

Let teachers strike in holidays, so pupils won't be losers



**TAKE
YOUR Q**

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IS IT TIME for the law to change in order to make it illegal for school teachers to strike? Of course not. They must be allowed to strike – but only during school holidays.

During term time, education should be deemed an essential service and teachers should be forced to remain in classrooms teaching rather than being out on the streets toyi-toying.

A workers' right to strike may be enshrined in the Constitution but, and this

seems to get forgotten amid the fiery rhetoric, the Constitution also says no rights are absolute and all should be accompanied by concomitant responsibilities.

In the case of clearly conflicting rights – that of a teacher to strike versus that of a child to be educated – I cannot see why the teacher, who is, after all, an already educated adult, wins.

The question of protected strikes is important at the moment because nurses, teachers and other unionised public servants – and I use the word reluctantly – are gearing up to walk out on their duties. Nothing, it seems, is going to stop them.

This is despite the fact that of all the problems that this country faces, unemployment among the youth is the biggest and most intractable, underpinning most of everything else that is wrong.

Recent data released by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) show that the proportion of youth under the age of 24 who cannot find work is now at 74 percent.

And three quarters of job losses in the recession affected people under 34 years of age. The recession also axed 46 percent of all jobs created since 2000.

Since 1994 the unemployment rate has climbed from around 13 percent to about 25 percent (excluding discouraged job seekers who have simply given up looking).

The people who make up these terrible statistics are not the children of the suburban middle class. They are not the kids of politicians or even, dare I say it, union officials. They are the offspring of the poor and destitute.

They are born into poverty and, because the system doesn't work for them and nobody has the political courage to do what is needed to fix it, they are destined to remain mired in it.

Just think about that for a second.

And then think about the fact that the people best suited to helping address the problems faced by an enormous group of largely unemployable young people, their

teachers, believe passionately that it's okay to jeopardise what little hope these kids have for a better life.

How can this be allowed to continue?

If workers were as enthusiastic about their responsibilities as they were about their rights, I would probably support them wholeheartedly. But they aren't. The data on South Africa's educational achievements and health-care systems prove this.

Not content with giving us a society with child mortality rates that rank among the worst in the world and with around a million unemployable young people exiting the school system every year, this country's labour elite are now demanding that their pay should rise by about twice the current rate of inflation.

In other words, workers are claiming that even though they refuse to work harder or more efficiently than they did before – normal grounds for above-inflation pay hikes – they deserve far more than a cost-of-living adjustment to their pay packets.

The reason they give is that others have received such large increases so they should too.

The knock-on effect of these demands – such as more babies dying and more matriculants failing – matters not at all to the trade unions.

And the fact that they are going to raise the cost of living for every South African, including the poor and unemployed who they falsely claim to represent alongside their employed labour constituents, is not relevant either.

After it is all over, when the union leadership collectively crows about the success of the strike, do you think they will spare a thought for how the granny who is looking after several orphaned kids copes when the costs of everything rises? Of course they won't.

That would require something special and recent experience has shown us that that something special is in very short supply in this country of ours.

