

PROTEST! BACK TO THE STREETS FOR PERMANENT JOBS

Assemble 09h00 Gauteng Provincial Legislature, Wednesday, 17 June

On Wednesday 17 June EPWP workers will protest outside the Gauteng Legislature in Joburg. This will be the first EPWP action since the 9/10 March protest at Corner House. Workers' won an important concession then – the opening of negotiations. Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit and the lockdown was introduced.

Management's cat and mouse game of avoiding the negotiations could now be explained as a result of the lockdown. The 31 March deadline for termination of EPWP workers' contracts came and went.

Workers were locked-down and unable to do anything about it. Unsurprisingly, the DID management broke its commitments and workers' found themselves out on the street with no income. Management clearly hoped that workers would give-up if enough time passed.

The DID's decision to terminate the contracts despite agreeing to open negotiations, has thrown thousands of workers onto the scrap heap of unemployment. To add insult to injury, only a handful of workers' applications for the insulting R350 Social Relief of Distress

(SRD) grant have been successful. Some workers have been disqualified because they are allegedly still on DID's payroll. Well, time has passed – ten weeks! – but workers have **NOT** given up. Workers are enraged!

The DID committed to negotiations with the Gauteng EPWP Workers Forum – we demand that these negotiations go ahead. With the move to Level 3, it is entirely possible to **set the date**. The main issue that workers will place on the table remains the same: **permanent jobs** and **R12,500 per month minimum wage**.

Developments Under Lockdown

The Forum leadership continued to do what they could despite the huge obstacles the pandemic and lockdown put in the way:

- As the country moved to Level 4 at the start of May, the Forum leadership made a constructive proposal to the DID management (as well as managers of health facilities and school principals). They proposed deploying EPWP workers where they had been working before, to assist in fighting the pandemic. The only condition was that the departments should provide these EPWP 'Covid Brigades' with health training and personal protective equipment. As usual DID management ignored the workers, creating their own brigades instead, in a cynical attempt to turn the poor and unemployed against each other in competition for low-paying jobs.
- With the support of the Nupsaw trade union, a case was opened at the Labour Court. Unfortunately, on 5 June the judge ruled the case "dismissed". A second case has been opened at the CCMA.

Nupsaw Takes Action

Many EPWP workers have joined Nupsaw. The historic two-days of protest at Union Buildings on 12/13 February was a joint action between the EPWP Forum and Nupsaw. It united EPWP workers with Community Health Workers and Early Childhood Development workers – the ANC government's other slave-labour programmes. The CHWs are on the frontline of the struggle against the pandemic.

- Nupsaw led protests at the Far East Rand Hospital on issues of deep-cleaning, PPE and transparency about the number of health workers who had tested positive for Covid-19.
- Organised a petition to the President calling for the permanent employment of CHWs at Salary Level 5, among other issues.
- Supported a case to the Labour Court to force the ANC government to pay the salary increases stolen from public sector workers.

It is important that the UNITY of EPWPs, CHWs and ECBs is RE-ACTIVATED and protests again CO-ORDINATED.

Prepare for the Future – Organise Against Unemployment

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed everything. The National Treasury thinks the economy could shrink by 16%. They expect the number of unemployed to increase by another 1.79 million. Possibly going over 50%. The Treasury is run by the ANC – they have no reason to exaggerate these figures.

It is essential that the EPWP workers remain organised no matter how securely locked the door to employment in the DID may appear. In the communities where EPWP workers live, attempts should be made to organise all those who are unemployed but willing to work. The demand must be: **Full-time Jobs or full maintenance!**

In other words, we demand the employment on a living wage of all those willing to work, or the payment of a social grant if work cannot be found.

The government is talking about a massive infrastructure programme. This must not be a feeding-frenzy for the tenderpreneurs aimed only at boosting the profits of big business. It must be a programme that pandemic-proofs communities through mass decent house-building, water, sanitation, road and public transport provision; the upgrading

and development of schools, clinics, day-care etc. This must be under the democratic control of communities. There must be mass training of the youth and unemployed to provide them with the skills to undertake this work.

The new SRD social grant must be made permanent and increased at least to the level of the current national minimum wage – R3,500 per month. The ANC government plans to end this social grant in a few months. Communities should be mobilised and campaigns organised now to stop this.

The ANC government's theft of public servants salary increases was the first shot fired in a war on public sector workers. They are intent on freezing or cutting wages as demanded by the bosses and the rating agencies. We cannot accept this. A public sector general strike, uniting all public sector workers irrespective of union or federation affiliation, must be prepared.

EPWPs, CHWs, permanent public sector workers – we are in this together! An injury to one is an injury to all!

2021 Local Elections - Constitutionally the local elections should happen no later than November 2021. It is possible the pandemic will be used as an excuse to postpone them. But in any case, EPWP workers should begin discussing how the local elections could be used to take forward the struggle for permanent jobs.

Imagine if we could put an EPWP worker-leader or two, strictly under workers' control, into the Johannesburg or Tshwane council.

They could be a voice for the unemployed and down-trodden communities – a voice for the entire working class.

Unfortunately, it looks like the leaders of the Saftu federation cannot be relied upon to implement its now years-old resolutions on launching a workers party. Workers cannot wait for them but should create facts on the ground.

It would be possible to register the EPWP Forum as a political party and contest the

elections that way. Workers may feel that they need a vehicle with a name that has wider working class appeal. We are willing to make the MWP banner available if workers want to use that. For the MWP, the name etc. is a *tactical* issue that can be resolved through democratic debate. The *principled* issue is the need for any political vehicle to have a **working class programme**, which can only mean a **socialist** programme, and be organised in a way to ensure the **control**