

LABOUR

Everyone has a right to a just job and to a decent living

The effect of the economic crisis on labour has been devastating. Given the extended family structure in Zimbabwe, the consequences for poverty of a precipitous decline in formal employment are dire. Those who have remained in employment have seen their real wages decline to levels that are scarcely credible. The consequence of the dramatic decline in both employment and real wages has been a sharp contraction in labour's share in GDP, even as GDP itself was declining by over 50 per cent.

In addition to losing employment and real incomes, workers have also been subject to the loss of labour rights, which, in theory, were protected by Zimbabwe's accession to various international agreements. Workers have never had the legal right to strike in Zimbabwe, but since independence various other rights have been curtailed. Attacks on workers' rights were a response to the growing militancy of labour, which culminated in the formation of the MDC.

The effect of repressive and anti-labour measures has been to prohibit stay-aways as well as strikes, to restrict freedom of organization and assembly, and to bring 'essential services' under the direct control of the government.

The MDC government will immediately rescind repressive legislation, including that relating to workers' rights. All the economic policies described elsewhere in this document will be biased towards the creation of jobs and the recovery of real wages.

Specific programmes will be launched to attract back the large proportion of skilled workers who have left Zimbabwe in recent years for 'greener pastures' in neighbouring and overseas countries. While Zimbabwe is well endowed with natural resources, more important in the modern world are its human resources. The MDC will strive to create and maintain world-class training and skills-development programmes that will make it possible for the country to compete effectively in the global economy.

A Vision for Labour

The challenge facing the MDC as a social democratic party will be to democratize and internalize growth through economic empowerment while enhancing the capabilities of the individuals who make up the nation's workforce. Particular attention will be paid in this process to previously marginalized groups. The MDC will seek to create a work environment that will reward enterprise and initiative, maintain sound

relations between employer and employee, establish a minimum wage that meets the accepted Poverty Datum Line for the industry, and allow freedom of expression and equal opportunity.

It is the stated goal of the MDC to stabilize and then foster the reconstruction and development of the Zimbabwe economy on a basis that will take maximum advantage of our rich natural resources, the country's strategic location as an economic and regional hub, and our excellent human resources. To this end the MDC commits itself to the creation of a labour-intensive, knowledge-based economy, which offers its people full employment in both the formal and informal sector. To achieve this the MDC government will seek to create and maintain an adequately remunerated, highly motivated workforce supported by well-managed and up-to-date training and research establishments.

Policy Objectives

In order to fulfil its mission and objectives the MDC government will set pragmatic targets for both formal and informal labour markets that will:

-  Ensure that all labour markets are well co-ordinated and have synergetic relations with each other, thus creating an efficient and effective market for labour responsive to the needs of the economy.
-  Empower marginalized groups and broaden the growth process to create greater absorptive capacity in an integrated and inclusive economy.
-  Ensure that wages are adequate to meet the requirements for whole family life in proximity to places of work.
-  Ensure that the labour market plays a critical role in linking growth with household well-being, ensuring that it provides gainful, durable and secure employment opportunities.
-  Promote the security and stability of the non-formal sector as an employer.
-  Ensure transparency, accountability and efficiency in dealing with all labour disputes.
-  Enhance post-retirement security for both formal and non-formal labour.
-  Facilitate strategically placed day-care centres for pre-school children of workers and require fees to be paid by employer/employee contributions.

Harmonization of Labour Laws

It will be the intention of the MDC government to harmonize all labour laws and consolidate these into a single Act to replace existing legislation. The main intent of this will be to update existing labour legislation, bring public-sector employees into the same system as that for employees in the private sector, and decentralize labour administration and dispute-handling procedures.

All workers will be covered by the new legislation, irrespective of the nature of the organization they are employed by. In this respect, special mention is made of Export Processing Zone employers, whose working conditions and staff employment terms will be required to comply with the new Act.

The Labour Market Commission

The MDC will establish a tripartite Labour Market Commission as soon as possible following its election to government. This will be made up of representatives of the three social partners: labour, the private sector and government. It will be funded and accommodated within the structures of a National Social and Economic Council (NATSEC).

The Commission will be charged with the responsibility of:

-  Establishing a Research Centre for Labour.
-  Ensuring that the Research Centre is able to produce an acceptable official Poverty Datum Line for all sectors of the economy as a guide to minimum-wage policy and negotiations.
-  Overseeing skills training as well as all forms of tertiary education to ensure their relevance to the employment market and employment needs.
-  Overseeing all learner mentorship training based on the formal apprenticeship training system and all on-the-job and ‘sandwich’ training systems.
-  Promoting all special public works programmes designed to provide employment on an emergency basis.
-  Researching security and health-care systems for both formal and non-formal workers.
-  Researching and proposing more active labour-market policies in respect of workers affected by insolvencies, redundancy and industry decline (‘sunset’ industries).
-  Strengthening the role of the National Employment Councils in all areas affecting the security of workers, the need for retraining and redeployment, health-care systems and pensions.
-  Ensuring the provision of career guidance and vocational counselling for students in all primary and secondary schools as well as in tertiary education establishments.
-  Overseeing the implementation of policies designed to benefit the disadvantaged.

In addition to the above, the Commission will ensure that a stakeholder-driven information system is established to provide up-to-date labour-market information on a timeous basis. This whole process will be overseen and supervised by the Commission to ensure that it is compliant with the needs of employers and unions.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The MDC government will seek to establish a Social Contract between labour (represented by trade unions), employers (represented by employer organizations) and central government (represented by appropriate ministers or their nominees). This will be put in place as soon as possible and will provide the necessary framework for tripartite consultations on all matters affecting the management of the economy, the promotion of economic growth and development, the operations of the labour market and the provision of a comprehensive social security net.

The Contract will provide the basis for the formation and operations of the National Social and Economic Council, which will be the highest organ of the Contract's existence and implementation activities. The main purpose of the Social Contract will be to:

-  Provide a vehicle for regular consultation between the social partners on all matters affecting their interests.
-  Agree on key economic and social policies that are designed to foster growth and development, poverty reduction and alleviation, social security, and equity in opportunity and the allocation of resources.
-  Oversee the work of the Labour Market Commission and its counterpart, the National Social Security Authority.
-  Advise government on measures required for enhancing growth and development, social security and cohesion.

It is the view of the MDC that for the Social Contract to function effectively, and for institutions such as NATSEC and its subsidiary organs to operate in an accountable and effective way, both employer and employee interests must be served by competent and professional representative bodies, and that such organizations conduct regular elections of their leadership in a democratic manner. It is also an objective of the MDC to ensure that all such public bodies are properly administered and their accounts audited.

In accordance with the above goals the MDC government will encourage the formation of broadly based representative organizations in each sector of the economy. Membership of these representative bodies will be mandatory, and funding will be provided through the levy system supporting the National Employment Councils. These representative organizations will be required to hold regular elections for leadership, employ competent and professional staff, and be able to represent the interests of their members within NATSEC and to the appropriate departments of the State.

DOMESTIC WORKERS

One of the most disadvantaged groups in Zimbabwe are domestic workers. Because of the nature of their employment they are often poorly paid, enjoy few of the conditions of employment that apply to other formal-sector jobs, and often face discrimination and abuse at their places of employment.

As is the case for all other formal-sector employees the Domestic Workers Union will be organized into a National Employment Council with employers drawn from various rate-payers' and residents' associations in the country. The NEC will be responsible for the determination, by negotiation, of the terms and conditions of employment that will apply to all domestic workers as well as a system of social security.

Minimum standards of accommodation and related working conditions will be required, and the training needs of domestic workers will be catered for at tertiary institutions.