

Tembalihle Struggle

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Mass mobilisation on the 04th-06th July 2007

The Tembalihle Crisis Committee did a door to door mobilisation in Lenasia, South of Johannesburg for their mass meeting that was going to be held on the 08th July 2007 and there was good response from the community. Many issues around development of Tembalihle were going to be discussed in the meeting and people demanded answers from the local ward councilor. As this was going to be a community mass meeting the committee held a meeting with the councilor on the 06th July 2007 so that he can give the committee answers to the developmental plans of Tembalihle. In 2002 there were threats of forceful removals of the community of Tembalihle to another called Vlakfontein and the community resisted. A struggle insured where the Landless People's Movement together with the Anti Privatisation Forum organised the people to demand answers from the government plans to move the people from the area. It was indicated to the community that the area is a dolomite area and no development could be done in the area and a land survey was brought in to do a visibility study. To the surprise of the community a trading mall was built in the same dolomite area and people were told that they will be moved to a new area called Lehae. The study reports were not revealed to the community and in the meeting with the Ward Councilor Dan Bovu, he indicated that there was a budget for development of certain sections in the area. But a process must be followed for development stages where certain sections will be developed for business and parks but only one area will be developed for houses. So those residents who wanted to relocate to Lehae were moved and more houses will be developed in Lehae for more relocation but those who wanted houses in Tembalihle will not be relocated.

Mass meeting on the 08th July 2007

The community came in large numbers to the mass meeting and more than 500 people attended the meeting where they demanded a report about the housing developments in the area. All the empty promises of the councilor were met with a huge dissatisfaction and people demand answers in black & white or hell was going to break lose. People demanded to know when will infrastructure be developed in the area as there were street lights be installed in the area but people were without electricity and housing. Another issue was the question of the area having electricity infrastructure and a march was to the municipal offices was a resolution taken so that the officials could respond to their previous memorandums.

March on the 09th July 2007 to the municipality office

The community marched on the Monday morning to the municipality office to deliver their memorandum demanding the installation of electricity infrastructure and the development of houses. This was a peaceful march and more than 500 people participated in it with no violent intentions but getting the government to answer to the development plans in the area. The City Area Manager was not available at his office so they were promised that they would come meet the community at Parkstation in Tembalihle. At the meeting @ SA Block, the officials also failed to show up to meet with the community. So when they failed to do so, it was then that the community decided to gather at the R53 road to stage a blockade so that the Mayor of Johannesburg Amos Masondo can come address their grievances since the area

Manager has failed to meet with the residents. The demonstration went through to the night and police came to disperse the crowd that has gathered and rubber bullets were fired to the crowd. A stay-away was declared for the 10th July 2007 and a night vigil was held as the community barricaded the roads.

There many clashes with the police who used excessive force in controlling the crowd that was getting angry by the minute and more people joined the demonstration making the area to be under community control. Police stopped shooting when the media was around fearing that they could be exposed in the news.

Demonstration on the 10th July 2007

A large crowd gathered in the early hours of the morning and they blockaded the road with a central demand that the Mayor must come and address their demands. The Director of housing was brought in at around eleven in the morning to address the people about their grievances and they requested that a delegation be elected from the community to meet with Mayor Masondo but the community opposed that decision as they were fed up with empty promises. It was clear that they will not be moved until the Mayor came to address their demands since their ward councilor has been playing developmental games with the community. The housing officials promised to take forward their demand to the Mayor and they will give a feed back to the leaders at around three in the afternoon. This was not accepted by the community as they dispersed and reconvened at around three in the afternoon for further action if their demands were not met by the Mayor. When the community gathered in the afternoon the South African Police Service together with the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department opened fire to the community as they didn't want to disperse from the roads when they heard that the Mayor will meet them on the 10th July 2007.

The Arrest of Tembalihe 17 on the 10th July 2007

The crowd dispersed under heavy fire from the police and scores of people were injured and seventeen comrades were arrested randomly from their homes or on their way to the spaza shops. This was a crack down to kill the community resistance and the targeted leaders managed to escape the police crackdown. The arrested comrades were Lindiwe Nhlapo, Mandla Sibeko, Albert Shabalala, Andrew Seqe, Callman Masinga, Willie Mabunda, Alfred Lekgon, Klaas Matchapa, Joseph Silwane, Benjamin Matchapa, Abram Maleshane, Samuel Nontena, Joseph Paulos, Nandipha Nhlawule, Palesa Stamper and one juvenile who were all charge with public violence. They were kept at the Lenasia police station on the Tuesday night and were to appear at the Protea Magistrate court the following day.

Protea Court Case of the Tembalihe 17 on the 11th July 2007

The comrades appeared at the Protea court number seven and were then not granted bail so that positive identification could be done before they were to be released. A bail of R300.00 was set for the comrades and only on the 17th July 2007 that sixteen comrades were released from Johannesburg Central Prison after the APF paid their bail money and one comrade was released on the 15th July 2007 after the family could raise bail money. The comrades could not report for work and others complained that there were not part of the protest but they were on their way home or to the spaza shop.

Mayor's Visit to Tembalihe on the 11th July 2007

The Mayor Amos Masondo visited the community of Tembalihle on the 11th July 2007 to receive another memorandum from the community and then respond to their demands. He indicated in his speech that there were other tactics that could be used by the community to raise their grievances rather than resorting to violent tactics. But he forgot to indicate to them that he has failed on many occasions to respond to previous calls from the community in having a meeting with them since 2002. He indicated that it is not going to happen that the government will build houses in the area of Tembalihle as it is a dolomite area and people will be moved into Lehae. The community indicated that they have minutes of the meeting with the councilor who promised them that there are developmental plans in the area but he rubbished those suggestions in front of the councilor and the community.

A new demand was placed that the community wants the councilor to resign for failing to give proper reports to the community and he has failed to take forward the demands of the community. The Mayor was quick to respond that agitators like the APF & LPM must not use the platform for their own political motives in misleading the community. He declared that development was not for the ANC or any other political organisation but for the community of Tembalihle. When it was indicated that the local ward committee members got first preference to be relocated to Lehae and that the ward councilor has in fact placed people into empty stands that were left by people who went to Lehae. He rubbished the claims that this was not happening and he will discuss these issues with a delegation elected by the community.

A shack burns in Tembalihle on the 15th July 2007

A shack burned in the early hours of the morning where a community member was burned to death. The community tried in vain to put out the fire but it was too late for the community member who burned to death and the Disaster committee was nowhere to be found in making sure that they ensure the safety campaign is working. No inquest has been made into the death of the community member and no investigation has been made to find out the cause of the fire. Many in the community view this a plot to pressure the community in taking a decision to be relocated to Lehae but with no help from the Disaster committee these allegations are left to be unresolved.

Community meeting at SA Block on the 15th July 2007

There was a community meeting on the 15th July 2007 at SA Block to choose a delegation to meet with the Mayoral committee to discuss the issues of development in Tembalihle and what was the plan for the seventeen arrested comrades but more than 18 comrades were injured. There fifteen comrades who were chosen by the community and given a mandate to highlight the crisis in Tembalihle that resulted in the uprising.

Meeting with the Mayor Masondo on the 16th July 2007

The meeting took place and the mayoral committee was present and issues on the agenda were the development in the area. But all the engineers and the people who conducted the visibility study were not present in the meeting. So the meeting was rescheduled for another day where all the people involved in the development plans could be present and all the reports could be prepared for the meeting. In the meeting it was acknowledged that dolomite is an area that can be developed but it is a question of cost involved in building of the houses and that could be discussed in the next meeting.

Protea Court Case on the 18th July 2007

In the second appearance of the Tembalihle 17 at the Protea magistrate court, the case was reminded to the 07th August 2007 as the accused did not have a legal representative but there was not enough evidence available so there was further investigation. The difficulty is that the community members are poor and they can't afford to acquire the services of a private lawyer. Another challenge is that the pro-bono lawyers who have worked with the APF communities have in the past failed to fully defend the accused in previous cases especially the Legal Aid Board lawyers. The matter is that these are political cases and the justice system in the country views them as criminal cases. In separate incidence, the pro-bono lawyers have requested the accused to admit to guilt even if they were not part of the protests that are viewed by the community as justifiable because they are demanding their right to basic services. So the community is left with no choice but to take it to the street in demand for basic services in their communities.

The arrest of three comrades on charges of intimidation

The TCC comrades held a community meeting at SA Block to discuss the struggle of Tembalihle and the ward councilor Dan Mbovu organised a counter meeting at the very same venue. Comrades then responded to some of the allegations that were raised by the councilor in the meeting and police were called into the scene. In the media statements that the councilor made was that he feared for his life because there are certain elements in the area that organise night meeting planning for his death. So the police quickly responded to the call for help as the councilor felt that his life was under threat and three comrades (Mkhuseli Zulu, Vusi Dlamini and a pensioner Aaron Nsibande) were arrested on charges for intimidation. One comrade (Mkhuseli Zulu) was denied bail and the other two were released.

Zulu's appearance at the Lens Magistrate court on the 02nd Augustus 2007

The APF hired a private lawyer for the comrade and the case was dropped by the magistrate.