

# A visit to the dentist?

## Visiting Saul: A friend's impressions

In a time of what is fast becoming worldwide social reform and political enlightenment, I had hoped to report that Saul Batzofin, along with other objectors, is about to be released from prison. Silly me. Saul has now served eight months of what is sure to remain an 18 month sentence.

For those in his support group, these have been eight months of adjustment to the routine of standing in line to go and visit, of photocopying and circulating letters, paying the odd account on his behalf, and mostly of coping with the personal knowledge that the person we all know and respect is in prison.

### Frustration

It feels as though he has been in for long enough now. We have all learned all there is to learn about dealing with our emotions: Saul has learned to make the best of it: he's not about to escape or crack up or assault his fellow prisoners.

He's also not going to change his mind or regret his chosen course. I keep expecting someone to say, "OK we've proved our point, there is little to be gained by keeping this man in jail."

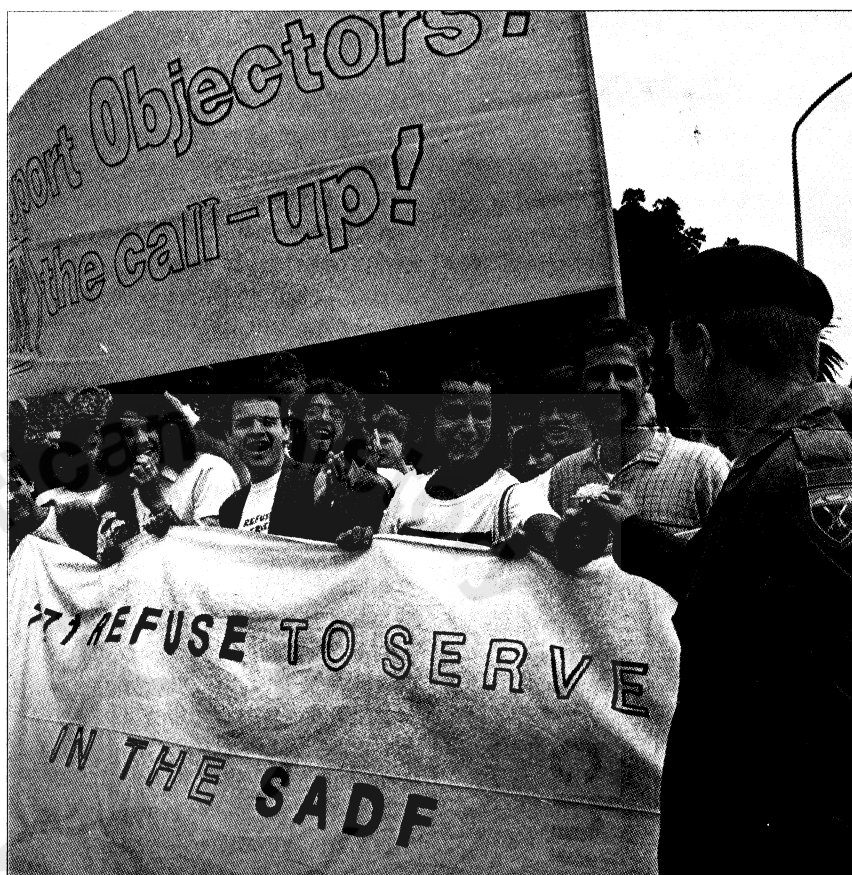
So now, for us it has become simply a matter of time and of dealing with the frustration.

In his letters, as always, Saul speaks only of being in good spirits and of finding this unimaginable hardship to be tolerable.

In one letter he says: "I feel that I am really learning about an aspect of society which I knew nothing about and find really interesting. Strangely I am starting to perceive the whole experience as something positive instead of just something to be endured." How guilty he makes me feel for ever bemoaning my fate!

### Bizarre experience

To go and visit is a bizarre experience that rates somewhere between going to the dentist, the zoo and



*In October 1989, objectors marched to the castle in Cape Town to hand in the names of those who had publically refused to serve in the SADF. Photo: Atrapix*

**'Strangely I am starting to perceive the whole experience as something positive instead of just something to endure'**

**- Saul Batzofin**

attending a group therapy session.

The trip to the prison at Zonderwater takes about an hour from Johannesburg, and is long enough to exhaust idle conversation and I find myself arriving with mixed feelings.

### High spirits

I want to see Saul, but I hate seeing him in prison. I worry that his skin will have taken on a grey pallor. I am angry at those who have done this thing. I wonder whether Saul will betray the effects of being locked up.

Thankfully, Saul always looks incredibly well, chats away about anything and everything, and invariably cheers his visitor up for good measure too.

He knows all there is to know about

current affairs and gives no hint of being badly affected by frustration and resentment.

At first I was very worried that he was taking it all far too well, and that a crack was bound to follow, but he makes it very obvious that it's not all just a breeze. Saul has simply refined his skill of making the most of a situation and finding something of worth in whatever he is doing.

I have no doubt that, in years to come, Saul will reap a rich harvest from this experience and from the knowledge that he remained true to himself in spite of the consequences.

For the time being, let those who wish to show support do so by using the next 10 months to their fullest potential. - Thane Haarhoff (SBSG)