

# END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

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MINUTES OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
9 - 12 MAY 1991  
KATBERG, E. CAPE

Present: 34 ECC delegates plus one rep from NUSAS and one from Black Sash (P.E.)

THURSDAY 9 MAY, Opening session

Chris de Villiers chaired the session, and after the welcome, introductions and agenda review a Conference Steering Committee was elected: Alastair (Jhb), Chandre (G'town), Illa (Durban), and Benedicta (Cape Town)

The opening address on Conscription, ECC and Political Developments was given by Chippy Olver. He addressed two questions

- where are we (the country) going?
- how do we (ECC) relate to the period?

It is not a foregone conclusion that the outcome of the present period will be better. The prevalent idea that this is a transitional period is based on two dangerous assumptions, i.e. that everything will work out well and that things are moving positively. However the concessions that have been made by the Apartheid State are the result of circumstances which have driven it to - make major concessions to the democratic forces

- ditch some of the right wing
- work to capture the middle ground
- see the emergence of a counter revolutionary onslaught (nurtured in Mozambique and Angola then brought home to Natal) which has brought us to the current phase of violence, aimed at weakening the liberation groups

ECC's situation in all this is that we are not sure whether we still have an issue, and not sure whether we still have a constituency as de Klerk has eroded the middle ground with his "reforms". The debate on the future of the SADF is now being undertaken by politicians.

Realistically there is still a reduced role for ECC, but we need to be sharper about our analysis and methods. Positively, we have won certain points - which is a cause for celebration; also, the two streams, internal and external, can now work together. We have always opposed militarisation, and still need to be in the forefront, e.g. by exposing the politics underlying the violence (but not by taking on a mediating role).

Chippy's talk was followed by general discussion on the relevance, capacity and main focus of ECC - which must still be to End Conscription.

FRIDAY 10 MAY

First session: Chair Alastair

A. Panel Discussion on Assessment of SADF, Malan, CCB, conscription, etc.

- \* Howard Varney - SADF in the Natal violence comes under the same criticism as the SAP. The security forces have the capacity to stop the violence but not the will

- 2 A3.1.2,3
- \* Chris de Villiers - Dilemma for ECC - admits there is a role for the SADF in current township policing, can therefore not call for "troops out" - issue no longer clear-cut
  - \* Kathryn Mathers - what is needed in the townships is a differently-trained security force. The SADF troops in the townships have often had only basic military training.

General discussion centred around two questions:

Is there still opposition to conscription? Yes, some, mainly resentment by conscripts at having their lives disrupted: N.B. We could emphasise the racial bias here. Others may see the SADF as a genuine peace-keeping force; the public has lost the perception of the SADF as the National Party's military wing. There are also right wingers opposed to conscription. We should be networking into national servicemen to trace the reasons for disillusionment, and we should develop our political critique of what conscription means and expose what the SADF is doing. Also noted that it is easier to avoid the call-up now.

How to stop the violence? Security forces should disperse crowds with weapons, and arrest and charge perpetrators. They do not have the political capacity - not trusted by anybody - may need an outside body (the church?)

Discussion on conscription issues continued in small groups later in the session (see C).

B. Assessment of ECC now and since the last National Conference.

Roddy Payne summarised actions over the past year, arising from last year's Conference:

1. The Welkom intervention - worked to some extent
2. The July action - transformed itself from a massive stand into a series of WJP type actions, eg Cape Town's creche-building, Jo'burg's cleaning up of blocks of city flats, etc
3. The Natal violence - positive result in the appointment of a Field Worker
4. The Safe Return Campaign - worked best in Jo'burg, to a lesser extent in other areas; postcard response good

Roddy then looked at the present position around the country. There is an ECC presence in various regions but sometimes only one person. Still some activists, and some new people. Many activists are tired and "gatvol" of the issue, and the shortening of national service to one year has dulled the issue for some. Although we cannot speak of huge mass actions any more, there have been some actions this year, such as the Durban anti-Malan pickets and the Cape Town CCB action. Jo'burg has good press relations and quite good media coverage. Nationally and regionally there is very little interaction with other organisations and we need to make alliances with like-minded orgs. Our constituency is still white and therefore a bit anachronistic. Since "our issues" have been taken over by the big political players this can be demotivating for ECC

C. Small group discussions on three questions:

1. How are conscripts seeing conscription?

Points raised in the groups were:

- \* ECC not a conscripts' union
- \* we are not "in the know" as to how they feel
- \* there is a crisis of control within the SADF
- \* very small minority of political objectors (if there are right-wing ones they must form their own support group!)
- \* many objectors have practical (not ideological) problems

2. How do we link the role of the SADF with our call to end conscription? Points raised here were:

- \* The SADF is the same as always but the public's perceptions have changed, so we will be going against the current
- \* Can highlight the fact that conscription is still racial
- \* Can draw attention to particular incidents, e.g. droves of conscripts failing to report (Sandton), failure to prosecute Francois and Brendan
- \* SADF's role in the violence through the CCB - Webster's death still unsolved and Malan still Minister.
- \* Conscripts not the ideal people to play a peace-keeping role even if seen as more viable than the SAP
- \* Can highlight the lack of accountability - society should have the right to know
- \* We need to consolidate our membership and to work with other organisations
- \* Need analysis and research of our position on conscription, and to feed this to the media
- \* The SADF is still a powerful tool of the government
- \* Our single priority is to end conscription
- \* Possible challenge of a mass refusal action - conscripts not to apply for deferment
- \* Economically, conscription wastes money

3. Why is there still resistance to conscription?

- \* SADF structures unchanged
- \* Resistance is practical and political - this includes the lack of accountability, and discrimination.

Second Session: Chair - Chandre

A. Introduction and short discussion of two documents prepared by Jo'burg ECC - a draft policy document on the future of conscription in post-Apartheid S.Africa, and a discussion paper on the future army. We decided that we such documents to have a positive policy to offer; it is important that non-militarists have a say in the future of S.A's Defence (which may include something on non-military defence). Are we well informed enough to comment? Maybe we need to accept some policy but not use it immediately.

B. Treasurer's Report.

A budget for the second half of the year had been prepared and copies given to Regional treasurers. Members wanting to see this should ask their treasurer. Money for the first half of the year has been slow in coming, but is expected soon.

Third Session: Chair - Paul

Small group discussions on the two documents introduced earlier were followed by report-backs and a plenary.

1. ECC's Draft Policy on Conscription in a Post Apartheid South Africa

The contents of this paper were accepted, including the contentious paragraph(point 2) dealing with non-military conscription. It was agreed that the wording that ECC believes that it is inadvisable to introduce a system of non-military conscription be retained.

Additional points:

- \* The preamble should include ECC's opposition to militarism, and the sentiments expressed in 1.c of the draft paper
  - \* Add 1.d - that conscription is politically divisive
  - \* Add 1.e - no need for military training for a whole nation
  - \* In 1.1 - wording to include the right of CO's to work in non-government agencies
  - \* On Point 2 various ways of getting people to contribute to "nation building" were raised, e.g the voluntary service/peace corps system, or a contract built into tertiary education so that skills are used in the rural areas.
- It was agreed that this document only needs to be "tidied up" and sent to the branches for ratification. Cape Town to do

2. Discussion Paper: Principles related to a future Defence Force in South Africa.

It was noted that this was a basis for discussion rather than a policy document, but could be the base for a policy document.

2.1 Non-racialism:

- \* The new DF must be actively opposed to racism, both in its structures and in the way it is used. Must also be non-discriminatory

\* Recruitment policy would need affirmative action initially

2.2 Defence Policy:

\* The DF's primary role must be the protection of the constitutional and territorial integrity of S.A. (Scrap the last two sentences dealing with the police).

\* On the questions of a nuclear (weapons?) free zone and of the Geneva conventions we need more information/education

\* Should there be clauses in the constitution to keep the DF within S.A's borders?

\* Only Parliament should have the authority to declare war, and then only if SA has been attacked or is needed as part of a UN force

2.3 Democracy and the Defence Force:

\* Internal democracy - is it unrealistic? What about a body where grievances could be aired and ensuring individual rights and well-being of soldiers?

\* Agreement on the need for accountability and for political non-partisanship.

During the discussion on this section, Haydn Osborn gave a report on the Namibian experience, as gleaned from his recent talks with the Namibian Minister of Defence. There is no conscription in Namibia - based on civil rights in the constitution and also for

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practical financial reasons; the present budget is R112 million as compared to the previous R400 million provided for SWATF. There have been practical problems in integrating PLAN and SWATF troops and many have had to be left out altogether because of reduced numbers. Are now aiming to depoliticise the Army altogether.

#### 2.4 Further issues:

Discussion on the possibility of non-violent, non-military defence. History of non-violence in the struggle. The preamble to this document should acknowledge the need for more research into this option.

#### Policy documents resolution:

1. Cape Town to work on Document 1
2. Chris (Jhb) to work on Document 2 and turn it into a draft policy document
3. Charles and Jhb to produce a discussion paper on non-military defence

#### The War Resister Returnees:

Francois reported on the current situation of those who returned in December. Fritz Joubert will publicly refuse his call-up in July. Francois thinks it is now "safe" for exiles to return as conscription is no longer enforceable. And in the UK conditions are no longer so good for war resister exiles.

SATURDAY 11 MAY.

#### First session: Chair - Brendan

Report from ECC Fieldworker, Haydn Osborn.

1. Haydn prefaced his report with some thoughts on Reconciliation and Reconstruction, using Namibia as a model. He defined Reconciliation to change as a recognition of past wrongs and present injustices and the need for future rectification. Reconciliation does not mean sweeping away the past, and since blacks are very familiar with the wrongs and injustices it is up to the whites to take positive steps in the reconciliation process.

Reconstruction is the practical application of Reconciliation and is to everyone's benefit, but is also largely the responsibility of whites who have most of the resources and skills. Politically SWAPO has had to compromise on its election promises to make concessions to whites for the sake of reconstruction.

In this country we need to start Reconciliation now; a gesture of acceptance entailing responsibility for past wrongs, would be necessary.

Some Namibians are asking whether ex-conscripts could be used to do voluntary reconstruction in Namibia as reparation for damages done by the SADF. Another aspect is that Namibia could be used as an exile-haven for conscripts with usable skills. This aspect to be referred to CAS - to discuss with SWAPO MP Danie Botha.

Discussion on ECC's role in reparations in Namibia raised the following points:

- \* only skilled people are needed - to train Namibians rather

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- than to taking jobs from locals
  - \* would have to link into current volunteer programmes
  - \* people must be committed for a certain period, even if conscription suddenly ends
  - \* not an ECC priority but does warrant keeping the lines of communication open, and perhaps further research

2. Natal violence monitoring report. Delegates had all received copies of this analytical report. Haydn went through it and in the discussion following it was agreed

- \* that the facts uncovered by Haydn need to get to a wider public through the press
- \* that therefore the regular bulletin of incidents be widely disseminated to the press; and the idea of a regular column in the daily press was also raised
- \* that the regular bulletin produced by Haydn be sent to National office for distribution to every branch

#### Second session: Chair - Illa

#### 1. Regional reports:

- Johannesburg: 8-10 people. Mainly media activity, background work (e.g. policy papers), liaison with National office
- Cape Town: About 6 people meet every fortnight. Have been trying to communicate with de Klerk for months, still no response. Also taking up the anomaly of cadets in open schools - positive response from pupils, teachers and Sash
- U.C.T.: 5-6 people active. Had a float for Rag. CCB pamphlet in process
- Grahamstown: Recruited about 70, have 10 active. Older base has left. Working on a pamphlet for action around the July call-up
- East London: 4-5 people, acting as a reactive forum. Will respond to military involvement in Ciskei
- Durban: Small group but has had actions, e.g. anti-war toys campaign, all-day stand and placard protest against Magnus (this involved about 30 people and other orgs). Contact with media; support group for Haydn
- Regions not represented at conference:
- Wits: Small group - reactive - respond to issues
  - P'M'burg: Small group, maintains a presence on campus
  - Bloemfontein: One person liaising
  - Pretoria: One person liaising
  - Stellenbosch: Branch lost!

All branches were reminded to send copies of branch media to the National office.

#### 2. Report back on National committee held February '91.

Themes identified at the National committee were:

- \* networking with other organisations
- \* lobbying
- \* press/media work

- \* building a register of CO's
- \* support for CO's around trials
- \* action around July call-up national co-ordination
- \* discussion on action of security forces

Programme of action identified as follows:

- \* 1. Lobbying - Nat, DP, ANC, Business, Others
- \* 2. CO's and returning exiles - continued press
- \* 3. Violence - ensure Haydn's report is circulated
- \* 4. CCB and hit squads - monitor (not a priority)
- \* 5. The Register - ongoing. Not a priority
- \* 6. Media - Creative! Objector, Resister (?), Mainstream and alternative press - keep articles rolling
- \* 7. July call-up action
- \* 8. Action around Defence vote

### 3. Issue of the Defence Vote.

Howard spoke on the disappointment of nothing much having come to light in the Defence Budget debate - Malan said conscription will remain as long as the security situation warrants it; the implications of the repeal of the Population Registration Act were not dealt with, the July call-up will go ahead. Perhaps the issue of whites only conscription could be legally tested at the January call-up (or a camp call-up) - this would need legal opinion. We can use media to embarrass the State on its commitment to remove racist legislation. Roddy cautioned us on the difficulty of moving protest politics into courts where the issue can become foggy because of complicated legal language.

Second Session: Chair: Roddy.

1. The question of an explicit call by ECC for conscripts not to serve.

Chandre introduced the discussion by clarifying the issue: there is a range of possibilities between

- (a) calling on people not to serve
- (b) not calling on people not to serve.

Is ECC going to make an illegal call?

Arguments advanced for the different positions included:

- \* the central campaign thrust would be making this the last call-up. No need to break the law
- \* if the call-up is illegal, then we can break the law too
- \* is it necessary to break the law and possibly alienate ourselves. Can we afford a "flopped" campaign? If only a handful of people (3 or 4) refuse it could flop
- \* people expect us to make this call anyway; so who are we going to alienate ourselves from? We can't be afraid to do this because it may fail
- \* important to challenge sec 121 (c) but who are we challenging?
- \* can't call for refusal for the sake of refusing - must be a matter of conscience

What do we stand to gain by breaking the law now?

- supporting the CO's who are resisting now by creating more resisters
  - more resisters would support the campaign
- What do we stand to lose?
- discrediting ECC
  - alienating ourselves

A distinction needs to be made between this call - to people who have actually been called-up - and the stand of the 143 and 771, who were facing the possibility of call-up.

A straw vote was taken, showing a majority of delegates not in favour of breaking section 121(c) and it was therefore agreed not to incorporate such a call into the campaign. But some people expressed an interest in issuing personal calls "outside" of ECC action.

### 2. Actions.

Three groups discussed priority actions and reported back to plenary with action plans:

#### A. Policy and Lobbying

Distinction made between policy papers and discussion papers. In addition to the Conscription Policy Paper and the Future Defence Force draft paper, the following need research:

- non-military service - David and Jhb
- civil conflict, including role of the SADF, socio-economic conditions and political factors: Haydn & Durban
- role of the SADF in the homelands: East London.
- section 121(c) : National office to investigate what has already been done on this

All documents to be circulated and used within and outside ECC. Exploit them!

Lobbying to continue with DP, NP, ANC. Further groups are Embassies, Sporting groups, Olympic committee, but there is some doubt concerning the relevance and use of addressing sports bodies.

#### B. Monitoring and Violence

##### 1. Role of Field Worker:

- gains made include the promotion of non-racialism, ECC's credibility in the areas of work, part of meaningful work in cooperation with other bodies
- problems are underutilisation of information gained, and the specifically ECC problem of communicating with the SADF and some people in the local white community

##### 2. Vision of Field Worker's role:

- accountability to the organisation
- two parts: monitoring and info-gathering on the one hand and mediation and reconciliation on the other. Too much for one person; do we need a second person in Natal?

##### 3. Use of Information in Field Worker's reports:

- give focus to the events with the aim of highlighting the role of the SADF. Reports to include actual incidents, analytical report on a regular basis, ECC to get and use immediate information if the SADF oversteps the mark; individual branches to use as best they can.

##### 4. Field Worker for the Transvaal:

-ECC to join in with other orgs who are already investigating this. May need financial help. Jhb to pursue  
5. Monitoring in Other Regions:

-branches to link in with monitoring bodies in their areas.

General discussion:

We need to remember that Haydn's role is to be objective and to expose the truth in his reports; we should not be manipulating the role of the Field Worker. His reports will reflect both positive and negative actions by the SADF. Need to be careful that in our use of the info we are also exposing the truth, but we are not here to use positive info on the SADF. On the dual role of Monitoring and Mediation we felt that ECC's role was Monitoring and Information gathering, not Mediating, and that therefore there was not a need for a second ECC Field Worker in Natal

#### C. National action around the July Call-up.

The following time line was agreed on:

May: Media work, i.e posters, pamphlets and stickers to be started by Durban. A general position statement to be drafted immediately by Jo'burg, as a basis for the campaign and for the pamphlet. Jo'burg to motivate TV, press and radio (specifically Agenda and 702) for programmes in July, and Durban to motivate 604. Cape Town to meet national DP re questions in Parliament

June: Questions in Parliament - Cape Town

Distribution of media to all branches -Durban

Letter to Press, FW etc for VIPs to sign -Cape Town

Letter campaign re Pop.Reg Act and conscription - All

July: Letter campaign on the call-up

Regional actions around the call-up (first week)

Discussion: (Saturday and Sunday morning):

Acknowledgment of seriousness of violence - ECC's position is that it is not for conscripts to deal with; we are monitoring and assessing the SADF's role and would like to see a professional army

Testing the legality of the call-up in the light of repeal of Population Registration Act: Lawyers will be looking into this, but in the campaign we can point out the anomaly.

Campaign name:

The final vote was for STOP RACIST CONSCRIPTION. All the suggestions are listed as some may be useful for slogans:

End Conscription Now Is this the last call-up?

Wrapping up Conscription Stop the call-up

July call-up - Make this the last

One conscript, one sucker Call off the call up

de Klerk - Stop conscription Stop racist conscription

Its time to stop the call up Can the call up

White conscription white elephant

Last conscript turn off the lights

Conscripts can/should choose Stop Apartheid conscription

Conscription is a con Drop the draft

Countdown on conscription

SUNDAY MAY 12.

Chair: Alistair

After the completion of the discussion and decisions on the

National campaign, the following remaining items were dealt with:

#### \* Next National Committee meeting:

Agreed that a phone conference be set up for July 20 to assess the campaign and set a date for next National Committee meeting.

National office to organise the phone conference

#### \* Payment of conference fees and tips.

Some conference fees still outstanding.

A collection was made for the hotel staff and supplemented from ECC funds

#### \* Press statement:

To be done by Chris

#### \* Recruitment pamphlet:

Instead of having a separate pamphlet the possibility of including something in the campaign media (e.g. regional and national phone numbers and national address) was discussed.

#### \* Ratification of National Employees

Haydn's appointment ratified for a further six months

Nan's part-time appointment confirmed

Roddy thanked for all his work, and especially for getting the conference arrangements under way.

#### \* Assessment of Conference.

Agenda: Well done and well run by the process group

Process: Left discussion of the campaign till a bit late

Campaign plans: Criticised as being without teeth by some, but others thought could still be given bite by the regions

Participation: Not cliquey. Attendance slack at some sessions

Venue: A bit too opulent perhaps, but helped to facilitate the smooth running of the conference

Weather: No comments!

General: It was a good conference: A luta continua.

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