

Workers come out in support of jobs

Thousands of workers took to the streets on 27 June to protest against job losses and a range of other issues.

The aftermath of the national strike saw the traditional playing out of the numbers game as to the level of support. The challenge now for organised labour is how to ensure the core demands of the strike remain at the centre stage of debate. The **Labour Bulletin** reports on the issues surrounding the strike.

As opposed to the anti-privatisation strike of 2001, workers across all sectors of the economy could relate to what the national strike was about. In essence, the core demands seek to protect existing permanent jobs (hence the focus on casualisation and outsourcing) and to prevent further job losses. This is aside from issues relating to racism in the workplace. During the march in the centre of Johannesburg, Cosatu president Willie

Madisha said it was 'it is because of our colour that we are being retrenched.'

What are some of the core demands, which are not only directed at business but also government?

- Retail employers, in particular, to agree to source at least 75% of their goods locally.
- Employers to end casualisation and racist work practices as well as to take steps to reduce retrenchments.
- Government to review policies to ensure a competitive exchange rate - the value of the rand.
- Government also should commit itself to source goods locally.
- Government should be reviewing its trade policies, which are destroying jobs and locate it without a broad industrial strategy framework.
- Whilst government should put pressure on the private sector to prevent job losses, local government should take steps to stop the privatisation of basic services, which often leads to job losses and affects the prices of services provided to the poor.

Some of these demands emerged from Section 77 notices tabled in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) since 2003 by the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Sactwu) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) respectively. Section 77 of the Labour Relations Act gives workers the right to take part in protest action to promote or defend their socio-economic interest and be protected against dismissal and other disciplinary action. In terms of the Act, Nedlac, as a policy-making body comprising representation from government, labour, business and the community, is tasked with the responsibility of bringing the parties together in an attempt to resolve the reasons for the protest action. Extensive



negotiations and discussions took place in Nedlac around the core demands submitted by both unions. However, these processes failed to deliver the desired results - hence the adoption by Cosatu of a programme of action which is supposed to continue well into 2006. As Cosatu stated in its planning documents, the programme of action, 'requires long-term, on-going mobilisation across the country' in order to ensure successful pickets and demonstrations on a regular basis. Whilst that constitutes a challenge for the organisation, the affiliates will have to deliver their members. It is far easier to mobilise workers in the midst of wage negotiations or a dispute. The challenge is how continuous rolling mass action will be sustained?

In a rather interesting twist, the march in Johannesburg was attended by a small group of members of the traditionally all-white union, Solidarity (the former Mineworkers Union), which is independent, and members from United Association of SA (Uasa), a Fedusa affiliate. They were participating because the march was also aimed at putting pressure on Seifsa to settle on wages in the metal and engineering sector. Whilst this might be considered a first, another first was reports that Cosatu was able to mobilise members in Ulundi, kwaZulu Natal. Presumably, that had a lot to do with the Zuma factor. Whilst reports were received that marches in KwaZulu Natal did focus on Zuma, this did not extend to other provinces. In the Johannesburg march there were perhaps a handful of placards which mentioned Zuma (No Zuma, No Vote), others focused on the core demands such as 'Dual Labour F... the Alliance'; 'ANC help us to save our jobs' and the stop casualisation etc. **LB**