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Author: Luyolo Mkentane

NEW MINISTER

Labour urges Kiviet to repair relations

Luyolo Mkentane
Political Correspondent

Labour federations have called on newly appointed public service & administration minister Noxolo Kiviet to speedily repair the fraught relations between the government and unions.

Relations between the more than 13-million public servants and their employer soured after the government refused to implement the last leg of a three-year wage agreement signed in 2018, citing a lack of funds.

The Constitutional Court ruled in February 2022 the government could back out of the last part of the agreement as the unions were "unjustifiably enriched" from the "impugned collective agreement".

Acting public service & administration minister Thulas Nxesi in October 2022 unilaterally implemented a 3% wage hike for public servants who had been demanding a 10% rise to offset the rising cost of living.

These developments led to a trust deficit between workers and the state, resulting in Cosatu's largest unions calling for the labour federation to dump the ANC and support the SACP during the provincial and national elections in 2024.

During his cabinet reshuffle on Monday evening, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that Kiviet would fill the vacancy left by former public service & administration minister Ayanda Dlodlo in 2022, before she joined the World Bank.

Kiviet, who holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Fort Hare, served as speaker of the Eastern Cape provincial legislature before taking over as premier from 2009 to 2014. The Public Service Commission rated her as the worst performing premier in June 2012.

Cosatu national spokesperson Sizwe Pamla said the federation expects to see Kiviet "move with speed to repair the broken relationship between the state and public servants if it is to achieve the various commitments made in the state of the nation address and budget".

National Council of Trade Unions president Pat Mphela said: "Her first priority has to be fixing the fraught relations between the employer and workers. The collective bargaining process has really been damaged over the years; the trust relationship is totally damaged."

Mphela said more concerning was that Ramaphosa, finance minister Enoch Godongwana and Nxesi "are former trade unionists" and could have done better to protect and advance workers' interests.

The Federation of Unions of SA (Fedusa) said the appoint-



Noxolo Kiviet

ment of tourism minister Patricia de Lille and Kiviet "will remain subject to continuous scrutiny to ensure that key elements of public service delivery and full recovery of tourism and hospitality from the pandemic are prioritised.

"Nonperformance, corruption, lack of accountability and darkness will only serve as the legacy of the Ramaphosa reign, if drastic measures for recovery continue to escape the governance landscape and leave South Africans in further dreads of despair," Fedusa said.

Public Servants Association (PSA) assistant GM Reuben Maleka said the Fedusa affiliate "welcomes the appointment of an experienced minister in the department of public service & administration after the tenure of an acting minister who opted to attack collective bargaining and reverse democratic gains for public servants.

"The PSA urges Minister Noxolo Kiviet to restore the trust deficit between labour and government and protect collective bargaining as a fundamental right for workers," Maleka said.

"The PSA also calls on the minister to ensure there is meaningful engagement with her office to address the chronic shortage of staff, abuse of power with employees being suspended for prolonged periods, the capacitation of government departments, and the absorption of cleaners, community health workers, and security officers."

Business Unity SA CEO Cas Coovadia said the cabinet would have to demonstrate, "with urgency, that ministers will be moving with speed to address the numerous crises we are experiencing in our country.

"The ministers do not have the luxury of taking their time in getting into their roles, but must move with urgency and implement, implement, implement."

When contacted for comment, Kiviet, the former deputy minister of public works & infrastructure, said she was still trying to settle into her new portfolio. She said she would have to be briefed by officials of the department before engaging the media.

mkentane@businesslive.co.za