

Clare  
B8.3.4

## ECC'S NEW FOCUS ON CONSCRIPTION

---

### Why the new focus on conscription?

---

From its formation in 1983 until the State of Emergency in June 1986, ECC made an important contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle by expressing and building white opposition to conscription.

The State of Emergency shifted ECC away from its primary focus on conscription. Intense repression and the Emergency regulations caused it to become defensive, demanding the right to speak and oppose conscription, and to broaden its focus to more abstract issues of war and militarisation.

ECC has done well to maintain its organisational co-hesion and public presence under the Emergency, but it is no longer having a major public impact. To regain the initiative, ECC must return to the basis of its support and past success: opposition to conscription.

The white community has strongly endorsed the government's "national security" programme. Yet there is every indication that opposition to conscription is growing. Conscripts and their families are increasingly concerned about the moral implications, economic costs and physical risks of military service. The potential therefore remains for ECC to mobilise around this crucial aspect of apartheid.

### What does the new focus on conscription mean?

---

At one level, the new focus means that ECC activities need to be more clearly centred around conscription. ECC must address its different constituencies - students, parents, pupils etc - in terms of how they are effected by conscription.

At another level, the new focus means working with conscripts and soldiers as constituencies in their own right. ECC needs to orientate itself towards speaking directly to and on behalf of unwilling conscripts and soldiers. The first step is to develop a better understanding of how conscripts and soldiers see themselves, the army and ECC.

### What has been learnt so far?

---

The following points emerged at house meetings with 'campers' :

\* ECC's image is very negative amongst soldiers because of army propaganda and a perception that the organisation is 'studenty, cliquish and elitist'. It is seen as 'out of touch with ordinary people'.

\* The lack of 'campers' amongst it's spokespeople creates the impression that ECC is 'arrogant' and 'doesnt know what its talking about'.

\* The above feelings are held even by people sympathetic to ECC's arguments against conscription.

\* For political and geographic reasons, ECC will never reach many serving soldiers. It should concentrate on conscripts outside the army.

\* Amongst the small number of receptive soldiers, ECC's political arguments, especially 'troops out', are appealing.

\* ECC taking up material arguments against conscription will not win support from other soldiers.

\* ECC should publicise soldiers' rights, especially amongst conscripts about to go into the army.

\* 'Campers' sympathetic to ECC are reluctant to get involved for fear of victimisation from both the army and ECC if they intend doing further camps.

\* Conscripts are unimpressed when ECC members are unable to answer their queries about conscription.

#### Points from the day away

---

At a recent all day discussion about the new focus, the following main points emerged:

\* The new focus on conscription does not mean that ECC must dilute it's political programme or distance itself from UDF.

\* ECC must however seriously set about changing it's image. Issues like dress, language, type of activities and quality of media need to be addressed.

\* ECC can strengthen it's image immeasurably by having more 'campers' talking on it's behalf.

\* Involving more 'campers' means changing ECC's image from an organisation of objectors to one that includes people who will go into the army.

\* ECC spokespeople must also include representatives of other constituencies effected by conscription (eg parents and wives/ mothers).

\* ECC office bearers should continue to be elected on the basis of the best person for the job, although whether a candidate has done military service is an important factor.

\* In the long run, ECC's image will only change as it's composition changes to include a broader cross section of the white community. Ideally, ECC must grow from being a political organisation of activists to being a broad social movement.

\* This process must involve ECC reaching out to new constituencies and to areas outside the southern suburbs. It must also involve ECC catering for different levels of political involvement through, for example, house meetings, open forums, monthly meetings and an extended membership.

#### Implications of the new focus for ECC structures

---

\* The ECC conscripts group will work directly with conscripts. The group is open to all ECC members and not only conscripts.

\* All ECC subcomms should incorporate the new focus into their work.

\* The ECC General Body is responsible for taking forward general thinking and action around the new focus.

\* ECC must consolidate it's links with the Conscription Advice Service.

\* ECC activists have to be trained as advice counsellors.

\* A group needs to take responsibility for addressing the question of ECC's image.

\* An outreach committee must be revived.

Dec. '87

**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.