

Marikana massacre: France's NPA sows illusions in South African government, unions

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It took three weeks for the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party) to break its silence on the murder of 34 South African miners on August 16 at Marikana, the site of the worst massacre of workers in South Africa since the end of apartheid. Its September 6 article, entitled "South Africa: After the Marikana killing," sows illusions in the ANC and the South African trade union apparatus that are responsible for the massacre of the striking miners.

Obliged to acknowledge widely reported facts that have shocked the world, the NPA begins with a brief description of the massacre. It evokes the political collaboration between the ruling African National Congress (ANC), the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The NPA recognizes that the NUM "is paying a heavy price for its support for the government and its collusion with the employers, and is now in full decline".

However, it presents a strike that started with a workers' rebellion against the NUM and escaped the organizational control of the minority AMCU (Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union) as a battle between opposing union apparatuses. The NPA writes: "Another union, the AMCU, reputed to be more militant, is now gaining ground. Furthermore, it accuses the NUM of 'being in the same bed with the management'. At Marikana the two organizations faced off".

This presentation of events, repeated several times, gives the false impression that a section of the union bureaucracy wanted the strike and still leads it. The NPA thus minimizes the class gulf between the trade union apparatus and the ANC on the one hand and the striking workers on the other, even when a river of blood shed by the police separates the workers from the NUM and the ANC.

The NPA continues: "The NUM considered the movement to be 'unrealistic,' whilst the AMCU was in support. It appears that in agreement with the management, the NUM bureaucracy attempted to liquidate the strike using force."

In fact, it is not a question of tentative reports that make it

"appear" that the NUM approved the massacre of the strikers. The facts are established and widely recognized. Faced with a revolt of the workers, the NUM joined the ANC government and the SACP in defending the police, who fired on the miners under the orders of ANC National Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega.

The NPA quotes neither Phiyega nor the NUM, whose spokesman, Lesiba Sesoka, unambiguously defended the massacre and denounced the strikers in the following terms: "The police cannot remain indifferent when our country is taken hostage by criminals".

The NPA also remains silent on the comments by the SACP leaders, who effectively dismissed the massacre of strikers, terming it "violence between workers". The SACP has been an integral part of the state apparatus since the end of apartheid, occupying high administrative posts in government, and supports the current president, Jacob Zuma.

At the end of the article, the NPA writes: "One would have thought that the Marikana bloodletting would allow the Zuma government to calm things down in the mines. On the contrary. On August 31, 12,000 workers at the KDC gold mine also went on strike".

The NPA does not explain this repulsive statement, according to which Zuma could "calm things down" with a bloodbath against the workers. On the face of it, however, either the NPA was expecting that the government could crush the strike with a massacre and make no concessions, or it hoped that Zuma would make a minimum offer enabling the union bureaucracy to rapidly organize a sellout and put an end to the strike. In either case, the NPA was mistaken.

As the strike spread, the ANC took an ever more threatening position towards the workers. It continued with repression, having already briefly imprisoned the strikers who survived the massacre and desperately attempted to reassure investors who threatened to pull their funds from the South African mining industry.

Thus, Minister for Mines Susan Shabangu said at a meeting in Australia: "We urge our investors, incumbent and prospective, to take comfort in the solid foundations set by

our constitution, government, legal and civil institutions.... The president and people of South Africa are determined to isolate bad elements in our society that are seemingly committed to undermining the democratic gains of the country to date”.

The NPA is conscious of the pro-capitalist character of the ANC and its trade union organizations. It writes: “The massacre took place in a country where the government is described as ‘left’. A coalition composed of the nationalist ANC party, the local Communist Party (SACP), and the COSATU trade union confederation support the current government of Jacob Zuma. From the workers’ standpoint, the balance sheet of Zuma and his ANC predecessor (M’beki) is disastrous. A thin layer of the black bourgeoisie benefited substantially from the transition, occupying the quarters formerly reserved for the whites under apartheid, in the name of ‘black economic empowerment’. But for the mass of the black population very little has changed”.

However, the NPA formulates no socialist or revolutionary demands against this corrupt capitalist regime. In conclusion, it simply states that “what is stake is obviously the capacity that workers will, or will not have in obtaining independent trade unions, regenerated after being rid of its agents in the bosses’ service, and a real party which represents them”.

This ambiguous formula, characterized above all by its indulgence towards the ANC regime, aims quite simply to cut short the drawing out of the political questions raised by the Marikana massacre before it poses embarrassing questions for the NPA.

If workers are ready for a merciless struggle against the pro-capitalist personnel of which the NUM apparatus—is composed—a struggle which is of revolutionary dimensions, as the union is entirely controlled by the bourgeoisie—why should workers stop at refounding the NUM? Why not struggle directly for power and the creation of a workers’ state fighting for socialism? The NPA is entirely foreign, and indeed hostile, to such a perspective.

For them, political discussion ends where really it should begin. What would an “independent” union hypothesized by the NPA negotiate with Zuma and Shabangu, or with their potential successors within the ANC? The workers will obtain no lasting gains by negotiating with a regime ready to commit the most despicable crimes in order to smash strikes.

As for a “real party” to represent the South African working class—which is indeed an urgent necessity—it will be impossible to create it on the trade union and implicitly pro-capitalist perspective outlined by the NPA.

In spite of the cynical criticisms it makes of the ANC and the SACP, the NPA is oriented towards the same social

layers in Europe that in South Africa have planned the massacre at Marikana: the trade union bureaucracy and the bourgeois “left”.

The NPA has for decades defended the French union bureaucracies, which are empty shells financed by the bourgeoisie and responsible for immense defeats imposed on the workers. During the recent presidential elections in May, the NPA called for a vote for Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande, fully recognizing that he would carry out brutal social cuts.

If the Hollande government were to crush a strike this autumn against PS austerity measures—as the police crushed the petrol strike in 2010 under his predecessor, President Nicolas Sarkozy—what would a South African observer write about the NPA’s role?

He could transpose the NPA’s analysis of Marikana to France, writing more or less the following: “The repression took place in a country where the government is described as ‘left’. A coalition composed of the social-free market Socialist Party, the local Communist Party (PCF-Left Front) and the NPA with the French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT) directly, and Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Fight) and the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) indirectly, called for the election of François Hollande. From the standpoint of the workers, the balance sheet of Hollande and his Socialist Party predecessor (Jospin) is disastrous. The bourgeoisie and a thin layer of the affluent middle class benefited substantially from austerity under the aegis of the European Union. But for the mass of the working class, things are only getting worse”.

The massacre at Marikana has underlined that the upper-middle class layer whose representatives in South Africa organized the massacre, and for which the NPA speaks in France, has passed over to the other side of the barricades.



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