

course of wage bargaining part of the wage should be directed towards social benefits provided by the employer, as the authors suggest, won't this in fact reinforce the divide between employed and unemployed, trade unions and other organisations? Surely the commitment to full social security will not grow simply out of sectoral and workplace struggles around skills formation? Surely there *is* a national political dimension to the struggle for social security?

Lessons

The book nevertheless suggests some very important lessons. Firstly, if the union movement is to see itself intervening in the economy it has to assert its ideological objective - that of intervening in the market against the domination of capital. This is all the more important in South Africa, given the explicit attack of the government's Normative Economic Model on the legitimacy of trade unions precisely because they do interfere with the market.

Secondly, to sacrifice wage militancy as a means of mobilising worker unity without an alternative unifying and mobilising project could be disastrous. Furthermore, industry strategy in isolation does not provide such a mobilising tool, as it is too bureaucratic in nature. If the struggle around skill formation provides a possible alternative, then the workers must own that struggle and believe in it. Given the long entrenched and relatively unchallenged philosophy of 'managerial prerogatives' in SA, considerable effort would be required to build up the confidence of workers to tackle the issue. For example, to what extent do the rank and file of NUMSA understand and believe sufficiently in the most recent proposals to SEIFSA on skills formation to really fight in support of their demands?

Thirdly, it is important to develop the skills and experience of trade unionists so that when they engage in industry policy development they are not "colonised" (as the authors put it) by the existing bureaucracy.

At the macroeconomic level, perhaps the most salient lesson of the book is that industry development programmes have to be supported by appropriate macroeconomic policies – unfettered

deregulation of the money market and privatisation and/or commercialisation of the public sector being singularly inappropriate policies. In South Africa it is clear that the union movement will have to develop far sharper answers to the debates on these two issues. In relation to the public sector, for example, it is not enough simply to assert an opposition to privatisation because of the potential job losses. The union movement (and its allies) has to develop a coherent political and economic argument in favour of the public sector.

Finally, the book does show quite clearly that there is a way out of the passivity and frustration caused by worker participation and job flexibility programmes imposed by management – that, through a struggle around skill formation, it is impossible to challenge in a fundamental way, the notion of managerial prerogative. Whether such a challenge will in *itself* result in the assertion of a more progressive and class based politics is questionable, but that it would certainly *contribute* to the same is irrefutable. ☆

Industrial Council Digest review: author responds *Shane Godfrey*

The first point about Jane Barrett's review of the INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL DIGEST (SA LABOUR BULLETIN Vol 17 No 1) is that it is a critique rather than a review. She does not do the book justice because she focuses almost exclusively on what the book does not contain rather than on what it does. So the review fails to show how the book does make a substantial contribution to understanding of industrial councils as institutions for centralised bargaining.

The aim of the DIGEST was to provide systematic and detailed information on all industrial councils and the industrial council 'system' as a whole, something which has never been done before. I believed that systematic research of this kind would inform the debate on industrial councils and any strategy that might result from that debate. The aim of the book was not to intervene in the debate but rather to contribute to the debate. Accordingly, it

provides background information which unions can use to develop their own strategies.

The DIGEST starts by identifying the main features and history of the legislative framework for councils contained in the LRA. This section shows that the original intention of the legislation was to create national, industry-wide centralised bargaining forums, but that its relatively limited nature, and the low levels of organisation of trade unions and employers, as well as other factors, led to the development of the diverse and irregular 'system' of industrial councils that exists today.

The major section of the book then follows, namely a study of all the industrial councils that existed in 1979 and any that have been set up since that date. This covers the parties to each council, how it is structured, whether there is sectoral or regional differentiation in the Main Agreement of the council, and finally whether there were any changes to these features in the period after 1979. This section therefore examines the diversity of industrial councils in detail and provides interesting examples of the way that the parties to councils have catered for differing interests. For example, the National Leather Council is shown to have four separate sectoral bargaining forums within its overall structures, whereas many other councils have created only one bargaining forum but have separate regional wage tables.

The reasons for any changes are also discussed particularly if they resulted from the participation or attempted participation of one of the COSATU or NACTU trade unions. The research shows that the engagement of these trade unions with various industrial councils does not always follow the same course or have the same result. For example, for the first few years of its participation on the Iron and Steel Council, MAWU successfully used the tactic of refusing to sign the Council's Main Agreement as a way of attracting workers to the union. However, when in 1989 BCAWU refused to sign the Main Agreement of the Transvaal Building Council and withdrew from the Council, those categories of work represented by BCAWU, namely the unskilled categories primarily filled by black workers, were excluded from the Agreement. These workers then lost the protection of a minimum wage and other

minimum conditions.

The differing experiences of unions engaging with existing councils does not therefore lend itself to easy analysis and neat generalisation. So it was decided to try to cover all of these struggles and rather identify the major themes and trends emerging from this process. The book therefore does not come up with any specific solutions for the reform of industrial councils, but then this was not its objective. However, it does provide systematic information that can be used by the parties for looking at each industrial council and assessing its problems and potential, and looking at the diversity and irregularity of the 'system' as a whole to assess how it can be reformed.

It also provides, contrary to what the reviewer argues, many pointers as to how trade unions and employers are dealing with the restructuring of industrial councils. But the lessons of engagement and some of the trends that emerge are regrettably not highlighted and often not made explicit enough.

To respond directly to some criticisms in the review, it is the case that there are some omissions and errors in the book. This is inevitable given the enormity of the field that the book covers, but it must be stressed that the major bulk of the information is reliable and the coverage comprehensive. It is, however, unfortunate that there are inaccuracies about the book in the review. I do not have the space to go into each of these and will therefore address the main criticisms that the reviewer had, namely that the book is "based entirely on secondary resources" and that "not a single interview appears to have been conducted for the purposes of the book". Firstly, the core of the book is based on primary resources (ie the gazetted agreements of the industrial councils), and secondly, although interviews did not constitute a major part of the research method, there were a number of interviews done for the purposes of the book and these are footnoted.

In summary, readers of the DIGEST should find considerable information to help them understand the history and nature of industrial councils. Such knowledge can also be used in developing a strategy towards an industrial council or for reforming the 'system'. ☆