

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR THE JOHANNESBURG ANC 'DISCUSSION GROUP' ON SECURITY IN A CHANGING SOUTH AFRICA

A18.14.9

A note of explanation

This paper has emerged from a discussion group of ANC members living in the Johannesburg area who have been meeting for the past 3 months. The initial motivation for the groups establishment was a desire to address the issue of the relationship of ANC members to their obligation (under South African law) of service in the SADF. Many of the group have been involved in elements of the anti-conscription movement for the last few years. However, in discussion it emerged that it was important not simply to address the question of conscription, but to begin to examine wider issues concerning the security forces and their transformation, on the one hand, and the nature of a post apartheid security framework on the other.

It is important to stress that it is not the intention of this group to take-over existing anti-conscription and related organisations, but rather to provide specifically ANC motivated input on the broad questions linked to the security forces now, as we enter a time of transition, and in a post apartheid democratic state.

Also, the motivation behind this paper is not simply to provide a forum for debate, but rather to draw as many interested persons, and groups, into the process of discussing the most appropriate security force policies, both during the present process of transformation and after. On this, it should be recognised that the ANC has a number of special-interest groups, eg. economic, law, science and constitutional sub-groups, but there is no comparable group relating to the issue of the security forces. In this regard, it is hoped that we will be able to provide a valuable input into the National Conference in July.

Background

During the 1980s the anti-conscription lobby grew from a handful of pacifist total-war objectors into the largest (white) social movement in South Africa's history. Growing out of a Black-Sash initiated conference, the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was formed in early 1984 to publicly campaign against compulsory military service for white males, and to provide support and encouragement to those who were prepared to refuse to serve in the SADF. Whilst the size, and influence, of the ECC should not be over-emphasised, it should be seen to have played an important role, intentionally and otherwise, in,

- * mobilising opposition to the extent, and nature, of SADF-SAP activities in the townships and Namibia and the "front line state".
- * reducing the morale of troops in the SADF.
- * providing a moral-political basis for the objection (mostly passive) to serving in the SADF.
- * politicising the issue of conscription.
- * using the issue of conscription to organise and mobilise whites into opposing apartheid.

After 1987, a number of well publicised objector trials occurred. Out of this stemmed a growing group of males who were prepared to publicly object to service in the SADF. In a few cases such objectors were prepared to go to jail rather than serve (Batzofin, Bester, Bruce & Toms). Initially numbering 23, the group grew to a current total of 1289.

Having sketched the growth of the anti-conscription movement, it is necessary to point out that at no time did it represent a homogenous grouping. Rather it included a number of different groups, united by their common opposition to conscription *in the context of Apartheid South Africa*. This included universal pacifists who were not prepared to serve in any army, religious people who would be willing to fight in what they saw as a 'Just War'; and people who were involved in the anti war movement for the strategic importance of weakening the support base of the state's security apparatus. Also, the anti-conscription movement included people who supported parliamentary opposition to apartheid as well as people who participated in extra parliamentary opposition. Of equal importance, it included people whose objection to conscription was limited to the context of Apartheid South Africa, and who would support conscription in other contexts, eg. the conscription of British soldiers to fight in World War Two (and the Gulf!!!). At no time did any one group dominate, and the different views were seen as a point of strength, not weakness.

The ECC and other anti-conscription organisations have tended to be viewed as the supreme authority on the issue of conscription and the SADF. This has led to a situation where other organisations have left this issue off their agendas in the belief that ECC and other groups deal with it effectively. While ECC and other anti-conscription organisations continue their work, it has become clear that the ANC as a developing party political force in South Africa needs to be articulating its own programme in relation to the question of conscription and the broader issue of transformation of the security forces.

Whilst the SADF is still integrally linked to the maintenance of Apartheid, it would be naive to deny that it has undergone profound (AND IRREVERSIBLE) changes in the past 13 months, and that effective ways to contest its political role need to be articulated by the anti-apartheid forces, both in terms of its role during the negotiating process, and as regards the nature of a post apartheid military-police philosophy. It is at this point that the motivation for a military-related interest-group becomes valid.

Goals

Here it would be convenient to divide our goals, or areas of discussion, into three groups:

1. The immediate question of ANC members relationship to compulsory military service in the SADF.
2. Questions related to the process of transition towards a non-racial, non-sexist, environmentally friendly radical democratic order (with a sensible attitude to nuclear power).
3. Questions related to the broader principles under which the post apartheid security forces would operate.

(1)

Many white male ANC members are still eligible for some form of military service within the SADF.

- * Should ANC members who face conscription, serve in the SADF?
- * If they should not serve, what should be their response to the call up?
- * What should the ANC's relationship be to members who face conscription into the SADF?

(2)

These questions relate to the broader issue of the role of the SADF in South Africa today.

- * Should we see the actions and structure of the SADF as "contestable terrain" at present?
- * who should be responsible for military-police actions in the townships?
- * Should groups be established to monitor the usage of the SADF-SAP in conflict situations, or should the above mentioned responsibility be left to the government?
- * Is there any potential for the ANC to be building support within the ranks of the SADF and if yes then how?
- * given the need for a strong police force, especially in the context of the current crime wave, what is our attitude to members of the 'ordinary' police?
- * given the ANC's policy of 'constructive engagement' with homeland administrations, what implications does this have for our policy with regard to homeland armies?

(3)

This group of questions involves discussing principles under which the security forces will operate in a post apartheid South Africa. Again, we shall do no more than single out a few topics for discussion.

- * does the state have the right to demand a positive duty from its citizens?
- * if so, should there be compulsory national service¹?
- * if so, should such "national service" make provision for non-military community service, even in times of war?
- * what is our position as regards religious objection?
- * what is our position with regard to the armaments industry²?

Summary

While this paper may only raise a few of the preliminary issues that we need to address, it is hoped that other issues will be raised and discussed in the ensuing months.

In this period of transition it is our duty to critically examine all avenues of struggle and to seek to articulate as many forces into our camp as possible. To avoid a critical examination of these would be to concede important terrain to our political adversaries.

¹ There is, to my knowledge, no clear rejection of the principle of military conscription in a post apartheid South Africa by the ANC leadership.

² Here it should be noted that no country in the world can afford to produce armaments in isolation from the world market, and a decision not to export arms is, by definition, a decision not to produce arms.

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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