

Consultation Before Legislation: *democratising the public service*

By LUCI NYEMBE and DEANNE COLLINS

Changes in the Civil Service announced by Public Service and Administration Minister Zola Skweyiya have drawn response from a variety of interested players.

The Minister announced steps to address apartheid imbalances in the public service and said he was setting up a permanent mechanism to monitor "racial representivity".

Filling of posts recommended by previous Public Service Commissions have been halted. These will be re-advertised. In addition, 1 000 new posts will be made available. These posts include director-generals of government departments. These posts are aimed at "under-represented" groups.

The predominantly white Public Servants Association, as well as the National Party expressed grave reservations about these measures. From a different perspective, so, too, has NEHAWU, which has put forward its own vision of the transformation of the public service.

Transforming the Public Service

NEHAWU points out that the public servant is central to the process of transformation.

This process will take place over a number of years. It is essential that institutions and structures are set in place which will ensure harmonious employer-employee relations in the public service.

Bargaining and Policy-Making

The Union envisages the need for separate institutions to deal with :

- labour matters
- policy matters

A Bargaining Council already exists where annual improvements to conditions of service are negotiated. In the Bargaining Council, the employer and employee representatives are the only interested parties.

NEHAWU sees a need for a much more broadly representative forum to deal with major policy issues such as the reform of public sector labour legislation and the development of employment and pay equity policies. The Union points out that "these are matters where a majority vote cannot resolve disagreements, but where consensus is required to see effective implementation of agreed policies."

In April 1994 a Public Service Forum was established to deal with the crisis in the public service prior to the elections. The Forum has become non-functional, and NEHAWU is calling for it to be re-convened to discuss the issues raised above.

Consultation before Legislation

The Union has also called for worker organisations in the public service to be given first hand information about any changes taking place in the administration. It feels that communication forums should be set up, and unions and staff associations given the opportunity to feed back information to members and make comment before legislation is published.

NEHAWU is calling for channels of communication to be set up between the Minister of Public Service and Administration and other parties to prevent "unnecessary misunderstandings" arising in the future. ☆