

## ***Civics in transition***

# **Tackling the Soweto crisis**

**The general secretary of the Soweto Civic Association, PAT LEPHUNYA, speaks about the Soweto crisis and the civic movement in transition**

**What steps does the Soweto Civic Association consider necessary to resolve the township's service crisis?**

We have been negotiating in good faith, but our good faith has been taken for granted and played upon. Two particular situations show this.

About three months ago, the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) wanted to pull out of the Wits Metropolitan Chamber (WMC), saying that they thought they could strike better deals at the Local Government Negotiating Forum (LGNF) and the World Trade Centre.

The SCA fought that and the TPA was brought back to the chamber. But what the TPA meant when it said it favoured deals from the LGNF came out clearly when they were supposed to deal with Dobsonville councillors.

The TPA had agreed, as part of a package to deal with the Soweto crisis, that the Dobsonville council should be dissolved. But then they started saying the Dobsonville council should be dealt with in the context of the LGNF agreement; in other words, it should become part of the interim structures. The simple reason is that these councillors are National Party members. The TPA thus wanted to take that LGNF agreement and impose it on our situation. But the mandate of the SCA is that there can be no deals when the councillors are there. We are not part of LGNF agreements. We believe strongly in our independence and autonomy and that deal is not going to work out in Soweto.

The SCA feels that the TPA is try-

ing to buy time. They are using the LGNF to buy time, and hope to escape the mess in Soweto.

**What is the SCA's bottom line?**

Because our good faith has been abused by the TPA, we have put forward certain non-negotiables.

One is that we want funds made available to bring the infrastructure of Soweto to acceptable levels. We are not prepared to talk of lifting the boycott until money is available for this.

We are also saying that the introduction of Transitional Metropolitan Councils (TMCs) does not automatically mean the boycott will end.

The TMCs only satisfy the needs of the middle class, who will go into local and regional government structures and parliament. It does not satisfy

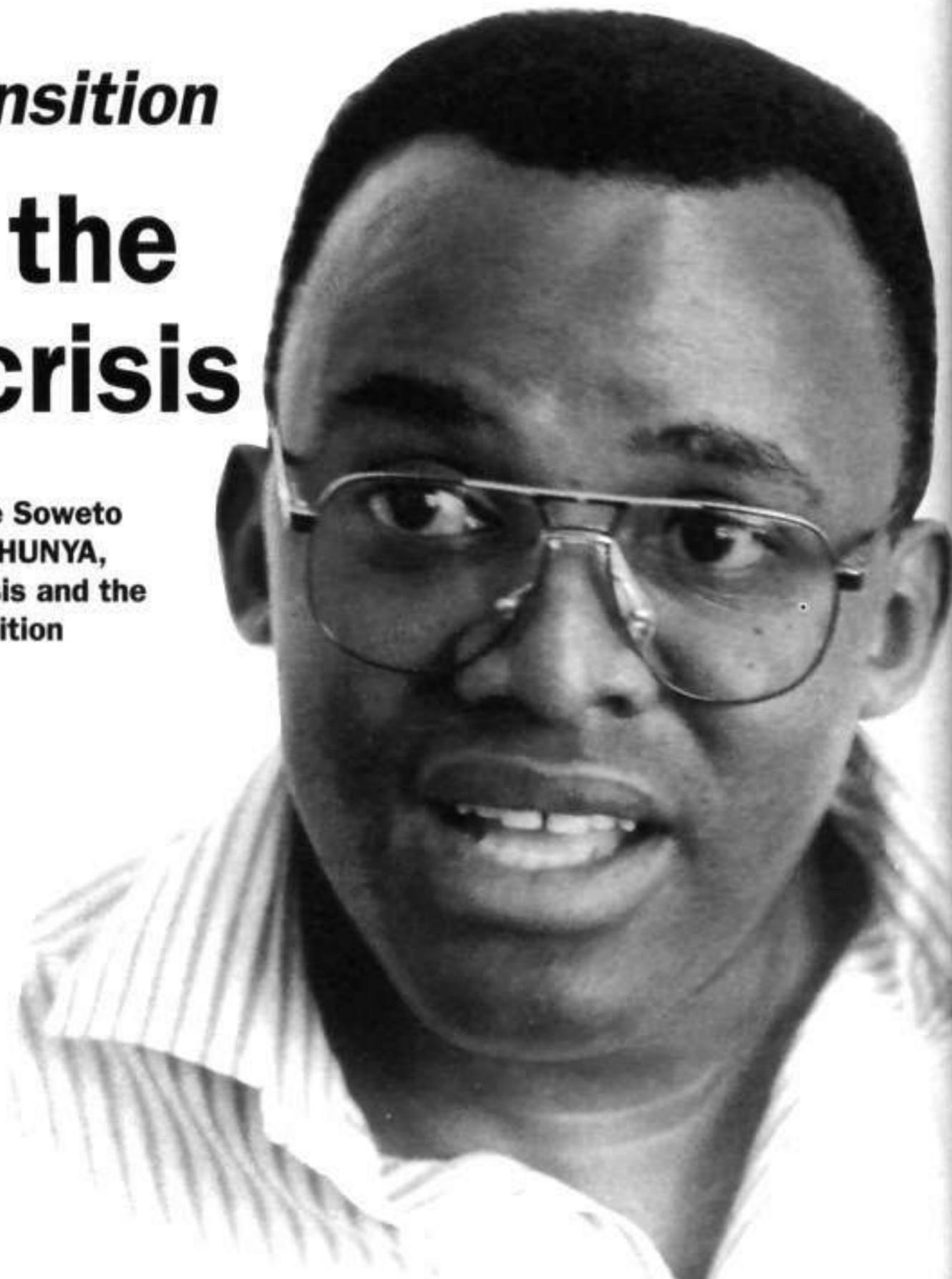
the needs of ordinary people in terms of improving infrastructure.

The only way to resolve the crisis is when these non-negotiables are met.

**Political organisations have recently become involved in the Soweto crisis, but who will take ultimate responsibility for ending the rent and service boycott? (Bearing in mind that as we get closer to elections, political organisations are less likely to make an unpopular call.)**

Nobody will resolve the boycott except the SCA. Nobody will pay unless being told to do so by us. These political organisations are not in touch with the masses. We are in touch.

**Is the SCA strong enough to call**



PIC: KENDRIDGE MATHABATHE

### **for the end of the boycott?**

Yes. But we want to see actual work to improve the infrastructure before we can talk about anything else. Where they get the money is not our business.

### **Do you think the Dobsonville crisis will be sorted out?**

I don't think the TPA has the political will to do this. I think the TPA is hoping is that, when the term of the councillors expires on 31 October, this will automatically deal with the Dobsonville situation. If the TPA dismisses the councillors on the basis of that date, it will still be in breach of the agreement.

### **The ANC has linked the resolution of the Soweto crisis to the establishment of interim local structures. Does the SCA support this position?**

We would support this. But furthermore, we are saying that the introduction of the TMCs does not necessarily mean the end of the boycott. There is a history of the state not honouring agreements.

We want concrete improvement.

### **Do you see your constituency as being mainly working class people?**

Historically, our constituency has mainly been ordinary working class people living in the four-room houses, backyard rooms and shacks.

But increasingly, the middle class has been coming to the civic for help. The reason for this is economic: many of these people have bonds that they are battling to repay. Increasingly, we are dealing with bond-related problems.

In our fight for democracy, an alliance was formed between the middle class and working class. But to the ordinary working class person, democracy does not mean voting. It means improving your living conditions.

Everyone wants this, but in any society it is usually the needs of the middle class that are met. The middle class goes to parliament. Institutions like banks usually only give bonds to the middle class.

It is an international phenomenon that the state runs away from meeting working class needs. Governments, particularly in the Western world, are

coalitions between the middle class and capitalists against the working class. As civics, we have to ensure that working class needs are met.

### **Will the SCA put forward people to go into the TMCs etc?**

That is still debatable. We have taken a resolution that we will not be part of any government structures. But it might happen that people want SCA people to be involved in these structures. At that time, we might have to consider this as individuals. But this depends on conditions prevailing then.

### **Political parties are expected to go into the Metropolitan Chamber. Will the chamber then be restructured along the lines of the LGNF, as a two-sided table made up of statutory and non-statutory delegations?**

Based on the agreement at the LGNF, the chamber has agreed to restructure as a two-sided table.

But this poses problems. It is difficult to define the non-statutory bodies. There are a number of organisations that have been closely associated with apartheid, but which are not statutory bodies, such as the National Party.

Personally, I would prefer to see a three-sided table. We should have the state bodies, or statutory bodies; secondly, those bodies associated with apartheid, like the NP, Sofasonke, white ratepayers' associations, Inkatha, the Democratic Party. The third category would be those bodies who have chosen to be part of the struggle against apartheid, such as Cosatu, the ANC, PAC, Azapo and the civics.

### **In the past, civics organised 'organs of people's power', such as street and block committees. Are you still committed to building such, and is it still possible given that the political conditions have changed?**

**Nobody will resolve the rent boycott except the SCA. Nobody will pay unless told to do so by us. The political organisations are not in touch with the masses. We are in touch.**

There is not that same enthusiasm to build street committees, but this does not mean there are no street committees. In Soweto, block committees are strong. It is only the street committees that are not existing in all areas.

The difficulty of sustaining the block committees is that there are different people with different interests involved. Some are interested in political organisations, and others are not.

But while there is a dominant political liberation movement, there are other organisations in Soweto. The block committees unite people across the political divide.

### **Once there is a more democratic government in power, civics say they will remain as watchdogs. What does this mean?**

The SCA will continue to represent the interests of Soweto residents on a non-partisan basis. As a people's organisation, we will be able to lobby government structures etc to ensure that people's needs are met. A democratic government does not mean people's needs will be met. The legacy of apartheid will remain with us.

### **What do you think of the recent defections by white councillors to the ANC?**

We are not impressed by these defections. The majority of the defectors in Randburg and Sandton are very problematic individuals. Some are enemies of the civics. Their defections are based on personal interest, rather than political principles.

I think their aim is to sub-regionalise the Witwatersrand area to safeguard their personal needs, using the democratic movement as a vehicle.

But at the same time, the ANC is for everybody. Different groupings in the ANC have their own interests, but nobody should prevent anyone else from joining the ANC or any other political party of their choice. ■