

Amcu vs Num: Workers to vote at "hostage" mine

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The Springs mine where hundreds of miners were held underground last week is to hold a ballot to decide on union rights, chief executive Jonathan Hericourt told *GroundUp*.



A ballot over union membership is to be held at Gold One mine in Springs where hundreds of miners were held underground last week. Archive photo: Shaun Smillie | *GroundUp*

The Springs mine where hundreds of miners were held underground last week is to hold a ballot to decide on union rights, chief executive Jonathan Hericourt told *GroundUp*.

More than 500 miners were kept underground at the Gold One Mine for three days. Last Wednesday afternoon, about 400 miners came to the surface after an operation that involved the police and the Proto team, who are trained in underground rescues. Earlier in the day, about 136 miners had escaped up a mine stope, an incline that is used to move vehicles underground.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) is fighting for legal recognition on the mine and is challenging the "closed shop" agreement with the National Union of Mineworkers (Num). The closed shop agreement means that Num is the only union that the mine recognises.

Amcu claims to have more support than Num.

Tladi Mokwena, the executive secretary of Amcu, said last week the union had collected 1,300 signatures on a petition which showed they had a majority and had submitted the petition to the company and to Num. He said they were giving the company a deadline of 3 November, to respond. If not they would take legal action.

Num denies that Amcu has a majority on the mine.

“Everyone is saying all sorts of numbers that we have no way of validating other than by doing an independent ballot, so that’s where we’re going to be going,” said Hericourt.

“And we will be going through the process the way it is supposed to be done.”

Meanwhile the company has begun disciplinary processes against people involved in the hostage action, with at least one Amcu member receiving a suspension letter on Tuesday. “We’re going to be going through a disciplinary process with a lot of people,” Hericourt said.

Amcu claimed it was not a hostage situation but a sit-in by their members.

Num said that several members had been injured during the three days. All had been released from hospital.

Police told *GroundUp* there was no update on an investigation.

Mpho Phakedi, Num Deputy General Secretary, said intimidation was hampering the investigation. “People are afraid for their lives ... they can open up a case, but ... they are going to be harassed at work, and in the communities where they live.”

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