

Strikes spread in South African mines

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Gold Fields Ltd.'s KDC gold mine has been hit by a new strike, as 15,000 gold miners at the company's KDC West section began a wildcat action at the start of the night shift on Sunday. The strike has forced the world's fourth-largest gold producer to suspend operations. KDC West produces about 1,440 troy ounces of gold a day.

The strike action was the second to hit Gold Fields in less than a week, following the company's announcement last Wednesday that it had resolved a weeklong strike by 12,000 miners at the nearby KDC East mine.

The gold miners' action is a demonstration of growing militancy among miners in the wake of the August 16 police massacre of 34 striking platinum miners at Lonmin's Marikana mine. The gunning down of strikers by the police force of the African National Congress (ANC) government has shocked public opinion and galvanized the resolve of miners throughout South Africa to fight their repressive working conditions and poverty wages.

Gold Fields management has expressed the fears of mine operators over the spread of strikes to other sectors of the mining industry in South Africa, host to many of the world's top mining companies. "Obviously we can see a certain trend with the militancy that is happening and certainly the volatile environment does not help that," said Gold Fields spokesman Sven Lunsche, quoted in the *Financial Times*.

Gold Fields reported it has received demands from the KDC West strikers for salaries of 12,500 rand a month, or about \$1,500, the same amount being demanded by the Marikana miners. About 400 Gold Fields strikers marched to the company's office, calling as well for a new union leadership.

As at Lonmin's Marikana mine, the gold miners are rebelling against the National Union of Mineworkers,

affiliated with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) federation, which has collaborated with the ANC government in its violent repression of miners. Gold Fields reported that during the strike at KDC East last week miners demanded the removal of NUM shop stewards.

At a protest September 3 at another gold mine, Gold One's Modder East, four miners were hospitalized, one critically, as police used tear gas and rubber bullets to break up their picket line. The violence followed a standoff between 200 sacked miners who were demanding to be rehired.

The protest included miners fired two years earlier as well as a group fired in June after mounting a wildcat strike against the NUM in an effort to secure recognition at the mine of the smaller Professional Transport and Allied Workers Union (PTAWU). The four miners were apparently shot as the protesting miners attempted to prevent miners who had been hired after the June strike from beginning work.

Gold One International reports that there have been no subsequent protests, but has maintained a heavy presence of the South African Police Service (SAPS), the national police force, at the Modder East mine. The company stated: "Gold One commends the SAPS for its previous and continuing support in this regard. Absenteeism at Modder East has remained low and the company also expresses its thanks to employees and management at the operation who have remained dedicated to their work despite difficult circumstances."

At Lonmin's Marikana platinum mine, northwest of Johannesburg, mine operators reported that just 6 percent of its 28,000 workers turned up for work Monday morning as the dispute continued into its fourth week. Drivers going out to pick up workers returned with empty buses. A government brokered peace accord signed last week by three major unions

has failed to quell the strike after being rejected by a breakaway union and nonunion strikers.

On Monday, hundreds of chanting miners, carrying spears and sticks, descended upon Lonmin mine shafts, one after the other, Associated Press reported. The strikers marched for 6 miles outside the gated shafts under the watch of police armed in riot gear, some on foot and some in armored cars. Police and mine security escorted some of the working miners from the scene.

AP reported that miners “are getting desperate and do not have enough money to feed their families because of the no-work, no-strike pay. One said a loan shark is refusing to give money to any but long-time customers. Still they have said they remain resolute and will not return to work until their wage demand is met.”

The last of the miners killed in the August 16 massacre were buried over the weekend, one in Lesotho and three in South Africa. The *Daily Dispatch* spoke to a family member of one of the slain miners, Thembelakhe Mati, who said he died while hiding in a shack after being wounded, fearful that he would be arrested if he went to the mine hospital for treatment.

The Legal Resources Centre announced it has hired forensic experts and pathologists to investigate the August 16 incident on behalf of the South African Human Rights Commission. The move followed local news reports that some of the miners were shot as they tried to surrender to police, others were shot in the back as they ran from police gunfire, and some were run over and killed by armored cars.



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