

# The 1995 bargaining agenda

briefing

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**C**OSATU affiliates have developed comprehensive strategies for this year's round of negotiations with employers.

A number of unions have held special bargaining conferences to debate and formulate demands.

In the past unions have tended to draw up long "shopping-lists" of demands, many of which fade away as negotiations progress. Demands emerging from the bargaining conferences show a more sophisticated understanding of the problems confronting workers in different sectors and the ways to overcome these.

## Centralised bargaining

Despite (or perhaps because of) the draft Labour Relations Bill's failure to legislate centralised bargaining, this will be a key union demand in 1995. The Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU) launched its campaign for centralised bargaining in 1991, but has seen very little progress towards this goal. At its bargaining conference the union resolved to halt all plant and company bargaining. Instead, it is demanding that employers come to a central bargaining forum. CWIU will work with National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) affiliate, the South African Chemical Workers' Union (SACWU), in this campaign. CWIU also plans to launch a joint campaign with other COSATU unions.

The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (SACCAWU) will also intensify its campaign for centralised bargaining.

Unions which already bargain at central

level want to extend the scope of these forums to include all employers in the sector. The South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) is demanding that the scope of industrial councils be extended to cover employers in the "decentralised" areas, as well as larger employers who still remain outside of central structures.

## Wages

At the heart of unions' wage strategy is closing the wage gap between lowest and highest paid workers.

This strategy takes a number of forms:

### □ Setting a minimum wage

The South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) is calling for a minimum of R1 500 per month in all major cities, while CWIU is demanding a minimum of R1 600. SACTWU will fight for a minimum of R150 per week in "decentralised" areas, where workers currently earn as low as R40 per week!

Mineworkers are demanding a minimum of R1 100 for surface and R1 200 for underground workers.

### □ A higher increase for lower paid workers

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) wants low paid workers to receive an additional 5% increase. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is demanding a larger percentage increase for lower grades.

### □ Reducing the number of grades

The NUM is calling for the first four grades in its sectors to be collapsed into one and for workers to be paid at grade





four rates. In the engineering sector, NUMSA has already succeeded in reducing the number of grades from 13 to five. A priority for this year's negotiations is to set rates which will reduce the wage gap between these grades.

**❑ The rate for the job**

One of apartheid's legacies is that workers doing the same job are often paid a different wage. Unions are demanding an end to this kind of discrimination

**❑ One wage structure**

A related demand is for one wage structure for each sector, instead of the current situation where there is one system for "skilled" and another system for "unskilled" workers

**❑ Recognition of existing skills**

In a demand which is sure to draw fire from employers, unions are demanding that workers be paid for the skills which they have, rather than the job which they do. This is summed up in the NUMSA slogan "grade the worker, not the work."

**A living wage**

Unions will also be seeking increases which bring their members closer to a living wage. With inflation expected to run at 11% this year, a real improvement in wages will require increases above this figure.

Over and above its minimum wage demands, SAMWU is demanding an increase of 20%. Clothing, textile and leather employers will face demands of between 18

and 20%. NUMSA wants a 15% increase, SACCAWU has left it to workers in various companies to come up with wage demands.

**Non-wage demands**

Common demands emerging from the unions include:

**❑ Paid education and training leave.**

NUMSA points out that "There will be no improvement in quality of production without improvement in education and training." The union is demanding a minimum of 160 hours per year adult basic education for every worker, conducted during

working hours.

**❑ Training Boards** in those sectors where none exist. SACCAWU, for example, is calling for training boards to be set up in the finance and catering sectors,

**❑ Effective affirmative action policies.**

The NUM wants government to pass a "Workplace Anti-Discrimination Act" which will force companies to implement affirmative action and penalise them if they continue with discrimination.

**❑ Reducing the working week**

**❑ Job security.** Sub-contracting and retrenchments threaten the jobs of workers in many sectors. While some unions are demanding an end to sub-contracting, the NUM takes a more pragmatic view and demands that all sub-contracting must be negotiated with the union.

NUMSA requires "life-long employment for all of our members". The union wants work security funds (as set up in the auto sector) to be established in its other sectors. Using money contributed by the employers, the purpose of these funds is to give training to retrenched workers to enable them to get new employment.

**❑ Housing.** Mineworkers have drawn up comprehensive proposals for the upgrading of hostels and for a housing policy for the mines.

**❑ Effective health and safety policies and training and participation for workers in health and safety issues.**