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AM.7.6.4

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

1) Significance/Political Objectives for taking up alternative service

* Draw in various sectors in the white community
* goood issue around which to build alliances
* alternative service a strategy along the road of ending conscription
* keep issue of alternative service and conscription alive
* ecourage South Africans to serve South Africa constructively
* positive
* minimal demand but represents a challange
* build non-racialism

2) Present support for alternative service

A wide range of support exists for alternative service. On the level of moral outrage, largely fueled by the stands of objectors, many different groupings and individuals have called for alternative service. Across the political spectrum, the Independent Party, NDM and PFP have all recently passed resolutions at party congresses in support of alternative service, while extra-parliamentry groupings have also supported the call for alternative service. Newspapers have editorialised support for alternative service and the editor of the Star is involved in a personal campaign to bring about alternative service.

Business and professional groupings have also supported the call, largely because of the brain-drain; a perception that young graduates and proffessionals leaving the country because of conscription is detremental to the economy. Finance Week and the Rinancial Mail have both called for alternative service. Various professional groupings have also made representations to the SADF.

There are a number of different initiatives at universities with the aim of uniting the university community in support of alternative service. The Centre for Policy Studies has embarked on an ambitious reseach project, largely directed at business and professionals, to determine the extent of the brain drain, costs of it to the economy, support for alternative service, and practicalities around revising the present system of alternative service.

The Churches have traditionally supported alternative service and are embarking on their own campaign to set up a church based system of alternative service.

3) A potential Alternative Service Alliance

There is potential for establishing an alternative service alliance given the widespread support for it. But the alliance should not be just of fringe groupings but must include establishment groups.

The nature of the alliance would be determined around the bottom line that is adopted. A bottom line that inculded a critique of the system of conscription and the role of the SADF as a justification for a new system of alternative service would limit the number of groups that would be able to be part of the alliance.

A more pragmatic bottom line based only on the desire for a new system of alternative service, for whatever reason would enable a bigger and stronger alliance to be built. A srtong political line would exclude the business and professional sectors. Alliance should be pulled together initially around support for a revised system of alternative service. Over time and as part of the alliance dynamic of compromise demands could be formulated. There would also be room outside the alliance for different groupings to assert their 'line' outside the alliance.

According to the adage "you're only as broad as you start", it would be crucial to establish the political bredth, from IP to UDF, at the inception of the alliance. It would be difficult to broaden out over a period of time. However, while the political bredth needs to exist at the inception of the alliance, othe groupings such as business, welfare and professional can be pulled in over a period of time and could comfortably slot into the political spectrum that has been established.

4) Process for the establishment of an alliance

The following process was floated by the group:

1) Consult with organisations about the possibility of forming an alliance, the bottom line, the types of groupings which should be part of the alliance.
2) Set up working group that is representative of the political spectrum that is to be included in the alliance. Working group would be responsible for drawing other groups into the alliance and in preparation for a conference.
3) Conference in September next year. Different groupings in the alliance would articuate reasons for supporting alternative service and alliance would be set up on a formal level.

Responses to the proposal, which was broadly adopted by the commission, was that perhaps the process should be quicker, athlough we neede to have a balance between acting as soon as possible in a context that could change Vs being thourough in our consultation and setting up of the alliance. It would be incorect to be presenting a possible form of the new alliance to other groupings at this stage as this needs to be worked out in practise by all members of the working group. The working group would be a good place to get a feel of the other groupings and a testing for the launching of a more formal alliance.

The commission felt that it was not representative enough to move on the process and that more groupings should be involved in the comission, especially groups such as FFF which have had experience in alliance work. Other groups would be contacted to send reps and organisations requested to discuss the proposals of the comission.

5) Next meeting

Items, amongst others, for the agenda of the next meeting are to be:

* other processes and senarios for a possible alliance
* the bottom line debate (Part II)
* which groupings should be part of the working group, and how to contact them
* discussion on the finer points of the process, practicalities etc.

S : The meeting also said that the initiative around an alliance should be NATIONAL and that similar processes need to be followed in other towns, villages and cities, that would lead towards the conference which, of course should be National. (appologies from the scribe for leaving this NB point out)

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