



## **EFF Workers' Day Statement**

Wednesday, 1 May 2024

As South Africa commemorates Workers' Day, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) stands in solidarity with the workers of our nation, honouring their contributions, sacrifices, and struggles. This day holds profound significance in our history, rooted in the struggles of workers for fair labour practices, better working conditions, and social justice. It is a day to remember the sacrifices of those who came before us and to recommit ourselves to the ongoing struggle for economic freedom and dignity in the workplace.

The catalyst for International Workers' Day was the struggle for the eight-hour workday. In the late 19th century, many laborers around the world were forced to work long hours in dangerous conditions, often for minimal pay. In response to these harsh working conditions, workers in countries such as the United States, Canada, and various European nations began organising and advocating for a reduction in the workday to eight hours.

One of the key events that led to the establishment of Workers' Day was the Haymarket affair, which occurred in Chicago, United States, in May 1886. On May 1st, 1886, workers across the United States went on strike to demand an eight-hour workday. The protests culminated in a massive rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square on May 4th, where tensions escalated, and a bomb was thrown, resulting in violence and fatalities. In the aftermath of the Haymarket affair, several labour leaders were arrested and convicted, sparking international outrage and solidarity among workers around the world.

In 1889, the International Socialist Conference in Paris declared May 1st as International Workers' Day to honour the memory of the Haymarket martyrs and to

continue the fight for workers' rights. Since then, Workers' Day has been observed annually by millions of people worldwide, with rallies, marches, and demonstrations held to advocate for labour rights, social justice, and economic equality.

Workers' Day holds profound significance in South Africa due to our history of the systematic exploitation and oppression of black labour. For generations, black workers in South Africa have endured deplorable working conditions, low wages, and a lack of basic rights and protections. From the brutal exploitation of miners in the depths of the earth to the demeaning work of domestic workers and factory workers, black labour has been the backbone of South Africa's economy, yet it has been systematically devalued and marginalised.

For the EFF, Workers' Day additionally holds particular significance in light of the Marikana massacre in 2012, which marked a turning point in our nation's history and the genesis of the EFF movement. On August 16, 2012, 34 mine workers were brutally gunned down by police during a strike for better wages and working conditions at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana. This tragic event exposed the harsh realities faced by workers in South Africa, where exploitation, violence, and disregard for human rights continue to be rampant.

The Marikana massacre served as a wake-up call for the EFF and ignited a fire within our movement to fight for the economic emancipation of all South Africans. Today, as we commemorate Workers' Day, we cannot ignore the sad state of workers in South Africa. Despite the end of apartheid, millions of workers continue to toil in exploitative and precarious conditions, with little to no protection from labour laws or basic rights. The scourge of unemployment, poverty wages, and unsafe working conditions plague our nation, perpetuating cycles of inequality and despair.

The EFF is committed to changing this reality. The recent revelations of exploitation within the private security sector, particularly concerning the denial of benefits to workers, serve as a stark reminder of the pervasive corruption and exploitation rampant in the private sector. As revealed by the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA), over 3,262 companies and municipalities, with the private security sector

being the major culprit, have neglected their responsibilities, accumulating an outstanding debt of R6 billion to the Private Security Sector Provident Fund.

It is alarming to uncover the extent to which private security companies withhold pension funds, provident funds, and health benefits from their workforce, perpetuating a cycle of economic injustice. As the EFF we have stood with private security guards in this matter as this blatant disregard for the law and the constitutional rights of workers cannot be tolerated, and we are in the process of holding the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA) accountable for permitting such exploitation to persist unchecked. We are also working with them in order to claim what is owed to them, as we remain dedicated to fighting for the rights and dignity of all workers.

Furthermore, the EFF has staunchly advocated for the recognition of sex work as valid work and advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work for both sex workers and their clients. We firmly believe that decriminalisation is essential to remove sex work from the shadows, enabling sex workers to report crimes and seek assistance from law enforcement without the fear of arrest. Moreover, decriminalisation empowers sex workers to access medical care without the threat of prosecution, leading to improved sexual health outcomes and reduced HIV/AIDS transmission rates.

By legalising sex work, sex workers can organise, negotiate safer working conditions, and advocate for their rights, thus enhancing their access to financial services and protections. The current criminal framework perpetuates stigma and discrimination against sex workers, making them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Decriminalisation not only removes the criminal taint from sex work but also facilitates regulation of the industry, aiding in the identification and prevention of human trafficking.

The EFF is proud to have championed the push for decriminalisation and played a significant role in the gazetting of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Bill. Despite delays in its enactment, the EFF remains committed to pushing the legislation through once in government, ensuring the immediate safety and well-being of sex workers while addressing municipal regulations as necessary.

As we head to the upcoming elections on the 29th of May, we have presented a manifesto dedicated to jobs and employment, outlining a comprehensive plan to create decent work and economic opportunities for all South Africans. Our manifesto prioritises the needs of workers, advocating for the implementation of a living wage, the protection of workers' rights, and the creation of sustainable employment opportunities.

The EFF government will ensure the creation of millions of decent jobs between 2024 and 2029. This will happen through building state capacity, state-led and protected industrialisation, industrial diversification, the protection of infant and existing industries, the transfer of ownership to black people through subsidies, an increase in tariffs, and state-aided marketing and promotion of South African products internally, across the continent, and worldwide, with a focus on key, progressive, and most beneficial trading partners.

Finally, as we commemorate Workers' Day, let us remember the sacrifices of those who have come before us and recommit ourselves to the ongoing struggle for economic freedom and justice. The EFF stands with the workers of South Africa today and every day, fighting alongside them for a future where all can thrive and prosper

**ISSUED BY THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

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