



NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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BATTLE LINE DRAWN

NAPTOSA has joined forces with the FEDUSA and COSATU unions in the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) in a programme of opposition against the State as employer to protect the constitutional right to engage in collective bargaining.

If collective bargaining collapses, the very backbone of labour relations is under threat. As one of the nations that has ratified the ILO's "Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 98 of 1949", it would be a sad day to see collective bargaining in the public service of South Africa break down at the very hands of the Government who purports to be a champion of that right.

Labour unions in the PSCBC and sectoral bargaining councils of the public service have for some time noted an evolving culture of disrespect for the institution of collective bargaining by the employer. There has been a tendency for the employer to enter into collective agreements, but often to let matters fall by the wayside. For many of the past rounds of collective bargaining in the PSCBC, labour has had to add as a demand that outstanding matters from previous agreements be finalised.

Ministers have also consistently been making statements in the media on the unilateral reduction of the public service wage bill, while amendments are being made to conditions of service with no input or involvement of organised labour. What has now brought this matter to a head, and prompted labour to take steps to defend our collective bargaining rights, was the State as employer's renegeing on the implementation of the third year of the Wage Agreement signed in the PSCBC in May 2018.

This unilateral disregard of Collective Agreement 1 of 2018 has led to anger, low morale, and frustration among public servants who are expected to be at the forefront of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic whilst maintaining services to the population, but who have not had their salaries adjusted as of 1 April 2020 in line with the collective bargaining agreement.

Up to now the unions to the PSCBC have shown extreme restraint in the situation and have taken all reasonable and responsible steps to challenge this new culture of disrespect by the employer. The employer's failure to implement the 1 April 2020 salary adjustment has been referred to the PSCBC dispute resolution processes and to the Labour Court. In both these forums labour has been faced by endless employer delaying tactics. The matter is currently awaiting placement on the Labour Court's roll.

The court processes on the non-implementation of the 2020 salary adjustment, however, does not put future salary negotiations on hold. Negotiations for the next financial year should already have commenced, but they have not. It is, however, not surprising, taking into account that National Treasury has issued guidelines to all departments informing them that there would be no salary increases for the next three financial years. How could collective bargaining not be under threat?

It is due to this frustration that the public service unions resolved to act in unison to stage a defence of the right to collective bargaining and to launch a joint campaign of activities to show our opposition to the threat posed by the employer. The campaign will commence on Monday, 5 October 2020, and will run until the end of November and, if required, for the rest of the year for as long as collective bargaining agreements continue to be disregarded by the employer.

The campaign will take various forms of activities, such as:

- Lunch-hour pickets in the workplace
- Commencing with the 'work to rule' principle where workers follow official working rules and hours exactly;
- Peaceful demonstrations in the workplace;
- Holding of sit-ins in strategic offices of government.

On 7 October 2020 the COSATU unions will be embarking on a National Day of Action against corruption, retrenchment/job losses and gender-based violence, among others. They will also link the "attack" on collective bargaining as one of the issues. NAPTOSA and the FEDUSA unions are, however, not part of this action.

Depending on whether the employer is prepared to show a willingness to re-commit and honour the principle of collective bargaining, the activities will be intensified.

NAPTOSA's National Executive Committee supports the campaign and activities and members are urged to do the same, because ultimately the future of collective bargaining in the public service will be dependent on the success thereof.

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