

flowing out of the Soviet Union, it will be interesting to see how debate develops around these issues - not only at the West German meeting, but also in subsequent contacts between the Soviet Union and members of the Congress alliance.

*WIP correspondent.*

## Sewage in Soweto's streets

**H**ealth hazards are developing in Soweto, South Africa's largest black township, while a dispute rages between the Soweto Council and 4 000 municipal workers.

The strike has been on for more than three months, a period which has seen the development of numerous decomposing garbage dumps in the crowded township. In some areas, streams of sewage flow through the streets.

A wage dispute sparked off the strike, which resulted in dismissal of 4 000 council employees. Currently the main issue in the dispute involves reinstatement of the strikers - with the council prepared to re-employ only 70 percent of them, with slight salary adjustments.

The wage dispute dates back to November 1987, when the Soweto Council was upgraded in terms of the Act on the Remuneration of Town Clerks. In terms of this Act, Soweto was classified a Grade 12 municipality. This prescribed wage increases for council employees.

The council agreed to the increases in principle, but said they would only be implemented when there was money available. Almost a year later, council workers - organised by the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) - are still waiting for the salary adjustments.

The council claims it cannot afford the increases because of the two-and-a-half year rent boycott, which has left it with a R150-million debt. But strikers say this is 'just an attempt to use us to break the boycott'.

According to one worker, 'The

council wants us to do its dirty work by demanding that we help municipal police evict rent defaulters and seal their windows and doors'.

Current minimum wages at the council range from about R370 a month for labourers to R609 for clerks.

The council embarked on a privatisation programme in January this year, and privatised certain departments during the strike. This is the reason it has given for offering to reinstate only 70 percent of the workforce - the other 30 percent, it says, have become obsolete in the privatisation process.

Despite the privatisation, garbage continues to pile up in the streets of Soweto.

Missing among the strikers this year are municipal police, who embarked on a huge strike over wages during 1986. Soon after this, the state gave municipal and railway police equal status to members of the SAP - and curtailed their membership of unions and involvement in industrial action.

Local municipal police still support the strikers, according to Samwu, and told a recent union meeting they would not evict rent defaulters in the township.

Strikers have been trying to hold a union meeting in the township since mid-September but police interference makes this almost impossible. One meeting was banned and at least three disrupted by police.

Police also disrupted a march by about 2 000 strikers, and sjambokked and teargassed workers after giving them 20 minutes to disperse. The union claims 12 members of its negotiating team have been detained under emergency regulations.

The union is finding it increasingly difficult to operate. So far the strikers have received some financial support from the National Association of Local Government Officers (Nalگو) in Britain, which also sent a telex to Soweto Town Clerk Nico Malan and Constitutional Planning Minister Chris Heunis urging them to resolve the dispute.

Cosatu's Wits region held a rally on September 18 in support of the strikers.

The question of staff association membership has also arisen during

the strike. When the Soweto Council took over township affairs from the West Rand Administration Board in 1984, workers were compelled to join the staff association and pay R5 a month in membership fees. Since then, says Samwu, workers have seen no financial statements or any increase in benefits.

Samwu says that although workers clearly want the staff association dissolved, the council insists it is a democratic body and that a general meeting must be called to determine whether this is the case. Workers have agreed to this procedure.

*Shareen Singh.*

## Saved by the Soviets

**A**fter stringing out the Namibian peace process for more than a decade, Pretoria has adopted the same tactics to avoid suspension from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

At the same time some nifty footwork from Foreign Minister Pik Botha has won the South African government a year's reprieve from signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which would force it to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection.

In September, Soviet delegates to the annual conference of the IAEA - a world body created to limit the spread of nuclear arms - combined with their US and British counterparts to head off a move to suspend South African membership.

This was the second year running that the Soviets refused to back the suspension of South Africa from one of the few international forums where it is still represented. The move reflects the importance placed by the Soviets on ending the arms race - overriding almost every other foreign policy objective - since Mikhail Gorbachev's appointment as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

In a flurry of negotiations before the September conference, Botha used this Soviet concern to talk his way out of both signing the NPT