

# Unity is our weapon against bosses

**COMMENT BY  
NUM PRESIDENT  
MOTLATSI**



James Motlatsi

The horrible conditions under which black miners work exposed by the NUM survey on repression proved mine bosses know no human values or mercy in the matter of making huge profits.

Their response was typical of all exploiters: instead of taking serious steps to lift the mine state of emergency, they went on a campaign of shameless mistruths against NUM through their newspapers.

Their publicists, mercenary journalists and self proclaimed researchers were forced to fill pages with lies and faulty statistics in an attempt to deceive the public about the real conditions of black mineworkers.

These notorious mercenary publicists of mine bosses even blamed NUM for the so called mine violence.

The real criminals are not to be found in overcrowded compounds patrolled by paramilitary police but amongst those who live by stealing the wealth created by mineworkers.

Mine bosses, industrialists and financiers have the most effective tools of repression and coercion to use against workers in the form of the apartheid state - SAP, SADF, prisons, security police and informers.

The list of atrocities committed by these agents against workers and blacks in general is long. No one can ever forget Sharpeville, Soweto 76, Langa, Mamelodi, Alexandra and the Uitenhage massacres, not to mention the mineworkers shot and injured in industrial action.

Mineworkers do not carry rifles and teargas canisters. The only weapon they have is Unity. It is this weapon the bosses fear most. Hence their divide and rule strategy through job categories, tribes, language and race.

The fight for higher wages and better working conditions is a life and death struggle.

The time for action is now, for tomorrow it will be too late. It is only by waging a relentless struggle against the whole system of repression that we can improve our wages and working conditions. This is the year of united

action to defend and consolidate the mineworkers' shield - NUM.

The campaigns for 1989: the-Living wage, Anti-Repression, Health and Safety, Recruitment and Save the Patriots campaigns come together in a single struggle for mineworkers to free themselves from domination by mine bosses and the apartheid state.

An end to mine repression means improvements in living and working conditions. The living wage is the basis of workers survival in order to be able to support themselves and their families.

Gold mines alone have killed 46 000 mineworkers - not forgetting those permanently crippled. When fellow comrades struggle against this state of affairs, they are sentenced to death by hanging.

If mineworkers let them hang for activities aimed at changing the horrible conditions under which they work, this will be hellicence for more judicial murders.

The NUM is the only organisation capable of conducting these campaigns. It needs to be defended and consolidated by

mineworkers.

It is the task of every union member to recruit workers into NUM. The victories won by NUM like higher wages and Provident Fund are for the benefit of all mineworkers.

The bosses have their dog squads, mine security, the army and the police to exploit and oppress mineworkers. Workers have NUM and COSATU to defend themselves, and wage battles against repression.

Mineworkers the time is now for you to raise up, under the banner of NUM to end mine bosses repression and apartheid tyranny.

We are not alone in this struggle. We have black workers in other democratic trade unions to count on. The entire black working class in alliance with the broad mass democratic movement forms a formidable force to end human suffering brought by exploitation of man by man.

James Motlatsi

## PEOPLE IN THE UNION

**MERRIAM MASHABA**, the national administrator of NUM, is not only charming but endowed with special qualities that make the head office tick. NUM News interviewed this mineworker's daughter to share her experiences.



**Merriam, how has your background influenced you in working for a trade union?**

I learnt and identified with injustices suffered by the mineworkers from an early age, i.e bad living conditions, low pay etc. Not only was my father a mineworker but we also lived amongst mineworkers and their families at married quarters.

In January 1982, after completing my matric, I started working at Saaiplaas Mine Shaft No 3 as a computer operator. When NUM was first launched in 1982, I was amongst the first people to join the union.

I started working for NUM in August 1983. I was approached by a comrade who was working

for the union who thought I would be of use to NUM because of the skills I had.

**What changes has the union undergone over the years?**

NUM has become very organised with a big membership. You know, we started off having our meetings under trees because we could not afford to pay for a venue.

Recruitment then was very interesting. Workers were joining in large numbers. Bosses were not repressive as they are now.

**What do you see as the role of an administrator?**

Administrators should see

themselves as part of the workers struggle, they should attend and participate in all meetings and structures of the union.

Administrators should assist in the proper handling of the union's finances and office equipment.

It is important for administrators to have a healthy relationship with worker leadership and union members.

**Do you think women have a role to play in the trade unions?**

I think women have a very important role to play in the unions since they are also workers.

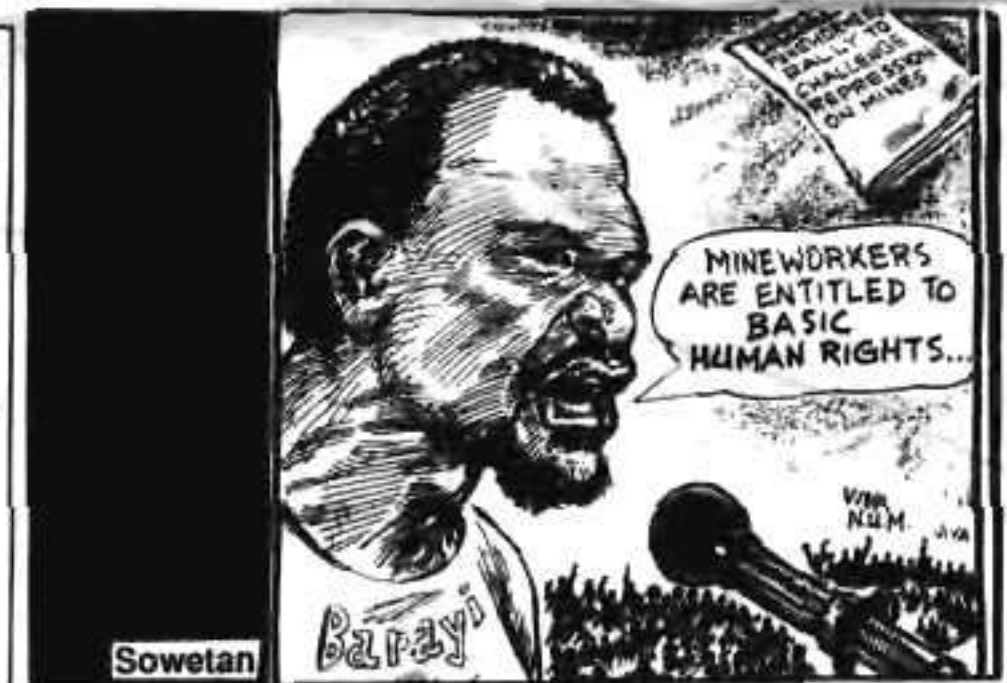
The mines have a lot of women workers. I feel that their demands have not been properly voiced out due to their lack of confidence and assertiveness.

**Tell us about your trip to Holland, and your active participation in the COSATU Cultural Group?**

I was part of the delegation of Cosatu's Cultural Group that attended the conference which was called "Culture In Another South Africa" which was held in Holland in December 1987.

It was my first time out of South Africa, and was an instructive experience. I met and talked with many different people and I learnt a lot about culture.

People tend to undermine the importance of culture in our struggle.



## Rally against repression

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Cosatu President, Elijah Barayi, himself a mineworker, likened conditions of work to concentration camps.

"Living in compounds surrounded by walls with barbed wire, mounted security patrols and hippos our conditions become like concentration camps.

**Workers are worse off**

"As mineworkers we have been removed from our homes and put into overcrowded compounds where we are packed like corpses in a mortuary." To have 60 males sleeping in a simple room is not only a health hazard but inhuman, said Barayi.

Speakers pointed out that mine repression was a reflection of the oppressive nature of apartheid system.

It is not surprising that repression is spread over all industries as it became evident from speakers of industrial unions like POTWA.

The State of Emergency was condemned as the use of brute force by the apartheid regime in a desperate attempt to roll the wheel of history backwards.

Dr Abe Nkomo, chairman of the Attredgeville-Sualsville Residents Organisation (ASRO), told the rally that for the state and the ruling classes the route was clear - eliminate all leading activists of the oppressed and intimidate and coerce the masses to support the regime's oppressive structures.

The presence of SAP a few metres away from the rally failed to dampen the militant mood of the workers who had five hours of speeches, freedom songs, poetry and chanting.