

Unam staff turn down pay increase offer

• SAKEUS IIKELA

THE University of Namibia's strike has entered its third week after staff members and the unions rejected the no-work no-pay rule the Unam council wants to implement after agreeing to pay the 6% salary increase.

Unam workers – lecturers, administration staff and general workers – embarked on industrial action after they failed to agree on the implementation of the promised 6% salary increase across the board.

The increase was agreed on last year, and was supposed to have been implemented from January, but Unam did not do so.

On Thursday last week, the council offered to pay “a once-off amount calculated at 6% of six-months' basic salary”, with a waiver on the benefits of the “no work no pay rule,” i.e. deductions on basic salary only”.

The university also gave the unions an ultimatum to either take the deal, or risk having deductions to the full remuneration for the days they did not work.

This offer was, however, rejected by the striking employees, with some believing that it was “punitive”, and that it was only benefiting those who did not join the strike.

A lecturer among the striking employees, Ndeshi Namupala, said they objected to the Unam offer on Friday because they believe the university was negotiating in “bad faith”.

She said the university was also “painting a very milk and honey picture about the impact

of this strike, which is not true”, and accused Unam's communication director, Edwin Tjiramba, of feeding false information to the public about the strike.

For the past two weeks, Tjiramba has been telling the media that the strike had no negative impact on the just ended examination process, despite the writing of some modules being postponed, and some centres being closed.

“We want this strike to end. We reject their offers because we see them as a punitive measure for being on a legal and protected strike. The one who comes out winning is the non-striking employee while we are being penalised,” Namupala stressed.

She added that the offer by the management would negatively affect other employees who were “at the bottom of the salary scale”, such as the farmworkers at the university's agricultural campuses.

“Me, as an academic, I may be able to trade my days, but my colleague who is an administrator may not be able to do that because they don't have enough days. Trading their leave days is punitive to them. We cannot accept that. We are saying that an injury to one is an injury to all,” she stated.

She continued that the university was also negotiating in bad faith when it attempted to instil fear in the striking employees by giving them an ultimatum to either take the deal by Friday last week, or risk having “the full remuneration for the days that a staff member did not work” deducted from their salaries.

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“They waited one week without talking to us, and they denied our colleagues access to the premises to go and see what is happening there. And they come a week after that with ridiculous offers.

“For us, the damage is already done. We are moving on, and we are going to continue until our demands are met. Our strike has not ended, and it will not end until we come out victorious,” she reiterated.

A meeting held on Friday between the university's management and the unions also ended in a deadlock after staff members rejected offers from the management.

Nantu's deputy general secretary, Loide Shaanika, on Friday said they will continue to negotiate with the Unam management today (Monday) to find a deal that benefits everybody.

The Unam Students Representative Council president, Tuhafeni Kalola, told *The Namibian* on Friday that students who had finished writing their examinations will also join the strike today.

The Namibia National Students Organisation (Nanso) secretary general Simon Taapopi also pledged to support the students in joining the industrial action.