

ONE UNION — ONE INDUSTRY

THE National Union of Mineworkers was formed in July 1982, when the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) took a resolution to organise mineworkers.

This decision was taken because many, many workers had come to CUSA's offices wanting to be organised. Comrade Cyril Ramaphosa, then head of the legal unit, was asked to spearhead the organising committee.

Earlier attempts

Earlier attempts to organise mineworkers proved extremely difficult. The most important, and partially successful attempt was in the 1940's with the African Mineworkers Union. By 1945 it had 100 000 members. But, the union's struggle to get recognition from the Chamber of Mines was refused. The mineworkers went on strike but it was crushed. It was a major setback for the organisation of mineworkers.

New attempts

Although there were attempts in the mid and late 70's, by the Black Allied Workers Union, to organise the collieries in Natal, not much progress was made. It was only in 1982, when the NUM was formed, that the mineworkers won major gains in the mining industry.

The first members of the union came from the Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA) at the Johannesburg depot. A few weeks later, six workers were retrenched at the depot. They became the first organisers of the union.

Organising workers is not easy. Organising mineworkers is even more difficult, because access to miners is tightly controlled. Early attempts to organise workers, without the bosses knowing, did not bring many members. A shaft steward at Vaal Reefs said why:

"The workers thought we were an insurance company and just wanted to take their money. They also said that if the bosses did not know about the union, then it was illegal. Besides this, the problems of talking to workers, and not having meeting places, made us change our plans."

Chamber response

The organising committee then decided to approach the Chamber of Mines. They wanted to see the constitution and on October 19, 1982, they granted the union access to the mines.

Although the union got access, the Chamber did not like unions on the mines. The only unions they like are those controlled by the bosses, that is, sweet-heart unions.

Targets

Ten gold mines were made targets for organising — Western Holdings, Saaiplaas, Welkom, President Brand, Western Deep Levels, Elandsrand, Kloof Libanon, Blyvooruit-

zicht and Venterspost. In total these mines had 170 000 mineworkers.

Launch

During November, a Planning Committee of three shaft stewards from the ten gold mines drafted a constitution for the first National congress. The congress was held on December 4, 1984, in Jouberton, Klerksdorp.

There were 1 800 delegates present. They were from 14 gold mines representing 14 000 mineworkers.

"It was a big moment for mineworkers," said one delegate who attended Congress. "The mineworkers had come of age. Almost ten years later, after the re-emergence of a strong democratic trade union movement, did the mineworkers start getting unionised."

Resolutions

Many important decisions were taken at the congress. They were that:

- The NUM should not register with the Department of Manpower
- The NUM should not join the Council of Associations and Mining Union
- All mineworkers should be organised in one union

The following principles were also accepted:

- Worker control
- Non-racialism
- Worker independence
- Industrial unionism
- International worker solidarity

Officials

The following comrades were elected the first office bearers of the union:

James Motlatsi — President

Elijah Barayi — Vice-President

Cyril Ramaphosa — General Secretary

Ishmael Thulo — Treasurer

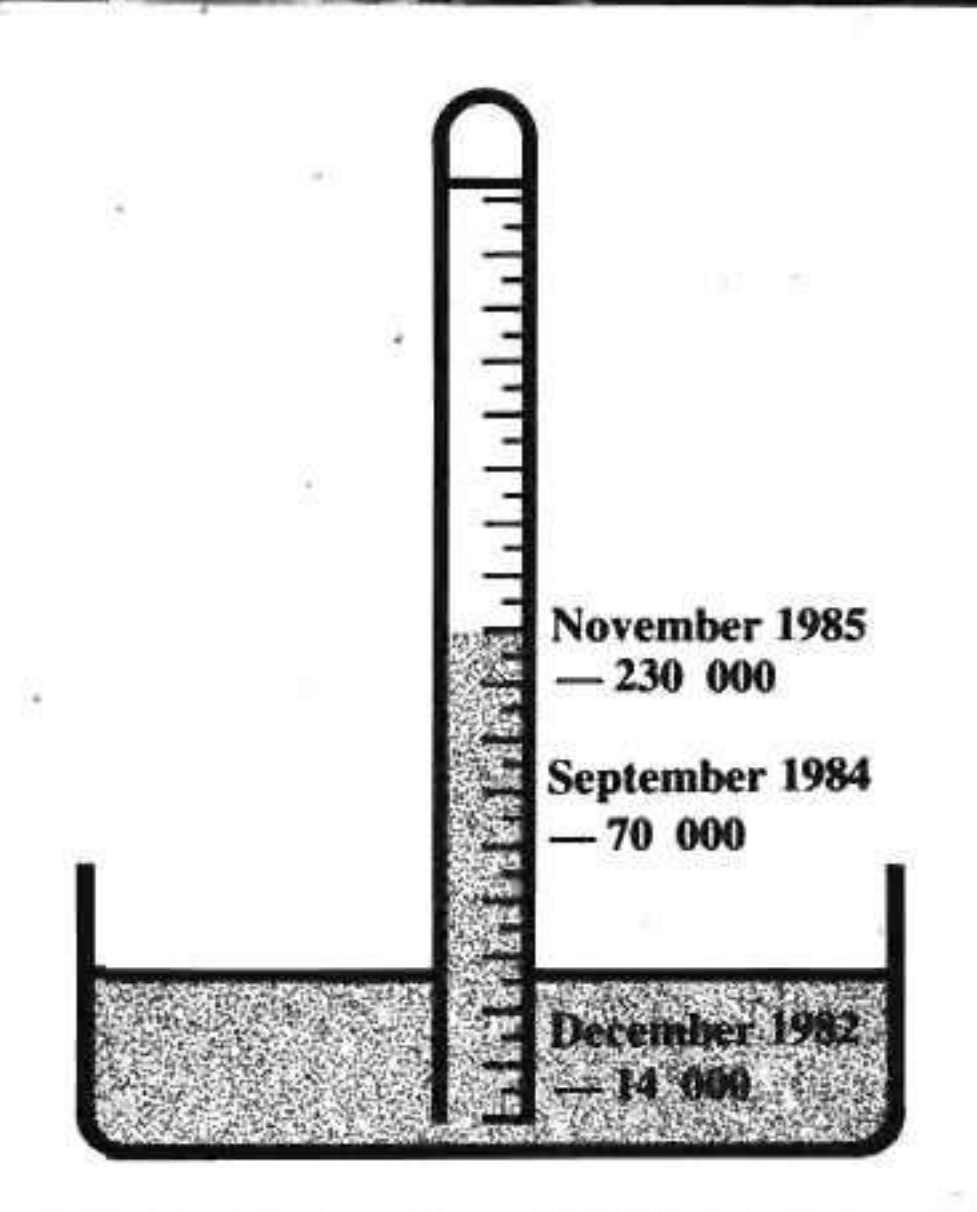
Mabandla Dodumashe, Kenneth Nomane, George Maluleke, Petros Miya and Lempotsang Metela — all regional chairmen — were also on the National Executive Committee.

Growth

Union membership grew rapidly. In three years the union had 230 000 signed-up members on gold, diamond, coal and other base metal mines. There are ten regions: Orange



Early days of the NUM: A meeting under the trees



Free State, Klerksdorp, Secunda, Western Areas, Witwatersrand, Phalaboroa, Natal, Namaqualand Northern Cape and Witbank.

Recognition

On June 19, 1983, the NUM was recognised by the Chamber of Mines as the first union representing black workers. Over the past three years the union has gained the following recognition agreements:

Gold Mines

President Brand; Saaiplaas; Stilfontein; Deelkraal; Libanon; Elandsrand; Western Holdings; Hartebeesfontein; President Steyn; FSG North; FSG South; Blyvooruitzicht, Vaal Reefs West; Vaal Reefs East; Kloof; Marievale; East Driefontein; West Driefontein and Western Deep Levels North.

Collieries

Bank; Kriel; Arnot; S.A. Coal Estates; Douglas; Van Dyks Drift; Wolwekrans; Tweefontein; Mutla; TNC; New Clydesdale; Rietspruit Diamond Mines; De Beers in Namaqualand; Premier in Pretoria and De Beers in Kimberley.

Other

Rand Refinery; TEBA (Johannesburg); Chamber of Mines Sports Club; Rand Mutual Hospital; Nuclear Fuels Corporation; Ergo and Murchison Consolidated.

The following applications for recognition have also been made:

Beatrix; St Helena; Unisel; New Vaal; Zinco; Phalaboroa Mining Company; Western Areas; Vaal Reefs South; Rand Mines Milling Company; Oppenheimer Hospital and Western Deep Levels Hospital.

The union has made rapid strides in the mining industry, but a lot of consolidation is necessary. This is the priority for the future.

In the future editions of the newsletter we will focus on the histories of the different regions.

SPOTLIGHT

Unisel: Comrade Makotoko, a worker, was forcibly removed from hospital when he was critically ill. Transferred home and died the following day. His family was given R300. His management escort told his family "he could die".

Hartebeesfontein Gold Mine: 75 workers locked in a "mine cell" for their participation in a strike. Hundreds were kept in an isolation block and then bussed home.

Western Areas Gold Mine: Comrade Benjamin Khoele was beaten by 6 whites underground because he was active in the NUM. He was left semi-paralysed on his left side. He spent more than three months in hospital.

THIS IS THE FIRST NEWSLETTER OF THE UNION. WE ARE LOOKING FOR A NAME FOR THE NEWSLETTER. WE WOULD LIKE SUGGESTIONS FROM WORKERS. SEND YOUR SUGGESTIONS TO: GENERAL SECRETARY NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS PO BOX 10928 JOHANNESBURG 2000

Name: Name of Mine:

Address: