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Story cleared by SAAN's lawyer, Mr David Dison

By GAVIN EVANS

Transvaal News Bureau

JOHANNESBURG -- The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) has won what it describes as

a "major victory" against Rapport newspaper in the Media Council.

Yesterday's edition of Rapport included a 550-word article entitled "Diensplig: ECC stel say saak" ("Conscription: ECC states its case"), following an agreement reached in the Media Council last week.

On October 27 Rapport published a spread of articles on ECC. The main story was headlined "Aanslag op wit seuns...om regering te laat val" ("Onslaught on white boys...to cause the government to fall") and contained several allegations which the ECC regarded as inaccurate.

Photographs of ECC national organiser, Mr Laurie Nathan, ECC Eastern Cape chairman, Ms Janet Cherry, and ECC patrons, Dr Beyers Naude, Bishop Desmond Tutu and the late Mrs Molly Blackburn were featured prominently.

Another article, "Die ECC se politiek skyn rooi deur" (The ECC's politics reveals red), included the allegation, from a source which Rapport refused to disclose, that the organisation handed out peace-kits which included material from the banned Council of South African War Resisters.

"This Cosawr publication was given to Rapport by their own source without the help of ECC and against the policy of ECC," said Mr Nathan.

ECC decided to take Rapport to the media council in order to be given space to reply, and after a month's mediation the newspaper agreed to print ECC's view that the original stories gave the wrong impression of the organisation, and to give Miss Cherry and Mr Nathan "the opportunity to give their side of the story and an explanation of their aims and work".

Commenting their "victory" Mr Nathan said ECC had been "thoroughly vindicated" and described it as a "set-back for the state's strategy of undermining ECC".

"Over the last couple of months ECC has been subjected to an ongoing smear tactics by the SADF and government spokesmen.

"Although these articles and statements are always inaccurate they are intended to criminalise ECC in order to weaken our support in the white community and we have been concerned that these tactics are a prelude for further, more serious state attacks against us," he said.

He described ECC as a legal movement made up of 51 church, youth and human rights groups and said their campaigns had attracted thousands of people.

"The support we enjoy is based on our opposition to conscription and to role of the troops in the townships. Because our arguments are so widely regarded as convincing the government has no alternative to try and undermine us through scurrilous means.

"The real problem in our country is not the growing opposition to conscription -- it is the fact that young men are being forced to take up arms against fellow South Africans in defence of apartheid.

"We regard our opposition as an act of patriotism and it is our love for our country and its people and our desire for a just peace that compels us to raise our voices," he said.

Mr Nathan said ECC was now planning a national campaign aimed at finding "alternatives to military service". In each major centre ECC will take on projects such as helping build health clinics, and cleaning up nature reserves "to demonstrate there are ways of serving one's country without killing one's neighbours", he said.

(MORE)

Introduction

One of the greatest tragedies of the South African conflict is the effect it is having on the youth and, in particular, the white youth.

There are lessons we can learn from the Rhodesian bush war and the Smith government's legacy to young white Rhodesians.

A massive propaganda machine operating through the press, radio, the schools and through military training itself held up an ideal for these young people to strive for. The picture of a strong young man armed and in uniform and his wife, mother or sister supporting him from home — all of them involved in aggressively defending a free, christian nation against the massed forces of communist terrorism.

So the young white men went out into the bush and died and killed for the cause and their mothers, sisters, wives and lovers proudly suffered the tensions of waiting and sometimes the anguish on the death of a loved one.

The rest is history — Robert Mugabe, the most diabolical and contemptible terrorist leader was elected to power in an overwhelmingly popular victory.

How could young white Rhodesians understand what had happened — they are still with us today, many of them at our universities, and all but a lucky few are hardened, angry embittered and alienated in a world they were not taught to understand, but even more criminal, in a world that was deliberately misinterpreted for them.

The parallels with our own situation are both obvious and frightening. It is becoming clear that our country is entering a state of civil war I don't want to look at this theoretically; I want to look at who is fighting whom and why, and why.

On the one side is the woman standing in front of her plastic shelter with a brick in her hand waiting to fulfil her promise that the only way the boere will get her to Khaylitsa is if they take her dead body there.

Or there is the man who glares with open hatred at the magistrate who is fining him R50,00 prior to his 4th deportation to the Transkei where there is no work and no food. There is their son, angered at the suffering of his people, who has slipped across the border, been trained, returned and has hidden his gun and ammunition.

There are workers, women, students and youth who come together in their trade unions and community organisations or mass-based popular fronts like the UDF, who are shaking the foundations of apartheid.

There are also the Namibian people who have long opposed the occupation of their country with whatever means possible. This is the one group of antagonists. On the other side, is the system itself and those who benefit from it — the Nationalist Party, the generals, sections of businesses, the white wage earners and the well-fed bantustan leaders like Sebe and Matanzima. And then, of course, there is us, the youth who get armed, clothed, fed and thrown into the breach to defend our christian national ideal against a communist onslaught.

In South Africa, the SADF is in the seat of political power. This focus week, today's meeting is the first of 4, will detail the SADF's role in government, and in education. We will gain a picture of a highly militarised society.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the SADF is everywhere. It's in the white schools, where the drag of cadets every Thursday afternoon imprints itself on the psyche of the boys who carry out attacks on mock SWAPO bases and the girls who are taught to be the mother eternal, firing the hearth and keeping the home for the man away at war.

It's in the black schools taking the children on outings to the zoo or to leadership camps. It is manning the roadblocks outside the townships, and assisting with removals in Magopa. The SADF is in our universities in as seemingly innocuous a form as research in the wave motion labs, or as frightening a form as a university military unit.

It's in the streets, in the media, it's a symbol in advertising. It's in Angola, but most of all it is in our heads.

As our country gears itself onto a war footing, so a war psychosis begins to permeate. In the media and in our minds the enemy becomes something foreign, less than human and the soldier becomes a symbol of the nation, something more than human. They are taking us down the same road where Smith led white Rhodesia.

They are telling us that ours is a just course and that because of this we will win the war. This is an enormous historical deceit. If we only glanced over our shoulders on the proud march to the battlefield, we would see that the glorious course is no more than the defence of apartheid no matter what colour they paint the enemy and that there is no possibility of winning a war in defence of this exploitative and oppressive system.

And yet the myth is propagated. The white nation prepares for war — our lives are put on the line. And in 5 years or 10 years or 30 years time, will there be a small white community in South Africa who are, like the ex-Rhodesians I mentioned, hardened, angry, embittered and alienated, in a world that was deliberately misinterpreted for them.

What can we, who are so caught up in this cycle of violence, do to break it and avoid our own brutalisation.

We can call out to those young white soldiers and to their wives, lovers and families. We can show them that they cannot win the fight, that it's wasteful to try, and that the cause itself is an unjust one. On every platform and in every forum we can say no this is a lie, this a deceit. We can call for an end to conscription, for South African troops to be pulled out of Namibia — we can call for an end to the war. We can organise others around this call.

Beyond this we have to attack the roots of violence in this country — the violence of the Bantustan, of the cheap labour system, the violence of group areas and forced removals, the violence of starvation and poverty, the violence of apartheid. And whether we come to a meeting like this, join projects committee or a UDF area committee, or the *E.C.C.* we can — to co-opt a phrase — each do our bit for the country. This is our patriotic duty, this is the only meaningful way we can do our national service — by working for a just peace in our country.

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