

Director of mining

I was born in 1957 and grew up in the Free State. I went to high school in Qwa Qwa. I was happy at home and had good support from my sisters. In 1976 my schooling was disturbed by the political turmoil and it took me longer to finish high school as a result.

I participated actively in the struggles facing students in those days, like most youths. I interacted with a certain comrade, Tebogo Mfang, who was inclined towards black consciousness but preached the ANC's slogan as well. He went around the high schools of the area and identified people that could join COSAS. It was a risk at the time.

Tebogo went into exile. I do not even know whether he is alive or not. I became conscientised in this way. When COSAS was formed in 1978, I became the first public secretary.

Joining the mines

After school I wanted to go to university but due to financial constraints I could not. There was nowhere to go except the mines. I went to Western Holdings mine. I am still on their payroll today.

Initially I was a crusher doing the lowest, most boring job. A crusher has to select between the rocks that contain gold and the wastage rock. The strategy of the mines was to demoralise workers.

After working underground I joined the personnel department as a clerk.

NUM regional chairperson, Ikaneng Edwin Director Matlala, talks to Etienne Vlok and William Matlala.

I attended an IR course on trade unions in 1982 at the Anglo-American training centre at Western Deep Levels. By coincidence I met Cyril Ramaphosa. We held a strategic meeting and that is where I joined NUM.

Cyril's strategy was to identify people that could work with him. I must confess that when I first met him I thought he was from state intelligence. As we continued I found a different person. I first learnt about trade unions during this course. Our main facilitator was Professor van Rensburg who told us about the Wiehann and Riekert Commissions.

Building NUM

NUM was first launched in Welkom. There was international media and I happened to be the chairperson of the meeting that was held at Western Holdings Mine. I contributed mostly to building NUM in Welkom but also operated in Klerksdorp, Carletonville and even in Kimberley. With the current premier of the Northern Cape, Manne Dipico and an MP, Godfrey Oliphant, we

established a base in Kimberley and a region was formed.

I represented NUM at the Unity Talks to form COSATU. The late Comrade Baraji led a NUM walkout when CUSA refused to allow us to participate and NACTU objected to the non-racialism clause we were fighting for.

Finally, when COSATU was launched, I represented the union. At the 1986 congress we declared our support for the Congress Movement (the ANC and its allies) and debated whether to adopt the Freedom Charter. Gwede Mantashe, who was the secretary of Witbank at the time, led the debate calling for the adoption of the Charter.

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During this time, we were working very closely with the Congress movement. In 1989 we took part in the UDF defiance campaign. In August I led a march to the Welkom city hall where FW de Klerk was addressing the NP. We wanted to submit a memorandum to him. We defied police orders but were forced to disperse before we could even get to the hall.

State intelligence and mine management worked very closely together in those days. That night in Welkom they masterminded our arrest. I was handed over to the state agents by mine security on 1 September and was detained in Newcastle. We were released after one and a half months because of the militant campaign of workers and the country.

I have always played an active role in the union. I was the first shaft steward and the first branch secretary of our region. I was elected as the secretary of our region from 1986 to 1992, and am currently the regional chairperson.

The union and directorships

The union has an arrangement with Western Holdings' management. We are trying to bring the German model to SA, where you can be a trade union leader while also holding a senior post in the company. This allows you to interact with the company while also serving the union. I fully support NUM president James Motlatsi's appointment to the board of Anglo.

In 1992 at a COSATU policy workshop we debated the whole question of directorship and up to which level workers can be appointed. COSATU decided not to place a ceiling on the level. This is a new thing. I support it but I understand the constraints as well. If NUM does not fill the post on a board other people who are not sympathetic to labour will occupy these.

Challenges and victories

Casualisation is the biggest threat to trade unions in SA. We could have a situation where the majority of workers are not fully employed but work as casuals. This is why we initiated the mining summit last year. We were trying to combat the retrenchments and mine closures, or, at least delay negative down scaling as much as we can.

We have also engaged mining companies about life in the compounds. The hostels were meant for the migratory labour system. In the past the mining houses said that there was nothing wrong with the system.

They have now agreed that the hostels

system has had negative effects They have agreed to build houses for mineworkers but are worried about costs This will happen in phases They have also agreed that the hostels should be turned into family residences, like flats, where a worker and his wife can stay when she comes to visit

There are still a lot of workers in hostels. I must not create the image that everything is going well

There have been victories for labour though. The Rovic judgement, where mine management was found to be responsible for a mining disaster, is a victory that we should be proud of. This is the first time that the mine has been found to be responsible for a disaster.

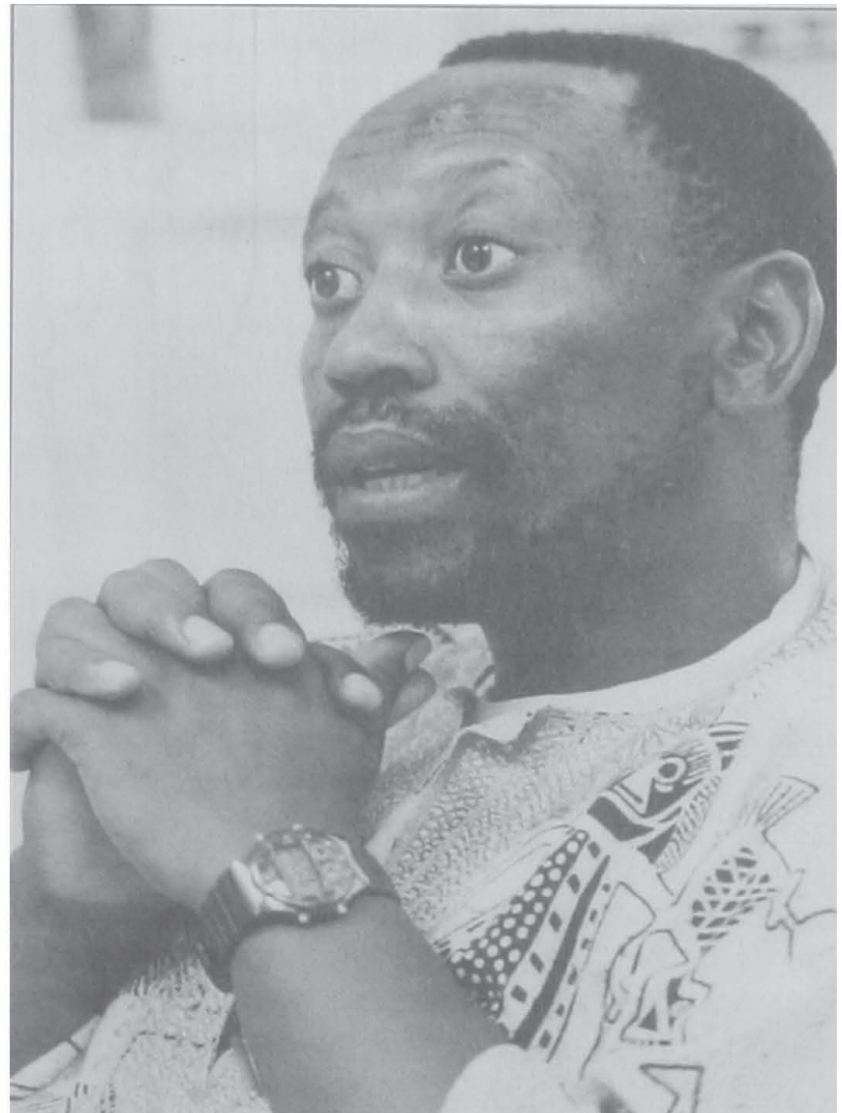
A safe environment motivates the workers and benefits the company. If there are less fatalities the companies save a lot of money

NUM accepts the principle of merging as decided by a COSATU resolution We have discussed it in our strategy meetings Initially NUM was totally against merging because we did not want to lose our identity. But with the integration of the world economy, sectors are shrinking and this impacts on unions Mergers can make unions more powerful

Family life

I live in Welkom in an area called Benmore Park with my wife and two boys. My youngest child was born in 1989 at the same time that I was detained.

My region is one of the biggest in the



country, so I am always busy and sometimes my family legitimately complains But when I am home I enjoy family togetherness My boys' names are Leboneng Anderson and Lehlohonolo Machabe. They are doing well at school I will be happy if they can contribute to the community and the country in whatever sphere of life

I am currently studying the Management Diploma Programme (MDP) at UNISA. When I am free I enjoy swimming, running, playing softball and watching cricket During my schooldays I was a wonderful ballroom dancer But now I do not have time to practice. If I have the resources I would like to open a dance club.' ★