

Nehawu rejects 'Foreign' bill plan

THE National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) rejects the Foreign Service Bill.

The main thrust of the bill is to take the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (Dirco) out of the public service – turning it into a stand-alone entity called the Foreign Service. As part of this, the bill seeks to usurp a wide range of powers that are vested in other departments, including the Department of Public Service and Administration, Department of Home Affairs, the Treasury and the Department of Public Works.

Our immediate concern and the primary basis of our rejection of this bill relates to its adverse implications on the benefits and working conditions which are part of the gains that our union has won for members and public service workers over the years and Dirco's attempt to create a parallel labour relations regime within government.

Yet despite these far-reaching implications on public services workers' rights and benefits, Dirco has steamed ahead to table the bill in Parliament without any consultation with organised labour at the Public Services Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC).

We also welcome the fact

that the Treasury has raised fundamental concerns that echo Nehawu's submission on the bill, expressing serious concerns about Dirco's attempts to create a parallel labour relations regime, undermining the Public Service Act and Public Finance Management Act.

Thus, as Nehawu, we reiterate our call that we made during our submission – that it is the oversight duty of the portfolio committee on international relations and co-operation to ensure:

- That Dirco has consulted with organised labour at a proper statutory forum, the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), that is designated to deal with matters affecting labour rights and working conditions.

- That Dirco consults with relevant departments that would be affected by its move to usurp their legislative mandates and roles through this bill.

- For Nehawu, if Dirco doesn't heed our call for engagement at the PSCBC, all remedial options remain on the table, including a court challenge and a strike. Nehawu shall soon report back to its members in the department with a view to also mobilise them for action.

Bereng Soke
General Secretary, Nehawu