



NUMSA SAYS HANDS OFF WORKERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR - THEY HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO STRIKE!

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Press Alert

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) stands in solidarity with all workers and trade unions in the public sector who are embarking on a strike in the public sector. We believe the demand for a 10% increase are entirely justified, and that this government must act with speed to resolve the strike, by putting a meaningful wage increase on the table.

We condemn the minister of Health Joe Phaahla and the ANC led government for blaming workers for disrupting services at public hospitals. This is a strike and it is the nature of a strike to be disruptive. If the government cared at all about patients, or the public at large it would have done everything possible to negotiate in good faith in order to come to an amicable wage agreement in order to prevent a strike. But instead, government the employer was extremely arrogant. It provoked this strike by undermining the principles of centralized bargaining. In the previous round of wage talks, government pulled out of implementing the last year of increases for workers and this resulted in workers getting a zero per cent in 2020. At the height of the covid-19 pandemic when workers in the health sector were risking their lives, working overtime without protective clothing, this government had the nerve to deny them a wage increase! They did this, whilst ANC cadres and those with political connections to the leadership of the governing party, looted state coffers to the tune of 13 billion rand on protective personal equipment (PPE) which was meant to benefit health workers and keep them safe. And they followed up this disgusting behaviour by imposing a 3% increase, without support from the majority of unions, in 2022 on all workers in the public sector.

Their extreme arrogance caused this strike and therefore, they must take full responsibility for the fallout. If patients are suffering it is because the ANC government took decisions which led to the current crisis. They have behaved appallingly and they have no right to stand on a soap box and point fingers at workers' for exercising their constitutional right to strike.

It is no secret that the healthcare sector in South Africa is on the verge of collapse because of chronic medicine and staff shortages, as well as the implementation of austerity measures. The budget for healthcare has been slashed and this has a severe impact on the delivery of quality health care. At the same time, there is a massive shortage of staff in the public sector. There are at least 164 661 vacant posts which have not been filled and the state has not lifted a finger to rectify this problem. All of these issues are at the heart of the crisis in the healthcare sector, but the state, who is the employer, is conveniently washing its hands of the situation it created. This is a government that has shown time and time again that it hates the working class and the poor.

NUMSA is saying, hands off workers in the public sector! They have every right to exercise the right to strike, and this right extends to all workers, including nurses and doctors, and all those who are deemed 'essential'. We reject attempts to blackmail workers into taking responsibility for a crisis which is not of their own making. We call on members of the public to direct their anger towards this greedy and corrupt ANC government which has failed to

manage the state and has failed to manage resources. The public must be angry with the fact that our hospitals, which used to be world class, are now places where patients go to die because of dire shortages, rampant corruption and mismanagement. This has been the case long before workers went on strike, and the ANC must take full responsibility for this crisis.

Issued by Irvin Jim

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