

WELCOME BACK ECC

In a recent interview with OBJECTOR, ECC National Facilitator Dave Schmidt talks of ECC's re-emergence.

What made the ECC decide to start up again?

After the banning of ECC, the war resistance movement dissolved into small disparate organisations that weren't very effectual.

Towards the end of '89, there was a strong national sense that we required a unifying initiative to bring these organisations into something with political clout. It was felt that ECC's restriction order rendered effective organisation impossible and in October 1989 at a national conference, it was decided that a new anti-conscription organisation should be launched. However, there was a great deal of vagueness about the nature of the new organisation and consultation around the new organisation didn't make much progress. In January 1990, there was a burst of ECC revivalism because it became apparent that the imminent derestriction of ECC was highly likely and furthermore, it didn't seem that restriction orders were being enforced. The fact that ECC also had a profile that would take any new anti-conscription organisation a great deal of time to achieve was another important factor. So, by late January, ECC had formally reconstituted itself.

In the light of recent political developments, do you think conscription is still an issue worth mobilising around?

Conscription still exists. The dilemma of the reluctant conscript remains unresolved; objectors are still in jail or facing trial and people

who have left the country in order to avoid serving in the SADF still remain in exile. The SADF is still an instrument of the National Party and it certainly doesn't represent the interests of the majority of South Africans.

However, major political changes have taken place. Whereas in the 80's, the government placed huge importance on the army, and deliberately sought to retain political power and maintain itself by military means, De Klerk has sought to demilitarise our society. The influence of the military on state policy has been reduced and conscription is not the issue it was in the minds of South Africans. ECC thus has to adapt or become peripheral. The challenge facing ECC is to define its role and position meaningfully in order to fit into the new South Africa. This is a task ECC will have to address both regionally and nationally.

What do you think are the most important issues for ECC right now?

Obviously the old issues - conscription and the trial and imprisonment of objectors are important. Malan remains an old-style total onslaught warrior and the SADF remains an undemocratic, subversive, secret clique with its own agenda - as we can see from the CCB revelations - and it needs to be exposed and opposed.

On the other hand, we're moving on to a new era, with new issues on the agenda. Debates will be hap-

pening with regard to the issue of conscription, the role of the armed forces and the position of objectors, and ECC will need to engage in these debates.

ECC has been viewed as an organisation targetting primarily the white constituency. Is this going to change?

The great challenge of the time is to build organisations across the constituencies defined by apartheid. The question every organisation needs to ask itself is: how do we become truly non-racial? Conscription is an issue primarily facing whites and therefore the ECC operated in white areas, but now apartheid is gradually ending and it is becoming increasingly unacceptable to have race-specific organisations. This is a situation that can't easily be resolved, but it is something we need to work towards.

Why is ECC taking over many of the functions of COSG?

At a recent national meeting of representatives from COSG and the 771 objectors, it was felt that ECC needed to be re-established as the campaigning and co-ordinating forum of the war resistance movement and thus objector campaigns need to be conducted by ECC. This would also be part of ECC's role as a unifying initiative and objection is obviously only one of the military-related issues that the ECC will be taking up.

If ECC campaigns around objectors, it will free COSG to play its role as a support group for objectors more effectively. COSG will of course continue to campaign around objectors, but in a more low-profile way. When ECC campaigns around other issues, we will certainly need COSG to keep the issue of objection on the agenda.