

The fight for a living wage

The Annual wage negotiations between the Chamber of Mines and the NUM directly affect 220 000 of our members. However the negotiations also affect a further 300 000 mineworkers because the Chamber settlement is usually used as a basis for setting the wages for workers who are still unorganised and are not yet members of the union.

In 1990, the results of the Chamber negotiations were both good and bad.

BEST WAGE INCREASE SINCE 1987

How do we judge whether a wage increase is good or bad? The first way to decide is to see if the wage increases beat inflation. In the year July 1989 to July 1990, prices rose by 14 percent. This means that for every R100 a worker earned in 1989, he needs R114 in 1990 - just to be able to buy the same as he bought last year.

So for a wage increase to pass the first test of being "good" it must be above the 14 percent inflation level.

All the wage increases negotiated by the NUM with the Chamber of Mines were above the 14 percent inflation level.

	GRADE 1 INCREASE	GRADE 8 INCREASE
Recognised gold mines	17%	14,5%
Amcoal	18,6%	17,8%
GF coal	17%	14,5%
Douglas	15,8%	15,7%
Tavistock	17,5%	15%
Duiker	17,5%	17,5%
T-Natal	30,8%	15,6%
Durnacol	30,7%	17,5%

The coal wage increases were higher in percentage terms, because the union demanded that the gap between coal and gold mines needed to close and because

coal profits have increased a lot in the past year.

Overall the wage increases were the best won by the union since 1987. Despite the fact that the negotiations took place at a time when the gold price had fallen very low, the wage increases were surprisingly "good".

RAND INCREASES	
Anglo gold	68 - 177
Genmin gold	61 - 184
GFSA gold	55 - 169
* Harmony	63 - 178
Amcoal	74 - 190
JCI coal	66 - 160
GF coal	55 - 158
Genmin coal	93 - 176
Douglas	78 - 178
Lonrho	53 - 178
* Durnacol	94 - 172

This does not mean that the mine bosses were suddenly being "generous" with their increases, but that the organisation we have built up on the mines over so many years has made NUM a force to be reckoned with. Management is forced to take our demands seriously...

WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

At the National Congress in 1989, NUM demanded:

- A national minimum wage for mineworkers to R600 underground and R543 surface;
- A common wage structure for the entire mining industry;
- Narrower wage gaps between black and white workers.

After long negotiations, the Chamber of Mines finally agreed that the wage structure was discriminatory. They agreed to work towards a common pay structure in the gold and coal mines.

While this is a major victory for the union, the Chamber refused to give any timetable for introducing one pay scale. This means that we have to continue to fight to see that this does happen.

GAPS BETWEEN MINING HOUSES

A further problem for the union is that again the gaps between the various mining houses have grown even bigger. Last year Goldfields paid R97 below Anglo. Now after further increases, the gap is R113.

This is a difficult situation for the union. Most of our members are at the "higher-pay" mines (that is why they pay more!). Why should well-organised Anglo workers get a smaller increase than less-organised Goldfields? We don't want to lower the wage levels of our highest paid workers just for the sake of a common pay structure. This defeats our whole fight for a living wage!

Our only cure is to build better organisation in the lower paying mines as well.

So while 1990 was a year in which we were able to make important gains, it is clear that we need to build organised strength in ALL our mines if we are really going to win a real living wage for ALL mineworkers.

