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# ECC FOCUS

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (TVL) OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

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Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, whose Progressive Federal Party is split over military conscription, ponders an uncertain future at a recent ECC debate. More hopeful were David Webster and Sheena Duncan.

## Defence Debate hots up

In a public debate on June 5, Dr David Webster, spokesperson for ECC, challenged Dr van Zyl Slabbert of the PFP to clarify his party's position on conscription.

Dr Webster outlined the ECC position that the SADF is not a 'defence' force but an aggressive force, both inside South Africa and in neighbouring states. The army is being used against the people of South Africa in the townships, he said. The 'enemy' is not a foreign aggressor, but fellow citizens. That young white South Africans are being called on to fight their countrymen he said, indicates that South Africa is in a state of civil war.

The SADF also plays an aggressive role in neighbouring states, Dr. Webster said. He referred to the illegal occupation of Namibia, and the destabilisation of Mozambique, Lesotho and Angola.

Dr. Slabbert began by pointing out that the government has repeatedly lied to the PFP

about the role of the SADF in southern Africa. He then said, however, that the PFP saw its role as to oppose the government from within parliamentary structures, and advocated 'engaging' rather than 'isolating' the SADF. "It is isolation that breeds tyranny", he said.

Dr. Slabbert also commented that the call to end conscription was "dangerously romantic, extraordinarily naive and counter-productive". He put forward the notion of a professional non-conscripted army, saying that unemployment would fill its ranks.

Laurie Nathan, national organiser for ECC, said that ECC is a broad front for organisations and individuals who oppose militarisation. He emphasised that the call to end conscription was made in response to the specific role played by the SADF in upholding apartheid. It was not 'naive' or 'romantic', he said.

## Sao Paulo's Dom Paulo

Among the speakers at our Peace Festival is the Archbishop of Sao Paulo, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns. Known to Brazilians as Dom Paulo, he has persistently advocated that it is the role of the Church to show the 'hypocrisy and injustice', of a country as rich in resources as Brazil, where so few benefit from, or share in, the wealth.

"Changes must be made," says the 64 year old Cardinal, "so that the majority have a minimum of justice; life cannot be the privilege of a minority."

And in his work of seeking justice Dom Paulo has been a leading force in opposing the absence of democracy in his country. Brazil is marked, like South Africa, by the strong hold of the military in everyday life. When he criticised Brazil's flourishing arms

industry, one general called him 'a bad Brazilian'.

Despite this he has defiantly continued his work of aiding a wide range of trade unions and community organisations. Rather than associate with the authorities he places his energies into working with the poor and oppressed. At his office he receives an unending stream of visitors: diplomats, strikers, mothers of disappeared prisoners in Argentina or Uruguay, repentant police torturers, shantytown dwellers, nuns. He is renowned internationally for his work in the sphere of human rights.

He promises to make a useful and exciting contribution to the discussion on peace at our festival. We thank him for coming to be with us.

## Editorial

### ECC and PFP

The public debate between Dr. David Webster (ECC) and Dr. van Zyl Slabbert (PFP) was a generally constructive discussion around the ending of conscription. The debate, was attended by over 600 people, most of whom appeared to support the ECC position.

Nevertheless, press coverage gave prominence to Dr. Slabbert's remark that the call to end conscription is "dangerously naive, romantic, simplistic and counterproductive."

There are thousands of white men who are currently confronted with an agonising choice: to be deployed in the townships, to go to jail for six years for refusing on moral grounds to serve in the army, or to leave South Africa permanently. These young men, filled with horror at the immediate prospect of taking up arms against fellow South Africans, would not regard the call to end conscription as "romantic" or "simplistic".

The call to end conscription has been made by Dr. Beyers Naude, Archbishop Hurley, Dr Allen Boesak, Bishop Tutu, Molly Blackburn, Sir Richard Luyt and Sheena Duncan. It has been made by the Catholic Church, PFP Youth, The Black Sash, UDF and the 40 groups affiliated to ECC.

They have demanded, and here Dr Slabbert agrees, that SADF troops should be withdrawn from Angola, Namibia and the townships. Until this happens it is as rational and important to demand an immediate end to conscription.

Despite the differences between the ECC and the PFP, there is no reason for the relationship between the two to be antagonistic. Our position on conscription and that of the PFP, although different and motivated for different reasons, ought to strengthen one another and the mass opposition to conscription.

# South Africa's 'Vietnam Syndrome'

Every family has experienced or is soon to experience that frightening, sinking feeling when a father, brother, relative or close friend receives his call up papers. But does the process start there — and when and how does it end?

To answer these and other questions ECC FOCUS interviewed a psychologist who did his "stint" from 1982 to 1984.

**ECC: Like all conscripts you received you signing up papers when you were 16 years old. Were you prepared for it and what went through your mind at the time?**

It does not start there — from boyhood you are aware of family and friend entering the SADF. You are also aware of injuries and deaths suffered. I received my papers in 1973 when I was 15 years old and service was for one year.

At that age you are naive, emotionally immature and do not realise the significance of conscription. I had the impression of handing over the control of my life to a larger organisation where I had no say at all on my future.

**ECC: When did the reality of the situation hit you?**

At the end of matric when you realise it is now - you must face the fact that every step of your life is controlled. Whatever you feel you are faced with four basic decisions: Commit yourself to the SADF, evade by leaving the country, object or delay by studying. At that age exile was not an option I felt ready to accept, particularly as I could not accept not returning to South Africa. Objecting strips you of your dignity and was nearly unheard of in 1975. So, the decision was more or less reached for me - I decided to delay and spent seven years at university.

**ECC: You became a qualified psychologist. Did your years at university change you in any way?**

I became mature and gained a theoretical and political education. I realised that committing myself to the army would clash with my political and personal feelings, but I reached a point when further delay would be ridiculous — and went to the army for two years.

**ECC: Once you made the decision to go you went through basic training and because you are a psychologist, part of your duty was to deal with the new intake.**

Your first experience of the SADF is a medical and orientation session. At this point the first symptoms of psychological stress become evident.

I am not merely talking of my personal experiences. Most servicemen are 18, immature, fresh out of school. They are forced to sever all ties with home, many for the first time. At some level everyone is scared of the unknown and most experience difficulty in adjusting. As a psychologist I saw it manifested in difficulty in sleeping, withdrawal, frustration and anger which is all kept hidden. This in turn results in psychological reactions such as headaches, nightmares, trembling and pimples.

**"Most servicemen are 18, immature, fresh out of school...most experience difficulty in adjusting. As a psychologist I saw it manifested in difficulty in sleeping, withdrawal, frustration and anger, which is all kept hidden..."**

**ECC: Would you say that the SADF fosters fear, frustration and anger in order to channel it towards aggression with a defined enemy in its sights?**

Yes. Your life is completely structured and controlled in terms of the ends the SADF wants to achieve. During basic training you are given the chance to forget all responsibilities - even when to eat, sleep and go to the toilet. The reality of life, money, love and the world is all easily forgotten.

This is all part of the strategy to break down your every defence and to instill respect for a peer structure which becomes an important vehicle for discipline and training.

Men become like children and succumb to a false reality of enjoyment. But, with a knowledge of psychology you realise what is happening to you and others around you. Because you realise that it is useless to resist — you comply with orders. You are otherwise in danger of destroying your personality and frustrating the need for an outward expression of your emotions unless you react in the required and channelled way.

**ECC: We have all heard of the "Vietnam Syndrome" - the inability to readjust to everyday civilian life. Do you think servicemen in South Africa suffer from a**

**similar syndrome?**

The SADF does not have a full-time project to deal with soldiers returning to civilian life. Only a few are referred to counsellors and many others go home not wanting to talk about their experience.

The situation is compounded in South Africa by the increasing difficulty that servicemen face in getting jobs. Increased alcoholism, emotional trauma and criminal activity belie the low percentage the SADF provides for conscripts who experience difficulty in adjusting when they return home. Newspaper headlines are more and more a reflection of this fact: "Bail for soldier on murder charge", "Soldiers a new crime factor", and "Soldiers stole car after pass refusal".

## Call-up for what?

On or around July 4, thousands of young men will make their way to call-up centres to begin their military training. Hundreds have already started leaving South Africa to avoid their call-up.

The country is in a state of civil war. The army is being daily used in the townships. Recently Parliament was told that five residents have been killed by the SADF. Community and student organisations have repeatedly called for the SADF to "get out" of the townships.

The recent attack on alleged ANC houses in Gabarone and the killing of 13 people bears witness to the SADF's role as aggressor in Southern Africa. Namibia is still under SADF control and Angola still suffers SADF incursions. Conscripts may well ask, 'What are we being called up for?'

ECC believes that it is untenable for a government to force people to take sides in a civil war. We believe that it is the moral right of young men to exercise freedom of conscience and to choose not to serve in the SADF. The way to bring peace to South Africa lies not in increasing militarisation, but in the building of a just and democratic society.

### ADVICE BUREAU ON MILITARY CONSCRIPTION



If you are worried about your call-up, contact us for advice and information on alternatives.

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