



PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

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25th April, 2024

PRESS RELEASE



PARLIAMENT DEBATES THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND UNION ACT, 2023

The Parliament of Sierra Leone on Thursday, 25/04/2024 debated and committed the Bill entitled "The Industrial Relations and Union Act, 2023" to the Legislative Committee for further scrutiny.

The Bill seeks to repeal the regulations of wages and the Industrial Relations Act, 1971 (Act No.18 of 1971), and the Trade Union Act (Cap221).

Presenting the Bill to Parliament before the debate, the Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations, Mr. Mohamed Rahman Swarray informed Members of Parliament (MPs) that the document was one of those old laws that deserved to be reviewed and went on to note that when enacted into law it would enhance development in the labour sector. In terms of penalties and fines, the Minister said it had been adjusted to meet labour standards. He also said it is timely for the Bill to be reviewed to meet international Standards.

In her contribution to the debate, the Deputy Parliamentary Chairperson of the Labour Committee, Hon. Emilia Lolloh Tongi from Kailahun District highlighted the historical background of the labour laws in Sierra Leone and went on to appreciate the work of the Labour Ministry. "Let's make these laws, they are beautiful for the people of Sierra Leone", she said and went on to advise the Minister to implement the Bill to the fullest.

The Deputy Chairperson assured colleague MPs that the Bill is not controversial and called on them to enact it into law.

On his part, Hon. Dr. Unpha Sorie Koroma from Western Area said the law has to be tightened up, to protect the workforce in the country. He underscored the establishment of a commission and the administration to be set to benefit the labourers and other related labour task forces. "We are creating employment for the trader's union and labour union" he emphasized. He expressed hope that what is entailed in the Bill will benefit the people of Sierra Leone.

In his contribution to the debate, Hon. Joseph Williams-Lamin from Bo District referred to the document as a good one for the development of the nation and went on to highlight the good relationship with investors and the people of Sierra Leone. The MP underscored the economic benefits of the Bill when enacted into law.

Hon. Ing. Fallah Tengbeh from Kailahun District commended the Minister of Labour for putting a fine document together and went on to define industrial relations. He said for the past years there have been a lot of transformations in industrial relations. "This document would proffer solutions for our industrial relations for the country", he said. He informed that the Act would provide skill transfers and also encourage investment and went on to say that the repeal of the Bill would enhance better opportunities.

In his submission, Hon. Tamba Kellie from Kono District said the Bill seeks to address wages and other industrial relations and went on to highlight various laws connected to the industrial relations Bill.

Hon. Umu Pyne from Moyamba District submitted that the document would lead to the creation of more trade unions in workplaces and went on to highlight some of the discrimination against workers in workplaces. "Some of the staff are not protected and if they complain they are sacked" she revealed.

Hon. Ibrahim Barrie from Bombali District said the debate is in the right place and noted that the nature of the Bill is important. The MP proposed five fundamental recommendations to be adopted in actualizing the implementation of the Bill.

In his submission, Hon. Bash Kamara from Bo District appreciated the Minister and went on to explain the importance of the industrial Bill towards the socioeconomic development of the nation. He also called on the attention of the Minister to do proper engagement and monitoring mechanisms in the industrial working places.

On his part, Hon. Mustapha Sellu from Moyamba District said the object and memorandum of reason of the Bill had explained everything connected to the successful implementation of the Bill. The MP also pinpointed the powers of the commissioners and their relevance to the development of labour laws.

Hon. Aruna P. Lakoh from Tonkolili said the Bill before the House is on the right trajectory and went on to express dismay over many laws that had been passed into law, but never being utilized to the fullest. "We need job space for the people of Sierra Leone", he concluded.

On his part, Hon. Mohamed Belloh Shaw from Falaba District submitted that the Bill should also address issues affecting those "contract workers" in the workplace and give them their rights. "Our citizens are suffering in the workplaces", he said and pleaded with the Minister to be proactive in supervising the industrial sector.

Hon. Mohamed Kanneh from Kailahun District said many foreigners are working in Sierra Leone without residential permits and requested the Minister and his officials to do the necessity to address the challenges. He also supported the establishment of the industrial court to promote its implementation and pleaded for more actions. The MP made reference to his unlawful termination by a certain entity.

Hon. Adulai Kamara from Western Area Urban said the Bill before the House would benefit Sierra Leone when enacted into law and went on to highlight the challenges perpetrated by foreign companies operating in the country on Sierra Leonean workers.

Hon. Peter Yamba from Bombali District acknowledged the hard work of the Minister of Labour but narrated how labour officers compromise with the company against compatriots. He advised the Minister to do the needful to protect workers.

Hon. Quintin Sallia-Konneh from Kailahun District appreciated the work of the Minister in transforming the labour sector. On regulation and registration, the MP emphasized adherence and compliance. "We need to sustain the full content of the law and monitor it to the fullest" he maintained.

In rounding up the debate, the Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Daniel Koroma commended the Minister and went on to remind the House that any Bill without the object, memorandum, and reason should not be placed in the House for consideration.

He said the Bill before the House seeks to provide and protect labour matters and also highlighted the challenges involved in its implementation. "The Bill is technical and it is connected to the bread and butter issue of the country", he said. On work permits, he said adherence is very difficult for foreign workers to comply. He also said the Bill gave more powers to the labour union and requested the union to act to ensure the protection of workers.

In concluding the debate, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie thanked His Excellency the President for the appointment of the Labour Minister and also acknowledged the powers of the law before the House. He acknowledged the work of the Minister and referred to him as a visionary Minister. The MP used the opportunity to advise all and sundry to be proactive in their work. "These offices are transitional offices", he noted. The Leader explained the relevance of the composition of the board and the commissioners.

The Leader also went on to explain the roles and responsibilities of the secretary to the board and also the appointment of the commissioners.

"When we make laws we should not consider ourselves but we should consider institutions and the interest of the nation", he concluded.

In another development also, the Parliament of Sierra Leone on Thursday debated the proposed tollgate increment fees as presented by the Parliamentary Committee on Works and Public Assets Chaired by the Deputy Leader and Leader of Government Business Hon. Bashiru Silikie. "On the inquiry into the proposed adjustment of the Wellington-Masiaka Toll gate tariff.

After an intensive debate on the report, from the Leadership and Members of Parliament it was recommended that the various adjustments be made to the proposed new tollgate charges to be reduced, in order to meet the affordability of the citizens.

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