

# Weenen labour tenants plan march

**F**ARM labour tenants in the Weenen District are planning a protest march to the local police station in April. The march is aimed at highlighting the plight of tenants in the area and to demand an end to evictions and indiscriminate cattle impounding.

Although labour tenancy was abolished in the Weenen District in 1969, large numbers of labour tenants still live on farms in the area. Their position is extremely vulnerable. They face threats of eviction, physical violence from farmers and have little chance to protect their position through the law. It is alleged that cases of assault against tenants are often not followed up.

People in the area report that farmers prefer to pay a fixed amount of money to people they assault rather than face charges.

In terms of eviction, farm labour tenants can, at best, challenge whether or not the notice given to them was reasonable. Their land rights are not recognised in the law, although many tenant families have lived on the same piece of land for several generations, long before the arrival of whites.

Since farm labour tenants almost all keep cattle, farmers in Weenen are able to impound these cattle and exact trespass fees from the cattle owners when such cattle stray onto white farmland.

In general, the position of farm labour tenants is one



Farm labour tenants from Weenen.

which requires attention from the government and lobby groups. Although labour tenancy itself was abolished in South Africa some years ago, pockets of farm labour tenants have survived in parts of Natal, the Orange Free State and the western Transvaal.

The people of the farm Ncunjane in the Weenen District are an example of tenants who have tenaciously refused to give up their occupation and use of the land. Although the tenants have experienced tremendous hardship, they have never given up their desire to remain on the land they have always called home. In 1992, they managed to reach agreement with the current landowner

of Ncunjane that they be allowed to pay rent to remain on the land. However, the agreement which followed months of bitter struggle, including physical assault, hangs in the balance as the tenants of Ncunjane again face eviction threats for alleged breaches of the agreement.

Farm labour tenants remain an ignored but significant reality whose land rights must be addressed in a land reform programme. The farm labour tenants of Weenen in planning to march are saying they are not going to allow their problems to be ignored. They are going to make their presence felt.