



Witdoeke set alight and loot KTC squatter homes as police patrol during the 1986 attack on the settlement.

SQUATTER communities are a mass sector of the broader Cape Town community. The residents of these areas are workers, youth, and women. But, today, squatter communities remain largely outside of our mass-based political organisations.

These communities have struggled on their own around demands for housing, land, jobs and improved community facilities.

Recently — in the KTC conflict — a division between its squatter leadership and members of our progressive organisations widened to weaken our potential to build broad political unity in the Western Cape.

When we look at what happened in KTC over the past few months we see a fundamental breakdown in political understanding between the leadership of most residents in KTC — the Masincedane Committee — and some of the leaders and members of our mass-based organisations — especially among the youth, civics and women.

Some people have accused the Masincedane Committee of being backward and undemocratic. Others have gone so far as to identify them as "the enemy". But this is not a correct judgement. In any political struggle it is crucial that we identify who "the enemy" really is. Let us look at some of these accusations.

Firstly, that the Masincedane Committee is backward. This is based on the fact that they are not seen to organise around clear political demands. But just because the Masincedane Committee concerns itself with pressing local community needs ie. housing and land — does not mean that it is backward.

The struggle for land and housing affects a large sector of our people in the Western Cape and, as can be seen from Freedom Charter demands, is a very important part of our broader political struggle. Squatter communities like KTC emerged and organised around land and housing issues. They pose serious

# Lesson of Crossroads squatter struggles

The squatter communities in Cape Town used to have close links with progressive organisations. They were strongholds of struggle against the government's plans to co-opt and control them. But since the State of Emergency in 1986 — and following the smashing of squatters in Old Crossroads and Khayelitsha by the security force-backed Witdoeke — the squatter groupings have been struggling in isolation from the progressive movement. Now in KTC, a repeat of the terrible setbacks of Crossroads/Khayelitsha is possible — unless the progressive movement learns the lessons of our mistakes in the squatter struggle. A comrade from the Western Cape tries to draw out these lessons here.

political challenges to mass-based organisations which we cannot ignore.

It has been our failure to do this which has made the squatter leadership lose confidence in our progressive movement. We have failed in our political task to give the squatter leadership the kind of direction and support needed if they are going to unite our people around the demand for land and housing.

Secondly, the Masincedane Committee is accused of being undemocratic. If we look into the history of this committee we see that right from the beginning (1984) it was born out of a desire on the part of Masincedane to break free from the traditional chief-like structures which dominated Old Crossroads and later, KTC. It remains a fact that the Masincedane Committee has always been close to our progressive movement.

This was why KTC, along with the squatter communities on land next to Old Crossroads, became a key area of militant action in 1985 and 1986.

Many squatters were also active members of the Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA). The immediate effect of the Witdoek attacks in 1986 was a breakdown in the alliance between squatter communities and mass-based organisations. The State of Emergency, which followed within days, increased the

squatters' sense of having to face the government on their own.

When the progressive organisations regrouped in KTC in the form of the WCCA (late 1986) they did not work through the Masincedane Committee or address the burning issues of the day. Instead the WCCA appointed a Steering Committee — without the knowledge of the Masincedane Committee or the consent of the majority of local residents. This, coming when the state was trying to destabilise and co-opt KTC, only added to the lack of confidence of the squatter leadership in the motives of progressive movement.

The Masincedane-led attacks on old KTC in January this year — when 2000 people lost their shacks — was one of the terrible consequences.

Lastly, we need to look at the serious accusation that the Masincedane Committee is part of the enemy camp. Here, once again, the facts say otherwise. The squatter leadership of KTC, as well as that of Portland Cement, Nyanga Bush, and Nyanga Extension, fought side by side with the progressive movement against the security forces in the 1985-1986 insurrection and the 1986 "Witdoek" attacks.

Following this they continued to challenge the government through the courts — ie. suing the Minister of Law and Order for damages and opposing the appoint-

ment of Ngxobongwana as "Mayor" of Old Crossroads. A clearer demonstration of their support for the progressive movements — in spite of their growing disillusionment and frustration — was the fact that the Masincedane Committee called on the UDF and COSATU to intervene to resolve the conflict situation developing inside KTC.

In the aftermath of the January 1988 conflict, they actively demonstrated their commitment to the peace process by preventing local residents from attacking undisciplined youth in Tambo Square. They also ignored attempts by local government officials and Ngxobongwana to draw them into a reactionary alliance against progressive organisations.

What all of this shows is that, up until now, neither the failures of our progressive movement nor the government's consistent attempts to co-opt the squatter leadership into its urban divide and rule strategies, has pushed the Masincedane Committee into the arms of the state.

But as long as the squatter leadership remains isolated from mass-based organisations it runs the risk of being exposed to the co-optive strategies of the state.

We saw how successful the state can be — for example, Old Crossroads is now firmly under the control of the South African government. It is impossible in

addressing basic demands like housing and land for the squatter leadership to ignore dealing with local government.

This meant that they had to engage the state in demanding land and housing. But in engaging the state and negotiating with it, just like with the bosses, can lead to co-optation and divisions within our ranks. All this challenges our mass-based organisations. Instead of fighting with the squatter communities, we need to assist squatters, who are employed and unemployed workers without houses and land, to achieve their demands without getting co-opted, controlled and destroyed.

In this battle to advance our struggle, the role of COSATU workers is crucial.

At the moment the government is moving to stop our attempts to address the problem of KTC. It appears the government does not want peace to return to KTC or the building of an alliance between the squatter leadership and the progressive movement. During the past few weeks, the state has tried to make sure that our defeats in KTC are not turned into victory for the progressive movement.

It has done this by crippling the role played by the Monitoring Committee (linked to UDF affiliates). This committee created the necessary space for a negotiated peace in KTC. So

far three people from the Monitoring Committee have been detained; two others have been restricted and a number of others have been questioned by the security police.

Entry into KTC has also been restricted — making contact between our activists and the Masincedane Committee more difficult.

What all of this shows is that KTC remains a key stepping stone for the government's broader plans of controlling working class communities through local Town Committee structures and Joint Management Centres.

The state is also aware that the progressive movement has failed to win the support of squatters. In KTC we have suffered a temporary defeat. But, if we learn from our mistakes, we can take our struggle forward. The state is fighting the progressive movement for legitimacy and control of the urban communities.

For the moment, the site of struggle is KTC. Before long it will be areas like Khayelitsha; the refugee settlements and eventually every working class community in the Western Cape.

To win this battle, progressive organisations need to recognise its importance; educate our members and ensure that our activists play a role in winning back the unorganised masses to our progressive movement.

We cannot let the youth play into the hands of the state by physically attacking the residents of KTC or the Masincedane Committee. If our own people are not disciplined inside our mass organisations, the forces of reaction will be mobilised to deal with the youth. This will only further the state's objective in KTC — to co-opt, control and destroy it.

This must not happen. Old Crossroads was lost to the state. We cannot afford to "lose" one more working class community in the Western Cape. This is the major lesson of the KTC conflict.