

Campaign to demand alternative to Military Service.

"Working for a Just Peace Campaign."

The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) in South Africa is soon to embark on a campaign which will involve working on community development projects throughout the country. The campaign titled the "Working for a Just Peace Campaign" will highlight the ECC's demand for an end to compulsory service in the country's armed forces. Through this focus, which will peak on 30 April, we hope to physically demonstrate alternatives to military service.

The ECC is the leading force opposing the compulsory conscription of young white men in South Africa. Our campaign is based on the fact that the universal right to freedom of conscience is not adhered to in our country, and that men are forced to serve in a defence force which is both implementing and defending the system of apartheid.

A range of projects, in which large numbers of people are expected to participate, have been lined up. At the Crossroads squatter camp, near Cape Town, plans are underway for a group of people to prepare the site for a new maternity wing for the clinic there. The Gandhi Phoenix Settlement will be rebuilt with the help of ECC volunteers [redacted]. Large sections of it were destroyed by fire last year.

In Pietermaritzburg a large group of people are expected to help with an agricultural project run by factory workers. In Johannesburg energy will go into running holiday programmes for youth.

Other project ideas include help with counselling schemes, Nursing assistance, teaching and environmental cleaning.

"We believe that an alternative to compulsory military service is urgently required," says our National Organiser, Laurie Nathan. "Young men are conscripted and forced into a position where they are bearing arms in defence of apartheid, against fellow South Africans. How can this be called national service? This system of conscription must end. Through the 'Working for a Just Peace' campaign we want to demonstrate an alternative to military conscription. "

At present alternatives to military conscription are severely limited. Conscripts who are religious pacifists can opt for

alternative service in government departments. The period of this service is punitive however in that it effectively lasts  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times the length of military service. This can amount <sup>to</sup> up to 6 years.

For those who don't satisfy the religious pacifist requirements, the prospects are bleak. They face either a prison sentence of the same duration as the alternative service; or a life in exile.

The alternative service projects to be organized by the ECC are hoped to be a model of what national service could be. Most important, says the ECC's National Secretary David Shandler, is that these projects will be based outside of government departments. "The projects we are going to work on will be formulated in consultation with community-based organizations. This is how a national service should be conducted. Service in the SADF or in apartheid government departments is everything but a service to the people."

"We will be demonstrating our demand for a national service that is based on the real material needs of South Africans. This is why the process of consultation with the people's organizations is so important. We do not want to be involved in projects which are imposed onto people. This is how the government acts."

The alternative service at present available to religious pacifists will also come under scrutiny. It is inadequate, not only because it is punitive, but also because it excludes broad categories of non-religious and non-pacifist people opposed to service in the SADF.

In all of the projects, a special effort is to be made to promote non-racialism by bringing black and white together in an activity, which is to the benefit of the community. "As a campaign based in the white community," says Laurie, "the ECC will also be promoting non-racialism through the 'Working for a Just Peace' Campaign by bringing whites together in a demonstration of their opposition to compulsory military service - an apartheid institution. It will show that there are many white South Africans who are opposed to racism and who wish to build a just peace in our country."

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