

NON-VIOLENCE

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If there is a Renewal Notice enclosed, please read it. Your continuing to receive Non-Violence News depends on your returning it! If it is not enclosed then you are safe!

SACC

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION.

Recent Developments On Friday 8th August it was announced that the SADF had recognised Peter Moll and Richard Steele as conscientious objectors instead of simply as call-up defaulters.

Up to that time Peter Moll had spent a total of 125 days in solitary confinement and Richard Steele 50 days (two of which were on bread and water only). Chris Boshoff, mentioned in the May issue of Non-V News, had earlier decided that the issue over which he objected had now become 'fait accompli' and (after 42 days in solitary) he has agreed to serve in the Army again.

It has been stated by the SADF that this recognition applies only to Peter and Richard and will not mean a review of their present sentences which end on 2nd December and 24th February respectively. It will presumably make any future sentences non-recurring in their cases, however.

Comment The country and the Church owe a great debt to these two young men and we thank God for their courage and commitment. Their willingness to suffer for conscience sake has stirred the conscience of the country's military leaders and we should also thank God for the willingness of these men to accept the witness made to them. Thank God for the parents of Richard and Peter who have borne a load of anxiety and have spent much time, energy and money in travelling to see top officials in the Defence Force and in Parliament.

This decision will have repercussions far beyond the ending of the solitary confinement, urgent as that was. Up to now the State has recognised five religious denominations as having tenets by which their members may not participate in war. They are the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, Plymouth Brethren, Suppliant Faithists and Seventh Day Adventists. The Court Martial trials of Richard and Peter and subsequent reviews have led to a more detailed study of the tenets of these groups compared with other churches and the dividing lines are not all that clear. In addition a serious contradiction in the Defence Act itself appears in the fact that Section 121(c) makes it a heavily punishable offence to "encourage, aid, incite, instigate or suggest to ... any other person ... to refuse or fail to render any service to which (they)... are liable in terms of this Act", whereas Section 126A 2(a), if read in the way Courts Martial have been doing, grants recognition as conscientious objectors only to members of those denominations which in fact commit this offence!

The Army has cut the Gordian knot in Peter's and Richard's case without going back to the courts (Martial or Civilian) or to Parliament. But the real need is for a revision of the law to provide a clear and comprehensive procedure for the testing and recognition of C.O.s, and it is surely the job of conscientious objectors and others concerned to assist the State in formulating this.

The Workshop on Conscientious Objection held at Botha's Hill last month started to think about this, but much work needs to be done. The Commission on Violence and Non-violence of the SACC could possibly initiate and co-ordinate this and we are meeting on 11th September. Please let me know before that date if you see any particular snags about that procedure. This News Letter is going to all participants in the Workshop, and you can have it regularly if you return the enclosed reply slip.

Meanwhile, with annual Church Assemblies, Conferences and Synods coming up there is an opportunity to ensure that your church's position on conscientious objection is clear and

relates to the present wording of the Defence Act's relevant sections.

- (a) The "peace churches" generally teach (though not all insist) that their members should not engage in war. Their members then have little difficulty gaining CO recognition.
- (b) Most other churches teach that members may participate in war "on just and necessary occasions", but they also recognise the conscience of the pacifists among them who believe they must abstain from all war.
- (c) Where a church has not made a pronouncement on the justice and necessity (or otherwise) of a particular war, it needs to be made clear that decision on this is left to the individual's judgment and that their conscientious decision is respected and accepted by the church concerned, also that such decision is binding on the person concerned, i.e. that their pacifist members must not engage in any war and others must not engage in a war they genuinely believe to be unjust or unnecessary.
- (d) It might be a salutary exercise for each denomination holding the "just war" view to debate whether in its judgment the defence of overthrow by arms of the present South African system is a just cause. Decision would be hard to reach but debate might clarify the issues and test the applicability of the "just war" and pacifist positions.

PROCESSION FOR JOHN THORNE May 26th. Of the 53 who took part in this largely non-violent action, 22 are on the mailing list of this News Letter. This quarter I am mailing to all 53, and will happily continue sending if you return the enclosed reply slip.

After the event and subsequent trial a general assessment was written by Dr. Kistner (Director of Justice and Reconciliation Division) and I did an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses as non-violent action. These are not for publication but you can have a copy on request if interested.

PAGEVIEW may, after all, be restored to the Indian community! On Tuesday 12th August it appears that the Cabinet decided to refer to the Group Areas Board the question of reversing the 1963 proclamation that made it a "white area". Renewed efforts are being made to halt the demolition while this is done.

CONVENOR'S VISITS TO CENTRES IN THE CAPE PROVINCE. I am to be in Cape Town for the Assembly of the United Congregational Church from 16-25th September and invite recipients of this News Letter to meet with me and with members of the CO Group in Cape Town on the evening of Thursday 18th September at 7.30 p.m. in the Minor Hall of the Rondebosch Congregational Church. Please do your best to come and let the church (65-4793) know if you wanted to but can't.

Then I shall also attend the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in East London from 19-24th Oct. and am arranging to meet people in Port Elizabeth on the evening of Wednesday 15th October. The Rev Peter Fox will notify you of place and time (Phone 30-3442).

There will be a similar meeting in East London on the following evening Thursday 16th Oct and the Rev Steve Fourie (Phone 5-7476) will notify you of the details.

JOHANNESBURG MEETING From the Seminar of Dr. Hildegard Goss-Mayr arose several suggestions of areas of action including the churches. A follow-up meeting for those interested will be held at 85 Princess St. Mayfair, Johannesburg on Tuesday 9th September at 7.30 p.m. Since none of us are experts, this will be a matter of learning by doing. But it is important that we act as well as think nice thoughts. Otherwise the field of action is left to those whose last resort, or even first and second resort, is violence.

Tapes of Hildegard's talks can be borrowed from Mr. Ian McLeod (Phone 615-3488) or myself and translations have been made into English of two of the non-violent victories she referred to from Czechoslovakia and France.

SWAZILAND SEMINAR From 3-16th January 1981 a Peacemaker Seminar will be held at Thokoza Church Centre, P O Box 329, Mbabane. It will deal with War, Peace, Violence and the State in Scripture, in Christian history, in southern Africa, in today's research, in liberation theology and in case studies by participants. The Resource Persons who will assist the Seminar are Bongajalo Goba, Th.D., lecturer at the Federal Theological Seminary of SA, William Keeney, Ph.D., professor of peace studies at Bethel College, Newton, Kansas, USA, and James Moulder, Ph.D., lecturer in philosophy at University of Natal.

Details can be had from the Thokoza Church Centre.

WILL WARREN, the English Quaker who visited SA in 1978/9, died in the UK on 16th June.