

Wits calm once more after chaos

Classes resume, but student body remains divided and suspicious

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A trail of litter lined parts of the campus after bins were overturned and attempts made to torch a bookshop.

WITS returned to normality this morning following yesterday's violent protests that saw students and security guards hurling rocks at each other.

Couples held hands, late students power-walked to their classes; police officers at the main entrance kept watch.

"I feel like crying tears of joy. When we started this week, the chances of classes resuming looked slim," said Yanga Damane, a first-year student.

Remnants of the protest remained, with "Run Habib, run" tagged on a wall. One room contained a stockpile of donated food.

Another student acknowledged the hanging sense of disruption.

"There's not as many people as there was before. It's got a weird feel," Keegan Fraser said.

Unlike last week's protests, yesterday's wasn't peaceful as students pelted security guards with stones, burnt vehicles and attacked fellow students returning to class.

But some students are unhappy because the issue of the outsourcing of university workers remains unresolved.



DEFIANCE: Students prevented vehicles from entering Wits at the Yale Road entrance yesterday. Members of a private security company forcibly removed the students from the security check point. Today, although a tense mood prevailed, campus was calm.

PICTURE: CHRIS COLLINGRIDGE

plea to the same effect.

Habib told the students gathered at the Yale Road entrance he'd considered closing the university for longer, but had received petition signed by 5 000 students and memorandums from four other student bodies – including post-graduate students, international students and the SRC – asking for Wits to reopen and exams to be written.

His mention of the SRC angered the protesters. Leigh-Ann Naidoo, a PhD student, said the SRC and the university's management were not to be trusted. He asked them to work together for a month to see if "the numbers work".

The refusal to end the protests at Wits and other universities has caused consternation among university and government authorities.

Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande appealed to students to return to class.

Wits vice-chancellor Professor Adam Habib seemed to be at the end of his tether yesterday as he made an impassioned

resented by the SRC.

Of the leaders who started the #FeesMustFall campaign, only one, Wits EFF leader Vuyani Pambo, was present at yesterday's protest.

He expressed his distrust of the outgoing and incoming SRC presidents, Shaeera Kalla and Noncedom Mkhatswana.

Pambo told the vice-chancellor: "You disrespected us by calling the police."

He suggested Habib close Wits until Monday while they all came up with a solution for the outsourcing issue, but Habib refused. He asked them to work together for a month to see if "the numbers work".

At the heart of the conflict seems to be the university-released SRC statement that Wits would reopen yesterday.

Earlier, a student said the

crowd collectively said no to meeting with him.

"We don't want any private meetings with you," said Pambo, referring to private meetings allegedly held with the SRC.

Some of the workers then spoke to Habib, saying they were paid a pittance, and asking him to promise to secure their jobs. "I will call all the service providers and tell them not to suspend or dismiss anyone," he said.

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Kalla and Mkhatswana have denied negotiating with the university. "Disunity among students is what will kill the movement for Free Education," Kalla tweeted yesterday.

Kalla and Mkhatswana have also denied accepting a R40 000 bribe to stop the protests.

See Page 6

Union hell-bent on defying interdict

THE TO MAHLAKOANA

THOUSANDS of SA Post Office (Sapo) employees were due to take to the streets of Joburg this morning despite a court interdict barring their actions.

The order was issued by the Labour Court, preventing workers from any form of industrial action against the Post Office.

Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders yesterday said the action would go ahead as planned. The union's Gauteng chairman, Velaphi Zulu, said they had followed all due processes and were taken aback by the interdict.

"We are continuing with the action despite the interdict. We are still going to march. They have interdicted us from going to their offices but I doubt that they can stop us from marching to other places," Zulu said.

The union was to march to the offices of the premier and the public protector, demanding the release of reports on the Post Office by the Special Investigating Unit and findings of an investigation conducted by the Public Protector into the state of the organisation.

The CWU said they would demand the total and immediate bailout of the Post Office. The union said the government had the capacity to resolve the problems at the entity, and they would keep knocking on its door until they were heard.

Today's march follows dozens of others on similar issues at the Post Office which have halted operations after workers downed tools.

Earlier this month, Sapo general manager for public affairs Andrew Nongogo told Parliament that the state entity was on the brink of collapse.

He said it was losing customers and revenue as a result of strike actions.

Undeterred, the CWU said the company was pleading poverty as part of a strategy to get rid of workers.

"They are trying their utmost to frustrate workers so that they leave the employment of the Post Office voluntarily. That will help them in achieving their turnaround strategy of reducing staff. We are worried about what will happen next month. There might be no salary," Nongogo said.

This month, the entity failed to pay workers their full salaries on time, which saw the payment of 70 percent of total pay on Friday and the rest yesterday.

The move enraged the CWU, which had already been planning the march, which was meant to address the conversion of temporary staff to permanent and a demand for 10 percent wage increases, among others.

The company rushed to court yesterday, requesting an interdict to stop the costly action.

The Post Office said it would lose much-needed revenue when workers downed tools.

"The CWU has been interdicted and restrained from striking and marching to and/or picketing at the SA Post Office's work premises," the entity said in a statement.

Post Office workers who opt to ignore the interdict would be taking part in the march unprocedurally.

Go local for president's cars, says professor

MARIANNE MERTEN

When the School of Economic and Business Science head Professor Jannie Rossouw added "these vehicles can still be painted black to intimidate other road users", there were guffaws in Parliament's Good Hope Chambers.

The government's use of luxury cars, or the blue light brigade, has long been a red flag for opposition parties, but in 2013, cutbacks on luxury cars were introduced as part of the "haircut", officially known as cost-containment measures, to curb government spending.

Going local for official transportation was one suggestion among many on how to find dearly needed cash during yes-

terday's public hearings.

While a wealth tax was opposed, higher taxes for the wealthy, the 150 000 South Africans earning more than R1 million a year, was proposed.

Increasing the tax rate to 45 percent on those individuals earning between R1m and R2m, and increasing tax to 50 percent for those earning more than R2m, would net the national coffers R6.8 billion.

Labour federation Cosatu supported a tax on luxury goods, and a wealth tax, but rejected the possibility of VAT increases and a repeat of general tax increases, as happened in February's Budget.

Cosatu parliamentary liai-

son official Matthew Parks said the federation had been "deeply distressed" by the tax hikes which hit the pockets of the already squeezed working and middle class. Increases in VAT would be even worse as these would also hit the poor.

And he tackled the elephant in the room – the public service wage bill boosted by an above inflation salary increase, which Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene said had gobbled up the R5bn contingency fund.

"It's bit unfair to make teachers and nurses the scapegoats for our problem," Parks said. Instead, he said, "bling expenditures" should be brought to an end.

Generals were in the wrong, MPs say

MARIANNE MERTEN



BACKED BY THE BRASS: Suspended police commissioner Riah Phiyega

unprecedented Rule 201 inquiry in

August, taking exception to what they called "the entry into politics" by the provincial police bosses, who are public servants.

Yesterday, concerns were again expressed that the generals, who appeared before the committee in August and apologised for their actions, had not quite been truthful in their account of events.

The police claimed that the statement issued a day after Phiyega told Zuma why she should not face a board of inquiry for

misleading the Marikana commission of inquiry, as the commission had recommended, was to reassure the rank and file there was no dissent.

MPs rejected this, saying the provincial police generals' actions were tantamount to "blurring" the line between the role of civil servants/police officers and the executive, who were elected representatives.

The committee will meet again on Wednesday to discuss its draft report and determine findings.

Under Rule 201 a parliamentary committee can summons any document or person to appear before it as part of an inquiry, which leads to recommendations to the relevant minister.

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