

# Political and historical issues in the South African miners' revolt

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The August 16 massacre of 34 striking miners at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana and the spreading confrontation between miners and the African National Congress (ANC) regime have exposed the reactionary character of racial and nationalist politics.

Eighteen years since the struggle of millions forced a legal end to white minority rule, South Africa's super-exploited workers are once again being brutalized and killed in the interests of transnational mining and mineral corporations. Their oppressors now, however, are the once-avowed "liberators" of the black masses in the ANC, alongside their partners in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP).

Unsurprisingly, President Jacob Zuma has denounced as "irresponsible" comparisons between Marikana and the police state measures employed under apartheid—most notably the Sharpeville Massacre of March 21, 1960 that left 69 black youth dead.

But the continuity between pre- and post-apartheid South Africa does not end with that bloody event. The ANC, which came to power under conditions of a virtual insurrection by the black majority, has used apartheid-era security laws to suppress the rank-and-file revolt against the mining conglomerates and their stooges in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

The ANC's brutal assault on the miners has the full support of the NUM, COSATU and the SACP, which, if anything, have demanded even tougher measures against the wildcat strikes that have spread across the platinum belt into the gold and chrome sectors.

The Lonmin miners have reportedly accepted a 22 percent pay rise, but strikes continue elsewhere. Yesterday it was reported that police used rubber bullets and tear gas against protestors near an Anglo American mine.

The violent state repression of the miners is a powerful confirmation that class—not race, ethnicity or other considerations—is the fundamental dividing line in South African society and throughout the world. If the ANC and its partners are acting no differently than their white predecessors, it is because the miners' revolt threatens not only the mining operations, but also their own social interests.

When it negotiated the end of apartheid in 1994, the bourgeois nationalist ANC undertook to preserve capitalist property relations, while claiming that its policy of "Black Economic Empowerment" would end oppression and provide jobs and rising living standards for all. This political fiction was bolstered by the SACP. Having long before rejected internationalism and the political independence of the working class, it insisted that workers had to subordinate their class interests to the installation of black majority rule, resting on capitalist foundations.

The last two decades have proved conclusively that the basic democratic and social needs of the working class and oppressed masses cannot be met under the rule of the national bourgeoisie, no matter how supposedly radical or "left." The extension of the franchise concealed that the interests of the same transnational and South African firms that profited under white minority rule remained intact.

The incorporation of the ANC, the trade unions and the SACP into the post-apartheid state stamped them as the political representatives of the South African bourgeoisie and global capital. The directive that companies had to place a portion of their ownership in black hands provided a mechanism for the enrichment of a tiny layer within the black population.

The events of the past month have demonstrated that these black bourgeois are no less vicious toward the

working class than their white counterparts.

The class lineup is nowhere more clear than in the lucrative mining industry. ANC Justice Minister and leading SACP official Jeff Radebe, who last weekend authorised yet another crackdown against the Marikana miners, has close family ties to mining interests through his wife, Bridgette Radebe, the head of Mmakau Mining and the wealthiest woman in South Africa. His brother-in-law, Patrice Motsepe, also a mining magnate, was designated the richest man in South Africa in the *Sunday Times* Rich List in 2011.

NUM founder and former ANC General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa is one of the country's richest businessmen. He is a non-executive director of Lonmin and has stakes in the company's mines.

These are only two examples, amongst many others, which underscore that the ANC and its partners have a direct stake in the exploitation of the working class and a vested material interest in suppressing any threats from below. This is the source of the conflict between the miners and the NUM.

These relations are by no means confined to the mines. For the mass of workers, conditions are now worse than under apartheid. South Africa is one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, with 60 percent of total income going to the top 10 percent, while the bottom 50 percent accounts for less than 8 percent of earnings. Some 20 million people are out of work.

The miners' strikes are only the latest and most explosive indicators of the social and political tensions that have built up in South Africa. According to *Time* magazine, this year has already seen more street protests than any year since the ANC took power. The magazine notes that "most of those protests have targeted ANC-run local authorities (many of them corrupt) over failure to deliver on services."

Hence Zuma's pledge that the ban on "illegal" gatherings "applies not only to labour disputes, but also in service delivery protests which are at times also accompanied by violence, including the destruction of property."

What is involved is not simply personal corruption. Nor are these conditions confined to South Africa. The lineup of forces against the miners illustrates the absence of any viable perspective for the working class, whether in the historically oppressed countries or the

advanced countries, outside of socialist revolution.

The fundamentals of Marxism—that the history of mankind is the history of class struggle, that economic relations ultimately determine political relations, that there exists an irreconcilable conflict between the interests of the working class and those of the bourgeoisie—are being confirmed in the explosive events in South Africa before the eyes of the world.

This signifies the reemergence of class struggle and social revolution on a global scale. The central issue is the urgent need for the building of revolutionary parties based on Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

The evolution of the ANC underscores Trotsky's insistence that the national bourgeoisie, which is economically dependent on imperialism, is incapable of resolving the democratic and social tasks facing the masses. That can be achieved only under the leadership of the working class and by means of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, as part of an international struggle to put an end to imperialism and establish world socialism.

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