

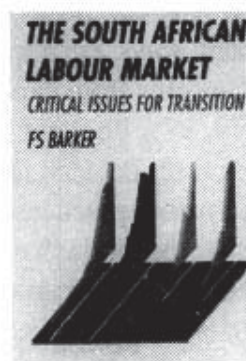
that capitalism was full of internal contradictions which would eventually lead to its overthrow through revolutionary struggle or class conflict, not class co-operation. At the workplace this would lead to the takeover and running of factories by workers through democratically elected committees. It is not clear whether this is what Maller means by transformation and there seems to be a leap of logic in her argument for worker participation. She argues for a different approach without saying why the long-held approach of class conflict is not workable.

In her conclusion, Maller argues that there has been a co-existence of conflict and co-operation between COSATU and employers at national level, as seen during the LRA struggle. This, together with participation in the National Manpower Commission and COSATU's involvement in the National Economic Negotiating Forum initiative, is seen

as the beginning of a social contract "in which labour agrees to participate in decisions governing the society and economy as a whole, implying a broad acceptance of the capitalist economy".

She says that the "macro and micro levels of union policy" are at odds on the issue of participation. This suggests the workplace relations need to be brought in line with national union-employer relations through worker participation, which would be some kind of social contract at plant level. This, by implication, would allow workers to participate in decisions about the factory as a whole. It is debatable whether at national level there is, in fact, now a "broad acceptance of a capitalist economy". Is Maller arguing for worker participation in order to make capitalism more acceptable or as part of a genuine transformation of the workplace? ☆

## The South African labour market: critical issues for transition by Frans Barker (van Schaik, 1992)



Faith McDonald looks at a new book on labour markets by Frans Barker, head of the National Manpower Commission.

**F**rans Barker's new book is a concise and welcome addition to the limited body of knowledge currently available to the layperson or student. Labour markets are an important factor of transitional and future societal stability.

The author points out that, until recently, most writings have concentrated on one aspect of the labour market, namely the protection of basic worker rights. But the interaction between broader economic issues and the workings of the labour market is now being recognised as of critical importance to a future South Africa. Hence, Barker's attempt to pull together all the key aspects pertaining to the workings of, and influences on, labour markets in general and the

South African labour market in particular.

The book contains a wealth of useful material covering all aspects of labour market theory. The opening chapter gives a general overview of labour market concepts together with the specifics of the South African labour market. The concluding chapter discusses labour market inequalities and discrimination. The body of the book covers all aspects of the labour market: principles of supply and demand; the supply of labour in South Africa; the demand for labour and productivity; unemployment; human capital; and, unions, collective bargaining and wages. This work is, for the most part, easy to read as well as being extremely informative.

An effective flow chart at the beginning is of

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great assistance in guiding the layperson through the structure of the book. It offers the reader a choice of selecting specific chapters which may be of individual interest. For example, the chapter dealing with human capital and the demand for skilled workers was especially interesting to this reader. In other words, although the book is written in logical sequence, it is possible to extract chapters which virtually stand on their own.

A multitude of tables and graphs, taken from a variety of sources pepper the text and provide valuable references. Unfortunately some of the graphs are complicated and require more than a simple basic knowledge of mathematics - an example being the graph on a monopsony market in chapter two. The author does, however, go to great lengths to simplify the calculations in the following text.

As far as the actual data is concerned, certain statistics presented appear to be at odds with other research. But, here again, the author highlights the difficulties, both practical and methodological, inherent in obtaining precise figures on such crucial questions as unemployment, literacy levels, etc. Statistics - which seem to be downplayed or understated compared with other sources - need to be carefully examined. For example, the author puts the level of functional illiteracy within South Africa's population at only 30%, compared with 42% reflected in the South African Institute of Race Relations Survey, 1990/91.

Barker takes great care to examine all the issues from a critical perspective within the parameters of data available and offers arguments for and against particular approaches. Given the sensitivity of some of the subject matter, most especially in terms of ideological differences within South African society, it is to his credit that no glaringly contentious conclusions are apparent. Moreover, as the intention is to provide a broad overview and make information easily accessible, Barker offers no apology for not exploring the issues in any great depth. Instead, throughout the book, he refers the reader to numerous other books and sources which go into more detail on specific elements of the labour market.

Perhaps, in a book of this nature, overlap is

inevitable. But a minor criticism is the repetition, particularly evident in the sections dealing with unemployment, human capital and education and training - each of which are the subject of single chapters - but are mentioned in similar vein in other sections of the book. Notes of referral to other chapters appear a little too frequently. Whilst this may emphasise the inter-linkage of certain factors within labour market theory, particularly with regard to the relevance of education and training to the notion of human capital, it seems unnecessary to achieve such reinforcement in this manner.

A notable omission, and a surprising one, given the author is Chairman of the National Manpower Commission, is the absence of sufficient discussion on the role of labour market institutions. Experience in a number of countries suggests that the form in which these institutions are structured is an important determinant of the level of labour market stability and, thus, economic viability. Certainly in South Africa, where the process of transformation will require major economic restructuring, the importance of creating democratic institutions capable of managing this restructuring is vital. A perspective of the way in which such institutions could be structured in the future South Africa would have been a fitting complement to his final chapter on addressing inequalities.

Barker has maintained an interesting, and perhaps over-careful, distance and refrains from committing himself to any position within the debates covered. Perhaps he gives himself away in some of the humorous quotes sprinkled throughout, most notably in the one by Winston Churchill which concludes the book:

"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings: the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."

Notwithstanding Barker's efforts to remain neutral, the book stands as a valuable contribution to the debate. With the emphasis currently being placed on labour market issues in the transformation of the South African economy, this book is both timely and significant. There is little doubt that it is a must for all trade union leaders and others concerned with labour market policy. ☆