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REPORT ON THE MILITARY FOCUS AT U.C.T.

From the 12th to 19th May 1982 a "Military Focus" was held at UCT. It was an indepth look at a number of areas of concern for students in the light of an ever-increasing militarism and militarisation in South Africa. The six lunch-time programmes included speeches, a debate, drama and a slide-tape show. A display on propoganda attracted large numbers of students during the two weeks and a number of publications were sold. Many more UCT students became aware of the implications of the growing militarism and militarisation during the focus.

What follows is a look at a number of elements that went to make up the focus. It arises out of, and is itself part of an ongoing evaluation of the educative role of the student movement.

1. BACKGROUND

A mass meeting was held towards the end of March in the light of the proposed "Army Bill". It became apparent during the packed out meeting that students as a whole were concerned about the military. Ongoing education on the issue had been going on throughout 1981 in the pages of "Comment" the Christian newspaper at UCT, and in 1982 in "Varsity" as well.

A group of people then started toying with the idea of a focus week to explore the issue in far more depth. It was decided to have a focus over two weeks from Tuesday 11 to Thursday 13; and Monday 17 to Wednesday 19 May. (Thurs. 20 May was a public holiday).

Just when everything was organised the Fort Hare issue broke and it was decided to have a mass meeting on Monday 10th May and to boycott in solidarity on Tuesday 11th. Not only did this push the focus on a day, it also taxed our media resources, and because of further developments forced us to change a venue for the debate.

The military issue, however, did come up at least twice during the Fort Hare issue. In the mass meeting when students said that they could only support non-violent action against the State, Peter Moll got a standing ovation from the 2000 people attending when he asked: "Are those who support only non-violent action going to be non-violent when they are called up to the army?"

Secondly, in the day of solidarity concert, two folk singers sang anti-military songs which went down very well.

It is against this background, long-term and immediate that the focus must be seen.

2. ORGANISATION

A large number of organisations were involved in the focus - Social Action, Projects Comm, Cathsoc, Edcom, Women's Movement, Wages Comm, Media Comm, and Christian Action (an ad hoc group of 'progressive' christians including those on the SRC etc). Not only did such a wide group of resources make for creative planning, but from all accounts the mix of leftists and christians was an incredibly creative one, discovering and sharing resources that have previously been kept apart.

Representatives from each of the organisations met quite regularly throughout the weeks preceding the focus to keep up to date with planning.

An attempt was made to include the Students' Christian Association (SCA) in the focus, but through some weak communication links, they decided against it. They were persuaded to show some interest at the last moment although they never became identified with the organisation of the focus.

3. TOPICS

The topics for each day were (speakers in brackets) :

- (i) "South Africa at war" - an overview of the increasing militarism and militarisation in S.A. and its implications (Mike Evans, Roger Hulley);
- (ii) "Women behind the War" - a look at how women are used to uphold the military image (Margaret Nash, Drama);
- (iii) "Hearts and Minds" - military propaganda and education (Glenn Moss, Bruce Meier);
- (iv) "Operation Carnation" - The SADF in Namibia and Angola (Keith Gottschalk, Slide/tape show : Africa's last colony);
- (v) "SADF - legitimate defender?" a debate on the morality of the war (Willem Steenkamp vs Doug Bax);
- (vi) "Alternatives - A soft option?" - an overview of the need for alternatives and what alternatives are being sought (Adi Patterson, Hugh Philpott);
- (vii) A seminar on experiences in detention barracks led by Peter Moll.

Other topics that were considered :

- the military and business
- the military and the media
- the role of the military in civil unrest
- using department of info. movies and discussing
- using SATV videos and discussion
- military and the law in S.A.
- military influences on campuses

(an evaluation of the topics is included under - 'Speakers' - because, to a large extent, it was how the speakers responded to the topics that can be evaluated.)

4. MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

This was probably a highlight of the focus. It included :

- * A separate poster for each day (A3 size), 250 of each
- * An A4 handout with the focus programme on it (4000)
- * An A3 poster of Section 121(c) of the Defence Act (300)
- * A large colour (A1) silkscreen poster advertising the whole focus (300)
- * A5 handouts for the "South Africa at War"; "SADF - a legitimate defender?"; and "Alternatives - A soft option?" meetings (3000 of each)
- * A large banner 10 x 2m that was displayed on Jameson Hall (until it was taken down by the authorities!)

The A5 handouts were distributed at the busstops on campus in the morning of their happening - which proved to be an excellent way of advertising.

The display that was put together was a huge success and was brilliantly done. It covered such issues as propaganda; school cadets; women; business; motivations for fighting etc. Mounted on three large display boards upon the background of the S.A. flag it attracted large groups of onlookers in the Leslie and Red Level unions.

A huge wall mural with a striking military motif was painted in the union by the Creative Arts Workshop (not a planned part of the focus). Within the context of the focus it helped add to the atmosphere of the focus.

Megaphoning just before lunch-time and UCT radio were two other forms of media/advertising used though they were not as well as they should have been.

8. OTHER IDEAS

The planning group came up with a number of creative ideas, that for various reasons never saw the light of day.

- * To use UCT radio in a send-off of Forces Favourites - playing peace and anti-war songs.
- * To have guerrilla theatre - people marching up and down in khaki with look-alike guns.
- * To have a folk concert with some local musicians during a lunch-time. This would have been an informal event with "Vietnam" and South African songs.
- * To use videos off SATV on the SADF for discussion starters.
- * To show commercial anti-war movies in the afternoons - Gallipoli; Woodstock; Apocalypse Now, Coming Home.

9. FOLLOW-UP

The focus was followed by an evaluation and the decision to produce an extensive report (this is it!) Most of the media - posters, handbills etc was posted off to the other campuses. The speeches that were given were collected and will be published some time in the future.

It was also decided that, due to the extensive interested generated by the focus that on-going education should take place throughout the rest of the year.

10. IMPRESSIONS

- * The focus and the flourish of media roused the awareness of many students. If they didn't attend, they were still aware that the military was under the spotlight.
- * People are concerned about militarism, militarisation and the implications upon society and themselves.
- * Whilst much of the public debate has been within Christian circles and hence couched in a Christian idiom, and many of the resource people are christians, it is changing and it needs to change.
- * Whilst it is an issue that affects men most directly, throughout the focus the position of women and the military was under review. The focus gave weight to that now near-famous remark :

"If you think women aren't involved -
you're wrong!"

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