

Is NUM coming of age?

NUM has come a long way since its inception nearly 20 years ago when former general secretary Cyril Ramaphosa and others used to drive around from one mine to another recruiting members while at the same time dodging the security police.

In many ways the terrain in which the union operates has changed dramatically and in other ways not. It still has to deal with issues around racism in the workplace and the constant threat of job losses. More importantly, however, the union has had to confront (more than other unions) the impact of the spread of HIV/AIDS. The mining industry, as a result of the migrant labour system and single sex hostels, was the first industry in South Africa confronted with HIV/AIDS in the early to mid-1980s. The disease was relatively unknown then in South Africa but the rates of infection on the mines was already high.

Single sex hostels

Mantashe says during the union's 2000 congress, delegates acknowledged that the spread of HIV had reached pandemic proportions and constituted one of the major challenges facing the country. The industry, he says, is particularly vulnerable to the disease because of the continuation of single sex hostels. Industry sources say however, that attempts to introduce family accommodation has not received overwhelming support. Mantashe stresses

NUM general secretary Gwede Mantashe talks to the Labour Bulletin about the union's upcoming central committee meeting.

the need for miners to enter into partnerships with employers to deal with the disease. Last year the union embarked on a major campaign to ensure that shaft stewards were educated to become HIV/AIDS peer educators.

The Chamber of Mines agreement relating to HIV/AIDS, he says, is a very positive move for the industry. The agreement, he says, will ensure an integrated approach in dealing with the disease. Ultimately, the challenge, he says, is to work on changing the existing culture so that people can talk out about their status and more importantly, ensure a change in behaviour.

'This is a war and we have to come together to fight this war,' Mantashe says. In this spirit Mantashe talks about the formation of partnerships with employers, other unions, communities and government. The Department of Health, he says, is doing very good work on the ground. However, the department does not seem that open to talk about all their initiatives. The union, he says, has to talk about supporting voluntary counselling

and testing (VCT) programmes and the wellness programmes linked to them. He is not opposed to prevalence testing as long as confidentiality is maintained.

Besides the spread of HIV/AIDS, a range of other health and safety issues will be discussed at the central committee. Mantashe says the union is going to deal decisively with problems experienced around vanadium and asbestos pollution. The increase in seismic events, especially on the West Rand is also of concern.

The union will also focus on other transformation issues such as employment equity. This, he says, is a problematic area with limited progress being made.

Throughout its history, the union has

had to deal with the threat of rival unions. Mantashe indicates that an increasing number of small unions were springing up on the mines. Of increasing concern to the union is the rising tension developing between shopstewards in certain regions. These tensions have emerged following attempts by a number of catering companies to bribe shopstewards in order to secure catering contracts in the hostels. This has led to growing tensions within the ranks of the shopstewards and has led to divisions in some areas, Mantashe says.

The union's central committee meeting will be held from 25 to 27 April 2002 in Bloemfontein.

Chamber of Mines and National Union of Mineworkers on HIV/AIDS (extract from 2001 wage agreement)

HIV/AIDS partnership structures

- Company/Mine level HIV/AIDS partnership structures should be established within three months of signing this agreement, where they have not already been established.
- The purpose of the HIV/AIDS partnership structures will be the development of relevant HIV/AIDS programmes within clear and defined budgets that will seek, *inter alia* to:
 - Create awareness, which is preventative in content, with particular emphasis on the ABC (Abstinence, Be Faithful and Condomise) of HIV/AIDS prevention.
 - Effect behavioural change, that may include programmes to encourage employees to voluntarily declare their HIV status without fear of victimisation.
 - Oversee the development of and early participation in Wellness Programmes for employees suffering from HIV/AIDS that will, *inter alia*, include:
 - (a) relevant counselling and education;
 - (b) medical care;
 - (c) regular medical assessment and appraisal;
 - (d) access to relevant medication in respect of diseases associated with HIV/AIDS;
 - (e) access to nutritious food; and
 - (f) access to hygienic living conditions.
 - Contribute to the raising of awareness and

- the necessary behavioural change by ensuring that testing programmes comply with the principle of confidential, informed, voluntary counselling and testing (CIVCT), and encouraging employees to participate in such CIVCT programmes by linking them to appropriate Wellness Programmes.
- Funding will be provided specifically for HIV/AIDS programmes that are to be undertaken by the HIV/AIDS partnership structures, and the information on such funding will be made available to the partnership structures.
- The joint HIV/AIDS partnership structures should interact with Housing Forums regarding housing matters, and the Mines will within the parameters of affordability and employee preferences make their best endeavours to accelerate programmes of making family accommodation available, including the conversion of hostels and utilisation of empty houses.
- The Mines and Union further agree the following issues relevant to a comprehensive and effective strategy in the Gold Mining Industry to positively impact on the lives and circumstances of HIV/AIDS sufferers:
 - Making available effective treatment and medication for HIV infected pregnant employees, including anti-retroviral therapy (ART) as may be medically justified.
 - Recommending to the Mining Industry HIV/AIDS Committee that an annual Mining HIV/AIDS Summit be convened, to discuss effective HIV/AIDS strategies and to learn from successes and failures in the industry and elsewhere.