

AM2

Transvaal UDP Media Committee

Report on Campaign against Local Authority elections in 1984

April 1984

Introduction

During the anti-community council campaign we placed heavy reliance on the media to achieve different goals. From looking at the media produced, it is clear that substantial time was spent by activists in producing the media.

Goals of the Campaign Media

An examination of the posters and pamphlets produced shows that the media was campaign media, rather than ongoing civic media (like a newsletter). It can also be seen that there was both civic and UDP media around the campaign. These facts influenced the goals of the media produced.

Media served a range of goals and purposes during the campaign. There are pamphlets, for instance, which were mainly to advertise meetings. There are posters which emphasise a mobilizing message (Don't vote!), while others sometimes ~~highlight~~ emphasise on popularising the civic (Support SCA!). Some pamphlets are educational in the sense of giving reasons why people were called on not to vote. Much of the media combines these purposes. But the most common purpose that is emphasised is mobilizing people against the elections through the Don't Vote! call.

Producing the Civic media

At the beginning of the campaign, very little or no media work was done by civic or residents associations. A number of organisations involved in the campaign did not have anyone whose task was media. However, during the campaign, civic people did go through a process of skill acquisition. These skills ranged from planning and producing a pamphlet, to finding cheap printers. Before the campaign, some of these skills seemed insignificant, but they proved very important when people were faced with having to produce media. Having people with the skills, it became easier for civics to plan their work and completely rely on their own people. Gradually, people in the civics began to appreciate the need for media work to go on, and to develop a media strategy for (and after) the campaign.

People also began to consider media strategically - whether it was aimed at mass or activist level. For example, with the question of language, it was realized that to get to the masses of people, it

was necessary to speak to them in the language they understood best. This was true for media as well as public meetings. Pamphlets written in a language understood by people were better received than those written in English.

Distribution of the media

Once the civics had media, the problem arose of ensuring that the publications and posters reached the masses of people. Blitzes at stations, robots, bus stops, etc. were held. Although this reached many people, some activists felt that not enough people seemed to have read the pamphlets.

Distribution also took place when media was used in a door to door campaign. One problem here was that activists could not hope to cover all the houses in the townships. On the positive side, the experience meant that many activists for the first time brought the campaign directly to people's houses. Even where such visits may not have succeeded in getting people to attend the meetings, people might at least have thought about the personal contact with the activists, and might have read the pamphlet left behind.

People's awareness of the call for a boycott was raised both during the blitzes and the door to door campaigns. Even those people who in any event would stay away from the polling stations out of apathy got to at least know that the local civic was actively campaigning for non-participation in the elections. In some very small way, this raises our people's awareness.

Evaluation of the civic media

Some of the posters and pamphlets advertising meetings were planned on the basis that not all people who received such media would attend the advertised meeting. And, therefore, far more had to be raised in the media than just calling people to a meeting. One point repeatedly made in almost all the media was a call for a boycott of elections.

On the other side of the coin, not all we wanted to say in our media was in fact said. This was largely as a result of the necessarily campaign-oriented media we produced. So, for example, by and large we gave a strong emphasis to what would happen if people voted in the elections, and not much on what would happen if they did not. There was also a heavy emphasis on boycotting the elections, rather than on inviting people to work within the civic. As a result, not too many who responded to our call for a boycott, thought it necessary to themselves become members and work actively in the civic. There are, how-

ever, a number of people now playing a vital role in the civics who did join during the campaign.

The campaign media did make an attempt at using jargon that would be easily understood by people at a mass level, and this succeeded to a large extent. However, we still used initials which are only truly popular and well-understood by activists. A sticker in Soweto for example referred to the SCA. People at mass level did not know what SCA is.

Because we were involved in a campaign and our resources were overstretched, we could not take up certain problems identified by people in meetings and include these in our media. Often also we did not have the resources to produce and distribute follow-up media in an area.

Other than calling on people to boycott and join/support the civic association, not much was done to suggest to people positively what else they could do to support the civics' struggles. We needed to move from abstractions like 'support' to more concretely spelling out what activity this meant. It should be noted, however, that we were in a campaign, and it was felt that if we scored a resounding victory, the image of the civic would be boosted and in the process it would be much easier for our activists to invite people to join and get actively involved in the civics' programmes.

UDF media in the campaign

We have so far focussed on media by the civics. We will all remember the vital role the UDF media played during the campaign. Whereas the civic media was local in nature, focussing on the problems in Soweto, Sebokeng, etc., and local meetings, the UDF media played a different role.

The UDF media took a bird's eye view of all the areas in which the campaign was going on, and even focussed on other sites of struggles elsewhere. This was aimed at knitting together all these struggles into one stream. Insofar as people from smaller isolated townships got to know that they are part of a broad movement opposing the same puppet structures, the UDF media played a tremendously good role.

People at a mass level have come to see the UDF as an important organisation, so much so that we were ^{flooded} with requests from people who as individuals wanted to directly join the UDF. The UDF has managed in getting a wide range of people to see it as an organisation big enough to be in a position to wage a meaningful struggle against oppression.

A call from the UDF for the boycott was taken much more seriously

and it added to the voice of our small civics. The fact that our civics were seen to be working with the UDF gave a boost to the campaign. Through the UDF media, we from the civics have been able to organise scores of people, in that it is just impossible to speak to people about the UDF without talking about UDF affiliates. In some areas, activists did, however, express concern about the timing of the media - feeling that local civic media should appear before UDF media. This was so that the local organisation would get priority, and so that UDF did not appear to be an outside organisation with no local aspect to it.

The UDF News was produced in close consultation with people directly involved in the civics. However, no follow-up has been made to get feedback from these people about how the publication was received at mass level.

Although there is a definite difference between civic and UDF media in the campaign, much of the civic media was sponsored by UDF. This is in the sense of UDF's media committee assisting the civics in getting skills training and production of civic media. It is also in the sense that UDF often assisted financially. This financial subsidy was a controversial issue - some civics were upset that they did not receive it. Other civics were content to rest on 'UDF charity' (which UDF could not in any event afford financially). It seemed that financing of media was something that was considered only at the very last minute by many civics. This produced a crisis because it was too late to fundraise whereas the media had to be out by a certain date. Another aspect to this problem besides this lack of planning, is that many civics did not perceive that fundraising can actually be a method of organising and a way of strengthening an organisation. To some extent, media became a substitute for essential organisational work like fundraising.

Since the campaign

Much as media played an important role in the anti-community council campaign, it does not seem that we have followed this tempo properly. We may even be beginning to lose some of the gains that were made during the campaign itself. Perhaps this loss of tempo may be attributed to the fact that all our media was campaign media and there was no ongoing media to accompany this. With the end of the campaign therefore, our media stopped flowing as well. What we have left, however, is an appreciation of the role of media, and a scattering of media skills among civic activists. These can be built on and consolidated.

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