

# MUN congress supports SWAPO



**THE third Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) national congress on 3 February was the biggest since the birth of the union in 1986.**

The MUN congress was attended by over two hundred delegates, and guests from various countries and organisations including NUM (South Africa), MIF (Miners International Federation), IMO (International Miners Organisation), CGIL (Italian Trade Union Federation Comrades) and NUM (Great Britain).

The theme of the congress was "Workers take control: Fight for a living wage".

The congress pledged support for SWAPO. Asser Kapere, President of MUN encouraged delegates to "fight relentlessly by all possible means for the implementation of Resolution 435".

"We as the Namibian workers should see ourselves not only as the exploited ... but as liberators", he said.

Comrade Kapere said the campaign for a living wage should not only be seen as a demand for more money, but should also include demands for better housing, improved education, job protection, pensions, health care, job security and improved working conditions.

Referring to the current moves towards independence he said "if the opportunity fails the mineworkers union of Namibia will join forces with the liberation movement Swapo and fight to the bitter end for the liberation of our motherland, Namibia".

The pledge to Swapo was welcomed by delegates - many of whom were wearing Swapo colours and T-shirts. The implementation of UN resolution 435 and the forthcoming independence of Namibia was the main issue with all the speakers.

Swapo Joint Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Niko Bessinger said "If Swapo does not get a clear two-thirds majority after the election in November, we will have to argue for the rest of our



**MUN DELEGATES AT THEIR CONGRESS: looking forward to the birth of a new nation**

lives about what should be in the constitution and what not, and meanwhile South Africa will be ruling and exploiting even worse than today".

He made it clear that independence meant hard work for everyone.

"We are going to give birth to a

new nation - and a birth means everything: pain, blood, and death, but that is the responsibility which is awaiting us".

Ben Ulenga, MUN General Secretary, highlighted the existing bad working conditions for miners in Namibia. He said MUN signed up membership

rose from 8000 at the end of 1987 to 11 169 at the end of 1988.

Comrade Ulenga said the union was very concerned about the health dangers of radiation and uranium. The General Secretary's report was discussed at length by delegates.

**Namibia stands poised on the brink of independence. The recent MUN congress pledged its support to SWAPO. In this exclusive interview with NUM News, Ben Ulenga, MUN's general secretary talks of the role of the working class in a future liberated Namibia.**

## 'Our struggle will continue until mines run by workers'

### How is the Namibian economy organised?

Politically Namibia is a colony of South Africa. Economically it's a free for all for the capitalists.

Multinationals like Anglo American, and Gold Fields extend from South Africa and Great Britain. West German, American, French, Japanese, Canadian companies also operate here.

The multinationals come here and exploit our resources, and the labour power of the people. They carry off everything.

Namibia is a backyard of South Africa, like the homelands. Manufactured goods come from South Africa or Western capitalist countries.

Anything that is mined here goes to other countries as well as farming or other agricultural produce. Actually even live cattle are carried off. Game, fish and crayfish are taken to places such as France.

So everything is taken off and manufactured goods come to those who can afford them.



**Ben Ulenga**

**In which industry is the major section of the Namibian working class employed?**

The major section is in the mining industry. The food industry has quite a lot of workers especially if you take into consideration the workers who are working in the fish industry.

### How do you intend correcting economic injustices imposed on the working class and peasants by colonialism?

Immediately after independence there will be moves to take control of the land again, to redistribute it amongst people who really need it for the purpose of conducting meaningful lives and not to leave it in the hands of commercial farmers who are using it for their individual interests.

We have just passed a resolution on the need to repossess Namibia's natural resources and national wealth. We feel that the mines should be controlled by the people, the wealth, the various buildings, banks, everything that has been created in the country should be in the hands of the people, working people, both workers and peasants.

### What kind of relations would you like to have between trade unions

### and the government?

We should have a close relationship if the government is progressive but the unions should keep their independence.

I am not saying this because I have doubts or lack of faith in the liberation movement.

I am a member of Swapo. I have been active within Swapo as a fighter, cadre, but still I believe that the workers even though they are members of Swapo, they should know that they are also workers, they are a class and they have certain definite interests as a class.

If a Swapo government comes to power and recognises these issues then it will be to the advantage of the working class in this country.

### What are the prospects of working class solidarity with South African workers after independence?

The problems affecting the working class of the region are more or less the same. The companies which have been subjecting workers to exploitation are the same.

### Can you say something about the role of the unions in a free Namibia?

The only difference is that the atmosphere will be more favourable. As long as the mineral resources, mines are not yet in the control of the workers the struggle will continue.

### How do you relate Namibian independence to the long-term objectives of the working class struggle or simply the struggle for socialism?

Independence doesn't mean that the problems of the workers will be gone and forgotten.

We have a long way to go. Workers in Namibia have just started organising formally. We do not have a workers party which is dedicated in looking at the political interests of the workers.

Swapo has very close ties with workers. It started off as an organisation of workers against the contract system, migrant labour and other conditions in the mines and other industries.

Swapo as a national liberation movement is made up of people from various classes. It will not be wise for workers to sit back and just expect Swapo, especially at its present form to care for their interests. The workers themselves must take their own struggle into their own hands

### Can you give us a glimpse into future developments in Namibia?

I think until such time that South Africa itself is liberated things are going to be very tough.

The South African government will try and hamper us through destabilisation and various manipulations inside this country by South African forces.