

# Farmworkers' struggle victory

by Thamsanqa Dumezweni



The state combines repression and concession in response to rising workers power



The achievement of a 50% wage increase to R105 per day by farm workers is further evidence that mass struggle works! Although farm workers were demanding a R150 daily wage to replace the current wage of between R69 and R70 a day, the concession forced on the employers by the government in the face of the strike wave represents another major victory for the working class.

The farm owners say that they cannot afford to pay more. This is not only unreasonable but also inhuman and callous towards workers who daily work under horrible conditions to make the farm owners rich while workers and their families are pulverised by poverty and disease. The 'unaffordability' of the R150 is a lie. The farm owners could afford to

hire, with huge sums of money, security companies and helicopters to protect their property to combat the strike. Out of frustration, some workers vented their anger by burning crops and tractors.

Despite the ANC's concession on the minimum wage it must not be forgotten that they have only taken this step because of the pressure of the masses. Their role if left unchecked would be to maintain the poverty of the farm workers. The poor wages paid to farm workers have been legally determined by this government. Minister of Agriculture Tina Joemat-Peterson unashamedly concurred with the farming capitalists that the R150 was unaffordable. Minister of Labour Mildred Oliphant also added her sycophantic voice – the wage demand could not be looked into

until March 2013, because sectoral wage determination must last for the full twelve months of the cycle. That this extreme insensitivity on part of government had to give way to a major concession is testimony to workers' power.

## Continuing threat of reaction

The Democratic Alliance (DA) leader, Helen Zille, reasoned that the police, courts and prisons were not enough to smash the farm workers' strike. She called on President Zuma to bring in the soldiers. What it does is to show the universal brutality of the capitalist class through its political agents, the ANC and the DA. Like the ANC at Marikana, the DA, in defence of capitalism is prepared, when the normal methods of oppression fail, to drown workers in their blood if

they dare demand a better life.

The backward semi-fascist gang, Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB), arrogantly entered the fray between farm owners and farm workers. Joann Spies, reportedly the AWB chief commanding officer, said: 'We will not allow the strikers to plunder the towns and farms.' He went further: 'If the police and army can't do the job we will do it for them.' (*The New Age*, 6 December 2012). 'We will do it for them' means that they will murder the farm workers like the ANC government murdered mine workers at Marikana.

The political imbecility of the ruling class and its agents is also manifest in the Cosatu leadership. 'Meanwhile', reports Business Report, November 30 2012,

'Cosatu has supported the call by Western Cape Premier Helen Zille for the army to be deployed in the province, "but to protect farm workers."' How is a capitalist army going to 'protect farmworkers' who are in class conflict with the capitalists? Workers must place no trust in the state forces and instead rely on the proven method of mass struggle and democratic control. For genuine Marxists, the solution to the misery of working people under capitalism is its overthrow. This is what the working people are learning from their daily experience of class struggle.

# Tshwane Metro workers fight for their jobs

by Shorkey Maila  
dismissed City of Tshwane worker

For nearly eighteen months Tshwane Metro has treated 1500 waste management and park workers with contempt; using labour brokers to hire & fire at will. As the workers were let down by their union, the Metro bosses have dodged local government's responsibilities to its workers – whether formally employed by the municipality or a labour broker. With the support of the Democratic Socialist Movement, the workers' long struggle to get their jobs back is at last about to yield results. This is the story of the fight so far:



City of Tshwane workers in one of many organising meetings.

We got to work for the City of Tshwane Municipality by starting as volunteers during the 2010 World Cup period. We were volunteering from December, with 200, working at night.

Afterwards we were transferred to work for the City of Tshwane Municipality, employed by a labour broker in waste management and parks and received small amounts of money. In May 2011 the labour broker claimed incapacity to pay us. By June, the Tshwane mayor, Seputla Ramokgopa came to a meeting of the waste management workers and promised us that within twelve months the labour brokers would be phased out and the workers would be absorbed as Tshwane Municipality permanent workers. He broke his promise – this did not happen.

Instead, in September they started terminating us one by one. We wrote a memorandum to the mayor but never received any response. Then in May last year all the remaining workers employed by the labour broker in waste management and parks were terminated. In total 1500 of us lost our jobs.

Now they have phased out the labour broker that originally em-

ployed us. They have engaged new brokers – Metsana & Operation Vat Alles – who have hired new people to work. Many of us have been forced to take whatever other work they could find while we fight for our reinstatement, but 510 of us remain unemployed at this point.

We took our case to the CCMA but it wasn't taken seriously. Our union, South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) not only failed to defend us, but it approved Operation Vat Alles! We took our grievance about SAMWU to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Cosatu applied for a march to the mayor's office so we could hand over another memorandum. This took place in November last year. We gave them fourteen days to give us feedback but they didn't respond. Cosatu failed to follow up on this lack of a response and they too began failing to support us.

On December 14 last year we held an 'illegal' gathering outside the City of Tshwane offices. They told us to rerun the second week of January 2013. So, on January 11, 2013, we went back on another 'illegal' gathering but they still didn't talk to us. They told us to

come back the following week

We did not give up and finally on January 15 we were able to meet with the Metro Municipal Councilors Terance Mashego, and Petunia Mashaba and the director of waste management Solly Moatshe. They showed us documentation stating that the mayor agrees that all the workers working under labour brokers will be absorbed by the municipality. They told us that from now on we should negotiate with Moatshe about returning to work. They set a meeting on January 24 for Moatshe to inform us of our return date, but he did not attend and the meeting could not proceed. Next, we were told we must postpone because the Executive Director Faith Masindisa could not attend. We pushed on and did meet with Masindisa on February 1. At the time of writing, we have a meeting scheduled for February 8 when we will bring the list of the workers who still need their jobs back to negotiate our reinstatement. It looks like our unity and struggle is now at last moving us forward.