



COVER STORY

*Cosatu has thrown its full weight behind the ANC in the 2004 election race. Last year's national congress reaffirmed the federation's support for the ANC and it is now mobilising what resources it has available to ensure a victory for its old ally. The **Labour Bulletin** reports on the battle to secure an ANC victory, the underlying tensions, and speculates whether the ANC will continue to be an automatic choice for workers.*

2004 elections

End of the Comrades' marathon?

Last year's national congress saw Cosatu again pledge its support and agree to mobilise workers to ensure an overwhelming election victory for the ANC. But at the same time it reaffirmed a decision, taken ahead of the 1999 elections, that it would not draw up its own list of Cosatu leaders to stand for election on an ANC ticket. Before the 1994 election, Cosatu deployed 20 members and officials to stand for election on an ANC ticket and the ANC reserved space on its election list for them. After the election a further 40 Cosatu officials and leaders left to take up positions in provincial and national government.

In the run up to these elections a number of senior Cosatu officials declined nominations on to the election list. This did however, not prevent others from taking up the offer whether it be for the national or provincial lists.

There has been much speculation about the delays in releasing the lists as it is known that the ANC has to try and accommodate a lot of people whose terms of office has expired elsewhere. Additional pressure has been placed on the ANC to find jobs for many of its officials in the provinces because it has been unable to pay them due to financial problems. The ANC's financial crisis might affect the election campaign but this factor is being played down at this point.

In 1999 the *Labour Bulletin* interviewed Cosatu's former first vice-

president Connie September on the eve of the election and a certain move into parliament. Five years on, the *Bulletin* spoke to September about her experiences as a former Cosatu leader in parliament (see p11).

Cosatu and the election drive

Cosatu participated in the 1994 and 1999 elections by conducting voter education, electioneering for the ANC and seconding personnel and resources to the election campaign on a large scale. Is it the case this time around?

Cosatu's organising secretary Mncedisi Nonsele says the federation is attempting similar initiatives to previous elections. However, its ability to do this is determined by resources available. Like the ANC, Cosatu is facing financial constraints which could affect its ability to help. Affiliates are supposed to contribute to a Cosatu election fund but it is questionable how many affiliates will be able to fulfil this obligation. Aside from financial resources, the ability of affiliates to release people on a full-time basis for the election is also determined by their existing obligations to members.

At a national level, Cosatu has set up an election unit staffed by two full-time co-ordinators seconded to Cosatu by Numsa and Num who are doing election co-ordination and liaising with the ANC on election programmes. The election team – which also includes Cosatu officials – ensures integration of

the ANC and Cosatu programmes. This structure, Nonsele says, is supposed to be replicated at a provincial level but it is not necessarily happening in all provinces as it depends on the resources available. One of the main priorities of the election campaign is ensuring ANC control of KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. But the challenge for Cosatu in rolling out resources, is finding a balance between the priorities of the election campaign and servicing members and consolidating its own strength.

Nonsele says the federation's first priority in the election drive was to ensure people registered to vote.



Cosatu had to respond to research which found that about 9m people (women and those below the age of 30) had not registered.

The federation also had to create an enabling environment to ensure people registered in the face of perceived apathy, the many challenges workers

face and claims of ongoing tensions with the ANC. But an ANC official says Cosatu could not just turn the tap on and off – one minute attacking the ANC and the next encouraging workers to vote. The attacks against ANC policies by Cosatu in recent years are having an impact on how workers perceive the election.

Nonsele says that aside from voter registration, the federation would also have to engage in voter education as there would be a large number of first time voters, for example, young people. This could only be achieved through greater co-operation between Cosatu and youth organisations.

In terms of dynamics between Cosatu and the ANC, the federation has been part of most regional and provincial structures which are responsible for the election. Cosatu has been involved in all the election processes, however it is debatable whether this was the case in the drafting of the ANC's election manifesto.

Election manifesto

Previous election manifestos were drafted within ANC structures and in close consultation with alliance partners – the SA Communist Party and Cosatu. It is questionable to what extent this was the case in the drafting of the current election manifesto (see p13). There is speculation that the manifesto was largely drafted within government and kept out of certain ANC committees initially. However at some point, election co-ordinator Manie Dipico intervened to ensure that consultations took place with other constituencies such as Cosatu. A possible reason for keeping it within government could have been concerns at making promises and commitments that the government could not meet.

The manifesto has received mixed

reactions. One trade unionist says it was like 'warmed up soup' while others have called it a rather odd document. Usually an election manifesto makes commitments so as to encourage people to vote for that particular party. In this instance, it calls for a 'People's Contract to Create Work and Fight Poverty.' A Cosatu official says the contents are not all bad but asks if it makes sense in a manifesto to tell people they have to do things in order to ensure certain deliverables. In one sense it shows some leadership but does it make people want to vote for you, he asks.

A political analyst says: 'The ANC argues that this distinctly non-populist stance reflects its confidence and maturity. The question, of course, is how voters will react to being called on to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, rather than getting handouts.' The concept of the people's contract reminded, a Cosatu official of the Brecht poem written on the occasion of the 1952 uprising in East Germany. The poem goes something like ...'the people are demonstrating against the central committee (the party). The solution is easy – dissolve the people and elect another'.

The term the 'people's contract' was hotly debated both within the ANC and Cosatu. It did not receive much support in Cosatu as the leadership were concerned as to how workers would view the term – some might see it as a management contract. A union official says ultimately, the concept means different things to different people. This poses the question as to what it means in practice. The key problem is that it does not tie the ANC down to deliverables. The one area where the ANC scores poorly is on keeping its promises so the concept of a people's contract may be seen as a cop out for being held accountable for delivery.

This view is reinforced by another trade unionist who suggests the people's contract is like the term African Renaissance – politically it does not tie the ANC down to anything specific and allows everyone to define it differently.

There are a number of sub-themes from the manifesto. For example, it emphasises a greater degree of co-operation between social partners, but to what extent will labour be able to maximise opportunities from the manifesto and ensure an alliance-driven approach to implementation?

Cosatu acknowledges that there are a few problem areas in the manifesto but these do not affect its overall commitment to the ANC. 'Our view is that differences must be seen in the context of ongoing struggle for the transformation of the country,' an official says. Most of the document outlines the ANC's success in consolidating democracy, extending services and fighting crime and calls for more mobilisation around ANC programmes in the name of the people's contract. Specific commitments are outlined near the end of the document and those of concern to Cosatu include the following:

- A commitment to holding down inflation and interest rates – although how remains unclear. While Cosatu welcomes the commitment to growing the economy and keeping interest rates down, it is concerned about the commitment to keeping inflation down – at what cost?
- Creation of a million jobs in the coming five years through an expanded public works programme, which will include community services as well as infrastructure. Although no additional funds will be provided, departments will effectively be asked to explore more



labour-intensive ways of delivering services and infrastructure.

- Cosatu is also supportive of the measure to ensure that the promotion of labour-intensive methods is incorporated in government's procurement system.
- Cosatu has also welcomed the commitment to increase state investment.
- New measures to protect casualised and outsourced workers, depending on the outcome of proposed research, are welcome, but the practical meaning of this commitment remains hard to fathom.

Cosatu is worried about the implementation plans for such commitments. For instance, the manifesto repeats the commitment to redistribute 30% of SA's agricultural land. That promise was first made in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and remains part of government policy but only 5% of land has been redistributed. An analyst says at the current rate, it will take another 150 years to achieve it.

Why should workers vote?

Cosatu's overwhelming message to workers as to why they should vote for the ANC is to say that: when you are voting for a party you are not voting

for every one of their policies. Cosatu's message to workers, incorporated in the latest *Shopsteward*, includes the following:

'The ANC's record in government and a comparison of the ANC election manifesto with those of all the other parties, makes it quite clear that it is the only force that can take forward our national democratic revolution and complete the transformation of South Africa. Although Cosatu has at times disagreed with the ANC government over certain issues, the government has a proud record of success in building a democratic South Africa and improving the lives of the majority.

'Our occasional differences are nothing compared to the gulf that separates us from such parties as the Democratic Alliance, which would like to put the ANC's reforms into reverse and pursue policies that would deepen rather than reduce the inequalities in our society.

'Our task now is first and foremost to make sure that the ANC wins a comprehensive victory, nationally and in every province.

Workers on the election

The *Labour Bulletin* interviewed workers and shop stewards at various public meetings organised as part of the ANC and Cosatu's election drive

(see p16). While high levels of commitment remain, there are clear signs of voter apathy and a general lack of enthusiasm, while some Cosatu members are beginning to question the ANC and the positions it adopts. A Sactwu shop steward said during a meeting at the Johannesburg City Hall in February 2004: 'We are now beginning to know what democracy is about.' He said some workers are not enthusiastic about the elections as since the new government came to power workers have faced job losses - 'there is nothing to celebrate in the face of unemployment'. Another Cosatu shop steward said that 'workers are beginning to complain but they remain committed to the ANC'.

An ANC representative says it is likely that high levels of apathy and demoralisation exist among Cosatu shop stewards and perhaps workers. Research has found, he says, that there is a disjuncture between views of the poorest of the poor, who want to vote, as opposed to people like shop stewards and other activists. Apathy amongst shop stewards, he says, might also be explained by the fact that those remaining behind are disaffected because they were not elected to become councillors. There could well be some merit in this as a number of shop stewards interviewed were disparaging about the councillors and said they only showed their faces ahead of the elections otherwise they were nowhere to be seen.

Dynamics in the provinces

It has been generally acknowledged - through various surveys - that the outcome of the election remains uncertain for KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The situation in KwaZulu-Natal is more fluid, given the on-going tensions between the ANC and IFP in the province. In the Western



Cape it seems likely that the ANC will have to remain in coalition with the NNP.

According to projections it is questionable whether the ANC will be able to reach the 50% mark (33% in 1994, 42% in 1999). There is speculation that the NNP and DP could increase their power in the Western Cape, largely at the expense of the ANC. However, given the unusually high level of undecided voters in the Western Cape this projection might prove wrong.

The dynamics in the Western Cape make for interesting reading – from internal divisions within the ANC (which have the potential of weakening the organisation) to tensions between the ANC and Cosatu in the region over election tactics (and other factors) and finally, the problems Cosatu faces in delivering the coloured working class to the ANC. While Cosatu affiliates such as Sactwu, Samwu, Numsa and Fawu represent the majority of the coloured working class in the region, there are a large number of workers who are loyal to Cosatu but who will not vote for the ANC. This is especially the case in unions such as Sactwu which has a traditional membership of coloured women who are unlikely to vote for

the ANC though the leadership is strongly pro-ANC. This creates problems for how Cosatu mobilises support for the ANC which is based on a more populist style of organising. Different approaches to election mobilisation have created some tension between the ANC and Cosatu in the region. Cosatu's regional secretary Tony Ehrenreich outlines some of these dynamics (see p17). The ANC believes that Cosatu is trying to translate union tactics into political tactics.

Aside from election tactics some tension has also emerged around the anti-ANC sentiment that has been created in the wake of a number of campaigns attacking ANC policy. It is understood that the DA has picked up on this anti-ANC sentiment and is using it in an attempt to mobilise worker support. Recently, the DA took out a full-page advertisement in the main daily newspaper in the province where it committed itself to providing a basic income grant of R120 a month. (See Redeye)

While the alliance between the ANC and NNP has not always been welcomed and supported within the broader ANC (and Cosatu), the ANC's Western Cape deputy elections co-ordinator Max Ozinsky says the co-operation between the two parties has brought political stability to the province and has prevented further infighting. The alliance has also brought to an end anti-poor policies and ensures the issue of nation building remains on the agenda.

Ozinsky explains that contrary to popular perception the ANC won the overall coloured vote in the last election. There are however, big differences in support within the coloured community. The ANC's base is strongest in rural areas (with increasing

support amongst farmworkers). In the urban areas the coloured vote tends to be split between the NNP and more lately the DA, Ozinsky says. One of the issues the ANC is attempting to deal with, Ozinsky adds, is the racial dynamics between coloured and black workers. Historically apartheid tried to create a buffer between coloured and black workers by granting coloured workers huge patronage. These dynamics continue to play themselves out within the province.

Conclusion

Cosatu sees its election efforts as being linked to their ongoing work around organisational renewal. Nonsele says that mobilisation around the elections could have positive spin-off for the organisation in terms of connecting and linking up with membership. The walkabouts by Cosatu leaders and officials are certainly an opportunity for members to highlight workplace problems and this is happening. It is also revealing the extent to which politics is no longer as prominent as bread and butter shopfloor issues. What this election process is also revealing is the true state of the organisation as financial and human resource constraints become glaring. The ANC too is being forced to face its financial limitations coupled with having an aging activist core that is driving the election process. What happens when it can no longer play the "loyalty" card?

Cosatu's efforts in the upcoming election raises questions around the gains it makes through political engagement and it's strategy in relation to politics (which are issues that other union movements that have alliances or close ties with the ruling party as in the case of Brazil (see p61) and Germany (see p67) have to deal with. ■