

A18.14.8

DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND WAR RESISTANCE

PURPOSE

This short paper seeks to outline some of the thoughts of members of the war resistance movement around maintaining pressure on the state to end military conscription. We regard this issue as one of great urgency and we have been concerned to note that it does not appear to have featured in any of the national discussions between the ANC and the government.

This paper firstly motivates that the question of conscription is one which should be exploited in this pre-negotiations stage. The government relies on white conscription to maintain its security strength, yet can no longer justify maintaining such a racially defined institution. Furthermore, the reasons for conscription no longer have the same resonance with the white community and we would submit that the ground is very fruitful for campaigns and activities that create a greater distance between the SADF and the white community from which they draw their manpower.

Secondly, this paper puts forward ideas and suggestions for the ANC to consider in developing a political strategy around the area of war resistance.

THE CONTEXT

Since the end of 1989 we have seen dramatic changes in the nature of military service and its affect on conscripts and their families as well as dramatic changes in the political role of the SADF. Initial military service has been reduced by a year, troops are no longer involved in the illegal occupation of Namibia and Southern Angola, formal raids on frontline states appear to have been suspended, and troops in townships now play a semi "peace keeping" role (with clear anomalies still occurring such as the Sebokeng Hostel outrage). In political society, the State Security Council and the National Security Management System, while still existing are playing a lesser role in the formulation of the state's political strategy. Conscientious Objectors now receive dramatically reduced jail sentences and in the latest case, community service in lieu of a jail sentence.

What these changes mean in terms of the potential for political mobilisation is that the strong "moral outrage" position that informed many of the campaigns of the war resistance movement has been eroded in that they strike with less force in the minds of ordinary concerned conscripts and their families. This means that the strategy adopted by organisations such as ECC of using concern around the system of conscription to prise whites away from the ruling block and encourage them to place their interest with the majority is becoming increasingly difficult to utilise. Anti apartheid mobilisation against conscription in the "middle ground" of the white community is a strategy which many activists feel has run its course. New and creative strategies to undermine the SADF need to be investigated.



However, while political opposition to the SADF on a "moral outrage" anti apartheid basis is having less resonance in the broader white community, dissatisfaction with the system of military service remains and has increased over the last few months. This dissatisfaction stems from several sources. First, there is less and less of a political logic being articulated by the SADF for whites only conscription to be maintained. All the "enemies" that the SADF were committed to fight against have now become legal and respected political entities. The "red threat" on the borders of South Africa can now no longer be used by the SADF as a reason for high levels of troop mobilisation. The racist nature of conscription is proving to be increasingly difficult to defend among white South Africans who believe that South Africa is moving a way from a race based society. Finally the system of camps is proving to be a source of major dissatisfaction with citizen force members still being called up and taken from their homes, families and jobs. Many feel national service men could do this work adequately and Citizen Force members feel that they have already "done their bit".

The state of organisations located within the war resistance movement reflects the shifting politics of conscription. The Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG), which works in the area of support work for COs has been able to maintain its support structures. It appears that there will be a number of COs going to court for refusing to serve in the SADF in 1991. The Conscription Advice Service still receives a large number of enquiries related to call up problems, particularly citizen force members and camp problems. ECC, however, is in a weak position. This weakness is due to the increased difficulty of mobilising the white community around political opposition to the SADF.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ANC

1. Negotiations.

The ANC could win support amongst significant sectors (including conscripts), if it is seen to be taking up the issue of conscription at the negotiations table. In contrast to the SADF and NP who have presented conscription as a non-debatable point, the ANC should argue strongly that it is a debatable point, and should push for an end to conscription and citizen force call ups.

In doing this, the ANC is most likely to gain support from the white community if, in addition to political concerns, it also emphasises that conscription is a violation of individual freedom; it is no longer necessary and is disruptive to family and economic life. By showing that it is taking political and material concerns around conscription seriously it has the potential to win real support in the ranks of white conscripts and soldiers.

In negotiations, the issue of conscription itself needs to be dealt with, and not just the issue of the political status of conscientious objectors. The link between the suspension of the armed struggle and the ending of conscription must be made.

2. ANC members with call ups.

There are a number of ANC members who face immediate call ups, some of whom are considering taking the issue to court. These members need direction from the ANC and we would suggest that the ANC can use this opportunity to state clearly that the SADF is still a politically motivated army working in the NP's best interest.

If the ANC makes a call to its members not to serve, then it must give clear political support both in the negotiations process; at the courts and in the press.

The ANC should also consider the message it gives to conscripts who are not ANC members. The tone of the message is crucial, and we would suggest that an "examine your conscience" message may be more effective than a "don't serve" message. We have found that one does not have to make the call for people not to serve to encourage people to do just that.

*
C → What does this mean → "examine your conscience".

3. Conscription under an ANC government.

Again the ANC will win support if it continues to articulate an anti conscription position for a post apartheid SA. The ANC can provide a powerful critique of the system as it now stands when explaining why military conscription won't be considered in the future.

SUMMARY

1. Conscription is an important material concern of the white community and there is the possibility, if played correctly, of the ANC winning support amongst whites if it is seen to be sincerely taking this issue up in negotiations.
2. There is great potential for exacerbating the dissatisfaction that people feel with regard to conscription, without actually making the call for people not to serve.
3. The ANC must present clear alternatives when critiquing the system of conscription. In particular, the question of law and order and the maintenance of peace in the townships needs to be addressed.
4. Due to the changed political terrain, one can no longer rely on organisations like ECC to handle this area alone. New strategies need to be developed in order to exploit the above mentioned potential.
5. The need for the ANC to publically enter the debate around conscription is vital.

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a collection held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.