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The decline of the mining industry and the response of the mining unions

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Abstract

The report examines the response of three trade unions, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the United Associations of South Africa (UASA) and Solidarity – to the economic, political and social changes over the past decade in the mining industry. In particular the report is concerned with union responses to the decline in the gold mining industry.

The report concludes that the NUM was conscious about the decline and developed coherent strategies for dealing with it, whereas both Solidarity and UASA did not pay attention to the decline. Instead their interventions were directed at countering the impact of legislative changes that accorded blacks the right to organise and join unions, and the competition that went with this opening.

The NUM remains a social movement union which balances community and workplace struggles. It is the strongest and most influential union in the industry. It is the only union in the industry that is politically active and has a strategy that deploys and supports members as political activists. UASA is a business union relying on benefits and services to retain members. It is politically neutral with a minimum interest in the developments in communities around them. Solidarity, on the other hand, is a service union which is a hybrid of business and social movement unionism. It is investing resources in improving its service delivery and mobilises its members for action with more visible militancy now than since the 1920s.