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● **Dozens of trained candidates picket outside City Hall, demanding to be permanently employed**

Standoff over metro police, traffic officer jobs

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Almost 50 trained Nelson Mandela Bay metro police and traffic officer candidates picketed outside City Hall yesterday, demanding to be permanently employed, saying they had been promised jobs three years ago.

The protesters, who were contracted under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), met mayor Gary van Niekerk on June 10 after their contracts expired last month.

They were offered new EPWP contracts but 48 of the 49 candidates rejected the proposal.

The municipality is adamant that there is no funding and insufficient vacancies to absorb them as permanent employees.

The officers are part of a group of 97 who were to undergo a 15-month training programme in 2020.

However, due to Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdowns, they ended up doing a six-month course.

Of the 97, 14 were permanently employed by the metro police and 34 at the traffic department.

The remaining 49 were of-

fered EPWP contracts to get work experience.

The group said they had been trying in vain to set up follow-up meetings with Van Niekerk through his personal assistant.

Yesterday, they opted to get answers by protesting at City Hall but were told they needed to make an appointment to see Van Niekerk.

Speaking on behalf of the group, Sinethemba Nyanda said during the meeting with Van Niekerk and safety and security political head Stag Mitchell, they were told to sign contracts for three weeks until the end of this month.

They would then be offered a new six-month contract from July until December.

"It has been three years signing these six-month contracts after former safety and security politics head Lawrence Troon promised we would be permanently absorbed."

"Their intention is for us to sign these contracts so that in December, when law enforcement is in demand, they have cheap labour on the ground, just like last year."

Nyanda said when they questioned safety and security acting executive director Warren Prins they were told about

budgetary constraints. "It's been three years too long," he said.

"They don't seem to prioritise us because they know we are desperate for jobs but this year we are putting our foot down."

Troon said the protesters needed to understand that there had to be a budget before posts could be advertised.

He said they should be grateful for the contracts.

"It appears as though these guys don't appreciate the provision that was made under my stewardship to provide them with employment when there was not any."

"Other people who went to the same training are sitting at home while they complain and demand to be absorbed."

"They want to be absorbed without applying for jobs and things don't work like that."

"They must wait for a budget to be found."

Prins said he would never promise to employ anyone, which is why at their last engagement he encouraged them to look for opportunities elsewhere.

"As an administrator, I can't account for what politicians say," he said.



'ABSORB US': A group of protesting workers previously contracted under the Expanded Public Works Programme gathered at City Hall yesterday, demanding to be permanently employed by the metro police and traffic department. Picture: EUGENE COETZEE

"I personally did not promise anyone permanent jobs because I knew there was no budget for it and no vacancies. "But we do need them."

He said when the affected group could not be absorbed, he suggested they be linked to the EPWP so they could get practical experience and be paid a stipend of R6,500. Prins said the economic development, tourism and agriculture department came on board in December, when it

needed manpower along the beachfront. "It was on this basis that they signed another contract for six months."

"We decided to give them another extension while we sort out our internal matters to see if we can advertise posts because we don't want them to be out of jobs."

"We have since increased their stipend in the new contracts by R500 to make their salaries R7,000. "Only one person signed while others said they won't be able to feed their families."

One of the protesters, Christopher Abrahams, said they had struggled to set up a meeting with Van Niekerk for three weeks and his assistant had not given them any feedback.

"We decided to go to the mayor's office but he refused to speak to us."

"We were told he is in meetings. He couldn't even promise to speak to us after."

Abrahams said he believed they were being treated unfairly because they did the same job, under the same circumstances, as permanently employed staff.

He said they did 12-hour shifts without being paid an overtime allowance.

"If they needed our services for all these years why are they not putting money aside and absorbing us?"