

REPORT OF ANTI-CONSCRIPTION COMMITTEE

Brief outline of resistance to the military :

An estimated 3 000 to 4 000 fail to report to service each year. Between 1977 and 1981, four CO's were tried. Their stands were based on religious beliefs, with some criticism of apartheid. CO support groups (COSG's) formed in support of these isolated individuals.

In 1982 the call up period was extended, and Billy Paddock objected on the first overtly political basis, focusing on the notion of structural violence. These two events provided the basis for a focus on the military.

In 1983, Pete Hathorn in his stand focussed on the role of the SADF in our society. His stand was followed by Paul Dobson who objected after serving 14 months in the SADF as a non-combatant participating in the Civic Action Programme. The most recent objector, Brett Myrdal, posed the Freedom Charter as a positive alternative to the present system of government in South Africa.

1983 Defence Amendment Act

This act increased the length of sentence for C.O. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the length of remaining service, or 18 months - whichever is the greater. It also divided religious pacifists from other objectors. It was in this climate that the Black Sash made its call to end conscription. In July at the National C.O. support group gathering, discussion around the call took place and what at first seemed like a serious crisis for the C.O. movement was turned into a call with significant political potential. The COSG's decided to take up this call thereby effectively moving from atomised support for individual objectors to a broader anti-military stance.

Rationale for the campaign

The South African state is becoming increasingly militarised. SADF involvement in all aspects of society from the level of the State Security Council to that of education makes this an important issue which we need to address ourselves to. With the introduction of the Defence Amendment Act (1983) the opportunities for raising questions around C.O.'s is diminished.

The call to end conscription opens up new opportunities for taking up the issue of militarization which has a number of advantages over simply taking up the stand of C.O.'s. These include :

1. The potential for a systematic programme of education which is greater than that of an issue-based response to the stand of individual C.O.'s.
2. It is more accessible to students because it is less threatening than the challenge of C.O. while retaining its personalised appeal.
3. The call to end conscription falls within a liberal framework of freedom of choice and many students will already identify with the PFP's call for a volunteer army.
4. It provides an opportunity to strengthen existing alliances with black organisations and develop relationships with liberal and church groupings on and off campus
5. It can tap the reluctant attitude which many students have towards the SADF.

Problems envisaged

1. It is an 'unrealistic demand' which the government cannot afford to meet and which students may find difficult to conceptualise
2. A deeply entrenched fear of the 'external communist' threat which may result in antagonism towards the campaign.
3. The extent of government propaganda which will continually undermine the rationale of the campaign.

Guidelines for the campaign

- (a) Starting point : It became clear during the committee session that we are unsure of the attitudes of students on our campuses to the issue of conscription. We therefore need to find a way of gauging student opinion at the start of the campaign, in order to develop an appropriate starting point. One suggestion was a survey, which would serve two functions :
- (i) to give us some idea of trends of attitudes (and this would be particularly useful if different constituencies could be assessed in this way) and
 - (ii) to raise the issue in an accessible way and begin the process of questioning. Another important way to inform our starting point would be to assess the extent of education around the anti-constitution campaigns on our different campuses, which would allow us to extend this to the issue of militarisation.
- (b) Organisational forms : The committee felt that the organisational forms which would be most effective in reaching the broadest range of students on campuses would be either an ad hoc committee or an alliance/front. It will be important to work with liberal, religious and women's groupings, either through the off-campus committees initiated by COSG's and/or on campus. Nusas can provide useful resources to these groupings in the course of the campaign.

Specific campus organisations and SRC subcommittees can take up particular dimensions of the campaign and appeal to specific constituencies in this way (eg. Women's Movments can hold workshops in women's reses around the effects of conscriptions and militarisation on their male peers and themselves). The role of media and, in particular, student newspapers, in giving ongoing profile and content to the campaign, will be crucial. These methods, together with the nature of the issue, create the potential for a broad-based campaign.

It was felt that different campuses may need to assert Nusas profile in the campaign to greater or lesser degrees. Nevertheless some level of Nusas national co-ordination was felt to be important, particularly through regular assessments at National Councils, and the swapping of ideas, information and resources.

- (c) Effect of Extension of Conscription: With the impending extension of conscription to so-called Coloured and Indian men, the potential exists for building non-racial alliances with black student and youth organisations, as well as progressive church groupings. While these opportunities exist, the exact nature of the relationships are not clearly defineable at this stage.

- (d) Content of campaign : It was felt that the campaign would differ from other campaigns, which have had a higher profile in the commercial press and SABC. A profile can be built up through integration of the campaign into our other activities. The links to a variety of issues can easily be drawn. In this way the campaign can be highlighted in the process of building up a coherent and in-depth picture of South African reality : conflict, bantustans and continued African exclusion, attempts at co-option of sectors of the oppressed in response to the State's crisis, the constitution and tricameral parliamentary elections ... In this context we can (continue to) popularise UDF as an alternative to a divided society fraught with conflict and inequalities, in which the call to end conscription is, by nature, a call for a changed society.