

Sars action takes sting out of strike

Progressive preparation by South Africa's tax authority has taken the sting out of strike action resulting from a deadlock in a labour dispute between SA Revenue Service (Sars) and the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) and the Public Service Association (PSA).

Whereas initial reports sketched a picture of wholesale disruption as some 700 employees or at least 90% of the revenue service's staff downed tools from Wednesday last week, official and unofficial statements confirmed the contrary.

In a statement released to the media late last Friday, Sars said that "customs operations at ports of entry, especially borders, have been without major interruptions".

This was in stark contrast to threats by Nehawu and the PSA that Sars would face "a total shutdown" if it didn't accede to its demands for across-the-board wage increases of 11.4%.

And as reports reached FTW that 33 out of 53 walk-in branches countrywide had not opened for business on Thursday and Friday after staff failed to arrive for work, Easy Clear general manager Michael Henning told FTW that e-reporting of manifests had gone ahead unimpeded.

"We did not hear from any of our clients about any disruption whatsoever. It seems Sars has gone out of its way to ensure that all runs well."

Commenting on a union remark that Sars' online platforms would fail as well, Henning said: "Because reporting is electronic nothing has happened, at least not to our knowledge. And the interactions we've had with head office also seem

okay as all the relevant people we're dealing with reported for work."

In its statement Sars said: "All border posts are operational with the contingencies that have been put in place.

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– MICHAEL HENNING



"Customs has received great support from law enforcement agencies across all border posts, especially from the South African Police Service, and this resulted in minimal impact on them."

As for reports that "massive disruption" had been caused by the strike, particularly at Beitbridge, the statement said it had been ascertained that the delays referred to most likely stemmed from usual holdups at the border.

The revenue service furthermore stressed that "while Sars recognises the constitutional right of workers to strike, it is equally cognisant of the obligation to ensure

that it has adequate resources to fulfil its duties to the country".

And as the strike dragged on into the weekend – only the first such labour action at Sars in a decade – Nehawu and the PSA seemed bent on negotiating a once-off 8% increase initially followed by an 11.4% increase later on, the original wage increases demanded from the outset.

At the time of going to press Sars however was sticking to its offer of 8% rolled-over year-on-year.

Anything outside this multi-term increase, it said, was beyond its financial means.

– Eugene Goddard