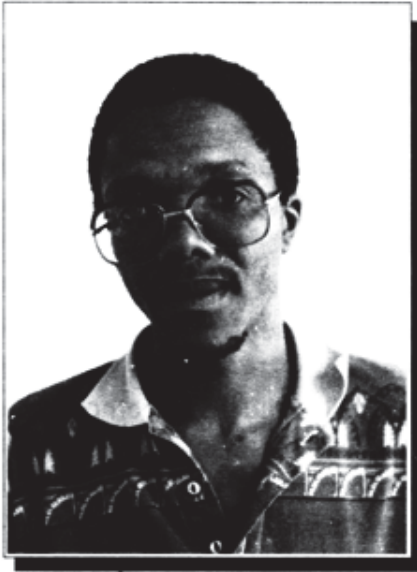


COVER FEATURE:

COSATU and the elections



SAKHELA BUHLUNGU* reports on the pre-election interviews that he conducted all over South Africa to assess how COSATU involved itself in the elections, and what the impact of that involvement has been on COSATU

The background

In September last year COSATU fired the first shots of the election campaign by announcing the names of 20 unionists to stand for election on an ANC ticket. Since then the 1,25 million strong federation has thrown its full weight behind the ANC in what many of its members regarded as a liberation election in South Africa. Many South Africans observed the election

campaign through the eyes of the mass media and election analysts who tended to focus on political leaders and major parties. As a result, the involvement and role of civil society organisations, particularly the trade unions, in these elections has been neglected. This article analyses the nature and extent of COSATU's involvement in the ANC's election campaign and the impact thereof on the federation's organisational structures and resources. It concludes by looking at the challenges and issues facing the country's biggest and most influential union federation in the post-election period and beyond.

Debates within COSATU on the relationship between the federation and the ANC did not start with the election campaign. In the 1980's one of the major debates in the unions was the relationship of unions to politics. At the 1987 National Congress of COSATU an uneasy consensus was arrived at by the major tendencies within the federation when they adopted the Freedom Charter and acknowledged that unions had a role in politics and that national liberation was an important phase of the struggle towards a society free of oppression and exploitation.

The importance of this accommodation among the tendencies was twofold. Firstly, it laid the basis for what was to become the tripartite alliance between the COSATU, the ANC and the SACP. Secondly, it laid a basis for what was to become a consensus position when the federation's structures were debating whether or not to support the ANC in the elections. Thus when the time arrived for COSATU to take a decision, the key question was not whether or not to back the ANC, but how to do it in such a way that such support also benefitted COSATU and its members. For this reason COSATU's involvement in the election campaign was not just a matter of backing

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the ANC for its own sake, it was a series of different, but related, interventions.

COSATU's interventions

COSATU's involvement in the 1994 elections should be viewed in terms of three separate but related interventions, namely, the reconstruction and development programme (RDP), the union candidates on the ANC lists, and voter education and canvassing for an ANC victory.

The RDP

It is a measure of COSATU's influence in our country generally that the RDP has not only been adopted by the ANC and other civil society organisations as a basis for building a new future, but it is also accepted by many others as the only plan at present that holds hope for reconstruction of South Africa.

The RDP is the brainchild of COSATU. Initially it was conceived of as a pact that would be signed between the ANC and COSATU with the objective of binding the ANC to specific agreements while the federation would undertake to deliver votes for the ANC. However, as discussion deepened it was felt that such a programme should go beyond just the ANC and COSATU and be a unifying plan which would also include civil society and other parties and organisations. Thus the RDP formed the basis of the ANC's election manifesto and has been the basis of engaging many other forces, including business, in debates about the economy and the future. As an intervention the RDP offers the following opportunities to COSATU:

- ❑ It enables COSATU to gain maximum benefit from the tripartite alliance, so that the alliance does not end with delivering votes for the ANC;
- ❑ COSATU will seek to hold the new ANC government to the plan. It offers COSATU members a yardstick by which to measure the ANC's performance in government;
- ❑ For these reasons the federation's

influence over the new government will continue;

- ❑ Through the RDP COSATU has managed to influence the agenda of the transition generally;
- ❑ The RDP offers COSATU the opportunity to get government backing for its key objectives (centralised bargaining, worker rights, affirmative action, etc) as well as access to state resources (research, education and training, etc).

Candidates on ANC lists

After the announcement of the first twenty union candidates last September, many more COSATU leaders were nominated to stand as ANC candidates for regional parliaments. In regions like the Eastern Cape where new local government structures are being established COSATU unionists formed part of the ANC lists. As early as May 1992 COSATU was already considering this option. COSATU's national negotiations co-ordinator, Jayendra Naidoo, explained at the time, "COSATU will not contest the elections. However, the CEC has discussed releasing people from the leadership of COSATU to be available to stand for election to the Constituent Assembly on an ANC platform if we are approached by them." (SALB 16.5, 1992) This option offered a number of opportunities to COSATU and the labour movement in general;

- ❑ People trusted by workers will occupy key policy-making institutions at all levels of government,
- ❑ For the first time workers may have access to sympathetic decision-makers, many of whom will feel obliged to keep the unions informed about discussions in decision making structures,
- ❑ The union nominees are better placed to understand the concerns and aspirations of workers. Many of them are the architects of the RDP,
- ❑ Union nominees come from a tradition which respects principles of accountability, particularly mandates and report-backs. Prominent union

candidate and former COSATU general secretary, Jay Naidoo, has indicated publicly that he will seriously consider other options, including resigning his seat, if the new government becomes unaccountable or if it deliberately fails to honour the RDP and worker rights.

Voter education and canvassing for an ANC victory

The decision to do voter education and to canvass voters for an ANC victory flowed from the other elements of COSATU's intervention discussed above. Apart from giving a big boost to the ANC campaign it held out a number of other opportunities to COSATU;

- ❑ Union leadership had an opportunity to re-establish contact with membership through factory general meetings, workers' forums and other meetings. This was an important thing in itself, particularly in view of the fact that leadership had publicly acknowledged the existence of a gap between leadership and rank and file,
- ❑ McVicar Dyasopu, CWIU official in PE admits that in 1993 their union structures were "seriously collapsing". He says that after the union and COSATU embarked on the election campaign there was noticeable improvement, particularly with regard to shop stewards' attendance of locals. In Durban former COSATU regional chairperson, now a candidate and the regional assembly, Samuel Mthethwa pointed to the establishment of a new COSATU local in Tongaat as one of the gains the federation has made out of the campaign. Clearly, therefore involvement in the campaign offered COSATU an opportunity to recruit new members, mobilise old members and revitalise its structures,
- ❑ COSATU and its unions are effective in defending worker rights and fighting for better wages and conditions of work on the shopfloor and beyond. COSATU has also launched the biggest and most successful campaigns in the 1980s and

1990s, like the LRA campaign, the anti-VAT campaign, etc. In addition to a solid track record the federation and its leadership have not been tarnished by corruption or abuse of power. During the election campaign it has cleverly used this credibility, using the slogan 'COSATU, the workers' voice. ANC the workers' choice', to win votes for the ANC. There is no doubt therefore that COSATU has brought in many votes for the ANC.

In concluding this section on COSATU's strategic interventions it is important to make certain general observations regarding COSATU and the elections:

1. By getting involved in the election campaign COSATU has been able to bring its solid track record of struggle as one of the key determinants of the election outcome. The federation has been visible before and throughout the transition period (eg anti-VAT general strike 1991, Chris Hani stayaways 1993) and has been instrumental in using mass action to unlock the transition process when it seemed to stall (rolling mass action 1992),
2. Of all the parties contesting the election, the ANC was the only one to be supported by a strong, mass based organisation like COSATU. This was not only a key determinant of the election result but it will make it very difficult for the ANC to sideline the federation after the elections. This will be more so because the ANC will still need COSATU's support over the next five years in order to succeed in implementing its plans,
3. Even if COSATU scales down its political involvement after the elections it will have put its stamp to the transition, through mass actions and by helping install an ANC government in power,
4. COSATU has been able to devote personnel and resources to the election campaign on a large scale while still carrying on with normal union work. This is in spite of the fact COSATU that

and some of its affiliates have limited financial and human resources. Creativity, resourcefulness and resilience are qualities that the federation has built from experience in campaigns during the dark days of apartheid repression.

5. Finally, it is important to note here that COSATU's decision to support the ANC was taken unanimously. No splits or major divisions have been occasioned by the decision in the federation or any of its affiliates. On the contrary the campaign has served to cement the federation, at least for the present moment. All the union officials, local and regional worker leaders and candidates interviewed were unanimous that the decision to support the ANC in this election was a wise one, "COSATU had no choice", said CWIU's national education officer and assistant election co-ordinator, Chris Bonner. "It would have been very difficult to stand back."

The impact of the elections on COSATU

It will take a long time before the full impact of the election on the federation can be felt and its implications fully understood. However, there are issues and trends that can be observed already. Below I attempt to analyse the impact of the election in terms of certain themes.

Members and structures: From the start of voter education activities late last year the campaign has enabled COSATU and its affiliates to reach thousands of their members. The effect of has been that many members have been mobilised and their interest in union activities revived, at least for the time being. The Eastern Cape seems to be the region where unions have been most successful in mobilising members around the elections. A series of workers' forums were held throughout the region. Attendance was generally very good.

According to Vo Tyibilika, COSATU's



COSATU election education in progress

new regional secretary, so successful were the forums in the region that they were beginning to raise the issue of solidarity, and he gives the Sappi strike in March as a case in point. Tyibilika says the forums were also instrumental in orchestrating mass actions to push employers to accept demands around voter education. Unionists in the region are now discussing the possibility of making the forums a permanent feature of COSATU's organisation at industrial area level, along the lines of what used to be called industrial area committees in the late 1980s.

NUMSA's national organiser, Gavin Hartford, who is based in the Eastern Cape also agrees that the election campaign has led to important improvements in union structures. He gives the example of the NUMSA's Uitenhage local which had collapsed but has now been resuscitated as a result of workers involvement in the election campaign.

Many other union leaders and officials also report some noticeable improvements in union structures. Others, like SADTU in Durban and SACCAWU in Cape Town also claim to have recruited a number of new members as a result of mobilisation achieved. However, most unionists admit that the process of involving workers and mobilising is a slow one. Also, as all unions were busy with voter education and campaigning, few of them have had time to assess so as to give accurate information regarding gains and achievements. The biggest gain recorded is that of SADTU in Southern Natal which claims to have recruited about 12 000 new teachers from late last year to early in March this year.

In general, however, two points can be made about the effect of the campaign on membership and structures. The one is that the mobilisation achieved in the process of the campaign has not translated into large membership gains for most unions. Even the SADTU achievement, which stands out as an exception, seems to be a result of the collapse of the homelands rather than the

election campaign per se. The second is that the campaign has not had a significant positive impact on union structures in general. Cases where there have been improvements are few and far between. Even where there have been notable improvements in structures it is still doubtful if these improvements can be sustained beyond the elections because the causes of the earlier collapse of structures have not been resolved. The enthusiasm and energy generated by the campaign may soon dissipate after the elections.

Servicing of members: There is no doubt that union activities, particularly the servicing of members, have been adversely affected by the election campaign. Every union released at least one full time official and some shop stewards in each region and even at national level to work on elections. In addition, some unions, like PPWAWU in the Eastern Cape, instructed their officials to do some canvassing in between their normal union work. Former COSATU Western Cape regional secretary, and candidate in the regional assembly, Jonathan Arendse, acknowledges that unions have had to postpone "non-essential union work" because of the elections. POTWA's Eastern Cape regional secretary, Mxolisi Mashwabane, says his union found it difficult to cope with union work, "The COSATU resolution said that officials must focus on the campaign. We have been attending and addressing workers' forums. Partially day-to-day issues have not been taken up as before. For example, some hearings (of members at factories) are not attended, some management meetings are not attended and we are not being in touch as usual. It a problem, particularly in unions with few staff in big regions. It was very difficult to cope."

Another level where gaps have appeared as a result of secondment to elections was that of shop stewards. On the shopfloor it is the shop stewards who attend to the day to day grievances and cases of workers before union officials intervene. They are part of the servicing machinery of the union.

Themba Mfeka, PPWAWU's assistant general secretary, explains the problem, "Shop stewards are influential people in union structures. So this secondment had a negative impact in union structures."

Unionists seconded to the election effort (ANC, COSATU elections teams, IEC, etc) ranged from shop stewards to local organisers, administrators, regional secretaries, education officers and even general secretaries. Others, who occupied similar positions are now elected reps in the various regions and at national level.

Unionists see the campaign as a temporary, once-off event and believe it is a worthwhile sacrifice. However there is no doubt that the backlogs of the last four months or so will begin to weigh down heavily on unions now the election is over.

Leadership: The major effect of COSATU's decision to put some of its leaders on the ANC's lists is the loss of many union leaders. The importance of these unionists was twofold. Firstly they were experienced, long-serving unionists many of whom have been in the labour movement for close to 20 years. In many ways they were the bearers of the traditions that have sustained their unions and the federation through dark and difficult days. In the eyes of millions of workers and the world some, like Jay Naidoo, had become the personification of COSATU itself. Secondly, COSATU has lost key strategists who will be sorely missed as the labour movements grapples with mapping out a new vision that will guide the labour movement into an uncertain future.

While most unions and COSATU regions have replaced all the departed leaders with what is known as 'second layer leadership', Salie Manie, formerly of SAMWU and now ANC candidate in the Western Cape, believes that replacing a leader is not as simple as putting a person in the place of another. He believes the vacuum left by the candidates will soon be felt. He makes an example of himself. He was chairperson of SAMWU in Cape Town, SAMWU NEC member and national

co-ordinator of COSATU's economic task force. Manie says that the union (and COSATU) will find it very difficult to find one person to fill all his previous positions. "The union, and



COSATU, invested years of education in me before I could be able to fulfil these responsibilities. So I do not think you can just take any worker and expect him/her to perform all those duties effectively within a short time."

Another possibility which, if it materialises, could haemorrhage COSATU even further is the likelihood that some unionists, particularly those from the public sector unions, may be approached or decide on their own to join the new civil service. While the process of putting up unionists on the ANC lists was easier to control because people had to be nominated by COSATU or ANC structures, the decision to join the civil service lies entirely with the individual concerned. If it happens it will cream off more thinkers from the labour movement. "The new civil service is the next thing to be with us", says CWIU's Chris Bonner. "Staff in the unions are restless. The end (to loss of leadership) has not come yet." At this stage there is no evidence that this will happen but many in the federation have resigned themselves to the fact that it may happen. COSATU's Southern Natal vice chairperson, Ian Mlazi, feels that unions should not stop unionists from going into the civil service as long as they are fit for positions they are offered. "What is important", he says, "is that we should build more leadership after the elections".

Tensions and divisions: No serious tensions or divisions have resulted from COSATU's decision to support the ANC in the election campaign. The campaign was

taken up with a great deal of enthusiasm in all affiliates. There are isolated cases where individual workers, shop stewards and officials were supporting or were standing as candidates on the lists of other political parties like the Workers' List Party (WLP), the Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Democratic Party (DP) and the National Party (NP). These cases were few and far between and do not seem to have led to any tensions or divisions in the unions. The only cases which could cause some tension, but only at local level, were both in the Western Cape where a PPWAWU official has been suspended because it is alleged that he publicly opposed COSATU policy and abused his access to union members by canvassing for his party (the WIRFI) during working time, and one in SACCAWU where an official is under investigation for allegedly going into SACCAWU factories while on leave to canvass for his party (the WLP).

The election campaign

In general, COSATU regional leaders are confident that the majority of their members voted for the ANC. This is corroborated by a recent survey of more than 600 COSATU workers done by academics at Wits University and five other universities in March/April in five of COSATU's ten regions (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Southern Natal and the PWV).

However, in the Western Cape the survey and other previous surveys of COSATU members showed a significant NP presence within COSATU ranks (see Coetzee, *SALB 17,2, 1993*). Elias Maboe, a SACTWU shop steward seconded full time to the regional elections team is one of those who carried out voter education and canvassing in the region. He admits that many coloured workers, particularly in his own union, indicated they will vote for the NP. Of interest are the reasons why many of them preferred not to vote for the ANC.

Maboe says there are five major reasons given by these workers:

1. They believe that the ANC is behind the violence in Natal and the PWV and if they vote for it the violence will also come to their region,
2. They fear affirmative action and believe Africans will take over their jobs. Maboe adds that this fear is exacerbated by certain employers in the region who tell workers that they will no longer employ coloureds because jobs are open for Africans only,
3. Many coloured workers fear that once the ANC is in power Africans will take away their houses. They quote events in Delf, Tafelsig and Hanover Park last year where new houses built for coloured people were forcibly occupied by Africans,
4. There is also fear that the ANC will take away workers' pension and provident funds once it is in government. At some stage the rumour was so serious that Mandela had to issue a special statement explaining that this would not happen,
5. Many workers also say they fear the SACP which they believe is using the ANC to take over the country. Their concern is that once the communists have taken over they will ban all religions.

Another contested region was Natal. But COSATU leaders in the region are confident that the majority of their member voted for the ANC. Paulos Ngcobo, COSATU's new Southern Natal regional secretary feels that the federation was pivotal to the ANC campaign in Natal, "The ANC would not be able to win on its own in this region. In Southern Natal and the Natal Midlands it is mainly COSATU people who initiate and organise, like the big march on the 25 March in Durban. The tripartite alliance in Southern Natal is weak. We decided to take the campaign upon ourselves." COSATU leaders also believe that workers took their advice to vote for the ANC because COSATU is

effective in defending workers and the RDP makes provision for the protection of worker rights and interests.

All unions carried out intensive voter education, both within and outside the workplace. It is difficult to get accurate figures, but thousands of shop stewards were trained as voter educators. In addition, hundreds of thousands of workers were reached by these trainers or by independent voter education agencies like IMSSA. However, all unions complained that they were not able to reach all workers because many employers were reluctant to allow shop stewards or workers to be trained during working time.

If many employers were reluctant to allow voter education within workplace they were even more opposed to canvassing in workplaces by COSATU or ANC representatives. But in many instances COSATU representatives went into factories on the pretext that they were going to do voter education while in reality

they do canvassing for the ANC.

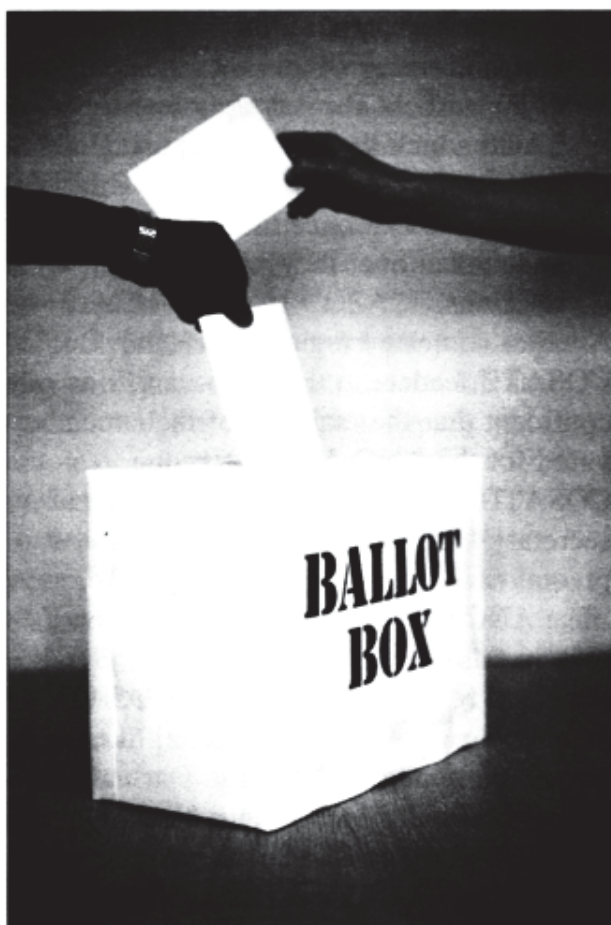
Interestingly, COSATU still feels that it has to canvass the votes of its own members notwithstanding the fact that its special congress decided to back the ANC.

Jonathan Arendse, former COSATU Western Cape regional secretary explains, "We are aware that factories are contested terrains. That is why we go around and explain to our members why COSATU supports the ANC. We are not forcing our members to vote for the ANC."

COSATU did not focus its canvassing on its own members only. They also targeted non-union members as well as members of communities where they live. Of particular interest here is COSATU's participation in door-to-door canvassing, especially in the Western Cape. In this region the federation transformed its locals (industrial locals and the joint shop stewards local) into canvassing machines. Shop stewards met for about 45 minutes to get briefings and were then transported to communities identified by the ANC for door-to-door blitzes. Elias Maboe says that this exercise was very successful in exposing people to the views of COSATU and the ANC. He reports that out of every 80 houses visited they were turned away in about four only. Arendse says the NP is the ANC's strongest rival in the region and therefore, "our strongest weapon is personal contact."

The Western Cape seemed to be one of few regions where COSATU structures were doing canvassing in addition to what the ANC was doing. Jesse Maluleka, COSATU's national elections co-ordinator believes this was very important for the federation, "We were saying to our members that participation in the door-to-door blitzes should not simply be as individual workers who join the ANC volunteers, but as part of an organised groups from COSATU."

Apart from factory general meetings another platform for canvassing was the workers forum where speakers explained the reasons for supporting the ANC and



COSATU voter education poster

workers put questions to the speakers. Hundreds of these were held throughout the country. The format of the forums differed from region to region. The forums were first started in the PWV region where high profile candidates like Nelson Mandela and Jay Naidoo addressed thousands of shop stewards and workers at a time. In the Western Cape COSATU election organisers made use of cultural events as one of the main attractions at workers forums, with John Pretorius' song Sekunjalo being the favourite hit at all election gatherings.

The questions that workers workers put to speakers at workers' forums show very clearly how most workers are going to judge the performance of an ANC government after the election. These range from jobs and job security, affirmative action, housing training, wages, to questions about the use of the police in strikes in future and what training will be available to workers.

In all regions union leaders complain about lack of co-operation from many employers, particularly small ones. The most contentious issues were:

- paid time-off for workers and shop stewards to attend voter education sessions,
- paid time off for shop stewards to do voter education training,
- the release of shop stewards to go and work full time in COSATU or union regional elections teams
- canvassing on the shopfloor by COSATU representatives.

Various strategies have been used to compel employers to agree to voter education demands and to allow canvassing by COSATU representatives in workplaces. In all regions there have been many struggles, including stoppages and



disputes around demands for voter education. The most notable of these are two hour stoppages by all COSATU workers in the Eastern Cape region in January. According to CWIU's organiser in the region these actions yielded some results as some employers agreed to voter education demands, including the release of shop stewards to do voter education full time.

Other strategies used to get the co-operation of employers have included negotiations with employer bodies like SACCOLA at national level and the various regional chambers of business. A number of regions, particularly the Western Cape have been making use of a provision in the Electoral Act to gain access into factories for the purpose of canvassing and using the IEC as a mediator in the event of disputes on the interpretation of this provision. COSATU's argument is that they need to go into factories to explain to their members why they advise them to vote for the ANC so that members can take informed individual decisions.

Accountability of the union candidates

This issue is the subject of another article in this issue of the bulletin (see article by Collins). However it is important to reflect on how those leaders who remain in COSATU see the issue of accountability of the labour candidates. When the issue of putting up COSATU leaders on ANC lists was first mooted in 1992 Jayendra Naidoo explained that the federation envisaged a situation where the unionists would become ANC candidates, "but they'll have a sort of ambiguous dual accountability". Now, two years later, it seems the debate was never taken beyond that point. Interviews with regional leadership reveal that no mechanism for collective or individual accountability by the candidates has been worked out by the federation. Each COSATU leader and each candidate expresses individual opinions rather than agreed policy on the matter.

No ideas have emerged on the form the

relationship between the labour MPs and the federation will take. However, it is a matter that could come up again in the near future when the federation begins to work out its relationship with the new government.

Conclusion: The future

From the above discussion a number of conclusions, many of which have a bearing on the future, can be made.

1. While COSATU will make some organisational and political gains out of its involvement in the election campaign, it will emerge weaker after the elections. Whatever gains it makes will be heavily outweighed by three main factors, namely, internal organisational problems, loss of key leadership and the difficulty of adapting to the challenges of democratisation of society. Members will remain mobilised and militant for some time, but lack of leadership and capacity will severely limit the ability of the federation to consolidate its base to prepare for the challenges of the future.
2. COSATU will be called upon to make sacrifices, particularly with regard to wages and mass action, in order to ensure that resources are used in a way that benefits other underprivileged sectors in society. The recent call by top ANC leaders to striking public sector workers to end mass action, however valid the reasons for it, could become a precedent for similar calls in future. The views of regional leadership are divided on this issue. However, most leaders tend towards a position which accepts making sacrifices provided there is transparency in the way government decisions are taken and implemented. Shaun Pather, a teacher who is a member of SADTU, explains the conditions under which calls for sacrifices would be heeded, "Last year the government's offer of a five percent increase to civil servants was not accepted by our members because there is a lot of mismanagement and corruption under the present government. But in future five percent may be accepted if the

rest of the money goes towards the RDP, eg. building more classrooms. SADTU leaders will be able to convince members to make sacrifices as long as the sacrifices are reasonable and government is transparent."

3. The relationship with the new ANC government will be co-operative but tense. Many leaders of COSATU express the view that an ANC government will be more sympathetic to the needs and interests of the workers. But it is also valid to expect that the nature of the relationship to be influenced by the number of votes the ANC gets in this election, regionally and nationally. A low ANC showing may make the relationship more co-operative as the ANC will feel less secure and need the support of the trade unions. On the other hand, a big ANC vote may make some within the ANC to believe that the time to dispense with the unions has come, thus making the relationship more tense and less co-operative.

Without a clear mechanism of accountability the position of the labour MPs may become very difficult as tension between the unions and the government may bring them into head-on confrontation with their constituency. The relationship may get more complicated if some COSATU people go into the civil service because some will become automatically part of the employer of COSATU members in the public sector.

While it is difficult to predict accurately what the relationship will be after the election, many COSATU shop stewards and officials believe that if an ANC government fails to deliver, particularly with regard to worker rights and the RDP, they reserve their right, as an independent organisation, to resort to mass action. Many of them repeated to me verbatim Nelson Mandela's closing remark when he opened COSATU's

"COSATU will emerge weaker after the elections"

special congress in September last year, "If an ANC government fails to deliver, you must do to it exactly what you did to the government of De Klerk."

4. There is a sharp division of views on what should happen to the alliance after the election. The two biggest affiliates hold two diametrically opposed positions, with NUMSA arguing for an end to the alliance while the NUM argues for its continuation. Others hold the view that the alliance should be redefined and be based on concrete issues. It would seem that once the election is over and once the leadership has begun to take stock of their organisational capacities the argument for scaling the alliance down into a relationship based on concrete issues will win the day. If this scenario materialises the RDP and worker rights may become the central issues on which such a relationship will be based.
5. There is no doubt that the democratisation of the state will have a tremendous influence on industrial relations after the election. Indeed there are signs that employers are aware of this. Faced with global competition and the likelihood of pressure from a new government to introduce meaningful changes, some employers have started experimenting with approaches towards less confrontational and more co-operative relationships with their employees. Examples of this are the introduction of worker participation, affirmative action and training programmes on the shopfloor by a number of companies. This is an eventuality for which COSATU and its affiliates are poorly prepared. According to Chris Bonner, "COSATU is facing a crisis because it is not dealing with major happenings on the shopfloor. Organisers are not coping with new shopfloor issues, they just run away from these." Of course co-operation will not do away with conflict. But what may happen is that lack of capacity and strategic thinking may make the use of conflict as the only weapon an attractive

option for some because it has worked for them in the past.

6. Prospects for trade union unity will continue to improve after the election. There are a number of factors which will propel the three main federations (COSATU, NACTU and FEDSAL) towards unity, namely:
 - ❑ All federations will need to redefine their alliances with political parties and this will lead to a reduction of political involvement,
 - ❑ More emphasis will be put on issues of common concern - jobs and job security, training, capacity building, common proposal to tripartite bodies, etc.
 There are already strong signals that co-operation among the federations will continue to grow after the elections. On the 15 April the executive of the three federations met in Johannesburg and resolved to work towards increased co-operation.

This article is an attempt to understand the nature and impact of COSATU's involvement in the election. There is no doubt that this involvement constitutes a historic intervention which offers many opportunities for South Africa's largest union federation. However, another observation is that COSATU is facing serious organisational capacity problems, has lost its key leadership to parliament and is strategically ill-prepared for the new era of democratisation. Thus the federation is at the crossroads. The crisis that it is facing threatens to deprive COSATU of opportunities it has helped create for itself and its members.

A number of unionists say that after the elections COSATU and its affiliates must "go back to basics" and begin to address their organisational weaknesses. Usually this term is taken to mean going back to the strategies the unions used in the past to build their strength. This is a positive sign, except that it assumes that the context remains static. The reality is that the context in which unions organise has changed since the 27 of April. ☆