

SOWETO MASSACRE

August 28, 1986, White City Jabavu: Workers return home from work to find their belongings thrown out into the streets by the Blackjacks (municipal police). They try to hold a peaceful meeting to discuss the situation, but the police open fire. A pitched battle begins with residents putting up barricades and eventually driving away the municipal police. They return, however, with reinforcements from the regular police. In the fierce fighting that follows, 32 people are killed.

rent increases

In April of 1986, municipal councils announced a rent increase of R5,00. Residents in the affected townships found the increase ridiculous. They were not prepared to pay an extra cent towards the lot they already had - blocked drains, untarred streets, unhealthy sewerage systems, houses which needed painting and other repairs.

boycott

Realising that they shared similar problems, residents came together and in June, began a campaign not to pay rent. The boycott started in White City Jabavu, Soweto and soon spread to about 53 other townships. White City is an extremely low-income area where small, two-roomed houses are often occupied by over 16 people.

Ultimatums were sent to residents demanding rent payment. If they failed to pay, they would face eviction.

unity

Faced with increasing repression, residents began organising themselves into street committees with the assistance of the civic association. They had come together realising that their strength lies in their unity. Together they said, "Enough is enough". Up till today, rent is still not being paid.



massacre

The people of White City staged peaceful marches to the rent office in protest to the unfair increase. They were met by teargas on each occasion. The situation remained unchanged, and on August 28th, the evictions started.

restrictions

The anger and frustration of the people was further increased when restrictions were placed on funerals. These included: restricting the number of people who could attend, no freedom songs, banners or marching, no political speeches etc.

At the funeral the police teargassed mourners. The president of AZAPO, Nkosi Molala, lost his eye when a teargas canister hit his face.

lessons

When we engage in struggle, we learn good things about the way we organise, but we also learn about things which we must avoid to make our struggle successful. Undisciplined "comrades" have during the rent boycotts behaved undemocratically - they have often acted without mandates and consultation. They sometimes use "necklaces" and beatings on workers and others who do not agree with them. We must convince them that the methods they use are wrong and that they are playing into the hands of the state.

The use of violence against our people will not put an end to our struggle. On the contrary, we will be even more determined.



A youth sets alight a makeshift barrier made of tyres.

Written by members of Action Youth living in White City Jabavu, Soweto.