

Eskom workers march to stop job losses

More than 3000 Eskom workers marched to the company's head quarters at Megawatt Park on June 29 to demand an end to restructuring which has already cost thousands of jobs.

Workers stayed on the premises while a small delegation from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA) and Electricity Workers Union (EWU) negotiated with the bosses.

After four hours workers had scored a major victory when Eskom agreed to their demands.

The demands were:

- That Eskom must suspend its current programme of restructuring;

- That all mothballing of power stations units be stopped;

- That the programme of restructuring be referred to a national forum; and

- Eskom will not carry on any privatisation activities, in-



Mass action: some of the protestors outside Eskom's head office.

cluding privatising peripheral services.

The Eskom Accord

Eskom and the unions agreed on the following:

1. An Eskom/trade unions summit to address various issues of mutual concern will take place as soon as possible.

Both Eskom and the unions agreed to speed up the establishment of this forum;

2. Eskom undertook not to retrench any worker until such time as the management of

surplus staff has been discussed at the summit or an agreement reached between Eskom and the unions

3. Eskom will be subject to paragraph 4 below continue to:

- 3.1. consider applications for voluntary separation;

- 3.2. use voluntary retraining and redevelopment strategies to deal with surplus staff.

4. Eskom undertook, where surplus arise, to communicate to groups that are affected, on what options are available and invite them to discuss these options.

Unions, Eskom start historic summit

Unions representing Eskom workers met with the bosses on July 21 to discuss ways and means of involving workers in decision-making structures at Eskom.

The meeting was attended by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), National Union of Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA), the Electrical Workers Union (EWU), and white unions.

The agenda of the meeting was 'open-ended', although the main purpose was to discuss the establishment of structures through which workers can participate in decisions that affect them at work.

At the start of the meeting, all the parties raised points that they see as important and need to be on the agenda.

The NUM put forward the following proposals:

Management board

The board of Eskom has always been dominated by a group of white males to the exclusion of the workers.

This will have to be changed so as to reflect the nature of Eskom. An immediate change must be the inclusion of workers representatives in the board.

Restructuring

Eskom must learn the process of consultation. Decisions have always been taken behind closed doors, and then passed on to workers and their unions. Unions get called to meetings to endorse these decisions. "This is an unacceptable situation," Gwede Mantashe of the NUM told the meeting. "We want to be involved in those decision-making structures," Mantashe continued.

Broad participation

The NUM proposed how the summit should be structured. The immediate goal of the summit must be to involve shop stewards as well as middle and lower management in this exercise.

As Mantashe puts it: "The process must be shaped by people in the power stations and business units. It's no use sitting around flashy boardrooms exchanging brilliant ideas when people who engage with one another on a daily basis do not understand the process."

Mineworkers Defy Apartheid Rule

Mineworkers have demonstrated their support for the peace and democracy campaign by staying away in their thousands on August 3 and 4, despite widespread intimidation.

Over 170 000 mineworkers participated in the two-day stayaway on August 3 and 4, in support of the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance call for peace and democracy.

Diamond mines were hardest hit with 90 percent of the workforce staying away on both days.

Gold miners took part in large numbers especially on the first day with 60 - 70 percent stayaway on some mines.

On Gold Fields mines the call

was supported by about 30 percent.

Repression by mine security and anti-NUM elements forced thousands of workers to work.

Violence erupted at GFSA's East Driefontein Gold Mine near Carletonville and resulted in the deaths of five workers.

Repression was also severe at Platinum Mines situated in the bantustan of Bophuthatswana where 30 percent participated in the action.

Coal mineworkers observed the stayaway in large numbers registering 80 percent on some mines.

Disciplinary action including dismissals has been taken by Amcoal, JCI, Duiker, Randcoal and Genmin.

Action planned against bosses who dismiss workers

Companies that dismiss workers for participating in the forthcoming general strike will face a campaign to isolate them.

The tripartite alliance took a decision to mobilise international support against those companies that will dismiss workers for heeding the call to stayaway from work on August 3 and 4.

The campaign will include the isolation of such companies in the international markets.

The isolation of South Africa from international sport will also be considered.

A second legal general strike will be called to force companies to stop mass dismissals and for the reinstatement of all workers dismissed because of the general strike.