

26 May 2003

THE RESULTS OF THE STRUGGLE

Be proud that the struggle you embarked on last year and early this year bore positive results. You really stood the test of time, especially the aggressive intimidation and victimisation that you were subjected. Some ran away and came back. Others did not put their feet in the water to test the temperature. But you did! And it was painful. Though it is not all over yet, you scored great points for everyone. The strike forced parallel progression to continue where it was unceremoniously stopped. President Festus Mogae was bitter as to why it was stopped in the first place. The concerned officers were instructed to unconditionally have parallel progression back on its track. If it was not because of the recent struggle, teachers would still be frozen in one position. Please observe this as a great success and give yourself a pat on the back.

The boycott of extra-curricular activities also resulted in the Ministry of Education publicly accepting that teachers legitimately need to be remunerated for the daily overtime work they are doing. Towards the end of last year (2002), President Festus Mogae agreed with teachers that they deserve overtime payment. He then called upon the Ministry of Education to discuss the allowance issue with the teachers' organisations. If it was not because of your resolve to go on strike and even boycott the extra curricular activities, the allowance issue would not have been entertainment. In fact, it was refused in earlier attempts. The teacher organisations' proposal of the allowance is that it should cover everyone in the school.

BOFESETE further observes that the struggle has helped greatly in conscientising teachers about their rights as workers. Teachers had to read a lot of literature during the struggle, especially educational policies. This should continue as knowledge is power.

The latest spate of letters withholding teachers salaries following last year's strike have started to arrive in schools faster than letters progressing teachers. This will only go a long way in demoralizing teachers and the Ministry of Education has been made aware of this. BOFESETE cannot stop this but will continue to work with other teacher organisations to request the Ministry of Education to stop this if at all fences are being truly mended.

MEETING WITH MINISTER KGOROBA ON OVERTIME ALLOWANCE

The teacher's overtime allowance was expected to be discussed by Cabinet on the morning of Wednesday 21 May, 2003. The same afternoon, teacher organisations had a meeting with Minister of Education, George Kgoroba, to get feed back about the Cabinet discussion of the allowance. The Minister reported that the overtime allowance item was not discussed because Cabinet reportedly had more pressing issues to discuss like the threat of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Teacher organisations however informed the Minister that teachers were already losing their patience because the allowance issue had dragged too long now. They also reminded the Minister that the allowance issue should have long been through by now before the De Villiers commission is through. The De Villiers commission is supposed to be out before the end of this month (May). Teacher organisations also registered concern that the Ministry of Education (MOE) should note that De Villiers commission and the allowance

issue are two unrelated items. This means that the overtime allowance issue is on its own and is not to be handled by De Villiers.

In the same meeting, the Minister also agreed with the teachers that the overtime allowance had taken too long to be settled. He reiterated that he still supports teachers to get the allowance. He further added that President Festus Mogae fully supports teachers in their bid for the allowance. Last year (2002), on November 7, the President told teacher organisations that he appreciates teachers' working conditions and that they be given an allowance to compensate the overtime work they are doing.

The teacher organisations are therefore pinning their hope on the cabinet that it does not only discuss the overtime allowance issue conclusively, but that it also gives it a positive consideration that is commensurate with teachers' working conditions.

The Minister was also briefed about the concern teachers were expressing regarding the slow pace of processing parallel progression. The Minister was informed that his ministry was again failing to deliver on time and that this was a serious concern since affected teachers were losing patience and morale. He was also briefed about the ongoing victimization and intimidation on the teachers and he promised that he will talk to his officers to refrain from this. Teachers are also challenged to note specific cases of victimization and intimidation, with documentary evidence where possible so that the ministry can launch an investigation.

WE ARE NOT TO BLAME ON YOUR OVERTIME ALLOWANCE, ORGANISATIONS TOLD.

The TSMCC meeting chaired by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Permanent Secretary, Phillimon Ramatsui was held on 16 Friday, May 2003. Teacher organisations told the MOE officials about their concern in the delay of releasing overtime allowance. The PS however explained that the overtime allowance issue was now outside their ministry and that everything had been handed over to cabinet for consideration.

The relationship between De Villiers Commission and the impending overtime allowance was also clarified. Teacher organisations expressed concern that the overtime allowance should have been out by now and that now it seems the De Villiers commission would overtake it. The MOE explained that the overtime allowance at this stage was no more their baby now, but Cabinet's.

Teacher organisations also expressed their worry over the snail pace work by the MOE on parallel progression. It seems the letters of progression have slowed down and those of withholding teachers' salaries following last year's strike are reaching the schools with lightning speed. At the beginning of the year, the MOE had said that they had shortage of staff to expedite the processing of parallel progression letters. The teacher organisations now wonders where the MOE suddenly got manpower to work on letters withholding teachers' salaries when the same staff is failing to work faster on teachers parallel progression.