

Wage rises beat inflation. But still not a living wage

TOP TEN PERCENTAGE WAGE INCREASES

Rank	Company	Minimum	% rise
1	CULLINAN MINERALS	R404	72.8%
2	ESKOM GROUP 1 NON-SHIFT *	R538	39.4%
3	CROMORE - MONTROSE CHROME (SURFACE)	R335	27.9%
4	TRANSHEX GROUP (Diamonds)	R542	25.2%
5	AFR. CHRYSOTILE ASBESTOS SURFACE	R269	24.0%
6	SAMANCOR MANGANESE (SURFACE)	R290	22.9%
7	CROMORE - MONTROSE CHROME (UNDERGROUND)	R387	22.7%
8	PERING MINE	R589	21.9%
9	AFR. CHRYSOTILE ASBESTOS (UNDERGROUND)	R300	21.5%
10	SAMANCOR MANGANESE (UNDERGROUND)	R373	19.9%

ALMOST all wage agreements negotiated by NUM this year have beaten price increases.

Minimum wages were on average 17.9% higher than in 1987.

The top ten wage increases are well above inflation.

But the Chamber of Mines still refuses to pay a "living wage" to workers.

The Eskom increase in January was part of a move towards parity between wage scales in the Western Cape and the rest of the country.

From July 1987 to July 1988 consumer prices rose by 12.4%. In most cases, mineworkers' wages have gone up by more than this amount.

The January minimum was 39.4% above the rate in January 1987!

But the main problem with the wages, which are all for the A1 (labourer) grade, is that they were too low to start with.

Only three of the wages for labourers in the NUM are above the bare poverty levels set by the University of South Africa.

a minimum living wage for all mineworkers.

The mines can afford to pay. The latest results of Randfontein Estates gold mine show how profitable the mines are.

The mine made R228,4 million profit before tax in 1987/88. There were 14 769 workers on the mine in this period. So, an average, each worker contributed R1 627 to the mine's profits every month of the year.

Minimum wages at Randfontein Estates were R289 per month for surface workers and R330 for underground. Over 80% of the workers were on wage scales that were less than R600 per month.

The latest Randfontein Estates Annual Report says the mine has changed its "management style" radically.

Now it has "participative management".

Management attitudes to living wage are wrong and unfair, says COSATU

COSATU has launched a strong attack against management attitudes to the living wage campaign.

COSATU spokesperson Frank Meintjies told an industrial relations seminar last month it was "hypocritical for those who enjoy a living wage to cry foul when other human beings demand the same for themselves".

The living wage is a human rights issue, said Meintjies.

"No employer has come out in public support of the notion of a living wage". This is very revealing to workers, he said.

State and capital gang up

"Workers see the living wage as a perfectly moderate demand. But the state has labelled it a communist plot. And employers are ganging up with them, in what workers regard as an alliance of minority power and privilege."

Meintjies said employer attitudes through the years consisted of statements such as "You can pay them a few shillings because

they do not have the same standard of living" and "These people do not want all the comforts of city life because they actually yearn to go back to the homelands". The false idea behind this was that wages for black workers could be kept low because subsistence farming brought in extra money.

Abolish cheap labour

COSATU condemns the cheap labour system, he said, and wants to see it abolished.

"We are saying the economy cannot function best if the mass of people cannot buy the goods they produce". Employers accused unions of making unreasonable demands which led to inflation.

They spoke of "growth" but not the need to redistribute. When speaking about growth, we should not just look at the results of a single company but of the whole economy, he said.

South Africa's economy was not growing but standing still.

Management spoke of growth, but when it did increase its profits it did not put the money back into extending the business or creating new jobs. It often put its money in the stock market or sent it overseas.

"If there are high profits", and no job creation, the only conclusion we can draw is that our continued persecution under the cheap labour system is aimed at filling employers' pockets and making the rich richer.

Workers are worse off

Workers had been driven to the point of despair with the collective bargaining system. They had to protect their real wages and "haggle over percentage points". There was no meaningful progress in living standards.

The living wage campaign was rooted in the hearts and minds of millions of organised and unorganised workers and could not be wiped out by management or the state, he said.

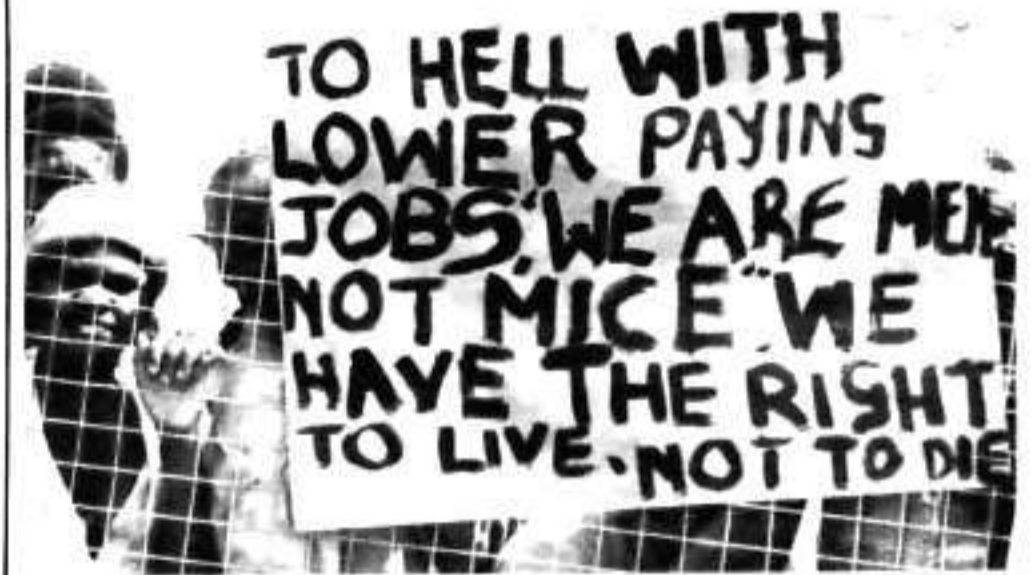
In September 1988, the SLL stood at R610 per month for an "average family". No mine yet pays a "living wage" to labourers.

The average minimum wage for all the 1988 negotiations of the NUM is R389 per month, but the median wage (the wage in the middle of a list running from the highest to the lowest wage) is only R350 per month.

The Chamber of Mines, in the wage negotiations that affect most of the miners in South Africa, rejected the union demand for an industry minimum wage of R350 per month.

So the lowest paid workers are still stuck on minimum wage rates below R350 per month.

The NUM still continues to fight a struggle with the bosses for



No mine pays a living wage

WORKERS UNITE FOR A LIVING WAGE!

LOOK AT OUR LIVES!

1. LOOK AT OUR OVER-CROWDED HOUSE
2. LOOK AT THE ROADS WHICH ARE NOT REPAIRED
3. EVERY DAY FOOD COSTS MORE
4. AND WHAT DO WE GET WHEN WE ARE TOO OLD TO WORK? A SMALL PENSION. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO LOSE BY JOINING NUM?

WE HAVE NO MONEY, MY WIFE. THE MINES DO NOT PAY ENOUGH. BUT I AM SCARED TO JOIN THE UNION

MY HUSBAND, I WILL TELL YOU WHY YOU MUST JOIN NUM.

MY WIFE, YOU ARE RIGHT. I WILL JOIN NUM TO FIGHT FOR A LIVING WAGE