

16th SEPTEMBER 1986 SPELT THE END FOR 177 MINERS LIVES

# KINROSS DAY

## HOW 177 WORKERS PERISHED IN MINE ACCIDENT

On the morning of 16th September 1986 at about 9 o'clock a fire broke out about 1 600 metres underground at No. 2 Shaft of Kinross Gold Mine near Evander. These are the events that led to the fire:

A team leader, Cde. Khisis Mbuthuma, had discovered a broken rail in a tunnel that leads from shaft No. 1 to shaft No. 2. Because this tunnel was also used to transport material for hoisting, it was important that the rail line was repaired as quickly as possible. On discovering the broken rail, he went to report the matter to the miner who immediately proceeded to the area to repair the rail. The team leader collected equipment and called five members of his team to go along with him to the scene where repair works were to take place. The white miner started with cutting operations using a cutting torch. As he switched the cutting torch off there was a flashback and the acetylene cylinder caught fire. The workers tried to extinguish the fire but instead the flame got bigger and bigger. The white miner instructed the workers to continue trying to extinguish the fire. As he gave these instructions he began to run towards No. 1 shaft.

The fire came into contact with the polyurethane foam that was lining the tunnel and this started to burn. The flames grew bigger and bigger as they were assisted by the wind that was blowing from No. 1 shaft. As the foam burnt it was emitting poisonous fumes which filled the whole of the 15th level and spread to the 14th level. All the workers killed and injured were working in these two levels. By midnight, 177 workers lay dead and over 230 injured. This was the worst disaster to hit the gold mining industry in the whole world this century. What had been regarded as a small fire turned into an inferno that left many families suffering. On the night of the 16th the bosses were telling workers to go back to work. But workers refused to be forced underground.

The apartheid machinery was again set in motion when dead black and white workers were transported in different ambulances to different mortuaries. This was also the case with those injured who were treated in different hospitals. The mine bosses organised a memorial service but this was disrupted by workers as they or the NUM had not been informed about this service. The Union organised its own service which was attended by thousands of workers in the Secunda region as well as township residents. Messages of condolence were received from many parts of the world including governments, trade unions, churches and other organisations.

NUM appointed a pathologist to represent it when the post-mortems were being conducted on the dead workers. The post-mortems were conducted at the Springs mortuary by the state pathologist. As the facilities were not enough the pathologists could not do a perfect job. The 33 bodies that they were examining

were stacked on top of each other. Secondly they were forced to use agricultural tools like bolt cutters and saws to open the bodies as there were no proper tools. This clearly showed that the government and the people it employs do not respect blacks even if dead. This was not being done with white workers killed in this same disaster.

NUM brought 2 experts from overseas to assist in investigating the accident. These experts were Herbert Eisner — a retired engineer who was working in a fire laboratory in England and Dr. Peter Westerholm from the Swedish Labour Federation. Whilst the General Secretary of the Union visited the site of the accident the day after the disaster no proper and thorough investigation and inspection took place. These experts were brought to do a thorough investigation. The bosses refused the Union and these experts access to the scene of the accident. It was only after much publicity both locally and internationally that the mine allowed the Union access.

On the 29th September — 13 days after the disaster — an inspection was conducted. The bosses had invited a

lot of people and organisations, including clowns from Inkatha, to the inspection. This was deliberately done in order to prevent NUM from getting as much information as possible from this inspection. The experts were also refused samples of the foam so as to carry out independent tests to check its chemical contents. After the inspection the bosses refused to answer any further questions about the accident.

The Union called on workers to observe the 1st October as a day on which to mourn the workers who had lost their lives in the Kinross disaster. The response was good. More than 325 000 mineworkers stayed away from work to observe the day. In addition more than 275 000 other workers in Cosatu observed the day in many ways. While some stayed away from work, others held services in the places of work.

This day was also observed by unorganised workers throughout the country. A number of large services were held throughout the whole country in response to the call. Most of these services were held despite the presence of large contingents of police and their dogs. ■



**TEN  
FIGHTING  
YEARS  
AGAINST  
RACISM  
REPRESSION  
AND  
EXPLOITATION!**

**1982 - 1992**

# 10 FIGHTING YEARS

By the end of this year, the NUM will be 10 years old. All mineworkers are requested to celebrate this historical occasion at all branches and regions. NUM head office will be co-ordinating the festivities nationally.

All branches and regions must discuss how bests they would like to celebrate.

All ideas and suggestions should be given to the members of the Co-ordinating Committee, for the attention of Frans Baleni and Lebo Moroe, at (011) 833-7012 — NUM Head Office.

Ideas and suggestions are also welcomed from the staff members.

## NUM wins R2,6 Million for victims of the Kinross Disaster

NUM has won R2,6-million in a legal battle with the Genmin owned Kinross Gold Mine over payment of those killed in the mine disaster in 1986.

Since the 177 were killed in the worst gold mine accident this century, NUM has been involved in a long legal battle with the mine bosses to get compensation for families of those who died in the accident.

It was after almost six years that Kinross bosses agreed to pay R2,6-million for the benefit of families of those killed.

It terms of the settlement with NUM R1,4-million will be paid into a trust to be established for the benefit of families who took legal action against Kinross Mine.

One million rand will be put into another trust for the benefit of families who have not yet taken legal action against Kinross mine but who may later do so.

The remainder of R200 000 will pay NUM lawyers for services given in the case.

### HOW THE TRUST WILL BE ADMINISTERED

To ensure that dependants of those killed in the accident benefit from the money NUM has won the following rules will apply for management of the trusts:

- ★ NUM and Kinross bosses shall each appoint a trustee who shall in turn be entitled to appoint an alternate;
- ★ A referee shall be appointed to determine any dispute between the trustees;
- ★ The trustees shall divide the portion set aside according to the splits given above and those who qualify shall be entitled to either withdraw their portion from the trust fund or have it administered on their behalf by the fund;
- ★ Those who will be receiving money from the fund have to make a commitment in writing not to take any further legal action against Kinross Mine concerning the accident;
- ★ All interest generated on the fund shall be used for the benefit of dependants of workers killed in the Kinross accident;
- ★ Should any funds not be used by the end of 1997, the trustees shall establish an additional fund which shall be used to help NUM members killed or injured in mine accidents and or their dependants.

This settlement is a historic victory for NUM in its struggle to ensure that Mineworkers enjoy high standards of health and safety. For details of the Kinross Disaster see main story on page 7.