

## Impala: Gencor Strikes Again

On January 6, Impala Platinum Mines, part of the Gencor mining group, dismissed over 20,000 miners who were involved in a strike and were refusing to return to work. (65% of these workers were recruited locally in Bophuthatswana and the others were migrants from other parts of South Africa, as well as from elsewhere in southern Africa. The dismissal is the biggest of its kind in recent labour history and raises important questions about the nature of, and possibilities for, trade union activity in the bantustans.

In the last few months of 1985, workers from Impala Platinum Mines approached the National Union of Mineworkers to organise them. The union then applied to the company for access but was refused. The reasons given were that Impala was in Bophuthatswana and that the NUM did not comply with the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act (Bophuthatswana), which stipulate that any trade union which wishes to operate in the area must have its head office and its governing or controlling body in Bophuthatswana.\* Significantly, this has not stopped the same management from having dealings with the South African-based white racist Mine Workers Union.

Although the company refused access rights, this did not prevent the workers from organising. On December 23, the workers presented management with a list of grievances. On December 26, another list of grievances was presented covering wages, working conditions and demanding that the NUM be given recruiting facilities. This was accompanied by a short work stoppage indicating to management the seriousness of workers' demands. Management, however, did not attend to these grievances and, on January 1, all the Impala mines went on strike - involving some 30,000 workers. The strike was well organised and disciplined. The demands presented to management during negotiations combined those presented previously.

During the period of the strike and the dismissals which followed, Impala management acted very heavy-handedly and co-operated closely with the Bophuthatswana police in dealing with union activists. Twenty-seven workers were shot with rubber bullets resulting in twenty-six being hospitalised. In addition forty-eight workers were arrested by the mine security and handed over to the Bophut-

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\* For further details see SALB 9.5, March 1984.

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hatswana police to appear in the Pukeng Regional Court.

The strong police and mine security presence in the area made communication between the workers and the union extremely difficult. Moreover, management refused to meet with NUM officials who came out to the mines. In as far as it had any dealings with the workers, management preferred to deal with the local sweetheart union - Bophuthatswana National Union of Mine Employees (Bonume) - which the workers have decisively rejected. Although it has been able to get access to the mines, it has not recruited many workers.

### Action Taken

The NUM has no locus standi in Bophuthatswana making the legal option very difficult. NUM is looking into the possibility that a committee could be set up to take up the matter on behalf of the dismissed workers.

NUM has informed other Gencor members about the situation and is examining the possibilities for solidarity action. On the international front the automobile and steel workers unions in the United States of America have been fully informed since platinum is used extensively in the motor industry there.

Pirowshaw Camay of CUSA has pledged the support of his federation to the cause of the dismissed miners. COSATU is compiling a list of Gencor-linked companies as a prelude to solidarity action by workers in these firms and by other progressive organisations, which are being kept informed. Sidney Mufamadi of COSATU charged Gencor with collaborating with this bantustan regime in order to create a trade union-free zone where extreme forms of exploitation could continue.

The issue at stake in Impala is not only wages and working conditions, but the very right of workers to join a union of their choice. Consequently, it is an issue which affects the entire trade union movement. At its inaugural congress COSATU adopted a resolution denouncing the bantustans. Exactly how unions are to operate in these areas and how to deal with union bashing managements which take advantage of these conditions requires urgent discussion and concerted action.

(SALB correspondent)