

SACP supports minimum wage law, but union rejects it

MARY JANE MPHAHLELE

THE SACP has thrown its weight behind the controversial National Minimum Wage Bill, as Parliament forges ahead to finalise deliberations on the legislation.

The bill, introduced by the Department of Labour, proposes a national minimum wage of R20 per hour. If passed into law, it is expected to increase earnings of more than six million working South Africans.

SACP acting spokesperson Mhlele Nxumalo said: "We think this is a good start for us, given the fact that it is going to benefit six million people who are currently earning below the amount currently proposed.

"We know it is not enough, and things are getting more expensive on a daily basis, but we think it will be wrong for us to reject what is on the table right now. We need to encourage stakeholders, especially business, to keep engaging going forward, to ensure that what is proposed now will be improved as we move on," Nxumalo said.

The agreed national minimum wage will force employers to pay employees R20/hour, excluding sectors such as farm and domestic workers.

The minimum wage for farm workers will be R18/hour, and domestic workers R15/hour. The minimum wage for workers on an Expanded Public Works Programme will be R11/hour.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) has, however, reiterated its rejection of the pro-

posed bill, saying it will not advance the living conditions of the working class.

Numsa acting national spokesperson Phakamile Hlubi-Majola said: "We are very clear that we reject the poverty minimum wage because, again, this is the government guaranteeing cheap labour. Most companies were very satisfied with the R20/hour minimum wage, because they will pay very low salaries.

"We know that no one can take their kids to school, or access proper healthcare with R20/hour only. We reject this minimum wage in its entirety," Hlubi-Majola said.

The National Council of Provinces is expected to finalise its deliberation on the controversial Bill tomorrow, as well as on the Labour Laws Amendment Bill, Basic Conditions of Employment Amendment Bill and the Labour Relations Amendment Bill.

The proposed bills will affect workers' right to strike, which is protected under the South Africa's Constitution.

The proposed amendments to the Labour Relations Act would introduce measures designed to minimise violent strikes, but would also discourage strikes.

Hlubi-Majola said they were not happy with the proposed amendments, and would reject them if they were passed in their current form.

"We have been very clear on our position with regard to the changes in the Labour Relations Act. We don't believe that the changes are in the interest of the working class majority."