

Paper for Discussion by Regional Workshops

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1. The Current State of Militarisation - Some Observations

- 1.1. Introduction

There have been significant developments in the field of militarisation over the past year which have had, and will have, an impact on opposition politics. This section provides an overview of the major issues that need to be considered.

- 1.2. Changed International and Regional Dynamics

The regional balance of forces, as well as the SADF's perception of this balance has changed. The following are the key trends:

The Soviet Union:

The South African military establishment has grudgingly recognised that the USSR is playing a new role in world politics. There is an acceptance of the fact that the Soviets are keen to resolve regional conflicts, a fact which was evidenced by the settlement in South Western Africa. Despite this, however, there has been doubt expressed at the Soviets intentions. SADF spokespeople have stated that the USSR is still seeking to establish sympathetic regimes in the region. On this count they contend that it is necessary for the SADF to maintain its level of readiness, and not to be deceived by the "euphoria of peace".

Namibia/Angola:

Despite claiming to have been the victors, the SADF received a major setback in the Angolan war. Observers claim that limited financial sanctions caused the SADF to run out of funds to bankroll its war in that country.

The associated withdrawal from Namibia has massively altered the shape of militarisation in the region as well as within the country.

General Kat Liebenburg has gone on record as saying that the SADF withdrawal from Namibia could allow for a 30% reduction in troop strength. Other military officials have, however, been quick to add that the SADF needs to maintain its readiness as the Namibian situation could easily be reversed and the peace could be terminated by changes in the settlement process in Angola. The conclusion is that while it is objectively possible that the SADF withdrawal could lead to massive troop cuts, this is highly unlikely. There may be short-term cuts in Citizen Force camp commitments, and even in the two-year period of service, but this will be approached as a temporary measure. The Namibian withdrawal will certainly not mean that the SADF moves away from conscription as its prime source of manpower.

A further implication of the pull out from Namibia is that there will be a new border to patrol, viz the Orange River. Lt Gen Hein Du Toit of the RAU Department of National Strategy has proposed that this will mean that the SADF will have to shift its orientation from bush to desert warfare. This, he believes, will be necessary because the future possibility of a SWAPO government in Namibia will mean that that country will become a "new infiltration route" for ANC combatants.

An additional point to note concerns the response of the white community to the war in Angola, especially at the time of its peak in mid-1988. The decline in morale that was then evident is important in that it opened up a crack in the ideological cohesion of militarism in the conscripted community. The question that this poses is whether a deep wound was left by this experience; and if so, whether this lends itself to ongoing mobilisation against the military? There is also the further issue of the wasted war in Namibia. Many whites will now be wondering why our boys were deployed in that country for so many years when there is now a negotiated peace. A cautionary note is that this peace may be upset by South African military intervention in the final stages of the 435 process, or soon after Namibian independence.

The Frontline States:

A consistent theme in military pronouncements has been the perceived threat of the frontline states. Of particular concern to the SADF has been the build-up of conventional arms in these countries. The major threat that this is seen to present is that these arms are used to protect the ANC's forward bases in these areas. The conventional threat in the frontline states is therefore tied up with the threat from the ANC.

The implication of this threat perception is that the SADF is intent on developing its conventional arms capability. This will mean that

Armscor will be pushed to produce the necessary hardware; and such armaments will be at the forefront of technological developments. This orientation is clear from statements made by senior officers of the Planning Division of the SADF. The implication of this approach in terms of manning is that the SADF will in future require a large number of technically proficient soldiers able to wield the latest in twentieth century armaments. This could potentially mean that there will be a lesser demand for foot soldiers; or alternatively, that white conscripts who come from the most educated sector of South African society will be deployed in the main in high-tech placements, while larger numbers of black volunteers will be recruited to fill less technical and unskilled roles. This latter approach is in keeping with the SADF's stated intention of boosting the numbers of black SADF members.

1.3. The SADF inside South Africa

The intense and ongoing presence of the SADF in South Africa's townships, as was witnessed in the 1984 - 1986 period, is no longer being experienced in the same way. There are a number of factors contributing to this state of affairs. These include:

- * a general dropping off of popular resistance as the Emergency took hold. The defiance campaign and other mass activities has brought this period of hiatus in resistance to an end. There is the possibility that the SADF may once again come to the fore as a force as resistance intensifies; alternatively, other forms of repression may be used by the authorities.

- * there has been a growth in the size of the SAP meaning that it can cope with larger contingencies than previously;

- * there has been an increase in extra-legal repression in the form of vigilantism.

There is clearly still a commitment to using the SADF in internal unrest situations where the need arises. This commitment is presented against the background of an internal "revolutionary threat" from the "SACP/ANC and the PAC". Therefore, while there is clearly the possibility of the SADF being deployed internally, there is also the possibility that it may be at a lesser level than in the past. This clearly will have implications within the conscripted community, in which there was widespread opposition to such SADF activity. The troops in the townships scenario proved to be the catalyst for the growth of the anti-war movement in 1985 - 1986.

1.4. Constraints on Conscription

A number of issues within South African society are placing pressure on the current system of conscription. These are factors which SADF planners are known to be concerned with and which may effect the nature of the SADF in future. Key issues are:

- * conscription is having a severe effect on the South African personpower situation largely due to the brain drain of highly skilled people, and the under-utilisation of conscripts with high level skills within the SADF;

- * the population from which conscripts is drawn - young white males - is getting smaller. The number of 18 year old white males is declining leading to pressure being placed on the SADF to supply the requisite manpower. Defence manpower planners believe that the way in which to deal with this problem is to make use of larger numbers of black volunteers in the SADF. The idea is still being floated that coloureds and Indians should be conscripted. This is a highly unlikely possibility due to the politically disastrous potential such a policy would have;

- * the SADF is moving onto a more high-tech footing meaning that it will be requiring more high level skills in the future. It may well have to boost its professional component in order to procure these skills at market prices;

- * the system of Citizen Force camps has led to much dissatisfaction amongst campers. It is very disruptive to the individual and to the economy. As a result the SADF has reduced camp call-up commitments. The issue of camps may well decline as a contentious matter in the future.

1.5. Political Issues

Aside from the area of political opposition to conscription and militarisation, there are a number of important political issues that may impact on the general state of militarisation. Two are particularly significant.

Negotiations:

The political climate within the country is generally moving into a mood of negotiations. This will create a context in which the demand for political as against military solutions to the conflict can be promoted. It is a logical base from which to attack militarisation. A note of caution needs to be made, however. While there may well be a mood of negotiation developing, this does not mean that the

struggle will not continue. If anything it is likely to intensify, especially at the level of direct confrontation and violence. The major protagonists in the struggle will be moving as hard as possible in the next period to neutralise the opposing force and to build their own strength. This is to ensure that they are in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table. Violence and the use of arms will therefore become an inevitable part of the negotiating climate. This presents an interesting question: How will the white community respond to this? Will they wish to encourage the government to lay down its arms? Or, will they be more fervent in their support for its use of militarism? The answer to these questions are crucial to developing future strategy.

The Five Year Plan:

Current Nat policy looks like it is heading towards the creation of some kind of fifth "open group" to which individuals can belong by voluntary association. This will mean that all races - white and black can be members of the group. An approach of this nature will inevitably pose a key problem in respect of conscription. Will the open group be called up? If it is, it will mean one of three things:

Blacks will now become conscripts, thus creating for the government a severe political pressure point as there will inevitably be opposition to this;

Only the whites in the group will be called up; thereby the essential nature of the group will be undermined;

No-one in the group will be called up. This will create a situation in which any conscript who does not wish to be called up can go into "internal exile" within the open group.

This is a significant issue, not only because it exposes a key weakness within government thinking, but also because it could establish new opportunities in the struggle against conscription.

1.6. The Van Loggerenberg Committee

The Van Loggerenberg Committee has been appointed to look into:

- * the management structure of the SADF;
- * the manpower procurement policy of the SADF;
- * Armscor
- * air traffic issues.

It is significant in a number of respects. As well as representing the fact that the above issues are of serious concern to the Defence Force, it is also opening up a channel of dialogue between the SADF and the public. This channel should be used by groups opposed to current defence policy as a means of directly engaging with the military authorities. The committee is sitting at a time when the SADF is seriously rethinking its overall orientation and positioning and it should be seen therefore as a high powered body.

1.7. Opposition to Militarisation

As this topic is covered elsewhere, only selected themes will be looked at here.

Objective conditions:

The objective conditions for anti-military work are such that they are at present not as favourable as they have been in the past. The general conditions of relative peace in the region downplay the harsh contradictions of participation in the SADF for the conscripted community. It should be remembered that such conditions may change, especially as regards the situation in the townships. At present, however, we only have the past to call on - troops in the townships; the Angolan/Namibian defeats. A further constraint is the organisational weakness and limited coherence of the anti-military movement.

Conscientious Objection:

A major positive trend over the past year has been the emergence of a thriving CO movement based both on individual and group stands. This movement has set the tone for much anti-military work and at present remains the cutting edge of this work.

The participation of community servers in the group stands is of great significance. Their participation shows that community service should be seen as a form of conscription; it is also presented as an unacceptable form of national service. This implies that community service has not co-opted resistance to conscription, but rather has created a new platform from which it can be challenged.

"The Establishment":

It is interesting to note that "establishment groups, eg. the universities, business, the liberal opposition, have increased their focus on conscription in the main through picking up on the call for alternative service. This is a positive development which creates new opportunities. The highly successful DP election campaign, and in particular its performance around security issues has won space for anti-military work. Of particular interest was the group of former

SADF officers who stood on the DP ticket, and in support of its anti-conscription policies. The impact of such individuals can be enormous in creating greater acceptance for anti-conscription work.

2. The State of Anti-Militarisation Organisations

Before we can consider new initiatives, we need to carefully assess the strengths and weaknesses of the past year. What follows is an attempt to draw a brief overview of the position nationally.

2.1. Historical pointers

The area of AM work has historically been taken up by different organisations with different emphases (eg. conscription advice, supporting objectors). When ECC was formed in 1983, it was formed as a front of those organisations already working in the field of militarisation, as well as organisations involved with broader issues, but sympathetic to a call to end conscription. ECC managed to mobilise broad public support for the call to end conscription, and also provided a centre for thinking and strategising, without detracting from the work being done by other organisations.

At the time of its restriction, there were differing opinions about the strength and importance of ECC.

- Some people argued that ECC was again in a position of strength and enjoying wide public support. Following the initial declaration of the national state of emergency, ECC went through a bad period both because of harassment but also because of a loss of focus. Because the state of emergency prescribed that one could not undermine/discredit the system of compulsory military service, ECC broadened its focus away from the issue of conscription to looking at more general issues of militarisation. In a later assessment, ECC decided that this did not help the campaign and 1988 saw ECC again returning to its focus on conscription. During 1988, ECC's main campaigns looked at conscripts and the call for a system of alternative national service.

-Other people argued that the State had successfully radicalised ECC in the eyes of the public and that it was consequently impossible for ECC to broaden its support base. This was seen as preventing broad work around the call for alternative national service and as a negative factor in ECC's efforts to reach conscripts. It was seen as a problem that ECC was trying to cover too many different angles, from supporting objectors to organising conscripts.

When ECC was restricted it was decided that it would be inappropriate

for ECC to continue by functioning covertly both because ECC had always operated as a mass based legal organisation and it thought that it could not achieve its aims by operating underground, but also because it was felt that the different elements of its work could continue more effectively via other existing organisations.

It was therefore decided that ECC should not continue functioning, but that other organisations, particularly those that had been part of the ECC front, should be encouraged to take up anti-militarisation issues. It was hoped that national and regional co-ordinating structures would be set up to keep the different organisations in touch with each other.

2.2. An assessment of the current situation

A year down the road, it now appears that in every centre the practice has not worked as well as the theory. A number of organisations are working around militarisation issues, but there is very little overall co-ordination and consequently not a great deal of public impact.

Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town each have +/- 7 different organisations working in the anti-militarisation arena, but almost all of these groups are small, not attracting new people and not having much wider impact. In the smaller regions, the issue of anti-militarisation work has largely been dropped from the agenda, with the Conscription Advice Service being the only active organisation in these places.

No national co-ordinating structure has been set up and regional structures have largely played an informative rather than a strategising role.

Regions generally have decided that the call for a system of alternative national service does not have the capacity to become a mass based campaign that could replace ECC as a national movement. Those who feel that ANS is still an important area, see it being taken forward more in the form of lobbying work that would complement rather than replace a more mass based national campaign. Partly because of a lack of person power, and partly because of a lack of clarity about the value of this area, it has not been a major priority over the last few months.

The issue of conscription has been taken forward in the churches through the Churches Alternative National Service Project. CANSP groups are however only active in Cape Town and Johannesburg and the project is in the process of assessing its direction and focus.

The "Give Our Sons a Choice" initiative has developed into a national structure over the last few months and has successfully involved a broad range of women in the issue.

In the last year conscription issues have been raised publically primarily through objectors. Charles Bester and Saul Batzofin have both been sentenced since the restriction of ECC, and COSG has run support campaigns around both these people. COSG also co-ordinated a national campaign around 15 May, International CO day, when objection issues were again raised publically.

The campuses have been able to adapt to the restriction of ECC more effectively than other groups with anti-militarisation organisations emerging at UCT, Durban, and Wits. A very successful national anti-militarisation conference was held for these campus groups, in July of this year.

To summarise:

- Organisation in the field of AM work has become very dispersed, with a number of groups operating, but with very little co-ordination between them.
- Consequently there has been no coherent or forceful public message.
- Because there is no organisation effectively raising public awareness about the role of the military, things like objection, conscription advice and the churches ANS work happen in a vacuum.
- Organisations have not managed to attract new activists and there is a sense of stagnation rather than growth.
- In some regions the ECC defiance actions illustrated that there is still widespread support and enthusiasm for the issue amongst activists as well as members of the public.
- ECC's focus on the conscript has not been taken up by any other organisation.

2.3. Regions should assess their own strengths and weaknesses during this past year.

2.4. Identify objectives for the AMM.

Assess priorities in terms of:

- Issues (eg. objection, ANS, Know your Rights work, conscription/militarisation, war/peace).
- Constituencies (eg. objectors, conscripts, youth, students, families, the establishment, church, the black community)
- Style (eg. lobbying, campaign work, cultural work)

2.5. Options for Future Work

We need to discuss whether our present structures facilitate meeting our objectives and priorities. What follows are a number of alternative options which need to be considered:

2.5.1. Relegitimising a call to end conscription.

This could be done by getting a wide range of organisations and prominent individuals to call for an end to conscription. This would have the effect of creating legal space for the re-emergence of ECC or a similar anti-conscription organisation.

2.5.2 . Reviving ECC

- * as a continuing act of defiance
- * if the state of emergency is lifted.

If we find that there is no political space for a new legal organisation, it might be appropriate for ECC to continue defying. This would have to be acts which keep the issue in the public eye, without being too costly in terms of sentences etc. Actions like street posters, could build on ECC's history, thereby keeping the issue in the public eye and raising a spirit of resistance, particularly amongst conscripts.

If the state of emergency is lifted we need to consider whether or not to continue working under an ECC banner.

Pros: We will be building on ECC's history in terms of our message and our support base. ECC's call is clear. Another organisation could not be just an ECC look alike and would therefore have to have a slightly different focus which might not be as direct, or have as much resonance for the public as the call to end conscription. It would be difficult to launch another organisation that utilised ECC's creative style but again did not look like ECC.

Cons: ECC had been radicalised by the state and at the time of its restriction was already unable to mobilise broader support than it already had. ECC was unsuccessfully trying to span too many issues and constituencies.

2.5.3. Forming a new organisation

The main motivation for the formation of a new organisation, is the need for public profile around the issues of militarisation and conscription.

If a new organisation is formed the main question that will need to be resolved is whether it should have a general militarisation focus or a more specific conscription focus.

Conscription focus: A clear conscription call has much more resonance with the public because of the personal element involved. The dilemma remains as strong as ever for the conscript and his family and speaking to the issue of conscription is therefore our way of being most effective in mobilising mass support.

Militarisation focus: Objective conditions have changed to the extent that we need to repoliticise the issue of the military. With troops no longer being in Namibia or Angola, and with black troops increasingly being used in townships, the issue of conscription is no longer as central an issue as it was. It is also possible that military liability will be decreased and we need to anticipate that happening. An organisation that focusses on the military more generally, will be in a better position to speak about black troops being used in the townships, etc. than an organisation which focusses specifically on the issue of conscription.

Form: We will also have to decide on the form that a new organisation should take, in particular assessing whether it should have a front structure. If we decide that it should have a front structure, we will need to bear in mind the principle that breadth is determined at the formation of an organisation and not at a later stage. We will also need to consider the status of present organisations if a new organisation emerges, particularly considering whether they should be absorbed as subcommittees into the new organisation or whether they should continue as independent organisations that form part of the front.

2.5.4. Formation of a Peace Movement.

Thesis:

- * The anti-militarisation movement needs to be broad, political, non-racial, and possibly, although not necessarily, situated within the MDM.
- * A focus on conscription or conscientious objection and alternative service alone is too narrow politically and too white.
- * Now is the time to join in and "build a mass movement for peace" (UDF/COSATU slogan in Natal).
- * Relevant ECC slogan: "Political solutions for political problems".

Organisational Implications:

Rather than having our "own" anti-militarisation group (like ECC was),

we should either: a) join the mainstream anti-apartheid movement in this country, and take with us anti-militarisation concerns and campaign suggestions, or

b) form another organisation which is based on anti-militarisation concerns, but is broader politically and racially. Existing specialist groups like COSG and CAS would continue.

Factors:

* Arguably, conscription as such is less of a mobilising point now than it was between 1983 and the first quarter of this year, particularly with troops being withdrawn from Namibia and a greater utilisation of black troops in township areas. These developments tend to undercut "Troops Out!" as a rallying cry in the white community.

* As it is, individual CO's going to jail as well as mass stands of CO's, make it clear that their actions should be seen as broadly political, not just aimed at conscription.

* Fits in with climate of negotiation internationally, in Southern Africa, and locally (eg. in Natal). There is an increasing emphasis in the progressive movement on "peace" rather than "civil war".

* Would fit in with increased efforts at bridging racial and ideological divides eg. COSATU-NACTU, Inkatha-UDF, MDM. etc.

* Slot in with international peace movements, including ecology and "Greens".

2.5.5. National co-ordination

It is possible that the national workshop will decide that there is not the political space for the emergence of a new initiative around conscription, and that the more dispersed nature of the work allows for greater stability in the light of state repression. If we decide that this is the case, it will be necessary to establish much better co-ordinating structures regionally and nationally. The idea of regional co-ordinating structures being open to all AM activists has been raised. These structures would then become much more capable of strategising and would hopefully develop into bodies which could effectively oversee the area of AM work. The composition and powers of a national co-ordinating structure would need to be assessed.

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