

Budget Vote Debate 38
Human Settlements
By
Hon. KP Sithole, MP

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Honourable Chairperson,

The labour laws of this country, though said to be some of the best in the world, have not created a functional labour sector. In fact, there have been more excuses from the department on why there has not been any effective breakthrough in improving the labour sector, when it is clear that the reason confusion reigns is because the chickens have come home to roost.

In the 21 years of the democracy that we gloat about, trade unions have been the lapdogs of the governing political party, where in many instances they have been used as vote gatherers for election purposes. They continually claim to represent the working class, yet more is done to uphold the status quo of government policies that prop up the current labour and economic systems instead of truly fighting for the poor.

In recent months we have seen the consequences of this strategy, where we find labour movements disorganised and focused more on internal political struggles than holding the government accountable for the working conditions of workers. The wage gap continues to widen; inequality is rampant in the workplace and even those who are employed are finding it hard to cope with their wages, as the cost of living is continually rising and there does not seem to be even the slightest light at the end of this dark tunnel.

The national minimum wage process also reflects the lack of proper organisation and unity amongst the labour unions, as there is no agreed upon basic minimum wage amount that they have banded together on, to present to government as a unified group on behalf of workers. Instead, we continually hear different amounts bandied about.

However, introduction of the minimum wage does not necessarily guarantee that inequality will be reduced. In fact, the lack of unifying voices in the labour movement will ensure that workers continue to be exploited in the workplace. Despite the continual process of consultation between the stakeholders, many businesses and even public institutions still have drastically different pay scales, and this has undermined statements by the department that it truly desires to see change, because the concerns of the rich are held at higher esteem than those of the workers.

The best job creation strategy involves the development of SMMEs and as much as government is said to be fully supportive of entrepreneurs, it is still difficult for many of them to begin to trade because of the levels of corruption when it comes to tenders, delayed payment for services they provide and lack of support for those who are outside the perimeters of the urban areas. Promises of support for small businesses, especially in the rural areas, are not the same as practical financial and material support, which will go a long way in helping to reduce unemployment, poverty and even inequalities in the workspace.

We need the department to be more determined to implement its mandate and also work together with the unions to ensure that inequality and unemployment is reduced. This continual year on year inequality in the workplace is not sustainable - our people need to see practical solutions being implemented and not just talked about.