

Stop the killing

AFTER almost 200 deaths on South Africa's mines last year, NUM has demanded an end to the system responsible for the killings.

Last year, the union carried out a joint inquiry with Anglo American into violence on the mines. Hundreds of workers were interviewed and they told the mine bosses that two evils lay at the root of the violence — migrant labour and the hostel system.

NUM also heard the voice of these workers. That's why delegates to the union's congress last month decided the only way to end the violence was to fight for worker control over the hostels and an end to migrant labour — a resolution that made the slogan "1987 — The Year Mineworkers Take Control" a reality.

It's not often that workers in this country get the chance to make their voices heard so clearly. Here, NUM News presents some of the views expressed in the historic inquiry.

Worker after worker told the union that the lack of family life was a major cause of fighting between miners.

"The employers are to blame. They care only for our physical contribution to production, not our welfare. They separate us from our families for about 12 months. So the men quarrel about women, who aren't theirs. They compete for these women and the fighting spreads back to the hostel."

Workers were also unanimous about the solution — end the migrant labour system and allow men to live with their families on the mines.

"Men who live with their families are never involved in fighting. A man who is with his children thinks before he involves himself in fights."

But the workers showed an awareness of why management loves the hostel system so much and how they use things like indunas, isibondas and dancing to encourage divisions on the mines:

"They set one language group against another. They wish to divide. They wish to weaken. They sow the seeds of dissension among blacks."

"At the workplace everybody is happy and there is a lot of unity among



THE LIBERATED ZONE: Miner Samuel Nyembezi and his wife Florence in their room at Landau coal mine.

workers. The problem starts on the surface after work. At the hostels — that is where divisions have been entrenched by management."

Many members spoke of how mine managers tried to stir up so-called faction fighting, especially at the time of wage negotiations, in an attempt to weaken the union:

"They are trying to undo the work of the NUM — they hate the unifying effect of the union on the workforce. They do not want to give any meaningful increase which NUM fights for."

"Managements turn a blind eye to these fights, which weaken NUM. Management wants to weaken the union's negotiating position during collective bargaining"

One worker told how the bosses at the President Steyn mine allowed a fight to develop last year

and then sent home more than 3 000 workers at a time when tension was building up around wage talks with the Chamber.

"Management has a motive. It prefers to recruit ignorant new workers, rather than work with union members. It likes to disorganise workers and delay their organisation"

"Wage season is the key time for management to turn a blind eye to the fights. During this period, workers are confused and anxious as to how much their increase will be"

"A lot of tension exists and management takes advantage of this. Now management gets in because he wants us to leave the mines. And those who replace us are new recruits to be started with low wages."

One old worker told of

how the mineowners used to bring in the police and stop faction fighting very quickly in the 1970s when there was no union around because they were afraid of losing profits.

Now that NUM is making the workers strong, management prefers not to end the fighting quickly and is willing to lose a few days of production if the union is weakened.

"In most cases, the police cause violence during legal strikes. But when workers need them for their own safety, the police are very slow to provide this service. Police action is conveniently selective and slow depending on what the mineowners want."

Workers from President Steyn in the Orange Free State and Vaal Reefs in the Western Transvaal told of how "Russian" gangsters armed with guns gained access to the hostels to stir up violent clashes.

"Long historical differences are being used and projected further by management. The NUM has played its role in uniting workers. Management is scared of this unity and cannot destroy it alone. Now it allows other forces to assist it in this"

Workers also spoke of the existence of a gang called Fito on the President Steyn mine, which they say is made up of anti-union elements which management tolerates and which attacks NUM members.

At the NUM congress, union president James Motlatsi added another voice to those expressed above: "Management has two options. They must negotiate with the union to destroy the hostels, migrant labour and induna system, or face mass struggles on the mines.

"If they do not negotiate, workers must take control of the mines."

'Liberated hostels' in Witbank

MINEWORKERS have started to take up the NUM's call for the eradication of the hostel and migrant labour system.

They have already made progress in hostels in Witbank, on coal mines owned by Anglo-American Corporation, where the wives and children of miners moved in on March 26 — bringing an end to single-sex living arrangements.

The mines affected are:

- * Kriel.
- * SA Coal Estates
- * Bank.
- * Arnot.
- * New Largo.
- * Goedehoop.

Initial discussions were held with Amcoal at a special shaftstewards' council meeting in the area, where management was told of the workers' intention.

Mine management's reluctance to attend to the workers' demands for adequate accommodation on or near the mine left workers no alternative but to implement the union's resolution of taking over the hostels.

Their movement into the hostels was gradual, disciplined and co-ordinated. The miners have introduced new communal rules governing the living arrangements.

These include:

- * Women without husbands are not allowed in the hostel.
- * Food for wives and children is supplied from nearby shops until a new arrangement can be made.

This is the first phase in the fight against migrant labour and hostel life, and clearly indicates that mineworkers want to be housed with their families.

The NUM feels family housing should be given to workers on or near the mines.

It also rejects attempts to force mineworkers to buy houses, as the wages paid in the industry are appallingly low.

The NUM has called on mineowners to clearly indicate whether they intend doing away with migrant labour, and whether they intend accommodating workers in family housing.

While the programme to eradicate the migrant labour and compound system is underway, the mining houses have been asked to negotiate on the following issues:

- * The improvement of the living conditions in the compounds.
- * The handing over of the running of compounds to workers.
- * The immediate removal of indunas.
- * The introduction of worker-controlled recreation facilities.
- * The dismantling of all tribal dancing groups
- * The accommodation of workers in the compounds on a non-tribal basis.

