

Campaign Against CCMA Budget Cuts Kicks Off with National Picket

By *Karibu!* Staff

25 February 2021

On 24 February 2021, 45 labour support, advice offices and social justice organisations around the country picketed against the current cuts taking place to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration's (CCMA) budget. These pickets, under the campaign banner of #OpenCCMA, took place at various CCMA offices and public spaces; including Kroonstad, Benoni, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and the Johannesburg CBD.

Some of the organisations who are part of this campaign includes but is not limited to: Casual Workers Advice Office, Khanya College, Migrant Workers Union of South Africa, Nelspoort Advice Office, Simunye Workers Forum, Elsie's River Advice Office, General Industries Workers Union of South Africa and Greytown Farm Workers Forum.

The recent budget cuts to the CCMA (in the middle of a global pandemic no less) is yet another blow to an institution meant to protect the rights of casual, contracted and precarious workers and has been described as "a direct attack on the working class". It has shut-down walk-in dispute referral facilities (ostensibly because of COVID-19), closed down satellite offices around the country, and working class people have forced to refer their dispute online.

In the past, the CCMA had 565 part-time commissioners who used to handle about 80% of the CCMA's cases. But now the CCMA has also decided to rely solely on its 173 full-time commissioners, who now have to take on the caseload of the part-time commissioners as well as their own. This has worsened the already large backlog that has accumulated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has often meant that the most vulnerable workers are forced to wait for extended periods for justice as cases often take months to be processed. Some commissioners have also pressurised workers to settle for pittance so as to maintain the 70% settlement rate, while others are compromised and prejudiced against workers because of their close position to the employers, who they have often represented in different settings.

Across the country, protestors held placards with a mixture of demands and messages about the problems workers have with the CCMA. Some of the placards demanded the institution fully resume, other placards demanded the CCMA hire its part-time commissioners on a permanent basis, and that the CCMA should stop using the online system.

Many protestors also raised on their placards the demand to scrap the exclusionary Rule 25. Rule 25 is one of the CCMA rules that limits who can represent a party at the CCMA to "a legal practitioner, director or fellow employee, office-bearer or official of the party's registered trade union or registered employer's organisation." This rule has often resulted in the mistreatment, misrepresentation and lost cases of workers at the CCMA.

Protestors in the Johannesburg CBD also combined picketing with pamphleteering and engaging passersby and people who came to the CCMA. Many received

positive responses and support from people who said they work at the CCMA, as well as ordinary working people who have had experience with the CCMA.

Two security guards stationed on Main street (in the Johannesburg CBD) spoke to *Karibu!* about their dissatisfaction about the CCMA budget cuts. “This CCMA action has affected our lives. How many people have access to internet?” they asked. “Our own colleagues at CCMA also make our lives difficult. They will turn you away without giving you a proper form to fill in. They will tell you go and apply online, just like that,” one said. “This online things does not work for us”, they concluded.

A CCMA official who was at the CCMA office in Eloff street (Johannesburg) during the picket, raised the issue of how “workers are [often] forced to sign settlements agreement favouring the employers.” He supported the picket and hoped to see more actions to defend the workers.

This article was submitted on 25 February 2021. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.