

What is (has been) the role of Unions in the mining industry in South Africa?

By

National Union of Mineworkers

General Secretary

Background to the mining in SA

- ▶ The mining sector has long history of worker exploitation of local and migrant workers
- ▶ Few companies dominates the sector (too much power over workers)
- ▶ Historically mine-profits were based on exploitation of illiterate mineworkers
- ▶ Hence the need of workers to organise for better conditions in the sector was inevitable
- ▶ It should be noted that black mineworkers were not allowed to form trade unions between the periods of 1946 to 1982

Background - Trade Unions

- ▶ A trade union is an organised association of workers in a certain profession, formed with the sole purpose of protecting members' rights and interests
- ▶ In an environment where there are few employers (Monopsony) trade unions allows workers to get bargaining power as a collective
- ▶ Bargaining powers allows fair distribution of benefits of production

Key Role of Trade Unions in the South Africa's mining sector

▶ **Workers Representation on:**

- Wages and benefits
- Health and safety issues

▶ **Harmonious industrial relations:**

- Create a forum for cohesive dialogue with workers as a unit
- Documentation of workers concerns to management as a collective

▶ **Protection of mineworker's interest post employment:**

- Compensation and provident funds deductions for workers
- Set up programs for ex-mineworkers

Key Role of Trade Unions in the South Africa's mining sector contd...

- ▶ **Defence of workers Constitutional rights**
 - Explains and interprets the legislation to member
 - Monitors implementation of legislation in the workplace
- ▶ **Policy influence and advocacy:**
 - Engage with proposed legislation from a workers perspective
 - Engage in pro-workers research
- ▶ **Transformation and development agents**
 - Creates a forum for easy passing on of development information to workers

Key Role of trade unions in the South Africa's Mining Sector

▶ Education and skilling of mineworkers

- Engages in training and skills development of workers - EBMTCC and the EBMTCC Artisan Academy

▶ Development of Mining Communities

- Unions support local economic development of mining communities - Mineworkers Development Agent (MDA)

▶ Scientific Research on Workers Welfare and their communities

- Undertaking of workers-related research and presentation of the workers 'side of things' - Sam Tambani Research Institute (SATRI)

▶ Advancing 'the Women in Mining' Agenda

- Highlighting the Challenges facing women in male-dominated sectors and proposing solutions

The specific role of the NUM in Mining sector, historical current and going forward.

► The NUM key achievement milestones include:

- ❑ Fighting for women employment and meaningful participation in mining sector
- ❑ The Union fought for the establishment of Provident Fund for workers
- ❑ Continuous economic empowerment of mineworkers and their families by providing bursaries - JB Marks Education Trust Fund
- ❑ The union led mining transformation of housing policies and benefits for mineworkers - move from compound system to family units and better housing conditions

Concluding Remarks

- ▶ Although trade unions have been **demonised**, by some, their role in shaping the mining industry has been beneficial and meaningful.
- ▶ Unions will remain the backbone of harmonious and mutually beneficial industrial relations in the mining sector.
- ▶ With the changing working environment due to automation, labour brokers, etc, workers' rights will need a stronger organised voice that the trade unions provide.
- ▶ As long as profits remain the key concern of dominant mining companies, exploitation and side-lining of workers will exist. To counter this exploitation, trade unions have to remain in place.

Concluding Remarks

Thank for your attention