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CWUW
SALHA 69: CWIU

Submission of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union to the Portfolio Committee on Child and Family support.

Having studied and extensively discussed the new child support and benefit system as agreed by cabinet on 5 March 1997, the CWIU Western Cape Women's Committee at its seminar held on 5 - 6 April 1997, noted the following:

- 1) That the process leading up to this development was not transparent and democratic despite its far-reaching consequences for the poorest sections of our people.
- 2) That the new system is designed to meet the requirements set by the government's economic strategy - Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) for "fiscal restraint" and reducing the budget deficit and not meeting the needs of the majority of South Africans. This economic strategy of the government is in itself its response to the demands of local and international capital and not in line with the promise of "A better life for all" as embodied in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the new constitution which states the right for all "to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance".
- 3) That certain assumptions are made regarding the requirements of families, specifically women and their unsupported children, with regard to their survival, let alone decent living standards. In particular we refer to the new rates of R75 per child (under the age of 6 years) per month which is according to the government "slightly above the household subsistence level". This raises a number of serious questions and implications. Who determined these figures, what are they based on and who is it aimed at? For years in the labour movement we have been confronted by capitalist bosses with similar "scientific statistics" across the bargaining table when fighting for decent wages. We have always rejected these as being based on existing poverty levels and seeking to perpetuate these conditions. These figures are also determined by academics hidden and protected by the privilege of the university environment, treating our poverty as mere scientific subjects for study to strengthen the ideological hand of their capitalist masters. We reject the figures and are convinced that the new rates will have the effect of increasing poverty. It has also been pointed out to us, for what it is worth, that the actual "Household Subsistence Level" figure is more than what the government has decided, ie. R96.83.

(Please note we are not hereby endorsing the latter figure).

We therefore felt that whilst we support the principle of equal access of all to social welfare, we will not support the attempts to drastically cut the benefits of those who were historically included in the system. Rather creative ways must be found of including the needy into the system at similar rates of benefits.

it can adequately assist some women as a viable alternative to the existing system.

The new amount is not enough to feed, clothe, house, educate and transport children.

The labour market within South Africa will be flooded and more competitive as children are forced to leave school to supplement the family income, as children older than 6 years will not be catered for at all. This will drive down labour standards in our country. As children leave school the levels of illiteracy will soar. Future generations of South Africans will be lacking in vitally needed life, work and intellectual skills much needed to cope with the demands of the modern world and place a further burden on the fiscus of the state in various forms?

Furthermore, we believe that women's development within society will be adversely affected. It makes a complete mockery of our attempts as workers to ensure equality within society, through education, affirmative action and collective with employers for parental and other rights. The implementation of this system will perpetuate and intensify the effects of apartheid. The Lund Committee has failed miserably in its task to ensure a just system and the consequences will drag our nation in to further impoverishment.

We as CWIU recommend:

1. The rejection of all the aspects of the Lund committee report.
2. That Cabinet review and rescind the new system on Child and Family support.
3. Embark on a full review of the social welfare system and based on extensive research and democratic consultation with organisations and communities including the rural areas, formulate new proposals for formal debate and adoption in parliament.
4. All parliamentarians especially those of the tripartite alliance (ANC/COSATU/SACP) to consult extensively with constituencies to receive a mandated position for parliament.
5. Education to be fundamental part of implementation of any system and rural areas especially should be targeted.
6. Administration of any system must be accessible to all.
7. The final drafting and negotiating committee should consist mainly of women and rural representatives.
8. Negotiations around a social welfare system should commence immediately based on the initial research acceptable to our structures.

Also it is quite evident from the way that the new system is designed, its overall aim is not as purported, to be inclusive, but rather to cut expenditure for social benefits in line with the aims of the governments economic policy.

For this reason we support the agreement reached by our federation, COSATU, and the government to give priority to completely overhauling the entire system of social welfare.

CWIU women decided that it will be important to mobilise all workers particularly women, within our union and COSATU, when we realised the likely consequences of the new system. We believe that communities will be further impoverished, particularly women as the most marginalised section of our society will be forced to take sole responsibility for the health and welfare of their children.

As organised workers we felt that we need to speak out for the voiceless in our country i.e children and rural women.

The government will be doing great harm if it deals with social welfare on a piece-meal basis. It should rather assess the social assistance and the social security in order to provide a basic standard of living for all South Africans particularly those previously disadvantaged under the apartheid system.

CWIU rejects the Lund Committee report and cabinet's new system based on it and we call on the government to reconsider its decision to implement it. The process embarked upon has not been transparent and has not involved all organisations and people within civil society from the outset, especially those affected.

The effects of the implementation will lead to an increase in crime and violence as communities with no income struggle to make ends meet. The burden on women to provide for their children may lead to an increase in prostitution, the worst degradation of women within society. More and more children are likely to be abandoned and flock to the cities already struggling to cope with the strains of destitute people. Crime, violence and prostitution will place an even heavier burden on our already overworked policing and health care services.

The rural communities who the system supposedly seeks to assist will not be able to qualify since clinics in these areas are virtually non-existent, as regular visits are a pre-requisite to obtain assistance. The cost transport to pay-out points will eat away at the meagre amount paid.

The racial divisions prevalent within the Western Cape will be further entrenched. Those benefitting from the system are mainly "coloured" and "white" women. We believe that equity should be achieved, but not by taking from the poor to give to the poor.

This will also indirectly affect our private maintenance system, as women will be faced with men that will use the proposed amount (R75,00) as a yardstick to justify their contributions to their childrens'. Yet, at the same time the new system seeks to encourage the use of private maintenance. The private maintenance system on the otherhand needs to be completely overhauled before