



Theme: HOW TO PROMOTE EMPLOYMENT

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Freeway
Time for Fresh Ideas

To obtain employment, and with it the income and the respect which come from having a job - this is the dream of countless people, both in Zambia and around the world. Yet governmental promises to create jobs, however genuine the commitment, rarely bring positive results. And that, alas, has been Zambia’s experience during the past 15 months. Clearly there is a need for new thinking and fresh ideas. The purpose of this issue of the journal is to offer practical suggestions for consideration by our readers.

Unemployment is especially acute in our near-neighbour, South Africa, where debate on the subject has been intense. That explains why we feature four articles from that country.

One of these articles advocates government sponsorship for a massive investment in urbanization. Yet for governments to ‘create’ employment in this way is rarely practicable, as that involves spending huge amounts of money, raised by taxation or borrowing, and enlisting scarce and

highly specialized business expertise. Consequently few large government sponsored projects produce sustainable job creation.

So a far more promising approach, on which most of the other articles focus, is to identify areas in the private sector where over-regulation prevents or inhibits job creation. Privately owned business covers some 80 per cent of Zambia’s economy, including the entire informal sector. So for governments to remove obstacles to job creation, where these exist, offers hope of real progress. The articles that follow, both from South Africa and from Zambia, contain thought-provoking suggestions in this area.

Comments by readers will be welcomed by the Editor.

Why ‘Decent Jobs’ become ‘No Jobs’ for the unemployed.

By Eustace Davie

The word ‘decent’ has such kindly connotations. Of course everyone wants workers to have decent wages, working conditions, hours of work and contractual arrangements with employers.

When applied to jobs, 'decent' has a variety of meanings, depending on who does the interpreting. The standards for 'decent jobs' set by labour unions are based on wages, working conditions and other minimum criteria they have negotiated with employers, and have had written into the country's laws and regulations: anything less is not regarded as 'decent'.

A desperate person, especially one who has been unemployed for a long time, will have an entirely different perspective of decent work. Money to buy food for the family is likely to be a first objective, then clothing, shelter and so on, along the scale of their priorities. As long as the job is tolerable, desperate people are prepared to accept any job that enables them to make progress in obtaining as many of their priority items as possible.

Understandably, labour union leaders are determined to set the highest standards they can achieve for their members when defining what constitutes a 'decent' job. Around bargaining tables they hammer out the details: minimum wages, working conditions, hours of work, overtime pay, leave periods and a great deal more, mainly with large employers, who generally prefer to negotiate with unions rather than with individual workers. Workers have every right to establish unions, appoint representatives, and have them enter into agreements on their behalf. Problems arise, however, when arrangements between large labour unions and large employers spill over and affect non-parties to these agreements.

The current labour laws and regulations have raised a veritable 'brick wall' between potential employers and the unemployed. Potential employers are not prepared to wade through and bear the costs of all the compliance requirements in respect of someone with no skills, no track record, and most probably a badly eroded 'will-to-work' approach caused by long-term unemployment.

The most tragic consequence of the current labour dispensation is that unemployed people cannot apply their conception of what constitutes a 'decent

job' to one that others do not consider to be 'decent'. They cannot do that because employers face prosecution if they employ them on the basis of the applicant's conception of 'decent' terms.

For several years, our Foundation has been lobbying for all parties to consider allowing people who have been unemployed for six months or more (to prevent firing and re-hiring) to make agreements (that are exempt from the labour laws) with employers on mutually acceptable terms. The booklet *Jobs for the Jobless: Special Exemption Certificates for the Unemployed* sets out how the situation could be totally controlled if Special Exemption (SPEX) Certificates are issued to the long-term unemployed, and also to graduates from school or college, valid for a period of two years, allowing the holders to enter into such agreements with employers on condition that the agreements are in writing.

Small firms and individuals are the most likely potential employers of SPEX certificate holders; many only marginally better off financially than their employees. Stripped of compliance costs these employers will probably pay wages to certificate holders that reasonable people would consider to be a 'decent' wage, given the circumstances. We are talking about 'decent jobs': an income, the promise of a future, the chance to feed and clothe a family. A 'decent job' that may not be everybody's conception of the term, but what a particular unemployed person would consider to be 'decent'. A job that a jobless person thinks is 'decent' is surely better than no job at all.

Author: *Eustace Davie is a director of the Free Market Foundation and author of 'Jobs for the Jobless: Special Exemption Certificates for the Unemployed'.*

When those with jobs block those without

By Herman Mashaba

IF the government does not remove the obstacles that prevent willing buyers of labour from employing willing workers on mutually acceptable terms, events elsewhere warn us that we can expect trouble. If idle

people get too desperate, they will find something destructive to do.

The government and the labour unions have to recognise, once and for all, that certain provisions in the labour laws contribute to unemployment and have to change. Minimum wages, hiring and firing laws, centralised collective bargaining and bureaucracy costs are huge deterrents to employment, especially when the potential employers are individuals and SMEs. Unemployed people must be allowed to make their own decisions about their own lives, and the labour laws must change to accommodate their decisions. They must not be turned away by potential employers because labour laws create a barrier between them.

In comparing South Africa with other countries, we have to start by asking what labour laws are appropriate in a country where 7.5 million people, 36% of the potential workforce, are unemployed. There is no point comparing South Africa's labour laws with those in wealthy countries. South Africa's unemployment is four times higher than their "panic" rate, which means obstacles to employment must be removed, fast!

Russian author Leo Tolstoy must have had something similar to our labour laws in mind when he wrote: "I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by all possible means - except by getting off his back."

Those who talk about "decent" jobs and "exploitation" are the ones who "sit on the backs of the unemployed", choking them and telling them how sorry they are for them. It is time to get off the backs of the unemployed.

It is really unfair to blame the labour unions for the plight of the unemployed. Union officials have the task of looking after the interests of their members. Union members have every right, as long as they do not use violence or violate anyone else's rights, to object to changes in legislation intended to make it easier for the unemployed to get jobs if they believe

such changes might have detrimental consequences for them.

Members of parliament of all parties must take full responsibility for the labour laws and any influence they have in preventing the unemployed from getting jobs.

The decision-makers owe this to the millions who cannot get jobs and to the entire nation to avoid the potential calamity that continued mass unemployment threatens to bring about.

Many of us have, in the past, worked for wages that would not have been considered "decent". We did it because something is better than nothing, being active is better than being idle, and you do not learn skills by sitting at home.

Loss of existing and future jobs happens when a government attempts to use a minimum wage to increase wages above what employers are paying or are capable of paying. Minimum wages generally do not differentiate between high-income and low-income employers, which results in the "Newcastle effect" and the loss of jobs, for instance, by domestic workers employed by low-income families.

Author: Mashaba is chairman of the Free Market Foundation

When employment laws misfire

By Murray Sanderson

Creating employment has today become Zambia's No. 1 Objective and a major topic of conversation. Yet we have laws which seriously discourage it. Consequently the World Bank's 'Doing Business' publication, rates Zambia as low as 135 out of 181 countries in the category 'Employing Workers'. Can this be the result of 'worker-friendly' policies?

First, a general point from economics: when a thing is costly we buy less of it. High prices encourage suppliers, but they discourage buyers. The buyers of labour are employers. Set the price of labour above what employers are willing or able to pay, and they will either buy less of it, or they will not buy at all.

Who determines the price of labour? Isn't it the buyers and sellers themselves, the employers and employees? That is true in a free market. But labour markets are often not free, for political reasons. Workers outnumber bosses, so they have more votes. And politicians want votes, so they pass laws which enforce minimum wages and conditions. Such laws are popular. But there is a snag: laws which boost entitlements discourage job creation. They may even cause lay-offs.

Let's look at two areas where apparently positive policies have negative results.

The Minimum Wages & Conditions of Service Act empowers the Minister of Labour & Social Services to issue statutory instruments which set minimum wages for all non-unionized workers. That is fine for people already in employment, unless they are then laid off, which can happen. But it creates a serious obstacle for the unemployed, especially for school leavers, who lack training or work experience. Most young unemployed Zambians would gladly accept a job at a rate well below the official minimum wage. But the employer recruiting them would be breaking the law. Thus school leavers are denied the opportunity to get work experience, gain skills and establish a track record. To put it bluntly: our minimum wages law considers only those with jobs; it ignores the unemployed. How can we talk of 'creating jobs' and yet prevent jobs from being offered to young people?

The other big area where our labour legislation discourages employment is terminal benefits. Businesses without established pension schemes are bound by law to pay 3 months pay per year of service as a gratuity to workers who retire after reaching 50 years of age and completing 10 or more years of service. For long-serving employees, that can amount to a huge sum, amounting to 5 years salary or more, which hardly any businesses could manage to pay. The fear of incurring such obligations is bound to discourage employment creation. No less important, the law is also very unfair to employees themselves, for the following reasons.

1. Employees who change employers before reaching retirement age forfeit their accumulating entitlements.
2. They also lose out if they give up employment for any other reason, such as to become an entrepreneur, or to care for a child or a sick relative.
3. The same occurs if the employee leaves work due to ill health or dies before reaching retirement age.
4. An employee who is dismissed for an offence also forfeits the entitlement.
5. All employees lose out if the employer goes out of business.

This legal requirement should have been removed when NAPSA was created to replace the ZNPF. But the need for change was overlooked at the time, and thorny issues tend later to be ignored. To remove this requirement in a way fair both to employees and employers would be tricky, but it is necessary.

Another kind of terminal benefit is redundancy pay, which Zambia, by statutory instrument, sets at 2 months pay per year of service. This may not sound a lot, but for a company which has to reduce staff numbers due to financial difficulties, it can present a huge problem. So steep redundancy pay acts as an inducement to keep the work-force as small as possible.

Other countries seem to recognize this danger, for few of them insist on redundancy payments in excess of one month's pay per year of service. Indeed, among the 181 countries covered by 'Doing Business', Zambia's benefit level is equalled by only two other countries, Ghana and Zimbabwe. Alas, future legal obligations to workers who lose their jobs can be a major obstacle to job creation.

These considerations suggest that 'worker-friendly' legislation can fail to achieve its purpose, and may even disadvantage existing workers and prevent employment creation. It can also be most 'unfriendly' to the unemployed. Clearly, a careful and thorough review of our Minimum Wages and

Conditions of Service Act is urgently needed. Even the best-intended laws can misfire.

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We should create public sector jobs to boost employment.

By Dr. Madson Pirie

There are no public resources, except those which government takes away from its citizens. If government is to spend money on projects, this means that private citizens are deprived of those funds.

Government can appear to create jobs by means of public spending. They can open the market as purchaser for certain projects, and see new jobs apparently created in response. These new jobs owe their existence to that government demand, and many depend on it for their continuation, in that unless the spending continues at that level, the new jobs may disappear.

Government funds such projects by taking funds from the private sector, either by open taxation, by stealth taxes, by borrowing, or even through inflation. Either way, it takes away the funds which sustained jobs in the private sector. People have less to spend on the goods and services of private business; they have less available to invest in it. This means that temporary, government-created jobs are at the expense of real, lasting jobs in the private sector.

Furthermore, government commands goods and services inefficiently. It costs more for government to perform many deeds than it does for private business to do the same. This is because government bureaucracy is often more cumbersome and more costly. Lacking competition, there is often no pressure to make it efficient.

Government-created jobs are often capital intensive, such as infrastructure jobs in road or bridge-building, and use a great deal of costly equipment for each

person employed. By contrast, the luxuries foregone when the private sector is subjected to extra taxation tend to be in labor-intensive service areas such as dining out, hair-dressing, etc.

The effect is to ensure that more jobs are destroyed than can be created. The problem is that political leaders are usually praised for the visible new jobs, without being blamed for those which quietly disappear from the private sector.

From 'Freedom 101' by Dr. Madsen Pirie, with permission from Adam Smith Research Trust 2007, info@adamsmith.org

Quotations

'Employment is nature's physician and essential to human happiness.'

Galen, Physician In ancient Greece

Unemployment exists 'because the government cannot provide any employment, and as such it is just as good as not having any government at all.'

Letter to Zambia's 'The Post' newspaper

'Jobs are never created. So long as there are unsatisfied desires, job opportunities exist. The problem is what keeps job seekers from available jobs.'

Leon Louw

'The government must make up its mind whether in tackling employment it should look at the big picture that includes the unemployed or cater for the interests of the already employed.'

Jasson Urbach

'Unemployed people should be allowed to decide for themselves what amount of wages and conditions of employment they find acceptable and to negotiate with prospective employers on that basis.'

Eustace Davie

Another Look at Casualisation

By Neo Simutanyi

The term 'casualisation' describes the practice of hiring employees on short-term contracts, where such individuals are paid low wages and denied the benefits enjoyed by permanent employees. This practice is said to favour employers, as it reduces labour costs and maximizes profits, but to disadvantage the affected workers with low incomes, poor conditions and lack of job security. The debate on casualisation has focused on the key issue of employment conditions versus employment creation, on quality versus quantity. This essay offers some thoughts on the subject, and argues that casualisation needs to be analysed in the context of a liberalized market economy and the global trend towards labour market flexibility.

During Zambia's 2006 general election campaign some opposition parties took issue with the idea of casualisation of labour, especially by foreign-owned firms. They argued that multinationals had resorted to hiring casual labour for jobs that would ordinarily be permanent. The impressive performance of the Patriotic Front, which campaigned on labour issues, reinforced calls for government to outlaw casualisation and introduce minimum employment standards.

The anti-casualisation debate, spearheaded by the trade unions and some NGOs, suggests nostalgia for the full-time, unionized workforce with guaranteed social security, which characterized the state-dominated economy of the 1980s. For example, trade unions and organisations such as the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) have suggested that any worker on a contract of more than six months should be placed on permanent terms so as to enjoy a higher income and guaranteed job security and terminal benefits.

Weighed against the need for providing incomes and employment to a greater number of people, the position of trade unions and some NGOs is unrealistic. It assumes that employers have the capacity to engage workers on a permanent basis

and with generous benefits. The reality is that many employers, including government, are unable to do this. The practice of casualisation should be considered, not just as an economic necessity, but as a requirement of labour market flexibility, which contributes to employment creation. It is part of a package of the development of a capitalist market economy.

While it is desirable that all employees be guaranteed a minimum wage to meet basic needs, many employers, especially those in the formal small and medium enterprise sector (SME) and the informal sector, are unable to afford this. But by providing casual work, firms provide employment to thousands of people who would otherwise lack an income. While casual employment tends to be low paid, and of inferior quality compared to permanent jobs, permanent employment increases labour costs and thereby limits overall employment creation.

In a labour surplus economy such as that of Zambia, arguments for high wages and guaranteed benefits and social security for all employees go against sound market principles. We need to avoid confusing and misrepresenting the employment problem. Pay and conditions are not the issue. People need employment and a regular income to meet their needs. Working conditions and job security depend on the overall performance of the economy and the ability of firms to pay.

When considering demands to prohibit casualisation in Zambia there is need to recognize that labour market flexibility is an important prerequisite to employment creation in a labour surplus market economy. Facilitating employment to the great majority of those those who wish to join the labour force should be the main thrust of public policy in this area. The quality of that employment should come later. China adopted this employment policy very successfully, and is today the second largest economy in the world.

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How our Government can Facilitate Employment

By Eustace Davie

At the stroke of a pen, 5-million more South Africans could enter the workforce today.

Current legislative and regulatory barriers prevent employers – from the largest to the smallest – from employing labour by mutual agreement. Because of this, more than 7-million people are being denied entry into the labour market.

The severe barriers that prevent unemployed people from entering the labour market are there to increase the job security of those who are fortunate enough to be employed. Labour unions vehemently oppose government making even modest changes to the labour laws and regulations to allow the jobless to find work. They swiftly accuse employers of ‘exploiting’ workers if they hear of any person finding a job that pays a wage below that regulated as a “decent” wage.

Government and the labour unions appear to believe that it is better for the worker to be unemployed and have no wage at all rather than one they do not consider “decent”. How can they believe that their support for stringent legislation, which prevents millions of people from getting work, places them on the moral high ground? How can they shut their eyes to the huge and escalating human misery this situation is causing?

Economies are not static but dynamic. Adding extra workers means extra production and extra capital to finance the extra production, including the cost of the wages of the additional workers. A nation with its potential workforce fully employed has a dynamic, growing economy that adds wealth and rapidly increases the incomes of its entire people.

When the cost of production rises, firms tend to look at automation. They introduce machines to do what men and women do if the cost of labour rises above the cost of automated production. Unions need to bear this in mind and remember that this causes the loss not only of existing jobs but also of potential

future jobs in new firms and factories. Fewer unskilled workers would be unemployed if the total cost of employing them were to be reduced, thus making their labour more cost-effective.

A zero-sum approach wrongly assumes that there are a fixed number of jobs available. It does not take account of the huge amount of additional production that would occur if labour compliance costs were lower.

According to the latest statistics from Stats South Africa, the typical unemployed individual is a first time job seeker, has been unemployed for longer than a year, and has not completed secondary level education. The typical potential employer of an inexperienced job seeker is an individual, small business, or non-profit organisation, in areas of activity where they would be unlikely to compete with union members.

The unions should encourage employment of unskilled people in small firms. Those people, once they have learned skills, will become candidates for swelling the ranks of the unions. The fears of the unions are unfounded; their members are well protected from retrenchment and certainly from being replaced by inexperienced low-cost young people.

SA badly needs economic growth. Any increase in economic activity will create a massive demand for labour. If employers, from the largest to the smallest, could employ people by mutual agreement, at least 5-million more people would probably earn a minimum of a conservatively estimated R5-billion and potentially R15-billion per month. An economic boost to the country with R60-billion to R180-billion per annum lawfully flowing into the hands of millions of the poorest families in the country.

There is tremendous scope for an increase in the demand for labour. It is crucial to recognise that there will always be employment for people whose value to the employer of their productive output is greater than the cost of employing them. The cost of complying with the labour laws is a major deterrent

to the hiring of labour, especially in the hiring of people with low skills. Compliance costs are as high, if not higher, for hiring a low-skilled worker at R2,000 per month as it is for hiring a high-skilled worker at R6,000 per month. Labour law compliance costs are therefore a serious deterrent to the hiring of low-skilled workers.

Although the labour unions support maintaining the *status quo*, they are not primarily responsible for the situation. Parliament and the governing party control the labour laws. They are responsible for preventing people from gaining employment by adopting laws that deny them the right to decide for themselves what wage and conditions of employment they find acceptable.

It is therefore the responsibility of Parliament and the governing party to remove the barriers that prevent our potential total workforce from finding work and earning a living. The more people who are self-supporting, the less call there is for welfare, the more money circulates in the economy, the faster this country's economy will grow. More of its people will be job-proud and few will be poverty-stricken.

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Africa poised for abundance and plentiful jobs ***The entrepreneurial gift of rapid urbanisation***

By Ruben Richards (Ph.D)

21st century African urbanisation, particularly over the next 40 years, will create the demand for 240 million new jobs in Africa linked to the designing and building of 800 secondary African cities which will accommodate over 800 million residents. Did someone say there was a shortage of jobs and employment in Africa? Who will respond and supply the demand created by the need for housing and associated infrastructure linked to rapid urbanisation?

The demand about to be created by rapid urbanisation must certainly be an unprecedented and rare entrepreneurial gift presented to the

African continent. Does it sound too good to be true? Am I deluded by my optimism that says we can shift from being a continent plagued by poverty, joblessness, corruption and a begging bowl mentality, to that of a land where the wealth of the African soil is enjoyed by all the people of the continent – where the table is overflowing with abundance – and where we have more jobs to offer than people to fill those job vacancies? But how do we achieve this? And is this even a real possibility?

Yes, it is likely that the population of some African cities is set to swell by up to 85% in the next 15 – 40 years. Yes, it is likely that food and water shortages, poor infrastructure and a lack of housing will be among the problems faced by governments during such rapid urbanisation. But is this not where the entrepreneurial and job creation opportunity reside? Or am I being too optimistic?

The simultaneous threat and opportunity facing current African cities is that they were not designed for the large in-migration anticipated over the next forty years. And it would appear that very few countries are proactively preparing the infrastructure required to enable a positive and proactive embracing of the challenges posed by urbanisation. An exception to this may well be the envisaged secondary city currently being designed and about to be built alongside the existing city of Cape Town - as part of the development corridor for the Western Cape region - as it expands along the West Coast. I am here referring to a unique project and human settlement called Wescape – a secondary city which will be built by a private property developer in consultation with the city authorities market sector and upmarket residents. The city will accommodate almost one million residents, and comprise 200,000 housing units together with all the required supporting infrastructure including rail stations and integrated rapid bus transport systems. The associated infrastructure will include among others: 415 educational facilities including 200 schools, technical training centres, a university and nursing training college; 551,250m² of commercial space, a wide array of green industries with a closed loop system where waste is seen as a resource and not a

problem; 15 sports facilities; 1,260,000m² light industrial space; 33 health care facilities and so forth. It is in this context and with this scale in mind that we now talk job creation and employment.

The grand opportunity facing Africa is that through the “housing” boom necessitated by African urbanisation there is the environment for massive economic development.

If one understands how these market forces operate, then what we have here in the form of the housing demand caused by urbanisation is an opportunity to reverse the historical legacy of under-development and ill-fortunes of the African continent. We have a chance to ‘supply’ as per the requirements of what will be an increasing demand. And furthermore, this level of demand means the necessity for 240 million jobs linked to the designing and building of 800 secondary African cities housing 800 million residents over the next 40 years.

Unfortunately, this scale of urban development is not yet part of the psyche of African entrepreneurial consciousness and it is hoped that the Wescape project might inspire similar projects elsewhere on the African continent. The blue print for such a development is available as a free download via a book recently launched at a sustainability conference in Cape Town. The book is entitled “**2 BILLION STRONG – A regenerative solution to building sustainable African cities**”. For more about the book and the Wescape project see www.wescapelife.co.za.

There is no doubt that building new cities for Africa is more than just a nice idea. It is more than an imperative and much more than a necessity. In fact, many cities of the kind described above are needed if Africa is to cope with the challenges posed by urbanisation.

The Wescape model is not a quick fix solution – but a sustainable and regenerative one. We are talking here a long term and an economically, culturally and socially sustainable approach to city building and city making. The idea of building houses/dwellings for masses of people is, of course, not new. What is new is deliberately surrounding those ‘dwellings’ with an

economic, social and governance framework that enables that city to be self sufficient, safe and a decent place to live. The inevitable alternative is that existing cities will be turned into massive slums as predicted by the UN report mentioned above – with no quality of life or even a chance to break the begging bowl image.

Is that pie in the sky? Perhaps! But only if you don’t understand the opportunities embedded in this gift called urbanisation and population growth. This must be an entrepreneurs dream come true. Never before has there been a moment of opportunity linked to city building and city making at this scale on the African continent.

I believe that a proactive approach to the creation of secondary cities – as proposed by the Wescape model is worth considering – if only to celebrate that Africa still has idealists who are very practical and committed to a vision that understands Africa as a place of abundance and not poverty – where our problem is not enough jobs but too little people to fill the job vacancies. Optimists of the world unite and let’s create the Africa we have always dreamed about – a place of abundance and plentiful jobs. Thank you urbanisation.

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Topic for April 2013 Issue

The April issue will be on ‘Markets and Governments’. Readers who wish to contribute an article on this controversial subject are invited to contact the Editor at <zippa@zippamail.com>

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