

Assessment of an ECC rep at the WRI Feminism and Nonviolence Conference and mini-tour of London.

July 23rd 1987 - August 11th 1987.

Introduction.

ECC was invited by the War Resisters League (WRL) to send a representative to an international conference on Feminism and Nonviolence in Ireland. The conference was planned by the War Resisters International (WRI).

From the outset we were aware that the stated nature, content and direction of the conference would not benefit ECC to a great extent, but rather acknowledging that our presence and input at such a gathering is important. We also realised that the ECC representative would be able to use this opportunity to make contact with those organisations and individuals who have provided constant support and encouragement of our campaign in both Ireland and London; and to extend our range of contacts.

In a word, these aims were achieved.

Aims of the trip as seen by ECC.

1. To extend our network of support
2. To maintain our contacts with those organisations and individuals already supportive of ECC and to provide updated information on the direction and activities of ECC.
3. To provide relevant input on the style and role of ECC in anti-military work in South Africa - most relevant for the conference.

Assessment of the Conference.

On the whole the conference was a tremendously empowering and at points informative experience for me. In trying to assess the value of attending this conference I would like to look at both the weaknesses and strengths of the gathering and in so doing also assess what the benefits are for ECC as an organisation.

Strengths:

1. The commitment on the part of all the delegates and the organisers to ensure maximum participation of all present and ensuring shared responsibility for events, such as the workshops.
2. It provided ECC with the opportunity to present our input and get our message across to a wide range of groups and women involved largely in the European and North American peace movements.

3. It provided the opportunity to make contact with several editorial staff/contributing journalists of international peace publications. Their eagerness to cover ECC events and their commitment to maintain contact was encouraging.
4. The international support and interest gained for the release of Janet Cherry and Sue Lund was phenomenal.
5. The international character of the conference provided an extensive network for ECC : there were 50 women representing 21 different countries.
6. Being able to maintain contact with those organisations such as the WRI and the WRI who have given us so much support in the past.
7. It was an affirmation of realising ECC's commitment to process and democratic practises.
8. A source of information on various aspects of the struggle against injustice: direct oppression of Thai women through mail order brides; Greenham Common women and the phenomenon of zapping; nuclear testing and experimentation happening in the Pacific; the conflict situation in Northern Ireland.
9. Generating some new ideas to take to ECC, such as the development of a feminist consciousness in our style of work and generating research in the area of women and the military.

Weaknesses:

1. There was insufficient clarity on the part of the organisers and the delegates as to the broad aims of this conference.
2. Despite the international character of the conference, there were some serious omissions here ie : - no women from other third world countries (the 2 South African women were the only two) ; no women involved in a liberation struggle situation where armed struggle is also a phenomenon; no women from oppressed classes and/or minority groups, ie : native Americans, etc.
3. There was not sufficient focus on international networking and how we would see that as building an international anti-war culture and developing some common strategy around this area of work.
4. There was no clear organisational representation and/or mandate from the majority of the women who attended. This raised the question of what happens to all of this energy and vision that is generated at such a gathering and what are the structures to which it is reported.
5. This is more a comment than a criticism. It would have been good to have more discussion on the juncture between feminism

and nonviolence, particularly with regard to feminist analysis and the practise of nonviolence.

#### General

The bulk of my time outside of the conference was spent meeting with anti-apartheid organisations and those organisations who have been supportive of our work in South Africa.

I made one or two new contacts but on the whole met with individuals and/or organisations which are familiar with ECC and needed an update on our activities and direction. Most of these meetings were low key and informal but important in terms of maintaining our strong and good international support base. Some of the organisations I met with included Christian Aid, Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), War on Want, Quakers, WRI, a member of the European Parliament.

The intention of the time outside of the conference was not to go too public but rather to strengthen our existing networks and to make some new contacts.

Richard Steele was also in London at the time and we participated in a lunch hour forum at the CIIR in which we addressed the general political climate in South Africa, with particular reference to the role of ECC and our present activities.

#### Press:

While in Dublin, Anita Kromberg (sent by IFOR to the Conference) and I did several interviews.

- a. During the conference, a journalist from the Irish Times, who was covering the conference as an event, interviewed us on ECC, and made special reference to the Conference's demand for the release of Janet Cherry and Sue Lund. A letter of demand for their release had been sent to the Minister of Law and Order.
- b. We did a second interview with a journalist from the Irish Times on the history, structures, activities and role of ECC within the national democratic struggle.
- c. We did an interview with Shelley Anderson, editor of an international peace publication, Disarmament Campaigns, on the general history and role of ECC.
- d. I did a brief interview with the editor of the monthly publication of Trocaire, a Catholic relief agency in Dublin.

In London, I had interviews with Peace News, Oxfam and Christian Aid.

## Conclusion.

On the whole it was a very stimulating and worthwhile experience, perhaps with one strong recommendation : that we plan a little further in advance to give ourselves and the host organisation more time to set up a more rigorous programme. As ECC we also need to have a more thorough process of making decisions about the value of international conferences and tours. This is an item for discussion at the National Conference in October 1987.

# End Conscription Campaign

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*Adèle Kirsten*

Adèle Kirsten (ECC National Secretary)

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