

We demand a Summit to decide the industry's future

The General Secretary of the NUM, Cyril Ramaphosa, outlines the state of the mining industry for the past two years, with special emphasis on the future role of all the parties in an industry that is gradually being decimated through retrenchments

South Africa of today has become the focal point of all progressive minded people here and abroad. The current socio-political changes taking place moves at a baffling speed.

Over three centuries of national and social enslavement has taught our people to resist and fight.

The whole history of our struggle is full of heroic battles our people waged in the face of almost insurmountable barriers.

It was sheer determination and tenacity of a people fighting for a just cause that all evil machinations of oppressors and exploiters came to nought.

Since its inception, almost a century ago, the mining industry has been the chamber where repressive and discriminatory laws were baked.

At the root of Chamber of Mines foundation lies the whole philosophy of common exploitation of human and economic resources of South Africa and beyond.

The mining industry has been structured basically for the extraction of raw materials to earn foreign exchange. At the base of this gross economic distortion is the use of cheap black labour, a policy still being pursued until this day.

CURRENT SITUATION

It is against this background that mineworkers unions have been operating over the years.

The biggest challenge mineworkers have been facing since they were unionised is that of fighting double oppression.

At the core of all this all-powerful industry is the power of conglomerates. A few mining houses - Anglo American/De Beers, Gold Fields, Gencor, Rand Mines, JCI and AngloVaal control over 90% of South Af-

rica's mineral wealth.

This massive economic power permeates all major institutions including government. Mining policy has become the monopoly of this tiny minority of mineowners with consequent gross mismanagement of South Africa's economic resources.

Rampant exploitation prevailing in the mining industry is reflected in poor working conditions of black mineworkers, starvation wages, horrible health and safety standards and callous disregard of basic worker rights.

REPRESSION

While the apartheid regime has finally admitted the failure of the policy of white supremacy, the situation is totally different on the mines.

Mineworkers are still herded into overcrowded single-sex hostels and compounds, totally unfit for human habitation. The semi-prison like conditions under which they live give mine bosses almost total control of their lives.

Racial discrimination still forms the basis of exploitation of labour.

The NUM has been fighting racial discrimination since its formation. Until this day the Chamber of Mines has not abolished discrimination based on race.

It is incumbent on mineworkers to formulate an ANTI-RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CHARTER to ensure that a real non-racial mining industry exists now and in future.

The mine regime still regards freedom of expression and association as totally inimical to the interests of the mining industry. We are still forced to use semi-underground methods to organise mineworkers into NUM.

We have the huge task of organising over 400 000 mineworkers under NUM despite all obstacles put in front of us. Union leaders and officials are still barred from entering mine premises.

Our success in organising mineworkers depends on the dismantling of all repressive structures that are typical of a state of emergency situation.

It is in this sense that mine repression becomes a national problem that needs efforts of all democratic forces of South Africa to eradicate.

POVERTY WAGES

The success story of over one hundred years of COM rests on the poverty wages earned by black mineworkers.



Cyril Ramaphosa

per month while their white counterparts pocket R3 500 on average.

Compared with other industries, white miners are among the highly-paid section of the working people whereas black mineworkers are among the lowest paid.

Our wage policy of a national minimum wage for mineworkers of R600 and R543 per month underground and surface respectively.

With the rate of inflation consistently rocketing and the depressive state of gold mines the situation remains bleak.

Retrenchments have reached unmanageable proportions with about 80 000 mineworkers having lost their jobs since 1989. Mine bosses are already pleading poverty in an attempt to save production costs at the expense of mineworkers.

We are asked to accept starvation wages which are characteristic of the mining industry in the interest of the industry in crisis.

We refuse to be party to any suppression of wages that will condemn mineworkers to hunger and disease.

We are reaping the fruits of a hundred years of economic mismanagement of the mines. This strategic industry cannot be left in the hands of a few people pursuing their narrow selfish interests.

There can be no talk of getting out of the current economic and political quagmire without socio-economic transformation of our society.

Political supremacy remains fundamental in starting a process of addressing socio-economic ills of South Africa. It is under such circumstances that restructuring of the mining industry will be realised to the fullest.

Negotiations for retrenchments packages with mine bosses, though important, will remain palliatives as long as they are not linked with an overall national plan of creating jobs mainly from the place of origin of such victims.

The current crisis demands that a national solution be sought before a social volcano of unemployment erupts.

The convening of a MINING INDUSTRY SUMMIT of mineowners, mineworkers organisations and unions, labour federations and the Ministry of Mineral and Energy Affairs remains a priority.

This is the forum where a sound start can be made in shaping policies and principles that would come with solutions to mining problems.



Anger against retrenchments is rising daily

On average black mineworkers earn R500