

Four South African miners shot as strikes spread after Marikana massacre

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Four gold miners were hospitalized after being shot at Gold One's Modder East operation yesterday, as police used tear gas and rubber bullets to break a picket line.

The police shooting followed a stand-off at Modder East with 200 sacked miners who were demanding to be rehired. Police Captain Pinky Tsinyane confirmed that the police shooting left four miners injured, including one in critical condition.

The protesting miners included some miners fired two years earlier, as well as a group of miners fired in June after mounting a wildcat strike against the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The June strike aimed to secure recognition of the smaller Professional Transport and Allied Workers Union (PTAWU) at the mine.

The current shooting apparently occurred as the protesting miners tried to prevent other miners who had been rehired after the June strike from starting work.

According to a Gold One statement, "The group blocked all access in and out of the mine and threw stones at vehicles attempting to gain access to the operations. The South African Police Service (SAPS) addressed the group extensively, informing them that the gathering was illegal and requesting them to disperse. The group refused. At approximately 11:30AM, the SAPS had to use tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the group. Access to Modder East Operations has since been re-established."

Gold One CEO Neal Froneman blamed the PTAWU for the strike, as it has not discouraged its members from fighting to get their jobs back. "PTAWU have missed the point ... they continue to misinform their members. They believe that they were incorrectly dismissed. They were not," Froneman told *Mineweb*, an industry publication.

PTAWU President Bheki Mthembu said he had no

knowledge of yesterday's shootings. The union has launched a lawsuit to require Gold One to rehire its members.

The Modder East shootings came less than three weeks after the police massacred 34 striking platinum miners at Lonmin's Marikana mine. The African National Congress (ANC) government's gunning down of strikers—many of whom were shot in the back or run over by police vehicles—shocked public opinion internationally and in South Africa and exposed the right-wing, pro-business character of the ANC.

Together with the union bureaucracy, the ANC, a pro-capitalist party which came to power in 1994 after mass working class struggles against the white-minority apartheid regime, has acquired a significant stake in South African business operations. It is responding ruthlessly to protect its class interests and those of international investors against the workers.

The ANC government had imposed murder charges on 270 survivors of the Marikana massacre under apartheid-era "common purpose" laws. These laws effectively allow the police to charge victims of violent police repression with responsibility for police brutality, under the legal fiction that they are responsible for causing the police response.

The ANC has announced that it is temporarily withdrawing charges against the Marikana strikers in an effort to dampen public hostility. Yesterday, some 100 of the 270 detained Marikana strikers were released and further "batches" are expected to be released in the coming days.

However, the ANC still plans to bring the miners to trial in February on charges of public violence, apparently hoping that by then public opposition will have died down and it will be easier to secure convictions of the miners.

The criminality of the new South African ruling class also plays a key role in the current strike by laid-off gold miners at Modder East.

The Modder East operation was previously managed by Aurora, a firm acquired two years ago by a group including President Jacob Zuma's nephew, Khulubuse, and Zondwa Mandela—a grandson of Nelson Mandela, the ANC's long-time leader. The two reportedly did not pay for the mine, but stripped it of its assets and are now being sued by liquidators. They have ignored court orders to pay tens of thousands of dollars to miners who were thrown out of work.

The ruling class fears the development of a mass rebellion against the trade union bureaucracies tied to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which have suppressed working class opposition as part of their integration into the ANC regime.

Gary van Staden, an analyst at NKC Independent Economists, told Reuters: "I think there is a good prospect for contagion. There is a very good chance we will see a spreading of wildcat action on the mines."

An illegal wildcat strike by 12,000 workers at Gold Fields' KDC Gold Mine continued yesterday, amid reports that miners were rejecting the local NUM branch leadership.

Gold Fields Executive Vice President Peter Turner told *Mineweb* that while the company was considering enforcing a legal interdict against the workers, it preferred to work with the NUM to end the strike: "Our preference at this stage is to assist the NUM leadership to resolve their internal conflict peacefully."

While the ANC is responding to rising working class opposition by deploying deadly violence against the workers, it is seeking to reassure global investors in the mining industry that the protests will not cut into their profit margins. Reuters cited Mines Minister Susan Shabangu, who warned last week that "recent labor violence would impact potential investment into South Africa."

Yesterday, Minister of State Collins Chabane told journalists, "The tragic incident at Marikana is not a reflection of the business environment in South Africa. Government remains in control of the situation and law and order continues to prevail. The country continues to fully support direct investment and appropriate incentives, and the legislative framework is in place to

give confidence and predictability to investment decisions and security of tenure."

Such comments underscore that what passes for "law and order" in official circles is lawless and violent behavior by the state, to crush working class protests and ensure the continued profitability of the mines for finance capital



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