

National Development Plan: Putting SA into reverse gear

The National Development Plan (NDP) is another form of the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Distribution (Gear) programme, writes **Mbuso Ngubane**.

At the National Bargaining Conference of our National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) held in April, we learned from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi that the NDP 'represent a typical example of a chicken-and-pig partnership, in which the chicken offers to lay eggs for breakfast but asks the pig to donate bacon'.

No thanks, we would like to enjoy eggs, but not at the expense of a neo-liberal deindustrialisation plan that makes promises of jobs while actually killing our economy, just the way Gear did in the late 1990s.

Remember in 1996 when Gear planners were led by Trevor Manuel, with the World Bank supplying a statistical model? Their promises were all broken, aside from one target met: lower inflation. That is the target bankers' care about the most.

In this case, the Cosatu critique of the NDP is very convincing to us. As the trade union federation argued six months ago, the NDP is unclear, tries to avoid revealing its underlying pro-corporate philosophy, is contradictory, and will support only low quality unsustainable jobs.

This is why Cosatu's biggest member, Numsa, will fight the NDP with all its passion. It is appalling to us the African National Congress (ANC) draft elections manifesto is based on the NDP, nicknamed 'the people's plan' even though it is a plan for big corporations. To hear the ANC claim that 'The NDP will create full employment' is chilling, because this was the same kind of rhetoric we heard about Gear 17 years ago, and the same minister is in the

driver's seat, not having to account for the economic train wreck he caused by putting South Africa into reverse gear.

Can our society survive another bout of Gear? What with the growth in poverty, rapid rise in the unemployment rate, and worsening inequality that reflected neo-liberalism under Manuel's finance ministry?

To campaign with this policy is to commit a moral and political sin, and if this continues, Numsa is seriously reconsidering spending the R2-million it had budgeted to support the ANC's re-election, if such straightforward lies are told to win votes.

For example, here at Durban's ports, the NDP promises that throughput capacity will rise from the current three-million containers to a highly unlikely 20-million in 2040, if we build a new privatised port on the old airport land costing around R100-billion. But all ports are over-expanding now, including Mozambique's Maputo, which is closer to the Gauteng market.

We worry because our city is littered with white elephants bred with similar promises. These include an unnecessary and mostly empty new airport, a second underutilised sports stadium, and a convention centre and commercial beachside entertainment area that require huge subsidies to run. The construction companies won but the city has hundreds of thousands of people living in shacks.

The NDP makes grand promises for job creation, yet it leaves out of its definition at least three-million discouraged job seekers. Worse still,

in 2011 the NDP Diagnostic Report even claimed, 'unemployment levels are decreasing since 2002', even though we lost 9% of our workforce during the 2008-11 period, leaving us with a higher unemployment rate than 10 years ago.

These are the kinds of problems that will haunt our movement and set back our workforce, as well as the broader economy, if we are not able to U-turn from the neo-liberal path of the NDP. The alternative we offer begins with the Freedom Charter's promise that the commanding heights will be under popular control. Strategic industries should be nationalised, the renewable energy sector should be prioritised, and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) revisited since so many basic needs are still unmet. Exchange controls should be placed on corporate profits which currently flow abroad, while our country's foreign debt rises to extremely high levels - probably R150-billion by the next election which is six times higher than in 1994!

Those who promote the NDP without taking the trouble to explain how this time it will be different - because it is the same as Gear - are destined to once again wreck our economic opportunities. Numsa will do its best to ask these questions and insist on answers, on accountability, and on the prospects of a genuinely democratic economy. **LN**

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