

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT
LABOUR DAY—1st MAY, 1980**

MY DEAR COUNTRYMEN,

This is the occasion every year when we can all get to grips with reality, appreciating that development of our Republic critically depends upon the dedication and the productivity of labour.

In the course of other public ceremonies, I have given details of economic problems with which Kenya is confronted, many of which are global in nature and beyond the control of any individual state. In some degree, these problems have been compounded by Domestic difficulties, associated with climate and with the demands of a rapidly rising population.

But my message today is that frustrations to development and human progress represent a challenge which all of us must face together: Government, farmers, private industry, and workers in every sector of the national economy. This is not a challenge which we can overcome through half-hearted approaches to work, or by simply sitting back and hoping for the best.

To keep up the pace of material advancement and social development, in this present phase, calls for increased production from the land and from all manufacturing plant, alongside more intensive and more efficient public services. I have therefore been disturbed by some reports of absenteeism or slackness in places of work. Our country at this time cannot afford to bear the cost of unproductive labour. Within the whole economy, there must now be introduced sterner measures of discipline. In this regard and as far as the private sector is concerned, I shall expect trade unions to support employers, whenever action is taken against workers who are unreliable or lazy. In each case, safeguards provided by the Public Service Commission or the Trade Dispute Act will be sustained, to ensure that no employees are unfairly

penalized or dismissed. But everyone must understand that no employer can tolerate idleness. Indeed our nation cannot afford such practices in any of our sectors.

While on this same general theme, I should reaffirm that strikes and lock-outs are activities which no small and developing nation like Kenya can accommodate. The purpose of Government, and surely the real purpose of trade unions as well, is to secure greater social justice for the people in every corner of our Republic. The means to this end, as I have already mentioned, is an ever-increasing output of goods and services, and not the kind of confrontation between employers and workers which results in reduced production.

In cases of genuine dispute, there is adequate negotiating machinery, under the law, made fully available to both sides. In extreme instances, when all voluntary and statutory processes for settlement have been exhausted, a general secretary may call a strike, but this year, we have had more than twenty strikes, called by shop-stewards or union officials, in complete contravention of law. It must be made clear to such instigators, henceforth, that the declaration of any illegal strike is a punishable offence which will be dealt with in our courts.

Trade unions which once played such a prominent part in the struggle for Kenya's independence must recognize the situation facing us today demand that their task be to co-operate fully with the Government in all fields. There is no place in our modern society for union leaders who agitate for parochial or sectional interests, or who believe that their principal function is to foment some industrial unrest.

Following the general election last year, when our people determined the composition of the National Assembly and of Local Authority, this in turn is the election year for Cotu and the affiliated trade unions. It is my express wish today that the conduct of these polls should be as peaceful and orderly as was the general election itself. Workers themselves have a clear and Constitutional right to vote for any candidate of their choice, and I urge them to select their leaders wisely.

Official policy in the past has always been rooted in desire to encourage and to work with strong, viable and responsible trade unions, together, of course, with comparable associations of employers. My Government fully endorses this general attitude, and will ensure that it is sustained.

The Federation of Kenya Employers has emerged today as a powerful and well-organized institution, with a group of salaried executives who can advise the federation and represent employers at any level of negotiation, right up to the Industrial Court. On the other hand, Cotu does not seem to have any similar structure of organization which fact could well represent a bargaining weakness. It would seem to me of considerable importance that Cotu, as well as some of the major unions, should establish a permanent body of officers, recruited on merit and working within the law along professional lines that is with fullest understanding of all attendant principles and practices. There is no present shortage of university graduates, who could be considered, with some special training, for such appointments. But it will be vital for any salaried officials to confine themselves to economic and administrative affairs, without ever getting involved in national or trade union politics.

In more general terms, I believe it is now time to renew the whole question of manpower training in our country. As you are all aware, Government has provided and is maintaining many different training institutions and specialized training facilities. The training levy has proved very useful and successful, in enhancing the skills of our own industrial technicians, but we still have resources which are under-utilized, or opportunities which cannot be seized, through lack of suitably-trained personnel.

I am sure that the Harambee Institutes of Technology can contribute enormously towards overcoming this problem. Indeed, it will be the Government policy to ensure that they do so.

I should mention as well that craft training centres, under the Ministry of Labour, are now playing a critical part in preparing school-leavers for self-employment and development in the rural areas, through the acquisition of creative skills. These institutions

should be expanded, in numbers and scope, to absorb and assist many more of our school-leavers over coming years.

One of the constant problems faced by employees is that of housing, and with more and more workers always flowing into urban centres, the difficulties are becoming more acute. Everyone concerned should be ready to take some effective steps in confronting this serious issue. My Government is doing everything possible, and the number of available housing units is being significantly increased by Local Authorities. But I am sure that, as yet, employers are not doing as much as they could and should in this whole context. It is equally true that workers must make some contribution as well, and I would like to see much more initiative being taken in the direction of setting up housing co-operatives.

A great deal of importance is attached by my Government to provisions calculated to ensure the safety and health of workers. Suitable infrastructures and regulations will therefore be accompanying all plans for the further expansion of industry. One particular project, to counter occupational diseases and accidents, has already been launched with the assistance of the International Labour Organization and the Government of Finland. Furthermore, the Factories Inspectorate within the Ministry of Labour is being strengthened, and will be technically equipped to embark on in-depth studies of any working environment.

As one of the critical provisions for the welfare of workers in Kenya, the National Social Security Fund was established in 1965. It now has one million members, and is collecting an average of 45 million shillings per month, from which workers who retire are being paid about four million shillings in monthly benefits.

The N.S.S.F. is one of the finest examples of co-operation, in this case between Government, employers and workers in all parts of the country. Although mainly an instrument of welfare, with provisions which will be expanded, the fund has so far invested nearly 200 million pounds in a variety of nation-building projects or programmes.

Finally, let me turn to the question of wages. In most cases, wages have been negotiated between employers and unions, with agreements expected to be in line with Wages Guidelines issued periodically to the Industrial Court by the Minister for Finance. Since such guidelines were first issued in 1973, they have been amended several times in accordance with changing economic circumstances, and this whole broad system is to be continued.

But there are some categories of employees, in respect of whom other machinery exists and whose wages have not been reviewed since 1977. My Government therefore invited recommendations from the General Wages Advisory Board and the Agricultural Wages Advisory Board. The proposals submitted by these boards have been carefully studied by the Government and I am happy on this occasion to announce the basic minimum consolidated wages to be paid to unskilled employees.

The new minimum wage in the agricultural industry will now be Sh. 215 per month instead of Sh. 175 as before. For the unskilled employees in Nairobi and Mombasa Municipalities, the new wage will rise from Sh. 350 per month to Sh. 456 per month. In all the other municipalities and the urban councils of Kericho, Kisii, Malindi and Naivasha, the minimum wage will be Sh. 418 per month compared with Sh. 310 per month as before. In all other areas of the Republic, the minimum wage will rise from Sh. 205 per month to Sh. 266 per month. The Minister for Labour will shortly be issuing the necessary Legal Notices giving full details.

These increases in minimum wages are only but a reflection of the Government and its institutions to ensure rising living standards for all our people. Indeed, and as the Kanu Party said as long ago as 1963, our party believes in a higher wage economy. However, for that objective to be achieved and sustained there must be increasing productivity in all our sectors; and in this connexion workers play a very big part in determining that productivity. The harder we all work, the higher will be the rate of our development and therefore the opportunity for all of us to benefit. In other words, we must steadily increase the size of the national cake.

It is therefore my earnest hope that with these new increases in minimum wages, the workers will make even greater efforts to increase production.

Finally, I would now like to wish you all, the workers of Kenya, a very happy Labour Day.

**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,
NAIROBI.**