

NON-VIOLENCE

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LOOKING AGAIN AT NON-VIOLENCE?

Alarmed at the increased level of obvious violence and loss of life and property, as in Durban, and the prospect of long and bloody strife, some leaders opposed to apartheid seem to be searching again for non-violent solutions.

From Dr. Boesak and the UDF, through Bishop Tutu and Dr. Naudé and the SACC-related church leaders who saw the State President on 19th August, to Inkatha and Chief Buthelezi many speak of being non-violent and some say they are committed to it.

This is surprisingly hopeful in the light of figures given at a recent UNISA Seminar on "Violence" which indicate that world-wide only one Christian in a thousand professes to be pacifist.

Though this principle of action was rejected in 1960 by the ANC and PAC as having failed, and has found very little favour since, it would be good if leaders did look at it again before we become accustomed to the present level of violence.

I am hardly qualified to expound on this or to comment on the views and often very courageous actions of leaders who carry a weight of tension and responsibility of which I have very little conception. Also this News Letter has not attempted to argue the violence/non-violence issue, but has simply tried to explain and encourage more truly non-violent action in the Gandhian sense of the term Satyagraha. For it does seem that when it comes to non-violent action on a large scale we are not all that committed nor well informed, trained and disciplined.

For the present I would like to offer a chapter from Gene Sharp's book "Social Power and Political Freedom" which addresses the South African situation and which you may be able to pass on to someone in a leadership position. Dr. Sharp is an international authority on the political and social meaning of non-violence. This chapter is entitled "What is required to Uproot Oppression?" and sub-titled "Strategic Problems of the South African Resistance", and its first paragraph reads:

The problem of how to uproot oppression effectively with minimal casualties and maximum long-range benefits to the liberated people still remains without an adequate solution. The people of South Africa have long awaited its resolution. Although this chapter is an edited synopsis of four articles published in 1963, with only a few changes and additions, its major points are, in 1980 - seventeen years later - still as relevant as when they were written, despite certain very limited new signs of Government flexibility.

It is just as relevant in 1985 in view of the clearer indications we now have of the Government's conception of "flexibility".

One of Dr. Sharp's very meaningful observations is that "in the Indian struggle for independence as a whole, probably not more than eight thousand died directly or indirectly as a result of shootings and other injuries inflicted in the course of the struggle over a long period." For a population a tenth of that of India at the time this would represent 800 lives in the South African situation. Sharp continues: "The immense number of casualties in Algeria - estimated as high as one million in a population not exceeding ten million - is quite alarming. This is not explained by accusing the French of being by nature more savage than the English." The Algerian level of loss using the alternative of violent revolution would represent 3 million lives lost in a population like that of South Africa, i.e. nearly 4000 times as costly! Dr. Sharp's article is available on request.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Geldenhuis Committee In consultation with the CO Support Groups I made representations to this Committee of the SADF on behalf of the SACC and some of its member churches in particular. This comprised proposals for the amendment of the Defence Act as follows:- Failing the abolition of conscription,

- (1) to make community service an option open to every national serviceman; failing that
- (2) to recognise certain objectors other than religious, and
- (3) to recognise certain cases of selective objection and ^{PT} to reduce prison sentences on those who (still) do not qualify;
- (4) to revise the period of community service, and to make some ad hoc adjustments to the regulations governing it, and
- (5) certain changes to the composition and powers of the Board for Religious Objection.

We also proposed an amnesty for persons who evaded call-up prior to the 1983 change in the Defence Act to allow them to apply for recognition without fear of prosecution. This runs to 18 pages. If you want a copy very badly let me know!

The Chairperson of the Board for Religious Objection is now Judge J W Edeling who took over from Judge M T Steyn on 1st August. The same friendly approach is maintained, but hearings are now briefer than they were.

Questions in Parliament re Numbers in Alternative Service

Figures given by the Minister of Manpower for the situation as at 5/6/85 are:

- 438 persons liable for national service had applied for recognition as religious objectors since the beginning of 1984.
- 353 of these had been recognised, 4 had been refused and 81 were awaiting decision.
- 295 of these 353 were given alternative service (Category 3 classification).
- 278 of these 295 have been sent letters by the Dept of Manpower requesting them to report to the offices of that Department for evaluation and placement.
- Of these 278, 33 have been placed in service,
 - 97 had not yet responded to the letters,
 - 115 are being prosecuted for refusing to do community service (almost certainly all Jehovah's Witnesses - RR)
- The remaining 33 were due to be placed in the near future.

(Meanwhile the old Cinderella Prison in Boksburg is being used as a Detention Barracks for about 120 Jehovah's Witnesses, convicted under the old legislation, who are still serving the three-year sentence they received. About 100 of these are due for release early in 1986 and the remaining 20 towards the end of 1986)

The Minister of Defence stated that in the period 1/5/84 to 31/5/85 no national servicemen who were employed in "unrest situations" or requested to patrol Black townships in the Republic had lodged objection to such service. However, thereafter on 13th August Alan Dodson of Durban was fined R600 by a Court Martial for refusing to do such service.

FASTING FOR A JUST PEACE As part of a two week campaign in Durban the End Conscription Campaign is supporting Richard Steele in a 15 day fast from 22nd Sept to 7th October, the latter date being the anniversary of the first public deployment of the SADF in the townships. Others will join him on the 7th. More information can be had from Richard himself (031-301-5663) or Loek Goemans (031-301-8088) and Gary Cullen (031-45-5682) or the ECC, c/o Box 1879, Durban 4000. Last month Richard faced the destruction of much of Phoenix Settlement, where he has been caretaker for the past year, and his own personal belongings. Support can be conveyed to him through the above address. Others will be fasting in other centres.

PRAYER GROUP FOR PEACE & JUSTICE There may be many groups of this kind in South Africa. The particular one I have been asked to mention meets at the home of Steve Granger (2 Lancaster Rd., Rondebosch, 7700) for an hour each Friday. For details phone Steve at 65-2260.