

How the West was won

The election campaign in the Western Cape raises a number of issues: both in relation to the role of the Tripartite alliance as an opposition until the next general elections, as well as an analysis of the different contributions made by the key organisations of the alliance in the election victory of the ANC.

COSATU identified the 1999 general elections as a political event that would play a key role in building a popular movement for transformation, by ensuring that our people realised and understood:

- what transformation the ANC achieved;
- how these social advances contributed to improving people's lives.

COSATU's key strategic objective was to ensure that people took an informed choice regarding which party they would support in the 1999 elections. Our assessment was that in 1994, people voted for the National Party (NP) as a result of their ignorance – not understanding the RDP. This ignorance had been fertile ground for the NP's racist campaign.

There were various legs to COSATU Western Cape's campaign around the elections:

Dream team

About 500 shopstewards and officials made up COSATU's canvassing team (broadly referred to as the 'dream team').

Tony Ebrenreich outlines what COSATU Western Cape did to secure a victory for the ANC in the province and points to the challenge ahead.

They had time-off from their workplaces and canvassed support for the ANC in the different communities during the day.

They were essentially the only people doing daily political work within the various communities. They worked to ensure that people:

- voted on June 2nd;
- understood the key areas of transformation;
- understood the political questions that confronted black working class communities.

Union programme of action

All of the affiliates within COSATU ran their own campaigns. Activities ranged from dedicated constitutional and mobilising meetings, to bringing out newsletters covering key issues, and calling on their members to vote ANC.

Affiliates further contributed by arranging time-off requests and other logistics. Their specific programmes closely linked up to the programme of the federation and the alliance.

The fact that coloured working class women had clearly changed their political views from one that was hostile to the ANC to one that said they would engage and understand the key issues confronting their communities, demonstrated SACTWU's good work in this area.

Regional election teams

The alliance set up regional election teams which co-ordinated the elections in the different branches. Key COSATU leaders made dedicated contributions to these regional election teams and played a role in their effectiveness. The biggest stumbling block in this area was the weak state of ANC branches throughout the region.

COSATU factory meetings

COSATU convened meetings at the 300 most strategic companies across all affiliates (in addition to the factory meetings held by shopstewards).

Alliance leaders addressed these meetings and played a crucial role in persuading COSATU members of the correctness of voting for the ANC. They also explained the necessity for each member to mobilise his or her community to vote for the ANC.

COSATU special events

COSATU organised a number of special events directed at building capacity amongst shopstewards and worker leaders so that they could mobilise for the ANC victory in their work places.

Over 6 500 shopstewards were workshopped on the key issues, provided with speakers' notes on these issues and instructed to have general meetings at their work places on these issues.

Close to 6 000 factory meetings were held where our members engaged on the issues and were empowered to take the

issues back into their families and communities. This made each COSATU member an activist.

Special events included:

- ❑ *Labour market training* - on how the ANC has contributed to labour market reform and opposition parties' rejection of this reform.
- ❑ *Election manifesto* - on the content of the elections manifesto.
- ❑ *Gender focus* - COSATU trained key women leaders on areas of reform that affect women (for example, reproductive rights, maintenance laws etc) and the ANC's efforts to advance women in society.
- ❑ *May Day* - an event was held with the ANC in Mitchells Plain.
- ❑ *Children's Day* - 1 500 children attended the event to learn about the rights they have secured under the ANC government. We also encouraged them to encourage their parents to vote ANC as the party that secured their rights.
- ❑ *Joint Shopstewards Council* - This event was the last big 'mobilisation' event for the ANC to ensure that workers voted. We also distributed the last COSATU media.

From the above it should be clear that a lot of work went into preparing people as canvassers in workplaces and communities. This was part of COSATU's strategy to ensure that people, this time around, made an informed decision regarding the party they would vote for.

Project Rural Blitz

Whilst COSATU members linked up with the ANC in the rural areas, we could not quantify their efforts in all areas. Reports indicate that our shopstewards and structures did good work. The common complaint was that there is a need to assist the ANC to build organisation.

Project Rural Blitz aimed at reaching



COSATU encouraged people to vote ANC.

key rural areas and farms that were not catered for under the rural programmes. Comrades spent five days in the field covering virtually the whole of the Western Cape. They were joined on the second last day by a comrade from the USA, and on the last day by a comrade from the UK.

Support

The campaign was supported by:

- ☐ administrators from COSATU and affiliates;
- ☐ the gender committee;
- ☐ affiliate national office bearers;
- ☐ COSATU provincial office bearers.

Media strategy

COSATU put an elaborate media strategy in place. It sent out different media to workplaces on a weekly basis for the last

two months before the elections. This media ranged from the COSATU booklet of why workers should vote ANC, to ANC media on provincial and national issues, to COSATU provincial media.

Assessment

COSATU has shown that even with all its difficulties, it can run campaigns that make substantial contributions towards achieving its objectives. COSATU was condemned for losing the 1994 elections. By the same token, COSATU should be recognised for having made a significant contribution to the ANC victory in 1999 – this recognition, however, was not awarded.

The ANC

The ANC was organisationally weak when it entered this election campaign. This is

shown by:

- ❑ a reduction in its membership from 70 000 in 1994 to just above 20 000 in 1999;
- ❑ generally weak branches throughout the province;
- ❑ very little political training being done in branches;
- ❑ the disjuncture between the ANC inside and outside Parliament.

The ANC made a number of political choices that COSATU had difficulty understanding but this still remained the basis of their campaign:

- ❑ *Let sleeping dogs lie* – this excluded people who had not supported the ANC in 1994 from our campaign. This was problematic for two reasons: firstly, we had to broaden the ANC's support to have any chance of having a majority in the province; secondly, the ANC had made a number of political gains in society. We effectively denied ourselves the chance of using these gains to convince non-ANC supporters to change their vote.
- ❑ *Nat attack* – this was designed to get prominent members of the NNP to defect to the ANC, in the hope that their members would follow. The election results indicate that members did not follow those leaders who defected. We should encourage people to come over to the ANC, but not necessarily in leadership positions, as they generally do not bring members and it causes dissent within our ranks.

The ANC's provincial leadership and especially its national leadership played a significant role in the ANC's victory in the province. Many of the most senior leaders of the ANC spend a huge amount of time in the province and made a very good impression on those workplaces they addressed.

The COSATU view in relation to our

approach to the elections was that the ANC should campaign in a way that would win us the elections. We did not want the ANC to campaign in a way where we hoped that the NNP would lose the elections.

Notwithstanding the challenges within the ANC, the structures made a profound contribution to the election victory, and very many branches should be commended.

The way forward

An anti-transformation alliance between the NNP and the DP has undermined our quest (as the biggest party in the province) to lead the coalition government.

We have to accept we will be the official opposition until the next election, or until the present coalition fails to such an extent that it brings about a motion of no-confidence. The view in COSATU is that we should focus on ensuring that our policy prescriptions drive the agenda in the Western Cape government.

We can do this in a number of ways, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary and through using section 77 of the LRA. We can thus force the present coalition to adopt a transformation agenda. The deciding factor should always be the improvement of the lives of our people and not petty politics with the NP. For this to be successful, the alliance must be strengthened in the province.

Central to this is an acceptance of the fact that the ANC leads an alliance of equal parties. We should, as the alliance, draft a clear political programme to guide us during the next period. Such a programme should be guided by the ANC election manifesto. ★

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