

Mineworkers at the bottom of wages ladder

MINEWORKERS earn very low wages. They are at the bottom of the wage ladder.

The picture of the "wage ladder" shows that miners are amongst the lowest paid workers in the economy.

Wages of mineworkers are low, but the jobs are the most dangerous of all. It is the mineworkers who produce the gold, the coal and the minerals that have made the economy strong.

The NUM has made wage demands every year for six years. The wage increases have kept up with prices but the end results are very disappointing.

Today the buying power of the Chamber of Mines minimum wage underground is less than in 1975!

Here we can see the Chamber of Mines wage policy at work. This is a policy of profits for the mine-owners and poverty for the mine workers.

The mining houses all have their own different wage rates for each job category. Workers do the same work - but they get different pay.

The underground minimum rates under Chamber mines are as follows:

Category 1 Underground Minimum Monthly Wage Rates in 1988/9:

	Gold	Coal
Anglo American	R385	R370
JCI	R384	R334
Rand Mines	R380	R341
Gencor	R350	R297
Gold Fields	R329	R278

The NUM Collective Bargaining Department has prepared a

union wage policy. Regions and workers must discuss the proposals for a new wage policy before Congress.

Smash poverty wages

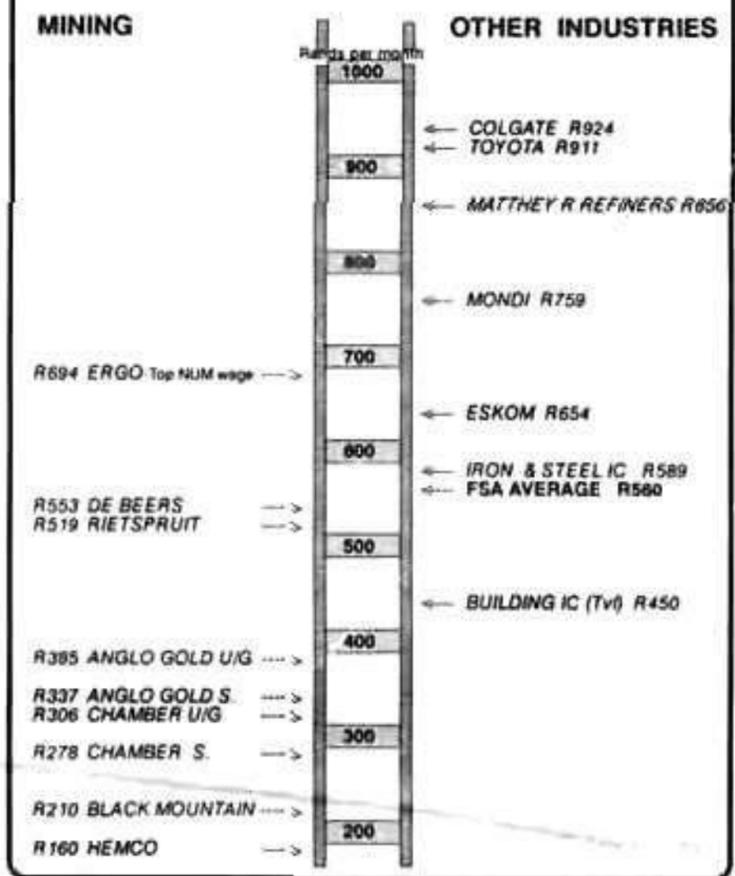
The suggested policy aims to build organisation to smash the poverty wages set by the Chamber gold and coal mines.

This union wage policy demands:

- A national minimum wage in the mining industry
- A minimum wage for each job grade. Wages must depend on the job done, not on which mining house administers the mine.
- A move towards a living wage by 1991.
- A narrowing of the wage gap between grade 1 and grade 8.
- Underground workers must get more than the surface workers.

Minimum Wages in Mining are Low

This "wage ladder" shows the monthly minimum wage (for "labourers") in mining and in other industries.



Branches must form living wage committees

THE campaign for a living wage must be taken forward in 1989. The union needs strong organisation and a wage policy to counter the attacks of the bosses on our living standards.

Every branch must participate in the Living Wage campaign. There should be a Living Wage Committee - with about six members - responsible for spreading the campaign in the branch. The tasks of a Living Wage Committee at branch level will be:

- To organise discussions on the living wage and the unions wage policy.
- To distribute all information on the living wage campaign.
- To keep copies of the wage agreements concluded with the bosses and to monitor their implementation on a regular basis.
- To collect pamphlets handed out by the bosses on the wage question.
- To keep contact with branch committee, the Living wage committee at regional level and the Collective Bargaining department at head office level.

Regions must set up Living Wage committees. They must encourage the branches and arrange rallies and meetings.

Regions should also liaise with other COSATU affiliates and community organisations.

National minimum wage in 1989?

PERCENTAGES rather than money demands in wage bargaining are being rejected by workers.

"We went along to assist the Lydenburg region with a workshop on conditions of employment", the NUM Collective Bargaining Department told NUM News.

"The aim was to spread discussion about the demands for negotiations in 1989 and to practice writing resolutions to debate at the NUM congress."

Forty comrades from eleven branches attended the one-day workshop.

"We began by discussing wages." Every year since it started the NUM has put in a demand for percentage wage increases.

In 1988 the NUM congress resolved that all workers must get a 40% wage increase.

The comrades from head office asked the Lydenburg comrades if this would be a good demand for 1989 as well.

Calculations

They wrote up on a black board all the minimum wages in the region. Next they calculated the rand increase that would be 40%

above the present minimum rates. The result of that follows the minimum wage in brackets:

Mine:Minimum	40% increase
CMI: R679	(R272)
TUBATSE:R625	(R250)
WINTERVELD:R448	(R179)
LAVINO:R415	(R166)
VERREF:R405	(R162)
MONTROSE:R367	(R147)
CULLINAN:R310	(R121)
DILOKONG:R295	(R118)
HEMCO:R160	(R64)

The seminar then divided into five groups to discuss the question: Is this traditional union demand of a straight percentage wage increase of 40% a good demand for 1989?

The workshop said that this "across-the-board" percentage increase is unfair to workers. These were the reasons the workshop decided on:

1. The percentage demand is unfair because many workers do not understand percentages. They are not sure what a 40% increase means.

They may think it is 40 cents increase or 40 rand increase. Often, they just think it is a big amount, and then are disappointed when they get only a few rands increase.

The percentage demand is unclear to workers. It leads to false expectations because of this.

2. The percentage wage demand is unfair because it means a big rand increase for workers with a high wage (like at CMI), but a low wage increase for workers with a low wage (like at

Hemco). The single 40% demand is adopted because mineworkers want to show the bosses that they are united.

What it means is that the union is asking for a R64 increase for cleaners at Hemco, and R272 increase for cleaners at CMI.

Workers at CMI already earn three times more than Hemco workers! The workshop thought that there should be a bigger increase for the Hemco workers, and all those at the bottom.

3. The percentage wage demand can divide the workers. In the negotiations, the union always comes down below its opening demand.

The negotiators may come down to 20%. For high-paid workers, a 20% increase is satisfactory. They may want to settle. But 20% for low-paid workers may not even be a R100 increase. This problem occurs within bargaining units.

20% increase may be acceptable to grade 8 workers - but it is much less acceptable to grade 4 or grade 1 workers.

These were the suggestions from the Lydenburg Workshop

- A national minimum wage for the mining industry in South Africa. Suggestions were for a minimum wage demand between R600 and R800 per month.

- The demands must be in money terms and not in percentage terms so that workers can understand the demands more easily.

