

# Drive against outsourcing gains momentum

Public institutions like varsities, councils have been main target

BONGANI NKOSI

**T**HESE people eat together. Owners of the companies that employ you are members of the ANC. Union leaders are members of the ANC and the premier is a member of the ANC."

Activist Musa Mahlalela uttered these words at the Beyers Naudé Square in the heart of Joburg while addressing about a 100 security guards employed by the Gauteng government in various departments.

Mahlalela spoke to the workers in a bid to mobilise them to join the #OutsourcingMustFall movement, which aims to force institutions to employ workers directly and dump contracted companies.

With a history dating back to the 1990s, the campaign against outsourcing by public institutions in particular intensified and scored some notable victories in recent years.

Protesting workers, aided by students and sympathetic academics, forced several universities across the country to abolish the practice they rejected as exploitative and fattening the pockets of company owners at the expense of workers.

Universities such as Unisa, Wits University and the University of Cape Town now employ staff like guards, cleaners and cooks directly, thanks to rolling protests that were linked to #FeesMustFall.

Universities took the most blame for promoting outsourcing. Wits and UCT sparked the first wave of protests against the practice in the late 1990s when they opted for it.

At the time, the institutions retrenched support workers - only to bring back some of them via contracted companies and with reduced salaries and no benefits.

Activists were now turning their attention to the government, mobilising workers to revolt against their outsourcing. Just this month,

hundreds of security guards working at government sites, took to the streets of Pretoria to demand the abolition of the practice.

They wanted the City of Tshwane, tertiary institutions and provincial and national departments to dump their employers.

"We have made progress in about 16 universities out of 26. We're left with only 10 and colleges," said Vusi Mahlangu, an #OutsourcingMustFall activist based in Pretoria.

"But the target now is the municipalities, provincial and national government and the private sector. We're taking the struggle into the comfort zone of companies.

"Outsourcing is incorrect because it promotes the super exploitation of the workers and corruption in government," Mahlangu added.

The #OutsourcingMustFall campaign, driven by left-leaning activists from organisations including the EPP and PAC, has scored a major victory in the City of Joburg. Mayor Herman Mashaba has announced the metro was working towards "insourcing" 4 000 security guards. This would see the City dumping 100 security companies, which it paid nearly R700 million per annum.

Mashaba said the metro paid R14 000 per security guard on average, "while the guards themselves received as little as R4 500 as a salary per month".

He said the move would increase the guards' pay and benefits, while not costing the City any more money.

"Our approach in this matter was to find a means of offering these contract workers the dignity of fair pay, stable employment and benefits available to employees of the City," said Mashaba.

Mashaba accused the ANC of being against direct employment of the guards. Jolidee Matongo, ANC spokesperson in Joburg, denied this.

"We support insourcing of the 4 000 guards. But our position has always been that you don't just wake



Outsourced workers march to Prasa offices in Hatfield year demanding a R10 000 minimum wage and permanent full time jobs with full benefits.

PICTURE: BONGANI SHILUBANE

up and insource. You must think things through," said Matongo.

Mahlangu said the campaign has managed to conscientise many about how outsourcing was exploitative.

"Since 2015, we've significantly made progress in terms of making people understand," said Mahlangu.

"No one ever thought that Mashaba will be the first one to understand what we meant when we

spoke about the super-exploitation of workers."

Reacting to the 2018/19 budget, Cosatu expressed concern that outsourcing was becoming entrenched in government. "We are deeply

worried about how permanent government and municipal jobs are being outsourced as cheap labour through the expanded public and community works programmes,"

said the federation's Sirwe Pamela.

"They are now being used to perform permanent government jobs, (like) cleaning streets, municipal police, electricity provision etc."

"This must stop and government must adequately fund municipalities and eliminate wasteful expenditure and corruption in these municipalities instead of treating workers as glorified slaves," Pamela

charged.

Following reports that the North West Department of Health had contracted private ambulances and mobile clinics, the National Assembly's portfolio committee on health

decided outsourcing.

"The use of private ambulances is costly and it is negatively impacting on the provincial department's budget."

"Outsourcing of services such as EMS further impacts on employment opportunities for people who could be directly employed by the state," said the committee's chairperson Lindelwa Dunjwa, who

labelled outsourcing done in this case as corruption.

"We will not allow corruption to rear its ugly head in the health sector," she said.