

Angry BCM contract workers kick up a stink

EPWP staff soil the CBD to show their disgruntlement

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Disgruntled Buffalo City metro contract workers threw bags of human waste and burnt tyres outside the metro's buildings in the CBD on Thursday.

The expanded public works programme (EPWP) workers, mostly from the department of sanitation services, staged a sit-in protest on Tuesday.

On Thursday morning the situation escalated to an active protest, with workers hurling bags of excrement about in frustration, saying they had received no communication from mayor Xola Pakati about their demands for more money and permanent jobs.

BCM spokesperson Sam Ngwenya said: "The municipality has noted with concern the issues of the EPWP employees and their actions in trying to compel the municipality to permanently employ them."

"Despite numerous meetings between the two parties to find amicable solutions, protest actions have continued."

"We have observed with concern actions that include littering, property destruction, picketing, closure of cemeteries, neglect of duty, with the latest being this trashing around the



VOICING THEIR STRUGGLE: EPWP contract workers are demanding permanent posts from BCM saying some of them have been working on contract for more than ten years. To make their point they burnt tyres and threw human waste at the municipal offices. Picture: MICHAEL PINYANA

city hall."

The Dispatch reported in April that some of these workers had been languishing on short-term contracts for more than a decade.

A worker, who asked not to be named fearing victimisation, said they also demanded adequate PPE and cleaning equipment from the metro.

One said: "We clean toilets

around the city's townships and informal settlements, which is dangerous considering the amount of money we get paid. We have been on short contracts since 2009."

"Instead of getting answers from the municipality, we get threatened by councillors that we will lose our jobs."

Ngwenya on Thursday said EPWP projects were part of

temporary programmes that were fund-based, and were never meant to guarantee full-time employment.

"The broader EPWP project has five components dating as far back as 2012, and these are potholes and water-loss projects, BCM Development Agency, EPWP, community workers' programme, and ward beautification projects."

"The municipality does not have funds to absorb all EPWP employees and this has been clarified explicitly at all our meetings."

On Thursday morning scores of EPWP workers were seen singing struggle songs and burning tyres outside the East London City Hall.

A foul stench drifted into the Trust Centre building, head-

quarters of BCM's bosses, after the workers threw refuse bags filled with human faeces near the entrance.

There was a sign on the door instructing BCM employees to use an alternative entrance.

Some of the workers were on pavements burning tyres, while six police officers who arrived in a Nyala, as well as a BCM fire truck, kept watch.

A demonstrator said: "We work with human waste and we are treated and paid differently to other workers. We are not protected, we do not have PPEs and cleaning material. We are at risk."

Another said: "We have to buy cleaning equipment ourselves from the little money we earn and yet people in the townships and the municipality expect public toilets to remain clean at all times."

"Other people get employed, while they started working many years after us. There are people who are on induction [programmes] while we are here on contract projects."

Ngwenya said three meetings had been held between April and May and all the issues related to the EPWP were discussed and investigated, and some were resolved. "We have, however, undertaken to prioritise EPWP employees who are on our database as and when vacancies arise."