



The Role of Nedlac

The history of the South African labour movement has been one of a tussle to limit the power of both business and government in acting in solidly.

Since the 1990s, the labour movement has increasingly become involved in processes of multifarious policy formulation as it attempts to ensure that state policy does not compromise the interests of workers, and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) is a statutory body that institutionalises this mode of policy-making.

NEDLAC provides a platform for the governed to engage with the government directly, and for the government to explain its policies and to justify them.

Though at times our government has floundered on the continual strife and conflict over many matters of production and distribution, if approached correctly, NEDLAC can and has in most cases played a positive and empowering role to parliament and the government on policy matters.

Located within the needs of workers and the broader working class is the question on whether NEDLAC's role is only to deal with

process issues or whether its role should extend to its real mandate - that of reaching consensus and agreement on socio-economic issues that will alleviate poverty, inequalities in wealth and incomes, create jobs, build houses and provide basic infrastructure?

Over the years we have seen increased reluctance by government to place policy proposals for discussion and as far as is possible to reach an agreement in NEDLAC. For us as organised labour this should be totally unacceptable as it then turns many vital negotiating opportunities into talk shops that yield no positive results on policy matters.

While remaining committed to NEDLAC and pledging to defend the existence of this institution, the conduct of government and business over the past 20 years of our democratic breakthrough have rather been disappointing to say the least, compounded by the neo-liberal policies of GEAR that have since entrenched themselves as part of the conditionalities imposed upon most developing countries by the IMF/ World Bank.

The purpose can be lost when the government and employers since they only pay lip service to NEDLAC, with some quarters who would be very happy if we walked out. Since it is about creating dialogue between business, government and employees, they do not want an effective NEDLAC but a toy telephone, just to satisfy the cosmetic features.