

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Reinstate shop-floor democracy and stamp out strike violence, says IRR

South Africa's industrial relations system has shifted too far in accommodating the interests of trade union officials and balance needs to be restored so as to curtail violence and reintroduce democracy on to the shop floor, says the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

In a report released yesterday, the IRR said that decisions to strike should be made "not by union officials but by those most directly affected, not least by risking loss of wages while on strike and possibly also by jeopardising their jobs".

Strike ballots should be made compulsory, and no strike should enjoy "protected" status unless endorsed beforehand by a two-thirds majority, the IRR said. Workers striking without the necessary two-thirds majority should be liable for lawful dismissal. Where workers did not wish to strike they should not be compelled to do so. If necessary, the police should be deployed to enable them to continue working.

The IRR said that 162 people had been killed in the last 20 years in violence against workers who failed to heed strike calls and that this violence needed to be stamped out. Whenever a strike was marred by intimidation or violence, the employer, the police, or any other interested party should be empowered to bring an urgent application to court to have its protected status removed.

The IRR also said that "where unions or workers fail to comply with court interdicts against strikes marred by violence, proceedings for contempt of court should be brought and those responsible jailed for disobeying court orders. Union funds should also be attached by court order where damage is caused in the course of strikes".

In addition, said the IRR, protection given to strikes should be confined to strikes by workers against their own employer. "Secondary" strikes or strikes for "socio- economic" reasons should not enjoy protected status. Employers should be entitled to dismiss workers engaged in such strikes without having their decisions overturned by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration.

Ends.
