

EDITORIAL

The potential for rapid social transformation that seemed manifest in South Africa some months back now appears to have receded. We are in a period of reaction, where conservative social forces seem set to play a greater role in influencing events.

It would however be a mistake to think that this period could herald a return to the frozen social wastelands of Verwoerdian Apartheid. South Africa is undoubtedly on the road towards a restructuring of the existing basis of political rule. The political and economic character this displays depends ultimately on whether it is an alliance of conservative or progressive social forces impelling it along the particular paths that are possible.

One of the currently important tasks that face popular organisations is to understand the nature of these conservative forces, particularly those that have a social basis amongst black people, as well as the options that they present for the future. Rhetoric is allowed to replace analysis when these forces are dismissed as 'puppets', 'stooges' and 'sell-outs', as if nothing more was required to be said. Yet their power is sometimes real and has a class basis. TRANSFORMATION 2 seeks to address some of these issues in our two main articles.

From the viewpoint of the state as well as the ruling class, the 'KwaZulu/Natal option' is indeed 'the only show in town'. Daryl Glaser attempts to unravel the variety of social forces that have intermeshed in an alliance of interests and produced the Natal 'Indaba'. He presents an analysis of the underlying material basis of this option, and issues a cogent warning to treat this new class alliance of conservative social forces less cavalierly.

The weight of conservatism in the countryside, particularly the bantustans, is too often treated as being attributable to the reactionary basis of chieftainship. Tim Quinlan takes up this issue in an analysis of the changing nature of political power in Qwa Qwa. His conclusion that political power no longer depends fundamentally on the tribal institutions of chieftainship raises questions about the potentialities of new types of political alliances.

Debate sections are meant to be controversial. Martin Plaut poses a number of questions concerning the political relationship between independent working class organisation and current political forces. The most central one for Plaut is whether COSATU will easily mesh in with ANC/SACP political strategies.

Jeremy Cronin replies to Hudson in TRANSFORMATION 1. He argues that 'national democracy' needs to be situated with relevance both to intellectual antecedents and to contemporary South African political practices. This clearly will not be left to rest here, for some will undoubtedly take further issue with his interpretations.

Our Review section includes an important consideration of Alan Jeeves' historical study of migrant labour on the gold mines by Rob Turrell. It steers readers into some of the debate between structural and processual interpretations of South African history. Both sides claim to be contributing to a left analysis but one emphasizes broader overall structures of accumulation and imperatives of capitalism while the other puts most weight on historically very specific and localised class struggles.

Ari Sitas deals with the new emphasis on the class dynamics of politicised culture in current trade union struggles. He introduces readers to the new working class poetry which utilises ethnic images of the past to convey the images of working class revolt and trade union struggle.

Finally we include two shorter reviews. Cynthia Kros considers the Africanisation of South African history and Mike Sutcliffe evaluates the merits and pitfalls of survey techniques in assessing South African political attitudes.