

October 2017

Conscripts Need Alternatives: Support Ivan Toms

End Conscription Campaign

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ecc>

 Part of the [African History Commons](#), and the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

End Conscription Campaign, "Conscripts Need Alternatives: Support Ivan Toms" (2017). *End Conscription Campaign*. 7.
<http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ecc/7>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Orlando Redekopp Collection at Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago. It has been accepted for inclusion in End Conscription Campaign by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago.

**CONSCRIPTS
NEED
ALTERNATIVES**
**Support
Ivan Toms**



In many respects Ivan Toms is like any other ordinary white South African. Born in Germiston, raised in Durban – where he captained his rugby team and was deputy headboy in an illustrious school career – Ivan eventually graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Cape Town in 1976.

From there it was into the army where he was commissioned to the rank of lieutenant. And like many of our young men in uniform, Ivan entered the SADF reluctantly.

It was not the sweat and drudgery of military life that concerned him. It was rather a deep rooted sense that it was wrong to serve in the SADF. His religious, moral and political convictions told him that the SADF was being used to defend apartheid. But the alternatives of leaving the country, living as a fugitive, or even facing the prospect of going to jail were too harsh to consider.

Now, after nine years of experiencing the harsh South African reality, Ivan calmly faces the possibility of up to thirty lonely months in prison. This is the punishment which confronts him if convicted for refusing to serve a one month camp in November.

"I, like many other young white men who love their country, find that I cannot ignore my conscience. I am prepared to go to jail for this stand," says Ivan.

"The reality of the injustices in our country have convinced me of the impossibility of continuing with any form of service in the SADF."

Ten years have passed since Ivan did his basics in the Medical Corps. Here he tells of some of the experiences he has had which have led him to the point of refusing to serve and possibly to go jail:

"I have served in the SADF as an officer, and these experiences have greatly influenced my decision to object.

"I was sent twice to the operational area and served on the Angolan border for six months. My contact with the Namibian people convinced me that they do not want the SADF in their country; international law says that South Africa has no right to be there. The local people feel that they are oppressed by an invading army. For them, curfews and security force harassment are the way of life in the SADF-imposed war zone.

"I have worked as a doctor for six years in Crossroads, and know that I am able to do real national service working with the poor and disenfranchised.

"In September 1983, Administration Board officials and police would come in, day in and day out, for three weeks, to demolish 'illegal structures'. What this actually meant was that innocent people who had come from the homelands of Transkei and Ciskei

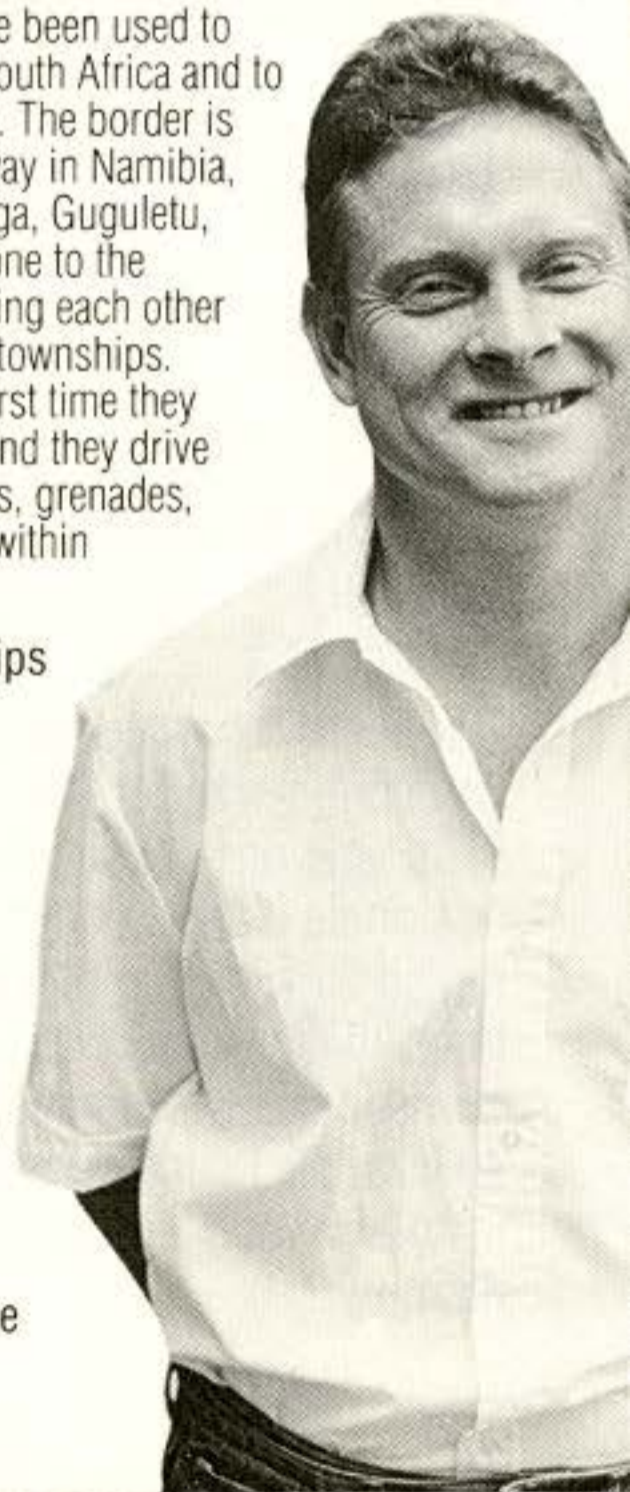
because there was no food or work there, were being attacked daily by these officials. Old women and babies were being left in the rain and cold of a Cape winter because, to the South African government, they should not have been in Cape Town. When the women held onto the flimsy branches that formed the base of their plastic shelters, this constituted a 'riot'. Rubber bullets, teargas, sneeze powder and police dogs battered the people into submission and we had to treat the casualties in the clinic."

In June 1986 Crossroads was destroyed by "witdoek" conservative vigilantes with backup from the security forces. On 16 June the SADF took over the clinic where Ivan worked: "Now what had been a community clinic run by a Christian staff team was used by the SADF to try and win the "hearts and minds" of the people. I don't blame the National Servicemen who were forced to be part of this occupation of the clinic. Some of the doctors had actually worked in the clinic in their final year at UCT and were very unhappy about what they had to do. The blame must be directed at the SADF.

"Since October 1984 troops have been used to control the black townships of South Africa and to suppress resistance to apartheid. The border is no longer thousands of miles away in Namibia, but right on our doorstep in Langa, Guguletu, KTC. Friends who might have gone to the same church school are now facing each other across the barrel of a gun in the townships. For most conscripts this is the first time they have entered a black township, and they drive in high up in a buffel with teargas, grenades, rifles – and with fear welling up within them.

"After working in the townships and developing real friendships with the people, I cannot believe that the children and youth being chased by patrolling buffels are the enemy.

"I really do believe that I have been doing true national service in my work in the poorest squatter areas of greater Cape Town. This is the kind of service that I believe will help to build a South Africa that we can all be proud of."



Ivan's voice echoes the concern of many other conscripts. Some have publicly been prepared to declare their opposition to serving in the SADF. For others – no less sincere in their beliefs – it is families and friends who bear their frustrations. Conscripts are not the only victims of the law. An entire community has been caught up in a web of war and conscription in South Africa.

"I am one of many unhappy and unwilling conscripts who have to make very difficult choices," says Ivan.

"While some refuse to serve, many simply find it impossible to do anything but go into the SADF reluctantly, angry that they are not given any realistic alternatives.

"I stand with all conscripts who support the End Conscription Campaign's call for constructive alternative national service.

"The law provides for community service only to conscripts who are both religious and pacifist. They are forced to do six years of service in a government structure.

"Constructive alternative service should be the same length as military service and be available to us in church, welfare and community organisations.

"To those conscripts who see no option but to go unwillingly into the SADF, the choice should be given not to serve in the townships or Namibia.

"I hope that my stand will contribute to the pressure on the government to introduce constructive alternative national service for all conscripts.

"I believe I must make a stand.

"I am committed to South Africa and believe that the truly patriotic action for me is to go to prison rather than deny my faith and my beliefs.

"South Africa is in a state of civil war and we have to take sides. I believe that the side of justice and truth is the side of the poor and disenfranchised in our country. I stand on that side."



You can support Ivan and other conscripts by sending the following message to:

The Minister of Defence
Box 47
Cape Town
8000

"I call on your government to change the law so that conscripts are given the option of doing constructive alternative National Service. This service should be the same length as military service and be available in church, welfare and community organisations. I also call for soldiers to be given the choice of not having to serve in the townships or Namibia."

DIENSPLIGTIGES
KORT
ALTERNATIEWE
**Ondersteun
Ivan Toms**



In baie opsigte is Ivan Toms 'n doodgewone blanke Suid-Afrikaanse man soos enige ander. Hy is in Germiston gebore en het in Durban groot geword. Op skool het hy goed gepresteer, was kaptein van sy rugbyspan, asook onderhoofseun. Daarna het hy by die Universiteit van Kaapstad medies begin studeer. In 1976 het hy as mediese doktor gegraduateer. Hierna is hy weermag toe, waar hy die rang van luitenant ontvang het. Soos dit die geval is by talle van ons jong mans in uniform, is Ivan onwillig die SAW in. Dit was nie die swoeg en sweet wat hom gepla het nie, maar eerder sy oortuiging dat dit verkeerd was om in die SAW te dien. Dit was vir hom duidelik dat die SAW gebruik word om apartheid te beskerm, wat volgens sy godsdienstige, morele en politieke oortuigings 'n onaanvaarbare rol is. Ten spyte hiervan het hy tog gegaan. Vir hom was die alternatiewe van ballingskap, ontwyking of tronkstraf in daardie stadium te swaar.

Intussen, na nege jaar se ervaring van die wrede realiteite van Suid-Afrika, het Ivan van sienswyse verander. Vir hom is dit nou ontmoontlik om diensplig te doen. Hy is vir 'n maand se militêre kamp opgeroep, waarvoor hy in November moet rapporteer. Aangesien hy gaan weier om diens te doen, sal hy te staan kom voor 'n vonnis van tot drie jaar tronkstraf.

"Soos baie ander jong blanke mans wat hul land liefhet, vind ek dat ek nie my gewete kan ignoreer nie," sê Ivan. "Ek is bereid om vir hierdie standpunt tronk toe te gaan. Die werklikheid van die onregverdighede in ons land het my daarvan oortuig dat dit onmoontlik is om met enige vorm van diens in die SAW voort te gaan."

Tien jaar het verloop sedert Ivan sy basiese militêre opleiding in die Mediese Korps ondergaan het. Tog bly van sy ervarings vars in die geheue, ervarings wat bygedra het tot sy besluit om te weier om weer in die SAW te dien, al impliseer dit dat hy dalk tronk toe moet gaan:

"Ek het in die SAW as 'n offisier gedien, en hierdie ervarings het my besluit om beswaar te maak, baie beïnvloed.

"Ek is twee keer na die operasionele gebied gestuur en het ses maande op die Angolese grens gedien. My kontak met die mense van Namibië het my oortuig dat hulle nie die SAW in hul land wil hê nie; in terme van die volkereg het Suid-Afrika ook geen reg om daar te wees nie. Die plaaslike mense voel dat hulle onderdruk word deur 'n besettingsmag. Vir hulle is aanklokreëls en teistering deur veiligheidsmagte aan die orde van die dag; die oorlogsonne wat deur die SAW geskep is."

"Ek het vir ses jaar as 'n dokter in Kruispad gewerk, en weet dat ek werklike nasionale diens kan verrig deur met die armes en onderdruktes te werk.

In September 1983 het amptenare van die Administrasieraad en polisie dag in en dag uit 'onwettige strukture' kom sloop. Dit het eintlik beteken dat onskuldige mense wat van Transkei en Ciskei af gekom het omdat daar geen kos of werk was nie, daagliks deur die amptenare aangeval is en dat hulle huise keer op keer afgebreek is. Bejaardes, vrouens en babas is aan

die reën en koue van 'n Kaapse winter blootgestel omdat hulle nie – volgens die Suid-Afrikaanse regering – in Kaapstad moes wees nie. Toe vrouens aan die dun takke, wat die basis van hul plastiekstrukture gevorm het, vasgeklou het, het die regering dit as 'onlus' beskou. Die gebruik van rubberkoeëls, traangas, niespoeier en polisiehonde het hul weerstand gebreek en ons moes die ongelukke in die kliniek behandel.

"Toe het die uiterste onheil gekom. Die regering het die hebsug van Kruispad se konserwatiëwe leiers gebruik om die huise van 70 000 plakkers in Nyanga Extension, Portland Cement en KTC gewelddadiglik aan te val en af te brand.

"As gevolg van doodsreigemente teen party van die swart personeel van die kliniek is dit tydelik gesluit. Die SA Weermag het die kliniekgeboue dadelik beset. Die gemeenskapskliniek wat deur 'n Christenspan bedryf is, is toe deur die SA Weermag gebruik om die mense se 'hearts en minds' te probeer wen.

"Ek neem nie die Nasionale Dienspligtiges wat gedwing is om aan die besetting van die kliniek deel te neem, kwalik nie. Party van die Weermagdokters het inderdaad in hulle finale jaar by die Universiteit van Kaapstad in die kliniek gewerk, en was baie ongelukkig oor wat hulle nou moes doen. Die blaam moet teen die SA Weermag gerig word.

"Sedert September 1984 is die troepe gebruik om die swart woonbuurte van Suid-Afrika te beheer. Die grens is nie meer duisende myle ver in Namibië nie, maar reg op ons drumpel in Langa, Guguletu en KTC. Selfs vriende wat dieselfde kerkskool bygewoon het, staan nou in die woongebiede teenoor mekaar met 'n geweerloop tussen hulle. Vir die meeste dienspligtiges is dit die eerste keer dat hulle 'n swart woonbuurt binnegaan – en dit hoog op 'n buffel met traangas, handgranate en gewere – en met vrees wat binne-in hul opwel.

"As gevolg van my werk in die swart woongebiede en die sluit van ware vriendskapsbande met die mense, kan ek nie glo dat die kinders en jongmense wat deur die patrollerende buffels gejaag word, die vyand is nie.

"Ek glo dat ek ware nasionale diensplig in my werk in die armste plakkergebiede van Kaapstad doen. Ek glo dat dit die tipe diens is wat sal help om 'n Suid-Afrika te bou waarop ons kan trots wees."

