

TALKS

More demands as unions consult over state's offer

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THE country's biggest unions representing government employees are consulting their members over the 1.5% or R1 000 offer while a Cosatu affiliate has demanded danger insurance for all public servants.

The Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru), a Cosatu affiliate, wants danger insurance for all public servants to be implemented as its experience shows that police officers' death benefits are not sustainable in the long term, which leaves their immediate families under worse conditions and unable to fund their offspring's schooling and address basic needs.

Danger allowance for police officers has stood at R400 since 2001, and Popcru has resolved to table a demand at the Safety and Security Sectoral Bargaining Council for it to be increased to R1 500.

Popcru's call was initially in response to the killing of police officers across the country, but the union is now demanding that the danger allowance be extended to employees hired under the Public Service Act.

"Considering the dire conditions these officers find themselves in, be it Public Service Act or SA Police Act members, their situation has worsened, and it is for this reason that their danger allowance should be reviewed," the union said following its two-day special national executive committee meeting over the weekend.

Popcru has told the government that it would only engage on a salary increase offer based on a real increase of consumer price index (CPI) as the state's proposal was only a 1.5% increase of an employee's pensionable salary, and was only applicable to public servants who did not qualify for pay progression and a R978 non-pensionable cash gratuity.

Cosatu's biggest affiliate, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu), on the other hand, is going back to its members to present the government's offer and convene branch general meetings across the country.

The union is consulting its members on the current offer and whether it should declare a dispute, which could lead to a strike, or accept the government's proposal. Nehawu began its consultative process on Monday and will convene a national forum on June 20 to decide on the offer.

At the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), the government responded to the dispute during conciliation filed by the Public Servants Association (PSA), and the employer raised jurisdictional issues.

The government informed the PSA at the PSCBC yesterday that its dispute was premature as the other unions were still involved in the facilitation.

The PSA has until today to respond to the government, and thereafter the employer will have to file its reply on Friday. A ruling by the PSCBC will be delivered 14 days after June 11.

Meanwhile, local government wage negotiations facilitator Naledi Bisiwe was yesterday expected to present her proposal identifying the terms of a possible settlement of the dispute.

The issues that are now subject to negotiations at the SA Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC) are an appropriate and affordable across-the-board increase, the duration of the eventual agreement, the increase's impact on the benefits payable to employees, and a new procedure for financially distressed municipalities to apply for exemption from the wage agreement.

Parties to the SALGBC were also expected to discuss an "opt-out" clause that would allow them to exercise their options in renegotiating a wage agreement in the case of very specific circumstances, such as the current Covid-19-enforced national State of Disaster, as well as improvements to maternity and/or paternity benefits and the regulation of vulnerable expanded public works programme employees.