

Comment

THE government has not only ignored workers' rejection of the new constitution and is proceeding with the elections to the two new puppet parliaments, it also expects us to pay for it.

Recently, it was revealed that the launching and developing of the new constitution would cost over R2 000 million. And who do you think will end up bearing this enormous cost? The already overburdened workers, of course.

Over the years, workers have been made to pay for their own exploitation. We not only have had to bear the tremendous cost of maintaining the massive bureaucracy needed to keep up the apartheid system. A bureaucracy which forcibly removes our relatives from their rural homes or from 'white' areas, which checks our passes to make sure that we have the right to work in the towns and cities and which makes sure that our leisure time is not spent in the 'white' areas but in the overcrowded townships.

Now the government is building three parliaments, with three separate dining rooms and presumably three sets of toilets. All so that the South African government can tell the rest of the world that it is in the 'process' of removing apartheid. So-called coloureds and Indians will be able to govern their 'own' interests. But all the time under the control of the 'white' government. And we the workers will have to pay higher taxes for this.

Just as we have had to pay for the establishing of the bantustan governments. Last year over R354 million was given to these 'independent' homelands as a budgetary aid by the South African government.

As the government continues to build its elaborate disguise for the same old apartheid system, it keeps on needing more and more money. But the government does not ask for more tax from the companies which continue to make huge profits through workers' labour. It fears that these companies will just close their factories. Instead the workers are taxed by increasing the General Sales Tax (GST).

What have we got out of the present economic system? Racial oppression, poverty wages, rising food and transport costs, unemployment and economic exploitation — these are the benefits for workers of the 'free enterprise' system. Free enterprise is a curtain behind which the rich get richer and the workers get poorer.

This government and big business have no intention of changing the system to the benefit of workers. Nor will the Labour Party, the Solidarity Party or any of the other parties that are fighting for places in the new puppet parliaments. We, the workers, are suffering and only we, the workers, have the power and the real solutions to our problems.

Zulu and Gum Boot dancers entertain at Vereeniging local

THE workers at the last Labour Studies Course were treated to a dance show by FOSATU's Vereeniging local.

About 250 workers in the Vereeniging area turned out to welcome the Labour Studies delegates and to express their solidarity with FOSATU members spread all over South Africa.

Workers from Samancor at Meyerton performed the Baca dance from Mzimkulu which they practice at their factory.

This was followed by the Mokhibo dance (a Southern Sotho dance usually performed for chiefs) which was performed by families of FOSATU members.

Then came Zulu and Gum Boot dancers.

Finally, the workers were entertained by a praise singer who accompanies himself on the concertina.

A similar evening was held for the Labour Studies delegates at the Springs local where the Irvin and Johnson and the Braitex choirs sang.

The more than 700 workers who came to this meeting also

listened to talks on the role of workers in the community.

A Thembisa worker attacked the community councillors for being sell-outs.

He said in Thembisa there was a rubbish dump where the unemployed and suffering people would scratch for a living.

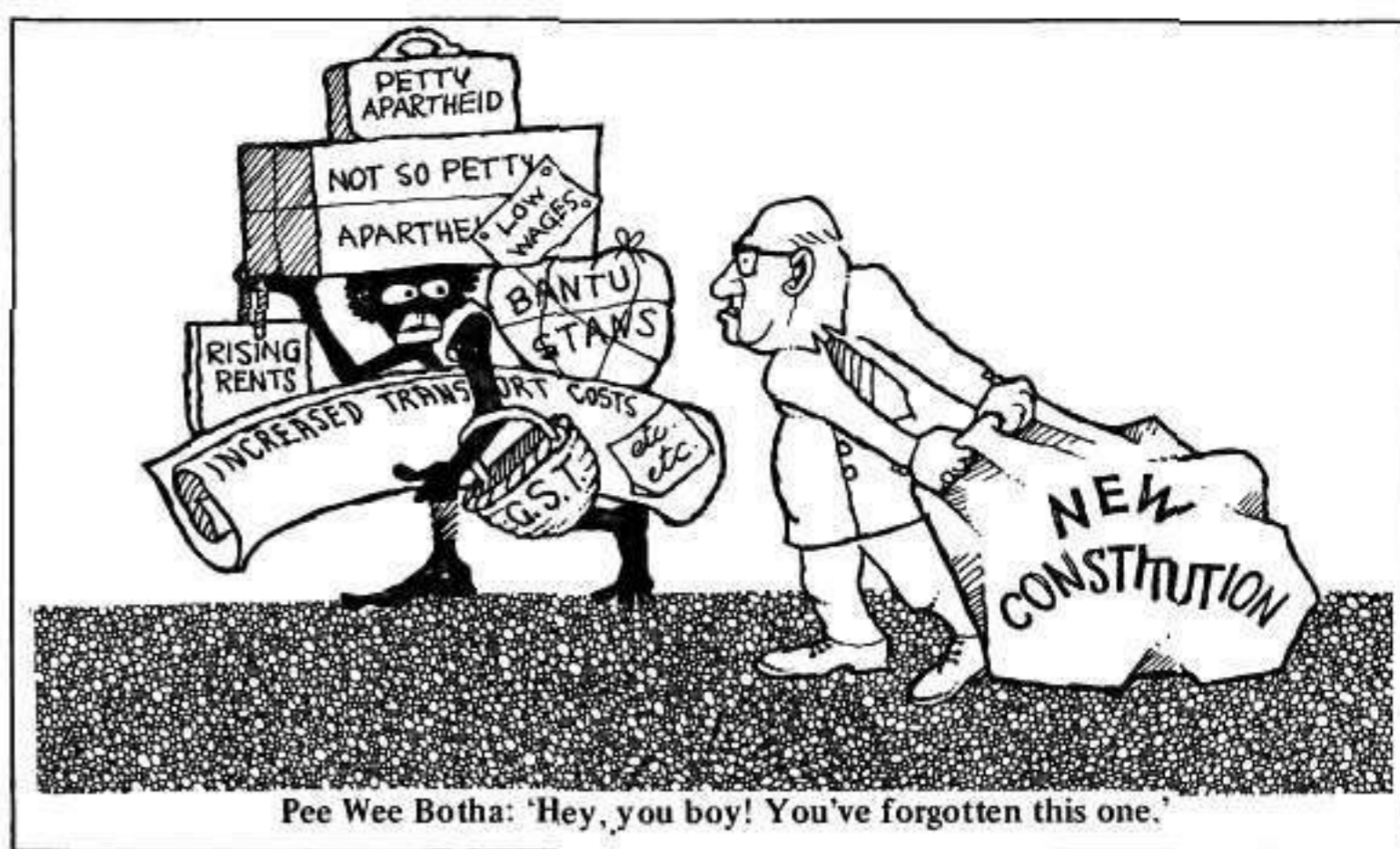
'But instead of the councillors helping these people get jobs and food, they just fenced off the dump,' he said.

Workers also spoke of the lack of communication between the students and the workers and said there was a need for joint action.

Another speaker raised the problem of scabbing by the unorganised people in the community.

He said that as there was no right to picket in South Africa, there was a need for unity in the community.

The chairperson of the Irvin and Johnson shop stewards committee argued that as women had shown that they can do any job in the factory, they should be accepted as equal partners in the workers' struggle.



Millions of workers turned into foreigners by new Act

LAWs have always existed covering foreigners in South Africa — these laws control the entry and exit of foreigners and the permits that they need in order to work in this country.

In April this year the government passed the Aliens and Immigration Laws Amendment Act which alters some of the laws covering foreigners.

Although this Act has now been passed, a date has not yet been set for when the law will start to operate.

The significance of these amendments must be seen in the light of the citizenship laws and the recent withdrawal of the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill.

In terms of the citizenship laws all people who are born in one of the 'independent' bantustans, or who speak the language of that bantustan or are culturally or otherwise identified with any person who is part of the population of that bantustan, are citizens of that bantustan and are therefore foreigners in South Africa.

The Orderly Movement Bill contained very harsh fines for people who were in the 'white' area without a permit or for people who employed permit-less workers.

After a massive outcry by the unions and other pressure groups, the Bill was withdrawn but these same harsh penalties have now appeared as law in the amendments to the Aliens Act.

There is a fine of R5 000 or two year's imprisonment for anyone employing or harbouring an illegal alien and a fine of R500 for failing to produce on demand the necessary permit needed to enter South Africa.

There is no doubt that these new fines will apply to people from the 'independent' bantustans.

During the parliamentary debate on the new Act, the opposition party suggested several amendments which would then exclude people from the 'independent' bantustans from the Act.

Not one of these was accepted.

Since then the deputy Minister of Internal Affairs has said that an alien is an alien, no matter what his country of origin is.

Since 1976, the South African government has turned eight million people into foreigners by creating 'independent' bantustans.

In addition there are thousands of black aliens from countries like Lesotho and Swaziland who were recruited by the government to come and work on the mines and farms — some of these have spent their lives working in this country.

If these workers had been white they would have been able to acquire permanent residence and citizenship.

But now these workers are no longer needed because of the high unemployment and the government has begun to push them back across the borders.

The Aliens and Immigration Laws Amendment Act joins the many laws passed by this government to deprive millions of black people of their right to a South African citizenship.

Workers' education fund

SPRINGS factory, Irvin and Johnson has set aside R6 000 for education grants for its workers' children as part of an agreement between the company and the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

This factory has been the subject of bitter battle between SFAWU and a rival splinter union.

And since workers came into the Springs' offices last year and demanded to be members of SFAWU, a number of verification exercises have been held as tests of the union's majority.

Now, a year later, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union has finally succeeded in signing a major agreement with the company.

An unusual part of this agreement is the company's setting aside R6 000 every year as an education fund for their workers.

SFAWU president, Chris Dlamini said they had a similar arrangement in the Kelloggs factory where he works.

He said that Kelloggs had agreed to pay school fees and for books of workers' children.

'We have agreed at I & J that if the fund should run dry, the management would consider adding to it,' he said.

The union has also recently completed wage negotiations at I & J which hiked the minimum wage from R56 to R70 a week.

Brother Dlamini said the wage minimum was not really satisfactory but 'it was a start'.

He said the company had also

agreed to 16 weeks maternity leave with guaranteed re-employment at the end of it.

'The company said it would pay R20 per week for 12 weeks of maternity leave and assist workers in claiming their UIF benefits,' he added.

Sales tax rise shows contempt for workers

THE Minister of Finance's decision to push up the General Sales Tax to 10 percent strongly reflects the government's contempt for workers.

This was said in a hard-hitting statement released by all the unions involved in the unity talks.

The statement said that the list of foodstuffs on which GST was eliminated 'is totally inadequate'.

'At the very least GST should have been taken off canned and certain processed foods,' it said.

'The majority of workers do not have refrigeration and have to spend a substantial part of their wages on these foodstuffs,' it added.

The statement said workers were not able to store fresh

fruit, vegetables, meat or fish and so would gain little from the dropping of GST on these products.

The 10 percent GST will mean that workers will have to pay more for the food they eat.

The statement also said that the GST rise would affect other household necessities bought by workers, like candles, soap, paraffin and clothing.

'This is absolutely unacceptable and will strongly influence our attitudes in wage negotiations,' the unions said.

'As workers have no representation in government, they will have no choice but to recover these losses in wage negotiations and failing this through collective action,' the statement ended.