

POLITICAL OPPOSITION in South Africa is a complicated business. As widespread as it is inevitable it involves a confusing variety of actors and scripts.

From Buthelezi to Biko, Van Zyl Slabbert to Slovo, the political observer is bombarded by a wide range of political alternatives and claims to credibility.

Some work within the system, others outside it. Some have taken up arms, others not. Some base their opposition on race alone. Others increasingly identify capitalism as the real enemy.

The Matanzimas and Thebehalis of South Africa have chosen to accept positions within government-created bantustan parliaments and community councils, but have attracted little popular support. Indeed, low polls and assassination attempts show the extent to which people are resisting these instructions.

There is no getting away from the fact that black people do not and will not believe that the Pretoria government has their interests at heart when creating these organs of "self determination". There is no carrot or stick that will convince them otherwise.

Where does Buthelezi fit into the picture? Does he not represent five million Zulus and many others despite his position in bantustan politics. Inkatha claims a membership of 300 000, wears the colours of the African National Congress (black, green and gold) and sings the anthem N'kosi Sikelele.

Some point out that Buthelezi and Inkatha have been attacked from all quarters — ranging from the ANC and the BC movement to Bishop Tutu and Motlana.

A convincing line of criticism has come from those who point to his role as a bantustan official.

They say the bantustans are no more than pools of surplus labour — preventing the flow of prospective workseekers to the towns and resettling those recently out of work.

The harshest aspects of Apartheid — labour control — form part of Buthelezi's function as a bantustan minister. Helping the government administer its resettlement programme and influx control measures has given Buthelezi enough to answer for.

Probably his most exposing piece of Apartheid dirty work came last year during the schools boycotts. For years at loggerheads with students at Ngoye (Zululand University), Buthelezi ran into opposition from school pupils as well. In both cases he responded with violence, and clashes between his kierie-wielding henchmen and students did a lot to destroy his image as a leader in the liberation struggle.

At the height of this confrontation Buthelezi moved himself further away from the "liberation camp" by failing to support the Free Mandela Campaign.

Ultimately, the acid test of Buthelezi's claims to support may be to ask how many of his Inkatha supporters would see Mandela as their true leader.

This leaves us with two principal groupings, divided roughly by their stand on the issue of race and class.

Some argue that the root problem in SA is race prejudice and the racial discrimination flowing from that. Their solution has been to urge the psychological emancipation of black people from the yoke of a slave mentality. Once this has been accomplished, they argue, black people will be in a position to liberate themselves.

Historically, however, the trend has been to go beyond a solely racial consciousness by looking at the reasons for racism. People's attitudes, it is argued, are products of their social environment and not the other way round. Hence it is the society and not merely its psychology that needs to be examined and challenged.

How many of Inkatha's members see Mandela as their leader. Not all, but . . .



Chief Gatsha Buthelezi

Adherents to this position argued that the development of apartheid can be traced back to particular needs experienced by capitalists at the time, and point to the fact that the basis of apartheid remains the control and supply of labour at very cheap rates. This is not to reduce racism to a rationale for capitalist exploitation, but it is to argue that the two have a direct link and that apartheid and capitalism have grown up hand in hand.

Apartheid, in this view, remains the target, but not as an end in itself. Rather it is the vehicle for an assault on capitalism which is seen as the real enemy. Because apartheid provides SA capitalism with its cutting edge, the struggle against the latter must proceed via an attack on the former.

This approach — which goes beyond apartheid as the only enemy — prevailed during the hey-day of mass protest in the fifties, with the Congress Alliance adopting a steadfastly non-racial approach. With the development of BC during the 70's, however, there was a swing towards a more rigidly racial approach. But developments during the last couple of years have accelerated the trend towards a non-racial, anti-exploitation strategy. The militant youth, at the forefront of so much protest, have come to adopt an increasingly sophisticated analysis of SA society, and one which has placed more emphasis on exploitation has the foundation for political oppression.

The growth of organisation has endorsed this approach — the fastest growing organisations being those that are taking up crucial aspects of oppression but linking them to the underlying factors of exploitation.

Progressive trade unions, community organisations, and student organisations have moved beyond black consciousness to a non-racial position. Working class in charac-

ter, they have sought to take up the most pressing problems facing the working class, and to use these to promote organisation and awareness. This has given them a support base of organised and aware workers — something they accuse the black consciousness movement of never managing to achieve.

Black consciousness has also recognised that power lies with the workers. In shifting the emphasis of the struggle to the working class, they have been reluctant to abandon their racial analysis of the South African situation. This has pushed them in to the awkward position of arguing that all black people are workers and all whites are exploiters. Having collapsed race and class into one and the same thing, the official line to emerge from some quarters within the black consciousness camp is that race determines class.

While the major thrusts of action and organisation bypass BC and create the most significant force of democratic and mass based organisation to be reckoned with since the fifties, a statement of democratic intention drawn up in 1955 has formed the rallying point for the new wave of organisation.

The collection of minimum demands formulated by representatives of a wide range of organisations after a nationwide campaign was designed to draw together the aspirations of the majority of South Africans. It sets out a broad based democratic vision of South Africa.

Its unique appeal lies in the fact that it provides a stark contrast to the anti-democratic system of apartheid, without becoming ideologically exclusive. This makes it widely acceptable to democratic groups as a statement of their broad aims and provides them with a set of minimum demands to which they can relate resistance to various aspects of apartheid.

Organisations are finding that these demands for political rights, housing, work, education, land and so on are as relevant today as they were 26 years ago. They also provide something of a yardstick against which to measure the relevance of their demands and their progress towards a democratic society.

This racially exclusive approach clashes directly with the non-racial stand taken by those who believe that the struggle against apartheid must never become an end in itself, lest the symptom be mistaken for the cause.

Victory against apartheid, they argue, without a far reaching restructuring of society, would simply open up the fruits of a highly unequal society for a small black middle class to share. Because the roots of economic and political inequality lie in a system of racial exploitation, the removal of exploitation from society becomes the real and immediate goal of the struggle.

According to this approach then, the struggle against apartheid is necessary because it acts as the vehicle through which capitalist exploitation takes place. It is not an anti-white struggle, but a struggle against a network of coercive laws which curb and control the working class. Any person, white or black, taking advantage of those laws to profit from the exploitation of their fellow South Africans, becomes an enemy of the people and a target in the struggle.

Likewise, anyone standing up to challenge those laws and the exploitation they make possible, is a democrat and an ally of the people.

On the surface of things, black consciousness does appear to clash with this approach. Black consciousness ideologues have refused to acknowledge the role played by progressive whites, and steadfastly

refuse to accept that they have a contribution to make to the 'black mans struggle'.

The youth however have turned increasingly to the non-racial, anti-exploitation line. Using black consciousness as a starting point to politicise people, they have insisted on drawing out the links between apartheid and exploitation, and stressed the need for the struggle to 'go all the way' and extend democracy not only in the formal parliamentary sense, but into the home, the factory, the school, the community, the bureaucracy, even the health system.

And it is the youth who have set the pace since '76, in word and deed. The 1976 uprisings launched a whole new generation of activities who pushed ahead to organise their communities, their factories, their fellow women, artists, sportspeople.

As the pupils of 76 became the workers of 79/80, we have seen an increase in worker organisation in the factories. No longer concerned to bargain simply for a few concessions within the system, the workers of today are refusing to see their problems at work in isolation from the rest of their oppressive existence, and are starting to wield their economic power effectively in support of more far reaching demands.

Students, trade unions, community groups, women groups and organisations active in many areas of activity are increasingly stating that there can be no substitute for struggle. Instead, a congress of democratic people would provide those struggling for freedom the opportunity formulating a programme of democratic demands to guide them in the construction of a democratic South Africa.