



Follow-up strikes' if state breaks with Cosatu

Congress of South African Trade Unions general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi warns of more strikes if the government goes ahead with its version of the proposed labour law amendments

SBU MJKELISO

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Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi warned yesterday that a planned strike next month would be followed by more industrial action throughout the year, if the government went ahead with its version of the proposed labour law amendments.

Year-long negotiations at the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) have reached a deadlock over draft amendments to the Labour Relations Act, Employment Equity Amendment Bill, the Basic Conditions of Employment Amendment Bill, and the Public Employment Services Bill.

The bills include a proposal to criminalise labour broking and another to limit temporary employment. Cosatu's definition of temporary work, employment equity rules and other ambiguities have upset business, resulting in delays.

Speaking at a provincial shop steward council meeting as he sought to mobilise workers ahead of the March 7 strike, Mr Vavi presented some of the proposals on the table at Nedlac. One strongly supported by labour was the "application of the principle of equal pay for work of similar value to temporary employees". But Mr Vavi said business was opposed to this.

"Already the government is on board ; we are happy it is pursuing it. But we want to pursue that demand in the context that there is no labour broker. It is of critical importance that government stick to that. If we can get that accepted as law then half of our problems are resolved."

Mr Vavi said the government had allowed for one more round of Nedlac negotiations before the strike action took place, but he was not optimistic about a significant agreement being reached.

"There is disagreement in the approach between us and the government. Government is insisting on regulating labour brokers. We are saying you can't regulate these fellows, get rid of them," he said.

Cosatu was opposed to a proposal tabled by business representatives that trade unions and employers should engage in negotiations for 60 days before a legal strike can ensue, lengthening the current 30-day period, Mr Vavi said. He also revealed that a key issue during the talks was the proposed amendment to section 21 of the Labour Relations Act.

"They want to amend section 21 ... so that when the union seeks recognition by being significantly represented in the workplace, by acquiring 51% representation, they say temporary staff should not be counted as part of that 51%. This is very dangerous," Mr Vavi said.

Labour also rejected proposals geared at boosting small-business growth, by way of limiting employee rights in companies with staff of 10 to 50 employees, and which had existed for less than two years, he said.

John Botha, business representative at Nedlac, said business was opposed to equal pay for work of equal value because companies' performance and prevailing economic conditions were a factor in determining wages. "If you appoint a person during the current economic crisis you should be allowed to appoint them at a minimum wage, because times are tough. "