

NUM gives Eskom notice of strike, Solidarity rejects utility's wage deal

MINeworkers' union NUM yesterday formally notified Eskom of its intention to go on strike next week, while trade union Solidarity rejected the parastatal's latest wage offer.

"Today (Wednesday) we started mobilising our members for the strike," said National Union of Mineworkers spokesman Lesiba Seshoka.

He dismissed the possibility that their industrial action may be illegal as Eskom was an essential service. "We will cross that bridge when we get to it. We have already notified

them of our intention to go on strike," said Seshoka.

"They cannot tie us to a tree and tell us we can't do anything when abused, because we cannot untie ourselves.

"We are going on strike and they cannot do anything about that."

Seshoka said Eskom's latest offer was an 8.5 percent wage increase and a R1000 housing allowance. Unions wanted nine percent and a R2500 housing allowance.

Seshoka said the NUM would have been willing to compromise on the wage increase if management

had acceded to its housing allowance demand.

Union leaders were on yesterday preparing for the strike.

Solidarity would not accept Eskom's offer as it currently stood and had pushed through revisions for the power utility to consider.

"We need more time to discuss with our members. There's still room for negotiations," Solidarity's general secretary Flip Buys told a media briefing in Pretoria.

Buys said obstacles in the way of a settlement had to be addressed.

Eskom had been given until Mon-

day to respond to the revisions, including a minimum service agreement, which the union said had to be in place before 2011 wage negotiations.

The union also wanted additional housing benefits and an external audit of Eskom to determine the state of relations between workers and management.

Solidarity also called for a probe into spending patterns at the power utility after it bought World Cup tickets for R12 million and paid R9.6 million in performance bonuses to directors and senior

managers. A spokesman for Eskom's third union, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa), Alex Mashilo, said they were still consulting members on what action to take.

NUM represented about 40 percent of Eskom's 30 000 employees. Solidarity had 23 percent, and Numsa 20 percent. The remaining 5 100 workers were not unionised.

Eskom human resources director Bhabhalazi Bulunga said the parastatal had not received NUM's strike notice. "Even if they notify us of the strike, it remains illegal.

"It's like telling someone you are going to murder them, that doesn't make the act legal."

NUM was risking getting its members arrested, he said.

"We are an essential service, therefore the security agencies will arrest anyone engaging in illegal activities."

He said Eskom was unable to meet Solidarity and Numsa yesterday.

"We were busy with internal meetings, trying to put contingency plans in place in light of the rumours of the strike." - Sapa