

In a pre-dawn swoop on December 3, security police detained nine members of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) in Cape Town. On their release, they were charged under State of Emergency regulations with producing 'subversive statements' that 'undermine or discredit' the system of compulsory military service for white men. Offences under the regulations carry penalties of up to ten years imprisonment.

The detentions reflect an important development in South African politics; over the past four years, a significant number of whites have become involved in working against apartheid. Increasingly, they are being subjected to the harsh 'security laws' that were previously applied almost exclusively to blacks.

The detentions are also part of on-going state action against the ECC, a national coalition of ~~over 50~~ women, students,



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religious and human rights organisations. The ECC seeks to raise public awareness about the role of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and to pressurize the government to end conscription. Under South African law, all white men have to serve a total of four years in the army.

Since the start of the current Emergency in June 1986, over 60 ECC members have been held in detention for periods of between two weeks and several months. The detainees are often subjected to intensive interrogation and sometimes held in solitary confinement. Many have been released with 'restriction orders' which limit their political activities. The homes of over 90 members have been raided by security police and one house in Johannesburg was petrol bombed last November. The ECC's publications have been banned and in some parts of the country it is



prohibited from holding meetings.

The organisation is most worried though about the restrictions placed on it by the emergency regulations.

While the Defence Act has long made it an offence to encourage conscripts not to do their military service, the regulations now aim to make any expression of opposition to conscription a criminal offence.

The harassment of ECC and the new restrictions on it reflect how sensitively ~~in~~ which the government views debate around conscription into an army that is being used extensively to maintain internal order in an escalating civil conflict. Government ministers believe that the ECC is "undermining the will of young people to defend South Africa" and is responsible for low morale amongst the troops. The current clampdown is designed to stop ECC's public activities and



and check its rapid growth.

Formed at the end of 1983 with <sup>three</sup> branches in ~~three~~ major centres and twenty-five member organisations, it now has nine branches and over fifty affiliates. The campaign has been endorsed by the English churches and its patrons include Archbishop Tutu, Archbishop Hurley, President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference and Dr Bessie Naudé, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

The government is particularly concerned <sup>though</sup> about the extent to which support for ECC's position has broadened beyond the traditionally radical sectors of the English churches and universities. Over the past two years, groups of school pupils and parents have focussed on the militarisation of white schools, artists and musicians have participated in anti-

was art exhibitions and concerts, and children have come together at non-racial picnics. The ECC has also won ground in the Afrikaners community and has branches in Pretoria and at Stellenbosch University. The campus branch, whose chairperson is the grandson of a former Nationalist cabinet minister, has been operating despite being banned by the university rector a few months after its formation.

Although it is working in a community renowned for its conservatism, the ECC has mobilised thousands of whites in political campaigns. The 'troops out of the townships' campaign in 1985 involved a three week total fast by several conscientious objectors and a twenty-four<sup>hour</sup> mass fast 'for a just peace in our land'. In the 'contribution not conscription' campaign the following year, volunteers worked on community projects designed as symbolic alternatives



to 'national service' in the army. They helped clear areas of litter, plant gardens and rebuild creches, often in black communities where previously the army had been.

According to Nic Botoin, recently appointed national organiser, ECC's success and growth are primarily due to the on-going presence of the SADF in black areas: "once the army went into the townships, military service was no longer something one did because one had to. For the first time, conscripts in large numbers began asking 'what am I fighting for?' 'who am I fighting against?' Nic believes the answers are obvious to many: "we are being called on to participate in the defence of minority rule, not against 'communists and agitators' as the government claims, but against ordinary black South Africans resisting apartheid."

The conscript who feels like this has limited alternatives to going into the army. If he is both religious and would not serve in any army, he may qualify for six years' community service in a government department. If his objections are <sup>regarded as</sup> moral rather than religious, or if he is not a universal pacifist, he will face a maximum of six years imprisonment for refusing to serve. Faced with these options, many men choose exile from South Africa; it is estimated that more than 7000 are in Europe alone.

= An even greater number of conscripts simply do not report for duty. Prior to the deployment of troops in the townships, an average of 1500 were prosecuted annually for this offence. Now the Minister of Defence will no longer make public the official figures as they are "misused by a certain organisation". Sources within the SADF however report that attendance



at annual 30 and 90 day <sup>army</sup> camps is often as low as 50%.

Since October 1984, the SADF has been widely deployed in black areas. In 1985, 35000 soldiers were used in more than 90 townships around the country. The soldiers, together with policemen and 'riot squads', make up the 'Security Forces' that have ~~and enjoy~~ wide-ranging powers and immunity from criminal and civil prosecution under the Emergency. Their official role is to 'maintain law and order.' In practise this has meant containing black resistance and policing apartheid laws.

Troops have fired teargas at funeral mourners, occupied black schools and universities and helped break consumer boycotts. They have been used in pass law arrests and forced removals. Until the emergency regulations prohibited reporting on Security Force actions, there were numerous reports of soldiers using excessive and gratuitous force and provoking confrontations with township



Nic Boin is convinced that this censorship of the press, while extremely serious, will not be completely effective

"precisely because the army is made up of conscripts, not professional soldiers, who interact with civil society all the time

When they come home to their families and talk to their

friends, they speak about what they experienced and what

they saw". Not will state harassment of ECC be effective in

ending opposition to conscription" because the opposition ultimately

comes from the role of the SADF itself", says Nic.

"Whatever happens to us, for as long as the army is used

against the people of our country there will be some kind of

movement against conscription."

Exactly what will happen to the ECC, and for how long

it can find ways of operating publicly, remain to be seen. It

is clear though that ~~the government~~ <sup>is attempting to</sup>

~~is attempting to~~ <sup>by</sup> compelling white men to contain black

the South African government <sup>has</sup> made itself vulnerable to dissension from within

its own power base and army.



**Collection Number: AG1977**

**END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)**

**PUBLISHER:**

*Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive*

*Location:- Johannesburg*

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