South Africa: The Popular Movement in the Flux and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

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Introduction

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is the most concerted and coherent attempt yet to devise a set of social and economic policies that can transform South Africa into a more just and equal society. Its starting point is an integrated sense of South Africa's developmental crisis — a 'growth path' that has lost its way — and an awareness that a new path will depend on the achievement of social and economic goals (Freund 1994c). An ambitious plan, it harks back to the sweeping post-independence experiments of the 1960s though it refrains from the rigid statism of those antecedents. Originating with initiatives within the popular movement, it has passed through extensive consultation and discussion.

Genesis of the Reconstruction and Development Programme

The original impetus came from key South Africa Communist Party (SACP) activists and strategists within the trade union movement, initially grouped in the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa),[1] intent on ensuring that the African National Congress (ANC) in government would honour its stated commitment to redistributive policies. At first, the conceptualization of the RDP was the preserve of COSATU which, at a special congress in September 1993, adopted the fourth draft of RDP, spelling out its broad objectives. The process was then broadened to include popular organizations grouped in the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) around the political leadership of the ANC. Along with the Confederation of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) (and the SACP), the South Africa National Civic

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1 Initially, the approach was 'syndicalist', aiming at an accord that would guarantee workers' rights. Later this was expanded (with Numsa strategist, now deputy finance minister, Alec Erwin at the helm) into broad programme for transformation.

Organization (SANCO), the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and ANC came on board and participated in subsequent drafts which swelled the document to a 146 page manifesto of change. Shortly, before the April 1994 election, the RDP Base Document was adopted by the ANC as its principal guideline for overcoming the legacies of apartheid.

The RDP metamorphosed afterwards, changing from being the programme of the ANC alliance to becoming the policy framework for a government of national unity. 'Ownership' passed from the hands of its creators, and consultation was broadened to include other stakeholders in society, principally business. The result was an RDP that was 'less what it is, than what it might become', as Canadian analyst John Saul (1994:40) noted at the time.

A 'Green Paper' discussion document, tilted towards the supply-side biases of a Development Bank of South Africa team tasked with proposing modifications, was prepared in mid-1994 and met with fierce resistance from within the democratic movement for its noticeable departures from the Base Document. An RDP White Paper discussion document was then drafted and released in September 1994, evoking more muted but nonetheless stern dismay.

The RDP today is the subject of intense contestation as divergent forces, bearing conflicting interests, struggle to harness it to their agendas. So much so that a distinction has become drawn between the RDP Base Document (taken to reflect, broadly, a popular agenda) and the RDP White Paper (which displays more clearly the imprints of pressure from local and international capital). Consequently, the RDP has become a pastiche; as a kind of road map towards transformation it pretends to lead divergent social forces to their respective promised lands.

Further complicating matters is the fact that some of these differences extend into the ANC-in-government and business. The White Paper, not surprisingly, contains an amalgam of development approaches — mixing neoliberal prescriptions with neo-Keynesian regulation, corporatist decision-making processes with a 'people-driven' approach, ostensibly firm commitments to redistribution with structures geared at speeding up growth, and more.

This contest will continue throughout the implementation of the programme, becoming less ideological and technical perhaps as the potential beneficiaries become more directly involved in the RDP. The principles, content and eventual form of the RDP therefore will be mitigated by this ongoing struggle; they are not written in sand, but neither are they inscribed in stone — yet. Nonetheless, while the White Paper remains equivocal on many scores, some government departments (notably Trade and Industry) appear to have finalised strategies and have begun implementation. How these initiatives slot into the overall programme to provide an integrated and

co-ordinated strategy to achieve the objectives set out in the Base Document — is unclear (Adelzadeh and Padayachee forthcoming).

The Road to Development

The RDP is an attempt to programmatize measures aimed at creating 'a people-centred society which measures progress by the extent to which it has succeeded in securing for each citizen liberty, prosperity and happiness' Less prosaically, it claims to be 'an integrated socio-economic policy framework' (RDP White Paper, section 1.1.1.) aimed at redressing the poverty and deprivation of apartheid, developing human resources, building and restructuring the economy, and democratizing the state. As conceived in the RDP White Paper, the programme 'integrates growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme. The key to this link is an infrastructural program that will provide access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for our people' (Shepherd 1994:38-41).

This comprises five key objectives: meeting basic needs, developing human resources, building the economy, democratizing the State and Society, and implementing the RDP

Initially, the RDP Base Document pledged, among other things, to:

- Create 2.5 million new jobs in 10 years,
- Build one million low-cost homes by the year 2000,
- Provide electricity to 2.5 million homes by the year 2000, doubling the number of households with such access from the current 36 per cent,
- Provide running water and sewage systems to one million households,
- Redistribute 30 per cent of agricultural land to small-scale black farmers within five years,
- Shift the health care system from curative services towards primary health care,[2] with free medical services for children under six years and pregnant women at State facilities. By 1998, all South Africans are to receive their basic nutritional intake, school-feeding and other schemes,
- Provide ten years of compulsory, free education as well as revise the curriculum, reduce class sizes and institute adult basic education and training programmes,
- Infrastructure is to be extended through a public works programme,

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2 Annually, South Africa spends 10 times ($183 per capita) on health care, what the World Bank calculates is needed to provide basic public health services for all. Most of the expenditure, however, is on expensive curative care (Shepherd 1994).

- State institutions are to be restructured so that they reflect, by 1997, the racial, class and gender composition of South African society.

These targets have been omitted from the RDP White Paper, however, and replaced by more general goals. As well, these six core principles of the RDP Base Document were substantially altered (RDP White Paper September 1994:6-7).

(i) The RDP is an integrated and sustainable programme based on co-ordinated policies that harness all South Africa's resources, including government, parastatals, business and civil society organizations,

(ii) It is a 'people-driven process',

(iii) It requires peace and security, which necessitates investing the security forces and judicial system with legitimacy,

(iv) Its success depends on a nation-building process,

(v) Reconstruction is integrally linked to development,

(vi) Thorough-going democratization of South Africa is essential to the programme's success.

The RDP White Paper principles now strike equivocal notes on redistribution, preferring to focus on factors deemed to inhibit growth and investment. Indeed, the word 'redistribution' appears only twice in the entire White Paper.

Who Pays the Piper?

Funding the programme will be achieved mainly through the 'better use of existing resources' — meaning rationalizing and reallocating the State Budget according to RDP priorities and, in so doing, 'unlocking' private sector funding.[3] The Budget, however, will not be increased by raising taxes (thus meeting a key demand of business). President Nelson Mandela described a restrained programme in which the government is, among other things, committed to: 'The gradual reduction of the fiscal deficit', ensure 'that recurrent government expenditure does not increase in real terms', 'reduce government dissaving over time', change 'the ratio of government spending towards increased capital expenditure', and finance 'the RDP primarily through restructuring the national, provincial and local government

3 The ANC has pegged the cost of the programme over five years at R90-billion ($26-billion), close to the Development Bank of South Africa's estimate of R105-billion.

budgets to shift spending, programmes and activities to meet RDP priorities' (RDP, 1994:i).

The final phrase is key since it predicates the programme on the State budget, the scale of which is being predetermined by a resolve to submit to 'fiscal discipline' and 'to not (increase) the general level of tax' (RDP, 1994:28). The upshot is that economic growth takes precedence over redistribution, despite the assertion in the preamble that 'growth and development ... are mutually reinforcing'. The scenario envisaged the claims that 'addressing inequalities will expand markets at home, open markets abroad and create opportunities to promote representative ownership of the economy' with the resultant expansion of the economy '(raising) State revenues by expanding the tax base, rather than by permanently raising tax rates'. Instead of outlining a 'mutually reinforcing' relation between growth and development, this in fact describes a trickle-down RDP. Adjustments aimed at establishing 'an environment in which winners flourish' are to catalyze economic growth, which expands the tax base, increasing the State budget and, consequently, the funds available for RDP projects.

'Reconstruction and development will be achieved through the leading and enabling role of the State, a thriving private sector and active involvement by all sectors of civil society which in combination will lead to sustainable growth', declared the RDP Base Document. The State clearly stands centre-stage, although the programme hardly deserves the allegation that it is static, its scope and character increasingly is determined by the (prerogatives of the) market. Indeed, as we argue below, the inclusive terms of the transition also shape the RDP process, although the precise distribution of power and authority to other forces in the planning and implementation phases, remains unclear — and subject to ongoing contest.

Participation in the consultative process that spawned the RDP was wide but shallow; a thin layer of activists and strategists were involved, prompting President Mandela to admit later that the process was 'top-down'. One result is that the acronym has become ubiquitous but very few South Africans have even a faint understanding of what it represents; generally, the RDP is viewed as a massive State charity programme. While goals, priorities and policies can be set at these levels, implementation depends ultimately on capacities at the local level, with local government as crucial player.

Since the 1970s, there has evolved in South Africa a dynamic range of progressive organs within civil society, grouped broadly under the rubric of the anti-apartheid struggle and referred to in this paper as the 'popular movement'. The sweep encompasses human rights, student, health, church, youth, civic, labour, education, women, legal, media, advice, housing, land and other groupings. To a great extent, they were the 'institutional', organized bases of resistance.

Like elsewhere in the world, a rich theoretical debate about civil society ensued after 1989 within the popular movement, seemingly confirming its wide sweep, maturity and sophistication. In many respects that reputation is deserved — the Confederation of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) is among the fastest-growing union federations in the world; though of uneven strength, civic associations are active across the land; a huge array of professional, community and service organizations remains active; a fledgling women's movement, grouped around the Women's National Coalition, already has mustered national lobbying campaigns and surveys of women's needs, and more. Not merely in comparison with other African countries but also in its own right, the accumulation of achievement, experience, skills, infrastructure and resources within progressive civil society organs seems to be formidable — and is expressed incontrovertibly in the demise of the apartheid system.

Assuming this state of affairs as a constant given, however, is foolish. Outside observers might retort that, 'embryonic' or not, at least these structures exist. The point , though, is not a roll-call of civil society but to assess whether its popular components can live up to the expectations that they 'lead' the process of transformation — which strengths need to be added or consolidated, which weaknesses need to be overcome.

New Shocks

It is becoming apparent that the popular sector is sagging beneath a variety of pressures and that the extent of organization (and political education) within it is less impressive than the rhetoric proposes. Three months after the election, even the ANC party apparatus was deemed to be 'in tatters' by its president, hollowed out by an exodus of leadership into the State, handicapped by poor organization and skimpy resources, and hobbled by its failure to answer the question 'what's our mission now?' The same ideological and material processes that brought this about have slammed into popular organizations. Some trends can be discerned:

- The post-1990 plethora of negotiating forums and the huge demand for policy proposals, action research etc., shoved to the fore those organizations capable of rendering 'technical' services (training, research, policy development, advisory support) and within them a caste of urban specialists, often pushing (wittingly or not) into the background the communities and sectors they are supposed to represent).[4] Except when these rarefied processes connect directly with a constituency's lived reality (e.g. When squatters have to select sites in a new housing

4 The Making People-driven Development Work report is highly critical of this trend which, it claims, has made NGOs 'rarely accountable to communities'.

settlement), a sense of alienation and withdrawal takes hold between the constituency and its organizational representatives (and their advisors). In such cases, constituency activities tend to be reactive and rejectionist.[5] In other words, the 'rootedness' and 'representativeness' of the initiatives of popular organizations is not guaranteed.

- The flagship organs of the popular movement tend to be organized in and around urban zones, where most of the resources and skills are concentrated. However, representative civic association are in those areas where they remain robust and well-organized (generally the 'established sections of townships rather than shack settlements), there are huge swathes of our society where such structures are either non-existent, disorganized or plain unrepresentative. In rural South Africa where some 40 per cent of (the nation's poorest) citizens live, and in squatter settlements on the urban periphery, popular organizations begin to resemble more their counterparts in other semi-industrialized countries.[6] Because they are generally poorly positioned to access funding and other support, this discrepancy is endemic, particularly when the overall funding pool shrinks. The resilience and determination that distinguishes many of these structures is undermined by their lack of material and institutional resources. In addition, the media, information and consultation circuits and networks operate largely within the urban realm, further pushing rural constituencies and organizations into 'the cold'.
- The vitality, resilience and, occasionally, the enterprising flair displayed by popular organizations drew billions of rands in overseas funding, the role of which in building, bolstering — and distorting — South Africa's vaunted progressive civil society cannot be underestimated.[7] As the flood of funding dries up, three trends have set in:

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5 For more on this long-standing trend in opposition struggles, see 'Legacies of the Past', below.

6 By 1995, there will be 11.5 million rural poor (about one third of the population), locked out on the fringes of perception and geography.

7 The report Making People-driven Development Work, commissioned by the South Africa Nation Civic Organisation (SANCO) includes trenchant critiques of this phenomenon, particularly in Chapter 12.

- NGOs especially are following a supply-side logic, as they tailor their work to access funds that donors earmark for particular types of work, e.g. 'gender and development' or 'governance'.[8] This has allowed donors to become much more interventionist in deciding what work is performed in which sectors,
- A process of attrition began abruptly after 1990, with projects and organizations collapsing in sectors struck from donors' lists of priorities. Media, cultures, community advice service and some education projects have been hardest hit.[9] Since these projects often serve as resource, training, information and infrastructural anchor points within broader civil society, the effects of their demise ripple out widely
- Soliciting funding and servicing donors has become an increasingly specialized and time-consuming aspect of work.

- Popular organizations (and service organizations linked to them) have suffered a massive exodus of experienced, skilled personnel after the April 1994 election. Benefiting from this drain, are government departments and State institutions, as well as corporate businesses implementing, affirmative action programmes. In rare cases, individuals have made principled decisions not to accept the enticing offers of lavish salary packages and perks. Not only NGOs but also the ANC's party infrastructure has been hard-hit by this trend. Civics will be hit hard by exodus when local government posts are filled after the 1995 local elections. Within the popular movement trade unions have been most pro-active in training successors (COSATU 'lost' 20 top leaders to parliament); unfortunately that diligence is largely unmatched in other sectors. One result is that organization's capacities are diminished, forcing them into holding patterns as they struggle to service their constituencies whilst simultaneously having to introduce structural adjustments required by the changed circumstances of the transition.
- The exodus of skilled personnel also reflects and is part of a wider, accelerated process of class stratification, especially among Africans. Although it is most obvious in the 'buppie' (black, urban professional)

8 During the 1980s donor monitoring of project spending and work was extremely lax, providing huge latitude which in some cases was abused. After 1990, however, the patron-client relationship applying in the rest of the Third World was reintroduced, its conservatism reinforced in part by the rise of the logical framework analysis (LFA) fad.

9 In the past year, four premier independent magazines and newspapers — *Work in Progress, Vrye Weekblad, Learn and Teach, South* — were forced to shut down for lack of funding.

> phenomenon, the class decompression of African communities is a widespread and profound trend of the past decade. As a result, within broad enveloping categories such as 'the oppressed', 'blacks', 'the masses' increasingly disparate needs and interests have come to the fore more obviously. Indeed, the fragmentation and diffusion of the erstwhile 'common enemy' — the apartheid system — removed one of the factors that helped unify popular resistance.[10]

Again, the representativeness of popular organizations is called into question. An often-cited example is rent boycotts organized by civic associations which claimed to represent 'the community' in toto: whilst tenants in formal houses stopped paying rent, they often continued to collect rent money from sub-tenants living in the backyards and garages. Thus, a protest to defend the interests of a presumed 'community' in some cases favoured its more privileged section. This is not to say that civics, for instance, are necessarily unrepresentative, but to stress an obvious point which for long has been slated as heretical: that reality seldom validates notions of monolithic communities bonded by common interests.

- Whilst not in crisis, popular organizations are in drastic flux. On the one hand, they are prey to an amorphous mood of disengagement and disorientation — termed 'post-liberation depression' by some. There are many causes, among them: the disorganizing and demoralizing effects of the intense violence and trauma suffered especially by African townships in Natal and on the East Rand; a well-nurtured belief that, the State being seen the prime actor in society (hence, the struggle to replace 'their' State with 'our' State), the onus of introducing and directing change now rests with the post-apartheid State; the alienating effect of drawn-out, discreet and remote negotiation processes; misgivings about the abilities of existing organizations to service people's needs.

At the same time we witness more spontaneous activities among the most marginalized sections, especially in the form of land occupations. They tend to be sporadic and short-term interventions aimed at 'coping' and 'survival'. In the South African context such initiatives have historically been subsumed and politicized within the broader transformative project of the popular movement. As examples of marginalized citizens regaining their

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10 Referring specifically to civic associations, researchers, Khehla Shubane and Pumla Madika have gone on to say that 'by suggesting that black township, residents share a common experience despite their differences, they have taken apartheid's definition of the group as their rationale'; see their: *The struggle continues? Civic Associations in the Transition*, pp. 13. For more on the ideological imprints of apartheid on the opposition, see the 'Legacies of the Past' section, below.

autonomy, these initiatives now reflect the perceived failure of popular organizations (and the State) to service their needs.

Adapting to the New

The upshot is that the basis for a 'people-driven' transformation process is much flimsier and evasive than commonly assumed. If, for instance, the RDP is to be 'people-driven' and if it is to counter the trend of splitting South Africa inexorably into 'insiders' and 'outsiders', effective community involvement must be ensured and insured. It cannot be taken for granted, neither can it be conjured up by directives that RDP committees be set up, nor can it be imitated by 'community leaders'.

A first — and often overlooked — step is to understand 'the community' better, which implies research and consultation that does not stop at the offices of organizations deemed to represent it but also penetrate the community. A second step is to build (where necessary afresh) new alliances around real as opposed to postulated needs. This demands concerted moves to redress the imbalance in knowledge and understanding of, resources for, and links with the most marginalized sections of South Africa.

A third step is to broaden the tripartite corporatist model that positions labour, business and the State at the centre of State policy making. No easy solution presents itself. One unnerving lesson of the negotiating forays of the past years is that participation by inexperienced and under-resourced representatives of marginalized constituencies tends to further marginalized them. The dependency on specialist advisors, alienation from the process and dissatisfaction with slow or inappropriate results builds a distrust which can boil over into conflicts that scuttle often precarious successes in achieving organized unity.

This section does not pretend to assess the state of the popular movement; it focuses on broad trends that complicate its capacity to meet its new challenges. However, because of the considerable faith vested in its ability to lead the process of transformation, and its sheer strength, the trade union movement deserves closer scrutiny.

The Labour Movement

The legalization of black trade unions and the large shift of unskilled African labour to semi-skilled labour saw hundreds of thousands of workers organized within a stout array of trade unions (1.1 million within COSATU alone) by the mid-1980s. These unions varied in degrees of militancy, strategic prowess, organizational character, democratic depth and political bent. But joined in two main federations — COSATU and the National Council for Trade Unions (NACTU) — they comprised the most formidable organized popular force in South Africa and became able and willing to act

around political demands. By 1990, about 2.5 million workers, 80 per cent of the blacks, belonged to trade unions.

Black trade unions came into their own amid the attempt by the State and capital during the 1980s to subject black labour to a more sophisticated containment and adjustment programme. Economic recession, high unemployment and rising inflation, however, tripped up this domestication exercise and the new unions reacted in militant fashion.

The coming of age of the modern black trade union movement can be divided into three phases (Barrett 1993): post-1973 when organizing was concentrated in the manufacturing sector and when 'unions eschewed mass mobilization and high profile campaigns in order to build a disciplined power base' (Friedman 1986:33); post-Wiehahn reforms in the early to mid-1980s when the National Union of Mineworkers was formed, militant actions grew, especially on the mines, the federation giant COSATU was established, and controversies raged over the role of the labour movement in broader political and social struggles; late 1980s onwards, when a new regime of labour relations was instituted, and public sector organizing commenced and boomed.

With its 1.3 million members drawn from 14 affiliated trade unions, COSATU is by far the largest and strongest trade union federation in South Africa. Its greatest feats have been of two types: its prominent political role in the anti-apartheid struggle which during the late 1980s helped stalemate the apartheid State and led to negotiations; the successes of its affiliates since the mid-1980s led to sharp rises in African workers' wages, improved conditions of employment and the introduction of the 'rule of law' into the workplace (Baskin 1991:449). To these ones can be added an array of other achievements, including — COSATU's birth and swift consolidation under four years of emergency rule; its survival despite intense subsequent repression; its defense within the popular movement of the need for critical debate, freedom of expression and democratic organization; establishing a tradition, embattled and uneven as it is, of participatory democracy within the democratic movement; initiating and developing the RDP; and more.

Along with these victories emerged several weaknesses which belaboured the movement during the transition. They include:

- political differences within and between COSATU affiliated unions and NACTU, leading to an outright split in at least one union. As well 'there has been an increasing tendency to actively discourage opposition views within the unions and to stifle any form of real debate';
- greater reliance on expert advisors which made policy making more rarefied and remote, and weakened democratic process;
- zealous participation in 'every negotiating forum under the sun' which stretched resources, removed key union leaders from their organizations,

led to sometimes unmandated agreements and tended to shift the focus away from 'bread and butter issues' to complex technical issues;

- an increase in bureaucratization, a measure of the rapid growth of unions, which fed a 'general trend of weakening of workers' control', once a central tenet and goal of COSATU;
- poor education and training for shop stewards and organizers in many unions.

Many of these trends are recognized by the labour movement (Shilowa 1994), which is trying to launch a 'back to basics' campaign which will involve 'pursuing the interests of working people, regardless of the twists and turns which government takes.

This section focuses, then, on some of the main opportunities and challenges that confront this movement in post-apartheid South Africa. They are manifold and interrelated.

Political Alliances

The dynamic role assumed by COSATU in the political struggle for liberation during the 1980s positioned it as a key partner in a tripartite alliance between it, the ANC and SACP. Indeed, there is good cause to believe that the drift rightwards by the ANC since 1989 will have been more pronounced, were it not for the political and negotiating roles played by some leading officials from COSATU and its affiliates.

The alliance expresses the dominance of a 'national democratic tradition' within the black labour movement over the past decade, a state of affairs which is not guaranteed to continue. Three political traditions have been detected in the labour movement (Alan Fine and Webster 1989). In the first, the devoted alliance between the South Africa Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and ANC during the 1950s led to the crushing of SACTU by the State and its retreat into exile by 1964. In the 1970s, there resurfaced strongly in general workers' unions the view that 'workers' struggle in the factories and townships was indivisible'. This 'national democratic' or 'populist' tradition was grounded in the Colonialism of a Special Type thesis of the SACP (see above) which privileged a multi-class national liberation struggle over class struggle. By the early 1980s several 'populist' unions were engaging the State as part of the United Democratic Front (UDF, formed in 1983).

Meanwhile, another tradition had gathered strength in the 1970s—that of 'shopfloor' unions which were leery of direct involvement in broader political issues and concentrated on building democratic shopfloor structures, accountability and worker control. Some went as far as proposing to create a mass-based workers' party as an alternative to the SACP. Supporters of this tradition were disparaged as 'workerists'.

A third current pursued the Black Consciousness tradition, emphasizing race and downplaying class. Supporters sought to combat the white intellectual leadership of the labour movement and nurture black (understood as including Africans, Coloureds and Indians) self-esteem, independence and capacity. The tradition would settle within NACTU, formed in 1986 and about 250,000 strong membership.

Despite the sectarianism and suspicion marking COSATU at the beginning, it decided at the outset to participate actively in national politics 'but on terms favourable to the working class'. Months later, at the peak of the uprising and with insurrectionary hopes high, COSATU shifted deeper into 'populist' mode when it pledged to fight the national democratic revolution under the leadership of the ANC — stirring fiery disputes among its members. Debates raged around questions of union independence from political organizations, the defense of working class politics, ensuring accountability of unions and their leaders to members and more — questions similar to the ones that beset the federation currently.[11] Between 1987 and 1989, however, a measure of internal political unity was achieved through a compromise that combined the priority of ending apartheid with the need to struggle for socio-economic justice after liberation. When the State banned 17 anti-apartheid organizations in 1988, COSATU stepped into the breach and assumed an even more direct political role, which later became institutionalized in its partnership with the ANC and SACP in the tripartite alliance, based on the privileging of the national democratic struggle over class struggle.

Not surprisingly, this alliance is enduring increased strain as COSATU seeks to defend its independence from a political ally that is now dominant in a highly compromised government of national unity and that is saddled with the historic task of managing the class compromise which underpins the transition. Several knots of tension have arisen. The Interim Constitution makes South Africa one of the few countries in the world where employers' right to lock out striking workers is ensconced in a Bill of Rights. At the helm of economic policy in the new government is a former banker, finance minister Chris Liebenberg, who is determined to curb wage increases in a bid to stimulate growth (a path even the World Bank advises hesitantly in the South African context). Stringent tariff reductions announced in July 1994 threaten thousands of jobs in the textile and auto industries. President Mandela's frequent counsel to unions that they defend their autonomy, merely confirms that government economic policy — and hence its attitude

11 Of the major unions, the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa) was actively suspicious of the 'national democratic tradition', whilst the massive National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was the most 'populist'.

to organized labour — increasingly is becoming reactive to powerful structural forces.

At the same time COSATU is committed to defending and pushing forward the democratization and development process — as confirmed by its central role in developing the RDP base document. The decision to release key union leaders to run on the ANC's election slate, to some extent consummated the alliance, but it also reflected COSATU's determination to try and stem the ANC's rightward drift, by contesting the party's policies and practices from within and without.

Talk of trade union autonomy and independence has become ubiquitous, but the question remains how it is to be expressed, what form it can take. Politically united are two players that are being pulled in distinct directions. COSATU is saddled with the role of defending the interests of the working classes — and perhaps, as we note below, even more narrowly, relatively privileged sections of those classes. The ANC (as a political party) is in flux. Organizationally weakened and strategically disoriented by the transition, it is unable thus far to bring to heel its representatives in a government which, lest we forget, has embarked on a broad hegemonic project that transcends in several respects the confines of party policy and specific constituency interests.

The national democratic tradition was predicated on the notion that class contradictions are secondary to the national liberation struggle, a perspective which is likely to become even more controversial. Thus 'trade unions which emphasize their representative role by struggling to defend and improve members' working and living conditions could easily be seen as opponents of the new State's attempt at national development, setting the stage for a much less placid relationship. 'Our alliance is based on certain terms', reminds trade union leader Jabu Gwala, 'and if those terms are breached, we will not take it lying down'.

At the same time, there is recognition that the ANC's 'working class bias' is not a given as it is being challenged strongly by other class interests both inside and outside of the party. Black business is embroiled in this fray, as advice such as the following confirms:

> It is time to make a choice: have an airy-fairy liberal democracy with a fairly mediocre growth rate or lay it out on the unions at the risk of being labeled a 'union basher', and become another growth-led Taiwan... my friendly advice to the government is: do the right thing ... and only have sentimental rather than economic regrets (Madi 1994:28).

The view that 'the most important strategic challenge of our time (is) the battle for the life and soul of the ANC', finds support among some worker leaders, especially those aligned with the SACP. However, as Von Holdt points out, 'the working class movement may then find that its quest for influence (in the ANC) is the very thing that holds it captive to ANC

policies' (Madi 1994). Complicating matters further is the possibility that the SACP, in order to avoid having to stand on its own feet, might try and hold the tripartite alliance together 'beyond the point at which it is in COSATU's interests to do so' (Madi 1994). In such changed circumstances, COSATU's political alliance with the ANC, indeed its political role per se, cannot escape re-evaluation.

New Economic Conditions

The labour movement's perceptions of economic transformation are dramatically different from a decade ago. Rhetorical support remains strong for grand interventions such as nationalization, but the centrally-planned economy has lost its attraction as a panacea. Replacing those fantasies is the (sometimes grudging) acceptance of 'economic pluralism' and 'a greater awareness of the complexities of modern-day economics, of the value of markets as mechanisms of exchange, and even of the usefulness of private enterprise as a vehicle for economic growth' (Schreiner 1994:44).

The labour movement now recognizes the need to extend its influence to the national economy and development process (Collins 1994) in line with its drive towards 'strategic unionism', essentially 'a strategic vision of a labour-driven process of social change' (Von Holdt 1992:16).

This is expressed in the labour movement's participation in key negotiating fora (including the tripartite National Economic Forum, the National Manpower Commission, the National Training Board etc...) where economic and socio-economic policy and restructuring decisions can be made on the basis of bargaining and negotiating rather than through secretive lobbying processes. The trend, then, is away from the conflictual relations engendered by the labour laws and practices of the old order. Controversy rages around the direction of this trend, however. Is it leading the labour movement into a social contract and, if so, is the movement strong enough to resist the cooption critics fear lies in ambush along that route? Related to this, is whether the incipient move towards a corporatist framework is to be resisted or not.

Critics like Langa Zita (1993a) remind that a successful social contract does not express 'a new-found love between capital and labour', but instead requires a set of conditions that can yield mutual, negotiated benefits. They include: steady economic growth in a competitive and leading economy internationally, an accompanying ideology of industrial peace, a strong union movement willing and capable of disciplining its members and a coherent and disciplined capitalist class, a coherent set of economic strategies geared to achieve a development path that breaks the insider/outsider mould.

Yet, for union leaders like NUMSA's Enoch Godongwana and SACTU's Jabu Gwala, there remains the need to participate effectively in economic

decision-making. Participation, however, cannot come at the expense of mass struggle, and must involve report backs by the leadership and mandates by the membership.[12] Zita (1993a) adds that a social contract should be treated as an arena of struggle that also involves civics and other social forces. Further, it must be reproduced at regional and local level, and be linked to the industry forums and factory initiatives to restructure production patterns. In short, a social contract with teeth.

Again, such objectives remain to be measured against the labour movement's capacities, which Schreiner (1994:44) believes are exaggerated. Controversially, he contends that a lack of long-term training means 'that levels of service to members are often very poor, campaigns cannot be properly carried out, and frustration becomes the norm'. Noting that 'even highly sophisticated national trade union centres have been forced into largely reactive and responsive roles', he counsels against union attempts to lead the process of industrial restructuring. Instead, its sights should be set lower — at securing 'an important range of concessions for its members'. Union leaders, at least in public, reject such 'doomsaying', however.

Compounding these (potential difficulties are the multiple pressures and shifts that are materializing as business seeks to insert itself afresh into the global economy on the basis of competitiveness and productivity. These range from the standard demand for 'wage restraint' to shifting production in favour of smaller volumes of skilled labour inputs to greater reliance on casual labour and flexible specialization to shifts in management style to 'participative management' to reducing tariff and non-tariff protections etc. All of which affect the priorities the labour movement sets itself and the ways in which it chooses to pursue them.

Ultimately, though, it is essential to shift economic policy making away from the secretive lobbying circuits employed by South African capital if 'strategic unionism' is to see the light of day. The question is how. Models that replace lobbying with more transparent and (nominally) democratic tripartite structures — comprising the State, labour and business — work best in societies with highly representative and cohesive business and labour organizations, conditions that do not pertain in South Africa. Left out in the tripartite formula are the most marginalized and poorly organized sections of society. Such a model probably will see State policy 'influenced by the best organized and most powerful in society: business and the trade unions' (Bird

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12 Many of these union traditions were trampled underfoot in the scramble to participate 'efficiently' in national negotiating fora. One ominous example was an agreement by union specialist negotiators to a radical and damaging cut in tariffs in the textile and auto industries early in 1994 which somehow escaped the usual report-back and communication procedures.

and Schreiner 1993:28). But strategic unionism', by definition, has to favour the broad working class as a whole, including the unemployed — if it 'only stratifies the working class further and fails to ensure a redistribution of income (with an emphasis on wages) then it will not achieve its objectives of radical economic restructuring' (Barrett 1993:48).

To avoid such a corporatist outcome, a multiparty model is proposed, 'based on guaranteed representation for the organizations of civil society with a mass base and definable national interests, which are independent of the State' (Barrett 1993). The decision to broaden the tripartite National Economic Development Council (succeeding the National Economic Forum) to include civic associations seems in line with such recommendations.

Working Class Stratification

COSATU claims — with some justification — to represent the interests of the entire working class. Intense stratification has occurred within the working class, however, in line with the historical insider/outsider trend but profound enough to fragment it into working classes. Divided along racial lines, the South African 'working class' has always been a postulate, never a coherent social force. Even the black working class no longer forms a neat category, it is driven by intra-class differences that undermine the singular roles adopted by standard bearers. Political and existing stress lines run between employed workers and unemployed workers; farmworkers and urban-based industrial workers; organized workers and unorganized workers; full-time and part-time or contract workers; semi and fully-skilled workers and unskilled counterparts. Ironically, the success of a federation like COSATU in achieving 'a real increase in the standard of living of its members and a significant shift in the share of wealth black workers receive' (Baskin 1991:449) has contributed to this trend.

Emerging in more pronounced forms since the mid-1980s, this differentiation was subsumed and 'flattened out' within the anti-apartheid struggle, essentially a national-democratic struggle. That overarching ideological bond is weakening, as the emphasis shifts from the political to the socio-economic. Even though the RDP is marketed as a national endeavour destined to satisfy all South Africans, its content is being shaped by contesting class (and other) interests. It probably will not replace the national-democratic struggle and function, ideologically, as a bonding device that pushes intra-class tensions and contradictions into the background.

These are some of the real — though not inexorable — pressure that might push COSATU affiliates towards 'enclave unionism', where their roles narrow to defend, in increasingly parochial terms, the interests of a membership that represent a comparative elite layer of the South Africa working classes: 'Classical notions of class interest and solidarity which fitted more easily with a far less economically complex bygone era are

unhelpful here ... divisions within classes may be of greater significance than divisions between classes' (Schreiner 1994:48). Readings of this sort are perilous since, as Fine and Webster remind, 'attempts to limit the role of trade unions in post-colonial Africa have often been justified on the grounds that trade unions represent only a tiny fraction of the labour force. Certainly, the South African ruling class has been quick to popularize this line in its bid to cut the black labour movement down to size — claiming that wage and other demands of organized workers are acceded to at the expense of unemployed workers. Nevertheless, the fact that business chooses to distort and exploit a trend is foolish cause for dismissing that trend and chiding those who attempt to discern and scrutinize it as 'reactionaries'.

The fact is that stratification is taking place. Union membership tallies are formidable when compared with other African and Third World countries but low compared to industrialized countries where inclusive socio-economic systems have been attempted. Moreover, organized workers in the formal sector represent a small, relatively privileged section of the total labour force, upwards of 45 per cent of whom are unemployed. A large share of those with jobs are unorganized in low-productivity, low-paying, highly insecure service jobs — like domestic workers (three million) farmworkers (one million), cleaning and security workers (250,000), and small retail outlet workers.

In 1989, already, Fine and Webster predicted that 'this means that unions face a choice: should they prioritize the immediate interest of their members, or do they set as a central aim the building of a social movement of working people as a whole'. Former NUMSA national organizer Geoff Schreiner now believes COSATU will be forced to abandon the mantle of leading the societal transformation process and will have to 'prioritize and champion the cause of the most privileged sections of the working class — those who have stable, formal sector employment, relatively high wages and those who dominate the leader echelons of the movement'. The causes lie in affiliated unions' diminished organizational capacities, dwindling personnel resources, the rise of flexible specialization in production, and the likelihood that if members' needs are not serviced, other unions will fill the gap: 'in order to survive, unions will have to prioritize the realization of shop floor bread-and-butter demands' (Schreiner 1994:44).

Stratification is occurring also within the organized workforce, as recent research in the metal industry confirms. In a 1993 study, Owen Crankshaw found that the African workforce 'is becoming more differentiated with respect to occupation and income', a trend that 'has implications for the solidarity of the African working class movement' (Crankshaw 1993:1). Noting that the 'character of the housing market is reinforcing the differences in the standard of living of different classes of workers, 'Crankshaw forecasts that as African white collar workers and supervisors

move into middle-class African neighbourhoods, they will find it easier to break ranks with blue collar workers. (Until recently this was difficult, since African supervisors 'lived cheek by jowl, and even socialized with, junior employees' — the phenomenon of class compression referred to above). What he found was less the onset of generalized reactionary sensibilities among this stratum of workers, and more the rise of an awareness of specific and differentiated interests.

Thus 94 per cent of African workers and staff supported the right to strike; but unlike their blue collar colleagues (who favoured 'mass-based and militant unionism' to defend collective interests), the staff members' main concerns were individual promotion and advancement. On the horizon is not a wholesale crack-up in black worker solidarity, but increasingly specific identification of interests. Thus Crankshaw concludes that 'if unions are to address the interests of African staff, they must adopt a style of organization that distinguishes between different classes of workers and which recognizes individual merit and promotion' (Crankshaw 1993:15).

What can be done? Attempts to organize farmworkers (in COSATU via the troubled Farm and Allied Workers' union, FAWU) sadly have been to little effect, with less than 1 per cent of workers in the agricultural sector organized. Efforts to organize domestic workers also have been uneven. In both instances, however, progress has been made in extending legislative protection to these sectors of workers (the defense of which, of course, requires union organizing). Unions like NUMSA have invested great effort in bridging the gap between the employed and the unemployed. As well, it remains true — to what extent is unclear — that employed workers cross-subsidize large numbers of unemployed relatives. And in recent years, training, education and skills upgrading have featured prominently on unions' lists of demands.

It is argued that unions, by virtues of their experience and capacities, should participate actively in 'delivering' socio-economic improvements in the broader community, which implies forging stronger, sustained links with organizations in other sectors. Meanwhile, Schreiner suggests, firstly, that this trend of intra-class differentiation be acknowledged and, secondly, that organizations which attempt to represent the interests of particular sections of the working class support one another. The clearest example of such cross-sectorial collaboration would be between unions and civics. From COSATU's side, such support could include: 'providing material resources to such organizations'; helping 'create a climate in which such organizations can flourish and grow'; supporting 'the institutionalization of broadly inclusive advisory forums within key sectors and at different levels of government' (Schreiner 1994).

Caught in the slipstream of the past, union federations like COSATU are beginning to come to terms with these and other new circumstances and

trends. Such is the flux of the transition, though, that responses are likely to remain fitful for several years more.

New Styles of Organizing

The signs are still preliminary but as the economy positions itself to enter the global market more effectively, production is likely to become reorganized away from fordist systems to flexible specialization, sourcing out, multi-skilling and so on. If so, it implies changes in union organizing, away from large industrial unions with members grouped in the lower-skilled end of production towards smaller unions geared to service more individualist needs (Schreiner 1994). But this forecast is highly speculative. Crankshaw's (1993:15) survey in the metal sector, for instance, found little evidence of strong career and promotion ambitions among skilled workers such as artisans and machine operatives — in marked contrast to staff and supervisors.

Greater changes will perhaps be wrought by the labour movement's need to reduce dependency on foreign funds and achieve financial self-sufficiency. This means greater dependency on membership fees — which implies that union work becomes focused around the needs of members. Winning and retaining members will require efficient, consistent service which several COSATU and NACTU union, even by their own admission, are not well-equipped for. Concerns that trade unions might adopt more introverted approaches, concentrated limited resources around defending and extending the relative privileges won by the organized working class, gain some resonance in this context.

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