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ECC AND POLICY FORMULATION.

A DISCUSSION PAPER.

This is a brief discussion paper on the issue of ECC policy and its formulation. The content of this paper is drawn from the policy workshop held at the ECC National Conference held in May 1990 and from the thoughts of the author. The paper is aimed at facilitating an understanding of policy as an aspect of our political struggle as well as looking at the more practical aspects of policy formulation. The purpose of the paper is not to present a "line" but rather to form the basis of further discussion aimed at ECC reaching a common position on policy in the not too distant future.

WHY DOES ECC NEED TO TAKE THE ISSUE OF POLICY FORMULATION SERIOUSLY?

South African politics has been slowly changing since the speech by State President De Klerk on the 2nd of February this year. What we are seeing is the readjustment (difficult at times) of organisations, previously solely involved in protest politics, to the challenge of more formal "party" politics. In many ways the South African public considers as seriously what organisations have to say on specific issues as much as what these organisations represent. Policy and attitudes on every aspect of South African life will be sought by the South African public from every political organisation that intends contesting state power. On the basis of what these organisations say a decision will be made by individual voters as to which organisation they intent to support and place their political, social and economic aspirations with.

While this is by no means an argument for ECC to contest state power (in a formal sense) and form a political party, ECC must recognise and equip itself as South Africa witnesses the gradual transformation of politics from the "politics of protest" to the "politics of policy".

As well as the rise of the "politics of policy" there is a growing sense that the "white community" (our traditional but not necessary exclusive constituency) is looking for positive solutions to South Africa's problems, rather than (what they perceive to be) the same old critique of "apartheid is bad". ECC has to provide those people who are possibly confused or disillusioned with politics at the moment, with a positive and practical alternative to the present policies of the government when it comes to the SADF.

What the above section is simply arguing is that ECC, like other extra parliamentary political groupings, has to develop clear policy and clear positions on the issues that fall within our organisation. ECC must sophisticate its message by presenting what we still believe are relevant critiques of the SADF, military service, etc..., in conjunction with clear policy

proposals directed to resolve what we still regard as problematic elements in South African society. For example, if ECC feels that the SADF is still playing the role of a biased and partisan defence force, we must explain clearly what information leads us to this belief and what changes in the structure or nature of the SADF or South African politics would resolve this problem.

It is by presenting these issues in a clear unambiguous way with concrete and reasoned policy alternatives that ECC will be taken seriously in the "ball park" of South African political society.

ECC AND POLICY: SOME IDEAS ON A WAY FORWARD

After presenting a (hopefully not too verbose) analysis of the importance of clear policy positions for ECC, the paper now turns to what policy we need as a priority to develop and how we should be developing this policy.

Initial policy that ECC has developed, while not adopting and therefore not being binding on us as an organisation, includes:

- * Troops in the townships.
- * Alternative National Service
- * Our draft policy document on conscription (the "ten point plan").
- * The ECC Declaration (issued 1985) which no one has really used since 1987.

What branches need to discuss is:

1. Are there other issues that we need to develop clear policy on as ECC?

This question should not be approached as "Hey, wow, wouldn't it be nice to have some policy on the SADF and the environment" but rather, "many people have asked ECC what our position is on the SADF and the environment. We need to recognise the importance of environmental concerns and environmental politics at the moment and it would strengthen ECC's work if we were to present a clear position on this issue and clear ways of resolving this area of conflict." It sounds a bit "heavy" but hopefully the point is made. Policy formulation is sometimes a time consuming and expensive process. We need to develop clear and solid political reasons in arguing that ECC must develop policy on specific issues.

2. Given the different areas of possible policy formulation, which are the immediate areas that need policy and which are the less immediate areas?

3. Is the process outlined below an adequate one to ensure rapid, but at the same time democratic policy formulation and adoption?

3.1 Once an area of policy has been identified by a branch a written motivation should be drawn up and circulated to all the other branches and sent to national.

3.2 Branches should then discuss the proposal and the gains they could make in their constituency by adopting and popularising this area of policy. The national office would coordinate a decision making process.

3.3 Once consensus has been reached that we need policy on the issue proposed, national would then investigate ways of developing a draft policy document. This could be consulting with experts in the area, establishing a research committee, commissioning research, etc... Branches would be kept informed on the development of the policy work and the expected time of completion.

3.4 Once a draft is prepared, this will be circulated to the branches for comment. The comments received would be built into the document and a final draft copy would be circulated *for adoption.*

3.5 ~~If no more comments or objections are received the document would become a proposed policy document and would be circulated to the branches for adoption.~~ The process of adoption should ideally happen at National Conference. If this is not possible then it should happen at a National Committee meeting or through the national office.

A few points to consider if we adopt the process outlined above.

- * Policy discussion should involve as many ECC members as possible.
- * Other organisations who work closely with ECC should be canvassed for their comments.
- * At every level of the process branches must be discussing how they can use in policy in their own areas and how the policy material can be used nationally.
- * Policy formulation and adoption must be a rapid process but we must ensure that time factors do not undermine the democratic process.

NOTE:

Branches should be encouraged to use this paper as a basis for further discussion rather than an end in itself.

Happy discussions,

Roddy

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