

The workers cease fire

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The Reconstruction Programme – an Accord belonging to the leadership

For us in COSATU, the process of arriving at the "Reconstruction Programme" has been a new one, substantially different from the way we have done things in the past. It went like this:

- COSATU Head Office produced 'COSATU's Proposal for a Reconstruction Accord' on January 11 1993.
- In the next two months COSATU Head Office produced three more drafts of a Reconstruction Accord, ending up with the CEC Discussion Document.
- In June and July a Tripartite Alliance Committee produced two drafts of an 'Alliance Framework Document on the Reconstruction Programme'.
- In August (two weeks before the

COSATU Special Congress) the Alliance Committee produced a third draft.

- When delegates arrived at the COSATU Special Congress, they received a fourth draft (amended by the Alliance Summit of August 20-21). It was significantly different from any of the previous ones.
- At the Special Congress, COSATU adopted the fourth draft as a "working document" with some changes and sent it back for revision by the next COSATU CEC.
- This process makes us ask: Who does the Reconstruction Programme belong to? Who owns it and who controls it?
- At all previous Congresses, COSATU considered its own documents, with positions from its affiliates. Now, for the first time, a COSATU Congress was confronted with a document from outside COSATU, a document which had never been seen before by the delegates. For the first time, a COSATU Congress was asked to adopt a position in principle, with the details to be filled in and changed later.
- All this makes it clear to us that COSATU has abandoned the responsibility for producing its own Reconstruction Programme. Instead it has negotiated a programme with the

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ANC – an ANC which is about to become the majority party in a power-sharing government.

- Whether or not we ask the ANC to sign the final document, the process of its production (jointly with the ANC) as well as its content make it clear that it is an Accord. Crucially, it is an Accord which is not on the working class's terms!

What can we expect as workers from the ANC-as-Government?

Until now the ANC has been a national liberation movement. We allied with them because we had a common interest in smashing white minority rule. The Alliance could tolerate widely differing opinions (everything from socialists to pro-capitalists).

On 27 April, white minority rule will disappear and the former national liberation movement will become a government. The ANC itself recognises that we have not defeated the ruling class, which is why they are prepared to have a power-sharing government. *The ANC will co-govern a country in which the power and influence of business has not been smashed.* It will therefore need to juggle with the conflicting interests of capitalists and workers (workers will want the profits from foreign companies to be re-invested here; capital will want to export those profits).

COSATU, on the other hand, cannot afford to experience any ambivalence. Its role is clear – to represent the interests of the working class in opposition to those of the bosses.

Because the roles and interests of COSATU and the ANC are clearly opposed, the basis for a joint or negotiated programme with the ANC-as-Government does not exist. Or at least it does not exist on COSATU's terms.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme: a cease-fire

Reading through the first four COSATU

drafts, we find that every single clause is already ANC policy, published in its document *Fit to Govern*. From the sections on “employment creation” and “public works”, through the provisions on “roads, water, electricity and waste disposal services” to proposals for a “National Health Service”. Apparently COSATU was trying to bind the ANC to the ANC's own policy.

COSATU's drafts only hinted at the price workers will have to pay for what they demand. So, in the third COSATU draft:

“An accord also implies duties, obligations and possibly compromises on behalf of the trade union movement as well as the ANC based on the realities we face ... the likelihood of wage restraint ... ”

The latest drafts are more explicit and boldly recommend that the working class must commit itself to the reconstruction of the post-apartheid capitalist economy.

So the latest Alliance draft says:

“Macro-economic stability is vital to the success of our programme. For this fundamental reason, coherent, strict and effective monetary and fiscal policies will be a cornerstone of our Reconstruction and Development Programme.”

While the COSATU Congress resolved that this section should be “substantially reworked”, its very existence reveals what this process of leadership negotiation is capable of producing.

The fourth draft continues:

“Further, our programme is predicated on the fundamental prerequisite that the democratic state, the trade union movement, business associations and all relevant organs of civil society *will always co-operate* in the process of policy formulation” (our emphasis).

We are sure that these sentiments found favour with Tito Mboweni from the ANC's economic planning department:

“Recent evidence suggests that a *co-operative partnership between labour and capital* is a crucial determinant of stability and international competitiveness Programmes to achieve higher levels of productivity and *profitability* should be

agreed upon by business and the trade union movement" (Tito Mboweni, ANC Department of Economic Planning, *SA LABOUR BULLETIN* Vol 16 No 8; our emphasis).

All this, together with the RDP's expressed need "to redirect government expenditure *within existing constraints* (our emphasis) begins to sound more like Margaret Thatcher than a COSATU committed by its 1992 Economic Policy Conference to nationalisation of the leading heights of the economy as well as nationalisation of strategic industries.

The political arithmetic, when it comes to paying for the RDP, is very clear:

Wage restraint + strict monetary policies + eternal co-operative partnership between capital and labour + achieve higher levels of profitability + government expenditure within existing constraints = *the workers will pay*.

Unity of process and product

The process which COSATU leadership adopted – of negotiating a programme with a political party committed to being the government of a capitalist state – was a retreat from the independent process of its history. Resolutions from affiliates were forsaken in exchange for input documents from the leadership. Mandates from the Locals were exchanged for documents from the Head Office.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the product would also be a retreat – a retreat from the anti-capitalist line of the 1992 Economic Policy Conference; a retreat from a strategy for building socialism.

Is this the best we can get?

"But what about the balance of forces?" comes the frequent reply to our argument; "internationally and nationally the situation is not favourable for the working class." We agree. But we assess the balance of forces in

order to give direction to our working class struggle, not to suspend it. The real question is *how to change* the unfavourable balance of forces.

The answer is not far away. No future government which operates within the bounds of capitalist social relations can satisfy a fraction of the material needs of the workers, the unemployed, the rural and urban poor. We are already beginning to hear the warnings that we must not expect too much too quickly.

We must draw together the material struggles of workers, the homeless, the landless in order to build the force which can overturn the social relations responsible for taking wealth away from the producers. But we must do this organically, building on the struggles that arise from the ground, not bureaucratically in a document of "achievable

time-frames" determined by 'experts' (time frames, incidentally, which were not even available for the Special Congress to debate).

What we mean simply is this:

From basic needs to anti-capitalist struggle

The latest draft of the Reconstruction Accord says that: "All citizens of South Africa will have a right to decent housing ... clean, running water ... affordable electricity" etc.

We agree with these statements. But all of these things require materials. To build houses you need cement and bricks. The industry which produces cement and bricks comprises a handful of companies which produce these things at high prices. The higher the prices, the less houses, schools and hospitals we can build. So the thing that limits our progress is the price of the materials.

The struggles of the working class for housing will lead in the direction of taking

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over the companies which produce building materials in order to produce more cheaply. The same can be said for the pharmaceutical industry or the health care industry. When we try this we will meet the strongest resistance from the whole capitalist class. They have already made absolutely clear their total hostility to nationalisation. They know that once we start taking over companies we will not stop.

The material struggles of the masses can and must lead us. In response we must offer a broader, strategic direction. If the direction we offer is "macro-economic balance" then we will be forced, ultimately, to turn against the masses and crush their struggle. The balance of forces will become worse. If the direction we offer is uncompromising anti-capitalist struggle, we can give leadership to the spontaneous uprisings that will come. That is the way to improve the balance of forces.

Towards an alternative

Of course we can only begin to give such a direction if we are free and independent as working class organisations. Otherwise we will become subject to the constraints of political parties attempting to run a successful (if 'progressive') bourgeois state. Such a strategy requires, as a minimum, the following:

- COSATU and all organisations of working class civil society must keep their independence from political organisations at all costs; this is even more important when it comes to political organisations which are part of the government.
- All organisations of working class civil society must draw up programmes of their requirements from the new government together with action plans to fight for what they need. These programmes will not be restrictive. Their purpose will not be to limit struggle but rather to give it direction.
- Then we will be ready to start the discussions about whether it is possible to unite some of these proposals and action plans. The direction is from the bottom, not the top.
- All of these programmes and plans must be the clear expression of what the masses on the ground need and want. They must not be adapted to a 'realism' dictated by leadership. In this way we will begin to revive our democratic practices which have started to decay in the last years. We will also start the process of building the structures and traditions that will lead to the working class becoming the ruling class. ☆