



Retrenchment victory!

After many rounds of negotiations, NUM has scored a major victory in fighting retrenchments. A retrenchment agreement was signed with Anglo's Freegold South Mine which reduces proposed retrenchments from almost 8 8 000 to 1 800.

The agreement lays down retrenchment rules & procedures. It is the first agreement which offers at least some form of protection against arbitrary retrenchments which have become the order of the day.

Ever since the mining industry began to retrench workers, NUM has accused the industry of trying to protect their profits, rather than save jobs. A huge anti-retrenchment campaign was launched. This included a massive show of strength by mineworkers as they marched in their thousands on Anglo-American's offices, demanding that retrenchments not be used as a union-bashing tactic.

At least 25 000 workers have lost their jobs in the past two years and mining companies have announced that more than 20 000 jobs will be lost by the end of this year. NUM estimates that 100 000 miners could be out of jobs within the

next 10 years.

Freegold South, which employs more than 107 000 workers is the biggest gold mine in the world.

According to the union's calculations, Freegold South would have saved R 100 million in wages had they gone ahead with the proposed 7 800 retrenchments.

However, the union argued that the retrenchments could be staved off if workers were given an additional three weeks' unpaid leave.

The second major victory which the union won was to ensure that retrenched workers would be re-employed as soon as possible at their existing rate of pay and that their transport costs to return to the mine would be paid by the company.

A similar retrenchment agreement was reached with another Anglo-American division, Amcoal. Amcoal agreed to establish a retrenchment fund of R1 million, which would be administered jointly by the union and the company and would be used to compensate retrenched workers.

While a million rand will not go far to address the needs of so many workers,

the principle established remains a victory for mineworkers.

The money will be used to train workers so that they can gain new skills. Paid for by the bosses, the training will include welding, motor mechanics, carpentry and brick-laying.

These agreements represent a significant step forward. For the first time in the history of the mining industry problems are being addressed through joint union/management consultation and negotiation.

After the announcement of massive retrenchments by mining companies a few months ago, NUM accused the bosses of economic mismanagement and a serious lack of social responsibility towards miners.

Now for the first time the bosses have been willing to discuss cost-saving measures and how to re-structure the mining industry during times of recession.

For NUM the retrenchment agreements reached are a hardwon victory. After many years of struggle to protect miners' rights NUM is making sure that people come before profits.