South Africa's unions use mass sackings and murder to suppress miners

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The National Union of Mineworkers is seeking to impose a sell-out deal on gold miners that will leave tens of thousands of workers sacked throughout the platinum, gold and coal sectors.

AngloGold Ashanti, South Africa's biggest producer, sacked half of its 24,000-strong local workforce Wednesday, and Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) has already sacked 12,000.

An agreement was announced yesterday after talks between the NUM, AngloGold Ashanti, Harmony, Gold Fields and the Chamber of Mines that appears virtually identical to demands already put forward by the gold companies and previously rejected by strikers.

It is too early to say whether the sell-out will be successful. At least 12,000 gold and 20,000 platinum miners were still on strike yesterday. But whatever happens, the NUM and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) stand condemned as strike-breakers and accomplices to mass sackings, police intimidation, brutality and murder.

COSATU this week issued a demagogic statement threatening to mobilise its 2.2 million members to protest against the mass dismissal of mine workers, warning that "the totality of the capitalist class will face the full might of organised workers and also will face stiff resistance in every corner of the economy."

Its pose is hypocrisy on an epic scale—a ruse to conceal the trade union bureaucracy's collusion with management in suppressing wildcat strikes by more than 100,000 workers. The NUM has worked against the strikers from the very beginning. It has blood on its hands.

Evidence has emerged of the collusion of the NUM and of COSATU in preparing the way for the police massacre of 36 and the injury of 72 miners striking against Lonmin at its Marikana platinum mine on August 16.

An October 12 report by *Daily Maverick* journalist Jared Sacks states that the violence at Marikana began due to the murder of two strikers by top NUM officials in the area. He reports from numerous interviews the "near-complete hatred that all residents, regardless of their connection to the strike, had towards the National Union of Mineworkers" and that "every single person that I spoke to, without fail, blamed NUM for starting the violence..."

On August 8, some rock drill operators (RDOs) held a mass meeting demanding a significant salary increase, a demand the NUM refused to support.

On August 9, a mass meeting of NUM members agreed to bypass the union and put their demands directly to Lonmin. The next day they marched to the company's offices. The company fetched the NUM leaders, who then reprimanded their members. The wildcat strike by 3,000 RDOs began as a result.

On August 11, the strikers marched to the local NUM headquarters demanding their support for the strike. It was then that the "top five" NUM leaders "and other shop stewards, between 15 and 20 in all, came out of the office and began shooting at the protesting strikers ... without warning or provocation."

Two RDOs were killed, named by one person as S. Gwadidi from the Roeland Shaft and Tobias Tshivilika from New Mine Shaft. Both were NUM members.

"The police did nothing in response to the two deaths on 11 August. No one was arrested that day, nor was anyone interrogated," Sacks writes. It was this that sparked revenge killings by strikers of NUM officials, as well as police officers and security guards.

Evidence submitted to the official Farlam Commission into the Marikana massacre by lawyers representing the victims of police violence shows that

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the NUM's response, backed by COSATU and the African National Congress (ANC), was to call for a crackdown on the strike.

A statement issued by NUM General Secretary Frans Baleni on August 13 declared, "The NUM is alarmed that the situation in the platinum mines and its escalating violence has been allowed to continue unabated by the law enforcement agencies in that area in North West Province... We call for the deployment of a special task force or the SANDF [South African National Defence Force] to deal decisively with the criminal elements in Rustenburg and its surrounding mines."

The most despicable role has been played by former NUM leader, and now millionaire businessman, Cyril Ramaphosa. On Tuesday, the inquiry into the Marikana massacre was shown numerous emails he had written.

Ramaphosa, a member of the ANC's executive and reportedly COSATU's favoured presidential candidate, wrote an email to Lonmin's chief commercial officer Albert Jamieson, stating, "The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such. There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation."

In an email entitled "Security Situation", Ramaphosa says, "You are absolutely correct in insisting that the minister [Susan Shabangu] and indeed all government officials need to understand that we are essentially dealing with a criminal act. I have said as much to the minister of safety and security."

Ramaphosa is reported to have warned Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa to clamp down on striking miners in response to lobbying by Lonmin that also urged him to "influence" ANC mineral resources minister Susan Shabangu. He warned her that the Marikana strike was "not a labour dispute but a criminal act" and that "silence and inaction" were "bad for her and government." He is also said to have held discussions with ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe and NUM President Senzeni Zokwana.

Advocate Dali Mpofu, representing injured mineworkers and more than 200 who were arrested, said that Ramaphosa's email to Jamieson, addressed to "Dear Albert of Lonmin," was an example of "toxic collusion." It took place "exactly 24 hours before the people were mowed down on that mountain… It is clear Ramaphosa was directly involved by advising what was to be done to address these 'dastardly criminal actions,' which he says must be characterised as such and dealt with effectively."

His intervention had culminated in the "premeditated murder of defenceless people."

Ramaphosa is only one of the more successful of the grasping layer of new bourgeoisie that has emerged from the ranks of COSATU and the ANC and grown rich through the policy of Black Economic Empowerment. His investment holding company Shanduka Group owns 9 percent of Lonmin as its favoured BEE partner, and he sits on the board of directors

In a radio interview in September, Ramaphosa had issued a pro-forma apology for Marikana, stating that "I think a lot of us as stakeholders are to blame." In an outburst of self-pity, he then complained that his 300 million rand (US$36 million) investment in Lonmin was "completely underwater ... almost lost."

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