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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: *from APARTHEID – OUR PICTURE*: reviewed page 17.

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## EDITORIALS

### 1. CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The fact that the Opposition persuaded the Government to amend considerably the provisions on conscientious objection in the new Defence Amendment Bill should not blind us to the fact that the Act as finally passed, is, in its own field, quite as obnoxious as anything we have on our Statute Book.

It is difficult to believe that the recommendations on which the Bill was based came from a commission chaired by a minister of religion and consisting of professing members of the Christian faith, for those recommendations showed a total disregard for some of the basic concepts on which that faith is supposed to be based. In particular they showed a total lack of compassion and nothing at all of "do unto others as you would be done by".

The Act, as we understand it, provides some sort of accommodation for religious objectors, depending upon which category a tribunal, at which they will have no legal representation, decides to put them into. If they are placed by it in the least favourable category they will be liable to a sentence of six years community service, during which six years they will be barred from all political activity. If an objector refuses to do military service on ethical or moral grounds he will be liable to a six-years prison sentence. The original sentence proposed by the Christian members of the commission on which the legislation was based was eight years. Its reduction to six years will, we understand, bring it into line with Soviet Russian legislation on the same subject.

The Nationalist government tells us that the South African Defence Force is protecting the State, and not its own policies, from attack. Our view is that if it had not been for

Nationalist Party policies we would not now have to be defending the State against the attacks being mounted against it.

We live in a deeply divided society. Some of these divisions are historical, but many of them have been created as a matter of deliberate Nationalist Party policy and without the consent of the majority of our people. If we are under attack it is because the Nationalist Party has deliberately excluded three-quarters of our population from any effective voice in the formulation of government policy since 1948.

In a free society, where **everyone** has a voice in electing the government, the State may have a case for conscripting everyone to defend it. But in a society in which that does not apply, surely it has no such right? What moral justification can there be for forcing people, under the threat of serving 6 years in prison, to defend a system which they think is disastrous for their children's future? In a country divided against itself, in a conflict which its own spokesmen have told us over and over again the SADF cannot win on the battlefield, a Christian government would surely be offering people who reject its policies on moral but not religious grounds, an alternative type of constructive service which would benefit society whatever system of government ultimately prevails?

In our society this would not only be a case of "doing unto others as you would be done by" but of "doing unto others as you **have** been done by". For the one thing which Nationalist supporters have never been forced to face, when wars of which they have disapproved have been fought by South African governments in the past, has been conscription. □