

Miners plan to make optimum use of the RDP

SALB Writer DEANNE COLLINS reports

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has drawn up a programme of action around the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). In what is believed to be the first intervention of its kind, the Union is taking steps to ensure that the interests and needs of mineworkers are promoted in the implementation of the RDP.

At a workshop held at the end of May, the Union drew up plan to embark on mass education programmes amongst its members to create awareness of their rights contained within the RDP.

The workshop noted that the various demands put forward by the Union in the course of collective bargaining are contained within the RDP. In future negotiations with employers, this link needs to be consciously articulated.

Special RDP Committees will be set up within the Union at national, regional and branch level. The function of these committees will be to ensure that membership and leadership understand and are able to take up projects under the RDP, and to identify clear and winnable demands which can be taken up in the short, medium and long term.

The Union has identified areas within the RDP where it intends to make specific interventions:

Basic Needs

The NUM will seek to participate in "development" structures with a view to influencing policy in favour of its members. The NUM Development Unit, which provides a service to retrenched and dismissed members, will play a crucial role here.

Developing Human Resources

The Union plans to lobby the Minister of Education and Training for paid education leave for workers and shop stewards, as well as launch a national campaign around this issue.

Policies around affirmative action will be developed as a matter of urgency.

Building the Economy

The Union has prioritised a number of areas of involvement :

- Health and Safety in the Mining Industry
- State financial assistance to marginal mines
- Worker participation in decision-making structures in the industry
- Plans of action around hostel democratisation and housing.

The Union will also lobby for the creation of the post of a Deputy Minister for the industry who is not hostile to the needs of labour.

Democratising the State and Society

The NUM intends to develop a lobbying strategy for parliamentarians and state officials. Union policy documents will be used to brief these officials on NUM policies on various issues.

The Union will campaign for local government elections as soon as possible, and will continue to campaign for the issuing of ID documents to workers to ensure that they are eligible to vote in these elections.

The Union will also lobby within COSATU for the proposed Conference on Civil Society to be held as soon as possible, as the RDP sets out an important role for civil society.

Comment

On the day of his appointment to the Cabinet as Minister without portfolio, Jay Naidoo warned the comrades assembled at COSATU Head Office for the Elections Victory celebration not to be complacent about the RDP. Naidoo emphasised that the RDP will not be handed out on a plate, and its successful delivery would require ongoing involvement and pressure from the unions and the organs of civil society. In other words, the better organised the organisation, the more likely it will be to gain from the RDP. Quite clearly, the NUM has taken this advice to heart, and plans to move quickly and forcefully to be near the front of the queue. ☆