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Meet the New Baas, Same as the Old Baas

Kevin Carson

7 September 2012

To see the real value of revolutionary parties, programs, and regimes, you need only look at the recent massacre of more than thirty platinum mine workers by the South African regime. Although likened in the media to the Sharpeville massacre, the bloodbath at Marikana was motivated not by race but by class and by economic exploitation.

The platinum workers' uprising was a reaction against corruption in the National Union of Mineworkers, the largest member organization of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, closely allied with the ANC regime). Former NUM president Cyril Ramaphosa, now a millionaire, sits on the board of directors of the London-based Lonmin corporation which owns the mine where the massacre took place. "Labor leaders" like Ramaphosa, the NUM, and the ANC regime itself — and the mining companies and other economic interests allied with them — have simply replaced the National Party of the Afrikaner regime as the new ruling class. The new face of power is black rather than white, and it cloaks itself in the radical leftist slogans of the old

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Retrieved on 2 February 2024 from c4ss.org/content/12499.

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ANC. But beneath the surface “the hands are Esau’s, but the voice is Jacob’s.”

This was followed early this week by a massacre of striking mine workers at the Aurora gold mine — which is owned by the nephew of the president and the grandson of Nelson Mandela.

The lesson? So long as power and hierarchy exist, they will be used by those at the top to live off the sweat and blood of those at the bottom. This is as true of self-proclaimed workers’ and socialist regimes as of any other kind. The only use for power is exploitation. And the very existence of power will transform those who wield it into exploiters, whether you call them “capitalists” or use some other name.

From its origins, the state has been the instrument by which priest-kings, latifundia owners and slave masters, feudal landlords, and capitalists have lived off the labor of the producing classes. In the nineteenth century, with the birth of a large-scale consciousness of this history of class exploitations, the first deliberate movements arose to seize the state and govern in the name of the exploited. But when these workers’ parties came to hold state power, they immediately became a new ruling class. Because that’s all state power is good for: Robbery and exploitation.

In the words of a joint statement by several South African anarchist groups (“ANC Throws Off its Mask! Workers Murdered!” August 20, 2012), “The ANC promised to change the system. Instead, it became part of the system. ... Marikana shows the true nature of the state/ government, no matter what party: a bloodthirsty killing machine for the rich black and white ruling class. ... Elections do not change the system. Joining the government and becoming a politician is no solution.... A new political party — even a ‘left’ or ‘workers’ party — is no solution. All the political parties are no solution.”

The solution is not to seize the state, to seize control of the hierarchies controlling the dominant political and economic institutions, nor to displace the existing ruling class in control of them.

So long as these hierarchies exist, they’ll simply create new ruling classes to replace the old ones. The only solution is to secede from their rule, to bypass them, to make them obsolete, to build a new society in which they are no longer needed.