

and motivate the call to end conscription.

In mid-1985 the ECC organised a "Stop the Call-up" Peace Festival in Johannesburg. The Festival was the largest ever national gathering of the war resistance movement. Two thousand activists and members of the public participated in three days of cultural activities, workshops, seminars and public meetings.

Key-note speakers at the Festival included Archbishop Hurley (President of the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference), Archbishop Tutu, Dr Beyers Naude (General Secretary of the SACC), Sir Richard Luyt (former Principal of the University of Cape Town), novelist Nadine Gordimer and leaders of the UDF, Swapo and the Progressive Federal Party (then the official opposition in parliament). This was the first time that so broad a range of anti-apartheid forces had been represented on the same public platform.

The Festival and ECC campaigns were characterised by a high level of creativity. Conventional political activities like mass meetings, seminars and press conferences were complimented by 'creative actions' like fun runs, fairs, kite-flying and street theatre. There were cultural events that included rock concerts, film festivals, art exhibitions and cabaret. Tens of thousands of colourful stickers, posters, pamphlets and t-shirts were produced (Appendix 7).

This dynamic style of campaigning was a departure from traditional anti-apartheid politics and a major reason for the ECC's

growth and success.

Our activities were accessible to whole families and not only 'committed activists'. They allowed the broadest range of people to express their unhappiness with conscription in whatever ways they wanted, and gave rise to a popular culture of war resistance. A useful spin-off was that they also generated a great deal of press publicity. (Interview with ECC activist)

The Peace Festival marked the end of the first phase of the ECC's development. It had built regional and national structures and involved a wide range of groups and individuals in organised opposition to the call-up. At a public level it had begun to establish a national profile and successfully raise questions about the role of the military. Its strong stand against one of the cornerstones of apartheid, however, put it well outside the mainstream of white politics.

Delivering the closing address at the Festival, ECC Chairperson Mike Evans accurately predicted that this would soon change. The organisation was about to enter a new phase of "incredible expansion" in the light of the deployment of troops in black areas. Quoting from the anti-war movement in the United States, Evans declared: "In human affairs there is still nothing so powerful as an idea and a movement whose time has come" (transcript of speech).

The "Troops out of the Townships" campaign

The ECC was in fact fortuitously formed at a critical moment in

South African history. Thousands of conscripts and their families were politicised by the national uprising of 1984-6 and by the use of the army to crush it. Whereas military service had previously been the preoccupation of a relatively small group of people, it now became an issue of deep and widespread concern in the white liberal community.

This concern was reflected in the rise in emigration and draft evasion and in personal statements made by conscripts and their parents (Chapter 6).

I have given birth to two sons. After 17 years' careful teaching and hard work, my children will be faced with conscription. They will be forced to follow orders- to sjambok [whip], throw teargas, kill and maim the spirits and sometimes the lives of other South Africans. To fight effectively, my sons will be taught to hate and see those they are fighting as the "communist enemy". I cannot be neutral. For myself, my children, and society, I will fight against conscription. (Letter to the Sunday Tribune 8.9.1985)

A dilemma confronts me- I will be celebrating my 16th birthday soon, and when I return to school this year I will be presented with a form to fill in. This form will provide me with the privilege of serving in the SADF. ...Many people seem to think that blacks are the enemy, do not belong in this country and that they must be controlled at all cost. However, I believe that many blacks, like the nanny who brought me up, do

not deserve this terrible treatment. I am confused about whether or not to serve in the army. ...I hope someone can provide me with a solution. (Letter to the Rand Daily Mail 3.1.1985)

The English-language press and churches interpreted the deployment of troops as amounting to a declaration of civil war. They argued that the army was not the appropriate institution and that soldiers were not suitably trained to deal with internal unrest. Newspapers that had not previously commented on conscription now recognised the ethical problems it posed.

Military conscription raises for many young South Africans a moral dilemma of excruciating complexity. The prospect that they will be called upon to face not a foreign enemy but their fellow countrymen is bad enough; if they believe, as many do, that the government which commands them is unjust and the opposition of black South Africans is justified by an edifice of evil law, it is worse. (Business Day editorial, 29.10.1986)

The Progressive Federal Party (PFP) strongly criticised the "politicising of the SADF" and the use of soldiers as "policemen" (Sunday Star 14.10.1984). Under pressure from the PFP Youth, an affiliate of the ECC, the party called for an end to conscription for the first time (Star 2.9.1985).

White unease and anger were most powerfully expressed by the ECC "Troops Out of the Townships" campaign in September 1985. The

campaign revolved around three week fasts by conscientious objectors in the major centres. Their fasts began on International Day of Peace and ended with a public 24-hour solidarity fast on the first anniversary of the invasion of the townships.

The Peace Fast is a powerful protest against the presence of troops in black areas, and an act of solidarity with township residents who bear the brunt of SADF aggression. It will build non-racialism by showing the extent of opposition in the white community to apartheid and to the role of the army in defending it. Above all, it is a statement of our commitment to work collectively for a just peace in our land. (Campaign pamphlet)

Thousands of people visited the objectors in the venues where they were fasting and participated in daily educational programmes being held there. Students, school pupils, soldiers and hundreds of overseas supporters undertook solidarity fasts. Jewish, Hindu and Muslim groups became involved in opposition to conscription for the first time. Also for the first time, Christian involvement went beyond church leaders and activists to include ministers and their congregations.

Another achievement of the campaign was to unite people of all races against the SADF's presence in the townships. This non-racial stand was considered vital at a time when the security forces were heightening racial tension in black communities.

The authorities would do well to note the growing

opposition to the use of troops in black and coloured areas. On Monday night some 4 000 people of all races, colours and creeds packed the Cape Town city hall to demand the removal of troops from the townships. [The ECC rally] was not a gathering of radicals and revolutionaries but a meeting of South Africans concerned about the future. Divided communities came together - black and coloured people who are subject to police and military action, white potential conscripts, their parents and families. It was a meeting such as the National Party, with all its talk of contact and negotiation, could never organize, but one for which Nationalist policies were responsible. (Cape Times editorial, 9.10.1985)

The campaign marked the ECC's development from a marginal pressure group on the fringes of white politics to a credible organisation with a mass following and significant national impact. It also marked the start of a concerted effort by the state to harass and discredit the organisation (Chapter 10).

The "Working for a Just Peace" campaign

From the late 1970's organisations opposed to conscription repeatedly called on the government to give conscripts the option of doing alternative service. They demanded that:

- alternative service should be available to all conscripts who in conscience cannot serve in the army;
- objectors should be able to do alternative service outside of

government and military bodies; and
 - alternative service should be the same length as military service. (7)

In August 1985 the ECC and the South African Council of Churches presented memoranda along these lines to the Geldenhuys Committee, appointed by the SADF to investigate various aspects of Defence Force policy (ECC, 1985b). The Committee rejected the proposed changes as "unacceptable" on the grounds that they would "result in the Defence Force being reduced to inefficiency [and] encourage an attempt against national service" (White Paper on Defence and Armaments Supply, 1986:7).

In May 1986 the ECC ran a "Working for a Just Peace" (WJP) campaign around the call for alternative service. The campaign sought to demonstrate in concrete ways "service that is genuinely in the interests of the country as a whole" (WJP pamphlet). ECC activists and supporters worked for a month on 21 community projects in black areas across the country. They planted trees, built a bridge, renovated child-care centres and organised non-racial picnics, anti-litter drives and children's holiday programmes.

We want to demonstrate the numerous ways in which a community and country can be served without resorting to military means. This is what a genuinely national service could be like : meeting the real needs of the people, crossing racial barriers and building bridges to a better future. (Ibid)

This message and the constructive nature of the campaign captured the imagination of many white people previously uninvolved in anti-apartheid activity. More than 600 volunteers participated in the projects and over 6 000 people attended the public rallies at the end of the campaign.

In a period of intense fighting between the security forces and township residents, the WJP volunteers also made an important statement to the black community.

We were warned that it would be very dangerous to go into the townships but in fact the residents welcomed us with open arms. In contrast to the SADF we went in without guns and uniforms, and in a spirit of non-racialism and solidarity. Unlike the army we first consulted the communities concerned and obtained their support for our projects. We feel that our work helped in a small way to counter the anti-white feelings developing in the townships because of the actions of the police and army. (Interview with ECC member)

Speaking at the WJP rally in Cape Town, Archbishop Tutu exclaimed: "ECC's rapid growth and popularity are signs of hope in this crazy, crazy but beautiful country". His statement reflected the feelings of the black community and a growing number of whites. Of particular significance was the fact that the war resistance movement was not simply expanding numerically, but was reaching out into new areas and constituencies that were traditionally conservative or politically apathetic.

CHAPTER 9
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THE BROADENING OF THE WAR RESISTANCE MOVEMENT
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Up until the mid-1980's the war resistance movement was based primarily in the English-language universities and churches, the most radical sectors of the white community. The widespread deployment of troops in the townships from 1984 to 1986 intensified resistance in these areas and, more importantly, provoked opposition to conscription among more conservative whites.

The war resistance movement expanded into new constituencies. The ECC began working with school pupils, in the Afrikaans community and in the cultural arena. It also made contact with a range of organisations overseas and established a significant international presence.

White schools

With the introduction of Total Strategy in the late 1970's white schools became increasingly militarised (Chapter 4). Most pupils accepted and absorbed this process and its values uncritically. Schoolboys were generally enthusiastic, or at least resigned, about participating in the cadet programme and fulfilling their military obligations after school.

The political crisis of 1984-6 had a profound effect on many young people at English-medium schools however. The use of white soldiers against black students stimulated a new understanding of the army's role. Pupils began publicly expressing unhappiness

about conscription for the first time.

I have a huge problem that I cannot talk to anyone about. I tried talking to my father and he got so angry with me, I thought he might actually hit me. I do not want to go into the army. There is no way I can square it with the way I feel and my religious beliefs. And I am not going to change under any circumstances. My father wants to send someone from the army to speak to me, but I don't want to speak to those people. I know what I want and am prepared to do and what I cannot do. All my friends seem to be looking forward to going into the army. I certainly can't discuss it with them. I feel terribly isolated, like I don't belong anywhere. It's not because I am a coward. (Letter to the Weekend Star 12.9.1987)

Against this background the ECC formed school sub-committees whose members included pupils and teachers. Together with newly established anti-apartheid pupils' groups the committees organised cultural evenings and concerts, ran skills-training and educational workshops and distributed pamphlets outside schools. The aim of these activities was to raise awareness of the nature and purpose of militarisation, cadets and conscription.

Anti-apartheid work in government schools was nevertheless extremely difficult. The majority of pupils remained conservative and those that were liberal often came under pressure from teachers and parents not to get involved in 'politics'. In 1986

provincial education authorities instructed principals to deny the ECC access to their schools (At Ease, ECC, December 1986). On several occasions soldiers and teachers promoted anti-ECC material among pupils (Weekly Mail 6.3.1987; At Ease, ECC, April 1986).

Private schools on the other hand were starting to 'demilitarise'. Many Catholic and Anglican schools phased out cadets or introduced alternative programmes for students. In 1986 the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses of Private Schools joined the call for alternative national service "in view of the present state of violence and social disintegration in our country, and having regard to the needs of the country for extended teaching and health services" (Star 20.11.1986).

Anti-war culture

As the war resistance movement developed in the early 1980's, anti-apartheid activists began expressing their opposition to conscription through poetry, drama and folk music. Their work was interventionist in the sense that it consciously aimed to mobilise and educate others; the pedagogical message was that 'the SADF is defending an unjust system'.

In the mid-1980's, after conscripts were sent into the townships, a more broadly based anti-war culture emerged. It involved alternative and mainstream artists and performers and included a range of different forms of expression- art, cabaret, rock music, plays, novels and short stories. The ECC did not itself produce this work but stimulated its development and provided it with

public platforms.

Although the new anti-war culture commented on apartheid and militarisation, it was primarily an expression of the personal feelings and experiences of young whites. It reflected their struggle to come to terms with living in a racially divided and increasingly conflict-ridden society. The dominant moods were anger, guilt, alienation and confusion.

In a short story called "The Fly", for example, a soldier sits in military detention barracks awaiting court martial. He had dropped his rifle into the hands of a township boy he had wounded, and watched in paralysed shock as the dying boy tried to shoot his fellow soldiers. In his cell, the soldier reads a few "grubby old copies of Earmers Weekly".

There were pictures of black men in overalls holding enormous rams for the camera. There were pictures of burly white men with short pants and long socks, fat women posing graciously besides lush beds of flowers. There were articles on how to combat pest and diseases, hunting stories, and a survey of stud farms in the Karoo with magnificent sleek racehorses. The youth stared at these pictures, trying to work out where they fitted in. (Andrew Maarten in Taurus, 1987:167)

Among the ECC's early cultural activities were 'high-energy' rock concerts with titles such as "Vibe against Violence" and "Rock the Ratel [a military vehicle]". The concerts attracted 'anti-

establishment' white youth who would not attend 'heavy' political activities like public meetings and seminars. In 1986 the ECC helped produce "Forces Favourites", the first compilation of anti-apartheid rock music in South Africa, named tongue-in-cheek after a weekly radio programme dedicated to "our boys on the border".

The concerts showed the potential of using anti-war culture to reach new constituencies. The ECC subsequently organised more 'serious' events for older audiences. Its film festivals, art exhibitions and photographic displays pioneered mainstream cultural forums with an anti-apartheid message. The central theme of these events was captured in the title of multi-cultural festival, "Prisoners of War". The 'prisoners' were both black victims of state violence and white people 'oppressed' by a highly authoritarian and militarised social structure.

In the early 1980's a new strand of Afrikaans writing had emerged. The grensliteratuur ('border literature') comprised novels and short stories by men who had served with the SADF in Namibia and Angola. Their emotional reactions to the war ranged from bitter fatalism to a desperate desire to find some confirmation of human values. The common theme was around "the horror of a youth forced to fight a war he does not understand, for a cause he does not believe in, against men he cannot see as his enemies" (ECC Focus, May 1987; see further Koornhof, 1989).

Anti-war plays focussed on the effects of military service on young men. They described the "brutalising, dehumanising and

spiritually castrating experiences of white soldiers". The message was 'look at what this war has done to us' rather than 'this in an unjust war'. The plays were written with "a sense of shared experiences, a sense of brotherhood and solidarity with other conscripts". (Interview with actors and writers in Johannesburg)

In 1986 the ECC collaborated with an Afrikaans publisher to produce a book entitled Forces Favourites. The collection of Afrikaans and English short stories captured the growing concern that 'the border' had shifted.

In those days they weren't sending soldiers into the townships. In those days the border was pretty much the border of the country. Now the border goes all over the place. Sometimes straight through families, which is, I suppose, what civil war is all about.

(James Whyte in Taurus, op cit: 70-1)

The Afrikaans community

The Afrikaans community is the support base of the National Party and far-right groups; it is extremely conservative and has little history of organised opposition to apartheid. Afrikaans churches, schools and families instill in young people a fierce loyalty to the government, pride in the army and belief in the necessity of conscription.

The 1984-6 national uprising caused a number of Afrikaners in university, church and cultural circles to question these values and beliefs. Even if they supported the SADF's role in Namibia and Angola they regarded its presence in the townships as inde-

fensible. With this shift in attitudes the ECC was able to establish Afrikaans branches in Pretoria and at Stellenbosch University. Its Johannesburg branch formed a new wing with the name Eindig Nasionale Diensplig (End National Service).

Although these branches were small, the ECC's expansion into the heart of the white establishment was regarded as highly significant by the mass democratic movement. This was especially the case in relation to the branch in Pretoria, one of the most conservative and militarised cities in the country.

The very fact that a branch of ECC has been formed here is already a victory. Pretoria is the embodiment of Nationalist ideology and adorned with its symbols: Voortrekker Monument, Union Buildings, Paul Kruger statue, Pretoria Central Prison and State Theatre. In addition, Pretoria is the NERVE CENTRE OF THE SECURITY NETWORK in the country. (Pretoria ECC letter to other ECC branches, 1986)

The authorities conversely viewed war resistance in the Afrikaans community as particularly threatening. For example the ECC branch at Stellenbosch University was banned by the Rector two months after its formation. 500 students and academics signed a petition supporting the ECC's 'right to exist'. A counter-petition from 400 members of staff, including 53 professors, stated that the ban "in no way threatens or hinders the free expression of opinions by individuals" (Cape Times 2.6.1986).

Only months after the Afrikaans branches were formed they were

thrown into disarray by the imposition of the 1986 State of Emergency.

WE WERE CONCEIVED ON THE EVE OF THE EMERGENCY! Inauspicious stars shone down on our first life tremors. Imagine a group of not-so-hard-core, timid would-be-activists confronted with the paranoia of a massive state clamp-down AIMED IT SEEMED AT US! THEY HAD POINTED THEIR FLIPPIN' HEAVY ARTILLERY AT US! The group shrunk to the size a tie pin and lost its momentum. (Pretoria ECC letter, op cit)

Although the Afrikaans branches participated in subsequent ECC activities, with the Stellenbosch group working off-campus, their progress was greatly hindered by the heightened repression under the State of Emergency. An anti-ECC smear campaign, often directed specifically at the Afrikaans community, further limited their ability to win support. The ECC frequently encountered people and groups sympathetic to its position but frightened to be associated publicly with the organisation.

In 1987/8 the SADF became embroiled in an eight month campaign in Angola. As the number of white soldiers killed in action mounted, an unprecedented wave of opposition broke out in mainstream Afrikaner circles (Chapter 10). Although short lived and in no way associated with the anti-apartheid war resistance movement, the opposition highlighted the state's vulnerability around the system of conscription.

The English-language churches

In the late 1970's the primary source of conflict between the state and the English-language churches was over the right of conscientious objection. The churches played a leading role in initiating public debate around this issue and subsequently became an integral part of the war resistance movement. Their concern acquired a new urgency with the internal deployment of troops.

As the civil war intensified the mainstream churches endorsed the demand for an end to conscription. They also compiled documents on the actions of the security forces and petitioned the government to withdraw the army from black areas.

The Anglican Church for example sought an urgent meeting with President Botha to present the "emerging mass of documents" alleging security force brutality and harassment of township residents. It called on the government to establish an independent judicial inquiry into SAP and SADF activities (Argus 12.7.1985). The Methodist Synod went further in stating that its members who entered the townships under SADF orders were acting contrary to church principles (Citizen 23.10.1986).

Notwithstanding these strongly argued positions, Christian activists were dissatisfied with what they perceived as a lack of church action around conscription and militarisation. While resolutions on these issues were regularly passed at synod meetings and many national religious leaders participated in ECC campaigns, little was being done to educate and involve ministers

and congregations at a grassroots level.

In 1985 the ECC formed churches sub-committees to do this work. The committees provided educational resources to Christian study and action forums and successfully encouraged the participation of priests and lay people in ECC structures and activities.

Christ has called all Christians to be peacemakers. This call becomes particularly significant in times of conflict and violence. We need to promote peace by working for an end to injustice in whatever ways lie open to us. Involvement in ECC is a concrete way for Christians to express their commitment to peace and justice for all people. (ECC press statement, 1985)

The crisis of the mid-1980's also contributed to the resolution of a controversial and long-standing church debate around the participation of military chaplains, from all denominations, in the SADF. The concern was that this practice provides the army with theological and moral legitimacy.

The institution of the chaplaincy tends to reinforce the SADF's claim to be defending 'Christian civilisation' against 'godless communism'. Chaplains are fully integrated members of the army, wear military uniform and are trained in the use of weapons. According to the SADF the chaplain occupies a "unique position through the fact that he is an office bearer of his Church and at the same time an officer in the Army. This dualistic role... places him in the centre of the combatting of the revolution" (quoted in Human Awareness Programme, 1986:B7).

After years of debate the English-language churches formulated a position on the chaplaincy in 1985. An Inter-Church Committee issued the following guidelines:

- chaplains should not wear the SADF uniform or have rank in the military hierarchy;
- they should be responsible to, and be paid by, local church authorities rather than the Defence Force;
- they should not identify with military action or with the aims and ideology of any particular side and should not be seen by the authorities as intended to contribute towards military morale; and
- they should be free to minister to people on both sides of the conflict. (Sunday Tribune 15.9.1985)

The Namibian churches took an even stronger stand under South African occupation. They did not allow SADF personnel to attend their religious services in uniform and refused to allow their priests to participate in the chaplaincy programme of the "foreign army" (Cape Times 10.7.1985).

The English-language universities

Students on the English-language campuses have historically been one of the most militant sectors of the white community. Through the anti-apartheid activities of the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) a large number of them come to identify with the liberation struggle. A high percentage are vehemently opposed to conscription.

Nusas was among the first groups to take up the issues of con-

scientific objection and militarisation in the late 1970's. It played an instrumental role in the formation of the Conscientious Objector Support Group and the ECC.

In the mid-1980's ECC campus branches, together with black student organisations, mounted vigorous protests against SADF aggression inside and outside the country. They organised focus weeks and cultural events, ran 'conscription advice services' and successfully put up candidates for Student Representative Councils.

In 1984 student and administration protests prevented the SADF from establishing University Military Units on the Nusas campuses. The units, which had long existed at Afrikaans universities, have their own insignia and colours and perform military drill on campus sports fields. They comprise students who have completed their initial National Service and are liable for army camps.

The right-wing National Student Federation (NSF) made a concerted effort to smear the ECC, accusing it of being 'linked to the Kremlin' and 'attempting to undermine the integrity of the SADF'. Most students regarded the allegations as ludicrous and the ECC convincingly won all campus debates against the NSF.

International contact and support

Around the time of its Peace Festival in 1985 the ECC initiated contact with a wide range of organisations overseas. Over 150 groups, spanning twenty countries, sent messages of support to

the Festival. Archbishop Tutu and European parliamentarian Carole Tongue participated in a public meeting on the "international struggle for peace". Another invited guest, Cardinal Arnns of Brazil, was denied a visa to visit South Africa.

Over the next two years the ECC developed a prominent international profile. Pacifist, conscientious objector, religious and anti-apartheid organisations reported its activities in their publications and took up its campaigns. Members of the US Congress and European Parliament sent protest letters to Pretoria when ECC members or conscientious objectors were imprisoned. Amnesty International and other human rights groups adopted some of them as 'prisoners of conscience'.

Special resolutions opposing conscription in South Africa and supporting the ECC were passed by the New York City Council and the African Caribbean Pacific-European Economic Community Joint Assembly. ECC members did speaking tours of Europe and the United States and attended international conferences in Bombay, Helsinki, Paris and Dublin. They also addressed the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid on two occasions.

The ECC had several aims in its international work: to keep organisations overseas informed about militarisation and conscription in South Africa and about the extent of war resistance and white opposition to apartheid; to promote the ECC so that it could call for international support when running campaigns and for international protest when under government attack; to contribute to the broader international struggle against apartheid;

and to learn about conditions and anti-conscription activities in other countries.

The ECC's success in realising these aims was due in part to the efforts of the War Resisters' International (WRI) and its US affiliate, the War Resisters' League (WRL). The WRI is an international federation of conscientious objector and anti-war groups committed to 'working non-violently to end war and all causes of war'. From this radical pacifist perspective the right of conscientious objection is a major concern. (See for example "War is a crime against humanity", WRI pamphlet, 1983)

The ECC was also supported by organisations that did not normally focus on conscientious objection but nevertheless felt strongly about the role of the SADF.

The SADF has gained the reputation of being notorious in the brutal suppression and repression of the South African people's struggle for a just, equal, peaceful and free society. We therefore appeal to you to listen to the cry of the South African people and abolish the forced conscription of young men to the army. (Protest letter to the South African Minister of Defence from the Movement of Catholic Students in Asia, May 1986)

This position was long shared by the United Nations which has repeatedly condemned South Africa for its policies of racial discrimination and regional aggression. Although the UN General Assembly has not formulated general policy on the right of conscientious objection, it has passed special resolutions regarding

military service in South Africa (1).

The ECC's high profile overseas was due too to unprecedented international mobilisation against apartheid in the mid-1980's. Tens of thousands of people were galvanised by daily television coverage of security force action in black townships. They participated in marches and rallies and called on their governments to intensify pressure on Pretoria.

In this context, and against a background of growing civil war in South Africa, the ECC's non-violent strategy and commitment to non-racialism were seen as symbols of hope.

It is important for you to know the world is watching. It is important for us to know that there are those working non-violently in a very difficult situation. If, in the years to come, there is peace within a non-racial South Africa, if the killing ends and human rights are respected, the credit for that will go to those who struggle in the present time. (WRI message of support, May 1986)

The Committee on South African War Resistance

The SADF's repressive role in black townships also stimulated the growth of the Committee on South African War Resistance (Cosawr), based in London and Amsterdam (Chapter 7). In 1985 the organisation reported being approached for assistance by an unprecedented number of South African conscripts going into exile (Business Day 12.9.1985). It helped them apply for political asylum, find accommodation and employment and adjust to living in a new

country.

Between 1985 and 1988 Cosawr held public meetings and cultural events, produced publications and lobbied parliamentarians and non-government organisations. These activities were aimed at generating support for the ECC and imprisoned conscientious objectors, and protest against the internal deployment of troops.

In 1988 Cosawr participated in an initiative with European parliamentarians around the large number of South African conscripts that hold passports of European Economic Community countries. The initiative sought to get the European Parliament to encourage member countries to make "enlistment in the South African armed forces incompatible with the retention of European citizenship" (quoted in Evans, 1989b:4).

Although Cosawr is in many respects the 'external wing' of the South African war resistance movement, the ECC and the Conscientious Objector Support Group felt obliged to avoid formal contact with it. This was because the organisation openly supports the armed struggle of the ANC and encourages conscripts to refuse to serve in the SADF. It is consequently regarded by the South African government as 'highly subversive'.

Despite this and other attempts by the ECC to protect itself against a state crackdown, its growth in the mid-1980's was matched by increasing state efforts to harass and criminalise it. These efforts reached a climax with the imposition of the 1986 State of Emergency.

CHAPTER 10
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THE ECC UNDER THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, 1986-1988
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In June 1986 the government imposed a national State of Emergency that remains in force at the time of writing. Intended primarily to crush black organisations and resistance, it was also used to suppress the ECC. Many of the ECC's activists were detained, its meetings and publications were banned, anti-ECC propaganda was stepped up and restrictions were placed on opposing conscription.

It took the ECC eighteen months to recover fully from the crack-down. In 1988 it regained the initiative through the "Know Your Rights" and "Alternative National Service" campaigns, protest action around the SADF's involvement in Angola, and activities in support of conscientious objectors. By mid-1988 it was clear that state efforts to discredit and silence the organisation had failed and in August the government banned it.

State repression against the ECC

The 1986 State of Emergency introduced an unprecedented wave of repression against extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid (Webster, 1987). The ECC was one of the organisations targeted for special attack. In the first six months of the Emergency it experienced a level of harassment so intense that many observers believed it had been dealt "a lethal blow" (Weekly Mail 12.12.1986).

A central thrust of the crackdown lay in special Emergency Regu-

lations which prohibited various forms of political protest and the making of "subversive statements". The latter included statements that "are intended to or have the effect of undermining or discrediting the system of compulsory military service" (Government Gazette, No. 10280, 12 June 1986). The offence was punishable by ten years' imprisonment or a R20 000 fine. Its intention appeared to be the de facto banning of the ECC.

A second thrust of the crackdown was the detention of tens of thousands of anti-apartheid activists. 75 ECC members, aged between 17 and 62, were imprisoned. They were held for periods of between two weeks and several months. Some were interrogated extensively by Security Police and Military Intelligence while others were not questioned at all. Not one was brought to trial. On their release from detention many were served with 'restriction orders' that prohibited any further involvement in the ECC.

At least 30 ECC activists went into hiding to avoid detention. They changed their appearance, switched cars and houses frequently and avoided places known to the Security Police.

The police raided ECC offices and homes, confiscating hundreds of documents and personal correspondence. More frightening were the 'anonymous' acts of terror. The tyres of ECC members' motor cars were slashed, wheel nuts were loosened and brake fluid was drained. There were obscene telephone calls and death threats. Bricks were thrown through car and house windows and ECC offices were vandalised.

ECC members were physically assaulted on at least eight occasions. At 3 o'clock one morning in July 1986 for example, petrol bombs were thrown into the home of activists in Johannesburg. The occupants narrowly escaped injury but extensive damage was done to some of the rooms (Star 14.7.1986). In October the following year two musicians were severely beaten up, one to the point of unconsciousness, after handing out ECC pamphlets at a nightclub (Weekly Mail 9.10.1987).

The criminalising of the ECC

A further thrust of the crackdown on the ECC took the form of a relentless and sophisticated smear campaign. The campaign aimed to criminalise the ECC by portraying it as 'treasonous' and 'part of the revolutionary onslaught'. If the labels stuck many people who opposed conscription would be afraid to support the organisation, and repressive state action against it would appear justified.

State radio and television ran commentaries on "conscription, Christianity, communism and civilisation" (SA Broadcasting Corporation, "Comment", 15.4.1987). Right-wing groups and publications 'exposed' the ECC's 'hidden links to Moscow' (Appendix 7), and Afrikaans newspapers claimed that it was "spreading Marxist literature amongst white schoolboys" (Rapport 27.10.1985). SADF and government officials regularly accused it of attempting to 'undermine the defence of the Republic' and being linked to banned organisations.

We think the ECC is dangerous for SA. These are people

who plead excuses but lack the moral fibre to defend the country against Russia and its surrogates. (Deputy Defence Minister Breytenbach, Citizen 15.8.1987)

The ECC is linked to the United Democratic Front, the ANC, the SA Communist Party and the Communist Parties in Britain, the US and the Soviet Union. Where does the ECC get its funds? I will say no more than that it gets them from the same international sources as the ANC. (Mr Fick, National Party MP, Citizen 11.2.1987)

New organisations - Veterans for Victory, End the End Conscription Campaign and Support National Service Campaign - were formed to discredit the ECC. Graffiti was sprayed on churches and private homes, proclaiming its members "Moscow's puppets" and "yellow bastards". Bogus ECC posters appeared on the streets announcing "refreshing talks with Irish guerillas". Stickers with the message "ECC: Every Coward's Choice" were stuck on shop windows and traffic signs. On one occasion hostile pamphlets from the "Anti-Liberal Alliance" were dropped over an ECC fair from a helicopter! (1)

The smear campaign began in earnest in late 1985 and reached fever pitch with the imposition of the 1986 State of Emergency. Its main vehicle was a special edition of the ultra right-wing Aida Parker Newsletter (APN). The newsletter claimed that the ECC was a "foreign-subsidised, tele-guided psychological warfare weapon aimed at gutting our defences and delivering us, bound, to our foe". The organisation was also said to be linked through

overseas peace groups to the "vast Soviet 'active measures apparatus'" (Aida Parker Newsletter, April 1986).

The ECC took the APN to the independent Media Council which found that the publication had "failed to report news truthfully and accurately" and was guilty of "distortion, misrepresentation and omission". The Council requested the press to publicise its findings and discouraged further distribution of the newsletter (Cape Times 6.11.1986).

Nevertheless, the conservative National Student Federation sent 1 300 copies to white school principals and the SADF distributed it amongst soldiers and pupils (Weekly Mail 6.3.1987). The newsletter in fact became the source of 'information' for many subsequent attacks on the ECC. It was even quoted by state lawyers in argument against a court application for the release of ECC detainees in the Eastern Cape (Cape Times 6.11.1986).

The ECC's response to the crackdown

The first few months of the State of Emergency were traumatic for the ECC. It immediately put a hold on all public activity until the legality of further campaigning could be established. Its new priorities were to support its activists in detention and in hiding and to maintain the morale and cohesion of the organisation.

A further priority was to make the organisation less vulnerable to detentions and police surveillance. In addition to activists going into hiding, committee meetings were organised clandestine-

ly and other security precautions were taken. An internal memorandum stated for example that ECC business should never be discussed over telephones, activists should watch for being followed to 'safe' venues, and no written notes should be taken at meetings in case they were raided by the police.

The memorandum warned however against overreacting to the situation.

We need to remember at all times that we are a legal and not an underground organisation. There is the danger that we become paranoid or go to the other extreme and romanticize what is happening. The trick is to find just the right level of security to protect ourselves and at the same time continue working democratically. ('ECC Security Memorandum', September 1986)

Once the initial shock of the State of Emergency had worn off, the ECC decided to resume campaigning. It accepted that there was a high risk of further detentions and even criminal prosecution, but was determined not to 'ban itself'.

The government is attempting to outlaw all opposition to apartheid outside of parliament. Together with other democratic organisations we have to contest its ability to do this. The people of South Africa are not about to give up their struggle. Now more than ever they are looking to the white community to join them. This means that we must 'get back onto the streets'. (Internal ECC document)

The ECC was nevertheless careful to avoid contravening the Emergency Regulations, and in particular the restriction on 'undermining or discrediting military service'. Its national campaigns in 1987- "Let ECC Speak", "War is No Solution" and "War is Not Compulsory, Lets Choose a Just Peace"- called for the 'right' to oppose conscription and focussed on various aspects of militarisation. The central theme revolved around the 'economic, physical and psychological costs of the intensifying civil war'.

The campaigns retained the characteristic ingenuity and creativity of ECC activities. In Cape Town a non-racial picnic was held at Archbishop Tutu's residence and pavement art drew large crowds in the city centre. In Johannesburg and Pretoria activists tied yellow ribbons around street poles and trees in a call for the release of detainees. In Natal there were peace corps projects in black communities, advertised through slightly altered SADF call-up papers.

At the end of 1987 the ECC assessed its work under the State of Emergency. Eighteen months after a crackdown that many thought would break it, the organisation was intact and active and the morale of its activists was high.

[The government has] taken some of the excitement and exhilaration out of our work, but in its place is a dedication and a life-long commitment. The State of Emergency is its own school, and we have sharpened our skills and learned to maximise our human resources. (ECC National Organiser, Out of Step, ECC, September 1987)

The ECC acknowledged though that the heightened repression had forced it onto the defensive. In shifting its focus from conscription to militarisation the organisation no longer generated as high a level of public interest as before. The commercial press was often scared to report its activities, and the concerted efforts to criminalise it had largely been successful in Afrikaans-speaking communities and conservative parts of the country.

The ECC in 1988

From the beginning of 1988 until its banning in August that year the ECC enjoyed its highest profile and broadest support. Its successful recovery was due both to independent political developments and to new strategies formulated in the light of its year-end assessment. The new strategies involved abandoning the broad focus on militarisation and responding more directly to the immediate needs and concerns of conscripts and their families.

One such need was for information about the legal and illegal alternatives to military service and about conscripts' rights and obligations under the Defence Act. To meet this need the ECC held a series of "Know Your Rights" meetings at which members of the public could put questions to a panel of 'experts'- a conscription advice counsellor, a lawyer specialising in military law and a conscript who had served in the army. The meetings and accompanying media boosted the ECC's credibility in that they provided a real public service and underlined the fact that the organisation was not 'anti-conscript', as the government claimed.

A second area of major concern in the conscripted community was around the SADF's deepening involvement in Angola (Chapter 2). Between mid-1987 and mid-1988 the authorities announced the death of 57 white soldiers (Weekly Mail 29.4.1988) (2). Although this figure was relatively small for a conventional war, it provoked an extraordinary wave of opposition from sectors of the white community that had previously been uncritical of the SADF.

Pro-government newspapers and conservative parents of soldiers killed in action questioned the army's presence in Angola for the first time.

You know I often do think of how it happened. There were ten of them in a Ratel [military vehicle] and it was one of those new bombs, a missile, something like that. He was in a convoy of Ratels and it was the only one bombed. Can you believe that? Isn't it terrible that it should be my son? Personally I feel that our children should not be fighting in that war. It is our duty to give our sons to the army- nobody really wants them to go, but it is our duty to send them. But ...we are not told that our children are being sent into Angola. We think they are in South West Africa. Since Pieter died I have had a lot of phone calls. People are unhappy that their children are being sent into Angola. (Mother of 19-year-old soldier killed in Angola, Evening Star 17.4.1988)

The most dramatic indication of the mainstream Afrikaans community's opposition was a critical editorial in Die Kerkbode (The

Church Messenger), the official publication of the state church, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church).

Without attempting to discuss the issue out of its political or military context, we nevertheless want to raise the question of whether it would not be morally and ethically correct for South Africa to withdraw its troops completely from Angola. The fact of the matter is that Angola is not its territory. It seems to us that the more or less permanent presence of troops in this foreign country can be questioned on Christian-ethical grounds. (Die Kerkbode 8.6.1988)

Although these protests were not linked to the anti-apartheid war resistance movement they created the space for it to campaign vigorously against SADF external aggression. The ECC organised protest meetings around the country and produced media explaining developments in Angola. It also delivered a statement to military headquarters in Cape Town and a more detailed memorandum to the Minister of Defence (ECC, 1988b).

The ECC's major activity in 1988 was the "Alternative National Service" campaign. The campaign called on the government to allow conscripts to do "non-government and non-military national service that is in the interests of the nation and its people as a whole". The call was endorsed by a wide range of academics, business leaders, parliamentary parties, welfare organisations and English-language churches and newspapers, many of which did not support the more radical demand to end conscription.

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