

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

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27 February 1992

Dear Sirs

SUBMISSION BY THE END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN TO CODESA WORKING GROUPS NOS. 1 AND 3

In response to the invitation to make submissions to Codesa, we submit herewith a copy of our policy on conscription in a post-apartheid South Africa, which was adopted at the ECC's national conference in May 1991. We also attach a copy of a Johannesburg ECC discussion paper which was circulated in December 1990, and a copy of an article submitted recently to the Human Sciences Research Council for publication in their Journal.

We believe that the enclosed documents make out a convincing case for the scrapping of conscription, particularly the present system of whites-only conscription, and for the introduction of a professional defence force supplemented by volunteers, subject to the provisos mentioned.

As far as interim measures concerning control of the security forces are concerned, we have noted recent statements by the Government to the effect that they consider such interim control to be "unacceptable". We consider this position to be untenable, and would suggest that it is, in fact, essential that a non-partisan body be set up to which the security forces are accountable while the country is under interim rule. We believe that it is important that such a body should not merely be a token body, and that mechanisms should be established for exercising effective supervision of the security forces at all levels. Despite Government denials, it appears indisputable that the security forces continue to be involved in politically motivated activities (such as the training of "hit squads" and the funding of political organisations). If the supervision which is exercised over the security forces in the interim period is not sufficiently strict and far reaching to prevent such activities from continuing, it is possible that reactionary elements in the security forces may attempt actively to derail the negotiations process.

If further information is required, or if there are any queries, you are invited to contact the ECC national office on telephone number (011) 836 8423 or to write to us at the above postal address. There are several articles and documents in existence which are relevant to the issue of conscription, which have been excluded from this submission for the sake of brevity.

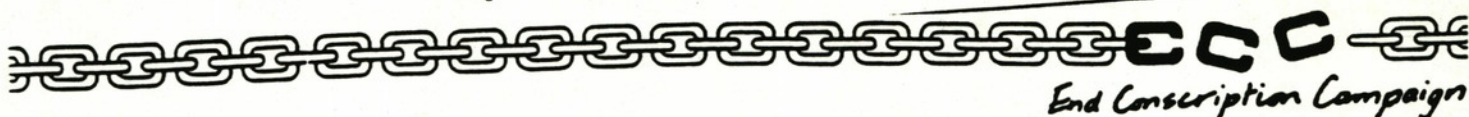
Yours faithfully

Chris de Villiers

CHRIS DE VILLIERS

For: The End Conscription Campaign

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End Conscription Campaign

ARTICLE FOR HSRC

The current military call-up system, in place since 1969, formed part of a deliberate government strategy to militarise and politicize white youth, and to orient them favourably towards the status quo. That this system succeeded to a large extent is undeniable. Thus, it should be clearly understood that the conscription system did not serve merely to create a large pool of whites who had undergone military training and who could be called up to counter a threat to the government (whether internal or external), but also served to politicize and indoctrinate white youth in line with the now discredited "total onslaught" ideology of the SADF.

Resistance to conscription over the years has been, almost exclusively, religiously and politically motivated. Only recently have the compelling economic arguments against conscription been marshalled against the present system. However, the bottom line remains that it is impossible to build an accountable, neutral, national defence force on the fundamentally unfair and racist basis of the present conscription system. It is worth noting that the SADF claims to have more black volunteers presently serving in the permanent force than the number of white conscripts presently called up. Given the clearly reduced military needs of the government (even seen entirely from the government's own perspective), there appears to be no rational explanation for the perverse retention of whites-only conscription, particularly in the light of the political controversy caused by the system. Possible explanations include a reluctance to alter the internal structure of the SADF at the present time, due to political instability at high levels, or perhaps a reluctance to make a concession which would be seen as significant in a symbolic sense by conservatives. The most likely reason would be a reluctance to relinquish the "ace up the sleeve" which the white-controlled SADF represents to the Nationalist government.

The main argument put forward in favour of conscription is that it is a cheaper system than running a fully professional defence force, or a hybrid system as proposed below. Arguments of this kind are fatally flawed by the blithe assumption that the only costs to the state of a conscription system are those reflected in the military budget. Of course it is cheaper for the military to pay a conscript a token wage, rather than to pay a volunteer or a professional career soldier a professional wage. However, such arguments conveniently overlook the hidden costs of conscription to the economy. These hidden costs include the loss of income of conscripts, particularly in the case of skilled individuals, with the resulting loss of tax revenue to the state. The conscription system is intrinsically inefficient, with individual conscripts being far less motivated than well paid professionals or volunteers. The administration or bureaucracy required to run a conscription system is enormous, would be increased dramatically if all black citizens were to be included in the system. A very large proportion of the present permanent force is involved in administering the call-up system. Many more are involved in the inefficient training of new batches of conscripts at six monthly intervals. In fact, the system is so inefficient that conscripts themselves are drawn into the administration and training procedure, as the SADF chokes on its own bureaucracy.

The ECC proposes the following as an alternative to the present system of whites-only conscription: The core of a new defence force should comprise professional career officers and a professional permanent force. Existing SADF personnel should not automatically fill these positions. In fact, the present permanent force includes large numbers of incompetent, inefficient bureaucrats who should ideally be weeded out. Equally, members of other forces such as Umkhonto we Sizwe should not automatically be absorbed in the existing defence force. Rather, suitable volunteers from the SADF and other military forces should be selected for a new defence force. Supplementing the permanent force should be a professional force of short-service volunteers. Such volunteers could serve a two to four year period before retirement into a reserve. Recruits could be accommodated in existing SADF facilities with no difficulty. These volunteers should be paid a realistic wage, and would be much more cost effective employees than unwilling conscripts who serve only a few months after their training is complete. The present short period of initial service means either that training must be skimped on in order to make trainees available reasonably quickly, or else that well-trained soldiers are released back into civilian life after a very short period of useful service to the military. The use of short-service volunteers as proposed above will alleviate this problem, while retaining one of the benefits, in military terms, of the conscription system: the building up of a relatively large reserve or citizen force which can be called up in case of a military threat to the country.

As to the size of the future defence force, it is widely agreed that an active force of between 50 000 and 100 000 (probably around 60 000 or 70 000) would be ample for South Africa's legitimate defence needs, especially if a volunteer reserve is implemented. Given a permanent force, at present, of about 60 000, the additional salary costs would amount to less than 1% of the current military budget.

Various military commentators have made proposals which are similar to ours. The common thread in such proposals is the reliance on a professional core force supplemented by well trained volunteers who will serve for a short to medium period of between two and ten years. Militarily, systems of this kind are clearly preferable to systems relying on coerced service by unwilling conscripts. In addition, we believe that such a system will be more efficient and ultimately less expensive than a conscription system, while also satisfying those with moral objections to conscription.

CHRIS DE VILLIERS
For: The End Conscription Campaign

18 February 1991

END CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGN

POLICY ON CONSCRIPTION IN A POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

PREAMBLE

The End Conscription Campaign rejects racially-based conscription as part of a broader strategy of militarisation. We believe that this system has resulted in racial polarisation and serious damage to the social fabric of our society. Furthermore, we believe that in a post-apartheid South Africa the coercion and force that has characterised our nation in the past must be done away with. Thus, we believe that conscription, both military and non-military, should not exist.

ECC POLICY

It is the ECC's policy that military conscription should not form the basis of the personnel procurement policy of the defence force in a post-apartheid South Africa for the following reasons:

- 1) Military conscription is a violation of the individual's right to choose how he or she defines "service" to his or her country.
- 2) Military conscription results in a serious misuse of manpower, results in the wasting of time and low productivity, and is inefficient as a means of ensuring adequate troop levels or at directing skills where they are needed most.
- 3) While recognising that there may be a need for nation building, particularly among the youth, the ECC believes very firmly that military conscription is an inappropriate vehicle for such a program. Instead, we believe that opportunities should be made available for those who wish to volunteer for military or non-military service.
- 4) South Africa has no need for a large defence force requiring universal conscription. The vast number of conscripts resulting from such a system would place an intolerable burden on state resources, without contributing to the upliftment of disadvantaged communities. While a ballot system could be used to control the numbers of conscripts, such a system nevertheless would require a vast bureaucracy to monitor potential and actual conscripts, and is, in a sense, the worst of both worlds.
- 5) The ECC believes that the effects of racial polarisation in our country will not disappear overnight, and that there will continue to be groups and individuals who resist conscription, for various reasons. Thus, we believe that conscription remains a recipe for ongoing polarisation and conflict, even if carried out on a non-racial basis.

The ECC further believes that a system of non-military conscription is undesirable and should not be introduced. Many of the above objections to military conscription apply equally to non-military conscription. In addition, the portion of the population potentially available for non-military conscription is huge, and could amount to several hundred thousand individuals per annum. Clearly, it is impracticable to introduce a "nation building" program involving so many people. On the other hand, we doubt that it would be possible to find an equitable basis for selectively conscripting people into such a program. Thus, we believe that such a system would simply place great pressure on the State's resources, and would be too large and clumsy for the effective implementation of development programs.

In the event of a democratically elected future government deciding that military conscription should be re-introduced, the ECC believes that the right of individuals to object to military service on grounds of conscience must be recognised. In such a scenario, we believe that conscientious objectors should be offered non-military service on request, on an entirely non-punitive basis, with the option of service in non-governmental bodies. This right should be entrenched in a Bill of Rights.

MILITARY CONSCRIPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE PAST,
THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.

A JOHANNESBURG ECC DISCUSSION PAPER.

DECEMBER 1990

INTRODUCTION

This paper has emerged from a series of formal and informal discussions with a wide range of political and religious groupings in South Africa. These include members of the ANC, members of the Democratic Party, Citizen Force officers in the SADF, office bearers of various religious organisations, and others. The purpose of this paper is to stimulate debate, both within ECC structures and in public forums, on the future of military conscription and possible alternatives to it. The paper does not purport to be a definitive exposition of ECC policy, or to provide all the solutions to a complex problem. Rather, it is a contribution to what we believe should be a popular debate on an important issue, one which is of concern to all political groupings in South Africa.

ECC'S OBJECTIONS TO THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF CONSCRIPTION

The ECC's opposition to the current system of military conscription in South Africa is based on the racist nature of the call-up, and the nature of the role played by the SADF in South Africa. Without dwelling unduly on the past, it is important to remember key elements of the SADF's defence of apartheid and white minority rule in southern Africa:

- * The occupation of Namibia.
- * The invasion of Angola.
- * Military raids into neighbouring states.
- * The assistance of rebel elements in neighbouring states for the purpose of destabilising those states.
- * The ruthless suppression of popular resistance in the townships under the state of emergency.
- * The murderous activities of the Civil Cooperation Bureau.

It must be borne in mind that the present Nationalist government and the present leadership of the SADF were responsible for the above listed events.

The fact that only whites are forced to perform military service is, in itself, an anomaly. This is particularly so in the present climate of de-racialisation and normalisation of our society. The maintenance of such a racist system continues to suggest that only whites have enough to defend to accept being conscripted. It also casts doubt on the bona fides of the government and the SADF, who are suspected of wanting to maintain a white-dominated force which can be deployed against the black majority in a last ditch "backs-against-the-wall" scenario.

Whites-only conscription continues to polarise our youth, the very section of society which should be encouraged to prepare for a social and political future in which race plays no role. Finally, there are the social and economic costs of conscription, including the loss of skilled workers from the economy, the brain drain, and many hidden costs.

The ECC believes that it is absolutely clear that the existing racist system of conscription is entirely unacceptable, and must be done away with urgently. The question is, what will replace it?

CONSCRIPTION AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

The main argument in favour of retaining conscription in a future democratic South Africa is one of economics. It is argued that poorly-paid conscripts are cheaper than professional soldiers. It is further argued that a conscript army is much less likely to be susceptible to involvement in a coup d'etat, or to commit atrocities in times of war. There are also arguments that compulsory military service has a beneficial effect on the conscript himself - it "makes a man of him". Let us examine these arguments.

The economic argument for conscription is the most superficially compelling. If we can't afford an alternative system, won't we just have to accept conscription? The economics of conscription relate to scale. Obviously, if one wants to raise an army of, say, 250 000 troops, conscripts will be cheaper than professionals. But what number of soldiers is required? At the Lusaka conference held in May 1990 between SADF members, ANC representatives and a range of other groupings, it was widely agreed that the SADF's present active strength of approximately 100 000 should be halved to approximately 50 000. Assuming a Permanent Force of approximately 20 000 (as at present) this would require 30 000 conscripts to be serving at any one time. Let us assume that the average conscript is paid R150 per month, compared with a professional soldier's pay of R1 000 per month. The annual salary saving brought about by conscription is thus R306 million. A lot of money? Yes indeed, although a small proportion of a military budget of R10 billion, or R10 000 million!

So we see that even in a realistic future South African scenario, using conscripts instead of professional soldiers will reduce military expenditure, on the present military budget, by just 3%.

For that saving, we are then faced with having to train 30 000 new soldiers per year, from scratch. Assume that the period of conscription is one year, as at the present. In order to achieve high standards, approximately 3 to 6 months of the year will be consumed in training, so that the availability of trained conscript soldiers is reduced by 25% to 50%. Needless to say, the cost of facilities and personnel allocated to training will be disproportionately high. In fact, this cost alone can be expected to largely cancel out the wage saving due to conscription. In addition, the administrative costs of

registering, monitoring and calling up millions of potential conscripts are enormous. At the end of their year of service, conscripts will be released into the economy, there to unlearn their expensive military skills. Of course, in a military conflict, those ex-conscripts might be called up, retrained and sent into battle. However, in peacetime this waste of resources becomes even more difficult to justify.

As far as the hidden economic costs of conscription are concerned, the 1989 report by the Centre for Policy Studies at the Business School of the University of the Witwatersrand provides detailed and startling figures of the cost to the country of withdrawing economically active people from circulation, and losing thousands of graduates to foreign countries in the "brain drain".

How would conscription be effected in the above scenario? Assuming, again, a halved personnel requirement in the future, one half as many conscripts as at present would have to be selected from the entire population - a pool five to six times bigger. (The pool is bigger still if age distribution is taken into account). Thus, only 1 in 10 male youths need be conscripted. If women are also conscripted (and why not?), the figure drops to 1 in 20 young people. This can be achieved by a ballot system. Of course, the arguments for the benefit of military service are rather diluted by such a system. And what about the problems? Imagine 1 in 10 or 1 in 20 whites, about half of whom could be called "right-wing", being conscripted into a largely black, non-racial defence force. Would they go? Don't bet on it. Recently, the Conservative Party put the issue of resisting conscription on its agenda. We suggest that such a system is a recipe for ongoing conflict and polarisation.

What about the arguments that conscripted armies are less likely to commit atrocities or to become involved in coups? On the first score, the history of the last two World Wars, the Vietnam war and our own border war should convince idealists that atrocities are not committed by fanatical hordes of brainwashed "gooks". They are committed by people like us, pushed beyond breaking point by a situation not of their own making. Were all the soldiers involved in World War Two German atrocities volunteers or card carrying members of the National Socialist Party? Were the Americans responsible for the My Lai massacre all professionals? What of the rapes, murders, torture and even mutilation of cats committed by our very own "boys" on the border? Atrocities can only be prevented by top quality training and discipline, instead of blatant propaganda and the dehumanisation of the "enemy".

As for coups, these generally involve a small core of senior or middle ranking officers, and not the rank and file of the armed forces. The best way to prevent a situation developing in which a coup becomes a possibility is to ensure full accountability of the military to civilian government, and to stamp out secret empires and power cliques within the military. If our own recent history has not taught us how important this is, then truly we have learned nothing.

ALTERNATIVES TO CONSCRIPTION

What are the alternatives to conscription? The ECC believes that the exact details of a new defence force for South Africa should be hammered out democratically, either in a process of negotiations or by democratically elected representatives. In constituting a new defence force, we believe that the following points should be taken into account:

- * It should be non-racial.
- * Its primary role should be the protection of South Africa's territorial integrity.
- * It should uphold democratic values and be completely accountable to Parliament (or its equivalent).
- * Its appointments and recruitment should be on merit alone.
- * It should adhere to the Geneva Convention and all other treaties and protocols governing the conduct of war.
- * The new defence force should be a professional organisation with high standards of efficiency.
- * The new defence force should be committed to the non use and non development of nuclear, germ and biological modes of warfare.

It is suggested that the new defence force comprise a fully professional permanent force and a short service volunteer force. The latter force would be recruited from the public and recruits would serve a period between two and four years (depending on practical requirements) before retirement into a reserve force. Present SADF and MK members should be invited to serve in the new defence force voluntarily. A joint SADF/MK committee could decide on appropriate placement and rank of such personnel. Members of the "Homeland" armies should likewise be invited to serve. The type of equipment required by the new defence force will tend to be "lower tech" than much of that presently in use or under development. In any event, the United Nations arms embargo can be expected to fall away, so that the uneconomical development of local "hi-tech" weapons systems will become redundant. The resultant saving will more than compensate for the slight extra direct cost of replacing conscripts with professionals.

What about interim measures? Won't it be a long and difficult process to replace conscripts with volunteer professionals? Not at all. The problems are mainly political, not practical. Firstly, the basic training infrastructure is already in place, and is geared up to deal with twice as many recruits as the number envisaged. As early as the time of the next August call-up, conscripts could be replaced with volunteers. Accommodation, training facilities and equipment are available for them. All that is required is an acceptable political framework within which to operate. In the meantime, no doubt, the government and the SADF will continue to rely on the crumbling system of whites-only conscription. It is to be hoped that the inevitable morale crisis in the SADF will not contaminate the new defence force.

WHAT IF CONSCRIPTION IS RETAINED AFTER ALL?

The ECC believes that conscription is undesirable, even in a new, democratic South Africa. However, if a fully democratic decision were made in future to retain or reintroduce conscription, we would have to abide by that decision. In such a case, we would insist on the right to conscientious objection for any conscript, with an option of non-military community service on a non-punitive basis. In any event, we believe that the chances of conscription being retained in the future are negligible.

In summary, the ECC believes that the existing system of racist whites-only conscription is doomed, and must be replaced urgently by an acceptable system. It is hoped that the above proposal will stimulate an open debate on the issue, a debate which is long overdue.

Chris de Villiers
ECC Chairman (Johannesburg).