Shack protest at Maties

Protesters concerned over dismissed workers clash with security guards and cops

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PROTESTING students and security guards at Stellenbosch University clashed yesterday after a shack that had been erected on university property was demolished.

A group who call themselves The Concerned Students took responsibility for placing the shack on the university’s Rootplein (red square), next to a statue of Jan Marais.

Gobisa Yani, a spokeswoman for the group, said the students were concerned about 150 workers who had been dismissed following protests to end outsourcing last year.

“All universities had end outsourcing protests, so why were only workers at Stellenbosch University dismissed?”

She said most of the workers who had been dismissed were from Kayamandi “and had been sent back to shackers”.

Yani said the group had decided to place the shack next to the Jan Marais statue, “which is a symbol of white culture”.

Just before 2pm, a notice from the university’s management was delivered to the group, instructing them to take down the shack by 2pm.

They refused.

About an hour later, security guards arrived and started demolishing the shack, piece by piece.

When only one panel remained, several students went to stand on it.

The security guards were joined by police, and students continued singing and refused to move.

Eventually they were dispersed following a loud bang, which was believed to be a stun grenade that had been thrown into the crowd.

Protesters then started throwing objects and waters at the security guards as they left Rootplein.

Stellenbosch University spokesman Martin Viljoen said the group had not obtained permission to hold a protest action.

“Earlier, the university informed both the protesters as well as AfriForum, who ran a promotion on campus for which they did get permission, to vacate the area. AfriForum took down their own stall, while the protesters did not do so.

“The protesters were again requested to take down the structure – which they did not adhere to. The structure was then taken down with some protesters trying to stop those taking it down.”

He said while there been some “scuffles”, no fights or injuries were reported.

Viljoen said the workers had been employed by external service providers and not by Stellenbosch University.

“They were dismissed by these external service providers in 2015 already.

“Stellenbosch University cannot report on the individual reasons for the dismissals, as these workers were not our employees, but it is understood that the workers were dismissed as a result of alleged misconduct during the protest action by workers at the end of 2015.”