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REPORT OF WORKSHOP DISCUSSION, 20 MAY 1987

The time has come for ECC to move forward in the struggle against conscription into apartheid's army. To do this we need to situate ourselves within the current political climate. Then to examine our effectivity, past and present. And finally to discuss the options for moving forward.

1. Political Climate

The state of emergency is nearly one year old. It is useful to remind ourselves of state of emergency objectives as a background to further discussion. The state of emergency was declared on June 12, 1986, with the following objectives in mind:

- a) to smash peoples' power
- b) to smash extra-parliamentary organisations
- c) to gather information about peoples' power and extra-parliamentary organisations
- d) to consolidate the ruling bloc with a hardline anti-"revolutionary" stance with the aim of attracting both ultra-right and wavering liberal support.
- e) to tighten control over information gathering and distribution.

This is the climate in which ECC as an organisation must function. The three major areas that ECC is concerned with are: (i) our constituency; (ii) other extra-parliamentary organisations and (iii) the State. These three areas determine how ECC operates and therefore current trends in each area need to be identified.

(i) Our Constituency

The whites-only election indicated a significant shift to the right. Two possibilities emerge from this. Firstly, there is now a larger pool of disillusioned whites for whom the futility of parliamentary politics has become clear. Potential exists for winning this group into the exciting world of extra-parliamentary politics. Secondly, those who have moved right are well out of ECC's range. This may allow ECC to associate itself more closely with extra-parliamentary progressive organisations.

(ii) Extra-Parliamentary Organisations

An important question being asked in extra-parliamentary circles is "What has happened to ECC?". Historically ECC has been well respected by progressive organisations but now they feel that ECC has stopped delivering the goods. Extra-parliamentary organisations are pushing for greater support for their own campaigns or greater punch within our own constituency. While this criticism is well taken, ECC must be careful not to be pushed into actions unsuitable to the objectives within our constituency. Perhaps a discussion of our constituency with progressive organisations, with a possible redefinition of the constituency, would help to determine future strategy.

(iii) The State

Not much more needs to be said about the State. The state of emergency objectives sum it up well. Repression will increase, information-gathering (ie. detentions) will continue and the

aganda war will go on.

How effective has ECC been ?

Conscription into apartheid's army has been an issue for many years. Other groups and individuals were objecting to conscripted service into the SADF long before ECC was formed, but there was always a vacuum. The potential for using conscription as an issue around which to mobilise the white community always existed. ECC used this potential to fill the vacuum and has up until June 1986 exceeded all expectations.

Pre-state of emergency ECC's message was clear. Campaigns were characterised by flair and content and won over a large and enthusiastic audience. ECC activists were brash and bold and were spurred on by many successes. Organisational structures were democratic, vibrant and together. ECC's constituency was expanding.

3. Are we still being effective?

Post-state of emergency ECC's message has become unclear. The slogans may (or may not) still be catchy and slick but the content has become severely curtailed. It is often said that, if the ECC logo and chain are there, people will connect and support. At best this may be so for committed supporters but it certainly won't gain new supporters for ECC.

ECC activists are demotivated and there is a nervous reluctance to participate in ECC work. There is also a tendency to over-censor ECC media and actions. (A number of pre-state of emergency ECC publications were banned, but have any been banned post-state of emergency??)

Organisational structures are disjointed, top-heavy and individuals are easily isolated.

The fact that ECC is still alive and functioning is a promising sign. But the question must still be asked: is ECC still capable of significantly filling the conscription issue vacuum?

4. Moving Forward

In moving forward and out of the assessment, what are ECC's tasks firstly, and secondly, what are the options?

a) Tasks:

- * to carry the anti-conscription banner high
- * to improve dialogue between ECC and extra-parliamentary organisations
- * to democratise organisations under repressive conditions
- * to build skills and leadership
- * to improve content in campaigns etc
- * to go back to the declaration and place the issue of conscription within the apartheid context.

b) Options:

- * At present the dominant view is that ECC should push the legal struggle unreservedly. Content must be re-incorporated and clarified. The conscription

issue must be unashamedly linked to as many other issues/campaigns as possible.

Other options mentioned for consideration are:

- * To engage in a defiant national mass action
- * To go back to an overt "Stop the Call-Up" emphasis. This has extreme implications for the organisation.
- * To disband. The conscription issue could still be slotted into other extra-parliamentary organisations.
- * To pick up on another issue in the white community around which to organise.

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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