Labour Day is celebrated worldwide on May 1 each year. On this day, workers walk out of their jobs and as custom, meet in public parks to mark one more year of tireless labour. They brave hot sun and rain to listen to their labour leaders and celebrate gains made.

In the last four years, Kenyan workers, especially those in the Public Sector, have witnessed inestimable loss of earnings caused by multiple factors. These include grave mismanagement of public resources, skyrocketing corruption, unprecedented depreciation of the Kenyan currency, unpredictable economic growth leading to high increases in consumer prices, and ballooning wage bill. These and other cases have been cited as reasons for failure by Government to consider an increase in wages.

**WORKERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

Kenyan Public Service workers are some of the most hard working, resilient and ingenious lot in this country. They wake up early to beat the ever increasing traffic jams experienced in most cities today, spend long hours in the office and bear the brunt of shrinking economic fortunes. At the end of the month, they harvest near-empty payslips.

Public workers continuously carry the indignity and live in denial. When you meet one, you see a decent man or woman clad in office attire looking healthy. Behind this mask is a worker who will skip a meal that day, will not carry a loaf of bread home, has not paid for water or electricity for the last month or more, and cannot access social medical services at Hospital because NHIF dues are in default.

This man or woman has children not in school over fee balances and has borrowed extensively from Saccos to try and make ends meet.

The Kenyan Government has consistently failed to address the plight of this category of workers. During the previous regimes, celebrations to mark Labour Days were waited upon with hope and high expectations from workers, especially those in the informal Sector, who apparently benefit from pronouncements made on such days in regard to minimum wage increases.

Workers in the Public Sector do not benefit from these. They depend on Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) negotiated and signed between their employer and their unions.

**STRIKES AND PICKETING**

In the recent past, Kenya has witnessed increased strikes by Public Service employees. Education and Health sectors have borne the worst of these experiences, an indication that all is not well in these jobs.

Teachers and health workers are generally demotivated and morally weakened. The government has employed excessive power and undue pressure to kill the unions.

**TAX EVASION AND WASTAGE**

A research recently commissioned by the Trade Unions Congress of Kenya shows that more than 40 percent of all Government allocations is either stolen, wasted or goes to non-core business within Government.

The report further shows that Kenya loses in the excess of Ksh137 billion in tax evasion each financial year.

The Government must seal all the loopholes that lead to tax evasion and stop wastage of funds allocated for public good. If this is done:

(a) Teachers’ salaries and those of other public servants can be increased without any strain.

(b) All public hospitals can be supplied with adequate medical equipment and drugs.

(c) Government workers, especially the Police, can be housed decently.

(d) Government projects would not require donor funding.

(e) The country can regularly service some of its external debts with ease and without excessive borrowing.

(f) All employees and contributors to the NHIF scheme would get best returns for their money.

**MOVING FORWARD**

Employers such as the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Public University Councils have made all efforts to negotiate, conclude and sign CBAs as a mirage, enjoying the support of the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC).

**The 1st May Day**

What is happening in Kenya today is not in any way unique. Celebrations of May Day are borrowed from a rich past.

On May 1, 1886, more than 300,000 workers from 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs in the first ever May Day celebrated in history.

On May 3rd, violence broke out at McCormick in Chicago. Workers were beaten by Police. As they responded with stones, Police replied with gunfire. Several deaths and injuries were reported.

The following day, a Public gathering was called at HAYMARKET Square to discuss the Police brutality. This meeting was attended by thousands, including the Mayor of Chicago.

From nowhere, unidentified provocateur threw a bomb at the Police ranks. Police officers and at least eight civilians lay dead thereafter.

Over hundred years have passed since that fateful 1st May Day, yet we can draw many parallels of events of that May Day today.

The owners of Capital and those in authority keep flexing undue influence to deny workers the opportunity to enjoy better conditions and rewards at work.

Our current position cannot be taken for granted. The sacrifices of so many people cannot be forgotten.

(i) We remember that people were shot so that we could have an 8-hour working day.

(ii) We remember that fateful day when workers’ houses were razed with families in them so that we could have Saturday as part of the weekend.

(iii) We recall the 8-year old victims of industrial accidents at a protest against child labour.

For these and other reasons, we in the Trade Unions Congress of Kenya have not seen anything to celebrate. We have chosen and are advising our members to celebrate in silence; and as engraved on the HAYMARKET Monument in Chicago, "The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you are throttling today."

Further, we make the following demands:

1. That the Teachers Service Commission conclude and ensure the immediate signing of the CBA with KNUT and other stake holders.

2. That the Public University Councils immediately conclude and sign all pending CBAs as negotiated by the Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU) and the Kenya Universities Staff Union (KUSU).

3. That the Public Service Commission, County Governments and all Public Employers immediately ensure that all pending business in terms of CBAs with Union of Kenya Civil Servants (UKCS), Dock Workers Union (DWU) and all other Unions that represent workers in the Sector are expedited and signed without further delay.

4. That the Salaries and Remuneration Commission do release to the public its findings in the job evaluation. Any further delay will only precipitate fears that the report is being doctored to favour vested interests.

5. That the Government be and is hereby reminded that it is its primary duty to deal mercilessly with the dragon of corruption that threatens to eat into every fabric of the society. State and Government officers are reminded of their oaths of office. They swore, and must own up and honour this promise. They chose and must bear the burden.

6. Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs recently sacked from their jobs be reinstated and subjected to due process as provided for under the Employment Act.

7. That if the demand for conclusion and signing of the CBAs as listed herein above is not concluded in good time to be factored in the budget for 2016/2017 financial year, this demand do serve as NOTICE that the Trade Unions Congress of Kenya (TUC-Ke) will commence the process of withdrawing labour in all sectors covered by employees in the Public Sector by 1st July, 2016.

Signed:

1. WILSON SOSIONN
   GENERAL SECRETARY

2. TOM MBOYA ODEGE
   NATIONAL CHAIRMAN