

# The unions betrayed us – Unam staff

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SOME University of Namibia staff members who participated in the just-ended industrial action say the unions betrayed them in the negotiations, and got a raw deal for them.

The university and the unions representing the striking workers, the Namibia Public Workers Union (Napwu) and the Namibia National Teachers' Union (Nantu), agreed on Monday to end the two-week strike.

They agreed that a once-off cash payment equivalent to 5% of seven months' basic salary would be paid to all staff within the bargaining unit on 14 December.

The parties also agreed to a 6% salary increase for 2019, effective 1 January 2019, and to apply the no-work no-pay rule.

Fifty percent of the strike days would be converted into leave days. The monetary equivalent of the remaining 50% of the strike days will be deducted over five months for those who were on strike for 11 days.

Employees who were on strike for less than 11 days would have their cash equivalent for the strike days deducted over three months.

The strike negatively affected the examination process as some of the centres were closed, and some modules had to be postponed.

Last week, the staff rejected an offer from the university's council that could have permitted the university to immediately pay them "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. deduction on basic salary only".

The offer was rejected because the staff felt that it was "punitive", and that it would benefit those who did not join the strike.

A lecturer who participated in the strike, Ndeshi Namupala, yesterday, however, said the unions betrayed them because the "agreement signed was not what we mandated the unions to do".

She said they wanted the university to agree to their original demand of a 6% salary increase backdated to January, and that "Unam must put in writing what in practical terms 'no-work no-pay' means".

"So, basically we are being penalised. We wanted some calculations made so that we can make an informed decision.

This was supposed to be shared with other campuses before it goes to management. We had said we do not want a lump sum where there is no adjustment to our salaries," Namupala stressed.

Nantu general secretary Basilius Haingura yesterday, however, refuted accusations of betrayal, saying that Unam staff had dealt themselves a blow.

He said the employees were not united at the beginning of the strike, and the management was not pressured to agree to their demands in full.

"They must ask themselves what they contributed individually to make the strike a success. You must know that the employer must feel the impact of the strike. But in the case of the university staff, I could see that there was a loophole.

Some were on strike, some were just relaxed, and some were even working. The impact of the strike was not maximised. That is the issue," Haingura stated.

He added that Unam staff were also not realistic to think that they could have gotten all their demands from the negotiations.

"In any given bargaining, it is very rare to get all that you demanded. It is just a give and take. And we must also try to understand the consequences of a prolonged strike. I know at the end of the day, they could blame the same Haingura whom they are criticising, that I am irresponsible and so on. And we tried to avert that, and through that, that is what we got out of the negotiations," he said.