

No wage settlement deal in platinum:

Amcu says platinum cartels arrogant

For over three months platinum workers have been on strike demanding a minimum wage of R12,500 – the same demand made by striking mineworkers of whom 34 were shot dead by the police at the Marikana Massacre in 2012. Finding a deal between the mine owners and the Association of Mining and Construction Union (Amcu) has been elusive. In April Amcu released a statement on the breakdown of a wage settlement.

‘It is with dismay that our latest proposal at reaching a settlement was arrogantly rebuffed by the platinum cartel of Angloplats, Impala and Lonmin,’ says Amcu.

‘We made several different proposals based on increases to the basic pay of the lowest paid workers. These proposals looked at ways of addressing the affordability concerns of the employers within the mandate of our members. In spite of all our efforts we were faced with complete intransigence and games of smoke and mirrors’.

‘The employers refused to provide information on the cost of these different proposals. When Angloplats eventually presented us with their calculation on 24 April after 13 weeks of the strike, it was found to be exaggerated by between R300 and R500-million. Their unaffordability argument collapsed when they were forced to acknowledge their false claim. Even the government officials observing the negotiations were left bewildered by their methods’.

Amcu says its future strategy is

to address mass meetings at which it will expose to its members the behaviour of the employers.

‘We were extremely livid at these underhand methods. It is difficult to predict how our members will react and what mandate they will give us faced with this situation’.

‘The lack of seriousness with which the Cartel is approaching the negotiations was evidenced by the failure of most chief executive officers (CEOs) and chief financial officers (CFOs) to attend. We are left with the strong impression that there is a hidden agenda at play. This too will be discussed with our members and we will work out a joint strategy to break their intransigence and arrogance. This will include solidarity actions and efforts with our brothers and sisters all over the world where these companies operate and market their metals’.

‘The employers must know that we will not be diverted from our just struggle for a decent life for our members and for all mineworkers in our country. Nevertheless, we as a responsible union remain optimistic that we will find a solution to this impasse,’ reads the statement.

Organisations such as the Democratic Left Front (DLF) support the platinum strike. In a solidarity message DLF says a ‘living wage for mineworkers is a living wage for all’ and that a ‘victory for the platinum workers will be massive for all South African workers, regardless of which trade union they belong to or which federation they are part of’.

‘The platinum miners’ strike for R12,500 is a legitimate demand. Workers have been massacred for making this demand. Yet the platinum workers are uncowed; 11 weeks on strike, but they are holding steadfast. It’s a response to the doubling of prices for basic food stuffs over the past five years and wage repression pursued by the mine bosses over the past 15 years. Mining capital as a whole has managed in this short space of time to ensure a fall in the wage share of total value produced in South Africa every year – from 55% in 1997 to 38% in 2012 according to StatsSA. In platinum mining the wage share of new value created stood at 61% in 1997. By 2012, it had fallen to 35%!’

According to the DLF mining companies were making huge profits which they did not want to share with workers. ‘Platinum has enjoyed extremely high rates of return on investment. R48-billion of the R158-billion in mining profits paid out to shareholders from 2006 to 2011 were from platinum mining. This fact has not been lost on miners, who have seen massive expansion of operations and their senior managers earn grotesque sums of money’.

As a result of the long period that the strike has been on, Amcu has opened a strike fund account with an initial deposit of R1-million, and the DLF was also fundraising for this fund. ^{LB}

In the July/August issue we will focus in detail on the platinum strike.