

MINUTES

(not completed)

COMBINED CONFERENCE OF
the END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN
the CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR SUPPORT GROUP
and the CONSCRIPTION ADVICE SERVICE
7 -9 AUGUST 1992
Bobolink, Johannesburg

1. International Conscientious Objectors Meeting (ICOM)

Michael Graaf reported back on the ICOM which he attended in France as a representative of COSG. The following are extracts from Michael's report.

- Nineteen countries (17 European) were represented at ICOM. Most of them have conscription. Two UK Gulf War objectors were amongst those present.

- An emerging trend away from conscription in Europe is reflected in the fact that Belgium and the Netherlands are in the process of doing away with conscription. The "new world order" can be seen as having contributed to the situation where conscript armies are no longer regarded as necessary. In addition the emphasis in modern warfare on high-tech weaponry has rendered large conscript armies in many ways redundant.

- Both Serbian and Croatian Objectors were present at ICOM. The war in the former Yugoslavia provides a parallel with the issue of "troops in the townships" in South Africa. Some of the delegates argued in favour of intervention by an international peace keeping force in the situation.

- This year's ICOM represented something of a turning point. Previously ICOM has been very male dominated. This time there were many women activists present (especially from France and Germany) and this has led to a confrontation. They challenged "objection" as a male issue.

- One issue raised was whether anti-militarist movements should focus on opposing conscription. Some of those present argued that conscription shouldn't be the focus of anti-militarisation work.

- Next year's international CO day and next year's ICOM will focus on Yugoslavia. Next year ICOM will be in Turkey. Other European centres will help in setting up the Turkey meeting.

A suggestion was that COSG hold a meeting to share information on Yugoslavia. Michael could help in presenting it.

2. State of conscription

There appears to be a general process of decay in the conscription system. For instance our information is that in the region of 4 200 people reported for the call-up in July while in the past the July intake has been in the region of 10 000. Presumably the system is functioning much more effectively in more conservative communities where there is still more acceptance of it.

To a certain extent the government appears to be accepting of this process and to a significant extent the system appears to be functioning as if it was a voluntary system. Thus in the vast

majority of cases where people do not report or refuse to serve they manage to get away with it without being prosecuted. Nevertheless a number of people have been charged for failing to report and at least one person, Merrick Douglas, is being charged for refusing to do military service. The government may be seen to be intervening at a limited level to maintain the system.

The government has indicated that it intends to maintain the conscription system for the duration of the transition process. They appear to accept that the system is breaking down but are committed to maintaining the basic structure of the system.

In the last couple of months there seems to have been a slight increase in the number of prosecutions. It is possible that this indicates the beginning of a new wave of prosecutions.

One consideration here is that we

In the past we have tended to assume that the negotiation process will "take care of" conscription. If we see the "transition process" as being the decisive factor then if the transition happens quickly conscription will be over soon but if the transition process is delayed then conscription will be dragged out.

It may be preferable to operate on a worst case scenario in terms of which we allow that

3. ECC/Richard Rule Court Application

4. Defence Amendment Bill

5. Conscription and Negotiations on a future defence force.

6. Strategy discussion

Focus: non-cooperation

7. Small groups

A: Campuses

B: Co-ordinating and strengthening organisations

C: Peace issues

8. National worker

9. Finances

10. CAS 087 number

11. Petition

12. Policy research

13. Merrick Douglas

14. Conclusion

Collection Number: AG1977

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (ECC)

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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