

## **TOM WASPE DETAINEE**

(SACBC press release on behalf of the Catholic Action Movement, affiliated to the South African Council of Catholic Laity)

Tom Waspe was detained on 1/10/1986, after evading the security police for months. One of thousands of others removed from society, Tom Waspe grew up in a Catholic home in Orange Grove Johannesburg. His parents taught their five children to love others and to treat them as equals. He was educated at Marist Brother's College, Observatory, where he was president of the Christian Life group. After matriculating he did his army service. He then attended the University of the Witwatersrand and studied for an arts degree.

He joined the Catholic Society and became its chairperson. In 1977 under his presidency the National Catholic Federation of Students organised its biggest conference at Oakford Convent in Natal.

### **Inspired**

It was with fellow catholic students that he began to understand the deeper implications of his faith. The life of Jesus and the Kingdom of God inspired him to live out his faith actively. He saw the widespread injustices in South African society and began to work against apartheid.

The 1976 student uprising had a profound effect on Tom Waspe. He met with black students and discussed their grievances. Because of these links he was detained in 1977 and spent four months in solitary confinement in John Vorster Square. Many people still remember the brave group of Catholics – nuns, priests and students – singing Christmas carols for Tom and other detainees. They were arrested and herded into John Vorster Square while singing the Our Father.

### **YCS and JODAC service**

After his release he worked full time for the Young Christian Students movement and started groups in Mamelodi, Soweto and at the University of the Witwatersrand where he also showed films to help increase his R90 monthly salary. Elected Young Christian Students' national co-ordinator in 1981 he was instrumental in promoting YCS nationally.

He believed that whites had an important role to play in bringing about a just society and when the United Democratic Front was launched in 1983, whites who wished to participate came together to form the Johannesburg Democrayic Action Committee of which he was elected president in 1984. Tom Waspe worked untiringly in the white community to oppose apartheid and strongly believes that there is a place for whites in a future non-racial democratic South Africa, but that whites should earn their place.

He is employed by the catholic Bishops' Justice and Reconciliation Commission in an economics project.

Tom Waspe's lifelong commitment to opposing apartheid made him a target for the police, and they raided his house a number of times. He went into hiding, disrupting

his personal life and marriage, not so much to protect himself, but to carry on his work of opposing the apartheid system.

### **Sarah Crowe's dismissal**

The southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference viewed BBC TV's dismissal of Miss Sarah Crowe on 13/10/1986 for singing Nkosi Sikeleli'iAfrica (God bless Africa) as outrageous.

To sing this Christian anthem at a memorial service with the customary raised fist – as is done at many church service throughout South Africa – is a prayer of petition, not a political statement. We fail to see how this impairs journalistic objectivity – all the more since Miss Crowe participated in the Kinross mine disaster memorial service while not on assignment.

Miss Crowe, as researcher had excellent contacts with community organisations and was a valuable and trusted journalist while employed by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

### **Church School Rights**

Heads of Catholic schools throughout South Africa met in March 1986 in Johannesburg to consider draft regulations for the "Registration and Subsidisation of Private Schools".

There was unanimous rejection of clauses, which would impose a racial quota on the schools. It was agreed that unless these clauses were withdrawn the schools, in conscience, could not even apply for registration. Strong objection was voiced to increased limitations of freedom that the draft regulations implied.

An appeal was made that the authorities recognise the right of church schools to serve their communities according to their religious principles, and to provide subsidisation, to which all parents believe they have a right.