

THE STATE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

AS.17

From its humble beginnings as a resolution at a fairly small conference of the Conscientious Objectors Support Groups in July 1983, ECC is able to reflect on its five year history with pride, having achieved far more than was ever anticipated.

This growth is not only the consequence of the dedication of ECC's members, but reflects the deep rooted character of the anti-conscription struggle within the white community. This character given rise to a whole arena of resistance, rather than just an organisation. This "anti-war movement" has a diverse nature and for the most part has arisen spontaneously, though it is slowly gaining a coherence which could pose a significant problem for the military strategists who sit so close to the seat of power these days.

THE FOCUS OF THE WRM

In South Africa we live under a fundamentally repressive regime which is committed to white rule. The extent of it was brought home to me recently when reading the SACC booklet produced for the churches convocation meeting in May 1988. In examining non-violent strategies for change it dealt with the example of the Philippines where people had actually gone and surrounded the army's tanks in the streets to prevent them intervening in a demonstration. That is a very powerful action but brings home the nature of the South African situation. Here the army is not of the people and that kind of demonstration would have become a massacre. The SADF people would not be confronting people from their own community but at best, "die kaffir wat in ons agterplaas gewerk het". Apartheid has dehumanised white perceptions of black people to the extent that any amount of violence is possible in its defence.

As popular struggles against apartheid have grown in the last ten years the efforts of the regime to maintain itself have intensified and become increasingly sophisticated. The philosophy of a Total Strategy has become upgraded with the latest American military strategies to cope with third world struggles which are informed by Low Intensity Conflict theory, some thing Jean Kirkpatrick described as "violent peace". Its element are a combination of reformist and repressive strategies with which we are acquainted, but which now assume a far more coherent and sinister tone under the direction of the National Security Management System. In essence this amounts to a military strategy within which all state policy is subsumed in the interests of the maintainance of power.

The applied in the South African situation over the past two years, this approach has been to:

- 1) smash the organised movement of the people represented by the UDF primarily
- 2) economic upgrading in "trouble spots" with a view to coopting conservative leaders and then the middle majority of the community
- 3) Following the above, they are trying to impose local state structure for control and select "leadership"
- 4) In the process of the above, through the structures of the NSMS there is an institution of military political rule at every level of society. Initially this involved gathering state functionaries under the chairmanship of the military. Over time the SADF's over role in this regard is diminishing as the civilians begin to internalise the military's way of thinking and the essence of the LIC approach

5) This approach involves repression as a long term defence mechanism when all else fails which is why it was termed "violent peace". The strategy is to contract this task out to surrogate forces. In the townships this means that white troops are being replaced by Council police and Kitskonstabels, removing the obvious racism from political power. In the neighbouring states where war and destabilisation distances the conflict from South African territory the same is happening. Hence the Angolan war and the building of Unita, fostering the MNR and the obstinate continued occupation of Namibia and Namibianisation of the conflict with conscription into SWATF.

Despite this last point the government will always depend on whites as its last resort as it is they who are likely to defend the system to the last, and be prepared if necessary to drive their tanks over the people.

The essence of the states strategy is that it is a military strategy for the maintenance of white power. This character brings home the significance of the "war resistance" movement in South Africa. It represents the opposition to the central defence component of the apartheid system, a cancer eating away at the very nerve centre of the ability to maintain the system by military force. Indicative of this, is the states paranoid response to the ECC since mid-1986 relative to its size.

ELEMENTS OF THE WAR RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

The war resistance movement is not a formal collection of structures and organisations though it would certainly include such. It is something far broader, diffuse and more fundamental. At its most abstract it is a spirit of resistance, something which exists in the hearts and minds of individuals who may or may not be connected to any organisation or group. It may be expressmore or less politically or simply as weak will to defend the present system. Its strength lies in the fact that at its root it is so intangible and so organic to the community from which it emerges. Organisations can fluctuate or even be eliminated but their basis will remain.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

This is perhaps the single most impactful expression of resistance because of the power of the individual conscientious objectors message which is that "you expect me to put my body on the line to defend this system and I refuse to do that". This sets a moral example and invokes tremendous respect and support, as evidenced with Ivan Toms and other objectors in the past. The break in objectors going to jail as a result of the harsh prison sentences is now a thing of the past. Ivan is inside, Dave Bruce is the first to face a full six years for a stand which is significant in its entirely secular political basis. These stands have galvanised substantial public support and a far broader empathy with their plight. Support groups have gathered around these figures in the process breathing new life into the CO Support Groups which have perhaps struggled since the passage of the 1983 legislation.

Ivan Toms and Dave Bruce are not isolated cases but there are a number of guys who intend facing jail sentences in the near future. We are not talking of another one or two, but numbers which will constitute the beginning of a snowball in themselves, let alone the inspirational example they set. I believe the army is also aware of the problem and will move fairly soon to address it.

accomodation of AS.

A new phenomenon with massive implications was the joint stand of twenty three people in CApe Town. Memnbers of that stand reported that many people subsequently approached them saying they would like to have been part of the initiative. This move was qualitative leap in strength and confidence amongst war resistors. It opens a whole new form of objection which provides the security of a group to substantial numbers of objectors, harking to the American anti-Vietnam war movement where flight to Canada became subsumed by mass refusals to serve, evasion and a preparedness to go to jail as a possible consequence. A proliferation of objection on that scale becomes extremely difficult for the state to maintain control without it appearing to have lost control of the situation.

Out of this type of objection an entirely new embryonic form of organisation has begun to emerge in the Objector Support Group. This group's significance is that objectors are themselves organising together.

A second form of objection is the numbers of people leaving the country rather than face the call-up or saometimes for women an unwillingness to part of this system in a less direct way. A Rhodes survey of last year showed that 57% of male graduates were considering leaving the country rather than face the call-up. This reflects a widespread tendency amongst tertairy educated males who can use their skills as a ticket out of the military. For some professions this brain drain is particularly significant ACCOUNTANTS FIGURES and poses long term problems for the state and development of the economy. Exile as a esponse has changed over recent years, more and more people are leaving yet the tendency amongst more politcally conscious people is to pursue every possible avenue to remain inthe country in response to a need to stay and contribute in the long term, but particularly because for most people one can do more to resist apartheid by staying than leaving the country. Significantly this attitude prevails without the answer being to go into the army on the basis of "strategic participation" as was argued quite forcefully by some in the early 1980's.

One of the options being used in growing numbers is that of applying to the Board for Religious Objectors. the majority are from the Peace churches yet many people from the Just War churches are defining themselves as universal pacifists. Undoubtedly for many their universality is defined by their entirely South African vision of reality.

The Comunity Advice Services around the country aregrowing steadily and are increasingly being made aware of the vaste numbers amongst the public who are seeking such service yet not really finding them at present. WHere the services are being effectively publicised they are processing increasing numbers of queries. The most common is guys looking to get round camp call-up, especially where these hold the promise of active service. Interstingly, in Cape Town there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of Afrikaans men approaching the CAS amounting to more than half the calls. This is more than an interesting statistic but significant qualitative development for the war resistance movement.

Like an iceberg one is often misled by seeing only the obvious fraction. What is less visible to us is resistance within the SADF. There is presently a case of a trooper wishing to object who has been courtmarshalled for a lesser offence. This keeps the matter out of the public eye and disguises the fact that the matter is one of conscientious objection. The obvious point is how many others like this. They may be infrequent yet their instance would appear to be on the increase. Much of the resistance takes less overt forms. Since the deployment of troops in the townships it appears a fairly widespread informal policy to accommodate people who object strongly to such service. It remains to be seen how people resisting service in Angola will be treated. Perhaps the most debilitating of all resistance activity comes from those unwilling conscripts in the army who disrupt simply by their absolute lack of commitment. Examples are misplacing of records and files, "loosing" demanding correspondence and making nothing look like work. The SADF is able to cope simply by drawing on more resources, however the resultant inefficiency increases the drain on the state's resources. A real achilles heel of the SADF particularly in as far as it would wish to contract out its regional aggression, was the minor mutiny's of soldiers of the 101 and 202 battalions of SWATF who refused to fight in Angola. The long term reliability of its black troops effects the degree to which white conscripts will have to face life threatening situations and hence the SADF's ability to sustain protracted conventional warfare.

All the forms of objection could be dismissed as insignificant in their extent or broader impact. This may in fact be so. However what is obviously different if one takes the total picture, is that in the very recent past the scale of resistance to serving in the SADF, particularly politically based resistance is increased dramatically. This is to the extent that a snowball could be said to be rolling and growing all the time.

RESISTANCE TO THE SYSTEM OF CONSCRIPTION

ECC has shown that there is the potential for mass resistance to conscription. This became evident from mid 1985 to mid 1986, spanning the troops out campaign and the Working for a Just Peace campaign which for the first time significantly raised the issue of alternative service. ECC never reached the scale of a mass movement but its message began to echo in all sort of unconnected areas of the anti-apartheid white community, particularly in the cultural area and amongst young people.

This growth was effectively halted by the state with the Emergency of June 1986. The criminalisation which followed that, both from the repression of ECC in the form of raids and detentions, and more significantly the communist bogey smear conducted against the organisation from official sources, propagandists close to the state like Aida Parker and the National Student Federation and then likely covert operations such as Veterans for Victory.

Despite the repression and sustained criminalisation ECC has more than survived. Internally in terms of membership and structures it has lost no ground at all, though certainly at a public level it has had a low period from which it is only beginning to emerge. This resilience is something of a compliment to the members of ECC but more, it is a reflection of the strength of the issue. This is reflected in the kind of groundswell of opposition even now, well after the height of ECC's growth. Though support for ECC has been somewhat undermined, opposition to conscription has only grown in the recent past.

Examples of this is that though the PFP leadership are more silent on the issue of conscription, their constituency committee members often have strong feelings on the subject and have shown substantial support for ECC in house meetings. The PFP youth are a firm support base for ECC and where they are organised, are active in the ECC.

Amongst mothers particularly but women generally there is a growing disquiet about conscription into the war in Angola. This was reflected in recent articles in popular women's magazines. One's desire to take this with a pinch of salt needs to be tempered by considering Magnus Malan's somewhat hysterical finger wag as a response, possibly indicating an awareness that this dissatisfaction could spread rapidly.

Women is a constituency opposed to conscription, is sometimes difficult to fathom because they are not conscripted, the mothers and lovers relationship is not an entirely sufficient reason and it appears to be more than simple an interest in an arbitrary anti-apartheid issue. The reflection of this constituency is the high proportion of women involved in ECC, almost half, and the consistent opposition to conscription, the role of the SADF and militarisation shown by the Black Sash. The government aligned Women for South Africa place considerable attention to opposing ECC and boosting the image of the army which might suggest that state intelligence perceive a growing problem in this area.

Deaths in Angola could become another significant area of dissatisfaction. Already there are mumblings of dissent, which are amplified when the families are ambiguous in their attitude to the conflict. This seems to have been the case with son of a Pinetown priest where their communities feeling was one of "what for". At the same time a CP supporting father who lost his son had bitter words to say about his son dying for the policies of the Nationalist government which he did not support. Feelings of dissatisfaction are also being generated by the SADF's handling of deaths. For morale reasons they are requiring families to suppress the fact of their loss. This demand in some cases serves to generate suspicion and unhappiness would could prove dangerous for the SADF. A particularly serious case related to a father who heard of his son's death six weeks after the fact from another conscript. When unable to get any satisfactory explanation from the authorities he threatened to root his queries via the press. He was lead to believe in no uncertain terms that, that would be an unhealthy thing to do.

Another area of resistance is amongst school pupils. A recent survey of nine Catholic schools revealed that 40% of the boys would not be going to the army or were extremely unhappy about the prospect. This is a massive percentage given the environment of ideological conditioning affecting white youth today. These particular schools were not from the Cape Town southern suburbs but included Boksburg, Welkom, Kimberley and Springs. In view of these figures the recent initiatives by Cape Town ECC to promote an alternative cadets programme becomes all the more significant. The project has aroused quite considerable interest and will hopefully be underway in some schools in the near future.

The churches have always been an important constituency from amongst which opposition to conscription has emanated. The main churches have all taken policy which at the very least, strongly condemns conscription, if it does not

imply that serving in the SADF is unchristian. The debate amongst Methodists about becoming a Peace Church have lead to nothing, though a fundamental break with the SADF was implied. Equal distance from the ANC's armed struggle is implied, however it is safe to assume that the SADF had more to loose by such a decision.

Chaplaincy in the SADF has been one of the areas where the churches have sought to remove any legitimising influence they may have. The army has recently all but been given an ultimatum to the SADF that chaplains should not wear military uniforms and that they be paid by the church. The stridency of this demand and the delegitimising effect for the SADF are noteworthy.

At the church leaders convocation in May one of the fourteen commissions dealt with conscription. The fact itself points out that this issue has some priority status which is more durable than simply being an issue at points of crisis of media hype of an issue. WHAT TRANSPIRED.

Shifts within the traditional apartheid fold are always particularly exciting and meaningful. Two recent developments within the NGK have pointed to a significant and growing questioning and possibly even resistance to the SADF from within its ideological bastion. The army hierarchy was shaken by the July 1988 edition of the church's official newsletter which through its editorial column, questioned the moral basis of the SADF's involvement in Angola and whether the troops should not be withdrawn. The story had not yet disappeared from the front pages of the newspapers when the Sunday Star carried a report that a faction within the church was lobbying for the withdrawal of NGK military chaplains. That this at issue within the church profoundly challenges the military when one takes account of the role chaplains play as morale boosters and legitimators of the SADF's role for the average troop. Those of us from English background will possibly not comprehend the significance of this theological questioning within the devout Afrikaans community.

INTERNATIONAL RESISTANCE to conscription is an important part of the resistance equation which is sometimes overlooked. COSAWR was set up in the late 1970's by the first significantly large wave of anti-apartheid war resisters. It has always played a significant role maintaining criticism of the role of the SADF. It has consistently distributed a well researched and informative magazine, Resister, including inside South Africa. Its impact has however remained limited in the country as its major vehicle Resister has never been terribly well circulated. Much of this has been due to a mistaken belief that all editions are banned immediately. COSAWR major effect at a propaganda level has been in Europe where it has helped maintain criticism of the role of the SADF. It appears that they are intending to raise their organisational profile further at an international conference, lobby level. Perhaps the most significant area of COSAWR's operation is its work to accommodate and assist people who leave South Africa to evade the call-up.

A more direct measure of the international support for opposition to the SADF is the support which ECC has received. Since early 1985 ECC has established an extensive network of friendly organisations with whom we correspond and involve in support actions alongside our campaigns. This support has ranged from statements of support, support for Ivan Toms, and joining our troops out the township fast. ECC has been able to represent South African war resistance at conferences and public speaking tours in the US, Canada, Britain, France, Finland, Ireland, West Germany, India and at the United Nations.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE

Initiatives for a system of alternative service is the third element of the war resistance movement. The present system is some four years old and is showing severe signs of strain as it drowns in the government's successful Total Onslaught propaganda. Community Service may only be done in government departments however many, including the departments of education and the CSIR refuse to take CO's who they regard as security risks, even if the majority are apolitical Jehovah's Witnesses. Recently the minister of manpower said they would need to consider extending AS beyond government departments. The security consideration has always applied in placing objectors so one must assume that the bottleneck has resulted from there being more CO's than was anticipated.

Recent research by the Department of Manpower has revealed that a significant number of immigrant families have re-emigrated as a result of Citizenship Amendment Act under which they became naturalised citizens and thus liable for the call up. This is causing a serious loss to the economy of High- and Middle Level Manpower. This might cause the Department to be pushing for more comprehensive extensions to the system of alternative service.

Especially interesting was Magnus Malan's statement in response to a question in parliament May that he was open to looking at the Defence Act on the issue of alternative service.

Why is the state seeing this strain on the system of conscription and the need to consider broadening the system of alternatives. Firstly, it is clear that the issues of growing objection, continuing mass groundswell of opposition to conscription, and the far broader call for alternative service itself. Wynand Malan writing in the Sunday Star, 31 July, symbolised this is calling for a system though his view of the role of the SADF and conscription is that of an enlightened Nat. Harvey Tyson, editor of the Star has over the past few months really taken up the cudgels on this issue and reflects a sentiment common amongst many other senior public figures who have never come out with an explicit end conscription position.

The breadth of support for the AS call was reflected in the enthusiastic support given to ECC members who proposed a motion from the floor at the NDM National Congress in May. This was referred to the leadership structures to considered for incorporation in the party's policy. The PFP also has policy supporting AS which corresponds almost exactly with that of the ECC.

Without a doubt the most telling reflection of the mass popularity of the issue has been the response to the jailing of Ivan Toms and David Bruce. Ivan emphasised the need for alternatives which was picked up extensively and supportively by the English press. David Bruce did not mention AS at all. The degree to which it was spontaneously raised in articles, editorials and features reflects the mass popularity of the call. More than this it is being made intuitively, without any "agitation".

Amongst the business community there appears to be significant concern about the extent of the brain drain of professionally skilled people. This has lead to significant support for the idea of an AS system. This sentiment has the

potential to spread rapidly as business people see the ability of such a system to help alleviate human resources problems as well as the positive developmental role such a system can fulfill. The SADF is likely to have its ear close to the ground amongst the business community whose ability to effect the system of conscription is therefore significant.

Support for AS was also reflected amongst a range of organisations in a survey done by the Community Servers group in 1986. Of 100 questionnaires 51 were returned and 49 groups expressed a willingness to take on community servers in a range of jobs. These groups included the Urban- and Rural Foundation's, organisations catering for the deaf, blind, cerebral palsied, as well as mental health, family and child welfare and others bodies.

The idea of alternative service is gaining ground amongst the churches where a interdenominational AS programme is being set up. This will involve conscripts doing community work through the church which they will pose in lieu of their military service. By trying to enforce their call ups the army will be entering into direct conflict with the churches. This is a direct challenge reflecting a qualitative advance in resistance to the SADF.

On the basis of all the above indicators ECC's alternative service campaign is proving to be particularly important. The mass base for the campaign is becoming increasingly evident as ECC's action gives it an avenue for expression. The campaign relative to the public sentiment can be likened to a veld fire. ECC is providing a spark which once it catches the issue will rage out of control until the authorities meet its needs, the provision of a system. The impression gained from the meeting between ECC and the SADF was that the army realise this and concede the need for AS.

RESISTANCE TO MILITARY RULE

A fourth area of resistance is opposition to military rule within the state in the form of the NSMS. There is a growing body of academic and policy related research into this area. Its aim is usually more to explore state attempts at cooption alongside its constitutional reform programme than to examine the extent of military rule per se. Nevertheless it is beginning to have an effect in generating awareness of the silent military coup since the accession of PW Botha as well as the militarist designs underlying JMC initiated upgrading schemes.

Within the PFP and liberal city councillors there is opposition to the JMC's in principle though this doesn't come to much as their actual operations are secret and therefore not criticisable. Business which is often a target for incorporation into the network of the JMC's are for the most appallingly ignorant about their operations or often even their existence behind behind the facade of upgrading.

If the ability of the security establishment to artificially prop up the regime is to be checked the NSMS is going to need to be placed under far more pressure through concerted exposure by ECC but particularly other organisations as the issue is more one of apartheid reform and repression than a concern of the conscript. No organisation has effectively found a way to make this an issue though perhaps the municipal elections may provide this op-

portunity by permitting the question, exactly how much say does the citizen have in the running of the country.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

This is not part of the South African War Resistance Movement however international pressure is an important compliment and sets a context within which the SADF faces resistance. US desires for change in South Africa even under the friendly Reagan government has lead to the screws being tightened in respect of Mozambique and Angola/Namibia. One cannot be sure of the extent of pressure the US and other friends of Pretoria can bring to bear when they want to, however it is evident that they are presently being able to hold the South African to a less hawkish position in relation to these countries.

The present negotiations concerning Angola have made the South African public less inclined for war, as they do not want to suffer losses when the SADF is going to withdraw sooner or later. Interestingly this sentiment is as prevalent amongst supporters of the CP and particularly the AWB as it is to the left of the government. This public opinion constrains the SADF's ability to fight its way out of the negotiations should they become too costly.

MASS POPULAR RESISTANCE TO THE SADF

In talking about war resistance one might confine this to the struggles of the ECC other similar organisation and developments in the white community. This is the focus of this paper however it should be borne in mind throughout that this aspect of resistance is but a small aspect of the overall challenge faced by the SADF. While white resistance might have an important ideological impact it is the black victims who issue the most direct physical challenges.

Stone throwing will never destroy a buffel but it has the effect of demonstrating to the ordinary white conscript, the unpopularity of his role. Even the majority who justify themselves will be aware of this. For a significant minority the grossness of the inequalities in the war between unarmed township children and themselves is powerfully disarming. In general the state war effort is continually squeezed between the physical challenge of the masses and the ideological backlash from within its own white ranks.

Alongside the ordinary township resident must be placed the ordinary peasant of Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and the other frontline states who supports the infiltration of ANC and SWAPO guerilla's that they may attack white rule and the SA security forces without the use of bases or sanctioned transit routes, except in Angola.

Of course the most significant resistance to the SADF is that of black (and white) South Africans who have decided to leave the country with the aim of joining the armed struggle of the ANC. Twenty years ago the ANC's Morogorro conference initiated a revitalisation of its barely existent military campaign. Despite the power of the SA security forces tens of thousands of people have joined in increasing numbers. In the last four years one has seen the evidence of this in the rapid escalation of the number of guerilla attacks. The number of MK members being captured or killed is fairly significant yet the scale of attacks still increases dramatically. Today the ANC talks of

training its MK forces inside the country signifying what it terms the transition to people's war. It is against the backdrop of this military resistance to the military maintenance of the present regime that anti-war resistance has and continues to grow.

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