

# The lessons of Marikana

The murders of 34 workers at Marikana on August 16 last year, and the tumultuous events that ensued, illuminated with blinding clarity all the accumulated political and social contradictions in SA society. It clarified relations between the classes like no other event before and threw the political role of the ANC government, the state and the trade union leadership into sharp relief. The same conclusion is drawn by opposing classes: we cannot continue like this. Marikana drew a line in the sand dividing the post-apartheid era into two epochs.

In the first 18 years the economic dictatorship of the capitalist class was preserved by political agreement in the negotiated settlement and legitimised by parliamentary democracy. Marikana exposed the purpose of ANC rule for what the capitalist class intended it to be: maintaining the grip of white capital on the commanding heights of the economy whilst assimilating a tiny black capitalist minority. This has perpetuated the exploitation of the black working class, and allowed the accumulation of extreme wealth for the economic and political elite.

The second epoch has begun with the working class resumption of the march towards the overthrow of capitalism and the socialist transformation of society from which it had been diverted by the dead-end of parliamentary democracy. This epoch will be marked by the battle between the classes. The working class is no longer prepared to endure. This year has opened with class confrontation on the farms and in the mines and an uprising against municipal re-demarcation by the residents of Zamdela.

## The ANC and Mangaung

Marikana formed the backdrop to the ANC's Mangaung conference. Mangaung concluded its business without even a minute of silence for the victims of the worst massacre since Sharpeville. Delegates adopted the youth wage subsidy, the National Development Plan and erased 'nationalisation' from economic policy documents. Now, the Zuma government is proposing to declare teaching an essential service and to ban teacher strikes.

To add insult to injury the butchers of Marikana were installed in their ANC positions

with overwhelming endorsement of conference delegates. Ramaphosa who condemned the Lonmin strike as criminal is now in prime position to succeed Zuma as president, and Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa, who would have had to give the order to crush the strike in blood, was voted onto the NEC. Zuma, who must have authorised the massacre, was returned with over 70% of the vote. But Zuma's popularity inside his party is in inverse proportion to his standing in society – a chasm separates the ANC and the working class that elected it.

The country is no longer in the hands of the ANC. The political atmosphere is pregnant with the idea of an alternative. The idea that the ANC is the party of liberation is no longer enough to keep the allegiance of the masses.

## Bosses counter-offensive

The mining industry's threat of mass retrenchments confirms its determination to avenge itself on the workers. They want a restoration of the pre-Marikana dictatorship and have been encouraged by the decisive shift to the right of the ANC at Mangaung.

That they have reacted to public outrage by substituting the stick with the carrot, offering housing and an employee share ownership scheme at Lonmin, does not alter these objectives. The mining bosses are set on a counter-offensive.

Normally the ideologues of capital dilute their language to hide the class divisions in society. But in a *Business Day* – the mouthpiece of capital – editorial the day after the massacre, their language was clear. Soaked with class antagonism and contempt toward the mineworkers, it bemoaned the failure of 'the majority black establishment (of which the NUM and the ruling ANC and the union umbrella Cosatu are leaders) to come to terms with the majority of black, marginalised, poor and desperate people.'

## NUM - policing the workers

This same editorial embraced the 'venerable' NUM. Terrified by the rejection of NUM by workers across the mining sector, *Business Day* describes NUM as 'the thoughtful, considered heart of the union movement... It appreciates and values private capital and strong

companies. Business everywhere should be hoping the union finds a way to defend itself...' The NUM, they tell us, is a tool of the mining industry bosses in maintaining the slavery of the mineworkers.

NUM worked hard to earn this praise. In the Rustenburg mines NUM had made itself infamous as the 'National Union of Management' for some years ahead of Marikana.

NUM's role in the 2012 Lonmin dispute was no different. It denounced the workers' demands for R12500 as unreasonable and condemned the increase won as having set a bad precedent.

## Strike committees

It was this rejection of NUM and the elevation of independent rank-and-file strike committees that simultaneously represented the greatest danger to the mining bosses and the greatest achievement of the workers. This process unshackled the mine workers and allowed them to rise to their feet to wage a determined struggle. The uniting of these strike committees across the mining sector – at the initiation of the DSM – in a national strike committee is a new foundation and tradition that no number of retrenchments can erase. The consciousness of the working class has been raised immeasurably.

NUM's recognition of the significance of this development lies behind their reactionary attitude to the workers. The prison gates of the collective bargaining system have been breached. The NUM leadership's authority has been broken and the groundwork laid, through the independent strike committees, for the emergence, in time, of an entirely new union movement outside of their control.

## Role of SACP & Cosatu

Egged on by the South African Communist Party (SACP), the Cosatu leadership soiled the reputation of a once great trade union federation by taking the unprecedented step of attempting to turn worker on worker through the 'Hands Off NUM' campaign in a desperate but futile attempt to force the NUM onto workers who had decisively rejected this rotten gang of class collaborators.

It is not the DSM's method to use insults as a substitute for reasoned arguments. We believe, however, that this action of the SACP through the

dominant faction it controls in the Cosatu leadership, qualifies as counter-revolutionary. Had a major confrontation occurred, it would have done incalculable damage to the unity of the working class and set back the struggle against the bosses and capitalism for years. Fortunately this potentially disastrous campaign found very little echo amongst Cosatu members.

The impact on the political dynamic within Cosatu is not limited to the damage flowing from their blind support of NUM and the failure to organise solidarity with the mine workers. The cowardly capitulation of the anti-Zuma faction at the Cosatu congress played a critical role in determining the scale of the Zuma-faction's victory as well as the ideological triumph of the right wing.

Cosatu's ideological roots and militant socialist traditions can only be revived if it splits from the Tripartite Alliance. That task can be undertaken only by the rank-and-file. We are past the point where a political alternative – a mass workers party – could emerge out of Cosatu in its present form.

## Political vacuum

For capital, the ANC's role as the main instrument of their rule has passed sell-by date. The debate amongst the elite is now about how the decline in ANC support will manifest itself. The bourgeoisie is actively preparing for an alternative. This is what lies behind the active encouragement by the capitalists of the blackening of the Democratic Alliance. Plans by Mampela Ramphela to launch a new party will not offer the working class an alternative. Her mandate would be to prettify capitalism

The same fears the ruling capitalist class had in the 1980s – that continued white minority rule would threaten capitalism as an insurrectionary working class embraced the ideas of socialism – now stalk the boardrooms of the captains of industry.

The key lesson of Marikana is that the working class needs to rebuild its political independence. That this process has begun – with the founding of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) by the mine workers and the DSM – will profoundly change the social and political landscape of SA in the months and years ahead.



## The ma

May 2011: Workers at Karee, Lonmin, strike in protest against the NUM regional committee's refusal to recognise their re-election of their branch committee. NUM leaders are chased away. As NUM and management collaborate in attempting to oust the branch leaders, 9000 workers are dismissed. The majority are later re-employed. As workers leave NUM, AMCU begins its presence at Lonmin.

Jan-Feb 2012: Discovering that NUM has agreed to 18% increase for miners, the highest paid mineworker category, while others got 8.5%, 5000 Rock Drill Operators (RDOs) at Impala Platinum in Rustenburg strike organised under strike committees in demand of R9000 after tax. 13 000 other Impala workers down tools in sympathy. All are dismissed. NUM calls on police and army to intervene. Management and NUM agree on Feb 29 with strike committee on effective reinstatement but the conflict lingers on for months after.

May: NUM official shot and wounded in clashes with workers protesting against NUM's continued occupation of offices despite having lost the bulk of members to AMCU. Arrest of local AMCU reps provokes strike. 15 000 march to court in Tlhabane in protest.

June: Workers at Gold One's Modder East mine on the East Rand strike and over 1000 are dismissed.

May-August: Workers at Lonmin, Marikana, begin to hold mass meetings at the shafts to discuss their grievances and agree on demands. They form shaft committees that are linked neither to NUM nor to AMCU.

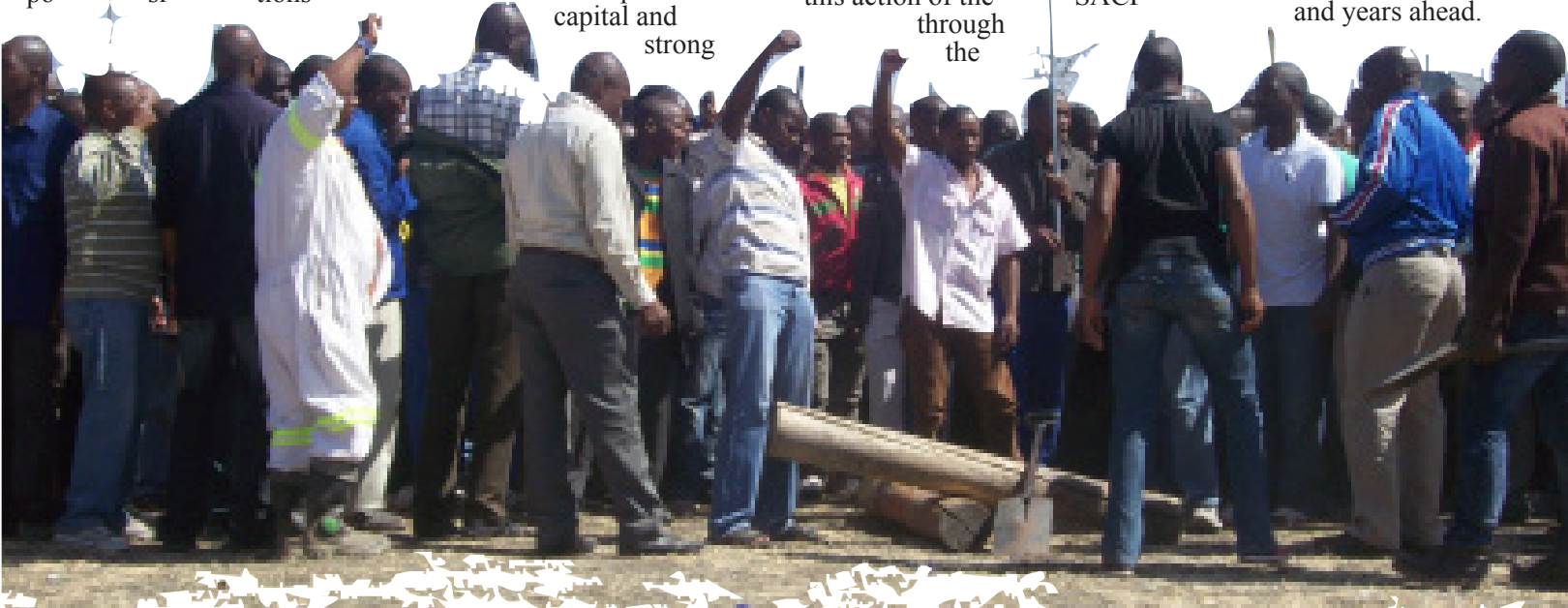
Wed Aug 1: Workers at Aquarius K5 shaft protest management's attempt to artificially restore NUM authority by reshuffling workers after the closure of K4 shaft. Police shoot three workers dead and injure another 20, two of whom die in hospital.

Wed Aug 8: Lonmin shaft committees send delegation to management presenting their demand for R12 500 basic salary, and an ultimatum: they will go on strike the following day if the demands are not met. Management refuses to talk to the committee, referring to the recognised union NUM. Shaft committees come together as an all-Lonmin strike committee.

Thu Aug 9: Lonmin strike begins.

Thu Aug 16: The massacre (see overleaf).

Fri Aug 17: Workers at five Rustenburg Amplats shafts present demands to management through independent strike committee. Workers at Royal Bafokeng's Rasimone mine outside Rustenburg present demands for R12





is spread by Llv Shange & Weizmann Hamilton



Anglo Gold Ashanti workers gather on the mountain, October 2012.

## king of the strike wave

500 to management. DSM calls for a strike on all North West mining operations.

Sun Aug 19: President Zuma declares 'week of mourning'. Lonmin issues ultimatum for workers to return to work the following day or be dismissed. NUM supports the ultimatum. Police Commissioner Phiyega tells police they should 'not be sorry'.

Mon Aug 20: NPA charges the 259 arrested on Aug 16 with the murder of their comrades based on 'common purpose' doctrine. Lonmin re-issues its ultimatum, now for Tuesday, but is compelled by government to withdraw it until the 'week of mourning' has lapsed.

Tue Aug 21: Lonmin agrees to speak to the workers' committee, but refuses to touch their demands; insists on return to work.

Wed Aug 22: 6000 Rasimone workers go on strike led by a strike committee, in demand of R12 500.

Wed Aug 29: 12 000 Gold Fields KDC East workers go on strike.

Sun Sept 2: Lonmin workers hold first mass march since the massacre, gathering over 20 000 workers joined by residents and youth; outnumbering and defying police.

Mon Sept 3: Charges against the 259 are withdrawn, the workers are released. Lonmin threatens to close SA operations, shedding 40 000 jobs, if workers do not end the strike.

Wed Sept 5: Impala workers raise new wage demands.

Sun Sept 9: 15 000 Gold Fields KDC West workers go on strike for R12 500, against NUM BC.

Tue Sept 11: Rustenburg joint strike coordinating committee is formed, involving strike committees of Lonmin, Amplats, Rasimone, Samancor, Murray and Roberts, the Democratic Socialist Movement and Marikana youth. About 20 000 march to Lonmin mine hospital in protest against harassment of injured workers. Body of a former NUM shop steward is found placed in the veld near the workers' place of gathering as march returns. Amplats Rustenburg shafts begin strike.

Wed Sept 12: Police draw positions closer to Lonmin workers gathering. Traditional 'kings' are flown in and arrive at Marikana with delegation of priests, pleading with workers to sign 'peace accord'. Military bases are put on high alert.

Thu Sept 13: Joint rally of Amplats, Samancor and Lonmin workers at Bleskop calls for general strike. Amplats suspends all Rustenburg operations. Zuma says government will act very soon against 'people of some description who are going there to instigate miners.' Lonmin tables 'offer' (early implementation of already agreed adjustment).

Fri Sept 14: Lonmin workers agree to sign 'peace accord' but reject 'offer'; strike 99% solid according to the company. Aquarius Platinum and Xstrata suspend Rustenburg operations. Zuma announces state of emergency in all but name; calling in army to assist police in quelling the unrest. Lonmin tables new more substantial offer.

Sat Sept 15: Police and soldiers raid hostels and homes in Marikana confiscating 'weapons', make arrests, shooting rubber bullets and stun grenades. Local ANC activist Paulina Masuthe is shot, later dies. Committees of Impala and Aquarius join Rustenburg Joint Strike Coordinating Committee.

Sun Sept 16: Coordinating Committee defies gatherings ban, marches on Rustenburg police station; marchers are eventually dispersed by police. Brutal police and army clamp-down continues in Marikana.

Mon Sept 17: Malema stopped from addressing workers meeting in Rustenburg, escorted by police to Pretoria 100 km away. Lonmin committee in talks with management.

Tue Sept 18: Lonmin strike committee agrees to a deal said to give 11-22% increases in exchange for return to work. Workers at Anglo Gold Ashanti's Kopanang shaft go on strike; strike spreads across AGA operations.

Fri Sept 21: 9000 workers at Gold Fields Beatrix operations begin strike for R12 500 begins.

Tue Sept 25: Strike engulfs all AGA shafts, involving 35 000 workers. Transport workers go on strike led by SATAWU. Coal of Africa strikers led by NUM reject company 22% increase.

Thu Sept 27: At Impala Platinum, AMCU presents a deal of minor wage adjustments, holding workers away from general strike action. Samancor Chrome strike renewed as 400 workers stage underground sit-in at Mooinooi.

Fri Sept 28: Samancor sit-in continues; company forced to effectively recognise strike committee.

Mon Oct 1: More Samancor shafts re-join Mooinooi on strike. 4000 workers at Bokoni Platinum, Sekhukhune, strike led by a strike committee, the Bokoni Labour Forum, demanding R12 500 basic salary. Toyota workers, Durban go on wildcat strike.

Tue Oct 2: At Harmony Gold's Kusasaletu shaft 6000 workers go on strike.

Wed Oct 3: Production halts at Kumba Iron Ore's Sishen mine, as workers go on strike. Amplats Northam operations join strike.

Fri Oct 5: Amplats dismisses 12 000 workers.

Tue Oct 9: Striking Bokoni workers are dismissed en masse, as well as Gold One Ezulwini workers.

Sat Oct 13: National Strike Committee is formed.

Oct: Companies effectively recognise strike committees; negotiations begin.

Wed Oct 17: Workers at Forbes' coal mine at Dannhauser, KwaZulu-Natal, go on strike.

Fri Oct 19: Cosatu delegation incl Vavi stoned as they try to approach AGA workers at Orkney. KDC West workers begin return to work.

Mon Oct 22: Samancor workers end strike. AGA threatens to dismiss 12 000 workers.

Tue Oct 23: Gold Fields fires 7000 workers. Workers at AGA Kopanang and Klerksdorp end strike.

Fri Oct 26: AGA issues dismissals; its Carletonville shafts return to work.

Thu Nov 1: Workers at AGA's Mponeng shaft stage underground sit-in. Farm workers begin strike at Western Cape.

Fri Nov 2: Sit-in spreads to AGA's Tautona shaft. Mponeng workers locked out.

Tue Nov 6: KDC East workers return to work.

Thu Nov 15: Amplats Rustenburg and Northam return to work; all workers reinstated.

Thu Nov 22: Two shot dead, one injured, as NUM officials attack workers, Kusasaletu.

Tue Dec 4: Farm workers' general strike begins.

Tue Dec 18: Bokoni Platinum workers return to work, all but three reinstated.

Fri Dec 21: 4000 workers occupy Kusasaletu shaft, Harmony Gold, in protest against suspensions.

## Massacre was no mistake

Below is a brief sketch, very far from an exhaustive account, of the events immediately linked to the massacre on August 16, based primarily on accounts as told to Izwi labasebenzi by several eyewitnesses independently of each other:

Aug 10: NUM shop stewards and officials intimidate workers, try to force them back to work.

Aug 11: Lonmin workers march towards NUM offices wall-to-wall with Wonderkop police station. Before they reach the office, the workers are shot at from inside NUM office, turn and run. Two are hit and left for dead. NUM officials chase after the running workers.

The workers decide to take struggle off residential area and mine property and start assembling on 'the mountain'. They also arm themselves with sticks and other traditional weapons and symbols of struggle.

Aug 12: Two security guards contracted to Lonmin are killed in clashes with striking workers.

Aug 13: Police confronts small group of workers in veld between mountain and Karee; demands that the workers surrender weapons. After some negotiation the workers are allowed to pass but then police start shooting. Three workers are shot. Two police officers are killed.

Media also reports that alleged strike breakers are found dead at some point during these days.

Government calls up 3000 police officers from across the country to Marikana, and calls in army to provide support in the form of equipment and vehicles.

Tue Aug 14: Lonmin management agrees on radio to talk to AMCU, which has been wrongly portrayed as leading the strike.

Lonmin management, police and government conclude a 'show of force' is needed against the 'criminal' strikers, with Lonmin shareholder and ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa playing a key role, in effect calling on Lonmin and the government to crush the uprising.

Wed Aug 15: The Lonmin management representatives arrive one and a half hour late for the agreed meeting, only to tell AMCU leaders that there will be no talks as 'the matter is now in the hands of the generals'.

Thu Aug 16: Thousands of police are transported to Marikana in army trucks. All roads in and out of are blocked. Rank-and-file policemen tell their homeboys among the workers that 'today is D-day. There is a paper that gives us the right to shoot you.' Several hundred police from various commandos gather in front of the mountain. They demand that the workers disperse. The workers insist they will not until the Lonmin management comes to talk with them.

The police roll out a razor-wire fence between their contingent in front of the mountain and the workers on the mountain, leaving a space of about five metres open.

The police attack the workers using teargas and some form of chemical blue water 'bombs' dropped from helicopter.

The police attack with water cannon, rubber bullets and live ammunition from behind the mountain and from above, using helicopters.

Workers start fleeing. At first many run forward towards Wonderkop squatter camp but are met with the razor wire fence. When a group, including one of the main leaders of the strike committee, Mgcineni 'Mambush' Noki, go through the five-metre opening in the fence, the police open fire with automatic rifles. All in the group are mowed down, most killed (this is shown on the news footage which was broadcast the same day).

The mass of workers run in other directions. Some run back around the fence, towards the Wonderkop squatter camp. Others run towards the small bushy koppies behind the bigger koppie ('the mountain'). They are chased after by police. They take cover among rocks and bushes. They are hunted down and shot at close range by police. Some get up hands raised to 'surrender' and are shot as they do so. Some injured workers are given an injection which appears to kill them instantly, their skin turning black within seconds. Police Nyalas drive over workers' bodies lying on the ground, appearing to deliberately crush their skulls and faces.

According to police figures, when they are eventually released, 112 workers are shot on that day, 34 of them killed, 78 wounded. 259 are arrested.



The letter 'N' marks the spot where a worker was shot at close range and bled to death, small koppie.