

INTRODUCTION

This paper hopes to contribute to establishing a common starting point and a common set of questions for our process of discussing the form and content of our campaign. This is not the formally mandated 'record of conceptual discussion' from NC, but rather reflects my own understanding of the issues facing us. It is also not an attempt to give answers to the questions, but rather tries to pull together some of our past conceptual thinking about ECC. Finally (as far as disclaimers are concerned) this paper is both subjective and cursory and should not be treated as authoritative, but seen rather as one of many contributions to our discussion.

Initial discussion around the issues facing us has demonstrated, more than anything, a weakness in our conceptual tools. We have floundered around - often in a demoralised state - without even being sure of what questions we are meant to be asking. This paper will try and pinpoint where the pressure is coming from that is pushing us to discuss our direction. I will then try and locate ECC socially, look at some of the reasons for our current form and content, try and look at the changing nature of our constituency, look at the state in relation to ECC, look at some of the initial discussions that have taken place and end by suggesting some starting points and initial questions.

WHY ARE WE DISCUSSING THIS NOW?

We are getting urgent 'prods' from various quarters to examine the form and content of our work. These 'prods' come from:

- 1.) The tendency for our ability to conduct mass work to be restricted by state repression.
- 2.) The 'criminalisation' of our organisation/work by state smear and repression.
- 3.) The critique from historically supportive groupings in the 'Democratic Movement' that we are 'too distant' from them and should move closer; also that there are general priorities in the struggle that our priorities sometimes conflict with etc. etc.
- 4.) The pressure on us to become part of fronts and alliances that do not relate directly to the ending of conscription.
- 5.) The feeling that a significant sector of whites has emerged that is seeking for more 'fundamental solutions' to the question our country is facing. this sector of whites readily agrees



with our message but is unable to see how supporting the ECC will bring them any closer to a peaceful and just society.

6.) A feeling from our own ranks that we have reached a peak and we are now just cruising - maintaining ourselves, without any real movement forwards.

What is immediately clear is that different issues are raised by these 'prods' which require separate investigations and answers. However, because we are right at the start of the process this paper still deals with the issues in a fairly undifferentiated way. An important part of the process is going to be breaking down the issues into separate components and dealing with different things differently - there is unlikely to be a 'total solution' to all the questions raised by the 'prods'.

#### LOCATING ECC IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

The single most important dynamic or contradiction that shapes our society and its future is the clash between the disenfranchised majority and the white minority determined to cling to power. The majority's struggle to throw off this oppression is called the struggle for national liberation. For the sake of brevity and simplicity let us call this the 'dominant contradiction' and avoid debating the relationship between the class and national components of the struggle. This contradiction determines (to a large extent) the nature of the state and the 'political geography' of our society - the division into two broad 'camps', the lines of stress within and between these 'camps', alliances between different interest groups within these camps etc. For the sake (again) of brevity, let us call the two camps defined by the struggle for national liberation the People's Camp and the Ruler's Camp. (There is no attempt here at any kind of theoretical precision and this should be treated as a kind of shorthand to bring us to the following point). The Ruler's Camp faces a concerted challenge from the People's Camp and it has accordingly prepared for and engaged in making war on its enemy. To make war on anybody you have to make significant demands on your citizens - conscription, militarisation of your society, increasingly authoritarian forms of government/military rule etc. Thus the 'dominant contradiction' has created another contradiction in the Ruler's Camp. As the government has made more demands on white South Africa for its war effort against the disenfranchised majority, so resistance and opposition to these demands has grown amongst whites. This opposition has taken various forms, the most important of which (for our purposes) is the End



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Conscription Campaign. The message of the ECC has always expressed this organic contradiction in white society, but the precise form and emphasis in this message has been determined by the strength of the different forces that have built the campaign. In it's public work the ECC has always identified the relationship between conscription and the 'dominant contradiction', but has remained organic to the contradiction in the Ruler's Camp. Our starting point has never been 'end apartheid, because this will end conscription' - in this sense we have tended to advocate the resolution of the conscription issue outside of the resolution of the dominant contradiction. Another way of saying this, is that while we have demonstrated that conscription and militarisation are a function of the white minority's compulsion to defend apartheid, we speak as people oppressed by conscription and militarisation, and not as people oppressed by apartheid generally. Practically, this has defined our relationship with organisations working for national liberation as 'friendly, but seperate'. We have avoided taking policy decisions on a whole host of areas on the basis that our aim is narrowly defined and we want to mobilise the maximum support for the single aim of ending conscription into the SADF (argued primarily on the basis that we are unhappy about being forced to defend apartheid).

#### ECC - THE SINGLE ISSUE FRONT

Up until now our common conception of ECC has been that it is a single issue front. This has meant that the campaign has taken the form of an alliance of organisations and ideologically defined groupings participating in a campaign on the basis of common oppositions to conscription into the SADF (the baseline of this opposition being the fact that the SADF is defending apartheid.) Historically, we have been quite rigid in not allowing other issues to devide the front or the potential front/constituency of the campaign. Our assumption has always been that there is a far broader grouping of whites who could support this call than could support any particular programme for the resolution of the 'dominant contradiction'. More particularly, we have always worked on the assumption that there is a far broader grouping of whites who could support an ECC type initiative than could support the National Liberation Movement. For these reasons we have always been careful not to let ECC be shifted away from it's organic social orientation, we have avoided taking up issues that do not relate to conscription and we have carefully



#### 4.)

protected our independence. As ECC grew it developed its own dynamic and organisation distinct from the front organisations themselves, but shaped in part by the strongly anti-apartheid groupings that put energy into building the ECC. In most areas the front still has some say over the direction of the ECC and we are moving (nationally) back to an emphasis on member organisations participating in ECC decision making. However, even at the level of organised ECC activists there is no homogeneity in political position. The 'alliance' between Christians/leftists/liberals/pacifists and any combination of these is still represented in ECC's internal structures throughout the country. However, the organisations and activists that make up the ECC's operational structure are a small part of what the ECC is. All the people who are touched by the work of the ECC, from the many 1000s of supporters right down to the people who at least have a questionmark put in their heads as a result of ECC's work are the iceberg submerged beneath the visible tip of the campaign. When we look to changing the form and content of our campaign we must deal with how this effects our ability to reach our constituency and our potential constituency, i.e. those we could reach, but just haven't targetted yet.

#### SO WHAT'S CHANGED?

The following section touches and comments on some of the pressures influencing us to assess our direction.

#### THE STATE

The state has clearly identified ECC as some kind of 5th column of the ANC and/or the SACP. They see ECC as a movement designed to have the effect, and/or actually having the effect of weakening the states ability to hold off the 'total onslaught' (i.e. they have located us as part of the total onslaught). They have acted accordingly; with legal, semi-legal and extra legal methods, they have attempted to weaken us internally, hinder our ability to propagate our message and discredit us in the eyes of those we hope to reach. I would argue that the main emphasis of the attack has been to try and convince 'the public' that we are not 'organic' to their objective concerns, and that we are rather a 5th column, a band of traitors to the 'national interest'. Until now, we have found ways around the legal limitations on what can and can't be said and we have survived most of the rep-

ression. How we have survived the 'smear' is not as clear. It is at this point that we start coming up against one of the greatest analytical weaknesses of most organisations operating in the white areas: who is our constituency, what is it feeling, how is it being effected. Possibly the only way for us to assess the effect of the state's massive smear campaign against us is by working face to face in our constituency. There is certainly evidence that there are people who support ECC's programme, but do not support ECC because they believe it is somehow subversive and dangerous. To this extent the campaign against us is clearly having some effect. We need to assess if we have lost support that we already had and if vast tracts of our potential constituency is forever lost to us (poetic stuff this!) as a result of our being effectively branded by the state. We must be careful not to credit the state with a limitless ability to define the ideological terrain, but we saw in the elections that they are not a push-over either.

"You have been effectively branded as part of the liberation movement, and therefore there would be no losses and some gains if you actually became part of it." This is a comment we are starting to hear in some places and in my opinion it is largely unhelpful and plays straight into the state's own definition about what ECC is. The state defines us as a tactical ploy by the liberation movement, with no social basis, designed to spread confusion amongst whites and able to be ammended, changed and restructured as and when the liberation movement sees fit. If we accept that there is an objective social contradiction expressed by the existence of the ECC then we must accept that the possibilities for the subjective intervention into the expression of that contradiction are not limitless or infinite. There is no doubt that the ECC continues to draw a broader following of whites than organisations in the white areas with a National Democratic programme. I would argue that this is not, in the first place, because ECC is 'good' at a tactical level. It is rather because the issue has a real resonance with whites. The appropriate tactics and style has developed as a consequence of this initial resonance i.e. it has been informed from below. When we reassess ECC's political orientation and alignment, we must start by looking at the specific tasks ECC fulfils, what is possible given the objective social conditions ECC has arisen from, which sections of the white population could still support the campaign etc.



OUR CONSTITUENCY

As mentioned earlier, this question seems to be the most difficult one for us and other extra-parliamentary white organisations. At the most abstract level our constituency is all those who could be moved by our propagation of our demands. We have tended to focus our campaign (on the broadest level) on the English speaking - and more lately Afrikaans - liberal/left intelligentsia. We have also had specific thrusts into the white schools and the Churches. For us, it has been very much a process of 'feeling out' who our constituency is or could be.

At the same time there is considerable debate about what the white elections reveal about the 'political geography' of the white community. There is a strong feeling emerging that there is a significant group of largely English speaking, largely ex-PFP supporters who are looking for a political home within the broad scope of the 'extra-parliamentary democratic movement'. There has been some talk about the possibilities of 'organising' this constituency. This group already agrees on the need to end conscription, and is looking beyond this for solutions to the political/military conflict in our country. There have clearly been other significant shifts in the white community over the last year or so. The dissention from Afrikaaner academics at Stellenbosch, UNISA and other areas is one indicator of this, and the considerable support for the Independents is another. We have different tasks with different groupings, depending on how 'deep' they are in the Laager. We need to have a more sophisticated breakdown of alliances and groups in the Ruler's Camp. There is a strong feeling in some quarters that the future of white democratic politics lies in the Afrikaans areas and that our organisations should be geared to expand that way.

For us an important issue is how we identify conscripts and their immediate loved ones as a focus of our campaign. This grouping is experiencing increasing suffering and demoralisation. Reports from the hospital wards tell of terrible injuries, maiming and extreme psychological damage. Reports from the camps tell of very widespread alcohol and drug abuse and often an almost mutinous atmosphere of deepseated discontent. We are entering an era when there is a real chance that husbands, boyfriends and sons either don't return, or return damaged from their call-up. It is my understanding, that it

is this suffering, that lies at the heart of the ECC - this is our 'grassroots'. I do not necessarily mean that these people make up the bulk of our organisation, but rather that this issue strikes a common chord in the hearts of many whites - it is this that gives ECC the potential to have a mass base and following amongst whites.

Another important constituency or area of work is the campuses. They have shown that they are in a good position to continue resisting in an overt way, despite extremely repressive conditions. It may be that we will reach stages in our struggle when the campuses are the only places where there is overt, militant and high-profile opposition to conscription. If this is correct, we need to ensure that we are concentrating our energies on building our campus section.

#### ECC FORM AND CONTENT - THE IDEAS SO FAR

My own feeling about some of the ideas that have been raised for amending our form and content is that we seem to be rushing ahead without establishing the grounding principles first. My own feeling is that we need a clear analytical approach to the questions. If we rely too much on our guts, we may find, that because we are activist, we could come out with answers that are off the mark with regard to what is possible in the white community. However, much of the discussion can provide us with useful indicators and ideas:

#### FORM

“ Because of repression and the increasing difficulty we experience in working at a high profile mass level we need to develop 'new ways of working', 'a second prong' etc. This has come to mean slightly different things in different regions, but the practical aspect we have agreed upon is the development of mass membership and working in a low profile way through house meetings etc. The kinds of phrases we have used to describe this thrust have included: 'we need to deepend our organisational roots', 'we need to network our most supportive constituency', 'we need to transform our mobilisation into low level organisation' etc. It has been stressed in most places that this thrust should never be at the expense of our high profile/media hype style. Since the elections it has been argued that there is some kind of 'mass constituency' (ex-PFP support base and to the left)



## 8.)

that is for the first time organisable in the sense that they have no political home and have been pushed to the extent that they are now prepared to act in some way. This has been used as an additional motivation for 'new ways of working'. The immediate questions we have run up against have included: 1. Do we have a political message and/or programme that can satisfy the needs of this constituency? 2.) Are we a campaign or a mass movement?; 3. What would we actually ask people to do?; 4. Should it be ECC that is doing this kind of work?

### CONTENT

“ ECC has a large constituency of support that now needs to be - and is demanding to be - 'consolidated', 'taken further', 'offered solutions'. This has devolved into a confusing debate about what ECC's line or message should be and what form our protest should take. It has been suggested: 1. that we be more vigorous/militant in our forms of protest; 2. that we emphasise in our message the conditions for the establishment of a 'just peace' or that we focus more on general militarisation or that we use the various aspects of the declaration as a basis for broadening our call. An alternative perspective is that ECC is essentially on the right track, and if anything we need to move more to the positions of speaking on behalf of conscripts who are unhappy about going to the SADF. That ECC still has the capacity to expand into new areas and that while our image has been damaged by state propaganda we are still the most viable and effective vehicle for opposition to conscription and militarisation. That the needs of our constituency for greater involvement and a more political message are priorities for the democratic movement as a whole, but these needs should be met by white democratic and other organisations.

### PROCESS

The questions we are dealing with are fundamental to our future. We cannot rush the process and nor can we do it in isolation to other groups. We need to consult with all our front organisation and we should ensure we are incorporating a wide spectrum of views. We have a couple of months to discuss this, but it should still be high on our agendas. In closing I would like to list the initial questions I understand to be the ones we need to address before we can start coming to conclusion. They are: 1.) What is the social basis of the ECC? 2.) What is the ECC's constituency and potential constituency? 3.) How does ECC contribute to the broader struggle? 4.) What is specifically ECC's work and what is the work that others should do?



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