

EDITORIAL



Each year on 21 March, we mourn the people of Sharpeville gunned down by the police during an unarmed protest. 25 years later to the day, police gunned down unarmed people at Uitenhage who were mourning those already killed in recent protests. We salute the brave people of Kwanobuhle and Langa and mourn their dead with them.

The events at Uitenhage are not isolated. They are part of a continuous pattern of brutal repression. The actions of the police and army in Soweto, the Vaal townships, Cradock, Soweto - to name a few recent examples - show up 'reform' as a mask for repression. They also show the increasing co-operation between the police and army, working in increasingly similar ways.

Mr Botha - what has been 'reformed' since the days of Verwoerd and Sharpeville? People living in desperate poverty must bear the burden of constantly rising prices - food, sales tax, housing and transport prices. The army's massive growth draws billions of rands a year which could be used to stop the poverty, not to build weapons with which to silence the resistance of the people.

1985 is International Year of the Youth: Peace, Participation and Development. Yet in our country, children do heavy work; children starve in the homelands and townships. Children have been killed, wounded and gone missing in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere. Children have been shot in the streets by police; while other children are prepared for military training. In the light of the latest police violence, we applaud the stand taken recently by the young policeman, Mark Nel, to discontinue his 'service' in the policeforce.

STOP PRESS: UITENHAGE

Press reported 17 killed by police at Uitenhage last Thursday. PE Hospital authorities gave the figure of 43 dead on arrival. The estimates have jumped by scores since then. When the inconsistencies are this great, all we are certain of is we will never see published the true events surrounding the killing of innocent people in our country.

ORGANIZING

Q: Laurie, you were appointed national organiser of the ECC in January this year. What does the job entail?

A: The job involves facilitating co-ordination between the ECC's nationally, spending time in each region working with the ECC and its affiliates, doing a little research and collecting resources on conscription and militarisation and helping prepare for the ECC Festival in July.

We felt the need for a national organiser because of the rapid growth of the ECC's. This is happening because of the tremendous support for our activities - concerts, drama, public meetings, pamphlet distributions, pickets etc - from every sector of the white community that we've appealed to: the 'counter culture' youth; students, schoolchildren and their parents.

Q: How would you account for this support?

A: One reason is the energy and commitment of our members and the creativity of our activities. These are attractive to the people we're trying to reach.

The most important reason though relates to the issues we're concerned with. An extremely large number of people throughout the world find war abhorrent and care deeply about peace. This is particularly true in South Africa because of what is specific about our situation: young white men are forced to take up arms against fellow South Africans and Namibians in defence of a system that causes unbelievable suffering.

The vast majority of whites enjoy the fruits of their privileged position. Even those who are unhappy about this do little to change it. Yet serving in the SADF is something that many young people simply find intolerable because of what it represents and the role that it plays.

Conscription is also the only aspect of apartheid that is a real imposition for the white community. National service involves taking young men from their normal lives for a total of four years and subjecting them to an authoritarian structure of discipline and conditioning that is dehumanising. There is the prospect of their getting snoot and the equally grim prospect of their having to shoot others.

People are only prepared to make this kind of sacrifice if they believe it is worth it. The support demonstrated for ECC, and also the fact that over 7 000 national servicemen failed to report for duty in January this year, are an indication of the large numbers who feel it isn't worth it.



Laurie Nathan, ECC National

Q: What is the significance of the support you've generated?

A: The phenomenal support from within the white community contributes to the non-racial character of the broader struggle for a democratic society. It shows that the conflict in South Africa is not simply between blacks and whites but between democrats and non-democrats.

The support also puts pressure on the state because it comes from sectors within the ruling group that are articulate and visible - students, academics, human rights and religious groups and the churches. The formation of the Board for Religious Objection is an example of the state acknowledging and trying to deal with this pressure.

Q: Do you think that this pressure will ever be great enough to actually end conscription?

A: Look, we do sometimes get very excited about the progress we're making but we have to be realistic. For as long as apartheid remains it will be resisted and the state will attempt to suppress the resistance by violent means. The invasion of the SADF into the townships at the end of last year made clear how integral the army is to this process.

So when we call for an end to conscription and for a just peace in our land we must know that these will only be realised when apartheid is dismantled, when the real leaders of South Africa are free to take their rightful place and when all South Africans can live as equals.

Nevertheless, I think that if our support continues to grow as it did last year we will be able to win important concess-

TO STOP THE CALL-UP!



ions e.g. the right to object to national service on moral and ethical grounds and not only on religious grounds as is the situation at present.

Q: You've spoken quite a lot about working in the white community. Does ECC limit itself to this constituency?

A: Not at all. Our campaign is fundamentally non-racial and many of our affiliates work in black communities. In all regions ECC works closely with the UDF and other black groupings. ECC's have representatives on UDF committees and on the Churches International Year of the Youth committees. UDF and black church leaders speak regularly on our platforms.

We recognise though that to some extent we have to work separately and differently in the white and black communities because of the different conditions that prevail in each and because the issues of conscription and militarisation obviously don't affect them in the same way.

Q: The ECC's exist as fronts which are comprised of about 40-50 affiliated organisations. What is the basis of unity amongst these organisations?

In South Africa we're living in a state of civil war, where the degree of violence is great, and growing, and where some of us - the young men - are called up and forced to participate in this violence.

It is this situation which has drawn together the organisations that make up ECC. They have in common the following beliefs: that in Southern Africa the SADF is an aggressive and not a defence force; that in South Africa the SADF acts in defence of apartheid which is the root cause of violence; that the so-called enemy is not an external foreign aggress-

or but the South African people; and that young men should have the right not to be part of the army.

Q: This year many progressive organisations are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Freedom Charter which was drawn up in 1955 under the auspices of the Congress Alliance - the African National Congress, Coloured Peoples Congress, South African Indian Congress and white democrats in the Congress of Democrats. What is ECC's position on the Charter?

A: Some organisations in ECC regard the Charter as the most democratic document ever drawn up in our country and as the blueprint for a non-racial and democratic South Africa. However, ECC, as a broad front, cannot actually endorse the Charter.

The final demand of the Charter, 'There shall be peace and friendship', is of course of special relevance to us and reflects the spirit of the ECC. We fully support the sub-clauses of this demand, which include: 'South Africa shall be a fully independent state which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations; South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation - not war; peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights opportunities and status of all.'

Q: Are there plans to set up ECC's in other regions?

A: An ECC has just been formed in Port Elizabeth. A group of about 30 interested people from various organisations came together to talk about the End Conscription Campaign and decided unanimously that it should be taken up in PE. This decision will be discussed in the organisations that could affiliate to ECC, which will then be formally constituted. Already there are some exciting plans and ideas for action.

There are a good number of people in Pietermaritzburg who are keen to get involved in the campaign and we should be able to set one up within the next few months.

Q: You can't wait to tell us about your Festival!

A: Right! The Festival is planned for the second or third weekend of July in Joburg. On the one level we will have high profile speakers so that the Festival makes a powerful statement on conscription and militarisation - a statement which will be heard by a really large number of people in South Africa

and internationally. We've invited Beyers Naude, Sheena Duncan, Bishop Tutu, Archbishop Hurley and UDF and ECC speakers.

On another level we want to organise a whole variety of different activities - drama, seminars, workshops, videos etc - that will be exciting and informative for people who participate in the Festival. We're only at the stage of brainstorming these activities but some of the ideas so far are to focus on Namibia, Southern Africa post Nkomati, militarisation of education, South Africa's nuclear capacity, women and the military, nuclear arms buildup, the Board for Religious Objection, the South African Peace Movement in the 1950s, Bantustan armies, the hearts and minds campaign of the SADF, non-violent forms of action, the Peace Movement internationally ... I've run out of breath!

Q: Go on.

A: What I've covered so far sounds a bit academic and 'heavy'. We really want to create a festival atmosphere - many of these areas will be explored through videos and drama. The ECC's in Durban and Cape Town have drama groups, there's the play National Madness which we would like performed, and we want to end the Festival with a big anti-war concert.

We also want to strengthen ECC and its affiliates through the Festival. So organisations will be asked to prepare stalls where they can display their media and to take responsibility for certain slots.

We think that the Festival can make a really significant contribution to the growth of the peace movement in South Africa and internationally.

