

REPORT TO NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE END
CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN'S MEMBER ORGANISATIONS IN CAPE TOWN.

1. What is the ECC:

The ECC is a single issue campaign that aims to draw together as many organisations as possible around the call to end conscription. The ECC operates both as an organisation in its own right, with various subcommittees, and as a 'Front' of member organisations. ECC's work is largely campaign-oriented and much of this work is done by the sub-committees.

2. Why are ECC's member organisations important?:

a) The member organisations enable ECC to reach a broad constituency. This structure enables ECC to sensitise other broadly sympathetic organisations to the issue of conscription and militarisation.

b) The member organisations help ensure that the ECC does not become isolated from its constituency, and remains sensitive to the various positions and views within it.

c) The member organisations help lend the ECC 'respectability' particularly in the face of the State's 'criminalisation' campaign against ECC.

d) The member organisations could take on a significant work load or play an important supportive role at times when ECC is operating under difficult circumstances -- such as during the WINS campaign.

e) The member organisations provide a potential method of continuing the ECC's work in the event of a banning or other forms of proscription.

History of ECC in Cape Town:

In July 1983, a Cape Town Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) conference resolved to establish the ECC. The COSG set up an anti-conscription sub-committee mandated to contact a range of organisations who were likely to support the broad objectives of an anti-conscription campaign. These would comprise the 'Front'. At this stage there were three major constituencies represented on the Executive together with COSG: students (in the form of an SRC representative); churches (a WPCO rep) and the Black Sash. COSG played a central role in pulling together the Front and providing direction. The first debate that arose out of the formation of ECC revolved around the problem of approaching organisations to be Front members. The approach was fairly haphazard with not all organisations were clear about the ECC's target constituency (i.e. those directly affected by conscription).

The ECC started meeting regularly from November 1983, during which the white referendum on the new constitution was held. The broader political context was characterised by strong rejection of the Tri-cameral constitution by progressive organisations and a fear that conscription would be extended to 'coloureds' when the new system was implemented.

During the first six months some church organisations, particularly those with a Black mass membership, raised questions about ECC's constituency being exclusively white. As a result there were some withdrawals from the Front although these were not antagonistic (e.g. the UWC SRC).

The first strategy workshop was held in March 1984, at which the idea of an ECC declaration was born. This workshop drew together 75 people from member organisations. At this stage the Front organisations took ECC very seriously and played a very active role. The period from April to June involved the drawing up of the declaration. At this stage, the aim was to get organisations to endorse the declaration, not necessarily to become Front members. This enabled organisations to show their support for the issues raised by ECC, even if it was inappropriate for them to join the Front formally (e.g. township organisations).

The period July to August saw careful assessment of the Front's structure. There was a conscious approach to various organisations. In May the Observatory Area Committee of the UDF joined the Front after being specifically requested to do so. In July and August the Anglican Board of Social Responsibility and the Gardens Area Committee became members.

Since then, organisations have only been drawn into the Front where there is a strong basis for membership of ECC. An example of this is Koeberg Alert. Koeberg Alert's membership arose from a discussion between the contact committee and KA in mid-1985, when both organisations hosted a joint open forum.

Until September 1984, ECC operated exclusively as a Front with no sub-committees. All participants were members or representatives of Front organisations. This caused a problem when ECC needed activists who were not prioritizing the work of the organisations they represented.

In May 1984 these difficulties had already become apparent during the Namibia Campaign. COSG had to set up an ad-hoc

Namibia Action Group to do the campaign work. This committee consisted exclusively of COSG people. A second problem area was that of recruitment. The Namibia campaign only recruited one person, who joined ECC through COSG. It became clear that ECC could and should recruit as an organisation in its own right.

Sub-committees began to form -- but only when there was a particular need that had to be met. 'Media' was the first sub-committee formed in September 1984, followed by 'Culture' in December/January 1984 when a concert was held, then 'Schools' early in 1985. 'Churches' grew out of the 'Troops out Campaign' in September/October 1985.

Up till the time of ECC's formal launch in 1984, individuals could participate in ECC either through a member organisation of the 'Media' sub-committee. The launch showed that people wanted to join who did not have a base in either.

This led to the decision that people could either join the ECC through a member organisation or a sub-committee. There was not to be general membership at this stage. However, ECC was already being dominated by ECC activists rather than representatives of member organisations -- although Front organisations still undertook specific tasks (e.g. Black Sash pickets). ECC made efforts to keep member organisations informed by circulating minutes of General Body meetings and campaign literature to representatives. Sympathetic organisations, from within the Front and beyond, were invited to participate in campaigns. At public meetings, representatives from member organisations as well as others were invited to sit on the platform.

By mid 1985 the composition of ECC was beginning to cause tensions. The existing sub-committees -- Media, Culture, Schools and Contact -- were expressing a need to have an active say in the running of the ECC. This culminated in a workshop where it was agreed that sub-committees would be represented on the ECC executive. (The last two executives voted in by the ECC have consisted primarily of sub-committee members with only one representative from a member organisation).

The workshop also recommended that ECC policy decisions would be made by all Front organisations and sub-committees having one vote. This policy was accepted and implemented on the Young Progs issue.

In October/November 1984 the issue of contact with the Young Progs was raised, when the YPs made contact with the ECC. The ECC Executive agreed to meet the YPs and discuss general matters. However four representatives of ECC's member organisations expressed opposition to the proposed meeting. (At that point four reps carried a lot of weight). The planned talks were suspended and member organisations were asked to discuss it. A workshop was held in December 1984 and the decision was taken not to talk. ECC activists and some organisations believed this decision was incorrect but the unity of the Front was the priority at this point. [In retrospect it transpired that two of the four organisations were divided on the issue. However, their ECC representatives happened to be on the left flank of these organisations.] This was a case where the representatives of member organisations, or the organisations themselves, made a decision that was not

felt to be in the ECC's interests. There was a measure of tension between the member representatives and the sub-committees which again became an issue in 1985 and 1986.

In May 1985 the issue of the Young Progs was raised again. Representatives of different organisations were asked to get mandates on the issue. Two of the four organisations that had previously opposed discussions, (WPCC and BSR, abstained. Officially no organisations took a hardline position. ECC supported a proposal of informal contact with the YPs. The Student Union for Christian Action (SUCA) then resigned as a member. This was done in a 'comradely' spirit and space was left for future co-operation. TEAM did not support informal talks but did not withdraw (although since then they have not attended meetings).

The YP debate arose again in March 1986 when they formally applied for ECC membership. The ECC delayed discussing the application several times to avoid divisions in the organisation. The issue was avoided during the 'Working for a Just Peace' campaign for the same reason. The imposition of the State of Emergency in June caused a further delay. Eventually the issue was discussed, and both sub-committee's and member organisations gave their representatives mandates on the issue. The application was opposed by the UDF, but the area committees remain members of ECC. Their membership is, however, due for review. Opposition has also emanated from certain quarters within the WPCC, where proposals were made that the organisation withdraw from ECC for several reasons, including the YP's membership. This issue has not finally been resolved. However a WPCC Commission of Inquiry into its membership of ECC has recommended that the WPCC should not end its membership while

ECC is under pressure from the State.

The ECC has found it useful to have good relationships with organisations in black areas, but it can sometimes be a hindrance to have them as member organisations. Informal or structures can be used to establish and maintain contact.

The best Front work has been when Front organisations have themselves had militarisation groups (e.g. the Observatory area committee, the Conscription Action Group and present attempts in Black Sash).

ECC has played a very active role within some member organisations: e.g. house-meetings held for Sash and Women's Movement for Peace members. ECC also assisted in the painting of two banners for Sash.

We have recently seen some resurgence of member organisations, with member organisations taking on ECC work: e.g. the role of Sash and WMP at the Peace Picnic. In addition representatives of the Young Progs, Sash, the Observatory Area Committee played an important role in helping ECC hold a public meeting on December 3 1986 after nine activists had been detained and many more were in hiding.

Present Front Membership of ECC Cape Town (in alphabetic order):

Anglican Board of Social Responsibility.

Black Sash.

Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.

Civil Rights League.

Koeberg Alert.

Methodist Christian Citizenship Department.

NUSAS.

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

TEAM (The Ecumenical Action Movement).

UCT SRC.

UDF Gardens.

UDF Observatory/Claremont.

Western Province Council of Churches.

Womens' Movement for Peace.

Young Progressives.

Active Members of ECC are:

ABSR, Black Sash, Civil Rights League, Koeberg Alert, Quakers, UDF Gardens, UDF Observatory/Claremont, Womens' Movement for Peace and Young Progressives.

Assessment of the Work of the 'Front'

While the concept of a 'Front' has worked reasonably well for ECC in Cape Town, there is still a vast scope for improvement in all areas covered in Section 2 above:

a) Reaching a broader constituency:

While the member organisations have enabled ECC to raise a broader constituency than would otherwise have been possible, there is much room for improvement. The issue of conscription and militarisation could be raised more actively within existing member organisations (particularly 'sleeping' members) and within other potential member organisations. Ultimately, ECC faces a problem of how to include sympathetic members of the public who are neither members of 'Front' organisations or a sub-committee. The issue of general 'ECC membership' is under discussion.

b) Sensitising ECC to its constituency:

The Front has played an important (although certainly not exclusive) role in sensitising ECC to the political realities of the conscripted constituency. (e.g. it does not dismiss the election campaign as irrelevant but uses it to its own advantage). However there is still much many Front organisations can do to familiarise ECC with alternative 'strategic logics' in South African politics and make an input to the strategy/principle/tactics debate within ECC.

c) 'Respectability':

This area has been, to a large extent, successfully executed. Representatives have in many cases placed the issue of conscription high on the discussion agenda of their organisations (e.g. Sash and Quakers). The dissemination of ECC's position, in small measure through the member organisations, has dramatically changed the public perception of conscription. Up till the early 1980s conscription was accepted with little question. This is no longer the case -- despite the Government's attempts to criminalise opposition to conscription. The support of many long-established organisations for the campaign against conscription seems certainly to have played a part in preventing the Government succeeding in its objectives.

d. Member organisations can carry a significant work load for ECC in times of crisis:

This happened in particular during the WINS campaign at the end of 1986. However, it was quite clear that this area required considerable work, co-ordination and planning. The Front organisations within ECC intend to meet and co-ordinate plans for a re-occurrence of such circumstances. One suggestion is that

'militarization interest groups' are formed within member organisations, where appropriate, to act in part as an ECC support network.

e. Keeping ECC's work alive in the event of a banning:

This potential of the Front equally requires planning and forethought. In the event of a banning, the extent to which ECC can keep its ideas alive will be the extent to which they are taken up independently by member organisations. Extensive preparations should be conducted now for such an eventuality.

A crucial area of front work that has not yet been included in this paper is ECC's participation in other front structures - e.g. the 23 organisations that formed an 'anti-emergency' front in 1985, and a group of orgs working in the white community who have met regularly throughout the present emergency. The question of ECC as a front working in a front has been discussed, but so long as it is relevant, useful and important for ECC to participate in other 'fronts' we have continued to do so. Other examples would be the 'SADF raids' meeting held in May '86, hosted by SASH, UDF + ECC and a number of other orgs.

Also, a technicality, there was a long drawn out, tedious process of working out the procedure of voting in an executive. Subcomm's (some of them) seemed to want more say than 1 vote for them & 1 vote for each front org. Eventually, though, that's what we decided to do. Other procedures were felt to be either politically incorrect or just too complicated.

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