



specialist David Everatt.

- It provided a significant input of intellectual support, guidance and sophistication to the ANC. This was revealed especially at the Morogoro Conference where the ANC adopted many of the major theoretical constructions of the SACP, and
- It played a major part in theorising the armed struggle and developing political military strategy.

THESE contributions disappear in the context of the new international situation and the normalisation of national politics. As the transition to democracy proceeds, the alliance must come under increasing pressure. A primary reason for this is simply that the drawing up of a new constitution and the election of a democratic government implies the end of the struggle for national liberation, the first stage of the revolution. The theoretical foundation for the alliance thus dissolves.

There can be little doubt that the ANC and SACP will enter negotiations together and will remain in alliance until after a new constitution is drawn up and implemented.

It is, however, clear that the SACP is preparing itself for an independent existence at some stage. It is attempting to create an identity and support base of its own as its large scale launchings around the country have indicated. It is assiduously cultivating a working class base. It continues to project itself as the major champion of socialism.

The nature and timing of the dissolution of the alliance is a matter of speculation. That it will introduce an important new dynamic to our politics is irrefutable. □

Simon Hoare is a law student at Rhodes University

Activists vs Academics at gender conference

By Sue Valentine

THE thorny question of the role of academics and their relation to activists and "the struggle" (the role of activists did not come under scrutiny) dominated the first ever conference on women and gender held in Southern Africa.

Conference organisers and the (mainly white) academic delegates came under fire from both activists and self-confessed black "middle class" professionals as the tensions inherent in a society as skewed as ours bubbled to the surface at the University of Natal venue in Durban.

It was on day two of the four-day conference, rich with local and international top flight women academics/researchers, that the sparks started flying during a panel discussion on "conceptualising gender".

In the chair was University of Cape Town political studies lecturer Mary Simons and on the panel were Belinda Bozzoli (Wits University sociology department), Rosalind Boyd (McGill University, Canada), Ann Levett (UCT psychology department) and Ginny Volbrecht (UCT sociology department).

At the outset, panellists made perceptive comments about the task of conceptualising gender and the need to do so in the South Africa context – a context of destabilisation, unemployment and violence. Power relations needed to be understood so that feminist scholarship, which opposed institutionalised knowledge, could move into the mainstream where power was vested, but at the same time transform those structures and practices.

Addressing the issue of who and how gender could be conceptualised, Bozzoli said it was too glib an assumption to assert that the two separate universes of academic research and on-the-ground activity could, or should, be brought together.

FOR academic work to be valuable it needed to be thorough and to stand up on its own terms. The two worlds could not be collapsed into one, but obviously it was possible for people to wear different hats and engage in academic or activist work at different times.

Responding to this from the floor, an American-based visitor to the conference argued that there should be no distinction between the two. "I am as much an activist sitting behind my desk doing research as when I might spend a night in jail for actions in a public protest," she said.

As the discussion moved from the distinction – or lack thereof – between academics

and activists, and began to tackle the predominantly white complexion of the conference, conference organisers had to explain the nature of the event.

They said that after much thought it had been decided to hold an academic conference, but that women activists would be drawn in as much as possible. Despite extensive consultation, however, there had been very little response from women in those organisations.

In response to a suggestion that the activists at the conference should meet separately to "reclaim" their space, a delegate from Mozambique observed that separate meetings were divisive and futile. "We must do things openly and together," she said.

While some of the audience felt that the differences between people should be "screamed" about in order to promote tolerance, others said that the dominance of white women academics at the event was because most women academics in South Africa were white. It was not a desirable situation, but it did reflect a reality.

A BLACK delegate lashed out at white participants saying she resented white women academics championing the cause of black women. She said black women needed to speak for themselves. Women should do their research/campaigning together, not on their own, nor on anyone's behalf.

Chemical Workers Industrial Union organiser Pat Horn told the conference that while blacks and whites seemed to have learnt to tackle capitalism together and had fought apartheid together, they had not yet learnt how to tackle the patriarchy.

"One place it still thrives is the university, therefore it is valid to have an academic based conference."

In a bid to refocus attention on the topic, "conceptualising gender", Wits sociologist Jackie Cock said attacks by women on each other fell into the state's trap. By focusing only on women the opportunity to work in new and important directions was being missed. It was necessary to move beyond and to look at gender.

"We must move away from the notion of triple oppression for women and talk about who benefits from triple privilege. We must focus properly on the concept of gender and away from narrow conceptions."

● *The conference drew together a vast and divergent range of papers on issues concerning women and gender in Southern Africa. For reasons of space we cannot do them justice here. In forthcoming issues, however, Democracy in Action will feature various aspects of the conference.* □