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Unions Grapple With Government's Latest Wage Increase Offer

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Advertisement Heading Public Sector Wage Negotiations Wednesday, 7

September, 2022 - 16:16 Author: Ryan Cloete Public service worker unions

and the government are yet to come to a wage increase agreement, despite

months of negotiations. The next few weeks are therefore crucial if industrial

action is to be prevented. Advertisement Earlier this year, the Constitutional

Court dismissed an appeal brought by public sector unions after the

government failed to honour the final year of increases as part of a three-year

wage agreement reached in 2018. While the decision from the Constitutional

Court was seen as a win for the government, public sector workers lost out on

increases to their salaries and pensions for the past three years. When

negotiations began this year, the union demanded a 10% increase in public

service worker wages. During negotiations, union demands were lowered to

around 8% as the negotiating parties worked to find a resolution. The current

offer on the table from the government is a 3% pensionable salary adjustment

to all employees on salary levels 1 to 12 employed before 1 April 2022 and an

R1,000 after-tax non-pensionable gratuity to all employees on salary levels 1

– 12. Public service workers include education workers, teachers, nurses,

doctors, members of the police, correctional officers, social and those

occupying government positions. The South African Federation of Trade

Unions (Safu) has rejected the latest offer from the government and has told

their members to prepare for a strike. The union wants an 8% increase on the

baseline and rejects a non-pensionable gratuity. They added that if a 3%

increase and a non-pensionable cash gratuity were implemented, public

service workers would have lost real increases to their wages and pensions for three consecutive years. “The cash gratuity makes some disposable income available in the pockets of workers, and this fact blurs the demarcation between the losses and gains of this offer by the government,” explained Saftu. The Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) say the wage increase offer should be above inflation on the baseline, which will increase the notch and pensionable increase. POPCRU said, “As a union, we have a mandate and responsibility to implement what our members mandated us, and will stick to this mandate.” The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents more than 235 000 public-sector employees has welcomed the offer from the government. While the union acknowledges that the offer by the government on the baseline alone is not close to the current inflation rate, the continued payment of a cash allowance will provide relief to many of its workers. This is as many workers have had to endure rising inflation and high cost of living. The PSA said they will consult with their members to determine if they should accept the latest offer from the government. The union warned that if the offer is rejected, members could soon embark on a national strike.

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