

**APDUSA**



# **AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

Affiliated to The Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA)

*The interests of the workers and landless peasants shall be paramount*

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## **THE LABOUR RELATIONS BILL**

### **A Charter for Working Class Enslavement**

The new Labour Relations Bill has come under strong attack across a wide front. Indeed, workers have every reason to be alarmed at this proposed piece of legislation. The legislators have attempted to dress it up as a basis for a happy and beneficial partnership between labour and capital. The notorious lockout clause alone exposes this as nothing but a cynical piece of deception. When there are serious disputes about how a business should be run, the bosses will have the right to simply kick the workers out of the workplace! Then again, the bill is concerned with the national economy and not merely the situation in particular businesses. If the workers are supposed to be partners in running the national economy, why are they denied the right of protest by means of sympathy strikes, when they are dissatisfied with the way things are being done in sister businesses? Far from being made partners, the workers are blatantly denied any right in making decisions on how production should be managed.

The proposed workplace forums do not alter this fact. They merely give the workers pathetic and useless "powers" of consultation with the bosses. Indeed, the creation of these forums can be seen as nothing but a blatant attempt to undermine the power and independence of the workers' own organisations - the trade unions.

For all its fancy wording, this bill offers no protection to the many workers who are the victims of the widespread and growing practice of employing casual labour and sub-contractors that the bosses of major industries are using. The casual labourer or the employee of a small-time sub-contractor has no protection against dismissal, nor does he enjoy any security in matters such as ill-health or old-age pensions. The bosses are free of any responsibility for the wellbeing of those who earn them their profits.

We can go on to see that at every instance it is the rights and interests of the workers that are under attack, in favour of the bosses. But it is also necessary to look at the whole picture. For this we must turn our eyes to some of the things that lie behind this proposed bill, to see how it has come about.

Not so long ago, when the freedom struggle of the labouring masses began to make big strides, the capitalist ruling class began to fear for their privileged position. They made a desperate attempt to win over the leadership of the masses in order to divert the liberatory struggle from its course. When it became clear that these efforts were not enough, they deemed it wise to ditch the brutal apartheid system. The denial of political rights to the majority had for long ensured them a paradise on earth. But now it had become a liability. Thus, the capitalist ruling class and its government entered negotiations for a political settlement, for the sole purpose of defending their position of power and privilege.

At the end of the negotiations the leadership of the ANC and COSATU had pledged themselves to the maintenance of a capitalist "free market" economy in South Africa. In this system the wealth of the nation and the means of its production is owned and controlled by a minority exploitative class, at the expense of the majority. By this deed they sacrificed the demands and interests of the

labouring masses to those of the capitalist exploiting class. Why? For the sake of the benefits that would flow to those who they really represent - the Black petty bourgeoisie and those budding Black businessmen who are concerned only about getting a share in the spoils of the exploitation of the labouring masses.

The ANC-led Government of National Unity now places its Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) before the masses, as a means of solving the dire problems of unemployment, homelessness, inferior education and health services, etc. But the RDP is nothing but a smokescreen to conceal their real aim. We are told that its success depends on building the South African economy along capitalist lines. This is only possible if the working class is tied down firmly under the control of the capitalist bosses and this is the main intention of the new Labour Relations Bill. The Minister of Labour, Mr Tito Mboweni, exposed this intention back in 1992, when in his work "S.A. in transition: making human capital work" he said: "Putting it more positively, where workers and employers cooperate in improving the competitive position of the firm, both sides benefit to a greater extent". In this flimsy attempt to conceal and distort the truth Mr Mboweni dare not say that only the OWNERS of the firm will really benefit by any improvement in its competitiveness. This clearly rules out the workers.

How indeed, can the competitiveness of any capitalist firm be increased in the present day? By cutting down on labour costs, by the introduction of the latest technology - which spells labour redundancy, and by clamping down on any disruptions in production resulting from worker disputes and strikes. In other words, economic competitiveness and industrial peace translates into minimum wages, ongoing unemployment and the regimentation of the working class as a helpless and docile labour force. The entire Labour Relations Bill is geared towards this objective and it does not help in the least when Mr Mboweni tells us that: "Programmes to achieve higher levels of production and profitability should be agreed upon by business and the trade union".

At the end of the protests and negotiations that are now in progress, it is probable that some of the clauses in the bill will be amended and their impact on the workers will be softened, before the bill becomes law. Such amendments may be regarded as a victory, but this should never blind us to the overall intention of this bill. Its main aim is to tie the workers hand and foot and to place them firmly under the control of the captains of industry. No amount of amendments can change this purpose. We of the APDUSA say that this bill must be condemned and rejected in its totality. No matter how the legislators attempt to dress it up as a basis for a happy partnership between capital and labour, the working class can never benefit from a partnership in their own exploitation.

No matter how successful the efforts to rebuild the South African economy via "improved labour relations", which this new bill is supposed to bring about, there will be little benefit, if any, for the working class. We simply have to look at those countries which are supposed to have successfully built themselves to great heights along capitalist lines. Behind the glitter of countries such as Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, we see low wages, high levels of unemployment and millions of workers living in disease-ridden squatter camps. That kind of "economic miracle" we can do without!

APDUSA calls upon all organisations of the people to resist this new Labour Relations Bill, as well as all the schemes of the capitalist ruling class and its political agents to keep the working class in subjugation. Let us unite for full political power to the labouring majority. Those who produce the wealth of this land must be free to manage and enjoy the full fruits of their labour.

***THE INTERESTS OF THE OPPRESSED WORKERS AND PEASANTS MUST BE PARAMOUNT!  
NON-COLLABORATION WITH THE BOURGEOIS CLASS!***

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