

## REVIEW OF :

Alf Stadler (1987) - *The Political Economy of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip; London: Croom Helm.

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What is immediately impressive about Stadler's book is the enormous amount of information he is able to bring within a single, clearly defined frame of reference without swamping a reader (only 76 footnotes in toto, for example). His central contention is that

while the efforts the state made to reform the political order during the 1970s were very significant in dictating some of the outcomes of the great transformation which South Africa is undergoing, they were part of a defensive strategy designed to avert fundamental change, by a process of incremental modifications to the status quo, and were not its leading edge (p 4-5).

His historical approach illuminates the point that past 'reforms' to the status quo (the jargon of previous phases of reorganisation was of course quite different) have been no more than defensive strategies either, aiming as they have done to reinforce racial domination and control over the black majority, deprived of common political rights. He traces the emergence of a domestically-located and politically powerful bourgeoisie, 'the really significant feature of the South African political economy' (p 22), first in the mining industry and then later in manufacturing and agriculture. The strong influence of this owning class, coupled with the particular labour needs of industry, meant the evolution of a highly coercive labour policy. And since 'the question of admitting the majority of adult men and, later, women to the franchise ... has only ever arisen anywhere ... in the context of industrialisation' (p 36), he explains the manifold attempts by successive white parties in government to repress the political aspirations of the majority. As he observes, controls over the movement of labour

were singly the most serious issue in the relations between governments and their black subjects, providing from before the First World War down to the 1980s some of the most intense confrontations (including the one at Sharpeville) in their political relations (p 86).

Drawing on the work of Doug Hindson, Stadler points not only to the racial divisions explicit in these labour controls, but also to the growing divisions within the African working class, principally between 'insiders',