OBJECTING TO APARTHEID:
THE HISTORY OF THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the history of the End Conscription Campaign (ECC) and evaluates its contribution to the struggle against apartheid. The ECC mobilised white opposition to apartheid by focussing on the role of the military in perpetuating white rule. By identifying conscription as the price paid by white South Africans for their continued political dominance, the ECC discovered a point of resistance within apartheid discourse around which white opposition could converge. The ECC challenged the discursive constructs of apartheid on many levels, going beyond mere criticism to the active modeling of alternatives. It played an important role in countering the intense propaganda to which all white South Africans were subject to ensure their loyalty, and in revealing the true nature of the conflict in the country. It articulated the di-ease experienced by many who were alienated by the dominant culture of conformity, sexism, racism and homophobia. By educating, challenging and empowering white citizens to question the role of the military and, increasingly, to resist conscription it weakened the apartheid state thus adding an important component to the many pressures brought to bear on it which, in their combination, resulted in its demise.
Contents

Introduction 3

Chapter 1: Background.
1.1 The role of the military in establishing European hegemony in South Africa. 9
1.2 The consolidation of military rule under apartheid and the introduction of conscription. 14

Chapter 2: Early resistance to conscription.
2.1 The first Conscientious Objectors. 31
2.2 Laying the foundations: The early days of the ECC 45

3.1. The official launch of the ECC and the occupation of the townships. 61
3.2 The Peace Festival and the Troops Out campaign. 73
3.3. Forces Favourites and Working For A Just Peace. 82

Chapter 4: The ECC goes underground.
4.1 The State of Emergency 94
4.2: A new wave of objectors. 110
4.3 The banning of the ECC. 119

Chapter 5: The End of Conscription. 127

Conclusion: The role of the ECC in the demise of apartheid. 138
INTRODUCTION

“What kind of society wishes to lock up, alongside the most dangerous criminals, people whose only crime is that they do not wish to kill or injure?”

It is important that the story of organisations like the End Conscription Campaign be recorded. The narrative of the struggle against apartheid has become a site of contestation. As the downfall of apartheid is still a relatively recent event, the history is still in the process of formation. There is much contestation over the relative contributions of different groups within the struggle. This is an important debate as it informs and shapes the politics of the present. A new official narrative is emerging which accentuates the role of particular groupings, portraying them as the heroes and the leaders of the struggle. A new elite have laid exclusive claim to the heritage of the struggle and are using this narrative to justify their hold on power through the creation of highly centralised political structures in which positions of power are reserved for loyal cadres and independent thinking and questioning are seen as a threat. A complementary tradition of grassroots democracy, of open debate and transparency, of “people’s power”, of accountability of leadership to the people fostered in the struggle is being lost.

It is important to contest this narrative. We need to remember that the downfall of apartheid was brought about by a myriad combination of factors and forces. Current academic interpretations emphasize that no one group or organisation, no matter how significant its contribution, was solely responsible. There was no military victory or other decisive event which brought the collapse of the system, rather a sapping of will to pay the ever increasing cost to maintain it. The struggle against apartheid involved a groundswell, popular uprising in

which the initiative came not from centralised political structures, orchestrating a grand revolt, but from ordinary South Africans who were reacting to the oppressive nature of a brutally discriminatory system which sought to control every aspect of their lives. Leaders and structures emerged organically as communities organised themselves around issues that affected them. Organisations that emerged were highly democratic and accountable to their members. There was no grand plan or centralised control of the process.

As Walter Benjamin warned in a different context, but applicable here: “All rulers are the heirs of those who have conquered before them.” He feared that what he referred to as a historicist view constructed a version of history as a triumphal parade of progress. “Whoever has emerged victorious” he reminds us “participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice the spoils are carried along in the procession.” He was warning of just such a tendency, which has been repeated so often in the past, for the victors to construct a version of history which ends up justifying a new tyranny. To counter this tendency it is important that other histories of the struggle are told — that the stories of other groups, which are marginalised by the new hegemonic discourse, are recorded.

This aim of this dissertation is thus two-fold. Firstly it aims to investigate “the story” of the End Conscription Campaign, which has largely been seen as a white anti-apartheid liberal organisation. The objective is to provide a detailed historical account and periodisation of the organisation to fill in the gaps and challenge the distortions of a new emerging “official” discourse.

Secondly within this framework, and by using the activities and strategies of the organisation as evidence for its suppositions, the question of the role played by the ECC in the struggle

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against apartheid, in particular its challenge to the suppositions and constructions of apartheid discourse(s), will be addressed.

The central argument I wish to make is that the End Conscription Campaign challenged the apartheid state in a unique way by not only challenging- but by actively modelling alternatives to- the hegemonic ideas and discourses that entrenched the hold of the apartheid state, and on many different levels. It thus added to the pressure brought to bear on the apartheid regime and played an important role in the demise of the apartheid state.

Much of my primary material is drawn from the ECC archive held at the Historical papers at Wits University, from material held in private collections by former members and from the Internet. For secondary material I have relied extensively on newspaper reports on the organisation. These were accessed through the SABINET Media website. Academic and non academic articles on the organisation were accessed either from the archive, through the Fort Hare Library website, from the Internet and from private individuals.

I have relied on personal contact with former members to supply much of my material, as well as comments and reflections on the organisation. I have renewed friendships and acquaintances from my own days as member within the organisation. I have also used Facebook to set up a site to contact members of the organisation. I used this site both to gather material and to encourage debate about the organisation. I appealed to former members to write about their memories of the organisation, either stories and anecdotal accounts of events that they remember or thoughts and musings on the relevance and effectiveness of the organisation. I also used the site to facilitate debate around some of the ideas and themes I have developed. This helped to clarify my own thoughts and ideas and introduced some fresh insights and ideas.

I also attended the 25th Anniversary of the organisation held in October 2009, at Spier wine estate in Stellenbosch. The workshops and discussions at the event provided much useful information. The personal contact with former members of the organisation was invaluable.
and aided in building up a network of informants, with whom I remained in contact through the Facebook site.

According to Conway “the legacy of conscription for white South African society and indeed, the activities of the End Conscription Campaign, have not been extensively researched or documented” 6 While there have been some notable exceptions (Conway himself, the work of Laurie Nathan, theses by Mieran Phillips and Graeme Callister) there is indeed a need for research in this area.

In his Master’s Thesis: “The End Conscription Campaign 1983-1988: A Study of White Extra-Parliamentary Opposition To Apartheid” 7 Mieran Phillips takes a detailed look at the activities of the ECC and reaches the conclusion that: “the ECC spearheaded a significant white extra-parliamentary opposition.”

While I have covered similar ground to Phillips in terms of media and archival research and in my analysis of the organisation, this dissertation differs from his in a number of ways. Firstly I have constructed a thorough chronology of the organisation, which was never Phillip’s stated intent. In terms of sources, I have drawn on a process of networking with activists to gain first hand accounts and reflections. Thirdly Phillips looks at the ECC’s threat to apartheid largely in political terms whereas I have addressed its influence in the cultural, social and personal realms. I hope with a different methodological approach and the use of additional sources that I have been able to generate new material and to offer a distinct perspective with fresh insights into the activities, ideologies and dynamics of the organisation.

Graeme Callister\textsuperscript{8} in his master’s thesis argues that the ECC’s role has been exaggerated. History is written by the victors, he reminds us and as ECC in this case was on the side of the victors he feels its chroniclers have overstated and distorted the role of the organization. He takes issue with Phillips’ thesis and claims that “the ECC managed to sway few people to oppose conscription” and that “the apartheid state was not even close to being forced to capitulate due to a dearth of manpower.”\textsuperscript{9} This dissertation contends that despite the fact that ECC remained a small organization in numerical terms it posed a unique and radical threat to the power of the apartheid state making a significant contribution to the downfall of apartheid.

From a different perspective Daniel Conway has written a number of articles on the ECC. His focus has been on apartheid’s discursive construction of concepts such as sexuality, masculinity and citizenship. He argues that the ECC limited itself, by wishing to project itself as an organisation of “respectable whites”, it remained within what he calls the “civic-republican” discourse of the state. Conway also feels that the ECC never reached its full potential of posing a radical threat to the apartheid state. He argues the ECC failed to break out of “republican modes of identity” and citizenship. He claims: “The ECC chose to remain within civic-republicanism and at key moments in the movement’s campaign neglected to contest the state’s sexual and militarized conceptions of citizenship and masculinity.”\textsuperscript{10} He gives as an example the ECCs reaction to state attempts to undermine it with accusations of homosexuality which it linked with cowardice and lack of masculinity. Rather than challenge the state on this issue it chose to shy away from it, deliberately downplaying the fact that many of its members were in fact gay. Conway feels that in avoiding this and other contentious issues the ECC failed to challenge the state from a “radical democratic perspective”. He also maintains that “policing the ruling class is a as much a state project as

\textsuperscript{9} Callister (2007). 24
the defence against a supposed enemy and that the primary means for this disciplinary project is the buttressing of a heteronormative gender binary”. 11

I have drawn much from Conway's ideas on constructions of masculinity and citizenship and how the ECC challenged those, but contend that the state’s disciplinary project and the ECC’s challenge to the state discourse that underlay it extended into other realms. The ECC contested the state’s construction of other concepts among them notion of peace, religion, culture, and even the very nature and practice of politics. It’s discourse may (largely) have remained within the “civic-republican” mode as Conway contends, but despite this I believe it nevertheless proved a radical threat to the apartheid state by actively modelling alternatives to state discourse on many levels. At a time when anti-apartheid politics in the white community consisted largely of rhetoric, the ECC offered a way to a more active involvement. The reaction to the organisation by the state shows that the state perceived it as a radical threat and went to great extremes to neutralise it. In this dissertation I explore the nature of the threat posed by the ECC.

CHAPTER 1  BACKGROUND

1.1  THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN ESTABLISHING EUROPEAN HEGEMONY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ever since the first European settlers arrived in South Africa, they have been in conflict with the indigenous population. In a pattern repeated around the world, wherever Europeans have settled they have fought indigenous peoples for possession of the land. At the root of this conflict was a clash of belief systems. Indigenous peoples believed the land was for the use of all and belonged to no-one. Europeans seeing only empty land coveted it for their own exclusive use.

The initial Dutch settlers at the Cape intended only to found a way station for ships on the long voyage to Asia. To this end they initially traded with the local inhabitants, a race of nomadic cattle herders. However as the European population at the Cape grew they looked to the land as a source of sustenance and began to take up farming for themselves. Soon fences were being erected and the Khoi were being driven off their own land. To the more sophisticated Europeans the Khoi, who wore few clothes and preferred their meat raw, fresh off the bone, were a degenerate and barbaric people. They were seen as less than human and given the derogatory name of Hotnorts. The Europeans had few qualms about stealing their land and killing them off when they dared to resist. From the start superior military hardware and skills gave the Europeans the advantage. Out of this conflict the first official military structures were established. A formalized Commando system was put in place all men in the colony were liable for military service and expected to be ready at short notice.

Ongoing conflict between the European powers granted a strategic value to the Cape and the budding colony was fortified with a military castle, which soon became it’s literal and symbolic heart. Literally it was the home of the governor and at the centre of political and
social life- symbolically its prominence represented the important role the military was to play in the future development of the country.

The Dutch rulers at the Cape had little interest in the hinterland, which they saw as a wild and lawless land. However as farmers claimed more and more land they inevitably ran out of space and began eyeing the interior. Beyond the fertile valleys of the Western Cape they found an arid and hostile land inhabited by the San with whom they too came into conflict. They named them Boesman and hunted them to near extinction. In this hostile environment the Boers (as these farmers began to refer to themselves) became a fiercely independent and battle-hardened people. All boers were expected to spend some time in military duty, and even women and the youngest boys were taught to fight and use guns. Violence was an integral part of their daily lives.

Moving further into the interior the Boers encountered the Xhosa people who were very different to the other people they had encountered. They too were given a derogatory name of Kaffirs (meaning non believers) to dehumanise them. The Xhosa were larger in stature than the Khoi and San, and far more organized- living in settled communities and ruled by chiefs. They were not afraid to fight the white man hand to hand and were highly skilled in the use of spears. They were also used to combat, having fought amongst themselves. They were a far more intimidating enemy. The Boers and the Xhosa fought over the land west of the Fish River, both claiming it to be theirs. The Boers triumphed, pushing the Xhosa back over the Fish River and settled the land, but the hostility continued. Both sides sent raiding parties across the river to steal cattle and harass the enemy. Once again it was the military organization and firepower of the settlers that allowed them to dominate.

At the turn of the 19th century the Dutch were displaced as rulers by the British. Where the Dutch had been content to leave the Boers largely to themselves, the British sought to establish their rule over the area and annexed the land up to the Fish River as part of the Cape Colony, founding a garrison town at Grahamstown. Governance of this territory,
named Kaffraria, remained in the hands of a succession of military aristocrats. A series of frontier wars ensued, during which the Xhosa were repeatedly defeated by the might of the British army, and driven ever eastward. One of the factors in the defeat of the indigenous peoples, apart from the superior military technology of to the divisions and disagreements between the different chiefdoms, whereas they faced a foe that was united in purpose and under one chief—the British sovereign. The colonial government relied on the army to maintain order and control both within and beyond the borders of the colony. Not only were troops brought in from Europe but local settlers were also recruited to spend time in military training and forced by circumstance to engage in combat.

Afrikaners who chafed under British rule trekked northwards and eastwards, where they came into contact with other African people. Again the result was conflict and victory for the settlers. Wallace Mills\textsuperscript{12} tracks the following process which had an important influence on these Vootrekkers and influenced their development as an autonomous nation: As their distance from the Cape increased their material, political and cultural ties with the colony lessened; educational levels declined and many were illiterate; they had to develop their own resources in regard to educational and religious training; standards of living were reduced – when not living in their wagons their dwellings were crude sod structures; cash disappeared—wealth came to be measured in cattle and trade was conducted by bartering. “In these respects” Mills claims “they became more and more like the indigenous peoples—pastoralists and a bit footloose.” In this milieu their sense of themselves as an independent and unique people was fostered. Religion played an important role in their lives, and they developed a unique interpretation of the Bible and the Calvinist strain of Christianity. They came to see themselves as latter day Israelites, fleeing from oppression, surrounded by hostile people and on a special mission from God to conquer the land. This period of history played an important role in the foundation and later development of Afrikaner nationalism.

\textsuperscript{12} Mills, W.G. White Settlers in South Africa to 1870. In History 316.1 Africa in the Nineteenth Century. http://stmarys.ca/~wmills/course316/18White_Settlers.html
Evidence of this can be seen in the important role Voortrekker mythology and symbolism played in Nationalist ideology and rhetoric.

At the Cape, under Sir George Grey official British policy towards the Xhosa changed. Instead of simply excluding them from the colony, the British now began to assert authority over them. The only Xhosa within the colony until this point were those under the protection of the missionaries. Xhosa people were now allowed within the colony, but only as workers for the settlers. Grey wished to educate and Christianise the Xhosa, but with a particular goal in mind—to provide a cheap workforce for the settlers. Grey manipulated the events of the cattle killing to undermine the power of the chiefs, and denied aid to the starving survivors—so that the only option open to them was to seek work in the colony. Although there was legislation to protect the Xhosa from settler abuse they were paid meagre wages and denied basic rights extended to settlers. Thus the African people became third class citizens in their own land and European authority over them was entrenched.

Further conflicts ensued with the Afrikaners battling the Zulu who in turn went war with the British. As always the Europeans were victorious—but not before the Zulu army inflicted one of its greatest defeats on the British army at Isandlwana. In the areas later known as the Free State and the Transvaal, Sotho, Pedi and Tswana people also battled the Europeans only to be defeated. As at the Cape, Africans were driven off their land and forced to work for Europeans. The discovery of gold and diamonds further exacerbated this process. Africans migrated to the cities to seek work, but were not allowed to take their families with them. Thus migrant labour became an important feature of South African economy.

The bloodiest of all the wars of Southern Africa, however, were fought between Europeans in the two wars that ensued between the independent Boer republics and the British Empire. These wars led to British victory and the unification of South Africa under the British flag. The defeat of the Boers however only hardened their resolve for independence and their determination to preserve their unique culture and identity. This led to the establishing, in
1918, of the Afrikaner Bond, which was dedicated to establishing Afrikaner hegemony in South Africa.

In 1910 the Union of South Africa came into being. The first two Prime Ministers, Smuts and Botha were both Boer Generals. In 1912 the Union Defence Force was established. Provision was made for the conscription of all males between the ages of 17 and 60, but this was not enforced and the military relied rather on volunteers.

During both World Wars South Africa fought on the side of the British and made a significant contribution to the Allied cause. Strong anti-British sentiment persisted, however, and many Afrikaners resisted participation in the war and refused to enlist, including many who would later enforce conscription under National Party rule.

In the same year (1912) the African National Congress was formed to give voice to the protest of black South Africans against their ongoing oppression. Restrictive measures already in place strictly controlled the movement of black South Africans (including coloureds and Indians) and required them to carry passes at all times. The Union government passed new laws stripping black South African of any right to vote or to own land outside of the “reserves” and forcing them to live in segregated areas. Black opposition to these measures was brutally suppressed. The pass law protests are but one example. These were entirely passive protests based on the satyagraha principles of Mohandas K. Gandhi who had been an early leader of the campaign. The Union government used its overwhelming military power to crush the campaign. At the same time a tradition of non-violent resistance, of large numbers of people refusing to co-operate, was established.

The European belief in the innate superiority of the white man and his system of government provided justification for the military conquest of the country. The important part played by the military in the history of South Africa ensured that a strong military tradition and mind-set was entrenched in the psyche of its people, particularly the Afrikaners whose leaders deliberately used military mythology and symbolism to foster the growth of Afrikaner
Nationalism. From the earliest days of the colony all men were expected to spend some time in military training and operations. The British relied on a professional army, and the military played an important role in governing their territories. Given the violent nature of life on the frontier the settlers continued to arm themselves, and ordinary citizens were often forced by circumstance to fight to defend themselves. As the settlers consolidated their power black South Africans continued to be excluded from political processes and structures and to be seen as a posing a threat to white rule and the civilization it brought. The conflict that resulted from black resistance to their continuing oppression and exclusion would ensure that the military would come to even greater prominence over the following decades.

1.2 THE CONSOLIDATION OF MILITARY RULE UNDER APARTHEID AND THE INTRODUCTION OF CONSCRIPTION.

“It is the privilege of every citizen of the RSA to protect his country against onslaught. National service is not so much an obligation as a call and a privilege.”

- Col. Viljoen in SADF Handbook 1984

In 1948 the Afrikaner National Party came into power, and introduced the policy of apartheid, which relied on a discourse of white superiority and privilege. A constructed historical narrative portrayed the Afrikaner as the legitimate rulers of South Africa and black South Africans as uncivilised and incapable of ruling themselves. Apartheid aimed at the complete segregation of black and white South Africans in all spheres of life. Its goal was the creation of independent states for each of black tribal groups (of which according to the government there were 13), so that no black Africans would remain South African citizens. All South Africans were now classified as a member of a particular race group, and allowed access to amenities accordingly- the notorious “Whites Only” sign made its appearance and even park

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benches were allocated to use by race group. Not only marriage but any sexual liaison between race groups became illegal. Existing legislation was tightened. Blacks were only allowed into white areas if they had legitimate employment. They were also barred by the 1957 Defence Act from undergoing military training – although not barred from membership in the Defence Force they would henceforth only be utilized in menial tasks. Resistance to apartheid escalated. The ANC came under the control of a new generation of young radicals who adopted a more confrontational policy, and adopted a program of Mass Action aimed at overthrowing the state through civil disobedience.

In 1955 the Congress of the People adopted the Freedom Charter—a blueprint for a democratic South Africa. The State responded by arresting almost the entire leadership of the ANC and its allies. They were charged with high treason and attempting to overthrow the government—a charge punishable by death. In 1960 police opened fire on a 7000 strong protest march in Sharpville killing 69 people. Blacks around the country responded with a wave of demonstrations, strikes and protest actions. On the 30th of March the State declared a state of Emergency subsequent to which over 18 000 people were banned. The ANC and PAC were banned. In 1964 Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and six others were sentenced to life imprisonment for Treason. The internal resistance movements were all but destroyed. The ANC announced it was embarking on a new course—that of underground, armed struggle. For the moment the state had triumphed. For the following decade there was little open resistance to the apartheid state. It was clear that the apartheid regime clung to power due to its overwhelming military might, and its willingness to respond brutally to any protest.

Black anger and resentment continued to simmer. The voice of Black Consciousness spread, especially through the student movements. It seemed that people were preparing themselves; waiting for the right moment. That moment came in 1976 when students went on the march in Soweto protesting the use of Afrikaans in schools. A new era of protest had begun. Again the State responded by using the armed forces to brutally suppress protest.
Over the next decade the violence would escalate to the point of civil war. In the international context the apartheid government portrayed South Africa as a bastion of Western, Christian, democratic values fighting on the frontline of the war against the godless, communist Soviets who were instigating the ignorant black hordes to rebellion. This simplification of the situation in the country fitted neatly into Cold War ideology. The election of “Cold War warriors”, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to leadership in the UK and USA during the 1980’s ensured continuing international support. The West’s need for anti-communist allies, as well as the strategic value of South Africa (enhanced by its production of essential minerals especially uranium) ensured that this portrayal went largely unchallenged by Western leaders. The growing criticism of apartheid internationally was simply dismissed as evidence of a Soviet conspiracy. Inside the country this narrative was used as propaganda to rally whites behind the government and justify the use of military action against black citizens.

In 1978 the rise of Pieter Willem Botha, previously Minister of Defence, to the position of Prime Minister heralded a new era of militarization in the country. Botha conducted what to all effects amounted to a military coup d’état. The previous leader B.J. Vorster had relied on the police and the Bureau of State Security to maintain order. Botha quickly dismantled Vorster’s security apparatus, replacing it with a military cabal. The Department of Military Intelligence assumed control of security matters. General Magnus Malan was promoted to the cabinet and General Constand Viljoen assumed command of the Defence Force. Both men were allies of Botha and shared his vision for South Africa. Malan owed his rapid rise through the ranks to his alliance with Botha and had no personal experience of ever being in battle. In their view South Africa was the target of a “total onslaught” directed from Moscow. This onslaught, they believed, was not only a military one but was waged on many different levels—ideological, political, economic, psychological, diplomatic, social and religious. According to Malan this onslaught “involves so many different fronts, unknown to

14 Vile, Venal Enemy of the People. Sunday Times. 24/97/2011
the South African experience, that it has gained the telling but horrifying name of total war. This different but all-encompassing war has brought with it new methods and new techniques which have in turn to be met by total countermeasures.”\textsuperscript{15} This required a “total strategy” where the enemy needed to be engaged in all these spheres. This meant that the military must be involved in all spheres of society. To this end Botha set about establishing a new structure for making and implementing policy which circumvented the existing structures.

At the head of this structure was the State Security Council,\textsuperscript{16} comprising the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Police, Intelligence and Defence, as well as the civil heads of these departments, with Botha at its head. All major decisions were made in secret by this body. A Secretariat, comprised largely of officials from the National Intelligence Service, but also from the security establishment, formed the next link in the chain of command and was responsible for dealing with administration, coordinating and interpreting intelligence, formulating strategy and communication with the next level of authority. This was formed by the Joint Management Centres, regionally based around the command structure of the SADF and further divided into Sub and Mini JMC’s responsible for smaller geographic areas. Like the SSC their membership comprised members of the local security establishment and all business was conducted in secret. Their primary task was the gathering of information relevant to state security and feeding it into the system, and coordinating strategy developed in response. In this way a network was set up over the entire country which was, theoretically, able to respond at the highest level to threats on the ground. Academic Peter Vale argued that “the military constituted an extra-parliamentary government that actually

\textsuperscript{16} Described in Selfe, J. \textit{South Africa’s National Management System}. In Nathan and Cock (1989) 150-152
ruled the country"\textsuperscript{17}. Control of the military, long a tool of maintaining white hegemony, had now become a crucial instrument in the enforcement of apartheid.

Throughout the 1980’s the SADF was increasingly used to suppress internal resistance. It was deployed in roles that normally would be seen as the preserve of the police. Soldiers were used to evict rent defaulters, occupy black schools, guard polling booths, maintain beach apartheid, staff roadblocks, monitor demonstrations, break strikes and were even granted the right of arrest. Nathan reports that in 1985 alone 35 500 troops were present in townships throughout the country.\textsuperscript{18}

Roger Hulley\textsuperscript{19} PFP Member of Parliament expressed the concern that liberal opponents of the regime felt over these developments: “There is a feeling at large among certain sections of the community…..that the power and influence of the military establishment has grown dramatically in the general policy making of the country. It has reached unusual proportions and the public is uneasy about the role the military is playing behind the scenes.”

Botha’s regime also made use a network of covert operatives which had been put into place under earlier administrations. These operatives specialised in fighting a no-holds barred, “dirty” war against opponents of the regime. Their activities included interrogation, torture, spying, kidnapping and the “elimination” of activists. According to Bell,\textsuperscript{20} even under Verwoerd “South Africa developed into a useful laboratory for Western torture and interrogation techniques” and spying and interrogation were commonplace. Evidence at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reveals that Botha refined and consolidated this network. Bell\textsuperscript{21} claims advice was sought from the Argentinian and Chilean military which sent members of their notorious death-squads to train local operatives. Out of this initiative arose the notorious Civilian Co-operation Bureau (whose activities are far too extensive to

\textsuperscript{17} Cock, J. \textit{Introduction}. in Nathan and Cock (1989) 8.
\textsuperscript{18} Cock, J \textit{Introduction}. in Nathan and Cock (1989) 7
\textsuperscript{21} Bell (2003) 80
more than touch on here and I refer the reader to other works including Bell and the TRC reports). Other covert projects included research into chemical and biological warfare—including experiment on live human subjects and an extensive spy network being put into place. Major Craig Williamson (known as SA’s “super spy”) headed up a spy network targeting campuses and in particular organisations like NUSAS and the ECC. He had insinuated himself with the ANC by setting up a route for activists to escape to Botswana after the 1976 uprising and was recruited by them to infiltrate the student movement. He later became national vice-president of NUSAS.

Hand in hand with this centralization of power in the hands of the military, Botha instituted a series of “reforms” designed to undermine support for the revolutionary movements and win the “Hearts and Minds” of Black South Africans, but also to convince world leaders that apartheid was being dismantled. Pass laws were done away with and blacks living in urban areas were recognized as permanent residents (as long as they had jobs). Trade Unions were recognized. Other “petty apartheid laws” such as the Mixed Marriages and the Immorality act were scrapped. A new political dispensation was announced in which Coloureds and Indians were granted limited Parliamentary representation. Blacks were still denied this “privilege”, being regarded as foreigners, citizens of the homelands. Local Authorities were put in place to, supposedly, giving them a greater say in their own affairs.

The aim was to create a new “non-white” elite which benefitted from apartheid and thus would support the system. In fact the opposite happened. Botha’s reforms were overwhelmingly rejected by those they were supposed to benefit and led to an increase in protest and state repression and an ever greater reliance on the military.

Another key strategy of Botha’s regime was the destabilisation of neighbouring states. Again the military played a key role in implementing this. The fall of the military dictatorship in Portugal led to the independence of Angola and Mozambique. Under Portuguese rule these countries had provided a buffer between South Africa and hostile black countries to the
north. Now these countries provided a possible access route for insurgents to enter the
country. To counter this Botha’s regime set about undermining the new governments by
giving support to opposition groups fighting them. In Angola the presence of Cuban troops
gave the regime an excuse for direct intervention. The Americans, concerned over
Communist influence in the area at first supported South African intervention in support of
UNITA and the FNLA, which were fighting the Communist backed MPLA.

The SADF first invaded Angola in 1975, in a joint CIA operation kept secret from both the
South African Parliament and the American Congress. The invasion force cut deep into
Angola and within days advanced on the capital, Luanda. The operation was however called
off when the American Congress discovered the deception and American support was
withdrawn. The near victory and the ease at which the SADF had overcome opposition
persuaded Botha and his allies that South Africa could indeed be a regional superpower and
encouraged further military activity. For the next decade the SADF continued to operate
inside Angola, until the battle at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 led to peace talks culminating in
withdrawal and independence for Namibia. White South Africans remained ignorant of the
SADF’s role in Angola- Malan only officially admitted that troops had been used in Angola in
1988. One unidentified soldier remarked: “Four days after we went into Angola the SADF
authorities were still denying that South African troops were in Angola. We were actually
there and listening to this on the radio.”

In Mozambique operations were even more clandestine – direct intervention was not
possible but the apartheid regime lent much support to Renamo in the form of financial aid,
arms and even so-called mercenaries. Throughout the 1980’s, according to Hanlon23 the
SADF raided three capitals raids (Maseru, Gaberone and Maputo), attempted to
assassinate two Prime Ministers( Lesotho and Zimbabwe), backed dissident groups that

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brought chaos to four countries (Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe), disrupted the oil supplies in six countries (previously mentioned plus Botswana and Malawi) and attacked the railways providing normal import and export routes of seven (adding Zambia to the list.) Ostensibly the aim of these operations was to strike at ANC targets, but there was an underlying intention of intimidating these countries into withdrawing support for the liberation struggle.

During these secret, undeclared wars on its neighbours much brutality was inflicted by the SADF on the local population. (This has been extensively documented and to more than touch on this subject would require a major detour from the purpose of this dissertation. I refer the reader to other literature on the subject including the TRC reports, Hanlon and Nathan and Cock.) Perhaps the worst atrocity was committed at Cassinga in Angola in 1978 where as many as 2000 men women and children, most of whom were non-combatants were killed. General Jannie Geldenhuys described this as “a jewel of military craftsmanship.”24 At the TRC hearings one of the officers involved, Lieutenant John Verster admitted that Cassinga was “probably the most bloody exercise we ever launched.” He confirmed that most of the dead were civilians and that orders were issued to kill the wounded and let none survive. The indiscriminate and extensive use of landmines, many of which still remain today, has resulted in Mozambique having the highest number of amputees in the world. Reports of acts of torture abound. It was common practice for troops to wear necklaces of the cut–off ears of their victims. High ranking officers were engaged in smuggling everything from guns, diamonds, to ivory and rare timber.25 Hanlon claims that more than 100 000 people were killed—most of whom starved to death as a result of South African backed rebels preventing drought relief in Mozambique- and more than one million were rendered homeless as a direct result of SADF actions.26

25 Bell (2003) 80
26 Hanlon (1986) 1
This pattern was later repeated inside the country with a high level of violence being directed at township residents during the period of SADF deployment in these areas. (Again this has been thoroughly documented and I refer to other literature on the subject.) One example will suffice. The Weekly Mail of 18/4/1986 reported a campaign of terror against black children: “In the past year a terrifying pattern of abuse has emerged in townships with a heavy military presence: soldiers pick up children on the streets, load them into Casspirs and hold them for several nightmarish hours. Inside the Casspirs the children are threatened, intimidated and assaulted before being turned out to make their own way home.”

Within the country a growing culture of militarism was taking hold. Nathan and Cock identify three aspects of militarisation. Firstly there is the militarization of political and social institutions. Secondly there is militarization as a social process, which involves mobilization of resources for war. Thirdly there is militarization as an ideology. This involves the creation of a discourse which justifies state violence, glorifies war - portraying soldiers and combat in heroic terms - and promotes “military values” identified as hierarchy, discipline, obedience and centralization of authority. These values were forced on young white South Africans who grew up in an atmosphere of violence, conformity and intolerance. Long before they were conscripted to fight to uphold the apartheid regime they were indoctrinated with military and apartheid ideology. At home, in church and at school they were taught the dangers of Communism, the need for vigilance and obedience and instilled with a fear and hatred of blacks who were portrayed as puppets of the Soviets, at best ignorant, at worst violent bloodthirsty terrorists wanting to drive the white man into the sea. According to Cock the SADF played a central role in creating a ‘terrorist state’ which "relied on extreme fear to maintain its authority."

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27 Cock Introduction In Nathan and Cock (1989) 7
28 Cock. Introduction In Nathan and Cock (1989) 2
In schools intolerance, racism, sexism and violence, not only towards blacks, but anyone who sympathised with them or refused to conform to the strict Calvinist values of society, were actively encouraged. Homosexuals particularly were despised as a threat to masculine hegemony, but any boys who showed a propensity to pacifism, non-racism or who eschewed sport, particularly rugby in favour of less masculine activities such as academics or art and culture, or even dressed differently, were subject to ostracism and bullying.

Starting in primary school pupils were encouraged to attend “veldt schools” where they were given a taste of army life and indoctrinated into the “South African way of life.” Girls were taught domestic skills and groomed for a life of submission and motherhood. A one sided history was taught which encouraged Nationalism and portrayed the Afrikaner as the legitimate rulers of South Africa and Black South Africans as uncivilized and incapable of ruling themselves. This narrative drew strongly on the mythology of the Voortrekkers and glorified the role of the soldier as hero. Children were not taught to question or analyse. Instruction involved memorising and regurgitating “parrot-fashion” what they were taught. Every morning the National Anthem was sung and the flag was saluted. “Youth Preparedness” programs taught children what to do in case of “terrorist attack” and indoctrinated them about the “Communist Onslaught”. Cadets were introduced in schools in the early seventies to prepare school children for life in the military. In 1977 the system was placed under direct SADF control and became compulsory in state schools. SADF personnel regularly visited schools and lectured the youth. In the words of P.W Botha: “Our education system must train people for war.” Thus the whole education system was geared towards preparing youth for war and was grounded in Calvinist and military values.

War games were popular. Younger children were encouraged to play militaristic games. Plastic guns and miniature soldiers were favourite toys (while some ¾ million white adults were licensed to carry arms.) Older children and adults played violent, military themed video

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30 ECC pamphlet: The Right To Choose. Historical Papers. AG1977. A7.5.5
games and “paintball combat” -which simulated real combat with live ammunition replaced by paintball bullets which marked the “wounded” opponent -were popular. According to Jochelson and Buntman these games “desensitise players to the real effects of war and famililiarise them with the idea of war as an unavoidable, if not desirable reality.” 31

The media too, which was largely controlled by the state, glorified and romanticized the military and fed South African a steady stream of state propaganda about the threat posed by the “Communist onslaught”. The ANC was “demonised” and “almost invariably reported on in terms of violence and terrorism.” 32 An atmosphere of fear and paranoia pervaded the country and was deliberately cultivated. In March 1980 the Sunday Times published a story about a SADF document titled “Psychological Action Plan: Defence Budget Debate” which detailed secret plans to manipulate the media in order to counter opposition to the government and the military. 33 Among the plans revealed was a campaign aimed at improving the image of the SADF among black South Africans and encouraging them to enlist. Advertising too adopted military themes. A light truck was advertised as a “little tank”, a video camera marketed under a banner: “Shoot the workers; it’s the only way they will learn.”34

Censorship added to the atmosphere of intellectual repression and paranoia and was a frustration for many white South African. Any films, art and books which smacked of liberal values, or were seen to promote or support the liberation struggle in the eyes of the apartheid censors were banned. This reached truly ridiculous proportions. Jacobsen’s Index of Objectionable Literature listed 14 499 publications alone which were banned. Alongside the works of Karl Marx, the Freedom Charter, any literature published by the ANC and

anything which even hinted at homosexuality or contained even mildly explicit descriptions of sexual acts, one finds such highly subversive works as A Common Book of Prayer, Catch 22, most of the works of James Hadley Chase and assorted works by the country’s most popular commercial author Wilbur Smith.

The most oppressive aspect of apartheid, for whites, however, was conscription. It was the price they paid for white rule. Conscription was introduced in South Africa with the passing of the Defence act in 1957. It was not enforced until 1967, when all white males over the age of sixteen were expected to serve one year of fulltime service in the SADF as well as a series of “camps” over the subsequent ten years. In 1977 fulltime service was increased to two years, plus 240 days of camps.

Military service was seen as a “rite of passage”, an initiation into manhood and the moral duty of every young white male. The effective educational and social conditioning of young white South Africans meant that few questioned it. In fact many viewed their time spent in the military with pride. Tim Ledgerwood, a conscript, speaking to the SRC claimed: “The society that I grew up in asked no questions about military duty (this was in 1980). You went to school, you registered when you were sixteen, you went off and did your national service, you came home and life carried on as normal.”35 According to Grundy: “If, indeed, young South Africans are in compliance with the compulsory military service provisions of the Defence Act, it need not be because they have thought through the vexing moral issues and found the government’s position sound. More likely, it is the absence of legitimate alternatives, the oppressive effectiveness of the government’s enforcement machinery, or the high social and economic costs of non compliance that assure obedience to the law.”36 In other words most white male youth reported for military service primarily because they felt they had no choice.

I refer briefly to my own experience to substantiate this. I was at High school in the late 1970’s. In std 9 (grade 11) we were all presented with conscription registration papers and told to fill them in. No debate on the subject was allowed. Most students did so unquestioningly although reluctantly. I conveniently “lost” my papers and never handed them in. This went for a time undetected, until the time, at the end of matric (grade12) when my fellow students started receiving their call-up papers. Mine did not arrive. My relief, however, was short-lived. I was called into the principal’s office and told he had received notification that I had not registered and that I was to do so immediately on pain of prosecution. I duly registered and subsequently received my call-up papers to begin service the following January. Fortunately I was conscripted into the Medical Corps, where I was trained to save lives rather than kill. I do not think I would have survived, mentally or physically, the trauma of being put in a position where I would have to kill another human being to survive.

In effect, conscription was the culmination of a life-long process of indoctrination into the value system of apartheid. It was to all purposes the ‘finishing school’ of apartheid – where the logic of apartheid was taken to its extreme conclusion. Young white males, mostly fresh out of school, were expected to leave their families and enter the military. Life in the army was harsh. Conscripts faced three to six months of initial “basic training” during which they were physically pushed to the limits. A brutal regime of physical fitness training, endless inspections, sleep deprivation and constant surveillance and activity along with lectures consisting of apartheid propaganda, was designed to break them down mentally and ensure that they followed orders unquestioningly. This was followed by a period of “counter insurgency training” in which they were trained in the art of killing. After this they were dispatched to the “operational areas” where many faced the enemy and engaged in active combat.
Dianne Sandler\textsuperscript{37} drawing on W.B. Gault’s idea of the ‘psychology of slaughter’ outlines the process that ordinary young men were exposed to in the army which turned them into willing killers. Drawing on the experiences of the Vietnam War, Gault attempted to explain how “relatively normal young men overcame and eventually neutralised their natural repugnance towards slaughter”. South African soldiers were subject to the same process.

First the soldier was taught that the enemy is everywhere. (What Gault referred to as “the universalisation of the enemy”). Even as civilians young South African were taught that all blacks should be seen as potential enemies. This paranoia was now taken to the next level. As a soldier he was conditioned to perceive hostility and immediate physical threat from all quarters. He was taught that in the field everyone wants to kill him- he becomes unable to distinguish civilians from “terrorists” – everyone becomes his enemy even women and children.

Secondly, the enemy is de-humanised (referred to by Gault as “cartoonisation”). Again this was merely the culmination of a process whereby white South African were indoctrinated to think of blacks as inferior and less than humans, savage, violent and incapable of reason. In the army the soldier was taught to actively hate all blacks. The next step is the “vertical dilution of responsibility”. The soldier was taught that he, ultimately, is not responsible for his actions, but is acting “under orders” from higher powers. This allows the soldier to disregard his own conscience and to commit acts which under normal circumstances he would never consider, and even find repulsive. Fourthly the soldier was put under “pressure to act”. On the battlefield there is no time to think- the soldier is taught to act instinctively, swiftly and violently to protect himself.

A fifth factor is referred to as “the natural dominance of the psychopath”. Accepted conventions regarding behavior are disregarded and those who lack empathy, guilt and compassion tend to dominate and rise to positions of leadership, encouraging others to

\textsuperscript{37} Sandler, D. \textit{The Psychological Experiences of White Conscripts in the Black Townships} In Nathan and Cock (1989) 81
emulate their behavior. Finally exposure to the “terrifying force of sheer firepower” in battle strips away the final inhibitions to kill and the soldier is “psychologically ready to engage in slaughter.”

Through this deeply pathologising process young whites South Africans were effectively moulded into instruments of state power, willing to kill and die for its cause. Many were unable to deal with this reality and committed suicide or suffered mental breakdowns. Many returned to civilian life deeply scarred becoming drug addicts or alcoholics. Others, unable to deal with “normal” reality took out their frustration in violence directed at friends and family. And of course many were injured or killed.

Theresa Edlmann\(^{38}\) of Rhodes University is engaged in research on the psychological effects of the war on young conscripts. Drawing on Karen Batley she refers to a process of psychic fragmentation or splitting that some conscripts experience to deal with the horrors of war. Put simply the individual creates a new persona (referred to by one subject as “an army soul”) through which the experiences are filtered. This can lead in extreme cases to schizophrenic breakdown. This fracturing of the personality mirrors the fractures within apartheid society. Edelman writes of one of her subjects: “His experiences of war …were a catalyst for the war within himself. “

There was little offered in the way of debriefing or rehabilitation and healing for conscripts suffering trauma related to their experiences. According to Naashon Zalk, director of the film _Eat My Call Up_: “It (the trauma) was not acknowledged because it wasn’t anything to be concerned about. Men went back into society with aggression and trauma from the war, but they didn’t know that was a problem.”\(^{39}\) In the film Marius van Niekerk, a former member of the elite parachute regiment, who served in covert operations in the then Rhodesia, Angola and Mozambique, tells of having to put a wounded fellow soldier “out of

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his misery” by cutting his throat. He talks of how that experience continues to affect him in the present: “It’s like a film gets put in your head, and it gets played over and over again….all that experience invades my reality. …When you’ve killed someone, something changes inside you. It affects your way of looking at life. Those emotions can never be revived. Then there’s this big silence, this emptiness…. We’re these ghosts walking around licking our wounds from that time.”

Where treatment was available it was often worse than the initial trauma. The conscript Edlmann mentions above was admitted to an army hospital psychiatric ward and was administered shock treatment. These wards became notorious for secret experiments. At the hands of the notorious Dr Aubrey Levine, better known as Dr. Shock, homosexuals and other ‘deviants’ were subject to involuntary aversion therapy reminiscent of the film “A Clockwork Orange”. They were given shocks or administered drugs which made them ill, while being shown images of their desires. Others were subject to “gender re-assignment” surgery, which left some of the victims horribly mutilated, castrated or lobotomised. Bell relates the experience of one conscript who objected to doing military service. He was strapped down, given a truth drug along with a sedative and then questioned about his deepest fears and secrets with the result that he was left howling and raving. This was repeated a number of times. This material was then used to mock and torment him during “therapy” sessions.

I would argue that the greatest cost white South Africans paid for apartheid was borne by their children who for the most part had no idea of what they were fighting for. While it is commonly accepted (and for the most part true) that whites were on the whole beneficiaries, and supporters, of apartheid, there was nevertheless a significant sector of the white community, particularly its youth, who strained and even suffered under the system. Evidence of this can be seen in the large number of white youth that left the country, the

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41 Bell (2003) 311-315
popularity of countercultural movements expressing frustration at the system, such as the Voelvry music movement, and the growth of white political groupings opposed to apartheid. I would further argue that motivation for the small, but growing, number of whites who did oppose the apartheid regime came not only from empathy with the sufferings of black South African, but also from a deep sense of frustration at the conservative, restrictive and paranoid atmosphere which pervaded the country and from a growing awareness of the psychological and physical damage done to the youth (on both sides of the apartheid divide), and to the country as a whole by conscription, which forced young South Africans to face one another over the barrel of a gun.
CHAPTER 2
EARLY RESISTANCE TO CONSCRIPTION

2.1 THE FIRST CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

“Compulsory military conscription required many young white males in South Africa to face the reality of apartheid, bringing them face to face with the knowledge that a war was being fought. Some were socially conditioned to accept conscription as a national duty. Some saw no other option. Some saw options but were afraid of the consequences of refusing. Some were shocked and traumatised by what they experienced and began to question the world view they had always accepted. A few believed that, for a variety of very different reasons, it was their moral responsibility to refuse to serve in the military.” TRC Report.

The first to speak out against conscription were the churches, some of which had long made a stand against apartheid. Members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Society of Friends (Quakers) amongst others had consistently refused to serve in the military since conscription was introduced. Their members served a term in detention barracks (at first three months later extended to three years) as an alternative to military service. They were recognized by the state as “peace churches” and were not seen as a political threat. Richard Steele however points out they were in fact political objectors as they refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the government. He further claims that they pioneered objection in South Africa and inspired later objectors including himself by “demonstrating that it was possible to refuse to be conscripted, and to survive imprisonment.”

The South African Council of Churches took a far more overtly political stance. In 1974 the S.A.C.C. issued a declaration which laid out a theological justification for conscientious

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43 Private correspondence. received 20/10/2009.

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objection to military service. The declaration claimed that South Africa was a “fundamentally unjust and discriminatory” society and that the military was being prepared to defend the status quo. In light of this it called on member churches to “challenge all their members to consider ... whether Christ's call to take up the cross and follow Him ... does not, in our situation, involve becoming conscientious objectors.” This was more than a statement declaring support for universal pacifism, but also justified objection to conscription on the grounds of moral rejection of apartheid.

There was a strong negative reaction to this statement from the white media, politicians and churches outside the SACC fold. The media and the public at the time were firmly opposed to objection. A poll published in the Argus showed that 80% of South African felt that South African citizens should not be allowed to refuse to do military service. The Minister of Defence, then P.W. Botha, called Archbishop Hurley, who had supported the resolution “a lackey of communism” He also said that “religious conviction should not be permitted to interfere with one’s attitude to military service.” The state reacted by introducing an amendment to the Defence Act which made it a punishable offence to encourage, aid, incite or suggest to any potential conscript that he should refuse his call-up. The penalty was R5000 fine or ten years in prison or both. This was an early indication of how seriously the apartheid government would respond to challenges against conscription and their perception of objection as a political threat. The declaration, however, opened up a public debate about conscription.

In the words of Douglas Bax: “For the first time, an unequivocal public declaration had been made that no longer spoke of the morality of war in general terms but rather questioned the

45Sprong. Chapter 6.
47Sprong, Chapter 6.
legitimacy of the SADF’s role in upholding apartheid. As such, this statement not only triggered the debate in the churches, in parliament and among the public but also helped to move some young men towards taking a stand against military service.48 It was a powerful message that let those contemplating objection know that if that did so they had a formidable ally, and could expect support from the SACC. Many of the other mainstream churches followed suit. The Catholics Bishop Conference (1977), the Presbyterian Church (1979), the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church (both in 1982) all issued statements in support of conscientious objection as a legitimate religious option. The Anglican Synod overwhelmingly passed a motion expressing “doubt about the legitimacy of a military system whose role is increasingly seen as the protector of a profoundly immoral and unjust social order.” It further stated that “a Christian before taking up arms must seek to ensure that this is the Will of the Lord for him.” 49 It was not surprising therefore that the first conscientious objectors came from the ranks of these churches and all expressed a strong Christian conviction at the root of their decision to object.

In contrast the major Afrikaans churches, which provided a theological justification for apartheid, refused to question conscription and condemned conscientious objection. The largest Afrikaans denomination the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk declared pacifism to be “unchristian.”50 It maintained that the state was an entity created by God and thus no individual had the right to challenge it on the grounds of religious doctrine.

A UN Report 51 was released in October 1979. This report claimed that between 1975 and 1978 on average between 3 000 and 4 000 conscripts annually had failed to report for

48 Connors (2007) 62
49 “Anglican Synod’s Attitude to SADF, Mixed Marriages.” Cape Times. 11/01/1983.
51 UN Report. Repression of Conscientious Objectors in South Africa
military service. In the same period at least 2,343 convictions were issued. Most of these were members of the “Peace Churches”. However included in this figure were approximately 400 of what were referred to as “selective objectors” who refused to serve for political reasons. Until 1977 these individuals were given fines or suspended sentences and once again called up for service. In that year the government changed tactics and began to imprison conscientious objectors. The report also mentions that in 1979 a young conscript, 20 year old Henry Holloway, committed suicide at the Voortrekkerhoogte detention barracks on July 15 1979 after being detained for refusing to serve on political grounds.

The first young man to stand trial for refusing to serve in the SADF was Anton Eberhard. He had completed his initial service in 1970. In 1977 he was called up for a camp. He replied with a letter to his camp commander in which he wrote: "I acknowledge receipt of your call-up papers, but for reasons of conscience I am unable to attend. I have given the matter much thought and am fully aware of the consequences of refusing...... It is my belief that the present government has no right to remain in power, and any organization which enables it to do so cannot be supported." 52 His boss, in a reaction which typifies the prevailing white attitudes asked him in fury: "So who will stop our daughters being raped?" 53 A crucial factor in his decision was the fact that a friend was detained at the time of his call-up. In an interview he stated: "I befriended Vusi and got a taste what life was like for black South Africans. I knew I couldn't put on an SADF uniform." 54 Eberhard was sentenced to 12 months in detention barracks of which he served two.

The next two objectors were cousins, Peter Moll and Richard Steele. Moll had served his initial army stint in 1974. At a Students Christian Association conference in 1974 he met Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise who pointed out to him that the guerrillas of SWAPO

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53 Hell No We Won’t Go. Mail and Guardian 25/08/2008.
54 Quoted in Hell No We Won’t Go. Mail and Guardian. 25/08/2008.
and the ANC were young men who were fighting apartheid and that the SADF was in fact fighting a civil war. This message struck home and Moll decided he could no longer serve. In December 1977 he received a three months suspended sentence for refusing to attend a camp. He was called up again in June 1979 and was sentenced this time to a R50 fine. The third time he was called up, in November 1979, he received a sentence of 18 months in detention barracks of which he served 12. During this time he was court-martialed a total of eleven times for refusing to wear army uniform and not saluting officers- spending a total of 139 days in solitary confinement. In a submission presented to the TRC Moll stated: “My motive was based upon general moral reasoning and Christian theological ethics. I was not a pacifist, although I had and still have great respect for pacifists. My objection was to the unjust nature of the war being conducted by the SADF in as much as it was in defence of White supremacy under the guise of protecting Christianity from communism.” Moll argued that he was a selective objector who was refusing to defend what he referred to as a “fundamentally unjust society”.

Richard Steele also expressed a strong Christian conviction as the basis for his refusal to serve on the SADF. Steele wrote a nine page letter which sent to SADF authorities. This was essentially a theological justification for his refusal to serve. In it he argued that violence was inherently sinful “because it arises out of man's alienation from God and his fellow man.” At his trial Steele made the following statement: “My refusal to do military service arises out of a more deep-rooted refusal to consciously participate in any form of violence, be it physical, psychological or structural. I believe that the way of violence and destruction is antithetical to the Christ-like way of love and healing.” He claimed to be a universal pacifist who would be unwilling to fight in any war. Yet he also had made it clear that he was


56 Truth and Reconciliation Commission  Special Submission on Conscription


58 Truth and Reconciliation Commission  Special Submission on Conscription
taking a political stand when he stated: “The military is one of the central features of apartheid and what is maintaining its power, and so I see my stand as non co-operation with the apartheid structure.”

He was sentenced to 18 months in Detention barracks of which he served 12. He was officially recognized by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience and received thousands of letters of support.

Steele and Moll both participated in an early alternative service project. After working with a Quaker run ambulance service in the Western Cape, Steele drove an ambulance to northern Namibia with the intention of providing medical care in the war-zone as an example of what CO’s could do as an alternative to incarceration. Military authorities initially approved the project, but upon his arrival in the operational area Steele was halted, and deported as “undesirable”. They worked closely with Professor Paul Hare of UCT on this project. Prof. Hare established a Voluntary Service Corp which he hoped to have recognised as a valid alternative to national service. His attempts however were rebuffed by the military who accused him of meddling in its affairs.

While serving their sentences both embarked on a hunger strike over Easter of 1980. A letter explaining their stand and appealing for support was widely circulated through the churches and church vigils was held at St. George’s cathedral and other venues around the country to express solidarity. Amongst the public figures who showed their support were parliamentarian Helen Suzman and Bishop (later Arch-Bishop) Desmond Tutu.

Charles Yeats, Michael Viveiros and Neil Mitchell followed suit. As with the other early objectors they expressed their conviction largely in religious terms. Yeats, who was head boy of Hilton College and captain of the Natal Schools rugby team, was inspired by Steele’s stand and performed an extraordinary act of conscience when he returned to South Africa to stand trial as a CO after initially going into exile to avoid conscription. Vivieros taught Sunday school classes in the coloured area of Hanover Park. His experiences there led to

61 Imprisoned Conscientious Objectors Plan To Fast. The Star. 01/04/1980.
his decision to object. “I saw soldiers shooting at children. I thought: ‘How could I teach these people the love of God when later I would be expected to shoot at them?’”\(^{62}\) Mitchell was the first Roman Catholic to object. At his trial he stated: “I believe that if I were to go into the army I would be denying Jesus’ way of dealing with conflict. I wish in my life to be a peacemaker. I want to work actively to promote peace and justice, which the world in general and South Africa in particular sorely need.”\(^{63}\) All three, like the previous objectors, expressed a willingness to undergo national service in a non-military capacity. Viveiros was sentenced to 18 months in civilian jail but served one year. Mitchell was sent to Detention Barracks for one year but moved to civilian jail after refusing to wear military dress. Yeats spent a 9 months in detention barracks and was then sentenced to a further year in jail for “dissent” while in DB.

In a discussion at the ECC 25 year anniversary Richard Steele addressed the issue that early objectors were perceived as being religious rather than political objectors. The reason for the emphasis on religious values, he explained, was that their moral values had been formed in a religious context and that there was at the time no political context for objection. Resistance to the military had not yet been taken up as a political issue. “The fact is we were using religious language to help us understand what our values and principles were. We were clear that we were making a political decision with political intent and consequences.”\(^{64}\) PW Botha clearly saw them as a threat to the state when attacked the early objectors saying they were part of “a new phase in the total onslaught ...manifested in the malevolent attempt to question the very essence of military service.”\(^{65}\)

These early pioneers of resistance were laying the groundwork for a political movement which would allow white South Africans to play a meaningful role in the struggle for a democratic future. They revealed to white South Africans the very real impact apartheid had
on their lives. As Connors states: “No longer was conscientious objection to serving in the military of an apartheid state merely an abstract theological or ideological debate; it now had a human face in the form of people outside those already accommodated by the government, who had the courage to object and people who supported this courage.”

Standing up to the apartheid state required extraordinary bravery, at a time it was almost unthinkable for young white South Africans to do so. They faced not only prosecution from the state but derision and rejection from the white community, including friends and family.

Their actions revealed the lies behind the state portrayal of objectors as traitors and cowards. By refusing to take up arms in support of apartheid they were standing firmly on the side of black South Africans in their fight for justice. Their example challenged the white community to rethink the role they played in supporting and maintaining apartheid, undermined the basic assumptions of apartheid discourse, but most importantly in terms of the threat they posed to the state, inspired others to engage in active resistance. In the words of Steele: “There was an expectation that whites would collaborate with the apartheid government, but the fact that there were people prepared to make a sacrifice sent a powerful message.”

They created a voice and a space allowing the expression of resistance to conscription to become part of public discourse. Extensive media coverage of the trials brought debate over the issues around conscription into the public domain. Many white South Africans were presented, probably for the first time with the dilemma raised by conscription. Although the white public, fed by government propaganda, were largely hostile to any challenge to the system they were now exposed to an alternative point of view and forced to consider its implications. Although few questioned the need for conscription itself, debate in the press revealed a growing support for genuine objectors to be allowed some alternative to military service. The liberal press increasingly published letters, articles and even editorial

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66 Connors. (2007). 68
67 Hell No, We Won’t Go. Mail and Guardian. 25/08/2008.
comments expressing sympathy with the objectors and with the notion of alternative
service.\textsuperscript{68} The Progressive Federal Party came out in support of alternative service even
though some it’s more conservative members were fiercely opposed.\textsuperscript{69} Even the student
newspaper of the Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, where future clergy of the NG Church
are trained, took a stand in urging the church to recognise objectors.\textsuperscript{70} They were supported
by two leading NG theologians, Professors Johan Heyns and Pieter Potgieter who wrote an
article in the \textit{Kerkbode}, the official NG newsletter saying: “When conscientious objections
are a serious matter to a person, they cannot be dismissed as irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{71}

As family, friends and a growing number of supporters sought ways to encourage and stand
by objectors in the many challenges they faced, a new organization emerged. Individual
support groups formed around individual objectors. These coalesced to form the
Conscientious Objector Support Group which was formally constituted in at a Durban
conference in July 1980. In the invitation to the conference a call was made for legal
recognition of conscientious objectors: “While there may be disagreement with the
conscientious objector’s stand, the various churches, organisations and individuals involved
in the issue are largely in agreement that conscientious objection is a stance which must be
legally recognised and provided for.” \textsuperscript{72} The church played an important role in the
organisation. Throughout the trials of the early objectors they were consistently supported
by prominent church figures. The fact that they were respected public figures gave
legitimacy to the objectors stand. The churches experience of challenging the state and the
fact that they were not easily intimidated proved invaluable.

\textsuperscript{68} For Example \textit{The Silent Exodus}. Daily News. 6/11/1981.
\textit{Frontline Service}. Star. 30/04/1982
\textit{A Matter of Conscience}. Cape Argus. 24/02/1982.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Schwarz is Perturbed}. Star. 23/11/1981
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Call on NGK}. Argus 22/05/1981
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Objectors: Kerkbode backs PFP}. Rand Daily Mail. 30/04/1982.
\textsuperscript{72} Connors. (2007). 72
The purpose of this organisation was to support the objectors through the extremely trying time they faced. This support extended not only to visiting the objector and providing moral and emotionally support through their time in confinement but also helping with legal matters: finding and funding representation, drawing up statements; supporting the family who had to endure anxiety over the circumstances of the objector and severe social ostracism as a result of his stand; political support by making the objectors plight known to the public through the media and taking up the issue of alternative service with relevant authorities and much more. This demonstrates how the example of the objectors inspired others to take up an active role in opposing the state, creating a momentum which led to the formation of the ECC. Many of the individuals active in COSG went on to play an important role in the formation of the ECC. The COSG continued to operate after the formation of the ECC, working with the ECC but maintaining its independence and focus on support of the individual objectors through a network of families and friends.

It was not only the CO’s that were refusing to serve. Growing black resistance to apartheid was creating a crisis of conscience for many white youth. Thousands simply did not arrive for their call ups. There were a number of options available. Many went into exile. Others prolonged their studies indefinitely, or went on the run inside the country. Another popular option was to feign medical or mental incompetence in the hope of gaining exemption. Some reported for service but refused to carry weapons. Some arranged transfers to non-combatant units such as the medics. Others, like myself, after completing my initial service, and a stint at university, simply ignored camp call-ups. I was never challenged on this—obviously too many conscripts were doing the same for the state to bother with individual cases.

In 1978 the United Nations General Assembly, which had in many past resolutions condemned apartheid as a “crime against the conscience and dignity”, passed a resolution recognizing the rights of individuals to refuse service in the military and police and calling on
the South African Government to do the same. A further resolution in 1980 called on South African youth not to enlist in the SADF and urged member states to grant asylum to objectors. This gave refugees legal status and a growing number took this option. A group of South African exiles in London and Amsterdam formed the Committee for South African War Resisters (COSAWR). The objectives of this organization were to “raise international awareness about the SADF’s role and to provide support to South African objectors overseas...[and to] help them apply for political asylum, find accommodation and adjust to living in a new society.” COSAWR also conducted extensive research on the SADF, and interviewed and debriefed ex-soldiers, providing the ANC with information to help undermine the military. It also held numerous pickets outside the South African Embassy in London. Other organizations were formed with similar objectives, among them the South African Military Refugees Aid Fund (SAMRAF), based in New York and the South African Liberation Support Committee (SALSCOM) which distributed a publication in early 1978 called Omkeer (About Face) which gave advice and offered support to those wishing to leave the country. It also offered suggestions to those not wishing to desert on how to undermine the SADF from within.

On University campuses NUSAS took up the issue. In 1978 Milcom (Military subcommittee) was formed, primarily to raise awareness over the militarisation of society. Richard Steele claims that there was initially little support for conscientious objection as an alternative to military service from the leadership of NUSAS who followed a policy of “strategic participation”, encouraging members to serve in the SADF rather than spend time in prison. He says his lobbying went down “like a proverbial lead balloon.” This caused much conflict within the organization, as many members were unhappy with this position. In 1980 the Milcoms were closed down largely due to the influence of then NUSAS chair, Auret van

74 Connors (2007) p66
76 Private correspondence received 28/11/2009.
Heerden who favoured “strategic participation”. Steele goes on to say that individual members from NUSAS did engage with the CO movement and made a significant contribution. By 1982 it’s seems the organisation had come round- The NUSAS Congress in Durban in December in that year unanimously adopted a resolution expressing solidarity with all conscientious objectors, both in prison and in exile.  

At this time the ANC was looking for ways to infiltrate the white community and to stir up white opposition to apartheid. The 1983 youth publication *Forward* identified military issues as “an effective opposition tool to raise questions within the white community” and called for white youth to “totally defy the draft” and to “link the draft resistance struggle to all struggles.”  

They began actively to recruit young white South Africans. Among the recruits were Gavin Evans, Janet Cherry and Brett Myrdal, who were all to play an important role in the ECC. In an interview with Kameraad Mhambi Gavin Evans talks candidly about his recruitment. He claims that the ANC was divided on the issue. He and Janet Cherry were deployed to Cape Town and were instructed to take an active stance in opposing conscription. They formed the Conscription Action Group- a small but vocal opposition caucus in NUSAS- together with other later ECC stalwarts. Discussion within this group focussed on the creation of a broader anti-war/ anti-military organisation, although they had not yet hit on the idea of mobilising around the call for an end to conscription.

The appearance of a new group of objectors created the opportunity for mobilisation and a high profile campaign around the issue. These objectors all took a more blatantly political stance than previous objectors and all were prepared to go to prison. The ensuing trials continued to receive a high level of coverage in the media. That fact that statements made by the objectors, and their often high profile supporters in court could be published in the

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press meant that the courts remained one of the few spaces where voices of opposition could be expressed. The objectors made full use of this platform to give expression to the voice of conscience of white South Africans, exposing the distortions and hypocrisy of apartheid discourse and reminding them that their service in the SADF made them complicit in the actions of the apartheid government. The controversy and debate they created may have alienated them from the mainstream of white society, but it also inspired and motivated many to action in their support. According to Evans these objectors demonstrated to the white left that “it was possible to object to the army on a left-wing political basis.”

Billy Paddock, the first of this new wave was tried in November 1982. He clearly stated that his objections were of a political nature. He was the first objector to base his resistance on the “just war” theory rather than universal objection or pacifism. He maintained that he had an “obligation to resist apartheid and exploitation in all its forms. Military service is just one of those forms.” “I cannot” he argued “enter the SADF because of the role it plays in defending the structural violence of the South African system.” He was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.

In January 1983 Etienne Essery, a 24 year old Durban actor was sentenced to 4 months in jail for refusing to attend a 30 day camp. He told the court that the lack of respect and dignity accorded to human life which he witnessed in the operational area crystallised his opposition to war. He had served his initial service and two camps running an ammunition depot. “My position led me to believe I was not involved, after all I was not pulling the trigger.” What he witnessed changed his mind. He continues: “I began to realise I was as responsible as the men pulling the trigger.” Essery had initially planned to go into exile—he had in fact already purchased a ticket but cancelled it “because” he explained “I couldn’t

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80 A Beer with Gavin Evans.
81 Paddock jailed by the SADF. Rand Daily Mail. 6/10/82.
82 Conscientious Objector from Natal Jailed for a Year. Natal Mercury. 8/10/1982.
83 “Actor Guilty of Refusal to do Army Service” Daily News. 13/01/1983
trade my physical freedom for my spiritual freedom”. He saw it as important “to make a non-violent statement in the midst of all the violence.” Rob Robertson of the SACC referred to his sentence as a “subtle kind of religious persecution…. If someone holds religious views he gets concessions- otherwise he is persecuted.”\textsuperscript{84} In another case a universal religious pacifist, Adrian Patterson was sentenced to 4 months for failing to report for duty.

The government also announced in January that 66 Jehovah’s witnesses were sentenced to 36 months each in detention barracks for refusing to undergo national service, and that more than 400 conscientious objectors were currently serving sentences of up to 3 years.\textsuperscript{85}

In early 1983 Brett Myrdal, who had publically declared his intention to object, undertook a nationwide tour in which he spoke publically of the reasons for his objection and of the need for a broader campaign against military conscription. This excursion played an important role in consolidating existing anti-conscription groupings, and mobilising new opposition to conscription. Myrdal inspired and challenged many young white South Africans (myself included- who attended his speech as a young student in Grahamstown) to rethink and question their relationship to the military and gave voice to the possibility of a way of resistance. Myrdal had been active within NUSAS, where he had consistently called for action on the military and worked with a core group to keep the issue on the agenda. He had also been involved with supporting earlier objectors, helping them to prepare their statements. Myrdal is accredited with being one of the major contributors in identifying a campaign to call for the end to conscription as the being the strategic key to mobilising white South Africans opposed to apartheid. As he wrote later: “conscripts and their families could be mobilised against apartheid as this was the only point at which apartheid required white

\textsuperscript{84} “Pacifist Got Light Sentence” Daily News. 13/01/1983.  
\textsuperscript{85} Objectors:400 In Jail. Star. 28/01/1983
people to “pay” for the privileges of apartheid. Dying for apartheid was just not worth it if you did not believe in it. The moral and ethical opposition to apartheid was strong.”

2.2 LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: THE EARLY DAYS OF THE ECC

"Conscription was the only way whites felt the pain of apartheid and this made it an ideal mobilising tool - apartheid wasn’t worth dying for." - Brett Myrdal

With a broad range of groupings now opposed to conscription the stage was set for the emergence of just such a campaign. The biggest obstacle was the law which prescribed a ten year jail sentence for anyone encouraging individuals to object. It was the overcoming of this obstacle which provided the final link in the chain and brought together these diverse individuals and organizations together into one body.

It was Sheena Duncan, National President of the Black Sash at the time and much respected and experienced anti-apartheid activist, who provided the solution. In the opening address at the Black Sash national conference in Cape Town in May 1983 she made the following statement: “At this conference we will also be considering the question of conscientious objection and the harsh and unreasonable new proposals for alternative service and the punishment of objector. We will be asking why there should be conscription at all.” She maintained that the need for conscription was an admission of the injustice of the war- if the war was just people would fight out of conviction and not have to be forced to fight: “If it is necessary to have conscription, is that not an admission that the war is already lost” she went on to ask. According to Mary Burton, Duncan had “the most

86 Private correspondence. Received 9/08 2011.
87 Hell No We Wont Go. Mail and Guardian. 25/08/2008.
89 ECC25. (2009)
amazing ability to understand the effect of laws, long honed in looking at pass law legislation.” Furthermore: “It was Sheena who realized that while it was illegal to support conscientious objectors, to promote objection, it was not illegal to call for an end to conscription. She identified the fact that this was the issue.” Duncan had identified a loophole in the law and provided a way forward.

The conference passed a motion concluding as follows: “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 effort of all South Africa’s people to bring about democratic government and the relief of poverty and deprivation suffered by the majority.”  

This statement reveals that the membership of the Black Sash clearly saw the battle against conscription as an integral part of the struggle for democracy in the country and provided a way for white South African to be part of that struggle.

Brett Myrdal recalls a clandestine meeting with other activists in a Grahamstown cemetery the very night the Black Sash resolution was passed. Discussion centred around the resolution. “We realised writes Myrdal that by calling on the state to end conscription, rather than encouraging individuals to resist conscription, one could sidestep the previously all encompassing reach of the Defence Act which forbade anyone ‘from influencing any one, or any group, in any way whatsoever - to not serve their call up’ on punishment of R7000-00 or seven years or both.” Further, “(w)e realised the potential of this call to end conscription as a legal way to bypass the Defence Act and to start an untouchable campaign against the state’s ability to conscript for an unjust war.”

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90 No War In Namibia. Black Sash, 27. 2 1984. 22.
91 Private Correspondence. Received 8/09/2011.
Earlier in the year, the government had given the first clue that it was planning new legislation to deal with the objector issue. Church leaders were summoned in January to meet with the Naude Commission, set up by the military to look into the issue of alternatives for Conscientious Objectors. The clerics were informed of the Commission’s recommendations regarding a pending change in legislation and warned to keep the contents of the briefing confidential. Their opinions were not sought and they were given one week to respond. The Commission, they were told was to recommend to the government that genuine religious objectors should be allowed to do non-military service under the department of Manpower, but that political objectors should be jailed for up to eight years (twice the length of their remaining service.) A proposed new body would be set up to oversee the process and to decide on the validity of each case.

Many of the attending church leaders voiced their opposition to the proposals. The English speaking churches expressed concern that the legislation would not provide alternative service for those objecting on moral and ethical grounds. SACC spokesperson Rob Robertson said the proposed legislation would have the effect of driving young white South Africans out of the country. He claimed the punishment was “on a par with the sentence given for high treason, rape and murder” and did not fit the offence. The Anglican Church (CPSA) issued a statement that “the distinction between a religious and a political objector is not acceptable to the CPSA.”

The February issue of Outlook, the SACC newsletter, was dedicated to the proposed new legislation. The editorial took the government to task over conscription. It reminded them that conscription had deliberately not been applied in South Africa during both World Wars due to extreme opposition to it from Afrikaner Nationalists, the forefathers of those presently in

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92 Military Objectors: Church Leaders Meet SADF To Talk About A New Deal”. Sunday Tribune. 02/01/83.

93 “Churches hit at Service Proposals” Daily News. 06/01/1983

94 “SADF View On Objectors Deplored by SACC”. Star. 11/01/1983
government, many of whom had fought and been jailed in an attempt to keep South Africa from entering these wars. Even the Afrikaner churches had supported civil disobedience. They did not support those wars on political grounds—yet now they were denying the rights of individuals to make a similar stand in the present situation.  

Steve De Gruchy also reminded Afrikaner theologians that even their own theological tradition rejected the distinction between politics and religion that was the basis of the proposed act. To Calvin, he claimed, religion suffused all aspects of life—a person’s political choices were defined by their religious beliefs—”religion that did not apply to all aspects of life, including politics, was no religion.” The proposals not only excluded non-religious objection but also the Christian “Just War” position which dated back to Aquinas, and which in fact Afrikaner theologians themselves and their Nationalist followers were using to justify their participation in a war against the perceived enemies of South Africa.

The Afrikaans churches supported the proposals claiming in their report that “the pacifist standpoint that war should not take place under any circumstances was alien to the tradition of Christendom.”

Charles Yeats was released from jail on February 15. In Durban, on the 16th a vigil was held to welcome him home, and also to pray for and express solidarity with those still in prison. Mike Vivieros was released on the 22nd.

In March General Magnus Malan introduced an amendment to the Defence Act in parliament. The Bill was in accordance with those outlines issued to the churches earlier in the year, and it was immediately obvious that church and media criticism had been ignored. A Board for Religious Objection was to set up to adjudicate applications for alternative

95 “Outlook of the Month” Outlook. 02/1983.
service. Only those judged by the board to hold a sincere belief in universal pacifism and grounded in recognized Christian doctrine would be granted alternative service. Political objectors, deemed to be “promoting the cause of an enemy of the Republic” faced imprisonment for up to eight years. In addition the Bill stated that all hearings would be held in camera and any public statement or publication by the objector prohibited. Obviously a major aim of the Bill was to not only discourage but also silence further political objectors.

Opposition to the bill came from unexpected quarters – even from within the Afrikaaner establishment. Dr Ettienne De Villiers, chairman of the NG Church’s Western Cape Synod’s sub-commission on war ethics and lecturer at the church’s Huguenot College in Wellington broke ranks with the church and wrote an article in a Cape Town Afrikaans newspaper calling for “some form of alternative service” for political objectors. He claimed that “the deeply-felt beliefs held by some that South African society was unjust ...should be respected” and argued: “It is not for the church to enter a debate with these people about whether they were right or wrong.” The Western Cape Youth executive of the Progressive Federal Party also rejected the bill describing it as “a cynical attempt at appearing to create a fair deal for conscientious objectors by ruthlessly intimidating and deterring potential objectors.” MP Philip Myburgh called the bill “a return to slave labour” during a parliamentary debate. There were however deep divisions within the party. A special caucus was called to address these divisions. While consensus was reached on an official stance, which called for the bill to be referred to a select committee for further debate, conscription was to remain a controversial issue within the PFP, leading to clashes and contributing to the eventual splitting of the party. Church leaders, academics, students, civil rights organisations and other supporters of the rights to conscientious objection publically slammed the Bill.

99 "PFP Youth Group Reject Objection Move." Cape Times. 7/03/83
100 “Church’s Stand Illogical” Sunday Tribune.6/03/83.
101 PFP Youth Group Reject Objection Move. Cape Times. 7/03/1983
102 Return to Slave Labour in SA. Cape Times 22/03/1983.
There was much debate in the pages of the media over the merits and demerits of the bill. Some of the liberal media took an openly critical stance and made use of the opportunity to inform the public both of the new proposals and of church opposition. The Argus for instance argued that “people should not suffer unreasonably punitive sentences for genuinely held beliefs”\textsuperscript{103}, while a Natal Witness editorial went so far as to “urge all South Africans to press for the abandonment of this proposal and it’s replacement with one of positive worth”\textsuperscript{104}. The Pretoria News called the proposals “thoroughly unfair and immoral.”\textsuperscript{105} Arguments raged over whether the SADF was engaged in a “just war” or not, and whether political objection was valid or part of the onslaught. The media debate not only raised temperatures but also exposed ordinary South Africans, who may not have previously questioned government discourse, particularly on the role of the SADF, to dissenting viewpoints. Public meetings were held in Cape Town and Johannesburg to express opposition to the bill. Minor amendments were made to the bill during the second reading in parliament—the most significant being a reduction of the time to be served by CO’s from eight to six years and the allowing of hearings to be held in public.

In the midst of the controversy over the Defence Amendment Bill Peter Hathorn, a 22 year old student, was sentenced to two years in jail for failing to report for military service. Hathorn made it clear his objection was based on political opposition to apartheid: “Since the conflict in this country is a civil not an external war, participation in the SADF is a profoundly political action. Participation does not act in the interest of the nation as a whole, but contributed only to the cause of the dominant minority….To go into the SADF is to take sides in the struggle in this country.”\textsuperscript{106} He emphasised that he had no objection to participating in a non-military national service. Dr Alan Boesak, at the time president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Graham McIntosh, PFP MP gave testimony in his defence.

\textsuperscript{103} Awkward Problem Cape Argus 04/0/1982
\textsuperscript{104} Next Step. Natal Witness. 04/01/1983
\textsuperscript{105} Not Justice But Vengeance. Pretoria News. 25/01/1983.
\textsuperscript{106} Conscientious Objector Jailed. Star. 23/03/83
More than 400 students attended a meeting at UCT to support Hathorn. In her address Dr Margaret Nash, of the Black Sash, urged students to “campaign with all their might” to end conscription and accused the government of trying to “manipulate the churches into denying the right of conscience of all human beings.” Hathorn’s sister Paula claimed her brother’s stand was part of a growing resistance to military service.

The UCT SRC published Hathorn’s testimony in a booklet entitled “Dissension In The Ranks- An Argument for Conscientious Objection”108. This and four other publications including Billy Paddock’s “Why I Say No To Collaboration With The SADF” were subsequently banned. They were deemed “prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare, or peace and good order” under section 47 (2) (e) of the Publications Act. This was another early indication of the seriousness with which the state would respond to the growing anti-conscription movement.

The Conscientious Objectors Support Group took the next step of concretising the Black Sash’s call into action. At the National Conference in Durban in July COSG endorsed the Black Sash resolution. A report on the meeting stated: “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 conscription and the unjust war.”109 Activists began to lay the groundwork for the future End Conscription Campaign. It had as yet no name or structure but committed devotees engaged in building organizational structure and establishing links with other struggle groups.

107 Campaign to End Draft- UCT Told. Argus. 25/03/83.
108 Objector Hathorn’s Testimony is Banned. Argus. 29/03/1983.
In September Paul Dobson became the first serving member of the SADF to be jailed for refusing to serve. After completing 15 months in a non-combatant role as a teacher, he reached the conclusion that it was untenable for him to continue to be associated with an institution “which serves to protect and reproduce an unjust society.” The judge, on sentencing him to one year in jail, claimed that to call Dobson a “conscientious objector” was to “praise and flatter” him, as his motivations were political. Furthermore, he claimed, the term was being abused by “those who oppose the country on a political level and to justify their support for those who believe in radical and violent means to bring about change.”

In October a story emerged about a national serviceman who had disappeared in mysterious circumstances. It was subsequently discovered that Ronald Woods had fled to Zimbabwe where he was granted political asylum and given a job by the Zimbabwe government.

The Inaugural meeting of the End Conscription Committee (as it was then known) was held in Cape Town on the 17th of November. Sixteen organizations attended among them NUSAS, the Black Sash, the Council of Churches, COSG and other Christian, student and women’s organizations. Delegates discussed and clarified the working principles, structure, character and aims of the organisation as well as concrete suggestions for activity. The main aim was stated as: “(t)o create a coherent voice of opposition to the military within the white community. This would be a significant force in undermining the state’s support base and in building a non-racial opposition.” The focus of activity would be “to decide on and co-ordinate a campaign against forced conscription.” In practical terms it was decided to focus on the drafting of an ECC Declaration and to work towards a national launch in the new year. Committees were also set up in Durban and Johannesburg.

110 Prison and Discharge for Army Objector. Daily News. 10/09/83/
111 Mystery As SADF Soldier Gets Asylum In Zimbabwe. Sunday Times.16/0/83
Billy Paddock was released in November after serving 10 months of his one year sentence. When it became apparent that he was liable to be called up again, Paddock re-iterated his commitment: “In the event of that happening my commitment would be the same, if not stronger. I will not collaborate with them.”

Brett Myrdal was due to be the next CO to be stand trial. Myrdal, a long time activist prepared a extensive and comprehensive statement for his trial. Having learnt from previous trials that court records could not be banned, Myrdal planned to use his trial as a platform for making a strong political stand, to build the momentum of the growing anti-conscription movement, and prepare the way for the ECC. With the help of legal advice from Edwin Cameron and Gilbert Marcus he planned to argue that South Africa was fighting a civil war -pitting fellow South Africans against one another. His chief witnesses were to be his mother and the mother of executed MK cadre Solomon Mhlangu—both were to testify that their sons were loyal South Africans. He saw previous objector trials as a progression towards more blatantly political resistance- which he now intended to take to the next level: “From religious pacifists to just war protagonists to moral secular positions until finally someone would object on the basis of the Freedom Charter.” “From here”, he continues, "the logical development of war resistance into the life blood of the struggle for peace as a whole developed.”

He outlined his reasons for objecting: “As a soldier in the SADF I would be called on to defend a system based on the violence of apartheid. I cannot defend a society based so inextricably on violence against its citizens” By making clear the linking between conscription and the broader struggle against apartheid, he was consciously preparing to do what no CO had previously done—make a statement of open support for the ANC: “Our demands must embrace a profoundly changed society….a society where young

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113 Objector May Face Second Jail Term. Sunday Express. 9/10/83.
114 Myrdal, B. Background to my Statement. From private archives. Received.12/10/2009

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men are no longer called on to fight their brothers in defence of a patently unjust system... where the people are in control of their lives- where the people shall govern.”

Myrdal was however denied his day in court. Whether by deliberate planning on the part of the state to thwart a concerted campaign against it, or by simple accident of timing the government announced, just days before his trial was to begin, that pending charges against conscientious objectors were being withdrawn. The Defence Amendment Act would come into effect on Jan 1 1984 and all objectors would be tried under the new law.

According to Gavin Evans, Myrdal was fully prepared to stand trial, even under threat of six years in prison. Instead he received instructions from the ANC to go into exile. They felt he would be more useful to them as an active MK member. He left for Zimbabwe and for the next six years worked for the ANC. His task was gathering information on troop movements, weapons, fuel depots, call-up mobilisations and invasion plans for Angola—all supplied by soldiers within the SADF.

During 1983 the SADF was involved in its third major invasion of Angola. Operation Askari involved over 10 000 white troops and was ostensibly aimed at SWAPO bases in Angola, but it was timed to support a UNITA push northwards against the MPLA government. More than twenty white conscripts died during the operation, provoking for the first time a critical reaction from the white public and mainstream press. In October SADF commandos attacked a house belonging to the ANC in Maputo, Mozambique.

Inside the country the government was pushing forward with its program of reform. The reforms were rejected by the majority of South African’s as an attempt to co-opt coloured and Indian people into the apartheid system. August saw the formation of the United Democratic Front which launched a national campaign to collect a million signatures against

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116 He had to Choose Sides. The Cape Times.3/11/83
117 A Beer with Gavin Evans.
the proposed new constitution. In November a referendum was held in which the all white electorate voted in favour of a new tri-cameral parliament in spite of opposition both from the liberal Progressive Federal Party and from right wing groups. Two new houses were created to represent the coloured and Indian communities. However these were structured in such a way as to ensure that the white House of Assembly would dominate and deny any significant power or decision making to the other houses. Blacks were excluded on the grounds that they had political representation in the homelands. Furthermore a new post of Executive President was created, further consolidating power in the hands of the head of government- P. W. Botha. Introduction of the constitution led to a split in the National Party. A right wing group of M.P’s under the leadership of Andries Treurnicht broke away to form the Conservative Party which subsequently replaced the PFP as parliament’s Official Opposition. In December ANC member Carl Niehaus was sentenced to 15 years in prison for treason. In his statement he referred to apartheid as a heresy and equated it with Nazism.

The End Conscription Committees continued to meet throughout early 1984. A questionnaire was drafted which was circulated amongst the constituent groups. Responses to this survey were used to determine the nature, aims and character of the intended organization. From the beginning the nature of the organization was to be, in theory, and largely in practice profoundly democratic. All those who participated in building of the organization had a say and influence in its structure. As the organization took shape this was a major factor. It was decided that the ECC would be a front with affiliated groups sending individuals to represent them. The structure would consist of working committees attended by these representatives, as well as individuals members. Decisions would be made in these committees in a democratic fashion with each individual having an equal say. This ensured that that the nature and direction of the campaign would be decided by the active members and guaranteed against it being hijacked by any existing organization or grouping. The focus on a single issue allowed for a wide range for political opinion- anyone who opposed
conscription would be welcome. The debate this created was welcomed as a way of educating and mobilizing people. This allowed for a vibrant and dynamic organization in which ideological differences would add to the diversity and character of the campaign and not become contentious issues. The result of this was that the ECC was to be largely free of the divisive factionalism which has plagued so many political groupings. The committee decided on a new name and the distinctive broken chain logo was adopted. A draft declaration was drawn up and a date set for the official launch.

The new Board for Religious Objection convened in February. It was headed by Justice M.T. Steyn and comprised of five members—three civilian theologians, one army chaplain and one army officer. In the first month the board received 90 applications. Whereas in the past religious objectors had come mainly from the “peace churches”, many applications were now received from the mainstream denominations—Presbyterians, Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists. In July Magnus Malan announced in parliament that the Board had heard 96 applications for Religious Objector status. Of these all but one had been granted. Bishop Desmond Tutu attacked the Board for allowing Conscientious on religious but not moral grounds. He urged the authorities “to provide as a matter of national urgency for alternative forms of military service.”

In March Peter Hathorn was released after spending one year in prison. He told reporters that he had spent much of his time in prison “teaching ants to swim”.

In May the fledgling organization launched its first national campaign. The No War in Namibia campaign drew attention to South Africa’s illegal and ongoing occupation of that country (then known as South West Africa.) Anton Lubowski, a human rights lawyer and the

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118 The Man Who’ll Decide Between God and Country. Sunday Express. 5/02/84.
119 Religious Objectors Must Wait. Rand Daily Mail. 14/06/84.
120 Objectors’ Act Does Not Cater For SA - Tutu. Rand Daily Mail. 27/06/84
121 CO Peter Hathorn Taught Ants To Swim In Prison. Sunday Tribune. 18/03/84
first white Namibia to publically join SWAPO, toured the country addressing public meetings and the press with the message that South Africa’s occupation was not only illegal in terms of international law, but was undesired by the Namibian people and the primary reason for SWAPO’s taking up arms. At a press conference he said: “The war there is a civil one in which one man’s hero is another man’s terrorist.” He was supported by other Namibian speakers including Hans Rohr, leader of the Christian Democratic Party and Pastor Kameeta of the Namibian Council of Churches as well as local church leaders and EEC members. Rohr told of widespread atrocities against the Kavango people of Northern Namibia. This took the form of torture, abduction, “disappearances”, arbitrary killings, rapes, (of children as well as adults) and the complete destruction of villages. Further evidence of SADF atrocities was presented in the 1984 edition of *Objector*. Trevor Edwards, a soldier in 32 Battalion of the SADF gave the following account of activity in Namibia: “Our main job is to take an area and clear it- we sweep through it and kill everything in front of us: cattle, goats, people, everything. Sometimes we take the locals for questioning. It's rough. We just beat them, cut them, burn them. As soon as we're finished with them we kill them.” The *Objector* also quotes from a report by Dr. Paul Wee of the Lutheran World Ministry who visited Ovamboland: “the evidence of South African Army brutality among all segments of the population is overwhelming. It makes a mockery of the South African governments claim to ‘be responding to the request of the Ovambo people for protection..... it is they that deserve the name of terrorists.”

At a public meeting at St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town Pastor Kameeta told the audience: “We can place the blame for the war in South Africa squarely at the door of those who create and implement *apartheid* policies.” Reverend David Russel challenged the same audience: “We should ask why we are being conscripted, what we would be called to do and whose interests we are defending in Namibia.”

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124 *No win: no war in Namibia*. Black Sash. 27. 2. 1984. 22
was addressed by Sheena Duncan and Patrick Lekota alongside Lubowski. Posters for the campaign referred to Namibia as SA’s Vietnam (using a play on the abbreviation Nam). Badges and stickers carrying the slogan “No War In Namibia” were also distributed. Vigils, picket protests, concerts and press conferences were also held in Johannesburg and Cape Town. A public demonstration, in Cape Town was broken up by police and some of the participants were taken in for questioning. In Johannesburg members of the public verbally abused demonstrators. To coincide with the campaign affiliated organizations took up the issue of the Namibian occupation in various ways. COSAWR published a four part series on the Namibian war in its journal *Resister.*

In September the newly formed Namibia National Students organisation came out in support of the ECC. The organisations vice-president, M. Hengari wrote in the *Student Voice* newsletter: “The People’s Liberation army have at heart the liberation of Namibia from South Africa’s illegal occupation.” He further claimed: “A call for the end of conscription and the war is a call for liberation.”

The PFP held its Cape Conference, also in September. Once again conscription was high on its agenda. Once again there was much debate and disagreement within the party. A motion supporting the end of conscription was passed. The party’s Defence spokesman clarified the party’s position in a press statement. While the PFP supported the change from a conscripted force to a professional army, he said, such a process “cannot take place overnight and a planned process would be necessary.” Just a week later the National Youth Executive of the party held its conference. It described the party’s official stand as “wissy-wassy” and called for an immediate end to conscription. Extensive press coverage of the conferences brought the issue of conscription yet again to the public’s attention and re-awakened interest and fired media debate on the subject.

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125 *SWA Students Slam Call-up.* Rand Daily Mail. 15/09/1984.
127 *PFP Youth Seek End to Conscription.* Argus. 26/09/1984
Several Churches also reiterated their stance against conscription. In August, the new Catholic Bishop of Johannesburg, Bishop Orsmond said that “(t)he Church must judge politics in the light of Christian principles. If it did not it would be failing in its duty.” He added that this particularly applied to conscription, and that objectors should be supported. In September the Presbyterian Church passed several resolutions challenging apartheid, including one that “representations be made to the South African Government, urging it to phase out military conscription.”

In October the Board of Religious Objectors turned down an application for exemption from a Buddhist student, David Hartmann. The Board found Hartmann to be “sincere and honest” in his belief. The problem centered around the nature of Buddhism and the question of whether, since it recognised no higher power, it could be regarded as a religion. A statement released by the Board said it “was of the opinion that he did not believe in a divine power, which does not comply with the definition of religious conviction.” The Board referred the matter to the Supreme Court which must decide “whether the definition of religious conviction as set out by the board presupposes the existence of a supreme being.” The Supreme Court later found in Hartmann’s favour and he was allowed to serve as a religious objector.

By the end of the year 321 applications had been received by the Board. Of 194 had been processed only four had been refused. One of the applicants was Rob Goldman. Goldman, the son of Sergeant “Tubby” Goldman, who had received a Distinguished Conduct Medal for brave conduct in an escape drama during the fall of Tobruk in World War II, had already completed his initial two year service. He had initially considered objecting along with Richard Steele but decided to serve under the condition that he would not carry a weapon.

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129 Church Hits Out on Race Issues. Rand Daily Mail. 27/09/1984
130 White Buddhist Raises Test Case For Courts. Sunday Express. 11/11/84.
Instead he was given a wooden replica to carry which he still keeps as a memento. Surprisingly he reports meeting with little hostility even from his superiors. He says he was often ridiculed but never bullied: “They were more curious than hostile and this gave us an opportunity to state our case.”

In spite of his previous service to the country, Sgt. Goldman supported his son’s stand saying: “There is a subtle difference between this war and my one. Mine was just. This one is not.”

Goldman told the board would be happy to serve in the Medical Corps provided he did not have to wear a uniform.

In other developments within the country the first elections for the new coloured and Indian Houses were held in August. Less than 20% of those eligible voted. In September PW Botha assumed the new office of State president and the revised constitution came into effect. A new wave of unrest swept the country. The government responded by banning meetings and arresting leaders of the UDF. In a show of force the SADF flexed its muscles conducting Operation Thunder Chariot - its biggest military exercise since World War II, involving over 11,000 troops. In early October Minister Louis Le Grange announced that SADF troops would be deployed in the townships to back up police. Army patrols start making an appearance in the townships of Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Soweto.

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131 ECC 25. (2009)
132 Army Objector Son of Famous Serviceman. Daily News. 11/12/84.
CHAPTER 3

3.1 THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE ECC AND THE OCCUPATION OF THE TOWNSHIPS

TOWARDS A JUST PEACE IN OUR LAND

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 the 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 citizens 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.
The official launch of the End Conscription Campaign took place in Cape Town at the Claremont Civic Centre on October 15. An estimated audience of 1500 was addressed by Alan Boesak, Sheena Duncan, Pete Hathorn, Michael Evans and Ivan Toms, amongst others. In his address Boesak asked the audience: “The glorification of war and destruction can only have a bad effect on the hearts and minds of our people. Haven’t we suffered 300 years of oppression? Do we have to add more hatred?” He claimed all war was destructive and thus worked against God’s purpose and called on all South Africans to make a clear choice to work to end conscription “for the sake of building a country that will one day be worth defending.” Sheena Duncan said the ECC was not trying to stop anyone from joining the SADF, rather it was calling “for all to be allowed to exercise freedom of choice.” Sue Williamson of Women’s Movement for Peace said she had cried on hearing of her son’s call-up: “I dread the day when my son is called on to lift his hand against the people of Soweto”, she said. Evans claimed that the SADF could not be seen as the government like to portray it – which is as a shield behind which policies of peaceful change could be pursued. Instead he said, “(t)he SADF underpins apartheid. It is an instrument for the defence of injustice in this country.” The ECC Declaration to End Conscription was adopted. A small but vocal group of protesters from the National Student Federation (a state-sponsored right wing group) tried to disrupt the meeting- among them was Russel Crystal who was to become a concerted opponent of the ECC. In the build up to the launch a “Rock the Ratel” concert, a church vigil and a picket protests were held in Cape Town.

Durban marked the occasion with a workshop on October 27 and a public meeting on the 28th attended by some 200 supporters and addressed by Richard Steele, UDF lawyer Zac

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133 South African Outlook. 04/1985..
135 Boesak Calls For End To Conscription. Citizen.17/10/84.
136 All War is Destructive says Dr. Boesak. Rand Daily Mail. 17/10/84.
138 Campaign is Growing Against Call-ups. Sunday Star.21/10/84
Yacoob and Rev. Wesley Mabuza. Yacoob said the battle against conscription should be “linked to the total struggle for democracy” and “should be taken door to door to every household in the land.” Rev. Mabuza commented: “One wonders why people like Mr P.W. Botha and Mr Pik Botha don’t go to the frontline. The day they have to suffer like others is the day they will stop the war.”

In Johannesburg public meetings were banned in response to the Vaal Triangle uprising. Instead the declaration was launched at a press conference at Khotso house on October 17. Dr Beyers Naude, Helen Joseph, David Webster, NUSAS President Kate Phillips and Dr. Kistner of the SACC spoke in support of the ECC declaration and signed it. The ECC released a statement saying conscription was “a violation of the moral right of the individual to exercise freedom of conscience in determining whether or not to serve in the SADF.” Two days later a “Spring Fair” was held at a Mayfair church. The gathering was addressed by Helen Joseph and Sheena Duncan. An afternoon of cultural activities ensued. Films, slides and videos were shown explaining the crisis in Namibia and resistance to conscription. Anti-war drama was staged and other performers included bands, singers and breakdancers. In Grahamstown, while there was no official launch supporters on campus marked the event with a concert and guerilla theatre. The October issue of Objector, the COSG newsletter published the declaration and was subsequently banned.

While the focus of the ECC was on conscription the real goals of the organisation went far beyond merely calling for an end to the forced enlistment of white youth. By identifying conscription as the one aspect of apartheid that most affected the white community it in effect created a point of convergence around which white opposition to apartheid could crystallise, a highly effective focus point to draw white democrats into the broader struggle for democracy and justice. It also showed a way to resist. As it was from the white

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139 New Body launched To End Conscirption. Daily Dispatch. 30/10/84.
140 Campaign Against the Draft Gains Support. Star. 18/10/84.
community that the apartheid government drew its support to maintain the system, opposition and even more so active resistance, from within this community posed a major threat to its maintenance of hegemony.

Speakers on ECC platforms consistently challenged state propaganda about the nature of the conflict in the country. While the state claimed that that South Africa was under attack from an external enemy, intent on destroying the country, they stressed that apartheid, which denied the majority of South Africans basic human rights and dignity, was the fundamental cause of the conflict. They claimed the deployment of troops in the township marked an escalation of the conflict in the country and the entering of a new phase which pitted fellow South Africans against one another and could only been seen as a civil war.

To the states insistence that the SADF was apolitical and protecting all South Africans, providing a shield behind which change could take place, they responded by highlighting the role of the SADF in maintaining an unjust system. They exposed the atrocities that had been committed, revealing the lengths that they were prepared to go to. In response to the claims that service in the military turned boys into men, developing their physical and mental potential, they countered that conscripts were being put into a position of having to defend apartheid and to take up arms against and even kill fellow citizens or to be killed themselves, or watch friends die, and that this was a gross violation of their human rights. To the charges that those within the white community who opposed conscription were traitors and part of the Total Onslaught they responded by highlighting the role conscription played in the ongoing oppression of the black majority and stressed that they were in fact patriots who were identifying with the black majority in their quest for fair treatment and justice for all.

Furthermore they expressed concern about the growing militarization of South African society, over increased military spending, military control over political processes, unequal education, poverty, destabilisation of neighbouring countries- of as one speaker put it “the
application of military solutions to political problems.” Application of military solutions to political problems. All these things were linked. Further quotes from the Objector emphasise this. “The conflict can only be resolved by the dismantling of the apartheid system and recognising all South Africans as full citizens.” “Only a free and democratic society can ensure that their army is not an instrument of domination in the hands of a minority.” The ECC through its media and meetings was providing an alternative source of news and views which challenged state media and its discourse.

As the symbolism of the ECC logo revealed conscription was seen as but one link in the chain binding South African society- but one which the ECC, by focusing on that one link, one weak point, rather than the entire chain, hoped to break, thus weakening the whole chain. Laurie Nathan defined the main objectives of the ECC as follows: “to build pressure on the government to end conscription; to raise awareness of and opposition to militarization and the SADF’s role in South Africa, Namibia and Southern Africa; to win support for non-military and non-governmental forms of alternative service for all conscientious objectors; and to work for peace and justice in South Africa.” Thus the new organization, by placing conscription in a broader context, aimed to provide a political home and a voice for white South Africans opposed to apartheid to enable them to play a role in the larger struggle for freedom, by focusing on an issue relevant to them. It also aimed on a broader level at informing and educating the South African public as to what was going on in the country as a veil of secrecy descended over the coming months. By standing up to the apartheid government it revealed the lies about the nature of the struggle- it showed the world that the struggle was not one between black and white, or between the forces of godless communism and civilised Christians as apartheid propagandists portrayed it—but between those who wished to maintain an unjust system and those who opposed it.

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141 Objector (1984.)
Media was divided in its reporting of the ECC launch. While most of the more liberal newspaper maintained a neutral stance, there was also much criticism from more conservative quarters. The Citizen, in an editorial gave voice to popular conservative criticism: “SWAPO and its backers, Russia, Cuba and East Germany would like to see the Defence Force weakened so that they can achieve their purpose in South West Africa.... We believe the government must do everything it can to counter the ECC before it subverts our young people and damages the SADF.”

In Parliament the leader of the NRP, Mr. Vause Raw called the campaign “subversive and extremely dangerous.” The PFP expressed qualified support. Defence spokesman Phillip Myburgh said that while the PFP supported the right of people to campaign for the end of conscription, PFP policy called for the phasing out conscription “but not at the expense of the strength of the SADF.” At the Transvaal congress of the party however tensions were revealed with more progressive members of the party, including Helen Suzman and Alex Boraine supporting the call to end conscription during a fiery debate over the issue. Party leader Dr Van Zyl Slabbert warned that the issue threatened to tear not only the party but society itself down the middle and proclaimed: “let those who want apartheid die for apartheid.”

The progressives carried the day with the congress passing a resolution calling on the party to “press for an end to compulsory military conscription”. An amendment proposed by Myburgh calling for an increase in the size of the Permanent Force and the continued use of conscripts as a “trained reserve” was overwhelmingly defeated. In protest Myburgh and three of his supporters resigned from the Defence committee. A split was narrowly avoided by Slabbert who proposed an amendment calling for the party to back the “phasing out” of conscription and its replacement by a volunteer system, rather than its immediate cessation.

144 Deplorable. Citizen. 23/10/84.
146 Feuding Factions Add Fire To Tvl PFP’s Congress. Star. 19/11/84.
Just a week after the ECC launch news broke of the first major operation involving SADF troops in the townships. On October 23 (Operation Palmiet) a combined SADF/SAP force of some 7000 personnel sealed off the townships of Sebokeng, Sharpeville and Boipatong and carried out house-to-house searches. Protests were dispersed with teargas and rubber bullets. This was not the first time troops had entered the townships. The Army had been mobilized in 1961 after the Sharpeville shootings and again during the 1976 Soweto uprising. This time however they were there to stay. Over the next two months the army moved en masse into townships around the country. The occupation of the townships had begun. The ECC continued to challenge the state discourse, which was that the SADF was in the townships to keep the peace and protect law-abiding black citizens. The editorial of the 1984 Objector commented “The meeting place for South Africa’s people is clearly not to be at a conference table but over the barrel of a gun.” Paul Graham, general secretary of the Christian Education and Youth Department of the Methodist Church told an ECC press conference in Durban that “Black People see the entry of the SADF into the townships in such large numbers and in such a public way as a declaration of war against them.”

147 Archbishop Tutu told an ECC rally in Cape Town “as a black person I know we don’t regard the police and army as our friends. No let me put it more strongly, we regard them as our enemies.” 148 In the next two months 160 South Africans lost their lives in the escalating violence. With the banning of meetings in force funerals became the site for expression of protest and the confrontations that ensued ensured there would be more funerals creating a spiralling cycle of protest and repression. In November, in an attempt to keep the white public ignorant as to the true state of events, the state issued a ban on media reporting of SADF activity in the townships.

147 Now It’s Civil War says Anti-Conscription Group. Sunday Tribune. 28/10/84.
The war in Angola also raged on. Despite the fact that the government had signed a peace treaty with the MPLA promising to withdraw in return for their promise to halt the operation of SWAPO troops in Angola, SADF troops were still based at Ngiva 50 kms into Angola. The Nkomati agreement with Mozambique had as little effect as the SADF continued to support its allies in RENAMO.

The official defence budget for 1984 was R 3755 million (over 10 million per day)- up 20% over the previous year.\textsuperscript{149} This amounted to 15% of the national budget. Actual expenditure was probably much higher as much of the money that was spent on, for example military maintenance, transport, housing and much else was drawn from other departmental budgets. The government also announced in November that immigrants who had retained foreign citizenship would no longer be exempt from conscription.

In January 1985 7589 conscripts failed to report for the first official call up of the year as opposed to only 1596 for the entire previous year.\textsuperscript{150} As there were two intakes annually this suggests a ten-fold increase. (The inclusion of foreign citizens living in South Africa in the call-up may account in part for this drastic increase). This was the last time the government released figures on non-reporting conscripts. It was also revealed that more than 600 potential conscripts had refused South African citizenship to avoid military service and that an estimated 7000 “draft – dodgers” were said to be living in Europe.

A letter which appeared in the \textit{Rand Daily Mail} in January, written by a 15 year old potential conscript, clearly expresses the dilemma faced by white youth: “On the one hand, there are my parents views which are that I will be ‘fighting for my country’, that it will ‘make a man out of me’. On the other hand, there are television and newspaper reports about army hippos and troops in the black townships. Many people seem to think that blacks are the enemy, do not belong in this country and that they must be controlled at all costs. However,

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\textsuperscript{149} Objector (1984).
\textsuperscript{150} Young Men Register Normally. Citizen 4/09/85
\end{flushright}
I believe that many blacks, like the nanny who brought me up do not deserve this terrible treatment.\textsuperscript{151}

Obviously the realisation that they would be expected to take up arms against fellow citizens had triggered a crisis of conscience in many young white boys. It brought home to many white South Africans the fact that the government was in fact recruiting one segment of the population to fight a war aimed at entrenching its own rule over the majority. As ‘Chippy’ Olver put it: “You could no longer pretend you were fighting a war against a foreign invading force. It was brought home very graphically that you were if fact fighting a war against your very own people.” \textsuperscript{152}

An intelligence report by the SADF also revealed a significant amount of dissension in the ranks. Army chiefs were disturbed by reports a number of sabotage events where conscripts deliberately damaged army property and weapons.\textsuperscript{153} There was also a warning of increasing use of dagga and drugs amongst conscripts. The government also announced that they would be activating local commandos- older men up to the age of 55 who had until then not been called up would be recruited into local “area protection units”. This was labeled by the press as “Dad’s Army”.

The ECC held its first national conference in January 1985 at Botha’s Hill near Durban. The main items on the agenda were the need to strengthen national structures and plan future campaigns.\textsuperscript{154} Schools and the Afrikaans community were identified as target constituencies for growth. The importance of establishing international contacts was also highlighted. Laurie Nathan was appointed national organiser. His primary role was to maintain contact between the branches and to build international contacts but he also acted as spokesperson and fundraiser. Plans were made for the establishing of new branches in Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, and Pietermaritzburg. The relationship with other groups in particular the UDF and

\textsuperscript{151} Unwilling Conscripts Fight Their Own Wars. Rand Daily Mail. 3/01/85
\textsuperscript{152} Hell No We Didn’t Go. Times 24/10/2009..
\textsuperscript{153} Objector (1984)
\textsuperscript{154} National committee Meeting. Jan 86. Historical Papers AG1977 A.2.
The PFP was discussed. This was a potentially contentious issue as it was felt that close affiliation with one or the other could alienate potential supporters. It was decided that the ECC as an organisation would not join the UDF but that individual members would be allowed to do so. The ECC maintained a close and cordial relationship with the UDF, working together on campaigns and events. UDF speakers often spoke at ECC rallies and vice versa. As each region had strong distinctive characteristics in terms of constituent groupings and agenda it was decided to avoid strongly centralised policy making, and that important decisions would be left to each region to make. In Cape Town area committees of the UDF joined the ECC, while in Johannesburg the ECC was represented on the anti-conscription sub-committee of the UDF. It was felt that the ECC should be as “user-friendly” and inclusive as possible, even allowing for serving conscripts to become members. The conference was raided by the security police who seized minutes, reports personal notebooks and posters. No arrests were made however.

In the early part of the year the focus was on local campaigns. In Johannesburg members established a weekly stall at the Yeoville flea market and held a joint picket with the Black Sash on Republic Day, 31st of March. In June the Johannesburg branch hosted a debate between David Webster and Frederick van Zyl Slabbert of the PFP. Many considered this to be a mistake as Slabbert was an erudite speaker, and although he supported them on many issues was highly critical of the ECC calling it “dangerously naïve” and “counterproductive.” The debate did however receive good publicity in the press and raised the profile of the organization and the debate around conscription. Dr Slabbert later changed his views and came to support the ECC.

The Cape Town branch held a joint meeting with the Cape Town Civil Rights League to mark the end of World War II. By this the ECC hoped to show that the organization as a whole was not opposed to the concept of a just war. The meeting was chaired by Sir Richard Luyt,

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155 Phillips (2002) 58
and addressed by WWII veterans, who drew links between South Africa and Hitler’s Germany. Sir Richard also gave the opening address at the annual Black Sash conference in which he said of conscription: “(it) creates painful moral dilemmas, it is expensive, it is unpopular, it disrupts the economic and social life of individuals and the community and it doesn’t provide the most efficient military force. Perhaps worst of all it generates a militaristic attitude and atmosphere in society which is not conducive to a constructive and peaceful approach to the settlement of problems.” In April a ‘Civil War Protest Meeting’, held at the Claremont Civic Centre, was addressed by Nathan and Trevor Manuel of the UDF. There was some controversy over the posters for the meeting which were rejected by the City Council on the grounds that they were ‘objectionable’.

The Durban branch organized a debate in February at the University of Natal. Laurie Nathan spoke against Dave McNaught of the New Republic Party. McNaught argued that conscription “was necessary so that South Africa can defend its borders” and without it the country would be reduced to “chaos and anarchy”. Nathan countered with the argument that the government was using the SADF to fight a civil war within the country and a “war of occupation” in Namibia. “Conscription” he claimed “meant the destruction of the lives of people who never invited the South African forces into the country in the first place.” They also established a presence at the Durban film festival in April, hosting anti-war films and holding a public meeting to coincide with it. Durban members engaging on a flyer blitz came under attack when they handed out flyers outside schools. Irate parents and headmasters complained that children should not be exposed to “propaganda”. The matter was taken up by the police who promised to investigate, although no further action was taken.

In Port Elizabeth the official launch took place on the 21st of March. Activists in PE struggled throughout with an extremely high level of police harassment. Due to conservative nature of the city the number of members remained small and they were thus given extra “personal

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156 Anti-Call Up Man Addresses Students. Natal Mercury. 20/02/85
attention” by members of the police. On the same day as the PE launch police opened fire on a funeral procession in Langa, Uitenhage killing twenty people. Public meetings were hastily arranged in other centers to protest the shootings. The first branch meeting of the PE ECC in April was attended by some 60 hostile UPE students who attempted to hijack the meeting and vote the organization out of existence before it even started. A new branch was also established in Pietermaritzburg.

Also in March the PFP again came under pressure from its own youth wing for a more radical stance. Donovan Gordon of the Western Cape region said the “myth” of the SADF as “a protective shield” behind which reform could take place was shattered when the SADF invaded black townships “to control, oppress and subjugate black fellow South Africans.”

A motion was passed calling for the immediate abolition not only of conscription, but all apartheid legislation. The congress also noted that the PFP had “little credibility on an extra-parliamentary level” and agreed to “establish liaisons with all non-violent extra-parliamentary groups in opposing apartheid” - including the UDF and the ECC.

On the international front support for the organization was growing. Richard Steele addressed the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in March. Monsignor Bruce Kent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Cardinal Paolo Arns of Brazil agreed to visit the country in support of the ECC. Contact was established with many overseas organizations, among them the CND, War Resisters International, Jubilee, Amnesty International, The Green Party of Germany, The Labour Party of Britain, the UN and other sympathetic political, religious and pacifist groups.

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157 PFP Youth Call For Radical Policy Stand. Rand Daily Mail. 04/03/85
3.2 THE PEACE FESTIVAL AND THE “TROOPS OUT” CAMPAIGN

“The situation in our townships is so disgusting that you sometimes ask yourself a question which has got no answer and that is “why did god create a human being?” We are always running away from the SADF troops. We are guarded by troops every day as if we are criminals which are life sentenced.” - 15 year old township resident.  

In June a Peace Festival was held in Johannesburg. Weekend activities included debates, workshops, plenary sessions, cultural events, visual displays, personal stories by objectors and a concert. Guest speakers included Archbishop Tutu, Bishop Hurley, Beyers Naude, Cheryl Carolus, Molly Blackburn, Nadine Gordimer, Mokganedi Thabanello of SWAPO and Carole Tongue of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in London. Stone Sizani of the UDF failed to make a scheduled appearance raising concern over his safety (especially in light of the recent murders of Matthew Goniwe and other activists). Monsignor Kent and Cardinal Arns of Brazil were due to attend but refused visas by the State. Cardinal Arns was initially granted a visa but claims he was contacted by the South African embassy hours before his departure. He was asked to sign a statement promising “not to participate in a campaign against military conscription or in any other event that could be considered to be political in nature.” He declined and his visa was withdrawn. He was told “the South African authorities could not accept his participation in an event which is an internal South African concern.” Monsignor Kent sent a recorded message. Over a hundred messages of support were received from national and international organizations. Even the youngest children were included as they were taught how to play non-violent games in crèches while their parents were attending other events.

The festival program included workshop on topics as diverse as “The International Cold War”, “Non Violent Action Workshop”, “Psychological Effects of Militarisation” and...
Woman and the Military." Once again speakers covered all aspects of the impact of conscription on society and the individual, linking it to the political situation in the country. Dr Beyers Naude\textsuperscript{160} noted that the fight to end conscription was really a battle against the entire apartheid system which depended on forced military service to bolster it. Bishop Tutu told the meeting that if apartheid were dismantled there would be no need for the SADF to terrorise the black population. Laurie Nathan claimed “The use of the SADF in townships intensifies anger and makes people more determined to fight back.” Gavin Evans\textsuperscript{161} emphasized, in the closing speech, that the ECC was part of a broad movement working for the overthrow of apartheid. He predicted support for the campaign would snowball – as increased SADF repression lead to increased resistance in the townships this would result in more young people experiencing moral crisis over military service. “The festival” he claimed “had shown that peace is a real issue on the political agenda. The call for a just peace has grown as our society has slid into escalating violence.” Carol Tongue made the claim that between 3 and 4 000 white South African had, in the past two years, sought asylum in other countries to avoid military service.\textsuperscript{162}

Phillips describes the festival as a watershed for the organization.\textsuperscript{163} Over a thousand people attended some of the events. Activists, many of whom had felt frustration that the organization was largely preaching to existing converts, were encouraged by the numbers and diversity of people attending. There was evidence that their message was making an impact. The vibrancy of the event indicated that a growing anti-war counter-culture was taking shape. The professional and slick nature of the event drew increased interest from the media and the public. The festival was well covered by the local press, and there was small but important turnabout of its portrayal of the ECC. Liberal newspapers responded well to the emphasis on freedom of choice. The Star newspaper commented that “the student

\textsuperscript{160} Apartheid Depends on Conscription- Naude. Star. 1/07/85.
\textsuperscript{161} Support for a Just Peace is Growing. Star. 01/07/85
\textsuperscript{162} Thousands Avoid Military Service. Sowetan. 01/07/85.
\textsuperscript{163} Phillips (2002) 59
longhairs are growing up." There was also widespread condemnation of the states' refusal of visas to overseas guest.

In July Alan Dodson, who was serving a one month camp, refused an order to go on a vehicle patrol in a nearby township. He was court-martialed and fined R600.

The Pietermaritzburg branch held a public launch in August. An audience of around 200 was addressed by Molly Backburn, Ivan Toms and Laurie Nathan.

On 17 September the ECC launched its Troops out of the Township campaign. This date was chosen for its significance as the United Nations International Day of Peace and the UN was notified about the campaign. At the launch meeting in Cape Town, Anglican Bishop Rev. Bruce Evans (father of ECC Cape Town chair, Gavin Evans) told the audience that placing a person, against his wishes, in a position where he might have to kill or maim another human being was wrong and created a "tremendous tension of conscience".

The focus of this campaign was a three week fast and vigil by conscientious objectors-Ivan Toms (in Cape Town), Richard Steele (who was in detention, but fasted nonetheless- in Durban), Harold Winkler (in Johannesburg), Phillip Wilkinson (in Port Elizabeth) and David Hartmann (in Grahamstown.) Stellenbosch and Pietermaritzburg also held fasts. Other individuals joined the objectors for shorter periods, including Sheena Duncan, Bishop Tutu, Rabbi Ben Isaacson, a number of priests and prominent community leaders. Harold Winkler said he had chosen fasting as a means of purification and protest to express his "deep horror at what is happening in the township." Ivan Toms said his work as a doctor in Crossroads had opened his eyes to the viciousness of apartheid and he was fasting "to highlight the issue and to pray and make contact with the people." Toms lost 8 kilograms

164 Phillips (2002) 60
166 ECC 3-Week Fast to Begin Today. Cape Times. 17/09/85.
167 Dr Ivan Toms Has Seen It From The Other Side. Sunday Tribune. 22/09/85
during his fast and received around 1600 visitors at the St Georges Cathedral where he held vigil.

The choice of fasting was a deliberate and significant one. It has an important history in the expression of passive resistance against violence, and was most famously used by Gandhi, not only to protest against British oppression but also to counter violence amongst his own supporters. Within the Christian community it signifies repentance and purification. In all major religions it is a means of raising spiritual awareness and affirming one’s faith. It involves an acknowledgement of moral responsibility for one’s actions. It is also often used by prisoners who have no other means of protest. It is a symbolic act of reclaiming control of one’s own body against outside control. By choosing to fast the ECC was not only deliberately allying itself with passive resistance, but also drawing attention to the fact that the injustice perpetrated by the state was being allowed to continue by the inaction of its citizens and (in the words of Phillips\textsuperscript{168}) “encouraging white individuals to reclaim power and choice.” Further as an expression of personal choice it is difficult, if not impossible to put a halt to without going to extremes of authoritarian intervention. Most importantly it is an act of protest anyone can participate in. Richard Steele claimed he saw fasting as “a radical stopping, a stepping out and becoming aware of the way we live our lives.” It was away of feeling the pain of society: “to weep with that pain, and respond in a creative way.” Furthermore as a non-violent activity it “cuts the spiral of violence and challenges others on a moral level to make a choice.”\textsuperscript{169}

During the campaign picket protests, debates, meetings, concerts and cultural events took place in the different centers. A daily program of workshops, seminars, debates, plays and films was held at each vigil venue. In Johannesburg black and white mothers were brought together to discuss how the violence was affecting their respective communities and discover common ground in the recruitment of their sons to fight one another. In Cape

\textsuperscript{168} Phillips (2002) 63
\textsuperscript{169} Why Were Fasting for Peace. Weekly Mail. 27/09/85
Town an “Arts for Peace” exhibition was held at the Baxter theatre. In Pietermaritzburg students at the university held a mock trial of the SADF. In Grahamstown a debate was scheduled between Andre Brink and SADF, but the SADF withdrew at the last moment. This was widely reported generating much publicity for the ECC. An “Arts for Peace” concert was held. In Port Elizabeth St Augustines Cathedral hosted events every evening. A debate took place between Janet Cherry and Ken Owen. Owen argued that while the government was “demoralized, incompetent and faltering”\(^\text{170}\), the SADF, and thus conscription was necessary to prevent a breakdown of law and order - an argument common in liberal circles. Cherry’s counterargument carried the debate.

The campaign culminated in a 24 hour fast on October 7, the anniversary of the SADF occupation of Sebokeng. All supporters were called on to participate. This was followed by church services and public meetings in all the centers. In Cape Town an estimated crowd of 4000 filled the City Hall - indicating growing support. The audience was addressed by Molly Blackburn, UDF vice-president Christmas Tinto, the United Woman’s Organisation’s Nomaindia Mfeketo and Gavin Evans. Father Trevor Huddleston sent a tape-recorded message of support from London. Ivan Toms thanked the audience for their support, but in his weakened state he was unable to do more. Speaking later he said his 3-week fast was “nothing compared to a child dying, to the teargas, the beatings” Molly Blackburn claimed that growing support for the ECC showed that people could no longer support the growing militarization of society. Miss Mfeketu called on white youth to refuse to go into the army as a show of solidarity with black youth. Gavin Evans said “the government has defined the enemy as being the people of South Africa” thus creating a state of civil war.\(^\text{171}\) More than 50 messages of support from organisations around the world were read. In Durban Archbishop Hurley and Helen Joseph addressed a meeting of some 200 people. In London War Resisters International held a vigil outside the SA embassy. Solidarity fasts were held also in Berlin, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Washington and New York.


\(^{171}\) *Cheering as Speakers Denounce Militarisation*. Star. 6/10/85.
Shortly after the campaign Ivan Toms was arrested. His home was searched – ECC material was confiscated and he was taken to Caledon Square police station. There he was photographed and fingerprinted and later released.

Sandy Hoffmann of the Port Elizabeth branch provided a personal anecdote from this period which illustrates the devastating effect of the war on young men. Exiting a meeting in support of Phillip Wilkinson, who was fasting, they encountered a young man intent on hanging himself in a nearby tree. After they had managed to talk him out of it, he explained what had led him to attempt suicide. He had gone into the Army with pride, believing that he would be involved in a legitimate war- to protect his country from a terrorist onslaught, but he found the reality of the situation far different. His unit had been given orders to wipe out a village of women and children. This he claimed was a common occurrence. Often they were instructed to rape and torture women and children before killing them. This was intended to demoralize and weaken the spirit of the men. In frustration and anger at his situation he had turned his self-loathing on the “enemy” and whipped into a psychotic rage, had taken part in the killing frenzy. Unable to deal with the resulting anguish and self-loathing, he had deserted and returned home. There instead of finding support from his family and friends they had turned their backs on him, labeling him a coward. In desperation he had decided to end his life. There are many such stories. (An official figure of 74 suicides among conscripts in 30 months was announced in March 1986. This was the reality that confronted the children of ordinary white South Africans. They were being taken from their families, often fresh out of school, brainwashed, broken down by physical and mental torture and turned into killing machines. Many never recovered from this experience

As the ECC was growing in membership and popularity it came under increasing attack not only from the state but also by right wing groups and media. Shortly after the festival the government declared a state of emergency in the Eastern Cape and Vaal regions.

172 Personal correspondence. Received October 2009.
weeks following a number of prominent leaders of the organization among them Richard Steele, Anita Kromberg, Sue Britton, Janet Cherry and Mike Evans were detained. Other members were taken in for questioning and had their homes raided. Documents pamphlets and other publications were seized. Police harassment of ECC members was nothing new but as support for the organisation grew so did the harassment, indicating that State was increasingly concerned over ECC’s role and growing popularity and perceived it as a threat. According to Evans the police who interrogated him were particularly worried about the campaigns impact on schoolchildren and serving conscripts.  

April had seen the launch of the Aida Parker Newsletter which regularly attacked the organization. Parker accused objectors of cowardice saying that their reasons for objecting were not moral but rather “that they did not want to die, did not want to get shot at.” She also accused the World Council of Churches and other Christian groups which supported the ECC of “doing very little to advance the teachings of Christ, but a great deal to further Communist revolution.” General Magnus Malan (who together with B.J. Vorster and other leading Nationalists had refused to serve during World War II) accused the ECC of “aiming to breakdown law and order by weakening state machinery.” The SADF released a pamphlet attacking the ECC. The Sunday Times carried a full page advert by the National Student Federation backing conscription as a patriotic duty and questioning ECC’s motives. Minister Adriaan Vlok derided the ECC for “being used by the ANC to achieve it’s evil goals.” In October Afrikaans newspaper Rapport called the ECC “a dangerous and subversive organization” and accused it of being an ANC front with the aim of causing the government to fail. (The ECC took the Rapport to the Media Council, which ordered Rapport to print an article by the ECC replying to the accusations.) Right wing groups such as the National Student Front and Veterans for Victory attempted to disrupt public meetings and

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175 WCC Involved in Campaign to End Conscription. Aida Parker Newsletter. 23/04/85.
177 Vlok says ANC Using ECC. Natal Mercury. 09/09/85
178 Phillips (1989) 69
protests and distributed pamphlets attacking the ECC. At a meeting in Sea Point supporters were threatened by a gun wielding member of Veterans for Victory.

The linking the organization to the ANC, portraying it as part of the ‘total onslaught’ and thus subject to control by the Soviet Union was effective propaganda. This was largely accepted by the majority of the mostly unquestioning white population. While many of the founders of the ECC were members of the ANC (as state propagandists were quick to point out), many others were peace activists committed to non-violence who opposed the ANC’s armed struggle. Once the organization was established it gained a momentum of its own. Janet Cherry recalled that while she and other ANC members remained under party discipline and were expected to report to them, this simply was not possible given the fragility of their networks and the distances involved. While they were under general orders to take up the issue of militarization and to mobilize white opposition, they had to develop their own strategy in conjunction with other members. According to her: “The ANC said we should be working in the white community to divide the ruling class and challenge the ideological hegemony of the state. They did not give us clear directions but we had a mandate to pursue anti-militaristic campaigns and support conscientious objectors …undermining white support for the SADF was a crucial part of ANC strategy’.\textsuperscript{179} She went on to say that the ANC was itself too militaristic for her liking and she preferred working with the ECC.

While the ECC and the ANC may ultimately have been working towards the same goal, the end of apartheid, and there may have been some members who toed the party line, the ECC was genuinely a creation of all the diverse strands that came together to respond to a real need, and by no means a puppet organization. As Cherry claims: “We actually came together without manipulating each other, but with a common agenda, and were able to apply our own different ways of working and backgrounds to that. It merged perfectly with what I would call a strategic confluence”.\textsuperscript{180} The organization thus was influenced as much

\textsuperscript{179} Quoted by Cock In Gasa (2007) 263
\textsuperscript{180} ECC 25 seminar. (2009)
by the input of church and student groups outside of the direct control of the ANC, as it was
by that organization. She believes that due to this influence, and the debate and compromise
it involved, the ECC developed a far more sophisticated and creative strategy than would
have been possible if they had simply been following ANC directives. Richard Steele
claimed: “I don’t think that any of us were receiving orders from some hidden hand. We
genuinely were creating the stuff ourselves. We were the hand. We weren’t doing it on
behalf of anyone.”¹⁸¹ The attacks directed against the ECC was more an indication of the
threat that it posed to the status quo, and the need for the state and its supporters to
undermine it by any possible means, than it was of the nature of the organization.

¹⁸¹ ECC 25 seminar (2009)
F.W.
EAT MY CALL-UP
"I was part of the gang that had our feet in alternative white culture. We were jollers, we followed The Clash and Voelvry and listened to Bright Blue. There was some incredibly creative stuff. We organised artists and musicians. Our posters were offbeat and appealed to a broad constituency, The lefties would never have pulled it off without us counterculture types. We were able to talk to the base in a way they never could. White conscripts would never have responded to a serious, principled, left-wing message." -“Chippy” Olver

In December Shifty Records in conjunction with ECC released Forces Favorites- ironically named after a popular radio program which sent greetings to troops. It featured songs from eleven groups and artists, including the Cherry Faced Lurchers, The Aeroplanes, Jennifer Fergusson and Roger Lucey. many of whom had played at ECC events. It featured some of the strongest political songs of the time. Not all of the songs directly dealt with conscription, but addressed concern about the current situation and the future, the responsibility of white youth and the alienation resulting from apartheid. Although the songs received no airtime the album proved to be enormously popular- the initial pressing of 10 000 copies sold out in a week.

In Suburban Hum Jennifer Fergusson sang of the brainwashing experienced by white youth and the paranoia it instilled : “Boeties on the border fighting for the country, if he doesn’t bow his brains out, he’ll come back to go a hunting for the terries in his backyard and in his wife’s bed and in his lighties head.” The Kalahari surfer’s in a more upbeat number (Don’t dance) told people to “get up off your feet and dance to a different beat” with the ironic

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183 Fergusson, J. Suburban Hum. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lyrrZLXj1w
chorus “The SADF is here to see that we all enjoy democracy.”

Roger Lucey commented on the album saying: “It is a small way of protesting against the atrocious situation in the townships—which affects all of us.” Jennifer Fergusson said: “I can't change structures. I'm not a politician. Hopefully my music has the power to lift people to an awareness.”

The vibrant, creative aspect of the organization was an important part of its make-up. (The posters and pamphlets on the previous pages are included to give a feeling of this). The ECC made use of popular culture to spread its message. This was more than just a strategy, but once again an expression of nature of the organization. A large portion of its members, and its target audience were young people who were part of that popular culture and it made sense, in appealing to the youth to exploit that.

ECC events always had a sense of fun—even though the message was serious; it was expressed in a way the youth could relate to. Popular bands and artists played at ECC concerts. James Phillips, the Dynamics, Bright Blue, Mapantsula, Kalahari Surfers, Johannes Kerkorrel and Johnny Clegg were just some of them. Music proved a popular way of getting the message across. It allowed young South African artists to express their frustration at the system and speak directly to the youth. The popularity of the music indicates that many were feeling the same frustration. According to Lloyd Ross, the owner of Shifty Records: “What musicians like James Phillips was doing was reflecting their experience on the world. The world they were living in was messed up, so the product had an edge. That’s why it worked.”

James Phillips’ (aka Bernoldus Niemand) song “Hou My Vas Korporaal” (Hold Me Tight, Corporal), although not on the Forces Favourite compilation, became a popular theme song of the anti-conscription movement and launched a revolution in Afrikaans rock. “Wie Is Bernoldus Niemand” is considered the first truly “alternative Afrikaans” album and inspired the launch of the Voelvry movement. Bright Blue’s

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184 Musicians Join The Fight Against Conscription. Star. 09/12/85.
185 Musicians Join The Fight Against Conscription. Star. 09/12/85.
1987 release *Weeping* later became the unofficial anthem of the ECC and has remained a popular protest song.

Popular artists Zapiro, Wayne Barker, Manfred Zylla, William Kentridge all made contributions to ECC art projects. T-shirts, badges, posters, flyers even graffiti (although leadership distanced themselves from the last—ECC graffiti made its appearance on walls around the suburbs) were funky, colourful and fun often drawing from comics or popular artists of the day. Usually they were handmade, using basic tools like silkscreens and cut out stencils—though initially fairly crude and raw, products of enthusiasm rather than expertise, they became increasingly sophisticated with experience – often using ironic references to mainstream culture. An example of this is the use of the T-shirt slogan “*Boetie gaan Athlone toe*” (little brother goes to Athlone) – a reference to the mainstream film “*Boetie gaan Border toe*” (Little brother goes to the Border) which was little more than SADF propaganda. A grinning skull wearing 3-d glasses advertised a film festival. A poster showed soldier with a hand grenade for a head, about to pull out the pin bore the caption “*Mannetjie didn’t they tell you, cadets maak malletjies.*” Another showing a soldier with his head between his hands exclaimed: “*Botha ek is gatvol*”. A sticker showed Bart Simpson rudely exclaiming “*F.W. EAT MY CALL UP*”. A favourite graffiti was "*A naartjie in our sosatie.*" Another exclaimed: “*Why go to the army when you can get stoned at home?*” ECC accessories become obligatory fashion items amongst the trendy.

Guerilla theatre too was widely used. Amateur actors ambushed unsuspecting members of the public, going about their daily chores. In Grahamstown ECC members dressed in military style outfits descended on a public fair- confronting the crowd with batons and telling them that as they constituted an illegal gathering and must disperse. They interrupted lectures, pretending to have a warrant for the arrest of one of the students (who would be part of the act) whom they would then drag off kicking and screaming. When some unsuspecting students attempted to intervene, things got a bit out of hand leading to
disciplinary action. This created much controversy- but also publicity for the organisation.

One of the students perfected a portrayal of PW Botha, and much to the amusement of students would pop up all over campus wagging his finger and lecturing them about the Communist onslaught. These snippets of drama were aimed to confront people with the realities of living in South Africa and to question that reality. Grahamstown also produced a popular singing trio, the Koeksisters, modeled on the World War II Andrews sisters, who sang satirical versions of Die Stem and popular tunes. They appeared at ECC events around the country.

Creative activities often provoked the anger of authorities leading to extreme even ridiculous over-reaction, which exposed the absurdities of the system. In Cape Town about 40 activists built a sandcastle on the beach in the shape of the Cape Town castle, the local military HQ, to coincide with the January call-up. Police arrived after complaints from members of the public and they were ordered to disperse, as they comprised an “illegal gathering”, to knock down the sandcastle and to remove their ECC T-shirts. In Sea Point after a joint UDF/ECC candlelit march was confronted by police and peacefully dispersed, protestors, among them Cheryl Carolus of the UDF, gathered around an ox-wagon “jungle-gym”, which was part of a play area, placing the candles on the wagon and sang “Nkosi Sikelele.” Police were highly offended at the “treason” of this action, becoming angry and verbally abusive—using physical force to break up the crowd. The actions of the police in these cases provoked much hilarious criticism from the English Press and, in the case of the sandcastle episode, even questions in Parliament.

The spontaneous, creative nature of ECC events separated it from other organisations. More sober minded politicos often accused it of not being serious enough. However this allowed it to appeal to the youth and contribute towards the creation of a thriving, vibrant and trendy anti-war sub-culture. According to Matthew Blatchford the ECC succeeded “because it cut itself loose from the deadening hand of the white left”- it avoided becoming another
“accountable” wing of the white left. He goes on: “NUSAS and UDF cadres were outnumbered by gays, greens, feminists and Unitarians and the arrogance of those organizations was voided in favour of mad schemes, publicity and sex and drugs and rock and roll.” 187

Certainly there were those who were drawn to the ECC for hedonistic reasons—with little political inclination. As Warwick Sony of the Kalahari Surfers put it, rather cynically “You could go and get smashed at Jamesons and feel like you were doing something for the struggle.” 188 A member of the audience at the 25 year anniversary, who identified herself only as “an Anglo-Boer meisie” speaks for many when she said “We signed up or ECC because it was fun….maybe we knew subconsciously it was about values…the kind of space ECC provided subsequently led us to developing a political consciousness.” 189

At the end of the year the Board for Religious Objectors released statistics showing an increase in application in 1985 of 35% over the previous year. To date 758 applicants had applied to the board of that only six had been turned down, including Harold Winkler. Clare Verbeek issued a statement on behalf of the ECC in response: “More and more people are simply not prepared to take up arms to defend a system they do not believe in.” 190

Violence in the country continued to escalate during 1985. The white population remained largely unaware of the true nature of the conflict. Magnus Malan made the comment: “I would say that 95% of the population is unaware that there is a war in progress”. 191 This was the result of deliberate government strategy to keep white South Africans uninformed through manipulation of the media and state propaganda. His comment was a surprising admission on that there was indeed a war being fought in the country, a fact he usually denied at every opportunity. Vigilante forces made their appearance around the country

187 Blatchford, M. ECC Could Have Save SA. Mail and Guardian. 1/09/94.
188 A Naartjie in our Sosatie. Sunday Argus. 25/10/2009
189 ECC 25 (2009).
190 Religious Objections to SADF up 35%. Natal Mercury. 18/12/85.
191 Quoted in ECC Combat Magazine.2 AG 1977. M1. 3
attacking UDF supporters and communities and disrupting meetings. These groups were backed by the state and helped them portray the impression that the conflict mostly involved blacks fighting amongst themselves, and to justify their actions as a defence of ‘decent’ blacks. Attacks on collaborators- including police and councilors also increased. The horrific “necklace” method, which consists of placing a tyre killing around the victim’s neck and setting it alight, made its appearance. Activists assassinated during the year included Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozi (the Pebco Three), Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkhonto, Sicelo Mhlawuli (Cradock Four- their funeral was attend by 60 000 supporters from around the country) and Victoria Mxenge. The ANC, at its National Conference announced its intention to take the struggle into the white areas. In December a bomb at an Amanzimtoti shopping centre killed five people. Police hiding in an innocuous civilian truck ambush and killed youth throwing stones at trucks in Athlone- in what became known as the “Trojan Horse” killings.

In August President Botha made his infamous “Rubicon” speech putting an end to speculation of any serious or real reform. Violence broke out in Natal between Inkatha and UDF members after Inkatha declared the area a no-go zone for the UDF. Twenty two leaders of the UDF were charged with treason—the trial which would continue over the next two years. In October the State of Emergency was extended to the Western Cape. In December wide-ranging new powers were given to SADF members, allowing them to search and arrest people and to disperse crowds. The SADF continued to raid neighbouring countries with attacks on Gaberone in June and Maseru in December. Molly Blackburn, a Black Sash activist and staunch supporter of the ECC died in a car accident in December.

The ECC again opened the new year with a national conference. An emphasis was placed on growth in schools and the Afrikaans community, as well as identifying campers as a target audience. 1986 would see new branches in East London, Stellenbosch and Pretoria and an Afrikaans branch in Johannesburg.
The Cape Town branch began the year with a local Cadets Is Not Compulsory campaign targeting schools. This was aimed at informing pupils of their right to refuse participation in cadets, and of the role cadets played in preparing them for the army, as well as countering the propaganda about the realities of the conflict in the country that they were exposed to as a result. EEC members handed out timetables bearing the slogan “Schoolyards Today-Townships Tomorrow” outside schools. Access to schools was problematic as they were controlled by the state and they were often prevented from doing so by school authorities. Some pamphleteers were even arrested. Private schools were more receptive and many did not implement cadet training. Pupils formed a Pupils Action and Awareness Group (PAAG), which took up the issue in schools. At a public meeting held in February one parent told of an example set by a school where pressure by parents had led to the introduction of community service as an alternative to cadets. PAAG also held a cultural evening at UCT.

International interest in the ECC continued to grow. Pete Hathorn and Laurie Nathan embarked on an international conference tour. Nathan addressed a 100 000 strong rally against apartheid in Trafalgar Square, London. He later claimed that: “in many ways we were the star attraction in some places because South Africa is the key international issue at the present.” Nathan also attended the International Congress of War Resisters International in India and re-called that many Indians were amazed that there were whites who were opposed to apartheid. Gavin Evans was invited to speak to the UN Special committee against apartheid in March- his speech was widely covered by the international media. He also presented a petition asking UN members to grant asylum to draft dodgers. He toured the USA meeting Congressmen, (among them Edward Kennedy), addressing student rallies, giving interviews and meeting with a wide range of organizations including the War Resister’s League and Amnesty International. He also took part in a debate with the

South African Ambassador Kent Durr. He recalls that a California Radio station took a particular liking to the Forces Favourites album and played it extensively.

In March Janet Cherry represented the ECC at a Paris conference on racism. Shortly before her departure her home was raided by narcotics police who found Mandrax. She was released when she convinced them that the drugs had been planted due to her political involvement. Justin Hardcastle, who was studying in London held meetings with WRI, COSAWR and other organizations. He represented the ECC at a public protest against apartheid, sharing a platform with Trevor Huddleston and Frene Gcinwala. He also toured Sweden and Finland and met with sympathetic organizations and members of parliament.

ECC was also continuing to reach out the Afrikaans community. A presence was established at the Universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria and at the Rand Afrikaans University, however these groups faced major problems due to the conservative natures of the campuses and their ties with government. Membership was small and groups were heavily infiltrated by informers. At Stellenbosch University in February NUSAS hosted a debate between the ECC and the Popular Students Alliance on the theme “National Service- Yes or No?” Laurie Nathan spoke for the ECC. He told the audience that “true national service is practiced by rendering aid on a humanitarian level” whereas “military service is used to maintain a white government.” Phillip Myburgh countered arguing that ECC’s refusal to criticize the ANC as it did the government amounted to support for it’s program. In early May the ECC was officially launched on Stellenbosch campus. Shortly thereafter the university council announced that the university’s faculties would not be made available to the ECC-effectively banning from holding any activities on campus. A group of 31 academics, including four professors condemned the ban calling it “an arbitrary violation of academic freedom.”

194 The ECC Zeroes in in Afrikaners. Aida Parker newsletter. 08/04/86.
195 31 Academics Hit at Matie Ban. Cape Times. 24/05/86.
In April the *Working For A Just Peace* Campaign was launched. The focus of this campaign was to demonstrate alternatives to military conscription using the slogan “Construction not Conscription.” A campaign leaflet summed up the aims of the campaign: “We are not opposed to genuine national service in the sense of service to the nation- to all the people of our country. When the public comes forward in April….. we will be demonstrating what a genuine national service could be like. In this way our campaign will challenge the government’s definition of “national service”, and the way in which they have used the annual conscripted intake.” In Cape Town the campaign was launched with a fair followed by an anti-litter drive. A Cape Town flyer for the campaign mimicked SADF call up papers- bearing the slogan “ECC needs you.” Trevor Manuel and Archbishop Tutu addressed a public meeting, which was attended by some 3000 supporters. Tutu told the audience: “The ECC’s rapid growth and popularity are a sign of hope in this crazy, crazy but beautiful country.” Members laid grass at the City Mission Home, cleared the garden at Crowley House, assisted in the construction of a children’s home and painted a mural and fixed toys for a creche. Other activities included a Film Festival, which was opened by PFP MP Alex Boraine, a Live Jive concert featuring some of the country’s most popular musicians, and a photographic exhibition, opened by Prof. Colin Bundy of the UCT History department.

Durban campaigners painted the walls of a children’s hospital, helped build a crèche, planted a vegetable garden and cleared a park. The branch also held an art exhibition and a picnic. Twenty activists were arrested after picketing at the arrival of State President Botha to open the Playhouse Theatre. Johannesburg volunteers held peace workshops, a picnic and a holiday program for schoolchildren which brought together children from black, white and coloured areas. They also helped in the construction of a home for mentally handicapped children. The launch rally was addressed by Albertina Sisulu, Alex Boraine and Beyers Naude. Phillip Wilkinson, who had recently announced his intention to refuse...
military service, was also due to address the rally but was arrested shortly before the event started. Other events included the creation of a 100m long “peace ribbon” which was used in protests, a peace picnic at Zoo Lake and a cabaret by performers Andrew Buckland and Irene Stephanou among others.

In Port Elizabeth an olive tree, symbolizing peace, was planted at the launch. Speakers included Rev. Bruce Evans, Rev. George Irvine, David walker of the PFP, Ivy Gcina of the PE Women’s Organisation and Zwelabantu Makwabe of the PE Youth Congress. Mrs Gcina called on white mothers to join with black mothers as the war was killing their children, regardless of colour. She told the audience “We are not fighting against whites, but apartheid.” Mr Makwabe said the sight of troops playing games with township children showed hope, but as long as the troops carried rifles there was little hope of true friendship.

The branch hosted a Peace Workshop at a local school, where amongst other things, boys were taught carpentry skills. In Pietermarizburg supporters painted dormitories, built a sandpit and fixed tricycles for a children’s home, planted trees and sedge for use in grass weaving and other traditional crafts and renovated a road to a resettlement area, which involved building a bridge across a river. CO’s Phillip Wilkinson and Pete Hathorn addressed a public meeting in Grahamstown. Volunteers held a carpentry workshop and built benches for crèches and old-age homes.

Sandy Hoffmann provided another anecdote from this time which illustrates how the ECC countered state propaganda. “I frequently drove into the township, with children in the car, and paints and brushes in the back. The conscripts seemed amazed that I would take my children into danger – did I not know that it is a ‘war zone’? I asked them what they would do if I visited their home in a caspir with guns, versus if I visited their home with my children and paint and then suggested they accompany me to the crèche, and come and talk to the citizens of Walmer township themselves. Many conscripts took up this opportunity and I later

198 White Women Should Join the Fight. Evening Post. 03/04/86.
heard that the conscripts were becoming more and more resistant to their deployment in the townships as a result of experiencing this ECC campaign in action.”

She ended up marrying one of those troops, a lieutenant who she had invited to the crèche and who subsequently become an enthusiastic supporter of the ECC. This is an active demonstration of how ECC was effective on many different levels. By going into the townships activists were revealing to broader society that it was possible for white and black South Africans to co-operate – that they were not natural enemies as the state insisted.

This was one of the ECC’s most successful campaigns. The move away from merely saying no to conscription and SADF activity to calling for, and demonstrating, a positive alternative was a strategic move that broadened the organizations appeal to church and liberal groups and drew positive media coverage. Calling for the government to offer alternative forms of service was generally perceived as more constructive than simply opposing conscription. The fact that activists were prepared to go out and get their hands dirty, to get involved in community upliftment projects, rather than just criticise, demonstrated commitment and earned respect. Even the PFP had come around and was now supporting the campaign.

The campaign also had other positive effects - it promoted goodwill and co-operation-countering the anti-white attitude the actions of the army in the township generated; It showed black people that not all whites supported apartheid and It showed white people how they could make a direct contribution to overcoming racial segregation. It demonstrated practically that white and black citizens were able to work together towards this common goal. It exposed whites to the realities of township life; fostered the formation of friendship across the racial divide. it promoted volunteerism, aimed at community upliftment and taught skills to township youth. Most importantly in terms of this dissertation it provided a model of an alternate form of national service which challenged state discourse.

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199 Personal correspondence. Received October 2009.
The ECC came out of the WJP campaign with a growing membership, a healthy respect from previous opponents in the liberal press and political grouping such as the PFP, and signs that the white community was becoming more receptive to its message. A survey conducted in Johannesburg showed that 70% of respondents supported a call for alternatives to conscription. Plans were laid for a major action around the July call-up, and there was much discussion on how to capitalize on the gains made. The state however had other plans.

April also saw a re-appearance of ECC’s old nemesis, Aida Parker. Her latest newsletter was a special 12 page issue devoted to attacking the ECC. The organization was referred to as “(p)otentially the most dangerous political movement to emerge in the current national crisis.” Parker claimed the ECC had a hidden agenda to undermine and weaken the SADF and thus prepare the way for an ANC takeover of the country. The organization in her view, while attracting many well meaning idealists (referred to as “useful idiots”), was in fact “powered by extreme left activists whose intentions are by no means so noble or artless.” These activists, she believed, were part of an international conspiracy, using the cover of the international peace movement, in particular the proponents of liberation theology, to undermine the military establishment of the entire Western democratic world. South Africa because of its supposed strategic and economic importance, was crucial to the survival of the democratic world order and thus a key target of the Soviets. Evidence of duplicity between Parker and state security came to light when Parker revealed information about Evan’s overseas activity which he believed could only have been passed on to her by police monitoring his correspondence. Furthermore Parker claimed to have evidence that among documents seized by the SADF on raids against ANC target in Gaberone and Lusaka were several “working papers” outlining ANC infiltration of the ECC and the recruitment of ECC activists for ANC training - again information that (if true) could only have come from state sources. The ECC laid a complaint with the Media Council which was heard in October.

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200 Naive Sincerity or Dangerous Duplicity. Aida Parker Newsletter. 08/04/86.
CHAPTER 4. THE ECC GOES UNDERGROUND.

4.1 THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

"It was a scary time to be a young activist. People did much braver things than us, but we were breaking very deliberately with our group. Those days were awful. We lived in fear of being detained, an experience not shared by the rest of the white population."

Adele Kirsten

The state was coming under increasing pressure on all fronts and it responded with increased repression. On the International front calls for sanctions were escalating. The UN eminent Persons Group made a tour of the country and called for tougher sanctions. Internally violence continued to spiral out of control. February had seen six days of full scale war on the streets of Alexandria. In March police opened fire on a thousand strong crowd in Winterveldt killing 26. On May Day 1.5 million workers stayed at home in the biggest national protest thus far. In February the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert and MP Alex Boraine resigned demonstrating growing white frustration with parliamentary politics. Growing numbers of students were protesting. An estimated 5000 students (of whom as many as 2000 were white) clashed with police on Wits campus. In May the SA Air force bombed targets in Gaberone, Harare and Lusaka. In June vigilante groups, supported by police descended on Crossroads settlement outside Cape Town intent on destroying it. Attempts to destroy it legally, as had happened to so many other black settlements across the country had been blocked by the courts and it had been declared a legal “emergency” settlement. So the state turned to other means. As vigilantes burnt homes with government supplied flamethrowers, police helicopters

201. Hell No We Won't Go. Mail and Guardian 25/08/2008
and armoured cars fired on residents attempting to defend their homes. Over sixty people were killed, including ITN cameraman George De’ath, and some 50 000 left homeless. Reports surfaced that the state was giving paramilitary training to Inkatha members in South West Africa.

In June President Botha announced a National State of Emergency. Security Forces were given increased powers of arrest and detention, the right to impose curfews, restrict gatherings, including funerals. Media coverage of “unrest incidents” and security force actions, or publication of any ‘subversive’ statements was prohibited and the period allowed for detention without trial extended to 180 days. General Liebenberg claimed “The alienation of a nation’s people from its security forces is a basic strategy in communist revolutionary warfare.” Along with hundreds of black activists, 46 ECC members were detained. Twelve were still in detention 2 months later. Meetings, publications and activities of the organisation were banned. It was declared illegal to make any public statement against conscription. Ordinary members were subjected to increased surveillance, systematic harassment, intimidation and arrest. Disinformation, death threats, obscene and threatening phone calls, physical assaults, break-ins, even fire-bombings against members of the organisation became commonplace. Activists vehicles were tampered with, tyres were slashed (13 such cases were reported). False charges were laid against members, drugs were planted. One member even received pornography in the mail shortly before a raid. Flyers and newsletters were seized by police. The state also seized the financial records of the organization, however the expected ensuing prosecution never materialised.

Barbara Orpen, a Port Elizabeth journalist, was attacked outside her flat while returning home. Three men in balaclavas surrounded her and hit her with sjamboks. She reported that “the suddenness of the attack - the fact that they didn’t even say anything –just added to the sheer terror.” Three petrol bombs were thrown at the home of ECC member Anne McKay in Berea, Johannesburg. ECC activist Dominique Souchon was detained and issued with a deportation order to Mauritius, even though he had only lived there for the first 18 months of his life and had been living in the South Africa for 25 years. He was released in October after 5 ½ in detention when Mauritius refused to accept him. Janet Cherry was arrested in Cape Town after five weeks in hiding. She was to spend over a year in detention. Cherry claims she was not interrogated by security police and that her detention was purely preventative: “They simply did not want me to play a political role in PE.” When asked how she survived such a long period of imprisonment she quoted what a security policeman said to her: “Human beings is a miracle: they can adapt to anything.”

The smear campaign against ECC began to take a new tack. “Every Cowards Choice” and “ECC does from behind” were slogans used in some of the flyers that appeared. The new approach attacked ECC members of cowardice and questioned the manhood of those not wanting to serve in the SADF, including their sexual orientation. Within apartheid society homosexuality was considered particularly abhorrent, the epitome of anti-societal values and a threat to the very survival of the human race. The President’s Council Report of 1987 claimed: “Homosexuality in men and women is a serious social deviation... The fact that it is increasingly

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203 Mystery Sjambok Attack. Sunday Star 18/05/86.
204 Petrol Bombs Thrown. Citizen. 12/07/86.
regarded as normal by the community is cause for concern.\textsuperscript{206} Thus the state and opponents of the ECC found this an effective attack on the organization. By accusing its members of being homosexuals and cowards, and (equally as abhorrent) as communists they were using language which ordinary South Africans would relate to with strong antipathy, and constructing a perception of its members as being a particularly insidious and treacherous threat to society, thus marginalizing their support base and the significance of their message.

The new Emergency regulations were more stringently applied than before. The ECC too was particularly targeted demonstrating in the words of Phillips that “the state recognized the organisation’s unique oppositional challenge to the security discourse.”\textsuperscript{207} Whereas the ECC had been able to continue campaigning and meeting through the previous emergency this now became impossible.

The State of Emergency had serious consequences for the ECC. It undermined the democratic culture of the organisation and put a damper on its activity. The fact that most of the leadership were in detention, or in hiding –seriously disrupted the functioning of the organization and made co-ordination all but impossible. It became impossible to hold meetings –as a result issues were not debated as they previously were before decisions were made. Increasingly decisions were made at a leadership level and passed down to members. Many members felt frustrated as they felt the organisation was becoming more conservative. Leaders were becoming more concerned about public profile. No longer able to call for the end to conscription the organisation moved in what many perceived to be a liberal direction, with its future campaigns calling for the right to be heard, and appealing to big business and

\textsuperscript{206} Conway In Gouws.(2005) 106
\textsuperscript{207} Phillips.( 2002) 87
conscripts and even to the SADF itself. As Matthew Blatchford put it: “The organisation became more centralised and less activist friendly and the leftie leaders became yuppies and started evolving ECC tie-pins and talking eagerly about getting the SADF on board.” Membership dropped off radically as the risks of supporting the organization increased. The disinformation and suppression of information also undermined support.

The ECC proved resilient however, and continued to operate. Active members were forced to meet clandestinely and adopt underground tactics. Acting independently, in small groups engaged in underground “hit-and-run” activity such as pamphlet drops, poster runs, graffiti, guerilla theatre and small placard protests, disappearing before police could arrive. Mundane activities like kite-flying or group jogs ensured the ECC maintained a visible presence and demonstrate that it had not disappeared. Simply going for a stroll with an ECC T-shirt on became an act of protest.

Occasional and impromptu visits by leaders on the run or in hiding helped boost flagging morale. Sympathetic newspapers published the adventures of ECC activists on the run as they donned disguises and had narrow escapes with the police. Gavin Evans told of jumping out of a second floor window to escape security police. He said of life on the run: “In a strange kind of way this type of existence gives a white South African a slight inkling of the way of life led by millions of South Africans who are refugees in the land of their birth.”

Messages of support from overseas individuals and groups including British politicians Neil Kinnock and Dennis Healy, American Senator Ted Kennedy and many of ECC’s friends in church, humanitarian and anti-war groups provided a

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208 Blatchford, M. ECC could Have Saved SA. M&G 16/09/94.
209 Life on the Run. Weekly Mail. 21/08/86.
further morale boost. The organization was able to capitalize on the detentions and ongoing attacks to draw attention to state repression and mobilize support. The fact that members were prepared to go to jail for their beliefs gave it legitimacy as an opposition movement and generated sympathy. Janet Cherry was nominated by the Star Newspaper as Women of the Year “Rising Star” and her ongoing detention attracted much interest in Europe. In the words of Wilhelm Liebenberg: “For no matter what the forces of Apartheid do to drive us off the streets and out of the press, the issue still remains. As long as thousands of young South Africans have to struggle daily with their consciences over conscription into the SADF, there will be a need for an ECC.”

By September many of the detainees had been released and the ECC was strong enough to take up its next campaign. The Right To Speak Campaign aimed at drawing attention to state repression of the organization and demanding the right to be heard. Newspaper ads appeared bearing the slogan: “Would you like to know our views on conscription? Sorry we can’t tell you” in which prominent South African from many fields (among them MPs, Church leaders, academics, authors and sportsmen) called on the government to recognize freedom of conscience.

Public meetings in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban were addressed by high profile supporters endorsing ECCs right to speak. A turn-out of some 800 people in Cape Town, when compared to attendance at earlier EEC events, demonstrated clearly how the state of emergency had intimidated the white population. Dr Alex Boraine – now resigned from parliament- told the audience that one of the biggest obstacles to peace was white ignorance of the way black South African’s lived. The

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210 Quoted in Cherry. ECC in the Eastern Cape.
ECC also called on white South Africans to send postcards to President Botha calling for an end to the silencing.

October saw the launch of Veterans for Victory, an anti-ECC group headed by Rob Brown, a military veteran who claimed to have served in the British Parachute regiment and Rhodesia’s Special Air Service. In an interview with the Aida Parker Newsletter he claimed that: “the real war being waged against SA today – by people like the ECC- is psy-war…. they go for men’s minds.” The aim of his organisation was “to expose the recklessness, irresponsibility, hypocrisy and cowardice of the ECC” which he called “a campaign to unilateral SA disarmament.”

A series of anti-ECC adverts, funded by Women for South Africa, was aired by the SABC.

The Yellow Ribbon Campaign (based on American anti-Vietnam protests) saw City centres around the country festooned with kilometres of yellow ribbon, but this was quickly taken down by police. In Johannesburg a court order was issued for the removal of the ribbons, as permission had not been sought for the protest. Furthermore opponents quickly drew association between the colour yellow and cowardice, undermining the effectiveness of this campaign. Thousands of flyers were distributed to white schools. It featured a letter from a Soweto student telling white student’s: “The SADF are camping in our schools and stadiums. We, the students of Soweto wish to be your friends.” A women’s protest was held outside Witwatersrand Command. Fifteen of the women were arrested for attending an illegal gathering. Six of them were charged and later sentenced to five days imprisonment. Durban took up a “Don’t Buy War Toys” campaign over Christmas. A new branch of ECC was launched at Pretoria University. Steven Lowry reminded the

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211 Veteran’s Fight Back. Aida Parker Newsletter. 01/10/86.
212 ECC Launches New Attack. Star. 04/10/86
audience of about 40 that the ECC was a legal organisation as it was not calling on people not to go to the army but rather for an end of them being forced to do so. In Cape Town a peace picnic on the grounds of Archbishop Tutu’s home was marred by a smear campaign. Copies of the invitation, defaced with the words “blacks only” and “bring your own tyres” were dropped in post-boxes in the surrounding areas and stuck on the gates of the Bishopscourt property. A protest meeting was held against the conscription of older men (the so-called Dad’s Army) at which 92 men issued a statement refusing to be conscripted.

A major Arts Festival was planned for December 1986. This was an ECC initiative but was to be hosted and organised by a wide range of community and church organisations. The motive behind the festival was to advance progressive, grassroots culture with the long term view of building a national, people’s culture. A wide variety of art forms were to be incorporated including theatre, film, music, photography, cartoons, fine art, poster art and fashion. There were also to be training workshops and symposiums dealing with issues related to people’s culture. This was to be an extension of the ECC’s commitment to culture as a site of struggle and to the use of innovative and creative strategies to challenge the state. As an article in SA Outlook on the proposed fair put it: “If we view cultural liberation as being integral to political liberation then we would know that for too long our culture has been shaded or oppressed by the dominant culture of the ruling classes. Too long have we been taught to believe that culture and politics are separate spheres. Too long has our progressive cultural activity occurred on an ad-hoc sporadic basis. The time is long overdue for us to consciously build a national people’s culture. The time
has come for progressive culture to be assertive.\textsuperscript{213} Unfortunately the festival was banned by the state, and was never held. Although the ECC continued to use art and culture as a means of challenging the state the banning of this event put a damper of what could have been a broadening of the white alternative culture built by the ECC across the race barrier imposed by apartheid, and the beginning of the growth of a genuine people’s culture.

Many other events had to be called off. Walk for Peace to a local township. In Johannesburg an ECC cabaret, “Noise and Smoke”, was called off after a bomb threat and a visit by the police. An ECC stall at the Pietermaritzburg market was ordered to close.

In November the Media Council announced the findings of its inquiry into the Aida Parker Newsletter (APN) allegations. It found that the newsletter contained a number of untrue allegations and many alleged statements of facts were unsubstantiated. It had thus breached the media code of conduct. A serious consequence of this was that extracts from the APN had been used as evidence to oppose applications for the release of detained ECC on a number of occasions. This had done great harm to the ECC and individual members of the organisation, the council found.\textsuperscript{214} Parker failed to attend the proceedings and refused to accept the jurisdiction of the Council. As the newsletter was not affiliated to the Newspaper Press Union no action or penalty could be forced on her, but the findings did seriously undermine the credibility of the newsletter and it’s claims, and vindicated the ECC. Parker issued a

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Towards a People’s culture.} SA Outlook. 10/1986

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Media Council Inquiry Rules Against Newsletter.} Star. 8/11/1986.
special edition of her newsletter challenging the findings, but the damage had been done.

December saw a co-ordinated police swoop against the organisation. From 4am on the same day a rally was due to be held in Cape Town, the homes of prominent members in Cape Town and Johannesburg were visited and searched. Thirteen members were detained, including the entire newly elected Western Cape branch executive committee. They were released after two weeks but charges were laid against them. Others were served with restriction orders preventing them from taking part in any activity connected with eight named organisations (among them the ECC, UDF and the black Sash.) The rally went ahead with an audience of around 1000 and was addressed by Sir Richard Luyt, Ebrahim Rasool and Dr Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert. Mr Rasool told the audience that in spite of the detentions, which indicated how “space (for protest) is being narrowed all the time” and the violence of the regime the meeting demonstrated that “there is still a commitment in our ranks to campaign in a legal and non-violent way.”

Official figures for the year revealed that there were 342 applications to the Board for Religious Objectors bringing the total number of applications to 1059, of which a total of 16 applicants had been rejected. The official Defence budget was set at R5 230 million. With the inclusion of the Police Budget, the amount spent on defence of the homelands plus other hidden costs the total spent on security was close to R10 000 million. Of 64 000 currently serving conscripts 35 372 were used in black townships. 6 soldiers were killed while on duty in the townships and 32 were killed in Namibia. There were 362 attempts at suicide by conscripts of which of which 18 had

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215 1000 at ECC Rally. Cape Times. 4/12/86.

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been successful. Once again official figures did not include the number of conscripts not reporting for duty.

During the latter part of 1986 the state continued its twin path of repression and reform and persisted with its claim that the security force clampdown was necessary to ensure peaceful reform. Influx control and pass laws were repealed. The “dompas” was replaced by a standard ID for all citizens. The Mixed Marriages act was repealed. Trade agreements were signed with Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. In August plans were released for a National Statutory Council which would represent blacks. Black citizens were granted freehold rights. 7.5 million South African blacks however continued to be denied rights on the grounds that they were foreign citizens (“citizens” of the homelands). Despite the reforms, Europe, followed by the USA declared comprehensive sanctions against the country. Two days after the imposition of the Emergency the infamous Magoo’s Bar bombing took place killing three people and injuring 69. The UDF launched the “Forward to People’s Power” campaign which encouraged the establishing of alternative structures of “grassroots” power through street committees and people’s courts. Protests and funerals continued despite government attempts to ban them. In August police opened fire on a protesting crowd in White City, Soweto killing 24. Security forces continued to engage in covert activity, aiding in the overthrow of the Lesotho government, breaking Charles Sebe (jailed for trying to overthrow his brother Lennox) out of jail and murdering activists among them Drs. Fabian and Florence Ribeiro and four members of the Chesterville Youth Organisation.
The ECC began the new year (1987) with a campaign titled “War is not Compulsory, Lets choose a Just Peace”. Due to ongoing problems with co-ordination and the limitations imposed by the state of emergency the focus was on regionally based events. As even the simple act of wearing of an ECC T-shirt could be an invitation to police harassment and arrest, much of organisations activity revolved around creative, small scale events such as pavement art at the Grand Parade in Cape Town and the building of a peace sign at Muizenburg beach. The later created some controversy reminiscent of the sand-castle affair. The SAP rugby team was training on the beach at the same time, leading to a confrontation in which two members were arrested. The Cape Town branch also generated publicity by supporting cultural groups that boycotted the Cape Town Festival in protest over the participation of SADF bands, and attended a UDF “Free the Children” vigil. Johannesburg hosted a “Prisoners of War” multi-media art exhibition, a film festival and a concert. On the 75th anniversary of the SADF members presented a chocolate birthday cake to Witwatersrand Command. The cake bore the message: “Happy birthday from a land in civil war” and was accompanied by a card which said: “On your birthday give conscripts a present”. In Pietermaritzburg a “Peace Boat” race was held on the Umsindusi river. The Durban branch sent ECC alternative call-up papers to Magnus Malan other prominent leaders. Valentine cards bearing the slogan “Make Love Not War” were also sent. Port Elizabeth focused on publicising the upcoming trial of Phillip Wilkinson. Volunteers also engaged in community service projects around the country. The campaign culminated in a national Day of Concern when vigils were held in all the main centers.

A primary focus during this period was on media to counter the effects of state propaganda. Flyers and pamphlets addressed the issues of ANC links, accusations
of cowardice and the criminalisation of the organization. A national comic book was launched. A militarisation fact sheet was published which used official statistics such as emigration figures and suicide rates to highlight problems with conscription. The Weekly Mail carried an “ECC in Perspective” insert, a comprehensive rebuttal of state propaganda.

In February the state announced it was dropping charges against the Cape Town members who had been arrested in December.

A campaign around the all-white election in May used the slogan- “The trouble with this general election is we don’t know which general we’re electing.” A discussion entitled ‘May 6- What happens next?’ was held at Johannesburg Central Methodist Church. Mr Ian Moll a lecturer at Wits University told the audience: “We are being given the hope that a moderate alliance of whites may be able to get rid of apartheid in Parliament, but the real force for change is outside Parliament.”

Also in May an article on the ECC appeared in Cosmopolitan magazine. This was another indication of growing mainstream interest in the organisation. It looked at the affect of conscription and militarisation on women, and the role of women in the ECC.

Women played an important role in the organisation. While they may not have been expected to do national service, they were still affected by conscription –having to see their loved ones depart and often come back radically changed—and sometimes not come back at all. They were also affected by the growing war psychosis: “which affects our lives in so many different ways; it affects the way we relate to each other, it affects our economic and political future; it affects the way in which we

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217 More Death and Destruction Predicted. Star. 24/04/1087.
secure our homes against ‘possible invasion.’” While the ECC did not prioritise gender issues there was, according to Cherry a “clear understanding that sexist practices were unacceptable and a clear feminist identity” within the organisation.

Conway claims that when the ECC did engage in gender politics it did so within the “civic-republican” discourse defined by the state: “The ECC represented its female membership in hegemonic terms- their political agency was framed as wives, mothers and sweethearts.”

It is certainly true that the ECC made use of essentialist views of motherhood and of women as nurturers and peace-makers. In doing so it was using language that the average white South African could relate to and would appeal to as broad an audience as possible. On the other it is also challenged gender stereotyping and contested the hegemonic view of both masculinity and femininity.

In my own experience women, gays and lesbians in the organisation challenged members to be more aware of their attitudes, particularly in their use of language, which expresses masculinity as normative. Even though not always outwardly expressed there was a strong progressive attitude within the organisation which challenged regressive attitudes of racism, sexism and homophobia. In apartheid society women’s ideas were not taken seriously and men rarely listened to their opinions. General Viljoen expressed the prevailing view of women in South African society: “I would especially like to thank those who stayed at home to keep the fires burning…..Without the support of their loved ones at home the men on the ground


219 Quoted in Cock. In Gasa (2007) 261

would not have been as successful as they were.”

In taking an active role in the organisation women—by standing up to the state, often facing arrest and detention—were challenging state discourse and modelling alternative identities of femininity. Furthermore, Anita Kromberg and Richard Steele have argued that ECC’s creative approach was essentially feminist in that its use of music, humour and celebration is the “antithesis of the traditionally male way of resolving conflict with violence and domination”.

On the international front Laurie Nathan toured the USA, speaking in 30 cities. Highlights of the tour included addressing the UN and attending a meeting of the New York City Council which passed a resolution in support of the ECC. In August members gave evidence before the UN Center for Human Rights. Adele Kirsten and Anita Kromberg attended an international conference on feminism and non-violence.

Attacks on ECC during this year included a letter condemning the ECC from Transvaal Women for Peace which was distributed to school principals and an anti-ECC advert in the Sunday Times. It carried an open letter from the chief of the Defence Force, General Jan Geldenhuys addressed to conscripts. In it he admits that the SADF was “perhaps not very flexible, but with tens of thousands of troop, if we allow each to do as he pleases, there will be chaos.” “However” he continues “we do try hard to treat troops as people”. In parliament an NP MP, Mr L.H. Fisk, alleged that the ECC had been infiltrated by the ANC. In evidence he quoted Oliver Tambo as having congratulated the organisation on the work it was doing. Magnus Malan attacked the organization saying “The ECC is the direct enemy of the SADF. It

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223 Ad Shows SADF Concern. Cape Times. 14/1/87.
is disgraceful that …the country’s young people, the pride of the nation, should be subjected to the ECC’s propaganda, suspicion sowing and misinformation.”

He also described members of the organisation as “mommy’s little boys”.

Reports appeared that the SADF was handing out copies of the discredited April 1986 issue of the Aida Parker Newsletter to cadets in schools and national servicemen. New issues of APN continued to appear, relentlessly attacking the organisation. In April smear pamphlets appeared claiming that an ECC Day of Concern was meant to mourn dead ANC members and showing a picture of a baby with a tyre around its neck. In Cape Town posters appeared with the slogans: “ECC members are yellow” and “ECC believes in fairy tales”. Ivan Toms encountered men putting up the posters and claims they had “strangely-cut short hair” and “looked suspiciously like off-duty policemen or members of the Defence Force.”

In Port Elizabeth posters of Phillip Wilkinson were plastered over with stickers bearing the word “coward”.

Just days after the election nine members were arrested in Grahamstown, including the son of the mayor of Cape Town. A Grahamstown printer was visited by police and warned not to print ECC material. Anti-ECC flyers were dropped from a helicopter at the Cape Town Peace Fair. In July the SABC current affairs program “Network” screened a film on the ANC which linked the ECC to that organisation.

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224 ECC a Direct Enemy. Citizen. 14/04/87
225 Anti-ECC Men Escape Police. Cape Times. 28/04/87.
4.2 A NEW WAVE OF OBJECTORS.

“We hit on a tactic which proved to be electric. That was to then go back to the old idea (of conscientious objectors), of individuals taking stands, but to do that with a mass base.” 226 - “Chippy” Olver

Since the imposition of the State of Emergency the focus of the organization had shifted from an offensive stance against conscription to a more defensive one of protecting itself from attacks by the state, of demanding the right to speak. This had been necessary for the organization to survive but many supporters and members felt that it weakened the organization and that the ECC needed to regain the offensive and return to its primary focus on conscription. The opportunity to make this strategic move presented itself with the appearance of a new wave of conscientious objectors and ensuing trials. The subsequent prosecution of Ivan Toms, David Bruce and other shows that the state was concerned over the rising number of objectors willing to take a public stand. It abandoned its policy of avoiding public trials and resorted rather to the tactic of prosecuting a small number of high profile objectors as an example to discourage others. The threat of going to jail had for a while deterred objectors, but this was obviously no longer enough. No objectors had yet been imprisoned under the new legislation – the state needed to demonstrate it was serious about prosecuting objectors.

In May Phillip Wilkinson appeared in court and was found guilty of failing to report for a camp. He was fined R600. Witnesses gave accounts of violence and misconduct on the part of troops. One witness claimed he had been told by his major to “beat up blacks” and had witnessed troops blackmailing shebeen owners to provide them with alcohol. He also told of witnessing a ten-year old child being placed in a rubbish bin for nearly an hour before being beaten with sticks. Wilkinson told the court that while he could not condemn these unwilling

soldiers –“I was once one of them. I know very well the pain these reluctant conscripts go through” – they were part of system that was used to maim and kill South African citizens.  

Ivan Toms toured the country to publicise his decision to refuse to do a camp. Toms had worked as a doctor at Crossroads and had witnessed first-hand SADF activity there. He was highly regarded in church and human rights circles for his work in the community. He had also served in the SADF and attained the rank of lieutenant, which gave him a credibility among conscripts and refuted attacks of cowardice. At the TRC Toms testified that his experiences in the army and at Crossroads had shaped his resolve not to serve. At Crossroad he had witnessed the police come in on a daily basis and rip down and burn make shift shelters that had been built the previous night. The next night the shelters would be rebuilt only to be torn down again the next morning. This went on for weeks in the middle of the Cape Town winter, when it rains almost constantly. When people tried to resist, the police used rubber bullets and dogs to disperse them. Toms was treating, on a daily basis, wounds inflicted by the police. “To put on that uniform” he said “would be to identify with those Amajoni who had actually been oppressing the very community that I served.” He also claimed that as soldier one was ”a cog in a machine that really just churned out war and destruction. A cog in a machine that defended apartheid.” In November he reported for a camp in his civilian clothes and was charged with refusing to serve.

In August 23 Cape Town men, mainly students from UCT and Stellenbosch publically issued a statement that they refused to serve in the SADF. Members of the group took a pledge to build a future where South Africans could live in peace. As long as the army was deployed against township youth they would not be part of it. “These people are not our enemies. They are fellow South Africans and we will not take up arms against them.” This was the

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227 *Conscientious Objector’s Evidence*. Leader. 28/06/87.


229 TRC Special Submission on Conscription.

230 *We Won’t Serve*. Weekly Mail. 13/08/87.
first of the mass stands which was to become an annual event, with the numbers of
objectors spiralling each year.

In December evidence emerged that the SADF was involved in the smear campaign against
the ECC. Three conscripts were arrested for conspiring to pass classified information on to
the ECC.231 This information contained evidence of SADF complicity in producing and
distributing anonymous material aimed at discrediting the organization. The SADF attempted
to silence the conscripts by holding the subsequent court martial in camera and by
sentencing them to detention barracks. The case however caught the attention of the press
and the public and generated much publicity. The conscripts appealed the case in the Cape
Town High Court and were released. The ECC subsequently applied for, and was
provisionally granted a Supreme Court interdict against the SADF, while the case was
postponed till October. The ECC had long claimed that the SADF and the state were behind
the smear campaign against it and the trial of the “Castle Three” supported these claims and
brought to light the extent of anti-ECC activity by the SADF.

Over the Christmas season the ECC again called on parents not to buy war toys for their
children. In an interview with the New Nation Tam Alexander said: “Kids assimilate the
values associated with the games they play, and toy guns make the whole idea of killing
more acceptable.... Children become more willing to accept war and aggression as a natural
way of solving problems.”232

During 1987 the SADF had continued to counter and undermine opposition to the state. In
early 1987 Inkatha vigilantes had attacked the home of UDF leader Bheki Ntuli killing five
adults and eight children and sparking the outbreak of a war between the two organizations
that would last until 1990. Transkei troops attacked the Ciskei presidential residence in an
attempt to kill leader Lennox Sebe. Later in the year Transkei president George Matanzima
was overthrown in a coup and replaced by a civilian government under Stella Sigcau which

231 Charged Soldiers Knew of Dirty Tricks. Weekly Mail. 24/12/1987
232 ECC Focuses on War Toys. New Nation. 22/12/87.
was in turn overthrown by a second coup under Transkei Defence Force General Bantu Holomisa. Security forces attempted to assassinate ANC official Albie Sachs in a car bomb attack, leaving him severely wounded. Successful assassinations were carried out against Gibson Ncube, who was poisoned and ANC executive member Cassius Maake who, along with other operatives, was ambushed in Lesotho. The Alexandra Treason Trial of UDF activists continued throughout the year. Large-scale protests took place around the all-white election in which the Conservative Party replaced the PFP as the official opposition. In July a group of sixty-two mostly Afrikaans speaking whites, headed by former PFP leader Slabbert, met with an ANC delegation in Dakar, Senegal in July. In November Govan Mbeki was released from jail. In December the ANC launched Operation Vula which aimed at building underground structures within the country and preparing for the return of leaders from exile. The SADF continued operation inside Angola, supporting its allies UNITA against attack by Cuban backed government forces.

In January 1988 the South African advance into Angola was brought to a halt at Cuito Cuanavale. Although both sides claimed victory, it was perceived as a strategic defeat for South African forces as for the first time its military superiority, particularly in the air was called into question. In February SADF troops were sent into Bophuthatswana to prop up the failing regime of Lucas Mangope against a rebellion by senior members of his army. In the same month the UDF, COSATU, the ECC and 16 other organizations were banned. In March Dulcie September was assassinated in Paris. Stanza Bopape died in police custody in June. Khotso House (UDF Head Quarters) and Khanya House (SA Bishops Conference offices) were bombed. In November a former Police officer and AWB member, Barend Strydom went on a rampage in Pretoria randomly shooting black civilians, killing seven and injuring sixteen. In December police stormed a prayer vigil in New Hanover, killing eleven in what became know as The Trust Feed killing. Large scale strikes took place in June to protest the Labour Relations Amendment Act and to mark the 12th anniversary of the Soweto uprising. Municipal elections in October provoked widespread protest and violence. In
December the government signed the New York accord, recognizing UN Resolution 435 regarding independence for Namibia and agreeing to withdraw its armed forces from Angola and Namibia.

The Alternative National Service Campaign of 1988 continued the shift to refocus the organization on conscription issues. This campaign called for the broadening of CO status to include non religious objectors, the shortening of alternative service and the right to perform it in non-government organizations. A Know Your Rights campaign focused on the February call-up. A booklet was published informing soldiers of their rights in the army. This was a conscious move to speak to the conscript, to gain their trust, to be seen as addressing issues relevant to them, rather than simply condemning them for choosing to serve. Activists once again participated in community development projects to demonstrate alternative forms of service. Protests and vigils to support the CO’s on trial were held around the country.

In March Ivan Toms was sentenced to 21 months in prison. Given the increasingly large number of individuals refusing to serve it seems likely that Toms was deliberately targeted for prosecution due to his high profile, to send a message to the movement in an attempt to counter the rising tide of objectors. His trial was extensively covered both in the local and foreign press. Tom’s personal commitment to social justice, demonstrated by his work in Crossroads drew extensive support from across the political spectrum. Prominent leaders testified on his behalf including Bishop David Russell, Wits Law Professor John Dugard and Namibian Pastor Oswald Shivuti. Russell witnessed Tom’s good character and strong Christian beliefs. Dugard reminded the court that SADF conscripts faced arrest and prosecution in 81 countries for the crime of aiding apartheid. Shivutu gave evidence of atrocities committed by SADF soldiers in Namibia. In his capacity as secretary to the Ovamboland Legislative Assembly he had collected 690 sworn affidavits alleging such atrocities.

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233 Phillips (2002).115
crimes as murder, rape, assault and mutilation on civilians. These included a man who had his face severely burned on the exhaust of a Buffel and a 13 year old boy who had his genitals beaten with a stick and burned with a cigarette lighter. On sentencing him the magistrate told Toms: “You are not a criminal, you are not a menace to society. In fact you are just the opposite, an asset.” During the trial a call was made to have objectors declared political prisoners.

There was some controversy within the organization over how to deal with Tom’s homosexuality. Tom’s himself felt that his identity as a gay man had shaped his political beliefs and that it should not be downplayed. This led to a split in the ECC. Many supported Toms, but others felt that given the pervasive homophobia of the society it would be strategic not to highlight it as it would open the organization to further attacks from the military and undermine the effectiveness of Tom’s stand.

There certainly was an opportunity to make a link between the struggle against apartheid and the struggle for gay and lesbian (LGBT) rights. Few had as yet made that link. Most gay organisations remained divided on racial lines and there was little understanding of LGBT issues within the anti-apartheid struggle. Edwin Cameron, in a letter to Ivan Toms refers to “the reactionary nature of most gay organisations” and the “deep-going chauvinism of many of the liberation organisations.” The ECC with its large LGBT membership and accepting attitude, was arguably in a position to challenge this state of affairs. Certainly progressive elements within the gay community hoped this would be the case. Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LAGO) was a small progressive group that had been formed in 1986 to provide a “gay/lesbian voice speaking out against apartheid” and to challenge

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234 Maximum Sentence for Toms. Cape Times. 04/03/88.
235 Conway In Gouws (2005).108
237 Nicol, J. If We Can’t Dance to it, it’s not our Revolution.in Hoad, Martin and Reid. (2005). 72
homophobia within the democratic movement. LAGO formally backed Ivan’s campaign and many of its members in fact joined the ECC.

After intense debate on the issue the ECC chose to downplay Tom’s homosexuality. In the end Tom’s compromised. After formal talks with the ECC leadership, LAGO withdrew their support from the campaign.

Many members were unhappy with this strategy and pushed for a more radical stance. There was a feeling that an opportunity had been missed to create a new alliance linking struggle and gender politics. Conway argues that the ECC that by avoiding this and other issues the ECC failed to move outside of a “civic-republican” discourse to a more “radical democratic” one. “The ECC he claims “chose to be conservative and therefore populist, rather than transformational” and this resulted in “liberation ideology being diluted and subverted for white society’s consumption.”

This was a tactical, rather than an ideological move. I would argue that that for the most part ECC members sympathised with LGBT rights, and broadly with feminism indeed many were active in the LGBT and feminist movement, but it was felt that a more radical stance would have alienated its target audience, distracted from the prime focus on conscription and would have seen the ECC even more marginalised within the conservative mainstream of apartheid era politics. This also did not stop the SADF from making an issue of Toms’ sexuality. Posters appeared saying “Toms is a fairy” and claiming he was HIV positive.

Veterans for Victory produced a glossy 32 booklet, *The Rape of Peace* attacking the ECC. Sgt Brown denied that he had received funds from the state to publish the booklet. Major Wynand Du Toit, who had spent time as a captive in Angola, also attacked the organisation. He claimed that if the ANC came to power, which is what the ECC wanted, South African

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youth would face even longer periods of conscription and have to serve in foreign countries.\textsuperscript{239}

The Minister of Defence and other ministers refused to answer questions about their involvement in anti-ECC activity, despite increasing evidence in the ongoing “Castle Three” trial pointing to state complicity. It was revealed that SADF had been involved in the pamphlet bombing of the ECC Peace Fair. The Supreme Court reduced the sentence for the Three to eight months for two and six months for the third.

In June the SADF acceded to a request to meet with the ECC, to discuss alternative service proposals. The state was obviously concerned over growing white opposition and particularly about the upcoming court case over the ECC interdict and for a while it appeared that they might be prepared to compromise. A statement released said that the meeting was “cordial and conductive to better mutual understanding”\textsuperscript{240}, and that the ECC’s proposals would be forwarded to the Minister of Defence. Nothing concrete however came out of it and the state remained committed to its hardline approach.

The headmaster of elite Cape Town School, Diocesan College (also known as Bishop’s) was forced to resign.\textsuperscript{241} No official reason was given, but there had been long-standing disagreement between the school’s governing body and headmaster John Peake over his “liberal approach”. Peake had apparently encouraged pupils to learn Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika and bussed boys to ECC meetings. He also apparently did away with corporal punishment and allowed senior boys to drink port on occasion.

In July David Bruce went on trial. As he had not previously served he was the first C.O liable to bear the full brunt of the new Defence Act. He was sentenced to the maximum possible sentence-- six years imprisonment. Bruce’s testimony was short and simple. He said: “I

\textsuperscript{239} Political Decisions Helping the Enemy. Sunday Tribune. 13/03/88
\textsuperscript{240} Army’s Concern is Genuine. Sunday Star. 19/08/88.
\textsuperscript{241} Out, Mr. Chips. Sunday Times. 24/07/88.
would be willing to serve in an army which is involved in fighting for and defending all the people of this country. I am not prepared to serve in the defence of a racist political system.”

Ntatho Motlana testified on his behalf, claiming that Bruce and other CO’s were regarded as heroes by black South Africans. Helen Suzman, PFP MP, expressed the views of many when she said she was deeply dismayed at “the savage sentence” Bruce had received.

The CO trials generated a great deal of interest and publicity for the ECC and the issue of conscription. One benefit was the fact that information which came to light during testimony was allowed to be quoted by the press. This ensured that information which had been suppressed under Emergency regulations was able to reach the public. During Wilkinson’s trial, for example, a camp commander had admitted that as many as 25% of conscripts were not arriving for duty. The ECC made the most of this by publishing transcripts of the trials and by using the trials as a platform to disseminate information and put across their message. Public meetings were held to support the objectors. Prominent public figures such as Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude and Sheena Duncan declared public support.

By midyear there were signs that public opinion was beginning to turn over the role of the SADF in Angola, Namibia and the townships. News of the clash at Cuito Cuanavale played a large role in undermining morale and bringing the role of the SADF in Angola into question. In June the NG church newsletter raised the question of the death of white conscripts. A survey by the Institute of Internal Affairs showed that 58% of whites favoured negotiation with SWAPO. The press increasingly raised concerns over the “brain-drain” caused by emigration, post-traumatic stress amongst conscripts, the high number of family murders and the economic costs of conscription. The Sunday Star reminded its readers in an editorial: “There are many patriotic young men who- far from being cowards- display

242 Morals and the Law. Financial Mail. 29/07/88
243 Bruce’s Jail Sentence Savage. Star. 27/07/88
immense courage and strong will, but who reject township duty."\textsuperscript{244} The women’s magazine *Fair Lady* carried an article focusing on the death of conscripts. One mother of a conscript killed in action was quoted as saying: “It is our duty to give our sons to the army….But we are not told that our children are being sent into Angola. People are unhappy that their children are being sent into Angola.”\textsuperscript{245} Even the pro-government press was becoming critical, with the *Beeld*, for instance conceding that South Africans had a right to ask whether the death of conscripts was justifiable.\textsuperscript{246} In October Malan admitted for the first time that South African troops were in Angola and acknowledged the death of 63 conscripts in the previous year. This triggered further criticism as many that had previously supported the government were confronted with its blatant duplicity.

4.3 THE BANNING OF THE ECC

*[The ECC is] “the vanguard of those forces that are intent on wrecking the present dispensation and its renewal”*\textsuperscript{247} - General Magnus Malan announcing the banning of the ECC.

In August 143 men made a public announcement that they would not serve in the SADF. Among them was Andre Zaaiman, a Permanent Force captain who had resigned from the SADF. A joint statement said : “We cannot make a contribution to justice and peace and at the same time be part of the SADF.”\textsuperscript{248} Within days the state responded by banning the ECC, making it the first white organization to be banned in over twenty years. The Minister of Law and Order declared that “the danger it poses to the safety of the public and the maintenance of public order leave

\textsuperscript{244} Quoted In Conway In Gouws (2005)108
\textsuperscript{245} Quoted in Nathan in Nathan and Cock (1989) 320.
\textsuperscript{246} Phillips (2002) 109
\textsuperscript{247} Phillips (2002) 118.
\textsuperscript{248} A Bitter Row Rages Over Peace. Weekly Mail. 11/08/88
no other choice but to prohibit it from continuing any activities and acts.\textsuperscript{249} According to Nathan “(t)he banning was an unintended testimony to the degree of the ECC’s success.”

Shortly after the ban the ECC’s case against the SADF, stemming from the revelations of the “Castle Three” came before the Cape Town Supreme Court. This proved a victory for the organization and press coverage of the trial ensured that the organization’s name, at least, remained alive. The Court ordered the SADF to refrain from “unlawfully harassing or interfering with the ECC.” The SADF admitted that it had carried out what it called “legitimate secret counter-measures”\textsuperscript{250} against the ECC. These included sticking up anti-ECC posters and the use of a helicopter to drop pamphlets at the Cape Town Peace Fair. SADF lawyers argued that it was justified in doing so because the country was “on a war footing” and the courts therefore had no jurisdiction to rule on the actions of the military. This was a rare admission by the state that South Africa was at war, and was contrary to their usual denial. In fact in the very same month Brigadier Hermanus Stadler of the SA Police argued in a treason trial that South Africa was not at war, but facing a ‘revolutionary onslaught’\textsuperscript{251}. He was arguing to deny ANC members prisoner of war status under the Geneva Protocol. The contrary statements in the two trials reveal how adept apartheid officials were in twisted facts to achieve their desired goals. ECC lawyer Sydney Kentridge told the hearing: “The generals have declared martial law by means of an affidavit. These are the pretentions of a junta of South American

\textsuperscript{249} Nathan in Nathan and Cock (1989) 308
\textsuperscript{250} Nathan in Nathan and Cock (1989) 322
\textsuperscript{251} Cock in Nathan and Cock (1989) 1
The opposition press used the SADF’s admissions to raise questions about state abuse of power.

With the banning came a new wave of detentions, restrictions and harassment of the organization. Although the ECC was effectively prevented from any public activity, the culture of resistance it had inspired had taken hold and continued to grow, having gained a momentum of its own. The liberal press, academics, church leaders and political opposition groups vigorously protested the banning and took up the call for alternatives to national service. Political groupings as diverse as the PFP, the newly formed Independent Party and the Mass Democratic Movement (which had replaced the now banned UDF) passed resolutions in support of objectors. According to Phillips the level of reaction to the ban indicated that the ECC had “successfully integrated conscription into national white discourse”. There was a proliferation of press articles looking at the negative effects of conscription. Academics at Wits and UCT engaged in research projects revealing that many conscripts suffered psychological trauma as a result of their experiences. Activists continued to take up the issue of conscription through other organizations such as NUSAS, COSG, the Black Sash and the SACC. COSG hosted a conference in October to discuss ways to continue challenging conscription. New organizations were formed such as Mothers against War, which held church services around the country to coincide with the February call-up, and a support group for parents whose children had emigrated. The banning also drew widespread international condemnation. Meetings in eight international cities were addressed by COSG activists.

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252 Nathan in Nathan and Cock (1989) 322
253 Phillips (2002) 113
Continuing prosecution of objectors and the subsequent high profile court cases kept the issue alive in the press and the mind of the public. In December Charles Bester, an 18 year old fresh out of school was sentenced to the maximum penalty of six years for refusing to serve. Bester had reported for his call-up in August and informed the officer in charge that he was refusing to serve. Bester told the court that his Christian conscience would not allow him to participate in “the evil perpetrated by the SADF”.\textsuperscript{254} It seems likely, as with Toms, that Bester was specifically chosen, no doubt because of his youth, to send a message to the anti-conscription movement.

Another objector, Tam Alexander was due to go on trial. Lawyers, officials and supporters had already assembled for his trial when news was received that Alexander had left the country to go into exile.\textsuperscript{255} Two others, Ernst Tamsen and Jacobus Nel, a member of the right wing Herstige Nationale Party were charged for failing to report to camps and received suspended sentences.

In the same month Toms was released from prison. His sentenced was reduced to 18 months and he was allowed out on bail pending an appeal. Tom’s said his time in prison had only strengthened his commitment and that he was excited by the growing numbers of objectors: “we’re seeing the start of a peace movement” he said, “white South Africans have in felt the past there is no place for them.. now they are realising they can make a difference.”\textsuperscript{256}

\textsuperscript{254} Conscientious Objector Jailed for Six Years. Star 6/12/88.
\textsuperscript{255} Shame and Love- Anguish as Mon Flees Army Service. Sunday Star. 30/10/88.
\textsuperscript{256} Peace Movement has Begun. Weekly Mail. 08/12/88.
In early 1989 ECC members visited Holland and Germany speaking to war resisters. Rob Goldman reported that their meetings were attended by exiles and ANC officials, and they received a very warm response.²⁵⁷

Saul Batzofin announced his refusal to attend a camp and was sentenced to 21 months in prison in March. Batzofin claimed that it was his experiences in the SADF in Namibia and its “violence against ordinary people” that lead him to object. He was particularly affected by witnessing the treatment of corpses of SWAPO members, which were mutilated and then left for wild dogs to consume. He told the court: “We did not go out of our way to help these people but were far more interested in intimidating and scaring them.”²⁵⁸ The existence of the ECC and the support it provided was for him a major factor in his decision. “I would not be acting alone”²⁵⁹ he said, and this was important to him.

In May representatives of War Resisters International, including objectors from Europe and America, toured the country. South Africa was chosen to be the focus of International Conscientious Objectors Day on May 15. Activities included a cycle tour through Germany and France and the distribution of a birthday cake in London in celebration of Bester’s 19th birthday. GOSG also launched a Release the Objectors campaign. This culminated on the 15th, when a delegation including Charles Bester’s mother and Ivan Toms handed a petition of some five thousand signatures to parliament. An attached open letter to General Malan stated: “We refuse to accept that objection to service in the SADF is a crime.”²⁶⁰ On the same day rallies and pickets were held throughout the country. The Weekly Mail carried an

²⁵⁷ EEC Conscription Speaker Returns. New Nation. 30/03/89.
²⁵⁸ Why I Refused Call-up. City Press. 19/03/89.
²⁶⁰ 5000 Call for Objectors Release. Cape Times. 16/05/89.
advert placed by the German branch of War Resisters International in which some fifty German Organisations and some 200 prominent citizens called for the release of all South African Objectors and the unbanning of the ECC. Addressing a rally at UCT the Dutch objector Peet van Reenen told the audience that the UN had earlier in the year adopted a resolution acknowledging the individual’s right to refuse to kill as a basic human right. At Wits Vietnam veteran Greg Payton spoke of the long-term psychological damage done to those confronting the horrors of war. He said that while some 58 000 Americas had died during the Vietnam War, more than 60 000 veterans had committed suicide since the end of the war. Thousands of others became drug addicts, suffered mental breakdowns or were involved in violent crimes. Howard Clark, the secretary of WRI, said that the six year sentences imposed on Bruce and Bester were the longest sentences ever inflicted on objectors anywhere in the world and that the international trend was to more lenient treatment of objectors.

In August the Castle Three case came up for appeal in the Cape Supreme Court. The Three were cleared of all charged and their sentence was laid aside. Evidence was led that they had been entrapped, that sensitive information had been deliberately leaked to them and that recording devices were used to gather evidence against them.

A young Anglican Priest, Douglas Torr notified the SADF that he would not be reporting for the August call-up and was not prepared to serve in the SADF in any capacity. Torr had been a student at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Unlike most other cities in the country the townships of Grahamstown are not hidden away, but fully visible from the white areas. White citizens of the town were thus exposed
to the activities of the SADF first-hand. For Torr, and for many other white citizens and students of Grahamstown, this was an enlightening experience. Although, as a universal pacifist, he could have applied to the Board for Religious Objection, Torr felt he had no right to special privilege and was prepared to go to prison for his beliefs.

On the anniversary of the ECC’s banning the organisation declared itself unbanned and activists embarked on a series of actions around the country. Other MDM allied organisations, including the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) followed suit.

In September a National Register of Objectors was established and was signed by 756 individuals, thus publicly announcing their intention to refuse to serve. Also, although the government had long stopped giving figures all indications showed that an ever increasing number of conscripts were simply ignoring their call-ups.

Pressure on the government continued to escalate. In early 1989 detainees around the country embarked on hunger strikes. In Namibia the UN Transitional Administration Group was installed to oversee the transition to democracy. In February David Webster, who had often spoken on ECC platforms was assassinated. In July the ANC and UDF released the Harare Declaration which outlined conditions for negotiation with the government while at the same time launching the Defiance Campaign to keep up pressure on the government. The first acknowledged meeting between PW Botha and Nelson Mandela took place in July. Botha also announced that previous secret meetings between the ANC and the government had taken place. Massive protests and corresponding repression marked the general election in September. In the Western Cape twenty people were
killed on election night alone. At a massive ‘Peace March” in Cape Town protestors were dispersed using water cannons filled with purple-dyed water. One of the protesters, ECC member Phillip Ivey, managed to take control of the water cannon turning it on police and colouring large segments of the inner city, including the NP headquarters bright purple. This became known as the (in)famous Purple Rain march and provoked much humorous comment in the press over government plans to solve the race problem by turning all inhabitants of the country purple. “The Purple shall Govern” became a popular anti-apartheid slogan and appeared around town as graffiti. Less than two weeks later another march took place, this time the 3000 plus crowd was not harassed by police. Anton Lubowski who had been part of ECC’s inaugural No War In Namibia Campaign was assassinated in Windhoek.
CHAPTER 5

THE END OF CONSCRIPTION.

“We in the ECC are proud to have made a contribution, however small, to the undermining of the machinery of apartheid, and the fostering of a spirit of non-racialism in the white community.” Final official Press statement from the ECC on announcing it’s formal disbanding.

At the last all white election in September 1989 the National Party’s majority in Parliament dropped from 124 to 103, indicating significant dissatisfaction with the government. Shortly after the election P.W. Botha was replaced as President by F.W. De Klerk in what amounted to an internal coup-de-etat by verligte (enlightened) members of the National Party. De Klerk announced to an astonished and sceptical country that he would embark on a program of real change. He began by downgrading the influence of the military in government and set about dismantling the National Security Management System and slashing the defence budget.

In October the new President announced the release of Walter Sisulu and seven other high profile ANC and PAC leaders. Police involvement in political assassination was revealed when a hit squad member, Almond Nofemela confessed on the eve of his execution that he and other operatives based at Vlakplaas had been involved in political killings and “dirty tricks” campaigns aimed at discrediting government opponents. In November general elections in Namibia were won by SWAPO. In December three police officers were killed in a car bomb explosion by fellow officers to prevent further possible revelations about covert police activity.

ECC Disbands. Citizen. 19/08/94.
On the anniversary of his imprisonment Charles Bester received a letter of support from Nelson Mandela who described him as a walking symbol whose noble deeds should be enshrined in a praise song. 262

In December the period of conscription was halved to one year. The ECC welcomed the announcement but said it would continue to work for a complete end to conscription. This was followed by an announcement that community service for religious objectors would be reduced by one year. In January it was reduced by half, to three years, as was the prison sentence for future political objectors. Neither of these reductions, however, applied to those already serving prison sentences, although they would be considered for remission of sentence on the basis of good behavior.

The laws covering objectors however remained unchanged and objectors continued to be charged. Five new objectors, Rev. Douglas Torr, Andre Croucamp, Michael Graaf, Richard Clacey and Gary Rathbone, were charged in December and January. Two more, Brendan Moran and Cobus de Swart presented themselves for call-ups and announced their refusal to serve.

In February Saul Batzofin was released after having served nine months of his sentence. The ECC was officially unbanned along with the ANC and other liberation movements. The ECC never regained its previous level of support, or activity but dedicated activists took up the campaign. The changes that had taken place during the banning period forced the organization to take stock and re-assess its role. Workshops were held around the country to discuss the future role of the organization. It was felt that the ECC had an important contribution to make to the debates around the role of the Defence Force and in the construction of a new post-apartheid South Africa. The organisation continued to call for the release of jailed objectors. Marches were held in all the main centres. Douglas Torr and Brendan Moran, both facing charges for objecting, spoke at a series of meetings around the

262 Mandel Message to CO. New Nation. 14/12/89
A new campaign was taken up aimed at exposing the recently revealed undercover activities of the Civil Co-operation Bureau.

Nelson Mandela was released to much public fanfare. The State of Emergency was partially lifted. Regulations restricting the media were removed although security regulations governing detention without trial and the prohibition of public gatherings remained in place. The Berlin Wall fell in the same month bringing a symbolic end to Soviet Communism and the Cold War. In April ANC leaders in exile began returning to South Africa, among the first were Thabo Mbeki and Joe Slovo. Shortly thereafter the first steps were taken towards formal negotiations between the government and the ANC.

The Harms commission was appointed to investigate covert police activity. It was revealed that David Webster and Anton Lubowski (among many other opponents of apartheid) had been victims of a covert police assassination squad. Gavin Evans discovered that he had been fortunate to avoid the same fate as his name had appeared on a list of intended victims. Detailed information on the ECC was found in a CCB file confiscated by officials of the commission. The information, it was found, had been gathered by informants paid to infiltrate the organization. Among these was Olivia Forsyth who had been active in the ECC at Rhodes University and later attempted to infiltrate the ANC.

In April the Appeal court overturned the mandatory six year sentence for objectors, ruling that judges should use their own discretion in sentencing. David Bruce was released after his initial sentence was set aside. On re-sentencing it was reduced to the 20 months he had already served.

In May the cases of Douglas Torr and Gary Rathbone were heard. Rathbone was acquitted. The judge found that with the recent reduction in the length of national service taken in to account, Rathbone, who had served in the Permanent Force for three years, had already
fulfilled his requirements for duty. Torr was found guilty but sentencing was postponed until later in the year, allowing the judge to consider all options.

The credibility of the ECC with the liberation movement positioned it to play the role of mediator between the state and the ANC. In May ECC members, together with the Institute for a Democratic South Africa (IDASA) arranged a meeting between SADF officers and ANC members in Lusaka to discuss a ceasefire and the formation of an integrated Defence Force. Umkhonto we Sizwe leader Chris Hani said that he did not foresee conscription as being necessary in a post-apartheid country.263

By July some 1300 individuals had signed the National Register of Objectors, announcing their intention not to serve.

Charges against Croucamp were dropped. In a precedent setting case he was recognised by the Board for Religious Objector’s and allowed to do community service, in spite of belonging to “a non-theistic mystic tradition” rather than a recognised religion.264

The ECC continued to be a target of attack. An ECC workshop at Rhodes University (now Fort Hare) in East London was bombed.265 Substantial damage was doing to the building in which the workshop was due to be held. Fortunately the workshop had been moved due to a larger than expected turnout. The focus of the workshop was on the activities of the CCB which the ECC had been working to uncover. Veterans for Victory produced a new pamphlet condemning the organization, which was handed out to conscripts reporting for the August call-up at Nasrec in Johannesburg. In October a parcel bomb exploded at the business premise of ECC member Tam Alexander, killing an employee, Nick Cruise.

263 ANCSADF Army to Join Forces? Weekly Mail. 08/03/1990.
264 Decision On Objector Sets Precedent. Star. 4/07/90.
Alexander speculated that the bomb had been intended to kill him and Cruise had been an unintended victim.\textsuperscript{266}

In August the ANC and government signed the Pretoria minute bringing to an end the armed struggle.

Charles Bester was released after having served 20 months of his six year sentence. Douglas Torr was sentenced to 12 months in jail, but was released on bail pending an appeal. Torr was eventually sentenced to community service as was Michael Graaf. Although a number of objectors announced their refusal to do military service at the time of the January call-up, only one was charged. In March 1991 Alan Storey, a young Methodist minister appeared in court for refusing to do military service. His case was remanded until later in the year. He was told that the Attorney-General was “still deciding whether to press charges.”\textsuperscript{267} Charges against him were withdrawn in June. Although conscription remained in place, no more objectors were prosecuted.

In response to the dropping of charges against Storey, Chris de Villiers, chair of the Johannesburg ECC branch claimed that “the system of conscription has become unenforceable”\textsuperscript{268} However, he continued, as long as system of call-ups for whites only was retained the ECC would continue to fight it.

In November 1990 a campaign was launched to welcome home objectors returning from exile. The first group of 10 returned at the beginning of December. Although they were warned by an SADF spokesman that they would be liable for call-up, none of them was charged. COSAWR estimated that about 10,000 people left the country to avoid conscription since 1978.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{Homemade Bomb Made of Commercial Explosives}. Citizen. 4/10/90.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Jubilation as Objector Charges are Withdrawn}. Cape Times. 18/06/91.
By the end of 1990 the country was well down the road leading to the first non-racial election and a democratic government. Although violence and turmoil continued to wrack the country, apartheid was in demise. The ECC’s objective of bringing an end to the system of compulsory conscription, although not yet fully realized, was well in sight. The SADF was still deployed in the townships, but as it became clear that the government was committed to meaningful change opposition dropped off. In light of the ongoing violence, particularly in Natal, the government was able to justify its deployment in a peacekeeping role. ECC activists continued to campaign against conscription and were now able to actively call for conscripts not to serve without fear of prosecution.

In July 1991 the ECC’s arch-enemy, Magnus Malan was demoted to the Ministry of Water Affairs and Forestry, signaling President De Klerk’s intention to reduce the influence of the military establishment. He was replaced with the verligte Roelf Meyer, who was to play an important role in negotiations with the ANC. Chris de Villiers commented that although the move was largely symbolic it was a clear signal “that the days of uncontrolled military ventures are over.”

In December an SADF spokesperson revealed that attendance for national service was at an all-time low. Although no official figures were given, ECC research showed that, nationwide only 20,000 of 27,000 called up had reported for their initial service, while attendance for camps was, on average, as low as 50%. In some particular cases only 10-15% of campers had reported.

In January there was some controversy and much debate in the media over an ECC prediction that less than 50% of those called up would report for duty. Official figures were not given, but evidence from conscripts showed that attendance figures were comparable to figures released in December for the previous year. The organization further claimed that

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269 Big ECC Hand for Cabinet Changes. Star. 31/7/91.
270 SADF Conscript Numbers Down to All-time Low. Natal Witness. 24/12/91.
since the Population Registration Act had been scrapped, a whites only call-up was actually illegal and called on youth not to register. For the first time rightwing groups, including the Conservative Party Youth and *Aksie Eie Weermag*, called on their members not to report for duty. After some initial threats, the government announced it would not prosecute those who failed to report for military service, pending the outcome of the Gleeson Commission into conscription.

In March the ECC filed an application with the Supreme Court to have conscription declared illegal. In a separate case brought by a conscript, a Supreme Court Judge ruled that it was not a criminal offence not to register. It was revealed that non-reporting conscripts were being charged and fined in military court. The ECC’s Chris de Villiers claimed this was in contradiction to assurances given by the Defence Minister that prosecutions would cease.\(^{271}\)

The government announced in May that it was introducing an amendment to the Defence Act that would broaden objection to include moral and ethical ground, but tightening up loopholes and with allowances for those refusing community service to be jailed. Objector and ECC spokesman David Bruce responded: “Conscription still only affects whites- it’s part of the apartheid structure. For the government to expect us to take these concessions seriously… is simply ludicrous.”\(^{272}\)

In September the ECC’s submission to the Supreme Court was turned down – the Court held that conscription for white men only was still legal. In response ECC published a list of 40 advocates who would be willing to defend objectors free of charge and urged conscripts not to co-operate with the SADF. The *Non Co-operation Campaign* was launched which openly called on conscripts not to serve.

In December General Liebenberg announced that the July intake of the following year would be the last whites only call-up.

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\(^{271}\) *Military Courts Prosecute Under Invalid Law.* Citizen. 21/03/92
\(^{272}\) *Relief for Army Objectors.* Cape Times. 21/05/92
In early 1993 The ECC made a presentation to the CODESA working group on security. They asked that conscription should play no role in the future arguing instead for a professional army supplemented by a short-term volunteer force.

In July 1993 the ECC held a final Peace Fair in Johannesburg, before scaling down operations and making preparations to disband. Nelson Mandela delivered the opening address. Other speakers included Albie Sachs, representatives of uMkhonto we Sizwe, war correspondent Maggie O’Kane and author Joseph Hanlon. A farewell concert was supported by a host of top musicians. An anti-militarisation group, Cease Fire, was formed to continue to work on issues around militarization in the country.

On 24 August 1993 Minister of Defence, Gene Louw, announced the end of conscription. Those who had already served however were still subject to call up for camps. Camp call-ups increased over the period of the April 1994 elections, and for the first time the ECC called on conscripts to consider these call-ups to be different from previous call-ups as troops were being used for a constructive purpose; to ensure stability and a peaceful transition. Nan Cross of the ECC claimed it was the conscripts themselves who brought an end to conscription as they “made it possible by simply staying away and making the system unworkable.”

The ECC formally disbanded in August 1994. Since the first multi-racial elections in 1994, conscription has no longer applied in South Africa and the civilian draft has been replaced with a professional standing army.

During the Truth and Reconciliation commission hearings information came to light revealing that the apartheid government had funded a number of smear campaigns against the ECC. Organisations hostile to the ECC such as the NSF, Veterans for Victory, and the

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138
Vrouefederasie were found to have received state funding and support, as had the *Aida Parker Newsletter* which had access to information confiscated from the ECC by police.

At the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the ECC there was much discussion over the legacy of the organization and in particular over the role that members could play in confronting the problems of today’s society.\footnote{274 All views here expressed in discussion on “The Meanings Of ECC” at ECC25: Stellenbosch. (2009).} Of particular concern was the lack of a “white voice” voice in contemporary South Africa. A member of the audience expressed that there is a feeling amongst progressive whites that they are not in a position to criticize the present government without being seen as racist or reactionary. One of the reasons according Cheryl Carolus, was that at the time we faced a “big fat enemy” – everyone knew who the enemy was and what the solution was whereas today things are far more complicated –we are facing many different threats and there is no one obvious problem to be tackled. She also felt that people were disempowering themselves.

To Mary Burton the problem lies in the fact that whites are still clinging to their “white” identity, that they need to move beyond this and realise that their identities are more complex than this. Janet Cherry agreed, raising the success of various initiatives such as moves to tackle xenophobia in the Port Elizabeth town ships, the successes of the LGBT movement in attaining marriage rights and the TAC in challenging government policy on the treatment of AIDS. These initiatives, like the campaign to end conscription involved people of diverse cultural and ideological background uniting around a single issue. She believes that people need to organize around issues that are relevant to them, that affect them in their everyday lives. Richard Steele responded by pointing out that many ECC activists are today still involved in movements tackling such issues—ranging from organizations addressing environmental, anti-nuclear, anti–violence, women’s, anti-militarist issues. For him the important thing is the values instilled in people by the ECC which have been retained and passed on. Zackie Achmat, speaking from the audience, expressed regret that the racial
polarization imposed by apartheid was still a problem and was in fact getting worse—and an area that needed particular attention.

Another challenge which needs to be taken up is the legacy of the apartheid wars. At the time there was little awareness of the damage done to the individual and the collective psyche by the violence of these wars. Soldiers participating in the war in Angola were part of a conspiracy of silence—the state denied it was even taking place thus there was no recognition of their action. More recently there have been a number of initiatives to addressing this issue. There have been books and films on the subject (Eat my Call-up, Troepie by Cameron Blake). Recently the play Somewhere on the Border, initially performed in 1986 was staged at Johannesburg’s Market Theatre. There have been acts of ‘personal reparation’ such as former soldiers becoming involved in clearing landmines in Mozambique or meeting with former Angolan combatants. Theresa Edelman (amongst others) at Rhodes University, has been engaging in research in the area, interviewing conscripts and writing about their experiences. It seems that individuals and society as a whole are becoming more aware that this problem needs to be tackled for healing and reconciliation to take place.

For many the TRC was the beginning of a healing process. Tim Ledgerwood was a young white conscript who deserted from the SADF during his national service and attempted to cross the border, by climbing the fence, into Botswana with the intention of joining uMkhonto weSizwe. He was captured and handed over to security police. Assuming that he was part of some conspiracy they proceeded to torture him. Ledgerwood experienced what few other white South Africans ever have—the full brunt of the horror unleashed upon black opponents of apartheid. He was beaten, shocked, suffocated, kept naked and repeatedly raped with a police baton. He claims to remember few details “except the screaming.” He was nineteen years old at the time. He spoke of his experience at the TRC, and told how
this profoundly affected his life. Previous to this, he claims, his family never spoke of his ordeal. Afterwards he said it was he had been freed from prison - it was alright to talk about it. In the act of acknowledging publically what was done to him he found healing. Of the TRC he says “there is at least one person they have helped reconcile; myself to myself.” He goes on: “Its as though we are waking up from a long, bad nightmare..we are no longer living under the tyranny of silence.”

Richard Steele addressed this issue at ECC 25 when he spoke of how the violence of apartheid continues to affect us today. Much of the violence present in our society today is a result of the conflict of the past and that for society to heal, individuals need to go through a healing process which involves confronting the past. He reversed the old struggle motto of “An injury to one is an injury to all” to become “A healing to one is a healing to all.” This is an area where essential work that has begun, in small ways, needs to be expanded. Much research and work needs to be done and ECC activists can play an important role in this task.

The ECC has also been inspiration to objectors in other countries. Objectors from Israel and Eritrea spoke at the ECC 25th anniversary. Israeli objector Yuval Auron claimed that the creative actions of ECC had provided ideas for Israeli opposition groups to take up. In Eritrea where youth face enforced conscription for indefinite periods, and objectors are often shot out of hand, the ECC slogan “Eat My Call-up” has been adopted by anti-conscription campaigners.

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276 ECC 25 Stellenbosch (2009)
CONCLUSION:

THE ROLE OF THE ECC IN THE DEMISE OF APARTHEID.

“You are among those who rejected the privileges of white minority rule and instead chose to fight for peace. Your campaign against conscription put you firmly on the side of the democratic forces and contributed considerably to the overall efforts of the people of South Africa to overthrow racial oppression.”

— Nelson Mandela at the final ECC Fair.

According to Foucault: “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.”

The apartheid state maintained its power through the construction of a discourse of white superiority which relied on particular interpretations of such concepts as citizenship and masculinity. As Conway reminds us (quoting Roper and Tosh): “Masculinity is never fully possessed, but must be perpetually achieved asserted and negotiated.”

The same applies to many other basic concepts which were appropriated by apartheid discourse.

In keeping with Botha’s idea of ‘Total Strategy’ apartheid discourse penetrated society through all levels, even down to the domain of personal identity, prescribing normative behavior in all spheres of life, covering even acceptable dress codes. Censorship governed what one was allowed to read, look at and listen to. Conformity and obedience were highly valued. Individuality in identity and expression was frowned upon and actively discouraged, even punished.

Through its rigid control of educational and religious institutions and the media, it was able to engender in its citizens, from an early age, unquestioning acceptance of its discourse.

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277 Campaign that was a Thorn in the Ministers Flesh. Cape Times. 27/10/09.
279 Conway in Gouws (2005) p93
dominance of this discourse meant that few white South African questioned its tenets and it’s hegemonic hold over white society shaped the values and realities of that society. I have argued that for many white South Africans this amounted to a form of psychological oppression, and many would have been happy to see the end of apartheid.

The ECC’s challenge to the state went beyond merely articulating opposition to conscription. In actively modeling alternatives, it demonstrated and contested, in a practical and tangible way, through concrete example and in action, the constructed and contingent nature of the discourse and its basic suppositions. This is what made the ECC unique and was the reason it was feared by the state. One example of this was in the Working for a Just Peace Campaign where activists demonstrated what an alternative form of service would look like, undermining the concept of national service as military service. In going beyond rhetoric and providing tangible examples the ECC was effectively revealing, in action, how the apartheid state appropriated language and concepts for their own purpose, and undermining and deconstructing the state discourse of power.

Military service was the culmination of a life-long indoctrination into apartheid discourse. As I have argued it was the “finishing school” of apartheid where the logic of apartheid was taken to its ultimate conclusion and young white men were moulded into instruments of state power. State power relied on acceptance of its discourse by white South Africans. Any questioning of this was an attack on its power. The ECC found a way to use the state’s discourse against it by identifying a contradiction. It found a point of resistance. A weak link in the chain. White privilege came with a cost—it had to be fought for. To make people willing to fight, willing to kill you have to instill hatred and violence within them—and this is what apartheid did. The realities of war are harsh. Life in the army is hard. Most went because they had to, because it was expected of them, not because they wanted to. Few articulated this as a political resistance, but a significant number of white youth, and their parents, felt at least some dis-ease at the thought of military service, but the tight control of society by
apartheid authorities left no space for its expression. This was the stumbling block of apartheid discourse and the ECC was able to exploit it. The ECC was able to articulate the political root of this discontent and turn it into an instrument of change.

The objectors themselves articulated, and more importantly, modeled, through their actions, a version of masculine identity contrary to that espoused by apartheid, which was rooted in conflict, competition, control, sexism, racism, homophobia, and blind acceptance of authority. Thus they threatened the hegemonic discourse of apartheid by undermining the very nature of its definition of masculine identity. They demonstrated that a masculinity which valued co-operation, peace, equality and the questioning of authority could be just as valid and provide an alternative model. As Daniel Conway put it; “the ECC’s challenge to the supposedly ‘natural’ bonds between masculinity, military service and citizenship posed a serious threat to the states ideological foundations.”

The bravery the objectors showed in standing up to the apartheid state at a time when it was almost unthinkable for young white South Africans to do so made a huge impact and inspired others to resist. They showed that it was possible for individuals to refuse to cooperate with the apartheid.

While the state aimed to alienate and exclude the objectors, a solid body of support coalesced around them. A growing support base provided a sense of community from which “objectors could gain a sense of agency and ability politically to challenge apartheid” and planted the seeds from which the ECC would grow.

Apartheid discourse relied extensively on a particular version of Christianity as espoused by the state sponsored churches which taught that apartheid was sanctioned by God and the Bible and that Christians should submit to the state. The Christians within the ECC challenged this by showing a strong commitment to a Christian message of love and

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280 Conway In Gouws, (2005). 92
reconciliation, which viewed apartheid as heretical, and a readiness to stand up to the state. This was demonstrated by many of the objectors for whom their faith provided a strength and determination which allowed them to face persecution and imprisonment with courage and hope. Furthermore the ECC challenged the idea that morality can only come from a religious, more especially a Christian source. While the state only ever recognized Christian Universal pacifism as a grounds for objection the ECC argued for the recognition of objection regardless of religious belief.

The role of women was another area where the ECC practically modeled an alternative to the hegemonic discourse of apartheid. The ECC was confronted with a major dilemma over gender issues. (as Conway has shown) There was much support in the organisation for a more radical stance, and there was much debate over the issue. This was probably the most divisive internal issue faced by the ECC. A hard choice was made and the organisation decided strategically to avoid gender issues and maintain its focus on conscription. Nevertheless women played a prominent role in the organization and their voices and views were taken seriously. While the ECC may not have officially espoused a feminist viewpoint it certainly did challenge gender stereotyping, by contesting the hegemonic view of both masculinity and femininity. It rejected the dominant view of woman as submissive and in need of protection, in contrast to the ideal aspired to in apartheid society and it addressed the role of women in society.

Notions of peace and justice were also contested by the organisation. According to Laura Pollecute: “The apartheid government claimed that everyone lived in peace …activists were disturbing the peace”. The ECC made it clear that the two were intrinsically linked, peace was more than the merely absence of violence, but a process to be engaged in involving a change in values and transformation at a personal and societal level. As Jacklyn Cock explains: “Peace was expanded to become an animating ideology; something which

282 Cock In Gasa (2007) .258
implied collective action through a process of struggle rather than simply an outcome or event… it became linked to other elements, social justice and sustainable development.”

Although the ECC was by its nature a white organization, it maintained close links with other political organizations and activists often went to township rallies and funerals and developed friendships across the race barrier, often for the first time, and saw first hand how black South Africans lived. The presence of friendly whites in the townships made a huge impact and demonstrated to people living there that not all whites supported apartheid. The culture of non-racism developed during the struggle provided a model for the future democratic South Africa. Deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe commented on this at the 25 year anniversary at Stellenbosch. He claimed: “the ECC and conscientious objectors had an inspiring impact across the South African population in giving life to the vision of a non racial society and eloquently rebutted the argument of racially exclusivity”.

The political strategies used by ECC can be seen as another area of alternative modeling. It challenged white South African to an active resistance which went beyond the rhetorical opposition posed by most white left organizations, and in doing so built a momentum that the apartheid state itself came to fear. It used creative means to get its message across, not relying on traditional methods of politics, but finding ways of expression which its target audience could relate to, using music art and culture. Simple everyday acts like prayer, donning a T-shirt and going for a run, flying a kite, dancing became acts of protest in which anyone could participate. It took culture seriously as a site of protest and in doing so it helped create a flourishing alternative and progressive subculture. It provided exposure for musicians and artists banished to the margins by the mainstream media. It found ways to draw people who would not respond to a political message, but who could identify with the fun and vibrancy of the organization. It provided a stark and welcome contrast with the dour and somber demeanor adopted by National Party politicians and demonstrated an

alternative way of doing things. State authorities also insisted that culture and politics belonged to different realms and should be kept separate (as should religion). By demonstrating how politics infiltrated and influenced all spheres of life it challenged the compartmentalization of existence and identity into different spheres which was implicit in apartheid discourse. It also emphasized peaceful protest, challenging the concept that political power comes through the barrel of a gun and needs to be backed by military force.

Furthermore, the ECC was a thoroughly democratic organisation, with decisions debated at all levels, providing an active model of grassroots politics.

The ECC provided an alternative community to many who felt alienated by apartheid society, who felt a dis-ease with the racism, sexism and violence of conformity and the oppressive and paranoid nature of that society and allowed them to relate to other like-minded individuals. It challenged the prevailing notions of identity and provided a space for alternative expressions of identity which did not conform to, or uphold, the rigid Calvinist values of society. The ECC unmasked the arbitrary and contingent nature of the society’s norms and values and allowed for alternative modes of expression. Whites who did not “fit” the discursive categories of apartheid were under constant threat of punishment from authorities or violence from peers. The ECC brought such “outsiders” together allowing them through strength of numbers to stand up to bullying and persecution. The state played to this, realizing that many within ECC were marginalized by the expectations of their society, using this to attack members as homosexuals and misfits. In reality the ECC was one of the few gay friendly political organization and many of its members were openly gay.

It also brought together people from very different personal and ideological backgrounds, drawing together a broad coalition of white organisations and individuals, students and clerics, liberals and communists, believers and atheists, women and even members of the armed force. It was able to use this diversity to its benefit, largely avoiding ideological dogmatism and the divisive factionalism to which it so often leads. It was a model of
diversity and tolerance and demonstrated, in defiance of hegemonic discourse, that sought
to divide and compartmentalize, that individuals of very different personal and ideological
background can co-operate towards a common goal.

The ECC also played an important role in educating the white public. Most whites took the
discourse of apartheid at face value and were ignorant as to the extent of the ongoing
violence, and of nature of its dynamics. The state control of the media was extreme and
ensured this. The ECC provided an alternative source of news and informed people of the
true nature of the conflict in the country. By holding an unrelenting spotlight on the SADF
and state military activity it revealed the duplicities and contradictions of the entire apartheid
edifice and the discourse that upheld it. By illuminating the links between conscription and
apartheid and the role the SADF played in its perpetuation, it played an important role in
getting people to question and challenge the system. It challenged whites to question their
identity, their history and their contribution to maintaining an unjust system.

In a very real sense white South Africans were “enslaved by fear, ignorance and avarice,” and the members of the ECC were fighting their own personal battle for liberation, for
themselves and the broader white community, from the psychological oppression of
apartheid. Richard Steele referred to the ECC and COSG as a “crucible for the
transformation of white identity.” By this he means that the ECC allowed members to shed
their identity as part of the white oppressor class and become activists in the struggle for
meaningful change in the country. By linking conscription to the broader struggle against
apartheid the ECC provided an outlet for expression of resistance. It allowed White South
Africans to be part of the liberation struggle and in Mandela’s words to “stand firmly on the
side of the democratic forces.” Amical Cabral wrote “The revolutionary petite bourgeoisie
must be capable of committing suicide as a class in order to be reborn as revolutionary
workers, completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which it

Those who broke rank with apartheid and its military apparatus were rejecting the privileges of white power, and actively working at weakening it’s power base. They were opening themselves to persecution from authorities and alienation from their friends, family and community, so as to stand on the side of justice. The objectors certainly, and to a lesser extent the members of the ECC provided an active demonstration of what this class suicide entailed. They can say, along with Richard Steele: “I have no reason to feel guilty. I can look black people in the eye because I was a freedom fighter too.”

The example and legacy of the ECC offers a way forward. People have become discouraged by the fact that the “New” South Africa has not met their expectations. However I agree with Mary Burton when she says: “We have a right not only to criticize what is wrong but to celebrate what is right.” Much has changed for the better. Much is still wrong. By taking seriously the idea that “the personal is the political”, Richard Steele reminds us, we become aware that all our actions are linked in some way, that we cannot separate the realm of politics from religion from culture or from personal morality. It reminds us that change begins with ourselves and we need to find ways, as the ECC did, to demonstrate and actively model the changes we would like to see in society. The example of the ECC encourages us to take up issues that affect us personally and to find creative ways to solve them—to reach across ideological, racial, religious and cultural barriers, always challenging and questioning the discourse which frames and limits our thinking. The history of the ECC shows that all South Africans, regardless of class, race, religion and ideology, have an important role to play in building the future. In listening and responding to the voice of those who lie prostrate before Benjamin’s ‘triumphal procession’ we bring it to a halt and reclaim its spoils.

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286 *Hell No We Won’t Go*. Mail and Guardian. 25/08/2008.

287 ECC 25: Stellenbosch.
While it may be true, as Callister argues that ECC never mobilized a significant mass political resistance to conscription it did see the successful implementation of its primary goal. The strength of the ECC lay not in its numbers but in its vibrancy and creativity. While it is true that only a small number actively and publically objected to military service, many tens of thousands more simply never reported for duty, indicating a widespread opposition to conscription. Not all who refused to serve, or who challenged conscription became active members of the campaign, nor indeed did so on political grounds, but the message of the campaign struck a deep chord within white society and resonated way beyond the circles of its active membership. It was largely due to the efforts of the ECC that conscription became such a highly contentious issue within apartheid society.

. Conscription ended because apartheid ended. What is debatable is to what extent this was due to the efforts of ECC. The end of apartheid was brought about by a myriad combination of factors, but is ultimately attributable to the fact that the cost of maintaining apartheid became too high. Pressure on the apartheid state came from the armed struggle, the mass revolt of the people of the country, and the efforts from the international community to isolate the state. There was no military victory or other decisive event which brought the collapse of the system, rather a sapping of will to pay the cost.

While the ECC may not have been, as Conway, contends radical in an ideological sense, it did pose a radical threat to the state. The effect of the organization and its message can be measured in the response it received from the apartheid authorities. They clearly saw it as a radical threat and an important component of the struggle against apartheid. The extreme lengths they went to undermine the organization and discourage objection indicate a real fear of its potential ability to emasculate state power to enforce apartheid.

The ECC undermined the apartheid state by consolidating an active white resistance to its abuse of military power. It was able to articulate the political roots of the general dis-ease felt by many white South African's and to forge this into a political tool. Furthermore it mobilised
from within the very group upon which the state relied for it’s power. In identifying conscription as the crucial issue, as both the means by which young white South Africans, as soldiers, contributed directly to upholding apartheid and as the cost they paid for it’s perpetuation, it revealed a weak link in the apartheid edifice, a “point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” It challenged white South Africans to question the role of the SADF and its use of its white youth, at the cost of their innocence and their lives, in upholding apartheid and showed a way to resist. It encouraged many white South Africans, who would not have had the strength to do so on their own, to defy the authority of the apartheid state. It also showed that co-operation across the barriers imposed by apartheid was possible and pointed the way to a non-racial future. More importantly it went beyond criticism and challenged the underlying assumptions of apartheid discourse by actively modeling alternatives, thus deconstructing apartheid discourse and revealing the possibility of alternative discourses. Black South Africans had always known apartheid was immoral and untenable. It was only when white South Africans began to realize that the cost of maintaining it would be perpetual war and international isolation, a cost too high to bear, and to envisage other possibilities, that peaceful change rather than violent revolution became possible. By contributing to the cost of maintaining apartheid and by undermining the primary tool of its enforcement, the SADF, and the discourse by which it perpetuated it’s power, the ECC added to the pressure being brought to bear on the apartheid state and thus played a maybe small but certainly important role in its demise.
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