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Reintroduce salary table for public sector

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THE employees of five statutory bodies are frustrated, angry and now defiant. It appears that they have not been given salary increases along with other employees in the public sector since 1996 in spite of their pleas to the management all these years.

Finally, they went to the Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek with their predicament and intimated their decision that they were going to picket until their claims were met.

Lim promised that he will take up the matter with the Cabinet but made the employees representatives promise not to picket.

Lim kept his promise and the Cabinet has since directed the Public Service Department to look into the matter.

Now Lim is disappointed and angry because he says the employees have not kept their promise not to picket.

Trade unions should know by now that the Government has a particular aversion in responding to demands under threat.

The employees in this instance are that of the EPF, SOCSO, Bank Simpanan Nasional, Armed Forces Fund Board and Tabung Haji.

All are financial institutions which do not rely directly on the taxpayer to pay the salaries of their employees.

The funds they manage are invested and a portion of the income from the investments go towards operating expenditure which includes the payment of salaries.

There has been no explanation however, why their salaries have not been adjusted along with other employees in the public sector.

In 1971, the Government appointed a Royal Commission to standardise the salaries, terms and conditions of service of employees in all Statutory Bodies and Local Authorities.

The terms of reference to the Commission required it when making its recommendations to bear in mind the salaries and allowances that were being paid to government employees at the time.

The Commission nevertheless made certain recommendations which were more favourable than that paid to government employees.

Subsequently, a Cabinet Committee chaired by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made upward salary adjustments for all employees in the public sector, including employees in Statutory Bodies and Local Authorities.

The result was that all employees in the public sector were paid the same salary for doing the same type of work.

The Royal Commission recommended that the salaries be reviewed once every five years to coincide with the Five-Year Development Plans.

Over the years there have been periodic reviews of salaries with everybody benefiting.

It is not surprising therefore that when one sector does not benefit from a current salary adjustment they will complain.

A principal feature of the report of the Royal Commission was the Salary Table which provided for the minimum and maximum salaries for each group of employees out of which separate salary scales could be drawn to suit particular categories within the confines of the Salary Table.

The purpose of the Salary Table is to reflect internal and external relativities, both horizontally and vertically in the salaries payable to achieve standardisation.

Alas, the Salary Table has not since been maintained.

It should be reintroduced not only for the benefit of public sector employees but also for the benefit of the taxpayer because it gives an overall picture of the salary structure in the public sector.

The highest paid in the public sector is the Prime Minister and this should be shown on the Salary Table right down to be lowest paid unskilled worker.

For the purpose of the Salary Table only basic salaries need be shown as allowances can vary due to duties and responsibilities of the same Salary Group.

Public sector salaries are transparent because they are stated in detail in the annual budget approved by Parliament.

In the public sector there are five salary groups which should feature in the Salary Table.

Group One: Includes the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Judges and Officers in the Staff and Superscale Grades.

Group Two: The management and professional group requiring a university degree qualification for entry.

Group Three: The executive officers group requiring a diploma qualification for entry.

Group Four: The technical and clerical group requiring the SPM qualification for entry.

Group Five: The skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

For each group there will be three salary levels. All the salaries in Group One are fixed salaries.

The salaries in the other groups are on the incremental rate scale with a maximum of twenty steps at each level.

The point of entry into each level of the group will depend on qualifications, relevant experience, the duties and responsibilities of the job.

With such a structured Salary Table, all that needs to be done during the periodic review is to grant percentage increase across the board which will automatically apply to all employees in the public sector including members of the administration.

There will then be no dissatisfaction by any sector of the public service or the need for wage isolated battles.

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