

MONITORING: The police were called in to monitor the situation after a large group of disgruntled EPWP workers gathered outside the offices of the Sol Plaatje executive director of community and social development, Khuza Bogacwi, yesterday.

Picture: Danie van der Liff



■ SOL PLAATJE MUNICIPALITY

EPWP workers demand answers

STAFF REPORTER

A LARGE group of disgruntled EPWP workers gathered outside the offices of the Sol Plaatje executive director of community and social development, Khuza Bogacwi, demanding answers regarding the apparent termination of their contracts.

“We are hungry, we want to work,” the workers, who were being closely monitored by a heavy police presence, stated yesterday.

Several officials, including Bogacwi and later the executive mayor, Patrick Mabilo, were locked in Bogacwi’s office while the group gathered in the passages outside.

The group stated that they would not leave until they had received answers from Mabilo.

They said they had contracts to clean various parts of the city, including the cemeteries.

“There are three projects being undertaken by the Sol Plaatje Municipality that fall under the EPWP programme, including the cleaning of the CBD and another at the waterworks section. However, ours is the only project that is being stopped.”

According to the workers, they were informed by the former executive mayor, Managaliso Matika, on Thursday last week that they should report for work on Monday.

“When we arrived at the Social Centre on Monday, however, we were told that the project would not be continuing.

“The Sol Plaatje Municipality receives funds from the Department of Public Works for the project, which is supposed to cover the costs for a full year. Why then is the municipality telling us in October that there are no funds for the project? What has happened to the money received from the department?”

They also questioned why the other two EPWP projects, namely the CBD cleaning project and the waterworks contract, were still continuing.

“The politicians and officials are fighting among themselves and are using us in their battles.

“We have lay-byes for our children for December and policies that need to be paid. We need this work. If we die, the mayor and the director will not pay our funeral costs.”

The workers also pointed out that they were paid below the minimum wage and also questioned why they were not made permanent employees.

“We are overlooked when there are vacancies at the municipality

Although we do the same work year after year, which shows that the municipality needs our labour, we remain contract employees. This is despite the fact that the Department of Labour has stated that contract workers must be absorbed after three months.”

They added that the last time they tried to address their issues with the municipality, they were not recognised as Sol Plaatje employees. “Yet, we have the badges of the Sol Plaatje Municipality on our overalls.”

They said that yesterday they had come to see the director (Bogacwi) “but he said we do not fall under him and then he ran away into his office and locked the door”.

“We want our jobs back, to be permanently absorbed and to earn a minimum wage and even if we have to sleep here tonight, we will not leave until we get answers.”

One of the project’s managers, Paseka Rasego, pointed out that if the project was terminated the relevant director should address the workers and inform them about what was happening. “Instead they ignore us. We phone but we can’t get hold of them and instead we, as managers of the project, are expected to tell the workers what is happening.”

In a statement issued yesterday afternoon, Mabilo confirmed that he, together with his mayoral committee members and management, had met with EPWP workers yesterday in an attempt to resolve the issue.

Following the discussions, it was resolved that the 370 workers would be reinstated and would resume their duties today.

“As the municipality, we are doing everything in our power to ensure that we give workers job security in order to build a better city and unwavering municipality for all residents,” Mabilo stated.

He also reassured workers that their concerns had been noted and would receive his full attention.

“Dialogues of this nature are vital as we try to remedy the challenges and find some common ground as quickly as possible for the benefit of all,” he stated.

Mabilo added that he was committed to finding an amicable and workable solutions to workers’ concerns and issues raised in the meeting.

“Following this, skills and training programmes will also be offered to workers in an effort to improve and empower them in executing various tasks and responsibilities. The new model of work shall

be ward based, task based, with strengthened supervision and monitoring. The project will be streamlined in accordance with national EPWP recruitment guidelines and well as the EPWP policy adopted by the municipality.”

DA caucus leader in the Sol Plaatje City Council, Christopher Phiri, pointed out on Monday that the fund for EPWP workers was currently standing at only R46 000, while an amount of approximately

R1 million is needed to pay the close on 500 project workers every month.

“The Sol Plaatje executive mayor, Patrick Mabilo, must come clean with the EPWP workers about the fact that Sol Plaatje Municipality does not have sufficient funds to pay them for October and November,” Phiri said.

“It is thus reprehensible that Sol Plaatje is avoiding breaking the news to the EPWP workers,

rather encouraging them to continue working in spite of the fact that there is no money to pay them.

“We further renounce the actions of former ANC mayor of Sol Plaatje Municipality, Managaliso Matika, who told the EPWP workers that they must start working today. Matika has zero authority in as far as Sol Plaatje Municipality is concerned. Why has he involved himself in something that has nothing to do with him?”