

STOP THE ATTACKS ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING & WORKERS RIGHTS

Genuine Negotiations and Social Dialogue – the real and lasting Solution!

Background

The Collective and centralised bargaining system in South Africa and globally, was a product of hard struggles by workers for effective defence of their rights, wages and decent working and living conditions.

Employers and governments fought long and hard to effect the divide and rule principle in order to weaken the unity, solidarity and collective power of workers.

The adage, “an injury to one is an injury to all” threatens employers and shakes ruling classes to the core as it wields massive workers power that cannot be defeated by any army or power anywhere.

When workers sing the song solidarity forever, it haunts established powers about the essence and strength in numbers and unity of workers. It reminds all that the factories, workplaces, public services, private enterprises, schools, health facilities, community services, industrial production and mining sectors and all other functioning places are the result of workers labour. In other words, they can and have come to a standstill whenever workers withdraw their labour and demand better wages and working conditions.

Global capitalism is based on global cooperation of workers and the millions of workers running the systems that benefit the profiteers and suck the blood of workers. It is a system of legalised parasitism, corruption, exploitation and abuse of workers and the poor.

In the specific case of South Africa, the struggle against apartheid was a struggle for workers rights, decent working and living conditions, better wages and incomes for workers, as well as health and safety for improved quality of life in general.

It was a struggle against class exploitation, gender oppression and abuse, as well as racial inequalities and discrimination. It was a struggle waged as part of the broad liberation struggle led by the democratic and liberation forces, at the head of which was the ANC and its allied forces.

COSATU

COSATU and its predecessor decisively led the struggle for workers against all these and other ills of the apartheid system. This was the crux of the struggle for democratic, collective and genuine negotiations and social dialogue between all social partners. There can be no workplace and industrial stability, let alone political and economic stability without workers interests and voices being heard.

We are now going through an unprecedented period in the history of bargaining in the country, where sustained attacks on the Collective Bargaining system have been launched and intensified, particularly by employers, both private and public sector. They have identified collective and centralised bargaining as the main target of their desperation to impose neo-liberalism and neo-apartheid working conditions.

Employers are keen to unilaterally impose starvation wages, sub-standard working conditions, sub-human living conditions and generalised erosion of all the hard gains workers made since the dawn of democracy and freedom.

Employers openly disregard, undermine and attack the social dialogue system and blame it for their under-performance and low profitability margins. Their main concerns are their shareholders and not those who work to produce the profits and wealth.

Government has become the latest culprit in the Public sector. Led by the pole-bearer of neo-liberalism, the National Treasury, government has brazenly disregarded and violated the 2018 3year Wage agreement to the total dismay of workers and the country as a whole regarding the true meaning and value of wage negotiations.

This has also sent a wrong message to the very belligerent employers in the private sector, who are drooling and strengthening their manipulative tactics to undercut wage negotiations and social dialogue over working conditions.

This has rolled back the many gains and hard work of many years by the working class and all progressive forces and communities. It is the reason why COSATU is mobilising hard against all and every attack on the collective bargaining system and workers rights and wages. It is not a luxury, but a fundamental condition for our life and death struggle to retain any semblance of decent work and decent lives.

Throughout the economy, in mining, clothing and textile, transport and logistics, chemical and plantations, retail and hospitality, security and cleaning, domestic and pharmaceutical sectors in both private and public sectors, we are seeing millions of jobs being shed by the economy and more threatened for shedding.

The size and scale of job losses and those on the line of being lost is so vast, we are literally facing a real jobs bloodbath of monumental proportions.

Labour market institutions are under-funded and starved of the necessary resources to carry out their work effectively, particularly those that are at the frontline of enforcing workers rights and the labour relations law. This is not accidental, but the deliberate outcome of a systematic and well-orchestrated plan to attack collective and centralised bargaining.

Labour broking, out-sourcing, casualisation and all other such substandard employment practices are intensified during this period. The COVID 19 pandemic has literally provided an excuse to most employers to carry out their long planned erosion of workers hard earned rights.

