

## 8 background



Police shoots on miners fleeing the premises

On August 16, 2012, at Marikana, a bloody line was drawn in South Africa's political sand when police in cold blood shot dead 34 workers and wounded 78. The few seconds of the massacre that were shown on TV tore down decades of carefully nurtured illusions about the ANC government and the capitalist state. The state's resort to the most brutal form of reaction against the striking Lonmin workers set in motion a new period of revolution and counterrevolution in South Africa. A year later, a mining bosses' offensive against jobs and worker rights is gathering pace. With the lessons of Marikana imprinted on the consciousness of millions of workers and youth, the scene it set for further mighty upheavals centred on the mining industry.

### Remembering Marikana

The massacre on August 16, 2012, was a carefully orchestrated operation calculated to crush the Lonmin workers' deadly challenge to the government and the capitalist order. Provoked by days (and years) of repression, the thousands of workers gathered on the hill, 'the mountain, outside Marikana were fenced in with razor wire, attacked from behind and from the air with water bombs, and automatic gunfire. Chased towards the five-meter opening in the fence, in front of TV cameras, a first group was shot down. The majority of those killed and wounded were hunted down, out of sight of the cameras, among the rocks and bushes at another small hill. Many were shot at close range, in the back or with their arms stretched up to surrender. Police deliberately destroyed the faces of the dead by running over their skulls with armoured vehicles.



Less well-planned, perhaps, was the police 'investigation' of the scene which has been revealed as a clumsy cover-up attempt.

The true story of Marikana was forced out in the open by the Lonmin workers' defiant continuation of the struggle after the massacre and the industry-wide strike that followed. In the days immediately before and after the massacre, the public was washed over by a virtual flood of vicious propaganda against the Lonmin workers and their struggle. The workers who had been left, by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM's) betrayal, with no choice but to take the fight for a decent wage into their own hands and for this crime were subjected to brutal repression were painted variously as blood-thirsty criminals and murderers, muthi-possessed savages or hapless victims of manipulation by a 'third force'. Jeremy Cronin of the South African 'Communist' Party (SACP) took the prize by publicly condemning the strikers a 'Pondoland vigilante mafia'. While the state and its appendices continue to hammer the refrain of police 'self-defence' at the Farlam Commission, showing how detached from reality this farcical show trial is since in the rest of society, these initial 'truths' had long been overturned by the workers' struggle.

Bloody repression of working class struggles in general, and mineworkers' struggles in particular, of course did not begin at Marikana. Just two weeks earlier, on August 1, 2012, for example, five protesting workers were shot dead by police at the Aquarius K5 shaft outside Rustenburg. Their mur-

# One year Marikana

## both capitalists and working class

ders warranted no more than a paragraph on the business pages. The scale and publicity of the violence meted out on the Lonmin workers, which shook SA and the world, were no accidents. This was the calculated response to the, up until then, most serious challenge to the foundations of the African National Congress' (ANC's) rule – a mineworkers' uprising against the NUM, which throughout the democratic era has been the key to controlling the mineworkers and thereby the mining industry, the backbone of the SA economy. By so doing also becoming a bearing pillar of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the ANC-led Alliance. The threat was not just to the NUM's authority but to the ANC's ability to maintain the capitalist ruling class' confidence in its ability to 'control the black working class' (as a recent Business Day editorial so helpfully defined the ANC's reason for being). 'Concomitant action', the expression used by ANC leader and Lonmin shareholder Cyril Ramaphosa to urge the crack-down, therefore had to mean asserting the state's power through the barrels of automatic rifles.

### 'This is not our government'

The attempt to drown the worker-led strike in blood, instead of shoring up these relationships, exposed them to millions with blinding and instant clarity. One of the key lessons of Marxism – that any state at its core consists of 'armed bodies of men and women' defending the ruling class, while also relying on 'softer' institutions such as parliament as a means to reinforce illusions in the system on regular basis and appendages such as the media to justify the oppression of the many by the few. Marikana spelled out that the ANC government is a party that exists to defend the interests of the capitalist bosses, that the NUM is the main tool to carry out this task, and that the supposedly neutral police, courts and media are in fact little more than the private securities and praise singers of big business.

Flowing immediately from these conclusions is the search for a working class alternative. Mineworkers, first in the Rustenburg platinum belt and then throughout the country's mines, immediately followed the Lonmin workers' example of setting up independent strike committees. The NUM

fulltime shop stewards, often earning ten times the wage of ordinary workers, were chased out of the union offices. Through the spreading, unification and coordination of the strikes the mining houses and the government were forced to instead recognise the workers' committees. In the minds of the striking workers this was right from the start linked to the need to also take the government bosses out of their Union Building offices, and put in place a workers' government. As workers regained the confidence in the ability to organise, fight and win, the idea of building a new party, a working class alternative to the ANC and all the established parties, took root as an urgent necessity. The development of the strike committees into the National Strike Committee by October 2012 and the formation of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) by December 2012 came out of these realisations.

### New battles on the mining front

Marikana registered a new level of class consciousness within the SA working class, which is forced to fight on several fronts – in the workplace, in the community – on a daily basis. When battles are now escalating again this is against the backdrop of the recognition that things cannot continue as before – both within the working class and the capitalist class. Again, SA's political and economic contradictions find their most concentrated expression in the mining industry. While the R15bn in lost sales as a result of the strike wave August-December 2012 is certainly an irritant to the bosses, this is not the cause of the looming onslaught on

jobs. It is the relentless downturn in the world economy which have seen prices of e.g. platinum and gold plummet and eaten into the profits and room to manoeuvre of the mining multinationals. Their major objectives are to cut the 'over-supply' of minerals such as platinum and gold to restore profitability and to shoot down the workers' newfound confidence in struggle.

Already before Marikana, the mining houses were testing the waters for reducing over-production by attempting the closure of some shafts around Rustenburg. Having been forced to retreat by the strike movement, they resumed the offensive immediately after the strikes were over, starting with the lock-out and eviction of 6000 workers at Harmony Gold's Kusaalethu shaft in Carletonville on New Year's Day 2013. Amplats, the world's biggest platinum producer, followed two weeks later announcing the so-called moth-balling (closure with the possibility of re-opening later) of four shafts in Rustenburg, the closure of one mine and the retrenchment of 14 000 workers. Under pressure from government and the continued combativity of the mineworkers, the numbers have been reduced to three shafts and 6000 workers, for now. While the AMCU (Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union) is still busy with the company's 'consultation on this 'strategic review', the bosses are already acting on the plan and count on its finalisation within the second half of 2013. Anglo Gold Ashanti has announced a 300 000oz cut of its total 920 000oz global production – in just one year, most likely concentrated to SA.





# after the massacre

## Workers prepare for unforeseen turmoil



Like Amplats, Glencore Xstrata is a pilot case for the ruling class. They too understand the working class truth that an injury to one is an injury to all. Throughout 2013, brief spontaneous worker-led strikes have continued to break out throughout the mining industry. At Glencore-Xstrata's Eastern Chrome mine in Tubatse, Limpopo, 2000 workers struck in May in protest against the company's protection of a white supervisor who had racially assaulted a black worker. The company acted immediately by having the strike declared illegal and dismissed the 2000 workers. Backed by SA mining bosses and international speculators united, the Glencore Xstrata bosses are hell-bent on consolidating a defeat for the workers, who are fighting for their reinstatement supported by the Workers and Socialist Party and the Democratic Socialist Movement. Bourgeois analysts speak of a possible cut of 200 000 mining jobs in the next three or five years. At the same time, the falling Rand, falling GDP growth rate, falling tax revenue and rising inflation, unemployment and government debt has the SA economy overall balancing close to a 'tipping point' which pro-capitalist commentators fear may trigger an all-out social crisis.

### Peace without justice?

In addition to the attacks on mining jobs, the ruling class is responding by pushing for the rolling back of the collective bargaining system and for the cementation of the repression to which they resorted in Marikana. A series of

'peace accords', under various labels, have been branded about in the aftermath of the massacre. The latest is the 'Framework Agreement for a Sustainable Mining Industry', developed in talks government-industry-union talks led by deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe (a former NUM GS). Like previous, completely ineffectual agreements, it contains vague promises to improve the standard of living in mining communities and more concrete undertakings to enforce law and order, e.g. through the permanent stationing of police and 'other security forces' at all mining operations. Workers and unions are made to take responsibility for maintaining 'peace' while the bosses are preparing for war. Meanwhile, threats and assassinations against worker leaders associated with AMCU have continued, often provoking bloody retaliation.

The 'Framework' is part of the ANC government attempts to assure the mining capitalists and the ruling class as a whole that it can re-establish a grip on the situation after Marikana. It is of course no accident that it was drafted just at the start of wage negotiations in gold and platinum which are the most polarised in decades – e.g. a 120% increase demand versus a 5% offer in the gold industry – and the onset of the possible mass retrenchments. The attack on the Democratic Socialist Movement, attempting to scapegoat DSM EC member Liv Shange for so-called anarchy in the mining industry and effectively deport her from SA, also forms part of the efforts to undermine the fighting

capacity of the mineworkers.

Despite the ANC's efforts, its ongoing internal rifts are evidence that its big business handlers are yet to be convinced that 'the centre can hold'. While the Zuma-faction appears all-powerful for the moment, its paranoia indicates a recognition that others, e.g. around deputy ANC president Cyril Ramaphosa, may be biding their time. Increasingly however, the ruling class is

could shake SA to its core, the SA working class has only just begun the reconstruction of its class-independent organisations. AMCU, the union which took over the Rustenburg platinum belt and cut out a large chunk of NUM membership also in the gold industry in the wake of the strikes is yet to show how it will fare in the test that is already beginning with dismissals and retrenchments. So far, the lack of any

independently organised and united in action. Izwi labasebenzi/ the Democratic Socialist Movement calls for the mineworkers National Workers Committee to work for a joint fight-back plan, coordinated across the different mining sectors and trade unions, to stop the mass retrenchments and fight for living wages and jobs. We also call for a national day of action against the job cuts, for the nationalisation of the

### Rasimone: royal mine police threatens democratic rights

Royal Bafokeng Platinum's Rasimone mine in Chaneng was among the first to go on strike after the Marikana massacre. Led by their own strike committee, the workers downed tools on August 17, 2012. Not surprisingly, the strike was condemned by the Bafokeng royal house, which has been handed the majority shareholding of the mine by Anglo American. The security company which works for the mine and for the Bafokeng royal house was used together with state police to suppress the strike. No mass meetings or even smaller gatherings were allowed. Police and security terrorised the community. The strike eventually disintegrated when the workers were unable to counter this virtual undeclared state of emergency. The mine has since fired over 1000 workers, by various means and isolated from each other – dismissal, retrenchment, 'voluntary' retirement. The strike leaders are still banned from approaching the mine. Workers remain organised to fight for their reinstatement, but are subjected to constant harassment by the royal mine police. A worker from the dismissed workers' committee tells of one incident:

- On Monday, August 5, we held a meeting inside the yard of one comrade and as we were sitting there, a Security/ Re-Force van was circling around and around. Eventually it came back accompanied by five police vans and a police minibus from the SAPS in Phokeng.
- They were led by the SAPS deputy station commander, Sengwana, and he told us that they had received a report from RBP that there was a gathering taking place and that they had come to 'advise' us that if we were having a meeting of more than 15 people we had to apply to the municipality for permission. Why do you need five vans and a kombi to give 'advice'?
- The SAPS also told us they had been instructed by RBP that AMCU should not be allowed to enter the shaft or to canvas workers in the community but they added that as the SAPS they should not get involved with such matters.
- This was not the first attempt to intimidate workers. They visit workers leader in their homes, you receive strange phone calls. Dismissals are continuing – recently a guy was fired simply for wearing an AMCU t-shirt.



Security guards come for advice?

Izwi labasebenzi/ the Democratic Socialist Movement stands for uniting all forces that are committed to fight for reinstatement for the Rasimone workers, for jobs and development, for the reestablishment of full democratic rights such as freedom of association and against the dictatorial rule of the Bafokeng in a Workers and Community Forum open to all. The unity of the employed workers, the dismissed and community members generally needs to be rebuilt to wage an effective campaign of mass action.

shopping around for political 'Plan Bs' outside of the ANC. The formation of Agang-SA, a new political party led by former mining magnate and World Bank director Mampela Rampele, is one such experiment. The right-wing opposition Democratic Alliance is aggressively attempting to swallow other parties into a 'super-opposition'. Expelled ANC Youth League president Julius Malema is now the 'commander-in-chief' of the Economic Freedom Fighters hoping to capitalise on the new situation with radical rhetoric. The ANC is widely expected to suffer big losses in next year's elections to national and provincial parliament.

A year after Marikana, on the threshold of turmoil that

apparent fight-back strategy is a great cause of concern. Cosatu, the trade union federation to which NUM belongs, appears unable to recover from its historical capitulation to the bosses at Marikana. Since the Cosatu leaders effectively condoned the massacre, and went on to endorse the (directly responsible) ANC leaders for re-election, the federation has not displayed any effective organising or campaigning work. Instead it stoops to new lows in bitter infighting on a weekly basis.

It is high time for workers, the unemployed, youth and students to act on the key lesson of Marikana – that there is no force more powerful than the working class

mines, banks and big and big business under democratic control and management by workers and communities, for jobs and decent living conditions such as housing and education for all. Izwi labasebenzi/ the DSM campaigns for the convening of an all-SA Assembly for Working Class Unity to chart the way forward for working class organising and urges all genuine working class fighter to come together in the building of the Workers and Socialist Party. The best honour we can pay to those comrades who were mowed down at Marikana is to craft the political weapon we will need to defeat their murderers once and for all – a mass workers party armed with a socialist programme.

