

End Conscription Campaign

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227/9 Khotso House
42 De Villiers Street
Johannesburg
2000
Tel: 337-6796
Telex: 4-86519 S.A.

REPORT ON THE PERIOD JANUARY 1985 TO MARCH 1986

INTRODUCTION

The period since the beginning of 1985 has seen the consolidation and considerable growth of the End Conscription Campaign. From having End Conscription Committees in three centres (Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town) at the beginning of the period, the campaign has grown to include committees in Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg and Grahamstown with one having recently been established in Stellenbosch. There are also good prospects of establishing committees in other centres. An extensive array of activities have been undertaken and large numbers of people reached in the course of the campaign.

This growth has coincided with an enormous escalation in the level of conflict within South Africa. The majority of South Africans have in one way or another entered the struggle against apartheid. Townships around South Africa have been the sites of often violent confrontations between the security forces and the masses of people protesting against the system of apartheid. There has been the extensive use of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in these situations, and of significance to the ECC has been the forced involvement of many thousands of conscripts.

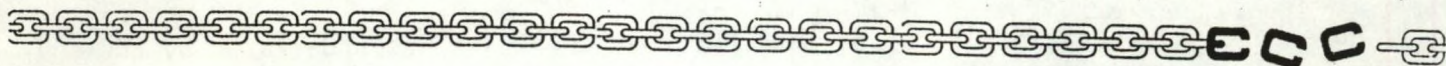
Resistance to the system of conscription and the deployment of troops in the townships has developed in the white community. At the same time ECC's call for a just peace in South Africa has been received increasingly warmly.

This is the broad context in which ECC has operated in over the past year. What follows is a brief overview of the period.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Protests against the six-monthly military intake have taken place. This happened in January and July 1985, as well as in January 1986. Activities at this time included media blitzes of posters, pamphlets and stickers, and also single person pickets. These activities served to maintain ECC as a high profile organization at a time when we were not conducting specific campaigns.

Protest meetings against the Uitenhage killings of March 21 1985 were held. At these we stressed our belief that a civil war was fast developing in our country and every



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effort had to be made to prevent it.

Debates, eg. one between Witwatersrand University's Professor David Webster and the then leader of the Progressive Federal Party Frederick van Zyl Slabbert. About 600 people attended this gathering.

Between April and early June 1985 committees were established in Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg and Grahamstown.

In June 1985 ECC's "Stop the Call-Up" national peace festival was held in Johannesburg. It was attended by about 5000 delegates and observers. Cardinal Paulo Arns, Archbishop of Sao Paulo was to have addressed the festival but his visa was withdrawn by the South African authorities at the last minute. Speakers included Carol Tongue, European MP and member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Molly Blackburn of the Black Sash, Murphy Morobe and Cheryl Corrolus of the UDF, Mokganedi Thlabanello of SWAPO, Dr Beyers Naude, Nadine Gordimer and others. Workshops, seminars, plays, concerts, art and poster displays, cultural events and vigils were held during the course of the festival.

In August 1985 ECC submitted evidence to the SADF's Geldenhuys Committee. This committee was investigating all aspects of the operation of the SADF. Interim proposals were made that a volunteer army would be preferable to a conscripted one, that all objectors be recognized and be allowed to do alternative service, that the maximum length of community service be reduced from six years to four years, that those doing community service be permitted to do it in non-state organizations and that individual conscripts be permitted to refuse to enter the townships, Namibia or other Southern African countries. All of these proposals were made in the context of ECC's call for an immediate end to conscription.

In September and October 1985 ECC ran a national "Troops Out of the Townships" campaign. It was launched in early September to commemorate the start of the township conflict a year before. A central aspect of the campaign saw Dr Ivan Toms (Cape Town), Richard Steele (Durban), and Harald Winkler (Johannesburg) fasting for three weeks as a means of protest and to promote ECC's call for a just peace. Relay fasts were also held in Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Pietermaritzburg and Stellenbosch. In all a few thousand joined in in fasting for shorter periods. Pickets, vigils, mass rallies, meetings of mothers, discussion forums, media displays, pamphleteering, art exhibitions and church services formed part of the campaign. In Cape Town over 4 000 people attended a rally in the City Hall.

In November an international tour of nine European countries was undertaken by ECC's National Organizer Laurie Nathan and conscientious objector Pete Hathorn.

In February 1986 a "Cadets Out" campaign calling for an end to the cadet system in white schools was held. Pamphlets, posters, pickets public meetings and cultural events were held. In Cape Town two Catholic schools and one Anglican school gave students the option of alternatives following the campaign.

In April a national Working for a Just Peace campaign is being held. Work projects in black and white communities are being conducted to act as a symbolic protest against the system of conscription and to present viable alternatives. Public meetings and cultural activities are being held and a wide range of media is being distributed to publicise the campaign.

Earlier, in March this year an ECC representative addressed the special sitting of the United Nations in New York to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. He subsequently went on a six week tour of the USA on behalf of ECC. Also in March another ECC representative addressed a Paris conference against racism organised by SOS Racisme. ECC's international contact is growing continuously. We appreciate very much the solidarity of organizations internationally and the work they are doing for our campaign. This is having a real effect on the South African government.

STRUCTURES

By the end of 1985 ECC had established media, culture, churches, schools, contact and other sub-committees in each centre to better coordinate its work and to allow people who were not members of ECC member organisations to get involved in the campaign. Hundreds of people have become involved in the ECC nationally.

As well as establishing new regions a number of organisations have become part of the ECC. There are at present 47 member organisations nationally.

Student organisations have formed a significant segment of ECC member organisations. On all of the English language university campuses there are campaign structures. The Afrikaans language Stellenbosch University and Rand Afrikaans University have recently been added to these.

In January 1985 ECC held its first National Conference attended by thirty delegates. At this conference a National Organizer Laurie Nathan was appointed. At the second conference a year later ninety delegates represented ECC's six regions. Due to the campaign's growth a decision was taken to set up a national office with a full-time National Secretary. David Shandler was elected to this position. Part time employees have also been appointed in Durban and Cape Town.

Between conferences regular National Committee meetings have been held. At these representatives from all regions coordinate activities and exchange information.

REPRESSION

An effect of the increasing growth of the ECC has been that it has attracted a wide range of repressive measures from the state and right-wing quarters. Some of these have been the detention of members, security police raids on ECC meetings and on members' homes, restrictions on meetings and on member organizations, visa restrictions, attacks by cabinet ministers and SADF generals, smear campaigns, physical attacks on ECC members, as well as the banning of ECC publications.

Whenever possible ECC has responded to these attacks. Responses have ranged from making press statements through to taking legal action. The Afrikaans weekly Rapport was forced to publicly retract statements it had made after ECC had taken it to the Media Council, an arbitration court.

CONCLUSION

1985 and the first quarter of 1986 has been a very successful period for the End Conscription Campaign. There has been much growth for the campaign. This has especially been significant in a number of constituencies, most notably amongst school pupils, afrikaners, and youth who are part of the "alternative" sub-culture. This growth has reflected a growing disaffection amongst white South Africans. There is a growing anti-war culture which is being perceived and acted on by ECC. In the coming year ECC sees as its tasks to further expand the campaign to new areas as well as new constituencies. These would include afrikaners, conscripts and school goers. Another important group are those men who have completed their initial period of military service and are now doing camp duty. Parents are another significant group to reach.

There is plenty of work yet to be done in the End Conscription Campaign. 1986 is set to be the year in which much of this is done and in which there should be much further growth for the ECC.

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