

PRETORIA : Has received proportionately the most "troubled conscript" calls as well as only hassled ones. The latter take their stand mostly on the basis of the "racial call-up" position. Two counsellors handle the bulk of the work and are kept very busy. Has had to deal with cases involving harassment of objectors and their families by M.P.s. A few suspicious calls have also been received and met with very legalistic answers.

GRAHAMSTOWN : The previous contact person has moved to Queenstown and is keen to provide a service there. A number of calls are being received and the intention is to hold an information session for counsellors (including the Rhodes Student Advisor, local Lifeline people, ECC and Sash, the Streetlaw Project and local school guidance counsellors). Re-advertising will also be done.

PORT ELIZABETH : Calls are increasing here too, also with few moral dilemmas but lots of irritation with the system.

After this, Alan Dodson led a discussion on the current legal situation.

The salient points were:

The Defence Act is still in force and opinion is that the upcoming challenge to it will in all likelihood fail. The draft legislation amending the Act, based on the recommendations of the Gleeson committee, will probably be published this year. This will expand the range of objectors recognised by the Act and make the system of conscription comparable to that in many Western countries. Prosecutions could then increase on the strength of this new-found respectability. So conscription could therefore be around for quite a while still!

At the moment failure to report is being handled internally by the military. The "worst-case" scenario for failure to report is a fine of community service so the cost is relatively minimal. Personal anxiety and harassment are the only risks. It was observed, though, that in the smaller conservative country areas, these prosecutions are still being handled through the magistrates court.

The next discussion centred on the future of CAS in the light of the developments already discussed. As with the previous discussion, I've simply jotted down the points and decisions made without trying to put them into structured form.

The first position expressed was that CAS is catering mainly for people who are not morally opposed to their call-up but are simply hoping for an easy way out of it. If there isn't one, they would do their camp feeling irritated and inconvenienced but not morally compromised. CAS was formed originally to counsel the reluctant conscript who objected to serving on moral grounds and it no longer seems to serve this purpose. The result, especially in Cape Town, is that counsellors are no longer fulfilling their original motivations for their involvement in CAS and are ambivalent about continuing the type of service offered at present.

The responses to this indicated that other regions were not nearly so negative.

These were inter alia:

People are still needing advice and that as long as conscription continues there will be a need for CAS. Even people who are only "hassled" are still eroding the system and are therefore important. CAS helps to empower the conscript against a system which controls largely through ignorance. Most people are ignorant of their rights and their position and CAS is, for our callers, the only counter to this on a personal level.

CAS is now reaping the benefits of one call a month. Any reason, even not wanting to leave one's family, is a good reason not to go. CAS should not judge conscripts reasons.

An 087 number was considered as a future option. Messages giving the information required by almost all callers was seen as a way out of the drudgery of advice work. But as the personal contact with callers was seen to be a valuable component of our services, it was felt that contact numbers should still be provided at the end of messages.

This option was considered worth investigating. Johannesburg undertook to look into the logistics of it and report back to other centres. Cape Town will get their lawyers to vet the messages if it reaches that stage.

When the expected amendment to the Defence Act (based on Gleeson's recommendations) is introduced, we should pay for a legal opinion on it. The Cape Town CAS committee is extremely burnt out and have none willing to be a full time contact person/coordinator. This shows up CAS's difficulty in reproducing itself, which some regions are addressing.

The question as to under what circumstances CAS should cease to exist was posed. The feeling was that if conscription ended or we ran out of money we would disband. If conscription ended and CAS still got calls, then another group (eg. COSG) could take over that responsibility.

Richard is to send a letter to the relevant CODESA sub-committee pointing out the unviability of conscription under an interim government. Robby will help.

Jonathan will be the national conference person and will organise the next tele-conference when necessary.

Neil in Johannesburg will be the national treasurer henceforth.

Cape Town (if it continues) and Johannesburg will keep accounts. All other regions who do not use/need local accounts will close these and send the balances to the national account.

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