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Present:

I couldn't find out the full names of everyone there, nor can I remember the first names of all of them. In the following list I try to identify all present in one way or another.

Anderson

Shott

Gavin Cawthro - ANC sympathiser, who, after meeting Shott and Anderson recently,

Steve ^{de Villiers} was told about this meeting and spoke to us about it. I know him from the past (I think he was involved in Nusas, and I've also met him here since) but ~~I can't remember his surname~~. Not certain where he is politically, but he's certainly not heavily pro-Salscom. He has been in this country for a few years (I think 3). Was in army commandoes back home and is possibly not legally a conscription avoider (i.e. could possibly go back into the country). His political awareness seems fairly high, though I couldn't quite gauge his attitude to the ANC.

Derek Forbes - connected to Swapo of Namibia Support Comm? - others know more about him than I do. He is on the South African War Resisters (SAWR) Co-ordinating Committee (which consists of 5 or 6 people, including Shott and Anderson. see below). I've seen Forbes at many ANC/AAM functions. It's difficult, from the context of the meeting, to say where Forbes is politically. He's not, it seems, in Salscom, but seems to be going along with it on the issue of war-resisters.

2 young conscription avoiders - (don't know their names) Both left South Africa to avoid the January 78 2-year intake. They both seemed politically naive and undeveloped. They had recently contacted SAWR after seeing the article in Time Out. I managed to chat to one of them during a break in the meeting. He had been studying at Wits. He hadn't been very involved (if at all) in student politics. He referred to general apathy of students as a justification of his own non-involvement.

Bloke with shoulder-length blond hair - short and stocky, with glasses. Couldn't fathom out any of his background. He was quite vocal and argumentative during the meeting - mainly on issue of SAWR's links to Salscom, not on a particularly anti-Salscom line, but he seemed generally concerned about SAWR's being aligned to any political organisation (see below). His own political views seemed close to 'unaligned anarchist' but I couldn't be sure.

Alan - don't know anything about him - darkhaired with beard. His most notable contribution to meeting was his suggestion that Salscom and SAWR should dissolve into each other - i.e. there's no need for the two to be kept separate.

Other bloke - on SAWR Co-ordinating Committee I think - was keen on writing for 'Omkeer'.

Myself - After hearing about the meeting it was agreed that I should go along, being the least-known of the three war-resisters ~~working~~ involved in the ANC working group. It was agreed that I should adopt a relatively low-profile approach, but not try ~~to~~ an elaborate cover-up of my position - in other words, that I should play it by ear. This I did. I responded sympathetically to the ideas put forward by Anderson, Shott and others,

at the same time firmly stating my (i.e. our) views on the various issues raised. I put our views in a general way - i.e. I didn't announce myself as ANC, or as particularly concerned with the war-resistance issue except as a war resister. Towards the end of the meeting I did state that I believed that the ANC was the 'major liberation force' in SA, and that I had had discussions on the war resistance issue with people I knew who were in, or close to, the ANC.

I have a strong suspicion that Shott knew or guessed that my connection with the ANC was greater than I was admitting, though I don't think he realised the actual extent of my involvement.

The Meeting:

The meeting was held in a pub in Camden Town under noisy conditions. We eventually had to move to a quieter pub. I noticed a singular lack of security consciousness on the part of most of the people there - i.e. people were sometimes talking very loudly, so that anyone sitting in the pub could hear our discussion quite clearly.

The meeting started with Shott reading us a list of nine points which had been agreed by the SAWR Co-ordinating Committee as suggestions for the activities and functions of a group of war-resisters in this country. I can't remember all nine points, but some of them were:

- * Support for the liberation struggle;
- * Input into 'Omkeer';
- * Publicising war resistance in this country, thus creating publicity in SA and encouraging more war-resisters (i.e. conscription avoiders and deserters);
- * liaison with SAMRAF (?)
- * Educational - i.e. political discussion groups etc.

Shott then asked us what we thought of these points.

Someone asked about SAMRAF. Shott described it as having been set up by Salscom to raise funds for military refugees; that it was broad front, and, in answer to a question, listed approximately ten people on SAMRAF in this country. The only names I knew were: Haslam and Cosmos Desmond. Others were: someone from Amnesty and someone from some Lewisham community project (a black South African).?

Discussion ensued on a number of points. The shoulder-length blond expressed concern over the relationship with 'Omkeer' - he felt that there should be a clear distinction between an internal publication and a publication for military refugees ~~abroad~~ in the UK (with information on things like how to get social security etc). It seemed generally accepted that there was at present not much scope for a separate external publication because the number of military refugees abroad was still relatively small.

I raised the question of the necessity for seeing work with war resisters here in relation to an overall perspective on war resisting. Anderson made a little speech in which he predicted internal resistance taking other forms than conscription avoidance. He mentioned that during his army service he'd seen a whole platoon shave their heads bald in protests against fortnightly haircuts(!). I asked him to be more specific about the forms that he saw this resistance taking. I said that I thought it was important to have a perspective on how war resistance was likely to develop in order to plan activity in this country.

At this point Shott said that it was not the task of this meeting to discuss these issues and that Salscom was handling that aspect of things. He said that it was the task of the liberation movements to handle internal mobilisations, that discussions

with the ANC in particular (as well as with the BCM and PAC) had been held on this issue (i.e. he reiterated things we know him to have said before).

A lot of discussion followed this initial attempt to get a response to the list of nine points. The discussion was quite general and political. I'll try to summarise the main features.

Firstly, it became clear as the meeting progressed that the people generally present were not the type (or number) of people expected. They were hoping for a large number of the non-political conscription-avoiders who had got in touch with them in response to their publicity. Only two such people (see above) were present. They had obviously intended to present such people with the list of nine points for general discussion and approval and hoped for a mandate to move on from there. Shott told us that a co-ordinating committee of about 5 people existed, which had decided to stay in existence for three months until the project had got far enough off the ground for a new committee to be elected.

Most of the ensuing discussion centred around the relationship between Salscom and SAWR. People felt the relationship was unclear - that, on the one hand, Shott and Anderson described Salscom as concentrating purely on the war resistance issue. On the other hand, they were projecting it as having a distinctly separate identity to SAWR, SAMRAF etc. In trying to justify Salscom, Shott and Anderson didn't, I felt, do very well. They kept on pointing out that it was Salscom that had initiated Samraf, SAWR etc, that it somehow had an historical *raison d'etre* etc. Another argument was that the war resisters campaign needed international co-ordination.

They assured the meeting that Salscom was not a political organisation in contradistinction to the liberation movement, but that they were in fact working with the liberation movement.

An important point - Shott and Anderson stated emphatically a number of times that they saw the ANC as the most important liberation movement and as the 'leading force'. They said that approaches had been made to the ANC and they were waiting for guidance. They restated their view that the fact that the ANC had not said no to their plans implied tacit approval.

Second important point - It was agreed by the meeting that no real progress could be made until word had been received from the ANC. Shott and Anderson stated emphatically that if the ANC said that Salscom ~~should be dissolved~~ was an unnecessary organisation, they would dissolve it. When some incredulity was expressed they assured us ~~that~~ by saying that it would be absurd to continue if the main liberation force had said they were not needed. They would, though, put up an argument for the war-resisters project.

This last was the point on which the meeting more or less ended - i.e. waiting for a response from the ANC. The possibility of carrying on with assistance to war resisters was discussed, as well as political education activities for the less political war resisters.

Some interesting points:

The two non-political people there were quite overwhelmed by all the political discussion. When asked for their response to the discussion, one of them said that he didn't understand what the problem was "...Salscom?...ANC...what does it matter...?"

At one point I asked this bloke what he knew about the ANC. He said 'very little', but he certainly did not seem antagonistic.

I gained the impression that Shott and Anderson were not in an easy position - i.e. they didn't have unconditional support from the people there, even the people on the co-ordinating committee. I found it very easy to put our case (in general terms) and my points seemed to have been well-received. In fact, the presence of myself and Gavin was specifically mentioned as having had a definite effect on the direction of the meeting. I had the feeling that if we'd had a definite set of suggestions to put to those people, we could have got them accepted.

The problem of a war resisters group being publicly aligned seemed an important issue. Shott argued that one of the reasons for SAWR's links to Salscom was so that it would not be seen to be aligned directly to the ANC and thus would not put off war resisters. Others pointed out that in SA Salscom was tarred with the same brush as the ANC, CP etc.

During a private discussion with Shott he mentioned that while studying at Sheffield Poly he'd been involved with the SWP there, but intimated that that was because there were no other campaigns for him to involve himself in at that stage. Before we parted company Shott asked where he could contact me.

General impressions:

There are conscription avoiders in this country who are gravitating towards SAWR because it is the only forum so far. I got the feeling from the meeting that there is a lot of potential which could be constructively channeled. If we don't make a move one way or the other soon, we are going to be faced with a growing problem. As I've hinted above, I think the ~~new~~ potential exists to turn the people who were at the meeting - and others - in the direction of the ANC, or AAM, or work on war resistance.

Salscom doesn't have the situation in absolute control and a clear move from us (especially if we take up their offer to dissolve themselves) could lead in very positive directions as far as the war resistance issue in this country is concerned.

These are just impressions from this particular meeting and need to be placed in an overall context of our discussions on war resistance.

I obviously have other impressions of the meeting and the people involved which can be discussed verbally, but which would have made this report too cumbersome if included here.
