

MINUTES OF THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICE CAMPAIGN (A.S.C.)

held on 31st August, 1987.

Present:

J. Mathews (E.L.C.S.A.), A Bhiman (I.C.T.), R. Robertson (SACC, PCSA, OCCSA), S. Duncan (CPSA), T. Farrell (CPSA), H. Lancaster (CPSA), T. Makgoba (ASP), M. Walker (PACSA), S. Britton (Diakonia), P. Verryn (M.C.S.A.), P. Holness (B.U.), D. Smidt (CAS), R. Dohmeier (S.F.), G. Collings (W.A.P.), D. Hazelton (Catholic C.S.), L. Goemans (R.C. J and P), M. Kelly (J and P), B. Mosake, K. Selema, P. Kgongwana (CASA), B. Leong (N.C.F.S.), P. Sadie (R.C. Youth), B. Hamman, A. Kisten, I. Petje (E.C.C.) S. Lowry, N. Stott, J. Boulle, S. Sadie, Archbishop Daniel (Peace and War).

Apologies:

R. Steele (C.O.S.G.), Dr. Moore (P.C.S.A.), Olive Gibson (C.O.S.G.), J. Leach (SUCA), N. Smith (N.G.K.)

1. Welcome and prayer by Archbishop Daniel, followed by a sharing of our expectations.
2. Agenda Review.
3. Input on the Defence Act: 1957 and 1983.

Prior to 1983: Defence Act No 44 of 1957 which

- required 2 years service in the S.A.D.F.
- did not recognise C.O.
- made allowance for traditional peace church members e.g. Quakers and Jehova witness.

Under this law C.O. were sentenced to jail for a maximum of 2 years. This was initially in military detention barracks but later changed to a civilian prison sentence.

Defence Amendment Act No 84 of 1983.

Aim: to revise and extend provisions for C.O.'s.

A. Classification of C.O.

- Only religious pacifists recognised.
 - there are 3 categories of objection.
1. Non-combatant status (in the army)
 2. Non-combatant (who refuse to wear uniforms but will participate in the army).
 3. Universal Religious pacifists who refuse to participate in the S.A.D.F. and do alternative service.

There is no recognition of moral, ethical or political objectors.

- Objectors must apply to the Board for Religious objection 30 days after receiving their call-up.
- The Board has the power to change the categorisation of an objector.

B. Length of Service

- Alternative Service of one and half times that of Military Service and in one continuous period.
- Those who refuse to perform their community service are sentenced to D.B. They are then parolled and given community service.

(this clause seems to included to provide for Jehova Witnesses)

- Unrecognised objectors serve one and half times the period of service owed to the S.A.D.F. in prison. This is in continous period, the minimum is 2 years and exempts one from service thereafter.

D. Type of Service

- Community service is in a government, provincial or Municipal Department.
- Conditions of community service are described in detail in the Act.
- Limitations are placed on political activity and publishing of documents.

4. Input on the 23 who refused to serve in Cape Town.

First thing to note is that this was a spontaneous group and very diverse.

The 1983 Act effectively discouraged people from saying "I won't serve" despite the growing number who think this. The 23 decided to say this.

The response of the military has been to ignore the action except to say that it is an offence to refuse to do service and any offender will be punished.

5. Input on the A.S.C.

The idea is to give an overview of the churches position - to show how the demands have developed and to root the A.S.C. in a historical framework. In 1974 the SACC and Archbishop Hurley first raised the questions of military service and objection. In the late 70's with the emergence of objectors like R. Steele, P. Moll etc the churches came out more solidly in support of the right to conscientiously object.

In the 1980's the Churches again came out in support of C.O. Evidence was given to the Naude Commission through the SACC asking for changes. The Defence Amendment Act of 1983 did not provide these changes and most of the churches reject it as inadequate. In 1985 the churches again reiterated their demands that:

1. All objectors are recognised.
2. Alternative service be the same length as national service.

3. Alternative service be available in church and welfare organisations.

The demands were again ignored. It was in this framework that Peace and War said - the churches need to be doing something more, we need to think of a new strategy. In light of this the A.S.C. was born.

Aim of the A.S.C.

1. Win the 3 demands for C.O.
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To assert the churches' right to expose the inadequacies of the law.

- Advertise for volunteers.
- volunteers to apply to the "Panel" stating publicly "their" reasons for objecting.
- volunteer placed in a church or welfare organisation to do service.
- Publicly this would be presented to the government.

The A.S.C. would need to be well co-ordinated and have the full backing of all the Churches.

What the campaign would need:

- governing body to co-ordinate.
- administrative staff.
- network of church and welfare.
- "Panel".

Note that legally conscripts would still be required to do service. All we would be doing is getting those people who did not want to serve to make a public statement and to offer themselves for alternative community service, in an attempt to legalise this option.

After the input there was extensive discussion about our aims, the format of the proposal and the proposal. Suggestions made are noted later under strengths and weaknesses.

6. Group Work:

- (1) Do we support the changes proposed for the Defence Amendment Act.
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There was a general yes to this question.

- (2) Do we agree the churches need to work in a united action to win support for these changes and to effect them.

Again a general yes. Points noted were:

- If the church was united the government could not play off one church against another.
- We need to extend our base to include more churches.

- (3) Given the many ways to do this, is there support for the A.S.C.

There was general support although most people felt the need to work out the details and tone.

Points raised:

- the need to choose terminology that people will identify with.
- the need to involve the Afrikaans churches.
- we should try and gauge the support for the A.S.C. before proceeding.
- The A.S.C. is an interim measure while concision exists.

- (4) Is the A.S.C. opportune at this time?

Yes - Points raised were:

- the situation we find ourselves in, is an urgent one.
- several concisions find the law inadequate and are looking for alternatives.
- Church unity is an issue.
- we need to act soon.

7. Group Work:

- (1) What are the strengths of the A.S.C.

- It is a form of pressure to change things.
- There is a strong potential to mobilise people around the issue.
- it has a large symbol significance.
- concrete and tangible project.
- move from statements to action.
- broad base due to specific focus.
- publicity in our favour.
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- open to all objectors
- attempt to meet real needs.
- could strengthen advice bureau.
- although it does not solve military obligation it could help those going into exile.

Weakness of the A.S.C. or Problem areas.

- potential finance could be a problem.
- it will only work with full church backing.
- How do we take it beyond the hierarchy to a 'grassroots level.
- How do we ensure follow-up of those placed in church or welfare institutions.
- language of the proposal - words like campaign, demand, pressure, right are confrontational.
- "Panel" if it judges an individual's integrity.
- There is a potential problem around co-ordination due to church bureaucracy.
- lack of clarity about who can be a volunteer.
- How does the church really support the individual making this option.
- How the project is seen by township people we need to be clear about our aims and objectives - It is because of Apartheid and the role of the SADF in maintaining it that conscripts have this dilemma.

Ideas.

- to involve the Afrikaans churches.
- to prepare a kit to take to parishes and youth groups on the issue.
- to divide the A.S.C. into 2 stages.
 - 1) to get a list of 100 or more names and our demands. These could be presented to the government.
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- to run peace projects as support actions.
- to make the option available to women and blacks - not just conscripts.
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- maybe it could be called something else.
- most people agreed some form of selection was necessary (or accountability).

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Role: Redraft the proposal

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It was generally felt that the meeting should reconvene.
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