

BCM workers protest over wages, conditions



DEMANDING CHANGE: Buffalo City Metro municipal workers protesting in front of the city hall, demanding better pay and secure working conditions. Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA

Members of new union hand memorandum to deputy mayor

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More than 100 Buffalo City Metro workers downed tools on Thursday to picket outside the East London City Hall.

The workers, affiliated to a new union, the Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (Demawusa), called for metro bosses to fully recognise the union, among other demands.

Demawusa is affiliated to the SA Federation of Trade Unions (Safu), led by general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, the former general secretary of Cosatu.

Demawusa's provincial coordinator, Siphiwo Ndunyana, handed over their memorandum to BCM deputy mayor Zoliswa Matana.

Addressing the workers, Ndunyana said: "Our solemn belief is that the municipality is afraid of a militant and democratic union like Demawusa.

"It is afraid that we are going to ensure that workers are properly protected financially, and in terms of health and safety, at work.

"We demand that Demawusa be fully recognised, afforded organisational rights and workers' rights to select a union of their own choice and be properly respected.

"We demand that those workers who are trapped in low pay, insecure work through the expanded public works programme (EPWP) and through other forms of casual, and labour-brokered slave labour are made permanent and are given the same terms and conditions

as their permanent colleagues," Ndunyana said.

He said BCM had failed to respond to a written request submitted in June for Demawusa to be recognised by BCM as a registered union.

The Demawusa unionists came from municipal offices in Mdantsane, King William's Town and East London.

They complained they were forced to work without protective gear when they needed it and wanted an end to outsourcing of municipal work to private companies.

"We demand all workers are issued with protective safety wear when needed and are given training in health and safety and all that we need to deliver services safely to our communities," Ndunyana said.

"We demand the finalisation of the job evaluation process and the placing of workers in their correct categories so that workers can receive wages that are associated with these positions as a matter of urgency."

Accepting the memorandum on behalf of BCM, Matana said: "I believe this is not a platform to score political points but a platform to highlight and bring forward the workers' grievances.

"We will process your demands [but] I'm unable to commit that the institution will be able to respond to your demands in seven days as you have demanded. But we have accepted your memorandum and we will process it."

Ndunyana said the workers would be back at the city hall next week if the metro failed to respond to the demands within seven days.

"We will be joined by Safu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi," he said to applause.