

# Solidarity shuns Eskom offer

CHARL DU PLESSIS and SAPA

THE third union representing Eskom employees in a bitter wage dispute yesterday said it "did not accept" the electricity utility's revised offer.

But Solidarity general secretary Flip Buys was careful to point out that the union was "not rejecting" Eskom's offer of an 8.5% across-the-board wage increase and a housing allowance of R1 000.

"To be responsible to the country means we stay committed to a negotiated settlement," said Buys.

But the union representing the majority of Eskom workers, the National Union of Mineworkers, has informed Eskom of their intention to strike, said spokesman

## But union says it is committed to 'negotiated settlement'

Lesiba Seshoka.

"Next week, *die poppe sal dans*. It is our time now," Seshoka said.

Spokesman for Eskom's third union, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA, Alex Mashilo, said they were still consulting members on what action to take.

Solidarity leaders, however, played down the possibility of a strike.

Solidarity spokesman Dirk Hermann said yesterday it would give Eskom until Monday to consider its amendments.

"In the first place, a minimum service agreement must be put in

place before the 2011 negotiations. Currently, there is no agreement, meaning workers can't go out on a protected strike."

The minimum service agreement has been a sticking point in negotiations because unions claim Eskom has intentionally failed to implement the agreement to prevent non-essential workers from striking.

Hermann also said Solidarity did not accept the current housing allowance offer and wanted a process to ensure a "sustainable" housing solution.

The union proposed an external

audit of labour relations between management and employees and asked the public protector to "do an investigation on spending patterns in Eskom", said Hermann.

He was referring to the R12-million Eskom reportedly spent on buying World Cup tickets.

Seshoka said NUM's blood was also "boiling" over reports of financial mismanagement, adding that the union was not out to harm the country.

"[We're] not striking for the sake of having an effect on the power supply of the country, we're going to strike to restore our lost dignity,

Eskom has raped the working class for many years," said Seshoka.

Energy industry analyst Chris Yelland said he believed unions were close to reaching a settlement. "What we are seeing at the moment is brinkmanship and posturing normal in wage negotiations with a powerful employer," said Yelland.

He added that if all three unions were to strike, it "would have a very serious impact on the supply of electricity in the country".

Eskom's human resources director, Bhabhalazi Bulunga, reiterated yesterday that any strike action would be illegal. "We are an essential service, and therefore the security agencies will take over and arrest anyone engaging in illegal activities," said Bulunga.