

10 struggles

by Lucky Raphiri and
Morris Mmetoane

The community of Ga-Nchabeleng has won an important victory against the corrupt ANC leadership in Fetakgomo municipality, Limpopo. For two weeks in September the community protested daily. This included a 3,000 strong march to the Fetakgomo municipality offices.

The protest was sparked when work was halted on a new Home Affairs office in the centre of Ga-Nchabeleng on land given by the community to the municipality for development. The Fetakgomo ANC leadership pulled the plug on this site when they realised that the tender had not been awarded to one of their 'inner circle' and an opportunity for self-enrichment via the looting of the tender process had been missed.

The final straw for the community however was when the building work that had begun was demolished and a pre-existing unused municipal building – a previous white elephant project – was designated the Home Affairs office. However, this building is kilometres away from the municipal business and administrative centre and in fact kilometres from anywhere! In a community suffering severe unemployment, where huge swathes of the people are reliant on social grants, the ability to easily access the services of Home Affairs was an important developmental achievement. To have that snatched away and the suffering of the community prolonged just so a corrupt few could enrich themselves caused outrage.

But maybe more than the specific issue of the location of the office, the eruption of protest was the culmination of years of rising anger at the corruption of the



Ga-Nchabeleng residents in the decisive march on the ANC-led council.

ANC leadership who hold the community to ransom through the tender process. The ANC leadership in Fetakgomo is little more than a mafia! Rank-and-file ANC members were part of the campaign, sick of their own so-called 'leadership'. A huge gulf has opened between the ANC leadership and rank-and-file showing the collapse of the ANC as a community-rooted campaigning organisation as members step back in demoralisation.

Struggle works

Members of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) have played a key role in assisting the community to coordinate the protests and represent them in negotiations with the authorities through the election of a community forum. The

IZWI SAYS:

Across South Africa thousands of service delivery protests take place every year. Fundamentally, all these struggles are over the same issues, but the struggles take place in isolation. It is vital that community struggles are united on a socialist programme and under the common banner of a nationwide socialist civic. This would allow for the coordination of struggle and bring the maximum pressure to bear on government.

community raised further issues that they demanded action on from the municipality – the re-opening of Sekhukhune College, the completion of the local hospital, the development of long-promised agricultural schemes, improved water provision and job creation.

In the face of the protests the Provincial government was forced to intervene sending the MEC for local government to Ga-Nchabeleng to discuss with the community. Whilst this was welcomed, this carrot was matched with a stick, and for several days a heavy police presence was deployed including a militarised Special Task Force which led to wide-scale arrests of community members, including WASP members.

In the face of the unflinching

determination of the community however, these strong-arm tactics only strengthened the resolve of the people to struggle. The authorities conceded on the immediate demand: the building of the Home Affairs office in the centre of Ga-Nchabeleng will go ahead and construction will resume immediately.

This victory is not the end of the struggle but the beginning. Already the municipality is trying to go back on the agreement made with the community. But it has been proved that mass struggle wins results and the community will return to the streets if the Fetakgomo ANC leadership does not honour the agreement. Work is beginning to spread the establishment of community forums beyond Ga-Nchabeleng and across the entire Fetakgomo municipality to organise the communities and begin addressing all the service delivery and development issues faced across the region. Such forums can be the base from which to coordinate protests and continue to build the pressure to meet the other demands of the community. Ultimately a nationwide socialist civic is needed to play this role at national level, but its building blocks will come from campaigns such as those in Fetakgomo.

This struggle has also clearly shown the importance of leadership steered in the ideas of struggle and socialism. We call on the people of Fetakgomo to continue joining WASP and establishing branches as a crucial part of their struggle. The 2016 local elections are fast approaching and offer an opportunity to elect the real voice of the working class, the poor and the youth. WASP wants to organise communities under the WASP umbrella to do this. Such socialist representatives would act as an important platform to give voice to the struggles which must continue before and after 2016.

Strike against financial exclusion

On 9th September, students at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) began a strike. Two weeks later, at the time of writing, the strike is continuing. Izwi spoke to a student activist at TUT Pretoria West campus who is a member of Socialist Youth Movement (SYM), the youth wing of the Workers and Socialist Party.

What are the demands of the strike?
The central issue is financial exclusions. Students are expected to pay R60,000 to R100,000 each year in fees but the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is not making enough funds available to students from poor backgrounds. There are over 2,500 TUT students on their waiting list and only enough money to assist around one quarter of them. Lack of money

should not prevent anyone from getting an education.

Related to this we are also demanding affordable residences. Some charge as much as R35,000 each year and there is not the option for students to cook for themselves as a way of reducing costs. Some TUT campuses are demanding that a cafeteria be opened, and others that residences be provided with hot water for washing. There are several campus-specific demands like this. Students in the Engineering and Science Department are also asking that the strike take-up the issue of racism in that department because black students are consistently given lower grades than white students by the staff in that department.

How did the strike begin?

The strike began when the Local Students Government Council (LSGC) adopted a strike resolution. The previous day a meeting had been held with representatives of all residences, the SRC and student political

organisations to discuss the proposed strike action. These networks spread the word and prepared the strike. Pretoria West and Ga-Rankuwa were the first campuses to respond and students came out to blockade campus entrances. Five of TUT's six campuses eventually participated; the only one that didn't was Polokwane, which is the most distant. But we are appealing to the students there to join the strike.

What was the response of management?

Very quickly management was forced to close the campus. Unfortunately, due to the burning of a bus and several cars, police were called and the members of the SRC were suspended. However, this vandalism, whilst an expression of the anger felt by students, was not sanctioned by the SRC. The management conceded this when they lifted the suspension a week later in order to negotiate with student leaders in the face of the strength of the strike.

What tactics does SYM support for the strike?

We support mass action that requires the active participation of the maximum number of students. For that reason we did not approve of the burning of vehicles. We understand that students are angry, but vandalism, especially of university resources that we will need to use after the strike, is counter-productive. Mass struggle is what is needed, not acts of vandalism by a self-selected few. Also, whenever there is violence, the media focuses on this, and the real issues of the strike are lost.

We supported the call at TUT for a mass demonstration to the Department of Higher Education but unfortunately the SRC was unable to get funding. SASCO (South African Students Congress – the ANC aligned student movement) has hijacked that idea now and has called a demo under their own banner. We think it would have been better to organise that demo on

a broader basis rather than under the SASCO banner.

This interview was carried out on 22nd September, the day before further negotiations with management.

IZWI SAYS:

Every year, dozens of student protests take place against financial and academic exclusions and other issues faced by students. But there is no national student leadership worthy of this name and these struggles take place in isolation. We support the efforts of the Socialist Youth Movement trying to forge that unity between campuses but also unity between students and working class youth in the townships.