

Num and collective bargaining



*The National Union of Mineworkers' (Num) approach towards collective bargaining reveals the strategic path it is pursuing. The **Labour Bulletin** explores how the union is linking demands with its overall policy framework.*

In the past, the union would go to congress or a national executive committee and a list of demands would be drafted with some coming from members. These demands would then be submitted to the various employers for negotiations in the annual round of wage negotiations. The new approach is a more strategic one which seeks to determine what the union wants to achieve over a certain period of time. This first emerged with the drafting of a ten-year plan which was tabled some time ago. A revised ten-year plan was presented at last year's national congress. The revised plan (strategic plan) sought to ensure the union's survival whilst at the same time revisiting the targets set in the initial plan.

The union's collective bargaining coordinator Humbulani Tshikalange says that part of this approach provides for much tighter monitoring of agreements. For example, the union held a workshop in June to assess progress made in agreements struck last year. The union says it is critical where two-year (or more) wage agreements are entered into that progress towards implementation is assessed at least one year after the agreement came into effect. A key

focus is therefore on monitoring implementation of agreements. In the past the union would sign an agreement, for example, with the Chamber of Mines and then leave it up to the branches to ensure implementation. What the union eventually found, one official says, is that when preparation started for the next round of negotiations, up to 70% of issues had not been implemented during the duration of the agreement. In order not to do a disservice to members this approach has changed and now there will be proper monitoring from head-office.

Aside from failing to deliver to members in the event issues agreed upon are not implemented, it is also a sign of weakness (in the face of management) if year after year unions table the same demands previously agreed to. Aside from the focus on monitoring, the union's general secretary Gwede Mantashe says the union has increased its emphasis on bargaining over socio-economic issues rather than just wages. Socio-economic issues really can change the face of an industry but what makes it difficult, he says, is that workers understand money and socio-economic issues are not immediately quantifiable. The type of

issues the union bargains over presently is linked to the unions' overall policy framework. As Mantashe states in his secretariat report to the recent special congress: 'One of the tests of a good organisation is its ability to convert its decisions into an implementable plan of action.' This has been evident in the demands tabled during negotiations in recent years around housing and family accommodation, various proposals incorporated into the mining charter such as employment equity, ownership and human resource development. On the question of HIV/AIDS, the union has raised awareness in the industry but remains as Mantashe says in his secretariat report, 'treated as a guest instead of a co-host' in the various initiatives embarked upon by employers. The union did however, ensure that the industry HIV/AIDS summit took place but it is questionable whether sufficient follow-up to the summit has occurred.

A long standing demand of the union has been the establishment of a bargaining council in the mining industry. The union is still supportive of this move whilst at the same time being aware that there are both advantages and disadvantages.