On March 20, workers of Impala Platinum chased away the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) from over 20 of Impala's shafts, and the workers' independent committee took over the running of the offices. This gives an indication of the serious crisis we as mine workers in Rustenburg face because of the NUM, the biggest union in the mines. In the mining industry many workers lost their jobs. But the NUM does nothing. In fact, the NUM is an accomplice of the mine owners in many job losses. Workers no longer trust their union.

The Impala shafts which have now been taken over by the workers' committee are the ones that were involved in the drawn-out strike which started with 6000 rock drill operators (RDOs) laying down tools in February 2012. The RDOs went on strike after finding out that they were earning half the wages (R4500 compared to R9000) of other workers – miners and LHD drivers – as they were left out of a wage increase agreement which had been negotiated by the NUM. The strike was declared illegal and all these workers were dismissed. Without the RDOs, the mine could not operate. Their colleagues demanded that the company must give them all equal wage increases. In total 17200 employees embarked on strike. Meanwhile the NUM was supporting the employer saying that the strike was illegal. When Impala fired all 17 200 workers, the NUM commented in the media that management had made a mistake in allowing the workers to remain in the hostels after dismissing them.

The strike started to be violent when the NUM and the employer re-employed some workers while dismissing others, which is selective re-employment. The communities also came out in protest supporting the workers on strike. Four workers who went back to work were killed. Others who broke the strike were stripped naked by the strikers. They were humiliated in front of the community. The NUM and Cosatu, together with the ANC tried to convince the workers to return to work, but couldn't control the workers. Even the paramount chief, Molotlhegi, together with the Rustenburg mayor, Mpho Khonou, were stoned by the strikers.

Impala agreed to re-employ 15 000 workers. 2260 were left out, on the pretext that the strike had resulted in such loss of production that the company could no longer operate as before. In reality, it was those workers who were seen as having started the strike who were left out. Workers were selected for re-employment by the NUM together with management, through the NUM calling a meeting promising reinstatement for all workers. Instead of reinstatement, Impala re-employed the workers, which meant that the workers' previous years of service, with all the benefits accumulated, were erased.

The Impala strike was sparked by the wage increase which had been agreed by NUM and management which discriminates other workers who are doing the same job. So who is going to represent the workers if our own unions share the mission and vision of the capitalists? Our unions are now money-making schemes which are selling the rights of workers to the capitalists to fill their own coffers.

Recently at Samancor, the NUM also made a deal with management to end a strike without the support of the workers. The union leaders did not even report back to the workers. In the end it was management which came to the workers telling them that they had reached an agreement with the union. The bosses even advised the workers to consider finding another union that would not sell them out!

The Murray & Roberts struggle

On August 19, 2009, we Murray and Roberts workers were told by our NUM shop stewards that we would go on strike, that we had a certificate. On the 23rd, a Sunday, the shop stewards together with the NUM chief negotiator came to us saying they had not yet gotten anywhere with the company and that the company was asking for us to suspend the strike so that they could continue negotiating. We asked them if we had a certificate. They said yes, there was a certificate to strike. We said that we wanted to continue with the strike. They said they would go back to continue the talks on Monday. Then they started telling us that there was a problem with the certificate; that it had not been signed by the commissioner etc. They were refusing to show us the certificate, coming with excuses. We got a comrade to check on the internet and we found that there was a valid certificate. That's when we clashed with our shop stewards. During this whole process no one from the national executive council came to explain the situation. It was just us and the shop stewards. On the 25th we elected our own strike committee. We sent the strike committee to the company but they were not prepared to talk to us. That's when we started to strike. We marched to the NUM office. We demanded our NUM flag. They refused to give it to us. Our shop stewards came to address us and told us that they had already signed. The workers chased the shop stewards away. That's when we realised that the NUM is not really working for us. The strike was declared illegal on the 25th. We were 4900 who were dismissed. We were told to go back to work. When we went some were accepted back, others were rejected. Those who were not allowed back were told "you are the major cause of the strike". It was our own shop stewards who were selecting who would be allowed back to work. If you had spoken in a meeting and so on, they targeted you.

We approached the NUM for assistance. There was only one of the provincial officials, Manenze, who was prepared to try to help us. He said he would talk to management. We were

staying in tents in Matebeleng, and we trusted him because he was staying there with us. He referred a case to the CCMA. The case went to Labour Court. NUM promised us that we would all be taken back to work, 200 of us at the time. But after that, cde Manenze never came back to us.

Now, in 2012, the case is eventually going for trial, but the NUM has abandoned it and so has the union we joined after the strike, MEWUSA. Only Cosawu remains to represent the workers against Murray and Roberts.

We tried by all means to talk to our previous leaders about this case but we were getting nowhere. They called us criminals, saying that we were "out of control". We approached Cosatu in the North West, and Solly Phetoe did try to talk to the NUM leaders but eith no results. We even met with Julius Malema. He told us that if we could not agree with the NUM there was nothing he could do because the NUM was affiliated to the ANC. We tried everything, we went to the councillor, to the local ANC structures. We approached Cosatu at its national congress in September 2009. No one was willing to help us.

The problem with the NUM is that they are not really representing the workers. Most of the shop stewards are trying to befriend management, looking out for their own benefits. The NUM's provident fund owns shares in the mines in Rustenburg, including in Murray and Roberts. A raise for us is coming out of their own coffers.

The NUM takes you out on strike, but at the end you don't get even half of what you wanted, as seen recently at Samancor. You just get more promises.

The MEWUSA leadership has taken that union down the same road - without any alternative to the capitalist order, they prefer working hand-in-hand with the bosses over leading our struggles, and for this reason they also suppress union democracy and worker control.

South Africa, we are going nowhere under the so-called Tripartite Alliance of the ANC. Cosatu and ANC leaders meet but are still divided among themselves. To mention one example: the case against ANC councillor Wolmarans who is the speaker of the ANC in Rustenburg local municipality and its former mayor. He is accused of ordering the assassination of Moss Phakoe, another ANC councillor and Cosatu leader who was shot dead in 2009 after exposing

corruption.

The divisions in Cosatu are also clear as workers in most of the mines in Rustenburg, including for example Samancor, Murray and Roberts, Xstrata and Impala, did not support the general strike on March 7. On Cosatu's side, there was no mobilisation; no pamphlets, no posters. But the real reason workers did not participate is that they don't trust their union anymore.

The problem facing mine workers is that we are being exploited both by our unions and the employer. We as the ex-employees of Murray and Roberts were lucky and because we were helped by the DSM. That's why our case is proceeding in Labour Court. What the workers really need now to have a way forward is to build a new better union that will really fight.

Viva Izwi labasebenzi viva!