

## **Labour brokers not wanted**

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Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) affiliates protested against labour brokering across the country on Wednesday.

Cosatu had called for a day of picketing as part of a global worker protest organised by the International Trade Union Confederation.

"Here in South Africa the focus will be on labour brokering, which Cosatu has vowed to see outlawed," the federation said in a statement.

National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) spokesman Lesiba Seshoka said that 1500 of its 3500 branches participated in picketing.

In Johannesburg, National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) general secretary Irvin Jim attended a lunch-time picket in Wadeville near Johannesburg which he said drew 700 workers. He said the union had held pickets in nearly all provinces.

"I'm extremely happy for obvious reasons." said Jim.

However, not all unions were as active in the day's picketing. South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu) spokeswoman Nomusa Cempi said that to her knowledge only its members in the Western Cape participated in lunch-time pickets.

Sadtu's leadership did not attempt to organise from the national level. "It was just up the people in the provinces," she said.

Despite the lack of turnout, Cempi said Sadtu supported Cosatu's position on labour brokers.

"Because we are an affiliate of Cosatu, we do sympathise even if we are not directly affected," she said.

Some of the protests were reportedly marred by violence. Numsa members protesting in Isithebe, an industrial area in Durban, smashed windows said KwaZulu-Natal police.

"The workers who were carrying sticks and knobkerries broke factory windows and burned objects on the road," Captain Khephu Ndlovu said.

"Over 1000 workers downed tools this morning [Wednesday] protesting against labour brokers. The workers were supposed to picket during their lunch time but they embarked on a massive march."

Ndlovu said no arrests had been made. Jim said he had looked into the matter and denied that Numsa members were engaged in vandalism.

"Yes members have picketed and there was absolutely no violence."

Unions have described the practice of labour brokering as "human trafficking" and "slavery".

"Their practices are the absolute opposite of decent work," said Cosatu.

The trade union federation accused labour brokers of undermining unions by making workers transferable and difficult to organise. It said employers frequently looked to labour brokers to providing scab labour to break strikes.

"Labour broker are also basically anti-trade union," Cosatu said.

Jim said the turnout by Numsa workers had been stirring.

"What is inspiring is how ordinary workers are responding... because they have realised they will be back into slavery," he said.

Parliament is currently holding hearings on the practice of labour brokering, with many MP's from the African National Congress condemning the practice which they say should be ended.

However, parliamentarians from the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Congress of the People have instead argued that labour brokering should be self-regulated rather than banned.

"Cosatu is wilfully avoiding the real issues--like the fact that their ridiculous suggestion of banning labour brokers would place 500 000 jobs in jeopardy," said MP and DA spokesman on labour Andrew Louw in a statement.

"Instead, they would rather force their members to participate in insipid activities that will not change anything or help anyone."

Louw added that banning labour brokering would also hinder government work. He said that the departments of agriculture, communications and public enterprises had said they used labour brokers during parliamentary hearings.

Cosatu's call for a day of protests and picketing was "a signal that the union is slowly but surely losing the argument," said Louw.

Seshoka said that his union would be watching closeley the outcome of the parliamentary debate.

"We hope to intensify the action depending on the outcome of the public hearings," said Seshoka.

"We cannot overrule the possibility of a complete shutdown of the economy if our demands for the end of labour brokering are not attended to."