

## STRIKE

# Municipality to probe staff UIF mismanagement

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THE Bergville CBD was strewn with litter since last week after striking Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers went on the rampage. They had spilled rubbish all over town demanding to be paid outstanding money by the Okhahlamba Municipality.

Workers embarked on a strike after they discovered the municipality was not making contributions to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) to the Labour Department. They had been employed on a contract for one year during which the municipality said it would contribute to the UIF. Their contract ends at the end of June.

Ayanda Radebe, representing the workers, yesterday said they had raised the issue with municipal manager Nkosi Malinga last month, who promised to look into it. She said that after Malinga had failed to come to them with answers they decided to down tools last week.

Radebe said they went to the Labour Department and inspectors told them they would not be getting any money from the UIF because they and their employer were not contributors.

"We demand that municipal manager commit himself to paying all our money when our contract ends at the end of the month," said Radebe.

She further said the municipality was fooling them and had said it was in discussion with the Labour Department to sort out the problem.

"The manager told us to relax, but we could see he was fooling us. How can labour pay us when we were not contributors. We will continue with our campaign of spilling rubbish in town until the municipal manager sits down with us and commits himself to how we will be paid," said Radebe.

Malinga referred all queries to the mayor.

Opposition parties have entered the fray, supporting the workers. The IFP said it was disappointed the municipality had not been contributing to UIF.

"The municipality has breached the labour law and must bear the consequences," said IFP leader in the municipality, Sanele Buthelezi.

National Freedom Party member of the provincial legislature Vikizitha Mlotshwa said he met with the workers and had instructed his lawyers to file papers in the labour court.

Mlotshwa said it would not be his first time taking the municipality to court over the same problem because he did the same with previous EPWP workers who were unfairly dismissed and not paid their money in 2017.

He said the court had ordered that his lawyers attached the municipality's Quantum vehicle, tractor and bakkie to be auctioned to pay the workers.

Mlotshwa said that when the sheriff went there in February to attach the goods, the municipality paid R500 000 but said the money shouldn't be paid to the workers because they were appealing the matter.

Okhahlamba mayor Mlungisi Ndlangisa said the municipality had launched an internal investigation to check why workers' UIF contributions were not paid to the Labour Department because the municipality had paid the money. He said he met workers yesterday and gave guarantees that the municipality would pay their benefits.

"We think today they will go back to work because we have resolved the matter with them," said the mayor.

But the workers said they did not trust the officials to honour their agreement.