos volg to wysig:

AS ENIGE BURGER WEIER OM SY LAND TE DIEN, MOET DIT HOOGVERRAAD BETEKEN MET GEEN VERSAGTING NIE.....

Vandag is ek al 'n ou man en as ons land aangeval word, rapporteer ek vir diens.⁵³⁸

[Dear General,

...Here in our country there are many who do comply with the demands of the Defence law, but there are also many who do not. Their objections, through their church or churches, do not allow them to touch a gun.

Now this is a very serious matter. If our country is attacked. This kind of citizen is a great threat to our country. (sic)

The late General Smuts took part in the war with volunteers, but then we were in the Commonwealth with Britain.

Now we stand alone and we need each citizen. You can only regard that conscientious objector citizen as an enemy of our country.

⁵³⁸ Hoof Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag Collection, SANDF Documentation Centre, File No. 2.12.80 - 22.10. 80, "Letter from M. C. van Greune to Minister of Defence Magnus Malan, 9 March 1982".

Think of the boys who die on the border and the struggle they have on their return to find work.

While the conscientious objectors are used to water flowers etc. on military bases.

I would like to ask you please to amend the Defence law as follows:

IF ANY CITIZEN REFUSES TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY, IT MUST WITHOUT MITIGATION BE TAKEN TO MEAN HIGH TREASON....

Today I am an old man and if our country were attacked I would report for service.]

It is no wonder, then, that the solidarity of like-minded friends and activists, who understood the stance of objection often because they themselves had objected, meant so much, and indeed made objection a reality in some cases:

On the completion of my second course of study, I was again called up to render service. I again gave notice to the Exemption Board that I intended objecting and proposed a non-military form of national service. This it declined to consider.

At this point all resolve to accept the consequences of conscientious objection left me.

My mistake was not to have confided my convictions to fellow Christians. Instead I attempted to make a stand alone. This is fatal to the Christian who relies for his spiritual strength on the body of Christ.⁵³⁹

There are too many statements bearing testimony to the invaluable support given by the COSG and by individual support groups to be shared here. But a few must be mentioned as evidence of the depth of gratitude held in the hearts of all objectors and those who were closest to them:

While in Detention Barracks - with unlimited letters allowed - people's support made an incredible difference. In prison, just knowing that people are thinking of you helps; each letter one receives is important. On coming out of prison, the personal support received from family, friends and COSG helps a lot.⁵⁴⁰

And

Dear Friends

⁵³⁹ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, B3 - Yeats, "Why I am a conscientious objector to war - Testimony, Charles Yeats, Easter 1980".

⁵⁴⁰ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "Objector - Newsletter of the Conscientious Objector Support Group 2, April 1984", p 1.

I want this to be a note of thanks to all those many people who have stood by me so steadfastly for the time of my call-up, trial and imprisonment. I value your support immensely, in whatever form: resolutions, visits, gifts, thoughts, prayers.⁵⁴¹

The value of this support was explained by this same objector's parents:

That contact [letters, cards, telegrams] with people who understand, meant so much to him. There has been much misunderstanding here, even among dedicated Christians.⁵⁴²

And yet another expression of gratitude, with the added dimension of the impact of this support on the military authorities:

Dear Friends

It is marvellous to be home, to be in a warm, accepting environment once again. Thank you all for your concern and faithful support for me and my family while I was in Detention Barracks. Hardly a day would go by without there being some card or letter for me in the post - all in all I received over 1 400 pieces of mail during my twelve month stay. Besides the enrichment your letters and cards (I liked them especially because of the pictures) brought me, I am sure they were also a great witness for peace to those military authorities who read them all first.⁵⁴³

One objector,⁵⁴⁴ Charles Bester, spoke extensively of the tasks the support group assisted him with, which he admits would have been "too onerous" for him to handle at the time, including:

- finding him a lawyer;
- finding funding for legal fees;
- giving him reading material to prepare him, among other things, for prison;
- making him sit down and write his statement; "It was a great relief to see it on paper and acknowledge it as 'my view'";
- translating his statement into Afrikaans;;
- getting posters printed and working on press releases;
- organising a speaking campaign around the country;

⁵⁴¹ *Diakonia News*, February 1980, "Letter from Peter Moll", p 11.

⁵⁴² BC 1027, *Conscription Advice Service Papers*, UCT Libraries, C 2.2.1 - Why I am a selective conscientious objector, "Letter from the Moll family to friends, December 1978.

⁵⁴³ "Letter from Richard Steele to friends, 17 May 1981", in Richard Steele personal archives.

⁵⁴⁴ This paragraph taken from email correspondence with Charles Bester on 13 May 2007.

- organising for him to meet other objectors,⁵⁴⁵ some of whom were in prison;
- not forgetting him when he was in prison, for example by sending him cards, by organising vigils and pickets and writing newspaper articles, which inevitably found their way to him in prison;
- arranging for the group to remember and think of one another at a specific time each week;
- arranging for him to see a counsellor after his release;⁵⁴⁶
- providing him with something to do after his release.

In addition to all of these, he went on to explain what the emotional support of the group meant to him and his family:

...their presence lent a reality to a situation which was in certain respects distant and unreal. Call-up, trial, arrest, prison....had a vagueness to me. The reality the support group lent was that here were individuals interested in the same issue in a vital way...That affirmation was huge. And it bolstered my confidence about the route I had chosen...Emotionally, the Support Group was very good at keeping me somehow connected to the present. I was encouraged to take on a part-time job as volunteer at Scripture Union at once to show that conscripts would do an alternate service which was viable, but also maybe they knew that I needed to keep occupied in the uncertain period leading to trial. My parents, too, found huge comfort in the Support Group. No longer did they feel as isolated as they had done, but could see that I was part of something bigger;

and to express his deep gratitude for the people who stood by him through his ordeal:

I imagine in some ways being a member of a Support Group is a thankless task - you put yourself at the disposal of another, you enter the lives of a family under huge pressure, you open yourself to the charge that you are manipulating others (i.e. a young impressionable conscript) for your own ends, you put yourself under scrutiny of the security forces (who rightly see you as undermining conscription), and then the kudos for "brave stand" goes to the objector.

⁵⁴⁵ Among others, Charles Bester met Neil Mitchell, who invited him to speak to his class at Jeppe Boys High School.

⁵⁴⁶ Charles Bester, however, never took up this offer and feels that it is something, which each objector should be strongly encouraged to do; "...the guy in the chair might be able to help him understand why he is battling to make...everyday choices."

Looking back I am amazingly grateful to my support group in particular, and to COSG and ECC in general for all they did for me. Facing prison and then enduring it is not easy, but there was always a great deal of fun about all the people I encountered through COSG and ECC. Politics was grave because our country's plight was tragic, but there was always humour. They are each wholehearted individuals. I was fortunate to have such friends. I was privileged to be a part of such a movement.

Another objector, Brenda Moran, spoke of how the support his mother received meant as much to him as to his mother:

The greatest source of comfort to me was the support and the solidarity that my mother got from other older women, like Patty [Geerdts] and Ann Colvin, because my mother was struggling with this and it was important for her to get support from people her own age rather than just from Richard [Steele] and other young people.⁵⁴⁷

Often it was not only the objector himself, but those closest to him who bore the brunt of the emotional strain of conscription and who were equally as grateful for support and understanding received. Below is an account of support, as experienced by the wife of an objector, given to her husband who had undergone basic training in 1970, followed by a number of camps, then many hours of duty in army headquarters as a result of his refusal to wear army uniform or carry a weapon and at last an attempt to gain exemption from further military duty:

We collected the letter from the psychiatrist's office in Pietermaritzburg, and drove to the Natal Command headquarters on the Durban beachfront. While I waited in the car [name] went to deliver the letter to the adjutant. When he returned he was as white as a sheet and visibly shaking. "They told me there was nothing in the envelope," he said in a strangled voice.

Shortly afterwards, [name] applied for a job in Johannesburg, and we moved there early in 1981, hoping to make a new start. However, soon after we moved there, [name] received a call-up letter from Witwatersrand Command. He was absolutely adamant that he would never again wear an army uniform or carry a gun. I had joined POWA (People Opposing Woman Abuse), and someone there mentioned a Presbyterian minister called Rob Robertson, who

⁵⁴⁷ Comment by Brendan Moran at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

helped people who were objecting to military service on religious grounds, and that perhaps he would be able to advise us.

We went to visit Rev. Robertson in his house in Mayfair. I will never forget the warmth and comfort of his home and his welcome. He chatted with us for awhile...Having listened to [name's] story, he told us that he would arrange a meeting with Major Smith [a woman] at Witwatersrand Command, who had been very helpful in similar cases. We came away feeling comforted, and that there was a chance that at last something could be done for [name].⁵⁴⁸

It was often the mothers though who suffered most intensely and even for them, the COSG seemed to find a way of reaching out in compassion:

During the months leading up to Charlie's trial we met regularly, and the plans and strategies that were made were, in many ways, less important than what was happening on the human level. Very soon strangers became congenial acquaintances, and shortly thereafter firm friends. This close and supportive relationship never wavered and became ever more marked at the time of Charlie's trial and in the immediate aftermath. In those terrible days after sentence had been passed, and the reality of Charlie's punishment had begun to sink in, we were on the receiving end of such immeasurable kindness, sensitivity and generosity that it is hard to describe and this continued for the duration of his imprisonment up to his release...Despite the depressing and sometimes frightening realities that surrounded us, and the serious nature of COSG's mission, we often had loads of fun and much laughter. We shared meals, we wept, we laughed, we strategised to keep the profile of the CO's high, we visited them in jail, we were held up at gun point by security police, we experienced highs and lows, we defied the government - and we did it together. We were never alone. Scott Peck⁵⁴⁹ in one of his books, I don't remember which, describes the rare phenomenon of achieving "community", where all the members of the said community are in harmony and united in purpose. The only time I have experienced that is within COSG.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Email correspondence with a contributor who wishes to remain anonymous on 6 May 2007. This objector was subsequently exempted from the army due to the intervention of Major Smith.

⁵⁴⁹ Peck, S., 1988, *The different drum - the creation of true community; the first step to world peace*, Rider, Great Britain.

⁵⁵⁰ Email correspondence with Judy Bester, mother of Charles Bester on 10 June 2007.

In fact, any kind of support, even when it came from a constituency far removed from the COSG, and when it was not entirely successful, meant a great deal:

I got a lot of support from my [black] parish but there was also tremendous fear among them; many of my parishioners wanted to come to the [Board] hearing but the driver pulled out at the last minute.⁵⁵¹

Chapter 4 has spoken of the fundamental principle of nonviolence underpinning all the work of the COSG, but nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the testimony of the youngest objector to be given the maximum six-year jail sentence at the time, Charles Bester:

The reality the support group lent was that here were individuals interested in the same issue in a vital way. Conscription was a vital issue to them. What I was doing was important to them. And with that reality a great sense of solidarity. Even with mentors and confidantes and a strong family - all of which I had - a lot of time is spent by each objector thinking alone about his call-up. It was a great relief for me to find myself in a group of like-minded people. That affirmation was huge. And it bolstered my confidence about the route I had chosen.

Maybe the most impressive aspect of COSG was that they never hijacked my objection. Here I was, an eighteen year old with specific religious and political views, in the company of people whose knowledge of South Africa politics in general and the military in particular was far greater than mine. And yet my views were held to be important - and in as much as it was me who was objecting - to be respected. Not everyone in the group necessarily shared my Christian reasoning, but they never discouraged my motives. In their efforts to support me, and my objection, they made subordinate their own views. Looking back, that required a great deal of humility. It also required trust on their part. As a Conscientious Objector Support Group, they really were interested in my conscience. That is a great compliment, because the temptation must have been there many times to try to dictate matters. But COSG never tried to dissuade me, nor did they push me forward as a campaign piece. Instead they held me up and sustained me.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ Interview with Steve Brislin, 28 April 2006.

⁵⁵² Email correspondence with Charles Bester on 13 May 2007.

In a self-assessment of their campaign activities,⁵⁵³ Charles' support group noted that they had been extremely successful in certain aspects and not as good in others:

- they noted the availability of ECC members, which had been a great help in setting up the support group;
- Charles' speaking tour had been a success in that it had made good contact with student and campus constituencies, but it had not sufficiently succeeded in connecting with churches and church leaders;
- the vigil service had been prepared and carried out in a manner authentic to Charles and his family;
- the logo on the posters (a dove flying out between bars that were pulled apart by hands from within) was considered to be imaginative and appealing, but the slogan ("Christ's Way: Yes. SADF: No") was felt by some to have been provocative;
- excellent press coverage had been achieved with the overseas press, but not as successfully with local papers, some of which would not publish anything on Charles' case;
- the group felt they could have done more to prepare Charles for jail;
- the campaign work had meant growth and enrichment to the support group themselves;
- the family's feedback had been good too, despite initial concerns:

The family's viewpoint (Tony [father]): "unbelievably helpful". At first they had intended [a] very low key campaign, not even a lawyer, letters to Members of Parliament etc. Asked if they found [the] support group alienating or intimidating at first, he admitted the family first felt we were people who had hijacked Charles and were pushing him into gaol. We need to be careful of committee process....But as things developed they got more and more with it. The family discovered people who really care - had ended having great appreciation for the group. Also appreciation of availability of cash during the necessary processes, and the sharing of knowledge which had made the campaign and support possible....He intends remaining in touch with

⁵⁵³ "Charles Bester Support Group Assessment of campaign to date, 8 December 1988", in "COs in South Africa" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives.

the group to help with immediate future objector support and parent support.⁵⁵⁴

The inter-generational support that has been hinted at above is worthy of a little more attention, particularly for the way in which it seemed to transcend the generation gap. At the focus group meetings, participants of different generations expressed it as follows:

You young people gave such value to us older people; you found ways of drawing us into the struggle. You treated us with respect and equality and this had a huge impact on us;

and:

The older people in the movement were very important to me and very influential in my life; I got this extraordinary sense that we were part of a movement that was cross-generational; you were my parents' age but thinking very differently to them and doing things differently.⁵⁵⁵

A number of objectors and activists participating in this research project also spoke of the way in which the COSG provided a space for people to get in touch with their spirituality as being one of the successes of the movement. One activist saw this development of spirituality as the foundation of their activist work:

There was a spirituality about COSG; a quiet, reflective, introspective group of people who then got into activism and simply helped people deal with their issues;⁵⁵⁶

while another shared how being part of the liberation struggle called him to remember this aspect of himself:

I then became an atheist, which was comfortable until I lost friends [who were killed in the liberation struggle]; I then realised there was more to life, there was a bigger spirit, and for this I gave credit to my early COSG days when there had been a recognition of the religious dimension of ourselves.⁵⁵⁷

Still another expresses the balance between activism and personal spiritual growth: "It wasn't just a way of getting out of the army, but a way of working on

⁵⁵⁴ "Charles Bester Support Group Assessment of campaign to date, 8 December 1988", in "COs in South Africa" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 6.

⁵⁵⁵ Both these comments made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

⁵⁵⁶ Comment made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

⁵⁵⁷ Comment by Brett Myrdal at the Cape Town focus group meeting, 20 May 2006.

our souls.”⁵⁵⁸ For at least one person, however, this characteristic of the COSG was “...a bit alienating to those who did not have a theistic background.”⁵⁵⁹

In summary, it may be helpful to draw the testimonies of the successes of the COSG together under four predominant themes:⁵⁶⁰

- The COSG gave a home to people whose consciences were troubled by war, conscription and violence and helped them grow and develop their personal understanding of and commitment to dealing with these issues. People who found themselves at odds with the prevailing attitudes and beliefs in society could unite in resistance and offer alternatives. As one objector expressed:

It was a human organisation with love and care, with real men and beautiful people - a beautiful space where you could contemplate the past and the present.⁵⁶¹

- It enabled white people to articulate, in whatever way they chose, a very powerful anti-apartheid stance and in so doing gave courage to others who might otherwise have evaded the issue. In this way it lessened what was an overwhelming sense of helplessness against the might of the State and built respect and goodwill among the different populations groups.
- It provided responsible, non-manipulative support to conscientious objectors.
- It laid the groundwork for the inclusion of a freedom of conscience clause in South Africa's present constitution:

At the UDF launch,⁵⁶² a statement was read out re militarisation; I was horrified because there was nothing in it about COs, so I stood up in the middle of the meeting and said there needs to be a statement

⁵⁵⁸ Comment by Brendan Moran at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

⁵⁵⁹ Comment made at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

⁵⁶⁰ This paragraph is a summary of comments made by participants in the three focus group meetings.

⁵⁶¹ Comment by Brendan Moran at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

⁵⁶² “The United Democratic Front (UDF) was one of the most important anti-apartheid organisations of the 1980s. The non-racial coalition of about 400 civic, church, students', workers' and other organisations (national, regional and local) was formed in 1983, initially to fight the just-introduced Tricameral Parliament. Its slogan, 'UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides' reflect(ed) the Front's broad support (about 3 million members).” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Democratic_Front)

added in that the UDF will support those who chose not to serve in the military. Everyone cheered and the statement was amended.⁵⁶³

Turning now to the limitations of the movement, we honour the activists who took part in this movement by allowing them to share their responses to this question:⁵⁶⁴

- Our greatest success was also our greatest limitation; namely the fact that we were one-on-one and we did not take a more activist role, but that was a decision we took. If someone wanted to do more, they would go to the ECC.
- I don't think we analysed clearly enough the contradiction inherent in a nonviolent stance in a state that rested on violence. We were not aware enough of how through the sheer fact of being part of South African society we remained involved in violence and that may partly explain why we had problems connecting with black people, which was its greatest failure. We didn't seem to help the black community understand what we were about and many didn't even understand that going to the army was compulsory.
- There was a lack of connection with the wider anti-apartheid movement - we didn't manage to achieve demilitarisation.
- We were a small organisation with a huge task; it was hard to find us and as such our reach remained fairly limited.

Of the four broad limitations mentioned above, it was only the second one that did not receive agreement from all the participants in the focus group meetings and interviews.

One objector recalled how his stance had drawn him closer to his black friends:

There was certainly an impact in the black community; many of my friends were always impressed that there were white people who had a struggle with the military; even if it wasn't MK [uMkhonto weSizwe] it was a part of the liberation struggle.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Interview with Donn Edwards, 21 February 2006.

⁵⁶⁴ These are direct quotations from participants in the three focus group meetings.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with Patrick Vorster, 23 March 2006.

Another recounted how at a recent school function in Soweto, he had sat next to Siphiwe Nyanda.⁵⁶⁶

I told him my story and he was so pleased. He said, "We used to look up to you guys for refusing to fight against us! We used to say, 'They are the ones who do not want to kill us.'" So the witness to the black community was very important.⁵⁶⁷

And still another activist provided an extraordinary insight into how the COSG, through its adherence to nonviolent methods and principles, visibly carried out through the actions of white men, challenged the liberation army, uMkhonto weSizwe:

The impact of white people taking on the system helped people in the townships know we have allies, so for us COSG only being confined to one sector of the population was a strength rather than a limitation. COSG challenged the predominant concept of what it is to be a man; namely that you have to go and fight - this was also in stark contrast to what was going on in the liberation army. So COSG also influenced the liberation army because it challenged the use of violence and the use of arms. What was driving people then that still drives them today is that conscientious objection had to come from a deep personal choice or challenge...where in the liberation struggle you were part of a bigger movement; it was fashionable.⁵⁶⁸

Finally, while the comment below has no statistical basis and while it would be extremely difficult to verify, it does serve as a poignant reminder of the COSG's role in confronting a national issue that traumatised so many young people:

Some time ago, my daughters and I counted all the people we knew who committed suicide somehow as a result of the military - there were ten we

⁵⁶⁶ General Siphiwe Nyanda was appointed uMkhonto weSizwe Chief of Staff in 1992, and served on the Transitional Executive Council which oversaw the change of government in 1994. He transferred to the South African National Defence Force and served successively as Chief of Defence Force Staff (1994-1996), General Officer Commanding Gauteng Command (1996-1997), Deputy Chief of the SANDF (1997-1998), and Chief of the SANDF (1998-2005). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siphiwe_Nyanda)

⁵⁶⁷ Comment made by Neil Mitchell at the Johannesburg focus group meeting, 18 March 2006.

⁵⁶⁸ Comment made by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

knew; the impact of COSG must somehow counter weigh these ruined lives.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ Comment by Sue Britton at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

*We leaders are supposed to inspire the people.
But where do we get our inspiration from?
From people like the conscientious objectors.
Sometimes I get dispirited,
but when I read the statements by the COs I am renewed.*
Farick Esack, Call of Islam, South Africa⁵⁷⁰

This dissertation has covered the background to the objector movement in South Africa, the politico-military context in the country at the time, the history of the COSG as an objector movement, the extent to which the principles of nonviolence informed the strategies and actions of the movement, the impact of the movement's actions on the state, and finally an appraisal of the movement by people who were involved in it. What remains now is to draw together differing perceptions of the success of the movement.

To do this, it is important that we are clear about the question we are asking. To gain clarity, we remember Margaret Levi's assertion in Chapter 1 that "[Conscientious objection]...is an individual, but socially informed, act of resistance. It requires no organisation, no mobilisation of others, no group process."⁵⁷¹ And the question posed then: "How is this individual 'weapon of protest' affected if there *is* an organisation, a mobilisation of others and a group process?"

We can confidently say, from all that has gone before, that the organisation, in this case the movement of the COSG, amplified and intensified each individual act of objecting. What makes this so significant is the realisation that the power of the acts of nonviolent resistance lies not so much in the acts themselves as in the meaning given to these acts. This was pertinently expressed by one COSG activist:

We saw conscientious objection as an important means of getting white people to question apartheid and the role of the military in upholding

⁵⁷⁰ BC 1005, *Committee on South African War Resistance Collection*, UCT Libraries, A5 - Support Groups, "War Resisters International newsletter, May/June 1989", p 3.

⁵⁷¹ Levi. M., 1997, *Consent, dissent, and patriotism*, Cambridge University Press, p 165.

apartheid, and destabilising the recently decolonised Southern African region.⁵⁷²

Indeed, it was the COSG that succeeded in attributing meaning to these acts, which no proponent or passive supporter of apartheid could ignore. Deny, they could; criticise, they could; condemn and punish; they could. But not ignore.

And yet, the question, "Was the movement a success?" remains. Stated as such, however, it is too broad and vague a question. What it is really asking needs to be clearly defined. Is it asking whether the movement succeeded in keeping vast numbers of conscripts from serving in the SADF? If it is, the response must be that the movement was a resounding failure. Is it asking whether the movement convinced large numbers of conscripts that the SADF was upholding apartheid? And that apartheid was unjust? Again, if it is, the movement cannot be regarded as successful. But are these questions the true measures of the success of the movement? Quantitative questions of this nature could certainly be one way of measuring success, but for a movement as finely nuanced - politically, socially and humanly - as the COSG was, attempting to measure success by counting numbers would be like asking, "What is the value of turning one criminal away from crime?"

So we are called upon to continue refining our question. One attempt could be, "Can the movement show evidence of having enabled some conscripts to refuse serving in the SADF?" Not only must the response to this be a conclusive yes, but this affirmation must also carry within it a deep appreciation for the creative, responsible and compassionate way in which the COSG succeeded in doing this. Another attempted framing of the question could be, "Did the movement succeed in ensuring that the right of individual conscience would be upheld?" One only needs to refer to our Constitution today (and the role the COSG played in lobbying for this inclusion,⁵⁷³) to know that this was probably one of the greatest achievements of the movement, and one which required the greatest personal determination. As Charles

⁵⁷² Email correspondence with Fiona Dove on 15 February 2006.

⁵⁷³ See footnote 293.

Yeats wrote to Rob Robertson, "It is men of faith like yourself who are able to stick at the most unlikely causes and somehow end up making society a little more just in the process."⁵⁷⁴

Another question could be, "Did the movement succeed in ending conscription?" Bearing in mind that this was an implicit, not an explicit aim of the movement, a qualified response is necessary here; the COSG was not alone in working to this end, but what is indubitable is the role the COSG played, not only in supporting, but also in initiating and leading a coordinated movement, which brought an end to conscription in South Africa.

All the above questions have, thus far, concentrated on the stated outcomes of the movement. We turn now to the underlying message of the movement, by asking, "Did the movement succeed in maintaining what was in my assessment its implicit commitment to nonviolence, despite the fact that it was not a stated commitment nor a commitment held by all COSG activists?" Here it would be worth our while to measure the workings of the COSG against previous findings on nonviolence as a strategy for change:

...there is a well-worked-out set of guidelines for true civil disobedience, the most important being that the civil resister must not operate secretly or attempt to avoid legal penalties: one's resistance is to a law, not to the principle of Law."⁵⁷⁵

As such, one can confidently say that the COSG was a very significant witness to South African society at the time and to future generations everywhere that the power of nonviolence lies in its ability to work towards a just cause with an integrity and strength that severely challenges the injustice of a ruling authority, while at the same time doing so responsibly and openly, without going underground. Lest we forget how difficult it must have been to "remain open" in the political climate of the 1980s in South Africa, let us remind ourselves that the government had all kinds of power at its disposal;⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ "Letter from Charles Yeats to Rob Robertson, 4 July 1985", in Rob Robertson personal archives.

⁵⁷⁵ Nagler, M., 1999b, "Nonviolence", in de Cuellar, J., and Young, s., (eds), *World encyclopedia of peace*, Oceana Publications, New York, p 450.

⁵⁷⁶ This taken from Mayer, B., 2000, Power and conflict in *The dynamics of conflict resolution*, Jossey Bass, CA, p 57ff.

power that derives from formal authority, the legal prerogative, information (or in this case the power to withhold information), resources, the power to offer rewards or impose sanctions, nuisance power,⁵⁷⁷ and even procedural power. And yet the COSG stood up to all of these with a moral or personal power, which Gandhi called the Power of Truth and which no other power could silence. One activist expressed the power of a movement that succeeded as follows:

We gave the lesson across that a few people with a cause can defeat - it is not always about numbers. We had the cause, the strategy and expertise to deal with it and the perseverance.⁵⁷⁸

But for nonviolence to be more than a mere philosophy; for it to be a relevant theory for action and change, as Graser notes, "...both people and institutions must evolve new values and behaviour..."⁵⁷⁹ This leads us to our next question; "Did the movement succeed in evolving new values and behaviour, first on a personal level, and then on an institutional level?" The COSG profoundly challenged the ruling authority and society on many levels:

- By advocating for a person's right to have his conscience defended, the COSG challenged stereotypes of authority and rulership.
- It challenged gender stereotypes by questioning the concept of male bravery.
- It challenged racial stereotypes by questioning white supremacy and showing that there were whites who supported the liberation struggle's objectives.
- And finally, it challenged the notion that violence can resolve conflict.

And did the movement affect inner transformation? To know this, we listen to some personal accounts:

I want my sons to know that this is not going to happen again...even today I don't walk down the beach without making a scene about plastic guns;⁵⁸⁰

and:

⁵⁷⁷ The power to bother, interfere and harass, as was the task of the Military Police.

⁵⁷⁸ Comment made at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

⁵⁷⁹ Graser, R., 1999, "Nonviolence", in de Cuellar, J., and Young, S., (eds), *World encyclopedia of peace*, Oceana Publications, New York, p 455.

⁵⁸⁰ Comment by Brendan Moran at the Durban focus group meeting, 17 June 2006.

Lately, with.... the resurfacing of the issue, I have been so struck by how young we were and how incredibly courageous the objectors were. I feel incredibly proud of having been part of this history;

and finally:

It's been absolutely life changing. Pete [Hathorn's] objection really shifted me fundamentally from a very normal white South African girl who was getting on with life and having a fun time at University, to someone whose eyes were opened to the apartheid system and what we were living with and that we had to fight against it.⁵⁸¹

Perhaps, therefore, the most enduring legacy that the South African COSG has left the world is that it nurtured a group of people who learnt to see the world differently; who saw conflict differently, who tried not to forget the humanity of the other, who stood for their truth even if it meant making incredibly difficult choices, who had the courage to act on their principles and who still carry these principles into their lives today.

⁵⁸¹ Comment by Paula Hathorn in the follow-up to the Cape Town focus group meeting, 20 May 2006.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Press release

Peace activist and conscientious objector Nan Cross dies - Issued 14 July 2007

Long-time peace activist and committed supporter of conscientious objection during apartheid, Nan Cross, has died at 79.

During the years of apartheid, she was a founding and active member of the Conscientious Objector Support Group and active in the End Conscription Campaign. She also played a critical role in the Conscription Advice Service.

Many of the young men who became conscientious objectors, drew inspiration and strength from her. She regularly attended court when the law came down on them and gave support and solace to their families.

Her ability to integrate her religious faith with her commitment to social justice and non-violence, drew her into anti-apartheid activity. She had a strong personality and an incredibly sharp and honed intellect.

Adele Kirsten, who worked closely with her during those years says: "As a young woman Nan, who was 30 years older than me, served as a wonderful role model. As a young woman getting involved she showed me how you just do it."

Diminutive in stature, Nan Cross was never afraid of taking on the apartheid forces and arms manufacturers, particularly in demonstrations. Peace activists recall how after getting into an arms exhibition she clambered up on to a tank to plaster it with stickers saying 'Arms are for hugging not killing'.

With the end of apartheid, she joined others in establishing the Ceasefire Campaign, an anti-war organization demilitarist in nature and committed to disarmament and the reduction and eventual elimination of the arms trade.

She was an active member of the Ceasefire Campaign for many years working hard as a volunteer in the office and editing the organisation's newsletter *Anti-war News*. Although she had officially retired from Ceasefire, she continued to come regularly to seminars and kept abreast of anti-war and peace activities. Furthermore, Ceasefire campaign members and other friends continued to seek her out and to consult her on pertinent issues.

She will be sadly missed by all those who knew her and benefited from her counsel.

For further information:

Adele Kirsten 082 853 9776 (Ex-ECC; Ex-Gun Free SA)

Paul Goller 079 701 4703 (Ex-ECC ; Ex-COSG)

David Bruce 082 784 8616 (Conscientious Objector)

Prof Jackie Cock 011 788 8892 (Ex-Black Sash, Ceasefire Campaign member & supporter)

Prof Rob Thomson 011 646 5332 (Executive Member Ceasefire Campaign)

Laura Pollecutt 082 092 3849 (Executive Member Ceasefire Campaign)

Nan Cross: Supported men resisting apartheid conscription

Published: Sunday Times, July 22, 2007



Brave heart: Nan Cross, who supported conscientious objectors

She was driven by a commitment to social justice that was underpinned by a quiet, unpretentious bravery.

Nan Cross, who has died in Johannesburg at the age of 79, popularised conscientious objection in South Africa in the '80s.

The woman who helped start the Conscientious Objector Support Group in 1980 and the End Conscription Campaign three years later was a very small person physically but had the heart of a lion.

She was driven by a commitment to social justice that was underpinned by a quiet, unpretentious bravery that manifested itself in a simple refusal to be cowed.

Many conscientious objectors from that decade remember her as their moral compass.

But there was nothing self-righteous or self-aggrandising about her. She was as down-to-earth and practical as was the advice she gave to youngsters facing what for many of them was a terrible dilemma.

Cross's Kensington, Johannesburg, home was not only an important venue for meetings. It was also where anti-apartheid activists on the run from the security police knew they could get a decent meal and bed for the night.

Conscription was introduced in 1967 but it was only in about 1978 and 1979 that conscientious objectors who were not from the "peace churches", such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, began to make a stand.

By the late '80s, thanks to the efforts of Cross and a small band of volunteers who encouraged, organised, assisted and supported conscientious objectors, it had become an issue of some concern to the government.

In 1983, when the End Conscription Campaign started, the penalty for refusing to do national service was increased from between 10 and 18 months in jail – with time often suspended or reduced – to a non-negotiable six years.

In spite of this, the numbers of young white men refusing to fight what they saw as a war to defend apartheid increased steadily. Almost 2000 applied to the Board for Religious Objectors and more and more left the country to evade the call-up. By the late '80s there were mass objections.

In 1987, 23 conscientious objectors made a combined stand. In 1988, the number rose to 143, and in 1989, there were 771 who refused conscription.

Many of them received moral as well as practical support from Cross. To stick her neck out like that in the repressive climate of the time took courage. And she was under no illusions that helping young men evade military service made her a target for the security police.

Although she was never detained, she was harassed by them and interrogated several times at her home. It was broken into several times and suspicion fell heavily on the security police.

The level of their interest in Cross was further demonstrated by the fact that a person who attended meetings of the conscientious objection support group at her home was subsequently exposed as a security police spy.

In addition to writing pamphlets, Cross helped conscientious objectors with their statements,

visited them in jail, and was a consistent source of comfort and strength for them and their families whom she supported any way she could.

Although Cross had a very forceful personality, she kept out of the limelight. Extremely articulate, she was no public speaker. Yelling slogans from the podium was not for her. She did the hard, time-consuming, nitty-gritty background work that oiled the wheels of conscientious objection.

A stickler for detail and getting things absolutely right, she did this necessary work with a pedantry that even those who loved and admired her often found extremely trying.

As selfless and brave as she was, she could be very difficult.

After 1994 Cross helped start the Ceasefire Campaign which fought for disarmament and the reduction and eventual elimination of arms trading by South Africa.

Cross was born in Pretoria on January 3 1928. Her father was a lawyer for the Pretoria City Council. After matriculating at Pretoria Girls High School she completed a degree in social science at Rhodes University and embarked on life as a social worker. She worked for, among many other projects, the African Children's Feeding Scheme and was in Soweto running the Orlando sheltered employment workshop for the Johannesburg City Council housing department on June 16 1976, when the Soweto uprising began.

She never spoke much about this other than to say that getting out of the township that day was a terrifying experience.

Shortly before her retirement, in order to ensure that she would qualify for a half-decent pension, she was deployed to the Johannesburg library service where she delivered books to elderly people and invalids.

Cross was deeply inspired by her religion although, funnily enough given her religious pacifism and commitment to social justice, the Baptist Church of which she was a lifelong member had no "peace" tradition itself and was politically conservative. This made her a fairly isolated member of her religious community.

She never married and is survived by two sisters and 15 nieces and nephews.

– **Chris Barron**

Published: Mail and Guardian, 23 Jul 2007 10:59

Those involved in peace and in anti-conscription movements during apartheid, are mourning the loss of peace activist Nan Cross, who died last weekend aged 79. Her religion and her pacifist sentiments meant that her contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle centred on conscientious objection. She was a founding and active member of the Conscientious Objector Support Group and active in the End Conscription Campaign. She also played a critical role in the

Conscription Advice Service. As the apartheid state clung to power it became more militarised, increasing the period of military service white males were expected to contribute. Many objected, on religious and political grounds, to doing the dirty work of the South African Defence Force. Many young, white men went into exile, while others took the route of conscientious objection. The government of the day demonised these young men as well as those who supported them. Nan was no exception. As the 1980s drew to a close, the anti-conscription movement grew stronger, with more and more white men refusing conscription. This was undoubtedly one of the contributing factors to the growing realisation of the Nationalists that they were losing their hold. In the early 1990s, with the end of apartheid in sight, the End Conscription Campaign disbanded. But recognising that South Africa's long history of oppression and militarisation would not disappear overnight, Nan joined others in establishing the Ceasefire Campaign, an anti-war organisation committed to disarmament and the reduction and eventual elimination of the arms trade. In its infancy, she was the cornerstone of the Ceasefire Campaign, working hard as a volunteer in the office. These were not easy years, particularly as many South Africans could not appreciate why such an organisation was still needed. But she spurred us on in her indomitable way. She edited Ceasefire's newsletter, *Anti-War News*, with dedication and precision. Although she had officially retired from Ceasefire, she continued to attend seminars regularly and kept abreast of anti-war and peace activities. We continued to visit her to ask her advice or merely to enjoy the pleasure of her company. She had a remarkable memory and knowledge of the most extraordinary things. I will miss these visits and her sharp critical mind and sage advice. -- *Laura Pollecutt*

Nan Cross: born 1928; died 2007

Appendix 2 - Interview consent form

**History of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group
MA Dissertation - Judy Connors**

Name and contact details of interviewee:

Date of interview:

The project

This research project aims to document the history of the Conscientious Objectors Support Group (COSG), a nonviolent social movement, started in 1980 in South Africa, to defend the right of the individual to object to serving in the South African Defence Force.

Confidentiality

All interviews will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. The interviewee is free to withdraw from the interviewing, or further research process, at any stage. The written transcript of the interview will be shown to the interviewee, who will have the opportunity to amend it as s/he would like.

Use of interview material

The researcher would like to be able to use material shared in the interview in her dissertation. Please indicate, by means of a tick in the relevant box(es)

above each statement, your consent for one or more of the following, as you wish:

I agree to the use of any information I have shared in the interview in the above-mentioned dissertation, using my name as the interviewer sees fit.

I agree to the anonymous use of any information I have shared in the interview in the above-mentioned dissertation i.e. without using my name in connection with any of the information shared.

I agree to the use of any information I have shared in the interview in the above-mentioned dissertation, using my name as the interviewer sees fit, but would like to be informed of where / how my name will be used before submission of the dissertation.

I agree to the use of any information shared in my interview with the researcher, except for the following information (please attach another sheet if necessary):

I do not agree to the use of any information shared in my interview with the researcher.

Archival material

Please let me know if you would like me to lodge your personal archival material in an academic archive e.g. the South African Historical Archives at the University of the Witwatersrand? If so, you would need to let me know if you have any special preference of archive. I will then send you the relevant forms from that particular archive, which details the process as well as restrictions on access you may like to state, if any.

Signed (Interviewee)

Signed (Researcher)

Contact details:

Judy Connors

Researcher

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Appendix 3 - Suggested questions for in-depth interviews

The first three questions applied only to objectors; the third of which applied only to objectors who were never part of the COSG. The remaining questions applied to activists in the COSG, whether they had been objectors or not.

1. You were an objector - would you like to talk about this? What motivated your stance? What happened?
2. Did you have a support group supporting you? How did this come about? How did they support you? What impact did this support have on you/your family?
3. Were you aware of the organisation, COSG? What in your mind was their role?
4. How did you get involved in the COSG?
5. As a member of the COSG, what was your role in the organisation? Why did you get involved in this work?
6. How did the COSG support objectors? How did it further the aims of the broader campaign to defend the right of conscience?
7. How do you feel the support given by the COSG to objectors affected them?
8. How, if at all, was the philosophy and practice of nonviolence part of the work of the COSG?
9. What do you think was the impact of the work of the COSG?
10. What are some of the feelings that have surfaced most regularly over the years when you think about CO in general and/or your experiences as a CO? Can you say a little more about these feelings? When / why do they arise?
11. How do you think the passage of time has changed the way you see/remember things now?
12. What has been the most enduring impact of this involvement that remains with you in your life now?

Appendix 4 - Focus group meeting questions

Again some questions refer only to objectors.

1. As a member of the COSG, what was your role in the COSG?
2. What do you think you were able to contribute to the COSG?
3. How did you feel supported by the COSG?
4. What are your memories of the origins of the COSG in this region?
5. How was the COSG in this region different from the others, if at all?
6. What in your mind was COSG's greatest success?
7. What in your mind was COSG's greatest limitation?
8. Can you remember times when you were able to find ways of working with the SADF/government (or any individual in authority) on these issues (i.e. win-win), rather than as adversaries (win-lose)? Can you describe what happened?
9. Draft proposed amendments to the Defence Act - how did the COSG work on documents like this?
10. How do you think the work of the COSG impacted on the government of the time?
11. How do you think the COSG impacted on the consciousness of the general public?
12. How did you perceive the relationship of the COSG to other anti-apartheid/anti-military movements at the time?
13. What are some of the feelings that have surfaced most regularly over the years when you think about CO in general and/or your experiences as a CO? Can you say a little more about these feelings? When / why do they arise?
14. How do you think the passage of time has changed the way you see/remember things now?
15. What has been the most enduring impact of this involvement that remains with you in your life now?

Appendix 5

What is discipline?

Many points have been raised in recent correspondence about conscription. I want to look at the concept of discipline, as raised by some of these letter writers.

There are different disciplines. There is the discipline of living in a family. Children, as they grow older, learn to clear up their own rubbish, make their own beds and take responsibility for some of the drudgery that has to be done in a household. I do not understand why an army is needed to teach children that. A family will do.

During the eighties when I was a member of various anti-apartheid organisations there was organisational discipline, voluntarily taken on, of orderly debate and democratic decision-making and then acceptance of the decision arrived at in order to further the common goal, or else one could resign from the organisation on grounds of principle.

I have come to admire intellectual discipline – the discipline of methodical inquiry, of not accepting a belief simply because it is emotionally satisfying or because it is received wisdom, of accepting that all knowledge is provisional and subject to correction.

The other discipline that has helped me grow, a discipline accepted by the conscientious objectors and others I admire, is moral and ethical discipline – the discipline of faith, if you like. It is discipline that does not run counter to the intellectual discipline of sceptical inquiry, but helps those who practise it to accept the uncertainty of knowledge instead of seeking false certainty, to recognise infinity within themselves and in others, and to seek in faithful deliberation with others to discern the next step in their moral journeys.

These disciplines are like the inherent strength of a building – its foundations,

its walls and its roof trusses; a building that will withstand the storm.

Then I return to military discipline as seen by your letter writers who write about being “simply a number”, about “doing as you are told”, of being in trouble if “you step out of line”, of being a minuscule part of something bigger than yourself, so the line must be toed. They write about denying the emotional needs we all have, the need to be recognised and cared for. They talk about “pride” as if it has become one of the seven virtues.

Such discipline comes solely from outside the person upon whom it is imposed. It breaks down and hollows out the human being. It is like scaffolding for a building that has become structurally unsound and cannot stand up on its own. For that, some of us want to bring back conscription?

JANNEKE WEIDEMA

Pretoria (by e-mail)

Appendix 6

Because of the SADF, I have lost my son

*Mon, 28 Aug 2006

The recent review of a book on the experiences of army conscripts on the border and in Angola brought back painful memories to a local mother of the psychological damage inflicted on her son.

The review by Robin Crouch of the book *The Unpopular War* (The Witness, August 18) brought back many sad memories for me. The book dealt with a number of men who had been part of the Border War in one way or another. This was bad enough but there needs to be a very special salute to those who were actually sent to patrol our borders.

The impact of this ridiculous war was enormous. It was crippling for the young men and for their families because of the appalling treatment by and attitude of our then government. I am a mother of a son who went into the army at the age of 17 and was sent to the border at 18 in 1986-7.

The Border War was a period that the South African government needs to be ashamed of. It destroyed the white youth of our country. My son spoke very little of his experiences, but I picked up enough to realise that he had been through hell, both physically and emotionally especially as he was English-speaking and even at that young age, was far more educated than many of his superiors.

These so-called superiors had no knowledge of how to treat people or how to punish in a civilised manner. It was a case of constant "bawling" and intimidation. Punishment was walking around for hours with a haversack filled with rocks on their backs. To say the least, it was barbaric.

After intensive training in Ladysmith and a spell in townships, my son was

sent to the border for 15 months, to Ondangwa and Oshakati, where he experienced untold horrors. The army brainwashed these young men. Taught them to be aggressive and to fight for survival and then when it was all over they were sent back to Civvie Street with no debriefing whatsoever.

They were just flown out of the danger zone and straight back home! And forgotten about! It was a case of "now we've used you and messed you up, go home and we'll get busy on the next intake". It was appalling treatment.

We, as parents, were not qualified to deal with the aftermath and there was no available help for us or these brave young soldiers. They were emotionally and socially insecure, trying desperately to catch up with two lost, traumatic years. I have never felt so helpless in my life.

My son badly needed counselling but he was in complete denial. The army could have enforced counselling; it should have been compulsory but I could do nothing. Any suggestion that he was not behaving normally caused anger and tension.

My son went through nightmares, terror attacks and all the typical symptoms of contact-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Frequent army call-ups kept looming ahead of him and unsettling him badly as he was attempting to piece his life together. There was no way I could get through to him. I became "the enemy" and sadly his brother became "the enemy" also.

My son left the country and is now in Australia. We have had no contact with him for 12 years and it's not been for want of trying on my part. The heartbreak is indescribable. It is a needless tragedy which could have been prevented if the government had not failed in its responsibility towards these fine young men.

These young white South Africans were the future generation. Many of them would have been leaders. Instead of encouraging them and helping them get back into society, the government used their young lives for its own useless

bravado. Having used them, they were abandoned leaving parents (in my case, a widow) to take over as best they could and try to deal with a situation that was way beyond their capabilities. I am sure there are many others who feel as strongly about this as I do.

Those young men who served on the Border should have been given special compensation, debriefing, counselling and overall help towards careers or a job. And equally as importantly, those who served on the Border should not have been called back year after year. This brought back all the traumatic memories and started the problems all over again when they were trying so desperately to overcome them.

The writer wishes to remain anonymous.

Appendix 7⁵⁸²

The review by Robin Crouch of the book *The Unpopular War* on 18 August and the letter from Anonymous on 28 August refers. The book, the review of the book, and the letter, are the tip of a huge iceberg of conscription related post-traumatic stress still present in our society today. I believe that the articulation of that trauma also needs to name the root cause of conscription itself the unjust and cruel system of apartheid perpetrated by a minority in order to dominate a majority. That is where our anger should be directed at the previous government that acted like a pimp sending young boys out to do their dirty work.

I was conscripted too (1980), but I refused to collaborate and cooperate. I objected to war in general, and to the rule of the apartheid government in particular. As a result I spent 12 months in military prison 3 months in Voortrekkerhoogte DB and 9 months in Tempe DB. That was pretty traumatic too, but every time I refused a military order in prison (such as to wear the uniform or to march), I felt stronger. And that is the strength that fuelled my work in due course with the End Conscription Campaign and other anti-apartheid formations. I am happy now that conscription (and the previous government) has been abolished, and that boys and men are no longer compelled to go through basic training, war or prison.

I think a major problem facing conscripts when they begin to speak out their experiences and their pain is the sense of guilt and culpability. It is correct to feel that, because everyone did have a choice. But my sense is that if they can shift their eyes from themselves to the system that exploited them and took advantage of their naiveté and good will, then they will be able to lay blame where it is due. This may also create the space for them to consider some form of apology and reparation for the damage caused by them as conscripts to others.

⁵⁸² *The Witness*, 5 September 2006.

As we speak out, act out, and heal ourselves, we can contribute to the healing of others, and of our society.

Richard Steele

Durban

Appendix 8

"Statement in response to the Defence Amendment Act, 1983, to be implemented January 1984

We wish to make known our rejection of the new legislation on conscientious objectors as embodied in the Defence Amendment Act, 1983.

We believe that this legislation has been designed, not so much to give recognition to genuine conscientious objectors, as to ruthlessly crush all democratic expression of conscientious objection.

We reject this legislation because the period of service which religious pacifists are required to serve (6 years continuous) is more than twice the longest period of alternative service demanded by any democratic state in the world. A period of 6 years implies that a university trained teacher would not be able to teach until after his 27th birthday. A scientist trained to doctorate level would be 31 before he completed his studies.

By contrast people undergoing military service can complete similar training before they are 23 and 27 respectively. Thus this legislation not only discriminates against objectors in the severity of its period but also removes the most productive years of a person's life and gives no guarantee that the 6 years will be spent constructively in activities relevant to the objector's qualification or experience. It effectively makes objection, even for a religious pacifist, a crime.

We reject this legislation because it places the religious pacifist doing alternative service under a virtual banning order, with its prohibitions and sever penalties relating to the publication of the objectors' writing and his political activities, This serves to further reinforce our view that the legislation views all objectors, including religious pacifists, as criminals.

We reject this legislation because it seeks to distinguish between 'religious ' and other objectors, both of whose opposition to war is based on equally genuine ethical and moral foundations.

We reject this legislation because it imposes penalties on moral, humanist and political objectors that are in excess of those applied in any other country, including the Soviet Union. These men of integrity will be imprisoned for a period longer than many sentences for manslaughter, drug dealing, common assault, car theft and hijacking.

The new legislation is in our opinion characterised by unreasonable punitiveness, gross discrimination and downright unfairness. It is a retrogressive step and represents on paper harsher treatment of conscientious objectors than the old legislation in practice. It will force many young South Africans, who love their country and wish to serve it, to go into exile from it. This would constitute an unnecessary drain of already scarce skilled manpower.

We believe our country is capable of better than this and therefore call on the Government to withdraw this legislation and enter into consultation with objectors and concerned religious and secular bodies in order to formulate more practical, more reasonable, and more just legislation.

Durban Conscientious Objector Support Group."

Appendix 9⁵⁸³ - Sample questions put to applicants by the Board for Religious Objectors

1. Exodus 22.1: "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck a mortal blow, there is to be no blood vengeance for him." How do you explain this verse, where killing a person appears to be justified?
2. How do you define "force" and "violence"?
3. When does force become "violent"?
4. What is meant by "render to Caesar what is Caesar's"?
5. Do you mind paying taxes that go towards Defence spending?
6. Define universal pacifism.
7. Can you imagine a situation in which you would use force, or violence?
8. Why should identification with the SADF alienate you from people?
9. Why do you say "SADF" all the time in your presentation? Are you objecting to service in the SADF only?
10. Do you leave a door open for the possibility that the oppressed may be justified in resorting to violence?
11. Would you be prepared to support the right of others to use violence if they so choose?
12. You seem to have strong objections to the political system in South Africa; make it clear in your own words: what are the real grounds for your application - religious or political?
13. What do you mean by "institutional violence"?
14. Your decision is a product of many influences. What about the religious influence?
15. On average, how many times do you go to church in a month? What other church meetings do you attend?
16. In the case of Cornelius the Centurion; nowhere does it say that he left the armed forces?
17. What are your conditions for a Just War? How do each of these apply in the South African situation?

⁵⁸³ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A9 - Board for Religious Objection, "Second report on the Board for Religious Objection, September 1984", written by Richard Steele, p 5 and 6. Please note that this is by no means a comprehensive list of possible questions posed by the Board and that the Board varied its questions with each applicant.

18. Do you think the military force used by the South African government is justified?
19. Faced with the invading SWAPO army, what would you do if you were the government?
20. Is this belief of yours based on principle, or on an assessment of the prevailing situation which could change tomorrow?
21. On what books of revelation do you base your conviction?
22. The absence of scriptural references may indicate that your convictions are not religious, whereas repeated references to moral, political and philosophical convictions give the impression that your motivation is from those convictions. What is your real motivation?
23. What is the content of your convictions?
24. Can you imagine a situation where violence and war may be used to uphold peace, like in World War II?
25. How do you explain the verse where Jesus tells his disciples to buy a sword, even if they have to sell their coats to do so? [Luke 22:35-38]
26. Are police justified in killing people in the course of their duties?
27. Is it justifiable to kill one person in order to save the life of others?
28. Many organisations need an amount of violence in order to maintain order, e.g. prisons, Do you object to that?

Appendix 10⁵⁸⁴ - A song sung at a COSG annual conference:

"Let us remember who we are

A people united against the growing militarisation of our land,

working towards the right of conscience in those who say

"We will not fight this war".

LET US BREAK DOWN THE WALLS THAT SEPARATE US, LET US UNITE
IN HOPE AND STRENGTH.

There have been times when we have been divisive in our thinking,

in our speech, in our actions. We have classified and imprisoned

one another.

LET US BREAK DOWN THE WALLS THAT SEPARATE US, LET US UNITE
IN HOPE AND STRENGTH.

We were meant to be one people, ruled by peace, feasting in freedom,

freed from injustice, truly human people, responsible and responsive

in the life we lead, the love we share, the relationships we create.

LET US BREAK DOWN THE WALLS THAT SEPARATE US, LET US UNITE
IN HOPE AND STRENGTH.

We need courage to do what is right - even when it is not allowed,

and persistence in undermining unjust structures until they crumble into dust.

LET US BREAK DOWN THE WALLS THAT SEPARATE US, LET US UNITE
IN HOPE AND STRENGTH."

⁵⁸⁴ "The report on the fifth National Conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups, Wilgespruit, Johannesburg, July 1984", in Richard Steele personal archives, p 21.

"BAD ROLEPLAY

Narrator: Private du Plooy's unit was moved to PE five days ago. He is quite sure that they are there to do township duty. He has principled objections to doing such duty. Everyone else in the unit seems very excited about the possibility of some action. Then one afternoon, the sergeant orders the unit to fall in.

Sergeant: Okay men, fall in. Quickly. I have some good news. You are all getting the chance to get off your backsides and do what you've trained for. There is rioting and stone-throwing in New Brighton and we're going in to help the police. Any questions?

Du Plooy: Yes Sir.

Sergeant: Yes Du Plooy.

Du Plooy: I refuse to do township duty, Sir.

Sergeant: You what?

Du Plooy: I refuse to do township duty, Sir. It is against my principles.

Sergeant: I am not interested in your principles or anything else about you. You are going to be in the very first Buffel when we go in and I am going to be sitting right behind you all the way in. Do you understand?

Du Plooy: No, sir.

Sergeant: No, sir? Listen here Du Plooy, do you know what I can do to you if you no sir, me.

Du Plooy: No, I don't. I have been trying to tell you that it is against my principles to do township duty. I don't see why I must fight against fellow South Africans whose behaviours I can understand given the apartheid system in this country.

Sergeant: Now listen here*****, and listen very well. Firstly, you will never speak to me like that again, or you will wish that you had never been born. Secondly, in five minutes time you will get into that

⁵⁸⁵ "Review of counselling principles - Session 2", in "Advice Bureas Counselling" file, Adele Kirsten personal archives, p 3ff.

Buffel and you will go wherever I tell you to. If you don't I will charge you with disobeying a lawful command and you will spend the next 18 months in DB. Or I could charge you with mutiny or I could charge you with desertion and I could have you put up against a wall for that. Did you know that Du Plooy?

Du Plooy: No, I didn't Sir.

Sergeant: And so Du Plooy, are you coming with me in the Buffel?

Du Plooy: I guess I don't have any choice, do I.

(And so off he goes in the Buffel).

Narrator: (asks participants) Now where did Rifleman Du Plooy go wrong? How would you counsel him if he came to you about his problem?

GOOD ROLEPLAY

Narrator: When Du Plooy returns to his unit after his next leave, he immediately asks his lieutenant for permission to speak to the kommandant, about an urgent matter. This is granted and so he goes to him.

Du Plooy: Morning Staff. Could I please speak to the kommandant about an urgent personal matter?

Staff: Have you got permission? And what is this about?

Du Plooy: I have Lieutenant Brown's permission and the matter is personal.

Corporal: Okay, I will see if he can see you.

You can go in now.

Du Plooy: I have been assigned to township duty, kommandant. I request that I be allocated other duties because it is against my principles to patrol the townships. I have a statement setting out grounds and an affidavit from my university lecturer testifying to my sincerity.

Kommand.: (looks through papers)

I don't think I am going to allow you to do this, Du Plooy. If every serviceman could just pick and choose what he wanted to do

and what he didn't, then we would not have an army, we would have a rabble. Not so?

Du Plooy: I'm not seeking to break down discipline, commandant. I do not want any confrontation with the army. That is why I am approaching you now for an allocation to other duties so that I don't have to disobey an order when I am instructed to go into the townships.

Kommand.: So you would disobey an order Du Plooy. I could put you away in DB and throw away the key. Do you know that Du Plooy?

Du Plooy: I am aware of the legal implications, kommandant.

Kommand.: Du Plooy, do you think you are special? Do you think you can be clever with the army? These papers, all this information about the law. Do you think you're clever Du Plooy?

Du Plooy: No, kommandant.

Kommand.: I think you're a stupid piece of****. I want to warn you DuPlooy. Don't mess with me and don't mess with the army, or you are going to come very short. You had better go now before I start getting cross.

Du Plooy: Yes, commandant. Does that mean I shall get my re-allocation?

Kommand.: No, it does not mean anything. You shall find out tomorrow what I intend for you.

Narrator: The next day Du Plooy was made a storeman and was not required to do township duty."

Appendix 12⁵⁸⁶ - Letter from General Magnus Malan

"Before dealing specifically with the subject of conscription, I believe that it is necessary to define the circumstances in which the SA Defence Force has to operate and the duty of the Force to society.

The role assigned to the SA Defence Force is to defend the sovereignty of the Republic of South Africa and to maintain the essential climate of stability within which the political and economic policies of our government can evolve in a peaceful and orderly manner. The nature of the current threat demands that the Force is fully trained in the techniques of conventional and counter-insurgency warfare...the massive build-up of Soviet armaments in some of our regional States is a major cause for concern...The vigilance and efficiency of the SA Defence Force, in concert with the South African Police, ensures that terrorist activities are kept in check within the Republic itself...In this physical and psychological battle, the enemy seeks to subvert our resolve, to overthrow the established order and to destroy the fabric of our society. It is imperative in this situation that every eligible citizen is fully trained and motivated to assume his share of the burden...

Having made these points, however, I hasten to add that I welcome constructive debate and dialogue on this vital topic...All political and other interested parties have been invited to submit their criticisms and suggestions to the [Geldenhuys] Committee...Nevertheless, in the fierce climate of the psychological war, extreme caution must be exercised to ensure that the morale of our Defence Force, and indeed of the nation as a whole, is not placed in jeopardy."

⁵⁸⁶ BC 1005, *COSAWR Collection*, UCT Libraries, A10 - PFP / DP on War Resistance, "Letter from Magnus Malan to Paul Graham of the Christian Education and Youth Department, Methodist Church, 28 January 1985", p 1-3.

Appendix 13 - Summary of significant Defence legislation in South Africa

Name of Act	Provisions of Act
Defence Act No. 13 of 1912	Established a small Permanent Force, which would be supplemented if necessary by volunteers from the Citizen Force regiments, to be selected by the use of a ballot system, or by men serving in the "Rifle Associations". 30 days of initial service was required with the possibility of 21 days per year for three more years. Anyone whose name appeared on the ballot and who wished to apply for exemption from the ballot could make a written application to the Exemption Board. One of the grounds, which the Exemption Board took into account in considering the application, was "his <i>bona-fide</i> religious tenets".
Defence Act No. 44 of 1957	Established a Permanent Force, a Citizen Force, Commandos and a Reserve Force. All males "of European descent" between the ages of seventeen and 65 were liable for service and had to apply for registration to the registering officer. A three-month period of compulsory military service in the Citizen Force and 21 days in a Commando regiment was required. The call-up system was, however, still administered by ballot. This Act provided for a non-combatant option for anyone who belonged to a religious denomination that did not allow him to participate in war.
Defence Amendment Act No. 12 of 1961 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Various amendments made, but none relating to length of military service, age of conscripts or provisions for objectors. The ballot system was still in place.
Defence Amendment Act No. 77 of 1963 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Provided for members of the SADF to be allocated to perform police duties when necessary, or for the prevention or suppression of internal disorder in the Republic. The ballot system was still in place.

Defence Amendment Act No. 85 of 1967 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Made it compulsory (as opposed to "liable") for all white males between the ages of seventeen and 65 to do nine months service. This Act again provided for a non-combatant option for members of pacifist sects. Refusal to accept this non-combatant option was punishable by repeated sentences of up to six months; although in reality the sentence was usually 90 days in Detention Barracks.
Defence Amendment Act No. 66 of 1972 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Length of military service was extended from nine to twelve months, to be followed up by nineteen days annually for five years. This Act also introduced a once-only sentence of between twelve and fifteen months for "peace church" objectors who had been sentenced to DB for twelve months or more.
Defence Amendment Act No. 8 of 1974 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Made it a punishable offence to encourage, aid, incite, instigate or suggest to any potential conscript that he should refuse his call-up, for which the maximum penalty was R5000 or six years imprisonment or both.
Second Defence Amendment Act No. 68 of 1977 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Doubled the length of service to 24 months plus 30-day camps for eight years.
Defence Amendment Act No. 49 of 1978 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)	Increased the (once-only) twelve-to-fifteen-month sentence for "peace church" objectors to a (once-only) sentence of between eighteen months and three years in duration. Anyone not from a "peace church" refusing to serve was subject to repeated call-ups and hence repeated jail sentences up to a maximum of two years or R2000 at a time, until the age of 65.
Defence Amendment Act No. 103 of 1982 (to amend	Annual service system of follow-up "camp" call-ups was extended from 30 days a year for eight years to 120 days every two years for six two-year cycles. After this twelve-year period, conscripts were to be transferred to an Active Citizen Reserve Force for five years.

<p>Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)</p>	<p>After this, conscripts were transferred to Commando Units where they were liable for service until the age of 55, usually on an area basis and for a maximum of twelve days per year. All white adult males who had not undergone any military training were conscripted to these units. All white males over 60 years of age were required to serve on the National Reserve until the age of 65. The penalty for refusing to serve remained a maximum of two years' imprisonment, recurring.</p>
<p>Defence Amendment Act No. 34 of 1983 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)</p>	<p>Introduced the Board for Religious Objection, and provided the option of military or non-military alternative service for religious objectors both from "peace churches" and other religious denominations. The penalty for refusing to serve on any other grounds was increased to six years.</p>
<p>Defence Amendment Act No. 132 of 1992 (to amend Defence Act No. 44 of 1957)</p>	<p>Broadened the definition of an objector to include moral, ethical and religious objection; the Board for Religious Objection replaced by the Board for Conscientious Objection. Alternative service provisions remained substantially similar to previous legislation, but fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Manpower. Conscripts were not allowed to be drafted into the SAP without their consent.</p>
<p>Defence Act No. 42 of 2002</p>	<p>Repealed 38 previous Defence Acts that had been enacted between 1957 and 1997. In this Act it is stated that "conscientious objection' means an objection against the rendering of military service or against participating in a military operation, on grounds of conscience based on compelling religious, ethical or moral beliefs."</p>

Appendix 14⁵⁸⁷ - Letter from a Baptist Minister to General Magnus Malan

"Dear Minister Malan,

I write to you again to express my deep distress about the continued incarceration of the above two men. The longer the South African Defence Force victimizes two men who are only asking to fulfill their obligations to the State in a non-military way, the more one is tempted to question the credentials of the military authorities in our country...."

Response from Malan (signed by himself):

"Sir,

Before replying to your questions in your letter dated 5th August 1980, I would like to comment on remarks made in your introductory paragraph. In the first instance I strongly object to your statement that the SA Defence Force "Victimizes two men who are only asking to fulfil [sic] their obligations to the State in a non-military way....one is tempted to question the credentials of the military authorities in our country". To say that the two national servicemen concerned are being victimized, testifies of total ignorance of the law relating to national service, military discipline and Detention barrack Regulations. Although it is not the policy to allow conscientious objectors to do their national service in a non-military capacity Privates Moll and Steele were, as is done in all such cases, given the opportunity of serving in a non-combatant capacity.

Instead they chose to contravene a law of the country and were punished. After being sentenced to Detention they repeatedly refused to wear the prescribed dress in the Detention Barracks thereby disobeying lawful commands. Although one may have sympathy for their convictions, undermining of discipline can not be tolerated. It is, therefore, not a question of victimizing them but of enforcing discipline and this applies to all members of the SA Defence Force who commit similar offences. The SA Defence Force

⁵⁸⁷ "Letter from Rev Martin Holdt to General Magnus Malan, 5 August 1980", and "Response from Minister Malan, 6 September 1980", in "Correspondence and representations" file, Richard Steele personal archives.

does not discriminate but has certain rules and regulations to which all its members are subjected. How could our "credentials" therefore, be questioned?..."

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