

Nedlac has a crucial role in bringing labour, government and business together

NEDLAC has played a critical role in bringing together government with business and labour to craft various interventions on how we can collectively tackle our common problems as a nation.

Its role as our legislated social dialogue forum is one that must be jealously defended and nourished if we are to overcome our many challenges as a young democracy. This year marks the 30th anniversary of our young democracy, it also marks a new chapter in our democratic journey where for the first time no single party emerged from the elections with an outright majority.

The ANC as the largest party felt it critical to forge a Government of National Unity to help forge a national consensus on uniting society, growing the economy and rebuilding the State. On Friday, the government and social partners gathered at Nedlac's Annual Summit to take stock of the progress achieved over the past year, and most importantly to chart the year ahead.

These must be pinned upon addressing our fundamental challenges as a nation, namely a 42% general and a 60% youth unemployment rate, resulting levels of poverty and inequality, endemic levels of crime and corruption, struggling public and municipal services, and fragile economic growth.

Workers have high expectations for the 7th administration, including ensuring it builds a modern fit for purpose Unemployment Insurance and Compensation of Occupational Injuries and Diseases funds, where workers do not struggle to receive their monies. Similarly, we must prioritise providing the CCMA the resources it needs to fulfil its mandate to help resolve workplace grievances and boost labour market stability. Nedlac has over the years played a transformational role in support of labour market stability.

It is in this spirit that we must ensure proposed amendments to the labour laws strengthen, not weaken workers' hard won rights. A discussion is long overdue on

how we can ensure government's employment programmes provide a pathway to finding decent permanent jobs for its participants. This includes raising the EPWP and CWP to the National Minimum Wage. Critics have questioned the relevance of Nedlac, yet it is where the Eskom Social Compact was finalised giving momentum for the debt relief package that today is helping Eskom shift its focus to maintenance and ending loadshedding.

The new Minister of Transport has brought renewed focus to rebuilding Transnet and Metro Rail. We must reflect at Nedlac on how we can do more to support these efforts as without an efficient rail network and ports, our economy will not take off.

Closer involvement is needed to ensure the new Mining Rights Application System is fast-tracked to turn this critical industry around and stem the flood of retrenchments. A frank discussion is needed on an urgent plan to turn local government around. On every indicator, it is in deep trouble and yet we see little besides PowerPoint presentations on what will be done to save this key arm of service delivery. More needs to be done to revive our engagements on how we can ease the pain of the rising cost of living on workers and the economy in line with President Cyril Ramaphosa's progressive call to Parliament.

A year ago, South Africa's continued membership of the African Growth and Opportunities Act (Agoa) was in freefall. After strategic interventions by government, business and labour and our hosting of the Agoa Forum last November, today the discussion is on how Agoa can be strengthened, and workers' rights be placed on its agenda. Similar efforts are needed to expedite the African Continental Free Trade Area as well as to reinforce the industrial master plans if we are to reindustrialise the economy and to win the war against unemployment. Government will soon table the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement at Parliament.

Nedlac needs to elevate our budgetary engagements with Treasury to ensure we achieve a budget that stimulates the economy, creates jobs and capacitates the State. Cosatu is pleased that from September 1, labour's struggles to reform our pensions and ensure workers' needs occupy the centre of this debate have begun. Whilst the two pot reforms do not include all that we proposed, they provide a

decisive foundation for further reforms to ensure pensions support workers during their careers and in retirement.

More must be done to resolve the crises of unclaimed pensions as well as employers who fail to pay workers' third-party contributions. Nedlac has proven its value to government in enriching important legislation from the Public Procurement Act boosting locally produced goods to tackling corruption, to the Carbon Tax finding a fair path for a Just Transition. It is Nedlac that forged consensus between government, business and labour on the historic National Minimum Wage raising the wages of 6 million citizens, in particular farm and domestic workers.

During Covid-19 it was at Nedlac where the government, labour and business released R65 billion from the UIF helping 5.7 million workers, oversaw the introduction of the SRD Grant uplifting 8 million citizens and laying the foundation for a Basic Income Grant and a highly successful health and safety campaign that saw more than 60% of society vaccinate saving millions of lives and jobs. Nedlac symbolises the value of social compact where all parties contribute towards a common objective. Social partners want the 7th administration to succeed and most importantly to give our people a better life.

Government would do well to continue to engage labour and business at Nedlac, to hear the challenges workers face and the obstacles hindering the economy, and to develop common programmes to address these. South Africa's successes, as well as those in many other progressive nations, have been built upon forging social compacts between government, labour and business. This spirit laid the foundation for our progressive labour laws, the 60% of the budget spent investing in working class communities amongst other critical working-class victories. If used wisely, Nedlac cannot only help the Ramaphosa administration achieve its goals but also improve the working conditions and lives of workers and their families.

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