

We sing of our struggles, victories and in praise of our heroes - JB Marks Choir

Somewhere in the mining town of Orange Free State, NUM members are singing praises about the gallant struggles that the working people have been waging since the beginning of oppression and exploitation.

Not only do they sing praises about the struggles against oppression and exploitation, they also sing of the joys, pleasures and light moments of victories registered during the course of that struggle.

When eight NUM members from the OFS region decided to start a choir in July of 1989 to express their feelings in song, they did not expect to end up with a group of almost 30 people that it is today.

The JB Marks Choir was spotted by NUM NEWS at the regions conference in March. They all looked radiant in their red and

black regalia with JB Marks' image emblazoned on their shirts.

Why JB Marks Choir? Why not Clements Kadalie Choir? Or Moses Mabhida Choir? What was so special about Marks that made the choir members to name it after him? We put these and other questions to the comrades in the choir.

"We admire JB Marks for his role in the organisation of black mineworkers, his teachings laid the foundation for the present day struggles."

The comrades also reminded NUM NEWS that comrade Marks was instrumental in the 1946 mineworkers strike that shook the mining bosses and the government of the day. Marks was also a leader of the African Mineworkers Union.

"It is our intention to present our message of

freedom to our fellow workers through song. At the same time, we want to express our disgust at the repressive methods that are still in force in the mines. JB Marks' determination to improve the mineworkers' conditions therefore remains one of our guiding motivations."

The comrades further told us that they meet twice a week for practices. "We work as a collective and the production of songs is a collective effort. We merge our ideas and tunes are then created. It takes some time as none of us is musically trained to compose or write music."

The major problem remains that of exposure and lack of resources. The choir always sings in meetings that are organised by the NUM and other COSATU affiliates around the Free State.



The JB Marks Choir doing it for their fellow workers at a COSATU rally in Welkom

Stop the violence or talks are off - ANC warns government

The ANC has given the racist regime until May 9 to take drastic steps in an attempt to end the current violence.

Since the eruption of reactionary violence in Natal in 1984 almost 10 000 innocent people were butchered.

Last year alone 2 900 people were killed when the violence swept the Reef. This year about 600 people died in the same manner without any sign of effective on the side of the SAP and SADF.

Negotiations between the government and ANC have been put under severe strain by this senseless violence directed against peace-loving people of our country.

About the character of this violence, the ANC says: "The killings, maimings and beatings that have occurred have greatly influenced feelings of ethnic antagonism among various sections of the African people; have distracted public attention from the

root causes of poverty, hunger, deprivation and want in the country, and have rendered it more difficult to achieve united action among the African people for generally accepted and commendable goals."

In an open letter to the apartheid government the ANC put these demands:

- * There should be no carrying of weapons - traditional or otherwise - at public gatherings;
- * Removal from public office of Ministers Vlok and Malan, and the dismissals of all SADF and SAP personnel involved in CCB and other hit squads;
- * All counter-insurgency units such as Koevoet, Askaris, Koevoet, etc should be publicly disbanded.
- * All police personnel implicated in massacres such as at Sebokeng be suspended. Legal proceedings be instituted against them and an independent commission of enquiry

investigate the Daveyton and other massacres.

* The SAP and SADF give assurances that they will use civilised methods of crowd control and that there will be no issuing of live ammunition on such occasions.

* Effective measures to phase out the hostel system and labour compounds and begin providing proper family units and single occupancy flats.

* An independent commission of enquiry be established to look into complaints of misconduct by the police and security forces. The letter concludes by giving the government until May 9 to meet these demands, failure of which shall force the ANC to:

- * suspend any further discussion with the government on the All Party Congress
- * suspend all exchanges with the government on the future constitution of our country.