

Wish list

**BETTER LIFE
AHEAD? Children
on the Cape Flats.**

Picture: SOUTH



or blueprint for a brilliant future?

CO-AUTHORED by the South African Communist Party, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco), the National Education Co-ordinating Committee and the ANC; extensively workshopped, critiqued and redrafted, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is probably the most significant statement on South African society since the Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955.

There is a lot to the RDP document and any review must be limited to a few issues. My reading begins with two general points. First, I want to underline that the general public has been given an incorrect impression that the RDP centres entirely around the economy. In fact only one of six chapters, covering about one-third of the text, deals directly with the economy. Thus much of this review is devoted to other sections of the report.

Second, the quality of the document as a whole is variable. Some parts are far more effective than others; much of the attention

here will be devoted to the weakest parts, rather than heaping praise on the best.

Let me start with the best, however. Most impressive of all is the introductory chapter with its powerful statement of general principles and its vision – economic development flowing from social reconstruction, tied in to the political democratisation of South Africa.

Second in line comes the key chapter on the economy which one suspects has been the most affected by the writing of multiple drafts, some under the overly penetrating stare of our business sector. Coverage here is broad, thorough and insightful.

Analysis flows out of an integrated sense of a South African developmental crisis, a “growth path” that has lost its way, and out of an awareness that a new road will depend on the achievement of social as much as economic goals. This section offers a realistic balance between private opportunity and state regulation/channelling as the means through which change can and must occur.

A key element in strategy is corporatism:

the current negotiating forums linking state, capital and labour are to remain and function as key policy instruments.

According to the RDP, “a five percent growth rate and the creation of 300 000 to 500 000 non-agricultural jobs per annum can be achieved within five years”. This ambitious goal is identified (along with many others) as a target if all goes well. However, as with the heart of this chapter, policy objectives are suggestive, not prescriptive.

It avoids making promises which cannot be kept and suggests, but leaves to the politicians and the political process, the final decisions on priority. This is fundamental to good policy writing that does not discredit the work experts can do in this area.

There are a few weak paragraphs in this section: one, on the “living wage”, too carefully avoids defining this loaded concept and makes the reader wonder what is intended.

Turning to the chapter that deals with the state and democratisation, there is much that is fundamentally important. Two positive noteworthy points are the call for the demili-

Programme nevertheless offers South Africa an inspiring and enduring

point of reference, says economist BILL FREUND.

Essence of the RDP

"SIX basic principles, linked together, make up the political and economic philosophy that underlies the whole RDP. This is an innovative and bold philosophy based on a few simple and powerful ideas." So begins section 3 of the introduction to the RDP document. The six principles are:

- ▶ an integrated and sustainable programme;
- ▶ a people-driven process;
- ▶ peace and security for all;
- ▶ nation building;
- ▶ linking reconstruction and development;
- ▶ democratising South Africa.

The five key RDP programmes are:

- ▶ meeting basic needs;
- ▶ developing our human resources;
- ▶ building the economy;
- ▶ democratising the state and society;
- ▶ implementing the RDP.

The RDP is the fruit of wide consultation. An introduction by Nelson Mandela invites inputs from all South Africans. To make an input, contact: The RDP, ANC, PO Box 61884, Marshalltown 2107 or phone (011) 330-7000.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994, Umanyano Publications, Johannesburg) is available from ANC offices and Clarke's Bookshop, Long Street, Cape Town at R28,50. ■



abuse and solving virtually every woe you could think of.

One could query the desirability of some of the objectives proposed in these two chapters but far more disturbing is the lack of realism about what a state can and should deliver, the more so because pious comments on "affordability" are thrown in while little if any nationalisation is intended to occur.

To sit on the back of the private sector as arbiter and regulator of 1 001 matters, as is suggested, is in fact a far more demanding task than to nationalise. There is not only the very real question of costs, for those who lack unshakeable faith that a "Mandela boom" will overcome all obstacles, but also of person-power. From where are the armies of highly skilled and devoted planners and regulators to come?

There is more than a grain of truth in the liberal stereotype of apartheid as a system of intense social engineering and regimentation. Will the South African people want, or even tolerate, a new set of social engineers (even men and women with the best intentions) to put all the gears into reverse? I am sceptical.

These chapters at times seem governed by a vision of a politically correct version of Calvin's Geneva. In fact, it would take the level of social discipline, of accord between state and people that we associate with Scandinavia or Singapore, to make such a vision come to life.

On the specifics in health, energy, telecommunication, culture, youth development and many other areas, the experts (and non-experts) must continue the debates about what can and should be done, debates which are not resolved in the RDP despite many interesting suggestions and worthwhile goals.

I would like to register my displeasure, however, at a toothless little section on higher education. This receives barely half the attention devoted to sport and recreation!

Overall, the RDP is an impressive catalogue of South African dilemmas and ideas about how to solve them. We will continue to refer back to it as a reference for a long time to come. ■

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tarisation of South African society and the commitment to overriding customary law on fundamental individual rights issues. Both will mark big changes if they are carried through.

A few problematic or bothersome points attract attention as well. This chapter deals briefly and somewhat grudgingly with the new regional framework that has been created. The existence of nine provinces is acknowledged and the need for equity among them signalled but that is about it. No interest in dynamic or distinctive regional policies is even hinted at. What will the ANC make of the new and expensive regional structures?

Given the role of Sanco as co-author of the document, it was surprising to note the absence of civics, people's courts and other resistance structures that became so prominent in the 1980s, beyond a vague commitment to creating an "enabling environment for social movements". Does this mean that the ANC is giving unequivocal pride of place to newly legitimate formal governmental structures?

In order to achieve equity in the civil service, the RDP asks for "a defined quota of all new employees" based on race and gender in future. Does this mean that the "non-racial, non-sexist state" will continue to keep tabs on our racial and sexual identity and evaluate us accordingly? How do you harmonise affirmative action with non-racialism? This extremely thorny issue is never addressed.

If these sectors are good to excellent, I have to register my disquiet with the chapters on "human needs" and "basic resources". Not that they are uninteresting or lacking in serious consideration. They highlight numerous social problems and reveal consultation with experts to a point that many facts and figures are themselves instructive.

But there is a lack of realism and perspective about solutions. On the one hand, no prioritisation is offered for policy but, on the other, innumerable claims about what ought to be achieved simultaneously within a short space of time are put forward.

A striking example is land reform. The redistribution of 30 percent of "agricultural land" is called for but the mechanisms for achieving such a redistribution are left quite vague and unconvincing. Public works are to be instituted but who will qualify for these jobs and at what rate of pay? Also put forward as goals are ending traffic accidents and drug