

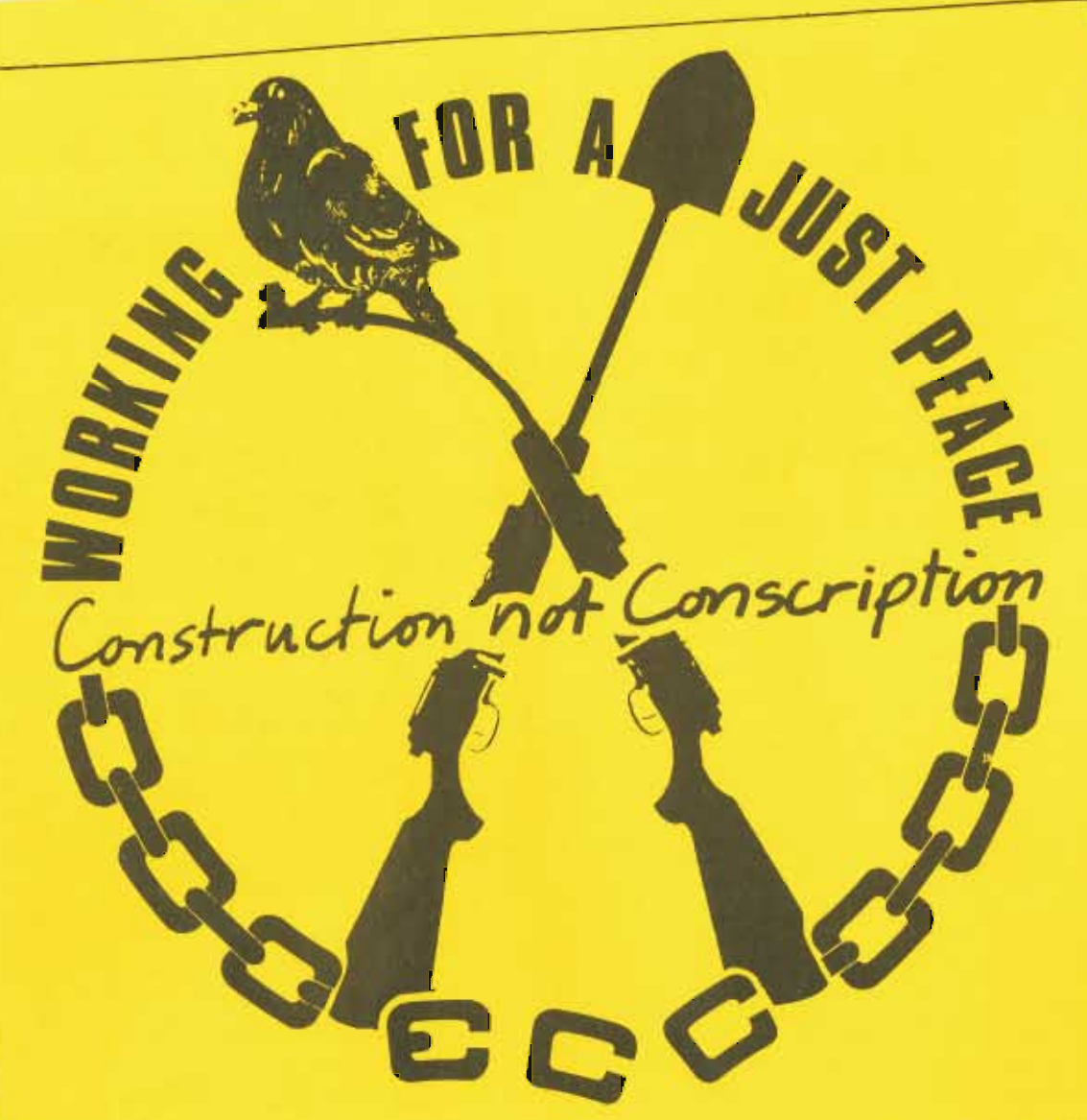
7. ALTERNATIVE SERVICE PROJECTS

The ECC believes these proposals are practical and achievable. In order to demonstrate this, the ECC has embarked on a number of alternative service projects. Most of these were clustered together in the first quarter of 1986. We entitled these "Working for a Just Peace".

Six hundred volunteers around the country worked on projects that we believe constitute real national service. We helped plant trees, renovate creches, lay water pipes and clear rubbish in black communities. We were welcomed with open arms by township residents at a time when they were strongly demanding the withdrawal of the SADF.

ECC believes that these projects not only showed the viability of a system of alternative national service, but also (in a limited way) the nature of that service.

'Working for a Just Peace' ECC Campaign for 1986



Ever thought about helping build a children's home, painting a hospital ward or laying a rural water pipe instead of patrolling the township in browns?

These are the kind of things the End Conscription Campaign will be doing in April this year.

ECC is committed to solutions to the conflict in our country that do not involve military or police intervention. We are opposed to conscription into the SADF and to the militarisation of South African society. We believe in constructive community service that crosses racial barriers, building bridges to a better future. To illustrate this, we have embarked on an ambitious country-wide campaign: "Working for a Just Peace".



WORKING FOR A JUST PEACE

The "Working for a Just Peace" campaign is a protest against compulsory conscription into an army that, at the very least, plays a controversial role. The campaign is an active call for viable and beneficial alternatives.

On the 13th August 1985, something unusual happened at "The Castle", Cape Town. In this building, that has immense historical and symbolic importance to the SADF, two End Conscription Campaign representatives stood before General Jannie Geldenhuys, head of the SADF, and several other senior SADF personnel.

ECC was giving evidence to the Geldenhuys Commission, which is, amongst other things, examining the question of conscription.

The ECC told the Geldenhuys Commission that all people, who, in good conscience, found themselves unable to serve in the SADF, should be allowed to do a realistic period of useful alternative service. We will only know how they received our detailed suggestions when the committee reports to parliament in this session.

But we haven't left it there. We are launching a campaign which is called: ECC - Working for a Just Peace.

In April of this year, thousands of volunteers throughout the country will set to work on constructive community-based projects. Some will be helping in child care centres, some will be repainting houses for the aged and others will be assisting communities that have recently been resettled.

We will be doing these things, not only because they are useful in themselves, but to demonstrate that national service has more than one meaning.

Conscription into the SADF is posing a very serious dilemma for many South Africans. This is not surprising. There has been considerable controversy over the role of the SADF in the current South African crisis - in particular their role within the black townships and schools.

Further, in democratic societies, the government would be fully mandated by all citizens to use the army where they deemed necessary. But in South Africa, the state is unaccountable to huge sectors of the population.

In this situation, ECC's central concern is that conscripts have the right to choose - the right to decide whether they can participate in this army or not. Compulsory conscription gives most people no choice.

The few who have an alternative are universal religious pacifists - people who on religious grounds would not serve in any army in any war. Those who are accepted by the Board for Religious Objectors face a punitive six years alternative service in a government department.

But those who cannot, on moral or religious grounds, serve in the SADF, have a choice of six years in prison or a life in exile.

We are not opposed to a 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 to help lay a water pipeline in a rural area, paint hospital paediatric wards, build a home for handicapped children or help preserve the natural environment, we will be demonstrating what a genuine national service could be like.

We will also be indicating the manner in which community service projects should be decided upon, for each project has only been embarked on after much consultation with the communities concerned.

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.

Projects for a Just Peace

As part of our national campaign, we have undertaken projects that will serve the community directly. These include environmental projects, health and health-care related work, projects that are directed towards children and the elderly, as well as symbolic actions epitomising the notion of a just peace.

In Durban, the ECC will be repainting two paediatric wards at a local hospital and we will be helping establish and stock an art workshop. Other projects involve fencing a creche and clearing a park. In Pietermaritzburg, the major focus is on an agricultural and building project in the township communities.

Cape Town ECC will be helping refurbish both an orphanage and a old-age home. We are out alien vegetation and we will be assisting township residents to learn to drive. Port Elizabeth ECC will be renovating a creche and an old-age home. In Johannesburg, we will be helping build a home for mentally handicapped children and will be assisting in the running of holiday camps for children.

Such a variety of projects demonstrates the numerous ways in which a community and country can be served without resorting to military means. We hope to demonstrate that the true patriots of our country are not on the borders, but are, unrecognised, working for the communities that need them.

ECC - A Phenomenal Growth

... From a resolution passed at the 1983 Black Sash conference, to a burgeoning movement of resistance to compulsory conscription into the SADF.

That is the story of ECC's brief history.

The Black Sash resolution prompted the coming together of what eventually amounted to 50 organisations opposed to conscription. By 1985, branches had been set up in six centres, with the possibility of three more being established during 1986.

In the interim, ECC established a presence on the streets in a way best reflected by the attendance over 4 000 people at an ECC Peace Rally in Cape Town in October last year.

Support for ECC has not only come from within our borders. Throughout the world, organisations have expressed support for the campaign. Many sent messages to ECC on the occasion of the first national Peace Festival, held in June last year. Attended by 400 delegates and 2 000 participants, the festival was in many ways the national launch of the campaign. It showed that beyond all doubt the campaign had come to stay and would continue to grow until the day that conscription is ended.

Despite our successes, the system of conscription remains; the troops are still in the townships and conscripts still face the dilemma of participation. It is this that has prompted ECC to put renewed energy into the Working for a Just Peace Campaign.



WHO DOES NATIONAL SERVICE SERVE?

WE HAVE NO CHOICES GIVE US ALTERNATIVES


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JOIN OUR PROJECTS...

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