

NON-VIOLENCE

LETTERS

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THE CHANGING PURPOSE OF THIS LETTER

When this letter began in 1979 its purpose was to encourage non-violent action towards peace and justice in South Africa. It was felt that the academic discussion on the merits, rights and wrongs of violence and non-violence had been carried on long enough, that we should stop arguing and let those who believed in certain courses of action get on with it and demonstrate their validity, if they can.

Without telling others to be non-violent, least of all those who suffer most from the violence inherent in the South African system, let those who want to see non-violent change, especially if they are in the privileged white position, be the ones to act (not talk) and put their bodies sacrificially in the way to absorb and turn back the violence we all would like to see ended.

This News Letter therefore aimed:

- (a) as an encouragement to others to report cases of this happening, however small those cases were, and
- (b) to put interested people in touch with groups and resources on non-violence.

We did not aim to carry articles on non-violence, but sometimes referred to what was available.

Then came the Conscientious Objection issue in which a handful of courageous young men offered themselves to be the victims of the Defence Act and its lack of provision for the CO rather than go to war and make other people their victims. It was a non-violent action of civil disobedience. Groups formed spontaneously round them.

By the time half a dozen of them had gone to prison the State was committed to changing a law that had stood since 1912 and which successive Ministers of Defence had said would not be changed.

That change came this year, accommodating to some extent the main thrust of those who had led the action for change (namely Christian pacifism), but at the same time using the immense power of the State to out-flank that thrust and strike a blow at any widening of the concession to accommodate "just war" and other objectors.

Further improvement of the CO provisions of that Act could come through similar sacrificial actions by others directly able to show, in their sufferings, the moral issues for which they stand.

Meanwhile, in a small way, the possibilities of non-violence have begun to be reconsidered and to regain credence.

- There have been remarkably affirmative statements by leading church people, such as that of Archbishop Hurley at the trial of Charles Yeats;
- There have been enquiries by the churches and action, such as the decision of the Presbyterian General Assembly (PCSA) calling its ministers to disregard several laws, including the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, which decision was followed by a number of other churches;
- There has been the growth of the Trade Union movement where, although non-violence may not be a principle, experience is being gained in the power of both co-operation and non-cooperation on a large scale;
- There have been seminars, etc., quite independent of the SACC, for the learning of non-violence in several parts of the country, and one or two publications like Dr. Margaret Nash's "Christians make Peace";
- There has been the phenomenal growth of the anti-nuclear and pro-life movement in the Northern Hemisphere which cannot but be noticed here, and several very capable South Africans have been gaining experience in non-violence overseas;
- There has been the GANDHI film at an appropriate time.

If I am correct in this assessment, as I hope I am, then this News Letter and my own abilities become quite inadequate to cover all the "news" and I gladly give up the attempt!

About 300 people in South Africa now receive this Letter, and many of them are more active and capable in social reform than I am. My idea of a new function for it is to pass on to the developing movement for non-violence any ideas and forms of action that come to my notice or otherwise occur to me, together with any sources of more detailed information or experience.

Any comment by readers on this proposed development will be so welcome. And for the next few issues readers can expect an experimental mixture of scraps of news that come my way plus tentative ideas of what people inclined to non-violence might attempt in SA at present.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Apart from Jehovah's Witnesses several young men have refused the July '83 intake to the SADF, but it will now not be possible for this News Letter to keep abreast of all the details. You can assist them by being part of a CO Support Group in your area (if there is one). Three new groups have recently formed in Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg. The people to contact are:

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| Cape Town | Mr Mike Roux, 6 Christow Rd, Rosebank | 65-5523 |
| Durban | Ms Sue Brittion, Box 1879, Durban | 31-2609 |
| Johannesburg | Ms Adele Kirsten, 11 Anson St, Robertsham | 680-7151 |
| Port Elizabeth | Mr Norman Heath, 29 Hurd St, Newton Park | 39-2291 |
| Pretoria | Mr Peter Greenwood, 370 Smuts St, Kloofsig | 62-2278 |
| Pietermaritzburg | Mr Peter Kerchoff, PACSA, 203 Loop St. | 2-0052 |

The annual CO Conference in Durban resolved to go beyond simply helping COs to handle the legislative provisions or penalties and to call and work for an end to conscription. The Conference statement is available on request.

"OBEDIENCE, SUBMISSION & CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE" is the title of a leaflet recently put out by the Church & Nation (SA) Committee of the PCSA. It lists some 20 cases of civil disobedience in the Bible and then examines the Greek words used in the New Testament for "obey" and "submit". Single copies can be had on request.