

E.C.C. Workshop

Summary of position reached at Workshop and in subcom discussion on National Committee report

State's strategy

We attempted to ascertain the probable duration and intensity of the current phase of repression and narrowing the legal space. We did this by trying to discover what threats the state was responding to, how likely it was that they would be able to overcome these threats, and hence the likely future direction/strategy.

Of all the different elements of the crisis the state is in, we felt the state was most threatened by the mass movement and the form it was beginning to take throughout the country, but particularly in the Eastern Cape, new forms of organisation have arisen that the state feels particularly threatened by. This form of organisation is mostly centered around street committees. It is a method of organising every member of the community into a democratic structure which allows for quick and thorough decisions about stayaways, boycotts etc. This method of organisation also allows for civil defence, peoples militias - alternatives to the police, the army, municipal maintenance etc.

The state fears this organisation because it is very difficult to crush and it is a concrete alternative to the state itself.

The state believes that this form of organisation has been built in the climate created by the mass legal movement, mainly the UDF and its affiliates.

The state concludes from this that it is crucial to crush or at least effectively silence the mass popular organisations. In the lull the state hopes will follow this repression they probably hope to root out the peoples committees etc. (a process that they realise would take some time)

Parallel to this general strategy they hope to implement the Regional Service Councils and the joint management committees. This will allow for an integrated approach to the crisis at a local level. The old reform and repression couplet will be co-ordinated through these structures. In the vacuum they hope to create a concerted effort will be made to push alternative/moderate black leaders by co-opting them onto RSC's and/or by a more expansive approach - 4th chamber etc.

We felt that this strategy was unlikely to succeed. There was no evidence that the state had succeeded in crushing organisation. Despite the mass detentions in most centres, it seems that structures are weakened but essentially intact. This probably means that the level of repression and the narrowing of the legal space will continue indefinitely.

ECC has clearly been placed by the state alongside the mass popular movement. The state senses we are contributing to a serious split in their support base, but they also probably believe Aida Parker when she claims ECC is undermining the Nation's ability to defend itself against the 'communist onslaught' etc. So ECC, an organisation firmly based on a debate in the white camp and concerned essentially with calling for a change in the law, finds itself dumped (by the state at any rate) in the people's camp and alongside the 'revolutionary

threat'.

Our Constituency

We discussed how all of this had affected or was likely to effect our constituency.

We felt our constituency was increasingly polarised between a borderline Nationalist position and a radicalised, if often hopeless, anger. The middle ground was increasingly characterised by despondency, fear of violence, hopelessness, ignorance etc.

The curtailing of the flow of information has had a serious effect. Our constituency has little idea about the severity of the emergency, the harshness of repression and the general state of civil war in our country. An almost contradictory response has been the overreaction and fear. Many of our own supporters feel we are banned and therefore are afraid to associate with us.

Testing the regulations

We felt that while the state intends to stop us in the long term, their ability to do so was never a foregone conclusion. The level of repression and the over exercising of executive power in this emergency has been resisted and criticized from within the ruling group. The government will continue to try to unite the ruling group and their international allies behind a programme of reform and repression. It seems conclusive that they will be unable to achieve this unity in any significant way and their programme will cause further splits, divisions, sanctions etc.

In this context we need to 'test' the legal space. This means little more than attempting to operate and campaign in the way we have in the past. With each action or meeting we hold we will be able to see how the state intends to deal with us. This does not mean that we deliberately embark on illegal action. Our legal advice indicates that there is significant legal space open to us. What we need to do is engage in action we think we could legally defend in court. We would then hope that the state realises our action is legal and leaves us alone. We have already made it 'legal' to demand our right to oppose conscription - the fact that they were forced to release and have not yet charged the people printing stickers - we need to deepen this process and make other demands/actions 'legal'.

This testing could also lead us to court. We intend to take the state to court to challenge the clause relating to conscription. However, we could end up in court through the state deciding it wishes to prosecute over apparent breaches of the regulations. This is a less attractive option because it ties us up in lengthy court proceedings but it none the less achieves the same ends - whether we win or lose we will know more about how much legal space we have.

Effective banning or actual banning

It is not impossible that if the state block us at every turn and yet we continue to push they may decide to ban us. Alternatively if they block us at every turn, tighten up all the loopholes in the regulation and we realise there is nothing effective we can legally do, then we will have reached a conclusive end to the process of testing.

Preparations for the future

We felt there were a number of areas we needed to examine and discuss further if we were to be prepared for various future options:

- * Our member organisations and 'the front' become increasingly important in taking the campaign forward. The possible scenarios include expanding the existing front of organisations and/or helping to set up a broader anti-apartheid front in which we would form an anti-conscription component.
- * We need to increasingly work with our 'knobs', VIP's, and notables. This can provide us protection and a certain legitimacy. We need to examine the potential of the coming Black Sash VIP's forum in this regard.
- * We need to be careful of becoming introverted, secretive and radicalised. The state is trying to portray us as 'heavy baddies' and we need to counter that threat. Most importantly our ideological line should not change. We represent conscripts who are unhappy about being called on to defend apartheid, no more or less radical than that.
- * We need to prepare our activists with a broader political education than purely issues related to conscription. We must beware of embarking on a doctrinaire education programme and we could handle all controversial issues in a debate form. This broader political training should also extend to issues of security.
- * We need to examine areas in which we can stimulate anti-militarization work that is independent of ECC. The parents group, and in its original conception the Cultural Forum could be examples of this.
- * We need to look at our structures to see how they could best facilitate education and training, participation in decision making, the training of leadership etc. An activist forum has been mentioned in this regard.

Workshop

Agenda: * Short input - summary of the last discussion

- * Small group discussions with each group handling only one question. Since not everybody will have discussed every question (the way we usually do things) report backs should be thorough and interesting. Suggest 1/2 hour for discussion and 10mins for preparing reports.
- * Reportbacks from each group with approx 20 mins for each report and the discussion. Groups should take responsibility for posing the issues and questions that need to be discussed by the big group, and they should facilitate the discussion.

Questions

1. Broad front approach

- * Should ECC prioritise building its own front or rather slotting into (as the anti-conscription component) a broad anti-apartheid front? Are these suggestions contradictory? (It would be useful if questions of practical implementation were considered)
- * Is our use of VIP's and notables adequate? How could we make best use of the VIP's and VIP forums?
- * Should the 'Friends of ECC' initiative continue even when ECC can speak?
- * Are there areas where anti-militarisation work independent of ECC could be stimulated?

2. Internal Education.

A report will be given to the plenary from the internal education group which met earlier in the week.

3. Activities and issues

- * What are the issues ECC should focus on at the moment? Consider our constituency and their needs as well as other general campaigns that we may be able to slot into.
- * What forms would be appropriate for the issues - national campaigns, media blitzes or whatever.
- * How can we reach and develop our work with the most supportive sector of our constituency?

4. Structures

- * Do our structures best facilitate the training of leadership, internal education, general training and democracy in our organisation?

5. Security

Can we ensure secure operations in ECC without losing our openness?
How could this best be facilitated?

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