

The case for a national minimum wage for mineworkers

THE NUM is demanding a national minimum wage while the Chamber of Mines is resisting tooth and nail.

A national minimum wage means all mining houses will pay the same basic wage to workers in the lowest grade, if not more.

The minimum wage decided on at Congress is R600 a month for underground workers and R543 for surface workers. The union did not reach this figure in negotiations, but mineworkers were able to accept the rises the Chamber offered for the time being.

However, industrial action may be necessary at some time to force the bosses towards a decent wage.

A national minimum wage is the first step towards moving mineworkers to a living wage.

The NUM has also proposed wages for the various wage grades above the minimum. This is to build a standard of pay for the different jobs in the industry. At present the scales of pay vary very much between the different mining houses.

The union believes the wages of workers should depend on the job they do, not the mineral they mine or the mining house that administers the mine.

First step

Uniformity in the various grades may take time to establish, but the union believes the first step is to establish a national minimum wage.

The minimum wage that the union has demanded - although not achieved in negotiations with the Chamber - is a very reasonable sum.

It is in line with wages in the manufacturing industry. What the new NUM wage policy wants to do is to move mineworkers from the very bottom of the wage ladder to the middle. It wants the minimum wage in mining to be similar to the minimum wage for A1 - the lowest grade - in other industries.

The demand for a national minimum wage is also a political demand. Today many firms are exploiting the resources of South Africa - the natural wealth of the country which should be shared by all is being used for the enrichment of a very few.

Union arguments

In negotiations the union put forward its proposals for a national minimum wage and a industry wage structure.

The Chamber of Mines resisted by saying "each mining

group has its own wage philosophy". But they are unable to explain exactly what this philosophy is or on what it is based.

Workers, of course, would know that the bottom-line line of the mining houses' "philosophy" is exploitation.

In negotiations with the Chamber the union made a strong case for a national minimum wage.

The union said when the Chamber was first established, the minebosses said one of the purposes of having a Chamber would be to have a standard wage. The union said although the minebosses wanted this to keep wages down - the Chamber could not deny that there was a lot of logic in a standard wage.

Blatant racism

The union accused the Chamber of "blatant and naked" racism because white workers were able to negotiate standard wages with the Chamber. But when it came to black workers, the Chamber fell back on weak arguments like "that is the way it has always been done in the past".

The union said the Chamber had no excuses for this racism - there were no laws forcing them to negotiate in this way.

The union pointed out that in other mining countries all mining unions which negotiated with a central mine industry body, negotiated on uniform standards of pay.

It also reminded the Chamber that all other employer bodies in South Africa that negotiated wages and conditions of employment with unions, negotiated national standards of wages.

The Paterson grading system was being used in the mining industry by the different mining houses. But a worker graded A1 on one mine would be paid a different wage to a worker on another mine.

The different mining houses had standard rates of pay, and the union said it "could find no reason" why this principle should be not applied at Chamber level.

The union added the Chamber of Mines was a centralised body and the mining houses had cross holdings, shared board directors and used the same recruitment agency.

Comrade Ramaphosa said the union's general satisfaction at the outcome of the negotiations was marred by the increased gap between the wages paid in the lower job categories by the different mining groups.

He said the negotiations had highlighted the need for a uniform wage structure.

Union battles Chamber for every cent

THE union rejected the first offers of the Chamber of an 11 percent across the board increase. The Chamber then put their offers in cash terms which were just as low.

The NUM would not even consider such ridiculous offers which were seen as insulting.

Without reviewing its offer the Chamber of Mines declared a dispute with the union. The two parties opted for the establishment of a Conciliation Board in an attempt to resolve the deadlock.

At the Conciliation Board, after careful thought and discussion the union reduced its minimum wage demands to R420 and R480 for surface and underground respectively.

For the Chamber the new union position was still unacceptable. The Chamber then made their final offer of a minimum increase of R56 surface and R64 underground in gold mines. In collieries they offered R59 as minimum for surface and R64 for underground workers.

First offer rejected

This was overwhelmingly rejected by mineworkers who did not see any progress towards a living wage.



Mineworkers then proposed that the NUM opened informal talks with the Chamber to try and resolve the wage war which had been raging for more than a month. The next alternative was mediation.

In its informal discussions with the Chamber, the NUM succeeded in making the Chamber move from its final offer to make an extra increase of R6 a month across the board.

More negotiations

After meetings and report-backs mineworkers accepted this increased offer.

However the union will continue negotiating on a standard contract industry-wide, an end to compulsory overtime work, restrictions on evictions from hostels, negotiations over retrenchments, two months notice on end of contract and health and safety.

During negotiations the Chamber of Mines argued that they were facing economic difficulties due to the fall in the price of gold and the problem of marginal mines which are no longer yielding high profits.

On the other hand, the union argued mineowners still refuse to pay properly the thousands of men who work underground in highly dangerous conditions.

In all other major mining countries of the world, mining wages are well above manufacturing and other industry wages. This is because of the hard and dangerous nature of the work.

In South Africa, however, wages for blacks on the mines are far below those in manufacturing, while whites on the mines earn more than whites in manufacturing.

Whites on the mines are the top earners amongst all whites.

The poverty wage policy of the Chamber of Mines has kept black miners' wages amongst the lowest of all black workers.

GOLD

1. ANGLO AMERICAN GOLD MINIMUM RATES

	1988	1989	Rand increase	Percentage
SURFACE				
1	337	399	62	18.4%
2	382	450	68	17.8%
3	443	519	76	17.2%
4	517	597	80	15.5%
5	597	682	85	14.2%
6	704	803	99	14.1%
7	823	943	120	14.6%
8	956	1096	140	14.6%
UNDERGROUND				
1	385	455	70	18.2%
2	443	520	77	17.4%
3	512	595	83	16.2%
4	599	688	89	14.9%
5	694	783	89	14.3%
6	799	914	115	14.4%
7	924	1050	126	13.6%
8	1067	1222	155	14.5%

2. GENCOR GOLD MINIMUM RATES

	1988	1989	Rand increase	Percentage
SURFACE				
1	294	356	62	21.1%
2	337	405	68	20.2%
3	402	478	76	18.9%
4	474	554	80	16.9%
5	565	650	85	15%
6	670	769	99	14.8%
7	812	932	120	14.8%
8	1006	1148	140	13.9%
UNDERGROUND				
1	350	420	70	20%
2	398	475	77	19.3%
3	475	558	83	17.5%
4	548	637	89	16.2%
5	661	760	99	15%
6	780	895	115	14.7%
7	929	1055	126	13.6%
8	1119	1274	155	13.9%

GENCOR MARGINAL MINES GOLD MINIMUM

Marginal mines are Grootvlei, Marievale and Stillfontein

	1988	1989	Rand increase	Percentage
SURFACE				
1	291	353	62	21.3%
2	335	403	68	20.3%
3	400	476	76	19%
4	471	551	80	17%
5	561	646	85	15.2%
6	665	764	99	14.9%
7	806	926	120	14.9%
8	1000	1140	140	14%
UNDERGROUND				
1	347	417	70	20.2%
2	394	471	77	19.5%
3	472	555	83	17.6%
4	544	633	89	16.4%
5	656	755	99	15.1%
6	774	889	115	14.9%
7	922	1048	126	13.7%
8	1110	1265	155	14.0%

COAL

ANGLO AMERICAN COAL MINIMUM RATES

	1988	1989	Rand increase	Percentage
SURFACE				
1	338	397	59	17.5%
2	375	439	64	17.1%
3	424	497	73	17.2%
4	477	556	79	16.6%
5	543	631	88	16.2%
6	618	715	97	15.7%
7	699	805	106	15.2%
8	845	969	124	14.7%
UNDERGROUND				
1	370	434	64	17.3%
2	412	482	70	17%
3	465	544	79	17%
4	520	606	86	16.5%
5	590	685	95	16.1%
6	667	771	104	15.6%
7	755	869	114	15.1%
8	906	1039	133	14.7%