

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE! SCRAP THE LRA AMENDMENTS

- Unite the working class in a campaign of rolling-mass actions
- Capitalist parties will always give us laws for the bosses – workers' need their own party



The bosses' know that they are in a war with the working class. That is why they are upgrading their weapons. They want to make it harder for workers to defend themselves from exploitation, job losses and poverty pay by going on strike. For this the bosses need to undermine workers' control in the workers' movement and in its place increase the powers of the capitalist state over the trade unions. That is the essence of the changes the government plans to make to the Labour Relations Act (LRA) on their behalf.

What lies behind this attack?

There is no end in sight to the crisis of the capitalist profit system. The economy is stagnant. Big business will not invest its huge wealth to create jobs or raise wages – leaving us stuck with mass unemployment and poverty. The anger of the working class, the poor and unemployed is ready to boil over. In places it already is. Just in the past week the national bus strike and the Mahikeng community uprising against corruption have shown the huge frustration in society. This terrifies the ruling capitalist class. They want to prepare better weapons

now because they know they urgently need them to stay in control of the economy and society.

The trade union movement remains the biggest potential threat to capitalism. Until recently the bosses were able to rely on the ANC's dominance over the Cosatu leadership to keep the working class under control. But Cosatu has suffered serious splits and lost its dominant position in the workers' movement. It is also unclear if the ANC will keep their majority in next year's elections. The old framework of bosses' control has weakened.

The ruling capitalist class needs something more decisive to rely on. They understand that when the class struggle intensifies the corrupt and cowardly trade union leaders they rely on now will be swept aside. The long-stifled democratic structures of the workers' movement could start to reflect the wish of a radicalised working class for fundamental change. Most dangerously for the ruling class the trade unions can organise this mood into mass struggle.

To limit this and to try and stay in control it is better for the ruling class to strengthen the powers of unelected judges and

commissioners over the trade unions. They calculate that in 'normal' times this will give them a way of 'lowering the temperature' of workers' struggles. It will also strengthen their hold over conservative trade union leaders who will be able to hide behind the amended laws as an excuse for doing nothing. When this fails and workers' struggle 'crosses the line', the bosses will be able to call on the armed power of the capitalist state in defence of 'law and order'.

Way forward

The 25 April strike organised by the new Saftu trade union federation is an important start to the campaign against the LRA amendments. The Workers and Socialist Party played an important role in campaigning for the action to go ahead. The strike must be used as a platform to reach-out to the workers in every union and federation. The members of the Cosatu, Nactu and Fedusa federations will be extremely angry that their leaders have gone along with this attack. Open and democratic co-ordinating committees should be established to lay the basis for a mass united campaign of rolling mass action until the amendments are scrapped.

The campaign must not end if the amendments become law. If this happens the entire workers' movement must be prepared for a campaign of mass civil disobedience to make the new laws unenforceable.

Open political front

The LRA amendments were proposed, developed and gazetted under Zuma's ANC government and will become law under Ramaphosa's. The Democratic Alliance supports them. They only wish they were tougher! No party in parliament has championed opposition to the amendments. This is because there is no party in parliament that represents workers' interests. These parties are all competing with each other to take over the management of capitalism which will always require weapons to attack workers.

The LRA amendments underline more than ever that the workers' movement requires a 'political arm' – a socialist mass workers party. It would allow us to open another front in our struggle with the bosses. Workers' MPs – strictly under the democratic control of workers – could use their platform to explain the real calculations of the bosses which lie behind the amendments. They could break the unchallenged lie that the amendments are to deal with "violent strikes" and expose the real views of the capitalist parties expressed in the closed parliamentary committees. This would be important assistance to the central task of building a mass movement.

These attacks show that under capitalism workers' cannot rely on 'the law' or 'the constitution' to defend their rights. We live in a capitalist democracy where the influence of the bosses will always remain dominant because they own and control the economy. To defend capitalism the ruling class has no choice but to limit democracy and the rights of workers. All the legal gains of workers are temporary as long as capitalism exists – they can only be guaranteed in a socialist society where the capitalist classes' control of the economy is ended, removing the source of the class struggle that requires the minority to hold the majority in chains.

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