



# Most people have no electricity. So why is Eskom retrenching?

**ESKOM'S decision to retrench workers and cease some of its activities has been rejected by the union.**

The decision which will affect over 5300 jobs in the next three years.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the Electricity Workers Union (EWU) have also supported the declaration of a dispute with Eskom.

## Unions declare dispute

The decision to call a dispute was taken after Eskom failed to consider the union's proposals of shorter working hours or to examine alternatives to lessen or avoid retrenchment of its workers.

Eskom seems unwilling to negotiate in good faith. Instead it seems intent on going ahead with its downscaling of its plant which will have serious effects on the coal mines which supply the power stations.

Eskom has claimed that the reason for the retrenchment is the over capacity of electricity which is not needed by its users.

Eskom's Chief Executive, Ian Mc Ray said: "Eskom's position of over capacity goes back beyond eighteen months ..... in fact before 1983 signs of a drop off in demand... became evident". He said retrenchments are nearly the last step.

Eskom's position is due to mismanagement and bad planning. "If they knew over 18 months ago, why did they only inform the unions about two months ago, that they intended to retrench", said comrade Gwede Mantashe, National Organiser of the NUM.

Comrade Mantashe said Eskom is trying to fool the workers and the public. The main reason was that they are mismanaged, and now workers have to take the brunt of this bad planning.

Eskom must surely be lying! How can they claim they have an over capacity of electricity, and need to reduce the workforce, when 80% of the country continues to live in darkness?

They admit that out of every ten households, eight do not have electricity. It is clear that Eskom is only concerned about profit and that the advertisements that they are concerned about people are lies.

## Profit not jobs

Eskom has put profit and not jobs as its main concern.

The rationalisation of the workforce seems in line with the intention of Eskom to privatise. Eskom started to retrench workers in 1986, and this was followed again in March 1988.

By the end of 1989 Eskom hopes to have reduced the workforce of 57 000 which employees due 52 000. Put simply, Eskom wants less workers to

produce the same or more electricity than they have today.

Eskom's decision to retrench is to make the company more attractive for privatisation. Eskom has refused to admit that it intends privatising.

They have refused to give the union any information of its future plans on privatisation, or even how it intends electrifying the country.

The union has asked Eskom the following questions:-

- What do they intend doing about bringing light to millions of our people in the townships?
- Why do they need to destroy jobs when other alternatives can be looked at?
- Why are they hiding information from the unions about privatisation?
- Why do they not work shorter working hours like other energy sectors in other parts of the world?

Eskom has had no answers to these questions.

## Union unity

When Eskom informed the unions of its intention to retrench workers, we worked closely with NUMSA and EWU as well as the white Eskom unions.

This was an important step in getting unions building unity and solidarity against job losses.

A joint memorandum was sent to Eskom, setting out alternatives to the intended retrenchment

programme.

Among the most important recommendations made to Eskom to avoid retrenchments were the following:-

- The introduction of shorter working hours per week.
- The trade unions believe that the working week of all workers should be reduced by five hours.
- The limitation of overtime.
- All contracting work for maintenance and line and sub-station should cease at once and all these jobs be given to present Eskom employees.
- Placing an embargo on both the recruitment of additional and replacement of workers. This will allow for natural attrition and to encourage training and re-training of Eskom workers to fill future positions.
- Eskom must stop employing of temporary labour and consultants.

As a last resort the trade unions are willing to consider short time in order to limit the redundancies.

## Shorter working hours

The demand for shorter working hours would require no worker to be retrenched. Instead, Eskom would have to consider employing more workers.

Presently Eskom workers would work 40 and 45 hours per week. If working hours were

reduced by 5, instead of destroying jobs, more jobs will be created in the plants.

In the United Kingdom, for example, energy workers work 37 hours per week.

Eskom rejected the proposals without providing reasonable alternatives to the union.

It refused to provide reasons why the proposals submitted by the unions were not considered.

The NUM, NUMSA and EWU suggested, before it declared a dispute, that Eskom consider a commission of inquiry, to study the proposals of shorter working hours and the alternatives submitted by unions in its attempts to avoid retrenchment.

## What is Eskom hiding?

Eskom rejected the proposal. What are they hiding? Why do they not want the public or workers to know their plans?

In spite of the union's demands to stop retrenchment, Eskom has said that they intend proceeding with the retrenchment of workers. This they intend doing even though the unions have not signed the retrenchment agreement.

They have already notified workers that they intend implementing the retrenchment.

Energy workers want jobs not money.

NUM, NUMSA and EWU have committed themselves to fighting for jobs and preventing job losses.

## Moses Mayekiso out on bail

**MOSES Mayekiso, the general secretary of NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of SA), is out of detention on R10 000 bail.**

He and his four co-accused were welcomed joyfully by union members, friends and family following their release on Monday, 12 December.

Moses Mayekiso had spent 900 days in detention. A massive campaign of solidarity internationally and inside South Africa drew attention to his case.

Mayekiso and Paul Tshabalala, Richard Mdakane, Obed Bapela and Mzwanele Mayekiso face charges of treason, alternatively sedition.



Out on bail with heavy restrictions: NUMSA's MOSES MAYEKISO is greeted by his wife

## NUM branch leader stopped at border

MEMBERS of the NUM coming from neighbouring countries are being victimised.

One such case is that of Louis Lithakong. Lithakong, a Lesotho citizen and former vice-chairman of a NUM branch committee, went on holiday leave in August. His contract to work at Doornfontein gold mine was renewed.

But on trying to re-enter South Africa he was stopped by customs officials who asked him what his union affiliation was. After informing them of his NUM membership, he was told according to their records he was not a "listed" person.

"My passport had an unusual mark, an 'L' which was never explained", said Lithakong. TEBA in Lesotho failed to give a satisfactory explanation.

The Carletonville region of the NUM has taken the matter up with management - who deny any hand in the matter.