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CONTRACT WORKERS PROTEST OUTSIDE PRISON OVER JOB LOSSES

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Contract workers at a water and waste treatment plant within the grounds of Sefontein Prison in Elandsfontein, Pietermaritzburg, have demanded reinstatement after being without work for three months, despite years of service at the facility.

Yesterday, the workers blocked the road leading to the prison entrance with burning tyres and bottles.

One employee, who has worked at the plant for 22 years, said they were told the department no longer had funds to appoint them individually.

Although employed on a contractual basis, the workers are now demanding that any new contractor appointed to the plant hire them, citing their availability and experience.

"We want to be reinstated at work. Our families are suffering. It is the first time we have stayed at home for so long — usually it's just two weeks. We have bills to pay. Our lives are on hold," said the employee, who asked not to be named for fear of victimisation.

Another worker said they felt abandoned by the department.

"It seems like this is their way of getting rid of us. Life is not easy. We are no longer able to provide for our families," he said.

Many of the workers, initially employed under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), say they were promised permanent posts as far back as 2015 — a commitment that remains unfulfilled a decade later. Adding to the frustration, workers allege that not a single community member has been employed under the EPWP at the prison, despite ongoing maintenance and environmental issues at the facility.

Department of Correctional Services spokesperson Singabakho Nxumalo said, "It is important to clarify that the Department of Correctional Services appoints a service provider to manage cleaning services, not individual employees. This is done under binding contractual agreements established by the Public Procurement Act of 2024. In this arrangement, the service provider is responsible for their own personnel."

Nxumalo explained that once a contract ends, it is automatically terminated, allowing for the appointment of a new service provider.

The procedures for selecting a new provider are nearing completion, and the department does not have authority over the contractor's human resources. "Therefore, the department recommends that individuals with concerns direct their complaints to their contractor," he said.