

# **What the Marikana Massacre tells us**

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The sight of policemen brutally gunning down striking mineworkers at Marikana was truly galling. At the very least 300 rounds of live ammunition were fired at workers (and not only those seen on TV) by the police using automatic assault rifles in a military style operation<sup>1</sup>: the infamous consequences being 34 workers killed and perhaps as many as 87 injured<sup>2</sup>, with some workers still unaccounted for<sup>3</sup>. Most of the workers were also reportedly shot in the back<sup>4</sup> and some executed<sup>5</sup>. To add insult to injury, and with what was clearly some relish, the police arrested 260 workers in the aftermath<sup>6</sup>. This often even involved policemen literally sticking the boot into injured workers. Allegations have also subsequently emerged that 190 of these arrested workers were tortured, some for up to 3 days, whilst being held in surrounding police stations<sup>7</sup>. One worker also claims that he was taken to a room on Lonmin's property, who owns the mine at Marikana, and handcuffed to a chair and beaten with a rubber pipe by police in a bid to extract information about the 'leaders' of the wildcat strike<sup>8</sup>. Not to be outdone in callousness, Lonmin issued an ultimatum that unless the rest of the striking workers returned to work by 7am on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August disciplinary actions would be taken against them<sup>9</sup>. The strikers though have ignored Lonmin's threats, and at the time of writing, most remained out on strike<sup>10</sup>.

While any human being with any sense of justice should be appalled by what happened at Marikana it would, however, be a mistake to view it as an isolated incident that emerged out of the blue. Rather, Marikana is the latest episode, even if an extremely violent one, in a long running battle between ruthless mining companies and the state on the one hand; and workers in South Africa's platinum belt on the other. In fact, Marikana, and the events surrounding it, not only cast light on the ongoing class warfare in the platinum industry, but it brings the cruel exploitation of workers in general in South Africa into the spotlight, it exposes the true face of class rule in the country, it lays bare the role of the state in society, and it yet again reveals that the black working class not only experiences exploitation but ongoing national oppression – and accompanying racism – in South Africa. Indeed, this article explores these issues, including the context in which the Marikana massacre took place, from an anarchist-communist perspective. Whilst much of the article looks at the repugnant practices in the platinum sector, and the equally repugnant nature of the ruling class and its state, an argument will also, however, be made that out of the fires of Marikana, and other ongoing struggles in the platinum sector, there is hope: they offer a possible way forward in terms of building a working class counter-power and furthering the fight for genuine freedom and equality in South Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za) 19<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>2</sup> <http://rustenburgmonitors.blogspot.com/2012/demand-r12.html?spref=fb>

<sup>3</sup> [weknowwhatsup.blogspot.co.uk](http://weknowwhatsup.blogspot.co.uk) 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>4</sup> [news.iafrica.com](http://news.iafrica.com) 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>5</sup> [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za) 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>6</sup> [www.thepost.co.za](http://www.thepost.co.za) 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>7</sup> [www.citypress.co.za](http://www.citypress.co.za) 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>8</sup> [ewn.co.za](http://ewn.co.za) 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>9</sup> [www.fin24.com](http://www.fin24.com)

<sup>10</sup> [abahlali.org](http://abahlali.org)

## Life and Death in the Platinum Belt

The reality is that for platinum mineworkers, life is hard and often oppressive – and it is in this context that the struggles of Marikana must be seen. Working conditions for platinum mine workers are riddled with dangers. Most workers are forced to work hundreds of meters below ground, in very cramped conditions and in constant heat<sup>11</sup>. The pneumatic drills used, each weighing 25 kilograms, make a constant and piercing noise – along with rock breaking, sorting, and milling equipment – and the result is that workers' hearing is permanently damaged within a few years (even if they are wearing protective gear). The drills in many of the mines are also cooled using brown water: partially treated sewerage in other words. As a consequence many mineworkers suffer from skin ailments from the spray. Dust is also a constant problem and contracting silicosis a real danger. Many mine workers end up dying, and forgotten, in the rural areas of southern Africa from silicosis. Along the tunnels in the platinum mines, rock fissures also occur regularly signifying the real potential for rock falls. Coupled to this, rock blasting occurs daily escalating the danger of cave-ins, but also increasing the prospect of dangerous gases being released into the tunnels where workers have to work<sup>12</sup>. Accidents, therefore, are a constant possibility, with drillers – the category of workers that went on strike at Marikana – being especially prone.

If truth be told, the dangers for mineworkers are of such an order that on average 2 miners a month died in accidents at AngloPlatinum alone throughout 2005<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, AngloPlatinum was not the exception: deaths on the mines of Impala Platinum, Lonmin, African Rainbow Minerals (ARM) and all the other players in the sector have occurred frequently. For example, at Impala Platinum in 2011, 9 workers died due to causes ranging from ground falls, being overcome by methane gas, and accidents involving explosives [14]. These deaths show no sign of abating as fatal accidents on the platinum mines were reported in June 2012 to have increased by 29% when compared to the previous year<sup>14</sup>. In the drive to maximise profits, extracted via surplus value from workers, human life for the mining companies means little.

Along with facing hazardous conditions, mineworkers are also routinely subjected to domination and oppression at the hands of foreman, supervisors, security guards and managers. They are ordered about, commanded and reprimanded for any infraction. On surfacing and exiting the mines, workers are subjected to humiliation as a result of routine body searches by security guards. Indeed, security on the mines is tight with barbed wire and electric fences cordoning off sections of the mines; and heavily armed security guards keep an almost constant watch over the movements and actions of workers. The latest technology is also used in this, with many mines monitoring some of their workers via CCTV. Even in order to gain access into the mines, workers have to pass through various security checks, some even subjecting workers to iris and figure print scans<sup>15</sup>. Companies like G4S, who are often outsourced to undertake security by the platinum mining houses, boast about offering trained armed guards and dog units for riot control

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<sup>11</sup> www.peherald.com 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012

<sup>12</sup> Hermanus, M, 2007. Occupational health and safety in mines: status, new developments and concerns. *The Journal of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy* Vol 107: pp. 531–538.

<sup>13</sup> Hermanus, M, 2007. Occupational health and safety in mines: status, new developments and concerns. *The Journal of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy* Vol 107: pp. 531–538. 14. The Bench Marks Foundation. 2012. *Communities in the Platinum Minefields*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>14</sup> www.miningsafety.co.za

<sup>15</sup> Nasiorowska, N. 2010. Improving safety and security in platinum mining using the newest facial recognition technology. www.saimm.co.za

or labour ‘unrest’, intelligence gathering operatives, and the ability to undertake screenings of any employee<sup>16</sup>. Protea Coin Security, which is reportedly the outsourced security at Marikana, offer similar services including ‘targeted surveillance’<sup>17</sup>. Certainly, the anarchist Bakunin pointed out that workplaces under capitalism are oppressive as once someone enters into work under the current system an ..../..../“employer will watch over him either directly or by means of a overseers; every day during working hours and under controlled conditions, the employer will be the owner of his actions and movements...when he is told: ‘Do this’, the worker is obliged to do it; or when he is told ‘Go there’, he must go”<sup>18</sup>.

But on the platinum mines, workers not only face such oppression based on their class, but those who are black also face routine racism and paternalism at the hands of management. Such attitudes are so pervasive that it is still quite common for managers to refer to black mine workers as ‘mine boys’<sup>19</sup>. Unfortunately, such discrimination is not even limited to the mainly – but not exclusively – white management; even the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) General Secretary, Frans Baleni, derogatorily referred to the lowest paid black workers at Lonmin as ..../..../“ignorant”<sup>20</sup>. Certainly it is no accident that the vast majority of workers that do the lowest paid, and the most dangerous jobs, tend to be almost exclusively black: it is the legacy of past and current systematic racism in the sector.

Indeed, there are thousands upon thousands of mine workers that remain poorly paid. The wildcat strike at Marikana began with the demand by 3 000 rock drillers to have their salaries increased to R 12 500 a month. Many were earning as little as R 4 000 a month; despite some of them having worked for decades on the mine (compared to the R 44.6 million earned by the top 3 managers at Lonmin in one year<sup>21</sup>). As a matter of fact, the platinum sector is well known for this type of situation. In other companies low wages are also the norm, especially for rock drillers. Prior to a massive wildcat strike at Impala Platinum, for instance, rock drillers at that company too were earning in the region of R 4 000 a month<sup>22</sup>. This is not surprising as the massive profits of the mining companies have been, and are, based on the extremely low wages that are paid to workers, such as the rock drillers, who are mostly black.

In order to keep wage bills low, the platinum mines also make extensive use of outsourcing and labour brokers. Workers employed through labour brokers are usually paid much less than ‘permanent’ workers and are excluded from receiving benefits such as healthcare and housing. The practice has become extremely widespread, with AngloPlatinum alone employing over 41% of its workforce through labour brokers. The picture at Lonmin’s Marikana mine is similar with 30% of workers being employed through labour brokers<sup>23</sup>. Of course, labour brokers are also used by these mining corporations in a bid to circumvent aspects of the labour law, along with using it as a tactic to divide and rule the workers on the mines. The labour brokers themselves mostly recruit migrant labour from the rural areas of southern Africa; again dividing people not only

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<sup>16</sup> [www.g4s.co.za](http://www.g4s.co.za)

<sup>17</sup> [www.coin.co.za](http://www.coin.co.za)

<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, M. *The Capitalist System*

<sup>19</sup> van Wyk, D. 2011. *The Policy Gap: A Review of the Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum Mining Industry in the North West Province*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>20</sup> [www.amandlapublishers.co.za](http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za)

<sup>21</sup> [abahlali.org](http://abahlali.org)

<sup>22</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za) 17<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>23</sup> The Bench Marks Foundation. 2012. *Communities in the Platinum Minefields*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

on race, but on ethnic lines. Some of these labour brokers are extremely large companies in their own right and include the likes of Murray and Roberts.

For communities around the platinum mines, as has been well documented in a number of studies by the Bench Marks Foundation, life is also harsh<sup>242526</sup>. Most of these communities live in tiny houses or shacks, often with no access to clean water or decent sanitation. In Rustenburg alone, one of a number of towns in the platinum belt, an estimated 250 000 people, including most mine workers, live in shacks. The Wonderkop informal settlement at Marikana, therefore, is simply one example. The few services that are provided by the state or by mining corporations, through so-called Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes, are mostly of an appalling standard. The water sources surrounding these townships and informal settlements are often heavily polluted from both mining activities but also due to a lack of services. Dust from the tailing dams of these corporations also regularly coats the townships and shacks in a layer of toxic material, resulting in extremely high instances of respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis. Constant blasting by the mines has also taken its toll, with many of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses in the surrounding communities suffering structural damage as a result.

The mining corporations too have been involved in massive land grabs, often colluding with 'traditional' chiefs and the state to do so. While a black elite linked to the ANC now have shares in, and sit on the boards of, the massive mining companies; impoverished black communities have simply seen their farming land stolen by the likes of Lonmin, Impala Platinum, and AngloPlatinum. This has been done with the backing of state laws and the compliance of the traditional authorities. The mining companies have gone as far as using barbed wire and armed security patrols to ensure that surrounding communities do not trespass or threaten the lucrative mining operations. Linked to this, the local state in the Rustenburg region has reportedly effectively made it almost impossible for surrounding communities to legally protest against this situation, with planned marches being regularly banned<sup>27</sup>.

The migrant labour system used by the mining corporations, including Lonmin, is also directly associated with other ills such as a high levels HIV and AIDS and violence against women in the communities that surround the mines<sup>28</sup>.

## **Resistance has been heroic and furious**

It would, however, be a complete mistake to view the mineworkers and communities as merely victims with no hope. In fact, the struggles by mineworkers against corporations in the sector have been going on for a while – Marikana is simply the latest in a long line – and they have been inspiring, large, heroic and extremely promising. In fact, wildcat strikes and sit-ins on the mines by workers have occurred regularly over the last few years across corporations<sup>29</sup>. For instance, in

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<sup>24</sup> The Bench Marks Foundation. 2012. *Communities in the Platinum Minefields*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>25</sup> van Wyk, D. 2011. *The Policy Gap: A Review of the Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum Mining Industry in the North West Province*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>26</sup> The Bench Marks Foundation. 2011. *Rustenburg Community Report: Defending Our Land, Environment, and Human Rights*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>27</sup> The Bench Marks Foundation. 2011. *Action Voices*. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>28</sup> Van Wyk, D. Speaking at a public meeting in Cape Town, Community House 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>29</sup> Hattingh, S. *Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa*. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250.

2008 at Aquarius Platinum's Everest mine, 1 300 contract workers embarked on a wildcat strike due to bad working conditions<sup>30</sup>. Wildcat strikes by workers have also occurred at Lonmin itself before. In 2011, 9 000 workers at Lonmin's Karee operations at Marikana went out on a wildcat strike<sup>31</sup>, which both shocked the management, but also NUM officials.

Along with wildcat strikes, a string of at least 6 underground sit-ins and occupations, collectively involving thousands of mineworkers, occurred between July 2009 and July 2010 in the platinum sector. These included sit-ins at Eastern Platinum's Crocodile River Mine<sup>32</sup>; Aquarius Platinum's Kroondal Mine<sup>33</sup>; Impala Platinum's Rustenburg Mine<sup>34</sup>; Anooraq Resources' Bokoni Mine<sup>35</sup> [37]; and Impala Platinum and ARM's Two Rivers Mine<sup>36</sup>. In each case, the workers involved were militant and the sit-ins were preceded by wildcat strikes. Many of the workers that undertook the sit-ins – in the light of company and police violence which will be discussed later – undertook precautions, including barricading themselves in and in one case rigging explosive booby-traps<sup>37</sup>.

The reasons for these sit-ins, and the grievances of the workers involved, were wide-ranging and depended on the mine involved. Nonetheless, some of the reasons and demands of the workers included an end to labour brokering, the hiring of contract workers permanently, the full payment of unpaid wages, the provision of benefits denied to contract workers, the end to racism by management and foreman, the ending of unsafe working conditions, the payment of Unemployment Insurance Funds (UIF), the restatement of fired workers, and increased wages<sup>38</sup>.

In 2012 such struggles continued and in some cases escalated. Early in the year, 17 000 workers at the AngloPlatinum and ARM's Modikwa mine undertook a protected strike over higher wages. However, as part of this the mineworkers also barricaded the roads leading into the mine, in a move that surprised workers and evidently NUM officials<sup>39</sup>. This followed on the heels of a 6 week wildcat strike at Impala Platinum where the action began with rock drillers demanding a wage increase from R 4 000 to R 9 500. They were then joined by other workers and eventually 17 000 workers at the company came out. During the strike there were regular battles between mineworkers, and the forces of repression in the form of the police and security guards. As part of the strike tactics, workers also barricaded the road to the nearby informal settlement to stop any scabbing workers from breaking the strike<sup>40</sup>. In the end, the workers won an increase from R 4 000 to R 9 500 a month<sup>41</sup>, demonstrating just how effective mass direct action can be. It is also in this context that the demands of the Marikana workers, for an increase from R 4 000 to R 12 500

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<sup>30</sup> [www.miningweekly.com](http://www.miningweekly.com) 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2008

<sup>31</sup> [www.miningreview.com](http://www.miningreview.com) 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>32</sup> [www.groups.google.com/group/cosatu-daily-news/msg/16c4c01e2acd8969](http://www.groups.google.com/group/cosatu-daily-news/msg/16c4c01e2acd8969) 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009

<sup>33</sup> [www.iol.co.za/widgets/rss\\_redirect.php?artid...setid](http://www.iol.co.za/widgets/rss_redirect.php?artid...setid) 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009

<sup>34</sup> Hattingh, S. 2010. Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250.

<sup>35</sup> [www.af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE60L07G20100122](http://www.af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE60L07G20100122) 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010

<sup>36</sup> Pringle, C. Illegal sit-in halts production at SA Platinum Mine. [www.miningweekly.com/.../illegal-sit-in-halts-production-at-two-rivers-2009-10-19](http://www.miningweekly.com/.../illegal-sit-in-halts-production-at-two-rivers-2009-10-19) 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009

<sup>37</sup> Hattingh, S. 2010. Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250

<sup>38</sup> Hattingh, S. 2010. Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250

<sup>39</sup> [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com) 15 March 2012

<sup>40</sup> [mg.co.za](http://mg.co.za)

<sup>41</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za) 17<sup>th</sup> August 2012

must be seen. As such, the demands of the Marikana workers were not unrealistic, as some on the left have painted them<sup>42</sup>, but rather quite sound given what occurred at Impala. In early August 2012 there was also action at the Aquarius' Kroondal Mine. There hundreds of mineworkers that had been fired for an earlier wildcat strike embarked on a protest to reclaim their jobs. As part of this, they tried to gain access to the mine during the protest, which saw them clashing with the company's armed security. It is, therefore, in this context of ongoing mass mobilisation that the struggle and events of Marikana must be seen – they are part of a longer process that has involved workers mobilising to justly claim what should be theirs across the platinum sector.

What has been important and highly inspiring is that in all of these cases, whether wildcat strikes and/or sit-ins, the workers involved have done them on the basis of self-organisation. It has been clear that no union official or bureaucratic organiser has been involved. Even at Marikana it is evident, for anyone who would wish to see, that the workers themselves organised their action. An Associated Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) official, despite being blamed, acknowledge this<sup>43</sup>. In fact, anyone familiar with wildcat strikes in South Africa knows that they are carried out on the basis of self-organisation – it is simply not in the union officials interests, which lie in formalised collective bargaining, to organise wildcat strikes and sit-ins. Wildcat strikes and sit-ins require a huge amount of bravery from the workers; not only can you lose your job, but in the case of sit-ins criminal charged are likely to follow. In fact, it is the self-organisation of workers in these cases that has been so promising: as will be discussed later the very real potential for the revitalisation of workers' struggles and possibility of building a counter-power rests on it.

Over and above the self-organisation involved in the wildcat strikes and sit-ins, elements of direct democracy have been evident in these struggles. Marikana specifically highlights this, as the workers involved gathered on the now famous hill in what effectively was a mass assembly. They had gathered there to discuss and formulate demands democratically. They collectively also demanded to speak to Lonmin managers about their grievances.<sup>44</sup> A similar case of using assemblies to organise existed in a number of the other wildcat strikes and sit-ins that have occurred. In fact, it is the mass self-organisation and the use of elements of direct democracy, along with the direct action and the large scale, which makes the ongoing battles in the platinum sector so significant.

Certainly for the bureaucrats within the NUM, the wildcat strikes and sit-ins represent a massive crisis. This is because, even if unconsciously, the workers involved are taking their struggles into their own hands. It is for this reason that in almost every instance, including Marikana, NUM officials have condemned the action of the workers – many being their own members. This has gone as far as calling for the police to arrest those involved, calling on those involved to return to work, and calling on the companies to fire those involved in sit-ins and wildcat strikes<sup>45</sup><sup>46</sup>. Indeed, the NUM officials' reaction to the Marikana workers, where they called for the police to take strong action against them, is a continuation of the reactionary role they have played for a

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<sup>42</sup> [www.amandlapublishers.co.za](http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za) 18<sup>th</sup> August

<sup>43</sup> Comments made by the AMCU General Secretary at a public meeting at Community House, Cape Town 28<sup>th</sup> August

<sup>44</sup> One of the striking workers speaking at a public meeting in Cape Town, Community House on the 28<sup>th</sup> August made this clear

<sup>45</sup> [www.thestar.co.za](http://www.thestar.co.za) 29<sup>th</sup> August 2009

<sup>46</sup> [www.miningweekly.com](http://www.miningweekly.com) 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009



number of years now when it comes to self-organised worker struggles. This too is the reason why a rival union, AMCU is starting to see an influx of members from the platinum mines. The frustration felt with NUM bureaucrats is growing, especially amongst the contract and labour broker workers. This is why workers heckled top NUM officials when they addressed the gathering at Marikana; and it is why in 2009 the NUM officials, including the President, were pelted with stones by striking workers when they told them to go back to work<sup>47</sup>. Many workers are, consequently, looking around for a solution and a way to take their struggles forward; and some are looking to initiatives like AMCU. This search opens up the possibility for a truly self-managed workers' movement to evolve or emerge, but it also opens up potential dangers in that populists – with their own interests – might step into the void. Again, this is a theme that will be returned to.

## **The corporations and state's reaction to platinum workers' struggles**

Corporations have had a history of dealing harshly with wildcat strikes and sit-ins in the platinum sector: they truly fear them and want to wipe them out. As such, the ground had been set for an event like Marikana to occur. In most of the past wildcat strikes and sit-ins, the companies involved have used the strategy of initially dismissing all of the workers undertaking the actions. This has been a way to intimidate the workers involved and to try and stop future actions. There are in fact numerous examples of this: at the Impala Platinum 2012 strike the company dismissed 17 000 workers<sup>48</sup>; at the Crocodile River Mine sit-in 560 workers involved were dismissed in 2009<sup>49</sup>; at Lonmin's Marikana mine 9 000 workers were dismissed for a wildcat strike in 2011<sup>50</sup>; at Platmin 500 workers were dismissed for an unprotected strike; and during a massive wildcat strike in 2009 at mines in Rustenburg over 5 000 people involved were sacked<sup>51</sup>. The companies involved, in order not to further disrupt production, also tended to rehire many of the fired workers once the action was over. However, they have re-hired the workers on a selective basis with those who are seen as having been militant, ring-leaders, or 'trouble-makers' excluded. The 2011 wildcat strike at Lonmin highlighted this process clearly: of the 9 000 workers initially fired for being involved, only 6 000 were rehired<sup>52</sup> with the most militant being sidelined.

Bosses have also used underhanded tactics when dealing with workers involved in the sit-ins and wildcat strikes. At the Crocodile River Mine sit-in, for instance, management at the mine, in a bid to obviously end the sit-in and get the workers involved out of the mine, announced that they and NUM officials had reached an agreement to look at the possibility of hiring all contract workers on a permanent basis. As the sit-in had been undertaken around the demand that contract workers be hired on a permanent basis, the workers saw this as a partial victory. On this basis the workers occupying the mine decided to surface. Yet, as soon as they had exited the mine, the management once again reneged on its promises and fired the workers that were involved in

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<sup>47</sup> [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com) 4<sup>th</sup> September 2009

<sup>48</sup> [www.moneyweb.co.za](http://www.moneyweb.co.za) 16<sup>th</sup> February 2012

<sup>49</sup> [www.miningmx.com](http://www.miningmx.com) = YP&p\_content\_id=199965&p\_site\_id=83

<sup>50</sup> [www.miningreview.com](http://www.miningreview.com) 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>51</sup> [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net) 6 December 2009

<sup>52</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za) 30<sup>th</sup> May 2011

the sit-in<sup>53</sup>. Likewise, after a wildcat strike at the Aquarius mine, most of the workers were fired. Many were then consequently re-hired. Nevertheless, as soon as the workers had returned to work they discovered that the bosses had erased their employment histories and had terminated some of their benefits. This then led to a second wildcat strike. Once again the management fired the workers involved and refused to even issue them with their UIF certificates<sup>54</sup>. At Australia Platinum's mine in the Limpopo in 2011 a similar story of deception by management took place. When a number of workers went out on an unprotected strike; the company promised to look into their grievances if they returned to work. The workers agreed to this. Upon doing so, however, disciplinary hearings were subsequently called by management for some of the workers. Upon attending the hearing, the workers involved were promptly arrested upon their appearance, in what was blatant intimidation by management and the police<sup>55</sup>. Such tactics, as described above, are clearly used to try and undermine workers' struggles and strike fear into anyone thinking of embarking on a wildcat action.

Naturally in the case of all of the sit-ins and wildcat strikes the state and corporations have colluded to try and crush the actions and severely punish any workers involved. For example, when the workers surfaced in the aftermath of the Crocodile River Mine occupation, not only were the promises made by management reneged upon, but the workers involved were arrested and charged with trespassing and even kidnapping<sup>56</sup>. At the Bokoni Mine sit-in in 2009 a large and well armed police contingent was sent down the mine with the intention of forcing the workers out. Under the threat of violence, the workers eventually elected to end the sit-in<sup>57</sup>. If workers have tried to hold out against the threats of the police during sit-ins, this has inevitably led to clashes. For instance, at the Aquarius Kroondal Mine in 2009, workers had barricaded themselves in and had reportedly set explosive booby-traps to stop the police from violently evicting them. This had occurred in the context where the police had recently used lethal force, along with security guards during a strike (which will be discussed in more detail below). The police must have been aware of the booby-traps as explosive experts from the Special Task Force were sent down, followed by heavily armed members. Nonetheless, in the eagerness to get to the workers some of the police members set off one of the booby-traps with the result that 3 police were injured. All of the workers involved in the sit-in were consequently forcefully arrested and were charged with offences ranging from malicious damage to property, attempted murder and trespassing<sup>58</sup>.

Along with the gung-ho attitude of police storming mines to evict workers involved in sit-ins or to break wildcat strikes, as part of protecting private property, they have used high levels of violence and even lethal force. On numerous occasions police have fired rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades at workers involved in wildcat strikes, protected strikes and sit-ins. Along with this, police have also regularly used armoured vehicles and helicopters, reportedly at times filled with armed soldiers, against striking workers. Indeed, using rubber bullets and other forms

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<sup>53</sup> Hattingh, S. 2010. Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250

<sup>54</sup> [www.sundayindependent.co.za/?fSectionId=1087&fArticleId](http://www.sundayindependent.co.za/?fSectionId=1087&fArticleId) 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009

<sup>55</sup> [amabhungane.co.za](http://amabhungane.co.za) 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>56</sup> Hattingh, S. 2010. Mineworkers direct Action: occupations and sit-ins in South Africa. WorkingUSA Vol 13 Issue 3, pp. 243–250

<sup>57</sup> [www.af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE60L07G20100122](http://www.af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE60L07G20100122) 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010

<sup>58</sup> [www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za) 29<sup>th</sup> November 2009

of violence has been undertaken to intimidate workers, with the result that many have been injured<sup>59</sup><sup>60</sup><sup>61</sup>. Communities protesting against pollution, land grabs and a lack of jobs at platinum mines have also not been spared, as police have regularly fired on such protests with rubber bullets<sup>62</sup><sup>63</sup>. Indeed, the use of violence by the South African police across the country is standard practice when it comes to protests that they have deemed to be ‘illegal’.

Police and security guards too on a number of occasions have used lethal force against striking workers, sit-ins and community protests in the platinum sector. In 2009 during a widespread strike, police and security guards used a massive amount of force in an attempt to break it. Along with firing rubber bullets, dogs were also set upon striking workers. Live ammunition too was part of the arsenal used. At least 3 strikers as a result were reported as being killed at the hands of the police and security guards, while several went ‘missing’<sup>64</sup>. This, however, was not an isolated incident.

In December 2011 a protestor died when people from Bapong protested at Lonmin’s operations demanding employment. Police, at the very least, fired rubber bullets at the protestors. On being fired at the crowd retreated. In the wake, however, one of the protestors lay dead at the scene – he had been shot with live ammunition. The police spokesperson said in response to questions about the incident that ..../..../“it was not immediately clear how he (the protestor) had been killed”<sup>65</sup>.

More recently, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2012, 3 more workers were killed at the hands of security guards, and 20 more were wounded, at the Aquarius Kroondal mine. In the build up to this shooting, 200 contract workers, who had been fired by the sub-contractor Murray and Roberts for a wildcat strike, protested against this. They reportedly tried to get onto the mines’ property and some allegedly were armed with petrol bombs. Security guards at the mine moved in against them and opened fire with shotguns, in the process killing and wounding the protestors<sup>66</sup>. It is in this wider context of supreme oppression and police and security guard violence that Marikana must be seen.

In fact, in the days preceding the run up to the massacre at Marikana, 6 workers, 2 security guards, and 2 policemen had died. It has been reported, in an excellent piece – by the generally pro-business Daily Maverick – that the violence began when 3 of the strikers had been gunned down by men wearing NUM T-shirts. Now it is not clear whether these men were in fact NUM members. They may have been, but they could also – given history and subsequent events – have been policemen or security guards employed by the mine to break the strike. Whatever the case, management used the incident to promote the idea that all the strike was about was inter-union rivalry and the media lapped it up. This was very convenient for the management: it distracted attention from the very real grievances of the workers. For their part, the workers themselves on strike actually deny that the deaths have been about inter-union rivalry – pointing towards the fact that the workers had self-organised the strike and, at least formally, that many

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<sup>59</sup> mg.co.za 16<sup>th</sup> February

<sup>60</sup> amabhungane.co.za 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011

<sup>61</sup> www.cosatu.org.za 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007

<sup>62</sup> www.citypress.co.za 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011

<sup>63</sup> The Bench Marks Foundation. 2011. Action Voices. Bench Marks Foundation: South Africa

<sup>64</sup> www.socialistworld.net 6 December 2009

<sup>65</sup> www.citypress.co.za 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011

<sup>66</sup> Van Wyk, D. Speaking at a public meeting in Cape Town, Community House 28<sup>th</sup> August 2012

belonged to both the NUM and AMCU, and some were non-unionised<sup>67</sup>. It is also in this light of violence directed at the strikers that they, rightfully and fully justifiably, armed themselves with knobkerries, spears and pangas.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August more violence occurred, again starting out as violence direct at the strikers. On that day a delegation of striking workers was sent by the strikers' assembly to cross over to Lonmin's other operation, the Karee mine, in order to talk to workers there to try and see if they would also come out on strike. In 2011, the workers at Karee had also undertaken a wildcat strike, many had been fired, and discontent was rife. Mine security, however, turned the workers' delegation back. On the way back to Marikana, the workers' delegation was stopped by a group of heavily armed police. They were told to lay down their knobkerries and other weapons. The delegation refused, saying the weapons they had were needed for self-defense as strikers had already been attacked and killed. The police line parted and initially allowed the workers through, on the face of it appearing to have accepted the explanation. Nonetheless, after the workers had got 10 meters, police opened fire. The miners in the delegation, correctly and justifiably, turned to defend themselves and took police chasing them. The police, with the support of a helicopter, shot dead 2 of the workers, and severely wounded another. The workers also, as part of defending themselves, killed 2 policemen. A number of the workers were arrested on the scene, and charged with murder, despite having been fired on first<sup>68</sup>.

In fact, a number of people, from different ideological backgrounds, have also reported that the actions of the police on the infamous day of 16<sup>th</sup> of August were extremely sinister and exceptionally brutal. What is now becoming clear is that the workers who were captured on TV were not storming the police, but fleeing Nyalas that were running over people and firing tear gas. This is why they were heading in the direction of the policemen that gunned them down. But the workers who were shot in front of the TV cameras were a minority. Other workers had fled the police heading towards the Wonderkop settlement. Some too were ridden over by Nyalas, others shot at from helicopters. Some tried to flee into a boulder field to hide – the boulder field was 400 metres in the opposite direction to where the TV cameras were. They were then systematically persuaded by police task force members into the boulder field and some executed. As part of this, some workers were reportedly shot at almost point blank range.<sup>69</sup> What is exceptionally interesting is also that not a single policeman was in anyway wounded during the action. Workers did have knobkerries and spears, but appear not to have used them on the day. In other words, the policemen murdered workers who were actually not even posing a threat at the time<sup>70</sup>. This all takes place in the context where the head of the police openly stated on the day of the massacre that it was ..../..../..../“D-day” for the strikers<sup>71</sup>. Reportedly, one of the policemen had also warned one of the striking workers who he knew, before the massacre, that orders had been signed instructing the police to fire on workers with live ammunition to end the wildcat strike<sup>72</sup>. In fact, the orders for such an action, involving police using live ammunition, must have come – or have been approved – by someone very high up in the state; and not just the police commissioner.

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<sup>67</sup> One of the striking workers speaking at a public meeting in Cape Town, Community House on the 28<sup>th</sup> August made this clear

<sup>68</sup> [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za) 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012

<sup>69</sup> [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za)

<sup>70</sup> [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za)

<sup>71</sup> [abahlali.org](http://abahlali.org)

<sup>72</sup> [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za)

## The lessons of Marikana and the events in the platinum sector

The outright violence of the state in the platinum sector and at Marikana lays bare the true nature of the state; and the role it plays in protecting the ruling class. It is not an unfortunate accident that the state was protecting the mines of huge corporations, like Lonmin, and that it was willing to use such violence to do so. It is rather one of the main functions of the state: it is what it is designed for. For capitalism to function, and for class rule to be maintained, a state is vital. It is central to protecting and maintaining the very material basis on which the power of the elite is derived. Without a state, which claims a monopoly on violence within a given territory, an elite could not rule nor could it claim or hold onto the ownership of wealth and the means of production. In fact, the state as an entity is the ..../..../“defender of the class system and a centralised body that necessarily concentrates power in the hands of the ruling classes; in both respects, it is the means through which a minority rules a majority”<sup>73</sup>. Through its executive, legislative, judiciary and policing arms the state always protects the minority ownership of property (whether private or state-owned property), and tries to squash any threat posed to the continuing exploitation and oppression of the working class.

All states, wherever and whenever they have existed, also have always intervened in the economy in favour of a ruling class of some sort. As noted by Kropotkin, under capitalism:

*..../..../“the state has always interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. And it could not be otherwise. To do so was one of the functions – the chief mission – of the state.”*

This is why the South African state has legalised the land grabs of platinum companies, like Lonmin. It is also why it does little or nothing to stop the massive pollution they are causing – to do so would not economically favour these corporations.

State managers, who comprise a section of the ruling class, based on their control of the means of coercion, administration and sometimes production, also have their own reasons for wanting to protect the minority ownership of property – which includes private and state-owned property – because their own privileged positions rest on exploitation. As such, all states maintain capitalism and minority rule through hierarchies and a chain of command<sup>74</sup>. Thus, it is wrong to believe that the South African state was ever going to be a neutral entity in the struggles in the platinum sector and at Marikana. Its role is not that of a protector of the workers’ interests, it is rather that of a protector of corporate interests, and when the need arises, it is to kill for these interests. Certainly we must raise demands from the state, and mobilise to have these met, but we must realise that the state is part of the problem, it is inherently in opposition to the working class. As such, we must make demands, but we need to fight and mobilise for those outside of and against the state.

Of course, the state can’t simply rule by force alone – force is ultimately the last pillar upon which its power rests – but for its own stability and that of capital, it also tries to rule through consent. To do so, it pretends to be a benefactor of all. Certainly, most states today do have laws

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<sup>73</sup> Schmidt, M. & van der Walt, L. 2009. Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism. AK Press: United States, pp. 52

<sup>74</sup> Rocker, R. 2004. Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice. AK Press: United States, pp. 11.

protecting basic rights, and some provide welfare – including the South African state. However, such laws and welfare have been won through massive struggles by the oppressed, and that should not be forgotten; states simply did not hand out these rights. But even where such laws exist, and sometimes they merely exist on paper, the state tries to make propaganda mileage out of them; as if it is a benevolent messiah; while in reality facilitating, entrenching and perpetrating exploitation and oppression. It is this duplicity that led Malatesta to argue that the state: ..../..../..../“cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness; it cannot impose respect for the lives of the privileged people if it does not appear to demand respect for human life, it cannot impose acceptance of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all.”<sup>75</sup> It is in this context that the South African state’s announcement that it is setting up a Commission of Inquiry into what happened at Marikana must be seen. Even within this, however, it must be recognised that the Commission of Inquiry will not be neutral; within it – as it will itself be part of the state, it will be centralised, and its functioning will be based on laws which are against the majority – there will be a bias towards the state and the company.

What the events at Marikana and on the platinum mines also reveal is the nature and form capitalism has taken in South Africa. Ever since capitalism emerged it has been based on the exploitation of both black and white workers. However, in South Africa, black workers have also been subjected to national oppression; and this has meant that they were systematically turned into a source of extremely cheap labour and subjected to institutionalised racism. Indeed, the history of very cheap black labour enabled white capitalists – traditionally centred around the mineowners – to make super profits, and it is on this basis that they became very wealthy<sup>76</sup>. Without extremely cheap black labour, mining in South Africa would have never been as profitable and the riches of the white capitalists would have been much less.

Today, as seen by the situation on platinum mines, this continues: the wealth of the ruling class still rests mainly on extremely cheap black labour: it is the reason why certain sections of the economy, like platinum mining, are so profitable. Certainly, since 1994 the entire working class has fallen deeper into poverty, including sections of the white working class, as inequality has grown between the ruling class and working class as a whole. However, the black working class – due to mostly holding the lowest paid jobs and thus facing continued racism – remains both subject to exploitation and national oppression. Until this is ended, along with the capitalist system on which it is based and which it serves, true freedom and equality for both the black and white working class will not be achieved in South Africa. As was vividly highlighted by Marikana, therefore, central to the struggle to end capitalism has to be the ending of the national oppression, and accompanying racism, that the black working class is subjected to. As anarchists have long pointed out, however, if a just society is to be achieved the means and the ends in struggle have to be as similar as possible. Hence, if we want a future genuinely equal and non-racist society, our struggle to end the national oppression of the black working class, and the accompanying capitalist and state systems in South Africa, must be based firmly on the ideals of non-racialism. This too is highly important to ensure that populists, amongst them Julius Malema, using racist rhetoric to benefit themselves do not make gains out of struggles such as Marikana.

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<sup>75</sup> Malatesta, E. 1891. Anarchy. [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org), p. 3

<sup>76</sup> Callincos, L. 1980. *A People’s History of South Africa: Gold and Workers 1886–1924*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

While it is clear that the black working class remains nationally oppressed, the situation for the small black elite, however, is very different. Some, through their high positions in the state – and hence having control over the means of coercion and administration – have joined the old white capitalists in the ruling class. They themselves have used their positions in the state to amass wealth and power. Others, have also joined the ruling class, but through the route of Black Economic Empowerment. Indeed, all of the top ANC linked black families – the Mandelas, Thambos, Ramaphosa, Zumas, Moosas – have shares in or sit on the boards of the platinum mining companies<sup>77</sup>. In fact, Ramaphosa not only owns shares in, and is on the board of, Lonmin; but a number of functions at Marikana are outsourced to various companies he has interests in, like Minorex<sup>78</sup>. The wealth and power of this black section of the ruling class in South Africa too rests on the exploitation of the working class as a whole, but mostly and specifically on the exploitation and national oppression of the black working class. Hence, this is the reason why the black section of the ruling class has been so willing to take action – whether during platinum strikes, Marikana, other strikes in general, or community protests – against the black working class.

Of course, Bakunin foresaw the possibility of such a situation arising in cases where national liberation was based upon the strategy of capturing state power. Bakunin said that the “statist path” was “entirely ruinous for the great masses of the people” because it did not abolish class power but simply changed the make-up of the ruling class<sup>79</sup>. Due to the centralised nature of states, only a few can rule – a majority of people can never be involved in decision making under a state system. As a result, he stated that if the national liberation struggle was carried out with “ambitious intent to set up a powerful state”, or if “it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class” it would become a “retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement”<sup>80</sup>. He also noted that when former liberation heroes enter into the state, because of its top down structure, they become rulers and get used to the privileges their new positions carry, and they come to “no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people”<sup>81</sup>. History has proven his insights to be correct; former liberation heroes in South Africa rule in their own interests, they wallow in the privileges of their positions, and they exploit and oppress the vast majority of the people in the country to do so.

## What is to be done?

It is vital that a revolutionary working class counter-power emerges in South Africa, based on self-organisation, direct democracy, direct action, appropriate tactics and a vision. If it does not, the exploitation and oppression that defines companies like Lonmin, the economy, and society as a whole will continue. Linked to this, the national oppression of the black working class will continue. Freedom is, therefore, not going to drop from heaven; unless a counter-power emerges the working class will continue to suffer. Certainly, history has proven that true freedom won't be given by the current state; but – as will be touched upon later – it will also in all likelihood

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<sup>77</sup> Van Wyk, D.

<sup>78</sup> [www.minopex.co.za](http://www.minopex.co.za)

<sup>79</sup> Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy”, p. 343

<sup>80</sup> Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism”, p. 99

<sup>81</sup> Bakunin, M. 1990. *Statism and Anarchy*. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom, p. 178

not be granted by a workers' party, of whatever variety, heading up a state, even if it is called a workers' state. Indeed, if the working class truly seizes power, there would be no need for a state (which as an institution has throughout history protected minority rule); rather society would probably be run via organs such as federated assemblies and councils based on direct democracy. But building a revolutionary counter-power capable of creating and winning a new society based on genuine freedom and equality, via revolution, will not be easy. In all likelihood – as Marikana gives us an insight into – it will also not be peaceful. Rather a working class counter-power is going to have to be built brick by brick by the workers and unemployed; and it is going to have to be built in opposition to capitalism and the state system. The problem, if one is sober and honest, is that at the moment, community movements remain small, the unions highly bureaucratised, the 'service delivery' protests promising but not yet galvanising into durable structures or a movement.

But Marikana and the other struggles in the platinum sector offer a possible catalyst to change this all. The importance of the struggles in the platinum sector, and massive potential, are due to several reasons. The platinum sector is a strategic industry within South Africa, employing a large number of people and it is central to the economy, meaning a well organised militant force in the sector could have a massive impact. Not only could such a movement cause economic damage to its class enemies, but because of its strategic nature, real gains could be won. Added to this, the confidence amongst the workers to win battles is already there: this can be seen most clearly in the events around the Impala Platinum 2012 wildcat strike. If a movement that is militant and strong can galvanise and sustain itself in the platinum sector, it could easily inspire workers in other sectors – where militancy in recent years has been far less – but also activists involved in community struggles elsewhere in the country. In fact, Marikana is one of the few cases since 1994 where communities and workers have joined up in struggle. In terms of this, and despite some tensions having existed in the past, it was truly significant that women from the community joined and united with the male strikers at certain times during the on-going protest. Added to this, and again despite some tensions, the platinum belt is also one area where the struggles of workers and wider communities overlap: both starkly face the same enemies and as a result working class unity there could be built.

Indeed, out of the wildcat strikes and sit-ins it is very likely a movement could emerge in the next few years in the platinum belt, but what form and the politics it might take up are unclear<sup>82</sup>. As such, it could end up being progressive and even revolutionary; or it could end up being purely reformist or populist. Out of the struggles in the platinum sector though a real potential lies for building a mass movement controlled by the workers' themselves based around the principles of self-organisation, direct democracy, and direct action. Certainly a foundation does exist, but whether such a mass movement will arise is not guaranteed; if it is to do so, a vision is going to be vital along with greater co-ordination and the adoption of appropriate and consistent strategies and tactics.

It is possible, but very unlikely, that a radical movement may grow out of the wildcat strikes and sit-ins inside NUM. However, the NUM bureaucracy has treated the most militant workers in the sector – those undertaking sit-ins, wildcat strikes, and the strike at Marikana – appallingly. At times, this has even seen NUM officials working with bosses in the aftermath of wildcat strikes or sit-ins to have the most militant workers involved sidelined during rehiring processes (and

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<sup>82</sup> [www.amandlapublishers.co.za](http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za)



hence also pushed out of the union). In the aftermath of Marikana, and out of future struggles in the platinum sector, the only way NUM will be revived, is if workers decide to take control of it, but such a battle would be immense and nasty. The officials, some of whom earn up to R77 000 a month, will fight tooth and nail to stop this. Perhaps a more realistic scenario is that a movement might emerge around AMCU, but whether it will be revolutionary, unless AMCU changes, is highly debatable. AMCU's structures are still reportedly weak, its President and General Secretary have held the same offices ever since it began more than a decade ago, it is not yet based on direct democracy, and it does not see itself – at least openly – as being linked to a revolutionary vision. Although the AMCU officials appear better than the NUM ones, if a counter-power is to emerge around it, AMCU too would have to be transformed into a bottom-up, directly democratic, and militant union by the members themselves.

What has been extremely interesting, and potentially the most promising way forward for workers struggles, and the possibility of building a revolutionary working class counter-power, has been the mass assemblies that have been self-organised at Marikana and around other wildcat strikes and sit-ins in the platinum sector. The potential of these becoming the basis of a counter-power could possibly be realised, in the future, if the workers involved in them could, at some point, turn them into more durable assemblies, in which workers regularly met. The struggles in the platinum sector are not going to end anytime soon, more sit-ins and wildcat strike assemblies will emerge, these are the only way such actions can be organised. If some of them could become more permanent in the future they could be used by the workers involved to systematically entrench a culture of direct democracy, militancy and self-organisation across the platinum sector. It also means workers across the different unions, as has happened in the sit-ins and wildcat strikes, could participate in these together. Consequently, they could also be a way of circumventing the union bureaucracies, and they could be the basis of building solidarity and mutual aid on the ground amongst workers, which will be vital for militant struggles going forward. However, if such assemblies do ever emerge in different workplaces, they would also have to be federated. To co-ordinate joint actions and contact, a system of mandated recallable delegates in federated councils could be established – but power would have to remain in the assemblies themselves if genuine control by the workers is to be maintained. In order to foster working class unity, and link worker and community struggles, community members could also participate in the assemblies. Thus, through extending current initiatives, federated working class organs, controlled directly by the working class could be created, initially in the platinum sector, but by example extended to other sectors and communities. Through this, and a revolutionary practice, culture and vision, a counter-power could be built. If the workers involved too felt that it was necessary to fight to transform the existing unions, this could be co-ordinated through the assemblies and councils.

For this to happen, the workers involved in future wildcat strikes and sit-in assemblies would have to consciously transform their current experiments with direct democracy, direct action, and mutual aid into a revolutionary vision and a revolutionary practice. It is here that socialists who are truly for working class power, especially anarchists, could play a role. Firstly, anarchists – despite the movement being small – could offer solidarity and through this share ideas about how worker assemblies and councils, based on direct democracy, have been used in the past in struggles and revolutionary situations. This would not involve anarchists imposing ideas or looking to lead through force, but rather sharing our knowledge and vision of a genuine working class power. Indeed, the very foundations of anarchism as a revolutionary practice are built around

working class power, direct democracy, self-organisation and direct action. These are principles the workers are already, even if unconsciously, using in their struggles. As anarchism arose out of the struggles of the working class; it has much to offer to existing struggles in South Africa, including workers struggles in the platinum sector. The real problem for the moment though is that socialist organisations who are for genuine working class power, not least the anarchist ones, are currently very small in South Africa – this also needs to change if a working class revolutionary counter-power is to be built.

The one thing though in building a counter-power in South Africa, if it is to emerge, is that any illusions in a state, of whatever kind and as alluded to earlier, need to be countered by socialists that are for genuine working class power, in the battle of ideas that will take place in building a counter-power (whether in the unions or an assembly type movement). Many leftists before and in the aftermath of Marikana have called for mines to be nationalised by the state<sup>83</sup>. Those calling for nationalisation of the mines, even though they are well-meaning, make the mistake of completely misreading the nature of all states. Some people calling for nationalisation of the mines sometimes acknowledge that states exist for one class to rule over another. Nonetheless, if one uses a genuinely historical materialist perspective, it is evident that states are more than this. All states, whether they claim to be capitalist or ‘socialist’, have existed so that a minority can rule over a majority. As such, state ownership, which nationalisation is, does not equate to ownership by the working class, but rather a state bureaucracy. It is this that led Emma Goldman to argue that when property or a company is nationalised:

*.../.../...“it belongs to the state; this is, the government has control of it and can dispose of it according to its wishes and views...such a condition of affairs is called state capitalism but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense communistic<sup>84</sup>.”*

Of course, some leftist groups try address some of the problems around nationalisation by stating it must be under workers’ control<sup>85</sup>. In fact, many calls have been made in left pamphlets for Marikana to be nationalised under workers’ control. The comrades making these calls do believe it is a genuine solution; but again their analysis is fundamentally flawed. To begin with, it is inconsistent with building a truly working class revolutionary counter-power, as it places faith in a higher institution, the state, and not in the working class itself. This is because in the end the state, even if it ever nationalised the mines (which is questionable today) will still own such mines; not the working class. Added to this, it is illogical to believe an instrument of repression, which has gunned down working class people so ruthlessly, whether at Marikana or elsewhere, would allow workers to run the factories or mines it owned.

In fact, there are ample examples from history that demonstrate that the interests of workers’ self-management (genuine workers’ control and not simply ‘oversight’ over managers) and state-ownership, including ownership under a so-called workers’ state, are incompatible. States have shown to have almost no interest in allowing workers to run their own affairs or to allow democracy in the workplace. The Soviet Union itself is a prime example of this. It was the Soviet state, under the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party, which unfortunately crushed worker

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<sup>83</sup> [amandlapublishers.co.za](http://amandlapublishers.co.za)

<sup>84</sup> Shulman, A. 1998. *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*. AK Press: United States, pp. 406.

<sup>85</sup> Revolutionary Marxist Group. 2012. *Massacre at Marikana: A Turning Point in the Class Struggle!* RMG: South Africa

self-management. This happened shortly after the October Revolution when the interests of the working class began to openly clash with those of the elite within the Bolshevik Party. As such, it was in 1918, before the civil war, that Lenin ended worker self-management within Russia through decreeing the implementation of one-man management<sup>86,87</sup>. This saw the Soviet state appoint new managers, often from the ranks of the old elite, and forcefully end any pretence of democracy in the workplace. The fact that the Soviet state had nationalised most of the factories, which had originally been seized by workers from the capitalists, contributed to this – it gave the Soviet state immense power which it then wielded against the workers. In fact, the Soviet state accepted no independent initiative from workers and state rule proved itself incompatible with workers’ self-management and direct democracy. As workers were not, and could never be the state (due to its oppressive and hierarchical nature it was designed for a minority to rule over a majority), state ownership never translated into the socialisation of property and wealth, it never led to an end to capitalism, and it smothered workers’ control. As such, nationalisation also never broke the relations of production that defined capitalism; it rather re-instituted it and entrenched it<sup>88</sup>. As such, nationalisation under workers’ control has proved to be a historical oxymoron: a tactical and ideological dead end that undermines true workers’ control and self-management.

While being sober, and recognising we are a long way off from any movement being a strong revolutionary counter-power (whether union based or through workers’ assemblies); it is vital our visions, our actions, and our practices are consistent with extending working class power. The struggles in the platinum mines offer a potential catalyst for building such a power. But that requires working class power to be extended today and in the future. Certainly, reforms must be won, and they are already in the platinum sector, but if workers are to build a counter power they need to be won in a way that extends working class power. Battles have to be fought to win higher wages, to end racism, to win safe working conditions, to end outsourcing, to end labour broking, and to get better services not only in the platinum sector, but eventually everywhere. Our goal as the broader working class, however, should not be for nationalisation and state ownership in the future – it is inconsistent with building a working class controlled power in the long run. Thus, a much better and more consistent option for the working class is to fight to seize the mines, factories and farms through their own organs in the long run (whether future revolutionary unions and/or councils). In other words, the long term goal, if we are consistent, is for workers to fight to take over the mines, factories, farms and run them on the basis of worker self-management in order to meet everyone’s needs. This too would allow for the relations within production to be changed into ones based on equality and direct democracy – which is so desperately needed at workplaces, including Lonmin. The economy and wider society, including local, city-wide, regional and international affairs, could be run by the working class, once the state is smashed, through federated assemblies and councils, using mandated and recallable delegates where the power remains at the base. In other words, the society could be run by assemblies, similar in spirit to, and perhaps even coming out of such structures as the ones seen in the sit-ins and wildcats strikes in the platinum sector – only on a vastly larger scale. Such a vision is far from utopian, in every single revolution, worthy of the name, elements of this have been implemented. Even in South Africa workplaces have been occupied too in the past and, at its

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<sup>86</sup> Lenin, V. 1920. Speech Delivered to the Third All-Russian Trade Union Congress. [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org) (In it Lenin reflects upon the Soviet states’ imposition of one-man management in 1918.

<sup>87</sup> Brinton, M. 1970. *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control*. Black Rose Books: Canada

<sup>88</sup> Brown, T. 1995. *Lenin and Workers’ Control*. AK Press: United States

best, people's power was based on elements of direct democracy. To defend a revolution, armed militia – made up of workers and the poor and controlled by them through direct democracy – could be used. In fact, self-defence for the working class is needed, as Marikana casts light on, but it needs to be based on direct democracy (otherwise it will become a power apart from the working class and probably will in the long run try and crush the working class). If we want such a society, based on working class power, we have to start building towards it today and the means and ends have to be as similar as possible – hopefully Marikana and the struggles in the platinum sector are the start.

[37]www.bdlive.co.za 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012

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Shawn Hattingh  
What the Marikana Massacre tells us  
September 4, 2012

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