

ANC MPs divided on the future of labour broking

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PUBLISHED: 2009/09/02 06:28:38 AM

CAPE TOWN — The future of the R23bn labour-broking industry is still in the balance as African National Congress (ANC) MPs appear divided on whether to regulate the sector or to scrap it completely, as demanded by a host of unions in public hearings last week.

At its first meeting following the hearings, Parliament's labour committee was split yesterday, with some MPs asking if the system that allowed labour broking had a place in SA. Others adopted a more hardline attitude, saying it had to go, and some ANC MPs suggested further research in the form of public hearings should be held before parties adopted firm positions.

However, it soon emerged that the ANC contingent on the committee was enraged by comments made on the floor of the National Assembly last week by Democratic Alliance MP Andrew Louw.

Louw had said the ANC chairwoman of the committee, Lumka Yengeni, was not fit to head it and criticised her use of words such as "slave traders" and "human traffickers" when referring to labour brokers.

In defence of Yengeni, her colleague on the committee, Eric Nyekembe, said he was shocked at Louw's statement and viewed it as an attack not only on Yengeni but on the integrity of the committee. Rather than going public with his criticism, Louw should have approached Yengeni first.

ANC MP Patrick Chauke said the problem with stating party political positions upfront on the issue was that it killed the effectiveness of public hearings, but he too wanted Louw to explain why he had criticised Yengeni. He said it was wrong for a member of the committee to do this and suggested Louw should apologise.

Louw said when Congress of South African Trade Unions general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi had told the public that the union federation was looking for a street fight on the labour-broking issue, Yengeni had failed to protect them from what was palpably intimidation. He also noted that many of those making submissions to the committee had felt insulted by the language used.

Congress of the People MP, former Cosatu president Willie Madisha, tried to find a middle path, suggesting that compromises would have to be found between a ban and further regulation. He said the matter had to be researched, and wondered if an outright ban would simply drive rogue brokers even further underground.

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