



# A RAGE FROM THE BOTTOM



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The Role of NUM in Transforming  
The Mining Industry in SA



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion will seek to demonstrate the transformative role the National Union of Mineworkers has played in the changes characterizing the Mining industry in South Africa in the past and the present. In doing so focus will be on the following :struggle for home ownership and hostel conversions burial with dignity ,democratization of hostels .

The discussion will also look at the struggle against job reservations linked to it the group areas act .Focus will then extend to the struggle for public holidays , health and safety ,collective bargaining and the emergence of women in mining .

The Social and Labour Plans are crucial including Future forums as change agents in the transformation of the mining industry. The rise of adult education as part of the struggle for recognition of prior learning and phasing out of Fanakalo.The latter being a common sense language that emerged in the mines to overcome unintelligibility at work in the mines between workers and employers who were speaking different languages from many part of

Africa and Europe .The union created institutions of learning to improve numeracy and literacy levels of its members to be active in the changes made by the industry.

It is contended that NUM though its active role contributed immensely towards the transformation of the mining industry in improving working and living conditions of the black workers in particularly and the industrial proletariat generally in the mining industry .It is important to give a brief background about the formation of NUM and the linkages between the shop floor struggles and the national democratic struggle in South Africa.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was founded in 1982 as the largest union since the beginning. It has grown into a giant boasting close to 400 000 membership base .This makes it the biggest affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) which was founded in 1985. NUM is originally a mining sector trade union.

However its sphere of operation has changed and it now organizes in construction and energy sectors. From its inception it declared its political affiliation with the congress tradition by adopting the so called four pillars of struggled embraced by the African National Congress when it was in exile. NUM is the first trade union to adopt freedom charter in its constitution.

The four pillars are: armed struggle, mass mobilization, international solidarity, and underground operation as adopted by the ANC Morogoro Conference in 1969. In this regard the union linked its shop floor struggles with the national political landscape grievances of national democratic struggle to liberate South Africa. In essence its struggle became enjoyed with the popular mass democratic struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa. By virtue of this it defined itself in terms of the concept of social movement trade unionism.

Having defined itself beyond the struggles of the shop floor The National Union of Mineworkers went on to facilitate the founding of the Congress of

South African Trade unions in 1985 which undertook the first biggest strike in 1986 demanding the recognition of May Day.

### 3. HOME OWNERSHIP

The National Union of Mineworkers has been instrumental in pushing for the conversion of hostels into family units and single units. This is an attempt to change the system of putting workers into more than ten groups as residents in one hostel room. Through the family unit system the union tries to stabilize the workers lives and restore normal family support in areas where they work given the migratory nature of the mining industry labour force.

African mine workers in a migrant hostel



Picture Source : Cape Archives Repository

For instance many workers come from the rural areas as far as the Eastern Cape and neighboring countries such as Lesotho. They are cut away from family life for a long time and this makes them to be vulnerable to other social challenges .When they have family support around them it could be an important institutional intervention to ameliorate their social and biological burdens .

By winning the war for the conversion of hostels into single units since from the 1980s the union's hopes to create an atmosphere of privacy for the individual workers which are important given the varying ages of the mineworkers. Mineworkers would be allocated one big room for almost 18 of them to reside .So changing this arrangements goes a long way in promoting and inculcating the culture of respect amongst workers .Many of the workers come from traditional rural areas which hold age and respect as an important family and social relations value<sup>1</sup>.

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Tafa Moya (2012), Interview. a former miner who now works for National Union of Mineworkers as Mine Coordinator(Managerial level position) focusing on serving NUM members

#### 4. BURIAL WITH DIGNITY



**The Scale of Justice**

NUM has successfully driven the fact that workers who perish due to mining fatalities should be buried in their places of origin preferred by their next of kin. Usually workers who died due to mine accidents were buried in the cemeteries around their places of work or the mines.

Today workers are given a dignified burial and the companies assists in allowing crew members to accompany the deceased to their places of origin for proper burial as an act of courtesy and solidarity .The mine companies play a role in the arrangements .This is a great achievement in the struggle for workers

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working for AngloGold Company ,interview conducted in April at NUM Head Office .Johannesburg South Africa

rights and human dignity in the mining industry. Many companies today have funeral funds and life insurances to cover workers.

## 5. DEMOCRATISATION OF HOSTELS

### 5.1 Access of married quarters for all

Furthermore the struggle to transform the hostel system is also a battle to reconfigure apartheid mode of housing arrangements which were consistent with the Group Areas Act .For instance White workers qualified to reside in the so called married quarters by virtue of their race .

None of black mineworkers would qualify despite the fact that some of them were already married as they came into the mines .They would be *treated as boys which was very offensive to black workers*<sup>2</sup> .The

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Buda(2012),Interview on the struggle for housing accommodation in the mines ,conducted at NUM Head Office ,April 2012.Kenneth Buda is a former mineworker and is now employed at the National Union of Mineworkers as a Mining House Coordinator .Hi responsibility is to

National Union of Mineworkers in its struggle to convert the hostel system sought to ensure that there was equitable access to mine houses .

### 5.2 Hostel Residence Committees

The National union of Mineworkers mobilized workers to establish Hostel Residence Committees .These committees were created as centers of popular power. They were Intended to be use to mobilize workers and organize them into a united force to dislodge company control through the hostel system .Through these structures workers could speak in one united voice and engage management about their conditions of living .

One way of company control through the hostel system was allocating residence on ethnic or tribal bases to ensure divisions amongst workers .These kind of divisions created an easy environment for ethnic tensions which gave advantage to control of the workers while accentuating poor living

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service NUM members employed Goldfields .Johannesburg South Africa .



conditions. So birth of Residence Committees would enable workers to manage the potential of hostile contradictions amongst workers triggered by tribal and ethnic divisions .

## 6. Better Food and Good Nutrition

The Board of Governors was also created to formalize approaches for workers in dealing with kitchen politics .This served as an extension of Residence Committees. This is a formalization of Residence Committees .

The Members of the Board of Governors would be elected by Residents and they serve on a full time basis .Their responsibilities include ensuring good nutrition is maintained with regard to hostel meals served to workers .In the past and in certain instances workers would be served *rotten food*<sup>3</sup>.

There were food strikes at President Steyn and Western Holdings when workers discovered that they were given rotten meat <sup>4</sup>.While this evolved as part

of the struggle of the 1980s it turned into implementation in the early 1990s.This is part of the transformation of the hostel system into hospitable accommodation and living environment by the workers .

It contributed in changing the living conditions of the workers and therefore contributed in democratizing the living conditions in the mining industry .

## 7. Job Reservations Act

Black mine workers were not allowed to have blasting certificates or become artisans because skilled jobs were reserved for whites in the mining industry .These were normally best-paid jobs This was the sole preserve of white mineworkers .

To alter the status quo NUM campaigned vigorously in the 1980s to end this legislative arrangements which was effectively discriminatory .The National Union of Mineworkers organized the 1987 strike which took 21 historic days. Amongst other demands of the strike was the extension or creation of Provident Fund for black workers. White mineworkers had

<sup>3</sup> Ibid (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Tafa Moya (2012). Interview.

Retirement Fund and black mineworkers had none of these benefits.

Between 1987 and 1989 discussion took place between industry stakeholders to remedy the situation. In 1989 Retirement Fund was put into place accommodating black mineworkers. This created a sense of equality versus discrimination. Both black and white mine workers now had access to this important retirement facility and it was victory for NUM and black mineworkers generally.

There is co-determination today pertaining to the funding of provident funds or pension fund by way of employer and employee joined contributions which ultimately are to the benefit of the workers or employees post retirement.

## 8. Public Holidays

Workers were only entitled to Good Friday and former Republic Day (31<sup>st</sup> May). The National Union of Mineworkers was the first union to negotiate for the observation of May the 1<sup>st</sup> (May Day) popularly known as

Workers Day. Under the Leadership of President James Motlatsi and General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa the Chamber of Mines agreed in negotiations to observe the workers day in 1989.

This was an important victory by mineworkers in terms of Working Class International Solidarity. For the first time workers in South Africa would stand up to share commemoration of this day with workers of the world.

Formally the workers in South Africa joined the tradition set out by the Second International Congress in 1891 which called for recognition of this day as day of solidarity influenced by the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Thale (2005), *Haymarket and Mayday* "On May 1, 1886, Chicago "unionists, reformers, socialists, anarchists, and ordinary workers combined to make the city the center of the national movement for an eight-hour day. Between April 25 and May 4, workers attended scores of meetings and paraded through the streets at least 19 times. On Saturday, May 1, 35,000 workers walked off their jobs. Tens of thousands more, both skilled and unskilled, joined them on May 3 and 4. Crowds traveled from workplace to workplace urging fellow workers to strike. Many now adopted the radical demand of eight hours' work for ten hours' pay. Police

where workers and police were killed during protest.

It was a precursor to formal recognition of Workers Day in South Africa and NUM led the way in institutionalizing this day as recognized worker day. Thus eventually turned into a formal holiday in the national calendar.

The recognition of this May Day by the Chamber of Mines besides internationalizing in the calendar recognition of working class solidarity it actually formalized the struggle for 8 Hours Day work which was one of the key demands heralded by the Chicago strike in 1886. Today not only mineworkers but workers in South Africa commemorate this day as a public holiday in the national calendar.

## 9. Health and Safety

The Mine Health and Safety Act came into being as a response to the Vaal Reefs Disaster wherein 104 workers died underground crashed beyond

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clashed with strikers at least a dozen times, three with shootings' (Encyclopedia of Chicago)" by 2005 Chicago Historical Society.

recognition in 1995. Already the debate about safety had started to roll along the many disasters that characterized the South African Mining Industry and that took place before the Vaal Reefs one. For example mine accidents such as the 1986 Kinross Disaster wherein 177 mineworkers<sup>6</sup> perished underground all of them being migrant workers<sup>7</sup>.

## Safety First



Picture Source: unknown<sup>8</sup>

## Profits Later

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<sup>6</sup> They died due to lethal fire which led to the spread of poisonous gas through the tunnels of the Kinross mine (Eastern Transvaal) s where they working.

<sup>7</sup> Van Niekerk, P. (1986). "Gencor agrees to NUM day of mourning", Weekly Mail: Vol. 2. No 38. pp. 7

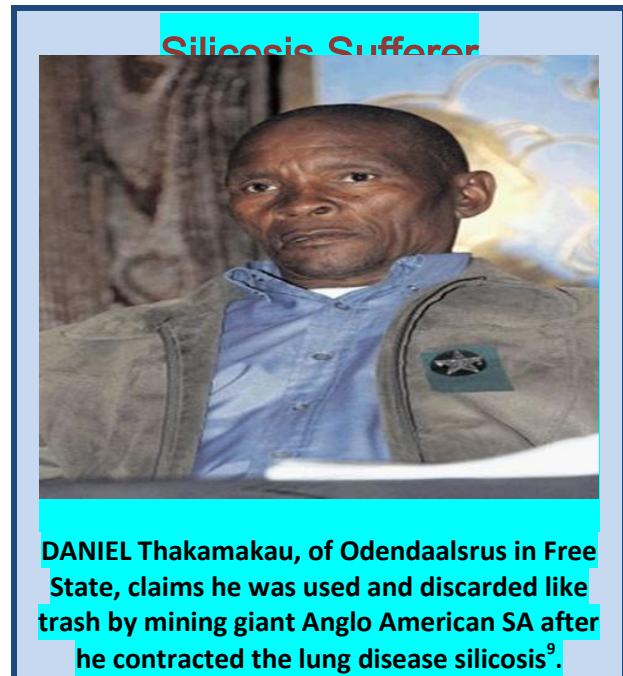
<sup>8</sup> Picture layout manipulated by Mike Fafuli



## 10. Occupational Diseases & Compensation

The discrimination on the basis of race was part of the mining employment regime. The entrenchment of the culture and spirit of discrimination at production points and the shopfloor went as far as effecting differences in how compensation was managed to workers who suffered from occupational diseases such as and silicosis. TB and Silicosis is common amongst mine workers particularly in the Gold sector.

Silicosis is a lung infecting occupational disease mainly caused by inhalation of silica dust underground. Black workers are the main culprits who largely contract both silicosis and TB in the mine industry. In the past Black mineworkers who contracted any of these disease would be compensated including white workers who were marginal statistically. For instance a Black mineworkers would be given R1 000-00 as compensation if they are diagnosed with TB. They would get R3000-00 if suffering from silicosis.



White mineworkers were earning compensation way beyond R10 000-00. The National Union of Mineworkers fought against this in its war against racism, discrimination, and separation of workers along ethnic lines. Today workers are compensated equally fairly irrespective of colour or category. This defines how compensation is managed today.

Thus the NUM has transformed the industry by ensuring that compensation is governed differently without inherent undue entitlements on the basis of colour. Today as a result of these

<sup>9</sup> Sowetan 19 April 2012

worker struggles many enjoy disability cover given the dangers inherent in their scope of work .Workers now have access to medical aid in mining which is an important achievement.

## 11.Hiv Aids Policies

Furthermore ,The National Union of Mineworkers was instrumental in the development and adoption of HIV AIDS Policy in the mining industry .NUM campaigned vigorously in the 1990s for companies to develop and adopt HIV AIDS policies to cater for the wellness of workers who fell ill due to the pandemic .As a result the Chamber of Mines acceded and all companies now have HIV Aids policies .Companies have partnership structures to provide support for workers .Wellness programmes are also important features in the partnership war against HIV AIDS.

## 12.Collective Bargaining

The Officials, Miners and the Artisans had their own separate Bargaining Units .This essentially sustained racial divisions at the workplace because unskilled miners were mainly black

workers and Artisans and officials were all white .As at present Bargaining processes fall under one roof for all and no more separation on the basis of job category or racial classification .This has been a tireless struggle waged by the National Union of Mineworkers.

In pursuit of the struggle for a living wage in the 1990s the National Union of Mineworkers pushed for the phasing out of category one and two in terms of employment entry in the mining industry .Both categories entrenched poverty wages for black workers .

As at present category three has become the entry point to the advantage of many black mineworkers.These collective bargaining struggles have culminated into improved conditions of service for black workers in terms of benefits which are legislated like annual leave and etc.

The right to strike which is today part of the labour regime regulations was one of the key principles NUM fought for and the fact that it has been legislated in the labour relations act 1996 is a great achievement for the mineworkers .It has

contributed a lot in the art of managing employee relations not only in the mining industry but across industry and sectors in South Africa.

### 13. WOMEN IN MINING

The mining industry is male dominated by character .This means that the role of women in terms of employment in the mining industry was limited in terms of the numbers .Mlambo<sup>10</sup> indicates that the limited number of women in the mining industry was not only by virtue of stereotypes.

But there was legislative framework that made this possible such as the ‘South Africa Minerals Act of 1991’.According to Mlambo the situation has been changing with technology contributing towards eliminating of gender

stereotypes that have presented the industry as exclusively masculine .

The South African Mining Charter was introduced in 2002 with intent to redress the historical imbalances .For instance the Mining Charter sets out targets in an attempt to address the gender questions .The Charter called on the mining industry to ensure 10% of women in terms of the total workforce were women by 2009.

This triggered slight improvement .For example by 2009 the industry had reached the 10% target .Many women got job opportunities and these ranged between different categories such as artisans , plant managers , administrators and etc.

However there are a lot of challenges for women in mining .One of these challenges is when male comrades still view their female counterparts as sex objects .The recent example at Implants demonstrates the gravity of the challenges faced by women in the mining industry . Some companies are still lagging behind in reaching the targets. Companies like Lonmin Plc.

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<sup>10</sup> Yeukai Mlambo (2011), Women in mining: Legislation and representation for women in mining ,published by Consultancy Africa Intelligence, August.

Were still lagging to reach the target .This is one example amongst many.

It is upon government to use stringent measures in making sure that companies meet targets . One of the important punitive measures is by denying such a company the opportunity to renew company licenses if they have failed to meet their targets .

NUM has been driving the campaign for gender equity in the mining industry. Thus it is important that mining companies create a conducive working conditions environment for women to flourish .Many companies did not embrace this kind of change of the labour force in terms of gender.

While these have been positive developments from NUM internally a serious indictment on its commitment to women empowerment was dealt a blow .For instance a female black mineworker was allegedly raped and killed at Anglo Platinum mine (khomanani) in Rustenburg .In its press release statement NUM confirmed and condemned the incident .The General Secretary said ""The worker was found

violated and dead underground at the mine yesterday afternoon,"<sup>11</sup>.

## 14. Social and Labour Plans + Future Forums

Over time the National Union of Mineworkers became concerned about effects of mine closures on the workers livelihood .When there were operational changes workers would consequentially be retrenched effectively dumped into destitution. Whatever they will be given would not be sustainable given their literacy and numeracy levels .

They were deficient in managing money and so on for a long term because of lack of necessary skills .They would not be employed anywhere because they had no alternative training .Eventually remaining unproductive and joining the long queues of the unemployed.

It is these scenarios that pushed NUM to find options of reskilling as important to mitigate impacts of retrenchments .So that workers who are retrenched will have the opportunity to be productive in

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<sup>11</sup> Woman mineworker raped, killed underground, Feb 7, 2012 | Sowetan LIVE

a different way .This led to the birth of the concept of Social Labour Plans which has now become a business imperative by legislation. For example **Section 46(d)(i) of the MPRDA** calls upon Mining companies to create Future Forums .

Through such structures people participation becomes entrenched .The mines become duty bound to engage and develop strategies with workers through their recognized unions and management .Today mines should comply with Mining and Petroleum Resources Development Act(MPRDA).

### **15. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)**

The notion of ABET is home grown and its developmental character has been transformative in the mining industry. The National Union of Mineworkers realizing the disadvantage of its members in terms of education levels and in this regard focused on improving the numeracy and literacy levels of its members . It wanted the experience of the black workers to be recognized in terms of what it called

Recognition of Prior Learning so that this could stand them better opportunities pertaining to promotion in their areas or work.

Furthmore the National Union of Mineworkers also wanted to stop the mining bosses from using formal education as the sole barometer to determine competency and potential in promoting workers which would have run in favour of white workers if not challenged and entrenched the racial status quo .It was purely a strategy to further the discrimination practices and promote the culture and spiritit of job reservations in the industry.

Essentially ABET would provide adults with a platform to access general education to improve their conditions .For example **“At our age (53 and 54) it is not easy to learn but we are determined to better our lives. Our employer is providing necessary support by giving us enough time to study. They give us incentives for passing our subjects,”**<sup>12</sup> . This will empower them to determine their future and destination

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<sup>12</sup> Esios Magopane and Jacob Sithole interviewed by Business Day.



with confidence than as spectators handicapped by lack of education.

### Workers Underground Hard at work



A level of education and development is required to safeguard mine workers<sup>13</sup>.

Through this vehicle workers prior knowledge would be recognized by certification which was important to the achievers. It was transformative in the sense that it helped advance the National Union of Mineworkers struggle towards the elimination of Fanakalo in the mining industry.

Fanakalo developed as a functional mode of communication unique to the Mining Industry. In a survey undertaken at the operations of Anglo Platinum it has emerged that close to 60% would like to

<sup>13</sup> Courtesy of Fanie Heyns- 24 January 2011

see this functional language eliminated. Fanakalo emerged as a language of integration at production points in underground mining in South Africa.

The South African Mining labour force was very diverse linguistically given its migratory nature. The fact that the labour force was diverse as workers came as far as Mozambique, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and spoke their language of origins which hampered intra communication pertaining to receiving and implementing instructions at production points.

This was worsened by the fact that those who held senior positions were mainly white from European countries and unfamiliar with African languages and traditions. Non-intelligibility would have developed into a production crisis had **fanakalo** not been adopted for mining work purposes.

Although it became a functional language of communication in the mining industry it did not originate in mining. For instance as Thwala (2008) argues "Fanakalo is a pidgin which

developed first around the Eastern Cape and then in the Natal sugar cane plantations. The mines adapted and developed Fanakalo for the mines and used it as a lingua franca for mining purposes<sup>14</sup>.

## 16. Creating Educated Membership

### 16.1 Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Center (EBMTC)

Through the EBMTC NUM was also able to train its own members as Labour Relations Brigades after the enactment of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) in 1996. This was to ensure that its own members would be better equipped to handle challenges that would emerge arising from the perceptions of the LRA. These trained brigades went on to play an important role in disputes with management and etc. Some have become important leaders in the industry.

In order for NUM to develop a class conscious cadre and revolutionary trade unionism .It considered skills training and political education as a fundamental basis .It is against this background that it built the training center called Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Center (EBMTC) in 1993. This also assisted the union to embark on the process of improving numeracy and literacy levels of its members and shop stewards.

Via this institution the union would be able to sharpen the class consciousness of its members through political education programs hosted at this college .This included empowering the members with technical know how and administrative skills such as case preparation and understanding of labour law .

Furthermore in order to create institutional support for access to primary education and tertiary opportunities for dependents of its members the union established what is called JB Marks Education Trust Fund .

This ensured that children of the workers have different opportunities and

<sup>14</sup> Nhlanhla Thwala Getting Rid of Fanakalo in the Changing Political Landscape, July. Published by Wits Language School.

not create and generation replication of the status of their forebearers ..Both national and migrant workers from the neighboring countries such as Lesotho ,Swaziland and so on have had their dependents being funded by this entity in pursuing tertiary education in areas of their choice .

JB Marks Education Trust has provided full bursaries to dependents of workers and migrant workers to pursue studies in accounting commerce, law, medicine, IT, engineering, and etc. This support has been cutting through university ,technickons and colleges .

At the shop floor the union has successfully secured effective Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programmes in partnership with companies in construction, energy , and mining which are sectors it organizes.

Some of these development projects are in neighboring countries like Lesotho such as sandstone sculpturing conducted for both domestic and corporate use. This is an important product of the interventions made by the National Union of Mineworkers to

support its members post formal employment to sustain their livelihood and survival in and beyond the borders .

## **17. Mineworkers Development Agency (MDA)**

NUM established the Mineworkers Development Agency (MDA) in 1987 as an instrument that would assist the union to design social labour plan programmes and skills development in mitigation of negative impacts of retranchements that were endemic in the mining industry . Particularly after the 1987 massive strike where many people lost their jobs .

But it has grown to cover energy and construction sector workers which are sectors organized by NUM today .The union has established various centers to this effect including beyond South Africa`s borders given that some of its members are migrant workers from different African countries. To be able to minimize the impact of retrenchments this may create serious socio-economic challenges.

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