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The hollow freedom of unemployed youth

Last week the country celebrated the 18th anniversary of our democracy, an important milestone for every South African. There is no doubt that the majority of South Africans continue to enjoy political freedoms, but few enjoy economic freedom. Without the opportunity to attain this economic liberation, there can be no development and our freedom will remain incomplete.

Both in the past, and still today, the majority of South Africans are denied opportunity, a ladder out of poverty, a stepping stone towards realising their full potential. This cannot be allowed to continue. Many unemployed young people tell me that they appreciate their political freedoms but they don't feel totally free.

For these young people, they will be free when they are able to put bread on the table.

It is against this backdrop that the DA Youth has been at the forefront of urging the government to introduce a Youth Wage Subsidy. We have raised our objections against the delay of the implementation of the Youth Wage Subsidy, lobbied parliament and erected a "Youth Wage Subsidy Now" billboard opposite the offices of Cosatu. Yet, little progress has been made on the part of government, mainly due to the ideological differences between the ANC and its alliance partner, Cosatu, which has vowed not to compromise. It has always surprised me why Cosatu would be against the introduction of the scheme whilst on the other hand claims to represent the interests of the poor. Since last year, Vavi has been calling the millions of unemployed youth 'a ticking time bomb' that needs to be addressed urgently. When given an opportunity to defuse the 'time bomb' by supporting the introduction of a Youth Wage Subsidy, he became philosophical and threw around theories in opposition to it that are devoid of any fact or reason.

One of Vavi's favourite reasons for not supporting the proposal is that it will benefit employers and thus lead to the exploitation of young people, retrenchments of the current workforce and the lowering of wages. This is a claim that is not supported by any facts or evidence. It is merely a sinister ploy that is denying over 500 000 young people the opportunity to gain employment.

The Youth Wage Subsidy will not result in a lowering of wages, which is important as we have a high cost of living. An analysis in the Financial Mail correctly attributes these high costs to the "legacy of the apartheid economy, in particular poor transport infrastructure, long distances to work and high, monopolistic pricing." A wage subsidy allows the State to take on some of these costs.

Having gained support from parliament, government and business, the time has arrived for the millions of unemployed young South Africans to take the fight to Cosatu. We have talked but they refuse to listen to the plight of unemployed young people. As a last resort, we are being forced to use the language that Cosatu seem to understand the most. We will take to the streets against Cosatu's continuous blocking of the proposal at Nedlac on the 15th of May and we ask every South African to support our action. Let us be reminded that the task of building one nation – one future cannot stop, not even for a day.

Regards,



Makashule Gana
DA Youth Federal leader



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