

**THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN 1983-1988: A STUDY OF WHITE  
EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID**

by

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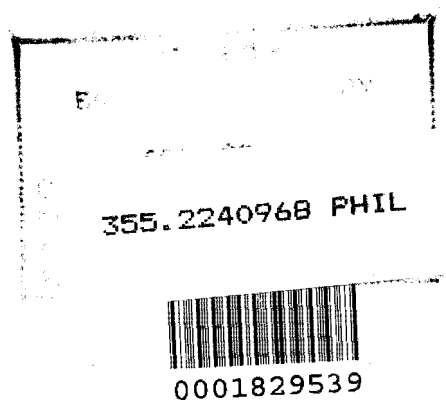
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I declare that "The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



## **Preface**

The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was a unique part of the anti-apartheid movement. Emerging from within the politically dominant white group itself, the ECC mounted opposition which threatened the apartheid state in an increasingly vulnerable area.

While there is existing literature on the ECC, much of it emerged in the 1980s and had a highly proselytising tone, reflecting on the negative impact of militarisation on white society, and attempting to drum up support for the ECC. Other studies considered the ECC in the broad context of conscientious objection, or the anti-apartheid struggle, offering little insight into the peculiar challenges facing the organisation, or the particular opposition threat it posed.

This study offers a contribution to understanding of the ECC by exploring new sources. Military commentators insisted that military manpower was not an issue during the 1980s. However, the Defence Force records currently open for research suggest that manpower was an issue of significant concern, particularly during the township uprisings of 1985 and 1986.

Secondly, analysis of popular magazines demonstrates that escapism was an integral part of white culture in this period. This has significant implications for the ECC. Rather than countering a culture of militarism, much of its work lay in encouraging whites to acknowledge and articulate the pain and frustrations caused by conscription, which in turn encouraged calls for change.

Thirdly, investigation of newspaper articles indicates the difficulty of anti-conscription opposition. White security fears remained a potent force, limiting the ability of the ECC to penetrate white society as a whole. The press offers a unique indication of where the ECC was successful in winning white support.

Lastly, the ECC's use of popular culture was a highly significant aspect of its work. While much of the performance work is not part of the permanent historical record, the graphic legacy of the ECC has been preserved but has been analysed only partially to date.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people who have contributed towards this research:

I have been so impressed by the willingness and enthusiasm of the library and archival staff who encouraged me to use their facilities to the full. I would like to thank my joint supervisor Dr F.A.Mouton, and particularly my supervisor Nicholas Southey who has been tremendously helpful in so many ways, from gaining access to Defence Force archives to offering consistently constructive criticism, and perhaps most importantly, patiently redirecting my many moans and whimpers into more productive activities!

I have a particular debt of gratitude to those members of the ECC who shared their perspectives and experiences with me. Your input gave a whole new dimension to my thinking and I am very grateful for your time. To any ECC activists who read this: I am sure there will be aspects of this work with which you disagree, and areas you feel should have received more attention. Nevertheless, I hope it also brings you a renewed sense of achievement. The work of the ECC remains a model for the post-apartheid period too, demonstrating that people can and should take responsibility for the state of their society, and work courageously and creativity for justice, despite the institutional monoliths which obstruct such efforts and the rampant self-interest which governs all human societies.

On a personal note I would like to thank my dear friend Margi. Without the stimulation of your company, and the example of your commitment to choosing integrity over compromise, I would never have had the courage to begin. To my husband Doug, your unfailing kindness and confidence in me have rescued me from many moments of feeling completely overwhelmed, and the fact that this is finished is due to your consistent support and encouragement. Apologies to Robyn and Garth for the many periods of distraction, growls, snarls and general computer hogging, but please note: even snails get there in the end! I also owe a great deal to Merriam Mokhare, whose ability to keep domestic chaos firmly at bay gave me space and time to work.

I would like to dedicate this study to my dad, who once said that no normal person could use a word as pretentious as "exacerbate". You taught me to enjoy long philosophical journeys, and although you did not see the end of this one, it's been quite a ride!

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## Summary

The apartheid state was vulnerable to the opposition of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) on two fronts. From 1967 universal white male conscription was introduced, and progressively increased until 1984. This indicated the growing threat to the apartheid state from regional decolonisation which offered bases for the armed liberation movement. From 1977 a policy of "reformed apartheid" attempted to contain internal black opposition through socio-economic upliftment, but the failure of this containment intensified the need for military coercion. Minority conscription created an ongoing manpower challenge, which the ECC exacerbated by making the costs of conscription explicit, thus encouraging non-compliance and emigration.

Secondly, the National Party used a security discourse to promote unity among whites, offsetting both its conscription demands and its decreased capacity to win white political support through socio-economic patronage. After the formation of the Conservative Party in 1982, the state faced conflicting demands for stability from the right, and for reform from the left. The ECC's opposition intensified these political differences, and challenged conscription on moral grounds, particularly the internal deployment of the SADF after 1984.

Through its single-issue focus the ECC was able to sidestep divisions which plagued existing anti-apartheid opposition, uniting a variety of groups in national campaigns between 1984 and 1988. Since it could not afford to accommodate the ECC's demands, and in view of growing white acceptance of aspects of the ECC's opposition, the state repressed the ECC to limit its public impact.

By 1988 – in a climate of growing white discontent around the material and personal costs of conscription, economic decline, political instability and conscript deaths in Angola – the ECC's call for alternatives to military conscription encouraged a broader range of anti-conscription sentiment, prompting the state to ban it.

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## List of Abbreviations

African National Congress	ANC
Anti-conscription committee (UDF)	ACC
citizen force	CF
Committee on South African War Resistance	COSAWR
conscientious objector	CO
Conscientious Objector Support Group	COSG
Conscription Action Group	CAG
Conservative Party	CP
Eindig Nasionale Diensplig	END
End Conscription Campaign	ECC
Institute for a Democratic South Africa	IDASA
International Year of the Youth	IYY
Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee	JODAC
Joint Management Centre	JMC
Lesbian and Gay Organisation	Lago
National Democratic Movement	NDM
National Party	NP
National Student Federation	NSF
National Union for the Total Independence of Angola	UNITA
National Union of South African Students	NUSAS
Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk	NGK
Pan African Congress	PAC
permanent force	PF
Progressive Federal Party	PFP
Rand Afrikaans Universiteit	RAU
South African Catholic Bishops' Conference	SACBC
South African Council of Churches	SACC
South African Defence Force	SADF
South African Police	SAP
State Security Council	SSC
Student Representative Council	SRC
South West African People's Organisation	SWAPO
South West Africa Territorial Force	SWATF
Truth and Reconciliation Commission	TRC
United Democratic Front	UDF
United Nations	UN
United States of America	USA
University of Cape Town	UCT
University of South Africa	UNISA
War Resisters International	WRI
War Resisters League	WRL
World Council of Churches	WCC

## Chapter One

The role of the South African  
Defence Force in perpetuating  
the apartheid state.

It is the overall contention of this thesis that the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) posed a unique oppositional challenge to the apartheid state between 1983 and 1988. This chapter will examine how the apartheid state became increasingly dependent on the South African Defence Force, which, in turn, relied heavily on conscripted white manpower, making the state vulnerable to a call to end conscription from within the white community.

Initially there was little white opposition to conscription. The use of military power had been an integral part of the colonisation process in southern Africa, so that whites had a long history of advancing their values and interests by force. By the time South Africa was constituted in 1910, not only did whites uncritically assume their political right to rule the territory, they also regarded the protection of their own interests against competing claims from other groups within South Africa as part of the function of the defence apparatus of the state.<sup>1</sup> The Union Defence Force, created in 1912, therefore limited the registration of soldiers, and hence the right to bear arms, to whites.<sup>2</sup> However, because white numbers were low as a proportion of the total population, and because whites contributed significantly to the country's relatively small tax base, conscription was the only means to supply sufficient numbers of soldiers in times of crisis, while keeping the economy functioning.

At a time when European countries were increasingly differentiating between the minimum force expected of police within the country and the maximum force deployed by the army against external enemies, in South Africa the white community thus classed all threats to its privilege as the legitimate targets of the state's security apparatus.<sup>3</sup> Underlying whites' common demand for racially based privilege and security, however, were divisions along class, political, cultural, language and geographic lines, which the demands of conscription had the potential to exacerbate. Consequently, South African men participated on a voluntary basis in both World Wars, as the governments of the day chose not to confront the divisive potential of conscription for external wars.<sup>4</sup>

When whites' exclusive political and preferential economic access to power was formalised in apartheid legislation after 1948, the need to protect white privilege by force intensified. Political exclusion and socio-economic restrictions helped focus black opposition in mass protests like the 1952 Defiance Campaign and built bridges between the African and Indian Congress movements. The apartheid state therefore reconstituted the defence force to serve its

<sup>1</sup> In many ways the apartheid state merely formalised existing segregation and racially based exclusion from economic and political power. As Beinart comments, current events were "situated in context of long-established historical patterns of violence". W. Beinart, "Political and collective violence", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1992, p. 456.

<sup>2</sup> This was despite the qualified franchise in the Cape and the request of coloureds to serve. S.B. Spies & B.J. Liebenberg, *South Africa in the twentieth century* (Pretoria, J.L. van Schaik, 1993) p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Magistrates frequently received "reports of agitation and subversive activities" where white fears of black uprisings led whites to demand a greater supply of arms or the protection of the Union Defence Force. A. Seegers, *The military in the making of South Africa* (London, Taurus, 1996) pp. 23, 37 & 48.

<sup>4</sup> Spies & Liebenberg, *South Africa in the twentieth century*, p. 285.

growing containment needs. The Defence Act (Act 44 of 1957) established a South African Defence Force (SADF) comprising permanent force (PF), citizen force (CF) and commando components, as well as an officer, permanent force, citizen force and national reserve.

Initial defence demands were light as the National Party (NP) built its power base. In 1957, for example, when the NP had less than 60 per cent of the vote, it relied primarily on the South African Police (SAP), with the SADF only mandated to call-up 7 000 men and to train each intake over a three-month period, despite the provision of the Defence Act that all white males between the ages of 17 and 55 were liable for training and service. Similarly, commando units were set up for short notice service, but until 1967 commando service was voluntary.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, conscription was the point at which whites "paid" for the privileges of apartheid, setting up a critical contradiction within the apartheid state. On the one hand the NP was increasingly successful politically through its servicing of white needs, but on the other hand white privilege could only be maintained by the state making the unique demand on its white constituency that it contain the disgruntlement of the excluded majority by shouldering the primary defence burden.

Conscription thus set up a cost:benefit ratio with political risks for the NP. The first major increase in conscripted manpower occurred in response to black protests following the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, when the SADF intake was raised from 7 000 to 20 000 and the training period increased from three to nine months.<sup>6</sup> Although white South Africa was badly frightened by Sharpeville, the state was able to regain control through a combination of force and repressive legislation, which progressively outlawed black opposition. After the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) in 1960, both movements calculated that they would have to counter the violence of the state with armed resistance, but here, too, the state was able to raise significantly the costs of opposition through legislation which made sabotage a capital offence.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly punitive legislation and an expansion of the powers of the police meant that by 1964 the leadership of both the major opposition movements, the ANC and the PAC, was either imprisoned or in exile.<sup>8</sup> The state's use of force in the early 1960s thus proved a highly successful containment strategy against internal opposition, while the state's heavy reliance on the SAP meant that the burden on the white electorate was not too heavy. An economic boom further allowed the state to absorb white

<sup>5</sup> Section 67 of the Defence Act allowed the Minister of Defence to make up by ballot the difference between the men required and those who volunteered for service. *Statutes of the Union of South Africa* (Parow, Cape Times Ltd, 1957) part 1, no.1-44, pp.528-556 & 586.

<sup>6</sup> *Out of step: war resistance in South Africa* (London, CIIIR, 1989) p.55. *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (TRC) (Cape Town, TRC, 1998) vol.4, p.246.

<sup>7</sup> Spies & Liebenberg, *South Africa in the twentieth century*, pp.405-407.

<sup>8</sup> G. Cawthra, *Brutal force: the apartheid war machine* (London, COSAWR, 1986) p.16.



discontent through patronage, so that despite increased conscription demands the NP's parliamentary majority grew between 1961 and 1966.<sup>9</sup>

However, from the mid 1960s South Africa faced new threats from a changing regional context as black self-government began to replace colonial rule. Neighbouring Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland became independent, and wars of liberation broke out, beginning with Angola in 1961, followed by Mozambique in 1964, and Zimbabwe and Namibia in 1966. Decolonisation increased the significance of the apartheid state's military capability because it ended the protective *cordon sanitaire* of white-ruled states which had limited the reach of the exiled ANC and PAC within South Africa. The 1975 independence of Angola and Mozambique, in particular, increased the likelihood of liberation movements setting up bases in these countries to mount "armed propaganda" operations into Namibia and South Africa.

As black states achieved greater political and diplomatic influence they campaigned against apartheid. In 1963 the Organisation of African Unity was formed and by 1969 had developed the Lusaka Accord which committed 13 states in the region to support the international campaign to isolate South Africa, and called for support for regional armed struggles. As newly independent African states began to take their places in the United Nations (UN), they also encouraged South Africa's traditional western allies to oppose apartheid more actively, and South Africa found itself increasingly isolated internationally. By 1963 the UN imposed a non-mandatory arms embargo, following its 1962 call for economic and diplomatic sanctions against South Africa, while the continued South African administration of Namibia also drew concerted international disapproval.<sup>10</sup>

This combination of growing international isolation, decreasing diplomatic leverage, and the increased regional threat posed by decolonisation encouraged the apartheid state to strengthen its capacity for forceful containment. Defence expenditure rose from R44 million to R210 million between 1960 and 1964. By 1968 Armscor had been established to produce or procure the SADF's military requirements and within ten years the South African military machine had become one of the "most modern and effective" in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>11</sup> South Africa also began to seek alternative sources of essential resources like oil, and to stockpile against the possibility of further sanctions.

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<sup>9</sup> The NP won 65 per cent of the seats in the 1961 election and 76 per cent in the 1966 election. T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) (London, Macmillan, 1991) pp.564-565.

<sup>10</sup> The UN General Assembly declared South Africa's continued presence in Namibia illegal in 1966, and the International Court of Justice made an official ruling to this effect in 1971. Cawthra, *Brutal force: the apartheid war machine*, pp.13 & 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

As South Africa was increasingly unable to influence the course of regional decolonisation through diplomatic channels, so it became more committed to military intervention, particularly to contain the opposition of the Namibian liberation group, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), and to mould the course of Namibian independence to create a friendly buffer state. Similarly, its lack of diplomatic or economic leverage in Angola encouraged South Africa to use the SADF in 1974 to attempt to manipulate the independence power struggle in Angola by backing the guerrilla group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The failure of this initiative to install UNITA as a "friendly" black government merely increased the state's perception of the importance of a strong military capability, particularly in the context of the withdrawal of western powers from the region, growing international pressure for a settlement in Namibia, and the arrival of Cuban troops in Angola.<sup>12</sup>

However, the increased regional threat meant the apartheid state could no longer rely primarily on the SAP for security. By 1967 the apartheid state was forced to put into effect the provision of the 1957 Defence Act for universal white male conscription. In 1972 the SADF increased conscript training from nine to 12 months with a subsequent CF obligation of 19 days per year for five years in order to have sufficient manpower to contain the growing dissatisfaction in Namibia. In 1971, for example, 20 000 people went on strike and SWAPO attempted to make political capital out of this discontent by intensifying its attacks. By 1973 the SADF had replaced the SAP as occupying force in northern Namibia, and by 1975 it had taken overall responsibility for the counter-insurgency war, and conscripts now faced a three-month operational camp in Namibia as part of their national service.<sup>13</sup>

By the 1970s the apartheid state also saw a resurgence of internal black protest, fuelled by a new generation of leadership, the empowering ideas of Black Consciousness, and the anger generated by the oppression of apartheid policies. Beginning with the Durban strikes of 1972/1973, protest culminated in the Soweto riots of June 1976. While the security forces regained control, the import-dependent South African economy was hurt by capital flight and the threat of further sanctions implicit in the successful passage of a mandatory UN arms embargo in 1977. Future economic growth demanded a greater pool of consumers and skilled workers than current apartheid policies could provide, as well as conflict-resolution mechanisms. The riots also significantly strengthened South African liberation movements operating outside South Africa. The ANC, in particular, was boosted by growing international recognition and aid, as well as exiles seeking military training.

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<sup>12</sup> By 1975 Britain and France unilaterally dissolved long-standing defence agreements with South Africa. Even the United States of America, which had initially supported attempts to avert a Marxist government in Angola, withdrew from the region by the end of 1975 and the senate passed the Clark Amendment, ending military assistance to groups like UNITA. R. Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa: regional dynamics of decolonisation 1945-1990* (London, Kegan Paul, 1993) pp.78-79, 109.

<sup>13</sup> *Out of step*, p.55. TRC, vol.3, p.17.

This convergence of internal and external opposition to apartheid intensified the apartheid state's reliance on military solutions, leading to a further extension of conscription. In 1977 national service was effectively doubled, with the initial service period increased from one to two years, and the CF camp commitment increased from 19 days annually served over five years, to 30 days served over eight years. The SADF expected that a longer initial training period would triple the usefulness of units, cut down on transport costs and the operational dislocation which resulted from frequent changes of manpower, and thus decrease the burden on the economically active sector: the CF and the commandos.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the extension of service, manpower remained a problem for the army. Effective numbers were back under the 1976 figures by 1979,<sup>15</sup> but operational commitments continued to increase with continuous occupation in Namibia,<sup>16</sup> including 14 military bases along the Angolan border and the extension of *de facto* martial law as far south as Windhoek, as well as a situation of "escalating/de-escalating conflict intensity",<sup>17</sup> which required flexible manpower resources to mount both counter-insurgency and conventional operations. The 1978 passage of UN resolution 435 further increased the pressure for Namibian independence. In turn, this encouraged the apartheid state to put renewed emphasis on the military containment of SWAPO's liberation struggle in order to install a government friendly to South Africa, which could then be expected to block ANC incursions into South Africa.

As the apartheid state was increasingly forced to rely on military containment, so this changed the conscription cost:benefit equation among the white electorate. CF commitments in particular meant economic and social disruption for whites. While the 1957 Defence Act prohibited employers from penalising employees facing national service, this was difficult to prove, and white unions began to complain that some potential employers were prejudiced against white candidates because of the disruption of their military commitments. Even when employers kept jobs open, they were not obliged to make up the difference in pay. In a period with rising inflation and a slowing economy, this could mean financial hardship for conscripts. Graduates serving their two years often found that while their professional

<sup>14</sup> Documentary Service Directorate of the South African National Defence Force (DSD) Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, report on the extension of the national service system 1977.

<sup>15</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.5, box 46, memorandum on manpower 8 March 1979. Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 101/5/1/B, box 394, statistics of those called up 14 August 1979. The navy and air force received four times as many applications as they could use, but the army continued to struggle with manpower provision.

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
army	33 000	37 000	45 280	51 010	41 378	39 604
airforce	-	316	1 521	2 393	690	2 569
navy	701	986	1 014	1 217	1 247	2 155
medical	510	340	680	540	520	850
total	34 211	38 642	48 495	55 160	43 835	45 178

<sup>16</sup> J. Barber & J. Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy: the search for status and security 1945-1988* (Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1990) p.313.

<sup>17</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, memorandum on manpower 8 March 1979.

organisations were prepared to recognise appropriate service, the SADF preferred to use them as military leaders than to utilise their professional skills. Business, too, complained about the impact of camps, while women's groups began to express concern at the impact of extended periods of military service on family life.<sup>18</sup>

Elements within the white community began to demonstrate their dissatisfaction at the state's conscription demands by withholding their labour. Some responded by avoidance. Non-registration and non-reporting accounted for some 3 904 and 4 622 men respectively in the 1980 intakes. Perhaps the most common form of resistance was not notifying the SADF of changes of address. Since the onus was on the SADF to prove a conscript had received his call-up before he could be prosecuted for not serving, this carried very little risk. There was also an increase of around 8 000 exemption applications between 1974 and 1978, leading to a SADF directive that the Exemption Board tighten its conditions. School leavers applying for passports had to seek the authority of the SADF, those renouncing South African citizenship now had to provide documentary proof they were leaving, and the SADF uncovered a bribery scam designed to avoid service. Rising white emigration figures were further evidence of resistance to conscription.<sup>19</sup>

Heavier conscription demands also undermined the morale of those who continued to serve. Among serving men the SADF noted an increase in "welfare" cases, which included social, economic and psychological problems exhibited by troops. The nature of the conflict meant that counterinsurgency units in particular were continually in demand for camps, leading to complaints of unequal service. Moreover, manpower needs sometimes meant that units served three-month camps instead of the prescribed 30 days, but were still only credited with 30 days,<sup>20</sup> as Defence Minister General Magnus Malan claimed that if full credit was given the effective troop strength would decrease so rapidly the SADF would be unable to undertake defence tasks.<sup>21</sup> Numerous letters to the SADF identifying particular individuals or groups as avoiding service were thus not just evidence of personal vindictiveness and xenophobia, but also of a growing sense that national service was a burden, and anger when this was perceived to be unfairly shared.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.5, box 46, Federation of Women's Institutes resolution 25 November 1977. Vol.6, box 46, memorandum for submission to Assacom Defence Liaison Committee 18 May 1978, letter from General Magnus Malan to the South African Association of Municipal Workers 29 February 1980. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.45, box 215, numerous letters from various conscripts to the Minister of Defence requesting area-bound status for professional reasons, 3 October 1984, 2 November 1984. Vol.55, box 233 & vol.60, letters from conscripts, spouses and parents to the Minister of Defence complaining about the economic hardships caused by national service, 26 May 1983, 24 January 1984. J. Hanlon, *Beggar your neighbours* (London, CIIIR, 1986) p.54.

<sup>19</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, memorandum from the Minister of Defence on the tightening of conditions for exemption 29 September 1979. Vol.5, box 46, note regarding bribery charges 12 January 1979. Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/4, vol.31, box 86, memorandum from the Exemption Board 4 March 1980.

<sup>20</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.8, box 47, letter to Minister of Defence 3 March 1982. The author of this and other letters written by members of the public will not be named in this study as they were not writing to a public forum.

<sup>21</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.8, box 47, letter from the Minister of Defence to a member of the public who had complained about the burden of conscription 3 March 1982.

<sup>22</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, letters exposed neighbours, family members, immigrants and various ethnic groups as failing to serve, see for example under 16 December 1976 and 3 August 1977. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.60, box 234, numerous letters to the Minister of Defence, often giving identity numbers or addresses, 13 February 1984, 18 April 1984. Vol.65, box 236, letter to Minister of Defence 10 March 1985.

Critics argued that the SADF should augment the PF. By 1980 the PF stood at 7.5 per cent of the total SADF, but despite attempts to increase it, numbers continued to decline through the 1980s. Similarly, the attempt to draw white women into non-combatant posts did not attract the required numbers.<sup>23</sup> Manpower projections in 1980 thus indicated that further increases in white conscription would be necessary.<sup>24</sup> The SADF explored the option of conscripting other race groups. The tricameral parliament, established in 1983, gave a segregated vote to coloureds and Indians, and at first the SADF hoped to use this to justify extending conscription to these groups too, potentially more than doubling the numbers available.<sup>25</sup> However, the large-scale rejection of "reformed" apartheid by these communities,<sup>26</sup> together with the costs of setting up additional training facilities, and long-standing white fears about arming blacks, made the extension of conscription beyond the white community impractical and politically risky. While a poor economic climate led some blacks, coloureds and Indians voluntarily to seek employment with the SADF, and blacks were absorbed into non-combatant roles in the Supporting Service Corps, these numbers also were not substantial enough to decrease the SADF's dependence on white conscription.<sup>27</sup> Thus while a white critic suggested to the SADF that a "system offering wider involvement to the population as a whole seems to be more appropriate for a country whose very survival is threatened",<sup>28</sup> only whites were benefiting sufficiently to be willing to defend the status quo. Most blacks continued to view the apartheid system, rather than the liberation movements, as the enemy.<sup>29</sup>

The state's continued reliance on white conscription thus posed a threefold problem. It forced the state to make continuous manpower demands on the most educated and highly skilled group to the detriment of the economy. The limited size of the conscripted group was increasingly disproportionate to the growing threat it was expected to contain. The white group only made up 16.7 per cent<sup>30</sup> of the total population of South Africa, and its numbers were

<sup>23</sup> P. Johnson & D. Martin, *Destructive engagement* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1986) pp.177-8. DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6 102/12/B, vol.2, box 519, toewysing van NDPs 23 November 1982, despite a recruitment campaign intended to attract some 150 applicants, only 50 women applied in 1983, and of these only 33 were suitable.

<sup>24</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/2, vol.7, box 47, SADF projection of manpower needs October 1980.

<sup>25</sup> The 1981 attempt to reclassify Chinese as whites was a further attempt to expand the small white group of conscripts. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.8, box 47, secret memorandum "Plans for the preparation of the public for changes in the law" 12 November 1982.

<sup>26</sup> Only 30.9 per cent of coloureds and 20.2 per cent of Indians supported the tricameral system in 1983. Spies & Liebenberg, *South Africa in the twentieth century*, p.479.

<sup>27</sup> *White Paper on defence and armament supply* (Cape Town, Government printer, 1977) pp.18 & 30. By 1977 only 1 185 of some 12 392 troops at South West Africa Command were black. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/2, vol.8, box 47, memorandum regarding the accommodation of coloureds and Indians 31 May 1982.

<sup>28</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, letter to the Minister of Defence 28 September 1977.

<sup>29</sup> While the SADF liked to boast it had many more non-white applicants than it could accommodate, this was more a reflection on the accommodation than the numbers. In 1982, for example, 1 500 Indians and coloureds were being trained, while between 2 000 and 3 000 were applying. Commentators also noted that black enlistment for the SADF reflected a worsening economy rather than support for SADF policies. DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, vol.2, box 519, voorligting aan Minister 5 November 1982.

<sup>30</sup> Some official statistics put whites at some 19 per cent of the population, but the artificial exclusion of the "independent" homelands skewed these statistics. W.F. Gutteridge (ed), *South Africa from apartheid to national unity, 1981-1994* (Aldershot, Dartmouth Publishing, 1995) p.170. Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history*, p.370.

further undermined by emigration and a low white birth rate.<sup>31</sup> Lastly, conscription demands created dissatisfaction among whites,<sup>32</sup> threatening the white political cohesion which kept the NP in power.

By 1977 it was clear to military manpower planners that the limits of white conscription had to be addressed. The apartheid state thus introduced a policy of "reformed" apartheid, designed to co-opt blacks through socio-economic upliftment, while containing white dissatisfaction through a threat-based analysis of the conflict, intended to build white cohesion by focusing white attention on the protection of a common self-interest. This strategy clearly indicated how the civilian state's growing reliance on military coercion had led to the incorporation of the military into policy making. "Reformed" apartheid largely reflected the ideas of military counter-insurgency strategist André Beaufre who argued that in order to defeat a guerrilla movement the state must correctly identify the sources of discontent and undermine them with convincing reforms. He claimed that a formula which was 80 per cent political and 20 per cent military would shrink the popular support base of the guerrillas. The state thus had to mobilise all aspects of the power structure to win the hearts and minds of the population.<sup>33</sup>

In presenting the 1977 Defence White Paper to parliament the Minister of Defence linked the idea that the SADF was "one of the most important guarantees for the security of all population groups in our country" to the necessity for "full and worthy opportunities" for all population groups, in the context of continued white "self-determination", which most whites understood as the perpetuation of white political domination.<sup>34</sup> The NP was also attempting to move beyond its predominantly Afrikaner support base by emphasising that "free enterprise and economic growth, not Afrikanerdom and racial hegemony, were at the core of the system to be defended".<sup>35</sup> Military power thus remained critical for influencing the regional balance of power and containing the ANC's ability to mount guerrilla attacks. However, through socio-economic reform the state hoped to co-opt blacks short of political accommodation and facilitate the growth of a stable black middle class, sharing the state's determination to fend off Marxism. "Reformed" apartheid thus recognised both the state's reliance on the SADF and the limitations of the SADF's capability due to its largely conscripted white manpower base, and aimed to contain the contradiction of conscription by co-opting the black majority, thus in the long term lessening the state's reliance on the military, and hence its demands on white conscripts.

<sup>31</sup> The number who emigrated to avoid military service is impossible to ascertain because young men without asset bases were not required to have an emigration allowance and consequently could leave without becoming official statistics. A. Greenblo, "Self-defence", *Finance Week*, vol.32, no.9, 5 March 1987, p.434.

<sup>32</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, letter from Minister of Defence to Head of the Army 16 September 1977.

<sup>33</sup> S. Davis, *Apartheid's rebels* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987) p.159.

<sup>34</sup> *White Paper on defence and armament supply 1977*, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> L. Price, *A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force* (Durban, University of Natal, 1989) p.46.

Instead, the failure of co-option led to increased levels of protest in the black townships in the mid 1980s. Although the state attempted socio-economic upliftment, it did not have the resources to deflect growing levels of black discontent. Rather, economic factors "played a decisive role in fuelling discontent and its translation into organised resistance".<sup>36</sup> Reform also created new opportunities for the expression of black protest, through the establishment of trades union for instance. The state's problems were further exacerbated by the ANC's reactivation of its guerrilla campaign after 1979. As black protest increasingly focused on political exclusion, the apartheid state had no answer but to contain the growing protest militarily, and in September 1984 the SADF was deployed in black townships, in addition to its external containment role.

The SADF's manpower difficulties were exacerbated by this dual deployment, while the burden on white conscripts intensified, increasing white political dissatisfaction. The state's attempted co-option of blacks had lessened its patronage among the white community. Race bars were lifted in the work place, for example. A conservative white breakaway resulted, formalised in the emergence of the Conservative Party (CP) in 1982. The state was thus caught between the demands of the international community, the parliamentary left and white business in South Africa that reform should be faster and more far-reaching, and those of the CP, which focused and encouraged the claims of the white right that the NP had lost control, and could no longer be relied upon to protect white interests. Not only was containment increasingly necessary in the face of failed co-option, it was also critical in order to limit the political threat from the white right. However, containment necessitated further extensions to conscription in 1982, 1983 and 1984, despite the risk of intensifying white dissatisfaction. The inherent contradiction of conscription was becoming increasingly clear.

By 1984 state policy suggested that security concerns were taking precedence over diplomatic, political and economic gains, both reflecting the influence of the military, and indicating the apartheid state's decreasing options. From 1978 the military had moved steadily from the position of policy advisors to becoming an integral part of the executive structures of ex-Defence Minister P.W.Botha's government. Executive authority was strengthened at the expense of traditional party instruments, while the State Security Council (SSC) emerged as the most important cabinet committee, co-ordinating the total strategic planning and policy-making of the state, which was then disseminated to regional and local levels of government through a system of Joint and Sub-Joint Management Centres (JMCs).<sup>37</sup> The SSC was not accountable to the cabinet as other cabinet committees were. Its decisions were neither circulated nor

<sup>36</sup> K. Naidoo in S. Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: no turning back* (London, Macmillan, 1988) p.178.

<sup>37</sup> R. Griffiths, "The South African military: the dilemmas of expanded influence in decision-making", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol.26, no.1-2, 1991, p.82.

subject to confirmation by the full cabinet.<sup>38</sup> The state's heightened threat perception meant that the military were well represented in the SSC, while the definition of "strategic affairs" was significantly broadened, allowing the military to influence a wide range of domestic, regional and international issues, giving substance to analyst Kenneth Grundy's assertion in 1986 that the SADF "is no longer simply an instrument for policy implementation. It is an active participant in policymaking".<sup>39</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that military force became the primary strategy in regional relations. Significantly, five of the 15 JMCs set up to facilitate implementation of SSC policies were aimed outside South Africa, to give force to the 1977 amendment of the Defence Act which allowed for the deployment of troops outside South Africa's borders.<sup>40</sup> While South Africa also used economic leverage to influence neighbours' policies, exploiting historical dependencies and its own strong infrastructure, communications network and energy production,<sup>41</sup> the impact of this was heightened by military destabilisation which targeted Mozambican and Angolan ports and the Benguela railway, enforcing South Africa's dominance with regard to the region's exports and imports.<sup>42</sup>

A military subtext also underlay the foreign policy initiatives of the early 1980s. While the official foreign policy line still addressed regional co-operation, the military established a "cordon of instability",<sup>43</sup> undermining the political and economic structures of the region. Overt raids in Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, and the SADF's use of the surrogate force Renamo in Mozambique were further designed to intimidate these countries into refusing the ANC aid or access.<sup>44</sup>

The 1984 Nkomati accord with Mozambique briefly regained some international diplomatic recognition for South Africa. Yet, when this was sabotaged by the open contempt of General P. van der Westhuizen, who encouraged continued military action in Mozambique, the apartheid state did not reprimand him, and later promoted him to Secretary of the SSC.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the capture of an SADF commando unit on a sabotage mission inside Angola after the 1984 Lusaka Agreement, which promised a South African withdrawal, was further evidence that the apartheid state valued security over diplomatic advantage. Until the mid 1980s international repercussions over these actions

<sup>38</sup> H. Giliomee, "The militarisation of government policy in South Africa", *Indicator*, vol.1, no.2, 1983, pp.16-17.

<sup>39</sup> K. Grundy, *The militarisation of South African politics* (London, Taurus, 1986) pp.1, 4, 5, 11.

<sup>40</sup> R. Davies & D. O'Meara, "Total strategy in Southern Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol.11, no.2, 1985, p.194. Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.212.

<sup>41</sup> Hanlon, *Beggar your neighbours*, p.79.

<sup>42</sup> I.S.R. Msabaha & T.M. Shaw, *Confrontation and liberation in Southern Africa: regional corrections after the Nkomati Accord* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1987) p.182.

<sup>43</sup> Hanlon, *Beggar your neighbours*, p.32.

<sup>44</sup> The SADF armed and trained Renamo in Mozambique from 1980. S. Metz, "The Mozambique National Resistance and South African foreign policy", *African Affairs*, vol.85, no.341, 1986, p.494. G. Cawthra (ed.), *War and resistance* (London, Macmillan, 1994) p.89. Msabaha & Shaw, *Confrontation and liberation in Southern Africa*, p.76.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson & Martin, *Destructive engagement*, p.39.



were limited because of the Cold War concerns of conservative governments in Britain and particularly the United States of America (USA), which made them willing to accept that apartheid could be reformed.<sup>46</sup>

This growing power and influence of the military came at a cost, however. Military containment in the regional context was manpower intensive, demanding a large-scale and long-term deployment of troops. In Angola UNITA required ongoing training and logistical support to face Cuban and Soviet-armed and trained Angolan government troops, while its political ambitions militated against a quick, devastating victory.<sup>47</sup> Attempts to create political alternatives to SWAPO in Namibia failed in 1983 and again in 1988, so the SADF remained committed as an army of occupation there too. Attempts to conscript Namibians were largely thwarted by the low population, resistance, and a lack of instructors. Although the SADF used indigenous units in the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) and Angolan deserters in special units like Koevoet and 32 Battalion, the extent of its manpower requirements meant the SADF continued to rely heavily on its white conscripted forces for the bulk of its manpower provision.

While the SADF described the development of a trained, efficient CF as the primary long-term goal of national service, providing the "backbone of the SADF", the deployment of this group created perhaps the greatest white dissatisfaction.<sup>48</sup> Although the conscription load was supposed to be carried by the three separate sections, where insufficient national servicemen arrived for the initial intake, a double burden was placed on the economically active CF, and, to a lesser degree, the commandos. Although paper strength for a complete deployment in 1981 was 168 000, rising to a projected 225 000 by 1990, the SADF still faced a relatively constant actual availability of some 27 000 national servicemen per year, after an exemption rate of between 30 and 45 per cent, while it faced low reporting figures of 50 per cent in the CF and 36 per cent in the commandos.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, a complete deployment was a doomsday scenario, as it would devastate the economy.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> The USA refused to actively condemn South African actions in Angola, like Operation Protea in 1981, because of the continued Soviet and Cuban presence. Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.277.

<sup>47</sup> Metz, "The Mozambique National Resistance and South African foreign policy", p.507.

<sup>48</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 101/5/1, box 394, memorandum on manpower 6 November 1986, memorandum from the Minister of Defence regarding manpower 26 November 1986. 102/12/B, box 519, a secret memorandum about troop strength from 17 September 1986 showed the national service component at 48 000, the conventionally trained citizen force at 70 000, the citizen force units trained in counter-insurgency at 41 000, and the commandos at 73 000 men. These statistics show the extent to which the SADF relied on ongoing service from men who had already completed their initial training. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.9, box 42, secret memorandum regarding manpower and complaints (undated). Letter of complaint from a businessman to the SADF 10 December 1982. MV/V/61/12/1, vol.11, box 209, report from military secretary Colonel Opperman 18 April 1984.

<sup>49</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.5, box 46, memorandum on troop strength in the Orange Free State 8 March 1979. 61/12/2, vol.7, box 47, letter from the Minister of Defence to the Secretary of the SSC October 1980, projection of manpower needs October 1980; vol.8, box 47, secret memorandum on troop strength (undated).

<sup>50</sup> W. Steenkamp, "The South African Defence Force", *Leadership*, vol.2, no.4, pp.53-55, 60. DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 101/7/1, box 1A, memorandum regarding problems in the commandos 20 June 1984.

Thus while the SADF's allocation of manpower resources, as a proportion of the total white population, rose from 3.1 per cent in 1970 to 8.6 per cent by 1982, increased demands on the SADF, together with limited actual availability, necessitated further extensions of conscription.<sup>51</sup> Given the political dangers of increasing the burden on the white community, this indicated both the intensity of the threat perceived by the apartheid state and its limited options for dealing with it. Defence Amendment Act 103 of 1982 nearly trebled camp commitments, from 240 days over eight years, to 720 days over 12 years, with further obligations in the commandos till age 55, and in the national reserve until age 65. The SADF took pains to prepare the ground for this new legislation, undertaking surveys of conscript opinions, and carefully designing propaganda to accompany the announcement of the changes, suggesting that the apartheid state was well aware of the potential political costs of these further demands on the small pool of white conscripts. SADF communications personnel were told to emphasise the intention of the new legislation to spread the burden more equitably, with credit for service now on a day-for-day basis and three-month camps being limited to alternate years.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the state stressed the threat to the white community, and the need to counter this militarily, encouraging continued white conscription compliance by emphasising the common white self-interest it was defending.

As the apartheid state faced the growing political dangers and practical limitations of white conscription, so it became increasingly unwilling to tolerate the more public white opposition to conscription which developed after 1978. Although conscientious objector (CO) numbers were very small, CO generated considerable national and international publicity.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, by January 1983, despite the SADF claiming to have cut its requirements "to the bone", only 13 053 of the required 17 037 national servicemen (excluding graduates) arrived, suggesting that there were many who expressed their resistance through passive non-compliance, and could be further encouraged by a growing and vocal resistance movement.<sup>54</sup>

Defence Amendment Act 34 of 1983 was therefore intended to nip the developing objector movement in the bud, providing for CO on strictly religious grounds, while extending the period of such alternative service to an effective six

<sup>51</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 101/5/1, box 394, the Minister of Defence was concerned about the impact on white public opinion, overseas investment and the South African economy of deploying reserves and even citizen force troops beyond their fourth cycle of 30 then 90 day camps. In the fifth cycle the unit commander needed the authority of the Minister of Defence or Chief of the SADF to call up troops, while in the sixth cycle troops could only be called up on the direct orders of the Minister of Defence. Moreover, the period for which these troops could be used was limited, there were exemptions, a number were not G1K1 fit for active service, a number did not report, and so the paper strength was whittled down. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.12, box 210, confidential report "Voordrag aan die Minister op 5 Mei oor begrotingsdebatraangeleenthede".

<sup>52</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, vol.4, box 519, voortigting aan Minister 5 November 1982.

<sup>53</sup> CO as an ideological challenge to the state will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>54</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, vol.5, box 520, toekening van Januarie 1983 NDP inname 2 Februarie 1983. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.9, box 42, a secret memorandum on manpower parity (undated, but referring to a recent poll of immigrant leaders, so presumably before the 1984 amendment) noted that the growing incidence of draft dodging meant that approximately 12 000 citizen force members were having to be called up annually to fill the manpower gap. This suggests a much more extensive problem than the SADF ever publicly admitted.

years. Objection on any other grounds was punishable by six years in jail. By significantly increasing the costs of non-compliance, the state hoped to re-assert control over conscripts. In addition, the Non-Effective Unit was created to find defaulters and those who had slipped through administrative gaps, and members of the national reserve were required to take part in a nationwide registration of their current details.<sup>55</sup> Once again, however, while greater administrative efficiency produced a registration of some 6 256 new members in commandos, and the future allocation of 11 654, paper strength did not correspond with reporting figures, which remained low.<sup>56</sup> This suggested that conscription increasingly interfered with career and family commitments to the point that whites withheld service.

By 1984 the state was forced to harness its last untapped source of white manpower.<sup>57</sup> The South African Citizenship Amendment Act (Act 43 of 1984) gave automatic citizenship to white immigrants, making those under the age of 25 liable for military service. Previously this group had not been conscripted as the state had feared losing skilled immigrants, but by 1984 manpower needs were more pressing. Although the SADF quoted its poll of immigrant leaders to demonstrate positive support for this measure, the fact that only 3.19 per cent of immigrants had voluntarily registered for national service indicated that there was not widespread support among the conscripted generation.<sup>58</sup> Rather, the state had to resort to the threat of withdrawing permanent residence status to force compliance after 1984.<sup>59</sup> After exemptions, only between 3000 and 4000 immigrant servicemen were expected to report in 1985, but the SADF was hopeful that the immigrants could be utilised as a "bonus", rather than a stopgap. In addition to easing manpower requirements, the drafting of immigrants was also intended to stop the continuous stream of discontent directed at the SADF as South African whites felt they were carrying an "unfair" burden.<sup>60</sup>

While the liberal newspaper the Star questioned this continuous expansion of the SADF, suggesting that drastic new immigrant measures were not justified in a country "not in a state of war",<sup>61</sup> the ongoing allocation of resources to the SADF was symptomatic of the level of threat perceived by the apartheid state, and its reliance on a military containment of that threat. While its allocation of material resources is difficult to calculate, since SADF expenditure was hidden in the votes of other departments or in the Secret Services Account, which was not open for scrutiny, UN

<sup>55</sup> The state was also able to use its influence in major semi-state organisations like Iscor, to ensure that this took place. Government Gazette, no.1182, 3 June 1983, p.14.

<sup>56</sup> In some areas this was running at between 35 and 60 per cent. DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 101/7/1, box 1A, memorandum about problems in the commandos 20 June 1984. Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 101/5/1/B, box 395, letter to the Minister of Defence from a national serviceman 5 January 1982, the conscript complained to the minister that many of his peers were emigrating as they felt they would never be finished with their military commitments.

<sup>57</sup> By conscripting white women the state would have doubled its labour force, but the cost of duplicating facilities, as well as considerable resistance within the general white population, seem to have limited this avenue.

<sup>58</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.5, box 46, memorandum from the Minister of Defence on the need for parity 6 January 1978.

<sup>59</sup> Grundy, The militarisation of South African politics, p.23.

<sup>60</sup> Once again firms preferred those without military commitments. DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 101/5/1/1, vol.1, box 1A, memorandum about the amendment to the Defence Act 14 September 1984.

<sup>61</sup> The Star 3 September 1982.

analysts estimated that real spending on security could be as much as 35 per cent of the total budget,<sup>62</sup> while other analysts argued that defence expenditure had risen from one-fifth to one-quarter of state spending between 1980 and 1986.<sup>63</sup> Despite the enormous allocation of resources to the SADF and the continuous extension of conscription demands, however, by the mid 1980s the convergence of internal and external opposition to apartheid rule exposed the limits of minority rule by force, while the ever-increasing conscription demands on whites exacerbated the potential for disaffection within the white community.

Moreover, containment was no longer as successful as before. The creation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 led to a wide affiliation of groupings helping to build and focus the growing opposition in the townships, while its grassroots organising structure lessened the impact of the arrest and detention of top leadership.<sup>64</sup> Its community base enabled it to spread rapidly and mobilise widely, and required vast resources to quell. As the Deputy Commissioner in the Police Counter Insurgency Unit complained, "rural areas and small towns...began to experience extensive political unrest, in some cases for the first time ever".<sup>65</sup> Black anger further limited the state's co-option schemes by making collaboration a deadly choice, as township councillors became the targets of township violence. SADF coercion did not quell this anger; rather the SADF itself became a focus of discontent. The use of the SADF as a strikebreaking force, for example, encouraged further "unrest" as organised labour linked security concerns to its demands, like the well-supported two-day general strike in 1984, calling for an end to the police and army presence in the townships.<sup>66</sup> As greater levels of force were needed to suppress protest, containment itself became a source of renewed resistance, providing black martyrs and "funerals-as-resistance".<sup>67</sup>

Growing grassroots opposition in the townships further encouraged greater access and sanctuary for ANC cadres and provided more recruits to train. Although state propaganda insisted unrest was fermented by outside agitators, in fact the ANC was increasingly welcomed and incorporated into the black community. As the ANC was able to re-establish a presence within South Africa, it reinforced its status in the townships by linking guerrilla activities to popular grievances.<sup>68</sup> While the Nkomati Accord cut guerrilla activity from 56 attacks in 1983 to 44 in 1984, attacks increased to 136 in 1985 and 168 in 1986. In 1987 the Minister of Law and Order refused to disclose statistics, but information gathered from press reports suggested they could have been as high as 566, indicating that the ANC was finding new

<sup>62</sup> Grundy, *The militarisation of South African politics*, pp.20-22.

<sup>63</sup> Davis, *Apartheid's rebels*, p.180.

<sup>64</sup> Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.304.

<sup>65</sup> R.L. Jackson (ed), *Security: a national strategy* (Johannesburg, Lex Patria, 1987) p.83.

<sup>66</sup> J. Cock, "A high price for freedom", *Work in Progress*, no.53, April-May 1988, p.20.

<sup>67</sup> Davis, *Apartheid's rebels*, p.90.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155. W.James, *The state of apartheid* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987) pp.53 & 65-66. *S.A. Barometer*, vol.2, no.9, May 20 1988, p.137.

points of refuge and support within South Africa itself.<sup>69</sup> SADF containment thus became increasingly difficult.

Township residents started erecting alternative structures, with street committees and people's courts replacing apartheid rule.<sup>70</sup> Civic self-defence units resisted the incursions of the security forces, while rent, schools and consumer boycotts demonstrated the power of resistance. The ANC's call to make the country ungovernable seemed to have taken hold.

Increased black resistance meant the apartheid state had little option but to continue to pump resources into regaining control militarily, but this ongoing dual deployment of the SADF stretched its manpower capacity to the limit. From 1984 SADF records show a continuous refusal of requests for transfers and deferments due to manpower shortages across the board, a situation which continued into 1985 and 1986. While regional commands in the popular urban centres were overstuffed, fighting units were under-strength.<sup>71</sup>

The necessity of deploying some 35 000 troops in over 97 townships required a significant reliance on the citizen force, so that by 1985 the state was forced to make a further conscription demand: that the length of township camps be doubled from 30 to 60 days.<sup>72</sup> By August 1986 78 of the available 272 companies, including 13 national service companies, were still being deployed inside South Africa, while in September the SADF estimated its requirements at 420 companies per year, nearly 50 per cent more than was available. It estimated that its citizen force and commando units were already maximally deployed and by June it had already deployed the January 1986 intake of national

<sup>69</sup> *S.A. Barometer*, vol.1, no.7, June 5 1987, p.101. Davis, *Apartheid's rebels*, pp.120-125, 145-146.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>71</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.11, box 209, while the Exemption Board was instructed on 30 October 1984 to be as accommodating as possible "in the current economic climate", by mid 1984 the SADF was refusing transfers on the grounds that units were shortstaffed in terms of active troops. As the situation worsened with the continued deployment of troops in the townships so the Exemption Board was told to tighten its policy and a wide range of army divisions continued to refuse transfers. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.37, box 213, refusal by 2 SA Infantry Battalion (Walvisbaai) 30 March 1984. Vol.39, box 214, refusal by 4 SA Infantry Battalion 19 June 1984, Personnel Services Corps 15 June 1984. Vol.40, box 214, refusal by Western Province Command 2 July 1984. Vol.41, box 214, refusal by Southern Transvaal region 1 August 1984. Vol.42, box 215, refusal by 6 SA Infantry Battalion 6 September 1984. Vol.45, box 216, refusal by Regiment Bloemspruit 19 September 1984. Vol.45, box 216, refusal because of a shortage of tank personnel 29 November 1984, refusal by 10 Artillery Brigade 29 November 1984. Vol.47, box 216, refusal by 7 Divisie Mobilisasie Eenheid 13 February 1985. Vol.49, box 217, refusal by Northern SWA Command 11 April 1985. Vol.50, box 217, refusal by 3 SA Infantry Battalion 24 January 1985, notification of Komops personnel shortage. Vol.51, box 218, refusal by 5 SA Infantry Battalion 21 May 1985. Vol.52, box 218, refusal by Pantzerkorps 24 May 1985, 1 Valskembbrigade 16 July 1985. Vol.52, box 218, notification of a critical shortage of artillery men 24 June 1985. Vol.55, box 219, refusal by 8 SA Infantry Battalion 4 September 1985. Vol.58, box 220, refusal of transfer because of the shortage of medical orderlies 17 January 1986, refusal by Armoured Division 6 December 1985. Vol.64, box 222, notification of a critical shortage of infantry personnel at Eastern Transvaal Command 26 June 1986 and in the Eastern Cape 8 July 1986. Vol.65, box 222, even the navy, which was inundated with requests for transfers, was 30 per cent short of personnel by August 1986, and estimated that 17.3 per cent of its intake was "untraceable overseas" 20 August 1986. These shortages were not widely publicised. Rather, from September 1984 refusals were couched in terms of the costs of training the conscript. Chief of the SADF, group 2, 101/5/1/1, box 1A, personnel allocation 21 July 1983

	<i>allocated</i>	<i>originally requested</i>
<i>army</i>	25 832	25 272
<i>airforce</i>	2 400	3 042
<i>navy</i>	940	1 100
<i>medical</i>	1 550	1 829
<i>special services</i>	-	579

<sup>72</sup> *Out of step*, p.55. DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 34C, letter from the Minister of Defence to the Chief of the SADF 13 May 1985.

servicemen.<sup>73</sup> Leadership was also significantly understaffed.<sup>74</sup> The SADF warned that this situation was not sustainable from an "operational, morale [or] economic viewpoint". At the same time SADF records pointed to 80 633 non-effective members. Manpower planners argued that many of these were only absent on paper, and that of the 25 000 it had found, only 10 000 still had service owing. However, further calls from within the SADF for future extensions of national service to enable the SADF to meet the requirements of "present or future projected manpower needs" suggested a problem beyond administrative inefficiency.<sup>75</sup>

The state ultimately regained control by a two-fold strategy. Firstly, from July 1985 a series of states of emergency gave the security forces wide-ranging powers and indemnity, while allowing the state to arrest and detain its opponents indefinitely.<sup>76</sup> Secondly, the state began to foster civil war between the UDF and conservative black elements<sup>77</sup> such as Inkatha, the Zulu cultural organisation which was beginning to be mobilised more directly in political conflict. It also began to train homeland armies from 1986,<sup>78</sup> and deployed some 16 000 "kitskonstables" and municipal policemen as a first line of defence in the townships and rural areas,<sup>79</sup> as well as training 14 black companies with four coloured companies already serving in Namibia by 1986, and using blacks in a full-time capacity in commandos for border control.<sup>80</sup> However, this strategy, too, had limits. While a 1980 SADF memorandum noted that 20 per cent of troops in the operational area were "non-white" and this was expected to increase with time, by 1988 General Malan was forced to admit in parliament that no black volunteers had signed up in 1987.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, demand for rapid and far-reaching change had reached such a pitch in the outside world that sympathetic conservative leaders in Britain and the USA were no longer able to block significant financial and economic sanctions,<sup>82</sup> deepening South Africa's economic decline and the spiral of white discontent and black

<sup>73</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, box 519, secret memorandum about troop strength 17 September 1986. 101/5/1, box 394, memorandum on manpower 6 November 1986, memorandum from the Minister of Defence regarding manpower 26 November 1986.

<sup>74</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.11, box 210, memorandum on the use of graduate national servicemen 14 June 1984. Letter from the Minister of Defence to the Minister of Justice 19 September 1985. In September 1985 the Minister of Justice's request for law graduates to be seconded to his department was refused by General Malan on the grounds that the SADF faced a critical shortage of leadership so that graduates not used in their professional capacity were needed in other leadership positions. Chief of the SADF, group 2, 101/5/1/1, vol.1 box 1A, request from Prison Service for national servicemen 16 May 1983, a similar request from the Prison Service was also turned down on the grounds that secondeering was a "sensitive issue" and the SADF needed graduates for leadership as the growing number of conscripts choosing to study first was depleting the leadership pool.

<sup>75</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, box 519, secret memorandum about troop strength 17 September 1986. 101/5/1, box 394, memorandum on manpower 6 November 1986, memorandum from the Minister of Defence regarding manpower 26 November 1986.

<sup>76</sup> Cawthra, *War and resistance*, p.10.

<sup>77</sup> Black police were trained in anti-terrorist techniques by the SAP and deployed in Namibia. *IRC*, vol 3, pp.17 & 22.

<sup>78</sup> Gutteridge, *South Africa from apartheid to national unity*, p.216.

<sup>79</sup> J. Lonsdale, *South Africa in question* (London, Heineman, 1988) p.69. J. Cock, *Colonels and cadres* (Cape Town, OUP, 1991) p.9.

<sup>80</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.12, box 210, manpower report 5 May 1986. Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 102/12/B, box 519, secret memorandum about troop strength 17 September 1986. 101/5/1, box 394, memorandum on manpower 6 November 1986, memorandum from the Minister of Defence regarding manpower 26 November 1986. Chief of Staff Personnel, group 6, 101/5/1/B, box 394, secret memorandum to bring the Minister of Defence up to date on the manpower position 17 September 1986.

<sup>81</sup> *Weekly Mail* 4 March 1988. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/4, vol.31, box 86, ministerial enquiry regarding national service 4 March 1980.

<sup>82</sup> Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.323.

frustration.<sup>83</sup> At the same time that the NP faced intensifying international pressure for reform, it lost eight seats in the 1987 election. As the CP took over as the official opposition the pressure from conservatives within the country increased.<sup>84</sup>

Conscription exacerbated these growing white political divisions. Businesses continued to complain about the withdrawal of personnel, particularly when they felt these men had not been deployed on vital matters. Repeated heartfelt pleas came from parents and spouses for exemptions and transfers, suggesting that conscription was playing havoc with family life, studies and careers. While SADF personnel officers privately made unsympathetic recommendations that mothers "learn to live with it", and sarcastic comments about the number of mothers who developed nervous complaints during their sons' national service, the disruption of national service began to be evident in symptoms like a rising conscript suicide rate, and welfare requests from previously G1K1 (fighting fit) troops, including officers.<sup>85</sup>

Internal SADF assessments attempted to personalise the problem, blaming particular soldiers for "anti-social" tendencies, or asserting that problems arose from other "deviant" behaviours like drug usage or homosexuality.<sup>86</sup> However, the continual disruption of national service, the brutalisation of army training and active duty, and alternating

<sup>83</sup> S.A. Barometer, vol.1, no.15, September 25 1987, p.234.

	<i>liquidations</i>	<i>insolvencies</i>
1983	2 275	1 201
1984	2 675	1 637
1985	3 061	3 221
1986	2 741	4 248

University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, ECC collection, AG 1977, folder A11.3.1, the financial journal, *Econometrix*, reported that in the 7 years between 1981 and 1988 the tax burden on individuals, which particularly affected whites, had doubled.

<sup>84</sup> The CP now had 22 seats, while the PFP lost seven seats and the NP lost eight. Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history*, p.564.

<sup>85</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence group 4, 61/12/1, vol.4, box 45, manpower memorandum 31 January 1977. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.49, box 217, a 4 April 1985 memorandum from 2 SA Infantry Training Unit noted sourly that each of the five officers deployed there had developed welfare problems, which none of them had had before their December 1984 departure to the operational area. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/2, vol.31, box 43, *oorplasing en toewysing* 12 January 1983 – 15 March 1983, although only covering a three month period, this folder bulges with heartfelt pleas for husbands and sons to be closer to home for a variety of reasons. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.37, box 213, report on transfers 30 March 1984. Vol.41, box 214, letter from conscript to the SADF 2 July 1984, this young man pleaded to be classified as area bound to prevent him losing his job. He asked plaintively if it was a good idea to "destroy a man's spirit for the future?" Vol.49, box 217, report of increased welfare cases 4 April 1985. Vol.62, box 221, letter from a mother to the Minister of Defence 21 April 1986, like many others this mother assured the Minister that despite the request that he exempt her son, her family were loyal citizens with no conscientious objection to conscription. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/3, vol.81, box 224, SADF internal response to a mother's request for her son to be transferred closer to home 21 January 1984. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.41, box 214, in a revealing series of correspondence, the mother of a conscript who had taken an overdose claimed in a letter to the SADF (14 May 1984) that the "sadistic brutality of some of the corporals' and conscripts' powerlessness to bring this matter to the attention of anyone in command "completely destroys all motivation in decent young men". The SADF concept answer of 12 July 1984 attacked the conscript, "Your son, who is a self-confessed dagga-smoker..." While this concept answer was discarded, fears that the mother would go to the press led to the suggestion that it would be simpler to transfer the conscript to another unit, memorandum 23 June 1984. Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.64, box 236, letter to the SADF 22 January 1985, similarly, when a serviceman returning from the border warned the SADF that "More of our own troops are killed on the border by negligence and alcohol-related incidents than the enemy", the SADF response was to attack his integrity and to warn him not to "spread stories". Group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.44, box 215, reports from Eastern Province and Natal Command respectively refusing further welfare cases as they were already overstuffed, 4 September 1984, 30 October 1984. S.A. Barometer, vol.2, no.15, 12 August 1988, suicide rate among servicemen:

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
<i>suicides</i>	11	25	37	24	24
<i>attempts</i>			260	362	352

In the general population the suicide rate was 1:10 000 but 6:10 000 among servicemen.

<sup>86</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/4, vol.34, box 87, report of psychiatric examination of conscript 27 June 1980. Vol.36, box 88, letter from SADF regarding discharge of conscript 2 December 1980. Group 4, 61/12/4, vol.50, box 95, report of psychiatric examination of conscript 27 October 1982. Vol.55, box 233, psychiatric evaluation of a conscript (undated).

periods of danger and boredom led to demoralisation among serving soldiers, and destructive behaviour including substance abuse, vehicle and ammunition accidents, and suicide. Theft and sabotage increased as conscripts sought an outlet for their frustration and anger. Returning conscripts began to exhibit symptoms of stress too, such as alienation, the inability to readjust to civilian life, depression and difficulties in forming relationships. The divorce rate climbed, and the phenomenon of family murders emerged, which psychologists explained as resulting from despair or a sense of loss of control over events or the future.<sup>87</sup>

As political and economic progress failed to materialise, growing numbers of young whites began to express their dissatisfaction by emigration. From 1987 the press began to document a growing "brain drain" as increasing numbers, of skilled graduates in particular, left the country. Some were politically motivated; more probably felt the personal and professional costs of remaining were too high. Thus while conscription emphasised the duty of the individual to serve the good of the group, for many whites the group benefits of continued white rule were being undermined by the personal costs. As a father wrote to the Minister of Defence as early as 1983, explaining his decision to send his son abroad, "I do not agree with the politicians playing political games, whilst my only son could be killed."<sup>88</sup>

Racially based conscription was thus ultimately a self-limiting strategy, creating continuous manpower problems as well as fracturing white political consensus by the extent and nature of SADF deployment. If whites were deployed in high-risk positions which justified their call-up, there was the political risk of conscript casualties. If the state tried to fill its front lines with blacks<sup>89</sup> and used whites in support positions, it was accused of compromising white interests without a visible justification. In the long run, the very success of regaining control by force thus pointed to the demise of the apartheid power structure. The NP's inability to co-opt the black majority weakened it politically by forcing its continued, and even increased, reliance on the SADF. As the burden of conscription grew it was increasingly difficult for the NP to demonstrate sufficient benefits to offset the costs of its conscription demands on whites, which in turn limited the effectiveness of SADF deployments.

<sup>87</sup> DSD Reports, K 97/3, box 373, "Refusing apartheid conscription by a war resister", *Sechaba*, December 1985, pp.18-25. Price, *A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force*, pp.9, 184, 185, 192, 194, 208, 212, 248, 295, 312, 388, 389, a conscript explained that one way of opposing the authoritarian SADF was to "jippo" at every point. It was almost something that was revered. It was part of our ethic. One of the ways of getting through the army was that you really took pride in your jippo-moves, how good they were, how well-planned they were and how successful they were". *S.A. Barometer*, vol.1, no.10, July 17 1987, vol.2, no.12, 31 July 88, p.145.

<sup>88</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.57, box 234, letter to the Minister of Defence 1 December 1983. *S.A. Barometer*, vol.2, no.3, 26 February 1988, pp.41-42, vol.2, no.18, September 23 1988.

*Emigration statistics*

	<i>October</i>	<i>November</i>	<i>December</i>
<i>1987</i>	617	566	689
	<i>April</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>
<i>1988</i>	724	839	606

<sup>89</sup> G. Arnold, "Africa is arming itself. South Africa beware", *New African*, no.250, July 1988, p.37, black troops were used in more dangerous situations because white deaths were reluctantly reported.



By late 1987/1988 when the NP feared that a combination of circumstances – including a warming in the Cold War and a change of US president – would further decrease sympathy for its regional ambitions,<sup>90</sup> its ability to influence regional settlements through decisive military action in Angola was limited by a broad negative reaction in the white community to the conscript losses this entailed. Limited air cover and dissatisfaction in the ethnic battalions meant white soldiers were more exposed than before.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, SADF commanders felt that a decisive infantry push might succeed in taking the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola, but were constrained by concerns that the casualties which might result, estimated as high as 300, were more than the white South African public would tolerate.<sup>92</sup> As early as 1983/1984 the state had faced the first critical reaction from the white public and mainstream press when 20 conscripts died during Operation Askari.<sup>93</sup> The 28 deaths reported in the last three months of 1987 and a dozen more by April 1988 provoked a new range of white criticism – including traditional supporters of the government, like the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) – to the extent that military specialist H.R.Heitman suggested that the political cost of gambling with conscript lives limited South Africa's use of the SADF.<sup>94</sup> Thus while the NP continued to jockey for position, alternating negotiations and renewed attacks, after a further 11 men were killed in June 1988, a settlement was finally reached on 22 August 1988 with South Africa agreeing to withdraw from Namibia before having reached a firm agreement on the removal of ANC guerrillas.<sup>95</sup>

An examination of the apartheid state after 1957 thus shows an ever-increasing reliance on the SADF to contain opposition, which, in turn, set up a critical contradiction within the heart of apartheid's power base. Firstly, the minority basis of conscription and the growing threat led to ever increasing demands for white military manpower. Some commentators have suggested the SADF was limited by equipment shortages and obsolescence rather than its reliance on minority conscription,<sup>96</sup> but SADF records open for research thus far suggest that at the very least a *perception* of shortages influenced the continuous extension of the state's conscription demands between 1957 and 1984. Secondly, increased conscription demands fostered white discontent and political fragmentation. As whites felt the costs of conscription more, their demands for political and economic stability intensified, but growing political division within the white community made it impossible for the state to reconcile the conflicting demands. Conscription was thus both an essential part of the apartheid state's ability to perpetuate itself, and a unique opposition opportunity.

<sup>90</sup> Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, p.170. Cawthra, *War and resistance*, p.70. Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.343.

<sup>91</sup> A. Seegers, "War in southern Africa", *Africa*, vol.62, no.2, 1992, p.278. H. Campbell, "The military defeat of the South Africans in Angola", *Monthly Review*, vol.40, no.11, April 1989, p.12.

<sup>92</sup> Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, p.172. Cawthra, *War and resistance*, p.69.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8. Johnson & Martin, *Destructive engagement*, pp.99 & 102.

<sup>94</sup> Cock, "A high price for freedom", p.21. A. Grundlingh, "Oorlog en onrus: vertolkings van resente Suid-Afrikaanse militere geskiedenis", *South African Historical Journal*, vol.23, 1990, p.159.

<sup>95</sup> Dreyer, *Namibia and Southern Africa*, pp.177-179, this was finalised in January 1989.

<sup>96</sup> J. Cilliers and M. Reichardt, *About tum* (Halfway House, Institute for Defence Policy, 1995) p.127.



**Chapter Two**  
 The emergence of conscientious objection: Early alliances and issues leading to the formation of the ECC.

**THIS IS JOE... HE'S A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR.**



**SO WE PUT HIM IN JAIL.**



**HE DOESN'T WANT TO DROP BOMBS..**



**WHY?  
 BOMBS**

**HE DOESN'T WANT TO SHOOT.. HE DOESN'T WANT TO KILL..**



**HE'S A THREAT TO SOCIETY.**



While the previous chapter detailed how the apartheid state increasingly relied on the SADF to contain the discontent of the black majority, and was thus vulnerable to the call to end conscription, it is significant that the ECC was banned on 22 August 1988, the day on which South Africa signed a ceasefire with Angola, thus cutting its manpower requirements. This suggests that perhaps the greatest opposition threat of the ECC was to the apartheid state's ideological hegemony, undermining and contradicting the threat-based ideology with which the NP attempted to maintain white unity. This chapter will examine the state's security discourse and how the remaining legal avenues for extra-parliamentary white opposition – the churches, universities, and human rights organisations – challenged this by taking up the issue of CO in the 1970s and early 1980s. This period was significant because it was the state's attempt to contain this early ideological opposition which led to the formation of the ECC, while the vocabulary, issues, and alliances of the early CO debates continued to influence the structure and campaigns of the ECC.

Initially, the state successfully controlled the security discourse. From colonial times the economic and political ambitions of settlers had been entangled in ideologies which justified their military conquests. Although South Africa increasingly found itself at odds with the rest of the world during the 1960s and 1970s, threats like regional decolonisation and reminders of the potential strength of the black majority in protests like Sharpeville and Soweto encouraged white political cohesion on security issues.<sup>97</sup> While white liberal parliamentary opposition criticised apartheid policies in this period, white security fears remained a potent unifying tool for the state.

From 1977 "total onslaught" and "total strategy" became the new watchwords of apartheid ideology. Precisely because the state's demand for greater co-operation from the white group was tied to "reformed" apartheid, which meant less socio-economic patronage for whites, survival became a critical element in state discourse as a means of maintaining white political loyalty. The sacrifice of some white privileges and renewed conscription demands were therefore presented as necessary in an epic battle between starkly contrasted choices, either "Christianity" or "atheism", "democracy" or "totalitarianism", "order" or "chaos".

Significantly, it was the 1977 Defence White Paper which initially presented the analysis of a number of domestic and foreign problems in terms of a "total onslaught" which located the threat outside the country, ascribing all internal opposition to "agitators", supposedly agents of a broader east-west ideological struggle.<sup>98</sup> Black protest and the ANC and PAC's armed struggle were thus decontextualised and explained as the work of agents or stooges of

<sup>97</sup> White fears were exacerbated by well-reported stories of racially motivated atrocities in former colonies. P. Hugo (ed), *South African perspectives* (Cape Town, Die Suid-Afrikaan, 1989) p.240.

<sup>98</sup> *White Paper on defence and armament supply*, p.3. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, for example, was the beginning of legislation which turned ideological opposition into a criminal offence.

communism, particularly Soviet expansionism seeking to incorporate South Africa's strategic position and mineral wealth. In such a scenario the role of the SADF was presented as defensive, seeking to stop an unscrupulous enemy, in turn manipulated by an even more devious superpower.<sup>99</sup>

"Total onslaught" propaganda played an important role in redirected attention from political to military solutions, while "total strategy" reminded whites that the NP was their protective, pre-emptive bulwark against the security fears articulated by "total onslaught". The discourse of "national security" was therefore a critical rallying call to encourage the white population to remain politically loyal to the NP as protector against black majority rule, while accepting limited reform as a safeguard against the spread of Marxism, with the subtext that the NP would continue to protect white interests in return for continued political loyalty and conscription service.<sup>100</sup>

Again, in preparing to market its increased 1982 conscription demands, the SADF briefed its public relations team to stay away from political questions and to emphasise that the demands of security, as well as continued white prosperity, peace and happiness necessitated greater manpower demands and sacrifice. The proximity of the Russian/Marxist threat to South Africa was to be emphasised, together with the theme that peace required new initiatives and plans.<sup>101</sup> In 1985, too, as South Africa faced growing internal unrest, SADF communications strategy emphasised that destabilisation was coming from Russia, through stooges like the ANC, while the SADF was the protector of all groups in South Africa.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, the security discourse held political risks. Demands justified primarily in terms of the negative effects of non-compliance led to increased emigration as some whites found the costs too high and chose to leave. Growing black militancy and grassroots organisation, combined with ongoing guerrilla attacks, also helped foster a conservative white backlash based on the perception that rising costs were producing little result. The white left and humanitarian and church groups condemned the spiral of violence to which the state seemed to have no answer but more violence.

Conscription thus remained a potential political wedge among whites, although the NP's ability to set the dominant discourse among whites meant that objection to conscription was slow to develop. Established in 1963, the

<sup>99</sup> M. Hough & M. Van der Merwe (eds), *Selected official South African perceptions 1976-1987: Institute for Strategic Studies ad hoc publications no.25* (Pretoria, University of Pretoria, 1988) p.35.

<sup>100</sup> *White Paper on defence and armament supply*, pp.4-10.

<sup>101</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.8, box 47, secret memorandum regarding planning for the preparation of the public for changes in the law 12 November 1982.

<sup>102</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 102/14, temas in Suid-Afrikaanse leër komopsstrategie 1984/1985 28 June 1985.

Publications Control Board was mandated to prohibit material "prejudicial to state security", and the growing power of the state encouraged self-censorship in the press, while the state controlled public broadcasting.<sup>103</sup> By the 1970s the geographic and social separation of apartheid had created a generation of whites who had little contact with blacks except as subordinates, while Christian National Education in state schools encouraged authoritarianism and an uncritical acceptance of the doctrines of apartheid. The growing power of the apartheid state further enabled it to limit white opposition. The multiracial Liberal Party, for example, was legislated out of existence in 1968, while more outspoken and radical white critics of apartheid like Braam Fisher and Helen Joseph were silenced by prison or banning.

Initially, white security concerns, the relatively low burden of conscription and the mainstream gender expectations of both English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites encouraged a broad white acceptance that military service was a useful disciplinary and maturational process, making "men" of boys.<sup>104</sup> CO was limited to the doctrinal objections of the "peace" churches, which espoused universal pacifism, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose religious beliefs forbade them to participate in the affairs of the secular state. Both these groups were numerically small and did not attempt to politicise their objection.<sup>105</sup>

In 1974 the South African Council of Churches (SACC) released the Hammanskraal Declaration, often seen as the first salvo of the anti-conscription movement. The Declaration reflected growing international protest against apartheid and the increased influence of blacks in the multiracial mainline churches. The SACC's parent body, the World Council of Churches (WCC), had committed itself to a "Programme to Combat Racism" by 1970, which explored and attempted to address socio-economic and political structural oppression. The WCC also pledged to provide financial assistance to "anti-racist liberation movements fighting in southern Africa against white minority governments",<sup>106</sup> insisting that social justice was a Christian responsibility.

The Hammanskraal Declaration, however, was a modest document. It made no prescriptions, as the SACC had little authority over its member churches,<sup>107</sup> and some black theologians dismissed its call as mere "situational

<sup>103</sup> Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history*, p.365.

<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, in both the case of the "mobilisation of whites around what was perceived as a threat to their survival and the organisation of opposition forces around the cause of national liberation" conservative views on gender prevailed. E. Unterhalter in *Unsettling settler societies: articulations of gender, race, ethnicity and class* (London, Sage, 1995) p.234.

<sup>105</sup> Although Jehovah's Witnesses formed the majority of objectors at any given time, they will not be discussed in this study, as their objection had no political base. While Jehovah's Witnesses remained a nuisance to the state, because many refused to be processed through the new channels created for religious objection in 1983, insisting on being charged in a civil court before carrying out alternative service, they were generally perceived as narrowly sectarian and alien, eliciting little sympathy or understanding among the broad white group. CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa* (London, Pax Christi, 1982) p.27.

<sup>106</sup> J. De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans, 1986) pp.116-117 & 129.

<sup>107</sup> W.S. Vorster, *Views on violence* (Pretoria, UNISA, 1985) p.44.

passivism".<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the Declaration did represent a new ideological challenge to the state's justification of conscription by suggesting that individual Christians should not "engage in violence and war, or... prepare to engage in violence and war, whenever the state demands it", but rather consider "whether Christ's call to take up the cross and follow Him in identifying with the oppressed does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors".<sup>109</sup>

The competing authority of church and state has been in contention since the church's inception. As theologians struggled to determine how Christians should respond to the demands of the state for military manpower, the "just war" doctrine gradually emerged. In essence it stated that war should be contracted as the "last resort", for "legitimate causes", by "legally constituted authorities", be conducted "justly" and only if there were a reasonable chance of success. The mainstream Christian denominations which endorsed the just war doctrine thus theoretically claimed the right both to judge the actions of the secular state and to engage in civil disobedience.<sup>110</sup>

In the South African context this was significant because many whites still regarded themselves, at least nominally, as "Christian",<sup>111</sup> but state ideology had gained moral power by steadily usurping the authority of the church, encouraging a spiritualisation of religion which limited the implication of religious belief to the individual sphere, while arguing that the social, economic and political implications of Christianity could be entrusted to the "Christian" state. Moreover, the apartheid state used the Pauline doctrine that states exist because they have been established by God in order to justify the demand for obedience from conscripts.<sup>112</sup> Since the state claimed to be resisting the "ungodly advance of the Marxists", *ergo* the defence of the status quo was a Christian duty, as the opponents of the "Christian" state must, by extension, be the enemies of all Christians. Duty to the state was therefore to be given precedence over individual conscience, as indicated by Defence Minister P.W.Botha's 1970 statement that the duty to defend one's country "should not be made subservient to one's religious convictions".<sup>113</sup>

In stark contrast, the Hammanskraal Declaration offered an alternative interpretation of the conflict in South Africa, suggesting that Christians were personally accountable for their actions and must therefore scrutinise the purposes

<sup>108</sup> This tension continued into the 1980s. The Church of Province for example, was criticised by black priests as equivocating when it decided to support spiritually those on both sides of the border. Yet within white churches many whites felt the church leadership was moving too fast and too radically. De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, p.144. C. Villa-Vicencio (ed.), *Theology and violence: the South African debate* (Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans, 1988) pp.77-78 & 91. CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, pp.7-9. B. Tlhagale & I. Mosala (eds), *Hammering swords into ploughshares* (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1986) p.243.

<sup>109</sup> J.W. Hofmeyr, J.A. Millard & C.J.J. Froneman (eds), *History of the church in South Africa: a document and source book* (Pretoria, UNISA, 1991) p.264. De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, pp.140-141.

<sup>110</sup> C.C. Moskos, & J.W. Chambers II (eds), *The new conscientious objection: from sacred to secular resistance* (New York, OUP, 1993) p.9.

<sup>111</sup> According to the 1980 census 77 per cent of all South Africans still identified themselves, at least nominally, as Christians and members of a church denomination. J. De Gruchy, "Christians in conflict", *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, vol.51, June 1985, p.18.

<sup>112</sup> Romans 13:1-2, *New International Version* (Cape Town, The Bible Society, 1978) p.202.

<sup>113</sup> CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, p.58.

and actions of their society, and had the right, even the duty, to disobey the state if it acted unjustly. This thinking was informed by the growth of liberation theology in response to decolonisation struggles worldwide, which justified rebellion against the "structural violence" of existing authorities. The Declaration thus contrasted the violence of "terrorists or freedom fighters", condemned by many white South Africans, with the state's institutionalised violence, often unquestioningly accepted by whites. By suggesting there were Christians on both sides of the border it undermined the state's characterisation of the enemy as godless communists. In questioning the provision of army chaplains it refuted the church's perceived blessing of the existing conflict.<sup>114</sup> The overall ideological challenge of the Declaration was therefore to contextualise the just war argument, and to question the justification of SADF deployments as defensive. This challenged the state's claims of a just cause, and hence the justice of its conscription demands, and so legitimised Christian CO.<sup>115</sup>

However, in tracing the history of CO, C.C. Moskos and J.W. Chalmers suggested that this kind of particularisation of the just war debate has never been tolerated by a secular state because of its direct political challenge to the state's moral and physical right to rule.<sup>116</sup> The rapid, punitive nature of the apartheid state's response to the Declaration suggested it fully recognised the potential of this challenge, despite the fact that existing CO was extremely limited and non-proselytising. Section 121(C) of the Defence Further Amendment Bill (1974) criminalised not only CO, but even discussion of the issues. Encouraging anyone to avoid military service was now punishable by a hefty fine of R6 000, six years in jail, or both. In addition to criminalising discussion of CO, the state also attacked the integrity of those who had opened the debate, attempting to portray CO as the province of "cowards and rotters", while reiterating its doctrine of the separation of religious beliefs and civic responsibilities.<sup>117</sup> A favourite argument against Christian anti-apartheid activists was therefore that their protest was essentially a "cloak of religion to disguise subversive activities", and the state claimed that bodies like the WCC, and outspoken individuals like Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu, had missed their Christian calling by meddling in politics.<sup>118</sup>

The responses of the broader white community to the Hamanskraal Declaration indicated that security concerns were still a powerful uniting factor among whites at this point. Not only were there "strong cultural-political traditions emphasising service to the state" and a culture of authoritarianism in opposition to the individual exercise of

<sup>114</sup> De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, p.141.

<sup>115</sup> K. Nurnberger, J. Tooke & W. Domeris (eds), *Conflict and the quest for justice* (Pietemartitzburg, Encounter Publications, 1989) p.120. Villa-Vicencio, *Theology and violence: the South African debate*, pp.6-7.

<sup>116</sup> Moskos and Chalmers, *The new conscientious objection*, pp.14-16.

<sup>117</sup> Comment by Deputy Defence Minister J. Coetsee in 1979. CHR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, pp.54 & 59.

<sup>118</sup> De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, p.92.

conscience,<sup>119</sup> but regional decolonisation also encouraged whites to see a direct connection between their safety as a minority and a viable defence force. Predictably, the state-controlled media projected CO as a menace to the country's security, but within the white commercial press there was also little sympathy for CO. The liberal press was sharply critical of the SACC resolution for encouraging "unlawful" actions,<sup>120</sup> while the pro-government press emphasised the Biblical injunction of obedience to authorities and made emotional judgements on those it labelled "disloyal" for daring to oppose the state. Parliamentary opposition also ranged itself firmly behind the government in condemning the Hammanskraal Declaration, underscoring both the convergence of white opinion, and the political riskiness of security issues. Sir de Villiers Graaf, leader of the official opposition, the United Party, opposed the SACC motion on the basis that it was the duty of every South African to assist in the defence of the country against aggression, including terrorism. The small liberal opposition party, the Progressive Party, argued that opposition to conscription was counter-productive because it "spreads a defeatist spirit towards peaceful change and...draws attention away from crucial political issues that are negotiable in our society". Whether motivated by "volk en nasie" - style patriotism, nervousness over the regional situation, or the possibility of reforming apartheid, the need for "law and order",<sup>121</sup> and hence viable security forces, was clearly a point of convergence for white interests in 1974.

Nevertheless, the Hammanskraal Declaration was an important stepping-stone for the later emergence of the ECC. In addition to a theological justification of CO, it used a political vocabulary to which those outside the church could relate. Moreover, the size, nature and authority of the church meant the state could not use its normal repressive mechanisms against it,<sup>122</sup> but was obliged to engage with at least some aspects of the debate. The CO movement also benefited from access to church resources and contacts, for example, alerting worldwide agencies like Amnesty International about CO prisoners to increase pressure on the apartheid state.<sup>123</sup> As individual COs later stood up to the state the SACC provided financial backing and produced a Counsellor's Resource Manual in 1983, aimed at empowering COs.

Although by 1975 CO issues were parcelled out to various interested divisions of the SACC, becoming less prominent as they were taken out of the plenary, CO did become part of the work of the Justice and Reconciliation Departments

<sup>119</sup> Moskos and Chalmers, The new conscientious objection, p.127.

<sup>120</sup> CIIR, War and conscience in South Africa, pp.29-30.

<sup>121</sup> ibid., p.29. De Gruchy, The church struggle in South Africa, p.ix.

<sup>122</sup> Although it did investigate the SACC's finances.

<sup>123</sup> Historical Papers, Robertson collection, A 2558, folder 11, legal assistance for CO: a memorandum on the Defence Amendment Act no.34 of 1983 October 1983. DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 49B, Directorate of Publications appeal regarding Counsellor's Resource Manual 21 March 1984, a further indication of the concern CO was causing the state was its urgent application to have the Counsellor's Resource Manual declared undesirable. This application was rejected by the Cape Town Supreme Court on 10 December 1984.



in the SACC and South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC),<sup>124</sup> so that a group of Christian activists was informed about and experienced in conscription opposition by the time the ECC was established.

For a number of reasons, however, the church's ability to propel the CO movement was limited. Conscription was just one of the problems generated by the monolith of apartheid and the church's multiple foci diffused its ability to take up conscription effectively. Moreover, within both the SACC and SACBC there was outright resistance to the church's involvement in opposition issues as white congregations tended to be much more conservative than the more progressive leadership.<sup>125</sup> White member churches limited the impact of such SACC resolutions at congregational level, if not refusing outright to endorse them.<sup>126</sup>

Indeed, the mainline churches suffered a significant loss of membership as white congregants sought less "political" churches in the 1980s. H. Jurgens Hendrikse has documented a denominational shift among whites, particularly after 1980, towards community-based Pentecostal and independent churches, and suggested that the numerical growth of these churches at the expense of mainline denominations was at least partly due to their focus on individual salvation, which, at a time of intense political and economic upheaval, whites found more comfortable than the social justice thrust of the mainline churches. These new churches tended to take a fundamentalist line on obedience to the state, with little sympathy for CO.<sup>127</sup>

Support for CO was thus largely limited to the traditional English-speaking churches. Afrikaans churches turned increasingly inward as their continued support for apartheid alienated them from their reformed counterparts worldwide and from the ecumenical movement within South Africa. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Afrikaans

<sup>124</sup> De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, pp.98-99. CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, p.54.

<sup>125</sup> Particularly after Vatican II, the SACBC took a clear and often bold stand on conscription issues, similar to that of the SACC. In 1972 the Catholic Church published a "Call to conscience" which denounced the injustices of South Africa and committed itself to the anti-apartheid struggle. In 1974 Roman Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley anticipated the SACC Declaration, arguing that to defend white South African society by force of arms was to defend apartheid, and that to defend apartheid was to defend an unjust cause. He emphasised that Christians must not fight an unjust war, but needed to "recognise the right of liberation movements to react to the situation in this country". CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, pp.13-14. Moskos and Chalmers, *The new conscientious objection*, p.127.

<sup>126</sup> Significantly, the resolution to adopt the Hammanskraal Declaration was proposed by Presbyterian minister Douglas Bax, but the Executive Commission of the white Presbyterian Church disassociated itself from the motion, although the predominantly black Tsonga Presbyterian Church passed supported the SACC's stand. Similarly, the Assembly of the Congregational Church passed a motion in 1980 resolving that its members might adopt a pacifist position with the full support of the church, and calling on the government to allow these persons to serve in a non-combatant capacity within the SADF. However, an individual Congregational Church was so incensed by this that its leadership wrote to the Minister of Defence explaining that their church did not agree with the ruling. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.51-54, box 49, letter to Minister of Defence from the East Claremont Congregational Church (undated). CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, pp.31-32. De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, pp.92&124.

<sup>127</sup> Between 1980 and 1991 white Pentecostal membership increased by 16 per cent and independent churches by 111 per cent, the Anglican Church lost 36 per cent of its membership, the Catholic Church 20 per cent, the Methodist Church 19 per cent, the Congregational Church 24 per cent, the Presbyterian Church 30 per cent, and the Lutheran Church 28 per cent. H. Jurgens Hendrikse, "South African denominational growth and decline 1911-1991", *Journal of Theology in South Africa*, vol.91, June 1995, pp.38-43. De Gruchy, "Christians in conflict," p.19. In 1985 the *Weekly Mail* suggested that the enthusiasm of the Pentecostal churches to sign up as military chaplains, together with their unquestioning attitude to secular affairs were no doubt a welcome change for the authorities, and noted that white numbers were still small, they were growing, at a time when both the English and Afrikaans churches reported declining numbers. *Weekly Mail* 16 August 1985. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/2, vol.30, box 43, letter from Ray MacCauley to the SADF 14 December 1982, MacCauley, pastor of the 3 000 member Pentecostal Rhema Church in Johannesburg, requested that he be allowed to spend his 12 days of commando duty as an evangelist among the troops.

churches continued to endorse the NP's line of separate spheres for church and state, and to support conscription.<sup>128</sup>

While the religious aspect of CO was important because it was from this angle that the state tried to contain the conscription debate in 1983, CO opposition grew because of its increasingly multifaceted appeal. Yet as other opposition sectors took up the issue of CO, they faced similar constraints to those of the churches. After 1974 English-speaking campuses began to consider the political and ethical implications of conscription, but the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) also faced a diffusion of energy because of the scale of apartheid issues, internal divisions along liberal-radical lines, and a white constituency which still saw its interests best served by the status quo.

The Progressive Federal Party (PFP), which became the official parliamentary opposition in 1977, and its youth wing, PFP Youth, endorsed the possibility of reforming apartheid from within the parliamentary system, while radical students maintained contact with the ANC, and saw little chance of creating a democratic system without a complete restructuring. Thus, while universities were important centres for conscientising whites, offering some free-flow of information, interracial contact and protection for dissident ideas, there were considerable ideological differences between the radical left, the Christian left and the parliamentary-affiliated liberals on campuses.

Moreover, universities were gateways to privileged professions and many whites were unwilling to risk future rewards by engaging in student politics. Apartheid apportioned opportunities and privilege on a racial basis which deadened empathy for other groups through the enforcement of geographic and social distance, while hardening pre-existing racial and class prejudices. Language, class and cultural differences, exacerbated by negative sanctions against contact, resulted in South Africa's youth growing up in segregated worlds. Much of white popular culture was based on American or British models in terms of dress, music, literature and films, and many white students passed through universities with their stereotypes and cultural expectations relatively unchanged. Even for those whose consciences were stirred, active opposition was often seen as too costly in a society in which the economy sanctioned apartheid, the state sector actively promoted it, and opposition was not only discouraged but also criminalised.<sup>129</sup>

Thus while NUSAS endorsed the Hammanskraal Declaration, it was divided as to how to address conscription. The early 1970s had been a difficult period. The 1973 Schlebusch Commission declared NUSAS an affected organisation,

<sup>128</sup> De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, pp.90-91.

<sup>129</sup> Nurses and teachers in state hospitals and schools, for instance, were forced to join segregated unions. State employees were not allowed to have a criminal record. Private employers were also unlikely to be enthusiastic about employees who were likely to spend a couple of years in jail because they were COs.

limiting its finances and banning and detaining leaders. At the same time, the Black Consciousness movement appeared to repudiate any role for white activism, and non-racial movements only began to develop after the Soweto riots in 1976. Commentator Julie Frederikse suggested that the line "the most I can do is be the least obstruction", from a 1976 play "The Fantastical History of a Useless Man", encapsulated the lack of positive direction of white student activism in this period.<sup>130</sup>

After the Soweto Riots the small white activist community was also hindered by increased white emigration. Some continued to raise the issue of militarisation abroad. The Committee on South African War Resistance (COSAWR), based in London and Amsterdam, was established in 1978 to "mobilise support for conscientious objectors in South Africa and to highlight the repressive role of the military". It also published Resister to give information and analysis on South African militarisation.<sup>131</sup> Yet, while the state kept records on the most vocal of these emigrants and how they were received by host countries,<sup>132</sup> many of those who left chose to make new lives for themselves, and due to family ties, or the nature of their qualifications, were quietly absorbed overseas. By the late 1970s a section of NUSAS leadership actively discouraged CO through a policy of "strategic participation", which urged students to grit their teeth and do their national service unobtrusively in order to be able to stay and contribute to building opposition within the country. The externally based ANC was also divided on the conscription issue at this point, and called on whites to find ways to "resist apartheid war", without prescribing a particular course of action.<sup>133</sup>

From 1979 the stands of individual objectors demonstrated the political and public potential of objection while encouraging a new convergence of interest and a cross-pollination between the Christian and secular left on campuses. In 1978 Militarisation Committees (Milcoms) were envisaged, initially at the University of Cape Town (UCT) then spreading to other NUSAS campuses, to explore alternatives to military service and to investigate its effect on conscripts. By 1979 this had grown into focus weeks on war resistance, public debates involving church leaders, the distribution of publications and pamphlets, and a petition calling on the government to introduce a non-military form of national service for COs.<sup>134</sup> From 1982 NUSAS began to produce a number of booklets intended to educate students about the link between growing militarisation and apartheid, while well-attended mass meetings suggested that a

<sup>130</sup> J. Frederikse, The unbreakable thread: non-racialism in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990) pp.145-153. Evidence of the racially divided opposition movement is evident in English subtitles to protest songs sung with enthusiasm, but little comprehension, at a NUSAS pre-congress seminar in 1984, Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers.

<sup>131</sup> Needless to say this was promptly banned for general circulation in South Africa. Cawthra, War and resistance, p.1.

<sup>132</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, Omkeer, no.3 1980, SADF report on the position of the churches (undated). SADF report comparing CO worldwide (undated).

<sup>133</sup> Cawthra, War and resistance, p.18. Interviews with Steve Lowry ECC treasurer (1999), and Cape Town member Steve de Gruchy (21 July 1997).

<sup>134</sup> Out of step, p.80.

significant proportion of the student body was concerned about conscription.<sup>135</sup> The 1982 UCT campaign around militarisation and conscription led to the formation of a Conscription Action Group (CAG) and other NUSAS campuses followed suit. A broader campaign developed as students in CAG linked up with church groups, Conscientious Objector Support Groups (COSG) and progressive organisations like the women's group Black Sash. The level of interest and participation was such that by the end of the year the state felt obliged to intervene, sending military leaders to speak on campus to emphasise the "snares of conscientious objection", while NUSAS' anti-militarisation material was the subject of yearly reports and analysis in the SSC.<sup>136</sup>

By the early 1980s the ANC, too, decided military issues could be an effective opposition tool to raise questions within the white community. In 1983 the ANC youth publication Forward was calling for whites to "totally defy the draft", to "link the draft resistance struggle to all other struggles", and to develop multi-level strategies that would involve as broad a spectrum of whites as possible. Student leaders in contact with the ANC therefore began to push for active opposition to conscription, rather than "strategic participation".<sup>137</sup>

However, as NUSAS gradually committed itself to war resistance it encountered limitations similar to those faced by the churches. CO was just one of its concerns, and there was a wide divide between the commitment of leadership and that of the student body. Moreover, NUSAS directives only affected English campuses. Afrikaans universities were more intellectually conservative and authoritarian. While NUSAS-affiliated universities were setting up Milcoms, Afrikaans universities were allowing SADF commando units to be established on campus to facilitate camps without interrupting students' studies.<sup>138</sup> Yet even on English-speaking campuses, which did not allow commando units, white self-interest, encouraged by the state's security discourse, was a powerful conservative force.<sup>139</sup> NUSAS therefore contributed valuable analyses of apartheid and militarisation, as well as creative, experienced, articulate and energetic activists, but remained a contributor to, rather than the driving force behind, CO.

A third strand of white opposition was the numerous regional and national extra-parliamentary human rights groupings. These groups addressed the issue of conscription within their own contexts and attempted to bring the

<sup>135</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.4.1, Social Action Committee of the Student Representative Council (SRC) report on the military focus at UCT June 1982.

<sup>136</sup> CIIR, War and conscience in South Africa, p.61. DSD Insam, box 40, Special Situational Report to the SSC 85/84 30 October 1984. Report 226/82 on NUSAS pamphlet Total war in South Africa 25 November 1982. Report 151/83 on NUSAS pamphlet Militarisation and the apartheid state 15 August 1983.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Michael Evans ECC Cape Town chair (1998), David Shandler national secretary (1998). DSD Insam, box 40, Special Situational Report to the SSC 85/84 30 October 1984, Forward, no.9, 1983.

<sup>138</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.9, box 42, memorandum from the Minister of Defence regarding the establishment of university military units 26 August 1982.

<sup>139</sup> V. Crapanzano, Waiting: the whites of South Africa (London, Granada, 1985) pp.ix, 114.

weight of their particular membership to bear on the state.<sup>140</sup> The Cape Town-based Civil Rights League, for instance, organised a conference on objection and the plight of Jehovah's Witnesses as early as 1970/1971.<sup>141</sup> Like the churches and NUSAS, however, conscription was just one of the foci of these groups. Moreover, they did not represent a broad white movement for democracy, but rather numerous special interests, perpetuating the same kind of liberal/radical divisions faced by NUSAS. Membership was also limited, as the majority of whites still clearly equated the protection of their interests with NP rule, and even the more liberal who supported "reformed" apartheid often relied on the NP to ensure a pace and degree of reform which would not compromise white interests. This was clearly indicated by the 1983 referendum on the tricameral parliament. Although the PFP opposed the proposed constitutional changes on the grounds that they did not address black political grievances, the state's promise of "reformed" apartheid swayed a considerable number of PFP supporters to vote against the official party line, suggesting that much of the PFP's membership wanted to encourage the NP towards controlled reform, without committing themselves on the more dangerous question of black demands for full political inclusion.<sup>142</sup>

Given the limitations of the church, academic and human rights sectors of the growing objector movement, it is unsurprising that the greatest anti-conscription impetus between 1979 and 1983 came from the stands of individual objectors. They gave a human face to theological and ideological debate, conscientised their peers, and created considerable publicity for CO issues through the human interest inherent in their stance as Davids against the Goliath of the powerful apartheid state. The refusal of the apartheid state to acknowledge CO led to further publicity as objectors faced imprisonment. Their willingness to accept the consequences of their civil disobedience, together with public outrage at the harshness of their sentencing and treatment, gave them a kind of martyr status. This helped to keep conscription a live issue in white public discourse, particularly in the English community, significant elements of which related to issues raised by CO, such as freedom of conscience, freedom of choice and individual accountability.

The objectors thus built on and expanded the preceding conscription debates. In 1979 Peter Moll's refusal to serve a three-month camp was based on a "just war" position, which was well publicised in the press and within the church. He received over 550 letters of support, both local and from England and the USA.<sup>143</sup> In 1980 Richard Steele objected on the basis of universal Christian pacifism, and was also sent to detention barracks. Moll and Steele received further publicity as the SADF had no mechanisms for dealing with CO within its ranks either, and there was

<sup>140</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, letter to the Minister of Defence from Women for Peaceful Change Now 25 February 1980.

<sup>141</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 49B, briefing regarding proposed legislation regarding religious objectors, confidential report (undated). Interview with Cape Town ECC member Dot Clemminshaw (1998).

<sup>142</sup> Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's foreign policy*, p.290.

<sup>143</sup> M.L. Lehman, "The story of a South African conscientious objector," *Christian Century*, 1981, p.1129.

ongoing conflict over the SADF's insistence that they wear SADF overalls. When objector Charles Yeats refused a SADF overall in 1981, he was left in his underwear in winter and sentenced to a further year, prompting an intervention by Amnesty International. Within South Africa COSG branches emerged in various regions, dedicated both to publicise the stands of objectors and to sustain them through their incarceration.<sup>144</sup>

From 1981 the state began to give objectors dishonourable discharges and then send them to civilian prisons in an attempt to defuse public interest in CO. While a 1972 Defence Act amendment had provided for a once-only detention barracks sentence, this was limited to adherents of the "peace" churches. The SADF did begin to accommodate non-combatants informally at unit level,<sup>145</sup> but concern about growing numbers of COs in the context of the state's increasing reliance on the SADF limited the extent to which it could attempt to defuse CO in this way.

A terse letter from General Magnus Malan to the Minister of Justice demanding that Yeats should receive no reduction in sentence<sup>146</sup> indicated that the opposition potential of CO was a matter of concern, but also epitomised the apartheid state's preference for confrontation and shows of force to dominate opposition it could not afford to accommodate. Malan wanted to make an example of Yeats to deter further CO, but it was precisely this intransigence which sustained and stimulated the CO movement, encouraging the ANC and NUSAS to see objection as an effective opposition tool. Human rights groups and churches focused on the lack of alternatives faced by objectors, and the churches continued to defend CO as a legitimate Christian response and to debate the justice of the conflict. In the light of objectors' expressed willingness to serve in alternative structures, for instance, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church I.C. Atkin told General Malan in 1982 that "the issue before the church is whether it can defend the military option if others are not open".<sup>147</sup>

While CO was initially on Christian grounds, it soon developed into political and ideological opposition too. Objection grew from one case per year in 1979, 1980 and 1981, to three by 1982, and six by 1983. By 1983 Paul Dobson became the first serving soldier to object,<sup>148</sup> and student leader Brett Myrdal began to travel between campuses, publicising his forthcoming CO trial. In the context of intakes of some 27 000 this was a miniscule challenge. However,

<sup>144</sup> CO Peter Hathorn emphasised the importance of support while living as a "bandiet", a sub-human, a nothing" in jail. *Objector*, vol.2, no.2, April 1984.

<sup>145</sup> K. Nummerger, *Power and beliefs in South Africa* (Pretoria, UNISA, 1988) p.322. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, SADF report on CO (undated). Although there was no legal provision for this, there was some leeway for individual commanders to try to avoid confrontation if they felt men had a genuine conscientious objection to carrying weapons. However this SADF report complained that more and more soldiers were "abusing" this concession, trying to make ideological capital under cover of religious objection.

<sup>146</sup> CIIR, *War and conscience in South Africa*, p.27. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.51-54, box 49, letter from Magnus Malan to H.J. Coetsee 16 February 1982.

<sup>147</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/4, vol.51-54, box 49, letter from I.C. Atkin to the Minister of Defence 9 July 1982.

<sup>148</sup> He was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, despite having already served 14 months of his national service. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A1, the End Conscriptio Campaign – a chronology (undated).

despite a steady increase in conscription demands on whites, the SADF still found itself facing an escalating threat with a constant manpower pool, in part because conscripts demonstrated passive resistance through “no shows” and emigration. As the CO movement grew, so organisations like COSAWR made it their business to disseminate information about how to seek asylum overseas. Moreover, CO raised moral and spiritual questions about conscription which challenged “total onslaught” propaganda, stimulating white discontent, overseas criticism and encouraging further emigration by demonstrating the costs of resistance.<sup>149</sup>

The growing publicity associated with CO was thus a considerable problem for the state. In 1980 the SADF suggested the whole objector movement should be regarded as part of the “total onslaught”, since it aroused the interest of a media prepared to carry such “subversion”,<sup>150</sup> and elicited a degree of public sympathy, particularly as it was non-violent and COs accepted the consequences of their actions.<sup>151</sup> CO debate also fuelled divisions within the white community. By 1982/1983 the state feared a spread of conscription objection into Afrikaans circles. To the left, the son of Dawid Bosch, University of South Africa’s (UNISA) Dean of Theology, was thinking about objecting, while to the right, two extremists were refusing to do camps, demanding that the state first implement extreme anti-black and ultra right-wing policies.<sup>152</sup> Thus on the one hand liberal newspapers ran agitated letters from readers condemning the treatment of COs, while on the other, the SADF received irate letters from the Afrikaner right asking why those who refused to carry weapons were being accommodated in a time of “national crisis”.<sup>153</sup> With the creation of the UDF in August 1983 conscription further focused opposition, as the UDF set up a committee to examine how to oppose the extension of conscription to coloureds and Indians.

As early as 1975 the SADF had recommended alternative service for COs in order to keep their profile low.<sup>154</sup> The state had also attempted to discourage CO through measures as diverse as propagating the view that university studies were more successful after national service in order to keep conscripts out of the clutches of “dissidents”, to articles on how CO was a Russian plot and descriptions of the difficult conditions draft dodgers would face

<sup>149</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, *Omkeer*, no.3 1980.

<sup>150</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/2, vol.7, box 47, letter to the Minister of Defence 5 February 1980, SADF report on CO 4 February 1980.

<sup>151</sup> J. Rawls, *A theory of justice* (Oxford, OUP, 1971) p.366.

<sup>152</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, memo on the newest developments on Moll and Steele (undated).

<sup>153</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.6, box 46, letter to the Minister of Defence 5 February 1980. Group 5, MV/61/12/4, vol.51-54, box 49, opleiding: gewetensbesware 9 February 1982. In 1975 0.49 per cent of the call-up made CO applications, 0.31 per cent in 1976, 0.18 per cent in 1977, 0.17 per cent in 1978, and 0.20 per cent in 1979. i.e. after 1976 applications dropped by half. The SADF thought that Section 126 A of the Defence Act, which now set the detention period at longer than the service period, might be having the desired effect, but admitted these figures did not take into account those who had left the country, claiming it was impossible to calculate their numbers accurately. By 1982 only 263 COs were serving sentences in military detention barracks and the vast majority of these were Jehovah’s Witnesses. The state estimated “true” religious objection i.e. universal Christian pacifism at 0.026 per cent. However, the media attention around CO, rather than the numbers, concerned the state.

<sup>154</sup> DSD Chief of Staff Personnel, group 5, 502/16, box 150, recommendation from the National Service Committee 2 June 1975.

overseas.<sup>155</sup> Military analysts also collected church resolutions in an attempt to develop a strategy to appease the churches while defusing the political potential of just war objection.<sup>156</sup> The growing public profile of CO gave added urgency to containing the political impact of the issue.

In 1980 the state set up the Naudé Committee to investigate and make recommendations about CO, in consultation with the churches. The state retained tight control of this process, staffing the committee with three SADF chaplains, all from the NGK which was unsympathetic to CO, and limiting the parameters of its investigation. Its complete acceptance of the premises of "total onslaught" made it unsurprising that the Naudé Committee Report of 1982 validated the state's conscription demands, concluding that "without the military to protect the system it would collapse overnight".<sup>157</sup> The state used the committee's recommendations and its limited consultation with the churches to try both to recapture the moral high ground and to contain CO by accommodating very limited CO on religious grounds, while criminalising all other objection, with the intention of dividing the CO movement.<sup>158</sup>

Defence Amendment Act 34 of 1983 provided for a Board for Religious Objection, mandated to allow religious objection on universal pacifist grounds only. Although nominally autonomous under the auspices of the Department of Manpower, its composition demonstrated the state's determination to control CO. Two of the board's members had to be from the SADF, one a chaplain, with a quorum consisting of the chairman and three members, including the chaplain, ensuring the board would favour the state's interpretation of legitimate CO.

In this way the state hoped to avoid further conflict with the churches, while protecting its own interests by only accommodating "the small number of genuine religious objectors who actually operate beyond the threat context".<sup>159</sup>

Even the public potential of religious objection was limited, as religious objectors were not permitted to disseminate their ideas or speak publicly about CO once they had been classified. The punitive demand that applicants demonstrate the sincerity of their convictions by serving one and a half times as long as soldiers meant that objectors would be safely tucked away in government offices for a long time. More importantly, the Act gave the state license to

<sup>155</sup> Paratus January 1980, p.47, April 1982, pp.34-35.

<sup>156</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 49B, confidential report: briefing regarding proposed legislation regarding religious objectors (undated).

<sup>157</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.9, box 42, secret memorandum on the need for manpower parity (undated).

<sup>158</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/1, vol.5, box 46, "Weerstand teen diensplig en ondermying van die SAW" collated by members of the information community 25 June 1979. Vol.6, box 46, confidential report on CO 7 March 1980. This desire to split the objector movement can also be seen in a confidential report on a soldier who justified "terrorist" activity in Namibia in the October 1979 issue of South African Outlook, but still served in the SADF and rejected selective CO. The state carefully collected such evidence of differences in emphasis within the broad objector group and hoped to utilise them to create division.

<sup>159</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 49B, briefing regarding proposed legislation regarding religious objectors, confidential report (undated).



"unmask radical elements hiding behind conscience and apply real sanctions to them".<sup>160</sup> CO on just war, political, ethical, or moral grounds was now punishable by a six-year jail term, as the NP loftily declared that the physical safety and military defensibility of the state could not be compromised by subjective ideological views about the injustice of its internal policies.<sup>161</sup>

In order to regain control of the security discourse the apartheid state thus claimed that religious belief differed from other ideological positions. Whereas it had previously repudiated individual CO positions, allowing only CO which was based on the testable evidence of the faith tradition or articles of faith of the "peace" churches, the apartheid state now reversed itself and claimed that while other kinds of belief were not a valid basis for CO since they were "subjective", universal religious pacifism was testable.<sup>162</sup> Yet the criteria for the Board for Religious Objection to identify a "genuine" candidate rested solely on its accepting the sincerity of his personal beliefs, with no frame of reference to anything outside of his subjectively held views. This manipulation of language and logic was a clear indication that the whole system was designed to limit the political threat of CO by invalidating selective opposition, which contextualised conscription and therefore raised questions about the apartheid state's legitimacy and its deployment of the SADF. With unconscious irony the state defended these narrow conditions on the basis that uncontrolled CO would allow the "domination of the majority by the minority".<sup>163</sup>

Initially, the SADF seemed to have regained control of the CO issue. The cost:benefit ratio of a personal CO stand was no longer tenable, as demonstrated by Brett Myrdal's choice of exile, rather than continuing his trial and facing a potential six years in jail.<sup>164</sup> All the objectors of the January 1984 intake agreed to apply for some category before the Board for Religious Objection. As a small number of objectors gradually refused to appear before the Board, the SADF initially opted to avoid the high profile of previous CO trials by deferring or dropping these call-ups.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>160</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/2, vol.7, box 47, report on CO 4 February 1980. Group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.51-54, box 49, opleiding: gewetensbesware 9 February 1982.

<sup>161</sup> Out of step, pp.69-71, non-combatant service in the SADF was served for the same period as military service, non-combatant service in non-military uniform required a continuous period of one and half times the length of military service, while those who refused any association with the SADF could serve a continuous period of one and half times the length of military service doing community service in a government, provincial or municipal department, up to a maximum of six years. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/14/1, vol.5, box 211, confidential report regarding the proposed legislation on religious objection (undated).

<sup>162</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 1077/5, box 9C, letter from the Humanist Association of South Africa to the Minister of Defence 1 December 1984. This group complained to the SADF that "all the debate was in church circles", but this was the only way the SADF felt it could regain control of the conscription discourse.

<sup>163</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 1077/5, box 49B, confidential report: briefing regarding the proposed legislation regarding religious objectors (undated).

<sup>164</sup> Cawthra, War and resistance, p.8.

<sup>165</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.10, box 210, report on the functioning of the Board for Religious Objection 3 October 1983. Of the January 1984 intake, for example, 377 indicated they would take a religious objector stance, but 80 were prepared to do non-combatant service and the rest were Jehovah's Witnesses. In the July intake only 83 men had indicated they would apply for objector status and all were prepared to do non-combatant service. Historical Papers A 2558, folder 11, legal assistance for CO: a memorandum on the Defence Amendment Act no.34 of 1983 October 1983.

However, the conscription debate of the preceding decade had consolidated a clear understanding of the link between apartheid and conscription in a number of quarters and opposition began to regroup. While the state had hoped to deflect attention away from the issue of conscription and the legitimacy of the conscripting authority<sup>166</sup> and direct it towards the new legal alternatives to military service, the churches were not co-opted by this partial accommodation of CO. The SACC and SACBC continued to insist that "just war" objection was a legitimate Christian response, and to demand the recognition of objection on humanitarian and ethical grounds.<sup>167</sup> The terms and conditions of alternative service thus became an important plank of the ECC platform, one which united the churches and liberal and humanitarian groupings, and attracted international interest.<sup>168</sup>

The SADF's hopes of containing or dividing the CO movement were also doomed, as the state's actions encouraged a greater push for unity amongst groups concerned about conscription. A 1982 conference by COSG and the SACC Commission on Violence and Non-Violence was unable to find a comfortable accommodation between NUSAS's political stance and religious objection. By the July 1983 COSG conference, however, the threat of the new legislation encouraged the acknowledgement of common ground, as the churches called for recognition of non-religious objection, and the radical left on campuses acknowledged the political potential of religious objection.

Moreover, as the new legislation limited the returns of an individual CO stand the CO movement began to broaden its focus. When Black Sash proposed an organisation specifically concerned with conscription at its April 1983 conference, this call was positively received in the existing CO support bases. As NUSAS noted, conscription opposition would be "less threatening than CO, while retaining personalised appeal", tapping the "reluctant attitude" many students had to the SADF while reinforcing links with black, church and liberal groupings, as well as exploiting liberal concerns such as freedom of choice and the PFP's call for a volunteer army.<sup>169</sup>

The July 1983 COSG conference formally proposed an organisation to oppose conscription. The backgrounds and experience of the approximately 100 participants who endorsed this motion demonstrated the range of people now interested in conscription issues. They included objectors – both universal pacifists and those whose objection was

<sup>166</sup> De Gruchy, *The church struggle in South Africa*, p.143. A similar situation obtained with the exemption board. Once again the SADF retained a measure of control over exemption because the board was staffed by members of the labour department and the PF, rather than representatives from commerce and industry, yet the SADF could represent it as a separate entity. Moskos and Chalmers, *The new conscientious objection*, p.131.

<sup>167</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/14/1, vol.5, box 211, response to proposed legislation regarding COs as given at the briefing to the churches by the SADF 5 January 1983, the United Congregational Church of South Africa. Letter from Douglas Bax to the Minister of Defence 17 March 1983. Vol.6, box 211, letter from Archbishop of Cape Town Philip Russell to the Minister of Defence 23 May 1986. Chief of the SADF, group 2, 10777/5, box 9D, letter from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa to the Minister of Defence 7 November 1986, ECC statement on conscription signed by six prominent Cape Town church leaders, SADF date-stamped 14 May 1986, letter from Secretary of the SACC Desmond Tutu to the Minister of Defence 7 August 1984.

<sup>168</sup> The "This is Joe" graphic on the title page of Chapter Two, for example, illustrated a fact sheet released by the ECC detailing the choices facing conscripts, Sue Britton's personal papers.

<sup>169</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H1, NUSAS anti-conscription committee report: the call to end conscription (undated).

highly selective – and their friends and family, ministers of religion and academics, Christian students and student politicians, left wing radicals and liberals, as well as office bearers in sympathetic organisations, including the current NUSAS president and a prominent official from the SACC. Some of the participants at the conference became integral to the functioning of the ECC, while others continued to focus on conscription issues from within the rationale of their own organisation. Both were necessary to develop the CO movement into a broader anti-conscription movement.<sup>170</sup>

The early CO movement thus contributed significantly to the emergence of the ECC, and to its character and goals. While the initial CO opposition indicated the political potential of conscription, the multiple foci of the organisations involved both divided them from one another and limited their effectiveness. The ECC, however, was able to draw on the wide range of experience and resources which had coalesced around CO, while avoiding much of the conflict and diffusion of energy by concentrating on the single issue of conscription. The CO movement also created a common vocabulary, and established conceptual parameters and a platform of issues which continued to be used by the ECC in its battle with the state. However, as the ECC explored the COSG conference charge to “raise awareness and build opposition” to conscription<sup>171</sup> it developed the existing CO protest into a wider, and consequently more effective, opposition movement. Lastly, CO raised public interest in, and tolerance for, conscription debate, making it more difficult for the state to control. Unlike 1974, where the media roundly condemned CO, by 1983 a Cape Times cartoon epitomised a new acceptance of the CO position, and a questioning of the validity of the state’s response to it. Two convicts, a thug-like criminal and a weedy, bespectacled CO, compared their respective sentences: six years for armed robbery, assault and battery versus nine years for pacifism.<sup>172</sup>

Thus the ideological challenge of CO reinforced the manpower challenge inherent in white conscription, while also undermining the state’s attempts to contain the costs of its conscription demands by encouraging individuals to accommodate the burden of conscription in order to protect the broader self-interest of white society. As CO encouraged debate about the political, economic, moral and spiritual implications of conscription in the white community, it became clear that for every Peter Moll or Richard Steele who confronted the state head on, there were others who had begun to avoid SADF service through emigration or non-compliance. The opposition work of the ECC between 1983 and 1988 was to build on the existing manpower challenge inherent in white minority conscription, and on the early CO movement’s ideological confrontation with the state’s security discourse, moral authority and definition of white self-interest.

<sup>170</sup> Sue Britton’s personal papers, registration for CO Conference in Durban July 1983.

<sup>171</sup> Historical papers AG 1977, folder A1, the End Conscription campaign: a chronology (undated).

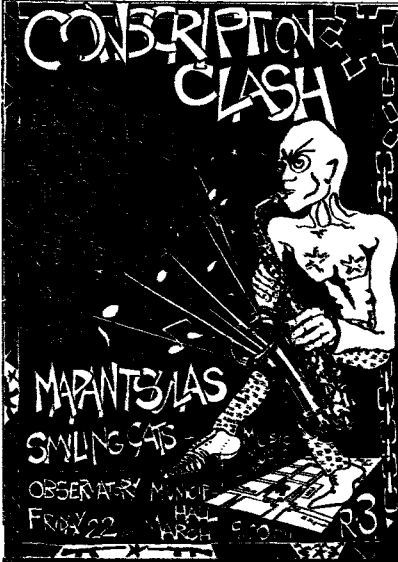
<sup>172</sup> Cape Times 10 March 1983. The ECC and COSG adapted this cartoon when the 1983 legislation was passed. At the time of the cartoon the state was still debating how long the period of alternative service should be.



# End Conscription Meeting

Monday 16th October 8 pm  
Claremont Civic Centre  
Rev Allan Boesak, Sheona Duncan

play + songs + talks



WHY MUST THIS HAPPEN TO US




Chapter Three  
November 1983 – July 1985:  
Building the ECC.



## STOP THE CALL UP

ECC  
End Conscription Campaign


**HAS THE ARMY INVADED YOUR LIFE?**




- CADETS
- CALL-UP
- CAMPS
- CAREER/STUDY INTERRUPTION
- PERSONAL RELATIONS

ECC  
End Conscription Campaign


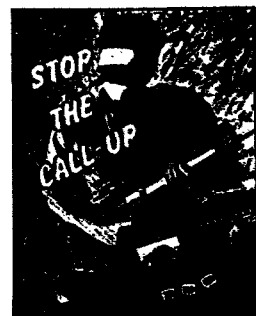
WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION



WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION



WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION

From the context of the previous two chapters it is clear that attempting to campaign against conscription among whites would be difficult. The state, increasingly reliant on the military to perpetuate itself, used its powers continuously to narrow the political space to oppose conscription while simultaneously increasing the costs. The state had also developed a security discourse that appealed powerfully to white self-interest, so that white liberals were inclined to see the SADF as a necessary stabilising force during the process of reform,<sup>173</sup> while conservatives viewed it as a critical bulwark against the forces of revolution. The success of the ECC's ability to shift white perceptions of the cost:benefit ratio of conscription was related to a number of factors ranging from its organisational capacity to socio-economic trends over which it had no control; from the changing impact of the inherent contradiction which formed the basis of the ECC's campaign to the increasing coercive capacity of the state to prevent it from making its case. Discussion of the ECC's work will therefore be divided into three phases, from a slow beginning in 1983/1984 to the greater profile generated by the peace festival in July 1985; the growth phase of the well-received "Troops Out" and "Working for a Just Peace" campaigns of late 1985 to mid 1986; and lastly, the changed emphases needed to survive and campaign in the greater repression from mid-1986 to the banning of the ECC in August 1988.

The ECC soon found that campaigning was not only difficult within broader white society. Even among extra-parliamentary groupings sympathetic towards the ECC, interest in, and support for, conscription issues was only one of the many aspects of their opposition to apartheid. The ECC therefore had to compete for limited financial resources and personnel in the small white anti-apartheid movement, and it was three understaffed, under-funded, and over-extended committees which set out to tackle the might of the apartheid state in one of its most sensitive areas at the end of 1983.

The initial expectation of the campaign was not so much to *end* conscription, as to use the issue to provide a legal platform from which to educate people about the relationship between militarism and apartheid, raising issues like defence costs, challenging the prevailing security ethic and opposing the extension of conscription to coloureds and Indians.<sup>174</sup>

This planning was strongly influenced by the initial structural conception of the ECC as a front, or "co-ordinating committee", rather than an organisation in its own right. While COSG inaugurated committees in Durban, Cape Town

<sup>173</sup> The lack of parliamentary opposition on defence-related matters for the first half of the 1980s and the controversy which the issue of conscientious objection stirred within the liberal Progressive Federal Party, which emerged as the strongest group in a reshuffling of the left wing opposition in 1977, indicated the success of the threat motif among many whites. J. Herbst, "Political and economic implications of South Africa's militarisation", *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, vol.8, no.1, 1986, pp.68-69.

<sup>174</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.3, Cape Town ECC paper drawn up for presentation to the Cape Town COSG weekend. University of Cape Town Archives and Manuscripts, BC 668, folder E, a campaign to end conscription report (undated).

and Johannesburg in late 1983, and COSG personnel were initially very involved in the structuring of the committees and drawing in other interested organisations,<sup>175</sup> Black Sash, NUSAS and a number of churches also provided a nucleus of representatives in the three committees. Committed to modelling democracy, the ECC adopted a structure whereby the primary decision-making forum of each committee was the general body meeting, where information was shared and campaigns planned. Affiliate representatives were to be the link between various organisations and the ECC, bringing the concerns of their organisations to the general body and taking ECC decisions back to their own organisations, in order to generate the necessary resources to run campaigns. In this way the ECC hoped to heighten affiliates' awareness of conscription issues, encouraging them to include a conscription focus in their normal work.<sup>176</sup>

The ECC also expected to rely on the existing skills, resources and contacts of the affiliates. COSG's experience with conscription issues meant it had contacts and credibility when trying to set up the three committees, as well as the resources to put together information packages, like the one used by the Johannesburg COSG to establish contact with target groups to initiate an ECC.<sup>177</sup> COSG also helped to disseminate the ECC's ideas within a sympathetic constituency by making space available in its publication Objector. Black Sash used its experience in arranging pickets and dealing with town councils on behalf of the ECC, as well as making space for the ECC at Sash events, such as fêtes and conferences. NUSAS publications like "In whose defence? Conscription and the SADF" raised ECC themes without requiring funding or manpower from the ECC,<sup>178</sup> while NUSAS CAG committees promoted conscription issues on campuses. A number of local churches made their facilities available to the ECC and umbrella bodies like the SACC and SACBC were an important source of funding.<sup>179</sup> The ECC could also draw on the experience and overseas contacts of early COs like Richard Steele, while fellow Durban ECC member Anita Kromberg worked for the international Quaker organisation IFOR which proved a useful ally in raising international awareness and channelling much-needed funding. The ECC also hoped international contacts would give them some security in the face of possible government repression.

Affiliate support had limits, however. To avoid state harassment and alienating the "broad spectrum of conscripts", as well as sectors within the ECC's support base, the ECC decided to have no formal contact with the ANC, although

<sup>175</sup> Archives and Manuscripts, BC 668, folder E, report to Black Sash national conference March 1984, "The Development and formation of the End Conscription Campaign (Western Cape)". Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, minutes of "The meeting held to discuss the launching of an End Conscription Committee" 13 October 1983. Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the ECC 17 November 1983.

<sup>176</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A1, structure of the ECC committee (undated). Folder B8.4.2, report on activities of ECC Western Cape March 1984-February 1985.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> UNISA, Documentation Centre for African Studies, ECC Collection ACC 326, "In whose defence? Conscription and the SADF", NUSAS, 1982.

<sup>179</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H9, report on fifth national conference of COSG July 1984. Folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 19 April 1984.

some individual members did keep in contact with the ANC, which remained broadly supportive of the ECC's work throughout its existence.<sup>180</sup> Within South Africa, groups sympathetic towards the ECC did not necessarily want to be associated with one another. The ECC spent much time debating whether to allow the PFP Youth to affiliate nationally, as multiracial affiliates opposed the PFP's continued participation in the tricameral parliament. Similarly, the churches felt it would be inappropriate to be closely associated with the UDF, so the ECC allowed local area committees to affiliate, rather than the UDF *per se*. Internal limitations further affected the support of individual affiliates. Within the SACC, for example, a resolution calling for an end to conscription was still blocked, and the military chaplaincy issue remained divisive.<sup>181</sup> NUSAS put its UDF affiliation first and indicated that its response to the ECC would be in the light of its UDF commitments. Organisations like Black Sash and the Civil Rights League were sympathetic, but already relied on heavily committed volunteers. Moreover, activists from affiliated organisations were often not *au fait* with the rationale and core values motivating the ECC. Affiliate workers' energies were diffused and they were frequently driven by an attraction to a specific cause, rather than a clear understanding of the interconnection between apartheid and militarism.

The structuring of the ECC as a front also led to numerous bureaucratic delays. In Cape Town, for example, a meeting to discuss the launching of a regional ECC was held on 13 October 1983. Yet by the inaugural meeting a month later, a number of interested organisations had not yet been able to discuss the issue within their own structures. The bureaucratic organisation of the churches also delayed appeals from the ECC for endorsement.<sup>182</sup>

As a new organisation, without national structures, a constitution, or a mission statement, much of the initial energy of the ECC went into determining its direction and developing credibility within the existing anti-apartheid movement. The varying make-up of each committee meant that there was, as yet, little common sense of direction, or a recognisable national identity. Thus for much of 1984 each region acted largely autonomously, having broadly similar aims but lacking consensus on aspects as fundamental as a name.<sup>183</sup> As campaigning began, however, the ECC needed more competent spokespeople and committed personnel than the front structure could provide. Gradually, within each ECC a core group developed, whose primary commitment was increasingly to the ECC.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Letter from Laurie Nathan to Merran Phillips 16 May 1998.

<sup>181</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 29 March 1984.

<sup>182</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, minutes of the inaugural meeting of the ECC, 17 November 1983. Cape Town ECC minutes 13 September 1984.

<sup>183</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.2, Movement Against Conscription (MAC) minutes 5 August 1984, at this meeting the Durban committee decided to fall in line with the other two regions, which had already been using the name "ECC". Although only formally adopted in August 1984, the name ECC has been used throughout partly for convenience, and partly because it was only the Durban group which argued for alternatives.

<sup>184</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.4.1, Johannesburg ECC – an assessment of 1984. Folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 13 September 1984.

The motivation of these core activists influenced the structure and emphases of the three regional ECCs. The Durban ECC, for example, had a strongly Christian pacifist flavour, and the group's ethic encouraged an informal structure, with rotating positions of authority and responsibility, and a steering group, rather than an executive. Activists tended to be older, a number of them full-time Christian workers. The ecumenical organisation Diakonia was an important resource, offering space for meetings and a peace library.<sup>185</sup> For much of the year the membership overlap of COSG and ECC activists made it difficult to generate a specific ECC identity, and to extend membership. The regional context further complicated Durban ECC work. The UDF in Natal was strongly opposed by Inkatha, making it difficult to establish UDF Anti-Conscription Committees (ACC) in Natal. As the ECC developed a more public presence in October 1984, it attracted the interest of black groups seeking a forum from which to address the proposed extension of conscription. This further diffused the focus of the Durban ECC as it tried to accommodate widely diverging interests.<sup>186</sup>

By contrast, in Johannesburg and Cape Town the ECC found itself addressing a whites-only constituency, due to the presence of UDF ACCs. Students at the predominantly coloured University of the Western Cape, for example, agreed to be observers at ECC meetings, but reserved their active participation for UDF structures.<sup>187</sup> Where local area UDF committees did affiliate with the ECC, the impact of the Group Areas Act meant that participants were predominantly white.

Because of the early campaigning at UCT on militarisation issues, the Cape Town ECC had a strong student flavour, as students who had been prominent in the 1982 Militarisation Focus moved into leadership and working positions within the ECC, contributing useful experience and a clearly articulated analysis of the relationship between militarism and apartheid. Campus was a venue for mass meetings and concerts, as well as a resource base, giving access to the Student Representative Council (SRC) press and resource centre, and the support of academics like Francis Wilson and Michael Savage, who were pressed into service on ECC platforms. Contact with students, the directly conscripted group, also led to a greater appreciation of the potential of appealing to white self-interest, particularly white resentment at conscription, and encouraged the integration of a conscription message into youth culture.

<sup>185</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Durban core group minutes 5 March 1984. Folder B10.3, report on MAC for national meeting 17 July 1984.

<sup>186</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A5.1.1, ECC first national conference minutes, regional reports and papers 25-27 January 1985. Box H9, report on fifth national conference of COSG July 1984.

<sup>187</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, minutes of "The meeting held to discuss the launching of an End Conscription Committee" 13 October 1983.



Human rights organisations like the Civil Rights League and Black Sash, and campaigners with high white community status like past UCT principal Sir Richard Luyt also helped develop the ECC's public presence in Cape Town. As in Durban, the churches remained an important source of support, venues and resources, but the overall image of the Cape Town group was less overtly religious. A 1982 SRC report on the UCT Military Focus set the tone, stating that while "much of the public debate has been within Christian circles and hence couched in a Christian idiom, and many of the resource people are Christians, it is changing and it needs to change".<sup>188</sup>

The structuring of the Cape Town ECC thus reflected the influence of the numerous ex-NUSAS leaders and students, with a greater emphasis on procedure, analysis and introspection. From the start, the Cape Town group had an executive – constituted as a representative forum for the most involved affiliates: UCT, COSG, Black Sash and the churches – with clearly defined duties and a chairperson.

There is scant material on the early life of the Johannesburg ECC but interviews with activists suggested a radical Christian presence,<sup>189</sup> more overtly political than the universal pacifism in Durban, and that UDF affiliate, the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC), and radical activist academics like David Webster and Tom Waspe were important influences. Regional resources included the Human Awareness Programme, which provided the ECC with organisational training. The ECC was also able to use the resources of the SACC, which had its headquarters in Johannesburg. Like the Durban branch, a number of activists were already working, making their participation less flexible. As in the other regions, experienced Black Sash personnel made a significant contribution, as did COSG, but again there was a confusion of identity between the ECC and COSG.

In Johannesburg, leadership seems to have been defined, with an executive and a chairperson who became a recognisable spokesperson for the ECC, particularly with regard to the press and other organisations. However, the 1984 September uprisings in the Vaal Triangle townships meant that the Johannesburg branch was exposed early to the rigours of campaigning under emergency regulations, and several Johannesburg ECC events had to be restructured to allow them to take place legally.<sup>190</sup>

Thus while there was core agreement on structure and purpose, and a similar basic constituency of Black Sash, COSG, NUSAS, and education, church and regional democratic organisations, the ECC's impact in 1984 was

<sup>188</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.4.1, Social Action Committee of the SRC report on the military focus at UCT June 1982.

<sup>189</sup> Interviews with Steve Lowry and Adele Kirsten, national secretary (4 February 1999).

<sup>190</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H9, report of the fifth national conference of COSG July 1984. Folder B1.4.1, Johannesburg ECC – an assessment of 1984 report.

predominantly regional, rather than national, as regions explored the nature of the white societies they were trying to reach, and the varying resources at their disposal. This regionalism was exacerbated by limited contact between the three committees due to financial and time constraints. Activists from different regions tended to meet at events focusing on other organisations, like COSG and NUSAS conferences, rather than initiating meetings. Nevertheless, there was some sharing of resources from the outset. The Cape Town group was the first to get off the ground, with a set of working principles, subsequently utilised by the Johannesburg group in their own start-up campaign. Similarly, media and resource packages developed by one committee were shared around and utilised by others where appropriate to their particular constituencies.<sup>191</sup>

As the ECC began to promote its views more actively, its campaigns became a barometer of the growth of self-awareness, identity and capability within and among the three committees. The first initiative was a survey of conscription attitudes, intended to raise awareness of conscription issues among the general public and affiliates. Affiliates were to develop and run the survey within their own constituencies, with the ECC co-ordinating the results as a database for future work and for release to the media.<sup>192</sup> This indicated the limited initial capacity of the ECC, relying entirely on volunteers, and emerging from a very small resource base.

By mid-year, however, the Cape Town and Johannesburg groups had developed sufficient internal cohesion to attempt a more specifically ECC campaign. Converging condemnation of the SADF presence in Namibia from churches, NUSAS and academics led the ECC to develop a "No War in Namibia" campaign. Again, the focus was primarily educative, with the goal of raising questions about the role of the SADF in Namibia. By giving Namibian opposition spokespeople a platform at ECC-organised press conferences the ECC hoped to counter the state's "total onslaught" explanations for its presence in Namibia, while not overtaxing its own personnel. In Cape Town, Anton Lubowski, a Namibian advocate, Hans Rohr, leader of the Namibian Christian Democratic Party and Cornelius Kameeta, vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, told the press that the SADF's presence in Namibia was illegal and unwanted and that young men were being conscripted to uphold apartheid, while in Johannesburg a few weeks later Lubowski and Sheena Duncan, president of Black Sash, gave a similar message.

The resulting press suggested that the state still dominated white public discourse through intimidation, successful propaganda, and direct control. The sympathetic alternative press such as Objector and Grassroots carried

<sup>191</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 14 & 22 February 1984. Minutes of Durban core group 5 March 1984.

<sup>192</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 14 February, 8 & 29 March 1984. The payoff could be seen by the following year as the liberal press began to show more interest in the ECC. The 28 June 1985 Star article "Campuses spearhead growing resistance to military service", for example, was based on the data gathered in the 1984 survey.

comprehensive reports on the press conferences, but the limited readership of these publications meant that the ECC's profile was only raised within an already sympathetic constituency.<sup>193</sup> State control of broadcasting meant the ECC's message was effectively withheld from much of the white public, while the white press still regarded the ECC's message as fairly radical, and turned in conservative, if any, reports.<sup>194</sup> This situation continued after the campaign. The Durban group attempted a letter-writing campaign but letters were either not printed or "cut to ribbons", while an editor rejected an ECC advertisement because he was afraid of running foul of the law.<sup>195</sup>

However, as a first salvo the "No war in Namibia" campaign demonstrated the organisational gains of active campaigning, and exposed fallow areas for future work, particularly among white youth. Although the campaign still lacked a national focus, participating regions experienced considerable benefits in terms of a greater public presence and internal growth. Committees discovered that where the ECC offered material useful to sympathetic groups, greater numbers were attracted to meetings, while active campaigning encouraged regional growth, and subcommittee work generated a greater sense of commitment to the ECC. Media, in particular, generated excitement, as the ECC began to explore the power of graphic communication in posters, as well as producing an information sheet detailing the rationale for its existence and its achievements thus far.

The campaign also proved an important organisational learning curve. A lack of co-ordination between the UDF and the ECC meant the UDF's Republic Day meeting deflected attention from the ECC's "No War in Namibia" events.<sup>196</sup> The May Cape Town campaign had a strong Christian flavour, with candles and vigils featuring prominently, but breakdowns in co-ordination with the churches and advertising meant that the main meeting and the vigil were not as well attended as expected, with between 300 and 350 people, although a display on Namibia at UCT was very well received. When the Johannesburg ECC held its own Namibia focus in June, it experienced similar results. Events like pickets, a display on Namibia, a slide-tape show and a concert were most successful within the existing sympathetic constituency. Besides logistical problems, like too few workers, and t-shirts which arrived too late and were banned too soon, the campaign demonstrated that the ECC had not yet engaged many people beyond those already open to the anti-conscription message. Although the link between the presence of the SADF in Namibia and the call to end

<sup>193</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H9, *Objector*, vol.2, no.3, 1984.

<sup>194</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.4.1, Johannesburg ECC – an assessment of 1984.

<sup>195</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.3, report on MAC for national meeting 17 July 1984.

<sup>196</sup> Sue Britton's personal papers, information sheet for bystanders taking part in Namibia focus week May 1984. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 22 February, 19 April & 7 June 1984. Folder B8.4.2, report of activities of ECC Western Cape March 1984-February 1985.

scription was clear to those involved in the ECC, Namibia was geographically, emotionally and practically distant from the daily concerns of many ordinary white South Africans.<sup>197</sup>

Nevertheless, the fact that even this limited campaign drew vituperative right-wing Afrikaans press, which criticised the state for laxity in allowing any protest against conscription, confirmed that public campaigning around conscription had the potential to put political pressure on the state.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, as the ECC began to take on a specific character, so its reputation grew among organisations which shared its broad anti-apartheid goals. These organisations began to include the ECC in their own initiatives, or allowed it to use their functions as a means of publicising the ECC. In Durban, for example, the ECC was invited to present a display on conscription at a fête organised by the National Organisation of Women, and to make a presentation to the Association of Durban Democrats. The Cape Town group presented papers on the ECC at both the Black Sash and Western Province Council of Churches conferences. The ECC was also welcomed by community initiatives like the Grassroots newspaper, which offered the ECC space, while the Cape Arts Project gave the ECC media training, and made their facilities available to the ECC.<sup>199</sup> At UCT two candidates standing for the SRC did so successfully on a "Unite Against Conscription" ticket, and when Namibian students came to speak at the University of the Western Cape the ECC was invited to state its case. Thus, while the ECC was hardly a dynamic force in 1984, its growing organisational and public presence continued to focus conscription awareness among the diverse groups which had called it into being.<sup>200</sup>

In addition to the more academic and political debate, the emergence of the ECC also helped stimulate and focus the emerging cultural and emotional responses of white youth, and conscription issues began to feature regularly in student publications. At UCT, for example, the Psychology students' publication looked at "Mind and the Military", while the Christian newspaper examined the cases and workings of the Board for Religious Objection. CAG also continued to publicise the results of the NUSAS survey, which indicated that the majority of students supported neither the SADF nor conscription.<sup>201</sup>

Conscription issues were also explored through the more accessible form of graphics, drama and poetry. UCT Varsity editor Steve Kromberg's poem "The Hell Bent Terror" was printed in a number of publications. After examining the personal terrors of being exposed to conflict situations, it asked

<sup>197</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder E2.5, assessment of "No War in Namibia" campaign by Mike van Graan (undated).

<sup>198</sup> Afrikaner 11 July 1984.

<sup>199</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 22 February, 19 April & 11 October 1984. Folder B10.2, MAC minutes 5 August 1984.

<sup>200</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 30 August & 13 September 1984.

<sup>201</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H1, Psyche, vol.4, no.3, 1984, pp.6-7.

"If there isn't someone sitting in Pretoria

Cutting out hell bent terrors",

an image which both ridiculed the state's portentous rationale of the conflict and suggested a hidden agenda, in which the individual conscript was merely a pawn, despite the personal physical and emotional cost.<sup>202</sup>

Graphics also targeted conscription. A Varsity cover depicted the conscript's dilemma. The male figure could either fall despairingly backwards into nakedness and prison, or step forward into army uniform, his face distorting into a violent snarl as he shook a black child. A shaft of light, like a spotlight, drew attention to the moment of decision; both futures were shaded off into darkness, equally bleak. This was an emotionally powerful depiction of the unpalatable alternatives facing young men, and their lack of choice. Cartoonists were also attracted to conscription issues. The NUSAS Law Directive, for instance, showed P.W.Botha as a recruitment-style Uncle Sam proclaiming, "The SADF wants you!" while the majority of the approaching potential recruits peeled off to the left and right, into exile, hiding or jail, and a lone figure took the straight path to Botha, a visual representation of the opinions students had expressed in the NUSAS survey.<sup>203</sup> This tradition of visual argument and analysis continued to be incorporated into the posters, banners and stickers which characterised later ECC campaigns.<sup>204</sup>

However, if conscription issues were gaining some momentum among ECC affiliates by mid 1984, the ECC had to resolve a number of organisational difficulties in order to exploit this interest and consolidate a national presence. An early August meeting of representatives of the three regional campaigns proved to be an important planning and strategising forum. In addition to improving structure and co-ordination by mandating each region to appoint one person to co-ordinate with the other regions, the meeting finally agreed on the name "ECC" and a logo, a chain with broken links forming the letters ECC, and staged a new campaign intended to consolidate the ECC's national presence. A declaration was drawn up, summarising the ECC's analysis and demands, to be endorsed by "nobs" (high profile people in a variety of fields).<sup>205</sup> The ECC hoped to use their patrons' credibility and profile to mount public launches of the ECC in each region simultaneously, generating an increased sense of momentum and unity.<sup>206</sup> Organisational challenges were also addressed at the meeting. While the ECC remained committed to the front concept, ongoing work had made it clear national structures were necessary to facilitate planning and co-ordination. A

<sup>202</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H1, Varsity fragment.

<sup>203</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder H1, Law Directive fragment.

<sup>204</sup> This aspect of the ECC's opposition will be discussed in chapter nine. The non-ECC graphics described here are shown on the title page of chapter two.

<sup>205</sup> See Appendix One.

<sup>206</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.1, Wilgerspruit reports 22 July 1984, Cape Town ECC report January 1985. Folder B10.2, MAC minutes 5 August 1984.

working conference was planned for January 1985, at which delegates would be mandated by their regions to make decisions regarding the future direction and structure of the campaign.

The ECC was also forced to confront its financial crisis. Despite hopes of funding its running costs through affiliate subscriptions, by August the Cape Town ECC had no money at all and the other regions were not much better off. The second half of 1984 thus saw the ECC beginning to fund itself through its own efforts, a further boost to its identity as an organisation. The Cape Town group, for example, held several concerts featuring popular local bands and a short conscription message. These proved hugely successful, attracting crowds of up to 1 000 white youth, while generating profits as high as R1 200 a time. Wearable media, such as badges and t-shirts, also proved popular and profitable, while offering the ECC free advertising.<sup>207</sup>

Through its own efforts the Cape Town ECC was able to end the year in the black, but campaigns were very expensive and local and international donors were critical for the ECC to be able to project itself nationally. At the August meeting the ECC decided to apply for aid to a number of international groups and peace organisations as soon as possible, rather than waiting for January to draw up a comprehensive budget. Once again the ECC was aided by the reputation and contacts of previous objectors, such as CO Peter Moll, who undertook to meet with various organisations on his forthcoming overseas trip. Within South Africa the churches remained the single biggest sponsor, and a channel for international funds.<sup>208</sup> The declaration launch, for instance, was funded by a R4 000 donation from the SACC. Prominent clerics such as Denis Hurley also wrote letters of recommendation to accompany ECC requests for international aid.<sup>209</sup>

As the costs indicated, the declaration launch was the most ambitious campaign thus far, serving both as mission statement of the ECC's goals and rationale for its existence, a statement of identity and intent.<sup>210</sup> The declaration was in three parts, each separated by the refrain: "We call for an end to conscription". It began by categorising the South African state as "unjust", "unequal" and "in a state of civil war", a direct challenge to the official line of "total onslaught", which identified the South Africa conflict as being externally fermented. The second part looked at the conscript, his role in maintaining the "illegal occupation of Namibia" and assisting in the "implementation and defence of apartheid policies", and his lack of options. Again, this was a challenge to the total onslaught emphasis on the patriotic duty of

<sup>207</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.4.2, report of activities of ECC Western Cape March 1984-February 1985. Folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 28 July & 30 August 1984.

<sup>208</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder G2, letter from Steve Lowry to a German CO 19 May 1986.

<sup>209</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 27 September, 11 October & 8 November 1984. Folder B10.3, Durban ECC report to national conference 25 January 1985.

<sup>210</sup> In 1985 the ECC drew up a constitution to facilitate fundraising, but the declaration remained its primary document in media work as the most succinct expression of the ECC's identity and goals, and as a basis for affiliation.

servicemen, and their protective function in the face of outside forces of degradation and destruction. "Total onslaught" propaganda used terms like "boys on the border", while the declaration focused attention on the fact that in reality servicemen were deployed in another country. The third section looked at the costs of conscription, both financial and in terms of increased division within the country, particularly if conscription were to be extended to other race groups. Again, this challenged the "total onslaught" legitimisation of an ever-increasing percentage of the budget to defence. The ECC argued that the costs were not worth it, and that the inherently unequal allocation of resources was the root cause of the conflict in the first place. The declaration concluded by claiming that the exercise of conscience was a "moral right", and calling for an end to conscription and for a "just peace". This, too, challenged the state's security discourse, undermining its attempts to confine moral debate around conscription to the narrow parameters of universal pacifism.

From August, the three committees began to collect signatures of support from prominent people and pro-democracy organisations in each region. This was a time-consuming process, but the ECC was later able to brandish this support base of some 50 organisations when making representation to government, the UN and the numerous international bodies it approached for funding.<sup>211</sup>

The declaration campaign was intended to establish a national profile for the ECC but the lack of national structures hindered co-ordination and each region eventually organised its own timetable of events. While all three regions recognised the need to draw people in with engaging activities rather than just political speeches, the Cape Town group was the most successful. A "cultural roadshow" was specifically developed, including the play "Somewhere on the Border" (which had been on the commercial circuit in 1982), poetry and a slide-tape show. Preceding the launch was a "Rock against the Ratel" concert at UCT attended by an estimated 1 000 people, as well as a prayer vigil for an end to conscription, and a press conference to allow prominent people to explain their endorsement of the declaration. Academic Michael Savage, regional Black Sash chair Mary Burton, Presbyterian minister Doug Bax, and conscript and doctor in the deprived black area of Crossroads Ivan Toms, modelled the range of opposition to conscription.

The success of the Cape Town launch can be gauged by positive indicators like an attendance of some 1 400 at the launch meeting, as well as opposition such as the disruptive presence of the NP funded National Student Federation

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<sup>211</sup> These included churches, women's and students' movements, human rights organisations, black movements like COSAS, the UDF, as well as 33 prominent individuals, including academics, ministers, two members of provincial councils, and the presidents of both Black Sash and the UDF. Bureaucracy again retarded the process of endorsement. Archbishop Philip Russell of Cape Town, for example, supported the declaration in his personal capacity, but could only sign it once it had been endorsed by the Provincial Standing Committee or the Synod of Bishops. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 16 & 30 August 1984.

(NSF). The launch generated sufficient state interest to justify an October special situation report on the ECC to the SSC, suggesting that even the modest gains of the ECC worried the apartheid state. The report indicated the state's concern about the ECC's future momentum, given the convergence of anti-apartheid activism around conscription, as demonstrated by the ECC's international contacts, growing support for the ECC on NUSAS campuses, and the ANC's encouragement of conscription resistance.<sup>212</sup>

By contrast, the Johannesburg ECC launch coincided with unrest following the deployment of the SADF in Vaal Triangle townships, leading to a ban on all meetings. The ECC held a press conference with public support from anti-apartheid activist Helen Joseph, SACC general secretary Beyers Naudé, NUSAS president Kate Philip, and academic David Webster, to demonstrate the range of support for anti-conscription work. In order to remain legal, however, the launch itself had to be converted into a fête, with affiliates taking stalls.

Durban ran perhaps the most conservative launch, with a public meeting addressed by anti-apartheid activist Zac Yacoob of the Natal Indian Congress, the Reverend Wesley Mabuza, Christian youth worker Paul Graham, and CO Richard Steele, which drew an estimated audience of 200. Perhaps more significantly, an organisational workshop, which also formed part of the launch, attracted 40 people from a wide variety of organisations and indicated multiracial support for the call to end conscription.

In both Durban and Johannesburg low attendance figures indicated the ECC was still struggling to move outside its existing support base. Although the launches had the positive effect of drawing affiliates together and involving them more closely in ongoing ECC work, these ECCs did not feel they were drawing new people into the movement, nor attracting significant press coverage. In all three regions those doing the work were still the same small group and distribution of media remained an ongoing problem. As the Johannesburg branch noted, conscription had not yet caught the popular imagination and so was not prioritised by many organisations.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, although the declaration represented a cogent analysis of the interconnection between apartheid and militarism, the implications of the radical call to end conscription were too risky for many whites. The state continued to try to shut down conscription debate, banning the issue of Objector which first carried the declaration, but the limited support of the white press

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<sup>212</sup> DSD, Insam, box 40, special situation report 85/84 30 October 1984. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.1, ECC press release 16 October 1984. Folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 30 August & 13 September 1984. Folder B8.4.2, report of activities of ECC Western Cape March 1984-February 1985.

<sup>213</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.4.1, Johannesburg ECC – an assessment of 1984 report.



suggested that it too, remained committed to a “total onslaught” rationale of both the conflict and the state’s conscription demands.<sup>214</sup>

If the ECC was unable to raise support for the call to *end* conscription outside of extra-parliamentary circles, other aspects of conscription were nevertheless gaining momentum as opposition issues. The deployment of the SADF in black townships in September 1984 and Minister of Law and Order Louis le Grange’s statement, that such deployment would continue if necessary, gave a new immediacy to the ECC’s arguments as conscripts faced township call-ups. This brought the interdependence of the apartheid state and its military muscle into much sharper focus for whites. The state issued a blanket ban on the release of information regarding the deployment of troops in the townships by 6 November 1984, but the use of conscripted troops in the townships encouraged ongoing discussion of the link between the SADF and continued apartheid rule. The liberal press discussed what patriotism meant in a South African context, and the public was made aware that SADF conscripts were being used in South African townships, despite the state’s polemic about needing to increase the period of national service because of the external threat.

By 1984, in significant contrast to the concerted white condemnation of the 1974 Hammanskraal Declaration, the internal deployment of the SADF created moral unease among whites and exacerbated existing political differences.<sup>215</sup> The SABC radio programme “Microphone In”, for example, found that the majority of callers who responded to a conscription show favoured a professional volunteer army and an end to conscription, and indicated that the use of troops in the townships had been a major influence on their thinking. The PFP faced an angry internal debate on its conscription policy, and the greater public debate around conscription which ensued led the liberal press, in particular, to adopt the position that conscription had implications for traditional liberal concerns like freedom of speech, human rights, and the rule of law. Although the English press and the PFP were still far from endorsing the ECC’s declaration, there was an increasing acceptance that conscription opposition was a legitimate position, and an issue which had a place in public discourse.<sup>216</sup>

While the debate around conscription in the latter part of 1984 neither encouraged a convergence between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary initiatives on conscription, nor significantly raised the profile of the ECC,<sup>217</sup> it indicated both that conscription was a fertile opposition issue, and that it had the potential to be politically divisive. In

<sup>214</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 13 September 1984. See chapter seven for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the press and the ECC.

<sup>215</sup> Daily Dispatch 21 November 1984, Cape Times 21 November 1984, Sunday Star 25 November 1984, Cape Herald 1 December 1984. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder O, PFP Comment October 1984.

<sup>216</sup> Argus 18 October 1984, Sunday Tribune 25 November 1984, Argus 26 November 1984, Financial Mail 30 November 1984.

<sup>217</sup> An ECC press release questioning the suppression of news coverage of unrest, for example, was not published, although other organisations were raising the same issue and being recognised. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.1, ECC press release 9 November 1984.

such a context there was renewed scope for the ECC. The January 1985 national conference was an important step towards taking advantage of these new conditions, as structural changes gave the ECC a new organisational strength and focus.<sup>218</sup> Another significant aspect of the conference was to allow regional activists to spend time together, developing a sense of the ECC as a national movement and planning campaigns which would clearly project the ECC's message in order to avoid diffusing the limited available energy and resources.<sup>219</sup>

The ECC also expected gains from working collaboratively, especially on the International Year of the Youth (IYY) projects emerging from the UN's 1985 focus on youth. Youth had been one of the ECC's most receptive constituencies thus far, and the churches and the UDF planned to take up the IYY campaign too. The ECC aimed to add a uniquely anti-conscription message to IYY, while recommending a joint focus with other groups in areas of common concern such as a proposed national day of protest commemorating the SADF invasion of Sebokeng.<sup>220</sup> However, the ECC was also determined to create its own momentum, drawing other groups into its concerns, and to this end planned to focus both local and international interest on a high profile peace festival planned for June/July.

The ECC intended to expand into new regions too. In Pietermaritzburg, Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth there was support for the formation of new ECCs. Pietermaritzburg activists were close enough to Durban to attend some ECC meetings there, stimulating interest in the ECC. In the eastern Cape, the "Dad's army" call-up of the commandos had brought conscription issues to the fore. In Grahamstown an advice centre on national service, Gracons, had been set up and received considerable publicity for exposing the attempts of the local commando to enrol those who were not eligible, while Rhodes student Dave Hartman had aroused local interest by challenging the theistic tenets of the Board for Religious Objection by objecting as a Buddhist.<sup>221</sup> While Port Elizabeth was considerably more conservative and its university was not a NUSAS affiliate, a number of ECC activists had relocated there, such as CO Pete Hathorn, journalists Mike Loewe and Gavin Evans, and Janet Cherry who had filled a number of leadership positions at UCT. These people had leadership skills and an understanding of ECC structures and principles, invaluable in an area with a very small white progressive movement.

<sup>218</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.1, Cape Town ECC minutes 22 November 1984.

<sup>219</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.8.3, a glaring example of how little national impact the ECC had had beyond existing constituencies was the enquiry in late 1984 by the government department handling International Year of the Youth funding, offering a government subsidy if ECC programmes and projects were in keeping with the goals of the government!

<sup>220</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A5.1.1, ECC first national conference Botha's Hill 25-27 January 1985.

<sup>221</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 1077/75, box 9D, memorandum on the Hartman case 4 February 1985, the SADF was deeply concerned that Hartman could have an advocate to argue his case, but because the SADF was not officially part of the Board for Religious Objection, and since the Board did not have the funds, it would not have an advocate. The SADF was particularly concerned that if Hartman won it would "open the door for any CO to apply and be categorised".

However, none of these three proposed regions had a branch of COSG, which had played an important role in getting the original three committees off the ground. The January conference therefore created the position of national organiser. The job involved keeping the regions connected, being a spokesperson for the ECC, conducting research and monitoring the public profile of the ECC in the press, helping in the creation of new ECCs, as well as liaising with sympathetic umbrella organisations like the UDF, SACC, SACBC, and international groups. Weaker established regions, like Durban, also hoped an ECC worker would stimulate the campaign there, as activists were overworked.<sup>222</sup>

Laurie Nathan was unanimously chosen as national organiser, and he brought boundless energy and passion to the job, sometimes signing himself, with an almost biblical dedication, "the bricklayer".<sup>223</sup> Through numerous handwritten circular letters he kept the regions in touch with one another, as well as making contact with overseas donor and support agencies. His enthusiastic grin began to appear in newspapers as he gave statements and interviews on behalf of the ECC. He appeared on public platforms and in debates representing the ECC and was so successful that the next national conference had to deal with the issue of how to develop more leaders and tone down his role. In 1985, however, his energy was an important propellant.

Although Nathan only earned R500 per month, such ongoing expenses necessitated plans for a more secure financial base and greater centralisation of finances.<sup>224</sup> A system of national and regional access to funds was established, with Steve Lowry as treasurer. This was a thankless job as enthusiastic activists were often careless bookkeepers, but financial accountability was crucial, not only to win overseas backers, but also because the state was able to use fundraising laws against anti-apartheid groups reliant on donor agencies. In 1985 more than half of the ECC's funding came from overseas groups. In many cases money was nominally sent in return for ECC pamphlets, stickers and other media in order to bypass fundraising laws. Sometimes it was quietly channelled through sympathetic organisations, predominantly the SACBC and SACC.<sup>225</sup>

Final financial control was vested in the new national committee (initially called the national council) established by the national conference to improve communication and planning. Mandated to meet several times during the year, this

<sup>222</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A5.1.1, ECC first national conference Botha's Hill 25-27 January 1985.

<sup>223</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, letter from Laurie Nathan to "Dave" 11 April 1986.

<sup>224</sup> As a point of comparison, in 1985 a junior teacher's salary – one of the worse paid professions – was between R800-R900, depending on gender. Natal Education Department salary advice slip February 1985.

<sup>225</sup> CO Richard Steele was also given introductory letters from the WCC. This, together with his own contacts built up through his CO stand and overseas travel, allowed him to appeal to German aid organisations for some R27 000 and to approach overseas agencies for funding via their Africa desks. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A5.1.1, ECC first national conference Botha's Hill 25-27 January 1985. Box G2, ECC: monies promised and received 1985/1986.

body comprised one representative from each region, and the national organiser was responsible to it.<sup>226</sup> The ECC was still strongly committed to participatory democracy, and so carefully hedged the national committee's authority, but it became a useful communication and discussion forum.

Aside from constitutional and planning matters, as the most representative forum of the ECC the January conference also had to take decisions on potentially contentious issues which had arisen in its first year of operation, such as opening affiliation to the PFP Youth. Once again regional differences affected activists' views. The Johannesburg branch planned to challenge the PFP to a debate, as a means of raising the issue of conscription within its essentially liberal and left wing constituency, while multiracial affiliates in Cape Town opposed the PFP because of its continuing parliamentary participation. The conference thus decided that each region should decide on its relationship with the PFP. This proved a wise decision, as the Port Elizabeth branch, constituted later in the year, found the PFP a useful ally in a region with very limited extra-parliamentary white opposition.<sup>227</sup>

Even the Cape Town group recognised the importance of liberal establishment contacts in generating "righteous indignation" in the face of state repression. An indication of what the ECC could expect was a security police raid on the last day of the conference. Although no arrests were made, papers were seized and formed the basis of a special situational report to the SSC. Since the ECC later identified one of the participants at the conference as a government spy, the intention of the raid may have been intimidation, as much as information gathering.<sup>228</sup>

The January conference thus set a national direction for the ECC, put national structures in place and prioritised national campaigns for 1985, while also recognising that significant regional differences remained. In 1985 Cape Town and Johannesburg continued to have active input from UDF affiliates, while the multiracial component of the Durban group diminished as the threat of an extension of conscription faded in black areas and black activists increasingly focused on conflict in the townships.<sup>229</sup> Durban retained a strong Christian pacifist flavour. It contributed non-violent direct action training to the other ECCs, but its small size meant it sometimes was forced to rely on media from other

<sup>226</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A5.1.1, ECC first national conference Botha's Hill 25-27 January 1985.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* Folder B8.1.1, Cape Town Minutes 25 October & 8 November 1984.

<sup>228</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.1, Cape Town ECC report to national conference January 1985. DSD Insam, box 40, Special Situation Report 25/85 11 April 1985. Cock, *Colonels and cadres*, p.143. Interviews with Steve Lowry and Durban member Sue Britton (1998). The Johannesburg ECC identified Joy Harnden as a spy. Many of the ECCs were infiltrated by spies, although Britton noted that they were often very easy to pick out and were given boring, non-sensitive tasks. However, the constant threat of state action also created a paranoia which may not always have been justified. A Pietermaritzburg ECC member responded to my questionnaire with some bitterness saying that she felt that some elements within the Pietermaritzburg ECC had decided she was a spy, without giving her a chance to state her case. She was hesitant to answer the questionnaire, and did so anonymously (1999).

<sup>229</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.2, Durban ECC minutes 12 November & 10 December 1984.

regions. In Cape Town, by contrast, the popularity of the media subcommittee at times led to a lack of cohesion between itself and the general body.<sup>230</sup>

The lack of personnel in Durban also meant that proposed campaigns, like "Peace in the Park", with art and cultural inputs, became impractical, and existing campaigns, like a particular focus at the time of the call-up, were kept simple due to fears of over-committing the group. A more successful effort was to take advantage of the existing April Durban film festival, which already drew a more "alternative" crowd of whites. The ECC held a public meeting on campus, coinciding with screenings, and drew 150 people. This group was also outside of the normal ECC constituency, and proved interested in the talks, although not uncritical of the ECC's media and viewpoint.<sup>231</sup> Cultural events were thus a means of drawing in a sympathetic fringe, but unlike in Cape Town where cultural activities were tightly linked to the ECC – such as the roadshow which operated as a subcommittee for part of the year – in Durban the culture group which developed towards the end of 1985 only had loose links to the ECC.

Regions also continued to have differing procedural emphases. The Durban ECC remained committed to a highly participatory style, and only reluctantly agreed to a permanent chair for public relations purposes. It opposed the growing directive role of the national committee in the course of the year, arguing strongly that significant decisions must only be taken at the yearly national conference, where there was the greatest possible representation, and issues could be discussed on a person-to-person basis. The style of Durban general body meetings also emphasised highly personal interaction and mutual support among activists,<sup>232</sup> whereas Cape Town and Johannesburg tended to be more activity- or information-centred. Cape Town valued procedure as a means of facilitating greater efficiency, and the group explored how to structure meetings so that subcommittees and people drawn in through open forums could be integrated better. In Johannesburg the ECC was largely driven by the initiatives and decision-making of the executive. While the executive would have preferred to reproduce activists, rather than having such a directive role, the front structure continued to produce a more distracted affiliate-based general body.<sup>233</sup>

Active affiliate support continued to be a problem in all the regions. Few affiliates contributed to or attended the Durban film festival meeting and the church constituency did not participate at all. The Johannesburg ECC had a close

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.2, Durban ECC minutes 10 December 1984 & 24 April 1985.

<sup>232</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.2, Durban ECC minutes 10 December 1984, 20 February, 3 April, 11 April & 2 November 1985, the minutes noted, for example, that the group cried with a member who had witnessed police brutality and "felt her pain about the terrible situation in SA". These shades of a 1970s encounter group were totally foreign to the brisker, more academic and political styles of Johannesburg and Cape Town. Similarly, the sharing of uplifting newspaper articles to generate a positive attitude was far removed from Cape Town's envisaged education of activists via a 15-minute information slot in meetings.

<sup>233</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 28 February 1985. Folder B1.2, Johannesburg ECC executive meeting 10 March & 9 December 1985.

relationship with JODAC, with joint projects like a stall at the Yeoville flea market, but other organisations tended to contribute to specific functions, such as a joint ECC-Black Sash picket before Republic Day. Affiliates' internal policies could also be problematic. JODAC, for example, took a hard line on participation in the SADF, excluding those who had served or were serving from publicly representing it,<sup>234</sup> yet by 1985 the ECC was concerned not to develop an image which alienated the individual serving conscript. Nevertheless, affiliates remained important to the ECC. Both the Cape Town and Johannesburg branches began regional newsletters, designed to keep affiliates more in touch with the ECC. The Durban ECC articulated the reality of the affiliate-ECC relationship in all three regions, however, when it noted that the "ECC is becoming its representatives, not its affiliates".<sup>235</sup>

Despite these regional differences, the common national focus did help to build a national ECC profile in 1985. A measure of the growing credibility of the ECC is that by midyear it was asked to contribute not only to the alternative Christian publication SA Outlook, but also to an academic project exploring aspects of militarisation and to a book on the freedom charter.<sup>236</sup> However, the ECC was still learning how to use campaigns and events to maximise exposure and to push its own agenda. Although IYY had seemed to have great potential, targeting the youth, and supported by both the UDF and the churches, in practice it largely wasted the ECC's energy, and proved too nebulous to be a useful vehicle for ECC issues or the development of an ECC profile. Joint IYY meetings allowed for networking, but the ECC was fitting into others' campaigns rather than drawing them into ECC projects.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, those directly affected, like white scholars, were targeted by the state's own IYY programmes, and the ECC did not have easy access to them.<sup>238</sup> Durban pamphleteering of white schools, for example, provoked hostile white press.<sup>239</sup>

By contrast, the March Uitenhage shootings by the security forces provided a more concrete platform for ECC demands and in all three regions public meetings were hastily arranged with other progressive organisations, drawing an estimated 500 in Johannesburg and 150-200 in Durban. While the Johannesburg ECC complained that working with other organisations could involve a large amount of effort but little visible public profile at the event,<sup>240</sup> in April the joint meeting between the Cape Town Civil Rights League and the ECC to mark the fortieth anniversary of the defeat of fascism attracted favourable press. By linking itself with a military victory, the ECC hoped to emphasise the specific South African context of its opposition to conscription. Although part of the ECC's support base came from pacifist

<sup>234</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.2, Johannesburg ECC general body meeting 21 May 1985.

<sup>235</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.2, Durban ECC minutes 24 April 1985.

<sup>236</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 29 May 1985.

<sup>237</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.8.3, general report from the Youth Committee to ECC 14 February and April 1985.

<sup>238</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.3, general report from the Cape Town ECC education subgroup.

<sup>239</sup> Natal Mercury 1 June 1985.

<sup>240</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 11 April 1985.

organisations like the Quakers, the high profile of a decorated soldier like Sir Richard Luyt helped move the ECC's profile beyond that of a peace organisation.

Nevertheless, the ECC's contention that South Africa was in a state of civil war remained a problematic concept for whites. The Cape Town city council, for example, demanded the removal of the words "civil war" from ECC posters and both the Argus and Cape Times refused to print an ECC advertisement containing the term, claiming it had "awesome implications and should only be used with great care and circumspection and appropriate qualifications".<sup>241</sup>

This conservatism was exacerbated by renewed smear attempts linking the ECC to the "total onslaught" in an attempt to undermine its credibility. While pamphleteers found the general public slightly more sympathetic than previously, the ECC had to contend with incidents like the spraying of its slogans on buildings in Johannesburg – implying it was an uncouth organisation of vandals – and overt counter-pamphleteering, like an NSF pamphlet which claimed the ECC was playing Russian roulette with peace, continuing "total onslaught" themes by suggesting the ECC was irresponsible, and a pawn in the devious hands of the USSR.<sup>242</sup>

The debate "SADF shielding the nation or defending apartheid?" between David Webster and PFP leader Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert in Johannesburg on 5 June further demonstrated the difficulties of getting the ECC's message into the white community. Given the delicate truce within the PFP on security matters, it is not surprising that Slabbert was scathing of the ECC position, labelling the ECC "dangerously naive" and "counterproductive", or that the liberal press sympathetic to the PFP should endorse him. While the PFP Youth disassociated itself from Slabbert's comments and apologised to the ECC, it was clear that the ECC still had a long way to go in winning over even liberal whites, and that security issues remained highly divisive on the left.<sup>243</sup>

Nevertheless, the debate renewed interest in conscription, so that three weeks later an ECC press release advertising its peace festival achieved a surprising amount of coverage in the English-speaking press. The ECC's developing international profile, boosted by actions like Richard Steele's address to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in March, encouraged overseas participation and interest in the peace festival. Locally, the SACBC's strategically timed statement denouncing conscription just before the festival further enhanced the profile of the

<sup>241</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 25 April 1985.

<sup>242</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 10 January 1985. Folder B1.2, Johannesburg ECC minutes 16 April 1985.

<sup>243</sup> Star 6 June 1985, Transvaler 24 June 1985.

ECC,<sup>244</sup> while the refusal of visas to Monsignor Bruce Kent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and human rights activist Cardinal Paulo Arns of Brazil, linked conscription issues with freedom of speech.

The peace festival itself was a watershed in the early existence of the ECC. Slick promotional media, a professionally mounted, multifaceted event, and international speakers combined to draw press attention. The views of Carole Tongue, British member of the European parliament and member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, were well reported locally. The wealth of visual interest encouraged several newspapers to reproduce ECC media or showed ECC personnel against a backdrop of ECC media, encouraging further interest in the ECC, and making readers aware of its message.

The festival tried to explore all aspects of conscription, from plenary sessions to debates and from cultural events to the personal stories of objectors. Visual displays were mounted to maintain the conscription theme even when moving between venues while wearable media took the message of the festival out into the wider community. As children were being introduced to non-violent games in crèches, clerics Beyers Naudé and Desmond Tutu were making an explicit connection between apartheid and conscription. Monsignor Bruce Kent sent a recorded message from London. Laurie Nathan explained how troops aggravated the situation in the townships. Past SWAPO official Mokganedi Tlhabanello told the festival why SWAPO had no reason to trust Pretoria and lay down its arms. Molly Blackburn, Port Elizabeth PFP Member of the Provincial Council for Walmer, gave eyewitness evidence of the costs of increased militarisation in eastern Cape townships and reported that troops were being used to carry out apartheid policies such as forced removals.<sup>245</sup> This input was given added impact by the non-appearance of scheduled speaker Stone Sizane of the UDF, whose absence struck a sinister chord after the recent disappearance and death of fellow activist Matthew Goniwe.

The peace festival thus represented the spectrum of objection from the personal to the political, from religious to secular objection, as well as moral and political CO. It gave whites insight into the impact of the SADF on blacks through the testimony of a Cape Coloured Corps objector, and speakers from SWAPO and the UDF, while demonstrating the uniting power of a common issue, with an estimated 1 000 people attending some of the events.

The peace festival also drew more than 100 messages of support both locally and internationally, and the ECC's lobbying for these messages and the post-festival reports of people like Tongue helped to establish a greater

<sup>244</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.1, ECC press release. Daily News 24 June 1985, Citizen 24 June 1985, Star 24 June 1985.

<sup>245</sup> Star 1 July 1985.



international awareness of, and sympathy for, the ECC.<sup>246</sup> Work on the festival further encouraged links between affiliates, while its success created the perception of a developing anti-war culture. While the state noted with satisfaction that a lack of funds and the absence of Kent and Arns had somewhat inhibited the festival, it was concerned that the ECC had succeeded in "attracting a broad spectrum of anti-government people and organisations" and was "developing an escalating following especially among students".<sup>247</sup>

The festival was therefore another important step towards encouraging public debate on conscription issues and a recognition of the validity of aspects of the ECC's position. While some reporters wrote with amusement of a "hippie" feel to the peace festival, in the liberal press the peace and justice themes were represented as essentially irreproachable, and the ECC's emphasis on traditional liberal values like freedom of choice drew a positive response, in contrast to condemnation of the clamp down on freedom of speech demonstrated by the state's refusal of visas to prospective festival participants. For the first time the ECC was able to gain some control over the kind of media attention it received and to shape its own image. After the festival the ECC was accorded a new respect in the local press as the "student longhairs" were perceived to have grown up.<sup>248</sup>

As the ECC moved into higher profile campaigns from mid 1985, this growing openness to the conscription debate among whites contributed further to the pressures on the apartheid state, and ECC activists began to be targeted for state harassment. Soon after the festival on 21 July 1985 the state declared a partial state of emergency in parts of the Cape and Transvaal, giving it greater repressive powers and control over public meetings and publications. These new powers were used to harass activists like Clare Verbeek who had played a major role in organising the festival. In September five Johannesburg members were subjected to raids on their homes and to questioning. Document seizures further indicated that the ECC was becoming a sufficient threat for the state to consider ways to undermine and limit its appeal among whites.

From slow beginnings in 1984, the ECC had emerged by mid 1985 as a movement with significant regional variation, but sufficient national cohesion to influence and encourage public discourse around conscription. In part this was due to organisational changes, in part due to campaigning, and in no small measure due to the actions of the apartheid state itself. As the NP was increasingly forced to rely on its security forces to maintain control in the face of a more

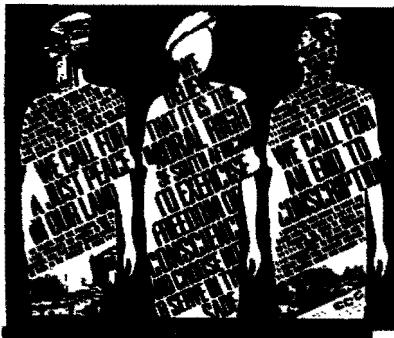
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<sup>246</sup> A glaring exception is the conservative Orange Free State where the ECC never gained a foothold, although there was some very scattered underground opposition to conscription there too. The ECC monitored its impact through a press clippings service, but the results suggested the ECC had virtually no mainstream impact in the Orange Free State. Documentation Centre for African Studies ACC 326, *Calendar*, vol.1, no.3, August 1985.

<sup>247</sup> DSD Insam, box 40, special situation report 56/85 7 August 1985.

<sup>248</sup> *Star* 28 June & 1 July 1985.

active externally-based ANC guerrilla campaign, as well as growing resistance within the country, the ECC's campaigning, limited as it was, presented a threat by encouraging pressure from the left for faster reform and demands from the right for increased control. ECC campaigning had also drawn attention to the moral and personal dilemmas inherent in conscription, undermining the state's "total onslaught" security discourse which encouraged white unity by redirecting white attention from the costs of conscription to the role of the SADF in promoting white security.



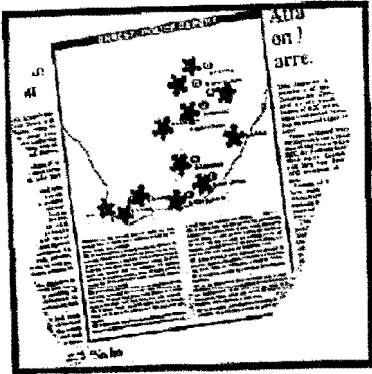
Sebokeng · Soweto  
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**TROOPS OUT NOW!**

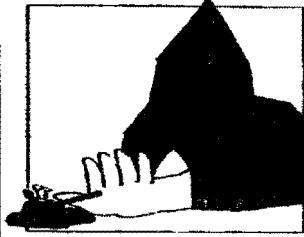
ECC



WHERE'S THE BORDER NOW?

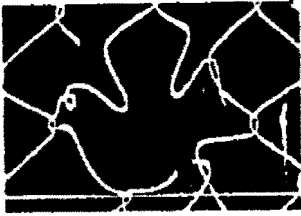
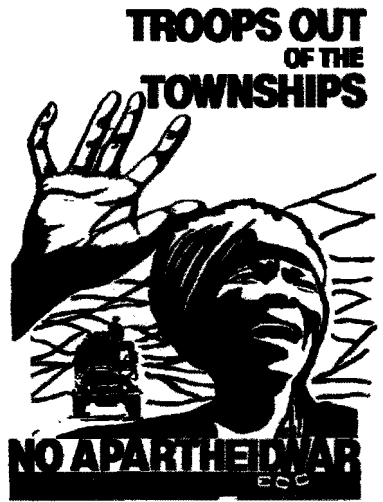


**SADF GET OUT!**



Chapter Four

July 1985 – June 1986:  
 The campaign takes off.



By mid 1985 a combination of tactics – including the integration of culture with protest, using big names to draw attention to conscription, and increased organisational capacity – meant that while regions continued to exercise their individuality,<sup>249</sup> the ECC had become a recognisable entity, both nationally and overseas, and had proved capable of stimulating and influencing white public interest in conscription issues, particularly within the English-speaking community.

Building on these gains between September 1985 and June 1986, the ECC continued to grow. The number of branches doubled, with more in the pipeline, facilitated by increased organisational efficiency. The ECC also began to address the Afrikaans community directly. Its international profile was maintained by a submission to the UN, and European and American tours by activists, while unambiguous and accessible campaigns widened the range of local support for the ECC, particularly where it called for alternatives to, rather than the ending of, conscription. A context of economic decline, political insecurity and growing social dislocation, together with unease at the internal deployment of the SADF further boosted white support for calls for alternatives to military conscription. Thus while the ECC was only a small part of the rising tide of opposition which forced the state to implement a full-scale state of emergency by June 1986, the emergency regulations specifically targeted the ECC, suggesting that the ECC's mobilisation of white youth and its expansion into the broader white constituency were perceived as a real threat by the apartheid state. This chapter will examine how and why the ECC was sufficiently successful between September 1985 and June 1986 to warrant this kind of repression.

In September 1985 the ECC launched a three-week "Troops Out" campaign, which involved individual and group fasts. This seemingly passive activity was an active challenge to the state on a number of levels, and the fact that the state began its first real repression of the ECC by detaining four members just before the fast indicated that it recognised this.<sup>250</sup> Fasting was familiar to both the religious and human rights sectors of the white opposition, an action associated with crisis and penitence, and a means of protesting a wrong. In choosing to fast the ECC was thus signalling to whites that something was amiss within their society, as opposed to "total onslaught" which ascribed the source of the conflict to outside forces. In calling for a "fast for a just peace" the ECC was explicitly condemning the status quo as unjust, and by extension, the state's forceful protection of it. Fasting is often the weapon of prisoners, who have lost all other power. Through fasting the ECC was also encouraging white individuals to reclaim power and

<sup>249</sup> Despite their differences, the regions exercised a commendable degree of compromise. The declaration, for instance, was drawn up by Cape Town, and although both Durban and Johannesburg would have liked to have changed some of the wording, they proceeded rather than endlessly rewrite the document. Similarly, Cape Town appeared to have felt a little upstaged by the peace festival, and experienced difficulty integrating with local activists while in Johannesburg, but the overall perception of the festival was nevertheless positive. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A15.1, ECC assessment of festival, conference and Laurie's role 29 July 1985.

<sup>250</sup> Janet Cherry was detained earlier during the July peace festival, but her wide involvement in progressive organisations made it unclear whether her detention was aimed at the ECC *per se*.

choice. The authoritarian discourse of apartheid society set decision-making as the right of the state and obedience as the duty of the citizen. By using individual conscripts to focus attention through their fasts, the ECC was revitalising the moral power of the early CO struggles, demanding that individuals be allowed to follow their consciences.

Furthermore, the "Troops Out" campaign was a means of counteracting the state's attempts to deflect white interest from conscription issues and to contain the flow of information about its internal troop deployment. Even the timing of the campaign became part of the protest, beginning on the UN's International Day of Peace, 17 September, and ending on 7 October, a month after the first anniversary of the deployment of troops in the townships. In this way the ECC drew attention both to the state's year-long presence in the townships, and to the extent to which South Africa was out of step with the international community.

By advertising the fast as "a democratic commitment to a just peace and to express solidarity with people suffering throughout South Africa", the ECC invited a wide range of participation, further underlined by the number of entry levels: a continuous three-week fast, relay fasts, public fasting, and private fasting, all culminating in a 24-hour fast which was to be as widespread as possible, finishing with church services and public meetings. Because it was a relatively unthreatening activity, the fast was suited to a white community with little activist history. It was also difficult for the state to contain. Not only could people participate as publicly or as privately as they chose, but if the state banned a fast "for a just peace", this would highlight its repressive role and raise questions about its moral authority, bringing it into direct conflict with the mainline churches which opened their facilities for the fast.

Cognisant of the pressures on the apartheid state which had led to the internal deployment of the SADF in the first place, the ECC was under no illusion that its demands would be met. However, precisely because the state could not afford to withdraw troops from the townships, it was vulnerable to the ECC's focusing of liberal and human rights protest on this issue. The "Troops Out" campaign was therefore intended to expose the essentially political nature of the conflict, the interrelationship between apartheid and militarism, and the costs this inflicted on both black and white communities. By building on existing white unease, the ECC also hoped to draw more whites into opposition.

This campaign had additional impact because it ran in six, rather than the previous three, urban centres. Even before the peace festival, two new ECC branches were initiated in Pietermaritzburg and Port Elizabeth, and work in Grahamstown was in progress.<sup>251</sup> COSG had played a crucial formative role in the initial regions, but no COSG

<sup>251</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 9 May 1985.

branches existed in the new regions. The greater organisational capacity of the ECC was thus an important factor in its continuing growth. The national organiser was able to build up contacts, circulate material, and represent the ECC publicly. These outside resources were important because the new regions had a less developed culture of white opposition, while the eastern Cape experienced particularly harsh state repression. Branches in this region encountered ongoing harassment at a much higher level than existing branches. In the case of the Port Elizabeth branch this was the case from the day of inception, as some 60 University of Port Elizabeth students attended the inaugural meeting and tried to vote the ECC out of existence before it got started. Co-operation with PFP Youth was thus not a matter for abstract debate, but rather afforded additional security in a dangerous confrontation with the state, particularly as the small size of the branches, and the overlap of activists' commitments made them more vulnerable to the state's targeting of individuals, like Port Elizabeth chair Janet Cherry, who was subjected to endless harassment, eventually detained and later released subject to severe restriction of her activist work.

Although these new branches took varying amounts of time to become officially active, all were able to use the "Troops Out" campaign to develop a public profile and to encourage affiliate action. In Grahamstown, for instance, conscription had already been taken up by NUSAS through the 1984 survey, an advice bureau on conscription was established in 1984, and the Grahamstown Committee of Democrats also raised conscription issues. The "Troops Out" campaign allowed the small local ECC interim steering committee to combine the opposition of churches, prominent individuals, academics, the local PFP, Black Sash and NUSAS.

Like the earlier campaigns of the initial regions, the new Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown branches relied heavily on "nobs", people with status and credibility within the white community, to promote the fast. Academics, clerics, black leaders and PFP leaders were asked to fast in relay, and cultural activities and debates were arranged to draw further attention to the campaign. Grahamstown academic André Brink, for example, attracted an audience which the fledgling ECC could not, and when the SADF reneged on a planned debate with him, his scathing comment that the SADF seemed "only able to communicate through the barrel of a gun" was well reported. An "Arts for Peace" concert also drew in people not necessarily interested in political issues. The detention of black leaders in the eastern Cape at the time of the fast encouraged further publicity for the ECC as the media supported the ECC's call for peace and dialogue and its questioning of the SADF's role.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B6.1, Grahamstown ECC peace campaign report. Grocott's Mail 8 October 1985, Eastern Province Herald 4 October 1985.

While existing regions ran more sophisticated “Troops Out” campaigns, the common time frame of the campaign, together with the work of the national organiser, meant that information about the activities of the various regions could be fed into press releases, communication with affiliates, and sympathetic international organisations. This encouraged a stronger national picture of the ECC, which in turn benefited the emerging regions.

In Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg, where conscription was more established as an issue, individual conscripts undertook to fast for a three-week period. During the day they were in public venues so that people could visit them to show support or discuss conscription. In Cape Town Ivan Toms declared that to serve in the SADF would put him in conflict with the people he felt called to serve as a township doctor. In Durban CO Richard Steele’s credentials included being jailed for his pacifist convictions in 1980. In Johannesburg student Harald Winkler faced a January call-up and was in the process of applying to the Board for Religious Objection. These regions were therefore able to move beyond the use of prominent people outside the ECC to draw in their constituencies, and to focus instead on the impact of conscription on ordinary people.

Toms attracted the most publicity. His work among the poor in Crossroads and his public refusal to render further service in the SADF gave him considerable credibility in Cape Town. The local press ran regular updates on his mental and physical health during the three-week period, providing ongoing free publicity. Media interest in the fast also emphasised the range of objection, as the Cape newspapers noted the interfaith support for Toms from the Jewish and Moslem community, while a Weekly Mail interview with Steele and Winkler contrasted their pacifist and “just war” positions.<sup>253</sup>

Concurrent events were designed to raise further questions in the white community, drawing attention to the campaign. In Johannesburg affiliates hosted a series of lunchtime meetings which explored the implication of troops in the townships through debates, cultural programmes and the testimonies of COs. A meeting of black and white mothers was particularly well reported in the media, although the meetings themselves did not attract large numbers. In Cape Town local artists contributed to an ECC “Art for Peace” exhibition at the Baxter Theatre, which attracted the attention of the local arts page in the Cape Times, reaching a wider audience than speeches and meetings.<sup>254</sup>

The climax of the campaign in all regions was a 24-hour fast, a concrete expression of support for the call “Troops Out”. It drew a response from sources as diverse as the Baxter Theatre staff, ECC affiliates, prominent individuals,

<sup>253</sup> Weekly Mail 27 September 1985.

<sup>254</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, Cape Times fragment.

ordinary people, and overseas groups like the War Resisters International (WRI), who staged a vigil outside the South African embassy in London.<sup>255</sup> The Cape Town meeting to mark the end of the fast attracted particularly significant media attention. A multiracial crowd of some 4 000 people filled the city hall, sending an unmistakable signal to the government that conscription was an issue which concerned a broad range and a large number of people, making it a serious threat.

"The "Troops Out" campaign thus raised public awareness of the ECC and sympathy for its demands by channelling existing liberal unease at the internal deployment of the SADF, strategising an accessible campaign with a clear demand, and establishing the link between the state's use of conscripts and the call to end conscription. Once again the state's own repressive mechanisms gave the ECC additional publicity. As an introduction to the campaign the ECC was able to use the court martial of conscript Alan Dodson to highlight the moral dilemma and lack of choice facing conscripts called to serve in townships. Unlike COs who refused to serve at all, Dodson could neither be written off as a "drop-out" or a "shirker". A lawyer doing his articles, he had an exemplary military record and had been awarded the Pro Patria medal. His objection centred directly on being called up to serve in the townships. While the judge president of the court reiterated the "total onslaught" line that South Africans "are standing with our backs to the wall and are fighting for our survival" and that the SADF was "trying to maintain the lawful society and protect the lives and property of citizens who do not have wherewithal to do so", Dodson's defence lawyer reminded the court that in most western democracies it was the role of the police to suppress domestic resistance, and that there was widespread opposition to the internal deployment of the SADF.<sup>256</sup> The fledgling Pietermaritzburg ECC was then able to capitalise on the publicity generated by the trial of the former Pietermaritzburg student, holding a mock trial of the SADF at the university as part of their introduction to the "Troops Out" campaign.<sup>257</sup>

The detention of Durban activists Richard Steele, Anita Kromberg and Sue Britton, and Cape Town chair Mike Evans, just before the "Troops Out" campaign also stimulated public interest, just as the denial of Cardinal Ams' visa had for the peace festival. The detentions raised civil rights questions in the media and highlighted the state's repressive response to opposition. The state appeared to be attempting to investigate what the ECC was trying to achieve, to cast doubt on its legitimacy and intentions, and to remove activists from circulation. The four who were arrested noted that interrogation focused particularly on the history and structure of the ECC and COSG and the relationship between the two, ECC affiliates, alleged UDF and ANC links with the ECC, local and overseas finance for the ECC, overseas trips, and ECC work in schools. The Durban three were released when the court accepted their lawyer's argument that

<sup>255</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.2, messages of support. Folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 10 October 1985.

<sup>256</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder G2, Alan Dodson pamphlet.

<sup>257</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B11.1, ECC advertising leaflet.



Section 29 of the Internal Security Act allowed for arrest based on the subjective judgement of the arresting officer and was thus virtually impossible to disprove. Evans was released shortly afterwards in Cape Town, possibly to prevent a similar precedent in the Cape courts.<sup>258</sup>

Both the campaign and the repression increased the ECC's international profile. The ECC used its contacts to bring the detentions to the attention of Amnesty International and the Quaker UN office in Geneva, which in turn notified the western missions in Geneva. Sympathetic organisations were also sent "Troops Out" campaign material, approached for finance and given suggestions about how to take up campaigns in their countries. Solidarity fasts were held in London, Berlin, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, New York and Washington, raising awareness of the connection between militarism and apartheid and leading to actions like the resolution of the Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society in the European Community suggesting sanctions against South Africa and stating that South African COs should be given support, including refuge. Public figures like Cardinal Arns assured the ECC of their continuing support and influence. The campaign also raised the ECC's credibility among organisations committed to similar work abroad, like the WRI and the War Resisters League (WRL), leading to an invitation to the ECC to take part in an international conference tour in December, which further built the ECC's international profile and fund-raising capacity.<sup>259</sup>

The fast was thus successful in raising questions and stimulating debate on a number of fronts, indicating that the scope of conscription as a mobilising force among whites was growing. While some ECC communications were still quite amateurish, such as handbills asking readers to set off a chain reaction by making ten copies and giving them to friends, in general the ECC's ability to develop a newsworthy campaign was becoming increasingly sophisticated, while interest in conscription issues was radiating beyond a student base. The "Troops Out" campaign generated renewed interest in conscription on the NUSAS university campuses in Durban and Johannesburg, but both Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg noted that an older constituency was being drawn in too. The campaign further emphasised the power of integrating conscription and culture. While only 300 people attended the Johannesburg meeting to mark the end of the fast, an estimated 1 000 attended an ECC "Troops Out" campaign concert.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>258</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.1, newsletter to branches from Laurie Nathan 30 September 1985.

<sup>259</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.1, letter from Laurie Nathan to Matt Meyer chairperson of WRL 18 September 1985. Folder A7.1, report on ECC's international contact during the "Troops Out" and peace fast campaign November 1985. Folder A11.1.1, letter from the Quaker Council for European Affairs to Steve Lowry 24 October 1985. Folder B8.1.2, Cape Town ECC minutes 12 & 26 September 1985.

<sup>260</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.1, open letter from Cape Town ECC August 1985.

Although "Troops Out" demonstrated the power of a single-issue campaign to generate a national profile, regional assessments suggested that differing conditions and emphases at the local level still affected the ECC's power to infiltrate white communities. No other region approached the support achieved by the Cape Town rally. In Durban, for example, the largely religious pacifist image of the ECC, together with the detention of key figures shortly before the fast, meant that only an estimated 150 attended the closing ceremony, although the fast and detentions stimulated a higher profile for the ECC on the Durban campus, with four students fasting. By contrast, just 100 kilometres away in Pietermaritzburg, despite the region's fledgling status, the fast stimulated great press interest, and some 200 people attended the final meeting.

The other new regions, Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, found that the fast promoted internal growth, encouraging a committed core to develop, and facilitated interaction with township groups, so that in Port Elizabeth the concluding ceremony drew some 250 people. Relay fasts, however, lacked the human drama of a three-week fast, and unlike Toms' numerous daily visitors, the Grahamstown branch reported that the fast had not drawn in visitors or built interest. The limited personnel of the new regions also meant activists were exhausted by the campaign.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, some post-campaign reviews expressed concern that the fast had been too narrowly Christian in orientation, and questioned whether the image of the ECC as a peace movement, developed through the peace festival and the "Troops Out" campaign, was appropriate.<sup>262</sup>

Despite these ECC reservations, clearly the state felt threatened by the campaign. The context of growing white discontent at continued call-ups and internal SADF deployment, together with the lack of resolution of South Africa's economic and political turmoil, played an important role in the ECC's growing national profile. The state attempted to counter this by muddying the ECC's image and creating public confusion about its goals. In addition to harassment of activists before the campaign, and General Malan's accusations on 21 September 1985 that the ECC was aiming to break down law and order by weakening state machinery, harassment of the ECC continued after the campaign. The SADF released a pamphlet attacking the ECC. In October major Afrikaans Sunday newspaper Rapport, in an article designed to undermine the ECC's credibility and justify any state action against such a "dangerous" and "subversive" organisation, accused the ECC of being a front for the ANC. Similarly, the Sunday Times carried a full page NSF advertisement which backed conscription as a patriotic duty, and argued that the ECC had a hidden agenda, linking it to the ANC and UDF, while claiming that it ignored important "realities" of the South African conflict.<sup>263</sup> This increased

<sup>261</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.4, evaluation of "Troops Out Campaign" and "Fast for a Just Peace" (undated). Folder B5.3, Port Elizabeth ECC assessment of "Troops Out Campaign" (undated). Folder B6.1, Rhodes University ECC report October 1985.

<sup>262</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.1.4, evaluation of "Troops Out Campaign" and "Fast for a Just Peace" (undated).

<sup>263</sup> Rapport 27 October 1985, Sunday Times 6 October 1985, Star 21 September 1985.

level of attack suggested that the overall impact of the ECC was disproportionately large, given its small numbers and limited resources. The relatively weak Pietermaritzburg group, for example, noted that despite their limited regional impact, the level of harassment they faced indicated that the state took them seriously.<sup>264</sup>

The successes of the peace festival and the “Troops Out” campaign meant that by the time the ECC met for its next national conference in January 1986 it was a significantly more visible and co-ordinated movement. Difficulties chiefly resulted from the relative weaknesses and constraints faced by the regions, and the challenges of campaigning with a small group of activists in the face of the state’s aggressive “total onslaught” propaganda and repressive capacity.<sup>265</sup> The ECC’s shifting volunteer base of activists, and particularly the large student component meant a high turnover of membership. The Pietermaritzburg branch, for example, stood to lose ten members at the end of 1985, a significant number in a small branch. Other activists became burned out by the workload and left ECC, since, as Durban activist Paul Graham put it, “it became impossible to do everything and have a life”.<sup>266</sup>

Growth also created organisational challenges. The national organiser could no longer cope with all the work. At a local level, an ongoing concern was the successful integration of new members and affiliates drawn in by national campaigns and regional profile-building activities such as regular stalls at flea markets. There was the danger that long-term members’ shared activist vocabulary and experiences, and their often intimidating level of commitment could alienate or threaten newer, more tentative members. Within the ECC there was a tendency for campus ECCs to be exclusively campus-centric, and for subcommittees to be task-oriented, rather than relating to the wider functioning of the ECC. Art and cultural groups in particular were attracted by the ECC’s message, without necessarily wanting to become full-time activists. In Durban “Artists against Conscription” was set up as a subcommittee of ECC, but remained only loosely affiliated, and in Cape Town a group specifically called the “loosely-affiliated group” agreed to produce t-shirts as long as it was not required to attend meetings.<sup>267</sup> Trust also took time to develop in a climate rife with the threat of state infiltration. The Port Elizabeth group, for instance, was plagued by the leakage of documents, like those used by Rapport to suggest the ECC was in cahoots with banned organisations. To counter these trends

<sup>264</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, Johannesburg ECC annual report and evaluation 12 January 1986. Folder B11.3, Pietermaritzburg ECC report (undated).

<sup>265</sup> Johannesburg had 30 regular participants at general body meetings and Durban eight by the end of 1985. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, Johannesburg ECC annual report and evaluation 12 January 1986.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Durban ECC member Paul Graham (1998).

<sup>267</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.2, ECC Cape Town annual assessment in preparation for the national conference January 1986, Durban ECC report February 1986.

ECC branches set up consolidation efforts ranging from Johannesburg affiliate newsletters to Cape Town orientation groups, and the national organiser was charged with planning regular skills workshops.<sup>268</sup>

The regional context of branches continued to affect their impact and emphasis. In Port Elizabeth the ECC had contributed to township pressure in a business boycott which forced a temporary withdrawal of troops from the townships. The ECC in Port Elizabeth thus argued for a new emphasis on the cost of the war, targeting business.<sup>269</sup> In Cape Town the concerns of a parents' group led to a "Cadets Out" campaign. In Johannesburg there was sufficient Afrikaans interest in the ECC to initiate an Afrikaans subcommittee. Context also affected the success of actions. The Pietermaritzburg branch, for example, noted that it had gained few activists, and suggested its members needed to be less introspective and more positive. However, it was more difficult to encourage an ECC culture in Pietermaritzburg, known locally as "sleepy hollow", than in Cape Town, where an ECC focus could be added to a more vibrant existing cultural base. Cape Town's numerous local bands, for instance, facilitated big concerts.

In addition to problems of internal cohesion, the ECC continued to face a tension between its nominal commitment to the front structure and the reality that the ECC was increasingly an independent organisation,<sup>270</sup> particularly as the multiple focus and limited activist base of affiliates continued to limit both the penetration of an anti-conscription message into affiliate organisations and affiliate involvement in ECC. However, in weaker areas, like Pietermaritzburg, the front structure remained important, with the affiliate PACSA, for example, taking over conscription work among the churches. In the eastern Cape the extent of state repression and the small size of white opposition also made the contribution of affiliates particularly valuable.

As the ECC's most representative forum, the 1986 national conference was mandated to address these problems, set direction, and facilitate greater organisational efficiency. It will therefore be useful to examine the decisions and goals of the conference, and how these were implemented.

The Afrikaans community was particularly targeted for 1986. This was a bold move as some of the most vituperative attacks on the ECC had been from the Afrikaans press and anti-ECC propaganda was widely distributed in Afrikaans areas. However, there would be significant advantages for the ECC if it could widen its support base within the white

<sup>268</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.2, ECC Cape Town annual assessment in preparation for the national conference January 1986, Port Elizabeth annual assessment for January 1986 conference, national organiser's report to national conference, January 1986.

<sup>269</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A5, Port Elizabeth motivation for "Working For a Just Peace" campaign February 1986.

<sup>270</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.2, ECC Cape Town annual assessment in preparation for the national conference January 1986. Folder B1.1.4, evaluation of "Troops Out Campaign" and "Fast for a Just Peace" (undated).

community. Afrikaans-speaking ECC members would be invaluable for drawing in more of the Afrikaans community, as they would have a better understanding of how to target the anti-conscription message in the light of their different historical and cultural background. National organiser Laurie Nathan, who was co-ordinating work within the Afrikaans community, noted that the ECC would have to work differently in this constituency as the ideal of freedom of choice was secondary to concepts of patriotic duty and obedience to authority. Moreover, academic Dawid Bosch warned that the Afrikaans church was too tightly tied to the government to be responsive to the ECC's message. Rather ECC sympathisers might face the kind of cultural isolation of a "dissident" like Beyers Naudé. The Afrikaans press, too, was largely impervious to the ECC message until the emergence of Die Vrye Weekblad in 1988.<sup>271</sup>

Campuses proved slightly more amenable. From 1985 the ECC had been putting out feelers in Pretoria, where UNISA Theology Department staff had expressed interest, and in Stellenbosch, where there was potential support from campus. In both areas much of the initial work relied on personal contact, both from members of the ECC and the national organiser, as these regions lacked any significant opposition or activist structures. Laurie Nathan and Cape Town ECC member Mike Rautenbach did considerable spadework at Stellenbosch, meeting with a wide range of lecturers and student leaders to explain the ECC's demands and to assess Stellenbosch students' views on conscription and the role of the SADF,<sup>272</sup> so that during orientation week ECC media could be tailored to an Afrikaans constituency. In Johannesburg, contact with Rand Afrikaans Universiteit (RAU) academics also helped initiate an Afrikaans subcommittee of the ECC called Eindig Nasionale Diensplig (END), which began operating by March 1986.

This slower, more tentative approach was inevitable in a largely unsympathetic constituency. By the mid 1980s there were some dissident Afrikaans voices, like rock singer Koos Kombuis, but overall the response to the ECC still tended to be hostile or indifferent, and Afrikaans ECC posters tended to be torn down particularly fast.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the state had considerable power to intimidate this sector of white society. In 1985, for example, a group of Stellenbosch students had intended to visit the ANC in exile, but were intimidated into staying at home. Nevertheless, the internal deployment of the SADF seemed to concern Afrikaans students too. ECC media targeted this issue, with t-shirts asking "Waar is die Grens Nou?" and the modification of the popular Afrikaans film series "Boetie gaan border toe" to "Boetie gaan Athlone toe".<sup>274</sup>

<sup>271</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, ECC Johannesburg annual report 1985, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986. Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A19, national organiser news 28 May 1986.

<sup>272</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B9, ECC branch set up in Stellenbosch, newsletter from Laurie Nathan 20 March 1986.

<sup>273</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, ECC Johannesburg annual report 1985, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986.

<sup>274</sup> A black residential area where troops had been deployed. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B9, ECC branch set up in Stellenbosch, newsletter from Laurie Nathan 20 March 1986.

The social action aspects of the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign also had appeal for Afrikaans students, and by 25 March 1986 a working group of some 25 students was set up to generate projects at Stellenbosch. The Pretoria branch took longer to constitute. The headquarters of the SADF, Pretoria was a city with a strong military ethos and presence in the white schools, and the ECC made little headway at the Afrikaans-medium Universiteit van Pretoria. The potential of the Pretoria branch was further limited by the imposition of a state of emergency soon after it began operating. Nevertheless, its very existence represented a defiant gesture.

Despite the limited success of the ECC's attempts to organise in the Afrikaans sector, its efforts quickly attracted repression. Stellenbosch rector Mike de Vries banned the ECC on campus, severely restricting its ability to organise and advertise. In Johannesburg Joy Harnden, later identified as a spy, was the contact person between the English and Afrikaans groups, suggesting the state wanted to monitor this development closely. There was also evidence of state infiltration in the developing Stellenbosch branch.<sup>275</sup>

However, the ECC's work in the Afrikaans community was only one aspect of its increasing constituency. Another was the focus on cadets. From 1976 the school cadet programme had been administered by a standing interdepartmental committee comprising representatives of the army and Education Departments, with the Defence Ministry carrying the budget. A requirement in all state schools, the cadet system was intended to prepare school pupils physically and psychologically for the SADF. Although the 1957 Defence Act gave parents the option of refusing to allow their sons to participate, a combination of peer pressure, ignorance about the provision of the act and apathy meant that generally only Jehovah's Witnesses objected.<sup>276</sup>

The importance of cadets for the state can be seen in its allocation of resources. The 1984/1985 budget for cadets was expected to run between R61 and 62 million, and teachers were given incentives like CF credit for serving as cadet officers. Teachers doing national service were also pre-selected for officer training and encouraged to earn medals, thus presumably inspiring boys with their heroism. This suggested that while the state hoped to attract boys to cadets, targeting their "adventurousness, youthful liveliness and natural dare-devilry" by giving them the opportunity to handle weapons, participate in marching bands, visit military bases and go on survival camps, the essence of cadets

<sup>275</sup> Mark Behr, later exposed as a state spy, supported the ECC in Stellenbosch, even making a public opposition stand, so that he was bracketed with Ivan Toms and Philip Wilkinson in the CIIR publication Country and conscience (London, CIIR, 1988). DSD Insam, box 40, 25/85, special situation report 11 April 1985. Cock, Colonels and cadres, p.143.

<sup>276</sup> Between 1983 and 1985 I taught at a predominantly Afrikaans high school in northern Natal, where a significant sector of the staff insisted Jehovah's Witnesses be excluded from consideration for prefectship because they refused to do cadets. Since adolescents are notoriously unwilling to stand out from the crowd where this might involve ridicule, objection to cadets was not common, but rather required a considerable degree of religious or political conviction, and thrived best in a supportive liberal environment.

was ideological, rather than just the knowledge and skills to prepare boys to be more effective soldiers.<sup>277</sup> The cadet programme gave the state a unique opportunity to inculcate "total onslaught" thinking into future conscripts, encouraging them to accept the state's definition of patriotism, its identification of the enemy, its analysis of the nature of the conflict, and hence, its conscription demands.<sup>278</sup>

From December 1985 a section of the Cape Town ECC began to develop a "Cadets Out" campaign. As with conscription, it was illegal to dissuade anyone from participating, but it was still legal to campaign to end cadets.<sup>279</sup> However, schools were a difficult constituency. Unlike the mobile, independent student group, pupils lacked a high level of political awareness and could be restricted by their parents and teachers, denying the ECC access. The campaign therefore concentrated on media with instant eye appeal, cartoons, stickers, and items of direct use like timetables. Slogans like "schoolyard today, townships tomorrow – no thanks!" questioned the state's justification of conscription and its deployment of the SADF, and indicated that cadets had a choice. Like its adult campaign, the ECC's "Cadets Out" campaign also appealed to school pupils' self-interest. A "Cadets Out" pamphlet began, "Many school students feel that cadets is a waste of time..." Another pamphlet appealed to parents, addressing concerns about the impact of conscription on their sons and advertising the Conscription Advice Service.<sup>280</sup>

In general, private schools proved a much more fertile ground for protest than state schools. In all the regions most school participation in ECC campaigns was by private schools, and more specifically by individual concerned teachers, rather than the schools *per se*. During the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign the ECC "Cadets Out" group contacted principals and asked for an opportunity to speak to pupils. Private schools responded more sympathetically, but since many of them already offered alternatives to cadets the ECC was still preaching to the converted.

In Cape Town a "Pupils Awareness and Action Group" was formed at the end of 1985, in conjunction with UCT. This group tried to raise conscription issues among its peers at schools, and produced a newsletter. While the Pietermaritzburg ECC expressed concern that the ECC should not impose ideas on scholars or do their organising for them, in practice the school constituency did not effectively organise itself on a sustained basis. The campaign did create new avenues for attracting affiliates, however, through groups specifically concerned with education issues.

<sup>277</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.11, box 209, memorandum from the Minister of Defence November 1984. Vol.11, box 210, memorandum 18 July 1985, the fact that no cadet officers were to be used for "unrest" control also suggested a strategy of keeping cadets separate from the more contentious area of the internal SADF deployment.

<sup>278</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/12/1, vol.11, box 209, memorandum from the Minister of Defence November 1984.

<sup>279</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A7.5.6, minutes of a workshop around the "Cadets Out" campaign 7 December 1985.

<sup>280</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 1102, folder F2, "Cadets Out" pamphlets.

Despite the limited impact of the campaign, the state's concern at the potential extension of the ECC's reach can be seen in repressive measures like the banning of an ECC picket of Cape Town schools, and the arrest of two pamphleteers.<sup>281</sup>

A third new constituency within the white community was that of "campers" (those with outstanding CF camps). Those currently serving in the SADF were almost impossible to reach, due to the punitive pressure the SADF could exert and its anti-ECC propaganda, but those with continuing CF commitments formed a large group potentially open to demands such as the withdrawal of troops from the townships or the extension of alternatives to military service. Some were also politicised, or at least disillusioned, by their first-hand experience of the dehumanising effect of the military or the moral dilemmas created by their experience of, or participation in, SADF actions. A return to civilian life also emphasised the burden of conscription as camps interrupted progress in the personal and professional lives of returning conscripts. The ECC was concerned that its ability to mobilise this group was limited by the perception that it was "anti-soldier". In developing contact with conscripts, the ECC thus emphasised its interim demands, the legality of its campaign, and the internal deployment of the SADF.<sup>282</sup>

In addition to identifying new constituencies for 1986, the January national conference examined how to consolidate and expand the ECC's public profile. Cultural actions had proved particularly appealing among youth. The December 1985 release of ECC record and tape "Forces Favourites", for example, demonstrated that an anti-conscription message could be successfully integrated into popular youth culture. Subverting the title of a radio programme of music requests for servicemen, the music featured local bands addressing conscription dilemmas through a range of styles and from a number of perspectives. In a market notoriously unsympathetic to local musicians, the ECC only aimed to sell 10 000 copies, but within the first week the initial pressing was sold out.

Besides spreading the ECC's message, music also reached constituencies which were otherwise problematic. Despite the difficulties of mobilising the school population, "Forces Favourites" prompted several school pupils to contact the ECC, and the record also led to music reviews in the press, while the process of recording cemented ECC relationships with musicians. The whole project further established the ECC as a contemporary movement, in tune with the mood and problems of white youth. Moreover, the impact of conscription also affected musicians, reinforcing the ECC's contention that conscription was a burden for whites, an imposition which interfered with their dreams and

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<sup>281</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B11.7, programme for 1986 schools sub-group ECC Pietermaritzburg 13 February 1986.

<sup>282</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986. Folder A3.1.2, provisional agenda for 1986 national conference.



careers. The ECC planned to use appropriate cultural events to attract an older audience too. The Cape Town group noted that the "Art for Peace" exhibition had "created a ripple effect within the arts community", enhancing the ECC's reputation as a "dynamic political organisation".<sup>283</sup>

Another important part of the ECC's ability to spread its message into the wider white community was continuing work with the press, sending out regular press releases and developing relationships with sympathetic journalists. Supportive press coverage of the September detentions and the "Troops Out" campaign indicated the potential of concerted press work. In Pietermaritzburg good press coverage in the Natal Witness helped the new ECC in its struggle to establish a profile. Regions like Durban felt they had developed good relationships with local journalists, while ECC members who were journalists pushed ECC stories. The ECC was thus able to create a media impact out of proportion to its numbers.<sup>284</sup>

In addition to this building of a national profile, the campaigns of 1985, together with the December/January international conference tour by Laurie Nathan and CO Pete Hathorn stimulated overseas interest in the ECC, and encouraged activists by demonstrating the range of potential and existing support for anti-apartheid activity. Nathan was able to report that an anti-apartheid rally at Trafalgar Square attracted 100 000 people, while the Arns visa debacle had been instrumental in the Brazilian government imposing sanctions against South Africa in July 1985.

The WRI conference also made ECC activists aware that they had not "even begun to realise the full potential of international solidarity networks". Numerous European radio, newspaper and television interviews allowed Nathan and Hathorn to explain what the ECC stood for, and contributed to responses from a range of groups and individuals seeking more information on the ECC, and supporting its work.<sup>285</sup> The fact that the ECC contributed to multiracialism, as well as the social upliftment implicit in its planned "Working for a Just Peace" alternative service project, gave it considerable overseas appeal, and by early 1986 the ECC had been asked to make a presentation to the UN Special Committee against Apartheid and to tour the USA under the auspices of WRI.

Although the state tried to block the ECC by denying visas to several ECC members, Gavin Evans was able to present the ECC submission to the UN in March. He used affidavits collected by Black Sash from township residents

<sup>283</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986. Folder A3.1.2, ECC Cape Town annual assessment in preparation for the national conference January 1986.

<sup>284</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1.2, ECC branch assessments in preparation for national conference. Folder B11.3, Pietermaritzburg ECC campaign assessment of "Working for a Just Peace".

<sup>285</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.1.2, selection of letters and postcards around the arrest of Pietermaritzburg chair Jaq Boule 25 August 1986. Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A29.1, report on Pete Hathorn and Laurie Nathan's trip overseas (undated).

to argue that the SADF was the apartheid state's primary means of upholding minority rule by force, and urged UN member countries to "do everything in their power to end apartheid", and to give political asylum and refugee status to those who conscientiously refused to serve in the SADF. In addition to its impact on diplomats, the speech was covered by Reuters and the BBC, reaching a wide international audience.<sup>286</sup>

After addressing the UN, Evans embarked on a six-week tour of the USA. He met with over 50 national peace and anti-apartheid organisations as well as ten congressional aides and congressmen, gave interviews to over 35 newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, and spoke to numerous community, religious and student groups. He was able to communicate both a CO and political objector stance which further consolidated the range of support for the ECC in the USA. However, while trying to propagate the ECC's message, Evans tried to avoid giving the state reasons to clamp down on the ECC, and was therefore concerned when people at meetings called for disinvestment "off their own bats". He tried to avoid associating with the ANC both at a personal level and on public platforms despite their common opposition goals, and the fact that a number of ANC members were known to him.<sup>287</sup>

This growing overseas interest in the ECC had a number of organisational implications. Firstly, within South Africa it was easier for women to play a high profile role in the ECC, as men often feared being victimised by the SADF if they were associated with the ECC.<sup>288</sup> The outside world, however, wanted to hear the conscript's voice. The ECC's participatory style, the single issue campaign and the growing threat it faced largely contained the potential for internal gender conflict over leadership and representation as pressure increased for men to represent the public face of the ECC.

Secondly, overseas interest significantly increased the workload of the national organiser. In assessing Nathan's work, the national conference expressed some concerns. Regions had tended to rely on Nathan for national co-ordination and public speaking, giving him a high public profile similar to that of a national president. Campaigns like the peace festival led him to take on a greater co-ordination role as the national committee met only every couple of months. The nature of the job meant that he had a better overall grasp of the ECC than many regions, while his enthusiasm and energy made him a good interviewee. During the September detentions, however, it became clear that over-centralised co-ordination could be a problem, while Nathan was concerned that he might set too fast a pace for new

<sup>286</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A12, UN press release 21 March 1986. Sue Britton's personal papers, Human Awareness Programme militarisation dossier.

<sup>287</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A13.3, letter from Gavin Evans to the ECC 10 April 1986, report on ECC US tour by Gavin Evans 6 May 1986.

<sup>288</sup> A Pietermaritzburg ECC member noted that her brother feared being victimised during his national service because of her involvement in ECC, Fiona Jackson interview (22 January 1999).

regions.<sup>289</sup> These concerns demonstrated the tension between the commitment of the ECC to the ideal of non-hierarchical participatory democracy, and the practical reality that over-committed activists were often delighted to let Nathan take charge, while outside influences, like the press, demanded authoritative spokespeople.

Nevertheless, having a national organiser had benefited all regions. New branches had been encouraged, both in their start-up phase and during initial campaigns, by the presence of the national organiser and his ability to round up material, personnel and “nobs”. Even in established regions the national organiser had been able to give a wider perspective. For instance, when the Cape Town branch encountered temporary setbacks in 1985, Nathan was able to remind them of the wider gains of the ECC.<sup>290</sup> The success of the national organiser encouraged the national conference to create another salaried position, that of national secretary, first held by David Shandler. This job involved co-ordination, press work and international liaison as well as public relations to consolidate existing contact, and in anticipation of further international attention, as well as to free the national organiser to concentrate on organising new and future regions. The national secretary was to operate from a proposed national office in Johannesburg because of the proximity of major press networks like SAPA and Reuters.

In addition to these functions of setting direction and streamlining organisation, the 1986 national conference also had to decide how to deal with the realities of harassment. Some areas had been under a partial state of emergency since the peace festival. Following Ivan Toms' high profile during the “Troops Out” campaign, he was briefly detained in October 1985, and his premises searched. In Port Elizabeth, harassment was a way of life as activists were singled out for intimidation.<sup>291</sup>

In Johannesburg, harassment, including detentions and house searches, had forged tighter bonds between members, producing a “defiant spirit” and a renewed sense of urgency and purpose. Harassment could also be used to further the ECC's cause. Toms had become a public figure and his detention made the news, unlike the many faceless others detained. On other occasions action against the ECC made the state look foolish or unduly aggressive. In December 1985 a candlelight procession by 23 Cape Town organisations, including the ECC, was broken up by security police, prompting numerous cartoons and news columns deriding the state's actions. In January 1986 the Cape Town ECC built a sandcastle in the shape of the Cape Town castle, emblem of the SADF. The security police ordered them to demolish it, again provoking much ribaldry from the English press, and questions in parliament. These kinds of

<sup>289</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A6.1, national organiser's report to national conference January 1986.

<sup>290</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

creative actions involved a minimum of effort and expense, and by exposing the authoritarian repression of the state encouraged opposition from a sector of white society not necessarily sympathetic to the ECC *per se*. Regional exploitation of harassment also drew local attention. In Johannesburg, for example, the city council decided to deny maternity leave to all employees whose husbands were COs and the ECC and others campaigned against this decision.<sup>292</sup> In Port Elizabeth the ECC began to highlight the stand of local CO Philip Wilkinson, who faced a trial and possible jail term following his rejection by the Board for Religious Objection in February 1986.

Perhaps the most significant work of the national conference, however, was to strategise the national campaigns for 1986. The major national focus for the first half of 1986 was to be the "Working for a Just Peace" alternative service project. While the ECC's "civil war" analysis had been difficult for many whites to accept, and the ECC had been criticised as an essentially "anti" movement, the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign allowed the ECC to exploit the wider appeal of its interim demands, while demonstrating an alternative understanding of patriotism, and emphasising its positive goals of freedom of choice and a just peace. The campaign also modelled democracy as service projects were set up in consultation with black communities.<sup>293</sup>

The campaign posed a direct ideological challenge to the state. As the state was forced into increasingly repressive measures, including a partial state of emergency from July 1985 to March 1986, the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign focused on the claim that peace without justice was untenable and that justice required active white participation. The campaign slogan "Construction Not Conscription" challenged the state's positive associations of reform with conscription, rather suggesting that conscription was essentially negative and destructive, and focusing on alternatives which would build communities and encourage multiracial dialogue.

Durban ECC activist Beatrice Schofield suggested the significance of the ECC's contribution thus lay not in "presum[ing] to understand township politics" but in targeting "an important symbolic centre of apartheid – the military."<sup>294</sup> The call for alternatives was a particularly successful oppositional move, as the ECC represented the extreme left of the discussion, but it encouraged less radical calls, like the PFP's recommendations for a volunteer army and the church's insistence on a widening of CO. Thus while prominent church leader Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise would not endorse the ECC Declaration in 1984 because he felt focusing on the Defence Amendment Act

<sup>292</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.11, proposed objection to Johannesburg Management Council regarding proposed maternity leave amendment (undated).

<sup>293</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A3.1, minutes of national conference 1-3 February 1986.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Durban ECC member Beatrice Schofield (16 May 1998).

offered a “more realistic chance of success”,<sup>295</sup> by 1986 the “Working for a Just Peace” campaign showed that the ECC had learned how to incorporate moderate conscription objection, thus extending the conscription debate in white circles and consequently increasing pressure on the state as it had few non-military options in the face of increasingly organised and vocal black opposition.

The state attempted to counter growing criticism of conscription and its CO provisions by setting up the Geldenhuys Commission in 1985 to investigate the national service system. While concerned organisations were invited to make submissions, the consultation was largely cosmetic. The committee reported to the SADF, not parliament, thus avoiding debate of its findings, while the staffing of the committee with newly appointed head of the SADF, General Jannie Geldenhuys, two officers from the SADF and a representative from Armscor, meant a predictable conclusion that the existing system was “satisfactory”.<sup>296</sup> The state then used the Geldenhuys Commission’s findings to justify turning down all calls for changes to the conscription system.

There were a number of reasons why the state remained obdurate. Firstly, the SADF had become an important player in state decision-making and the SADF was extremely concerned about its manpower capacity. Secondly, in the face of political threats from the CP and a worsening socio-economic climate, the state remained committed to a threat-based conflict analysis, intended to maximise white cohesion. It therefore could not allow ideologically based CO within the white community, as this would legitimate alternative analyses of the South African conflict. Thirdly, as conscription demands on whites increased, it was important to be seen to spread the load as fairly as possible. Any further widening of exemption could aggravate white dissatisfaction. The state therefore refused even to consider releasing religious objectors for service in welfare and religious organisations, despite its difficulties in placing them in government departments.<sup>297</sup> Lastly, SADF records suggested that Defence Minister Magnus Malan was an authoritarian whose personal style militated against strategic compromise. The ECC focused white attention on the bankruptcy of the state’s policies precisely *because* its demands were not met. Given the size of the ECC, and its relatively small support base, accommodation of its CO proposals could well have buried the movement, and indeed PFP politicians Philip Myburgh and Graham McIntosh, who were unsympathetic towards the ECC, urged the state to do just that, pointing to the low application rate encountered by the Board for Religious Objection. However, revealing episodes like Malan’s determination to punish CO Charles Yeats, and his suggestion that teachers who refused

<sup>295</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B11.1, letter from Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise to Jac Boule 9 August 1985. Like many white South Africans Cassidy became more sympathetic to the dilemmas of conscripts when the issue touched his family directly. In 1988 Cassidy’s nephew, 18-year old Charles Bester was sentenced to six years in prison for refusing to serve.

<sup>296</sup> *The Conscript*, vol.2, no.3, 1986, p.4. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/61/14/1, vol.6, box 211, letter from the Minister of Defence to Philip Myburgh 24 July 1986.

<sup>297</sup> DSD Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 9D, report on the condition of religious objectors 11 April 1986.

training as cadet officers should be "removed from teaching"<sup>298</sup> indicated that he took opposition personally, and was determined to confront and crush such opposition. As a result of the state's refusal to widen its definition of objection and its continued punitive accommodation of objectors, not only the ECC, but also churches and human rights organisations mobilised around alternatives to military service, while the state's inability to accommodate these demands kept the issues alive.

The "Working for a Just Peace" campaign focused a dual spotlight on the continuing deployment of troops in the townships, as well as the lack of alternatives to military service. The ECC's alternative service demands thus proved to be one of its most widely accessible and popular platforms. The campaign made concrete demands which were perceived as more realistic, while still allowing the ECC to question the state's reliance on, and deployment of, the SADF, while highlighting the consequent denial of choice and of freedom of conscience to individual conscripts. Form letters sent out to win support for the campaign continued to reiterate the analysis of the declaration and "Troops Out" campaign, that the root cause of the violence was an unjust society, and that conscription was forcing white South Africans to take up arms against fellow South Africans. However, the ECC now emphasised that its actions were a positive protest, an attempt to "contribute constructively to improving the nature of our society", encouraging individuals to believe that their actions could make a difference.<sup>299</sup>

The campaign took place in April 1986, with regions staggering events as they saw fit. Like the "Troops Out" campaign fast, the activities of the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign were, in themselves, above reproach. Community upliftment was a concern both of churches and human rights activists. Painting crèches and hospital wards, planting gardens and running children's holiday programmes drew some 600 volunteers nationally, and created media interest. Like the "Troops Out" campaign, these activities also carried an implicit ideological challenge, inviting comparisons between the state's authoritarian imposition of "reformed" apartheid and the ECC's consultation with communities, the negative impact of military intervention in the townships as opposed to the positive contribution of service projects, and contrasting the number of volunteers exercising choice in alternative service with the lack of choice facing conscripts, particularly in terms of township duty.

Once again, the ECC drew attention to its "Working for a Just Peace" campaign projects through a series of creative and culture-based actions and vibrant media. In the planning stages, symbolic actions like beating a sword into a

<sup>298</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.45, box 216, undated concept response by the Minister of Defence to a letter from a teacher refusing to undergo leadership training 31 August 1984.

<sup>299</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B11.1, "Working for a Just Peace" circular letter (undated).

ploughshare, planting olive trees to symbolise peace, and sowing wheat as a sign of regeneration in SADF-occupied townships were considered, although most regions eventually settled on more practical, conventional activities.<sup>300</sup>

The established regions planned more adventurous events, like a peace picnic and a peace ribbon, incorporating the declaration demands, which was painted by prominent people in Johannesburg. Durban planned an art exhibition featuring prominent artists under an ECC umbrella. Cape Town hosted a section of the Cape Town Film Festival. PFP member of parliament Alex Borrairie addressed the opening night, and the ECC included a number of free screenings at UCT as part of the festival, which played to full houses. A "Live Jive" concert at the Baxter was studded with big name musicians from Cape Town, generating further press interest.<sup>301</sup> The ECC also held a photographic exhibition at the Baxter Theatre, entitled "South Africa in Conflict: Protest, Resistance, Power", which was estimated to have drawn "hundreds each day". The exhibition was very successful and the ECC planned to tour it, and to create a book around the photographs, with a historical contextualisation by Professor Colin Bundy, who also opened the exhibition.

Like the "Troops Out" campaign, the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign intended to maximise its impact by culminating nationally on 30 April. The most high-profile events were rallies planned for Johannesburg and Cape Town. The Cape Town rally was attended by an estimated 3 500 people, and drew prominent Cape Town speakers like PFP Member of the President's Council Di Bishop, UDF speaker Trevor Manuel, and Archbishop Tutu. The Johannesburg rally drew about 1 000 people, and the ECC's message was given added impact by the public arrest of CO Philip Wilkinson just before the meeting.<sup>302</sup>

Even smaller regions were pleased with the impact of the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign. Although the Pietermaritzburg branch was less than a year old, some 350 people attended its "Working for a Just Peace" campaign meeting, and 70 volunteers participated in work projects. The Grahamstown group, although still not officially launched, noted that this "type of activity seems to make a favourable impact on the liberal constituency". In this region the campaign also led to closer contact between town and campus ECC groups as well as township organisations, although not drawing significant numbers of new people into the ECC.<sup>303</sup>

<sup>300</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.1, update from national secretary David Shandler 26 March 1986.

<sup>301</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.1, Cape Town ECC newsletter 12 April 1984. Folder B8.1.3, Cape Town ECC minutes 24 April 1986. Folder B8.8.3, report on photographic exhibition (undated).

<sup>302</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.1, newsletter from David Shandler to the various overseas groups supporting or sympathetic to the ECC 21 May 1986.

<sup>303</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, Grahamstown ECC report to national committee May 1986.

Overall, the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign was extremely successful on a number of fronts. Firstly, it drew volunteers into the ECC. Secondly, it provided human-interest stories, encouraging good media coverage of the campaign. Thirdly, it encouraged a more positive public perception of the ECC. In strategising the campaign, the ECC had wanted a clear finish to activities so the organisation would not turn into a peace corps or service agency. The campaign was so beneficial, however, that Laurie Nathan urged regions to consider ways to run further "Working for a Just Peace" campaign actions, as a means of continuing the campaign gains: numerical growth for the ECC, excitement generated within affiliates, and the enhancement of the ECC's image as it was seen to be "doing, not just talking and protesting". Within the black community the campaign also helped to counter the anti-white feelings generated by security force actions in the townships.<sup>304</sup>

By May the ECC was thus considerably strengthened. It planned to run a survey which it intended "more as a political intervention than a sociology exercise". With General Malan refusing to release conscription figures, the ECC planned to gather an alternative data base, while interviews with a proposed 50 000 white South Africans would make the ECC better known on the streets, and encourage people to think about conscription. A pilot survey in Johannesburg indicated that while only 30 per cent of those surveyed knew about the ECC, between 70 and 80 per cent supported the idea of choice rather than conscription into the SADF.<sup>305</sup> This suggested that ongoing alternative service work was a fertile area for developing white opposition to conscription.

The ECC was also building on the gains of the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign, feeding those attracted by the campaign into progressive organisations and surveying non-governmental bodies as part of a campaign to push for the accommodation of COs outside of government departments. "Working for a Just Peace" campaign work continued. The Stellenbosch branch, for instance, attempted to organise white visits to Crossroads, both to distribute goods, and as a deterrent to security force action there. The banning of the ECC on Stellenbosch campus also generated publicity as the media took up the ECC's attempts to reverse this. Further work in the Afrikaans community included the inauguration of the Pretoria branch on 16 May, and a meeting at RAU in Johannesburg where two veterans shared their experiences. Middleburg, Bloemfontein and East London had also expressed interest in the ECC and the national organiser was investigating the viability of new branches, while campuses were asked if a third national position should be considered, that of national campus co-ordinator who would facilitate their work. To further consolidate the successes of "Working for a Just Peace" the ECC began planning for a concerted action around the

<sup>304</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, Grahamstown ECC report to national committee May 1986, letter from Laurie Nathan to "Dave" 11 April 1986. Folder A4.2.1, Cape Town ECC newsletter 12 April 1984. Box A5.2, ECC memorandum to the churches March 1986.

<sup>305</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B1.4, motivation for a "Working for a Just Peace" survey 9 March 1986.



July call-up, and a December cultural festival in Cape Town, which would draw a multiracial spectrum of art, dance, music and theatre around anti-conscription themes.<sup>306</sup>

However, the context of ECC work was becoming increasingly difficult. As the state felt more threatened it acted more repressively, and as it did so, its actions increased strategic and ideological tensions within the wider anti-apartheid opposition movement. The Johannesburg "Working for a Just Peace" campaign meeting, for instance, had to juggle the agenda as black speakers refused to appear with a white speaker involved in the National Convention movement. Even within the ECC there was conflict between the Johannesburg and Cape Town ECCs over the participation of controversial Afrikaans activist Breyten Breytenbach on an ECC platform.<sup>307</sup>

Increasingly harsh state actions also worked in the ECC's favour in some cases. SADF raids on frontline state capitals in May 1986 were a potent reminder of a central tenet of the ECC's campaign: that the apartheid state used the SADF to perpetuate white rule through military force. The raids encouraged collaboration between the ECC and its affiliates to mount an impromptu mini campaign. The forceful public arrest of Philip Wilkinson also generated publicity for the ECC. High-profile speakers at the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign meeting denounced the arrest, and attention was once more focused on the use of conscripts in townships and the lack of alternatives to military service. The SACBC committed itself to publicising and funding the Philip Wilkinson campaign, while the ECC's national secretary kept international backers updated as the ECC prepared to campaign around Wilkinson's trial.

As the bombing of the frontline capitals suggested, the apartheid state was increasingly running out of momentum. Threats like renewed Commonwealth and US demands for an end to apartheid increased the state's reliance on the military to defend the status quo internally and to push for regional advantage. On 12 June 1986 the state's repressive capacity was unleashed against the growing opposition movement, as a nationwide state of emergency came into effect, giving the security forces wide-ranging powers and indemnity, while imposing stringent limits on the flow of information and the activities of opposition movements.

The period between September 1985 and June 1986 thus saw the ECC achieving considerable success because of increased organisational capacity, as well as growing experience in how to present an accessible anti-conscription message to the white community. While the ECC was only a small part of the opposition which was building within the

<sup>306</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, letter from David Shandler to the various overseas groups supporting or sympathetic to the ECC 21 May 1986.

<sup>307</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, letter from Dr Alex Boraine to Marlene Powell 5 May 1986, memorandum to ECC regions from Johannesburg ECC (undated).

country, it nevertheless represented a peculiar threat to the apartheid state. The inherent tension of the state's conscription demands on the white community had encouraged sufficient interest in conscription as an opposition issue that the ECC was formed in late 1983. As this tension intensified between 1985 and 1986 so the ECC had increasing scope to campaign, as well as a more receptive white constituency. Growing black opposition intensified the state's need for a strong coercive capacity, making it vulnerable to the ECC's call for alternatives to military service. However, where the state was forced to use military containment of internal opposition, this was not so easily explained by "total onslaught" propaganda. The ECC thus posed a secondary threat in that its continual focus on troops in the townships and its articulation of white discontent around conscription and consequent call for alternatives exacerbated political divisions among whites and undermined the ideological power of the state's security discourse.

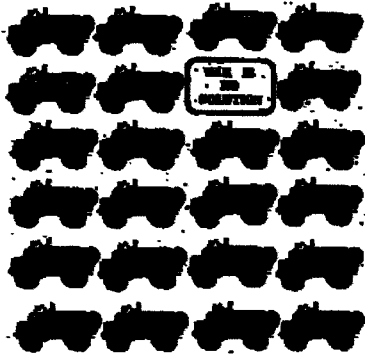


don't give a war toy

this Christmas

buy toys for peace, not war!!!!

End Conscription Campaign



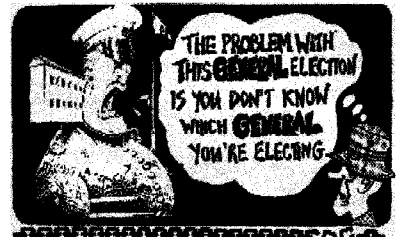
End Conscription Campaign

**WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO OPPOSE CONSCRIPTION!**

End Conscription Campaign

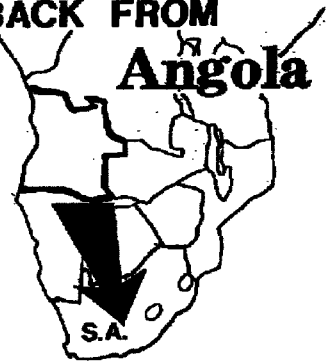


WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW OUR VIEWS ON CONSCRIPTION? SORRY - WE CAN'T TELL YOU.



THE PROBLEM WITH THIS GENERAL ELECTION IS YOU DON'T KNOW WHICH GENERAL YOU'RE ELECTING.

**BRING OUR BOYS BACK FROM Angola**



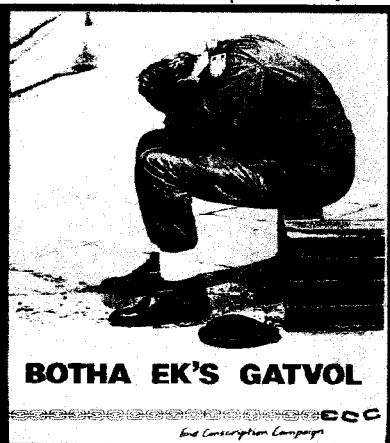
End Conscription Campaign

**Chapter Five**  
 July 1987 – August 1988:  
 A changing campaign under the state of emergency.

**Soldiers OUT of the Schools**



TIE A YELLOW RIBBON AGAINST A CIVIL WAR!



**BOTHA EK'S GATVOL**



**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS IN THE S.A.F.**



Will this budget kill your son?

Join up and make the **Peace Ribbon**



**NOT VERY RELAXING**



**WAR IS NO SOLUTION**

The specific targeting of the ECC in the June 1986 emergency legislation demonstrated that the state recognised the organisation's unique oppositional challenge to the security discourse. State of emergency regulations changed the opposition landscape, undermining the ECC's platform and intimidating its constituency. However, as the ECC had always claimed, the burden of conscription on whites was an inherent contradiction of the apartheid state, not an issue created by the ECC. The increased coercive capacity of the state thus did not resolve its fundamental difficulties. While the state of emergency limited the flow of information, it could not disguise the existential realities of general economic decline and social dislocation. Although emergency regulations increased the state's power to act against its opponents, they simultaneously intensified the demands of conscription on white individuals, families and the economy. Despite the state's attempts to curb the conscription debate and its continued use of the security discourse to maintain white political cohesion, this changing cost:benefit ratio of conscription for whites meant that the ECC continued to have both a platform and an audience. This chapter will examine how the state's contraction of the legal space for extra-parliamentary opposition after mid 1986 forced the ECC to re-evaluate its campaign, but was ultimately unable to limit the opposition potential of conscription issues.

Initially, the state's attempts to disrupt and undermine the ECC were effective. State of emergency legislation made it an offence to produce or distribute "subversive statements" that could "incite the public to discredit or undermine" conscription, thus curtailing the legal space to campaign.<sup>308</sup> Harassment of the organisation and its activists further limited the ECC's capability. Within two weeks of the declaration of the state of emergency 30 ECC members were in jail and 50 ECC homes had been raided, sending the remaining activists into hiding. ECC regional offices closed. General body meetings ceased, as did media and campaign work. In the Western Cape the ECC was prohibited from making "any utterance", while in the Eastern Cape it was barred from holding any meetings whatsoever.

As Laurie Nathan later noted, "The repression was not simply intended to stop high profile campaigning. It also aimed to disorganise us by intimidating our members." The new periphery drawn by "Working for a Just Peace" quickly fell away in the face of a state crackdown including house searches, detentions and even threatened deportations. Moreover, as the ECC responded by tightening security, avoiding the telephone, destroying documents and changing meeting places, it increasingly looked like an underground organisation, which exacerbated the problems of maintaining and attracting membership, as well as affecting its image among the broad white public, and even on the

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<sup>308</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A13, ECC reviews 1986 15 February 1987.

white left. The state of emergency thus increased the costs of supporting the ECC, while at the same time undermining the credibility of the ECC and the urgency of its issues among whites.<sup>309</sup>

While the ECC had not penetrated much beyond the liberal white sector, even liberals' support of the ECC was eroded by the state of emergency. Privileged whites were not spurred by the political and socio-economic oppression of apartheid, so the state could more easily intimidate and confuse them by curtailing the flow of information and criminalising extra-parliamentary opposition. Moreover, a situation of continuing conflict and disinformation diluted the liberal outrage utilised by the ECC during the "Troops out Campaign". This was particularly true of Natal where escalating conflict between Inkatha and the UDF led some black communities to express a preference for troops rather than police in the townships.<sup>310</sup>

Support for the positive alternatives suggested by the "Working for a Just Peace" campaign was similarly undermined by the repressive conditions under the state of emergency. While some white liberals followed the lead of Drs Slabbert and Borraine in abandoning parliamentary politics in disgust, the rising emigration statistics of the period suggested that many others, despairing of economic and social stability and political reform, were withdrawing from the country altogether. By mid 1987 the replacement of the PFP by the CP as the official opposition created further "hopeless anger" and "despondency" among the ECC's existing and potential constituency, as well as demonstrating the continuing ability of the security discourse to limit white parliamentary opposition to apartheid.<sup>311</sup>

In addition to this confusion within its primary constituency, the state of emergency circumscribed the ECC's public programme, making its call seem less differentiated from other peace calls. This led to a new pressure from the broader democratic movement – itself under stress – to abandon the single-issue position and move closer to the multifaceted opposition of the UDF. The state of emergency thus not only targeted the ECC's platform, organisational capacity and constituency, but also led to a questioning of the ECC's role from within the opposition movement itself.<sup>312</sup>

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.* Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, minutes of the ECC national committee meeting 17-19 October 1986.

<sup>310</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987.

<sup>311</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, minutes of the ECC national committee meeting 17-19 October 1986. Folder A2.1.3, ECC: the future (undated). Box H8, coalition workshop report 22 February 1987.

<sup>312</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987, the UDF expressed concern that the ECC was trying to win support among conservative elements of the white community. While the ECC took the UDF's criticism seriously, in its internal planning a key question regions were asked to discuss was in which sector the ECC was seeking legitimacy. The ECC noted that "some of our success is due to the fact that we distance ourselves from the [National Democratic Movement]". While the ECC maintained cordial links with the UDF the internal debate eventually produced a decision that the ECC's primary constituency was still the white community. Archives and Manuscripts BC 912, folder A13, box A13, ECC reviews 1986 15 February 1987. BC 1072, box L6, Cape Town ECC minutes 14 April 1987. University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton Centre, PC9/1 B, a few questions about our current and future direction (undated), report of workshop discussion 20 May 1987.

Earlier in the ECC's existence these pressures might have succeeded in crushing it, but by mid 1986, the ECC's internal organisation and external contacts had given it a measure of resilience. Within a month of the declaration of the state of emergency, national secretary David Shandler began to activate the ECC's support base, and soon messages of support for the ECC and condemnation of state repression were received from British opposition politicians Neil Kinnock and Dennis Healey, American senator Edward Kennedy, civil rights leaders Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, as well as humanitarian, anti-war and church groups, and individuals in Europe and America.<sup>313</sup>

As it recovered from the first blow of detentions the ECC began to explore the extent of the remaining legal space to campaign. At first, regional ECCs worked with other local groups concerned about the curtailment of rights and information, such as the "Coalition for the Right to Know" in Johannesburg, which drew some 1 000 people to a public meeting. After consultation with lawyers, the ECC was reassured that it could still use its name and campaign for a just peace, and this, together with the release of 43 of the ECC detainees by September, encouraged the organisation to begin campaigning again.

The September "Right to Speak" campaign used the repression itself to draw attention to conscription, by demanding that, as a legal organisation, the ECC be allowed to state its case.<sup>314</sup> Once again the ECC drew on the endorsement of prominent figures to legitimise and publicise the campaign through their participation. The main thrust of the campaign was a newspaper advertisement, endorsed by 45 church leaders, members of parliament, authors, academics, sportsmen and other well-known personalities, calling on the government to recognise freedom of conscience. In Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pietermaritzburg high-profile people headlined ECC public meetings calling for the right to speak, while an intensive media blitz used teasing slogans like "Would you like to know our views on conscription? Sorry we can't tell you."<sup>315</sup>

The ECC further tried to empower the white public by encouraging them to participate in a postcard campaign calling on President P.W.Botha and PFP leader Colin Eglin "to recognise the right to express opposition to military conscription and end the silencing of the End Conscription Campaign". In this way, despite the limited capacity for a specifically anti-conscription thrust, the ECC was still able to generate opposition by encouraging whites not to accept the state of emergency, and by demonstrating how the state was eroding white freedoms.

<sup>313</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A6.4, national secretary's report December 1986.

<sup>314</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 912, folder A13, ECC reviews 1986 15 February 1987.

<sup>315</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.3, ECC press release 24 September 1986. Folder B1.7, declaration for the "Right to Speak" campaign.

The ECC soon found, however, that it was now operating in a very different context. Cape Town had always been its most supportive region, yet a turn-out of only between 700 and 800 people at the September "Right to Speak" meeting demonstrated how badly the state of emergency had frightened the white public. Similarly, the September and October yellow ribbon campaign – based on Vietnam War protest using yellow ribbons as a tangible demonstration of protest against repression – had limited success in Johannesburg and Pretoria. A strong security force presence meant that ribbons were quickly taken down in the streets, while the ECC's limited public profile made it difficult to impose the ECC's opposition message over entrenched associations of yellow with cowardice.<sup>316</sup>

Despite the ECC's renewed ability to campaign, the state of emergency also inhibited national cohesion. Limited communication and travel opportunities meant that national workers like Laurie Nathan felt isolated from the branches, while branches often seemed to have turned inward, lessening their concern for the national impact of the ECC, and focusing their energies on protecting the activists and activities of their particular region. All the regions noted a need for internal education and a drive for new membership, further demonstrating how the state of emergency had disrupted both the internal functioning of local ECCs and their capacity to reach their communities.<sup>317</sup>

The state of emergency also limited the support of affiliates. The front had never worked effectively. With the ECC in a state of flux it came closer to collapse. Affiliate participation in ECC activities dropped, as affiliates also struggled with limited personnel and an increased need for security. While the more difficult conditions encouraged the ECC to overcome qualms about the PFP Youth, which was finally admitted as an affiliate in October 1986, and Slabbert's quitting parliamentary politics led to a new rapprochement between his new Institute for a Democratic South Africa (IDASA) and the ECC, the state of emergency also exacerbated tensions on the left. The University of the Witwatersrand ECC branch, for example, found that tensions within NUSAS spilled over into the campus ECC.<sup>318</sup>

These more difficult national conditions led to a rash of regional campaigns at the end of 1986. The Durban group, with its strong pacifist influence, took up an "Anti-War Toys" Christmas campaign. This was endorsed by local churches and gained some sympathetic press. In Johannesburg, the deployment of troops in township schools was a matter of such concern that the Johannesburg ECC adopted a dual focus, "Right to Speak" and "Troops Out",

<sup>316</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, newsletter from David Shandler to the regions 18 September 1986. Folder A16.3, ECC press release 24 September 1986.

<sup>317</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, letter from Laurie Nathan to "Dave" 12 September 1986.

<sup>318</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, minutes of the ECC national committee meeting 17-19 October 1986. Folder A4.2.2, Johannesburg newsletter 7 November 1986. Folder B10.1, Durban ECC newsletter 17 October 1986.

including a women's protest stand outside Witwatersrand Command. In Cape Town a "War Is No Solution" campaign looked at the costs of the war.<sup>319</sup>

Once again, however, the repressive capacity of the state was an important limiting factor. Some projects, such as a book arising from the April photographic exhibition in Cape Town, were cancelled altogether. The state barred outright some ECC actions, like the proposed peace walk to a local Cape Town township, while actions such as the women's protest outside Witwatersrand Command were quickly dispersed. In December further detentions – including nine ECC activists in Cape Town and four in Johannesburg, with a further 12 being issued with restriction orders – together with a tightening of the emergency regulations and a proposed amendment of the Defence Act after Buddhist Dave Hartman won a Supreme Court case against the Board for Religious Objection, suggested that the state remained determined to block forcefully the oppositional potential of both the ECC and conscription.<sup>320</sup>

Thus although harassment was an ongoing reality for much of the ECC's campaigning, it is perhaps most relevant to discuss it here, as the state of emergency of 1986 gave the state unprecedented powers against its opponents. The state also began concerted smear campaigns. Physical harassment was intended to limit the functioning of the ECC by breaking up planned activities, confiscating material and detaining leadership, while smears aimed to undermine the credibility of the ECC's message among its target audience. This combination of physical and ideological harassment increased significantly the costs of supporting the ECC, while forcing the organisation onto the defensive.<sup>321</sup>

Detentions and bannings did not just disrupt the organisation; they also increased the costs for individual activists. A 19-year-old Durban woman was interrogated 12 times, sometimes by as many as 15 security policemen during a 16-day detention. A Port Elizabeth activist was involved in a minor traffic accident and subsequently arrested for attempted murder and held for three days before this charge was dropped. A Grahamstown activist was threatened with previous shoplifting charges. Those holding foreign passports feared deportation, while other activists faced ongoing levels of stress as they were aware of being under surveillance, and received obscene and threatening phone calls.<sup>322</sup> Johannesburg chair Claire Verbeek was detained for 98 days, 11 weeks of which were spent in solitary

<sup>319</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, Johannesburg newsletter 7 November 1986.

<sup>320</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 912, folder A13, ECC assessment and planning (undated), ECC reviews 1986 15 February 1987. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, newsletter 1 September 1986. Folder A10.5.6, report on the period from July 1986 to September 1987.

<sup>321</sup> Despite the considerable powers of the state, its own bureaucracy did limit its reach in some cases. Steve Lowry noted that he and Gavin Evans were detained by the security branch at a time when the military police were also seeking them, but the two branches of the state's security apparatus did not have sufficiently efficient communication to make the connection and they were subsequently released, Steve Lowry interview.

<sup>322</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.1, incidents of harassment Cape Town ECC 1986. Folder A22.4, Johannesburg ECC repression report 14 August 1987. Folder A22.6, Port Elizabeth repression report (undated).



confinement, and was described as “fragile” after her release. At least three ECC members received psychiatric treatment as a result of their detentions, and Port Elizabeth activist Mike Loewe’s hospitalisation for asthma and depression after two weeks in solitary confinement is further evidence of the personal costs of opposition.<sup>323</sup> Laurie Nathan later suggested that because activists were often “young and cocky” they were confident that being white would be a protection against harsh state action. He and Gavin Evans made a media opportunity out of their adventures escaping out of windows and using disguises, offering their stories to sympathetic newspapers like the Weekly Mail. However, Grahamstown activist Sue Lund’s comments to supporters that “I have never felt as ignorant and helpless as I do here”<sup>324</sup> indicated the grim reality of living through indefinite detention without trial. Clearly, the state had considerable power to oppress ECC activists in this period.

If detentions were a means of immobilising activists, other forms of harassment were intended to scare, damage and disrupt. A substantial part of the national office’s mail was misdirected. Numerous vehicles owned by ECC activists were tampered with, from regular tyre slashing to sabotage. Attacks on activists also ranged from intimidation, like the January 1986 visit of security police to Pietermaritzburg activist Anton Krone’s employer, to physical assaults on activists who were mounting placard stands or staffing ECC information booths. In 1986 and 1987 respectively, a Johannesburg ECC home and the Cape Town office were petrol bombed.<sup>325</sup>

This intimidation campaign had a number of successes. In Pretoria, foreign-born Black Sash leader, Annika van Gylswyk, was forced to leave the country, and the Grahamstown branch reported that two members with foreign passports had withdrawn from ECC.<sup>326</sup> Similarly, while the front was strong enough to take over the limited Cape Town campaign after the leadership was detained in December 1986, the removal of experienced activists in smaller and newer regions both affected the capacity of the group to maintain a public presence, and intimidated potential members. The Port Elizabeth branch only began campaigning again in March 1987, while the fledgling Pretoria branch virtually collapsed.<sup>327</sup> As repression limited campaigns, all the branches found that ECC members became

<sup>323</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.8, update on repression against ECC 7 August 1986. Folder A4.2.2, letter from David Shandler to the Director of the UN Centre for Human Rights.

<sup>324</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 912, folder A24, Sue Lund prisoner of conscience pamphlet. I. Suttner, Cutting through the mountain (Sandton, Viking, 1997) p. 183.

<sup>325</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.5.6, report on the period from July 1986 to September 1987. Folder A11.1.5, letter from national secretary Adele Kirsten to Bob Woito director of World Without War 8 September 1987. Folder A22.2, Durban ECC list of harassment April 1986-January 1987. Folder B8.4.4 Cape Town ECC harassment report: February-August 1988.

<sup>326</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.3, Grahamstown ECC repression report (undated). Folder A22.4, update on repression against the ECC 7 August 1986.

<sup>327</sup> The older demographic of this branch made activists particularly vulnerable. Activists had children, careers, financial commitments and “little activist background to sustain them”, Steve Lowry interview. Moreover, Adele Kirsten suggested that in both Pretoria and Stellenbosch the Afrikaans activists drawn to the ECC were often very hard line, having little patience with strategic compromises, because the cost of opposition in their context was so high, Adele Kirsten interview.

demotivated and new workers were not drawn in. Although subcommittees continued to operate, the democratic functioning of the ECC was also affected by a lack of centralised decision-making and discussion of issues.<sup>328</sup>

Nevertheless, the ECC used the continuing detention of its activists to focus public attention on the state's repression and on the call to end conscription. In Port Elizabeth, for example, a series of innovative press campaigns reminded the public that Janet Cherry was still detained without charge. Her right to vote in municipal elections was debated in the press, a romantic story was created around another ECC member being arrested for trying to talk to her through her cell window, and she was nominated for the Star Woman of the Year "Rising Star" award. In November 1986 Amnesty International adopted her as its "Prisoner of the Month", while the ECC was also able to stimulate high-level French interest as a result of Cherry's 1985 trip to France.<sup>329</sup> Similarly, the detention of Steven Markovitz, the son of Cape Town's mayor, was a media opportunity for ECC to highlight both the state's repression and the plight of its activists.<sup>330</sup> Within South Africa these detentions also aroused the support of liberals. PFP Law and Order representative Helen Suzman demanded "When people like Janet Cherry have been in detention since August 1986 ...tell me how we differ from a police state." While emergency regulations prohibited calls for the release of detainees or even the publication of their photographs, the ECC was thus able to use the apartheid state's very power to repress it as an opposition issue.<sup>331</sup>

However, the ECC wanted to campaign actively, rather than merely defensively respond to the state. Previously, the ECC had used cultural events to great advantage within the white community, such as concerts which attracted youth. As so many other avenues of public work were blocked by the state of emergency, the ECC's planned cultural festival in Cape Town in December 1986 – to "promote culture as a progressive medium of political communication" – was expanded beyond a purely ECC event, to act as a "massive public spectacle of resistance culture in the midst of...repressive conditions". Speakers from the UDF, COSATU, the ECC and churches were to be given platforms amongst the cultural activities, while the symbols of the apartheid regime were to be subverted through activities like a planned candle-light tribute to heroes of struggle on 16 December, a holiday which endorsed the apartheid position that white dominance, gained through military force, was sanctioned by God.<sup>332</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A6, ECC notebooks (undated). Folder A22.4, update on repression against the ECC 7 August 1986. Folder B10.1, Durban ECC newsletter 17 October 1986.

<sup>329</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, newsletter from David Shandler to the regions 12 September 1986.

<sup>330</sup> Star 11 May 1987, Cape Times 19 May 1987.

<sup>331</sup> Cherry received over 500 letters of support from church groups, peace movements and individuals from four continents. Many prominent individuals and groups petitioned the government for her release. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.6, Port Elizabeth repression report 1 July 1986. Interview with Port Elizabeth member Dominique Souchon (1999). Cory Library for Historical Research MS 17804/1 Glover collection, ECC pamphlet: state versus peace.

<sup>332</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A15.2; report by festival organiser Mike van Graan (undated).

The festival was planned in traditional ECC format with high-profile public events, but the state of emergency context created new difficulties for white sector opposition. Black oppression under apartheid meant that black communities were sympathetic to the idea that opposition to an illegitimate system was not bound by the rules of that system. By contrast, support for the ECC came only from particular sub-sections of the privileged white community, and was limited by the broader normative understanding of whites that “the rule of law” and “parliamentary democracy” were not only operating, but were central to the reform process, thus limiting support for opposition outside of the law. Consequently, when the state banned the arts festival there were no legal avenues to salvage it, raising questions about future high-profile ECC public work.<sup>333</sup>

Not only high-profile events attracted harassment. In Grahamstown, for example, a proposed 1987 “Working for a Just Peace” project was stopped by the detention and restriction of activists, while a peace fair was disrupted by the dumping of a large amount of sneeze powder where it was due to take place. In Cape Town a helicopter was used to mount a smear pamphlet attack on an ECC fair in 1987. An October 1986 ECC cabaret in Johannesburg received bomb threats, the venue was vandalised with graffiti, and the manager later closed the show after a visit from police, which included the interrogation of performers and the audience. Another intimidation tactic was to note participants at ECC events, such as security force videotaping of those painting the peace ribbon or the photographing of picketers.<sup>334</sup>

The impact of the ECC on schools was an area of particular concern to the state, as indicated by increased measures to keep the ECC out of state schools. In the Transvaal conservative women’s group Women for South Africa compiled a lengthy condemnation of the ECC and distributed it to all the principals of schools in the region.<sup>335</sup> A school inspector harassed Johannesburg ECC member and teacher Annemarie Rademeyer after she had been detained. Where private schools were more accommodating, they faced intimidation, such as the security branch visit to St Joseph’s in Cape Town after a 1987 ECC event there. As small independent anti-conscription school pupil groups began to operate – the Pupils Awareness and Action Group (Cape Town 1985), the Pupils Peace Group (Durban 1987) and Linx (Johannesburg 1987) – these, too, were targeted for attack. Pupils reported intimidation from teachers

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, Johannesburg ECC harassment report for national committee 14 May 1987. Folder A16.5, ECC press release (undated). Folder A22.1, incidents of harassment Cape Town ECC 1986. Folder A22.2, Durban ECC: list of harassment April 1986-January 1987. Folder A22.3, Grahamstown ECC repression report (undated).

<sup>335</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, Johannesburg ECC repression report for national committee 14 August 1987, the difficulties of making headway in the state school system can be gauged by incidents like the Transvaal Education Department notification to all school heads telling them not to allow the distribution of the ECC calendar or to allow pupils to attend the Johannesburg ECC POW art exhibition in March 1987.

and pupils at school and the Durban schools' groups reported attempts to infiltrate meetings, while articles in the pro-government Citizen suggested the ECC was the covert mastermind behind such groups.<sup>336</sup>

The state further harassed the ECC by attempting to limit its finances. Both mounting campaigns and countering state harassment required funds. This was an area in which the ECC was particularly vulnerable since much of its funding came from overseas donor agencies (some 53.2 per cent in 1985, for example), while emergency regulations limited its capacity to be self-supporting through sales and events.<sup>337</sup> Prior to the state of emergency the state had introduced legislation to limit foreign donations to opposition groups. When the ECC's books were confiscated in 1986, it expected to be prosecuted under the Fundraising Act.<sup>338</sup> Eventually the case was dropped due to insufficient evidence, but fears of falling foul of the regulations led the ECC to return donations, despite being very short of funds. While donors still supported the ECC through the SACBC, which the state chose not to confront openly, ECC records after June 1986 show the regions were consistently struggling for money.<sup>339</sup>

At the same time that it restricted the ECC's funds, the state of emergency also increased the organisation's financial needs. With limited campaigning ability, the importance of mailing lists as a means of publicising ECC issues increased. Servicing a mailing list of some 50 000 people cost R7 500 in 1987, while pamphlets cost on average ten cents each so that the ECC estimated its pamphlet costs for 1988 at R86 400. Where these were banned or confiscated this represented a considerable financial loss, as well as the loss of potential publicity and membership.<sup>340</sup>

The ECC thus avoided the most obvious confrontations with the state. "Forces Favourites", a book of short stories which was to have been published under ECC auspices in 1986, was no longer directly connected to the ECC, while the ECC video "Marching Orders" was withdrawn. Nevertheless, the ECC's message was fundamentally a challenge to the state, and so material continued to be banned on the basis that it "stir[ed] up or foment[ed] feelings of hatred or hostility in members of the public" towards the security forces, essentially giving the state licence to limit much public expression of conscription objection. While the ECC could appeal, this was costly, running to some R350 per appeal, and where the ECC won, the victory was often essentially moral, as material such as the 1987 diary was time

<sup>336</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.4, Johannesburg ECC repression report 14 August 1987.

<sup>337</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.1, ECC balance sheet for 1985. Folder A10.2, ECC financial report 1985.

<sup>338</sup> Cory Library MS17804/1, treasurer's report by Stephen Lowry January 1988.

<sup>339</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report August 1987. Folder A11.1.5, letter from ECC to donor 9 June 1987. Folder B8.1.4, Cape Town ECC minutes 3 September 1987, minutes of Cape Town annual general meeting 19 November 1987, treasurer's report. Letter from ECC treasurer Stephen Lowry to Bishop Napier 12 September 1987. Folder A10.3.1, balance sheet at 31 December 1986. Folder A10.2.1, ECC income statement for the year ended December 1986, some R93 450,00 was channelled through the SACBC in 1986, for example. On the advice of lawyer Edwin Cameron Lowry redid the ECC's books, erasing all records of foreign donors and attributing all donations to the SACBC, Steve Lowry interview.

<sup>340</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.3.1, ECC budget for July-December 1987. Folder A10.5.6, ECC application for funding 1 January 1988-31 December 1988.

sensitive.<sup>341</sup> In the case of the 1987 national campus comic "War Is No Solution" the ECC tried to pre-empt seizure by obtaining a lawyer's letter beforehand, attesting to the publication's legality. However, legal fees were a further financial drain, totalling some R4 400 of a six-month budget request from July to December 1987. Moreover, legal advice was no guarantee of the success of proposed actions, as a bill for R1 666 for legal advice regarding the abortive Cape arts festival demonstrated.<sup>342</sup>

Despite these costs, direct harassment was easier to counter than the smears which became increasingly frequent and sophisticated by 1987. A variety of organisations were involved, generally following a "total onslaught" line, attempting to link the ECC with the ANC, SACP and UDF. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) investigations later showed that a number of these smear campaigns were state-funded, so that small groups like Veterans for Victory, for example, could afford glossy pamphlets, and the small NSF affiliates had the funds to attack the ECC. Smear campaigns were also fed information by the state. The Aida Parker Newsletter, for instance, used information confiscated from the ECC by police and an intercepted letter from Gavin Evans' 1986 overseas trip. The publication also quoted with impunity from the banned ANC's internal documents.<sup>343</sup> The state attempted to establish these smears as fact, introducing the Aida Parker Newsletter as "an authoritative source on issues of this nature" in a Grahamstown trial, for example.<sup>344</sup> Moreover, those smearing the ECC could use national television. Head of the 500 000 strong Vrouefederasie Gabriella Malan used a prime-time television slot to criticise the ECC as cowardly, and accused the organisation of having a hidden agenda under the guise of seeking peace, but the ECC could neither make its case nor offer a rebuttal on national television.

While the ECC could write off much of the content of the smears as "ridiculous", the smear campaign fostered and legitimised ongoing violence against the organisation, as well as contributing to the attempt to criminalise it in the eyes of the white public. The ECC became suspicious of attempts to trap it, as people posing as reporters asked for interviews, and a letter purporting to be from a serviceman requested addresses of banned organisations.<sup>345</sup> As early as 1985 drugs were planted in Janet Cherry's house. Shortly before a police raid, homosexual pornography was also sent to a Johannesburg campus member, presumably to incriminate him during the search. Such actions attempted to

<sup>341</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A17.15, annexure to banning order against the August 1987 Out of Step. Folder B10.9, judgement of the Appèlraad oor Publikasies case no.80/87 7 March 1987. Folder M1.1, letter from the publisher Taurus to Steve Lowry (undated).

<sup>342</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A6 ECC notebooks (undated). Folder A10.2.1, ECC financial report 1987. Folder A15.2, ECC financial report 5 March 1987.

<sup>343</sup> The TRC exposed the fact that SADF secret projects covered a range of activities such as publications and front organisations like "Vroue vir Suid-Afrika". SADF consultants were used in covert front organisations like "Veterans for Victory," as well as giving support to surrogate groups and publications including the Aida Parker Newsletter. The NSF was also "financed through a business trust until press disclosures led to its dissolution", TRC, vol.2, pp.525-530. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report October 1987. Folder B8.1.4, Cape Town ECC minutes 2 April 1987.

<sup>344</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987. Folder B1.8, Wits regional report 22 October 1987. Folder G1.2, trial documents, state v. Louise Carol Vale.

<sup>345</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.1, letter to the ECC 21 April 1986.

establish a connection between the ECC and behaviour which went against the official norms of white society in order to imply that, by extension, ECC politics were also deviant and detrimental to the wider white society.

Besides attacking the ECC as an organisation, as well as individual members, smears were also intended to counter the message of particular campaigns. During the April 1987 "Day of Mourning" action smear posters went up claiming that the ECC was mourning dead ANC victims. Visuals of a baby with a tyre around its neck directed attention to the least sympathetic aspects of the freedom struggle. Similarly, during objector Philip Wilkinson's trial look-alike pamphlets vilifying Wilkinson appeared, and "coward" stickers were plastered over the slogan "apartheid war resister" on Wilkinson posters.<sup>346</sup>

The ECC was determined to counter these smears, spending some R1 130 to refute the Rapport allegations in 1985, and R600 in fees and transcripts for a Media Council hearing against the Aida Parker Newsletter in 1986. In cases like a 1987 SABC "Network" programme, which explicitly linked the ECC to the ANC, the ECC's lack of access to the television medium made it difficult to counter these charges. Similarly, during the March 1987 Durban Rag float parade television cameras focused on an NSF float carrying slogans like "ECC sucks", while ignoring the ECC float altogether. Although the ECC had greater freedom to make its case in the press, here, too, rebuttals were not always published, as management was increasingly nervous of overstepping the myriad of new press regulations. The ECC thus feared that the continuous repetition of ECC-ANC links would eventually become accepted as fact among whites, particularly where accusations that the ECC was undermining the state's ability to fight communism came from the Minister of Defence himself, giving them added weight and guaranteeing them media space.<sup>347</sup> Even where the ECC did successfully oppose smears this did not necessarily stop them. Although the ECC won a media council ruling against the Aida Parker Newsletter in 1986, the council had very limited powers, and the issue containing allegations against the ECC continued to be distributed to schools and army bases, where the ECC had little or no sway. While the media council's decision against the Aida Parker Newsletter was widely published in the English press the exercise was costly, and further ECC complaints against the publication were turned down as the council claimed the ECC was essentially revisiting the same complaint.

The state's criminalisation of the ECC had a ripple effect in the regions. Local municipalities were more wary of the ECC, leading to difficulties in hiring major venues like the Johannesburg city hall, and demands for exorbitant

<sup>346</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B5.1, Port Elizabeth ECC report (undated). Folder B8.7, ECC press release 28 April 1987.

<sup>347</sup> 8.00pm TV1 news Tuesday 26 May 1986. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, national organiser news 28 May 1986. Folder A10.2.1, Johannesburg financial report 1986.

deposits. The Pietermaritzburg city council withdrew permission for an ECC stall at the local flea market and the Cape Town city council became increasingly punitive about ECC posters and pamphlets.<sup>348</sup> In Grahamstown a local printer took a policy decision not to print any more ECC media after a visit from the security police, despite assurances from the ECC that a lawyer had vetted material.<sup>349</sup>

This increased and ongoing harassment demonstrated the state's determination to limit the opposition of the ECC and to regain control of the security discourse, and support for the ECC was certainly limited by the harshness of the repression. For much of its existence, however, the ECC had represented the very small public face of a much larger opposition to conscription, which was more often expressed in individual non-compliance or emigration. Although many of the ECC's records for this period were destroyed, items like an anonymous postal order for R25 from someone leaving the country on an alternative passport, and the donation of a car from a UCT lecturer relocating to Zimbabwe, indicated that conscription remained a major problem for a number of whites, who supported the ending of conscription, although being unwilling to face the personal costs entailed by public opposition.

Moreover, while support for the ECC *per se* remained limited, the continuing conflict and the burden of conscription encouraged a new acceptance of the ECC's interim demands, such as the call for alternatives to military service and the widening of the parameters of the Board for Religious Objection. In Cape Town, for example, the extension of the "Dad's army" call-up encouraged older whites to become involved in conscription objection, with articulate spokespeople, like UCT Law professor Denis Davis. In Johannesburg the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses of Independent Schools also passed a resolution on community service as an alternative to military service.<sup>350</sup>

By the end of 1986 the ECC was determined to draw on this existing opposition to regain the initiative, with the October national committee meeting pushing for a big national campaign to build the ECC internally by attracting supporters and raising morale in subcommittees, as well as re-establishing the ECC's national profile.<sup>351</sup> The resultant "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign indicated the extent to which the state of emergency had derailed the ECC's opposition.

<sup>348</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.2.1, Cape Town financial report, 1986. Folder A22.4, list of Johannesburg ECC harassment 1983-August 1986.

<sup>349</sup> Cory Library MS 17804/1, Grahamstown ECC report to national committee May 1987.

<sup>350</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A4.2.2, letter from ECC national secretary David Shandler to the secretary of the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses 27 November 1986. Folder A10.2.1, ECC financial report 1987.

<sup>351</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.2, national committee proposal for a national campaign around the February call-up (undated).

Firstly, the overall organisational structure of the ECC had been weakened by continuous harassment. Previous campaigns had been planned at national conferences, with a broad democratic consensus and clearly strategised goals and demands. After the declaration of the state of emergency it was too risky for activists to meet for a conference. The national committee thus did much of the campaign planning, leading to discontent in the regions. Regions themselves had to reorganise for active campaigning again. As the Johannesburg branch noted, those drawn in since the state of emergency had no campaigning experience or exposure to the broader white public. At the same time, there were changes in national personnel with Nic Borain taking over as national organiser and Adele Kirsten as national secretary in January 1987.<sup>352</sup>

Secondly, the state of emergency diffused the ECC's focus so that the campaign became a kind of "catch-all" for the remaining legal aspects of conscription opposition, including the cost of war, the effects of militarisation, "Working for a Just Peace", alternative service, the cadet issue, and "Troops Out". This wide-ranging approach took a toll on both activists' energies and public interest. The focus of the campaign was further undermined by the need to reassert the ECC's credibility among whites while campaigning.<sup>353</sup> Regions began an intensive information campaign designed to counter the state's attempts to criminalise the ECC. Pamphlets addressed the issues used in smears, such as whether or not the ECC was "patriotic", or a pawn of the ANC. In June a comprehensive rebuttal, "ECC in Perspective", was issued as an insert in the Weekly Mail. The ECC also put out militarisation fact sheets to highlight problems associated with conscription. By using official emigration figures, the Auditor General's comments that the SADF was the main culprit in wasted state expenditure, and SADF suicide rates, the ECC hoped to move away from its propagandist image.<sup>354</sup>

Thirdly, state harassment not only limited the scope of the campaign but also undermined its execution. The campaign was initially planned to climax around the February call-up, but ECC detentions in Johannesburg and Cape Town in December 1986 meant postponements, while the December banning of the arts festival also encouraged the ECC to move away from single high-profile events towards a continuous ECC public presence through ongoing actions. Building on previous successes, the "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign featured vigils around the designated "Day of Concern" on 23 April 1987, which tried to draw attention to the costs of the conflict and to involve the churches. Regions ran various "Working for a Just Peace" type actions. Creative actions like a Cape Town fair, and peace boats on the Umsinduzi River in Pietermaritzburg, as well as the Durban ECC sending

<sup>352</sup> Clare Verbeek was elected as a second national organiser but was only able to take up the post in August 1987 as she was detained in the December 1986 swoop and then restricted.

<sup>353</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.7, press release 28 April 1987.

<sup>354</sup> Sue Britton's personal papers, "War Is Not Compulsory" and "ECC in Perspective" pamphlets.



alternative call-up papers to Magnus Malan, draw media attention to the campaign and to the ECC's call for alternatives to military service. The campaign also used current events, like the May general election to focus on the SADF's role in government, using slogans like "The trouble with this general election is we don't know which general we're electing", and "Will this budget kill your son?"<sup>355</sup>

Just as Alan Dodson's objection to township duty had personalised the "Troops Out" campaign, so CO Philip Wilkinson put a human face on the call for alternatives to the current system of conscription. Wilkinson had been rejected by the Board for Religious Objection, arrested for refusing to serve in April 1986, and then detained and restricted under the emergency regulations. By April 1987 he was preparing to stand trial, having once more been charged with failing to report for a camp. The Port Elizabeth branch took up his trial as its "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign, with other regions focusing on Wilkinson in a more limited way. While about 600 people attended a Port Elizabeth church service led by Archbishop Denis Hurley in April, public support was difficult to maintain when the trial was postponed.<sup>356</sup>

Nevertheless, trials held a number of benefits for the ECC. Witnesses inadvertently revealed useful information. In the April 1985 trial of five non-reporting conscripts, the commanding officers of several Witwatersrand units acknowledged that some 25 per cent of conscripts did not arrive for camps. During Wilkinson's trial the commandant in charge of administration at Piet Retief admitted that Wilkinson was not alone in his objection, and that there was an informal arrangement to try to avoid confrontation by keeping such people out of the townships.<sup>357</sup> Trials were also an opportunity to make ECC issues public through trial evidence, which could still be quoted in the press. Ex-serviceman Steve Louw gave evidence about SADF atrocities in the black townships, while a Namibian disabled in the Kassinga raid testified to the devastation of SADF actions outside South Africa. The extent of this evidence and the way it was taken up in the liberal press eventually led the public prosecutor to complain that the trial was being used as a public platform. The state's attempts to end this publicity by fining Wilkinson, rather than jailing him and so possibly creating a martyr, indicated that objector trials had considerable potential to embarrass the state.<sup>358</sup> Trials also reinforced and drew attention to the ECC's local and international support base. From within South Africa people such as Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naudé and Sheena Duncan, and organisations such as the UDF, the PFP Youth, and the SACBC issued

<sup>355</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, collected ECC stickers. Archives and Manuscripts BC 912, folder A8, collected ECC stickers. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A16.3, information sheet "War Is Not Compulsory Let's Choose Peace" by national secretary Adele Kirsten 21 April 1987.

<sup>356</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987. Folder B7, minutes of Eastern Cape regional co-ordinating forum meeting 17 April 1987. Folder E1.1.1, "ECC supports Philip Wilkinson, apartheid war resister" pamphlet.

<sup>357</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/1, vol.12, box 210, voordrag aan die Minister op 5 Mei oor begrootingsdebataangeleenthede, confidential report. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B7, minutes of Eastern Cape regional co-ordination forum 4 April 1987. Price, A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force, p.82.

<sup>358</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987.

statements of support, as did individuals and organisations in Europe and America. The SACBC funded a booklet on the trial, planned in conjunction with the ECC. Some 17 000 copies were eventually printed. Reading like a play, the booklet was intended to disseminate the information revealed by the trial evidence.<sup>359</sup>

Overall, however, the numerous elements of the "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign resulted in a very uneven impact. On the one hand, campaigning provided an active focus for membership drives across the regions, with a new emphasis on a differentiated membership, from the highly involved to those merely seeking information. Durban, for example, increased their mailing list from 800 to over 4 000, reaching beyond known supporters and sympathisers to publicise the ECC's case. The circulation of the Durban ECC newspaper At Ease was also increased from 500 to 7000.<sup>360</sup>

Despite the difficulties of the national campaign, well-targeted regional campaigns in early 1987 showed that the ECC could still successfully gain publicity for conscription issues. In Natal a low-key Valentine's Day campaign attracted local and national press coverage as "Make Love Not War" valentines were sent to prominent leaders in the province. In Johannesburg, a "Prisoners of War" art exhibition drew some 800 people on the first night, and attracted excellent press coverage. In Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg counselling services were established, and in Cape Town the ECC used a range of organisations to get across an anti-conscription message, participating in a "Free the Children" vigil, as well as supporting cultural groups who withdrew from the Cape Town festival in protest at the participation of SAP and SADF bands.<sup>361</sup> Cultural activities like concerts in Johannesburg and Cape Town continued to be well attended, as did information meetings, such as the Johannesburg Combat Conference in August. In the second half of the year some regions successfully focused on the continuing SADF occupation of Namibia. The Johannesburg branch held a photographic exhibition "Namibia - 21 Years of War", depicting a society under siege. Such activities increased both membership and organisational cohesion. The ECC also continued to have an international impact, giving evidence before the UN Centre for Human Rights in Geneva in August 1987, for instance.<sup>362</sup>

Regional successes, however, did not offset the fact that the ECC's loss of focus made it vulnerable to the existing ideological and methodological divisions within the broad anti-apartheid movement. Laurie Nathan's March 1987 tour of the USA demonstrated that there was international impatience with the ECC's need to be seen to be distanced from

<sup>359</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder E1.1.1, The trial of Philip Wilkinson: Conscientious Objector (Durban, SACBC, 1987)

<sup>360</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B10.9, the Durban campaign so far 13 March 1987.

<sup>361</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.5, national overview – first quarter of 1987, newsletter from national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith 7 March 1988.

<sup>362</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.1.5, report on the activities and direction of the ECC May-August 1987. Folder B1.4, from Verulum to X – an overview of Johannesburg ECC 1985 to 1987.

the UDF and ANC, yet within South Africa the racial divisions within the opposition movement were painfully obvious. Prior to the May 1987 general election the PFP demanded that whites be given a definite "vote left" message, while the UDF opposed any actions which might seem to legitimise the tricameral parliament. The ECC was caught between these opposing currents. At the March launch of the UCT campus branch, for example, UDF speaker Allan Boesak used the ECC platform to launch a stinging attack on both the PFP and serving conscripts.<sup>363</sup> While some ECC members supported the ANC and had close links to the UDF, the ECC's white constituency meant that the ECC had to proceed differently to the broad opposition movement. Black opposition was predicated on present frustration, but white opposition struggled to find a unifying focus because of white socio-economic and political fears about a post-apartheid future. Liberal disillusionment following the general election was consequently not translated into active opposition.

In assessing the "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign the ECC thus felt it had not significantly altered white perceptions or broken into the white community. Durban ECC activist Jeremy Routledge later suggested that the ECC's more successful campaigns "gave people a chance to make their own stand", while less successful ones "only had a media presence".<sup>364</sup> After the 1987 national campaign the ECC concluded that it was still largely seen as an organisation of objectors, with no message for those beyond the radical fringe. From August to October 1987 the ECC entered a period of introspection to investigate its conceptual and organisational difficulties.

Analysis of the "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign suggested that a return to the ECC's single-issue focus was critical, both for internal organisation and external impact. The proposed "Alternative National Service" campaign was intended to make a focused and potentially achievable call arising directly out of the single issue of conscription, by demanding that the state widen the narrow parameters of the Board for Religious Objection, and provide real alternatives to purely military conscription.<sup>365</sup>

In discussions with conscripts, the ECC found that its carefully distanced position from the UDF went unnoticed. Rather, the ECC was attacked as being "cliquish", "elitist", "student politicians", and "out of touch with reality". ECC spokespeople who had never served or were not liable to serve were not accepted as credible by veterans and "campers".<sup>366</sup> The ECC was forced to accept that while some conscripts were conscientised by their national service,

<sup>363</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A8, coalition workshop report 22 February 1987. Folder A13.4, letters to ECC from Laurie Nathan 27 March & 11 April 1987. Folder B8.1.4, Cape Town ECC minutes 2 April 1987.

<sup>364</sup> Interview with Durban ECC member Jeremy Routledge (1998).

<sup>365</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report August 1987.

<sup>366</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.3, some recommendations for structural changes in the Cape Town ECC arising out of a workshop on 29 November 1987. Folder B8.8.2, ECC outreach committee housemeeting with conscripts and campers (undated). Adele Kirsten interview.

and while it provided considerable material dissatisfaction – from boredom to bullying, career retardation to relationship traumas – the majority of conscripts continued to serve, in part because the alternatives of exile or prison were so extreme. Since ECC work had primarily focused on the moral dilemmas of conscription, serving soldiers and those with camps often avoided the ECC because they felt it had nothing to offer them but condemnation.<sup>367</sup> The “Alternative National Service” campaign was an attempt to shift the ECC’s image from an organisation of objectors to an organisation which could claim to speak on behalf of unwilling conscripts. The “Know Your Rights” phase of the campaign was intended to empower conscripts by making them aware of their rights, since the SADF seemed to be wary of civilian lawyers. The ECC further hoped that by trying to achieve something practical on behalf of soldiers it could counter the impression that it perceived soldiers as the enemy.<sup>368</sup>

The dominant consensus in the white community still accepted that reform was possible through the existing parliamentary structures, and “law and order” were seen as critical to the process of reform. Consequently, the “Alternative National Service” campaign intended to win support within the white community by working within this framework in attempting to change the existing CO laws to include non-religious CO, to cut the length of alternative service to something more equitable with military service, and to allow it to be served in the non-governmental sector.

Lastly, the campaign was an acknowledgement that there was potentially more support for opposition to conscription than support for the ECC.<sup>369</sup> While the state had attempted to contain the moral force of CO by setting up the Board for Religious Objection in 1983, neither theological nor ethical CO had been satisfied by this move. “Alternative National Service” was thus an issue with both a history, and a fairly wide existing, and growing, support base including business, academics, families, churches, and humanitarian groups. The “Alternative National Service” campaign was co-ordinated with academic and church programmes working in the same direction so that pressure for alternative service would continue even if the ECC were banned.

On the one hand, then, the “Alternative National Service” campaign demonstrated the power of the state to tighten the legal space to campaign against conscription; on the other, it highlighted the continuing power of conscription as an opposition issue. The ECC did not see the campaign as a dilution of the political basis of its opposition to conscription, but rather a “catch 22” for the state. In legitimising religious objection the state had effectively sanctioned public

<sup>367</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.8.7 discussion paper on ECC’s new focus on the conscript by Cape Town conscripts group October 1987. D. Russell, *Lives of courage* (New York, Basic Books, 1989) p.157.

<sup>368</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.3, some recommendations for structural changes in the Cape Town ECC arising out of a workshop on 29 November 1987. Folder B8.8.2, ECC outreach committee house-meeting with conscripts and campers (undated). Box B8.8.7 discussion paper on ECC’s new focus on the conscript by Cape Town conscripts group October 1987.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

discourse in this area of the conscription debate, yet when the ECC demanded the state engage with it over the issue of "Alternative National Service", the state could not afford to make concessions, since to do so would undermine both the manpower and propaganda pillars maintaining its continued white minority power base.<sup>370</sup>

The manpower needs of the SADF had decreased from the critical levels of 1985/1986, while the increasing likelihood of withdrawals from Angola and Namibia by 1988 suggested a further easing of the SADF's manpower needs. By August 1987 the state had regained control of most townships through a combination of the deployment of black "kitskonstables" and its fomentation of conflict between Inkatha and the UDF. Nevertheless, blacks still refused to buy into co-option schemes like proposed Regional Service Councils, while ANC attacks remained bold and popular, forcing the state to continue to rely on internal coercion of the black majority. Growing white resistance compounded the state's manpower headache. Radical journal Work in Progress noted that by 1988 one in ten were not reporting for initial service, and one in four were not reporting for camps. In a climate of growing dissatisfaction about the demands of national service even the limited demands of the "Alternative National Service" campaign threatened the apartheid state, as concessions on the length and type of national service could lead to further demands and "no shows".<sup>371</sup> Perhaps more importantly, the concession that the security situation required anything less than full white co-operation would weaken the urgency of the state's security discourse, one of the few remaining avenues of appeal to white unity.<sup>372</sup>

Despite being limited to the ECC's interim demands, the "Alternative National Service" campaign thus had considerable political potential, but in practical terms it got off to a slow start. After the organisational problems associated with the "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign, the ECC recommitted itself to broadly democratic, rather than centralised, decision making. Only after thorough discussion by 150 representatives of all the regions at the February 1988 national conference did regions begin "Know Your Rights" actions. These included an action around the February call-up and "Alternative Service" projects similar to "Working for a Just Peace" actions in March and April, to demonstrate the sort of alternative service that should be available to conscripts. A

<sup>370</sup> Cape Town ECC activist Helen Zille noted that she felt a tension between the political objectives of the largely student Cape Town ECC, and her own more pragmatic agenda. This final campaign showed a much greater pragmatism, but also demonstrated the extent to which pragmatic and political agendas were complementing one another by 1988. Interview with Cape Town member Helen Zille (7 September 1998).

<sup>371</sup> Work in Progress, no.53, 1988.

<sup>372</sup> Oponents of the ECC, like PFP defence spokesman Philip Myburgh, urged the state to extend CO as a means of containing the impact of the ECC. However, internal SADF documents relating to the Hartman Supreme Court challenge to the theist provisions of the Board for Religious Objection indicate that the SADF was determined to oppose any further extension of CO. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/14/1, vol.7, box 211, confidential report regarding the proposed legislation on religious objection (undated). Chief of the SADF, group 2, 107/7/5, box 9D, memorandum on the Hartman case 4 February 1985.

Know Your Rights" booklet, designed to inform conscripts of their rights in the SADF, was promoted at a series of meetings around the country in June and July 1988.<sup>373</sup>

This implementation of the campaign was limited by the extent to which regions were still struggling under the state of emergency. Throughout 1987 and 1988 most regions had only between ten and 30 regulars at general body meetings. Cape Town claimed an unusually high 55 active members but by 1988 three of its subcommittees had collapsed, while Durban faced a leadership crisis, Pietermaritzburg struggled with low numbers,<sup>374</sup> and the Afrikaans regions faced continued hostility. Attendance at "Know Your Rights" meetings only ranged between 40 and 80 people. On campuses students were fairly easily signed up to the ECC at orientation, but by midyear were no longer involved.<sup>375</sup>

Yet at a national level, the ECC was winning unprecedented attention, as much for events it had not initiated as for those it had. This allowed it to challenge the legitimacy of the apartheid state at a whole new level, as opposition to conscription increasingly grew larger than the ECC. The first example of this was the court martial of the "Castle Three". In December 1987 three serving conscripts were arrested by the SADF and in February 1988 were court martialled for conspiring to disclose to the ECC that the SADF was involved in producing and distributing anonymous smear material in order to undermine and discredit the ECC. While the SADF tried to keep the trial *in camera* and to silence the conscripts by sentencing them to 18 months in detention barracks, the conscripts successfully appealed in the Cape Town Supreme Court in March 1988. This evidence of SADF involvement in ECC smears encouraged the ECC to apply for a Supreme Court interdict against the SADF, and one was provisionally granted on 29 March, although the ECC was not able to make this public for over a month and even then was prevented from disclosing the details of its application until the matter could be heard in full later in the year. Nevertheless, SADF harassment of the ECC made the news for three months, first piquing public interest because of the secrecy surrounding the allegations, before compounding this with revelations of the SADF's manufacture of posters, t-shirts and pamphlets discrediting the ECC, as well as its use of a helicopter to drop smear pamphlets.<sup>376</sup> As the state was moving to ban, in all but name, some 17 organisations (including the UDF) and tabling new legislation to enable it to cut off foreign funding to these and other organisations,<sup>377</sup> repression of the ECC was beginning to create a different momentum, giving rise to

<sup>373</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.5, newsletter from national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith 7 March 1988. Weekly Mail 11 March 1988, New Nation 8 September 1988. Between 1986 and 1988 52 "peace projects" were completed by the ECC.

<sup>374</sup> Alan Paton Centre, PC9/1 B, Pietermaritzburg ECC report May 1988. An undated newsletter from the Natal region (approximately midyear) noted the branch had only seven active members.

<sup>375</sup> The Rhodes branch ruefully noted that people joined the ECC primarily to articulate their political frustrations, rather than to advance ECC issues. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1.3, national committee report May 1987. Folder B1.8, Wits regional report 22 October 1987.

<sup>376</sup> Weekly Mail 22 April 1988. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.5, newsletter from national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith 7 March 1988.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

questions about how the SADF was utilising its resources, as well as the methods it was using against its own citizens and legal opposition organisations.

A second source of renewed attention to conscription issues was CO trials. By September 1987 Ivan Toms was touring the country to publicise his decision to refuse to do a camp. Unlike the largely unknown Philip Wilkinson, Toms had recognition and credibility in a number of constituencies. He represented the face of serving soldiers, having previously attained the rank of lieutenant. He had experience of the negative impact of SADF activity in Crossroads. The fact that he was a doctor serving an underprivileged community also emphasised the waste of talent caused by imprisoning objectors and drew attention to the rising emigration rate in response to the lack of alternatives faced by conscripts. Support flowed in from the ECC's supporters overseas. In South Africa, prominent church leaders endorsed Toms' character and beliefs, and community leaders decried the waste of sending such people to prison. In March 1988 when Toms was eventually sentenced to 21 months in prison for refusing a 21-day camp, there was thus considerable public discussion and outcry.<sup>378</sup>

Toms was interviewed by foreign journalists in trial recesses and the trial was also extensively reported in the South African press. The testimony of prominent people demonstrated the extent of opposition to conscription. Anglican Bishop of Grahamstown The Right Reverend David Russell told the court that Toms was being obedient to his church and to the bible by refusing to serve in the SADF, and that he had the backing of the Anglican Church. John Dugard, Professor of Law at the University of the Witwatersrand, compared the role of SADF conscripts to soldiers in Nazi Germany, arguing that in terms of international law conscripts faced a "Waldheim dilemma" by serving in the SADF, since in 81 other countries they could be arrested and prosecuted for the crime of "aiding apartheid". Secretary to the Ovamboland Assembly in Namibia Pastor Oswald Shivuti testified to some 632 complaints of SADF mistreatment of civilians.<sup>379</sup>

Toms' imprisonment encouraged a movement to have COs declared political prisoners, a further source of embarrassment for the state since it underlined the political basis of objection. Incidents like an attack on Toms by another prisoner kept him in the public eye. The personal cost of such objection, however, was revealed by his

<sup>378</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.1.4, telex from the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. Cape Times 2 March 1988, Star 3, 4 & 5 March 1988, Cape Times 5 March 1988.

<sup>379</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.5, newsletter from the ECC to supporters 7 March 1988. R.L. Abel, Politics by other means: law and the struggle against apartheid 1980-1994 (New York, Routledge, 1994) p.78.

complaints to his support group that he felt neglected. Whatever the political gains, the individual prisoner still faced the issue of whether his great personal sacrifice was worth the cost.<sup>380</sup>

Nevertheless, by June 1988 another objector, David Bruce, was on trial. Because he had not yet served at all, he faced a possible six-year sentence. Toms' objection had highlighted the lack of alternatives for Christians who were not pacifists. Bruce's trial emphasised the dilemma facing young graduates, giving the ECC the opportunity to remind the public of the high emigration rate, particularly among graduates, and to publicise academic research which suggested that conscription was an important factor in graduates' decision not to stay in South Africa. Again trial evidence provided opposition to conscription with a public voice. Bruce told the court that he refused to serve because of the racist nature of military service. The testimony of Soweto civic leader Nthatho Motlana allowed whites to hear a dramatically different voice, as he claimed that Bruce would be viewed as hero by blacks and be greatly admired for his stand on racism. Bruce also told the court that the SADF had offered him non-combatant posts and encouraged him to emigrate rather than take a public CO stand, further evidence that the SADF was concerned and embarrassed by the increased public profile of CO.<sup>381</sup>

Yet if trials won the ECC and the "Alternative National Service" campaign publicity and sympathy, they also presented problems. Because the bureaucratic details were out of the ECC's control, it was difficult to sustain interest throughout a lengthy process. Wilkinson, for example, was in a pre-trial limbo for the best part of a year, and the trial itself was postponed. Toms' calls ups were also withdrawn and rescheduled for more than six months, so that the campaign faced a stop-start momentum, with tours and promotion of the issues, followed by letters explaining to supporters that matters were under review. As Cape Town chair Paula Hathorn wrote to the other centres, "It's frustrating to have one's timing dictated by [the SADF]." It was also costly to promote a CO. Toms' travel costs, for example, were estimated at R31 000.<sup>382</sup>

Toms' trial further emphasised the difficulty of maintaining a single-issue focus. While his trial drew support from across the spectrum of ECC sympathisers, with JODAC calling him a "symbol of hope in our striving for a non-racial democratic and united South Africa" and the UDF noting its appreciation that "Ivan is refusing to take up arms against our comrades in the townships", the Lesbian and Gay Organisation (LAGO) took issue with the ECC for downplaying

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> *Daily News* 26 July 1988. Abel, *Politics by other means*, pp.95, 118-119.

<sup>382</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.5.4, ECC application for financial aid (undated). Folder B7, minutes of Eastern Cape regional co-ordination forum meeting 17 April 1987. Folder B8.2.9, letter from Cape Town chair Paula Hathorn to "other ECC centre" 27 June 1987. Historical Papers A 2558, folder 11, legal assistance for CO: a memorandum on the Defence Amendment Act no.34 of 1983 October 1983, the state sometimes declined to prosecute some selective objectors, suggesting it avoided showdowns on numerous occasions.



the convergence of political and personal motivation behind Toms' stand because of concern about the reaction from its broader constituency, which it assessed as essentially homophobic. Certainly the rash of smears targeting Toms' sexual orientation suggested that the state perceived this issue as a means of undermining white sympathy for his stand.<sup>383</sup>

Individual trials were only one aspect of a growing objector movement, however. In August 1987 23 Cape Town men held a press conference and stated their intention not to serve further in the SADF. They emphasised that they took this position independently of the ECC, but the fact that many of them belonged to the ECC and that few faced an imminent call-up limited the public impact of their stand.<sup>384</sup> By contrast, when a public objection was staged in August 1988, a week after Bruce's sentencing, the number had grown to 143, and the major urban centres each had several objectors, kindling regional interest too. While denying involvement in the stand of the 143, the ECC was at pains to point out that 36 of the men had served in the security forces, some in the SAP and two in the PF. The press made much of Afrikaans objector, André Zaaiman, who resigned his rank of captain in the SADF, and at the press conference quoted Boer general J.B.M.Hertzog's speech, objecting to the conscription of South African soldiers for the occupation of Namibia in 1915. Significantly, more than half the western Cape objectors were from Stellenbosch, suggesting that, despite the fact that the ECC was not allowed on campus, anti-conscription feeling existed in Afrikaans areas too.<sup>385</sup>

General Magnus Malan's response was quick and vicious. He accused the ECC of being "in the vanguard of those forces that are intent on wrecking the present dispensation and its renewal", and both Beeld and the Burger, generally seen as mouthpieces of the NP, suggested that action against the ECC was imminent.<sup>386</sup> In part the intensity of this response was related to the third factor encouraging opposition around conscription: conscript losses in Angola. On 4 October 1987 Malan reluctantly admitted to the South African public that SADF troops were in Angola. The state officially acknowledged some 63 white SADF and SWATF deaths between September 1987 and June 1988, many of

<sup>383</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A25, collected messages of support for Ivan Toms September 1987 to March 1988. Folder B8.2.2, letter from LAGO to ECC 25 June 1987. Folder B8.2.9, letter from Cape Town chair Paula Hathorn to "other ECC centre" 27 June 1987. DSD Ministry of Defence, group 4, 61/12/4, vol.34, box 87, report of psychiatric examination of conscript 27 June 1980. The tone of SADF communications with regard to homosexuality were generally contemptuous. A conscript who had tried to commit suicide was described as exhibiting typical hysterical, dramatic behaviour, and written off as having difficulty adjusting to the infantry "like most homosexuals". Vol.36, box 88, letter from the SADF regarding the discharge of a conscript 2 December 1980. Another conscript was given a discharge on the grounds of being permanently medically unfit due to homosexual "deviations". Given this mindset it is easy to see why the SADF would regard Toms' sexual orientation as a means of undermining the ECC message. For Toms, being gay was closely connected with his "understanding of oppression". However, within the ECC there was concern that the gay issue would undermine or detract from the CO focus. Consequently, while touring the country to publicise his decision to object, Toms spoke freely only in small groups. At the trial the prosecutor brought up the gay issue to try to detract from the witnesses testifying to Toms' good character. However, not even the Afrikaans newspapers reported on this aspect of the trial. M.Gevisser & E.Cameron (eds), Defiant desire (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1994) pp.260-262.

<sup>384</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.1.5, report on the activities and direction of the ECC May-August 1987.

<sup>385</sup> Weekly Mail 5 & 26 August 1988, New Nation 8 September 1988.

<sup>386</sup> Cape Times 5 August 1988.

them conscripts. This resulted in increased criticism of the external deployment of the SADF and led to calls for the withdrawal of troops from Angola.<sup>387</sup>

At the beginning of July 1988 even the NGK's official mouthpiece Die Kerkbode questioned the ethics of a continued SADF presence in Angola, particularly as this might lead to further losses. The normally supportive Beeld conceded that parents and taxpayers had a right to ask whether the sacrifices made in the operational area were always justifiable.<sup>388</sup> The pro-government press further criticised the secrecy surrounding military operations, while the liberal press demanded details of deaths and called for troop withdrawals. An opinion survey by the South African Institute of Internal Affairs showed that while most whites were still confident about the capacity of the SADF to defeat SWAPO in the long term, the number of whites favouring negotiations with SWAPO had risen from 39 per cent in 1982 to 58 per cent in 1988. By July 1988 newspaper articles were also starting to question the SADF's military supremacy, particularly in the air.

Newspapers, academic journals and popular magazines increasingly focused on signs of white social dislocation, from concern at the "brain drain", to discussion of emerging symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome and family murders, and research on the economic and psychological implications of conscription. Women's magazines Fair Lady and Cosmopolitan ran articles about the impact of conscription on whites, from mothers bewailing the death of their sons, to young women complaining about a dearth of lovers, stimulating an outpouring of emotional letters in subsequent issues.<sup>389</sup> The state tried to try to deny these concerns, either by outright repression, such as General Malan's threats against any further women's magazine articles, or retraction, such as the "contextualisation" of the Kerkbode article by NGK moderator Johan Heyns, issued, significantly, by the SADF.<sup>390</sup> Such actions could not disguise the fact that white South African society was manifesting a number of signs of war-weariness by mid 1988.

The state may have considered making some accommodation of the ECC's "Alternative National Service" demands in June in order to contain the growing white criticism. For the first time it met with the ECC at the ECC's request, although remaining determined to control the meeting. The SADF delegation refused to discuss anything except alternative service and insisted the ECC cancel the scheduled post-meeting press conference, and merely issue a bland joint statement to the effect that "the tone of the meeting was cordial and conducive to better mutual

<sup>387</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A11.5, newsletter from national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith 7 March 1988. Star 10 November 1987, Sunday Star 15 November 1987, Citizen 20 April 1988, Weekly Mail 26 August 1988.

<sup>388</sup> Beeld 4 August 1988.

<sup>389</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A8, confidential ECC assessment and planning (undated). Folder A11.5, newsletter from national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith 7 March 1988. Fair Lady 27 April 1988, 6 July 1988, 3 August 1988, 17 August 1988. Cosmopolitan March 1988.

<sup>390</sup> Argus 7 July 1988, Star 7 May 1988.

understanding". In assessing the meeting the ECC noted that the delegation had been senior "in respect of staffing matters", and concluded the SADF might be trying to appear reasonable in light of the upcoming interdict hearing, or might be hoping to hold out dialogue about "Alternative National Service" as an incentive for the ECC to tone down its public campaigning.<sup>391</sup>

Whatever the SADF's motivation, events soon overtook the meeting. In July the Kerkbode article was published, "Know Your Rights" meetings began in earnest, and by the end of July David Bruce had been sentenced, to loud condemnation. A week later the 143 made their stand, while the ECC's interdict hearing against the SADF was set for 31 August. The editor of the Star was rallying support for the ECC's "Alternative National Service" campaign, and some churches were planning their own "Alternative National Service" campaign in competition with the Board for Religious Objection. By posing the limited and seemingly reasonable demands of "Alternative National Service", the ECC had thus successfully used conscription to focus white discontent, despite the limited legal space to campaign. By August, the growing profile of objection was sufficiently politically embarrassing – particularly with the forthcoming ECC interdict hearing and a number of important by-elections looming in October – that the state felt it had little option but to ban the ECC outright.

On 22 August the Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, justified banning the ECC on the grounds that it was a link in the "so-called struggle against apartheid", and a stooge of the ANC.<sup>392</sup> Yet the state could not afford to credit the ECC with too much power, so that while Vlok claimed that "many" had been influenced to refuse military service, he asserted that their motivation had not been political. Since religious objectors were accommodated by the Board for Religious Objection, and the Bruce trial had clearly demonstrated the costs of objecting, Vlok was essentially claiming that "many" were putting themselves in a dangerous conflict with the state for no reason. This descent into a garbled and unconvincing impasse indicated that the apartheid state was increasingly unable to limit the conscription discourse.

Analysis of the ECC's work after the countrywide state of emergency in June 1986 thus demonstrates that although the state greatly increased its power to act against its opponents, this very repression represented a crucial weakening of apartheid hegemony. The rationale behind the 1977 Defence White Paper, which introduced the concepts of "reformed" apartheid and "total onslaught", was the recognition that if the apartheid state could not co-opt the black majority it would not have sufficient coercive capacity to maintain power by force in the long term. The failure

<sup>391</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 1102, folder A1, Port Elizabeth ECC minutes 27 June 1988.

<sup>392</sup> Cape Times 22 August 1988. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A27, press statement by the Ministry of Law and Order 22 August 1988.

of co-option intensified the political significance of the ECC's opposition, both challenging the state's continued coercive power through its predominantly white conscript army, and its capacity to maintain white political unity through a security discourse based primarily on white fears about the future which outweighed current costs, including conscription.

Throughout the ECC's existence the state had attempted to contain its opposition by continuously narrowing the legal space to campaign against conscription. However, even the extensive repression legalised by the state of emergency did not change the fact that conscription was a critical contradiction within the apartheid regime. As long as the NP relied on force rather than popular legitimacy to remain in power, it could not afford to end conscription. By 1988, however, even the increased debate around conscription posed a political threat in the context of increasing white political fragmentation. This threat was intensified by the fact that as the state of emergency forced the ECC away from the more radical aspects of its programme, so its interim demands, if not its organisation *per se*, became more accessible to whites, while its expression of the white frustration and pain surrounding conscription increasingly resonated in white society.

## Chapter Six

September 1988 – 1993:  
The end of the campaign.

This chapter will conclude the chronological examination of the ECC's opposition by demonstrating that although the ECC campaigns which channelled and directed opposition between 1983 and 1988 were important in developing white opposition to conscription, one of the ECC's greatest successes was that by August 1988 conscription opposition was bigger than the ECC. Despite the ECC's being banned, legal, ethical, theological, psychological and economic questions around conscription continued to feature in white public discourse, both stimulating continued objection to conscription and highlighting the bankruptcy of the apartheid government's policies.

The level of reaction generated by the ban indicated where the ECC had most successfully integrated conscription into national white discourse. Within the liberal, church and university communities which had been the ECC's support base from its inception, there was vociferous condemnation of the ban.<sup>393</sup> Authorities within these groups drew attention to the negative consequences of conscription, such as the "brain drain", and reiterated the point that the ECC was merely articulating the existing grievances and uncertainties of young white males. The ban was also a reminder of shrinking white freedoms, and consequently stimulated protest from the press, business and the PFP; groups which had been less unequivocally supportive of the ECC. Condemnation did not spill over into the Afrikaans press, however, indicating the very limited impact of the ECC in the Afrikaans-speaking white community.

After the ban the state issued ECC national secretary Alistair Teeling-Smith and organiser Gary Cullen with restraining orders to limit their potential as spokespeople.<sup>394</sup> By the end of the year, regional offices closed, and caretaker executives were appointed, but the ECC was not wound down completely. As the Cape Town branch noted, the ECC still played "an important symbolic function, despite its inability to act or campaign politically". Activists, however, began to move into other anti-apartheid organisations, some of which – like COSG, NUSAS and Black Sash – still addressed conscription issues.<sup>395</sup>

Yet even as it seemed the ECC had been mothballed as an organisation, a number of factors continued to win public attention for conscription issues and fuelled the call for alternatives to military service. Firstly, the ECC's court case against the SADF began, and the ECC was granted an interdict against the SADF in October 1988. In defence of the SADF, head of the South African Air Force Lieutenant General Jan van Loggerenberg declared that SADF action against the ECC was justified as South Africa was "in a state of war". This was an expedient about turn for a government which 18 months previously had been unwilling to admit the SADF was deployed in Angola. SADF

<sup>393</sup> Although Archbishop Denis Hurley noted it was in a sense a "tribute to the ECC". New Nation 31 August 1988, Daily News 24 August 1988, Natal Mercury 24 August 1988.

<sup>394</sup> Business Day 1 September 1988, Financial Mail 14 October 1988.

<sup>395</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.4, Cape Town minutes of annual general meeting 10 November 1988.

testimony revealed a swaggering arrogance which was widely condemned in the liberal press, and raised questions about the moral integrity of the state, as well as the nexus of power within the government. The full bench of the Cape Supreme Court set aside the conviction and sentence of the "Castle Three" on 16 August 1989, and ordered the SADF to pay costs.<sup>396</sup> While these cases might seem like posthumous victories for the ECC, the publicity surrounding the interdict and the revelations of SADF "dirty tricks" contributed further to white disillusionment with the apartheid government. This disillusionment was expressed at the polls in the 1989 general election when the NP's elected majority was reduced from 123 to 94.<sup>397</sup> Significantly, when F.W. de Klerk became state president in September 1989, among his first acts was a downgrading of the influence of the military in civil government. By 1990 the SSC and National Security Management System were dismantled and the defence budget was slashed.

Secondly, CO trials continued, demonstrating the failure of the Bruce sentence to undermine this form of resistance. Two weeks after the banning of the ECC Charles Bester announced his refusal to serve, and in 1989 he was followed by Saul Batzofin. Together, they represented the extremes of CO, with Bester, fresh out of school, objecting on Christian grounds, while Batzofin represented an older, more politically motivated objection. Bester's trial drew press attention from France, Canada, Australia, the USA and Britain. The Star also noted that monitoring groups found many more objectors whose cases went unreported.<sup>398</sup> New trials reignited public interest in imprisoned objectors Ivan Toms and David Bruce, as well as furthering calls for alternative service, particularly as the ongoing "brain drain" continued to make news. Objectors and the cost of objection generated human-interest stories in the press. The Sunday Tribune, for example, investigated not only the flight of Durban ECC member, Tam Alexander, one of the 143, who left the country rather than face a trial, but also the divided responses of his parents.<sup>399</sup>

Thirdly, traditional ECC support bases continued to address conscription. SRC candidates at Rhodes and the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town were successful on "Alternative National Service" tickets. The churches continued to examine the viability of an alternative service system in opposition to the Board for Religious Objection. There were also new constituencies. In February "Mothers Against War" was launched in Durban, and groups representing about 800 mothers held simultaneous services in three cities during the February 1989 call-up around the demand "Give Our Sons a Choice".<sup>400</sup> A petition for alternative service was begun by Natal women,

<sup>396</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A 10.2.1, ECC report on its financial status (undated). Clearly, despite the banning the ECC could still count on powerful supporters, since 1987 estimates had put the cost of applying for the interdict at some R20 000.

<sup>397</sup> Davenport, South Africa: a modern history, pp.564-565.

<sup>398</sup> Star 5 November 1988. K. Nurnberger, J. Tooke, and W. Domenis (eds), Conflict and the quest for justice (Pietermaritzburg, Encounter Publications, 1989) p.388.

<sup>399</sup> Sunday Tribune 30 October 1988, Business Day 9 February & 15 May 1989, Sunday Star 4 June 1989, Financial Mail 15 December 1989, Weekly Mail 6 July 1990.

<sup>400</sup> Daily News 8 February 1989.

drawing some 1 000 signatures. The continuing impact of conscription on families can further be gauged by the fact that in June 1989 there was a “huge response” to the launch of a support group for parents of children who had emigrated.<sup>401</sup>

Fourthly, the success of the call for alternatives to military service in 1988 meant that this issue gained momentum independently of the ECC. In the liberal press numerous editorials continued to call for alternatives. Alternative service further bridged the divide between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition by 1989, as the PFP, Independent Party and the National Democratic Movement passed resolutions in support of objectors. Concern about the economic implications of continuing high graduate emigration levels led both the Financial Mail and Finance Week to come out in support of a new system of alternative service.<sup>402</sup> Academic research also focused on the call for alternative service. Arising out of the “Know Your Rights” campaign, the UCT Centre for Intergroup Studies held a workshop on military and alternative service and CO in 1989, which drew a diverse group of participants.<sup>403</sup> At the Centre for Policy Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand academic Laurie Schlemmer ran a research project investigating the costs of the current system of conscription, as well as the need for, and support of, alternative service. There was a new awareness of the long-term consequences of conscription as terms like “post-traumatic stress syndrome” were more commonly used in the media.<sup>404</sup> The ECC had felt it was often seen to be disseminating propaganda rather than factual evidence and was investigating implementing an independent opinion survey by 1988. Now the convergence of material on CO and the “Alternative National Service” campaign from such a variety of sources gave the issue greater credibility. The Financial Mail, for instance, quoted past ECC national secretary David Shandler as an authority on militarisation because his work was under the auspices of the University of the Witwatersrand, whereas when the same facts had been presented by the ECC there had been more scepticism.<sup>405</sup>

Lastly, the ECC’s international contacts continued to draw ongoing international attention to CO, making South Africa the focus of the 1989 international CO day, for example. COSG was instrumental in organising meetings in eight cities on 15 May 1989 in the absence of a legal ECC presence. The patronage of British anti-apartheid activist Father Trevor Huddleston helped give added impetus to the growth of the objector movement and in September 1989 771 resisters signed an international register of South African war resisters.<sup>406</sup>

<sup>401</sup> Star 4 June 1989. DSD Insam, box 40, 55/89, special situational report 12 May 1989.

<sup>402</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 1102, folder B3, fragments of Financial Mail & Finance Week.

<sup>403</sup> Sue Britton’s personal papers, Centre for Intergroup Studies workshop on military and alternative service and conscientious objection 1989.

<sup>404</sup> Sunday Times 5 November 1989.

<sup>405</sup> Financial Mail 15 December 1989.

<sup>406</sup> The Times (London) 22 September 1989. South African Outlook, October 1989, p.133. Abel, Politics by other means, pp.107-108.



Despite this continued prominence of conscription issues, when the ECC “unbanned” itself on 22 August 1989, it struggled to rebuild its profile for a number of reasons. The decreasing conscription burden undermined a significant avenue of support for the ECC. In 1989 the state set up the Van Loggerenberg Committee to investigate military service. One of its findings was that citizen force response to call-up orders was reduced from 47 per cent in 1990 to 34 per cent in 1991.<sup>407</sup> In 1993 the ECC estimated that “probably less than 20 per cent of those called up” reported for service.<sup>408</sup> Noting that large numbers of conscripts were simply ignoring their call-up instructions, the ECC concluded “the SADF no longer has the will or the manpower to enforce the law on a significant scale”.<sup>409</sup> Religious objection was also decreasing, a further indication of growing avoidance of conscription.<sup>410</sup>

In January 1990 the Weekly Mail reported that five COs around the country were on trial and facing sentences of up to six years and Bester received some 2 000 cards and letters of support over Christmas 1989. However, in December 1989 military service was halved. By February Batzofin had been freed. In April the Bloemfontein appellate division overturned the prevailing view that a six-year sentence for CO was mandatory. This allowed judges to exercise discretion in sentencing, and even to give suspended sentences. Toms was already out on bail, pending the result of the case, Bruce was released within the month and Bester by August. No more COs were imprisoned after that. Instead, objector Michael Graaf, for example, received a one-year jail sentence in November 1990, suspended on condition he served 2 400 hours of community service at rate of 72 hours per month.<sup>411</sup> The Board for Religious Objection also became increasingly flexible in its definition of religious objection.<sup>412</sup> While 1 300 men publicly declared they would not serve in the first seven months of 1990, there was not the same public interest in the issue. A combination of the decreased burden of conscription and greater private non-compliance thus lessened support for the ECC.<sup>413</sup>

<sup>407</sup> DSD Reports, K97/1, box 371, provisional report on CO 30 July 1991, p.11.

<sup>408</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 668, folder E, opening session of the ECC 1993 peace festival.

<sup>409</sup> Weekly Mail 2 March 1990. Archives and Manuscripts BC 1005, folder A4, report from the BBC 20 March 1989. BC 668, box E, ECC banned: 1988 to 1990. DSD Reports, K97/1, box 371, provisional report on CO 30 July 1991, p.11, appendix D: figures of those appearing before the Board for Religious Objection 1984 – 1991.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Refused	Total
1984	45	4	218	2	263
1985	62	2	203	6	269
1986	64		279		345
1987	51		239		291
1988	72		210		283
1989	61		202		263
1990	37		226		263
1991	15		137		152
					2129

<sup>410</sup> Abel, Politics by other means: law and the struggle against apartheid 1980-1994, p.118.

<sup>411</sup> Weekly Mail 26 January & 2 February 1990. Objector, November 1990. Sunday Star 1 April 1990.

<sup>412</sup> Abel, Politics by other means: law and the struggle against apartheid 1980-1994, p.113.

<sup>413</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 1005, folder A12.1, ECC press release 7 December 1989. Abel, Politics by other means: law and the struggle against apartheid 1980-1994, p.120. Suttner, Cutting through the mountain, p.174.

While the ECC was officially unbanned in February 1990 and reconstituted branches in seven of the regions, these branches were often nothing more than a skeleton staff.<sup>414</sup> The reasons for this went beyond decreased white discontent around conscription. As the ECC took up campaigns like the 1990 "Safe Return Campaign", organised in collaboration with COSAWR, and culminating in the arrival of ten exiled war resisters, it ran into the same kind of problems as the 1987 "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign. Where the ECC's call was not significantly differentiated from similar calls from the liberation movement it neither effectively advanced conscription issues nor built the ECC.<sup>415</sup> At the same time, the state continued to pose a "political problem in military terms" in order to predicate the possibility of negotiation on the ANC's renouncing the armed struggle, and to reinforce white security fears. Press articles like "Castro explains why Angola lost battle against the SADF" demonstrated a continued white belief that the SADF was a critical element in its security. A statistical survey of students in 1989 also revealed that the majority of white students in South Africa still viewed communism as a "very serious threat".

Perhaps the most telling reason the ECC did not regain its previous levels of support was that by 1989 the conflict between Inkatha and the UDF had reached crisis proportions. Much of the thrust of successful ECC campaigning between 1985 and 1986 had focused on the internal deployment of the SADF, and utilised the white liberal unease this had generated. By 1989 SADF deployment in the townships was accepted by a number of liberals as the lesser of two evils and troops returned to Cape townships in August 1989 to a "negligible outcry".<sup>416</sup>

In the light of these difficulties, and noting very limited membership at all branches, in May 1990 the ECC held a national conference to decide whether or not to disband. The consensus was to rebuild and continue campaigning, while moving from a protest orientation to an attempt to contribute to building the new South Africa, sending out a fieldworker to monitor violence in Natal, for instance. The ECC also continued to expose the state's forceful hold on power with a fact sheet on the Civil Co-operation Bureau, whose covert actions were just coming to light. ECC structures were re-established in the regions, and Roddy Payne was appointed national organiser.<sup>417</sup>

Yet even as the ECC re-committed itself to opposition, a new factor undermined any future resurgence of support. The February 1990 unbanning of the liberation movements and the release of Nelson Mandela led to a shift away from the unifying potential of a common opposition and towards a new political competitiveness within the broad opposition

<sup>414</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 1005, folder A4, branch reports to national conference 24-27 May 1990.

<sup>415</sup> *At Ease*, December 1990, p.6.

<sup>416</sup> *South African Outlook*, October 1989, pp.130-131. *Business Day* 27 July 1989. *TRC*, vol.4, chapter 8, p.223. *Business Day* 27 July 1989.

<sup>417</sup> For example, between 1990 and 1993 at least 572 people died in more than 600 incidents of train violence, and activists David Webster and Anton Lubowski, both of whom had been associated with the ECC, were assassinated. *TRC*, vol.3, chapter 1, pp.29-33. Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers, fieldworker report January 1991. Price, *A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force*, pp.371-6.

movement. The disbanding of key affiliates like JODAC, which encouraged its members to join the ANC, signalled the growing significance of party political affiliation. Increased factionalism within the anti-apartheid movement, together with the diminished burden of conscription, weakened one of the ECC's key strengths: the unifying power of its single issue focus.<sup>418</sup>

Moreover, as it became clear that real power sharing would soon be a reality, and as the armed wing of the PAC, APLA, began a campaign of violence aimed at whites, so white security fears intensified. The hesitant findings of the Van Loggerenberg Committee suggested that the demands of the business, academic and religious communities that conscription should be scaled back had created political difficulties for the NP. Yet even as power bases within the white community tested new political alignments, the protection of their privilege and power was still high on the agenda for whites. Thus while the collapse of communism was a body blow to the ideological power of "total onslaught", white security concerns and special interests continued to limit the ECC's influence.

The ECC took up the unconstitutionality of continued white conscription after the repeal of the Population Registration Act in June 1991. However, the combination of white security concerns, decreased white discontent around the internal deployment of the SADF and the burden of conscription, as well as the state's growing inability to contain evasion of conscription limited the campaign's public appeal.<sup>419</sup>

In 1993 the ECC held another peace festival, but this was, in effect, a farewell salute as the ECC was then disbanded. Nelson Mandela, as keynote speaker, paid homage to the ECC, and the ECC, in turn, called for a new broadly based peace movement to address "the demilitarisation of our society and the promotion of a culture of peace".<sup>420</sup> The ECC had always been more than a political opposition movement. It had a strong moral core made up of deeply committed pacifists who believed that there could be no permanent solutions based on force. The ECC had discussed future conscription policy with the ANC. After the dissolution of the ECC in 1993 people who had been integral to the functioning of the ECC throughout its existence continued to lobby, and were ultimately successful in getting conscription written out of the military policy of the post-apartheid South Africa. Only then could these activists feel the work of the ECC had truly been finished.<sup>421</sup>

<sup>418</sup> Frederikse, *The unbreakable thread: non-racialism in South Africa*, p.10. H.Adam and K. Moodley, *The opening of the apartheid mind: options for the new South Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993) p.40.

<sup>419</sup> *Objector*, June & September 1991.

<sup>420</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 668, folder E, keynote address by Nelson Mandela to the ECC 1993 peace festival.

<sup>421</sup> Sue Britton interview. Durban activist Michael Graaf nevertheless expressed disappointment because he felt the ECC had not discredited militarisation altogether. Michael Graaf interview (1999).

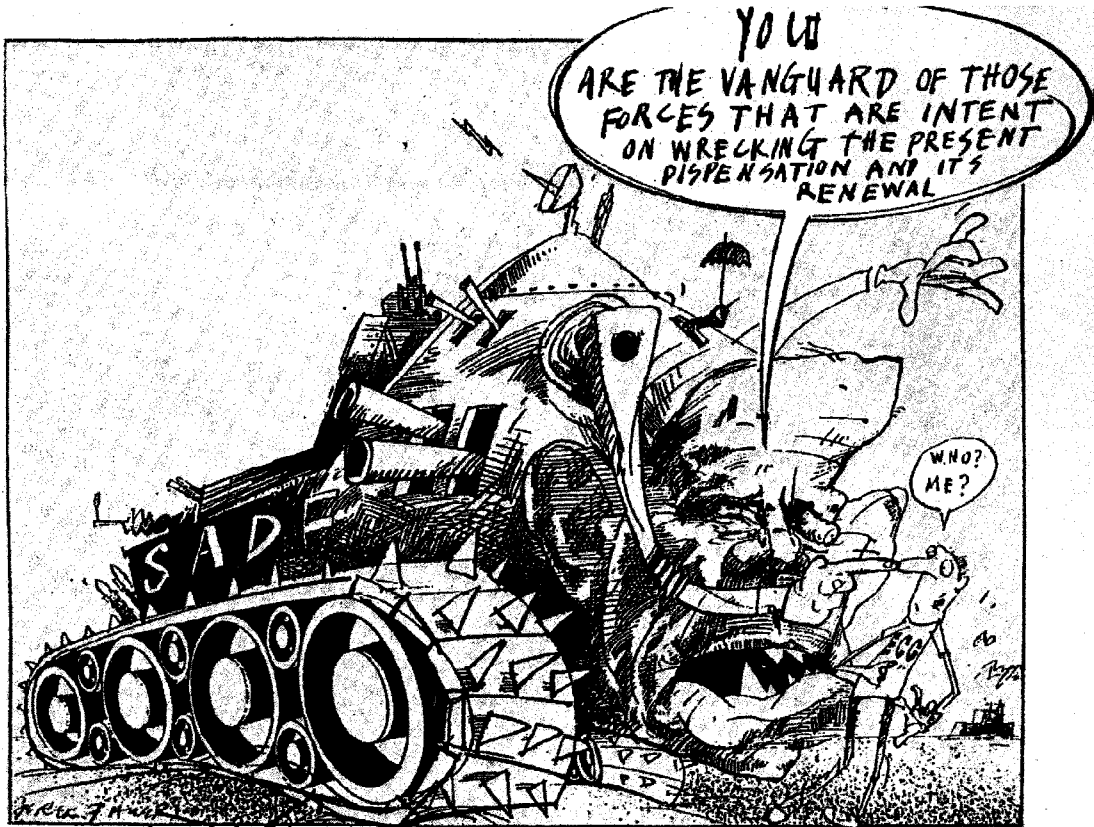
An examination of the ECC after August 1988 thus demonstrates how the ECC was uniquely positioned between 1983 and 1988 to attract the resources, contacts and personnel of a wide range of organisations to further the call to end conscription. In this period the ECC was strengthened by its single-issue focus, as well as its articulation of growing white discontent at the burden of conscription, and white concerns about the implications and consequences of the internal deployment of the SADF. As these factors fell away, so did white interest in, and support for, the ECC. As conscription became less of a burden after 1990, so the ECC increasingly struggled to campaign, suggesting that much of the oppositional power of the ECC between 1983 and 1988 lay in its ability to link the burden of conscription to white self-interest. Between 1983 and 1988 the ECC was able to exploit both the moral and political aspects of conscription objection. After 1989 the political power of the conscription issue was largely overtaken by concerns about the character and composition of the future dispensation, while white moral outrage over the use of the SADF was dissipated by the intensity of township violence.<sup>422</sup> The success of the ECC as extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid between 1983 and 1988 was thus closely tied to a particular convergence of circumstances and the ECC's ability to exploit these.

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<sup>422</sup> Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers, "Where must the war resistance movement go? A discussion document for the national committee meeting 3 February 1991".

## Chapter 7

Being heard I: Changing white attitudes to conscription as reflected by the white commercial press.



“ THERE is no liberty of speech, no liberty of the press, and all the ordinary liberties of the public have been taken away. We have nothing less than a despotism such as we find nowhere else in the world where there is any semblance of constitutional government ... I will do my best ... to prevent the people coming under slave rule ... as a result of the acts of the minister of defence who would do well to listen to the voice of the people. ”

**General Barry Hertzog, opposing the conscription of South African soldiers to fight in Namibia in 1915**

(Front page of the Weekly Mail 5 August 1988. The issue was banned.)

The preceding chapters have examined how the ECC took up its mandate to oppose conscription, challenging the official security discourse by attempting to create a climate of dissent among conscripts and encouraging whites to call for alternatives to national service. Discussion of the extent of the ECC's success has thus far been measured largely by state responses, such as attempts to contract the legal opposition space through the state of emergency, and the banning of the ECC.

The impact of the ECC on broader white society is more difficult to gauge. The state's opposition to conscription objection largely kept the issue out of areas of statistical information gathering, such as public opinion polls. The ECC ran surveys on white attitudes to military service but the limited reference group made their accuracy questionable. Psychological models are another way to try to reflect on the relationship between beliefs, attitudes and actions, but often reflect the norms of their period (much like histories) rather than providing comprehensive models of human behaviour. One of their few points of agreement relevant to this study is that people will generally act in what they perceive to be their own or their group's best interests, attempting to maximise positive outcomes and minimise negative ones.<sup>423</sup> Yet if one applies this to observed white behaviour in the period between 1983 and 1988, numerous interpretations are possible. Increased emigration, for example, suggests, rather than definitively proves, a correlation with growing white opposition to conscription, while the relatively constant reporting figures can be explained as much by the harsh alternatives to national service as by support for the system.

In the absence of hard statistical data or definitive social science theory, the commercial media becomes a highly significant source. Both the tone and content of newspaper articles can be used to document changes in white attitudes to conscription. In assessing the role of the commercial media in the apartheid years the TRC concluded that it "played a crucial role in helping reflect and mould public opinion".<sup>424</sup> Radical critiques of the press in the 1980s were scathing about the influence of the big mining houses on the two main English newspaper groups, South African Associated Newspapers and Argus, and suggested that the liberal press' relative freedom from government control was symptomatic of how its reliance on racial capitalism made it as much part of the system as its Afrikaans counterparts. Yet for the purposes of this study it is precisely the influence of this underlying white world view which makes it possible to assess changing white attitudes to the ECC and conscription issues.<sup>425</sup>

<sup>423</sup> D.Foster, & J. Louw-Potgieter (eds), *Social Psychology in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Lexicon publishers, 1991) pp.127-133.

<sup>424</sup> TRC, vol.4, ch.6, p.165. The electronic media will not be considered in this study as it was so largely controlled by the state. Since newspaper readership tended to follow racial divisions, the black press will not be considered either, as the point of this analysis is to assess the impact of the ECC on white attitudes.

<sup>425</sup> TRC, vol.4, chapter 6, p.173. Manuscripts and Archives BC 1005, folder LL3, M.J.Roodt, "Ideological state apparatus", unpublished (undated). K.G.Tomaselli, "Adapt or die: militarisation and the South African media 1976-1982", pp 8-13. Michael Barkusky, "The English press in South Africa" unpublished paper, 1977.

Unlike the alternative media, which was largely sympathetic to the ECC from the start and which was as much concerned with proselytising as with circulation, the commercial orientation of the mainstream press encouraged a conservative tone, aimed at the "lowest common denominator" in order to ensure the widest possible readership. The commercial press could not afford to stray too far from its readers' comfort zone for fear of a drop in circulation and advertising revenue. This commercial orientation also encouraged accommodation rather than confrontation with the state. Although the English press liked to tout its liberal criticism of apartheid, more than 100 laws, ranging from outright prohibition to the threat of prosecution for "subversion", affected its operations and encouraged self-censorship. As the state became more determined to control public discourse, confiscation and closure became real threats, particularly after the 1986 state of emergency. As editor and publisher of the Southern Africa Report Raymond Louw noted in a paper delivered to the general assembly of the International Press Institute, "Confiscation of a few issues, let alone a three-month ban, could mean the difference between profit and loss on a year's operations for a major newspaper – and that could result in permanent closedown."<sup>426</sup> Because support for the ECC was potentially costly, both in terms of reprisals from the state and the danger of antagonising readers, the attention devoted to conscription issues by the press at any given point indicates a correlation with the attitudes and concerns of the readership of the particular publication.

While neither the English- nor Afrikaans-language press was a monolithic entity, in general terms the English press tended to be more liberal and to oppose the excesses of apartheid, except for the Citizen, which tended to support the government. Most Afrikaans newspapers endorsed the NP, although newspapers supporting the right wing, like Die Afrikaner (Herstigte Nasionale Party) and Die Patriot (CP) were critical of the government. The first left-wing Afrikaans newspaper, the Vrye Weekblad, only emerged in 1988 and so has little relevance to this study.

When the ECC was constituted in late 1983, the commercial press was not generally sympathetic towards CO, although the opposition press had expressed outrage at the treatment of individual objectors like Charles Yeats. Besides the state's coercive threat, the liberal values of the English press encouraged agreement with some of the tenets of the state's security policy, such as a belief in the possibility of the parliamentary reform of apartheid and the importance of controlled reform, as well as an emphasis on the need for law and order. White security fears remained a politically risky area and the opposition press thus tended to attack the state's apartheid policies while steering clear of security issues.<sup>427</sup> In the pro-government press there was almost total acceptance of the state's security discourse and hence the need for conscription, while the right wing used white security fears to stir up opposition to the NP.

<sup>426</sup> Star 3 June 1988.

<sup>427</sup> TRC, vol.4, chapter 6, p.186.

From this largely unsympathetic base line in 1983, this chapter will analyse the extent and nature of reporting on conscription issues from 1984 to 1988 to suggest the impact of the ECC on white attitudes to conscription and conscription objection.

The available source material means that the discussion will seek to indicate trends rather than be a definitive analysis. The Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis at the University of the Orange Free State has detailed source material, giving both the placement within the publication, and the size of the article, useful for assessing its visual impact, but the collection is far from complete. The ECC's own collection of press clippings is an important supplemental source, but is also incomplete due to the destruction of documents under the state of emergency. Moreover, many of these articles were collected via a press clippings service and were consequently divorced from a sense of placement on a page or within a publication.

The scarcity of press reports on the emergence of the ECC and its early low-key campaigns indicated that the 1983 change in the Defence Act and the creation of the Board for Religious Objection were initially successful in deflecting the media interest in conscription which had developed around the objection and trials of the early COs. Yet while the new legislation limited the expression of opposition to conscription, it neither removed the conscription burden on whites nor the need for forceful coercion of the black majority. Consequently, by late 1984 the ECC's growing organisational capability allowed it to mount its first national campaign, and this coincided with the state's deployment of conscripts in the Vaal townships in September and a policy schism within the PFP over conscription in October and November, encouraging a burst of renewed press interest in conscription.

The October 1984 declaration launch combined a clear manifesto with well-known patrons, while the success of the initial Cape launch, which drew some 1 000 people, suggested that this was a movement with some credibility, direction and a following. The Johannesburg and Durban branches were able to capitalise on the success of the Cape launch, allowing for free mass advertising of ECC events.<sup>428</sup> Patrons drew attention to the ECC as articles about the launch often carried patrons' photographs, eye-catching in a page of text.<sup>429</sup> In the pro-government press, however, patrons' association with the ECC was used to warn readers that the organisation was politically dangerous. Headlines combined the names of apartheid opponents and conscription: "*Boesak sê diensplig moet beëindig word*" and "*Beyers in veldtog teen diensplig*". A photograph of Black Sash's Sheena Duncan together with Anton Lubowski of

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<sup>428</sup> Sunday Tribune 21 October 1984, Star 18 October 1984. Significantly, I did not come across one newspaper article on the ECC from any of the Orange Free State papers throughout the five-year period. The ECC made virtually no impact on this stronghold of Afrikaner hegemony, so wherever the national efforts of the ECC are mentioned in this thesis, this area is always conspicuously absent.

<sup>429</sup> Beeld 12 October 1984, Cape Times 9 October, 19 October 1984, Star 18 October 1984.



SWAPO at the June 1984 ECC Namibia press conference similarly reinforced the idea that opposition to conscription had communist links, while the right wing Afrikaner overtly accused the ECC of being communist-inspired.<sup>430</sup>

The increased publicity surrounding the ECC's first public campaign was duplicated in all subsequent campaigns (see Charts One to Five<sup>431</sup>), highlighting the importance of active, focused campaign work for attracting white attention. Greater publicity for the ECC did not necessarily mean wider acceptance of the ECC's platform, but as long as white society was debating conscription, the divisive aspects of the increasing costs of conscription and the decreasing benefits of continued apartheid rule, including the infringement of white freedoms and economic decline, could be introduced into public discourse too.

The ECC had little control over the initial publicity, however. Throughout its existence, the ECC sent out press releases (which tended to be wordy political treatises) only to see these translated into human-interest stories, or toned down to bring them in line with existing liberal tolerance levels. Publicity around the declaration campaign focused on the voices of patrons and existing organisations like the UDF and Black Sash rather than the ECC. Similarly, an article on Cape Town ECC member Dr Ivan Toms, a doctor at the Crossroads squatter camp, focused on the human interest of his work. While the article noted his objection to national service, it did not advance the profile of the ECC.<sup>432</sup>

Reporting on the content of the declaration further illustrated the ECC's limited impact at this point.<sup>433</sup> The pro-government Afrikaans press gave the ECC scant attention, while the Citizen demonstrated a predictable commitment to the "total onslaught" line. Although it reported on the launch, it used only selected and sanitised aspects of the declaration. Oppositional charges like "illegal occupation" and "wage unjust war" were cut, the conflict was reported as only "verging" on civil war, and the ECC's call to "choose not to serve in the SADF" was removed completely.<sup>434</sup>

By contrast, the opposition press quoted the declaration verbatim in a number of places, but the emphasis was on aspects of the ECC's programme which paralleled existing liberal concerns. Areas like the unjust allocation of resources and the call for a redistribution of wealth were glossed over in favour of criticism of the cost of the war, an

<sup>430</sup> Afrikaner 31 October 1984, Burger 16 October 1984, Beeld 12 October 1984.

<sup>431</sup> National ECC campaigns occurred in September/October 1984, June/July 1985, September/October 1985, April 1986, September 1986, April/May 1987, and July 1988.

<sup>432</sup> Argus 15 November 1984, Sunday Star 20 October 1984, Sunday Tribune 21 October 1984, Daily Dispatch 20 November 1984, Beeld 12 October 1984, Rand Daily Mail 18 October 1984, Sunday Times 7 October, 14 October 1984, Cape Times 5 October, 9 October 1984, Citizen 17 October 1984, Star 18 October 1984.

<sup>433</sup> See Appendix One for the full declaration.

<sup>434</sup> Citizen 12 October, 23 October 1984, Beeld 12 October 1984.

issue which was even being raised by the Financial Mail and an Afrikaans professor of Economics at conservative Potchefstroom University.<sup>435</sup>

In the liberal press issues of individual conscience and the contention that South Africa was an unjust society were also sympathetically received. The Daily Dispatch suggested that few young men wanted “two years and more wrenched out of an embryo career”, and indicated the potential for conflict within families by suggesting that mothers and fathers viewed military service differently. Encouraging the state’s attempts to make accords with its neighbours, the Rand Daily Mail went to the heart of the issue, saying simply, “People want their boys home”. The Sunday Tribune emphasised the human cost of conscription, reminding its readers that potential conscripts had left the country or gone to prison rather than serve, and suggested this would increase as the SADF was used “in the towns and cities to quell civil dissent by our black fellow citizens”. Perhaps most significantly, Cape Times military correspondent Willem Steenkamp, a steadfast opponent of the ECC, warned the state that conscription only worked because “...generally speaking the whites accept it even if they don’t particularly like it. If you tamper with that situation you are playing with fire”.<sup>436</sup>

To some extent this liberal press interest surrounding the ECC launch reflected a broader white complaint that “something must be done”. A declining economy, increasing guerrilla attacks, and the stress repeated call-ups placed on families and businesses were increasing existing white criticism of the state. Yet if the liberal press, and by implication its readership, broadly accepted that objection to conscription was a relevant moral issue in public discourse by late 1984, it was far from endorsing the call to end conscription.

While the liberal press was concerned about the potential for racial polarisation implicit in the use of white troops in the townships, it still largely accepted the basic tenet of “total onslaught”: that the external threat required a significant military deterrent. The call of the youth wing of the PFP for the party to adopt a position close to that of the ECC thus created a furore. As Chart One demonstrates, although reporting on conscription rose in September 1984 as the ECC began its most active campaign to date, the greatest volume of press around conscription in 1984 still centered on the October/November internal PFP divisions over conscription.<sup>437</sup> The liberal press’ close ties to the PFP meant that it continued to endorse the PFP position that while conscription should be phased out, this was only practical once a

<sup>435</sup> Barkusky, “The English press in South Africa”. Star 18 October 1984, Cape Times 5 October, 24 October 1984, Sunday Tribune 21 October 1984, Sunday Times 7 October 1984, Pretoria News 28 November 1984, Financial Mail 30 November 1984.

<sup>436</sup> Sunday Tribune 25 November 1984, Daily Dispatch 21 November 1984, Rand Daily Mail 21 November 1984, Cape Times 21 November 1984.

<sup>437</sup> Argus 20 November 1984, Pretoria News 20 November 1984, Daily Dispatch 21 November 1984, Rand Daily Mail 21 November 1984, Cape Times 21 November, 22 November 1984, Eastern Province Herald 21 November 1984, Burger 22 November 1984, Beeld 22 November 1984.

professional, volunteer army was in place. The liberal press also propounded the PFP position that the SADF was a “neutral shield” behind which reform could take place, thus effectively implying that conscription was contributing to the reform effort.<sup>438</sup>

Two editorials at the height of the PFP debate indicated the two main white attitudes to conscription objection at this point. The liberal Argus agreed that opposition to conscription was an understandable position, a matter of “anguish in many homes”, and refuted the state’s attempts to polarise the issues into patriotic service or alignment with the enemy, arguing that “people who may be prepared to lay down their lives for South Africa do not want to die for apartheid”. The editor also adopted the ECC’s vocabulary in warning the state that people who questioned conscription were neither unpatriotic nor cowardly, but concerned about “the *justness* of the cause they are being called on to defend, and the manner in which it is to be done”, and criticised the “abrasively political” deployment of the SADF in the townships. However, the call was for faster reform rather than an end to conscription, because the editor continued to accept the SADF as a necessary “shield that prevents hostile interference” during the process of political reform.<sup>439</sup>

By contrast, the pro-government Citizen editorial denied that any opposition to conscription was acceptable, claiming that “anything that weakens the SADF is a shameful betrayal of this country”. The ECC was firmly aligned with the country’s enemies, from the headline “Deplorable”, to the suggestion that the ECC was a front for “leftists”, “radicals” and the UDF, which would like to “see the country’s security forces weakened so that they could achieve their aim of destroying the existing order”. The ECC was presented as a purely negative influence, part of “the anti-apartheid, anti-this-and-that crowd all over again”. The certainty projected by the Citizen editor’s thundered “Of course”, at the beginning of five successive paragraphs to emphasise his “total onslaught” arguments against the ECC further contrasted with the equivocation of the liberal position that conscription was a “sensitive” issue and a “complicated dilemma”.<sup>440</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1984 liberal whites were being forced, particularly by the youth, to acknowledge that conscription generated political and moral unease, to the extent that the liberal camp endorsed the ECC’s right to oppose conscription. As conscription became an acceptable topic of public debate this also facilitated a new articulation, particularly in the letters pages of the liberal press, of white discontent at the burden of conscription and concern about

<sup>438</sup> Natal Mercury 23 November 1984.

<sup>439</sup> Argus 18 October 1984.

<sup>440</sup> Citizen 23 October 1984, Argus 18 October 1984.

the internal use of the SADF.<sup>441</sup> A tacit acknowledgement of the divisive potential of conscription could be seen in the attempts of the pro-government press to downplay the ECC's impact. This sector of the media estimated launch attendance figures much lower than the liberal press, for example, while emphasising the negative, as in the Citizen's report of violence at the Cape Town declaration meeting, which was not mentioned in the liberal press. The NSF further emphasised its role as spokesperson for youth in a Cape Herald interview.<sup>442</sup>

Overall, this initial publicity suggested that the early impact of the ECC was limited to an accommodation of aspects of the ECC's call into the existing conscription discourse, rather than the ECC significantly altering this discourse. Continuing white security fears meant there was little sympathy for the ECC's radical analysis that the apartheid state was being perpetuated by force through the SADF, and that South Africa was essentially in a state of civil war. Moreover, despite sympathy for the ECC's moral arguments, its programme tended to be written off as "impractical", as the liberal press, despite opposing the deployment of troops in the townships, continued to endorse the SADF as a necessary part of the reform process.<sup>443</sup> Yet if the ECC had won only limited support for its platform by the end of 1984, it had nevertheless achieved recognition as a valid commentator on conscription issues. For example, the Cape Times headlined an article "PFP hits at use of troops", but two-thirds of the article was dedicated to an ECC press conference called to protest the decision to use the SADF in black townships.

In the first half of 1985 articles about conscription continued to be in general terms rather than advancing the ECC's concerns. While the ECC was increasingly accepted as a recognisable part of the opposition – for example, quoted along with representatives of white political parties, the UDF, AZAPO and the SACC, after the June 1985 SADF attack on Gabarone – its profile was largely dependent on being seen to be in tune with liberal concerns like individual conscience, freedom of speech, detention without trial and spiralling defence costs. The Argus, for example, condemned the banning of a proposed ECC meeting after the March Uitenhage shootings. Similarly, disclosures about SADF activities at Cabinda in Angola, despite a supposed accord between the two countries, created space for the ECC. However, patrons like Sir Richard Luyt or André Brink still received far more space to talk about conscription issues than the ECC.<sup>444</sup> This suggested that liberal whites generally continued to accept the PFP's analysis of the

<sup>441</sup> This was particularly true of the letters pages of the liberal press. Cape Times 9 October, 14 November, 5 December 1984, Natal Witness 29 November 1984, Sunday Tribune 2 December 1984.

<sup>442</sup> Citizen 18 October 1984, Sunday Tribune 21 October 1984, Cape Herald 1 December 1984.

<sup>443</sup> Cape Times 19 October, 24 October 1984, Cape Herald 1 December 1984, Argus 18 October 1984, Eastern Province Herald 21 November 1984, Daily Dispatch 21 November 1984, Financial Mail 30 November 1984.

<sup>444</sup> Sunday Star 28 April 1985, Weekend Argus 2 March 1985, Cape Times 21 March, 9 May, 25 May, 14 June 1985, Rand Daily Mail 4 March 1985, Argus 4 March, 21 April, 7 May, 9 May 1985, Star 4 March, 27 April 1985, Evening Post 5 March 1985, Eastern Province Herald 15 March 1985, Pretoria News 22 March 1985.

SADF as a necessary shield for reform, and consequently to press for the creation of a professional army, rather than the ending of conscription.<sup>445</sup>

Reporting on the ECC *per se* remained largely sporadic and localised. Articles about the security police raid on the ECC national conference in Natal, for example, were mostly limited to the Natal papers, and the opening of ECC Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg branches received mostly regional attention too, suggesting that the ECC was not yet recognised as a nationally significant organisation. Rather, articles headlined “Anti-call up man addresses students” and “Student: SA in state of civil war in townships” reinforced the ECC’s image of a student-based oppositional group, leading to hostility towards the ECC as a “radical” or “impractical” organisation. A Cape Times editorial, for example, denounced the 1985 extension of camps for a number of reasons, including the fact that this would “lend impetus to the anti-conscription campaign”, while a report on ECC school pamphleteering in the Natal Mercury suggested that the campaign had been rejected by “a trail of angry parents, headmasters and school children”, who had been approached largely by “students”. While the ECC successfully negotiated a positive article a few days later, this was no guarantee that the previous readers would be either reached or convinced. A similar problem arose with reports of a Johannesburg vandalism campaign using ECC slogans.<sup>446</sup>

The June 1985 Johannesburg debate between the ECC and PFP leader Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert further demonstrated the limited credibility of the ECC at this point. The liberal press gave Slabbert the floor, reporting his round condemnation of the ECC as “dangerously romantic, extraordinarily naïve and counter-productive”. Only the Daily Dispatch gave space to David Webster’s rebuttal although still headlining Slabbert, while at the other end of the liberal spectrum a Natal Mercury editorial angrily concluded that Slabbert was being “dangerously and extraordinarily charitable” towards the ECC. In the pro-government press, reports of the debate were used primarily as a means of taking issue with the PFP over its professional army proposals. Beeld, for instance, reported the debate as a speech, effectively blocking the ECC’s point of view completely.<sup>447</sup>

The nature and extent of newspaper articles thus suggested limited white support for the ECC by mid 1985. Conscription, however, still featured regularly in the media because of the growing white problems and grievances surrounding the issue. Even the pro-government Burger ran a story about a camp dodger whose failure to report was based on business reasons. Humanitarian and theological concerns about the Board for Religious Objection also

<sup>445</sup> Rand Daily Mail 30 January 1985, Eastern Province Herald 30 April 1985, Natal Witness 29 May 1985.

<sup>446</sup> Cape Times 5 May, 26 June 1985, Natal Mercury 1 June, 6 June 1985, Rand Daily Mail 20 March, 16 April 1985, Daily News 19 April 1985, Pretoria News 20 April 1985.

<sup>447</sup> Daily Dispatch 6 June 1985, Beeld 7 June 1985.

encouraged stories about the cases reviewed and the plight of non-religious objectors.<sup>448</sup> Moreover, while General Malan used the press to attempt to smear the ECC by frequently asserting that it was part of a ANC-CP-UDF campaign to make South Africa ungovernable, the internal deployment of troops played an important role in moving the liberal press from merely accepting the legitimacy of conscription objection in terms of its broader commitment to freedom of speech, towards a new challenge to the state's security discourse.

Sections of the liberal press began to suggest that conscripts had the right to make a personal moral choice about their national service, particularly where this involved going into the townships. The Natal-based Sunday Tribune, for example, ran its ECC-Slabbert debate coverage with a picture of an unidentified black man, captioned "SADF is synonymous with tear gas, rubber bullets and aggression", and reported that township residents did not welcome the SADF as a peacekeeper as the state liked to suggest. The Cape Times also published a long letter which reopened the civil war debate, and claimed that service in the SADF was "moral suicide" primarily because of the internal deployment of the SADF. A Daily News editorial noted that the "issues are no longer clear-cut" and "conscripts have misgivings about what they are upholding" as the struggle seemed to arise "from the internal political system rather than a malignant totalitarian power". A Natal Witness editorial argued that the PFP was "evading the issue", by focusing on the creation of a professional army, as an army needed conviction rather than a mercenary spirit.<sup>449</sup>

In this climate of increased liberal unease the ECC held its June/July peace festival. The international interest and state repression which surrounded this event helped not only to draw attention to the ECC, but also to give a new credibility to its campaign. The state's refusal of a visa to Cardinal Paolo Arns embarrassed the liberal establishment, encouraging reports in which the voices of the SACC, SACBC, UDF and the ECC predominated, claiming that Arns had refused to accede to the gag demands of the South African government that he be silent on moral issues. This was in stark contrast to the pro-government press in which the voice of government spokesmen predominated, claiming Arns' visa had been withdrawn because there were hidden motives behind his visit, reinforcing "total onslaught" paranoia. The Vaderland made a visual connection between subversion and the ECC, with a photograph of a welcoming committee of black students in black power t-shirts against an ECC banner. The accompanying article presented the students as a "rent-a-rabble" who had no idea who Arns was, and suggested that the ECC had

<sup>448</sup> Burger 28 May 1985, Star 4 February, 13 May 1985.

<sup>449</sup> Cape Times 29 April, 14 June 1985, Star 27 April 1985, Sunday Tribune 9 June 1985, Daily News 24 June 1985.

prevented the students being interviewed further, again reinforcing the idea that the ECC had little real support and had something to hide.<sup>450</sup>

Initial liberal "freedom of speech" interest in the festival was further piqued by the calibre of international speakers, and the support of local affiliates, such as the SACBC, which, a week before the festival, made a highly publicised joint call with the ECC to end conscription. For the first time the ECC was achieving a positive public image through its own efforts. In the liberal press, including a front-page comment in the Star and numerous photographs in the Weekly Mail, the festival was reported as a successful and professionally run event, which increased the profile of the ECC, and, in turn, encouraged a more positive public association between the ECC and the existing conscription discourse.<sup>451</sup>

After the festival, the ECC's newfound credibility was demonstrated by reports on the role of conscription in white emigration and the ECC's publicising SADF non-reporting statistics. SADF sources reported that 7 589 conscripts had failed to report for national service in January 1985, a five-fold increase on the previous year. Although the SADF immediately refuted its own figures, claiming that exempted students had mistakenly been included, the increased profile of the ECC can be seen in the continuing resurfacing of this story throughout the year. The financial newspaper Business Day, for example, reported the Arms visa issue in the government's voice, but by September ran a story using the original non-reporting figures despite the fact that the state had already strongly refuted these.<sup>452</sup> The press also began to quote ECC members who used terms like "civil war", although still making it very clear that they were reporting an opinion.<sup>453</sup> When Alan Dodson was court-martialled in August for refusing to go into the townships, the Star report carried an ECC comment on the case, and both the Cape Times and the Star quoted the ECC's evidence before the Geldenhuys Committee. This counter-voice was important as in 1986 the committee declared the existing system "satisfactory", and the state refused to discuss the findings further, in an attempt to suppress the opposition expressed to the committee.<sup>454</sup> Another indicator of a broadening of white interest in conscription issues was the movement of ECC stories beyond the political pages of the press. Argus columnist, Gory Bowes-Taylor, for example, interviewed Laurie Nathan and articulated her pain as the parent of a conscript, as well as that expressed by her readers over their sons' call-up.<sup>455</sup>

<sup>450</sup> Star 26 June, 27 June 1985, Daily News 26 June 1985, Argus 28 June 1985, Cape Times 27 June 1985, Vaderland 27 June 1985, Citizen 29 June 1985, Business Day 27 June 1985.

<sup>451</sup> Star 1 July 1985, Weekly Mail 5 July 1985.

<sup>452</sup> Business Day 12 September, 19 November 1985, Star 29 June 1985, Sunday Tribune 18 August 1985.

<sup>453</sup> Argus 14 June 1985, Star 29 June, 1 July 1985. Privately, Nathan said he thought the SADF's explanation was probably correct, but it is significant that the SADF refused to release further reporting figures. Historical Papers, AL 2460, tape I 4, Julie Frederikse interview with Laurie Nathan 21 May 1985.

<sup>454</sup> Sunday Times 23 June 1985, Transvaler 24 June 1985, Citizen 26 June 1985, Cape Times 14 August 1985, Star 14 August 1985.

<sup>455</sup> Argus 19 July 1985.

Nevertheless, press reports suggested that white sympathy for conscription objection still stalled when it came action. Where ECC objection moved beyond the liberal comfort zone, Slabbert's accusation that the ECC was largely unrealistic and naïve was reiterated in the press. When the PFP Youth got too close to the ideological position of the ECC, its arguments were dismissed as "emotional".<sup>456</sup> In particular, the assertion that South Africa was in a state of civil war led to attacks on the ECC in the liberal press. Columnist Ken Owen, for example, argued that the ECC was polarising whites and attempting to "deny Mr Botha the instruments for the suppression of revolution". A Star editorial lumped together the UDF, ANC, PAC, and ECC as organisations which concealed their "real" agendas behind anti-apartheid rhetoric. The Cape Times demonstrated the extent to which whites were shielded from South African realities by contending that "If civil war does come nobody will be in any doubt." Thus when the Deputy Minister of Defence Adriaan Vlok alleged that the ANC was using the ECC to achieve its "evil goals", this was not only widely reported, but even enjoyed some liberal support, as indicated by the editorials which greeted attempts by the ECC to go beyond a moral challenge.<sup>457</sup>

If there was still only limited white support for the ECC, the organisation's increasing media profile after June 1985 nevertheless posed a sufficient threat that a media counter-campaign began (see Chart Two). Immediately before the peace festival the Sunday Times revealed "secret ANC material" suggesting the ANC claimed to have infiltrated the ECC. Since the state had considerable powers to control what the media said about the ANC, its approval of these extensive "revelations" indicated this suited its purposes. The next day the Transvaler carried a similar story, headlined "So veg die UDF teen diensplig en SA", while the Citizen emphasised the connection between SADF regional actions to quell "violence" and the continued possibility of reform. In reporting on the July chaplaincy debate in the Anglican synod, the Citizen also went further than most of the liberal press in expressing concern at the divisive impact of conscription debate and suggested the synod had been "hijacked" by the left, under the influence of the ECC.<sup>458</sup>

However, neither the state's attempts to undermine the ECC by smears nor the English press' continued loyalty to the PFP could disguise the continuing deployment of troops in the townships, or adequately address the white unease this generated. By targeting this issue the ECC's September 1985 "Troops Out" campaign encouraged the liberal community to acknowledge the dichotomy between its ideals and South African realities.

<sup>456</sup> Sunday Times 18 August 1985, Star 28 June, 31 August, 2 September, 4 September 1985, Cape Times 5 September 1985.

<sup>457</sup> Natal Mercury 9 September 1985, Daily Dispatch 10 September 1985, Citizen 10 September 1985.

<sup>458</sup> Star 12 July 1985, Citizen 11 July 1985.



Once again when ECC members were detained just before the fast, the human rights angle stimulated liberal interest in conscription opposition. Even the Natal Mercury, the liberal paper most critical of the ECC, noted sternly that while it was “possible to silence some voices, ...it is not possible to ban continued discussion of a question that directly or indirectly touches practically every white home in the land”, while a strongly ECC voice predominated in a Cape Times article on the detentions.<sup>459</sup> By contrast, the Burger ran a story on white school pupils planning to boycott in sympathy with blacks, and claimed the ECC was involved in this, conveying the impression that the ECC was actively encouraging unrest and thus tacitly justifying the state’s actions against the organisation.<sup>460</sup>

The combination of repression against the ECC and an accessible campaign led to a peak in media attention in late September and early October 1985, as the ECC achieved its most widespread coverage to date. The human interest of the fast led to almost daily updates, particularly in the Cape Town press, where Ivan Toms was already a known quantity. Further evidence of growing white interest in conscription issues was the flood of letters to the press around this time, both endorsing and opposing conscription.<sup>461</sup> An unusually high number of photographs not only drew attention to ECC articles, but also encouraged recognition of those taking part in the fast and gave visual corroboration to the figures of those attending the rallies. Photographs placed the ECC within a visual context as fasters were pictured with a rabbi, Archbishop Tutu, concerned mothers and thronged by multiracial crowds of supporters.<sup>462</sup> Recognition of the value of visual cues was demonstrated by the pro-government Citizen, which ran a large photograph of a pensive Archbishop Tutu, captioned “Silent Tutu avoids press at start of 24 hr fast” together with an article which emphasised his unwillingness to be interviewed, implying that he was uncomfortable about associating with the ECC.<sup>463</sup>

Once again editorials were a useful indicator of the range of interest and the level of white support for the ECC’s position. Liberal editorials at the time of the fast tended to be highly critical of the state, demanding faster reform and greater recognition for objectors. The Argus, for example, praised Toms for his “courageous and genuine expression of protest” at a time when “peaceful protest is stifled by official bans and restrictions”,<sup>464</sup> while the Cape Times argued that the 4 000 people at the Cape Town city hall meeting were not a gathering of radicals and revolutionaries but a

<sup>459</sup> Natal Mercury 10 September 1985, Witness 10 September 1985, Cape Times 10 September 1985, Citizen 10 September 1985, Daily News 10 September 1985.

<sup>460</sup> Burger 11 September 1985.

<sup>461</sup> Cape Times 3 September, 19 September 1985, Diamond Fields Advertiser 3 October 1985, Sunday Tribune 22 September 1985, Natal Witness 26 September 1985, Natal Mercury 5 October 1985.

<sup>462</sup> Star 18 September 1985, Argus 18 September 1985, Cape Times 19 September, 23 September, 24 September, 28 September, 8 October 1985, Weekly Mail 20 September, 27 September, 11 October 1985, Sunday Tribune 22 September 1985, Grocott’s Mail 24 September, 27 September 1985, Argus 1 October 1985, Grocott’s Mail 1 October, 4 October 1985, Sunday Tribune 29 September, 6 October 1985.

<sup>463</sup> Citizen 28 September 1985.

<sup>464</sup> Argus 7 October 1985.

meeting of South Africans of “all races, colours and creeds” concerned about the future.<sup>465</sup> The Cape Times also began to make a direct link between the SADF and apartheid. While not yet agreeing that there was a civil war, the newspaper was considering the possibility, calling on the state to listen to “the growing number of South Africans who say they do not want civil war”. In the eastern Cape where conflict was most violent, the Evening Post noted that in the townships the SADF was “increasingly identified as an instrument of government oppression”.<sup>466</sup> On the other hand, the Star argued that since South Africa was not at war the state must recognise and make provision for those with moral or political objections to serving in the townships or in “foreign territories like Namibia and Angola”.<sup>467</sup>

The press coverage of the fast thus offered a number of indicators that conscription was increasingly impinging on the white community, stimulating a range of potentially divisive responses. Not only was the geographic range of coverage the widest yet, and the daily intensity the highest (see Chart Two), but also the range of articles within publications addressing the fast meant that a wide variety of readers were being exposed to conscription debate. Besides religious and political commentary, and human interest and human rights stories, a tongue-in-cheek look at fasting as a way to beat inflation by Cape Times columnist John Scott indicated that conscription had moved from the rarefied realm of politics into the normal discourse of liberal whites, encouraging them to articulate the personal fears and frustrations of national service, which the NP had tried to disallow through its rhetoric of patriotic duty.<sup>468</sup>

While the liberal press was still far from endorsing the call to end conscription, the state’s renewed attempts to undermine the ECC suggested it found the ECC’s media headway threatening. Earlier, the Minister of Defence had warned a zealous NP politician not to raise conscription issues in his local press as this might give indirect momentum to the ECC.<sup>469</sup> By the time of the fast, however, senior NP leaders attacked the ECC publicly, and their prominence guaranteed them media space across the political spectrum. Shortly before the fast, General Malan launched a stinging attack on the ECC and defended the use of troops in the townships, while Chief Director of Operations, Major-General J.P. van Loggerenberg claimed in an address to a passing-out parade that the only aim of the ECC was to break morale in the SADF in order to leave South Africa defenceless.<sup>470</sup> Soon after the fast the Afrikaans Sunday paper Rapport carried a double-page spread with banner headlines “ECC se politiek skyn rooi deur” and “Aanslag op wit seuns”,<sup>471</sup> accusing the ECC of “subtle” propaganda. This allowed the journalist to make accusations with little

<sup>465</sup> Cape Times 9 October 1985.

<sup>466</sup> Eastern Province Herald 14 October 1985.

<sup>467</sup> Star 12 October 1985.

<sup>468</sup> Sunday Star 6 October 1985, Cape Times 7 October 1985.

<sup>469</sup> DSD Minister of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/4, vol.66, box 237, letter from Minister of Defence 17 May 1985.

<sup>470</sup> Star 21 September 1985, Natal Mercury 21 September 1985, Natal Witness 20 October 1985.

<sup>471</sup> Rapport 27 October 1985

evidence, and, claiming that the authorities were powerless against the ECC because it was not a banned organisation, encouraged readers to push for the state to act against the ECC.

However, in the liberal press, and increasingly in the business press too, draft resistance continued to make headlines. The “brain drain” became a recognised phenomenon, while articles like “Award for brave objector?” in the Daily Dispatch, the story of a drowning rescue by a CO, directly contradicted the state’s avowals that objectors were cowards.<sup>472</sup> By 1986 a steady stream of stories about the ECC continued the trend of liberal support for aspects of the ECC’s work which highlighted or complemented its own concerns, signalling the growing power of conscription issues to exacerbate political differences among whites. In January 1986, for example, security force intervention at Clifton Beach to prevent the ECC building a sandcastle in the shape of the SADF logo was widely reported and ridiculed in the English press. Reports now also tended to emphasise the legality of the ECC’s protest, suggesting that by 1986 the ECC had significantly increased not only its mainstream liberal recognition, but also its legitimacy within that group.<sup>473</sup>

Other indications of this trend included greater reporting of ECC’s protest at the January 1986 conscript intake than a year previously. Several ECC letters on the issue were printed, and both the Evening Post and Cape Times used language which supported the ECC’s position and emphasised that the movement had considerable support, respectively reporting that “thousands of reluctant conscripts” were beginning their national service, and that the ECC advice bureau had been “flooded with calls” in the pre-intake weeks, while also reminding readers of the support for the ECC indicated by the October 1985 Cape Town rally.<sup>474</sup> Reporting on the ECC’s anti-cadet campaign also clearly carried the ECC message that the cadet system was not compulsory.<sup>475</sup> When General Malan accused the ECC of not working in the interests of the country, the Cape Times carried an article which was essentially an ECC rebuttal. The Cape Times further allowed the ECC considerable letter space to carry on a running debate with Willem Steenkamp.<sup>476</sup> In addition, the liberal press began to give the ECC a platform to challenge the state. When the SADF refused to release its 1986 reporting figures, the ECC’s condemnation of this was published, as was criticism of the state’s refusal to publish the findings of the Geldenhuys Committee. The ECC’s position that there should be an

<sup>472</sup> Daily Dispatch 11 December 1985, Business Day 19 November 1985, Star 19 November, 21 November, 24 November 1985, Sunday Times 8 December 1985.

<sup>473</sup> Cape Times 13 January, 14 January, 15 January, 19 February 1986, Evening Post 13 January 1986, Argus 13 January, 14 January 1986, Star 14 January 1986, Daily News 14 January 1986, Weekly Mail 30 January 1986.

<sup>474</sup> Cape Times 10 January 1986.

<sup>475</sup> Cape Times 1 February, 7 February 1986, Eastern Province Herald 5 February 1986, Weekly Mail 13 February 1986, Grocott’s Mail 9 May 1986.

<sup>476</sup> Cape Times 14 February 1986.

extension of CO beyond religious objection and non-punitive alternatives to service in government organisations was also reiterated.<sup>477</sup>

Reports about the ECC in this period accorded the movement a new respect. Articles in the liberal press emphasised the ECC's growth, its international influence, and its potential expansion into Afrikaans areas like Stellenbosch University.<sup>478</sup> This carried over into the more conservative financial press. A Business Day report on the March ECC submission to the UN noted that it included a dossier of affidavits by township residents and COs, suggesting both that the ECC was taken seriously overseas and that it represented more than just a student constituency.<sup>479</sup> The continued endorsement of high-profile supporters helped consolidate the ECC's position further. Newly elected Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, was quoted as speaking warmly of the "wonderful momentum of the ECC"<sup>480</sup> and claiming that men like CO Philip Wilkinson represented "the hope for this country".<sup>481</sup> The opening speeches of respected academic Colin Bundy, and PFP politician Alex Borrairie also helped draw press attention to the April Cape Town ECC photographic exhibition and film festival.<sup>482</sup>

The net result of both its own efforts and the continued support of high level patrons ensured that when the ECC began its April 1986 "Working for a Just Peace" campaign, it was building on a solid media presence. Like "Troops Out", this campaign attracted liberal interest because it resonated with existing concerns. Although there was not the same "soap opera" feel to the campaign which the daily tracking of Toms' fast had produced, the social upliftment angle of the campaign generated photographs too. In addition to a positive press profile, the ECC was now headlined in its own right; a further indication that the organisation was established as an accredited part of the anti-apartheid movement, and that its actions were perceived as both interesting and relevant within the liberal community.<sup>483</sup> Moreover, although campaigning again created a spike of press attention, the ECC achieved a more consistent press profile throughout 1986, as opposed to 1985, where campaigns had been the primary means of attracting attention (see Chart Three).

Nevertheless, the ECC was disappointed with the media generated by the campaign because it felt the essential ECC message had been obscured by the liberal upliftment angle, which did not advance the ECC's radical understanding

<sup>477</sup> Cape Times 20 February, 4 March, 5 March, 23 April 1986, Natal Witness 1 March 1986.

<sup>478</sup> Argus 6 March 1986, Cape Times 2 June 1986, Natal Witness 18 February 1986.

<sup>479</sup> Business Day 24 March 1986.

<sup>480</sup> Cape Times 17 April 1986.

<sup>481</sup> Cape Times 24 April, 26 April, 1 May 1986, Evening Post 24 April 1986, Argus 24 April, 1 May 1986, Star 1 May 1986.

<sup>482</sup> Argus 7 April, 16 April 1986, Cape Times 8 April, 12 April 1986.

<sup>483</sup> Argus 1 April 1986, Cape Times 3 April, 12 April 1986.

of the connection between poverty and apartheid, or the SADF and apartheid.<sup>484</sup> Only the most left wing Weekly Mail contextualised the campaign as an interim measure in a civil war context.<sup>485</sup> The rest of the liberal press was still wary of the “civil war” concept, remaining committed to the PFP’s call for the conversion of the SADF into a volunteer force before making any changes to the system of conscription. The ECC’s call for alternatives to purely military national service, however, was clearly reported in several newspapers, suggesting that there was considerable support for the ECC’s interim demands, and a growing acceptance that there were numerous conscripts who were, justifiably, deeply conflicted by military service in the current political climate in South Africa.<sup>486</sup>

In the pro-government press the ECC still made little headway, suggesting that the readership of this sector remained highly committed to a “total onslaught” interpretation of the conflict. While the Citizen emphasised SADF socio-economic upliftment projects as a counter to “Working for a Just Peace”,<sup>487</sup> for the most part ECC activities were ignored. In January 1986, for example, Rapport was forced to retract its October 1985 smear of the ECC, and to allow the ECC space to state its case, but the rest of the pro-government press did not follow suit, although several English newspapers took note of the retraction.<sup>488</sup> Similarly, when the ECC won a media council ruling against the Aida Parker Newsletter in November 1986 this was reported in the English press, but largely ignored in the pro-government and right wing press, which continued to name the Aida Parker Newsletter as a credible source, such as an indignant Patriot article which warned of ECC activity on Afrikaans campuses.<sup>489</sup>

Nevertheless, conscription was becoming contentious in Afrikaans communities too. The Pretoria News, for example, headlined “War on campus”, claiming that conscription issues were having an impact on the Afrikaans Universiteit van Pretoria campus, despite continuing majority support for national service there.<sup>490</sup> In an attempt to counter the negative impact of the growing costs of conscription among whites, the pro-government press imputed sinister motives to the ECC rather than reporting on its activities. The Burger, for instance, reported “ECC se geld kom van buiteland”,<sup>491</sup> which suggested both an underhand foreign connection in the “total onslaught” context, and implied there was insufficient local support to sustain the organisation. Similarly, while the Cape Times reported the ECC’s ejection from the Stellenbosch campus from a freedom of speech angle, three articles in the Burger suggested the

<sup>484</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A5, ECC happenings. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.3, organisational reports 8 May 1986. Cape Times 8 April 1986, Natal Witness 8 April 1986.

<sup>485</sup> Weekly Mail 14 March 1986.

<sup>486</sup> Eastern Province Herald 4 April, 8 April 1986, Weekly Mail 17 April 1986.

<sup>487</sup> Citizen 30 April 1986.

<sup>488</sup> Rapport 19 January 1986, Cape Times 20 January 1986, Weekly Mail 30 January 1986.

<sup>489</sup> Weekend Argus 4 October 1986, Cape Times 6 November 1986, Star 7 October 1986, Weekly Mail 9 October 1986, Patriot 28 November 1986.

<sup>490</sup> Pretoria News 31 March 1986.

<sup>491</sup> Burger 15 May 1986.

banning was widely supported in the interests of order and stability,<sup>492</sup> and questioned the motivation and supporters of the ECC, using material from the Aida Parker Newsletter. The right-wing Afrikaner went further, claiming that an intensive campaign was underway by left-wing radicals, and noting that a founding member of the Stellenbosch branch, in open defiance of the government, had met with the ANC in Harare in December 1985.<sup>493</sup> The Citizen used criticism of the ECC by a coloured Labour Party MP to emphasise the ECC's limited support base.<sup>494</sup>

The pro-government press not only projected the ECC as an opponent of the state, but also as a destroyer of the status quo, and a "spoiler" with no positive programme.<sup>495</sup> While the liberal Star focused on ECC speaker Gavin Evans in its report of riot police entering the University of the Witwatersrand campus, after a "minor incident" with the NSF affiliate the Student Moderate Alliance during an ECC rally, the Citizen headlined "Violence on Wits campus", and reported an attempt to burn the South African flag and calls for students to be necklaced, creating an impression of irrational, violent, unpatriotic opposition associated with ECC activities. Similarly, when CO Philip Wilkinson was forcibly arrested at the start of a Johannesburg ECC rally in April 1986, the liberal press expressed outrage. The Cape Times asked "What kind of society treats ordinary citizens as criminals for refusing to take up arms and kill people?" while the Weekly Mail trumpeted, "For those of us who call ourselves white democrats, the time for theorising is over. We have to act." By contrast, Wilkinson's arrest was reported by Beeld as a "capture", with the implication of wrongdoing and evasion on his part.<sup>496</sup>

By mid 1986, both the growing acceptance of the ECC in the liberal media and the hostility of the pro-government press indicated that whites were increasingly aware of the impact of conscription. The ECC was becoming more successful at stimulating debate, and consequently division, around the moral dilemmas inherent in conscription, as well as attracting attention to the personal costs of conscription. In part, the 12 June state of emergency was an attempt to curb the growing media interest in the anti-conscription message.

Emergency regulations greatly increased the costs of reporting on the ECC, defining as "subversive" any statement which contained "anything calculated to discredit or undermine the system of compulsory military service". The regulations also created a climate of fear and uncertainty in which the press was not even sure if the ECC still existed as a legal entity.<sup>497</sup> The Cape Times noted with disgust that the opposition press "has been forced to censor itself to

<sup>492</sup> Burger 5 February, 15 May, 31 May 1986.

<sup>493</sup> Afrikaner 28 May 1986.

<sup>494</sup> Citizen 13 June 1986, Burger 2 May, 15 May, 31 May 1986, Vaderland 19 March 1986, Afrikaner 28 May 1986.

<sup>495</sup> Vaderland 19 March 1986, Cape Times 14 April, 17 April, 6 May 1986, Weekly Mail 17 April 1986, Daily News 19 April 1986.

<sup>496</sup> Cape Times 10 April, 12 April 1986, Star 30 April 1986, Argus 1 May 1986, Weekly Mail 2 May 1986, Beeld 1 May 1986.

<sup>497</sup> Cape Times 13 June 1986.

the point where the only meaningful reporting can take place in the editorial columns – comment and analysis are still relatively free. A few brave publications like the Weekly Mail, City Press and New Nation have tried to push the laws to the limit and have suffered the consequences in detentions, harassment, seizure and threats of closure”.<sup>498</sup> By December 1986 the press was no longer permitted even indirect signals – such as the use of blank spaces, daily reckonings of the length of the emergency and listings of detentions – to alert whites to the discrepancy between reality and what the press was allowed to print.<sup>499</sup>

However, Chart Three shows that despite the dip in the frequency of articles on conscription in July 1986, there was a recovery in the latter part of the year, while the Sunday and financial press exhibited more interest in the ECC after the declaration of the state of emergency than before. This ongoing press presence, despite the increased costs to the newspapers concerned, suggested that by mid 1986 conscription was firmly entrenched as an issue of concern to whites, and the ECC was accepted as a legitimate mouthpiece for objection to conscription. The pro-government press’ continued attempts to undermine the impact of the ECC on their readership, even after the increased repression was in place, further indicated that even in constituencies sympathetic towards “total onslaught” thinking, there was concern about the political potential of the costs of conscription.

Moreover, the state of emergency, while attempting to contract the legal space for public debate on conscription, also created news stories. Harassment of the ECC reignited the human rights concerns of the liberal press. The petrol bombing of the home of Johannesburg ECC member Anne McKay drew media attention,<sup>500</sup> while the state’s ineffectual attempts to deport Port Elizabeth ECC member Dominique Souchon prompted ongoing press interest as the case increasingly resembled a situation comedy with his passport expiring and his supposed “home country” Mauritius refusing to accept him.<sup>501</sup> As the longer term effects of detentions began to be felt, so the liberal press also used harassment of the ECC, articles about detainee depression or testing of the emergency regulations, as a means of drawing attention to, and protesting, the ongoing state of emergency.<sup>502</sup> In some cases this was implied, such as a Business Day photograph showing ECC women in a seated protest outside Wits Command, while armed police loomed over them. Other articles were overt. The Evening Post, for example, slated the state for holding Souchon without charge or explanation for five months.<sup>503</sup> The release of Michael Evans after six weeks of detention was

<sup>498</sup> Cape Times 12 July 1986.

<sup>499</sup> Argus 21 June 1986, Sunday Times 22 June 1986, Cape Times 26 June 1986, Weekly Mail 18 July 1986, Business Day 12 December 1986.

<sup>500</sup> Citizen 7 December 1986, Business Day 1 August 1986, Natal Witness 14 July 1986, Weekly Mail 1 August 1986, Evening Post 27 November 1986.

<sup>501</sup> Star 14 July 1986, Cape Times 14 July 1986.

<sup>502</sup> Star 5 August 1986, Evening Post 13 August, 5 September, 6 September, 28 September 1986, Weekly Mail 15 August, 18 August 1986, Eastern Province Herald 16 May 1986.

<sup>503</sup> Business Day 29 October 1986, Evening Post 27 November 1986.

sympathetically noted in the Cape Times, along with a photograph showing his dog's delight at his return. Evans was quoted as saying that "Detention is one of the things one accepts as a liability in commitment to peace and change in this country",<sup>504</sup> while the Star applauded "Brave Clare" (Verbeek, Johannesburg chair) for standing up for her convictions.<sup>505</sup>

Although the ECC was very weak in the months immediately following the declaration of the state of emergency, its continued press presence was in part due to its previous success in integrating conscription into public discourse. Despite the state's attempts to criminalise opposition, in the liberal press both the tone and language continued to create a positive picture of the ECC as articles emphasised the ECC's legality and reminded readers of its successful past campaigns. Moreover, the liberal press increasingly claimed that conscription issues would not go away if the ECC was silenced, and reminded readers that although it was illegal to oppose conscription, it was still legal to demand the right to do so. Local affiliates and patrons, as well as the ECC's international supporters, continued to draw public attention to conscription issues. The ongoing debate in "Letters to the editor" pages further demonstrated that the interest the ECC had managed to generate around conscription had sufficient momentum not to be crushed by the state of emergency. Rather, the state's continued deployment of the SADF in the townships and reports of the rulings of the Board for Religious Objection, particularly the successful supreme court challenge to its theist principles by Buddhist, Dave Hartman, continued to focus attention on the costs of conscription.<sup>506</sup>

Without campaigns, however, it was difficult for the ECC to move beyond existing levels of support in the press. Campaigns had given the ECC an opportunity to involve whites in positive activism, but after the declaration of the state of emergency the liberal press reflected a mood of helplessness. A Natal Mercury editorial argued there was no real alternative to "lumping" the current system, while the Business Day suggested that while "Military conscription raises for many young South Africans a moral dilemma of excruciating complexity", the only choices were between "order and chaos, courts and people's courts".<sup>507</sup>

Campaigns were also an opportunity to try to assert the ECC's position, in order to shift liberal perspectives rather than ECC actions being interpreted within the confines of liberal thinking. The "Working for a Just Peace" campaign,

<sup>504</sup> Cape Times 23 July 1986.

<sup>505</sup> Star 13 September 1986, Weekly Mail 21 January, 15 August 1986.

<sup>506</sup> Financial Mail 15 August 1986, Natal Mercury 14 June, 7 July 1986, Argus 5 February 1986, Cape Times 2 August, 14 August, 25 August, 29 August 1986, Star 6 August, 8 August, 20 August, 23 August, 25 August, 28 August, 29 August, 4 September, 14 September, 16 October, 23 October, 24 October, 27 October, 28 October, 4 November, 17 November 1986, Natal Witness 5 September 1986, Weekly Mail 8 August, 29 August 1986, Grocott's Mail 19 September, 30 September, 7 October, 14 October 1986, Sunday Tribune 24 August 1986, Citizen 25 August 1986, Daily News 26 August, 27 August 1986.

<sup>507</sup> Natal Mercury 29 August 1986, Business Day 29 October 1986.



for example, had won a new acceptance of the need for alternatives to purely military service. The September 1986 “Yellow Ribbon” campaign, however, demonstrated the difficulties of working under the new conditions. The campaign was primarily reported as a protest against repression, indicating both the capacity of the state to limit the conscription discourse, and the confusion in liberal white ranks about how to proceed. Nevertheless, a spate of letters followed the campaign; a clear indication that conscription was still a significant issue in white society, and one which could not be repressed away.<sup>508</sup> Like the January sandcastle incident, the “Yellow Ribbon” campaign encouraged the liberal press to question why the state over-reacted to the ECC, and articles mocked the heavy security force presence to prevent the innocuous tying of ribbons.

As the ECC began to campaign again, so the pro-government press ran counter-interpretations of its work. Beeld, for example, noted that the yellow ribbon campaign had been illegal, without the rider added by the liberal press, that the ECC had not sought municipal permission in order to prevent harassment. The Citizen reported that a crowd had applauded the October arrest of ECC women protesting outside Witwatersrand Command and suggested that while the ECC had claimed that prominent female black leaders like Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, and Leah Tutu would be there, they had failed to appear. The article thus implied that the ECC had delusions about being relevant to the opposition movement, and offered evidence of support for state actions against it.<sup>509</sup>

If the ECC had made little progress in the pro-government press by late 1986, its arguments were increasingly being integrated into liberal complaints, demonstrating that conscription was an issue of sufficient significance that the liberal press was prepared to face the risks of reporting about it. Criticising the imposition of restriction orders on the state’s opponents, for example, the Cape Times declared “There can be no peace under apartheid” echoing the just peace themes of the ECC.<sup>510</sup> Reports of actions such as of the Cape Town “Dad’s army” protest demonstrated the growing range of opposition,<sup>511</sup> while the Weekly Mail photograph of UCT students eating a cake in the shape of the SADF logo, described as “a way around the ban on building castles” reminded readers of previous ECC campaigns.<sup>512</sup> The fact that Business Day was one of the newspapers reporting on the arrest of ECC women outside Witwatersrand Command suggested that conscription was increasingly impinging on the business community too.<sup>513</sup>

<sup>508</sup> Argus 7 October 1986, Star 7 October, 8 October, 16 October, 23 October, 24 October, 27 October 1986, Star 1 November 1986, Beeld 8 October 1986, Cape Times 8 October 1986, Citizen 13 October, 14 October 1986, Natal Mercury 1 November 1986, Pretoria News 22 October, 23 October 1986.

<sup>509</sup> Citizen 29 October 1986.

<sup>510</sup> Cape Times 18 November 1986.

<sup>511</sup> Cape Times 6 November, 7 November, 12 November 1986, Argus 13 November 1986.

<sup>512</sup> Weekly Mail 9 October 1986.

<sup>513</sup> Business Day 29 October 1986.

Throughout 1987 a number of factors encouraged ongoing media interest in conscription. ECC projects which resonated with existing religious and liberal concerns, like the December 1986 “No War Toys for Christmas” campaign continued to attract media attention.<sup>514</sup> The “War Is No Solution Let’s Choose a Just Peace” campaign drew attention to the ECC’s call through upliftment opportunities and creative actions which publicised the ECC’s claim that alternatives to national service could be positive, and that the demand for such alternatives was reasonable, as well as encouraging photographic opportunities, which helped articles about the ECC to stand out.<sup>515</sup>

Ongoing repression of the ECC also continued to direct white attention to shrinking white freedoms, and to focus criticism of the state. The Cape Times editor, for example, commenting on the banning of the December 1986 Cape arts festival, noted that “South Africa cannot be bludgeoned back into a condition of stability and prosperity”, and called for negotiation “before the social and economic fabric of the country is destroyed”.<sup>516</sup> Instead of the ECC being called “unrealistic”, an Argus editorial now argued that the ECC espoused a cause “of grave concern to many” and admonished “the authorities” to “confront issues realistically”.<sup>517</sup> The press also noted the failure of state interventions to limit the ECC. In August 1987 the Saturday Star commented that the investigation of anti-apartheid bodies under the Fund Raising Act seemed “to have fallen flat so far”,<sup>518</sup> while the opposition press not only recorded ECC outrage at allegations made against it on the television current affairs programme “Network”, but also allowed the ECC space to counter these allegations.<sup>519</sup>

Reporters with links to the ECC like Barbara Orpen, Mike Loewe and Gavin Evans, drew attention to the lack of alternatives facing objectors such as Philip Wilkinson during his April 1987 trial, and reminded whites of the continued detentions of Janet Cherry and Sue Lund. In the liberal press the ECC voice increasingly predominated in reports of repression. A Cape Times report on the December 1987 detention of Paula Hathorn, for example, gave Cape Town ECC chair Crispian Olver the floor to challenge the state to bring charges against her openly, and to “publicly address the issues around conscription in a constructive manner”.<sup>520</sup> Even the Citizen allowed the ECC to comment that the seizure of its campus comic indicated the “pettiness of a government unwilling to tolerate dissenting voices”.<sup>521</sup> In this way the ECC was still able to stimulate press debate on the decreasing benefits of “reformed” apartheid, as well as to encourage whites to take stock of the costs of continued conscription.

<sup>514</sup> Weekly Mail 14 November 1986, Sunday Tribune 23 November 1986, Natal Witness 15 December 1986.

<sup>515</sup> Natal Witness 13 April 1987.

<sup>516</sup> Weekly Mail 5 December 1986, Cape Times 4 December 1986, Natal Witness 5 December 1986, Star 4 December 1986, Weekly Mail 12 December 1986, Star 20 December 1986, Citizen 20 December 1986, Saturday Star 20 December 1986, Sunday Times 21 December 1986.

<sup>517</sup> Argus 5 December 1986.

<sup>518</sup> Saturday Star 30 August 1987.

<sup>519</sup> Star 12 August 1987, Weekly Mail 14 August 1987.

<sup>520</sup> Cape Times 21 December 1987.

<sup>521</sup> Weekly Mail 20 March, 27 March 1987, Citizen 7 March 1987.

The liberal press had moved beyond its 1986 position of accepting the validity of the ECC's interim demands and by 1987 was reflecting a new scepticism towards "total onslaught" justifications of conscription. While the state continued to assert that the ECC was attempting to sway the young and naïve through its work in the schools, the 1987 SADF distribution of the Aida Parker News in Eastern Province schools and army bases was criticised in the liberal press, with the editor of the Eastern Province Herald dismissing the publication as "the epitome of advocacy journalism – the last thing to be foisted on young impressionable minds", and arguing that although most continued to "do their duty", it was often with heavy hearts, and conscripts therefore "...deserve understanding and support. Not inane brainwashing".<sup>522</sup> Similarly, when the SADF ran an unprecedented advertising campaign in January 1987, with the head of the SADF General Jannie Geldenhuys publicly acknowledging the fears and frustrations of conscripts, and emphasising it was not SADF policy to "break troops", the Star noted scathingly "With key opposition organisations silenced by emergency press curbs, government propaganda wheels whirled into motion unhindered this week".<sup>523</sup> The article offered a strong counter voice, quoting extensively from an ECC's press release, which reminded readers about the deployment of the SADF in the townships, questioned what they were being called on to defend, and asked whether or not their actions would "further the cause of peace in our country".<sup>524</sup>

It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest a smooth linear progression towards an ever-increasing acceptance of the ECC's cause in the liberal press. Chart Four shows that the amorphous "War Is Not Compulsory, Let's Choose a Just Peace" campaign struggled to make headway against news of the general election in May 1987. Moreover, the NP's focus on security issues in its election campaign, and particularly its attempt to undermine the PFP by associating it with the ECC, demonstrated clearly that white security fears remained a potent force in white politics.<sup>525</sup> The pro-government press was quick to accuse the PFP of being "soft" on security, demonstrating again why conscription was too costly an issue for parliamentary politics.<sup>526</sup> Nevertheless, while PFP defence spokesman Brian Goodall reiterated a "total onslaught" line that "one should not be naïve about the nature of the communist threat to overthrow the country violently and impose a totalitarian state", he also stated that the SADF "should be above controversy and be accepted by all South Africans as an impartial guardian of stability and order",<sup>527</sup> a comment which expressed considerably less confidence in the neutrality of the SADF than the 1984 PFP discussions around conscription.

<sup>522</sup> Eastern Province Herald 28 February, 3 March, 5 March 1987, Cape Times 9 April 1987, Financial Mail 7 August 1987.

<sup>523</sup> Star 14 February 1987, Sunday Times 11 January 1987.

<sup>524</sup> Citizen 12 January 1987, Sunday Times 11 January 1987, Star 12 January, 13 January, 14 January 1987, Daily News 12 January 1987, Cape Times 14 January, 15 January 1987, Star 22 January 1987.

<sup>525</sup> Cape Times 11 February, 12 February 1987, Daily News 13 February 1987, Star 5 February, 8 February 1987, Argus 5 February 1987, Burger 11 February 1987, Citizen 11 February 1987.

<sup>526</sup> Citizen 14 April, 15 April 1987, Burger 14 April 1987, Transvaler 23 April 1987, Vaderland 23 April 1987.

<sup>527</sup> Business Day 28 April 1987, Star 28 February 1987.

Moreover, the ECC was no longer relegated to the sidelines by the press when the PFP debated conscription. An ECC counter voice was heard throughout the elections, even though the PFP was under siege over security issues.<sup>528</sup> While the state celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SADF with great pomp and ceremony, the Johannesburg ECC delivered a cake in the shape of the ECC logo, covered in grave markers, to Witwatersrand Command and called on the SADF to give servicemen a present by extending the boundaries of opposition to conscription. This provided a wonderful photographic opportunity for the Weekly Mail.<sup>529</sup> Further evidence of liberal disillusionment with the impartiality of the SADF and a greater acceptance of the ECC's claim that the SADF directly upheld the apartheid state can be seen in the Cape Times coverage of the SADF's anniversary, which included the ECC comment that there was little for the SADF to celebrate, as the armed forces were responsible for "maintaining the abhorrent system of apartheid".

This growing criticism of the SADF in the liberal press still stood in stark relief to the pro-government press. The Citizen ran an editorial saluting the SADF as the source of South Africa's regional power, and reiterated that it was the "shield behind which the government is introducing reform". The editorial further attempted to bolster the SADF's image by the incredible claim that the SADF had helped "pacify the townships without becoming directly involved in putting down unrest", and claimed that if SWAPO, backed by the Angolan and Cuban forces, were to take over South West Africa, then South Africa itself would be the next target.<sup>530</sup> This kind of unsubstantiated threat-based rhetoric, typified by the NP election slogan "no surrender", demonstrated continuing resistance to the anti-conscription message in the wider white community. However, the attempt to white-wash the actions of the SADF in the townships suggested that where the ECC was having an impact in this pro-government constituency was its continuous reminders of the internal deployment of the SADF, and its questioning of the ethics of that deployment.

The May 1987 trial of Philip Wilkinson drew further media attention to evidence about SADF atrocities in the townships and the negative impact of the SADF outside South Africa.<sup>531</sup> Unlike the bald assertions of the Citizen that the SADF was keeping hostile regional enemies at bay, the trial allegations led to stocktaking in the liberal press, such as the analysis in the Cape Times by UCT Professor of Sociology Mike Savage. He addressed a range of issues, from the brutalisation of national service and its potential impact on civilian society, to a reminder of the ECC's "Working for a Just Peace" campaign as an example of "creative, constructive and realistic alternative service". He suggested that as

<sup>528</sup> Daily Dispatch 14 April 1987, Star 22 April 1987.

<sup>529</sup> Cape Times 6 April 1987, Weekly Mail 18 April 1987.

<sup>530</sup> Citizen 2 July 1987.

<sup>531</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B5.1, Port Elizabeth report (undated). Local activists were important in driving regional press reports. The Port Elizabeth ECC was initially horrified at the local coverage of the Wilkinson trial, and sent a delegation to the editor-in-chief of the Eastern Province Herald/Evening Post, lodging a formal complaint and giving him numerous press clippings from other regions, and later felt this aggressive strategy had paid dividends in coverage. Cape Times 14 May 1987, Argus 14 May, 15 May 1987, Weekly Mail 25 May, 5 June 1987.

many as 10 000 conscripts were living abroad, and warned readers about the Nuremberg principles which recognised individual responsibility for one's actions, even when under orders. Perhaps the punch line, however, was his assertion that "the right to contribute positively to the development of our society should not be limited to COs, but should be a basic human right".<sup>532</sup> This not only challenged the state's monopoly on the concept of patriotic duty, but also suggested that military service was actively contributing to the country's problems.

Ivan Toms' refusal to serve a camp, together with his subsequent arrest and trial, further kept the issue of conscription in the press from July 1987 until his trial the following March.<sup>533</sup> The liberal press emphasised that Toms had already served and attained the rank of lieutenant, and had tried the non-combatant option, but found it a prevarication. Toms' integrity was further underscored by his work in Crossroads, giving substance to his argument that his work among the poor was "real national service".<sup>534</sup>

The publicity which surrounded Toms' refusal to serve<sup>535</sup> also gave the ECC media space to refute Minister of Manpower Pietie du Plessis' contention that religious objectors were difficult to place as "many people were not in favour of being served by them". The ECC emphasised that religious objectors were not refusing to serve their country but were refusing to be "part of an army that in effect defends apartheid".<sup>536</sup> When Deputy Minister of Defence Wynand Breytenbach labelled the 23 who publicly refused to serve in August 1987 "cowards", the Cape Times allowed the ECC space to make a rebuttal that "Those South Africans who choose to work for peace find it impossible to serve in the defence of apartheid",<sup>537</sup> and even Willem Steenkamp objected to the label, saying that "no matter how short-sighted or misguided" these men seemed, the cowards and the selfish went on the "chicken-run", emigrating rather than confronting the state.<sup>538</sup> The Star further turned the tables by allowing the ECC to criticise the state for its failure to provide figures of those refusing to serve. Thus as the ECC was increasingly accepted as making a valid case, so new media opportunities allowed the organisation to reiterate previous arguments. The refusal of the 23 gave the ECC the chance to remind readers of the state's reluctance to disclose non-reporting figures, while articles in the week following the January 1987 SADF advertisement touched on the withdrawal of Souchon's deportation order, the failure to charge the nine Cape Town ECC members detained in December 1986, and emphasised that the ECC was

<sup>532</sup> Cape Times 15 May 1987.

<sup>533</sup> Sunday Tribune 5 July 1987.

<sup>534</sup> Star 3 November, 10 November 1987, Argus 11 November, 12 November 1987, Cape Times 12 November 1987.

<sup>535</sup> Star 20 February, 1 March, 3 March, 4 March, 5 March 1988, Cape Times 29 February, 1 March, 2 March, 5 March 1988, Argus 29 February 1988, Sunday Times 6 March 1988.

<sup>536</sup> Star 10 August 1987.

<sup>537</sup> Cape Times 17 August 1987.

<sup>538</sup> Cape Times 19 August 1987.

a "moderate and responsible opponent of the government", that ECC members in detention had been charged with no crime, and that the ECC was only campaigning for a change in the law.<sup>539</sup>

A further indication of the ECC's success in impressing the costs of conscription on whites was that articles on conscription began to appear independently of the ECC. While it is significant that Business Day, among others, should include comment from the ECC in its report on the Defence Budget vote,<sup>540</sup> it is also noteworthy that, as the negative impact of conscription became increasingly self-evident, 1987 saw a rise in articles about the "brain drain" and the costs of the conflict which did not necessarily originate with, or mention, the ECC. Even the Citizen, for example, headlined "Brain drain costs SA 40 citizens a day", and later ran a letter complaining about the treatment of veterans. This indicated that while the ECC represented an extreme of opposition, even among those who had done their national service there was a sense of making a sacrifice without recognition or reward. The negative impact of conscription on society was also explored in articles linking servicemen with crimes, and reports on the high SADF suicide rate. While the liberal press gave the ECC space to comment on this issue, even the Citizen and Beeld gave the statistics, suggesting that although the pro-government press was attempting to downplay the problems associated with conscription by giving them limited recognition, this could not camouflage the costs to white society. Similarly, while the liberal press ran predictably raucous cartoons around the exemption from national service of ballet dancers and jockeys, Willem Steenkamp, who had never questioned the need for the SADF, nor seriously challenged its deployment, responded to the exemptions with the comment that "National servicemen are not simply labour units and their parents are not simply child factories", suggesting a new recognition of the human costs involved in conscription. The casualties in Angola towards the end of 1987 exacerbated this climate of greater white uncertainty about the role of the SADF.

Again, as the ECC was more successful in focusing white attention on conscription and developing support for its interim demands, this provoked a counter campaign to undermine its work and image. The Citizen, for example, attempted to detract from Toms' refusal to serve by suggesting that he was talking about it but not following through with action.<sup>541</sup> Steenkamp, too, attacked the ECC for hijacking "caring people to pursue its own political aims".<sup>542</sup> While the Afrikaner was the most rabid, calling the ECC a deadly psychological weapon against white South Africa,<sup>543</sup> the supposed link between the ANC and the ECC continued to be emphasised by the pro-government press, as the state

<sup>539</sup> Star 26 August 1987.

<sup>540</sup> Star 4 June, 12 June 1987, Argus 4 June 1987, Weekly Mail 5 June 1987, Business Day 4 June 1987.

<sup>541</sup> Citizen 12 November 1987.

<sup>542</sup> Citizen 15 August 1987, Cape Times 9 September 1987.

<sup>543</sup> Afrikaner 4 February 1987.

justified its repression of the ECC in terms of “total onslaught”. President P.W.Botha alleged that the ANC’s plans for 1987 involved the PFP youth and the ECC in broad democratic front, while Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok told students, “Weaken our defence force and you dream your dreams in vain.”<sup>544</sup> Nevertheless, by the end of 1987, although Rapport still asserted, “ECC is SA se probleem” it also carried a story about national servicemen torturing a cat, indicating a new recognition that national service did not always bring out the best in conscripts.<sup>545</sup>

In the liberal press, the release of casualty figures after the SADF reluctantly admitted its troops were operational in Angola led to heightened criticism of the state, and more sympathy for the ECC. The ECC’s call that troops be withdrawn from Angola was printed widely, and the Cape Times ended its report of the death of 12 soldiers in Angola with the ECC comment that the “deaths of these young conscripts is the price paid for the military aggression of the Nationalist government”.<sup>546</sup> After the Veterans for Victory smear leaflet “ECC: wolf in sheep’s clothing” was inserted in the Grahamstown Grocott’s Mail, the Eastern Province Herald published a rebuttal by academic André Brink and the comment of Grahamstown ECC chair Andrew Roos that “Even good Nationalists are beginning to ask why their children must be killed on foreign soil in adventures which can do absolutely nothing about safeguarding our county.”<sup>547</sup> Support for the ECC’s interim demands began to emerge on a number of fronts. The ECC wrote to Business Day, for example, to express a sense of déjà vu on its editorial calling for “troops out”.<sup>548</sup>

A largely unfocused but increasingly debilitating white *angst* was clearly demonstrated in articles such as the one by journalist James Ambrose Brown in the Weekend Argus. Brown quoted from a letter he received from a man who had been in Angola in the 1970s and had seen a comrade wounded to the point of losing his humanity. He hastened to add that the ex-soldier did not support or condemn any controversy about conscription, and did not argue that war was bad or unnecessary, but that attempts to glorify war were vile.<sup>549</sup> While the article bent over backwards not to be seen to support the ECC, it encouraged a move away from the state’s “heroic duty” conception of conscription and, if nothing else, expressed some of the pain surrounding the ongoing conflict. The exploration by the press of the “brain drain”, the impact of the war on the economy, and, towards the end of 1987, the growing casualty list in Angola, further suggested that a reasonable proportion of the liberal readership were increasingly uneasy about conscription.

<sup>544</sup> Weekend Argus 4 October 1986, Natal Mercury 9 September 1986, Citizen 4 October 1986, Cape Times 13 December 1986.

<sup>545</sup> Rapport 13 December 1987.

<sup>546</sup> Sunday Star 11 October 1987, Star 10 October, 18 November 1987, Argus 13 October 1987, Business Day 6 October 1987, Cape Times 14 October, 4 November 1987.

<sup>547</sup> Eastern Province Herald 19 November 1987.

<sup>548</sup> Business Day 31 December 1987.

<sup>549</sup> Weekend Argus 21 November 1987.

While it may not seem indicative of a major impact on the part of the ECC to suggest that by late 1987 it had achieved a growing acceptance of the need for alternatives to conscription in the liberal press, this was indeed significant because it undercut the state's attempt to link the security of the whole white community to ongoing compliance with its conscription demands. By keeping the moral dilemma of conscription in the public eye the ECC further encouraged the liberal press to use ECC issues to assert the link between apartheid and the SADF, while redefining patriotism. Moreover, this reservoir of white frustration fuelled the "Alternative National Service" campaign of 1988.<sup>550</sup>

In 1988 the "Castle Three" story furthered this climate of growing white disillusionment. The pro-government press at first attempted to use the story to smear the ECC, with Beeld, for example, claiming to know "on good authority" that one of the servicemen accused of spying had previously requested exemption from military service and was possibly a member of the ECC. This indicated that the pro-government press still did not accept even the legal exemption process through the Board for Religious Objection, as Beeld implied that the request for exemption was part of a progression from pacifism to spying, with its associations of treason.<sup>551</sup> As the story unfolded, however, the state's demands for secrecy were received unsympathetically in the liberal press, and for the first time the PFP aligned itself with the ECC to investigate the state's implication in the smears.<sup>552</sup> This tendency to side with the ECC against its detractors continued in the liberal press' rejection of the March 1988 Veteran's for Victory publication Rape of Peace. The Sunday Times, for example, called the Veterans for Victory a "shadowy group", unknown to veterans' service organisations like the MOTHS or the South African Legion, and allowed the ECC space to dismiss the booklet as an "emotive tract" and to explain how it wanted to change the law to allow conscripts the freedom to "decide how they should serve their country".<sup>553</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Citizen quoted approvingly from the booklet and suggested that the 1985 ECC peace festival developed out of the ANC's consultative conference where the ANC had expressed itself as being in favour of whites joining its military wing.<sup>554</sup> Once again, the intention was to undermine the credibility of the ECC and to suggest that its peace actions concealed a more sinister purpose.

<sup>550</sup> Star 2 January, 6 January, 7 January, 13 January, 22 January, 28 January, 16 February, 18 February, 19 February, 23 February 1987, Cape Times 28 January, 20 February, 26 February 1987, Argus 18 February 1987, Beeld 19 February 1987, Citizen 27 January, 19 February 1987, Business Day 10 September, 13 November 1987.

<sup>551</sup> Beeld 21 December 1987. Similarly, Burger ran a story on independent candidate Wynand Malan, which focused on his contention that the ECC were "nie so sleg", presumably to damn him in the eyes of potential voters. Burger 29 October 1987.

<sup>552</sup> Star 14 January, 20 February 1988, Weekly Mail 5 February, 19 February 1988, Cape Times 8 February 1988.

<sup>553</sup> Sunday Times 13 March 1988, Argus 19 March 1988

<sup>554</sup> Citizen 11 March 1988.



In the liberal press, however, other voices were supporting the ECC's claims against the SADF. By February 1988 the Star reported at length on academic Peter Vale's claims that the state had used the media, particularly television, to keep South Africans believing in the existence of a Soviet-led "total onslaught", so that the ECC was the only "competing message vis-à-vis whites".<sup>555</sup> Headlined "Military in charge, claims professor", the tone of the article suggested a new wariness of both the military's influence in government, and the accuracy of its threat perception. This trend continued as the Cape Times published a long letter from theologians Douglas Bax, John de Gruchy and J.Thompson which asked, "Is the SADF beyond morality?"<sup>556</sup> An Argus editorial admonished, "No matter how unpopular the ECC's cause may be among a large sector of the population, the fact is that it is a lawful organisation. The mere suggestion that a large and powerful arm of the state is spending time and money on undermining a legal organisation within the society it is paid to protect is a serious one."<sup>557</sup>

A concomitant aspect of this growing disillusionment with the SADF and increased acceptance of its connection with upholding NP policies was a new openness in the opposition press to non-military solutions. The Sunday Tribune ran an article about the "fallacy of WHAM" (winning hearts and minds) strategy, and argued that the only reasonable alternative was political discussion.<sup>558</sup> From the proportion of state revenue spent on defence to those questioning the morality of the conflict, the voices calling for alternatives became louder, with the Sunday Star, for example, suggesting at the end of an article on an inquest into security force brutality in the townships, "There comes a time when the cure for what officialdom calls terrorism and subversion is worse than the disease."<sup>559</sup>

Nevertheless, white fears and concern over the future still created wariness about ending conscription. An article in Business Day, for instance, was sharply critical of the ECC and "all others who imagine that the solution to South Africa's problem is to destroy the civil administration".<sup>560</sup> The moderate demands of the ECC's 1988 "Alternative Service" campaign, however, drew sympathetic media attention, particularly as the costs of conscription within the white community were increasingly obvious. The trials of Ivan Toms and David Bruce drew attention to the stark choices facing conscripts.<sup>561</sup> The SADF suicide rate remained in the news, while the Sunday Tribune linked a range of social ills, from suicide and vehicle accidents to rape, heart disease, divorce, and drug abuse, to "war psychosis". The Citizen emphasised that it was his objection to the demands of military service on his sons which had led prominent PFP member Peter Nixon to decide to emigrate. A letter in the Natal Witness similarly explained that Dean of the

<sup>555</sup> Star 12 February 1988.

<sup>556</sup> Cape Times 23 February 1988.

<sup>557</sup> Argus 19 February 1988.

<sup>558</sup> Sunday Tribune 24 January 1988.

<sup>559</sup> Weekly Mail 11 March 1988, Sunday Tribune 6 March 1988, Sunday Star 13 March 1988.

<sup>560</sup> Business Day 24 February 1988.

<sup>561</sup> Argus 8 February 1988, Pretoria News 8 February 1988, Star 20 February 1988.

Faculty of Law at the University of Natal Professor Laurence Boulle had decided to emigrate because the “socio-political state of country leaves little prospect for the future of my children, particularly with increasing militarisation taking place”.<sup>562</sup>

Older issues also continued to be linked to the new campaign. The Weekly Mail, for example, reminded readers of the state’s continuing refusal to release non-reporting figures, headlining the article “Magnus says little but his silence speaks volumes”, and criticised the state for using billions of rand of taxpayers money, while throwing a “cloak of secrecy” over activities which might be “politically embarrassing”.<sup>563</sup> The ongoing banning of the ECC on Stellenbosch campus also continued to raise issues of freedom of speech in both the English and Afrikaans press.<sup>564</sup>

By the time the ECC met with the SADF in June 1988 a range of newspapers were expressing encouragement for the idea of alternatives to the current system of military conscription.<sup>565</sup> By July indicators of decreasing support for conscription included an article in the Weekend Argus which suggested South Africa’s aerial strength was seriously compromised, in contrast to the Citizen which the same day carried an article complacently reporting “SA military power on parade”.<sup>566</sup> The Star quoted Slabbert’s views that the government was lying to the public about Angola, and soon afterwards the Sunday Star, while reporting that white South Africans still had “every confidence” in the SADF, also headlined “War-weary whites support a settlement”.<sup>567</sup> After the Bruce trial the Sunday Star canvassed student opinion. While white RAU students still claimed it was a privilege to serve in the SADF, they agreed that the six-year sentence was too harsh. University of the Witwatersrand student attitudes varied from acquiescence, doing two years to stay out of jail, to definite plans to emigrate.<sup>568</sup> By the end of July the Sunday Tribune reported the call-up was a major factor cited by new doctors deciding to emigrate, and a week later the Sunday Star graphically demonstrated the skills gap left by emigration in its touched-up graduating class photograph, with the proportion planning to emigrate blacked out.<sup>569</sup>

By mid-1988 conscription was drawing continuous press attention from both the English and Afrikaans press (see Chart Five). Reports about David Bruce’s sentencing at the end of July were followed by the 3 August stand of the 143. While the Volksblad dismissed Bruce’s case as emotional and claimed that his duty, like everyone else’s, was to

<sup>562</sup> Sunday Star 13 March 1988, Citizen 19 February 1988, Sunday Tribune 24 January 1988, Natal Witness 4 February 1988.

<sup>563</sup> Weekly Mail 4 March 1988, Cape Times 2 March 1988.

<sup>564</sup> Burger 7 March 1988, Pretoria News 31 March 1988.

<sup>565</sup> Business Day 20 June 1988, Weekly Mail 24 June, 30 June 1988, Star 1 July, 4 July 1988.

<sup>566</sup> Weekend Argus 2 July 1988, Citizen 2 July 1988.

<sup>567</sup> Star 13 July 1988, Sunday Star 24 July 1988.

<sup>568</sup> Sunday Star 24 July 1988.

<sup>569</sup> Sunday Tribune 31 July 1988, Sunday Star 7 August 1988.

carry out his God-given task to protect his fatherland, Rapport ran an article acknowledging that soldiers experienced emotional and psychological difficulties related to their national service.<sup>570</sup> While much of the pro-government coverage of the 143 was predictably hostile, Beeld did include an article commenting that 600 SADF soldiers had died since 1975. The article still toed the patriotic line, claiming that many more enemy soldiers had died, and calling on whites to do their duty so that the conflict would be over and national service could be reduced.<sup>571</sup> However, this counting of the cost was a shift from earlier bellicose attitudes that the SADF could defend South Africa indefinitely, again suggesting creeping war weariness even in the sector most supportive of the SADF.

In the liberal press the Bruce trial led to criticism of the state for failing to provide acceptable alternatives. The Pretoria News, Daily News and Argus, for example, agreed with General Malan that citizens could not arbitrarily decide which laws to obey, but added that if he offered alternatives he would find it easier to win compliance. Moreover, the Pretoria News told Malan he was wasting his time attacking the ECC since the debate on conscription had spread “way beyond the ECC to the churches and political parties” so that despite the emergency regulations to contain criticism of the system of compulsory military service, conscription remained a “contentious issue which impacts the lives of many thousands of young South Africans”. Similarly, the Cape Times editor chided Malan for over-reacting in his diatribe against the ECC, which he had described as “the vanguard of those forces that are intent on wrecking the present dispensation and its renewal”. The editor claimed that rather than being a threat to the state, the ECC was a “worthy and useful organisation operating above board in perfectly legal fashion” to press for alternatives to purely military service. The editor of the Star went further, linking the call for alternatives directly to the state’s deployment of the SADF either to “preserve a sullen peace in the townships or defending ill-defined principles in an undeclared war far beyond the country’s borders”.<sup>572</sup> This criticism of the NP’s deployment of the SADF continued in the Sunday Times, which argued that conscripts particularly opposed township deployment, while the Sunday Star was more explicit, claiming that a growing number of conscripts “abhor the fact that the SADF is being used increasingly in the civilian arena to prop up apartheid”.<sup>573</sup> The Weekly Mail of 5 August ran a front page cartoon contrasting a military juggernaut bearing Malan’s face and sprouting his accusations against the ECC, with the small, defenceless figure of a lone ECC member. This power inversion was given added impact by a 1915 quotation from General Barry Hertzog, opposing the conscription of South African soldiers to fight in Namibia in 1915, which had been used as a defence of his refusal to serve by André Zaïman, one of the 143. Hertzog had accused the government of taking away the liberties of the

<sup>570</sup> Volksblad 28 July 1988, Rapport 10 July 1988.

<sup>571</sup> Beeld 4 August 1988.

<sup>572</sup> Argus 5 August 1988, Cape Times 5 August 1988, Daily News 5 August 1988, Star 5 August 1988.

<sup>573</sup> Star 3 August 1988, 4 August 1988, Volksblad 3 August, 4 August 1988, Business Day 4 August 1988, Pretoria News 4 August 1988, Eastern Province Herald 4 August 1988, Cape Times 4 August 1988, Natal Witness 4 August 1988, Daily News 4 August 1988, Vaderland 4 August, 5 August 1988, Daily Dispatch 4 August 1988, Grocott’s Mail 5 August 1988, Weekly Mail 5 August 1988, Argus 5 August 1988, Sunday Times 7 August 1988, Sunday Star 7 August 1988.

people, including freedom of the press and freedom of speech, and warned the Minister of Defence that he “would do well to listen to the voice of the people”. This juxtapositioning of the Afrikaner voice calling for freedom from government tyranny with the graphic depiction of the opposition impact of the ECC and a detailed article on the 143 led to the banning of this issue.

Nevertheless, conscription continued to feature heavily in the press, including reports that a move to commit the PFP to supporting both objectors and campaigns aimed at ending conscription had been narrowly defeated three days after the stand of the 143.<sup>574</sup> The Sunday Tribune chose to focus on the defection of Afrikaner André Zaaiman.<sup>575</sup> In the eastern Cape the press reported that a right-wing businessman refused to serve a camp.<sup>576</sup> With both the tone and content of the press making the divisive impact of conscription increasingly apparent, the state soon had little option but to ban the ECC outright.

Reporting of the ban was widespread and indicated the continued potential of conscription to polarise white opinion. Media opponents of the ECC reported the official press release faithfully. Both the Burger and the Volksblad ran stories of student support for the ban, with comment from Jeugkrug chair Marthinus van Schalkwyk to the effect that ECC members clearly placed themselves within the ANC-UDF alliance. The leader of the Populêre Studente Alliansie at Stellenbosch argued in favour of free speech, but agreed the ECC’s “smear campaign” against the SADF could not be allowed to continue.<sup>577</sup> When coloured parliamentary leader Allan Hendrikse criticised the ban, the pro-government press reported in detail Malan’s attack on him as being “emotional”, “reckless” and “irresponsible”, and “playing into the hands of terrorists”. These responses indicated that the pro-government press remained committed to a “total onslaught” interpretation of the conflict which refuted opposition where this appeared to undermine white security.<sup>578</sup>

In the opposition press criticism of the ban was widespread, indicating how successfully the ECC had been integrated into existing liberal concerns about contracting white freedoms. While the Weekly Mail scathingly noted that the Minister could not even ban the organisation efficiently, calling it the End Conscription Committee in the first official banning order, other newspapers which had not always been supportive of the ECC’s objectives no longer uncritically accepted the state’s “total onslaught” rationale.<sup>579</sup> The Cape Times used the government’s own admission that “many”

<sup>574</sup> Cape Times 6 August 1988.

<sup>575</sup> Sunday Tribune 7 August 1988.

<sup>576</sup> Eastern Province Herald 15 August 1988.

<sup>577</sup> Burger 23 August 1988, Volksblad 23 August 1988.

<sup>578</sup> Citizen 23 August 1988.

<sup>579</sup> Star 23 August, 26 August 1988, Weekly Mail 26 August 1988, Sunday Times 21 August 1988, Argus 22 August 1988, Cape Times 23 August 1988, Daily News 23 August 1988, Eastern Province Herald 23 August 1988, Natal Mercury 23 August 1988, Pretoria News 23 August 1988.

had been influenced to refuse to remind readers of evidence of growing resistance, such as the stand of the 143.<sup>580</sup>

The opposition press also emphasised the costs of conscription. Not only the sympathetic Weekly Mail but also the Business Day printed a long letter from Johannesburg chair Chris de Villiers headlined "Conscription issue won't go away", highlighting both the state's intransigence and high-handedness, and the fact that mainstream political parties had begun to take up conscription issues.<sup>581</sup>

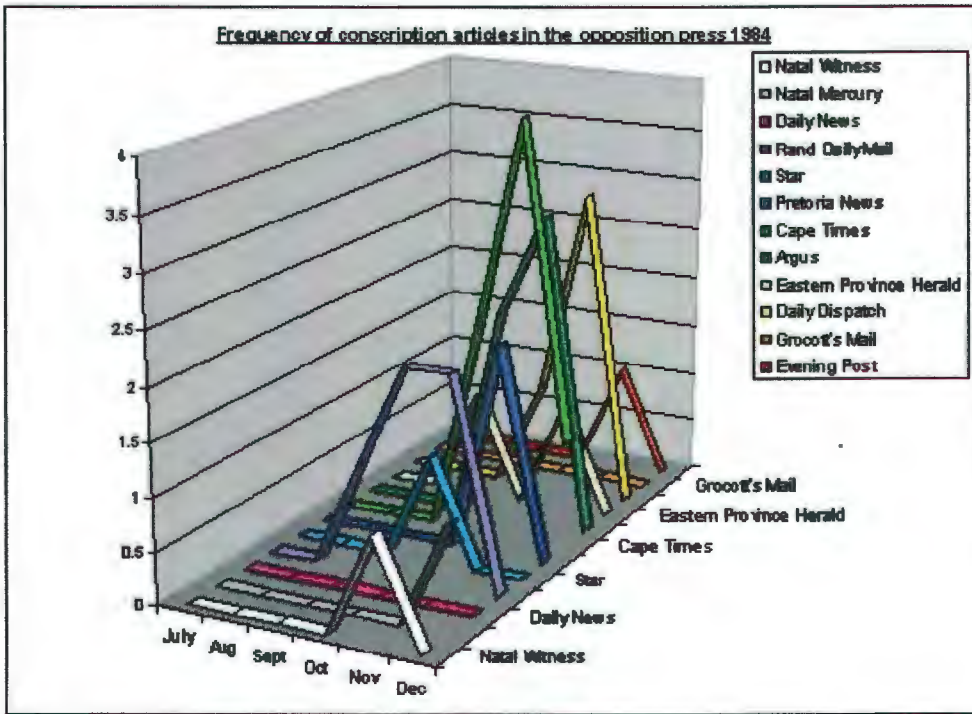
Analysis of white responses to conscription between 1983 and 1988 as indicated by the commercial press thus demonstrates a number of significant indicators of changing white public opinion towards conscription. Throughout this chapter the term "liberal press" has been used to cover a range of opposition opinion, from the very supportive Weekly Mail and Cape Times, to the more conservative Pretoria News, and the frequently hostile Natal Mercury. Overall, however, the tone and content of conscription reporting in this sector of the press between 1984 and 1988 shows a movement, albeit uneven, from an acceptance of the ECC as a peripheral opposition movement whose right to campaign was in question, to a legitimate organisation addressing an issue of great concern to whites, whose repression reflected the loss of white freedoms under apartheid. While the ECC was frequently dissatisfied with the press because it did not engage with the more radical elements of its call, as the ECC's interim demands were increasingly accepted as valid and reasonable this encouraged whites to articulate their frustration around conscription, to question the morality of SADF deployments and to seek alternatives. Moreover, the ECC did not have to win white support to have an opposition impact. While the ECC continued to be staunchly opposed by the pro-government and right wing press, its continued public presence encouraged the right wing press to use the ECC's existence to criticise the state for losing control; compounding the liberal press' questioning of the internal deployment of the SADF, and its criticism that repression of the ECC was unwarranted. As conscription issues increasingly polarised the white left and right, the NP's control of the middle ground became more tenuous as it could demonstrate neither convincing reform, nor significant socio-economic or political stability or progress.

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<sup>580</sup> Cape Times 23 August 1988.

<sup>581</sup> Business Day 5 September 1988.

Chart One: Frequency of conscription articles in the white press 1984



Key throughout:

x-axis: month

y-axis: frequency

z-axis: publication

Although the Financial Mail was not a newspaper in the sense of the other publications discussed, before the advent of Business Day it was one of the few indicators of business opinion.

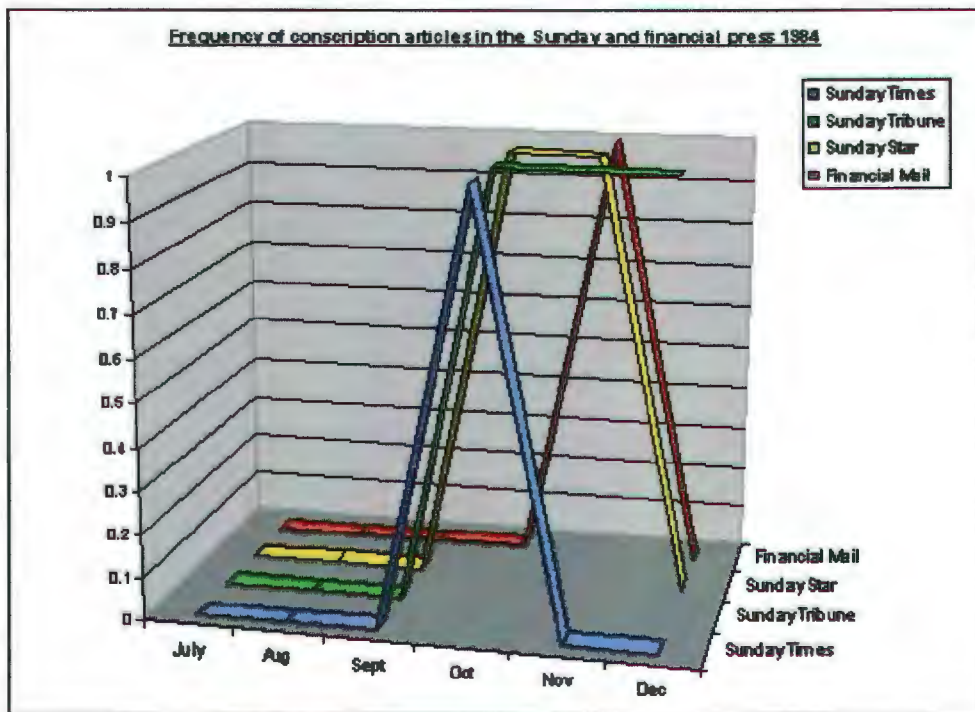
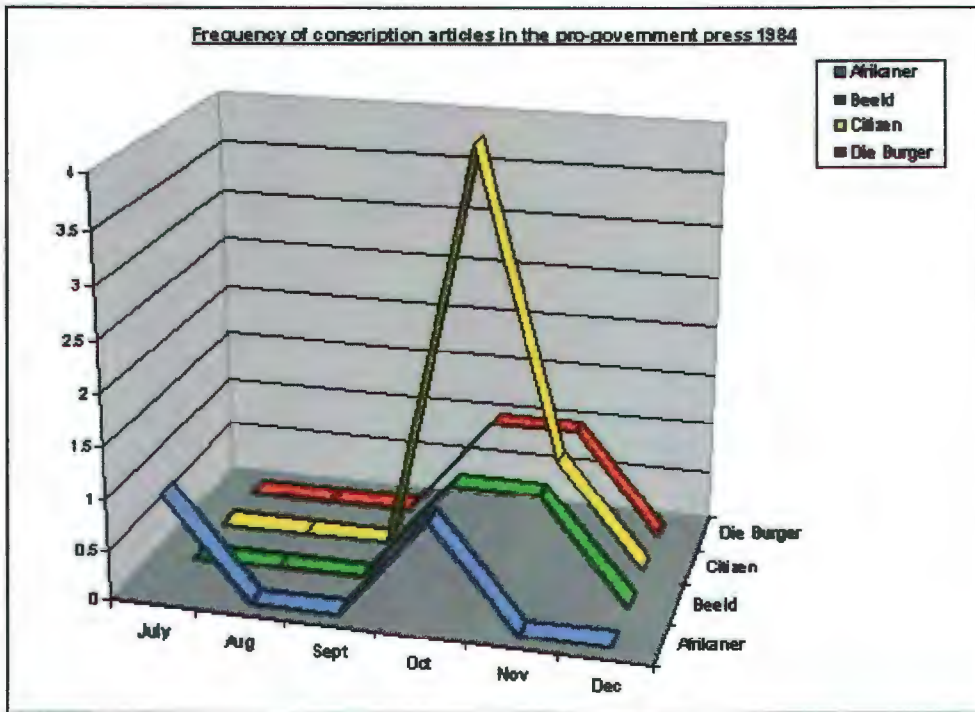
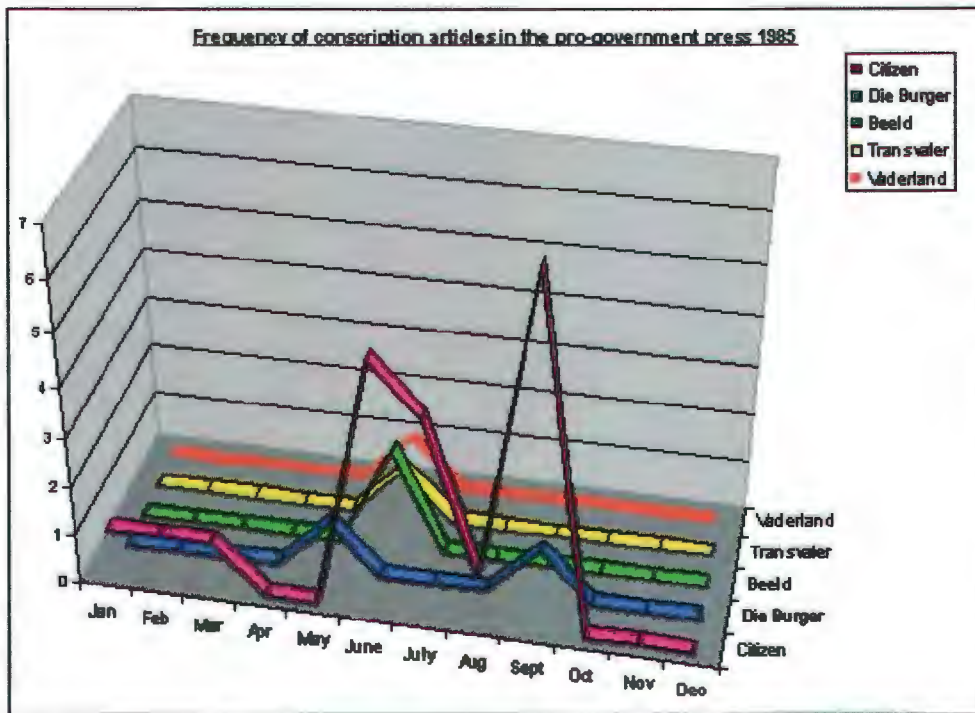
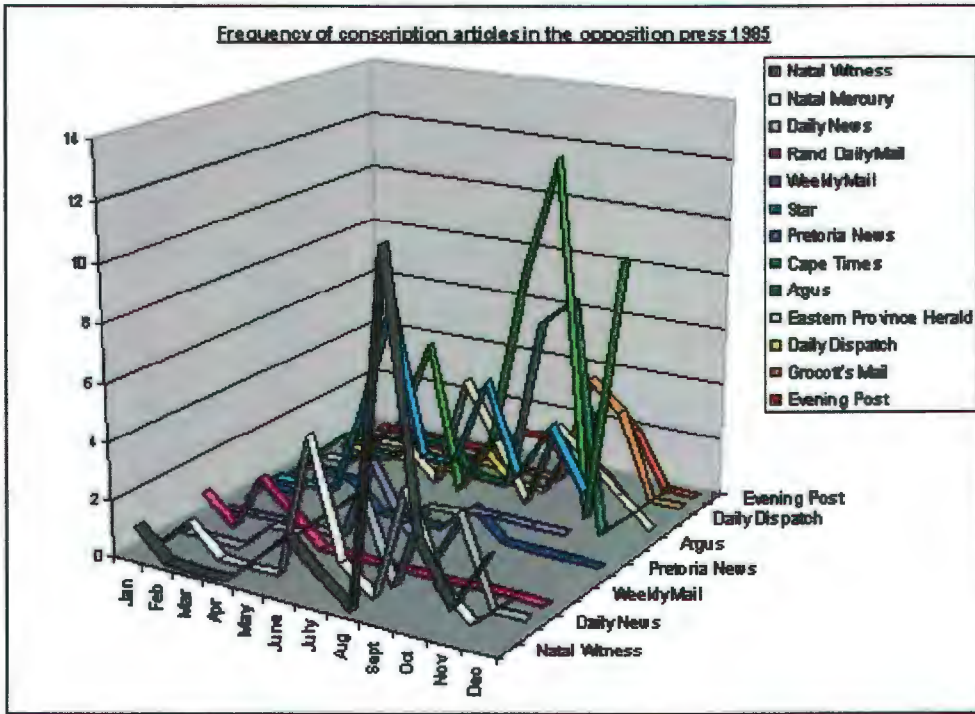




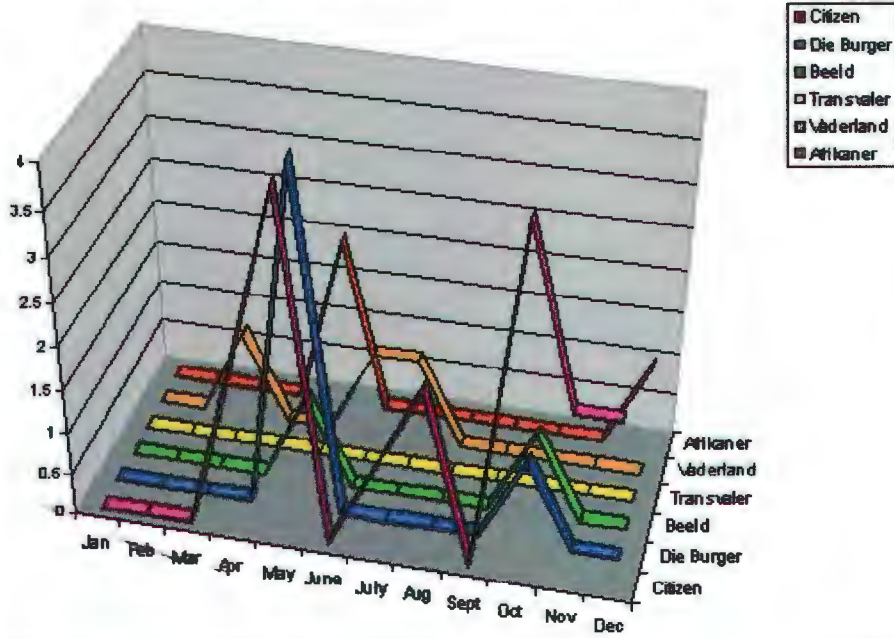
Chart Two: Frequency of conscription articles in the white press 1985







Frequency of conscription issues in the pro-government press 1986



Frequency of conscription issues in the Sunday and financial press 1986

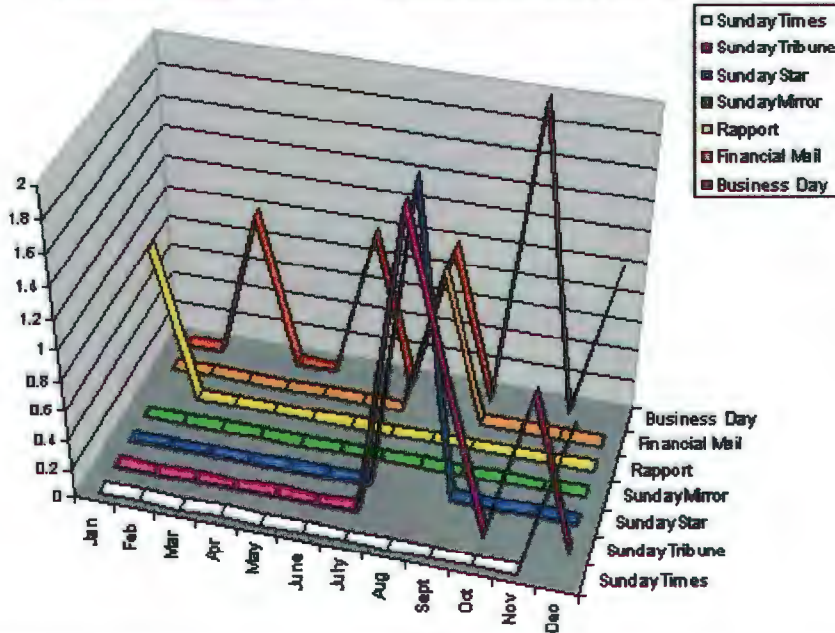
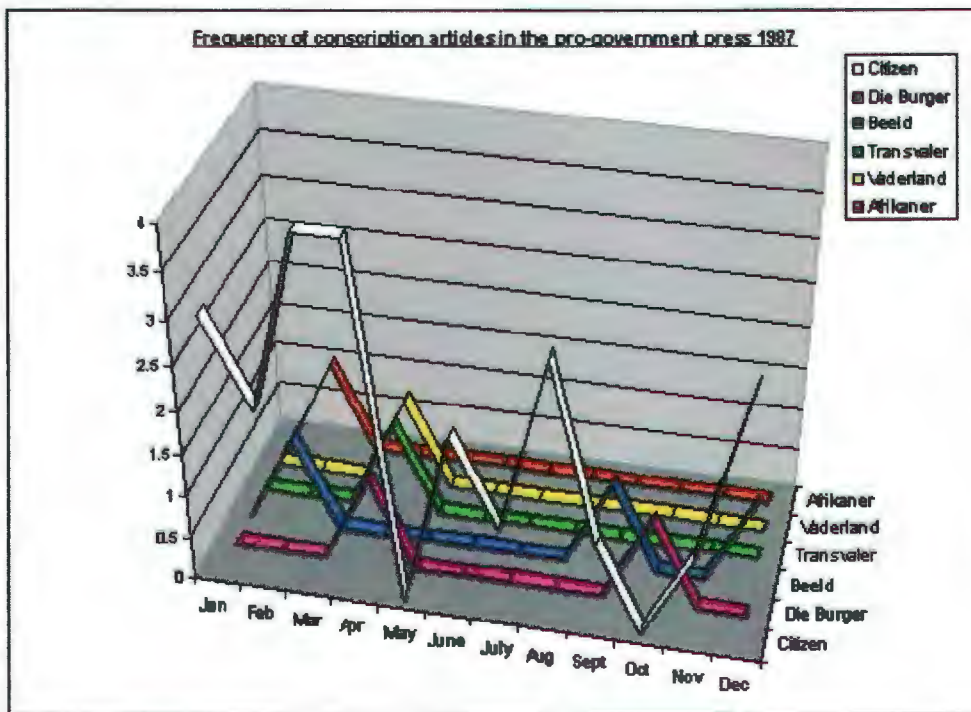
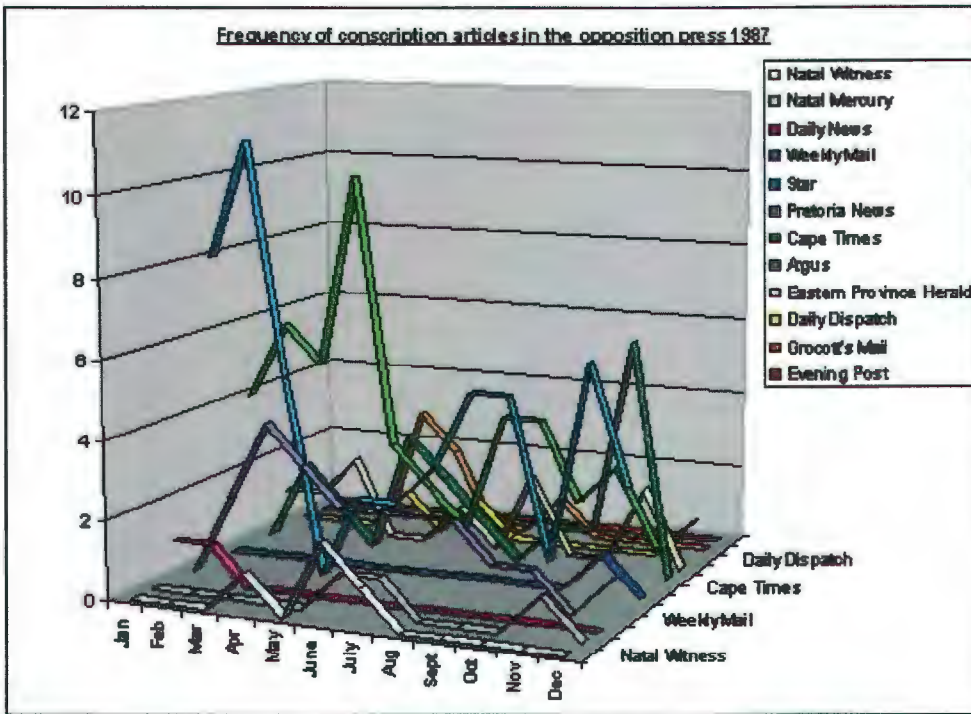


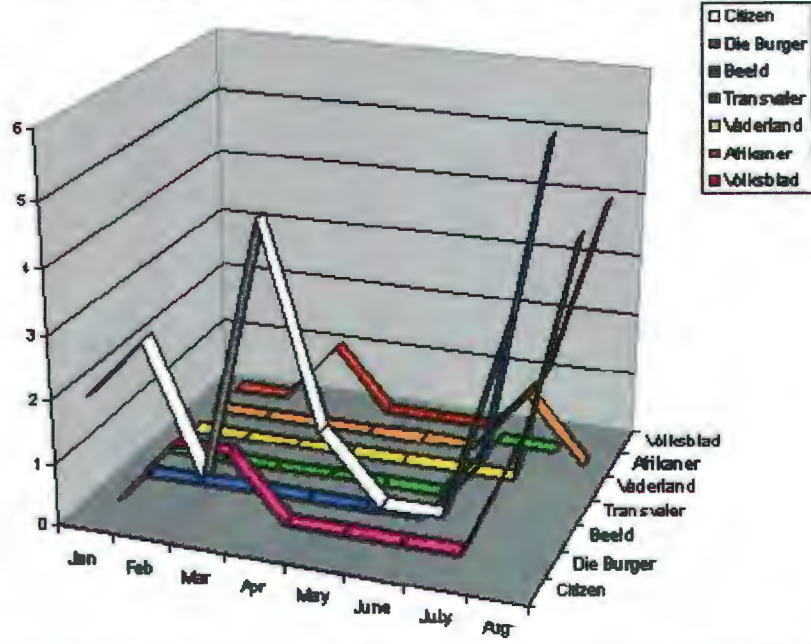
Chart Four: Frequency of conscription articles in the white press 1987



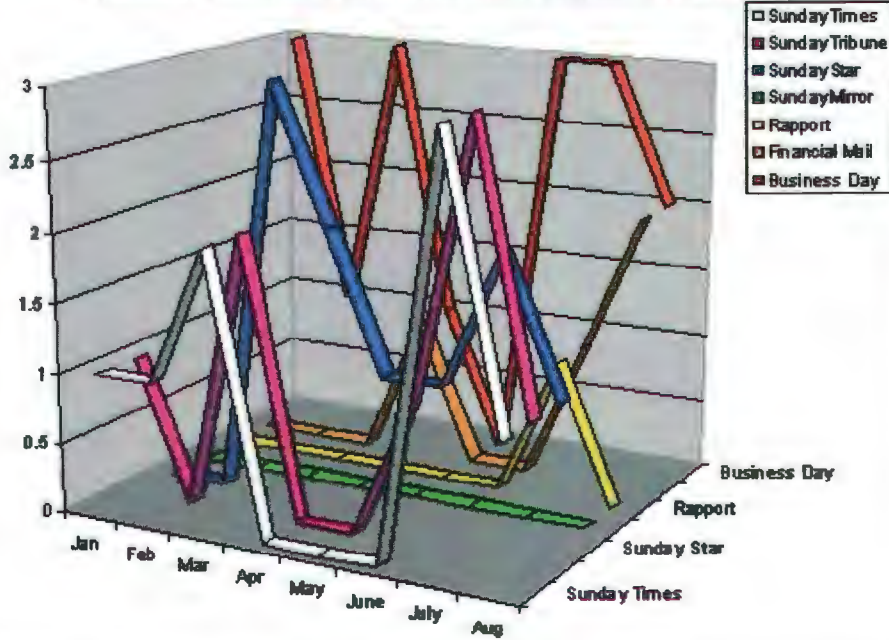




Frequency of conscription articles in the pro-government press 1988



Frequency of conscription articles in the Sunday and financial press 1988



## Chapter Eight

Being heard II: Changing white  
attitudes to conscription as reflected  
by white popular magazines.

Like the press, popular magazines are an unselfconscious record of the norms and attitudes of the period, while their commercial orientation makes them a valuable reflection of their readership's opinions.<sup>582</sup> Between 1983 and 1988 the press represented the more analytical facet of white public discourse, while magazines addressed issues like escapism and self-improvement, and, significantly, barely featured conscription *per se*. Instead, the ongoing debate in the letters pages of Fair Lady about whether magazines were supposed to be offering a respite from reality or educating their readership suggested that difficult issues were not welcomed by a considerable segment of magazine readership. Despite the lack of overt conscription coverage, analysis of the content and tone of a number of magazines of this period will suggest some of the expectations which helped to shape the predominantly middle-class white society the ECC was trying to reach, as well as indicate the growing stresses within that society.

In the 1980s academics pointed to a developing "culture of militarism" among whites, evidenced by advertising, recreational pursuits which emphasised combat, and the development of a mindset geared for conflict rather than negotiation. Certainly this seems to have been a goal of the official discourse, opposed by the ECC through its alternative peace culture. However, the magazines of the period indicated that whites also had a strong desire to deny the conflict and ignore its realities as far as possible.<sup>583</sup> This was exacerbated by the state of emergency which limited public discussion and denied whites access to information about township life as well as downplaying the groundswell of popular support for the ANC. The ECC was an important counter to this façade of normality, confronting whites with the continued presence of troops in the townships, articulating white discontent, and exposing evidence of a society at war with itself.

While more "intellectual" magazines, like Leadership or Die Suid-Afrikaan, offered studied analyses by academics or high-powered figures in politics or business, six mainstream popular magazines will be considered here, as a means of exploring the impact of conscription on ordinary whites. Scope was the only non-specialist magazine for men in this period. Fair Lady aimed at a mainly female English readership between about 18 and 50 years old, while Cosmopolitan appealed to the "yuppie" English female market, relatively wealthy, more educated, and more liberated in their views. Sanie and Rooi Roos were aimed at the Afrikaans female market, carrying mainly the traditional fare of

<sup>582</sup> Women's magazines, in particular, ran frequent surveys to make sure they remained in tune with their readership. The significant dip in readership which accompanied the resignation of Fair Lady editor Dene Smuts over the refusal of publisher Nasionale Pers to run a story on independent candidate Dennis Worrall in 1987 indicated that where publications offended their readership they could expect a decline in circulation. See footnote 584.

<sup>583</sup> Price, A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force, pp.201, 192, 383, 388-389. In her interviews with conscripts Price noted that conscripts experienced a "general lack of interest" among the public. A conscript told her "...the people at home didn't really know what was going on in the army, and that was a most frustrating thing. They were living their normal lives and didn't know what the army was all about, what so many young men were going through, what was happening to the sensitive people". Another said that he "had a year of experience which nobody wanted to talk about. Whenever I tried to interject with my experience people didn't want to know, and even if they did want to know, they couldn't understand". Conscripts felt their experiences in the SADF were so divorced from the priorities of civilian life they felt "lost and disorientated" when they were discharged.

women's magazines, cooking, crafts, relationship advice, fashion and self-improvement articles, although Sarie was slightly more upmarket. De Kat only operated from July 1985, and was a "yuppie" Afrikaans publication for the cultural and economic elite, male and female, with a cover price three times that of the other two Afrikaans publications.<sup>584</sup>

Since conscription particularly affected men, the definition of a masculine target audience by the only men's magazine in this period is revealing. Scope chiefly sold vicarious thrills, from provocatively posed women to high-speed vehicles; from weapons and extreme sports to serialised adventure novels. In addition to this escapist content, Scope's tone was sensationalist, presenting a world of clear-cut heroes and villains. The definition of successful masculinity it peddled was defined exclusively in terms of heterosexuality and male dominance, through control and power, whether through fast cars or dangerous weapons, with physical courage glorified, in both sport and national service.<sup>585</sup>

Formulaic, with about as much introspection as a rowdy bar, Scope is therefore a prime example of a source of information about changing male attitudes. Scope ran many well-illustrated articles which glorified weaponry, such as "Man's heart is in his weapons",<sup>586</sup> and equated weapons with manhood, in articles like that extolling "the virile beauty of a hand-cut blade",<sup>587</sup> while war games were advertised as entertainment.<sup>588</sup> Several "glamour" shoots, also featured James Bond co-stars, and scantily clad women posed with weapons, or even draped with a machine-gun magazine, as a "necklace".<sup>589</sup> Scope used women as "rewards" for serving soldiers, through its pen-pal service, complimentary copies of Scope for men on the border and the dedication of one of its topless spreads to the "troepies".<sup>590</sup>

Throughout the period from 1983 to 1988 much of the tone and content of Scope reinforced total onslaught discourse, with Russia frequently depicted as being behind a policy of deception designed to win over the unwitting people of South Africa.<sup>591</sup> The destructive intent of South Africa's enemies was an ongoing theme. Articles, often with graphic

<sup>584</sup> Circulation figures according to SA Barometer vol.2, no.7, 22 April 1988, p.101. Fair Lady 18 March 1987.

	July-December 1986	January-June 1987	July-December 1987
<u>Cosmopolitan</u>	115 414	118 296	123 459
<u>Fair Lady</u>	180 843	168 786	179 133
<u>Scope</u>	-	98 295	109 744
<u>Your Family</u>	-	255 831	-
<u>Huisgenoot</u>	-	507 484	-

The last two magazines, although having the largest circulation, are not relevant to this study as they were largely skills-, rather than information-oriented. Unfortunately Sarie, Rooi Roos and De Kat were not included in this circulation count.

<sup>585</sup> Scope promoted events like the Denim-man action hero competition, Scope 17 June 1983.

<sup>586</sup> J.Cock and L.Nathan (eds), Society at war (New York, St Martin's Press, 1989) pp.10-12. Cock, "A high price for freedom", vol.53, April/May 1988 pp.19-23. Scope 20 April 20 1984.

<sup>587</sup> Scope 22 July 1983.

<sup>588</sup> Scope July 8 1983, 11 May 1984, 29 August 1986.

<sup>589</sup> Scope 12 October 1984, 8 March 1985.

<sup>590</sup> Scope 14 January 1983, 20 May 1983. Price, A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force, p.71.

<sup>591</sup> Scope 7 September 1984, 16 November 1984, 17 May 1985, 10 January 1986, 17 January 1986, 18 July 1986.



footage, showed African countries and those under communist rule or attack, as places of civilian suffering where the rule of law was disregarded.<sup>592</sup> Similarly, an article on the training of women fighters in Libya claiming that “little girls are turned into cold-eyed killers”, was typical of the portrayal of South Africa’s enemies as the “unthinking products of ongoing propaganda”.<sup>593</sup>

Articles also contrasted the threat to South Africa with the SADF’s offensive capacity, touting the power of the SADF military machine through glossy photo-stories,<sup>594</sup> as well as covering weapons development in countries South Africa regarded as friendly.<sup>595</sup> Coverage of the ANC remained hostile throughout, particularly as the guerrilla campaign gained momentum. Articles like “The ANC terror plan to destroy South Africa”, and “Comrade Joe Slovo: the man who hates South Africa”, portrayed the liberation struggle as essentially destructive,<sup>596</sup> while UNITA was extolled as a band of heroic freedom fighters wanting only to “be master of [their] own piece of Africa”.<sup>597</sup> By contrast, an August 1988 article suggested the Cubans would be in Angola for a long time as war was Cuba’s most profitable export, reducing the enemy to the level of mercenaries.<sup>598</sup> Individual SADF unit leaders and special units were interviewed as heroes, further underscoring the contention that South African soldiers and their allies defended civilised principles, while the motivation of enemy soldiers was questionable.<sup>599</sup>

Scope was thus very much in tune with the state’s discourse of external threat, with the ANC as a destructive enemy, and the SADF as whites’ protection against chaos. Increasingly, however, the realities of ongoing conflict, economic decline and continuous conscription demands began to intrude even into Scope’s escapist world. As early as 1984, South Africa’s reliance on American film models exposed it to the crises of returning Vietnam soldiers, struggling to readjust. Reviews of a series of war films from “Apocalypse now” to “Platoon” and “Purple Hearts” began to consider concerns about the effects of war.<sup>600</sup> Secondly, disquiet over the growing dislocation within South Africa kept intruding. After 1983 the creeping malaise of HIV/AIDS tempered gung-ho articles on sex, while a declining economy meant articles about expensive cars were increasingly just window-shopping, and by 1986 a report exposed desperate white poverty.<sup>601</sup> In 1985 the article “Family killings: a South African ‘epidemic’ ” reported that some 200 people had died in two years and quoted a psychologist who linked these to deepening recession and political instability which “threatens

<sup>592</sup> These included an article headed “The 12 most sinister men in Mozambique” which turned out to be about the Mozambique cabinet. Scope 25 February 1983, 25 March 1983, 8 April 1983, 2 June 1983, 17 June 1983, 19 August 1983, 6 April 1984, 7 September 1984, 16 November 1984, 18 January 1985, 25 January 1985, 4 October 1985, 24 January 1986, 28 March 1986, 13 June 1986, 21 November 1986, 12 August 1988.

<sup>593</sup> Scope 17 June 1983.

<sup>594</sup> Scope 20 January 1984, 19 October 1984, 13 May 1983, 19 July 1985.

<sup>595</sup> Scope 28 January 1983, 11 November 1983, 11 October 1985, 19 June 1987, 10 January 1986.

<sup>596</sup> Scope 10 January 1986, 18 February 1983.

<sup>597</sup> Scope 15 June 1984, 29 June 1984, 29 November 1985.

<sup>598</sup> Scope 12 August 1988.

<sup>599</sup> Scope 16 December 1983, 25 January 1985, 18 March 1983, 19 October 1984, 19 July 1985, 17 January 1986, 7 March 1986, 18 July 1986.

<sup>600</sup> Scope 10 February 1984.

<sup>601</sup> Scope 26 September 1986.

to spill over into civil war".<sup>602</sup> By 1987 the link between the conflict and social dislocation was made much more explicit as Scope quoted Lloyd Vogelmann of the Applied Psychology Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand as saying "the troubled political situation in the country will lead to more family murders as people feel insecure, unstable and unable to impose a sense of order in their lives".<sup>603</sup>

Thirdly, while the ANC's widening of its guerrilla campaign led to articles like "How to survive a terrorist attack",<sup>604</sup> in which the tone was highly critical of the "heinous crimes" committed against civilians in the "name of freedom"<sup>605</sup> with no contextualisation of the conflict, the issue of troop deployment in the townships was treated differently. The editor assured readers that Scope was not turning into a political magazine, but he stated that the unrest in South African townships was "an issue of such massive social concern that it reaches far beyond the arena of politics" so that it would be "gross negligence" to ignore the violence in the townships.<sup>606</sup> When letters criticised Scope for running the story on the grounds that "we see enough violence daily on TV and in the press", the editor replied that unlike other countries where politics were abstract ideologies, in South Africa politics "affect each and every one of us every day".<sup>607</sup>

Thus although Scope continued to glamorise war in general, and to extol the SADF and accept its role as "defensive", by late 1986 it was also beginning to document a mood of resistance and unease. In an article on white emigration Scope stated that the "white community must be made to understand that they will face growing pressures if they concede less than what democratic equity requires".<sup>608</sup> A July 1988 article noted that national servicemen disappeared with "frightening regularity", especially when going home on pass, evidence of a growing opposition to the demands of conscription.<sup>609</sup> In a 1987 interview liberal icon Alan Paton claimed to detect a "tremendous mood of despondency among the young".<sup>610</sup>

Scope reflected the mindset only of a section of white South African males. Nevertheless, it is a useful indicator of white attitudes because its emphases were so similar to those of the SADF in glorifying war, uncritically accepting the premises of "total onslaught", and associating successful masculinity with combat experience. By 1988 the growing mood of uncertainty, despite the magazine's core goal of escapism, suggested a considerable shift in attitude from the

<sup>602</sup> Scope 22 November 1985.

<sup>603</sup> Scope 4 December 1987.

<sup>604</sup> Scope 4 October 1985.

<sup>605</sup> Scope 25 January 1986.

<sup>606</sup> Scope 25 October 1985, 20 September 1985.

<sup>607</sup> Scope 25 October 1985.

<sup>608</sup> Scope 7 November 1986, 19 June 1987.

<sup>609</sup> Scope 14 July 1988.

<sup>610</sup> Scope 7 November 1986, 13 March 1987.

uncritical acceptance of the long-term efficacy of “total onslaught” solutions in 1983. In a 1985 review of the book Like the wind: the story of the South African army, the reviewer claimed that reassurances about the capability of the SADF by Chief of the Defence Force General Jannie Geldenhuys were “long overdue in the current climate of uncertainty”,<sup>611</sup> suggesting a growing white need for reassurance, as opposed to the previous gung-ho mood. By 1988 the tone had become more fatalistic. Articles like “The AWB prepare for Armageddon”,<sup>612</sup> and “Shades of survival: what if the crunch came in SA?”<sup>613</sup> suggested Scope had not changed its definition of the enemy, but there was no longer the assurance that military solutions would inevitably save the day.

Equally significant was the fact that an examination of issues from 1983 to 1988 does not support the “culture of militarism” hypothesis. Rather, as a proportion of the output of a weekly magazine, war topics occupied a very limited space. Very few advertisements targeted conscripts directly, and only one fashion spread, in 1983, featured khaki.<sup>614</sup> What prompted more in-depth investigation and criticism was evidence of social dislocation and economic decline. While the magazine never even acknowledged the ECC existed, let alone endorsed its position, the tone of Scope thus suggested that the ECC’s call for “Troops Out of the Townships” and campaigns which targeted the costs of conscription exacerbated existing points of disquiet in white society.

By contrast, Fair Lady was aimed at a generally liberal, middle-class female readership and under editors Jane Raphaely (-1983) and Dene Smuts (1984-1987) the content and tone of articles reflected a belief that women had the right and the duty to be exposed to injustice in South African society, and that political issues (in the sense of where power was located and how it was shared in society) affected daily life.<sup>615</sup> From 1983 successful black women were interviewed, making the predominantly white readership aware of a more educated and empowered sector of the black community, beyond their normal domestic worker contacts. From 1983 Fair Lady published a who’s who of South African women, including not only the more conventional business and academic achievers, but also a number of peace activists.<sup>616</sup> Fair Lady further explored issues of urban unrest, squatter camps and detentions,<sup>617</sup> but primarily espoused ameliorative efforts, with concern to foster better interracial relationships, rather than offering a critique of

<sup>611</sup> Scope 5 July 1985.

<sup>612</sup> Scope 6 May 1988.

<sup>613</sup> Scope 18 November 1988, 1 July 1988.

<sup>614</sup> Scope 9 December 1983.

<sup>615</sup> Fair Lady 23 February 1983, Raphaely noted that female insistence on the right to cover political issues on women’s pages in newspapers and in women’s magazines was highly contentious, but noted the growing power exercised by women in the United States and encouraged South African women to “realise their potential power”. Fair Lady 26 June 1985. As the conflict built, Smuts defended the publication of interviews with blacks like Winnie Mandela on the basis that “We cannot hope to understand our fellow South Africans or to reach political accord with them if we do not know what is going on in their communities and minds.”

<sup>616</sup> Fair Lady 4 May 1983.

<sup>617</sup> Fair Lady 27 November 1985, 14 May 1986, 22 January 1986.

the underlying conflict beyond a liberal opposition to the racial inequalities perpetrated by the apartheid regime.<sup>618</sup> When Cape Town ECC member Helen Zille was interviewed in 1984 there was no mention of her connection to the ECC, let alone an explanation of what the ECC stood for.<sup>619</sup> Similarly, an interview with singer Jennifer Fergusson, a contributor to the ECC record "Forces Favourites", noted her comments that a SABC television interviewer had been afraid he would lose his programme if she "talked about the pain in the country", but the article did not investigate what she meant by this or comment on the accuracy of her views.<sup>620</sup>

Moreover, while Smuts once introduced the idea of the structural violence of apartheid in discussing township violence,<sup>621</sup> on the readers' pages a debate continued between 1983 and 1988 between those who wanted escapist entertainment from a magazine, and those who welcomed the political content, or felt that it was valid in a South African context.<sup>622</sup> An initial reading of the magazine could leave one doubting that there was a war. Apart from one example in 1983, advertising did not target conscription. Editors Smuts and Raphaely claimed not to have taken any conscious decision on this, nor to have been pressured by their publishers to promote the "war effort", although Smuts noted she had faced "constant pressure from management" about social awareness articles.<sup>623</sup> There was one article on tuck boxes for "troopies", no fashion spreads with a militaristic flair, and only one agony column describing the difficulties of having a loved one "on the border".<sup>624</sup> Like Scope, however, this desire for escapism was continually brought up short by the increasingly intrusive realities of conscription, economic decline and societal conflict.

Fair Lady was a particularly significant indicator of the stresses on the liberal group the ECC was most directly targeting. In January 1983 Raphaely wrote "If we judge the importance of the issues raised in Fair Lady by the volume of mail they attract then the most burning issue of our times for the women of South Africa is the question of military duty in South West Africa."<sup>625</sup> Writing about the cease-fire with Angola in 1984, Smuts wrote that she felt "terrific resentment when an army wife but gaily forg[o]t the army between camps".<sup>626</sup> This encapsulated the conscription dilemma for whites. However concerned white women might have been about their men serving in the SADF there were no easy alternatives, and for many the only way to cope was escapism. Thus when an article by a conscript

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<sup>618</sup> Fair Lady 1 April 1987.

<sup>619</sup> Fair Lady 16 May 1984.

<sup>620</sup> Fair Lady 14 April 1988

<sup>621</sup> Fair Lady 10 July 1985.

<sup>622</sup> Fair Lady, see for example the period 26 June 1985-4 September 1985.

<sup>623</sup> Letter from Jane Raphaely to Merran Phillips 14 September 1998. Letter from Dene Smuts to Merran Phillips 30 October 1998.

<sup>624</sup> Fair Lady 24 August 1983, 27 July 1983, 14 November 1984.

<sup>625</sup> Fair Lady 12 January 1983.

<sup>626</sup> Fair Lady 4 April 1984.

described his feelings of being dislocated from his society through his experiences in the SADF, this generated no response on the letters' page.<sup>627</sup> There was nothing helpful to say.<sup>628</sup>

Emigration, too, drew numerous letters and articles. As early as 1985 the editor called on readers to be sensitive to grandparents bereft through emigration in the holiday period.<sup>629</sup> Some readers made an explicit connection between the decision to emigrate and conscription, particularly after the internal deployment of the SADF.<sup>630</sup> Letters touching on various aspects of emigration continued until Smuts' resignation, after which the entire magazine took on a more frivolous aspect.<sup>631</sup> However, even those who welcomed Fair Lady becoming "delightfully carefree"<sup>632</sup> could not avoid the intrusion of conscription.

As conscript deaths mounted in late 1987 and 1988, eventually the dam burst. In a long, emotionally charged article, two Afrikaans mothers described their pain and confusion on losing their sons. The boys' photographs were superimposed on a map of southern Africa, with South Africa's borders outlined in red to demonstrate clearly how far from the South African border the boys had been when they were killed. With the unselfconscious self-interest of grief, one of the mothers told the reporter "Isn't it terrible that it should be my son?" and she added, "You can never bring your child back. You are the one that suffers." She did not question the need for conscription but she was very bitter that her son had not been guarding the "border", but had been killed in a foreign country, and she told the reporter that many of those calling her in sympathy felt the same way.<sup>633</sup> Due to the emergency regulations, the journalist was careful to end the article with the disclaimer that she had been reporting on the anguish of two mothers, not about the rights and wrongs of war. Nevertheless she opened a floodgate of emotion. A girl whose boyfriend had been killed sent in a poem, a mother complained that she was doomed to "worry non-stop for two years", another wrote in expressing her relief that her sons were still small.<sup>634</sup> This suggested that the ECC's articulation of the personal costs of conscription was a highly fruitful avenue of opposition within this target group, and reinforces the contention that conscription eventually hamstrung the apartheid state because it feared that the cost of conscript deaths would lead to significant white resistance and criticism.

<sup>627</sup> Fair Lady 23 March 1983, 15 June 1983.

<sup>628</sup> Durban ECC activist Ann Colvin wrote of her frustration at coming back from overseas and finding the supposed "liberals" of Natal demonstrating a "supine acceptance" of apartheid. Again this was evidence that in the face of the costs of opposition it was easier to look for distractions. Interview with Durban ECC member Ann Colvin (1998).

<sup>629</sup> Fair Lady 27 November 1985.

<sup>630</sup> Fair Lady 30 October 1985.

<sup>631</sup> Fair Lady 22 July 1987, until the end of the period under discussion the strain this put on journalists can be seen in articles as desperate as a discussion of Margaret Thatcher's wardrobe, and endless covers of Princess Diana and Princess Caroline, as the magazine gave in to the escapist faction. Fair Lady 25 November 1987, ongoing calls for a return to the previous mix were ignored. An angry reader noted Fair Lady now had little about the country and issues confronting South African women but "serve[d] up an international star-studded line-up of features".

<sup>632</sup> Fair Lady 2 March 1988.

<sup>633</sup> Fair Lady 27 April 1988.

<sup>634</sup> Fair Lady 6 July 1988, 3 August 1988, 17 August 1988.

Like Fair Lady, Cosmopolitan ran articles on prominent black women. An article on women who died for peace, for example, did not only look at whites like Molly Blackburn, but also black women such as murdered activist Victoria Mxenge.<sup>635</sup> Cosmopolitan also overtly saluted those white women confronting the apartheid state. A 1986 article featured Dr Wendy Orr who blew the whistle on human rights abuses perpetrated against detainees,<sup>636</sup> and in 1987 national secretary of the ECC Adele Kirsten was included in an article "Lionhearts", which also featured Helen Joseph, a stalwart of the liberation struggle. The quest for publicity was initiated by the ECC. In 1986 Paula Hathorn wrote to both Raphaely and Smuts suggesting an article on conscription. While Smuts demurred out of concern about the emergency regulations, Cosmopolitan took up the challenge, but while the ECC wanted space to make a political case, Cosmopolitan needed a story with human interest, leading to a lengthy process of compromise. The resulting article presented Kirsten as an admirable person, who was prepared to stand up for her principles and take the consequences, which included being in hiding, constantly looking over her shoulder and living alone.<sup>637</sup> However, the focus of the magazine was on advising women on relationship issues, and showcasing high-profile, high-paying jobs, and a consumer lifestyle. This suggested that while the average reader may have been interested in Kirsten's story and even have had sympathy for her work, Cosmopolitan's target audience was unlikely to be attracted to political activism if the costs were so high.<sup>638</sup>

However, Kirsten also expressed the view that women were drawn to oppose conscription because of its effect on their lives, and the lives of those they loved. The impact of conscription at the personal level emerged again in the March 1988 article "Conscription makes war on love". The journalist bemoaned the fact that her fiancé had left the country rather than do military service in the townships. The article included input from a Johannesburg marriage counsellor who claimed that alcoholism, psychological disturbances and interfamilial violence could frequently be linked to "army experiences that have pushed conscripts beyond their level of endurance", and described interviews with women whose marriages had suffered as a result of their partners' military service, as well as mothers fearing for their sons. Steven Louw's testimony at Phillip Wilkinson's trial was repeated to suggest that men were seeing terrible things in the townships, the effects of which was bound to carry over into their civilian lives. Another psychologist was quoted as saying that township duty "often proves to be the breaking point for many conscripts". The article concluded that "we can't afford to lose any more of our men, whether through fighting or flight". This time the magazine faced pressure from the security branch, and General Malan threatened to ban any further stories about conscription in

<sup>635</sup> Cosmopolitan April 1987.

<sup>636</sup> Cosmopolitan January/February 1986.

<sup>637</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.2.9, letter from Paula Hathorn to Jane Raphaely 13 November 1986 and Dene Smuts 21 November 1986.

<sup>638</sup> Cosmopolitan November 1987.

women's magazines.<sup>639</sup> Despite this intimidation a June 1988 article on those remaining in the face of the "brain drain" continued to investigate conscription concerns, suggesting the extent to which conscription was affecting white society, and consequently was of continuing interest to whites who needed to articulate their frustration and pain.<sup>640</sup>

These articles offered significant clues as to why an affluent, urban readership would be sympathetic to the ECC's call for alternatives to military service. The intensity of the tone, and the way the concerns of whites, rather than political polemic, were linked to conscription suggested that this readership was perhaps most susceptible to the argument that the costs of conscription outweighed the remaining benefits.

By contrast, Afrikaans magazines like Rooi Roos and Sarie remained within the ruling white consensus that conscription was a necessary duty and a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. In 1991 sociologist Jacklyn Cock argued that "popular magazines often include articles on the importance of supporting soldiers, for example through sending food parcels".<sup>641</sup> However, not even Rooi Roos or Sarie offered much proof of this, suggesting once again that South African whites had a strong desire to escape from the difficulties of their society where possible.

Nevertheless, conscription remained an inescapable fact of white life. Where Rooi Roos and Sarie did address conscription, the need for military service was an unquestioned given and articles focused on coping with the status quo rather than exploring alternatives. Even these magazines, however, bore unwitting testimony to the growing costs of conscription for whites. While a 1983 Rooi Roos article about women in the navy glamorised the incorporation of women into the security forces,<sup>642</sup> the majority of articles about conscription offered glimpses of the disruption of conscription, even as conscription was being presented as a necessary and proud duty. At intake times articles like "My seun gaan weermag toe" and "Wanneer hy grens toe gaan",<sup>643</sup> and at the end of service periods advice to mothers, wives and girlfriends on handling this transition, suggested that these were periods of real crisis for families, perhaps even more so because the expression of personal fears and loss were unacceptable.<sup>644</sup>

Rooi Roos, for example, took a highly patriotic tone, suggesting that no one watching those doing their part to ensure the "toekoms en voortbestaan van Suid-Afrika" could be anything but proud, and contrasting the confidence of the young soldiers with the uncertain, frightened schoolboys they had been before their basic training. While articles

<sup>639</sup> Star 7 May 1988. Cosmopolitan March 1988. Letter from Jane Raphaely to Merran Phillips 14 September 1998.

<sup>640</sup> Cosmopolitan June 1988.

<sup>641</sup> Cock, Colonels and cadres, p.120.

<sup>642</sup> Rooi Roos 18 May 1983, 16 November 1983.

<sup>643</sup> Rooi Roos 13 June 1984, 25 December 1985.

<sup>644</sup> Rooi Roos 26 December 1984, 25 December 1985.

presented the difficulties of re-adjusting to civilian life merely as a temporary transitional phase, there was an acknowledgement that changes would not only be physical but also mental, and the suggestion that the uncertainty of border war created its own kind of tension. However, relationship difficulties were written off as being due to the immaturity of these relationships in the first place, although the impact on marriages was accorded a little more sympathy. Such articles did acknowledge the concerns of parents that their sons were doing too much or too little in the army, as well as the complaint that two years of initial training was a waste of time and an imposition on the personal and professional lives of conscripts. However, the SADF had ample space to refute these complaints, to reassure mothers their sons would be well-fed, and to assure conscripts they need not be bored and that students would be accommodated in their chosen field as far as possible.<sup>645</sup> Rooi Roos articles in 1984 thus hinted at problems like post-traumatic stress syndrome, but the overall message was of rallying whites to accept conscription as a difficult but necessary transition which ultimately benefited white society. The possibility of objection was not even considered, and the tone suggested that anyone who was not coping was not trying hard enough.

From 1985 Rooi Roos articles on domestic violence and family killings, as well as articles about survivors of bomb and landmine attacks, suggested a growing dislocation in white society, where, despite the sacrifices of conscription, violence and uncertainty were becoming more prevalent.<sup>646</sup> By 1987 another Rooi Roos conscription article suggested some significant deviations from the earlier patriotic duty model.<sup>647</sup> While this was still the ideal being upheld, with the positives of teamwork, co-operation and discipline being claimed to outweigh the hardships, the article acknowledged that servicemen succumbed to drug and alcohol abuse, and that relationship difficulties occurred. Although the focus was on how the army had trained personnel to help in these areas, this was nevertheless a tacit recognition that not all servicemen were coping with their military training or with their return to civilian life. The article still did not even acknowledge legal avenues of objection like the Board for Religious Objection, or allow that there might be moral ambiguities surrounding the internal deployment of the SADF. Nevertheless it did suggest that even in a sector of white society strongly committed to the military, conscription was causing stress.

Like Rooi Roos, Sarie did not ever question the need for conscription. However, like the other magazines discussed, the content and tone of articles between 1983 and 1988 suggested areas of stress in white society. As early as 1983

<sup>645</sup> Rooi Roos 26 December 1984, 13 June 1984.

<sup>646</sup> Rooi Roos 7 August 1985, 28 May 1986, 6 August 1986, 16 April 1986.

<sup>647</sup> Rooi Roos 4 February 1987.



an article touted depression as “die siekte van ons tye”, and other ills like alcoholism and anorexia nervosa, as well as the rising rates of divorce and teen suicide, were topics of concern.<sup>648</sup>

In 1983 the positive image of the military was evident in a Sarie fashion shoot featuring khaki, and a wedding issue in which the bride’s white was offset by the generic uniform-style dress of the groom. A competition featured cake baking on a SADF theme.<sup>649</sup> Support for the “total onslaught” line was also evident in an article about urban terror, which emphasised that SWAPO and the ANC were financed by the Soviet Union.<sup>650</sup> This tone continued into 1984. An article on Prince Charles investigated his many uniforms, fusing the idea of political leadership with that of military command.<sup>651</sup> The association of successful masculinity with physical courage and stamina was also underscored by interviews and fashion shoots featuring actors like Tom Selleck and Mel Gibson, heroes of action films and television programmes, and this stereotype was further reinforced by an article which invited readers to rate their partners on a “macho” quiz.

From 1984, however, there was also evidence that while the male model of physical courage epitomised in patriotic national service remained the official role model, at a micro level it was under strain. A Sarie agony column discussed coping with separation while one’s husband was on the border.<sup>652</sup> The broader socio-economic decline was also clear in articles about how to cope if one’s husband lost his job.<sup>653</sup>

It is clear from the limited number of such articles that the primary emphasis of Sarie remained on escapism, but once again the intrusion of conscription on white life proved inescapable. At call-up time, a couple of articles investigated the practical and emotional demands on conscripts. Like the Rooi Roos articles, the conscripts interviewed stressed they were maturing through the experience and that although it was tough, in hindsight their national service had taught them valuable lessons. Even by 1986 an article suggested that one of the biggest problems facing conscripts would be their longing for home cooking and having to come to terms with the loss of personal freedoms. There was no suggestion that conscripts might be experiencing uncertainty about the nature of the struggle or township deployment.<sup>654</sup> Rather, readers were reminded of the close links between national service and patriotism, the preservation of cultural heritage and religious freedom. While the article did acknowledge that some “so-called” pacifists refused to do military service, their motivation was subtly called into question and they were clearly set

<sup>648</sup> Sarie 19 January 1983, 16 February 1983, 2 March 1983, 30 March 1983, 13 April 1983, 28 September 1983.

<sup>649</sup> Sarie 19 January 1983, 13 April 1983, 4 September 1983.

<sup>650</sup> Sarie 6 July 1983.

<sup>651</sup> Sarie 15 February 1984.

<sup>652</sup> Sarie 14 March 1984.

<sup>653</sup> Sarie 12 February 1986.

<sup>654</sup> Sarie 26 February 1986.

outside the group norms of Sarie readership. Similarly, while the article conceded that war *per se* was undesirable, it was justified the current conflict because people had a right to protect “their own”, emphasising that the SADF’s role was “defensive”. Despite this determinedly “total onslaught” tone, however, the article unwittingly exposed evidence of opposition to national service. The article relied on Defence Force input, and from this source came a warning against theft due to a sense of entitlement or as revenge against superior officers, and advice about problems in readjusting to civilian life, as well as the difficulties of maintaining relationships over time and distance.

The 1987 Sarie article “Grensdien: pa jou seun het jou nodig” continued the theme that with religious belief and familial support the SADF would make young adults out of boys. This implied that dysfunction was located within the home situation rather than army experiences. Again, however, there were subtle indicators of the stresses imposed by conscription. Parents were warned that conscripts sometimes acted in ways they never would otherwise because they had compartmentalised their army experience. Relationship difficulties were glossed over as mere teenage romances which would have ended anyway, although the article did acknowledge that it was not always easy to maintain the balance between the disciplined world of the soldier and a man’s “personal needs”.<sup>655</sup> The “total onslaught” line was strongly emphasised at the end of the article where SWAPO prisoners of war were interviewed, and, predictably, SWAPO was presented in a very negative light and the SADF was seen as a window of opportunity for the prisoners, some of whom indicated they would like to sign up.

Both Rooi Roos and Sarie demonstrated the difficulties faced by the ECC in penetrating Afrikaans culture with an anti-conscription message. However, there was also evidence of dissatisfaction with conscription manifested through impotent anger expressed in theft, and emotional distress expressed in relationship dysfunction and substance abuse.

De Kat was much more open to discussing controversial topics. Black leaders including Desmond Tutu, Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Jakes Gerwel were interviewed.<sup>656</sup> De Kat also acknowledged an alternative culture, investigating alternative music and labels, like Shifty Records which pressed the ECC record “Forces Favourites”, although this was not mentioned in the article. Nevertheless, De Kat did emphasise that through music people were exploring and commenting on the political situation in South Africa. In a later article singer Jennifer Fergusson was permitted to discuss her involvement with the ECC project, although from the angle of a general abhorrence of war, and the article suggested that even on the left, the ECC was controversial.<sup>657</sup> A 1985 article further explored the role of culture, from

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<sup>655</sup> Sarie 16 December 1987.

films to literature, in articulating the violence of society, and particularly how the traditional heroic view of soldiers was frequently inverted by authors who had seen active service.<sup>658</sup>

De Kat was not afraid to examine protest, or to suggest that the institutions governing South Africa set and controlled the norms and values of white society, rather than accepting these as ahistorical absolutes as Sarie and Rooi Roos did.<sup>659</sup> While an article on protest stressed the negative consequences of civil disobedience and suggested it was more appealing for the young, these kind of topics indicated a considerably more analytical readership, and one which was beginning to consider alternatives, albeit tentatively.

If some articles demonstrated a concern to question and explore alternatives to the status quo, De Kat nevertheless continued to present South Africa's enemies as brutal, suggesting that the Cubans were forcibly conscripting young Angolans, and presenting General Jannie Geldenhuys as a credible and charismatic authority figure. The decontextualisation of the South African conflict continued in an article about the television series about soldiers "Ouens soos ons", and the emphasis on the red BMW and new "star" status of Ronel Henning who presented the daily "emergency bulletin" on television, with no analysis of the implications of her role.<sup>660</sup>

Like the other magazines, De Kat suggested societal crisis in articles on investments and the uncertain gold price, as well as the growing emigration rate, family murders, and a climate of fear, but reflected disquiet and confusion rather than a clear prescription for change.<sup>661</sup> In November 1986 journalist Harald Pakendorf, for example, called for a new vision of leadership from the NP, which he criticised as being stuck between fighting off the challenge from the right and emphasising its continued protection of Afrikaner interests. Similarly, the Professor of Legal Philosophy at the University of Pretoria called for dialogue, suggesting there were areas of the Freedom Charter which would strike a chord with all parties. Articles on the new moderator of the NGK Professor Johan Heyns and independent parliamentary candidate Wynand Malan also emphasised the need for a new direction.<sup>662</sup> While De Kat did not support the ECC it is clear that within the ranks of wealthier urban Afrikaners concerns about the status quo might have made them more open to the call for alternatives to military conscription.

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<sup>658</sup> De Kat June 1986, 30 July 1985.

<sup>657</sup> De Kat December/January 1986, July 1985, December/January 1986.

<sup>658</sup> De Kat November 1985.

<sup>659</sup> De Kat February 1986.

<sup>660</sup> De Kat July 1986, September 1986.

<sup>661</sup> De Kat May 1986, August 1986, October 1986, February 1987, May 1987, December/January 1988.

<sup>662</sup> De Kat November 1986, December/January 1987, April 1987.

The readership of the magazines surveyed represented a small proportion of the white population. As footnote 584 shows, the readership of the most popular weekly magazine Huisgenoot was 507 484, while those discussed here were only half of that. However, while the ECC officially saw its constituency as all those affected by conscription, effectively its target audience was an educated, middle-class, urban elite, many of whom would have read these magazines. The changes in tone and content discussed are therefore indicative of changes in attitude within this narrower target audience.

Despite the lack of attention to the ECC in these magazines, analysis of their tone and content offers a number of indicators as to why conscription opposition offered a challenge to the apartheid state. Firstly, even politically conservative magazines like Scope, Rooi Roos and Sarie reflected the growing insecurity within white society. As the benefits of apartheid became less apparent for whites, so the inherent burden of conscription became more noticeable in reports of emigration, conscript suicide, evidence of theft from the SADF, substance abuse, domestic violence and relationship breakdown. Secondly, while the state's security discourse advocated conscription as a heroic duty and a rite of passage, the anger and anguish expressed by an Afrikaans mother in Fair Lady in 1988 indicated that disallowing opposition to conscription was less successful as the costs of conscription mounted. Thirdly, the topics covered in the magazines suggested that even if there was no outright support for conscription objection, other aspects of the conflict like the impact on family life, individual ambition and decreasing socio-economic cohesion were making whites reconsider the cost:benefit ratio of "reformed" apartheid. Lastly, by 1988 in more liberal magazines like Cosmopolitan and Fair Lady an explicit connection was made between white frustration and conscription to the extent that the Minister of Defence felt compelled to intervene. The tone and content of the white magazines considered in this chapter therefore corroborate the contention that conscription was a significant opposition issue because it imposed a cost on whites for the continued benefits of white political rule. As the costs increased while socio-economic indicators declined, so dissatisfaction around conscription put pressure on the apartheid state and undermined its attempts to reinforce white political cohesion through its security discourse.

## Chapter Nine

A unique voice: The role of graphics  
in the conscription debate.



While much of the discussion of the ECC's role thus far has been in terms of its language-based opposition, throughout the opposition movement, as formal opposition was increasingly curtailed, so flags, banners, songs, poetry, art and theatre took on a growing significance as symbols to rally support, and as a means of articulating anger, pain and political ideas.<sup>663</sup> The ECC, too, had a highly symbiotic relationship with the arts. Art exhibitions, music concerts and drama provided unique opportunities to attract audiences less interested in political argument, and gave an emotional edge to the ECC's work. This chapter will concentrate on the graphic work of both the ECC and its opponents to examine how this type of opposition contributed to the extra-parliamentary conscription debate between 1983-1988.

The graphic medium is significant for a number of reasons. Elsabe Pepler has suggested that after the 1976 advent of television in South Africa, visual images increasingly became a communication channel for abstract political ideas, as people became more reliant on, and adept at understanding, visual signals.<sup>664</sup> Moreover, research has shown that exposure to posters may have a long-term influence on making people aware of issues.<sup>665</sup> The use of t-shirts, bumper stickers and posters also allowed the ECC to reach a more diverse audience, and to intrude into the consciousness of those not innately sympathetic to the anti-conscription message.<sup>666</sup>

Symbols are a crucial aspect of ideology, which, as previous chapters have noted, played a significant role in perpetuating the apartheid system. Ideology works to ascribe meaning to particular symbols, which then act as a "capsule form" of the message. However, their persuasive capacity depends "on the degree to which ideas, images and symbols are internalised and reproduced as part of the individual's own way of thinking and experience".<sup>667</sup> The ECC's graphic opposition was thus particularly significant since it used graphic traditions and symbols accessible to whites, while conveying a message in direct opposition to that of the state.<sup>668</sup>

Visual images challenged existing symbols of power and security, for example, showing cracks in the five-pointed Cape Town castle logo of the SADF. ECC graphics also contrasted images of war and repression with symbols of

<sup>663</sup> S. Johnson, (ed.), *South Africa: no turning back* (London, Macmillan, 1988) p.175.

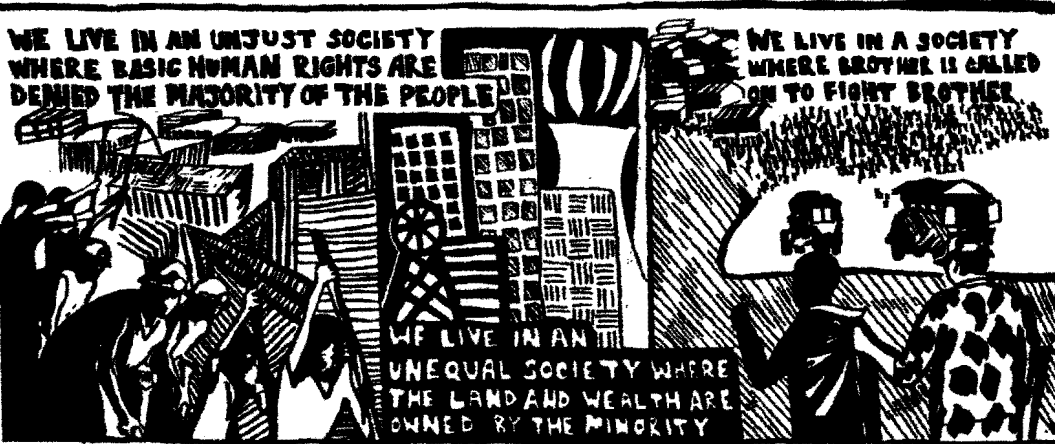
<sup>664</sup> E. M. Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate* (Johannesburg, RAU, 1988) p.87.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>666</sup> *Fair Lady* 13 May 1987, artist Sue Williamson suggested that the state was not threatened by opposition art in galleries because it appealed only to a liberal elite, whereas street level art on t-shirts, posters, and postcards was much more prominent and accessible.

<sup>667</sup> D. Posel, "The language of domination, 1978-1983" in S. Marks & S. Trapido, *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa* (New York, Longman, 1987) p.438. Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.153.

<sup>668</sup> On black protest posters, for example, the black fist salute was a readily understood and empowering symbol as well as a rallying call, but was perceived as threatening by whites. Historical Papers, SACC collection, A2623, box 34.12, letter from ECC rally co-ordinator Marlene Powell to Beyers Naude 25 April 1986. M. Graaf, *Hawks and Doves: the pro- and anti- conscription press in South Africa* (Durban, University of Natal, 1988) p.38.



# WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION



# WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION



Figure 1.

peace, encouraging the viewer to question the status quo. A barbed wire cage imprisoning the dove of peace, for instance, raised questions about the peacekeeping role of the SADF, and the repression of the state of emergency. The ECC also used Christmas cards, Valentine's Day cards and yellow ribbons, to superimpose opposition meanings over traditional ones.<sup>669</sup>

Through the colours, symbols and facial expressions used in the graphics, the ECC was also able to convey a more emotional message than its largely intellectual verbal and written work.<sup>670</sup> However, the intention remained the same: to encourage whites to re-evaluate the cost:benefit ratio of apartheid, using conscription issues as the focus. The concentration of resources allocated to this area of its work indicated that the ECC regarded it as very important. The significance of graphic opposition was further underscored by the emergence of a counter campaign, largely funded by the state.<sup>671</sup>

Initially the ECC's graphic campaign reflected a lack of experience which limited its impact. The 1984 declaration poster (Figure 1), for example, contained the entire declaration, filling the whole poster and leading to small writing only legible from up close.<sup>672</sup> The overall impact was cluttered and the lack of clarity or focal point made it difficult for a passing viewer to absorb. Later posters had much greater impact through the use of fewer, more intense colours, limited detail, and a short punchy slogan to complement a simpler, more focused, and thus more easily absorbed, graphic message.

Because graphic material was expensive and time-consuming to create and distribute,<sup>673</sup> it tended to correspond with the campaigns already discussed chronologically. However, in addition to the particular messages of campaigns, four concepts formed a continuous part of the ECC's opposition. The first challenged the SADF's conception of the soldier/conscript, the second opposed the NP's "total onslaught" conceptualisation of the nature of the conflict, the third undermined existing beliefs about the nature and possibility of peace, and the last offered alternatives both to conscription and to the conflict. This chapter will examine how the ECC's graphic work contributed to the introduction and consolidation of these concepts in white consciousness.

<sup>669</sup> Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers, ECC Christmas card.

<sup>670</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, pp.84-85.

<sup>671</sup> The ECC devoted a considerable part of its budget to media, and continued to put up posters despite fines from local municipalities. Vandalism and the removal of ECC posters in the Western Cape was traced back to the state in the course of the 1988 interdict hearing. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A10.5.2.2, notice from Cape Town municipality to the ECC 27 January 1987.

<sup>672</sup> *Images of defiance* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1991) p.130.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3, it is difficult to date and place all the ECC visual material. The spread of material between branches suggested that visual images were recycled and used in more than one region. Posters had a long protest tradition in South Africa, being common on campuses from the 1960s, and used by trades union from the 1970s. By the 1980s the opposition potential of posters was further enhanced by the Cape Arts Project and the Screen Training Project in Johannesburg, which gave the ECC access to unprecedented training and resources, in an era before ready and affordable access to the marvels of computer graphics.



The state's visual depiction of the soldier was designed to foster acceptance of conscription by idealising the soldier's role and romanticising war.<sup>674</sup> Price suggested that in western mythology the soldier's ability to "consolidate and reaffirm the existing social order" by subduing the enemies of that order has led to a process which not only justifies militarisation, but also exalts the soldier as hero, and even saviour. The apartheid state emphasised this aspect, justifying force by claiming that it was serving ideals like "freedom" and "justice".<sup>675</sup> The security discourse downplayed the specific historical context of the conflict, rather defining it as a clash of absolutes, good and evil. This encouraged a pre-social, biologically determinist interpretation of masculinity, which was only fully realised through military service. The language and ideology of SADF training underscored this by associating masculinity with power, and defining femininity and homosexuality in terms of powerlessness.<sup>676</sup> In SADF pamphlets, publications and sympathetic advertising, idealised images of men, lean, tanned, and muscled, were meshed with the power and dominance of military force. The hardships of basic training were presented as a rite of transition from boyhood to manhood, with the frequently used slogan "Let the army make a man of you". National service was presented as the means to build character attributes like bravery and endurance associated with traditional concepts of masculinity.<sup>677</sup>

Similarly, the SADF's encounters with the ANC were graphically "mythologised" in popular magazines like Scope which emphasised the excitement of conflict in terms of successfully completed missions against a faceless "enemy", with images of the SADF associated with copious weaponry, and the "enemy" often as nameless, tattered corpses, powerless and overcome.<sup>678</sup> On the film circuit, brooding, muscled actor Arnold Vosloo took acceptance of the soldier image further into popular culture through the "Boetie" films, while the censor's board ensured there were few critical dramatic counter voices, with the exception of the theatre, which had a more limited and elite audience.<sup>679</sup>

Much of the opposition writing of the 1980s sought to expose this "culture of militarism" and its role in overriding differences among whites to promote a common definition of white security based on military power. Yet analysts John Sharp and Emile Boonzaier argued that while culture creates the boundaries of "class, ethnicity, race, [and] gender", culture is not static.<sup>680</sup> The official culture of militarism thus faced a growing dissonance within the white community, as the prospect of serving and the realities of national service led to disillusionment, confusion, fear, anger and hopeless frustration among many young whites.

<sup>674</sup> Price, A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force, p.2.

<sup>675</sup> Nurnberger, Tooke, and Domenis, Conflict and the quest for justice, pp.156-158.

<sup>676</sup> Price, A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force, pp.52, 135, 147, 187, 192. H.Brod (ed), The making of masculinities (Massachusetts, Allen & Unwin, 1987) p.95. Cock, Colonels and cadres, p.94.

<sup>677</sup> Cock, Colonels and cadres, pp.31, 58-59, 74.

<sup>678</sup> Scope passim. Paratus passim. Cock, Colonels and cadres, p.73.

<sup>679</sup> Sunday Times Magazine 16 June 1985, p.38, the "Boetie" films were described as "a phenomenal success in South African box office terms".

<sup>680</sup> J.Sharp, & E.Boonzaier, South African keywords: the uses and abuses of political concepts (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988) p.22.

By naming and illustrating these realities, the ECC set up an oppositional projection of the conscript, which challenged the state's glorification of the soldier. Using symbols of entrapment and confusion, the ECC invited white conscripts to acknowledge and access their conflicted emotions regarding conscription. The 1984 Cape Town declaration launch pamphlet,<sup>681</sup> for example, showed a soldier bent double under the weight of a bullet, emphasising the burden of military service on conscripts (Figure 2). A frequently used image showed a black-and-white photograph of a soldier crouched in a foetal position inside the SADF castle logo, his arms wrapped defensively around himself, while a spider web of white lines was superimposed to suggest his sense of despair at being trapped in the conscription system (Figure 3).<sup>682</sup> The slogan "Conscripts with no right to choose" underlined the image of being voiceless, as another graphic showed a soldier's mouth sewn shut with barbed wire (Figure 4).<sup>683</sup>

Significantly, this aspect of the ECC's opposition was outlawed by state of emergency legislation, and the ECC was reduced to bumper sticker slogans, like "voters have a choice, conscripts don't" around the May 1987 election. By 1988, however, the "Alternative National Service" campaign gave the ECC space to visualize the conscript again. The growing public concern around CO trials and Angolan deaths led to a sepia-tinted photograph of a soldier, with his head cradled in his hands, and the caption, "Botha, ek's gatvol". The colour heightened the sense of depression, the brick background encouraged a sense of being hemmed in, while the colloquial slogan emphasised that conscripts' disillusionment and despair extended beyond the English-speaking community.<sup>684</sup>

These graphics were intended for general consumption, and, interestingly, often featured photographs, perhaps to give a greater authenticity to the visual message. In the student press, the greater existing sympathy for the ECC position, together with the speed and cost effectiveness of cartoons, encouraged a more informal graphic style to highlight the dilemmas of conscription. Youth audiences were open to more radical graphic messages, which tapped into their rejection of adult norms and values. Similarly, African geometric shapes in poster borders were accessible to white youth who listened to crossover bands like Jaluka and Mango Groove, whereas white magazines, subject to the conservative influence of their broader commercial goals, demonstrated a much slower general acceptance of African, as opposed to western, cultural influences.<sup>685</sup>

<sup>681</sup> Sue Britton's personal papers, declaration launch pamphlet.

<sup>682</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, ECC peace festival material.

<sup>683</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A12, *ECC News*, April 1986.

<sup>684</sup> *Images of defiance*, p. 133.


<sup>685</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder J, ECC stickers, various. *Scope* January 2 1987, *Scope* magazine, for example, did an article on how Ladysmith Black Mambazo had little relevance outside of a narrow ethnic market, shortly before Paul Simon's "Graceland" album, which featured the group, smashed records worldwide. *Fair Lady* 13 June 1984, p.138, and passim, *Fair Lady* only began to feature South African pop stars in 1984, and even then many of the pin ups remained overseas artists.



# End Conscription Meeting

Monday 15th October 8 pm  
Claremont Civic Centre  
Rev Allan Boesak , Sheena Duncan

play ~~Sides~~ Talks



*End Conscription Campaign*

Figure 2.



# STOP THE CALL UP



*End Conscription Campaign*

Figure 3.

# CONSCRIPTS *with* NO RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Issued by: ECC, 128 Chapel Street, Woodstock  
Printed by: Alliance Printing Services, College Road, Greenhew

Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

A cartoon version of Rodin's well-known "thinker" sculpture, surrounded by question marks while a faceless figure tried to thrust a gun on him, was used in the student press as a visual introduction to advertisements for the various conscription advice services established in response to the growing dilemma of conscription.<sup>686</sup> This graphic is an example of how the ECC tapped into the symbolic culture of its constituents. While the graphic was self-evident, the fact that a number of white students would have been able to identify it and so know its title would have given added impetus to the extrapolation of meaning that the viewer should seriously consider the implications of conscription.

In other instances cartoons highlighted the negatives associated with a call-up to draw attention to the issue. With the slogan "conscription headache", a SADF logo fell on a conscript's head, while another jumped in horror, his hair standing on end, at receiving his call-up papers. Cartoons were also an ideal medium to depict the dehumanising aspect of military service, and a number showed the transformation from soldier to pig.<sup>687</sup>

The ECC's attempts to counter the state's depiction of the soldier also extended to cadets. While *Paratus* carried numerous photographs of cadet competitions and cadets mastering survival skills to emphasise the role of military training in the transition to skilled and competent manhood,<sup>688</sup> an ECC anti-cadet poster made a strong visual argument that militarism involved barely controlled violence, and led to disintegration rather than maturity. In modern cartoon style, with direct appeal to the youthful cadet audience, and utilizing the most compelling colours, red and lurid yellow, the poster showed a cadet commander with a hand grenade for a head, about to pull the pin. The jagged lines of the drawing contributed to a disturbing image of unsuccessfully controlled violence and anger, reinforced by the blood on the commander's hand, his manic expression and bared shark-like teeth. The image underscored the slogan "Cadets maak malletjies!" in an explosion of a speech balloon (Figure 7).<sup>689</sup>

In both its more conservative public and its more radical student-targeted graphics, the ECC clearly opposed the state's depiction of conscription as a proud duty and a rite of passage. Instead ECC graphics suggested that military service was an imposition and a dilemma. Military symbols were associated with the degradation and disintegration of humanity, in direct opposition to the state's association of these symbols with the assumption of manhood and power. The fact that material such as the 1985 intake pamphlet, with a booted foot entering a door, under the slogan "Has

<sup>686</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B11.3, *ECC News*, vol.1, no.1, 1985.

<sup>687</sup> Archives and Manuscripts BC 1102, folder A, "What is the ECC" pamphlet. *At Ease*, vol.2, no.1, February 1987. Historical Papers AG 1977, folder M1.1, cover of *Forces favourites*. See title page for chapter three.

<sup>688</sup> *Paratus* June 1982, October 1983, January 1985, February 1985, July 1986, September 1986, and passim.

<sup>689</sup> *Images of defiance*, p.132. In one of the ironies of post-apartheid South Africa, in 1999 a postcard form of this image was on sale at the Castle in Cape Town where Western Province Command once mounted its anti-ECC smear campaign.



Figure 7.

the army invaded your life?<sup>690</sup> was banned outright, suggested that the state clearly recognized the danger of this kind of opposition, particularly with its strong student appeal.

A wider and potentially greater challenge was the ECC's attempt to counter the image of the SADF as an integral part of the reform process. This was a critical oppositional point as both the PFP and the state were committed to the view that the SADF was a "shield" behind which orderly reform (i.e. reform at a pace and to an extent acceptable to whites) could occur. Since the state largely controlled visual imagery of the nature of the conflict, this was a significant, but difficult, oppositional endeavour. Deborah Posel's research, for example, suggested that SABC newscasts, which were the main visual information about the townships for most white South Africans, decontextualised and depoliticised both the conflict and mass action, as "black on black violence", which reinforced white stereotypes about blacks, and furthered white acceptance of the need for forceful containment of the violence.<sup>691</sup>

Despite the state's attempts to present the troops as necessary for the maintenance of law and order and the protection of the "innocent", the white unease which accompanied the internal deployment of the SADF gave the ECC scope to develop a graphic challenge which presented the troops as part of the problem, and were reminders that troops continued to be deployed in the townships. The "Troops out of the townships" poster,<sup>692</sup> for example, showed the distraught face of a middle-aged black woman, her hand upraised as if to ward off a blow. The background was a crisscross of lines like a net, symbolising entrapment, or cracked earth symbolising barrenness. In the middle distance, between the woman's face and her hand, loomed an armoured personnel carrier symbolising the omnipresence, the divisiveness or the intrusion of the troops. The clashing visual impact of red and yellow further underscored the impression of conflict and violence. While the poster could be "read" at a number of levels, the emotional impact was clear: the woman's distress made an appeal to the viewer's common humanity, regardless of political differences. Thus, while the slogan, "No apartheid war", underscored the deeply political nature of the conflict, particularly by using red for the word "apartheid", the immediate impact of the poster had a wider appeal, reinforcing white liberal and humanitarian unease generated by the use of troops in the townships (Figure 8).

<sup>690</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, "Has the army invaded your life" pamphlet.

<sup>691</sup> Posel, "The language of domination, 1978-1983" in Marks and Trapido, The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa, pp.419-439.

<sup>692</sup> Pepler, Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate, p.124.

# TROOPS OUT OF THE TOWNSHIPS



Figure 8.



The poster "Where's the border now?"<sup>693</sup> (Figure 9) used a newsprint background to emphasise the current events triggering the protest, and a superimposed map of the country with red castle logos to highlight some twelve occupied townships. This created a visual association between the SADF presence and blood, violence and danger, visually validating the call "SADF get out!" in large print at the bottom. The poster emphasised the reality of the internal deployment of the SADF, as opposed to the state's justification of conscription demands on the grounds of the external threat of "total onslaught".

A "troops out" sticker featured an inverted dove, bleeding over a list of the occupied townships (Figure 10). This symbolised the inversion of values of "peace" and "conflict", as the state touted the SADF as a "peacekeeper" in the townships, yet many township residents perceived it as a means of enforcing the structural violence of the status quo and the instigator of further conflict.<sup>694</sup>

The importance of the "troops out" message can be seen in the desire to spread the message to a number of constituencies. Regional posters, such as "Troops out of Alexandra" and "Troops out of Crossroads", as well as an Afrikaans version, "Wat soek jy in die townships troepie?" were designed to bring home the impact of the internal SADF deployment as widely as possible.<sup>695</sup> The "troops out" call was also expanded to "Troops out of the schools" (Figure 11). Using eye-catching black and yellow, a poster used a child's drawing of a well-armed soldier carrying a child holding a brick to symbolise the circularity of the conflict, and its racial aspect.<sup>696</sup> Urging, "Tie a yellow ribbon against a civil war", the poster used a graphic reminder of the conflict in the townships and the ongoing SADF deployment there to make its point that the conflict was between South Africans, not faceless enemies. Pamphlets like "Join the army and see the townships", and "Catch 22 for conscripts, Namibia or the townships", also used images of violent domination, like a giant army boot about to come down on the heads of the people below, to suggest that the SADF's real purpose was to control and coerce.<sup>697</sup>

In contesting the nature of the conflict and the role of the SADF, the ECC went beyond questioning the "protector" image of the SADF, and depicted the soldier as a destroyer. The poster, "Namibia, South Africa's Vietnam"<sup>698</sup> (Figure 12) showed a soldier, tattooed with a skull and crossbones, tearing Namibia apart with his hands. Another showed an outline of Namibia in red with blood running down it, and a gun forming the Caprivi Strip, a graphic reminder of the

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>694</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, ECC stickers.

<sup>695</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, *ECC Focus*, March 1986. *Images of defiance*, p. 135.

<sup>696</sup> *Images of defiance*, p. 135.

<sup>697</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B5.4, "Join the army and see the townships" pamphlet.

<sup>698</sup> *Images of defiance*, p. 136.

SADF occupation of Namibia and the resulting conflict.<sup>699</sup> A later poster showed an armed soldier with his face masked with a South African flag, like a gangster or a terrorist, while a photographic negative of images of conflict and violence scrolled across the bottom of the poster; a graphic assertion that the ECC's message was based in the "real" world, rather than being propaganda (Figure 13).<sup>700</sup> The mask symbol underscored the state's attempts to counter individual conscience with the call of patriotism, while the ECC implied that this both blinded the soldier and made him "faceless", undermining his humanity, much like the state's projections of the enemy.

Particularly in the student press, cartoonised soldiers were used to speak ECC messages, suggesting that the ECC and conscripts could have opinions in common and reinforcing the ECC's claim to speak on behalf of the unwilling conscript. A soldier posed next to a story about the 23 who refused to serve in 1987, for example, commented in a speech bubble, "This makes a lot of sense, you know".<sup>701</sup> The ECC developed a war-comic style, similar to existing war comics, but carrying a very different message. The cover of one showed a soldier, standing amidst a scene of devastation, looking down at someone he had just killed, thinking "He doesn't look like a terrorist",<sup>702</sup> challenging the state's propaganda of clearly defined "good guys and bad guys" (Figure 14). A similar picture showed a soldier standing before a smoking battlefield saying, "They're all dead..both...their men and ours and what for?"<sup>703</sup> Again this attempt to tap into and express feelings of frustration and concern about the rationale and practicalities of the southern African conflict was in direct opposition to the unquestioning patriotism demanded by "total onslaught".

The ECC also used graphics of soldiers to justify their demands. Three white silhouettes of soldiers on a black background carried the declaration diagonally across their bodies (Figure 15). This time key phrases like "We call for a just peace in our land", "moral right... to exercise freedom of conscience" and "we call for an end to conscription", were highlighted in larger type. The slanted writing, interspersed with conflict images, encouraged the viewer to physically adopt a new perspective to make sense of the graphic, and by implication, to consider the conflict in terms of alternative ideological perspectives.<sup>704</sup> The monochrome colours emphasised the ECC's contention that the internal deployment exacerbated racial tension, polarising communities within South Africa. The starkness of the black and white image also reinforced the idea of choice between two very different realities, while the larger words directed attention to the key points of the ECC's call to end conscription, and the conflict graphics gave these added urgency.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>700</sup> Sue Britton's personal papers, *Objector*, vol.3, no.1, March/April 1985.

<sup>701</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder M1.3, "Hell no, we won't go" campus comic February 1988.

<sup>702</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.121.

<sup>703</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, war games comic.

<sup>704</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, *ECC Focus*, March 1986.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

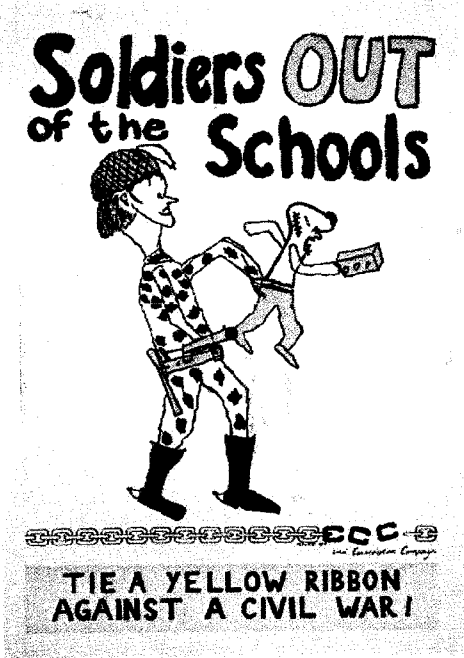


Figure 11.



Figure 12.

The ECC further created an opposition dissonance by combining opposition graphics with the security vocabulary of the state. A 1988 poster, for example, implored bring “our boys” back from Angola, using the language of popular rhetoric, “our boys on the border”, while an accompanying map of southern Africa and an arrow showing the path of their return, demonstrated how very far from any logical conception of a “border” Angola was (Figure 16).<sup>705</sup> The “Stop SADF terror”<sup>706</sup> poster in response to the attack on frontline states in 1986 carried the names of the countries attacked in the helicopter’s rotors, with the slogan “SADF terror” across the poster (Figure 17). The screaming face of the victim, in connection with the power of the SADF in the form of the helicopter, made a strong visual justification of this accusation. However, “terror” was a word usually used by the apartheid state to describe the actions of its enemies. It was therefore a direct challenge to the military policies of the state to apply the word “terror” to actions of the SADF, “the shield of the nation”, the “protector of law and order”, the “defender of civilisation”.

Thus in opposition to the “total onslaught” line that without the SADF everything worthwhile would be lost, the ECC depicted the soldier as an integral part of the process of destruction. The ECC projected the conflict as being perpetuated, rather than contained, by the SADF, and claimed that the end result would be devastation. As the ECC’s version gained currency with white youth the state moved more aggressively to prevent ECC graphics from being seen, with student comics being confiscated and legal action being taken against ECC material.<sup>707</sup>

However, the ECC did more than contest the state’s image of the soldier and the deployment of the SADF. It opposed the state’s basic justification of the conflict. Here the graphic medium was particularly effective, as language like “civil war” was deeply contentious, making the concept difficult to propagate among whites. Graphic symbols were an alternative means to convey a deeply subversive message. The ECC used a section of Picasso’s Guernica panels in a red-and-white poster which asserted ironically, “A civil war is not very relaxing” (Figure 18).<sup>708</sup> Once again, this drew on accepted traditions of western art, while inviting parallels between Picasso’s anguished depiction of the ravages of the Spanish civil war and the current South African situation. A simple font, and the use of red, with its associations with blood, anger, and violence, made for a powerful impact.

Similarly, a frequently used cartoon showed white hands gripping prison bars, but the scene inside the “prison” was not a cell, but a photograph of conflict within South Africa.<sup>709</sup> This suggested a two-fold message: white South Africans

<sup>705</sup> Alistair Teeling-Smith’s personal papers, bring our boys back from Angola graphic.

<sup>706</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.129.

<sup>707</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A22.4, update on repression against ECC 7 August 1986, eight ECC/COSG publications were banned between 1985 and 1986 alone.

<sup>708</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.133.

<sup>709</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, *The conscript*, vol.2, no.1 (undated).

were not being protected from outside aggression; rather the conflict resulted from the situation within South Africa.

The intensity of the hands' grip on the bars, and the visual suggestion that the bars were being broken, encouraged viewers to get involved in changing their "prison", with the slogan "End conscription" indicating that this was the way to do it. Posters for the 1986 Cape Town film festival showed an army truck running downhill as a bystander screamed in horror. The visual message was of imminent collision, that the situation was out of control. The pamphlet detailing the screenings showed a gleaming skull wearing 3D glasses, again a visual message that the reality was not what it seemed, and that death and destruction, rather than reform and regeneration, were imminent. Once again, the subtext was for whites to get involved in change. Just as the viewer could not see the 3D effect without putting on the glasses, so whites were being encouraged to move beyond a passive acceptance of "total onslaught" (Figure 19).<sup>710</sup>

In addition to graphically undermining the state's justification of the conflict, the ECC encouraged whites to question whether the costs of maintaining the status quo were worth it. As the cost of the war increasingly concerned whites, the ECC developed the poster "Is war the cost of living?"<sup>711</sup> comprising rows of one rand coins stamped with an armoured car. The brown-and-white tones of the poster gave it a depressing aspect, while it invited all kinds of questions, from the juxtapositioning of the words "war" and "living", to questions about what acceptable costs would be, and what kind of life was possible under conditions of continuous conflict.

Existing images from South African white culture were also pressed into service. As the state of emergency continued, a sticker used caricatures of the State President, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Law and Order to represent the three monkeys who see, hear and speak no evil (Figure 20), to make the point that South Africa's leaders were refusing to confront the realities of the South African conflict, attempting to paper over the cracks with emergency regulations.<sup>712</sup> Titled "Apartheid emergency", the sticker invited the conclusion that the real emergency was the kind of leadership directing the country. Another sticker used the benign image of children's comic book character, Casper, to make the point that not all "casspirs" were friendly.<sup>713</sup> Others used the conventions of road sign graphics to depict a soccer player kicking the SADF logo out of the townships, and the anti-litter logo to call for keeping the townships clean by throwing rifles in the rubbish bin, symbolising the ending of the SADF presence in the townships. Chevrolet's well-known advertising slogan, which portrayed the brand as an integral part of South African white culture, was restated as "Braaivleis, rugby, sunny skies and civil war", calling attention to the extent to which the

<sup>710</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder Q1.58, ECC and filmsoc anti-war film festival graphic.

<sup>711</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.138.

<sup>712</sup> Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers, see no evil sticker.

<sup>713</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder M1.7, ECC diary 1988.

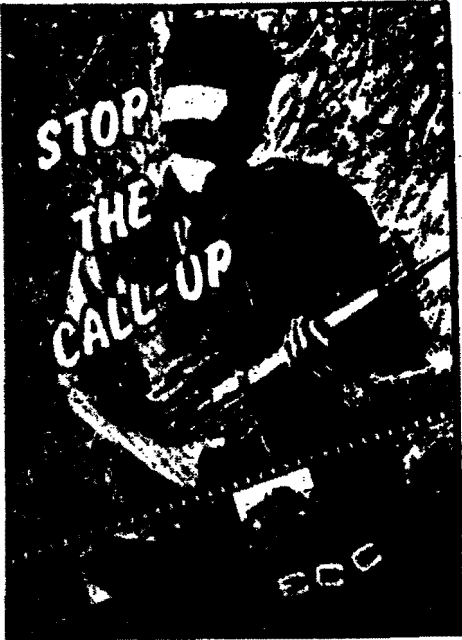


Figure 13.



Figure 14.

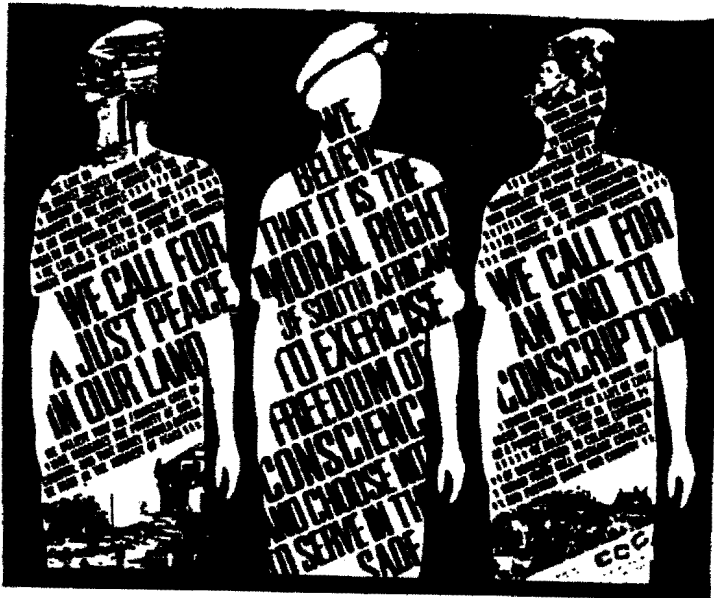


Figure 15.

**BRING OUR BOYS  
BACK FROM  
Angola**



Send to the P.E. END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN P.O. Box 947, P.E. 6001.

Figure 16.





Figure 17.

# A CIVIL WAR IS




# NOT VERY RELAXING



Figure 18.

**END  
CONSCRIPTION  
CAMPAIGN**



In association with the Film Education Unit, UCT  
**Anti-War Film Festival**

**Cultural Evening**

**Photo Exhibition**  
**SOUTH AFRICA IN CONFLICT**  
Protest, Resistance, Power




Figure 19.

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**APARTHEID EMERGENCY**



*see no casspis... speak no protest... hear no gunshots*

Published by UCT, 128 Oude St. 7700  
Printed in SA

Figure 20.

conflict had become a way of life.<sup>714</sup>

Much of this aspect of the ECC's campaign was closed down by the 1986 state of emergency legislation. The subsequent "War is No Solution, Let's choose a Just Peace" material demonstrated the new difficulties of opposition work. The campaign poster featured a static repeating graphic of casspirs interrupted by the campaign slogan (Figure 21). The largely black-and-white format, and the lack of people, action or interesting focus meant that there was little to engage the viewer emotionally. Similarly, the logo of the campaign, while continuing themes of peace through the use of a dove and setting the words war and peace at opposing ends of the graphic to suggest the need to choose, had so many elements and the images were too loosely defined to have much impact (Figure 22).<sup>715</sup>

Nevertheless, if this lack of focus and energy in the 1987 graphics demonstrated the difficulties of redefining opposition after the state of emergency, bumper stickers continued to provoke questions through pithy, punning slogans, like "The next war will determine not what is right but what is left", or "The problem with this general election is that we don't know which general we're electing" (Figure 23) and the confrontational "Will this budget kill your son?" (Figure 24).<sup>716</sup> The ECC also played on the traditions of free speech implicit in graffiti to reassert both its public presence and its right to speak. "The ECC was here" was scrawled the brick background of a sticker, with the "was" crossed out and "is" superimposed.<sup>717</sup>

The third part of the ECC's graphic challenge was to contest the nature of peace. The strong Christian tradition in the white cultural heritage made for an easy association between doves and peace. The ECC used this symbolic recognition to contend there could be no peace without justice. Doves appeared wrapped in barbed wire, made out of the fingers of bound hands or twisted out of the wire of fences, to emphasise that peace was under siege and those seeking peace were under attack. The 1985 peace festival used two doves as a logo, and, perhaps inadvertently, the negative space between them suggested a bone, offering a choice between peace and death (Figure 25).<sup>718</sup>

Other dove images invited the viewer to participate in a better future. As early as 1985 the ECC noted the need to counterbalance the civil war message with the ECC's positive demands, particularly the interim demands for a just

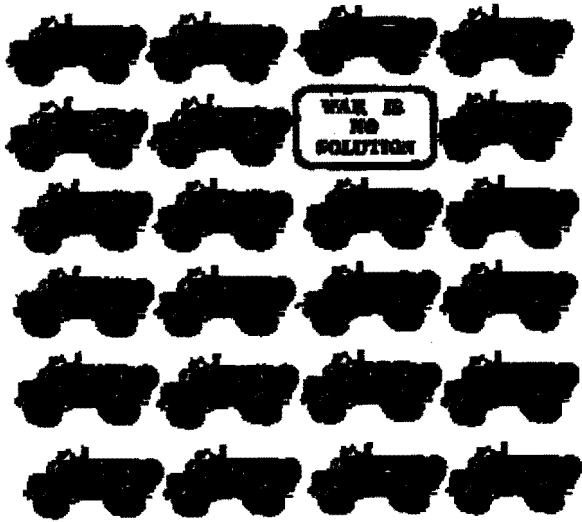
<sup>714</sup> Alistair Teeling-Smith's personal papers, braaivleis sticker.

<sup>715</sup> Manuscripts and Archives BC 912, folder A11, *At Ease*, vol.2, no.3, June 1987.

<sup>716</sup> Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, pp.199-200.

<sup>717</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder M1.7, ECC diary 1988.

<sup>718</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, ECC peace festival material, "Fast for a Just Peace" pamphlet. Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate*, p.135.



**BOYCOTT**  
*Red Cross/Red Crescent Campaign*

Figure 21.



Figure 22.

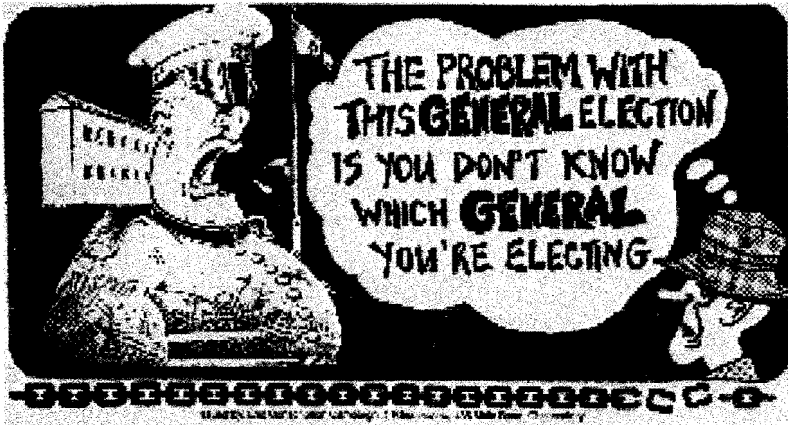


Figure 23.

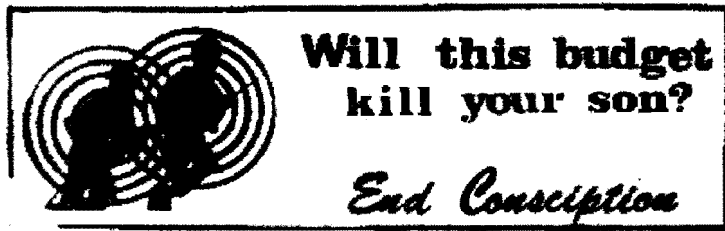


Figure 24.

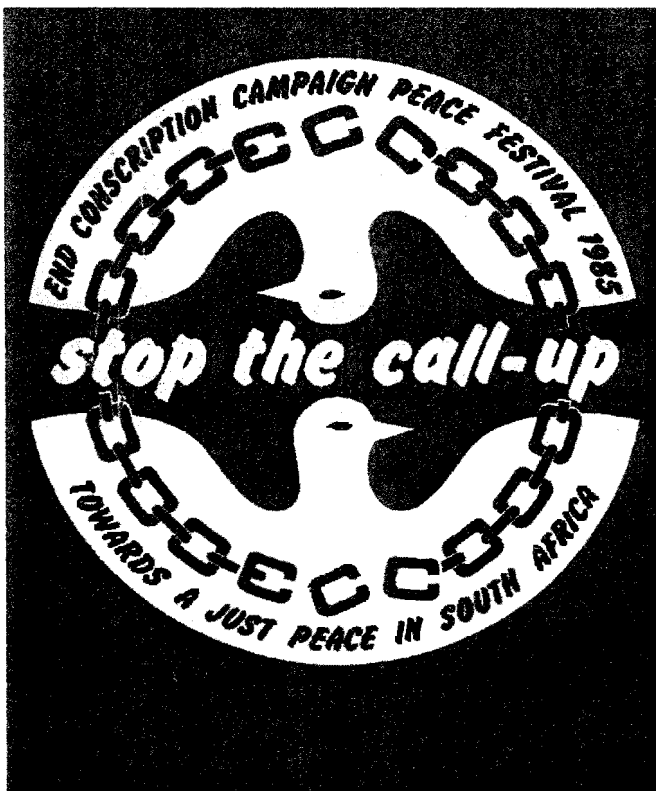


Figure 25.

peace and freedom of choice.<sup>719</sup> Consequently, the “Fast for a Just Peace” sticker featured a dove with an olive branch in its beak, in cool appealing colours of green, blue, and white; a stark contrast to the reds, yellows and black of many other ECC graphics. The “Working for a Just Peace” logo showed a gun metamorphosing into spade, and a dove bending another gun’s stock out of shape, symbolising the ECC’s commitment to work for peace through alternatives to military service (Figure 26).<sup>720</sup>

The last part of the ECC’s graphic opposition was the visualisation of alternatives to the “total onslaught” worldview. Theologian K.Nurnberger suggested that people within particular systems internalise the patterns of that system and thus perceive it as normal, especially “when the system grants them privileges”.<sup>721</sup> A significant aspect of the ECC’s work was thus not only to oppose the state’s justification of the status quo and to expose the realities of the conflict, but also to suggest positive futures and ways whites could contribute to bringing these about.

A “Working for a Just Peace” poster thus used dynamic verbs: “feed, teach, house, employ,” and hands carrying symbols of these upraised to the logo “towards a just peace” with sun-like rays radiating from it (Figure 27).<sup>722</sup> Colour analysts suggest that blue tones create associations of unity and stability, and the turquoise and white of the poster further suggested a calmness which was visually appealing, but also emphasised the contrast with the conflict experienced in the country.<sup>723</sup> The plant-like reaching hands and the sun suggested the natural cycle of growth and fertility, with the implication that a society in conflict with itself was abnormal. While the verbs represented concrete demands, they also encouraged the viewers to make themselves the subject of those verbs, and so contribute to this more harmonious future. At the same time, the graphic message was in clear opposition to the “total onslaught” focus on an external locus of conflict. The focus on a call for social upliftment redirected attention to the injustices of apartheid and suggested that overcoming these was the first step to peace. In the same vein, a 1987 ECC peace call-up showed a gun metamorphosing into a tree, again a visual message that peace needed to be “planted”, i.e. required a white contribution.<sup>724</sup>

At its most basic, the ECC’s alternative vision was symbolised by its logo (Figure 28). The broken chain, with the snapped links spelling out “ECC”, represented the breaking of the oppression of conscription, in contrast to the state’s

<sup>719</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.1.2, fast sticker.

<sup>720</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, *ECC Focus*, March 1986.

<sup>721</sup> K.Nurnberger, *Power and beliefs in South Africa* (Pretoria, UNISA, 1988) p.136.

<sup>722</sup> *Images of defiance*, p.131.

<sup>723</sup> [www.devx.com/projectcool/developer/gzone/color/color\\_symbolism.html](http://www.devx.com/projectcool/developer/gzone/color/color_symbolism.html). Pepler, *Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakate*, p.153.

<sup>724</sup> Sue Britton’s personal papers, Durban ECC peace call-up papers.

propagation of conscription as a proud and “manly” duty.<sup>725</sup> The chain also created associations like “chain reaction”, and “weakest link”, images which furthered the idea that the ending of conscription was a valid opposition enterprise, which could significantly undermine the apartheid state.

In contrast to these more generally aimed graphic alternatives, images aimed at students suggested a more defiant opposition, in tune with the late adolescents’ contempt for parents’ values, and confidence in their ability to change the world. Posters for music concerts visually symbolised the power of youth to contest the might of the SADF through cartoons of people dancing on casspirs (Figure 29), or the notes from a saxophone boldly superimposed over the sketchy outline of marching soldiers, suggesting an inversion of the realities of power, like a photographic negative (Figure 30).<sup>726</sup> These youth-oriented visuals also posed alternative visions of the future. The cover of the “Forces Favourites” record, for example, showed a desert-like brown-and-yellow patch with marching soldiers, contrasted with a green area where people were enjoying the music, with a cassette player with the logo “Forces Favourites” in between, implying a choice between conformity, sterility and possible death, and life, youth and pleasure.<sup>727</sup> Another common image in youth-oriented material was what a Weekly Mail columnist described as a “kind of forties dude... busy with some serious jiving”,<sup>728</sup> who represented the good life, and the refusal to conform. In the “Beëindig verpligte miliëre diens” poster,<sup>729</sup> for example, he was at the end of three rows of static, armed soldiers. They marched, he danced; they were in uniform, he had his own individual style; they were contained within the frame of the graphic, his arm punched right through it. They conformed to the demands of “patriotism”; he lived for himself and his own pleasure (Figure 31).

This kind of material showed how the ECC introduced anti-conscription themes into the existing youth culture, building on the resentment of the intrusion of military service, encouraging resistance and the exploration of alternatives, and so denying validity of the “total onslaught” message which claimed that youth must sacrifice to protect the culture defined by, and serving the needs of, their elders.

However, while more radical posters tended to be displayed on university campuses, if the ECC sought a broader market, it had to conform to the limitations of the state of emergency, or face the confiscation or banning of material. As the ECC sought to extend the appeal of its message through the more conservative demands of the “Know Your

<sup>725</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A1, ECC logo.

<sup>726</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, Cover of ECC news, April 1986. Images of defiance, p.303.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>728</sup> Weekly Mail 15 November 1985.

<sup>729</sup> Pepler, Alternatiewe media in Suid-Afrika met verwysing na plakkate, p.123.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



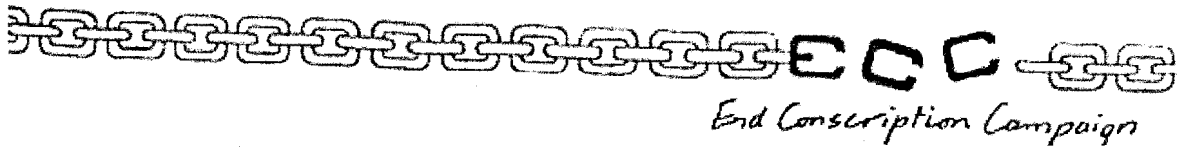


Figure 28.



Figure 29.

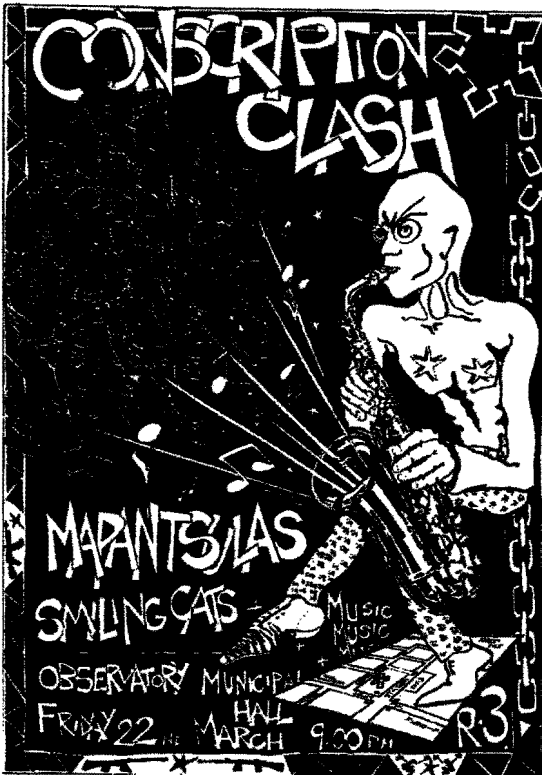


Figure 30.



Figure 31.

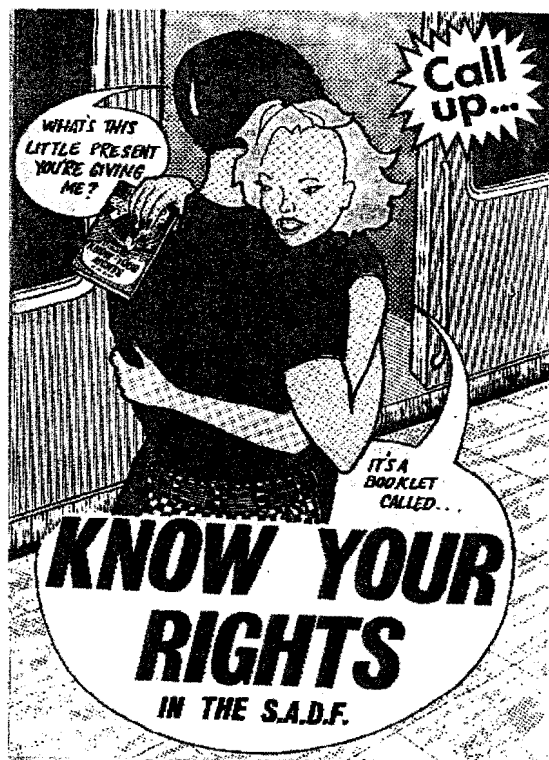


Figure 32.

Rights" campaign, so its material was toned down. Campaign graphics at first seemed tame, despite being aimed primarily at youthful first-time conscripts. While the booklet featured numerous cartoons, similar to those developed in the student press over the years, the cover showed a young man complying with his call-up (Figure 32).<sup>730</sup> The representation of both the conscript and his girlfriend were in modern cartoon style, each conforming to gender stereotypes. However, this depiction of conformity was undermined by the curvaceous girlfriend giving the conscript a copy of the "Know Your Rights" booklet, implying that this is something which would improve his conscription experience. While this may seem a very limited oppositional message, by July 1988 the growing call for alternatives was creating so much pressure on the state that the ECC played a significant role just by staying within legal limits and continuing to encourage an ever wider exploration of alternatives. The stresses the conscription debate were causing within the apartheid state can be gauged by the fact that within a month of the release of the "Know Your Rights" material, the ECC had been banned.

While the outright ban of the organisation was the state's most comprehensive move to contain the ECC, throughout its existence the ECC had faced vandalism, confiscation and the periodic banning of graphic material, as well as a graphic counter campaign. Although a number of organisations were involved – Veterans for Victory (VFV), the NSF and its numerous regional offshoots, Victims against Terrorism (VAT), the Aida Parker Newsletter and Women for South Africa – the essential convergence of the smears' motifs can be attributed to the guiding hand of the state, which provided both expertise and finance, particularly as the threat of the ECC intensified.<sup>731</sup> For example, the University of Natal Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit project Hawks and Doves noted that the 1988 VFV Rape of Peace booklet was "technically, conceptually and linguistically superior [to previous VFV publications] by several quantum leaps", suggesting that VFV now had access to experienced media professionals and financial resources.<sup>732</sup> The 1988 trial of the "Castle Three" also provided evidence of how Western Province Command had mounted a concerted counter campaign against the ECC.

This increased role of the state signalled its growing lack of manoeuvrability. Both the appeal of the right wing and of the ECC lay in their ability to tap into and exacerbate existing white discontent. Just as the right wing reinvigorated Afrikaner symbols to give emotional impetus to its opposition to "reformed" apartheid,<sup>733</sup> so to the symbols of the ECC, from its broken chain logo to its depiction of trapped conscripts, allowed both the voicing and the validation of

<sup>730</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder M.1.5, "Know your rights" booklet 1988.

<sup>731</sup> TRC, vol.2, pp.525-530.

<sup>732</sup> Graaf, Hawks and Doves, p.55, the similar sized but less glossy ECC publication cost R10 000 for 10 000 copies. The SADF had a considerable budget for publications, however, spending some R717 844.00 on just 16 of the 83 publications it released in 1987.

<sup>733</sup> P.Frankel, "The right: can culture be translated into power?" S.A. Foundation News, vol.14, no.1, February 1988, p.3.

emotions like fear, confusion, anger and frustration, which “total onslaught” ideology sought to repress by projecting conscription as a proud patriotic duty, the road to manhood, and the last bulwark of white security. State-sponsored smears therefore attempted to undermine the credibility of the ECC and thereby its counter interpretation of South African realities and its call to end conscription. Sociologist E.Said refers to the “social authority” of patriotism, in fortifying people’s sense of group identity as a means of security.<sup>734</sup> Attempts to smear the ECC consequently emphasised its “otherness”, demarcating it as outside of white norms, with the implication that its priorities and agenda were in conflict with white interests.

The graphic symbolism of smears included frequent use of red, with its connotations of danger, blood, and the Soviet bloc, while images of guns and vultures carried associations with death and destruction. Like the ECC, the anti-ECC groups also used pithy slogans to underline the graphic message. The VFV joked that the ECC had “a terminal stomach complaint: lack of guts”; while another group played on the ECC’s acronym to suggest an opposing message, “Every Coward’s Choice”.<sup>735</sup>

Significantly, many organisations opposed to the ECC used circles in their logos and graphics. VFV used a circle enclosing crosshairs aimed at a hammer-and-sickle symbol. Women for South Africa and the NSF enclosed a drawing of a soldier in a circle. The NSF had a fighter jet inside a circle. In contrast to the ECC’s linear chain logo, with its image of breaking the chain of oppression, and movement towards a new and better South Africa, circles symbolised completeness, fulfilment and unity, reinforcing the importance of remaining within white consensus, and thus making a symbolic connection between continued white security and military power.<sup>736</sup>

Like the ECC’s graphic messages, smears can be divided into a number of categories. The first attempted to undermine the ECC’s credibility by reinforcing the tenets of “total onslaught”: that conflict was externally created, and that its goal was conquest and the destruction of economic, political and social institutions that whites held dear. By reinforcing the state’s decontextualised “good guy/bad guy” scenario of “total onslaught”, smears thus justified the state’s conscription demands by mobilising white fears. Whether presenting the ECC as a willing accomplice or a dim-witted patsy, the graphic message of smears was that the ECC was in league with the country’s enemies, and its call to end conscription was thus part of the “total onslaught”.

<sup>734</sup> E. Said, “Identity, negation and violence,” *New Left Review*, no.171, 1988, p.59.

<sup>735</sup> *Out of step*, April 1987.

<sup>736</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folders C1-7, smear material of VFV, NSF & Women for South Africa. Graaf, *Hawks and Doves*, p.52.

Communications analysts suggest that propaganda works by creating “hooray” and “boo” concepts, the repetition of which leads to a conditioned response to certain words and images. The SABC was a prime source of state visual propaganda. News reports depicted the UDF, ANC and SACP in terms of random violence rather than political frustration. Political enemies were further dehumanised by largely featuring as statistics, or faceless mobs, while only the security forces and white victims were named in newscasts.<sup>737</sup> The ANC and SACP were automatic “boo” concepts because of their association with the “external threat”. By continually associating the UDF with the ANC and SACP, together with its role in organising protest marches and funerals, it also became a “boo” word for many whites. Smears against the ECC frequently concentrated on building a visual association between the ECC, and the UDF, the ANC, and the SACP, to facilitate a similar instinctive negative reaction.<sup>738</sup>

The Port Elizabeth-based NSF affiliate, Positiewe Studente Organisasie (PSO), for example, put out a graphic showing a hand of cards, labelled Freedom Charter, ANC, UDF, ECC, while the hand fanning them out wore a hammer-and-sickle cufflink. Using the concept that a winning hand in cards relies on the relationship between the cards, so the graphic implied a common basis to the organisations named, while the cufflink suggested that all these organisations were in fact controlled by the Soviet superpower. In similar vein, the PSO issued “Birds of a feather flock together”, which showed a row of vultures, identified by the hammer-and-sickle logo and the acronyms ANC, NUSAS, and UDF, perched on an ECC chain. This emphasised the symbiotic relationship between these groups, and the fact that the ECC was being used by the others (Figure 33).<sup>739</sup>

A full-page NSF Sunday Times advertisement implored, “Don’t let the ECC gamble with peace”,<sup>740</sup> and this concept was subsequently developed into a red, white and black poster, suggesting the ECC was playing Russian roulette with peace (Figure 34). The impact was heightened by the fact that the gun pointed directly at the viewer, demanding a response, and creating a visual message that this issue directly affected the viewer. The peace motif on the gun set up a visual dissonance, forcing the viewer to choose between the conflicting messages of peace or war, and raising questions about the motives of the peace organisations. The ring on the gunman’s hand carried a hammer-and-sickle symbol, once more inviting the viewer to recognise the controlling influence of the Soviets, while the colours encouraged an emotional awareness of danger.<sup>741</sup>

<sup>737</sup> Graaf, *Hawks and Doves*, pp.22 & 25.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>739</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C4, PSO, vol.1, no.1.

<sup>740</sup> Sunday Times 6 October 1985.

<sup>741</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder Q2.2, Russian roulette graphic.

The use of gambling images in these two graphics further reinforced the message that the ECC's call was risky, while official condemnation of gambling at the time intensified the impact of the visual link between the ECC and "disreputable" activities. The association of the ECC with irresponsible actions was further developed by the Women for South Africa pamphlet "The dangerous game of the ECC".<sup>742</sup>

An Aida Parker Newsletter cartoon of people sewing a peace banner by unravelling the threads of the South African flag illustrated the contention that the peace movement was undermining South Africa. A number of the figures were depicted as wearing glasses, to entrench visually the message that this group was shortsighted and unable to see the long-term dangers of its policies (Figure 35). Other figures looked like children, a graphic suggestion that the group was naïve or immature. Another cartoon was more aggressive, portraying the ECC as a mad dog destroying the SADF logo, while the controlling hand of the smug, smiling master with the hammer-and-sickle on his lapel again directed attention to the contention that the ECC was merely following the orders of its "master", the USSR (Figure 36).<sup>743</sup>

The visual message that the ECC was controlled by communist Russia was thus the most frequent theme of smears. A leaflet showed the letters "ECC" gradually metamorphosing into a hammer-and-sickle, the graphic message reinforced by the slogan "One and the same".<sup>744</sup> A cartoon in a VAT newsletter showed an emaciated ECC puppet, with dark glasses to symbolise the blindness of the organisation to how it was being manipulated, with the KGB bear pulling the strings (Figure 37).<sup>745</sup> A VFV leaflet had the hammer-and-sickle striking into South Africa, secured by the ECC chain (Figure 38).<sup>746</sup> The Aida Parker Newsletter carried a cartoon of a Soviet filling in the grave of the free world, with the slogan "We will bury you so gently you won't even know you're dead" (Figure 39).<sup>747</sup> The shovel bore the logo "World peace movements" and the use of a peace symbol underlined the idea that peace movements were unwitting allies of a devious plot, and that without vigilance and countermeasures Soviet infiltration would undermine the values of the west. The association of the ECC with communism also played on whites' fears, that, as the richest group in the country, they had most to lose from political and economic changes to the system of government. Smears thus continued the "total onslaught" thrust, directing white South Africans to identify with the east/west struggle, rather than the specifically South African context of the conflict.

<sup>742</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C6, "The dangerous game of the ECC".

<sup>743</sup> Aida Parker Newsletter, issue 102, March 25 1987, pp.9&13.

<sup>744</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C, "One and the same" anonymous pamphlet.

<sup>745</sup> VAT newsletter, vol.1, no.2.

<sup>746</sup> Documentation Centre for African Studies, ACC 326, VFV pamphlet (undated).

<sup>747</sup> Aida Parker Newsletter, issue 102, March 25 1987, p.8.

While the Aida Parker Newsletter and VFV smears were more generally targeted, it is significant that much of the smear material was aimed at students. Since this group was more open to alternative messages, the intention seems to have been to emphasise the risks of alternatives to “reformed” apartheid. As the graphic war intensified, even the Aida Parker Newsletter, which had previously featured pages of written diatribe against the ECC – some 12 pages of text in its 8 April 1986 issue – began to feature many more cartoons and graphics to make the articles more accessible and appealing.<sup>748</sup>

As the conflict within South Africa escalated, the ECC’s call for peace seems to have become a particular threat. Smear graphics showed the dove of peace carrying a hammer-and-sickle in place of the traditional olive branch,<sup>749</sup> and flying towards the hammer-and-sickle carrying the slogan “The war called peace”.<sup>750</sup> These images reinforced the state’s contention that any call to limit South Africa’s “defensive” capacity was playing into the hands of the enemy, and suggested the peace movement was not what it seemed, but was rather part of the “total onslaught”. The End the End Conscription Campaign explicitly claimed “Stop the call up and peace will fly out of the window”.<sup>751</sup> This kind of smear was intended to exacerbate white fears about majority rule. While few in the townships would have described the ongoing conflict and security force presence as “peace”, the smears were aimed at a white constituency whose geographic, political and social distance from blacks made them more credulous, particularly when their own interests were at stake.

In addition to repudiating the ECC’s depiction of the conflict and its call for a just peace, graphic smears actively promoted national service. A NSF graphic showed lines of armed marching soldiers with the logo “We are South Africans and are here to stay”<sup>752</sup> (Figure 40), making an explicit link between patriotism and military service, and implying that those who emigrated or refused to serve were not “real” South Africans. Smears also reinforced support for “reformed” apartheid. NSF material claimed to “support freedom and security”, with the logo of a soldier encircled by the words “I will serve”. This typified “reformed” apartheid thinking, that present norms could only be maintained by controlled reform, and protected by military power, which in turn relied on everyone doing his “duty”. A similar concept was the more openly macho VFV slogan “peace through strength”.<sup>753</sup> An Aida Parker Newsletter graphic contrasted the purported ECC image of the SADF as an armed barbarian, with the ANC’s image of South Africa without the

<sup>748</sup> The Aida Parker Newsletter, issue 102, March 25 1987, for example, featured an unprecedented number of cartoons.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>750</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C4, NSF publication.

<sup>751</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C2, End the End Conscription material.

<sup>752</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C4, NSF pamphlet.

<sup>753</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folders C4 & 5, NSF and VFV material.

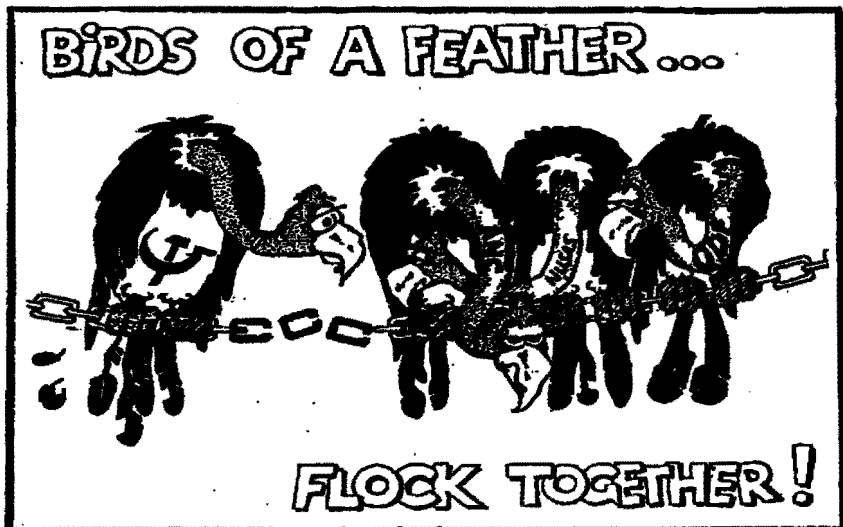


Figure 33.



Figure 34.

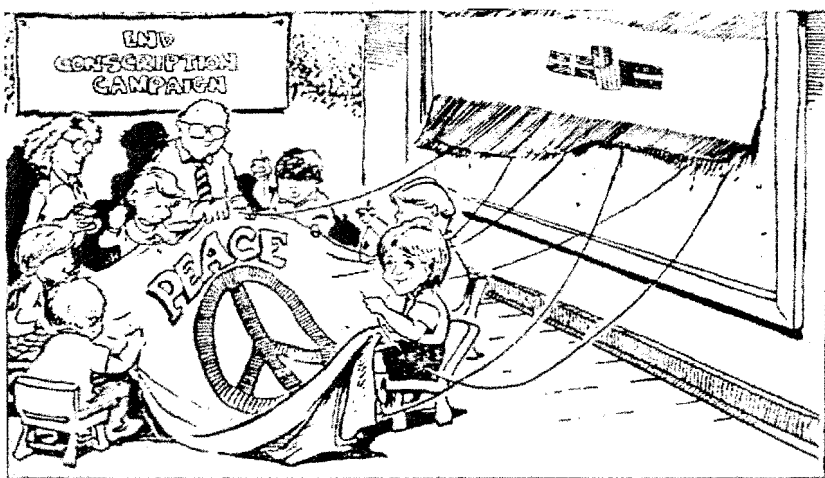


Figure 35.





Figure 36.

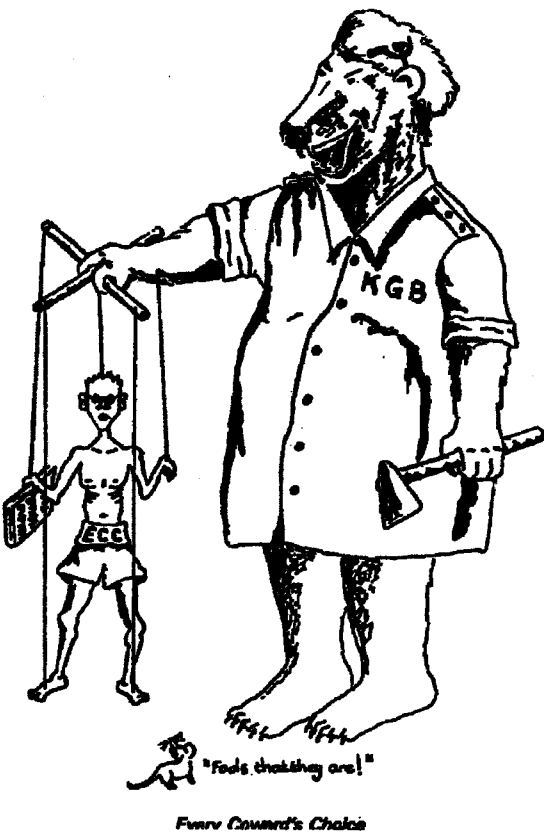


Figure 37.

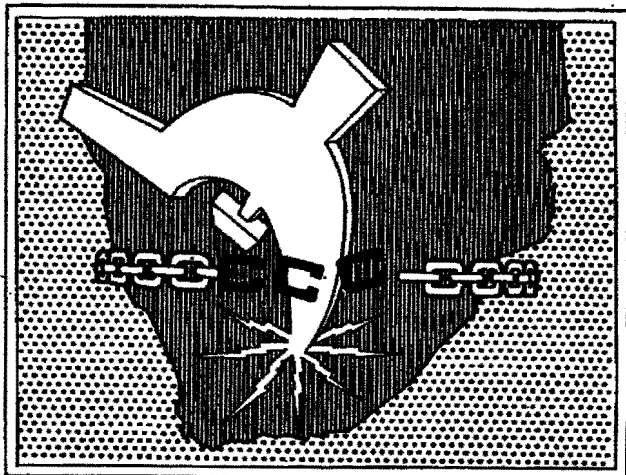


Figure 38.

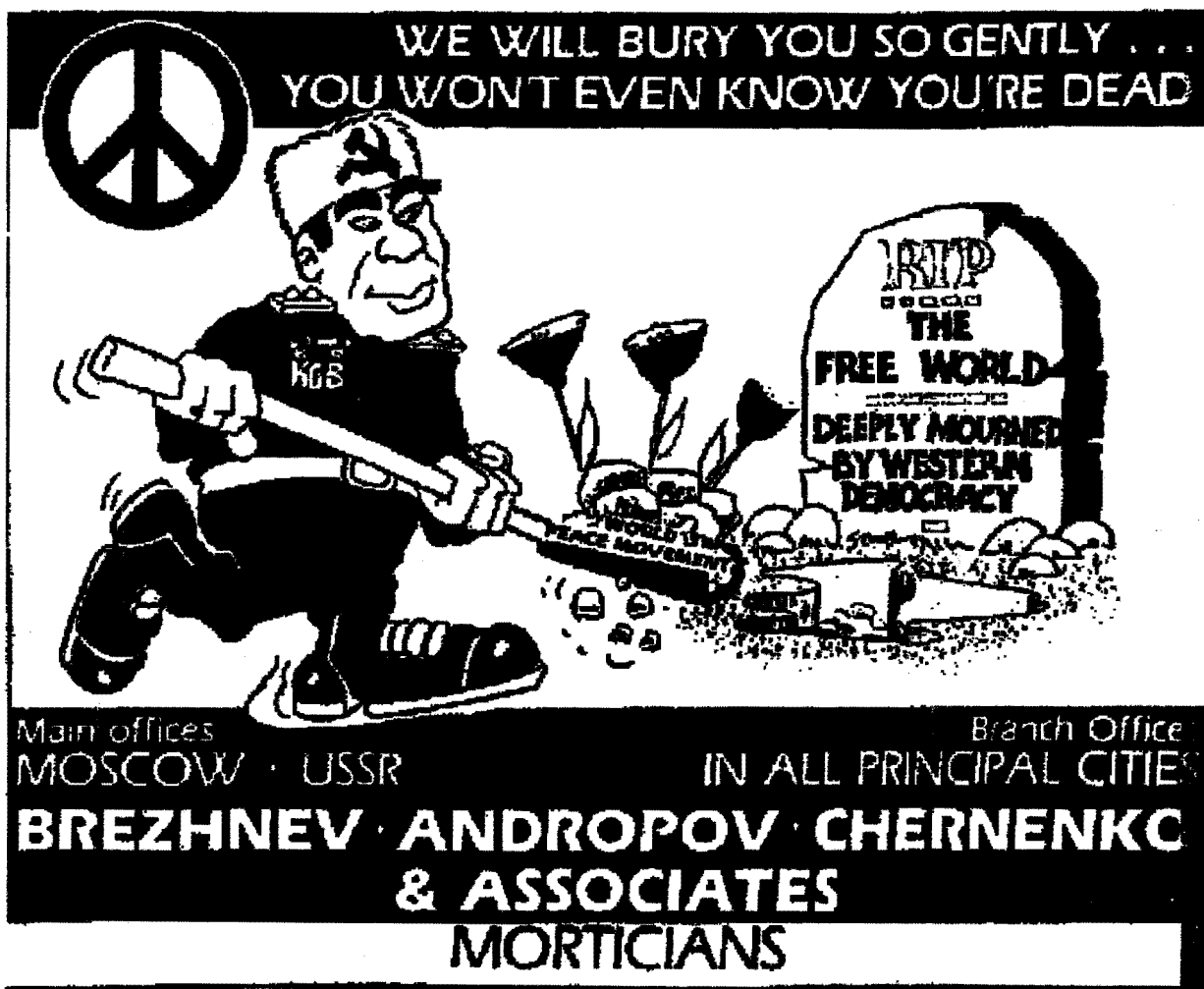


Figure 39.



Figure 40.

**SADF GET OUT!**



**SO THAT WE CAN TERRORIZE  
THE PEOPLE IN PEACE!**

Figure 41.



Figure 42.

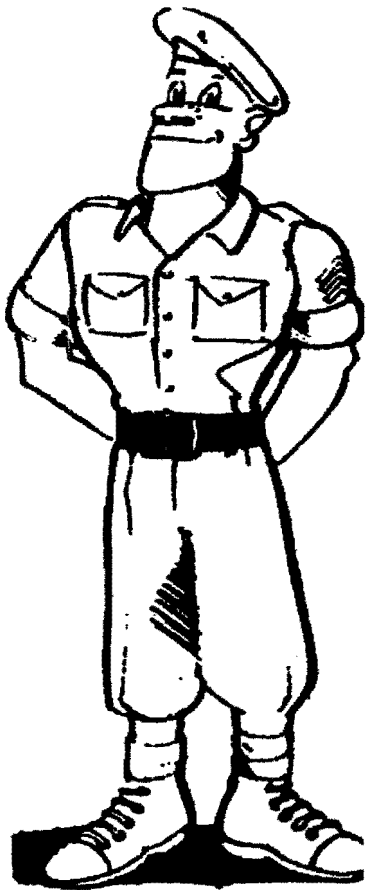


Figure 43.

SPECIAL REPORT

# VETERANS for VICTORY



## ORGANIZATIONS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY GROUPS

By Les...

For over the past ten years, the lesbian and gay movement has developed in the United States in virtually every part of the country, as well as in the small towns and in many rural areas. Lesbian and/or gay groups are active and growing. Their work includes support for people coming out, legal and counseling centers, the publication of newsletters and journals, legislative action either to pass gay civil rights or to stop anti-gay legislation from passing, demonstrations and actions raising gay rights, etc. One of the vital events of this movement was the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. On October 1979, over 125,000 people from all over the country marched in Washington, D.C.

Fact: there is no such thing as a "typical gay person" or "typical lesbian." To begin with, there are many differences between the sexes that exist in this society are reflected in the community as well. Beyond that, there are differences in sexual orientation, different perspectives, different talents and beliefs, and different backgrounds.

It is important to recognize that the lesbian and gay community is not a monolith. It is a diverse group of people with different experiences and perspectives. It is a community that is constantly evolving and growing.

Like 20,000,000 people in the United States...

One of the effects of the social and economic changes of the past few years has been for visibility as gays of the past few years. That struggle is...

### Living Around Gay

support in various forms from heterosexuals and even of organizations and gay men. This is a statement of respect for the right to express oneself freely and openly in one's culture. The experience of being gay in America is not a new one. It is a struggle that has been going on for a long time. It is a struggle that is still being fought today. It is a struggle that is still being fought today.

The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) which aims at promoting resistance to the armed forces in South Africa has mobilised various groups in the country to help it achieve its objectives. These groups have included national servicemen, school leavers and in recent months the ECC has been linked to LINX, an organization composed of 'concerned' schoolchildren who have been active in school playgrounds around the country.

• To page 2

**QUEER BIRDS THESE WAR RESISTERS**

Figure 44.

## ECC BIRD OR THE LEFTWINGER

**LUMP CAUSED THROUGH SWALLOWING A.H.C. AND COMMUNIST JUNK**



**BEAK BROKEN AFTER PROKING AT ALL AND ANY REPORTS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**TWO LEFT WINGS HENCE THE NAME LEFTWINGER MAKES BIRD FLY AROUND IN EVER DECREASING CIRCLES UNTIL IT DISAPPEARS.**

Figure 45.

SADF, a target painted over South Africa.<sup>754</sup> By reinforcing white fears about the ANC's ambitions this kind of smear was intended to promote acceptance of the continued need for the SADF, and to suggest that the ECC served the ANC's goals by undermining the SADF. Continued acceptance of the status quo was promoted by reinforcing fears of the unknown.

The graphic counter campaign further exacerbated white fears by presenting the "enemy" as demonic, calculating, and violent. VAT, for example, created newsletters built on white outrage at bomb blasts and landmine attacks and the fears these engendered. Its publications also upheld conscript deaths as the greatest possible honour.<sup>755</sup> Western Province Command put out a graphic of a bestial figure, with elongated teeth and nails, preparing to hurl a petrol bomb, while behind him was a necklace victim (Figure 41). The perpetrator wore the logos of the ANC, UDF and ECC, while his hat carried the hammer-and-sickle logo. The slogan of the graphic played on the ECC call for the SADF to get out of the townships, but the motivation was inverted by having the violent central figure make the call, with the explicit rider "So that we can terrorise the people in peace!"<sup>756</sup>

Smears against the ECC thus exploited the ambiguities of the freedom struggle, particularly the violence which was difficult for liberals to understand or accept. VFV, for example, put out a pamphlet to counter Ivan Toms' refusal to serve. Headed "We believe Dr Toms is wrong and here's why",<sup>757</sup> two contrasting photographs showed a necklace victim burning, and a soldier playing soccer with township youth, a clear graphic suggestion of the consequences of not having the SADF in the townships and a graphic claim that the SADF was both accepted by the township residents and was promoting positive interracial relationships.

Besides suggesting the ECC stood outside white norms of security, smears also depicted the ECC as being outside of gender norms. With national service being held up as the epitome of virile masculinity, General Magnus Malan called the ECC "mommy's little boys", implying their opposition reflected a lack of maturity, or a refusal to embrace manhood, with all its trials.<sup>758</sup> The characterisation of the ECC as cowardly and effeminate was intended to make support for the ECC less appealing. This kind of counter campaign seems to have been most directly aimed at youth, where adulthood is frequently perceived as the gateway to power and privilege.

<sup>754</sup> Aida Parker Newsletter, issue 102, March 25 1987, pp.2-3.

<sup>755</sup> Victims Against Terrorism, Update, August 1988.

<sup>756</sup> Sash, 31-5-1987, p.1.

<sup>757</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C5.2, VFV, "We believe Dr Toms is wrong and here's why".

<sup>758</sup> Cock, Colonels and cadres, p.74.

Interviews with soldiers and the ECC's own research showed that even among those who did not explicitly support the SADF, the sense of camaraderie, the sophisticated equipment, and the sense of adventure and the achievement of overcoming obstacles were often viewed positively by conscripts.<sup>759</sup> Smears thus attempted to build an association between military service and these factors, while denigrating the ECC as ineffectual bystanders. VFV newsletters suggested a mystical warrior cult, claiming "You have never lived until you have almost died".<sup>760</sup> A NSF graphic of armed soldiers drilling<sup>761</sup> reinforced the idea that national service built teamwork, discipline and responsibility. The symbols utilised in smears used the phallic associations of weaponry to reinforce the contention that military service was a valid and exclusive expression of masculinity, while the ECC was overtly accused of hiding behind "principles", while actually not being "man enough" to face the "discipline, physical training and discomfort".<sup>762</sup>

Interestingly, though, a number of these graphics of soldiers had a sanitised quality, suggesting that the realities of soldiering were not universally appealing, particularly to mothers. Women for South Africa, for example, put out a logo in which the soldier resembled a boy scout rather than a soldier<sup>763</sup> (Figure 42), while a VFV salute to soldiers showed a soldier looking more like something out of an Archie comic than the heroic but more overtly violent images in pro-war comics like "Grensvegter", whose sentiments accorded with VFV ideals (Figure 43).<sup>764</sup>

Smears represented ECC men as cowardly, spotty, weedy, effeminate, failed men or homosexuals, outside the "desirable" norm. VFV newsletters suggested that it was difficult to distinguish between the male and female members of the ECC,<sup>765</sup> implying that men involved in the ECC were asexual or impotent, while also presenting the women as undesirably unfeminine.

Significantly, when Ivan Toms decided to oppose his call-up in 1987 the ensuing smear campaign directly targeted his homosexuality. Posters claiming "ECC members are Yellow", "ECC does it from behind" and "ECC believes in Fairytales" appeared all over Cape Town,<sup>766</sup> clearly attempting to reduce support for Toms and the ECC, undermining their credibility by presenting them as outside of "acceptable" white norms.<sup>767</sup> Similarly, the VFV publication, "Queer birds these war resisters",<sup>768</sup> (Figure 44) included an obscured newspaper-style text, in which only a few phrases referring

<sup>759</sup> Price, *A documentation of the experiences of military conscripts in the South African Defence Force*, part II conscript interviews. Cock, *Colonels and cadres*, p.76.

<sup>760</sup> Graaf, *Hawks and Doves*, p.49.

<sup>761</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C4, NSF pamphlet "We are South Africans and here to stay".

<sup>762</sup> Graaf, *Hawks and Doves*, p.52.

<sup>763</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C6, "The dangerous game of the ECC" pamphlet.

<sup>764</sup> Graaf, *Hawks and Doves*, p.49.

<sup>765</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder C5.2, VFV pamphlet (undated).

<sup>766</sup> *Argus* 1 September 1988.

<sup>767</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder B8.7, ECC press release 28 April 1987.

<sup>768</sup> Sue Britton's personal papers, "Queer birds these war resisters" pamphlet.

to the growing mobilisation of gays and lesbians could be read in full. A sidebar used the words "schoolchildren" and "playground" in describing growing pupil support for the ECC, to imply the ECC was an organisation which would only be attractive to the naive, immature, or those with a "deviant" agenda. The ostrich feet which accompanied the text implied that the ECC had its head in the sand, and that only those determined to ignore the "realities" of the South African situation would propose an end to conscription.

The VFV smear, the "ECC bird or the leftwinger"<sup>769</sup> (Figure 45), also showed a disoriented looking bird with labelled features: a hammer-and-sickle lodged in the throat from "swallowing ANC and communist junk", a broken beak from "pecking at all and any reforms in South Africa", and two left wings, so it could only fly in circles. Moreover, the bird looked like some species of poultry, putting it considerably lower in the food chain than the birds and animals of prey the SADF used to name its equipment and units, creating associations of power, superiority and nobility. Once again the graphic associated the ECC with immaturity, obstructionism and a lack of any positive direction, as well as with ineffectuality and powerlessness.

Thus the graphic work of both the ECC and its detractors continued the conscription debate, contesting the nature of South African society and the conflict as well as the role of conscription, through symbols, slogans and emotional manipulation. ECC graphics claimed that the status quo was deeply flawed and challenged the viewer to participate in the process of change. Smear material called on the viewer to remain passive and to comply with the state's demands. By reinforcing white fears about change the state encouraged the protection of the status quo. ECC graphics emphasised the individual's frustrations and desires, and encouraged him or her to choose to participate in bringing about change. Smears emphasised the needs and security of the group, and the necessity for the individual to co-operate with the existing authorities in order to maintain white security. Smears used militaristic images to imply that the situation was under control because of the SADF, and to suggest that it would remain so if whites continued to comply with the state's conscription demands.<sup>770</sup>

The state had enormous power to project a social construction of its opposition which fostered acceptance of "total onslaught" and its conscription demands.<sup>771</sup> Yet despite its vastly inferior public access and resources, the ECC's graphic campaign was an important component in its opposition, allowing for an emotional articulation of the frustration of conscripts and the cost of the conflict. While it is impossible to quantify the precise impact of the graphic

<sup>769</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, C5.2, "ECC bird or the leftwinger" pamphlet.

<sup>770</sup> Graaf, *Hawks and Doves: the pro- and anti- conscription press in South Africa*, p.12.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.



campaign on whites, there can be little doubt that it significantly heightened awareness of the ECC among whites in general and ECC target groups in particular. The level of resources and concern expressed by the state in trying to counter the ECC's message further indicated that the ECC was perceived as posing a significant oppositional threat.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion.

In an analysis concentrating so specifically on the ECC it is easy to overstate its impact. The ECC was one part of a resistance movement which was primarily black, from trade union pressure on business to the township uprisings of scholars; from the internal pressure of the UDF to the externally conceived actions of the ANC and PAC. However, because the ECC emerged from within the privileged white group, it challenged the power of the state's ideology in a unique way. While white security fears limited the PFP's parliamentary opposition, the extra-parliamentary opposition of the ECC was not so constrained by the need to hold together a constituency. Rather its oppositional impact lay in encouraging whites to re-examine the cost:benefit ratio of the state's continuous conscription demands.

In 1985 James Phillips, leader of the band the "Cherry-faced Lurchers", commented that South African rock music was very significant because "people need to have their troubles and their fears articulated".<sup>772</sup> The accuracy of his comment was borne out by the 1988 commercial success of the song "Weeping" by the group "Bright Blue", which explored the use of the military in the South African conflict.<sup>773</sup> It is fitting to conclude this examination of the ECC using the insights of this popular song, because culture was a very important means of drawing people to the ECC, and in turn, of exposing a variety of people to the ECC's oppositional message, lodging slogans, graphics, drama and music, like seeds, in white consciousness. Germination was hastened by factors outside the ECC's control, but as the socio-economic climate worsened, and as white families and individuals increasingly felt the negative effects of ongoing conflict and conscription demands, so the ECC's call for alternatives to military conscription took root.<sup>774</sup>

The song "Weeping" described the conflict in South Africa through the metaphor of a monster who terrified everyone by its roaring, and had to be controlled by "a wall of steel and flame/and men with guns to keep it tame". As this study has shown, the state relied on white conscription for its physical perpetuation, and on its security discourse to maintain white ideological and political cohesion. Through "total onslaught" propaganda the state distracted white attention from the essentially political nature of the conflict, and, by portraying its political enemies as monstrous, destructive and defiling, legitimised military containment rather than negotiation as the solution. Throughout the ECC's existence white security fears remained a potent means of rallying white unity, and were used by the NP regularly at election time to ensure whites would return the party to power, as the best guarantor of white security.

<sup>772</sup> Wits Student, vol.37, no.715, May 1985.

<sup>773</sup> Bright Blue, "Weeping" from One world, EMI records, 1988. The song reached number one on the Radio 5 charts. See Appendix Two.

<sup>774</sup> A review of the 1985 Cape Town ECC "Art for Peace" exhibition, for example, was critical of the quality of some of the work but argued that "as socio-political comment by concerned artists, it deserves attention", Cape Times 9 October 1985. The ECC's focus on art, drama and music won it frequent media attention. "Forces Favourites", for example, was reviewed in the Financial Mail, a publication not particularly sympathetic to the ECC, Financial Mail 28 February 1986.

However, the state's ongoing conscription demands and its ability only to control the conflict, not to resolve it, meant that the issue of conscription had an inherently divisive power as whites continuously had to be convinced that the disruption of their personal and professional lives was necessary and worth the cost. The first part of the ECC's opposition challenge was thus to demonstrate to whites that the cost of conscription outweighed the benefits. By focusing both public and private white discontent on the conscription system the ECC widened the scope of objection beyond its own radical demand for the ending of conscription to a more moderate, and hence more widely acceptable, call for alternatives to purely military conscription.

While the ECC experienced periods of growth around campaigns, suggesting it was winning support for its position, the rising emigration rate also indicated that by highlighting conscripts' stark choices the ECC had an indirect impact on white society, as a number of whites chose to leave rather than confront either township duty or jail. The ECC's oppositional impact was about more than manpower, however. The state's security discourse had become one of the few avenues for reinforcing cohesion among whites by directing their attention to a common self-interest. The state's ideological construction of the conflict was intended to encourage whites to perceive themselves as a group, united in its goals, facing a common enemy, sharing a common value system, and then to see the NP as the means of realising the ambitions and ensuring the security of this white "group".<sup>775</sup> An important part of the ECC's opposition was thus its call for alternatives to military conscription, and its focusing of white attention on divisive aspects of conscription, particularly the internal deployment of the SADF, which exacerbated white political divisions. This left the NP in a shrinking and increasingly directionless middle ground, unable to overcome either its reliance on conscription, or to offer whites sufficient incentives to stem the growing tide of criticism, from both the white left and right, of the state's handling of conscription and its containment of the conflict.

While the ECC did gain a following between 1983 and 1988, the second significant point about the impact of its opposition is that it was not dependent on winning widespread white support. Many whites were insulated by apartheid so that they had little empathy with blacks, and often lacked understanding or knowledge of the effects of apartheid on black communities. The apartheid state controlled broadcasting, school education, publications, and through security legislation could muffle, if not entirely quash, protest. Extra parliamentary opposition thus remained largely a fringe activity for whites and the government presented its proponents as deviant in one way or another. Whites were also made uncomfortable by extra-parliamentary opposition because its demands were radical in the sense that they challenged the entire structure of the apartheid system rather than particular symptoms, questioned the moral heart of

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<sup>775</sup> Sharp & Boonzaier, South African keywords : the uses and abuses of political concepts, p.6.

apartheid rather than particular policies, and advocated cures which were enormously frightening for whites who had been raised for generations with a "them and us" mentality, which tended to conceive of change primarily in terms of the loss of white power and privilege.

On one level it thus seems incredible that the ECC should have been a threat to the apartheid state at all. A tiny organisation, comprising at its peak no more than between 15 and 80 active members in each of nine urban regions,<sup>776</sup> the ECC never had an organisational reach beyond the major cities. It did not penetrate far into the Afrikaans community, and even in the English community its support base was primarily drawn from the middle-class academic, liberal and church groupings which had called it into being in the first place. Throughout its existence military analysts insisted the apartheid state was still militarily powerful, while conscript reporting figures remained relatively constant. Yet the state regarded the ECC as a sufficient threat to target it specifically in the 1986 emergency regulations, to mount a disinformation campaign directly aimed at the organisation, and finally to ban it in August 1988.

The oppositional force of the ECC did not lie in its ability to mobilise large sections of the white community to oppose conscription, but in its publicising the essentially divisive issue of conscription. This created a challenge which the state could neither wholly contain by repression, nor wholly disarm by acceding to its demands, so that neither the white left nor the right were satisfied. While the state tried to control the ECC's opposition through repression, this stimulated liberal criticism. Yet as long as the ECC could be heard, the right wing criticised the state for having lost control. The situation was thus much like the one described in "Weeping". While the protagonist insisted the threat was under "firm control", the onlooker noted that "the fear and the fire and the guns remain". As long as conscription remained, the ECC had a platform, both to remind whites that control came at a cost, and to question the morality of that control, while its public presence exacerbated existing political tensions among whites.

In "Weeping", as the onlooker approached the monster he realised it was not roaring, but weeping. In the same way, the third reason why the ECC played a significant opposition role is that it offered whites an alternative version of reality, one which inverted the heroes and villains, and questioned the morality of accepted norms.<sup>777</sup> People drawn to the ECC were predominantly those already committed to the idea that the black majority was weeping in pain.

<sup>776</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder A2.1, national committee regional reports 3 May 1987.

<sup>777</sup> This was particularly difficult in a society bombarded on all sides by "total onslaught" propaganda. On a radio talk show in 1999, a caller relived his incredulity at being a conscript undergoing a briefing session on how the ANC embodied evil, when the briefing was disbanded due to the announcement that the ANC had just been unbanned. He recalled his struggle to come to terms with the sense of being a pawn, deceived by the very authorities which were asking him to risk his life in battle. The majority of whites were not confronted with the extent of the state's manipulation of the security discourse until well after the ECC had been banned. Even after the disclosures of the TRC, it seems that a number of whites will never fully believe that "their" government could be so expedient. Radio 702 The David O'Sullivan Show, 2 February 1999.

However the impact of the ECC came not from attempting to oppose the state's portrayal of the liberation movement as a roaring monster which must be kept at bay by military force powered by white conscripts. Rather, it articulated the increasing fears and frustrations of whites, which the state was trying to repress behind its discourse of patriotic duty. The ECC focused not on the monster's weeping, but on the weeping of those manning the barricades, encouraging whites to recognise that they, too, were in pain as conscription tore families apart, and caused individuals to suffer mentally, physically and economically.

In their comprehensive study of CO worldwide, Moskos and Chambers suggested that the emergence of the modern western concept of the individual has played a significant role in shifting the emphasis from duty to the group to the rights of the individual.<sup>778</sup> Tom Waspe of JODAC argued that the significance of white extra-parliamentary opposition was to organise the ruling class against its own interests, but the particular contribution of the ECC was to use white self-interest as an opposition tool, suggesting to whites that their interests were not being served by the current system. Similarly, Beyers Naudé argued that it was not possible to make inroads into white society in sufficient numbers for whites to change and make a significant contribution towards reform because they were too tied to the status quo by fear and self-interest. The ECC was able to make a difference, however, because it did not encourage whites to work for reform out of a change of heart, but used those very motivations of fear and self-interest to make whites question the costs of conscription.<sup>779</sup> The power of white self-interest had kept the NP in power for a long time, but became a weapon against the NP when the ECC used it to encourage whites to demand alternatives to military service.

Fourthly, while only sympathisers would recognise the few bars of opposition national anthem "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" woven into the refrain in "Weeping", this did not detract from the overall message of the song. In the same way, the more radical aspects of the ECC's call were never accepted by many whites, but as the status quo became increasingly untenable, the ECC's interim demands were adopted by sectors of white society outside of, and not necessarily sympathetic towards, the ECC. In 1986 General Malan told a conscript's wife that, because of the threat against South Africa, every able-bodied white man now had a second career in the military.<sup>780</sup> By 1991 the SADF estimated some 500 conscripts emigrated per year,<sup>781</sup> suggesting that for a number of whites the costs of this "second career" were no longer worth the benefits.

<sup>778</sup> Moskos & Chambers, *The new conscientious objection: from sacred to secular resistance*, p.199.

<sup>779</sup> Frederikse, *The unbreakable thread: non-racialism in South Africa*, pp.222-223.

<sup>780</sup> DSD Ministry of Defence, group 5, MV/V/61/12/2, vol.62, box 221, letter from Magnus Malan 28 May 1986.

<sup>781</sup> DSD Reports, K97/1, box 371, provisional report on CO 30 July 1991, p.2.

While extra-parliamentary support for the ECC might be battered and bloodied by the state of emergency, by 1988 the very moderation of the ECC's demands led to an avalanche of protest against conscription from the PFP, within the NGK, in the press and popular magazines, from the churches, universities, business and international supporters of the ECC, to the point that the state was forced to ban the ECC. The moderation of the ECC's demands thus intensified pressure on the state by widening the number of support bases, so that even opponents of the ECC encouraged a widening of the conditions of alternative service, convinced this would significantly undermine the ECC's momentum. Although the state's manpower needs were decreasing with the increased likelihood of a cease-fire in Angola, the state could not afford to make concessions on conscription, since to do so would undermine the authority of its security discourse, which remained a critical means of containing white discontent – particularly given the CP's gains in the 1987 general election – as by-elections loomed in October 1988.

Lastly, the ECC was a significant opposition movement because it gave whites a place to work actively and creatively for change. Unlike the repeated refrain of "Weeping", "It doesn't matter now, it's over anyhow", symptomatic of white feelings of impotence, a constant theme in interviews with ECC activists was their feeling of having been part of something entirely worthwhile. At the 1985 Cape Town "Troops Out" fast, Molly Blackburn told the audience "We must refuse to be pulled into a vortex of cynicism and despair."<sup>782</sup> The ECC gave whites a sense of being able to participate in the struggle for democracy at a meaningful level. No longer was it a case of "being the least obstruction".<sup>783</sup> Rather, Durban ECC member Rob Goldman suggested the ECC gave whites more options than "guilt-ridden inertia" or emigration.<sup>784</sup> ECC campaigns offered whites a vision of a better alternative to the embattled present, as well as a way to contribute actively to the struggle for a more just, peaceful and equal society.

In the context of bannings, detentions, violence, torture and executions, it seems incongruous to cast the period between 1983 and 1988 as an age of innocence, yet the ECC's very limited opposition goals and its emphasis on peace and justice gave the movement a unique sense of unity and a moral vocabulary which fostered an energising creativity, and offered a vision of opposition which was not only ethical, but was also fun. As the new South Africa manifests so much of the violence and power mongering, together with a continuation of much of the structural inequality of the old, it is difficult to recapture that sense of unity of purpose and clarity of goals, so that the ECC seems to belong to a different, simpler era.<sup>785</sup> Yet the ECC was not naïve. One of its core strengths was the ability to

<sup>782</sup> Historical Papers AG 1977, folder E1.1.2, Cape Town report on fast meeting.

<sup>783</sup> See footnote 130.

<sup>784</sup> *Sunday Tribune* 30 October 1988.

<sup>785</sup> Long-term ECC member, Gavin Evans, for example, in his book *Dancing shoes is dead*, detailed his growing disillusionment, with the realisation that the ANC, too, was peopled by mortals with faults and weaknesses, and concern about the endemic violence and crime in the new South Africa. G. Evans, *Dancing shoes is dead* (London, Transworld Publishers, 2002) *passim*.

unite such a variety of individuals and organisations around the common conviction that apartheid was wrong, that the SADF was directly responsible for perpetuating the apartheid system, and therefore to undermine the one was to undermine the other. As soon as the possibility of a new political dispensation became a reality, the fragility of these alliances was revealed, but between 1983 and 1988 the common goal of ending conscription created a unique focus and unity within the democratic movement, and the ECC spearheaded a significant white extra-parliamentary challenge to apartheid.



## TOWARDS A JUST PEACE IN OUR LAND

### A Declaration to End Conscription

We live in an unjust society where basic human rights are denied to the majority of the people.

We live in an unequal society where the land and wealth are owned by the minority.

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

We call for an end to conscription.

Young men are conscripted to maintain the illegal occupation of Namibia, and to wage unjust war against foreign countries.

Young men are conscripted to assist in the implementation and defence of apartheid policies.

Young men who refuse to serve are faced with the choice of a life of exile or a possible six years in prison.

We call for an end to conscription.

We believe that the financial cost of the war increases the poverty of our country, and that money should rather be used in the interests of peace.

We believe that the extension of conscription to coloured and Indian youth will increase conflict and further divide our country.

**WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS THE MORAL RIGHT OF SOUTH AFRICANS TO EXERCISE FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND TO CHOOSE NOT TO SERVE IN THE SADF.**

**WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION**

**WE CALL FOR A JUST PEACE IN OUR LAND**

**Appendix Two: "Weeping" by Bright Blue.**

I knew a man who lived in fear

it was huge it was angry

it was drawing near

Behind his house a secret place

was the shadow of the demon

he could never face.

He built a wall of steel and flame

and men with guns to keep it tame

Then standing back he made it plain

that the nightmare would never ever rise again

But the fear and the fire and the guns remain.

It doesn't matter now it's over anyhow

He tells the world that it's sleeping

But as the night came round I heard

it slowly sound

it wasn't roaring it was weeping

it wasn't roaring it was weeping.

SAX SOLO - Basil "Mannenburg" Coetzee

And then one day the neighbours came

they were curious to know about the smoke and flame

They stood around outside the wall

but of course there was nothing to be heard at all

"My friends", he said, "we've reached our goal

the threat is under firm control

As long as peace and order reign

I'll be damned if I can see a reason to explain  
Why the fear and the fire and the guns remain".

It doesn't matter now it's over anyhow  
He tells the world that it's sleeping  
But as the night came round I heard  
it slowly sound  
it wasn't roaring it was weeping  
it wasn't roaring it was weeping.

It doesn't matter now it's over anyhow  
He tells the world that it's sleeping  
But as the night came round I heard  
it slowly sound  
it wasn't roaring it was weeping  
it wasn't roaring it was weeping.

Composed by: Heymann/ Fox/ Cohen/ Cohen, from the album "One world" EMI records 1988.

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