

THE BATTLE FOR A LIVING WAGE HAS STARTED

The battle for a living wage has started between the NUM and the Chamber of Mines as annual wage negotiations start.

The negotiations started on the 4th of June, with the NUM carrying a clear mandate of demands endorsed by Congress. These demands take into account the current crisis faced by gold mines.

Congress has endorsed higher wage demands for coal mines, and an emphasis on non-wage demands for the gold mines.

Mineworkers are committed to the changing of their conditions of work so that they can enjoy basic workers' rights.

These are the non-wage demands that have been put to the Chamber of Mines:

* Trade Union rights:

- NUM officials must have full rights of access to all recognised mines;

- Every recognised mine must provide an office with furniture and a telephone for use by shaft stewards and Union officials;

- Full-time shaft stewards should be recognised;

- Shaft stewards must be granted 10 days fully paid to attend Trade Union Training Courses;

- The change in membership fees should be implemented automatically with immediate effect to all current NUM members.

* Labour Rights:

- All NUM members must be guaranteed the following rights:

- the right to freedom of association;
- the right to strike, consistent with agreements, procedures and the law;
- the right to shaft steward representation in disciplinary and grievance proceedings;
- the right to picket.

* Human Rights:

All NUM members must have:

- the right to peaceful assembly;
- the right to freedom of movement;
- the right to freedom of expression;
- the right to privacy;
- the right to human dignity and equality before the law, rules and procedures on the mines.

Social Rights:

- the running of hostels should be handed over to democratically elected committees of workers;

- All mines must improve provisions they make for visits by workers' wives by increasing the number of existing guest houses by 50%;

- recreational facilities must be controlled by workers.

De Beers offer insults workers

De Beers has offered mineworkers an initial 3.05% wage increase for this year. Negotiations between the NUM and De Beers affects about 10 000 workers.

The NUM is demanding wage increases that will enable workers to cope with the current rate of inflation estimated to be at 14%.

Initial demands from the NUM ranged from a monthly wage increase of R235 to R649 from categories A1 to C1. De Beers bosses have offered 3,5% across the board, stating as a reason the need for the survival of the company.

De Beers is bent on starving mineworkers by giving monthly wage increases ranging from R24 to R66.

This management offer falls far short of the union's wage policy as adopted by the 6th National Congress in 1989. The ultimate goal of this policy is for all mineworkers to be paid a living wage as opposed to the current starvation wages.

Other demands by the NUM are:

* March 21st to be recognised as a paid mine holiday;

* An equal production, safety and house-keeping bonus system for all workers;

* The company should agree to give financial assistance to all workers and their dependants for any field of study they may wish to pursue;

* All workers should receive 1.5% of their basic salary plus R100 for every year of service.

* The implementation date of wage increases should be May 1st 1991 for all divisions.

Mandela's message to the mineworkers

The ANC recognises that the mining industry is facing a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Johannesburg, the "city of gold", bears the scars of decades of burrowing deep underground for that most precious of metals, gold.

The dust that blows into the townships comes from the mine dumps that have become a geographical feature of this city. But the scars that cover the most painful wounds are those deep inside every mineworker in this country.

You know what it is to work in the heat deep in the bowels of the earth. You know the fear of being buried alive underground. You know the humiliation of body searches and being treated like worthless cattle.

You know the loneliness of hostel life, the control of your every move. You know the painful death that comes from inhaling the dust that destroys your lungs, that kills your children when they play in dumps of blue asbestos waste.

Yet it is your sweat and blood that has created the vast wealth that White South Africa enjoys. You dig for diamonds, platinum, gold - the precious metals that adorn the rich.

Yet in times of crisis, such as the industry now faces, you are the first to be retrenched. In the recent past 60 000 workers have lost their jobs. Thousands more are threatened. We are told this is because of the low gold price, the slump in the gold jewellery industry and the international cut in demand.

This may well be the case, given the worldwide recession, but we still expect the mine owners and employers to look beyond job cuts as a solution to the problem. I fully endorse the decision taken by the NUM to call for a Summit of the decision-makers of



Nelson Mandela with a sheep skin presented to him by the NUM at Congress.

the industry and the government to tackle this issue.

Alternative solutions must be found that take into account you, the workers, without whom mining is impossible. The crisis is of such proportions that a national response is required. The consequences for the entire country of such retrenchments will be devastating.

The rural areas, already impoverished, will be hard hit. Foreign exchange earnings will be dramatically reduced. We assure you that the ANC will do whatever is necessary to ensure that this crisis is addressed at the highest level.

The violence is designed to create divisions among the African people, especially between Zulu and Xhosa, hostel dweller and township resident. Mine workers have a very important role to play in defusing the tensions.

We call on all of you to organise in these hostels. Act together with township residents to isolate those who bring death and destruction. Isolate the vigilantes, and act against the levies for the purchase of weapons.