

ECC: WORKING FOR A JUST PEACE

Page 1 Introduction

Ever thought about building a tricycle track, cleaning up a beach or laying a rural water pipe instead of patrolling the township in Browns?

These are just the kind of things we will be doing in April this year.

Ecc is committed to solutions to the conflict in our country that do not involve military or police intervention. We are opposed to conscription into the SADF and to the unnecessary militarization of South African society. We believe in constructive national service that crosses racial barriers, building bridges to a better future. To this end, we have embarked on an ambitious country-wide campaign: "Working for a Just Peace".

Centre pages

WORKING FOR A JUST PEACE

On the 13th August 1985 something unusual happened at 'The Castle' in Cape Town. In this building that has immense historical and symbolic importance to the SADF, two End Conscription Committee representatives stood before General Jannie Geldenhuys, head of the SADF, and several other senior SADF personell.

ECC (the End Conscription Campaign) was giving evidence to the Geldenhuys Committee which amongst other things is examining the question of conscription.

We told General Geldenhuys we thought all people, who, in good conscience, found themselves unable to serve in the SADF, should be allowed to do a realistic period of useful alternative service. We will only know how they received our carefully motivated and detailed suggestions when the commission reports to parliament in this session.

But we haven't left it there. We are launching a campaign which is called: ECC - Working for A JUST PEACE.

In April of this year, thousands of volunteers throughout the country will set to work on Projects for the benefit of all of South Africa's people. For example, some will be helping in child care centres, some will be cleaning up Cape Town's beaches, some will be assisting communities that have recently been resettled.

We will not only be doing these things because they are useful in themselves, but to demonstrate that 'National Service' has more than one meaning.

Conscription into the SADF is posing a very serious dilemma for so many South Africans. This is not surprising. In democratic societies, the government would be fully mandated by all citizens. But in South Africa the state is unaccountable to huge sectors of the population.

The South African Defence Force is being used to quell resistance from those denied legitimate democratic representation.

In this situation ECC's central concern is that conscripts have the right to choose - the right to decide whether they can participate in this army or not. Compulsory conscription gives them almost no choice.

The few who have an alternative are universal Religious pacifists - people who on religious grounds would not serve in any army in any war. Those who are accepted by the Board of Religious Objectors face a punitive 6 years alternative service in a government department.

But those who cannot, on moral or religious grounds, serve in the SADF, have a choice of 6 years in prison or a life in exile.

The 'Working for a Just Peace' campaign is a positive protest against compulsory conscription into an army that, at the very least, plays a controversial role. The campaign is an active call for viable and beneficial alternatives.

We are not opposed to a genuine National Service. National Service is Service to the Nation - to all the people of our country. When the public comes forward in April to help lay a water pipeline in a rural area, paint a night shelter for vagrant children, lay a tricycle track for township toddlers or help preserve the natural environment, we will be demonstrating what a genuine National Service could be like.

Through our actions, we will challenge the governments definition of
'national service' and its abuse by the rulers of this country.

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ECC = WHERE FROM

...From a resolution passed at the 1983 Black Sash conference to a burgeoning movement of resistance to compulsory conscription into the SADF.

That is the story of ECC's brief history.

The Black Sash resolution prompted the coming together of what eventually amounted to 50 Organisations opposed to conscription. By 1985 branches had been set up in 6 centres, with the possibility of 3 more during 1986.

In the interim ECC established a presence on the streets in a way best reflected by the attendance of over 4000 people at an ECC Peace Rally in Cape Town in October last year,

The rally was the climax of ECC's most successful project to date - the campaign protesting the use of the troops in South Africa's townships.

Yet ironically it has been the presence of the Defence Force in the townships which has been a major factor in ECC's growth. For the dilemma posed for conscripts has prompted many to support the End Conscriptin call.

Support for ECC has not only come from within our borders. Throughout the world organisatins have expressed support for the campaign. Many sent messages to ECC on the occasion of the 1st national Peace Festival, held in July last year. Attended by 400 delegates and 2000 participants, the festival was in many ways the national launch of the campaign. It showed that beyond all doubt the campaign had come to stay and would continue to grow until the day that conscription is ended.

Despite our successes the system of conscription remains, the troops are

still in the townships and conscripts still face the dilemma of participation.

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PROJECTS FOR A JUST PEACE

As part of our national campaign we have undertaken projects that will serve the community directly. These include environmental projects, health and health-care related work, projects that are directed towards children and the elderly, as well as symbolic actions epitomising the notion of a just peace.

In Durban the ECC will be repainting two paediatric wards in King George V hospital and they have planned a picnic for underprivileged children. A symbolic planting of wheat outside military bases will take place. Johannesburg ECC has embarked on a progressive social work programme for children, previously run by the Wits social work department, and they are planning a picnic.

In Pietermaritzburg an agricultural project directed towards the township communities is taking place. Cape Town is planning environmental projects which will include clearing up litter from some beaches and the mountain, weeding out alien vegetation from the nature reserves, and planting trees and gardens in township schools. They have embarked on a campaign of visiting the elderly, will repaint some houses for the aged, and they will be laying a tricycle track for a children's home.

Such a variety of projects demonstrates the numerous ways in which a community and country can be served without resorting to military means. We hope to demonstrate that the true patriots of our country are not on the borders, but are, unrecognised, working for the communities that need them.

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WE STAND FOR: (alternatively: DEMANDS FOR A JUST PEACE:)

(bold) An end to conscription under the current apartheid system

(light) Our country is sinking into a deepening civil conflict. Today South Africans, in SADF uniforms, are fighting fellow South Africans in the townships. Many Conscripts consequently face a serious moral dilemma, and should therefore be given the right to choose whether to participate in the SADF or not. This is why we call for an end to conscription.

In the meantime our right to hold our own beliefs would be respected if the government provided the following:

- * Genuine alternative service open to all conscripts who in good conscience object to service in the SADF
- * Alternative service based in religious and welfare organisations
- * Reduce the length of community service from a punitive 6 years to a maximum 4 years.

CAMPAIGNING FOR A JUST PEACE

ECC has formulated these demands after extensive consultation with people throughout South Africa, and we will be embarking on a campaign to canvass the support of a wide range of South Africans for these demands. Throughout the campaign ECC will be taking these demands to shopping centres, universities, onto the street, wherever people will be gathering.

The ECC will be presenting these demands to the government, to demonstrate the feelings of a large body of South Africans on this issue.

ARE YOU WILLING TO GET INVOLVED?

If you are interested in participatin in one of our projects, or wish to involve yourself on our campaign work, you can get hold of us through:

JHB.....

DBN.....

CPT.....

PE.....

PMB.....

G'TOWN.....

or write to us at:

CPT.....

etc.

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END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

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