

# Elect safety stewards to check mines

**THE third Health and Safety Conference of the union was held in August this year.**

Three hundred health and safety stewards and officials attended.

The conference elected a national health and safety committee for the first time since 1987.

The main areas of discussion during the conference were organising to fight for health and safety, health and safety campaigns, education and AIDS.

Delegates at the conference said mining was a very dangerous industry - last year 563 workers died and over 10 000 were injured.

## Reduce accidents

The union and members had to work much harder to reduce accidents. There were thousands of accidents inquiries each year and officials could not attend them all. Members can attend inquiries.

NUM strategy is to elect safety stewards in all organised shafts and fight for recognition of the stewards through safety agreements.

So far NUM has signed health and safety agreements on nine mines, including a national agreement with De Beers.

The Chamber still refuses to negotiate with NUM on health and safety issues.

Where safety stewards are not recognised by the mines they can

refer issues to shaft stewards to take up with management.

AIDS was a major discussion at the conference. NUM takes AIDS very seriously and delegates discussed practical suggestions of dealing with a very sensitive issue.

- The hostel system must be abolished.
- The union must put into action a progressive AIDS education programme.
- Protective measures must start now. Workers must avoid many sex partners and use condoms.

Delegates also agreed that any blood testing for AIDS must be carried out by doctors who are independent from mine management. All dismissals or discrimination against people with AIDS must be opposed.

Delegates also said NUM would co-operate with the Chamber on AIDS education provided the Chamber negotiated on health and safety.

## Targets for future

The conference set clear programmes and targets for the next two years:

- Each branch will elect safety stewards and form a safety committee. They will fight for a safety agreement with management while continuing to strengthen the campaigns.
- All elected safety stewards must develop their skills through union training on health and safety.
- Regions must build their health and safety skills independent of head office.

# Safety conference resolutions

**MINERALS BILL:** The conference noted if the Minerals Bill was passed more control over safety issues would be given to the bosses. The conference resolved to make further representations to the government about our objections to the bill, to campaign on all levels against the bill.

**SAFETY ACTIVITIES IN HOSTELS:** The resolution noted that the food in hostels was not nutritious enough and that change houses were dirty. The conference resolved that safety committees should ensure independent food specialists are called in to check the quality of the food. Cooks should be properly trained in cooking and hygiene.

**RETIREMENT AGE TO BE REDUCED:** The conference said the present retirement age of 60 represented a lifetime of exploitation and workers views were never considered. It resolved all mineworkers should qualify for early retirement at the age of 50 years and normal retirement at

the age of 55 years.

**WORKING ENVIRONMENT:** The conference noted that workers in the mines are exposed to severe heat, dust, chemical fumes, noise and electrical hazards. Workers were forced to work in water and mud and are not equipped with proper safety clothing.

Mine walls are not supported and falling rocks endanger workers.

The conference said all employees were entitled to healthy conditions and employees were not concerned about the lives of black workers.

It resolved health and safety agreements should be negotiated between the NUM and employees at all mines.

It said danger pay should apply where worker's safety cannot be guaranteed and that safety committees should carry out inspections.

**KINROSS DAY:** The conference resolved that there should be no work on this day and the day be called Health and Safety Day.



Participants in the NUM conference for disabled workers said other workers were not aware of their special problems.

# Disabled workers talk about problems

**PARAPLEGIC and disabled mineworkers attended a NUM conference on the problems of victims of mine accidents on 30 September.**

One hundred and twenty delegates came from gold mines around the country as well as villages in Lesotho and Transkei.

About 150 of the more than 12 000 workers injured on the mines each year will remain paralysed for the rest of their lives.

## Money problems

Disabled workers and people in wheelchairs face many problems.

Pensions and compensation money is too small. Compensation paid out to white miners was much higher because of the wage gaps between skilled and unskilled work.

As one worker said: "My dependents are the same in number and my needs as a disabled person are increased. I need special toilets. I depend on transport (which I have to pay for) to go anywhere."

Disabled workers are often cheated of their pension, pensions stay the same while the cost of living goes up and workers are not paid while in hospital.

A second problem faced by disabled workers is that of job security as disabled workers are threatened with dismissal. They are not retrained for other work. If they stay on the mines they work at reduced wages doing things like picking up rubbish.

In the home and community workers face problems because their homes are not suitable for disabled people, there is no transport and their wives are not trained to look after them.

## Help with transport

The conference said that disabled workers were not assisted by other union members to attend meetings. Transport is always a big problem.

The conference resolved to take forward problems of disabled workers:

- It said the union should deal with disabled workers in future wage negotiations with the Chamber of Mines.
- The union should demand increased compensation, job security, guarantees that wages and conditions of employment will stay the same after an accident, payment for costs of medical treatment and alterations to houses.
- There should be proper wheelchairs, food, sport and recreation facilities.

# Families to sue Kinross

**THE families of 28 of the 177 mineworkers killed in the Kinross mine disaster in September 1986 are suing the mine, various companies and individuals for R2,5 million in damages. The claims are civil proceedings.**

The fire involved the burning of a polyurethane foam lining a mine tunnel.

Other court action is still proceeding. Claims for more compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act have been lodged. The basis of these claims is that the mine and its employees negligently caused the accident by installing the foam.

At the accident inquiry in June 1988 the NUM was not permitted to ask questions. The NUM is asking the Supreme Court to set aside the decision that the union could not speak and is asking the court to rule that the inquiry be re-opened.