

THE MINERS' INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION



MIF

activities on an international basis;
 ● To support both nationally and internationally the fight against the exploitation of workers;

The MIF hopes to achieve these aims by:

- Establishing and promoting close relations among trade unions and by maintaining close relations with organisations with the same aims;
- By undertaking any possible effort to strengthen affiliated unions in the fields of organisation, information and education and in the struggles of its affiliated unions to improve the living and working conditions of their members;
- Establishing new unions in regions where trade unions do not exist;
- Protect its affiliated organisations against attacks by government, employers and other organisations;
- Disseminating information and conducting research in support of the activities or interests of its affiliated organisations;
- Engage in common actions with other organisations wherever such actions promote the interests of its affiliated organisations and the working population as a whole;
- Assisting affiliated organisations in co-ordinating their policies on all matters affecting the living and working conditions of workers;
- Any other measures possibly necessary to defend the interests of its affiliated organisations and the working population as a whole.

Miners' Charter

One of the most important documents accepted by the MIF was the Miners' Charter. It sets out the demands of all miners throughout the world. It was accepted at the 37th Miners' International Congress in London in June 1957. The demands cover wages, health and safety, holidays and social security. (see below)

Activities

The traditional form of the MIF's activities has been the exchange of views and opinions of miners' problems. There is liaison with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), with its permanent and ad hoc committees for coal mines and other minerals. There is the Social and Economic Commission for Europe, whose coal committee meetings are attended by the MIF. In addition, the European Steel and Coal Community have MIF representatives attending their meetings.

NUM joins MIF

After the National Congress in January 1983, the union decided to affiliate to the MIF. The major reasons for the decision to join were:

- To establish contact with other miners' unions and draw from their experiences;
- To benefit from solidarity action when battles are waged with mine bosses;
- To exchange information about mining conditions and practices so that all miners can benefit from the co-operation;
- Establish the brotherhood and international miners' unity necessary to fight the giant mining companies.

But the NUM also has a special interest in building unity between the Southern African miners. Discussions between the miners' unions of Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia have already reached an advanced stage which will hopefully lead to the formation of a federation.



Cyril Ramaphosa receiving a pennant from Rolf Anndersen of the Swedish Mineworkers Union

There are mineworkers in many parts of the world. They work under some of the worst conditions and receive some of the lowest wages. They are the men who work in the bowels of the earth. The mines they work in are usually owned by very big companies or under state control. This is because it takes a lot of capital resources (i.e. money and machinery) to mine any mineral or metal. Mineworkers are therefore always up against the most powerful employers.

Very often the mine bosses operate in many different countries. They shift their capital round to those areas where they can get the most profit. These big companies are called multinational corporations. To protect themselves, mineworkers have had to form unions. But the mine bosses do not like this, especially if the union has the support of the workers and fights for workers' rights. They like sweetheart unions, that is, unions controlled by the bosses.

The NUM is affiliated to the Miners International Federation (MIF). Here is a brief history of the MIF.

In 1889 the Workingmen's Conference was held in Paris to establish what eventually became the Second International. Present at the conference were a number of miners. They took the opportunity to exchange information and views on the conditions and views on the conditions of workers in their own industry.

Among them were the British miners. They were enthusiastic about the contacts they had made and initiated the first international conference of miners held in Jolimont, Belgium in 1890.

Present at the conference were miners from the following countries: Austria; Belgium; France; Germany and Britain. They met again in 1891. At a further meeting in London in 1892 the constitution for the formation of the MIF was adopted.

Slow development

Development in the MIF was slow in the early years. The American miners joined early in the twentieth century. The First World War interrupted the international activities of the MIF. It was not until 1920 that contacts were re-established, after a break of six years.

Affiliates increase

Between the First and Second World War, the number of affiliates increased. They were mainly mineworkers' unions from Europe. But the contact was limited to the exchange of information on the working conditions of the miners in various countries. The exception, however, was during the Spanish Civil War, in 1936-9, when the MIF gave large material assistance to the Spanish miners and their families.

Great strides

It was after 1942 that great strides were made on the international front. The MIF grew in numbers, strength and more affiliates. By 1980 the membership of 1 124 566 consisted of 15 national unions in 13 countries in Europe, 8 unions in Africa, 9 unions in 7 Asian countries and 4 unions in 5 countries of the Americas.

Aims and methods of MIF

The aims of the MIF are:

- To strengthen the international solidarity of the workers in the mines, quarries and energy undertakings;
- To safeguard and promote their economic, social, political and cultural interests by supporting trade union activities in all countries and by co-ordinating and conducting ac-

MINERS' CHARTER

Hours of Work

1. The hours of work of underground workers should be no more than seven hours per day or thirty-five hours per week from bank to bank, including break times. The hours of work for surface workers should be no more than eight hours per day or forty hours per week.
2. Overtime must not be worked except in cases where it is absolutely necessary for technical reasons of safety or rescue work. It must be paid at least double time rate.

Holidays

3. All workers in the mining industry should receive a minimum of four weeks' paid holiday per year.
4. Statutory holidays should be paid at the usual rates. If any work has been done on statutory holidays, this should be paid for at overtime rates in addition.

Wages

5. Wage rates for underground workers should be better than wage rates in any other industry. Wage rates for surface workers should be equal to the best wage rates in other industries.
6. There should be a guaranteed annual wage, that is, even if they work for less than year they should not lose any wages.

Employment

7. If, owing to technical or economic circumstances at his place of work, a miner is laid off permanently, adequate re-employment and retraining facilities should be provided to enable him to provide for a standard of living as near as possible equal to that which he had been used to.
8. That the system, where still in existence, of employing labour through outside contractors who are not bound by the laws and agreements applicable to the mining enterprises, should be abolished immediately.

Safety and Health

9. Conditions in the mines with regard to the Safety and Health of the miner should be kept at the highest possible level. Safety and Health regulations should be rigorously adhered to and should be supervised by an inspectorate independent of the employers, on which the miners are effectively represented.
10. There should be adequate schemes for compensating the miner for partial or complete disablement due to accidents in the mines or to industrial diseases. Such schemes should ensure that the miner suffers no financial loss through his disablement. Expert medical treatment for miners injured or suffering from diseases directly or indirectly due to the nature and conditions of their work, should be provided free of charge to the miner.
11. There should be a comprehensive medical examination including X-ray on entry into the industry, which should be repeated regularly at least once a year during the whole period of employment in the industry.

Vocational Training

12. There should be vocational training schemes provided for new entrants to the industry.

Social Security

13. There should be social security schemes to provide adequate benefits in the case of sickness, death or old age. Old age benefits should be payable to the underground worker at the age of 50 and surface workers at the age of 55.
14. Every effort should be made to achieve the harmonisation of all social security schemes, so as to permit the migrant worker to retain his rights and receive the whole of the benefits due to him, regardless of any change in his domicile.

Social Welfare

15. Every miner should be entitled to be provided with good standard housing facilities at reasonable rents.
16. Every miner should have adequate pit head baths, medical and canteen facilities.

International contact

With strong organisation, worker to worker contact between different national mineworkers' unions can be established. In this way solidarity links are built up internationally and the giant monopoly corporations can be fought.

Through contact mineworkers' unions in different countries can learn from one another and share experiences of how to fight the mine bosses.

Last year we read a lot about the brave and heroic battle of the British coalminers against pit closures. We also had one of the miners, comrade Roy Jones of Staffordshire to tell us about their struggle. Because we were not very strong, we could give very little assistance to the British miners, except a small donation.

International Trade Secretariats

International contacts and solidarity are therefore very important between trade union organisations. Many South African industrial unions belong to various international organisations, for example, The National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) and the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) belong to the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), while the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union and Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa belong to the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations (IUF). These organisations are called International Trade Secretariats (ITS). The first ITS was formed in 1889. Each of the ITS's is confined to an industry. Today there are 16 ITS's with 60 million worker members across the world. Their job is to share information and organise assistance to trade unions in different countries which organise in the same industry. The assistance in-