

# WAR RESISTANCE

## Broadcast from Radio Freedom

Radio Freedom has recently received a copy of the latest issue of "Resister", the bulletin of the London-based Committee on South African War Resistance. This committee was formed in December 1978 and is made up of South African war resisters who have been active in many spheres of anti-apartheid work. The committee provides assistance to military-refugees from South Africa; it involves South African war resisters in discussion groups, seminars etc., it campaigns on behalf of war resisters inside the country; it produces various publications, and so on.

The latest issue of the committee's bulletin "Resister" - contains some interesting items.

In its editorial "Resister" comments on two dramatic recent developments in South Africa - the Free Mandela Campaign and the schools boycott. It says:

"From a war resistance point of view... it is noteworthy that significant support for both the Mandela campaign and the education protests has also been forthcoming from some sections of the white community, particularly students from the English-speaking universities...

"Thus some of the very people the regime intends to conscript to fight against the African National Congress' military wing, and to help enforce such aspects of the hated apartheid system as inferior education for all those not classified as white, have been showing direct support for the 'enemy'. Not a comforting thought for the Malan-Botha military machine".

In an article entitled 'Paratus Panics' "Resister" comments on the attempt by the racist regime, through 'Paratus', the official organ of the South African Defence Force (SADF), to counter the growing resistance to military service. To quote "Resister":

"...the insecurity of the apartheid military brass, and the growing concern they have for the rising tide of opposition to service in the SADF, rea-

ched its most hysterical pitch yet in the April, 1980 issue of 'Paratus'. No less than ten pages (one quarter of the publication) were devoted to propaganda aimed at persuading conscripts of the 'justness' of the racist 'cause'...

"But this propaganda is useless - every year growing numbers of young white South Africans see that they are being called upon to fight a civil war, and to take up arms against fellow South Africans whose cause is just. As conscientious objector Peter Moll argued last year, to fight for apartheid is to fight for the maintenance of a system of fundamental injustice. Conscripts are fooled - the morale of the SADF is at an all-time low, resistance is growing, there is mutiny in the ranks, and in the society as a whole the level of popular resistance to apartheid is higher than it has ever been".

In an article on military detention barracks, "Resister" the following to say:

Resister has received further information about conditions in the main South African Defence Force detention barracks (DB) at Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria.

"There are now over 200 detainees in DB there, 70% of them for offences involving what the military calls 'AWOL' (away without leave). This includes many war resisters and conscientious objectors - Peter Moll and Richard Steele among them. About 70 Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors are kept in a separate barracks. There are also a number of black Namibian soldiers sentenced for AWOL.

"DB is effectively controlled by a hard-core of about 15 'Ou Manne' - long-serving prisoners usually in for serious criminal offences - who brutalise the other inmates with the connivance of the corporals and officers in charge. Beatings of prisoners are a daily occurrence, and there have been numerous deaths, which often go unreported in the press...

"Despite the strict secrecy which surrounds the SADF's detention barracks, enough informa-

tion is leaking out to suggest that war resisters and others imprisoned there are in serious danger".

In the April 1980 issue of 'Paratus' mentioned earlier, the Chaplain General of the South African Defence Force has written an article in which he attacks conscientious objectors. "Resister" publishes a reply to the Chaplain General by Bishop Colin Winter - the Bishop-in-exile of Namibia.

In his 'Paratus' article, the Chaplain General asks:

"Can murder and assassination, havoc and destruction, rape and the overthrowing of established order through violence be founded on the word of God, even when the term 'freedom fighter' is used?"

In 'Resister', Bishop Winter replies:

"None of these can be defended on the word of God. Newspaper articles and eyewitnesses in Namibia show that the South African soldiers have engaged in all these against a defenceless black population".

The Chaplain General asks:

"Is the word of God ambiguous, in other words, does it lead to conscientious objection for one person while for another it is a call to responsibility - a God-given assignment to defend his country, his nation, his church, women and children and Christian civilisation?"

Bishop Winter replies:

"One could hardly call the South African state today a Christian civilisation with its mass arrests, state violence, use of torture. The word of God is unambiguous when it declares 'righteousness (Justice) exalts a nation'. The overwhelming majority of blacks in South Africa would deny that justice exists for them in South Africa today".

The Chaplain General goes on to ask:

"Are the churches not opening the door for young men who wish to evade their responsibilities to

do so under the cloak of conscientious objection?"

And Bishop Winter replies:

"The real question here is who is evading their responsibility. The Chaplain General would be on stronger grounds if he were to enter into public debate with such people as Peter Moll. What is he asking young people to die for in South Africa? Does he really believe that it is right to die to defend racism?"

Finally, Bishop Winter further replies to the racist army chaplain by saying:

"The question that the Chaplain General ought to be answering is why South Africa insists on sending thousands of young men to face death in Namibia when international law has declared their occupation of Namibia to be illegal, when the UN has condemned their right to stay there and when the leading churches in Namibia have asked for the UN to determine the country's future by a free and fair election. The Chaplain General's repeated statement that all who oppose South Africa are Marxists is nonsense. In Zimbabwe, the government, which the Chaplain General condemns, is using the Christian churches to help rebuild the country after the war.

"In his last paragraph the Chaplain General speaks about the conflict in 'Rhodesia'. I have just returned from that country and have seen for myself that the Christian church is working closely with the new government to help resettle the refugees. There is absolutely no conflict.

"So it is nonsense to claim that Mugabe's government is anti-church.

"In Namibia South African soldiers have burnt down churches, closed clinics and hospitals and are used to hold down a suffering people. It is this that the world condemns and which conscientious objectors in South Africa are refusing to support. The conscientious objectors are the true patriots because they call into question the things that the South African state is asking young men to die

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for. They are telling us loud and clear that all life is sacred. History will prove that they are right and South Africa is wrong".

...These extracts do not only reveal facts which are of concern to all our people, but they also raise issues which are of special concern to the young white South Africans who are compelled to take up arms against their own compatriots.

Firstly, the existence of a publication like "Resister" and an organisation such as the Committee on South African War Resistance indicates that the growing movement of resistance to the apartheid regime from inside its armed forces is not just a product of our wishful thinking. It is a fact, and one which it is going to become increasingly difficult for those holding the reins of power to ignore.

Secondly, these extracts from "Resister" show that there are a group of war resisters who are concerned not only with running away from the apartheid army, but are deeply concerned with making a positive contribution to doing away completely with apartheid and all it entails.

These people are setting a fine example to other war resisters and potential war resisters. It is up to those trapped unwillingly in the cage of the racist army to follow this example - to take their stand on the side of the people; to choose their action, and to follow that choice with determination. The South African struggle is a broad and complex one. It needs concerted and patient effort in all spheres - inside and outside the country, political and military. It is out of this concerted effort that we can say:

A VICTORIA E CERTA!

VICTORY IS CERTAIN!

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"IT WAS TO KEEP FAITH WITH ALL THOSE DISPOSSESSED BY APARTHEID THAT I BROKE MY UNDERRAKING TO THE COURT, SEPARATED MYSELF FROM MY FAMILY, PRETENDED I WAS SOMEONE ELSE, AND ACCEPTED THE LIFE OF A FUGITIVE. I OWED IT TO THE POLITICAL PRISONERS, TO THE BANISHED, TO THE SILENCED AND THOSE UNDER HOUSE ARREST, NOT TO REMAIN A SPECTATOR, BUT TO ACT. I KNEW WHAT THEY EXPECTED OF ME AND I DID IT. I FELT RESPONSIBLE, NOT TO THOSE WHO ARE INDIFFERENT TO THE SUFFERINGS OF OTHERS, BUT THOSE WHO ARE CONCERNED..."

- BRAM FISCHER -