

End Conscription Campaign

A7.1.7

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11/7/1988

Dear Friend

THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

The Defence Amendment Act of 1983 allows for a very narrow category of national servicemen, namely religious pacifists, to do a non-military form of national service. It is now commonly acknowledged that the legislation as it stands at present is inadequate and leaves many national servicemen in a severe moral dilemma. Their choice is either to enter the military unwillingly, go to jail or to leave the country. This lack of choice is proving to be detrimental to family life, the economy, the psychological well being of our young men, and to South Africa as a whole.

In more recent times a number of developments have popularised the idea of Community Service as a form of national service available to all conscripts who for reasons of conscience do not wish to perform military service:

- * The "brain drain" is having a retarding effect on the economy and is contributing to an increasingly serious skills shortage;
- * The major churches have been making efforts to have the legislation for alternative service broadened;
- * In a survey conducted amongst welfare and non-government organisations in 1987, 49 indicated their willingness to employ national servicemen if the legislation were amended to allow it. The skills which could be utilised between them covered almost every type of professional and non-professional qualification. The results of this survey were forwarded to the Departments of Defence and Manpower and we have some indications that the government is open to considering a change in the law
- * On the political front a recent NDM conference endorsed a motion of support for alternative service and the PFP has indicated similar support based on the motion presented by the Pretoria-East branch;
- * In June 1988 the End Conscription Campaign met with the South African Defence Force in Pretoria and presented a proposal for alternative national service along the lines of the attached statement. Our proposals are currently being considered by the Minister of Defence.

We believe that the government is sensitive to public opinion and its decision on whether or not to broaden the Defence Amendment Act will depend on feedback it gets from the public on this issue. We therefore ask you, as an individual or organisation of some influence to do the following as a matter of urgency:

1. Identify your name and / or the name of your organisation with the accompanying public statement. We would like to publicise the statement as widely as possible, however we do not have sufficient funds for this purpose. May we suggest a donation of R10.00 or more from individuals and R50.00 or more for organisations, if possible, to cover publication costs. Could you please return the cut-off slip to our Durban address as soon as possible, in order for it to reach us by the 24th. August latest.

2. Write to your local MP and the government in your personal capacity and/or as an organisation, expressing your views on the need for alternative national service. We would appreciate being sent a copy for our records. We suggest you write to:

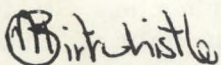
The Hon. Minister of Defence
Gen. M. Malan
Private Bag x427
Pretoria
0001

The Hon. Minister of Manpower
Mr P. du Plessis
Private Bag x499
Pretoria
0001

The Hon. State President
Mr P. W. Botha
Union Buildings
Pretoria
0002

Thank you in anticipation for participating in this lobbying exercise.

Yours faithfully



MARTIN BIRTWHISTLE
for DURBAN ECC LOBBYING GROUP.

WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW ALTERNATIVE SERVICE FOR ALL CONSCRIPTS.

We know that many National Servicemen are dissatisfied with the present system of National Service. We believe that these people are prepared to serve their country and that constructive forms of Alternative Service should exist.

We call for:

- * Alternative non-military forms of National Service to be made available to all conscripts.
- * Alternative Service to be made available in religious, welfare and community organisations.
- * Alternative Service to be of the same duration as military service.
- * Troops to have the right to refuse to serve in the townships.
- * Troops to have the right to refuse to serve in Namibia, Angola or elsewhere outside South Africa's borders.

Please tear off and return to: End Conscription Campaign
 56 Ecuemical Centre
 20 St Andrew's Street
 Durban
 4001 ph. 304-5883

Name and Position Held/Organisation:.....
 Address:.....

I would like my name and/or the name of my organisation to appear as a signatory to the public statement calling on the government to allow alternative service for all conscripts. (Delete as applicable)

.....
Signature

Donation enclosed (amount).....

Please return to us by the 24th. August.
P.S. The article on the reverse side is for your information.

INDICATIONS that the government is considering widening alternatives to military service were strengthened by the South African Defence Force's meeting with the End Conscription Campaign last week.

The extraordinary meeting – considering the SADF's fierce propaganda campaign against the ECC – ended with the release of a joint statement that the ECC's proposals for non-military community service would be forwarded to Minister of Defence Magnus Malan.

Earlier this year, Malan told parliament, in reply to a question from Progressive Federal Party MP Peter Gastrow, that he was looking into the question of broadening the definition of those who qualified for alternative service.

The government is likely to gain more than it would lose by widening alternative service. There are no indications that the SADF faces a manpower shortage.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, there are 106 400 people in the South African armed forces, including 64 000 conscripts, making it the largest army in

Secondly, ECC objects to alternative service being one and a half times as long as military service. It proposes four years as a reasonable period.

This is the same period as military service. As it will be served consecutively, it will deter all but the most committed objectors.

Thirdly, the ECC wants alternative service broadened to include non-government community, religious and welfare organisations.

Several state departments – including the Department of Justice and the Department of National Education (for white schools) – have refused to employ religious objectors.

Is the army pondering non-army service?



Cartoon from the ECC handbook, 'Know Your Rights in the SADF'

Indications are that the military may be thinking the unthinkable: exploring the idea of non-military 'alternative' national service. JO-ANN BEKKER reports

Sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, the SADF has a further 167 000 active reserves and 150 000 people liable for camps. In March, President PW Botha said South Africa could muster nearly 500 000 "well equipped troops if circumstances dictated".

Broadening alternative service would remove an important lobbying base for the ECC.

It would also bring to an end em-

barrassing publicity such as that surrounding the trial of Crossroads doctor Ivan Toms, who is a Christian and objected to doing army camps on moral and political grounds.

Toms, who was sentenced to 21 months' imprisonment in March this year, has been declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

On July 19, the trial of another political objector, Witwatersrand University Student David Bruce, 25, is

due to begin. Bruce faces a six-year sentence.

Alternative service, which was introduced as an amendment to the Defence Act in 1983, allows only religious universal pacifists to do alternative service in government departments.

Objectors not classed by the Religious Board of Objection as religious pacifists face six years in jail.

Before the board was established,

The National Community Service Group, which represents religious objectors performing alternative service, surveyed welfare organisations and church-related bodies (including the Urban Foundation and Operation Hunger) about whether they would employ objectors doing community service. A total of 50 responded positively.

The National Community Service Group serves as a support base for religious objectors, publicises the options and works for an improvement in conditions of service. It echoes many of the ECC's demands around alternative service.

Outgoing national co-ordinator said the support group saw itself as part of the broad anti-war movement.

The group works for a broader definition of those who can do alternative service. It also advocates alternative service in areas other than government departments.

At present, religious objectors have no chance of promotion. They receive the equivalent of a private's salary throughout their service and are lucky if they take home more than R600 a month, including the living allowance.

Only professionals recognised by the army are entitled to double pay. Teachers and psychologists, for example, are not recognised.

Religious objectors' salaries are taxed – unlike military service pay – and they receive no study or exam leave or medical aid benefits.

13 people – who fell outside the Jehovah's Witness and Plymouth Brethren "peace churches" – were charged with refusing to report for military service. Twelve were sentenced and served sentences in jails or detention barracks of up to two years.

Alternative service lasts for six years, compared to military service, which lasts a total of four years – two years' initial training, followed by 720 days of camps spread over a 12-year period.

The Department of Home Affairs decides in which state department objectors will serve. Current areas of employment include libraries, fire stations, hospitals, coloured and black schools and botanical gardens.

Most religious objectors get paid a similar rate to a private in the army, although they get a slightly larger living allowance of R250 a month, which was determined in 1984.

Calls for amendments to alternative service have been a key thrust of the ECC's programme since its formation in 1983. The organisation first presented these demands to the Geldenhuis Committee, which investigated conscription in 1985.

Since the State of Emergency makes it an offence to campaign against conscription, the ECC has increasingly focused its demands on alternative service – alongside calls for conscripts to have the right to refuse to serve in neighbouring countries and black townships.

Alastair Teeling-Smith, the ECC's national secretary, believes his organisations' demands for a broadening of alternative service are achievable.

The demands are, firstly, to change the definition of those who qualify for alternative service to include those who object for political, humanitarian and moral reasons. SADF members who become objectors should also be permitted to do alternative service.

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