



Poet Mzwakhe Mbuli at NUM rally: culture is a weapon

# MINING POETS

**MANY workers are starting to speak and write poetry. Sometimes we are lucky enough to see our miner poets at cultural or union events.**

Some recite poetry in English, while others speak in the more traditional orator forms in Zulu, Sotho or Xhosa.

But many more workers need to start writing and performing. The poets we know of are a drop in the ocean of potential mine-worker poets.

Many miner poets are not exposed to the work of other progressive poets or organisations of cultural workers. Often their work is not written down, and so is lost to other generations. They are denied venues and contact with other poets.

As we build and develop people's culture, this will be one of our challenges: making sure the voice of the miner poets echoes through South Africa as it does through the shafts.

## Militant message

The militant message of the miner poets is like the men themselves: it is strong, simple and has the spirit of no compromise. It picks up the sounds of the hard and dangerous work underground, of marching feet and the pains and joys of organised workers.

Like many other examples of people's culture - music, film and art - the poetry of mineworkers also looks forward to a future of freedom and liberty.

Members of NUM are beginning to link up with the COSATU cultural unit and the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW).

But many NUM members who are able to write, make music or act still have to organise themselves. COSAW is a national organisation of writers whose aim it is to become part and parcel of

our struggle for liberation, non-racialism and democracy.

As popular poet Mzwakhe Mbuli of COSAW says: "The most important issue in South Africa today is to work towards the destruction of apartheid and its culture, and the creation of a new, alternative, non-racial, united and democratic society."

## Culture is a weapon

"I feel very strongly that culture must be used both as a weapon and a vehicle to raise the awareness of people about their living conditions and the reasons for their suffering", he says.

"Particularly since avenues of freedom of expression have been affected by the state of emergency."

He stresses the need for worker poets to organise. Mzwakhe says: "One cannot be a coal, burning alone - then one will go cold very quickly. One needs to burn together with other coals - then the conflagration (fire) will grow."

The poems below are from the Orange Free State where miner poets are starting to come together to discuss and perform their work.

## LET US NOT FORGET

*Dear fellow workers,  
Let us step into the shoes,  
Of the families of our fellow workers,  
Who have lost their lives in the mining accidents,  
Let us be part and parcel of them.*

*Dear brethren,  
Let us wear the skins,  
Of the families of our brothers,  
Who have been consumed by death,  
Let us be part and parcel of them.*

*Dear comrades,  
Let us see what,*

*The families of our brothers,  
Are facing in this sick world,  
Let us be part and parcel of them.*

*Dear Africans,  
Let us feel,  
What the families of our brothers feel,  
Then we will know,  
Who we are, what we are and why we are.*

*Dear Africans,  
Let us not forget,  
Our brothers who become martyrs,  
For our liberty,  
We shall rise from the forlorn,  
And reign supreme among other nations.*

Stephen Rakgosi

## ALUTA CONTINUA

*The structure of our country is rough,  
The land of our forefathers has been confiscated,  
Don't quit young Africans,  
The struggle continues.*

*Youth of Africa,  
We have become strangers in the land of our birth,  
Don't allow it to continue,  
Don't retreat young Africans,  
The struggle continues.*

*We are the backbone of this country's economy,  
But in this country's wealth we share not,  
Therefore, fight workers,  
The struggle continues.*

*The heart of Africa is bleeding for our rights,  
Our beloved country needs our valour,  
The way to freedom bounds non quitters,  
Therefore, don't quit workers,  
The struggle continues.*

Edwin 'Mapeta' Tekane

**In the Orange Free State mineworkers are writing poetry and starting to organise themselves around issues of culture and liberation**

## VICTORY IS CERTAIN

*Mothers and father of Africa  
Shall you prick your ears and listen  
listen to the voice*

*Listen to the sound  
bursting through the bullet-riddled walls of Luanda  
Walls that gave refuge to PLAN combatants  
Combatants who routed the racist battalions  
on the valleys of Cuito Quinavale*

*Listen to this voice  
bringing tides of joy  
to the people  
tides of liberation  
to the nation*

*Sons and daughters of our Mother-soil  
Shall you rouse from your slumbers and listen  
divorce your siestas*

*Listen to the voice  
piercing through the billows of Walvis Bay  
Billows that rejected the anchoring of racist colonial ships  
Ships that brought war, injustice and famine  
to the land of peace, hospitality and plenty.*

*Listen to this great voice  
making promises of a happy future  
to Namibians  
promises of Uhuu  
to South Africans*

*Roar young lions of my country, roar  
As we're listening to the voice of hope  
thundering like a limpet-mine explosion  
rumbling over the dusty streets of Katutura  
Streets saturated with rivulets of blood  
Blood swallowed over time immemorial  
Blood that oozed from gaping wounds of innocent babies  
Wounds inflicted by barbaric Koevoet cannibals  
products of a racist womb.*

*Students, teachers, parents and workers  
hear this voice*

*Hear this sound  
through the toyi-toyi stamping feet of the energetic youth  
in the sharp ululation of a choking Namibian women  
under the tear-gas perfumed cloud of the slum and ghetto  
Bidding welcome back home to the SWAPO exiles*

*We will hear this same voice  
whispered on the half desert-land of Namaqua  
We will hear this same sound  
rumbling on the banks of the famous Limpopo  
We will hear this same voice  
shouting in the dense forests of Louis Trichardt  
We will hear this same sound  
roaring in the ever lively streets of Mamelodi  
We will hear this same voice  
bursting through the motors of capitalist machines*

*We will hear this same sound  
clattering through Holiday Inns' sculleries  
We will hear this same voice  
announcing VICTORY to us*

*Ask Pee Wee about this voice  
he'll tell you that it causes strokes  
Ask F.W. about this voice  
he'll tell you how how bald it makes one to be  
Ask Terry about this voice  
he'll tell you how good a music it is for laager*

*But remember  
this is not a voice from a minuscule opera  
for no racist violin can match its sound  
But a voice from an overwhelming majority  
A voice of citizens  
united  
A voice of patriots  
determined  
A voice of comrades  
committed  
A voice that knows only one truth  
that Freedom or Death...VICTORY IS CERTAIN*