

When End Conscription Campaign members gathered with yellow ribbons outside the State Theatre in Pretoria ^{early} ~~at dusk~~ one morning in October, eight SAP vans were waiting for them.

The yellow ribbon called for ECC's right to speak, the withdrawal of troops from the townships and the release of ECC detainees. As fast as the yellow ribbons were tied to parking metres and trees they were taken down by police.

The incident in Pretoria captured in fifteen minutes the past year for ECC - exciting but difficult. The dramatic growth we had experienced since the use of the army in the townships continued until June. Thousands of people participated in campaigns, and new branches were formed in Afrikaans communities. From June we became a special target of state harassment. Our members were detained, restricted and charged under the Emergency, our houses were raided, our

meetings were banned and the emergency regulations placed restrictions on opposing conscription.

The ECA survived and at times even flourished in this period but ^{it} remains under severe attack. The government sees it as "one of South Africa's main enemies" and is determined to put a stop to its campaigning. Whether or not we continue to operate effectively depends however on us as much as on the government. It depends on how well we adapt to the new situation and learn the lessons of the past year.

For the first six months of 1986 we moved at our normal frenetic pace. We held anti-war art and photo exhibitions, a film festival and a campaign around school cadets. There were public meetings and media in protest against the SADF raids into Southern Africa and then later in support of conscientious objector Philip Wilkinson. The Working for a Just Peace

Campaign involved hundreds of volunteers in community projects

^{that} we felt represented real and constructive national service. ECC

members addressed the United Nations Special Committee

Against Apartheid and a conference against racism in Paris.

We also established new branches in Pretoria and Stellen-

bosch and formed a group in East London.

Our success was due to two factors. The first was the

continued presence of troops in black areas, which for so

many conscripts remains a fundamental obstacle to going

into the army. The second was ECC's energy and creativity,

and its ability to incorporate people with different values and

styles into the campaign.

The national impact that ECC was having though, and the

reported low level of morale within the army, lightened the

reaction of the authorities. Troops were given lectures about the

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the ECC, senior SADF officers accused it of "undermining the will of young people to defend SA" and right-wing organisations intensified the smear campaign against it. Yet as we approached the middle of the year, our biggest complaint was that we were growing faster than we could cope with organisationally!

When the Emergency struck on June 16, this looked like the ultimate in famous last words. The first two weeks were traumatic. About thirty of our members were in jail. The homes of over fifty were raided by security police and military intelligence, bans were placed on our meetings in the Eastern and Western Cape. According to the emergency regulations it was now an offence to produce or distribute 'subversive statements' that could 'incite the public to disloyalty or undermine' conscription.

Our immediate reaction was to put a hold on all public work

until we received legal advice and our branches and affiliates had had an opportunity to assess the situation. Under attack, it was necessary for us to turn inwards. The repression was not simply intended to stop high profile campaigning. It also aimed to disorganise us by intimidating our members. A key task was to hold the organisation together, nationally and within the branches, and maintain a high level of morale. We had to create the space for people to talk about their feelings of fear and anger, and to provide each other with support.

It was equally important to improve on our security arrangements so that we were less vulnerable to detentions and police surveillance. For example, some of our office-bearers had to go into hiding, we had to avoid ever discussing ECC over the telephone and all notes had to be destroyed after meetings. The trick was to do these things without falling into the

trap of becoming or looking like we had become an underground organisation. The ECI has always been and will remain a legal ^{campaign} organisation.

A trap that we did fall into was to prioritise security at the expense of democracy. Discussion and decision making initially tended to be centralised in our executives, at the expense of involving all our sub-committees and affiliates. When we corrected this problem we found that our democratic way of working took longer in the new situation but, if we were careful, was not more risky or less efficient. On the contrary, it improved the quality of our decisions and helped build unity.

Another effect of taking a break from campaign work was that we could put more effort into thorough organisational training. This involved having skills workshops on public speaking, pro-

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during media and chairing meetings, and workshops to develop theoretical and analytical skills. The detainees had exposed how dependent we were on a few people to provide leadership and direction. These are qualities we consciously need to develop in all our members.

By September the dust had settled and we had gathered our wits and strength sufficiently to consider public action. The EEC detainees who had been released couldn't understand why we were not doing anything! Our lawyers advised us that, despite the emergency regulations, there was still much we could do. We could campaign around the broad militarisation of our society, the system of codes, the troops in the townships and the legislation around military service. We could use our name and continue to call for a just peace. (Although the restrictions on opposing conscription have since been

changed in the second set of regulations issued in December, our legal position remains essentially the same today).

We knew though that even if our campaigns were legal, they still carried the risk of further detentions. Yet it seemed vital not to ban ourselves. The government was attempting to outlaw all peaceful opposition outside Parliament. Together with other democratic organisations we had to contest their right to do so. This meant having to do more than challenge the regulations through the courts - it meant having to go out and campaign.

Our first national campaign under the Emergency was defensive, demanding ECC's right to speak. The thrust of the campaign was a newspaper advert calling on the government to recognise freedom of conscience. The advert was endorsed by 150 leaders of the black and white communities and included newspaper

editors, Dutch Reformed Church ministers, PFP MPs, Unisa lecturers
UDT executive members and the heads of the English
churches. We also distributed more than 10 000 postcards
addressed to the State President with a similar message.

From then on our campaigns got more adventurous. Yellow ribbons
lit up the streets in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Thousands
of pamphlets told white school pupils that "apartheid is sending us
to war." UCT lecturers at a public meeting declared their re-
fusal to register for Dads Army. ECC members were jailed after
a peaceful protest of women outside Wits Commando. In a major
pre-Christmas campaign, ECC called on parents to buy their
children toys for peace and not war. Children came together for
a non-racial picnic at Archbishop Tutu's residence and there were
lunchtime lectures, pavement art and a public rally in the
Cape Town based 'War is no Solution' campaign. The key action of

this campaign, a 'peace walk' from Rondebosch to Lyttleton, was cancelled after police warned they would stop it.

Through all these campaigns ECC achieved the national presence it had enjoyed before June. Our mistake was to underestimate the seriousness of the Emergency and imagine that things were back to normal. The national crackdown in December caught us off guard. A meeting in Johannesburg was raided by security police who detained four executive members and placed restrictions on everyone else. In Cape Town the following morning, 9 activists were detained and then charged under the Emergency regulations in relation to the War is no Solution campaign. (The charges have yet to be formulated).

So 1986 ended on a sober note. We had decided to assert ourselves publicly and had been successful. But the price was heavy and the December swoop confirmed our earlier analysis of

the government's intention to crush extra-parliamentary opposition
Yet despite the harassment, the year ended with our organi-
sation strong, united and, above all, committed to keeping
going. That commitment is based on the knowledge that free-
dom of choice in relation to military service is an inter-
nationally recognised right. In South Africa this right is of such
fundamental importance, and the effects of militarisation and the
internal use of the army are so devastating, that we have no
choice but to keep working.

Our first objective in 1987 is to continue to raise awareness around
these areas and to build pressure on the government to change
the law. The challenge will be to do this in ways that are
appropriate to the higher level of repression. The second objective
is to continue to put effort into the organisational issues that we
identified as priorities in the first two months of the emergency:

cohesion and morale, democratic processes, tight security and organisational training. The third objective is to develop lower profile means of reaching people - house meetings, letters to the newspapers, building a mass membership and strengthening ECC as a coalition. Under the Emergency our member organisations, and the Black Sash in particular, provided invaluable support and often took forward ECC work when we were unable to.

The long term future of the campaign may depend on the extent to which these organisations are able to take up issues of militarisation independently of ECC.

Whatever the government has in store for us, for as long as there is conscription there will be a movement against conscription.

By compelling white men to contain black dissent through force, the government has made itself vulnerable to dissension in the white community and in its army. Harrassing ECC will not change this situation.

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