

Seven killed in South Africa gold mine collapse

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Seven South African miners were killed on May 3 following the collapse of a mineshaft at a gold mine in Driefontein, near Carletonville, Gauteng. The collapse resulted from a 2.2 magnitude earthquake that caused a massive rock fall, which buried 13 miners. Six of the miners were trapped for several hours under the rubble, but were ultimately rescued.

The Masakhane gold mine is operated by mining giant Sibanye-Stillwater, headquartered in Johannesburg. The company is the largest producer of gold in South Africa and one of the largest gold producers in the world.

The incident follows a series of disastrous accidents at the mining company, including January's calamity at Beatrix mine near Welkom in which 1,000 miners were trapped for over thirty hours due to a power outage. In February, a section of the Sibanye-Stillwater-owned Kloof gold mine collapsed, killing two miners. The company was forced to shut down operations temporarily pending a whitewash investigation.

Also in February, a mineworker at the Masakhane mine was crushed to death by a box containing gold ore.

The latest incident comes amid an overall rise in fatal mining accidents across the country in recent years. In 2017, 88 miners were killed in various accidents, a sharp increase over the previous year, in which 73 were killed. Since the start of 2018, there have been 33 mine deaths across South Africa.

In a cynical display of feigned sympathy for the miners killed, Sibanye-Stillwater CEO Neal Froneman told South African media that the company was working with the Department of Mineral Resources to "conduct a comprehensive investigation into the incident to prevent similar occurrences."

Illustrating the ruthless drive for profit by Sibanye-

Stillwater at the expense of workers, Froneman told the media in February of his approval of "business-friendly" US president Donald Trump. "America has become a very friendly place from a mining point of view, that's one good thing that Trump has done," he said.

South Africa's trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and its affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), last week picketed the headquarters of Sibanye-Stillwater in Johannesburg, with union officials demanding action on the company's deteriorating mine safety standards.

NUM president Thamsanqa Piet Matosa said, "If safety measures had been implemented, this incident would not have happened. We believe Sibanye could have done more. We are here to remind the Chamber of Mines to ensure that mining companies observe the law. Miners have the right to be safe."

Piet Matosa went on to condemn Sibanye-Stillwater's treatment of mineworkers. "These people [the employers] are into profits," he said. "They have no respect for workers. Some have never been underground to see the conditions of work. It is neglectful to send people who are not properly trained underground just to make profits."

The declarations of the NUM are completely cynical and dishonest. The NUM, along with the ruling ANC government, with former NUM leader Cyril Ramaphosa at its head, coordinated the creation of the Farlam Commission to whitewash the NUM and ANC's responsibility for the killing of 17 miners by South African police. The massacre occurred after mineworkers began a wildcat strike over low pay and intolerable working conditions at two Lonmin mines at Marikana in 2012.

The South African trade union bureaucracy has sought to bind the working masses to the pro-capitalist and corrupt ANC government.

Miners frequently experience catastrophic accidents due to the mining companies' skirting of safety procedures in their drive to cut costs. But, with only the rarest of exceptions, no mining executives or directors are ever brought to account for their company's criminal negligence.

The hazardous working conditions mineworkers face are by no means isolated to South Africa, or even the mining sector. Internationally, workers across all economic sectors face extremely hazardous working conditions.

In Poland, seven miners were trapped after an earthquake struck the Zofiowka mine on May 5, resulting in a tunnel collapse that left four miners dead. Two more were rescued and one remains missing. Mineworkers in Poland face extremely hazardous working conditions. In 2017, 15 miners were killed in accidents. So far in 2018, eight have been killed.

On May 4 in Pakistan, 23 coalminers were killed at mines in two separate incidents after methane gas explosions collapsed the mines. Sixteen were killed at Marwar coalfields and an additional five went missing. At Spin Carez a gas explosion-induced collapse left seven dead.

In the United States, the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported the case of Shannon Allen, an Amazon warehouse worker who was injured while performing her duties at a fulfillment center in Haslet, Texas. The treatment she has received at the hands of Amazon epitomizes the exploitation of the working class under capitalism.

The mine disaster in South Africa comes amid growing popular opposition to the ANC government of Cyril Ramaphosa, an administration that is staggeringly corrupt.

After suffering years of stagnant wages and a skyrocketing cost of living, public workers have threatened to strike, demanding that the government grant a 12 percent increase in wages. Workers are also demanding increased spending for public education and health care.

At one pole, five individuals in South Africa are worth a combined \$14 billion, while at the other pole the South African masses experience chronic

unemployment, lack of affordable education and health care, and a generalized decline in living standards.

The ANC, after coming to power nearly 25 years ago at the end of apartheid, has presided over an astonishing rise of social inequality. The ANC's decades-long attack on the living standards of the working class shows the impossibility of securing social and political justice for the South African masses within the post-apartheid capitalist framework.



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