

MEDIA STATEMENT-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEHAWU REJECTS THE NOTION THAT THE PUBLIC SECTOR UNION'S DOMINATION OF COSATU RISKS TURNING IT INTO A YELLOW FEDERATION

NEHAWU is deeply troubled and disappointed ,by the statement attributed to the Secretary General of the ANC, Cde Gwede Mantashe, warning Cosatu to be wary of yellow unionism that will come as a result of public sector unions ,becoming dominant in the federation. While addressing the NUM Congress ,the SG of the ANC, is quoted as having said that "*Once you have a federation dominated by public sector unions, you are in trouble*".

The problem with this statement is that it reduces public sector unions to unreliable and ahistorical organizations and set the workers against each other. Public sector unions have grown their numbers and scored their victories because of their improved levels of service to members, mobilisation capacity and militancy not because of their proximity to government.

This is also very reductionist and mechanical because it limits hegemony to numbers and ignores factors such a union's militancy, activism, participation in the battle of ideas and campaigns. In fact, it's the role of Cosatu to dominate all sectors of the economy including the public sector. Cosatu public sector unions have more than 50% membership already in the sector and this should be encouraged. The SG should be encouraging the federation to unite the workers across the board instead of encouraging competition.

We find it regrettable ,that the SG of the ANC has fallen victim to the much believed and perpetuated myth, that a worker's employment sector can be used as a yardstick to measure their level of consciousness. This perpetuates the narrow understanding of Marxism and trade unionism that classifies workers into hierarchies and limits the definition of capitalism only to production and ignores reproduction.

Public sector workers face the same challenges as those confronting the industrial workers. Workers in our tenderized state ,work side by side with workers employed by the private sector. This unfortunate statement is also flawed because it ,unintentionally, paints the state as a better devil compared to capital and ignores its hierarchical, exploitative and coercive nature. Economic exploitation and the coercive institutions of political power have always gone hand in hand. In a nation ,whose universities and the entire education system

propagates, human capital theory, not even certificated workers can be regarded as immune from exploitation.

The capitalist state that employs public sector workers is designed to protect the ruling and exploiting minority class from the oppressed classes, notwithstanding that a government maybe progressive and broadly representing the popular classes. The public sector workers have to deal with an employer that is a tool of economic interest and a structure of class domination. The political class that controls the levers of the state develops a vested interest in the power and wealth that they derive from their position, thus turning them into passionate defenders of the class system. State and capitalism are allies with a mutually beneficial relationship and any attempt to excuse the state as a better employer or less exploitative is unsophisticated to say the least.

In this country, we have seen public sector unions leading the working class struggles, with the broader sections of workers and society. They have defended public education and universal healthcare. These very same public sector unions have participated in sympathy strikes and solidarity rallies in support of broader causes beyond their narrow work floor issues.

Our union ,NEHAWU, is an ardent champion of the NHI, Transformation of higher education, and the establishment of a state pharmaceutical company, and is among the leading internationalist unions , having campaigned vociferously for the release of the Cuban Five, Swaziland Solidarity, Palestinian struggle, affiliation to the class oriented WFTU ,etc.

Industrial unions are not immune from becoming yellow unions, so to assume that public sector unions are homogeneous is an erroneous belief. We have seen some unions in the industrial sector becoming nothing other than instruments of corporations'; encouraging political backwardness or suffering from false consciousness. Unions and workers cannot be judged using their employment sectors, but they can be judged using their consciousness, ideological clarity and whether they have a militant, class-struggle union leadership at the helm and across all its structures. Consciousness is acquired and is not naturally obtained from one's workplace.

The argument by the SG to demonise public sector unions is equivalent to the Neoliberal logic perpetuated by Treasury that treats the public servants salaries as expenditure instead of investment. They both relegate the public sector workers to the bottom end of the priority pyramid.

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