



1 May 2023

Workers Day Message

The Burden of Corruption and Poor Governance is Borne by Workers

This Workers' Day, we remember the long fought struggle of workers in South Africa.

We must be ever cognisant that legislation and controls of work hours, work conditions, minimum wage, and even the recognition of this day as a public holiday, are not a coincidence nor a gift of good will.

All these are the result of hard-won battles in South Africa and around the world fought by ordinary people who refused to put a price on their dignity.

On the 100th anniversary of May Day, 1st May 1986, a five-month-old Congress of South African trade Unions (Cosatu) would stage what was one of the largest strikes in South Africa's history at the time. Supported by the formations of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) under the leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF), Cosatu would lead 1.5 million workers in a national stayaway to demand recognition of May Day as a paid public holiday.

It is this generation of South Africans, who form such a crucial part of the legacy of South Africa's labour movement, who are amongst those who today bear the harshest brunt of corruption, state capture, poor governance, and unethical decision-making.

Only a month ago, a compromise was reportedly reached between the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) and Iqbal Survè's business, AYO Technology, outside of court. Only an estimated R600 million is said to have been recovered from the over R4 billion in Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) money that GEPF's manager, the PIC, invested in AYO in 2017.

For this, the Public Service Association's National spokesperson Claude Naiker, warned, "In the long run, if one calculates the pension benefits that are paid out to members on a fixed formula, sooner or later if that money is not recouped or replenished, the fund will be in dire straits, as far as paying out members their pension benefits."

What is most disconcerting is that, from the statement of the PIC, there seems to be an incongruence between the will of the board of the PIC and the actions of its executives.

We welcome the input from PIC Board chair and Deputy Finance Minister, David Masondo, stating, "Good governance, appropriate transparency, accountability, and integrity should be principles embedded in every decision the PIC makes."

However, given the gravity of the situation and the scale of the consequences, it is incumbent on the PIC to produce more than just well-meaning statements. The PIC must account for seemingly making decisions in the interests of AYO Technology, rather than for the government workers whose pension funds it is meant to manage.

It is a cruel irony to see a generation who fought for rights of workers now potentially being robbed of their rights to retire without the worry of their pension money simply being squandered by others.

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