

Anti-Privatisation

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Communities mobilise against privatisation!

The Anti-Privatisation Monitor spoke to Virginia Setshedi of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee about struggles against electricity cut-offs

Can you tell us a bit about the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee?

The Soweto Electricity Crisis committee started out of structures in different locations in Soweto. All of those locations' representatives decided to come together and make one committee, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. After people of Soweto suffered a lot of cut-offs by Eskom, especially during the winter, and elderly

people died of cold, and therefore we decided to come up with this structure. We decided that it shouldn't be linked to any political organisation, because people now seemingly have lost faith on political organisations.

We had problems like people having their electricity cut-off, receiving notices, and they were told to pay thousands of rands, and some of them were owing something like R35,000,

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and some of them R11,000. ... Sometimes Eskom would listen, it depends who you get. At the moment, some locations have taken the resolution, for example Diepkloof Concerned Residents have decided to boycott paying electricity. They are boycotting, but not necessarily all people are not paying, you know how people are. I think it can impact on Eskom, because last Monday we had a meeting with Morris Ramataba, he is the head manager of Diepkloof, he wanted to see the Diepkloof Concerned Residents. But he was telling us Eskom is prepared to still continue with the cut-offs if people are not prepared to pay. And if we don't pay, and have your electricity connected illegally you will be facing criminal charges.

So if Eskom come into the township to cut off electricity, do they face resistance?

Yes, because he was told that his workers, their safety is not guaranteed in the location. Now what they do, they come with two cars. There is this car with Eskom employees, and the other car with hit squads people with guns and all this stuff.

So, people are actually confused on what to do on the issue of electricity. but as the electricity crisis committee we are having meetings and workshops, we are trying to go deep on educating ourselves on how to fight the problem of electricity. And now we have just realised that Eskom wants to introduce this new remote control system, where they will be able to cut your electricity system at any time, any day but without going into the location.



How do people try to pay Eskom?

People will go and borrow that money, maybe from the money lenders, and then they go and pay that 2,000. Then next month they have to start paying the money lenders. And then they don't go back to pay for Eskom's current account. And then it comes again and cut off. That is the problem. And if you can get into arrears with Eskom, you just pay interest before you can pay the debt itself. People even complained about the meter men, because they sometimes don't come to read the meter, but you find a statement.

What is the scale of cut-offs?

I think now it has decreased a little bit due to the threats, but in May/June I think 100 people could get cut in one week. You will find that in one street maybe only 2 houses have not been cut-off.

Would you say that people have a fighting spirit around the cut-offs?

Yes, the do, they do. It is only that they are not focused. Even in our committee that we formed, people are not well informed. There is this thing that we are from different political organisations, so that if the point someone raises jeopardises the position of their political party there is always a conflict. But we are trying by all means to be neutral.

What can the APF do to help the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee?

We are still trying to draw some of the committees from other locations, because not all of them are involved. But we are trying to draw them in and familiarise them with what we are dealing with. The APF can come in now when we are starting to organise rallies, we are thinking of having an office regarding the issue of electricity, where we are able to help people with their problems, represent them as communities.

Wits 2001: Privatisation at Wits University



In 2000, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) began to privatise and commercialise its operations. Workers, students and staff have suffered as a result.

Management's plan, called Wits 2001, has two main aims. The *first*: to smash the main union, the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and cut wages and jobs. The *second*: to direct Wits' research and teaching towards the needs of big business.

In February 2000, the management of Colin Bundy, the Vice-Chancellor, decided to fire 624 workers in catering, cleaning, grounds and

maintenance. These departments would be closed down, and the work given to outside, low-wage, non-union companies such as Fedics and Supercare.

Workers fought hard against the retrenchments. Students and even some academics supported them in their daily pickets. There were press conferences and an occupation of management's offices.

And workers and students began to build unity with SAMWU and IMATU workers fighting iGoli 2002. In July, the Wits 2001 struggle and the iGoli 2002 struggles merged to form the Anti-Privatisation Forum. The new structure was baptised with the fire of disrupting the prestigious Urban Futures' conference, hosted by Wits University and the Johannesburg Council in July.

Bundy went ahead and fired the workers anyway. He is also planning to fire 55 academics.

But Bundy is wrong to think the struggle is over. NEHAWU is fighting the retrenchments in Court, and we to win reinstatements. Meanwhile, we continue to fight through the Anti-Privatisation Forum, and continue to build NEHAWU.

Aluta continua!

Why anti-privatisation?

- ➔ *Privatisation means mass job losses*
- ➔ *Privatisation means worse working conditions: outsourcing, speed-ups, multi-tasking, job insecurity*
- ➔ *Privatisation means higher costs for services such as electricity and water*
- ➔ *Privatisation means less money for government to help communities, and less electrification, phone lines, taps and toilets*
- ➔ *Privatisation means a bigger wage gap, more electricity and water cut-offs, more evictions and attachments, less telephone lines, and more corruption*
- ➔ *Privatisation is part of GEAR, the government plan that replaced RDP in 1996*

The rich get richer and the working class suffers

Phantsi nge- iGoli 2002, phantsi!

Since 1999, the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), affiliated to COSATU, and the Independent Municipal and Allied Workers Union (IMATU), part of FEDUSA, have been fighting the iGoli 2002 privatisation plan for Johannesburg. This plan will



- ❑ Sell council assets like the Johannesburg Stadium, Metro Gas, the Fresh Produce Market and the Rand Airport to big business
- ❑ Put council services such as roads and drains under private agents or contractors
- ❑ Turn services such as water, sanitation, electricity and the busses into separate business units or companies

These steps are bad news for workers and working class communities:

- ❑ Workers will lose their jobs or become outsourced
- ❑ Services such as the busses will become more and more expensive as they get run for profit
- ❑ Money that could be used for reconstruction, such as profits from the Fresh Produce Market, will be lost to big companies
- ❑ Resources that could be used by the Council to improve quality of life for working class communities, such as Metro Gas, will become profit-making private companies

Other problems with iGoli 2002 include:

- ❑ The plan was not developed through consultation with workers and communities: a handful of officials, high-ranking councillors and consultants (who cost R50 million) drew up the plan. Unions and communities were only informed later
- ❑ Council is union-bashing: more than 1000 workers face charges for protesting
- ❑ Money is being used on bloated salaries for top officials: City Manager Ketso Gordhan and his three assistants get salaries of over R2 million a year, and will get another R2 million more in "performance bonuses."
- ❑ The plan ignores other ways of restructuring services that save money and benefit communities, put forward by the unions

REVERSE THE DRIVE TO PRIVATISE!

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