

Below we publish two articles on the Reconstruction Programme adopted by COSATU's Special Congress (see p 21). JENNY CARGILL raises difficult questions about the need for compromise. ROGER ETKIND and SUZANNA HARVEY argue that the Programme marks a retreat from union independence and compromises mass struggle.

# Where *does* *the buck stop?*

by JENNY CARGILL

For COSATU there is no going back on its efforts to influence economic policy-making in a new government. The Special Congress in September stood firm on this. However, there was considerable unease among the 1 800 delegates as they debated the route of political and economic negotiations and compromises. Despite this, too much was left unsaid.

This is not to say that there is a neat package of answers which the congress failed to unwrap. What needs to be unpacked are questions. At this stage, it is less of a priority to look at the content of COSATU's economic aspirations, expressed in its draft Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). It is more important to examine the process which will determine the final reconstruction programme, as well as the political and economic environment in which it is taking place. The RDP initiative

is extremely tricky.

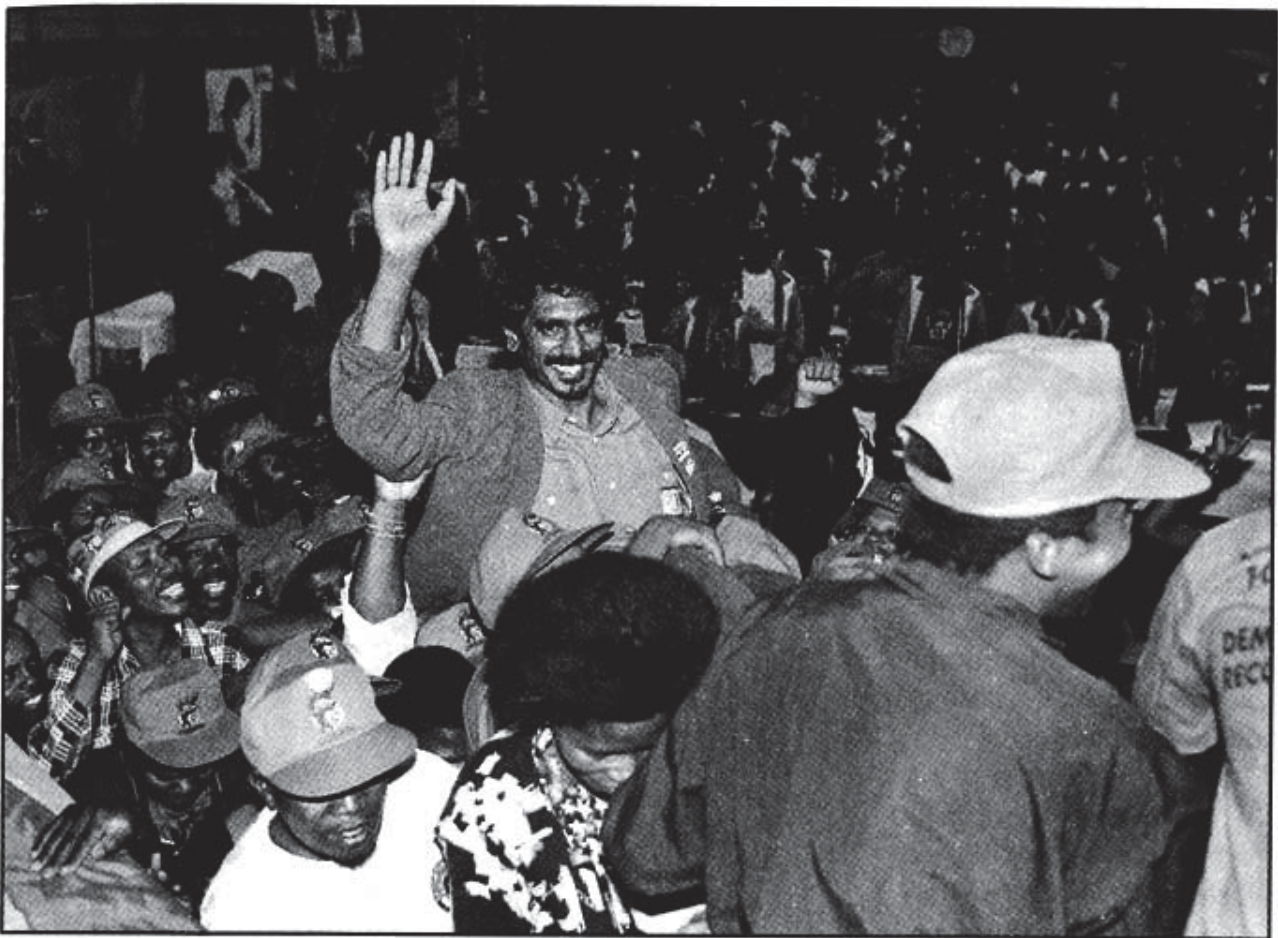
COSATU has sketched a broad approach to the formulation of an RDP. Congress suggested many changes to the draft RDP but approved it with the proviso that the CEC rework the draft to incorporate the congress criticism and debate. After that, a tripartite alliance team will draw up a consolidated proposal. At this point, the proposal will quantify the needs to be satisfied – for example, by stipulating the number of schools, clinics and houses to be built – and will lay down time frames for implementation.

The alliance proposal will then go out for discussion to the alliance constituencies and more broadly into the mass democratic movement (MDM). Further drafts will emerge out of an alliance/MDM summit in November, followed by an ANC conference

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*COSATU heads for parliament – but who takes responsibility?*

on Strategy and Reconstruction in December. Final approval will come at a Conference of Democratic Forces in February next year. In the lead up to next year's finale, COSATU notes that "the alliance will have engaged major stakeholders including business, domestic and international donors and multilateral organisations".

COSATU economics negotiator Jayendra Naidoo notes that the final document will be the product of alliance/MDM negotiations. It will not be a compromise document which tries to secure very broad-based support, for example, by including the inputs of business at large. Only certain sections of business will be drawn into the formulation of the programme, probably the Consultative Business Movement (CBM) and representatives of black business.

The RDP, says Naidoo, "will be a tool by which we are able to manage expectations and find the means of unlocking the

resources in the country. It is intended to be a realistic programme which provides the basis for engagement." In reality, it should be a package of socio-economic targets against which the new government's performance can be assessed.

In other words, if the RDP is as detailed as it is intended to be, the ANC is setting itself a standard against which its success or failure can be measured. This tends to make political parties somewhat nervous, particularly when they are entering government for the first time, as well as operating within a system which is new and untested.

That, in brief, is the roadmap for the RDP. However, it is drawn in such broad scale, that the twists, turns and potholes are not visible. Congress did provide some pointers, but obliquely through the underlying anxieties expressed in the debates. To look at just some of the questions that need to be explored further:



- **First, to what extent must COSATU carry responsibility for the final RDP and its implementation?**

Complicating this question is the distinction between policy-maker and lobbyist. Those who make policy are, by implication, responsible for its results.

Those who lobby for specific interests are not tied to the final outcome; they have simply tried to influence it and they are free to continue to do so if they do not like the results.

Statements at the congress suggest that COSATU is attempting to straddle both these positions. Incoming general secretary Sam Shilowa spoke of "taking to the streets" when the ANC "moves out of line with us". Delegates were also uneasy about jointly negotiated pacts and having to accept the unpalatable parts. This became evident when the most contentious component of the draft RDP, that on macro-economic stability, was blamed on ANC economists.

It would be useful for COSATU to consider whether it is not trying to secure the best of both worlds. On the surface at least, it wants to draw up policies and programmes in alliance with the ANC. Yet it wants no responsibility if the results are not to its liking. This kind of positioning could justifiably upset others in the alliance, principally the ANC.

- **Second, what economic and political forces will influence an RDP?**

COSATU has said that the alliance will try to build "a national democratic consensus on the RDP". It is envisaged that only those identified as part of "the democratic forces" will be party to drawing

up the programme.

Out of this interaction, the Conference of Democratic Forces will seek to agree on a "realistic" programme. Exactly what does "realistic" mean?

For one, the targets and budgets must make arithmetic sense. Take education, for example. COSATU's draft RDP refers to achieving reduced student/teacher ratios. This means more classrooms and teachers, and budget limits will have to be taken into account.

For another, the programme should not motivate those with the capacity to frustrate it to do just that. In a nutshell, a balance needs to be found between two broadly contending forces, the have's and the havenot's.

On the one hand are the needs of the black majority, which have so far found expression in militant struggle. On the other, there are the demands for moderate economic policy and management from the

predominantly – although not entirely – white establishment. This is not a judgment but a recognition of reality. Both these forces need to be accommodated since both have the capacity to undermine future efforts at development.

But the divide is not as neat as some would like it to appear. There are a range of different interests within and between the have's and the havenot's, with some overlapping interests which provide opportunities for co-operation and shared issues.

A "realistic" programme is therefore one which finds an economic comfort zone, where the contradictions between the main contenders at least do not undermine the whole programme and ideally, there are also sufficient points of mutual benefit. One such

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example could be a restructured training system of mutual benefit to employers and employees.

The practical implication of this is that an RDP will in all likelihood have to anticipate the response of the establishment. It will therefore implicitly incorporate compromises. This is already evident in the fourth draft put before congress, although much of it did not meet with the approval of delegates.

The ANC will want to secure a conservative assessment of "realistic". Poised as the in-coming government, with no hands-on knowledge of government and delivery capacity, it will understandably be nervous of setting difficult targets. A tension must therefore exist between COSATU, which will want economic targets set as close to aspirations as possible, and the ANC, which will see greater benefit in bringing aspirations into line with achievable targets.

• **Third, the question of implementation cannot be ignored in drawing up a reconstruction programme.**

Naidoo points out that there is already experimentation through the National Economic Forums's (NEF's) job-creation programme, with a trial run imminent in the National Housing Forum.

More needs to be said about the likely impact of the constitutional dispensation being negotiated at the World Trade Centre. In relation to the economy, congress delegates honed in on regionalism. Regionalism was whole-heartedly rejected on the grounds that it did not bode well for reconstruction. There was an underlying concern that the diffusion of power, through regionalism and minority vetoes, would

render the ANC politically impotent and therefore unable to push anything close to its own policies and programmes.

Overall, delegates appear to have some difficulty in coming to terms with the pending political reality of a so-called government of national unity. The role of minority parties and their veto powers in future have not been finalised. However, it is unlikely that the NP will accept being

powerless to influence decisions as part of a new government.

It is therefore likely that the minority parties will have some effective powers. If they do not support a reconstruction programme, do they have the capacity to paralyse efforts to implement it? Given the structure of the civil service, this is possible.

Therefore, more consideration needs to be

given to drawing in establishment institutions which are not strictly state, but which may be parastatal. The alliance needs to decide which of these organisations can be relied upon to bring in expertise and resources to help ensure a reasonably good shot at implementing a reconstruction programme. As sure as night follows day, an RDP will not succeed if socio-economic development is treated in terms of narrow political interests and ambitions and excludes potential allies from "the other side".

In the final analysis, the challenge facing COSATU is how to tailor strategies to political and economic realities on the one hand, but avoid abdicating to the status quo on the other. Unfortunately, there are no ready formulas to assist here. Rigorous and ongoing questioning is necessary to ensure that, whatever route to economic reconstruction is pursued, it is done so consciously and with the implications understood. ☆

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