

MINE WORKERS

The gold mines have been the heart of South African capitalism for the past century. Even today they account for two-fifths of the country's export earnings. Between them, gold and coal mining employ nearly a tenth of the entire workforce. The 550 000 black miners are mostly migrant labourers employed on short-term contracts and housed in all-male compounds attached to the mines where they work. They often sleep twenty to a room on steel triple-bunks.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Usually housing is on 'tribal' lines, supervised by stooge workers called 'indunas' and patrolled by 'tribal representatives' armed with truncheons. One of the many problems is the food they have to eat. One miner said, "We often have to eat raw porridge, fish with scales, and vegetables that are not properly cooked. Workers have to spend their entire time underground without a meal break.

WHITE FOREMEN

Set above black miners are the white employees who have had a legal monopoly of skilled work, and have therefore been able to earn more than twenty times as much as black miners. In practice, white miners play the role of very privileged foremen.

A black worker from Kloof Mine describes the whites' behaviour under-

ground: "When we start the 3.00am shift we are up well before 2.00am. When we go down we are tightly packed like sardines. The whites come down in the last cage but leave with the first. Many of them bring their newspapers along and sit around reading while we work. When our shift is over, we have to wait hours for the cage while they are gone. Often we work well over ten hours."

STRIKE

During the unrest surrounding the strike at Vaal Reefs in April, white miners went underground with loaded pistols and brandished them at black workers.

For the first six months of this year, more than 100 000 miners have taken strike action over wages, bad and unsafe working conditions and the harassment of shaft stewards.

In many of these strikes, violent action by police and mine security has left many workers dead and hundreds injured.

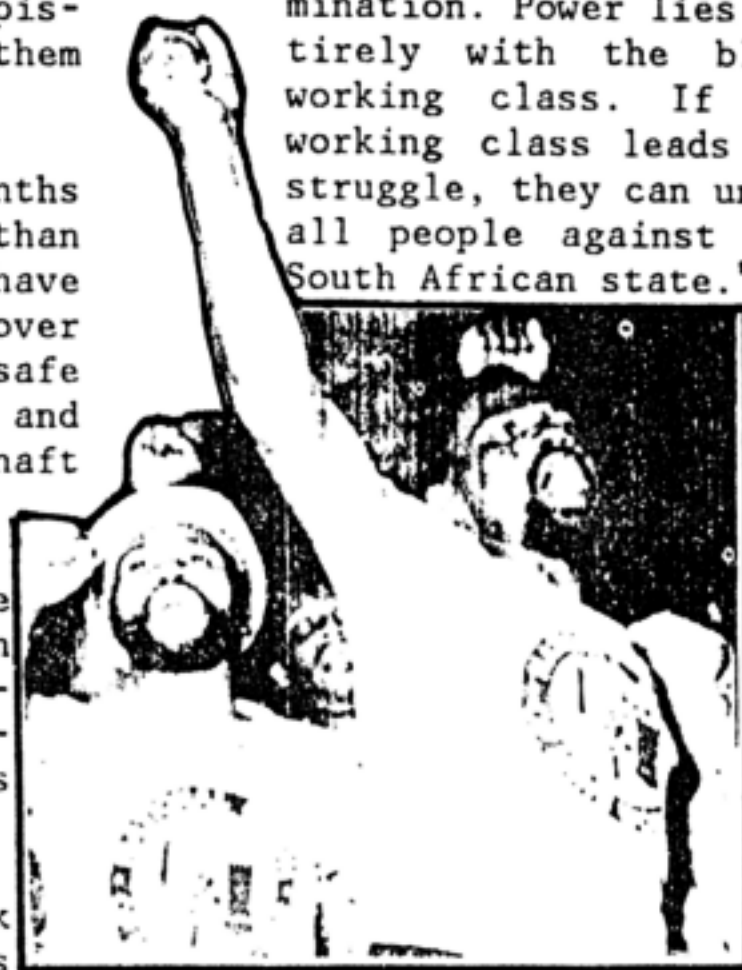
NUM

At the head of the black mine workers struggles is the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) - South Africa's biggest and fastest growing union. In September last year more than 70 000 miners were involved in the country's first legal mine strike when workers rejected the Chamber of Mines' wage offer. Although there were eleventh hour attempts at a settlement, this did not prevent a strike. This strike left

ten people dead and hundreds injured. Since then the union has grown rapidly and enjoys support of over 150 000 workers in the gold, coal, copper and diamond mines of South Africa.



For Manoko Nchwe, NUM's publicity secretary, the miners' struggle is part of the wider struggle against apartheid/capitalism: We are not only fighting against apartheid. Our struggle is also about decision-making and self-determination. Power lies entirely with the black working class. If the working class leads the struggle, they can unite all people against the South African state."



This year NUM rejected the Chamber's final wage offer of between 14% and 19%. Instead the union has demanded a 22% increase across the board, paid leave of 21 days, a 75% leave allowance, and a 6-hour reduction in the working time per fortnight. In addition, the union has demanded participation in the negotiations for the removal of job reservation, and May Day as a paid holiday.

STRIKE BACK!

PROFITS

The mining houses have made huge profits this year. Gold Fields, for example showed a record aggregate after tax of R229 million, despite the lower earnings caused by the decreased gold production. Workers underground, however, are earning as little as R166 per month and those above ground are earning even less than this. According to Manoko Nchwe, some of these workers are earning only R135 per month.

The negative response of mine owners to the demands of NUM led to a dispute arising and strike preparations being made by NUM. This strike was to encompass all mining houses in South Africa, and was to be launched on the 25th August.

As the strike day neared, mining houses panicked and called for urgent meetings with NUM. These meetings took place on the 21st and 27th August. Interesting developments occurred at the meetings. Most sig-

nificantly, mine owners' unity succumbed to worker pressure as individual mining houses scurried to settle with NUM.

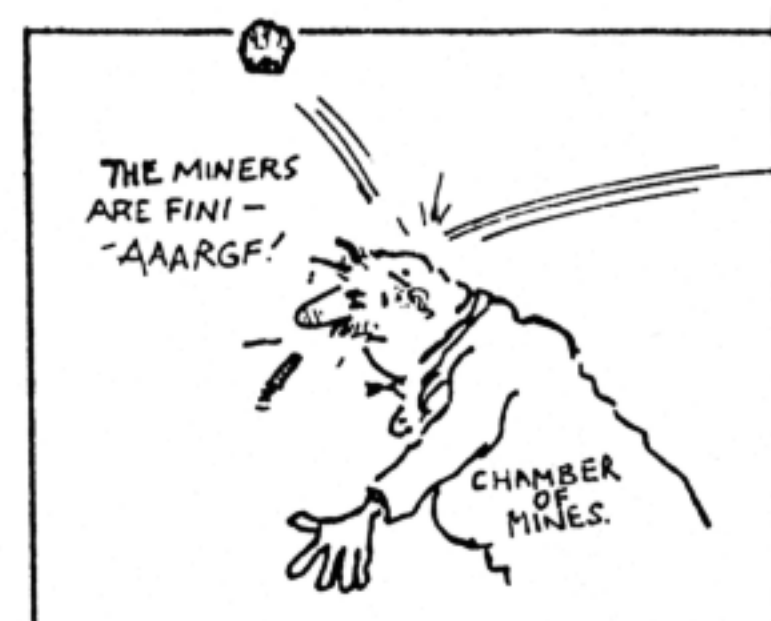
The split in the Chamber of Mines clearly reflected the effects of worker power - those that succumbed are mining houses where NUM is at its strongest (eg. Anglo American settled for between 17% and 19%) and those that did not, are those where NUM is weaker (eg. Gencor offered 14% and 19%).

THE STRIKE

On the 1st September, 28 000 miners came out on strike at Transvaal Navigation Collieries, Matla, Marievale, Beatrix, Blinkpan and Deelkraal. Harassment by the bosses and the state was stepped up immediately. The telephones at NUM's headquarters were cut. Although the strike was legal, unionists were not allowed access to the mines. There was a heavy

police presence on the mines and surrounding areas. Miners were forced to work at gunpoint. Hundreds were injured by rubber bullets, sjambokking and teargas. Thousands of mines were denied food and water.

By the second day of the strike, about 6500 workers were dismissed, many forcibly transported to the human dumping grounds - the homelands. The National Executive Committee of NUM decided to suspend the strike in order to protect workers from dismissal and evictions. (See briefs for NUM Strike Support Committee)



METALWORKERS

*PLANT LEVEL BARGAINING

- * a minimum "living wage" of R3,50 per hour and a 50c across the board increase;
- * May Day to be a paid holiday;
- * employers to double their contribution to the industry's pension fund. This to be invested in black housing;
- * four weeks paid holiday (presently 3 weeks);
- * maternity leave.

The following demands were made in response to mounting retrenchments:

- * increased overtime rates to curb overtime working
- * a reduction of 5 hours on the working week to 40 hours
- * retrenchment pay calculated on the basis of 4 weeks wages for every year of service.



DEMAND