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Time to challenge the 2.5% wages policy

If the next pay deal ends up delivering another series of 4% salary increases, as some observers predict, we must recognise that it will not be a real 4% unless it is fully funded. The last pay deal was unfunded by an annual 1.5%. PSA members are now paying for that with decreased conditions and increased workloads. Many members also attribute the spate of organisational restructuring and subsequent job losses, in part, to the current pay deal.

A funded pay increase of only 2.5% is less than the current underlying rate of inflation.

Members were not happy with the loss of conditions coming from the current pay round. However, now that the 'low hanging (savings) fruit' has been taken, we can expect the impact of the next round to be more severe unless the government's 2.5% funded wages policy is effectively challenged. It is critical that the PSA leadership faction don't consent again to Departments nominating their own savings.

Whatever the final proposal, all aspects of the deal must be explained and nothing hidden. A full, open discussion among members should be carried out at union branches, workplaces and departmental committees during a wages campaign, well before a vote by the membership.

If the PSA negotiators are not reporting back to and answerable to members, and they are not backed by a campaign with the possibility of industrial action, then they are not negotiating from a position of strength. It could also be said that they are therefore not negotiating in our best interests.

In the absence of a *member based* pay campaign we will get another backroom deal which may be accompanied by a "fait accompli" ballot of members.

Foundation exists for a pay campaign

But there are no signs that such a pay campaign is being formulated by the PSA leadership. The *Better Services for a Better State* campaign offers an important opportunity for a member driven pay and conditions campaign that combines industrial activity with media and community work to raise public awareness. In its current form there is no clearly articulated link between *Better Services* and our pay campaign that members can use.

The *Better Services Campaign* currently has no clearly articulated goals or measures against which members can judge progress, hold the officials accountable for facilitating action, decide on tactics, make decisions on resource levels, let alone have information that helps members make informed decisions on whether to support particular forms of industrial action.

After all better services are unlikely be delivered by poorly paid, overworked public servants in underfunded facilities. There is no better time than in the lead up to a state election for public servants to draw community attention to these issues and assert to their industrial strength.