

Is there harmony *at Harmony?*

National Union of Mineworkers

(NUM) shopsteward JOSEPH

LETSOTA tells SNUKI ZIKALALA

about problems workers at

Harmony gold mine face in

relation to profit sharing,

performance bonuses and

Sunday blasting.

Harmony gold mine is one of the marginalised mines. Last year, the company retrenched 6 000 workers and, because of downscaling, a number of workers are likely to lose their jobs.

Because of the price of gold and downscaling, we have agreed with our union, NUM, to a low wage increase. As a shopsteward, I found it very difficult to persuade workers to accept this proposal. Management showed us the books and we were faced with one option - retrenchment - or the closure of the mine.

Our task as shopstewards

was to persuade workers to accept the low wage increment. We also had to convince workers the only way to supplement the low wage increase and secure jobs was to accept the profit-sharing scheme, productivity bonus and Sunday blasting.

Workers want a fat wage package

As shopstewards we have an enormous task educating workers about these concepts. What workers want to see at the end of the month is a fat wage package.

It is not only workers from

Harmony who are battling to understand these concepts. At our last NUM Central Committee (CC) meeting we had to convince a number of comrades from our region and mines about these schemes. There is still a lot of ground work to be covered. Workers are still suspicious of management.

As a new scheme, profit sharing has teething problems. In principle, Harmony agreed with us that the first R1 million would be split equally among all the workers. We agreed the balance of the distributable amount would be divided

among the workers in the proportions that their individual basic salaries have to the company's total profit.

Workers do not really understand all this. The situation becomes tense when the company does not make profits. Workers stop



production and demand a meeting and an explanation as to why there were no profits for a particular month.

There have been a number of work stoppages, but as shopstewards we managed to explain these intricacies to the workers. You must understand you are dealing with workers who do not want theoretical explanations, but practical results in terms of hard-earned wage increments for their work.

Workers still feel the mining company is not sincere. These are old attitudes which derive from management's past insincerity. It is still difficult

for workers to trust them. More education on both sides is needed, and the employers will have to build the trust that has been lost.

Workers thought they would regain, through profit sharing, the ground they had lost. Yet those who earn more or who are skilled are winning that ground.

White workers, the majority of whom are classified miners, ie they have blasting certificates, are gaining a lot from these schemes. The other advantage white miners have is that they are the ones who are highly paid. These schemes add a lot more money into their coffers.

Performance bonus scheme

Workers are questioning the manner in which management is measuring the performance bonus scheme. In principle, this is based on our meeting the targets so as to improve on the cost per kilogram of gold produced. We are still very confused as to how the employers are measuring it.

It becomes easier if there are only seven workers in a gang. Then the bonus is larger. This confuses workers. They think the more of them there are in a gang and the faster they work in terms of drilling and clearing the stopes, the more money they will get. But it is not like that. Our production bonus is measured by total face advance divided by metre squared per man.

This infuriates workers. It

will take time for us to get used to this mechanism.

White workers gain from our bargaining strategies

White miners earn a lot from profit sharing, performance bonus and the Sunday blasting.

Sunday blasting means that mines are now operating on a seven-day cycle. In principle workers are opposed to this but due to the present circumstances – the saving of Harmony and jobs – we have agreed to work on Sundays. It is voluntary and this is not a permanent agreement. When the mine recovers, we hope, we will return to our normal shifts.

What really annoys us is that unions and associations representing white miners are "opposed" to Sunday blasting, and yet their members are the first ones on the mines as volunteers. They also get an incentive for working on Sundays.

White workers must not always benefit from our hard-won victories. They must involve themselves in decision making or pay an agency fee to NUM.

Downscaling will affect not only African workers, but the entire community of Virginia – the town near Harmony – and this will have adverse effects.

We believe it is only through our collective efforts and education that we can improve and save whatever we can. ☆