

# Editorial

## *Transformation* 1986–2016

We (more accurately, the founding editors: Bill Freund, Mike Morris and Gerhard Maré) established *Transformation* in 1986 to serve as a forum for analysis and debate about the changing nature of South Africa. At the time, the editors, in introducing the journal, argued:

Contemporary conditions in South Africa are altering rapidly. The balance of class forces that has shaped this society's past is undergoing fundamental restructuring. New class initiatives are apparent with every turn and twist of struggle. Fresh contradictions and struggles for different alliances pervade all the social forces on the historical stage. As part of this process capital is reorganising its agenda in order to bring about political restabilisation and a renewed basis for sustained accumulation. There is a new terrain of state reaction, intervention and ideological experimentation.

The papers in this special issue look back on the last few decades, exploring one critical dimension of change in our society – social policy. The papers highlight the need for nuanced and sophisticated analyses and debate about the nature, extent, content and impact of social policy. Without this nuance our ability to map out what policy changes should take place and why is limited. The papers in this special issue are a reminder to be cautious of what appears to be the 'consensus' and that while aspects of our society do remain unchanged, this collection illustrates the need to go beyond explanations and critiques that characterise all policy as 'neo liberal'.

The papers also touch upon the nature of social action and protest in South Africa. While it would be foolhardy to look for too many parallels between the heady situation described by the founding editors in 1986, when our society was emerging from a long period of oppression and political action, and the possibilities for change 30 years later in 2016 there are a number of examples which suggest that the society is 'restive' and that we may be entering a new period of rapid change. The student protests of 2015 highlighted, among other things, a significant inter-generational disjuncture.

In the economic sphere, the limits of a (not fully realised) commodity boom and the bizarre shenanigans around the post of the minister of Finance are but two examples of the limitations of the current growth trajectory. In the formal electoral politics, the recent municipal election results do suggest a shift in our politics, perhaps not fundamental, but nevertheless important. In the sphere of the labour market, the slow growth in employment opportunities and the seeming intractable challenge of unemployment continue to pose immense challenges. Yet, interesting new initiatives are being debated – for example, there is now serious consideration being given to a policy on minimum wages.

Looking back over the 30 years, it is pleasing as Editors of *Transformation* to have the sense that, in its own way, *Transformation* has served as an important forum for analysis and debate about the nature of change. As we enter what may well be a new time of change, we remain convinced about the need for a forum for serious critical and nuanced analyses and debate. As the founding editors so presciently warned, without such analysis and debate, social struggles could well be all about ‘movement and no direction’.

The editors