

Was there really a purge at Sars? The truth is about to be revealed

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Was there really a purge at Sars? The truth is about to be revealed. Nehawu wants the review of disciplinary hearings to go back even further than 2014, the set cutoff date 29 July 2019. Reading Time: 4 Minutes. Article Number: 2 / 27. Belinda Pheto Journalist. PLAYGROUND FOR GRAFT. The Sars building in Randburg. Image: Tyrone Arthur. A review of past disciplinary cases at the SA Revenue Services (Sars) could reveal if those who dared to question corruption were purged, according to union officials. Trade union Nehawu even wants the review of the disciplinary hearings to go back way further than 2014, the cutoff date announced by Sars commissioner Edward Kieswetter. "The review process will really tell if some of those disciplinary hearings were legitimate or if it was pure purging of people who were seen to be not toeing the line," Tahir Maepa, of the Public Servants Association (PSA), told Times Select on Friday. We are reviewing all disciplinary cases ... and where we believe that these cases were created or manufactured to support the corrupt intent we obviously have to address that. Sars commissioner Edward Kieswetter "Many people believe that from 2014, managers connected to the previous regime and rogue unit were witch-hunted and the disciplinary process was used to get rid of these senior managers and employees." Tom Moyane was appointed as Sars commissioner by former president Jacob Zuma in 2014, and was fired in November last year by President Cyril Ramaphosa. In September last year, the Nugent commission of inquiry into tax administration and governance at Sars heard that Moyane allegedly provided his then enforcement manager with a hitlist of senior officials he wanted suspended without due process, along with another list of replacements he wanted appointed in their place. These startling revelations were made by Sars chief officer for governance Hlengani Mathebula, who served as enforcement boss in 2016 when the request was said to be made. During the same hearings, the commission also heard harrowing testimony of how skilled, experienced employees were harassed, intimidated and purged from the institution or moved to redundant posts in which they did nothing. In June, Kieswetter told Business Day: "We are reviewing all disciplinary cases ... and where we believe that these cases were created or manufactured to support the corrupt intent we obviously have to address that." Sars to review all disciplinary cases since 2014. Maepa said he believed Kieswetter wanted to investigate the cases to determine if the process was deliberately flawed. Sars refused to comment on the matter or even confirm if former acting commissioner Mark Kingon would be chairing the committee handling the review process. "Please take note that matters pertaining to employer and employees are confidential, and deemed an internal matter dealt within our HR policies and procedures. Sars is therefore not in a position to comment," Sars said in response to Times Select's questions. Nehawu has expressed its own reservations about the process. Times Select has seen a letter written by the union, addressed to Kingon. In the letter, the union calls for an urgent meeting with Kingon, with the intention to get clarity on certain issues, which include: The scope of the review; The purpose and intention of the review; and The process and how it will unfold (both design and methodology, including why only review cases from 2014 and not 2007). "We call on you to urgently convene the meeting before commencing with this process so that we also eradicate unnecessary confusion," reads the letter addressed to Kingon. Nehawu spokesperson Khaya Xaba told Times Select the union wanted the review to go as far back as 2007, because it believed many of their members unfairly lost their jobs long before 2014. Last year, Kingon told the Nugent commission that Sars had kicked off a process to reinstate about 200 employees with experience running into "thousands of years", who were displaced due to the destructive overhaul of the tax agency's operating model. Maepa said the review process had already started and most managers who had been previously transferred to other positions were appointed back into their posts. In 2017, then finance minister Malusi Gigaba told parliament that a total of 506 employees

left Sars that year. He was responding to a parliamentary question. Get the Times Select app or daily email newsletter

Replying to the Democratic Alliance deputy finance spokesperson at the time, Alf Lees, Gigaba said 128 of those staff members had university degrees and 58 came from the audit division. The average age of those who left was 43.38, with an average 14.78 years of service, 344 resigned, 83 retired and the services of 40 were terminated. The reply did not provide figures for previous years, so it was not possible to determine whether the departures represented an exodus. But Lees said the reply revealed “the sheer extent of the brain drain” at Sars. “Sars has experienced institutional decay under its commissioner Tom Moyane and the reply confirms this. It also indicates the likelihood of continued institutional weakening,” Lees said at the time