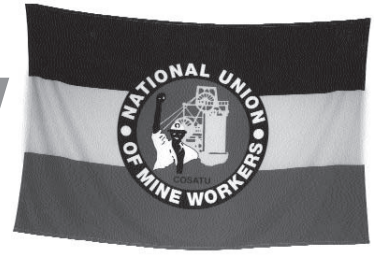


"A Good Union"



The National Union of Mineworkers

In this edition we profile the National Union of Mineworkers. The *Bulletin* spoke to general secretary **Gwede Mantashe** about Cosatu's largest affiliate. It was also a farewell interview to a seasoned, committed and adept unionists who will be leaving his position and the union at the NUM Congress in May this year.

I see you are drinking coffee from a cup that says "Dad you are my idol". Tell me about yourself.

Well I have three children. One is small, she gave me this cup. One is doing well at college and the second born is an NUM shop steward at Elandsrus in Carletonville. She's very active in gender structures.

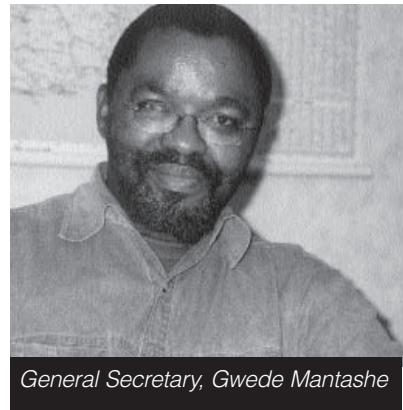
I was a mineworker at three different mines. I first worked at Western Deep which was a gold

mine. I was fired in 1975 so I moved to Prieska to a copper mine where I worked for seven years. At the beginning of 1983 I joined Matla Coal in Kriel in the Bethal area and it was here that I joined the National Union of Mineworkers. I had read about it in the newspaper and at the time it was in Cusa (Council of Unions of South Africa).

I took a bunch of joining forms to the NUM offices in Lectern House in Wanderers Street in Johannesburg. We recruited about 400 members which was 80% of the workforce. It was a small mine. That same year I became the Matla branch chair.

I became the Witbank regional secretary - in NUM secretaries are workers. Later, in 1985, when Cosatu was formed, I became the Cosatu Highveld Regional chair. In 1988 I chose to leave Matla just after the 1987 miners' strike which incidentally I don't think was as disastrous as some people make out. Yes, many were dismissed but for future generations we won the retirement fund and improved death cover from 24 to 36 months. The Mineworkers Provident Fund is now worth almost R10-billion. I joined the NUM as a national organiser in order to build the union.

In NUM the Head of Department drives the strategy but the real organising happens in the regions. Here branches drive recruitment.



General Secretary, Gwede Mantashe

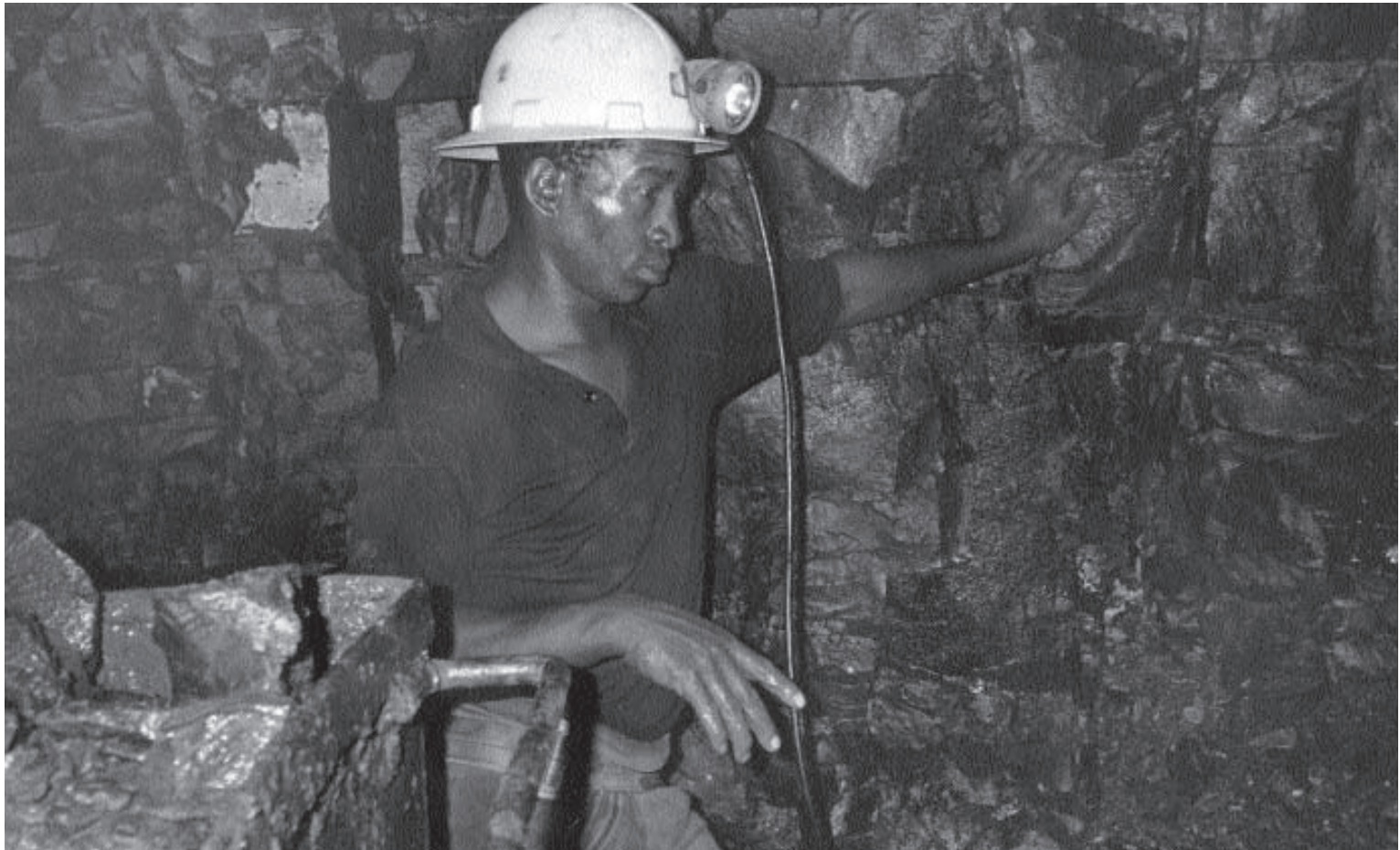
Each mine is a branch. I remained a national organiser until 1993. During that time NUM created the position of regional coordinators and I was appointed to this position when the Wits and Westonaria branches merged into the PWV (Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vaal) Region.

At the 1994 Congress I was elected assistant general secretary and when (Motlanthe) Kgalima left to become the secretary-general of the ANC I became the general secretary of the union.

At the Congress in May this year I am standing down and leaving the union.

Who does NUM organise?

Historically it is a mining union, no matter what the mineral. Then our scope expanded to include Eskom workers in 1985. About 90% of electricity is generated from coal and coal mines are located adjacent to power stations. We won recognition at Eskom in 1987.



Numsa also organises there and rightfully they should have handed over their members but it has been a bone of contention for so long that we have stopped trying to get those members into NUM. NUM has the biggest presence at Eskom, then Solidarity and thereafter Numsa.

In 2000 we became a super union when Cawu (Construction & Allied Workers union) merged with us. Cawu was on the brink of collapse.

In mining, gold had the largest membership but this is a declining base. The union has a membership of 269 831 members and of these about 100 000 are in gold in such places as the PWV, Carletonville, the Free State, Klerksdorp, Highveld, Evander, Mafeking and Kimberley.

There are about 24 000 members in coal where we also have a long tradition of organising. The bulk of mining is in Witbank and we have smaller operations in Natal, the Vaal, Ellisras (Northern Province) where the next power station is going to

be built.

Platinum workers are our growth point. Mining takes place in the North East and majorly around Rustenburg. It is one of our youngest regions and it has taken time to stabilise. It was complicated and we had a number of problems. It grew very fast - faster than our infrastructure. Rustenburg is our biggest region with 60 000 members. Its membership did not grow up with our democratic, accountable traditions and the result was a lot of infighting and turnover of leadership. At one stage in the early 1990s a splinter union formed called Mouthpiece although it has now collapsed. The region is now stabilising though.

Our diamond mines are shrinking. Some of these mines are 180 years old or more and are simply not producing any more. De Beers has just closed mines in Kimberley, Koffiefontein and mines in the Free State and Namaqualand are on the brink of closure. There's

a big mine in Cullinan but it has not met expectations.

Copper mines are small at Okiep and Phalaborwa but the mine at Prieska has closed. Iron ore however shows strong growth and we have a lot of members in this area.

Titanium mining is always contentious. It is a mine along the coast and so it offends environmentalist when the dunes are spoiled. We have members in Kumba near Empangeni and Lusikisiki and Centani in the Eastern Cape but these are on hold. Our position is that we should go ahead with the mining and ensure that the companies give an undertaking that the dunes are rehabilitated afterwards. An opportunity to mine the dunes would develop the economy and provide jobs.

Mining is the most densely unionised sector of the economy especially as they are generally large workplaces. All the organising is

done by workers. They conduct all their own negotiations (except wage bargaining) and shaft stewards take issues right up to CCMA level. We invest a huge amount in education to make sure that this can happen. We are the only union with our own education college, the Elijah Barayi Centre, which we are proud of and see as an institution for the working class to use.

Tell us about your newest sector – construction.

We have been organising in this area since 2000. When Cawu merged into NUM it had 17 000 members and R1,4-million liabilities. Yet we felt the potential in this area. We had a big nine day wage strike in 2003 which established us in this sector.

We now have 55 000 members and they bring in 10% of the

union's membership. We ring-fenced the revenue from construction so we could quantify our revenue. We ran for 18 months at a deficit then we broke even. We believe we can still grow but it is a difficult sector because membership is constantly disappearing. You have a big project, say Coega, where we recruited about 3 000 members, but when the project ends the membership goes.

We believe that Cosatu must take responsibility for 'vulnerable sectors'. NUM has accepted that responsibility and committed ourselves to this vulnerable sector. The cyclical behaviour of the industry must be absorbed by the union.

It is easy to organise mining because of the concentration of workers. In construction this is not the case. We have to identify new sites opening up in a region and go and recruit there.

We have three main growth areas. These are platinum, construction and white workers in all our sectors. About 25% in mining are white-collar workers. A number of these artisanal white members are committed to training our black members. White workers have begun to join as they are starting to see the value of joining a militant union rather than staying in white service unions.

How do you bargain in your different sectors?

In mining no bargaining council exists. We negotiate for gold and coal with the Chamber of Mines every two years. In the rest of mining bargaining is plant based.

At Chamber negotiations we have an 80-90 member worker delegation. Delegates come from all branches which makes it easy to

report back and to launch or call off industrial action if necessary. Before each round of negotiations we give a report back and get mandates for the next round. In a possible strike situation we get a precise report of each branch's position. We then add up the total and go with the majority decision. We go back to those who did not support strike action and explain to them that they must accept and they have to go on strike.

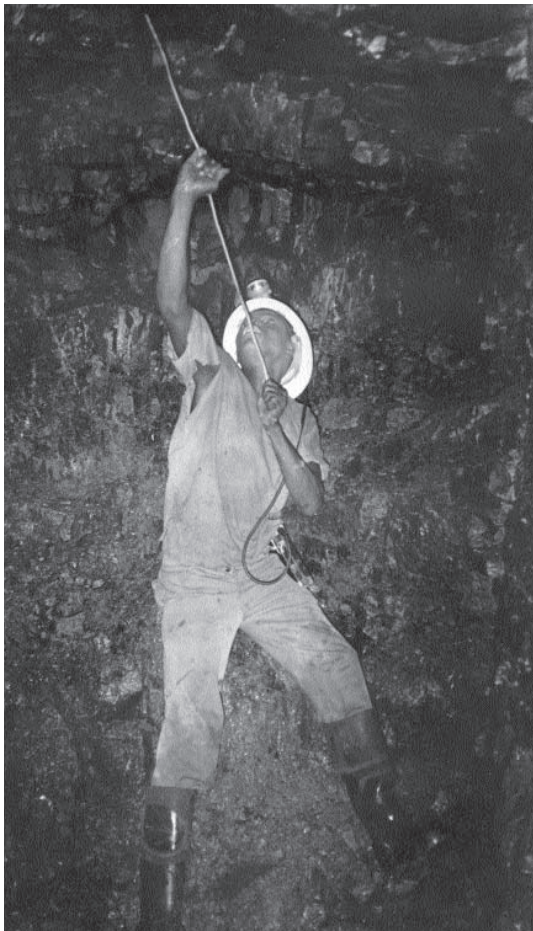
In Construction there is a bargaining council for the civil engineering sector and regional bargaining councils for building which includes the construction of houses, shops and malls. In the manufacturing sub-sector, in areas like cement, bricks and timber, we plant bargain.

On the civil engineering bargaining council we sit with a Nactu union, the Black Construction & Allied workers union (Bcawu). We don't cooperate that much and submit our demands separately. We are the majority union.

What are the main challenges the union faces?

The dismantling of single sex hostels is our big aim. We have agreed with the mining industry to eradicate hostels by 2013. There is majority agreement amongst workers that our aim must be the living of a normal family life. We endorse a principle of privacy. We had a couple of major strikes on the living out allowance which tells us that workers want to live in normal quarters with their families and they need to be subsidised to achieve this.

At least 70% of mineworkers in gold and platinum still live in hostels. In the collieries this number has dropped to about 50%.



We need a lot of resources to achieve our goal so we are moving at a slow pace in converting hostels into family units. In gold if the price of gold is weak we move even slower.

HIV/AIDS is one of our biggest challenges. It depletes the skills base, membership of the union, and the industry's retirement fund because of the number of deaths.

Most mining companies take this seriously and have agreed on a framework programme which entails prevention and wellness. They have agreed on the treatment of opportunistic illnesses, as well as to the provision of HIV drugs and decent nutrition. It is not a point of conflict but a point of cooperation with employers. Xstrata has been given a United Nations award for its HIV programme.

There are active HIV/AIDS structures on the ground and many peer educators who give information and conduct education and counselling. The greatest problems are in mining but it's also a problem in construction. We are running a large project in partnership with a Belgian donor.

Eskom are much slower to come



to the table. They are doing something but it is conflictual, we don't work as a partnership. They are arrogant and unilateral like Transnet, and insist on doing their own thing.

The final biggest challenge is to sustain our membership. Our membership in mining is constantly being depleted. We have to think ahead on how to sustain current levels (see SALB 29.6 on NUM's recruitment programme) of membership. We have been fairly successful as our membership has not declined as fast as the mining industry has.

We need to identify new areas of recruitment, new projects in mining and construction. We have to listen to employers' growth point analysis and then move to organise in those areas immediately such as in places like Kumba. This is different from public sector unions as for us it's about survival. Our membership has dropped from 310 000 in 1997 to a major decline from the end of 1997 to 1999 when we lost 176 000 jobs.

We have tried in small measure to re-direct retrenched to platinum and coal. We send letters to other mining companies and they come and recruit but they take people mainly from high skill areas like machine drillers. That is why it is important to strike for more in a

declining sector.

In 2005 we deadlocked in gold around the living out allowance, increased contribution to the retirement fund and on wages. Employers offered 5%, we wanted 10%. The strike was well supported and as is the tradition in the industry we engaged employers throughout the four days of our strike. There was no violence, no scabbing and no breaking of ranks.

After the strike we settled at 7% at the bottom grades and 6% at the top, a 2% movement. I only wish we were negotiating now when the price of gold is R1 000 per kg. It is not just a question of what employers can afford but it should rather be rephrased as there must be decent earnings for our members.

We raised the living out allowance from R700 a month to R800 in 2005, R900 in July 2006 and R1 000 in September 2006. This is a major improvement. We also won a 1% increase on the employers' contribution to the retirement fund. Our long-term aim is of course to achieve one mining bargaining council where commodity based chambers exist including a small scale mining chamber.

Well I can just say this is a good union.

LB