

We live with hardships Kinross two years on

OCTOBER 1 is a very important day for mineworkers.

That is the day we remember the 177 comrade workers who died on 16 September, 1986, at Kinross goldmine breathing poisonous gasses.

This year the NUM commemorated Kinross by services in Welkom, Secunda, Rustenberg, Wits region, Cape Town, Phalaborwa and Northern Natal.

The Wits region remembered Kinross by a mass meeting in the Johannesburg City Hall. There were speeches, music and cultural performances.

In declaring October 1 as a health and safety day NUM is not only calling on workers to commemorate the Kinross disaster but is also calling for the declaration of the day as a paid public holiday.

Work stoppage

A main point raised in the services was that in future the death of a single miner should be treated as a work stoppage.

The stoppage would protest against the interests of mine management to make profits at the expense of worker safety.

Speaking at Welkom, NUM general secretary Ramaphosa said: "workers should consider stopping work each time a worker or workers are killed - not as a strike - but as a sign of mourning the death of that or those workers".

NUM president James Molatsi said that as long as the bosses do not lose production whenever workers are killed in the mines they will do nothing about safety.

In 1986 more than 325 000 mineworkers and 275 000 workers from other industries observed a call from the NUM to mourn the 117 dead and show solidarity with the 365 injured in the disaster.

The Kinross disaster happened because the tunnel walls of the mine were lined with a special plaster polyurethane. Polyurethane catches fire easily and gives off poisonous gasses when alight. Kinross management were aware of the dangers.

Two years on, nothing has been learnt from the Kinross disaster because no proper inquiry has been held.

The Gencor mine officials were not blamed by the government. The white welder, who ran away and escaped the fire, was charged R100.

The NUM and its lawyers were silenced by inspectors at the Kinross inquiry and not allowed to ask questions or give evidence.

Comrade Ramaphosa said the inquiry was a sham. "The refusal of permission to the NUM to participate in the inquiry clearly indicates that management and the Government Mining Engineer have a lot to hide", he said.

Two years on the Government Mining Engineer (GME) has still not passed any regulations about the use of polyurethane and other plastic foams underground.

Workers business

Two years on, the bosses, the Chamber of Mines in particular, still refuse to negotiate health and safety with workers in the mining industry. For many years the bosses have been saying that health and safety is their business.

Workers have already taken the struggle around health and safety further. This struggle has resulted in the signing of two health and safety agreements. This achievement has proved that health and safety does not belong to management, it is a worker issue.

Organise or die - stop mines stealing our lives

ACCIDENTS continue to claim many lives on the mines.

In the first half of the year 265 workers died on Chamber affiliated mines. The number of workers killed in the same period last year was 361.

The decline in the numbers can be attributed to the active involvement of our members in health and safety issues in many mines.

However, there is still a lot of ground to be covered in this area. In a number of mines our members have started setting up health and safety structures like safety committees and safety stewards.

Further improvements will be made if workers on more mines can start setting their structures.

Whilst this is the case the bosses are busy, setting up their own structures.

These management safety committees must be rejected as they are not democratic and will not serve the interests of workers.

These committees will not have negotiating powers but will be the tool boys of the bosses' safety officers. The NUM wants committees that will negotiate health and safety with the bosses.

Whilst the bosses and the government are attempting to keep workers away from accident investigations and inquiries workers must make sure that they attend these as these can provide workers with a lot of information about accidents.

On October 1 a recommendation was made that workers must stop work everytime a worker has been killed on the mines. This is to mourn the death of the workers.

In 1987 workers at Bank Colliery in Witbank went on strike for 3 days after a worker was killed underground. The bosses on that mine were shaken up to an extent that no other worker died on that mine for the rest of the year.

This type of action has been employed by workers in many parts of the world and it has proven to be very useful. In these countries the numbers of workers dying from accidents has gone down.

This is a good example to follow if we hope to change the present situation. It is only when the bosses start losing money as a result of accidents that they will take safety seriously.

Gencor Ermelo coal mine found guilty of 35 deaths

GENCOR'S Ermelo Coal Mines and five officials have been blamed for the death of 35 workers in a methane gas explosion at the mine last year.

The court inquest found negligence by the mine and officials caused the deaths. Thirty four of

the workers were NUM members. The workers died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

NUM assistant secretary general Marcel Golding said the decision of the court showed "the whole system of mining was not satisfactory, especially the levels

of ventilation".

Golding said methane gas explosions had increased in the eighties and the accident last year was the mine's third in five years. The NUM will be demanding additional compensation for the dependents of those killed.



Workers disabled and injured in the mines have to organise to fight for better compensation and accident leave. VICTOR MHLLOMI salutes other workers on Kinross day.

Elect union safety stewards to guard your work rights

A NEW law has given the mine bosses power to appoint safety representatives to deal with health and safety issues on the mines.

But these "representatives" will not have any power in making any decisions. They won't be able to negotiate health and safety issues with the bosses.

They are nothing but an extension of the bosses's forms of control. They will only act as advisors to the safety officers which the bosses will be appointing in line with the new law.

These safety representatives are nothing more than the old and rejected liaison committees dressed in different colours.

The response of the NUM's members to this has been total rejection. Instead, workers are electing their own safety stewards.

These safety stewards are elected democratically. Our union's members are electing the safety stewards despite the fact that the bosses are refusing to recognise them.

The difference between the bosses' safety representatives and our safety stewards is that safety stewards have the power to negotiate health and safety matters; can inspect the workplace to identify hazards; have access to the government inspectors; are trained by the union; can investigate accidents and can get information from the bosses.

The union calls on workers on all mines to elect safety stewards as a matter of urgency.

ACCIDENT MONITOR

WESTERN DEEP - The NUM will be taking part in the inquest inquiry which will be held in February next year to look into the death of seven workers who died from breathing polyurethane gasses during a fire on 13 October at Western Deep Levels Gold Mine.

ORANGE FREE STATE - The tumbling of rocks at Lorraine Mine, No 2 Shaft tunnel, killed one worker and seriously injured three on 3 October.

RUSTENBERG - On 17 October six mineworkers died after the hoist went up and down without being operated. NUM members were refused permission to attend the inquiry after being told they were not "properly dressed" - they were wearing t-shirts. Members should be aware that anyone can attend an inquiry and there are no rules about clothes.

SAAIPLAAS - The OFS health and safety official has been attending inquiries about the deaths of 2 mineworkers in the same week at No3 shaft.

WESTERN AREAS - One worker died in a rockfall and several were injured underground at Western Areas Gold Mine on 13 October. NUM regional officials are demanding a full explanation of the cause of the accident.

KLOOF GOLD MINES - Three workers died at Kloof after a pressure burst on 13 October.