

AN INTRODUCTION TO ECC

UCT END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN 1987

NOTE: A separate seminar/paper on ECC's legal position will be produced later. This area is too complicated to cover in a few paragraphs without simply being confusing.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an introduction to the ECC; it will hopefully lay some of the ground for our work and growth at UCT. It is meant as a resource to equip ECC members and supporters to do ECC's work in their contact with individuals and in campus groupings and organisations.

ECC works around an issue which by its very nature has a broad appeal. Our strength lies in the fact that opposition to conscription into the SADF and the increasing militarisation of our society is a fact and a reality for many South Africans and not something we have created and blown-up with hot air. Our public campaigns and meetings have always received popular support at UCT. Our launch meeting in early 1987 was indicative of the amount of support ECC has on the ground. For our organisation to grow really strong, we need, however, to go beyond being simply a successful public campaign. It is important that we find ways of putting ourselves, as ECC members and supporters, to work within the university. At UCT an important part of that work is winning support for ECC and taking ECC to as broad as possible range of campus groupings. In the process, we must make our organisation accessible to those groupings and finding ways in which they can do the work of ECC and build ECC.

Around the country, ECC is made stronger by the affiliated organisations which come together in ECC's broad front. When it is working well the front not only serves to establish ECC's broadness and popularity, but has been seen to work in other ways to make ECC a strong organisation. Two most important ways in which our front members help strengthen ECC are as follows: firstly, front organisations have directly assisted ECC and put human energy into our campaigns and activities. This has contributed a great deal to the success of our many public events including, for instance, our last fair. Secondly, conscription and militarisation are taken up as issues within and by some of our affiliates. This takes our work further than we as an organisation ever could and becomes increasingly important as big public campaigns are made more and more difficult by the repressive climate.

Setting up an alliance on campus means far more than simply getting formal affiliates. With even two or three strong affiliates, we gain energy and momentum; we dramatically increase the variety of people who can contribute to building ECC and we poise ourselves to make a greater impact on campus. But for us to have that impact, we must work with commitment and imagination to make ourselves an organisation fit to perform our tasks. We need to make sure our members are prepared and trained well to do their work. Hopefully this paper will contribute to that process.

OPPOSITION TO CONSCRIPTION

There are various reasons for the opposition to conscription. They range from the general and fundamental issue of the right of the individual to choose to more specific opposition to the role played by the South African Defence Force in maintaining apartheid in South Africa.

The End Conscription Campaign was formed in 1983 to respond to these issues. The ECC is based on the fundamental belief that individuals should be free to choose whether or not to serve in the SADF. This belief is solidly based in international principles which recognise the right of freedom of conscience.

According to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom...to manifest his (or her) religion or belief in teaching practice, worship or observance."

Freedom of conscience involves the right to decide and act on ethical conviction. This moral conviction need not necessarily be of religious inspiration, but can also be supported by secular beliefs.

The right to freedom of conscience that is advocated by the UN Human Rights Declaration is extended by the Nuremburg Declaration, which makes it the responsibility of the individual to exercise moral conscience in military situations according to the Nuremburg principles a person under military authority who is ordered to commit "crimes against humanity", "crimes against peace" or "war crimes" would be punishable under international law and would thus have a right and a duty to refuse such orders.

It is therefore clear that it is a internationally accepted right that individuals should be allowed to choose whether or not to participate in a military force. This right is particularly important in the South African context. The ECC is dedicated to its task of representing those affected by the system of conscription who want real choices and alternatives.

THE APARTHEID WAR

a) Within South Africa:

We live in a society in a state of civil war where brother is called to fight brother.

Throughout South Africa's history, people have struggled to create a just society. Strenuous efforts to bring about democratic change by peaceful means have consistently been made. In response, the state has repeatedly demonstrated its readiness to use violence to crush peaceful opposition. In recent times, it has been conscripts who have had to perform this task against fellow South Africans.

The 1985 emergency situation was described by a speaker at a Civil Rights League VE Day meeting as follows: "Across the country, the townships are in turmoil. The army occupies the 'hotspots', patrols them, searches them - saracens and ratsels dominate the streets - at every exit, a roadblock. Behind the rifle a white kid's eyes stare...Hey soldier for what are you fighting - if not for a twisted government ideology and the unjustifiable preservation of white supremacy. The barrel of a gun - this is the final meeting place, for black and white, decreed by apartheid."

The townships of Cape Town are no exception as was evidenced by the Crossroads crisis last year.

Professor John Dugard, a University of the Witwatersrand legal expert, has described the Eastern Cape as "Gestapo country". Subsequent to the Uitenhage shootings on March 21, 1985, Mr Adrian Vlok, simultaneously Deputy Minister of Law and Order and of Defence, referred on SATV to the people of the Eastern Cape as "the enemy".

Young men are conscripted to assist in the implementation and defence of apartheid policies: the SADF is increasingly being used to carry out government policy. Such activities have ranged from assisting in forced removals, arresting people for pass offences, patrolling townships and manning roadblocks around the country.

The increasing polarization of South African society and the escalating spiral of violence will continue as long as the root causes exist. A just peace in our land can only be realised when apartheid is replaced by non-racialism and democracy.

b) Namibia and Neighbouring Countries:

It is 16 years since the International Court of Justice declared the South African occupation of Namibia illegal. This 1971 ruling is no less valid today.

South Africa has openly defied the consensus of the international community by increasing the number of troops in Namibia and by bringing into existence successive regimes not supported by the majority of Namibians (for example, the Democratic Turnhall Alliance and the present Multi-Party Conference).

The escalating conflict in Namibia which has been described as "unwinnable" by Lieutenant General Geldenhuys is daily exacting a heavy cost in lives and finance.

In 1980, P W Botha announced that South Africa has spent R3 000 million on "infrastructure and defence" in Namibia. Annually the war is costing R600 million, over 1 million per day, with more being spent bolstering Namibia's apartheid society.

The suffering of the Namibian people in their war-torn country is immense, particularly in Northern Kavango and Cvamboland where the war is most intense. Intimidation, torture and brutalization of innocent people by South African armed forces is widespread. It is estimated that over 10 000 Namibians, 1 percent of the total population, have died in the 19-year war.

South Africa has repeatedly conducted acts of military aggression against neighbouring countries. Since the 1975 invasion of Angola, there have been numerous attacks. Examples are: 1978 Cassinga (Angola), 1982 Maseru (Lesotho) and 1983 Maputo (Mozambique). The latest of these include the shocking raid in Gabarone, Botswana, where 15 people were killed including a six year old child, raids into Zimbabwe, air raids into Mozambique and most recently, a raid into Zambia where Zambian citizens were killed.

It is widely believed that South Africa follows a generalised policy of destabilization, providing support for the MNR in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola, super-ZAPU (dissidents) in Zimbabwe and the LLA in Lesotho. Pik Botha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, has recently admitted that South Africa has assisted the MNR (Remano) in the past and would assist them in the future if necessary.

c) The cost of the Apartheid War:

Defence spending has increased markedly over the last few decades, and consumes a significant proportion of the budget. In 1960 the defence budget was R44 million. The 1984/5 defence budget is R4,2 billion, 15,4 percent of the total budget. This in itself could be considered a conservative estimate, given that money can be channelled to defence through other state departments. A special

Defence Account exists, and during the fiscal years of 1979/80 and 1980/81, amounts were allegedly drawn from this account equal to more than half again of the regular budget. "If the same proportions apply today, another R2 150 million could be added to the latest defence budget of R4 274 million" (Sun Star 14/4/85). Much military related expenditure is the responsibility of other government departments, for example, housing for personnel and construction of bases is not reflected in the defence budget itself.

While state expenditure on education has increased, budget allocations for fundamental necessities such as health and housing remain alarmingly low. Infant mortality rates, squatter camps and gross over-crowding are merely an aspect of this.

The cost of the war in Namibia alone is estimated to be some R600 million annually, while the total daily defence budget is estimated at R12 million. Basic human rights such as health and housing are suffering at the expense of the escalating and ongoing war.

In the most recent Defence White Paper, Minister of Defence Magnus Malan has indicated that defence spending will remain a top priority. Defence spending undoubtedly adds a severe strain to an already strained economy. This was one of the motivations for raising of GST made by the Minister of Finance, who said that the military had overspent its budget by R300 million.

The End Conscription Committee believes that a direct correlation exists between defence spending and the increasingly depressed living standards of the majority of our people. No amount of military spending will provide the solution to political problems.

The reality of a divided country at war makes it particularly important that the ECC continues to demand real choices for all.

The following sections outline the options open to conscripts who are called up into the SADF.

Options for the Conscript

Broadly, there are five alternatives to military service in South Africa:

1. Exemption/Deferment
2. Religious Objection
3. Imprisonment
4. Emigration/Political Asylum
5. Evasion

(1) Everyone has the right to apply for EXEMPTION/DEFERMENT.

EXEMPTION involves permanent exemption from any form of service. It is very rare and is usually granted only in cases of physical/mental disability.

DEFERMENT involves temporary exemption from military service and must be renewed. It is granted on the grounds of educational studies, domestic obligations and trade/business obligations etc; ill-health/incapacity and compulsory detention at an institution.

- (2) Applications for RELIGIOUS OBJECTION go before the Board for Religious Objectors, set up in terms of the Defence Amendment Act of 1983.

Objections must be religious in nature and must involve an element of universality. The religion must be theistic thus there is no scope for moral or political objection. The Board has proved to be very strict in its interpretation of "an element" of universality. Only religious objectors who are able and willing to explain that on religious grounds they would be unwilling in any situation to participate in any army, anywhere are given community service as an option.

There are three categories of religious objection alternatives:

- (1) Non-Combatant Service in the SADF.
The person will not carry a gun, but will serve the normal time in the SADF. Defined as "A religious objector with whose religious convictions it is in conflict to render service in a combatant capacity in any armed force."
(Section 72 D(1)(a)(i))
- (2) Non-Uniformed, Non-Combatant Service.
An as yet unused category.
- (3) Non-Military Community Service.
The person will serve 1½ times what is owed to the SADF in a non-military government department.
Defined as "A religious objector with whose religious convictions it is in conflict to render any military service or to undergo any military training or to perform any tasks in or in connection with any armed force."
(Section 72 D(1)(a)(iii))

On application for religious objection, deferment is automatically granted.

- (3) Imprisonment.

If you fail to appear for your call-up, you commit an offence and are liable for a prison sentence.

If you are charged with failure to report, you face on conviction a fine or imprisonment of up to 18 months, which is not regarded as services completed.

If you are charged with refusal to serve, you face 1½ times your outstanding service (ie: maximum 6 years) or 18 months, whichever is the longer. This is taken as service completed.

NOTE: So far no-one has been charged with refusal to serve and even Philip Wilkinson is being charged only with failure to report.

- (4) Emigration/Political Asylum.
(5) Evasion - remaining in South Africa, but avoiding the relevant authorities.

All these options involve hardship and suffering on the part of the conscript and his family, and many choose eventually to complete their service in the SADF.

For this reason, the interim demands of the ECC are:

The broadening of the category of conscientious objectors legally entitled to alternative service, to include those objecting on moral and political grounds.

The reduction of the length of alternative service to a length equal to that of military service.

The extension of alternative service to include work in registered welfare and religious bodies independent of government control.

The right of soldiers, on the grounds of conscience, to choose not to be used in Namibia, a neighbouring country or South Africa's townships.

Advice Service

The Conscription Advice Service operates as an SRC service to support those who are faced with the crisis of being conscripted into the SADF. For a more thorough understanding of the law and the options open to conscripts, get in contact with the Advice Service.

Contact FRAN at 650-3537 or leave a message.

CAMPAIGNS

Introduction

Campaigns form the backbone of ECC's public work. We get to the broader community through our campaign work, whereas the training of our activists occurs on a day-to-day basis.

The ECC has become well-known for its exciting and creative campaigns nationally and the following is a brief outline of the national ECC campaigns that have taken place since the ECC's launch in 1984.

The first national campaign that was worked on was a campaign around the SADF's presence in Namibia, under the slogan "No war in Namibia". The campaign called for the SADF to withdraw from Namibia, stating (1) Young South Africans are dying in an undelcared war in a foreign country; (2) 10 000 Namibian citizens have been killed; (3) SA and the SADF have no right to be in Namibia.

The next national campaign that was launched was the "Stop the Call-up ECC Peace Festival" campaign which took place in June 1985. This was, nationally, a very exciting and successful campaign, culminating in a weekend of activities under the banner of the ECC Peace Festival. This occasion has been marked as the beginnings of the peace movement in South Africa - a truly historic moment.

In September/October of 1985, the Troops Out - Fast for a Just Peace campaign took place nationally. The call for troops to be withdrawn from the townships received massive support from a large variety of sectors, including incredibly strong international support. The highlight of this campaign was a three week fast by ECC members Ivan Toms, Harald Winkler and Richard Steele, which culminated in a national 24-hour fast. Rallys held around the country at this time received mass support.

In March and April of 1985, the Working for a Just Peace campaign was launched, perhaps the most successful of national campaigns to date. People from all sectors took part in what was termed "real" national service, where constructive work took place in the communities - building, cleaning, painting, etc. The campaign involved many projects and was worked on by hundreds countrywide. In Cape Town, other highlighted events of this campaign were a fair, an anti-war film festival and very successful art and photograph exhibitions.

The latest national campaign to be launched falls under the slogan "War is not compulsory - Let's choose a Just Peace". This campaign began with a national Day of Concern on the 23rd of April. A day of concern for the plight of the conscript. A highlight of this campaign in Cape Town will be the unveiling of a monument in the City Centre, dedicated to all the victims of the apartheid war.

Besides the nationally co-ordinated campaigns that have taken place, regional, more low-keyed campaigns have occurred too. For instance, at the end of 1986, the Cape Town branch launched a "War is no solution" campaign, while at more or less the same time, the Durban branch launched a "War Toys" mini-campaign.

ECC - The Organisation

At the end of 1983, End Conscription Committees were formed in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. This followed a resolution passed by the Black Sash at its annual conference earlier that year calling for an end of compulsory conscription into the SADF. Since then, the End Conscription Campaign has gone from strength to strength (despite intimidation from the state) and there are now committees in Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg, the Eastern Cape and on many of the campuses.

The End Conscription Campaign is a coalition of various organisations (see Appendix) which have different political and religious perspectives. These organisations are united around a single issue - their shared view of the system of compulsory conscription, the increased militarization of our society and the role of the SADF.

The coalition form of ECC allows it to reach a greater number of people and means that the issue can be taken up in different ways and in different constituencies.

The fact that ECC incorporates and reflects a broad range of perspectives (liberal, socialist, pacifist, religious and counter-cultural) gives it a distinct political character, which has wide appeal. It also means that the ECC has to be sensitive to all constituencies in its decisions and actions. The debate that arises out of the different approaches is usually constructively resolved. It is significant that ECC can accommodate such varying views and learn from them.

The day-to-day work of ECC is done by its subcommittees. Campus ECC has three subcommittees: Contact, Culture and Media.

A General Body meeting at which subcommittees and affiliates are represented is held regularly. Decisions are made at this meeting to ensure maximum democracy. When decisions are important, but not urgent, representation can take the issue back to their organisation or subcommittee for discussion.

End Conscription Campaign at UCT

ECC was established on campus early in 1987. Our first appearance as ECC was during Orientation Week where we had a table and recruited more than 80 new members. The conscription issue has always been an important one for students and the End Conscription Campaign enjoys large and broad support at UCT.

In the past, an SRC subcommittee has organised around the issue. Relating closely to ECC town branch, this subcommittee distributed ECC media and involved students in ECC campaigns, for instance, a large number of students were recruited and involved in the "Working for a Just Peace" alternative service campaign in 1986. At the end of 1986, a working group got together to establish an ECC branch at UCT; it was felt that this would be a much more effective way of providing students with the opportunity of involving themselves in the activities of the End Conscription Campaign. Since then, things have grown rapidly.

At an early stage we established our three subcommittees - media, creative cultural action and a subcommittee responsible for contact with other organisations, and for the recruitment of new members. We started the year off with a fairly small campaign called "Conscription - Everyone's Issue" during which we illustrated to campus the ways in which conscription affects everyone in South Africa, often in different ways. On the 26th of March, we held a very successful launch meeting in Jameson Hall where a large number of campus organisations stated their support for ECC by joining us on the stage.

We also took up the national ECC campaign on campus. "War is not compulsory - Let's choose a Just Peace" was a campaign which said to white South Africans that war and rule by force are not the only ways forward.

We have a particular vision for ECC at UCT. We want to be more than just an organisation holding meetings and distributing media. Ultimately, our aim is to establish a dynamic and working alliance of campus organisations united in their shared view of compulsory military conscription and in opposition to the increasing militarisation of South African society. We aim to create an alliance which works, in which off-campus organisations affiliated to ECC build ECC by taking up the conscription issue wherever they are situated. We want to reach every single UCT student, to build an ECC which is made strong by the depth and broadness of its support and by the fact that, all over campus, people are doing the work of ECC.

Helping to Build ECC - What Can Your Organisation Do?

If ECC is to become a powerful organisation on campus, then every supporter and member of ECC must do the work of ECC. An important part of our work is to raise the issues of conscription, to gain support for ECC and to point out the realities of apartheid's war in our faculty councils, clubs, societies, residences and other organisations.

Affiliation

If your organisation as a whole supports the principles and objectives of the ECC then affiliation to ECC is an ideal way in which you could help build ECC, participate in ECC activities and take part in deciding the policy and direction of ECC. The most important thing about affiliation is that it is not simply a few lines on a piece of paper. Affiliation means sending mandated representatives to the bi-weekly general body meetings where ECC decisions and policy is made, usually by consensus. It will mean that your organisation will remain constantly in touch with the activities of ECC through thorough reportbacks. Hopefully, affiliation will also mean that organisations will constantly find ways in which they can build and strengthen the End Conscription Campaign.

There are no established formulae for how an organisation could best relate to and help build ECC. It is important that each organisation finds ways of doing this which would be most appropriate to any particular situation. A workshop, lead by an ECC member, to discuss and startegise each organisations role in participating in and building ECC would probably be the best way of at least starting this process.

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