

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of white South Africans the dilemmas associated with conscription are increasing daily. The moral torment created by the system of compulsory service in the SADF has reached crisis proportions.

Counselling services, specifically for conscripts, have been inundated with calls from men who are opposed to serving in the SADF. In the large majority of cases there is little counsellors can do to help the lot of the conscript. Realistic alternatives to military service are few.

Says a Cape Town counsellor, "We can tell the conscript what his options are, but when one looks at what those consist of it comes down to three or four pretty harsh choices. Many chose to leave the country. It is so obvious that they hate doing that but they see no other alternative to going and fighting in the townships."

This is the context in which people from throughout South Africa have over the past three years been putting great amounts of energy into trying to get the conscription laws changed by parliament. They are all part of the new and dynamic movement - the End Conscription Campaign.

It is representing and assisting the many young men who are needing to do much soul searching to find solutions which will satisfy their conscience. And it is not only the conscripts themselves who are going through this experience.

"Parents, sisters, brothers, friends, girlfriends, all are affected," says "We have a situation in which it is the conscript as well as his community who are feeling the burden of the system of conscription. Conscription is not only the conscript's dilemma. We in the ECC are giving voice to a whole community of people affected by conscription."

The diversity of people within ECC reflects this broad community. Conscripts, their families and friends, scholars and students, professionals, ministers of religion, artists and musicians - all have found a home in the campaign. Through many exciting and creative public activities they have brought ECC to the fore as a leading movement representing many in the white community.

The campaign has, in addition to organising big public activities, also made numerous requests and representations to government. It has made calls for a change in the law on conscription. A notable occasion in this respect was when a delegation expressed ECC's views to the Geldenhuys Committee, an official commission of inquiry into all aspects of the operation of the SADF.

This pamphlet will explain the reasons for the call to end conscription, and the background to the campaign and its growth.

THE CONSCRIPTION SITUATION

Conscripts at present are required by law to serve a total of four years in the SADF - a two year initial period and a further two years spread over the following twelve years. Thereafter they are placed in the Defence Reserve until they reach the age of 55.

Alternatives to compulsory military service are few and harsh. A conscription counsellor explains what these are:

"Firstly, if the conscript is both sufficiently religious and a pacifist he can apply to the Board (for Religious Objection) to be granted religious objector status. If accepted he then does "community service" in a government department for a period which is 1½ times the length of his remaining military service. So if he hasn't served yet he has to do six years of community service.

"Secondly, many live as fugitives within South Africa, constantly trying to evade the military police who might be searching for them," she said.

"Most who refuse to serve in the SADF leave the country. We are aware of so many good people who have been forced to leave the country in this way."

A final option which few have taken, has been to make themselves available for arrest and conviction for refusing to do military service. The maximum six year sentence which such a conviction carries has made many wary of even contemplating it as an option. Only one man, a Jehova's Witness, has been sentenced under this provision. Philip Wilkinson, a Port Elizabeth conscientious objector and ECC member, has been the only other man who has publicly stated that he is prepared to take this option rather than serve in the SADF.

MANY GROUNDS FOR OPPOSING CONSCRIPTION

The ECC is based on the fundamental belief that individuals should be free to choose whether or not to participate in The SADF. The basis of this belief is contained in a document submitted to the SADF's Geldenhuys Committee of Inquiry. In it the ECC pointed out to a number of reasons why it believes conscription should be ended. Let us look at these.

A central factor is the international principle of freedom of conscience. Many internationally recognised documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise and support the right of individuals in this matter. They all agree that people have the right to decide to act in a particular way if they believe that something they are called on to do is morally wrong. This may be on religious, moral, political or ethical grounds.

"ECC believes that if the government were to uphold this internationally accepted right of individual conscience, all who face military service would be free to choose whether they participate in the SADF or not."

It is particularly in the South African situation that the individual's right to choose becomes important to us. The system of apartheid and the SADF's role in upholding it has led to many organisations and individuals supporting the call to end conscription.

The SADF has played a role which has contributed in a major way to this system. It is an institution which is not neutral and independent of government and in many respects can be seen to be devising, implementing and defending government policy.

Through its participation in the all powerful State Security Council and the locally based Joint Monitoring Committees, the SADF plays a central role in creating government policy. The State Security Council, dominated by military and security personnel, has become known as the "inner cabinet" with its decisions not requiring ratification by the cabinet. Effectively this makes it the most powerful body in government. Many observers have referred to this domination of government by the military as the "silent coup".

The SADF maintains apartheid more directly when it assists in the forced removal of black communities, the enforced segregation of beaches, and the demolition of squatter camps. In the past it helped with the arrests of black people under the now rejected pass laws.

But the most significant and vivid role played by the SADF in recent years has been its involvement in containing civil unrest. According to figures released in parliament by Defence Minister Magnus Malan, 35 000 troops were deployed in 95 townships between October 1984 and February 1986. (?) And according to its own statistics the SADF has been responsible for the death of a number of township residents.

"We have spoken to many township residents, troops, and independent observers to get an accurate picture of the effect of the SADF presence in the townships. Most agree that the deployment of troops there has not had the intended effect of containing unrest. Instead, the effect has been to intensify resistance and deepen conflict," says....

In its memorandum the ECC said, "The SADF is directly involved in the defence and maintenance of apartheid. In this context its enemy is not a foreign external aggressor, but black South Africans. We therefore believe that the cause served by the SADF is fundamentally unjust."

Said, "The conscript in the SADF has been forced to participate in this conflict on the side of the government. For many this means taking a side against their choice."

Military service has also led to negative psychological effects. Militarisation and con-

scription raised the level of violence in our society as a whole. A clinical psychologist pointed out in a court case that soldiers "who cannot handle stress are potential murderers".

Outside of the borders of South Africa the SADF has also played a destructive role.

In 1971 the International Court of Justice declared South Africa's occupation of Namibia illegal. Yet 15 years later the SADF maintains its presence in that country against the will of its people.

"In other Southern African countries the SADF has played an aggressive role. It has been involved in cross border raids, full scale invasions, acts of sabotage and supporting rebel movements whose aim is to overthrow established governments."

In all of these incidents the SADF has unjustifiably violated the sovereignty of independent countries. Most governments internationally have condemned these.

All these examples of the role played by the SADF reinforce ECC's call for an end to conscription.

HOW THE LAW SHOULD CHANGE

"Our basic demand is an end to conscription," says "We want the young men who are being called up today to be able to decide whether they wish to be part of the SADF or not."

Although not calling for the establishment of a volunteer army, the ECC believes that the setting up of one would be consistent with the demand that individuals be free to choose whether they participate in the SADF or not. It would be preferable to the present system of conscription.

And while conscription continues the ECC believes that the rights of conscientious objectors should be recognised. At present the law only makes provision for religious pacifist objectors.

"None of those involved in ECC or support us have opposed the concept of non-military national service." At present the law does not provide alternative ways for everyone committed to this country to serve it.

"We believe that the option of community service, as an alternative to military service should not be limited to religious pacifists, but should be available to all those who in good conscience cannot serve in the SADF."

The length of alternative service should not be a punitive 1½ times the length of the conscript's remaining military service as at present, but should be the same length as military service. This service should be available in non-governmental organisations, as well as government departments as at present.

These changes have all been proposed to the government as suggested amendments to the Defence Act.

The ECC also feels that those conscripts doing service in the SADF should be given a greater say over the nature of their service. So, for as long as conscription exists, conscripts should be given the freedom to choose not to enter South Africa's townships, or neighbouring countries including Namibia.

A GROWING CAMPAIGN

From small beginnings ECC has grown into a nationwide campaign with widespread support.

The initial impetus for the formation of the ECC came at the 1983 annual conference of the Black Sash at which a strongly worded resolution was passed calling for an end to conscription.

This came in the wake of a change to the Defence Act that year. The changes meant that military service was extended to four years, provision was made for religious pacifists to do non-military national service, but all other men who in good conscience had objections to serving in the SADF were not provided for. The new law introduced a maximum six year sentence for those objectors who did not fit into the law's narrow definitions.

These changes were a response to the rapidly growing conscientious objector movement which was at that time becoming a force in South Africa. The government hoped with this new legislation that they would succeed in dividing the conscientious objector movement and take the wind out of its sails. The opposite happened.

Widespread condemnation met the amendment to the Defence Act. Towards the end of 1983 the first three branches of ECC were formed in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. These were all coalitions of organisations both local and national. A wide range of religious, human rights, student, women's, and professional organisations were represented. Among them were the Black Sash, Conscientious Objector Support Group, Catholic and Anglican Justice and Peace divisions, the Methodist Christian Citizenship Department, the National Union of South African Students, the Women's Movement for Peace, the Civil Rights League, and the National Education Union of South Africa.

All came together in a common commitment to campaign against the system of conscription into the SADF. Many prominent individuals also expressed their support for the new

campaign. Among them were Sir Richard Luyt, the former principal of the University of Cape Town, Sheena Duncan of the Black Sash, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, Reverend Peter Story, Dr Beyers Naude, and the late Molly Blackburn.

From its small beginnings in 1983, ECC has grown into a major national movement. As well as the original three branches, new and active ECC groups have been established in Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Pietermaritzburg, Stellenbosch and Pretoria. The ECC coalition has grown to over 50 local and national groups. Many individuals have also got involved in the campaign.

As well as growing in size, attracting ever greater numbers of supporters and active members, the ECC has also united many diverse groups.

"ECC unites everyone who opposes conscription into the SADF because of the role the Defence Force plays in our country. This has meant that we have drawn together both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups like the PFP and the UDF," said The ECC is not aligned to any political grouping.

Young and old, student and working people, as well as English and Afrikaans speakers have come together into a single movement. Differences that might exist are overshadowed by a common commitment to ending conscription.

CAMPAIGNS

As well as involving a great diversity of individuals, the ECC has in the past few years run a number of successful campaigns. Many significant issues have been tackled. Particularly important have been those campaigns focussing on the situation of troops in Namibia in the townships, and that calling for an alternative national service.

The "No War in Namibia" focus was ECC's first national campaign. Held in early 1984 it brought to the attention of the public that South African conscripts were being used to maintain the illegal occupation of Namibia.

The deployment of troops in local townships in October 1984 brought the focus back firmly within South Africa. The initial public shock and outrage in response to the troops in the townships developed into a widely supported call for "Troops Out". Rather than calming the situation in the townships, the presence of troops led to the horrific escalation of conflict. So, following a highly successful National Peace Festival in Johannesburg in July 1985, the ECC embarked on its Troops Out of the Townships campaign.

As well as the production and distribution of much exciting media, public picket protests and public meetings, the campaign centred on a three week fast by ECC members. Dr Ivan Toms in Cape Town, Richard Steele in Durban and Harald Winkler in Johannesburg fasted for

three weeks.

"For the three weeks that I fast, my prayer is that many will recognise with ECC, the injustice of the use of troops in the townships, and will support the ECC's call that troops be withdrawn from the townships now, and that we work for a just peace in our land," said Ivan Toms at the time of the fast.

Many did support ECC's call with thousands attending the activities of the campaign. One meeting alone was attended by 4000 people.

ECC campaigns have not only been critical of the role played by the SADF, but have also presented viable alternatives to the present system of military national service. Such a focus was the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign early in 1986.

In this campaign ECC members and supporters showed their commitment to working actively for a better South Africa, and in the process showed practical examples of viable alternative forms of national service. In more than 20 community work projects around the country, hundreds of volunteers came forward to demonstrate ECC's beliefs in practice.

Crèches were built, a resettled community was assisted in a number of the schemes it had initiated. ECC members worked in a local community woodworking project, while a number of children related schemes were run. A garden for mentally handicapped children was planted. Many other activities were run around the country.

"I think that we have shown that there are so many positive and constructive ways of serving our society. Conscription is serving such destructive ends. We want construction not conscription. We also want to build race relations, not destroy them. When we went into the township to work on the creche people there said to us that our presence there was serving exactly the opposite of what the SADF were doing there. We were building bridges between black and white, not destroying them," said a Port Elizabeth project organiser.

ECC has had many ongoing focusses as well as its campaigns.

Discussion forums for mothers of conscripts have been held. Here women have been able to share their feelings on conscription. Many parents too, have come forward to work in ECC.

School pupils are a group who feel the effects of militarisation very directly. Many are opposed to the weekly cadet programme they have to participate in and have come to ECC for assistance. Campaigns against cadets have been run with the support of parents, teachers and principals.

The "dad's army" call up of older men for local commando duty has aroused much protest.

Public focuses have been organized in support of these men.

The creative community has also done much work for ECC. Artists, actors, and musicians have shown much support in the exhibitions, plays, performances and concerts they have put on for ECC.

ATTACKS AND SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

A consequence of the growth in support for ECC and its call to end conscription has been an extensive, and at times coordinated, campaign of harassment to undermine it. The state has also acted in numerous ways against ECC.

Of a particularly sinister nature has been a series of unsubstantiated allegations by members of the government, as well as smear attacks by conservative groups and publications. Attempts have been made in these attacks to link ECC to unlawful organisations and to allege that the ECC is a front for the Soviet Union. It is also contended that ECC is not telling the full truth of what it stands for - that it has a "hidden agenda".

"There is no truth to these allegations at all," says "This was shown in a legal action we brought against the Aida Parker Newsletter which had made a number of these very serious allegations."

The April 1986 issue of the Aida Parker Newsletter was devoted to a virulent attack on the ECC, which drew together most of the allegations previously levelled at the campaign. The publication was very widely distributed and quoted from.

ECC referred the publication to the media council for a ruling. Under the chair of retired Appeal Court judge, Mr Justice Diemont, it was found that it had made many false allegations and had told lies about ECC.

An attempt to link the ECC to the Soviet-aligned World Peace Council was found to be "misleading and untrue", and neither was there "evidence that the ECC is in any way involved with any Soviet organisation or any Russian surrogates."

"The Aida Parker Newsletter contains a number of untrue or incorrect allegations. Some of them are trivial, some more serious and many of them disparaging," said the judgement.

"Not only did the Aida Parker Newsletter contain factual inaccuracies and untruths, but there is also the innuendo which runs throughout the newsletter that the ECC is not what it appears to be but is guilty of "dangerous duplicity" and that it furthers the aims of unlawful organisations," it continued. "The Aida Parker Newsletter was wrong in claiming that it had a hidden agenda."

no substance and are attempts to smear the ECC. It proves that lies and false allegations have been used in an attempt to undermine the growing support for the campaign," said

"The smear attacks on ECC have been damaging in that they have been widespread. The Aida Parker Newsletter was also used by the security police as the basis of their detaining ECC members. The findings of the media council indicate that ECC members have been held on the basis of false information and allegations."

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The ECC has extensive links with a broad range of organisations internationally. These links were first established during 1985.

"We wanted to learn about and from the conscientious objection movement in Europe," says.. "We also feel a need to deepen our understanding on issues of war and peace in the international context; and we want to inform sympathetic organisations overseas about our work and campaigns. Financial support and solidarity from them is also a reason."

"The ECC has been especially careful as to who it has contact with. It concentrates on conscientious objector, pacifist, christian and anti-apartheid organisations. Contact with certain organisations overseas has been avoided. The ECC has a policy that no links should be made with any groups with whom contact could be dangerous. These are the ANC, the Committee on Iouth African War Resistors, the International Union of Students, and the World Peace Council.

This is firstly because the ECC avoids contact with organisations that the South African government has declared unlawful, says

"Secondly, just prior to our "Troops out of the townships" campaign we became aware that the government and various right-wing groups tried to create the impression that we were criminal and subversive. While there is no truth to the allegations, we nevertheless became extremely conscious of the need to avoid contact not only with banned organisations overseas, but also with organisations with whom contact could be used to justify further attacks on the ECC."

A significant aspect of ECC's international work has been a number of very successful tours of Europe, the United States and India by ECC representatives. As a result many groups around the world are aware of ECC and its work. Much support has come from these organizations.

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