

Review

A Review of Guy Standing, John Sender and John Weeks (1996), *Restructuring the Labour Market: The South African Challenge, An ILO Country Review*, Geneva: International Labour Office; and Jeremy Baskin (1996), *Against the Current: labour and economic policy in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan.

Here are two new books—in very different forms—which will be of value to those who are looking for a handle on contemporary South African economic policy. Standing, Sender and Weeks is a nearly 500-page long compendium of information on labour and the labour market in South Africa produced largely at the behest of the government. Amongst other things, it contains substantial critiques of both statistics used in assessing the situation of labour and of more conservative approaches to labour issues. On the former, readers will be struck by a chapter on unemployment which suggests that the indices used as a measure are so flawed as to be useless and that the real unemployment figures for South Africa should be considerably lower than are usually put forth. On the latter, Standing *et al* are particularly critical of the South African Foundation document of 1996, *Growth for All*, which laid such emphasis on making the labour market more 'flexible'. This book suggests both that the existing labour market is in fact quite flexible with workers vulnerable to many crude forms of exploitation (farm labour, domestic labour, outwork, casual labour, temporary labour), some of which are in the process of expanding and that lower wages are unlikely to be a source of employment expansion as the Chamber of Business assumes.

Standing *et al* conceive of apartheid labour legislation as having been an elaborate regulatory framework designed at letting state-designated mechanisms such as Wage Boards and Industrial Councils rope-off distinct labour markets from one another in accordance with the racial system of politics. What they say is needed is a regime that reflects the need for collective bargaining, puts an end to unwarranted forms of discrimination and is as inclusive as possible. They are somewhat agnostic on whether the goals of the new Labour Relations legislation to this end will be successfully achieved at all. It is possible to feel that the authors may be exaggerating their case in the attack on *Growth for All* both with regard to the size of unemployment and the irrelevance of a wage/employment relationship but this book is impressive in changing the terms of debate on labour-market issues with its emphasis on job creation rather than market

flexibility and can be a source of reference to all students of the South African economic scene. Chapter organisation is very clear and sub-headed but there is unfortunately no index.

In a short collection, *Against the Current*, Jeremy Baskin has put together a number of articles that mainly come forth from his work as director of the COSATU-generated National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI). While the articles discuss a variety of economic issues—the GEAR strategy adopted by Thabo Mbeki and his team, corporatism, privatisation, the Labour Relations Act—from a left perspective, it cannot be said that they add up to a concrete alternative strategy. As with Standing *et al*, they are doubtful about the possibility of regulating a so-called two-tier labour market without hurting the interests of organised workers and the Baskin team is also concerned to uphold the importance of COSATU as a generator of policy on labour in the economy. COSATU's view of corporatism is lukewarm; these essays reveal, for instance, considerable skepticism about the efficacy of the LRA-generated workplace fora. The emphasis lies on redistribution rather than a strategy of industrial peace based on such fora or NEDLAC. This book is valuable chiefly as an indication of how COSATU thinkers in the first post-apartheid years are viewing relevant policy initiatives.

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