

Workers' Day turned into an election rally

MHLABUNZIMA MEMELA and PHILANI NOMBEBE

WORKERS' Day celebration rallies throughout the country yesterday focused on politics and government policies.

The ANC used the occasion to attack the DA.

Speaking at a Cosatu rally at the Good Hope Centre, in Western Cape, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Marius Fransman said the DA's policies were against the interests of farmworkers.

Fransman said the DA did not care about the welfare of farmworkers. He said his party had rejected the DA's 12-point plan, touted as a strategy for ameliorating the farmworkers' plight.

"It does not deal with the question of economic transformation and land redistribution in Western

Cape," said Fransman.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the SA Democratic Teachers' Union used the occasion to slam the government's National Development Plan, claiming it would not lead to the upliftment of the poor.

Sadtu president Thobile Ntola said the NDP would not help the poor because it catered to capitalists.

But SACP deputy general-secretary Jeremy Cronin said its critics should read and understand the NDP.

He said there were those in the alliance who were misled by the DA, which chose a few lines in the NDP to claim that the ANC government was implementing its policies.

Cronin struggled to deliver his speech as workers constantly chanted Cosatu general secretary

Zwelizima Vavi's name.

Speaking at the main Cosatu rally, at Galeshewe Stadium, Kimberley, President Jacob Zuma said organised labour must pay attention to the living conditions of miners and farmworkers.

Zuma said it should be borne in mind that mining and agriculture were the backbone of the economy.

He said the loss of lives of miners at Marikana, in August, was a tragedy and that improving the conditions of workers should be accelerated.

"We have to draw lessons from Marikana, a tragedy, and the untold pain it caused must not reoccur in South Africa."

Marikana made headlines when labour turbulence at Lonmin's platinum mine culminated in violent

clashes between police and striking miners on August 16. Thirty-four mineworkers were shot dead on the day and 78 were wounded.

In the preceding week, 10 people were killed. Zuma urged members of Cosatu to work for unity in the trade union federation.

He said workers must prevent efforts to establish a "better vehicle" than the National Union of Mineworkers, Cosatu and the ANC, and guard against division in their ranks.

"Unity in Cosatu is paramount. We need a united Cosatu to promote the rights of workers."

Zuma urged labour to work seriously towards uniting the federation and resolving differences.

He said unity was the workers' best weapon.

He said workers were the cornerstone of the tripartite alliance. — Sapa