



## **BUS STRIKES ENDS WITH NO REAL WINNERS**

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The national bus strike has been a disaster and it has left behind only losers and no winners.

If the unions had accepted the employers initial offer of a seven percent increase the workers would be better off than they are today. Instead the unions started a strike and settled for a nine percent increase, but the workers lost nearly a month's pay because of the no-work-no-pay rule.

It will take a year of higher wages to wipe out their losses and pay back the loans many of them needed to put food on the table for their families. They are worse off now than they were before the strike and a lot worse off than they would have been if they had accepted the initial seven percent offer and continued working and earning.

Employers had also lost money as they were not allowed to operate and therefore had no income.

Worst hit were the bus passengers who had to pay higher travelling costs to get to work as most of them were forced to use taxis. Employers also lost out as a result of higher absentee rates, workers arriving late often making it impossible to start production lines and fulfil orders.

Even worse is that the strike has poisoned industrial relations. It is a fact of life that there are good employers and bad employers. Workers have a right to take industrial action against bad employers who pay the lowest possible wages and fail to provide the benefits that most of us take for granted.



But we also have good employers who pay well above negotiated pay rates and provide a wide range of benefits from medical aid and pensions to training and educational assistance. These good employers should be respected and held up as an example by unions and others.

Instead they were dragged into the national strike and suffered serious economic damage. Their workers also suffered as they could not be paid.

All this meant that the strike had achieved nothing except to destroy value and damage industrial relations. Everybody lost out except perhaps the union bosses.

There are important lessons to take from the disaster. One being that the system of national bargaining was grossly unfair as conditions varied from province to province and from employer to employer.

What we need is more democracy in the workplace and that means secret ballots before industrial action can take place. That gives more power to the workers but it does take away power from dominating union bosses. Business needs to hear the real voice of the workers and not the versions of union leaders.

Janine Myburgh

President of the Cape Chamber



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