Students call for statues’ removal

STELLENBOSCH University students have called for the removal of the JH Marais statue and an inquiry into other statues and symbols at the university.

At a mass meeting at Rooi Plein yesterday, students and workers discussed decolonisation and outsourcing.

Spokesman for Open Stellenbosch Majalete Mathumi accused the university of going against its word. He said the meeting was to discuss “the symbolic gestures of having a statue of JH Marais on campus, despite having had the same discussion with management last year”.

“The statues are symbols of political victories in times where black people were oppressed.

“This is the same oppression endured by workers at the university.”

Stellenbosch University spokesman Martin Viljoen said the university acknowledged that visual symbols evoked different emotions and experiences among people.

“…calling for an inquiry into historical statues and symbols at the university, in particular the removal of the statue of Johannes Henoch (Jan) Marais from Rooiplein, the university acknowledges the distinctive financial contribution made by JH Marais in 1915 towards the establishment of the university.”

Five months ago, at an outsourcing rally at the university, eight landscaping contractors were allegedly dismissed for attending the rally. The landscaping company, at the time, denied allegations of the dismissal and the university promised to look into the matter.

Yesterday, Mathumi confirmed to the Cape Argus that workers were dismissed during the December holidays. “Marais (held) the same position as Rhodes; they were friends and perpetuated the outsourcing system, where workers are oppressed. The university is doing the same – they are playing the system. They have no intention of ending outsourcing.”

Student Ijeoma Opara said: “There is a general fear that things will burn to the ground. All we want is management to understand where we are coming from.”

Students at the meeting were invited to write critiques and paste them on the Marais statue. One read: “JH Marais funded my exclusion in 1915.”

Viljoen said the university would discuss public symbols and historical figures with students. – Zodidi Dano