

KHAYA SITHOLE: State applies brakes to dangerous job spinning

Over the past few weeks the unity government has been dealing with two issues related to spinning. The new sports minister, Gayton McKenzie, proposed adding spinning to the national portfolio of sports codes. While many assumed he was referring to the pastime of middle-class gym fanatics who spin their way around a gym from time to time, those with a more adventurous streak had another form of spinning in mind altogether.

In some societies men and women of adventure have been known to occasionally “spin” in cars at high speeds in pursuit of an adrenaline rush, and those who do it best earn the accolade of spinning champion. While this may indeed appeal to some fans, the idea that such a reckless and dangerous social pursuit should be elevated to national sport status is the type of adventurous hyperbole McKenzie occasionally activates in his political invective, and should be dismissed with a pinch of salt.

Ironically, the idea of spinning cars is so well known in some communities that it led to a spin-off of another popular term — *ukushaya isidudla* — which is the Zulu iteration of the car spinning activity. Anecdotally, it takes its etymology from the idea that a person of large physical disposition doing a U-turn is similar to what the spinning cars favoured by McKenzie actually do when they are in full flow.

Unfortunately, it has also become a term used to refer to the practice of employees retiring prematurely and then heading back to work soon thereafter in the same sector. Core to this practice was the reality that under the traditional retirement planning model employees who invested in pension funds through their working lives were unable to access those funds until they retired.

In instances of a desperate need for funds, employees were inclined to press the resignation button long before retirement age just to access their pension pot and, once whatever emergency triggered the resignation had passed, they would simply re-enter the job market by “spinning” back to work.

In recent years there have been multiple cases of civil servants being scammed by purported lovers who persuaded them to withdraw their pension funds to invest in some imaginary business opportunities. In a country with a poor savings culture and low employment, which together translate into increased reliance on state financial support across the age spectrum, such practices undermined what was already a suboptimal system.

Finding a solution to this conundrum that would address the risks inherent in prevailing practices and also respond to the reality that emergencies do exist has been the great challenge of policymakers, retirement fund administrators and employee representatives.

An eventual meeting of their minds resulted in the implementation of the two-pot retirement model, which creates an accessible pot where emergencies and crisis funds can be found, and the retirement pot, which will now be completely inaccessible until real retirement age.

With this model, the state has essentially forced a new culture of compulsory savings that should reduce incidences of withdrawals eroding decades of savings and exposing affected employees to a life of penury in retirement. It can be seen as a case

of the state intervening to save us from our own tendencies, with the hope that we understand the need for painful medicine.

The problem is that for many people, emergencies in a job-insecure world with inconsistent incomes will persist, and resentment against a government that limits access to what ultimately belongs to us is unavoidable. As President Cyril Ramaphosa finally signed off on the implementation date, he brings to an end an era of spinning that brought many adverse consequences to the spinners.

Unfortunately for many more citizens outside the employment net, spinning the economic wheels is the one action they desperately want to see from this new government of national unity.

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