



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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FTUC Concerned with Wages Order Deferment and Father Barr's Resignation

THE FTUC is extremely disappointed with recent developments regarding the Wages Orders that is bound to have negative impact on workers employed in vulnerable sectors of the economy and the "pressured" resignation of the Chair of the Wages Council, Father Kevin Barr.

The extension of time for objections on the yet-to-be gazetted Wages Orders has become a regular and effective tool for some employers to delay its implementation.

There was no consultation with Father Barr on this issue and time was extended unilaterally by government under the pressure from some employers.

Such behaviour undermines tripartism and confidence in the sincerity of government to eradicate poverty. Some employers have over the past two years made it their war cry to remove Father Barr as Chair because they have been uncomfortable about his commitment to the poor workers of Fiji and have accused him of being biased to workers.

What they have missed is the fact that the Wages Council was set up to address the very issues that Fr. Barr has stood for, that is, to ensure a fair wage for workers and the eradication of poverty. These very employers, who claim to be unwilling to afford new wage rates, will not open their books for scrutiny even in private to independent auditors.

Government once again has demonstrated its lack of commitment to poor workers and the hold that big businesses have on them.

The Wages Council is made up of Employers' Representatives nominated by the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, Workers' Representatives nominated by the FTUC, Government representatives and Independent members.

The decisions reached by the Wages Council are collective decisions and not that of Fr. Barr alone. Therefore for Government at the behest of some employers to unilaterally defer decisions of the Wages Council undermines the Council and the organisations represented in the Council.

The question that arises is, why have a Wages Council if Government is going to behave unilaterally?

The FTUC will reconsider its position on the Wages Council and the extension of the appointment of its representatives on the Council at its next meeting.

Fr. Barr has done an excellent job as Chair of the Wages Council and the FTUC salutes him for that. He has stood up without fear for the poor of this country and remained principled in his approach to address the imbalances in our society. This was unpalatable to some who just want to ensure that their profit line remained untouched.

This whole episode clearly sends a message to the trade union movement and workers that the struggle for the reinstatement of basic civil liberties must continue.

We call upon the government to consider the re-appointment of Father Barr as Chair and demand that it exercises fair judgment with regards to the Wages Regulations Orders and the Wages Council as the recent development defeats the purpose of its set-up in the first place.

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