

Postponed Budget Speech Undermines Plight of Working Class People

By Viwe Mazwana

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The postponement of the 2025 budget speech has caused frustration among many people who feel that the Finance Department lacks planning and communication. The highly anticipated budget speech was initially scheduled for 19 February 2025. It was postponed due to disagreements among the different member parties making up the Government of National Unity (GNU).

On budget day, hundreds of working class people gathered in many places from early morning to march and demand that Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana prioritise working class community struggles.

The unions, who joined the march in parliament, expressed concerns that the minister might cut critical funding for important departments like health and education. This concern came from historical underfunding, understaffing, and mismanagement at the public healthcare and education institutions. This has mostly affected black working-class people, especially women.

People on the ground were very critical of the decision to postpone the budget. Many saw it as a form of incompetence while others spoke about the role of the Democratic Alliance (DA) in the decision-making process.

According to Sibusiso Mthembu, 40, a resident of Maboneng in Johannesburg, the government postponed the budget speech because it did not thoroughly research and consider people's needs.

The DA has been accused of stopping the budget speech due to disagreements over proposed tax increases. On the other hand, the ANC has been heavily criticised for its plan to raise taxes to recover lost money due to alleged mismanagement. This proposal has been met with resistance by their GNU partners, Mthembu noted.

“These people think our lives are a chess game, they settle scores instead of serving the people. Postponing the budget speech has never happened [before], they are all not ready to serve and share resources equally with the poor,” said Sarah Mthimkhulu (in her 50s) who lives in the Johannesburg (CBD).

In Ekurhuleni, Lwazi Mabizela, 34, from Phola Park, Thokoza, said, “These delays came as a result of the current political tension between the rest of the GNU and the ANC. And also, people are not happy with the proposed VAT increase and other taxes. I think they have to take time and talk to people about what they need. The return of loadshedding is very disappointing as well.”

In an unexpected move, the DA and other parties blocked the budget speech. The apparent reason for this move was the ANC's plan to increase taxes by 2% to recover funds lost due to improved revenue collection. This increase would affect the working class. Meanwhile, the DA, through Dr Mark Burke, said South Africa only needs to increase compliance in terms of tax collection. The DA's overall budget also favours big business.

As the country waits for the rescheduled budget speech, the urgency for the government to address the social and economic crisis remains. The postponed budget speech has highlighted the need for effective communication, planning, and consideration of the people's needs.

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