

South Africa after the Marikana massacre

Chris Marsden
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The police massacre of striking miners at Marikana is a watershed for post-apartheid South Africa and for the international class struggle.

It demonstrates in the starkest form imaginable that the perspective of “black empowerment” and the “National Democratic Revolution” providing the basis for overcoming economic and social oppression has failed utterly. The central lesson of Marikana is that the fundamental division within society is class, not race.

The African National Congress, having come to power in 1994 as a result of immense sacrifice and revolutionary struggle by millions of workers, has revealed itself to be every bit as ruthless as its white predecessors in enforcing the most brutal exploitation on behalf of the major global corporations.

The ANC sent in the police to shoot, kill and maim striking workers whose sole crime was to fight for the right to live as human beings and not beasts of burden. Now, after the police have killed 36 and wounded another 78, some 270 imprisoned strikers are being charged with the murder and attempted murder of their colleagues under Apartheid-era “common purpose” laws designed to blame the victims for “provoking” police violence.

The Marikana miners are paid less than \$500 a month for living in squalid communal huts and working in hazardous, back-breaking conditions for the UK-based Lonmin, extracting platinum that sells for over \$1,400 an ounce. Their fate, worse still, is shared by millions in what has now become the most unequal country in the entire world.

Meanwhile the ANC has spawned a grasping layer of black bourgeois, with a reputation for unparalleled corruption and repression. It is synonymous with terms like Black Economically Empowered (BEE) companies and “tenderpreneurs”—those who have enriched themselves by acting as front-men for the transnational corporations or who have used their control of the state

apparatus to secure a direct role in exploiting the working class.

Even as charges were being brought against the arrested miners, South African Minister of Mining Susan Shabangu was reassuring “our investors, incumbent and prospective” at a gathering of mining executives in Perth, Australia, that President Jacob Zuma is “determined to isolate bad elements in our society.”

The ANC in turn relies upon its partners in the Tripartite Alliance—the South African Communist Party and the COSATU trade union federation—to impose the dictatorship of global capital and the South African bourgeoisie upon an increasingly restive population.

The Stalinist SACP insisted throughout the struggle against apartheid that black majority rule of a capitalist South Africa was a necessary stage in an eventual transition to socialism. It has portrayed COSATU as a bastion of working class power within government that would guarantee this transformation.

Events have proceeded in an entirely opposite direction. For services rendered, SACP leaders were granted key roles in the post-apartheid regime and a share in the spoils of office. COSATU and its affiliated unions have functioned as an industrial police force and a mechanism for the self-enrichment of the bureaucracy.

Philip Hirschsohn, Professor School of Business and Finance at the University of the Western Cape, pointed out last year how the trade unions have taken on “oligarchic characteristics.”

The position of shop steward has become a mechanism for securing management positions, as part of the “emergence of entrepreneurial and career unionists,” with SACP membership a favoured “stepping stone” for “access opportunities in managerial ranks or in government.”

Former NUM leader and high-ranking ANC

politician, Cyril Ramaphosa is now the 34th richest man in the whole of Africa, with a net worth of \$275 million. One of his many companies has a contract to supply labour at Marikana in a form of indentured slavery. He is paid R12 000 (\$1500) per worker per month by Lonmin, but only pays his workers R4000 (\$500) per month.

Its role as an adjunct of management has meant that NUM membership has declined to less than 50 percent of employees in many mines; most of these are skilled white collar and surface workers. The strikers at Marikana are either members of the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) or not unionized at all.

The NUM, COSATU and the SACP have all called for police to clamp down on the strikers, defending the massacre and urging the suppression of the AMCU. NUM General Secretary Frans Baleni said of the Marikana massacre that, “The police were patient, but these people were extremely armed with dangerous weapons.”

This has not prevented the pseudo-left groups internationally from opposing the necessary break from COSATU and its affiliated unions, without which any struggle against the ANC is impossible.

The South African affiliates of the Committee for a Workers International, the Democratic Socialist Movement, instead urge “workers in both unions to demand united solidarity action, beginning with a local general strike” and ending in a “national general strike”—all presumably led by the NUM and COSATU.

The Socialist Workers Party in the UK is more despicable still, writing on August 17, “Whatever its intentions, AMCU has sometimes been used to introduce disunity at a time when workers face big challenges. It would have been better for the workers who formed the rival union to fight among the NUM rank and file and shift its policies from below.”

Support for the NUM and COSATU is support for the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance government. It is support for the continuation of capitalism and imperialist oppression.

The theory of Permanent Revolution provides the political basis for the workers and youth of South Africa to conduct the life-and-death struggles that lie ahead. The evolution of the ANC is a graphic confirmation of Leon Trotsky’s insistence that

bourgeois nationalist movements, tied as they are to capitalism and organically opposed to ending the brutal exploitation of the workers and poor farmers, are incapable of carrying through the struggle for democracy and liberation from imperialist domination.

The working class, mobilising all the oppressed rural and urban layers, must break with the ANC and its defenders in the SACP and the trade union apparatus and build their own socialist party.

A workers government must be established to take the entire economy into social ownership and utilise the vast natural wealth presently monopolised by the super-rich to meet the needs of all for decent jobs, housing, education and health provision. This revolutionary struggle must be extended throughout Africa and internationally through the construction of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.

Chris Marsden



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