

THE DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION OF THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN (WESTERN CAPE).

Paper to be presented to the Black Sash National Conference, Johannesburg, March 1984.

1. Black Sash Resolution.

At our National Conference in 1983 we passed a resolution on conscription and conscientious objection (Appendix i). This issue was raised because of the provisions of the 1983 Defence Amendment Act which was then before Parliament. Because of the increased difficulties in supporting conscientious objection we felt that focussing on conscription and working towards its abolition were constructive and legal ways of promoting the entire issue of conscience and the unjust war.

2. The National Conference of Conscientious Objectors Support Groups (Durban, July 1983).

Black Sash members attended this conference as official delegates. The new law was thoroughly examined at the conference, and it was felt that the valuable moral support given to conscientious objectors must continue, but that the public needed greater exposure to the militarization taking place in our society; the practicality of the "Black Sash Call", as it has been labelled, was raised. Conscription was seen as a valid and worthwhile issue to confront and the different regional C.O.S.G.s went home to start working on some form of campaign.

3. Formation.

The Western Cape C.O.S.G. set up a steering committee which convened a preliminary meeting on October 3rd to arrange the inaugural meeting of the End Conscription Campaign committee.

4. Inaugural Meeting - 17th November.

The Cape Town C.O.S.G. invited 16 organisations to this meeting (Appendix ii). Each organisation sent a representative and an observer. The following things were discussed and clarified:

i) The Working Principles of the End Conscription Committee (Western Cape).

1. This committee is brought together on the common understanding of the harmful effects of compulsory military conscription and increased militarization on our lives and our society.
2. The committee believes the SADF is active in upholding injustice in our society.
3. The function of the committee will be to decide on and coordinate a campaign against enforced conscription.
4. In order to effectively oppose conscription, education should take place within constituent organisations as well as the community at large.
5. This committee will liaise with similar committees to coordinate the campaign nationally.

ii) The Structure of the End Conscription Committee (W. Cape):

1. Representation. The committee shall consist of

representatives of organisations who accept the committee's working principles as the basis for cooperation to oppose conscription.

2. Powers. The committee shall make recommendations to member organisations, through their representatives on activities to engage in. The committee shall decide as a whole on programmes of actions and tasks to engage in to implement the campaign.

3. Executive. The committee shall elect an executive from representatives on the committee. The Executive shall include: Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, Secretary, Liaison Officer. The Executive shall be responsible for:

- a) convening regular meetings of the committee, and
 - b) undertaking any administrative tasks which may arise.
- (C.O.S.G., H.U.S.A.S., Black Sash and Western Province Council of Churches are represented on the executive).

5. Second Meeting - January 19th, 1984.

We had by now clarified several points about the campaign:

i) Rationale of the Campaign:

The call to end conscription opens up a new opportunity for constructively opposing militarization; it has a number of advantages over simply taking up the issue of Conscientious Objection:

- a) The campaign has far broader appeal:
 - everyone is affected by conscription, yet only a few are concerned with conscientious objection.
 - it draws on people's resentment of conscription.
- b) It is a legal campaign which does not contravene Section 121(c) of the Defence Act.
- c) It allows the opportunity for strengthening and broadening the alliances between groups concerned with the growing militarization of our society.
- d) It has the potential for a far more systematic education and awareness drive than conscientious objection.
- e) The initiative of the campaign has sidestepped the attempt of the Defence Amendment Act to reduce resistance to the military. It can therefore develop its own momentum.

ii) Main Aims of the Campaign:

- a) To create a coherent voice of opposition to the military within the white community. This would be a significant force in undermining the ~~state's~~ ^{National Party} support base and in building non-racial opposition.
- b) To create a supportive environment for political organisations to take up opposition to conscription in the oppressed communities.

iii) Target Constituencies (the focus of this committee is presently with those conscripted, i.e. whites):

- a) Youth
- b) Churches
- c) Organisations such as the Black Sash, Women's Movement for Peace and South African Institute for Race Relations, which have also clearly rejected apartheid.

iv) National Character of Campaign:

- a) The first stage of the campaign could be defined as the promotion of awareness and the understanding of opposition to conscription.

- 2) There is a great need for flexibility -
 - 1) to suit the pace of different regions,
 - 2) to suit constituent organisations,
 - 3) and to adapt the campaign to complement other campaigns.

6. Concrete Suggestions for taking up the Campaign

Following the 19th January meeting the Committee has been meeting regularly. A definite scenario has been drawn up which focuses on the many different issues facing us and uses them to create peaks of interest and activity through the year. It is very flexible because of the uncertainty of the political situations that might occur - e.g. peace initiatives in Angola, extended conscription, etc.

i) Survey: The Cape Town End Conscription Committee accepted the proposal to undertake a survey/questionnaire. To date NUSAS have set up their draft questionnaire which is intended to raise issues, give statistical results and form the first part of an awareness-raising programme this year. The Church group have a draft questionnaire pinpointing moral and religious issues; this is quite a long questionnaire with multiple choice answers. (The E.C.C. is formulating a survey to be forwarded to other organisations for their use - appendix iii).

ii) Preparation Day: This took place on March 3rd and was very successful. We had about 35 people present and some valuable discussion and ideas were generated.

iii) Declaration by E.C.C.: A draft of the proposed declaration has been prepared and as soon as this has the ratification of all bodies concerned it will be printed and will be used in the most effective ways open to us. (appendix iv). It is intended to be circulated for endorsement by as many organisations as possible, and is planned to be released at the time of the Defence debate in Parliament next month.

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APPENDIX 1 - 1983 Resolution on Conscription and Conscientious Objection.

During World War II the South African Government respected the conscience of individuals and there was no conscription. The country is even more seriously divided now than it was then.

South Africa is illegally occupying Namibia and this is cause for many in conscience to refuse military service. When South Africa withdraws from Namibia there should be no need for a massive military establishment unless there has been a political failure to respond to the desires of the citizens.

If a conscripted army is necessary it will be because of the political failure to respond to the desires of the citizens, and that army will be engaged in a civil war, which is good cause for many to refuse military service. In such a civil war, if the state has to rely on conscription to man its army the war is already lost.

Therefore the Black Sash demands that the South African Government abolish all conscription for military service. We maintain that there is no total onslaught against the people of South Africa and the total strategy demanded of us is not the military defence of a minority government but the total all-out effort of all South Africa's people to bring about democratic government and the relief of the poverty and deprivation suffered by the majority.

It was further agreed that all regions of the Black Sash should inform and educate their members about the militarisation of our society and the reasons for the Conference making the above statement.

APPENDIX ii: List of all the organizations involved to date in the
Cape Western End Conscription Campaign

Conscientious Objectors Support Group

United Womens Organization

University of Cape Town S.R.C.

NUSAS

Methodist Church

Koiba

Western Province Council of Churches

Catholic Justice and Peace

Black Sash

Student Union for Christian Action

Team - The Eccumenical Action Movement

Detainees Action Committee

Anglican Board of Social Responsibility

Women's Movement for Peace

Students Christian Association

APPENDIX iii

1. Are you liable for conscription?

YES

___ White male between 16 - 60

NO

___ Done it already

___ Woman

___ African

NOT YET ___ (Coloured, Indian)

2. Why are only whites conscripted?

___ Whites have the vote

___ Obligated to defend privileges

___ Too unpopular among black South Africans

3. Why do you think people are conscripted for 4 years?

___ Because of total onslaught against South Africa

___ To provide a military shield behind which internal change can occur

___ To defend apartheid.

4. Do you think the SADF defends the interests of

___ all South Africans

___ whites

___ those with privileges

___ Christianity and western civilization

___ none

___ some

5. How do you feel about conscription?

___ necessary evil

___ would like to end it

___ would like to have a choice to serve or not.

APPENDIX iv Draft Proposal for Discussion

Declaration in Support of an End to 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 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 cost of the war increases the poverty of our country, that the money should be used in the interests of peace.

We believe that the extension of conscription to coloureds and Indians will exacerbate the conflict and further divide our country.

WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS THE MORAL RIGHT OF ALL SOUTH AFRICANS TO REFUSE TO BE CONSCRIPTED INTO THE SADF.

WE CALL FOR AN END TO CONSCRIPTION.