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Strike looms as impasse continues in government workers' pay dispute

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Strike looms as impasse continues in government workers' pay dispute CLAUDE Naicker, the PSA's national manager, makes known their members' disapproval of the wage offer tabled by the government on Tuesday. PICTURE by: Sibonelo Ngcobo Published 12h ago Written by Mervyn Naidoo Share GOVERNMENT workers believe the 3% increase tabled by their employers is an "insult" considering how the cost of living has rocketed in recent years. Tuesday could prove to be a pivotal day in government workers' wage negotiations, as some threaten to go on strike if their demands are not met. Story continues below Advertisement The 12 unions representing those employed by the state are expected to make their stance known to the Public Service Bargaining Council. Two of the unions; the Public Servants' Association of SA and the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union, confirmed their dissatisfaction with the 3% offer tabled last week. They said they would dig in their heels until their members' wage demands were met, even if it meant strike action, which would mean public workers toyi-toying for the first time since 2010. Story continues below Advertisement Wage negotiations for the current financial year (April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023) began with unions asking for a 10% pay rise, as they last received an increase in 2019. Previously, the government had negotiated and agreed to a structured three-year wage increase plan for 2018, 2019 and 2020. However, the government refused to honour its 2020 promise of a nearly 6% increase and pleaded poverty, resulting in the dispute going all the way to the Constitutional Court. Story continues below Advertisement The court discovered that the government's negotiators were without the proper mandate from the Department of Public Service and Administration and the Treasury, which meant the wage deals brokered with unions were not in compliance with legislation. Therefore, the court ruled in favour of the employers and no increase was effected. To appease workers, since April 1, 2021 employees have received monthly cash allowances of between R1 200 and R1 600, so that they would each pocket a minimum of R1 000 after tax. Story continues below Advertisement But the allowance is not pensionable income for the workers. As part of the agreement, the Department of Public Service and Administration undertook to pay the cash allowances only until March 31 next year. CLAUDE Naicker, the PSA's national manager, makes known their members' disapproval of the wage offer tabled by the government on Tuesday. PICTURE by: Sibonelo Ngcobo Claude Naicker, the Public Servants Association of SA's national manager, said: "We will only accept the current offer if the government continues to pay the cash allowance after March 2023, or they incorporate it into the basic salary of workers. "If they don't agree, strike action will be our only recourse." Naicker said

the 3% offer had been approved by the Treasury. “Now that there is a binding written agreement, unions then had 21 days to accept or reject the offer. If they reject, they will either strike or the offer falls off the table and everyone goes back to negotiating.” He said their members had rejected the offer of Tuesday, September 27. Naiker said that before meeting with the bargaining council, the union would caucus so that they spoke with one voice. “We will meet other unions to see their thinking. If we decide to strike, we would like to have their support, but we can’t compel them. If push comes to shove, we will do it alone,” he said. Richard Mamabolo of Popcru said they would lodge their dispute with the current offer with the bargaining council tomorrow and take their next steps based on how the other unions responded. “If the majority signs the agreement, the offer will become effective. But if the majority disagrees, which we hope for, only then can we plan our next steps.” Mamabolo said that, if they decided to strike, they would be mindful of the fact that many of their members were essential workers. “But that is the trick that the government has abused because they know our members can't strike.” He said the fact that his members were essential workers would count for nothing if the impasse continued. “We are hoping to resolve this debacle within the prescripts that are in place, but the employers are undermining the same prescripts that govern collective bargaining. “We want 10%. We have not reached the point where we think we can compromise.” Mamabolo said they disagreed with “cash allowances”. “That gratuity is a short-term enticement. It does not benefit our members in the long-term because it has no pensionable benefits,” he said. A KwaZulu-Natal-based shop steward working in the medical fraternity said all they wanted was to feed their families, but the government was frustrating them. “Inflation goes on regardless. When Covid-19 emerged, they took advantage of the situation and did not give us increases,” said the informant, who asked not to be named. “I hear the cries of the people about dealing with the cost of living. “Staff are booking off sick before their payday because they don't have money to travel to work. So when they are genuinely sick, they won't have leave days and some have been blacklisted because of debt they have incurred,” said the source. Owing to the ongoing negotiations, spokesperson for the Department of Public Service and Administration Moses Mushi refused to comment. SUNDAY TRIBUNE Related Topics