

Carmakers' wage talks 'robust'

The battle lines have been drawn across South Africa's car industry as employers began squaring up to labour for what are expected to be hard-nosed wage talks.



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Negotiations got under way at the Motor Industry Bargaining Council last week. They are expected to thrash out today the finer details of what each party wants. The protagonists include the Automobile Manufacturers' Employers' Organisation, which represents all the major original equipment manufacturers, and trade union Numsa.

Economic crisis

Numsa general secretary Irvin Jim said workers should not have to pay for the global economic crisis. "We appreciate that the economy is bad but employers cannot hide behind the economic crisis."

Jim said that in addition to its base demands Numsa had a number of others that would be tabled at the negotiations. One of these was that manufacturers undertake not to shift production to neighbouring countries.

Jim said Numsa was seeking "constructive negotiations" that would not be at the expense of workers. "We will stick to our demand for a one-year agreement. If there are counter-offers on the duration, or any of the other issues, we will listen," he said. "Although it's still early days, indications are the negotiations will be robust."

Strike action

Jim said the option of striking remained. "The possibility of strike action will depend on the cooperation of the employers. We don't believe they should hide behind problems in the economy. Strike action is always a last resort," he said.

The bargaining began amid exceptionally difficult conditions in both the economy and the vehicle industry, and ahead of the expiry of the three-year labour agreements at the end of August. Other key elements in this year's negotiations are a Numsa demand for the creation of a "mega" bargaining forum through the inclusion of employees in other related sectors.

"The negotiations are expected to be concluded efficiently", the chief negotiator for the Automobile Manufacturers' Employers' Organisation, Thapelo Molapo, said. He refused to speculate on Numsa's demand for a one-year agreement.

"The industry has negotiated multi-year agreements for the past two decades," he said.

Source: The Times

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