

# CONFEDERATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **RE : TEACHERS FIRST IN NATIONWIDE ROAD-SHOW FOR ALL CIVIL SERVANTS**

The Confederation of Public Sector Unions are alarmed at the Acting Minister of Education's decision to conduct a series of roadshows starting first with teachers. This policy stance is a direct threat to the trade union movement in this country and it sets a precedent for the employers in the private sector to deal directly with individual employees and ignore the unions.

The government is particularly in breach of the ERP (Amendment) Act No.1 of 2016 which states that workers shall be entitled to engage in collective bargaining.

The roadshows by this government has become a vehicle to influence the target groups with selected data and statistics to sell their ideas which suits their agenda and convince the audience that no other points of view or ideas are better than theirs. The audience and the target groups do not possess the data or skills to argue against the borrowed ideas of highly paid Consultants.

The teaching profession, namely teachers, vice principals and principals have been targeted first because the JE exercise has gone awry and the new proposed JEE salaries have jumbled so much that instead of receiving a boost in their take home pay it has ended in nightmare of confusion with inconsequential increases in teachers' salaries. Far from expectations of our members to compensate for their professional integrity and contribution in the noble profession they are left to agonise on their future.

The purpose of the roadshow is to also appease the teachers and later nurses and other civil servants with the borrowed consultancy jargons, in order, to convince them that all is good and above board on the premise that it is a compliant group and/or scared to object and that there will be no reason for any negotiation or collective bargaining with their elected representatives.

A 13% to 15% JEE salary increase have been touted in the media and mentioned by the Civil Service Reform Management Unit (CSRMU) is patently wrong. As they are quoted within the JEE band chart, it is to be noted that 15% is a net result of their JE exercise and not everyone will get from 13-15% increase. In support services, Tranche 1, a substantial number of civil

servants got around 3-5% increase and teachers are finding out that they are in a similar situation and their expectations have evaporated in thin air.

The Confederation has seen the new contracts being given to the members in the general grade (Tranche 1) from first July 2017 and some of the conditions in the contract remind us that not even an authoritarian regime will force such conditions to its own employees.

The regressive provisions in the contract are summarized as follows:

- (a) Renewal of the contract is at the absolute discretion of the government.
- (b) The duration of the contract expires immediately upon a civil servants reaching the retirement age of 55.
- (c) Renewal of the contracts are subject to government requiring the services of civil servants.
- (d) The government, in absolute terms, to transfer a civil servant on the existing terms of the contract anywhere in Fiji is final; and
- (e) Government has the right to change and vary the contract at anytime.

Civil servants are to comply with General Orders and other policies and instructions as consolidated, amended, re-enacted or replaced from time to time which would be without any consultation with them or with their representatives. We are aware that the CSRMU's next step is to unilaterally amend the General Orders thereby reducing several benefits that are currently available to the civil servants and the announcement of JEE salary increase. Infact, it means government is exchanging benefits for draconian terms and conditions of contracts. It is not a JEE pay rise but clearly buying the benefits that civil servants had enjoyed over decades to build a career in the public service. The Confederation also questions as to how the JEE is related to the compulsory contracts now being given to those employees on tenure or 'permanent status.' The conversion to contracts in respect of all employees has been the agenda of the government from the very beginning and they have justified putting every civil servant on compulsory contract under the Public Sector Reform agenda.

The Confederation particularly refers to clause 8 of the Contract which states: *"Without prejudice to the provisions of Clause 10, the Government may, in its discretion and without having to provide reasons, terminate this contract."*

This clause is in total breach of ERP 2007 which prohibits termination of any contract without providing reasons. Furthermore, clause 15 in the contract also states that government may vary this contract at any time in accordance with the changes in law which also includes the General Orders and other instructions without reference to the other party who has signed the contract.

In regards to the broad banding and positions based pay that has been benchmarked to the private sector spells a disaster for the civil servants where the minimum starting salary in general grades SS01 to SS05 has been substantially reduced and it has been reduced by more than \$3000. As such this would be a disincentive to get the best brains in the civil service. There is no career path in the civil service when everybody is forced into contract appointments from 1 to 5 year period.

The Confederation believes that a combined good number of civil servants, teachers and nurses included, are employed on a tenure basis or 'permanent status' and they will be very badly affected by the forced contracts, which means that there will be no security of employment.

It is a fact that civil servants are compelled to sign a contract for a restricted tenure of their employment to qualify for the pay rise. Government's rhetoric that the contract offer can be rejected cannot be believed as the livelihood of public sector workers are dependent on their continued employment. As such, it has become a ransom for them to sign the contract which is not necessarily 5 years but depending on the remaining tenure of the last contract they were offered. A term of anything between 1-3 years depending on the remainder of the terms. The media hype about straight 5 years contract is definitely incorrect and the unions are ready to produce evidence of this.

On loans for home ownership by civil servants on contracts, the commercial banks have lately reacted on this issue after a print media prodded to them to define their policies on loans to civil servants on contracts. None of the banks gave a clear indication that they are denying loans but clearly circumvented their comments by stating that short term contracts are not the only criteria for assessment of loans except the Westpac bank which openly admitted that they consider the longevity of the contract. Other banks stated that borrowers are assessed on a case by case basis in line with their policies. The technicalities spewed by the banks is to maintain their wider customer base but it is clear that civil servants are at a great disadvantage for home ownership.

R Singh

**SECRETARY GENERAL**