

The Weekly

POLITICAL WRANGLING BEHIND COUNCILLORS' ARREST

February 24, 2012 | Filed under News | Posted by editor

The Nketoane municipality in Reitz is in turmoil following the arrest of eighteen people, among them ten councillors are set to appear in court again next month after they were earlier arrested on charges of trespassing, public violence, and crimen injuria. This follows a bitter battle between some councillors and the municipal manager Siphon Thomas.

The group, which included the speaker, Nhlahla Nkomo, allegedly marched to the municipal building, demanded the resignation of Thomas and the finance department staff, and staged a sit in. They also disrupted service delivery and chased workers away from the building. When they refused to disperse, the police were alerted and Thomas laid the charge at the Reitz police station.

A credible source, who wished to remain anonymous, said it believes the arrests were politically motivated.

"Nepotism, cronyism, corruption, and favouritism in the awarding of tenders are the defining features of Nketoana under Thomas. Having exploited all avenues to have him removed, it was felt that perhaps through mass activity he could be removed. Hence the march to the municipality to demand a response to the said issues and his resignation."

Allegations are that Thomas, whose contract with the municipality has since expired, is using every trick in the book to cling to power whilst in the process enriching his protégés and masterminding 'economic freedom' marches against the policy directives of the ruling party.

"Earlier this month Thomas sanctioned and masterminded the so-called economic freedom march in Petrus Steyn with the intention of taking white-owned farms. He also attempted to organise a similar activity in Reitz the day before the arrests."

He alleged that Thomas was in cahoots with the mayor of Nketoana, Matshukudu Molapisi, chief whip Mosotho Malindi, Councillor Mamahlape Mphaka, and the CFO Vincent Mkhafa. The marches accused Thomas of using law enforcement agencies to prevent them from adopting a resolution not to renew his contract.

"Thomas' contract with this municipality has since expired. The councillors want him out by all means necessary. Right now he is even busy with his cohorts buying ANC membership cards to bolster their standing ahead of the regional conference."

Thomas has, however, rubbished the accusations against him as unfounded and without substance. He said although he was not instrumental in organisation the ANCYL's 'economic freedom' march he saw nothing wrong with league members engaging in a legal march which is their constitutional right. Thomas added that he did not in any way organise the marches, but admitted that his fellow comrades were part of the march.

"I have thus far received no complaints about the march." In so far as the validity of his contract with the municipality was concerned, Thomas said: "As far as I am concerned my contract with the municipality is still valid".

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He denied any involvement in ANC factions. “As a municipal manager, I do not deal or entertain party political issues by the ANC, APC, DA, or FF+ parties represented in council. My work is solely to implement legal resolutions of the council as per the prescripts of the Municipal Systems Act, Municipal Finance Management Act, and Treasury regulations.”

He accused the councillors of using people who marched to the municipality to protest about services delivery to support their bid to oust him and the CFO.

Thomas insists police came only after the protestors were warned several times to disperse but to no avail. He said they also threatened to damage the property of the municipality.

“Councillors cannot complain about ill-discipline while they promote anarchy. They have an oversight role over the affairs of the municipality and can hold officials to account anytime. So there is no need for them to march to be heard”. He said accusations of corruption against him were baseless because all tenders at the municipality were awarded to companies that complied with the supply chain policy of the council.

Efforts to get comment from the affected councillors were unsuccessful as they have been barred from talking to the media.

The spokesperson for Cooperative Governance, Senne Bogatsu, said the arrest of the councillors is a legal matter which has been concluded in the courts. She added that the department will only intervene in the matter if requested by the council.

According to Bogatsu, the department is due to meet the municipality at a date yet to be confirmed to work out issues relating to the arrest and possible internal processes that ought to be followed up during an investigation into the matter.

The ten councillors and the speaker were released on R300 bail each and are expected to appear in court again on March 14.

[Source: www.theweekly.co.za]