

4 workplace

EPWP: Exploitative Privatised Works Programmes

The Expand Public Works Programme is a so-called government 'job creation' scheme. It officially employs 330,000 workers. But in reality it is a slave-labour scheme that enriched profiteering 'middle men' through the exploitation of workers and the looting of public funds. As if to prove this, EPWP workers will be excluded from the new national minimum wage. Instead of R20 per hour (itself a poverty wage!), the government expects EPWP workers to accept R11 per hour. But workers have had enough!

Cape Town: Firefighters take a stand!

On 3 May, South African firefighters currently outsourced through the EPWP (Expanded Public Works Program) to Working on Fire (WOF), marched to parliament with a memorandum of demands under the GIWUSA banner. The next day, 4 May, fire fighters and GIWUSA representatives took part in a meeting with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the Working on Fire management.

Rose Lichtenstein Cape Town WASP

Fire fighters are demanding an end to pay disparities in the program where executives are earning more than R1.5 million per year compared with firefighters earning a minimum of R23,000 per year. They also demand improved working conditions and benefits such as medical aid to counter the risks firefighters face daily as part of their jobs. For more than a month the DEA and parliament have remained silent as WOF management embarked on a repressive regime of victimization and harassment of the firefighters, ranging from empty threats of impending disciplinary action to disciplinary hearings.

The situation of the firefighters is not unique in the Exploitative Privatized Works Program. Despite the resolution that EPWPs are created to alleviate poverty through giving learning opportunities

to primarily young workers from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is clear that their privatized nature only serves to increase the wealth gap in the country that already boasts the worst inequality in the world.

The reality is that this is a wealth, not jobs, creation programme. WOF receives more than R700 million in public funds a year – more than enough to pay all firefighters a living wage. The executives and their running dogs in government make the conscious choice to exploit the workers who selflessly risk their lives to protect ours in order to line their own pockets.

WASP is currently working towards an extensive #OutsourcingMustFall campaign with the central demand being that all EPWP workers be insured by the relevant governmental departments.



Working On Fire firefighters march to parliament

Gauteng: Fighting slavery

The Expanded Public Works programme's primary objective is to provide a safety net to poor, unemployed and under-employed people by providing them with regular and predictable work opportunities enabling them earn a monthly wage, presently R86 a day, for as long as they need it. Revised annually and guided by ministerial determination. This is the opening statement of the EPWP's programme.

Executive Mukhwevo Johannesburg WASP

However this is the opposite of the reality of what is happening within the programme. The programme has so many projects under it, local and provincial government and various other state institutions i.e. police stations, community facilities etc.

In all these facilities workers are labelled as "beneficiaries" and as such do not enjoy the worker benefits enshrined in the Labour Regulation Act (LRA), since these workers are said to be under the so-called "ministerial determination".

We are constantly outsourced either to state-funded Non-Government Organisations (NGO's) and/or tender projects. We are not allowed to stay in the programme as long as we need as claimed by the opening statement. We are constantly signing short-term contracts ranging from three, six and twelve month depending on the various projects of the programme. These contracts are made to keep us on our toes, always reminding us that we are not workers but rather a "beneficiary" of the programme and that the government is just doing you a favour because you are poor and illiterate.

Projects under this programme are riddled with problems ranging from contractual mishaps, non-remuneration, corruption, mismanagement, and failure to take by both politicians and officials to be accountable.

Every time, at the end of the contract, nobody knows us. We are moved from pillar to post looking for someone to address our issues. Ugly scenes ensue and even some skirmishes, Police are called in, workers are shot at and "photos attached".

We workers want to change this. Currently workers are organising themselves under the banner of the ##OutsourcingMustFall workers' campaign. We are engaging with other EPWP workers across the country, to liberate ourselves from these modern day chains of slavery.