



# NUM matures to adulthood

*The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) held a special congress in May 2004 where it further consolidated the work done over the last 22 years. The **Labour Bulletin** spoke to the union's general secretary **Gwede Mantashe** about what he calls a revolutionary congress.*

**Labour Bulletin:** Why would you describe the congress as revolutionary?

**Gwede Mantashe:** I feel that the congress was a consolidation of all the work we have done since its inception in 1982. This is evident by the numerous resolutions dealing with strengthening the organisation but clearly illustrated in the resolution adopted that if you want to be elected to any official position in the union such as an office bearer you have to have been a member of the union. This resolution is critical as it reflects the unions' commitment to worker leaders.

**Labour Bulletin:** You have indicated that you do not plan to stand for re-election at the next congress in 2006. What will this mean for the union?

**Gwede Mantashe:** I have been in the union for 23 years. I have gone through every structure in the union over that time. I came to head-office after the 1987 strike to set up the organising division. I do not want to overstay my welcome and in any event if I have not done what I have wanted to do in the union during my time here then I will never achieve it.

**Labour Bulletin:** Have you targeted any successor?

**Gwede Mantashe:** Previous discussions have taken place on the succession plan in the union. As stated in my secretariat report the union is not a monarch and therefore, cannot have a list of names indicating successors to the current leader. The approach we have adopted is to invest in a pool of cadreship from which leadership would then emerge. However, ultimately, the democratic processes would continue to be used as a tool for electing leadership. To me this union has more than enough people to run it. Right across the union from regional structures upwards we have people who have developed themselves and their skills. Ultimately, what keeps a union together is a good body of people behind the general secretary. And that is what we have.

**Labour Bulletin:** What resolutions have been adopted which take forward the union's work around organisational renewal?

**Gwede Mantashe:** A key resolution in this regard has been around the realignment and rationalisation of

structures such as health and safety and education. The intention is to reincorporate these sub-structures into the centre of the union. There will no longer be such structures at a regional level. However, such structures will continue to exist at a branch level. The intention of this resolution forms part of a need to refocus and ensure greater integration of the work of these structures within the overall work of the union.

**Labour Bulletin:** Do you think the new minister for public enterprise Alec Erwin's comments on privatisation are a mere song and dance?

**Gwede Mantashe:** Government does appear to be seeing this differently but it does not want to send out a message that a U-turn has occurred. There does appear to be a realisation on the part of government that parastatals such as Eskom can be used to kickstart growth. In the case of Eskom, instead of pushing for selling off 30% of generation there is talk of opening up the generation market by 30%. Hence, the private sector can be involved in bidding for new business.