

SOUTH AFRICA: THE PARTIAL REEMERGENCE OF WORKERS AUTONOMY

PRESENTATION

In 2012, the mining industry in South Africa was overwhelmed by a wave of strikes without precedent since the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994. More than 140,000 workers stood up in opposition not only to the mining companies and the South African state, but also, very significantly, to the historic trade union of the sector, the National Union of Miners (NUM). This union, which was founded in 1982, led gigantic strike movements which strongly shook the mining industry, the economic basis of the country, and weakened the apartheid regime to the point of pushing its leaders to accept a compromise with organisations representing the majority of the inhabitants of South Africa, notably the majority of workers.

Less than twenty years after the coming to power of the tripartite alliance (the ANC, the Communist Party and the union confederation COSATU, in which the NUM plays a central role), the mine workers have therefore turned against the union which had previously led them in battle. The strikes were organised by strike committees, directly accountable to the workers in struggle. Often, these committees would be linked to a small union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), created fifteen or so years earlier by NUM dissidents. Some of the miners criticised the NUM for supporting the government. A symbol of its integration into the apparatus of the state and the ruling class was Cyril Ramaphosa, who was the general secretary of the NUM at its foundation and who led it before becoming one of the leaders of the ANC. Today he is a businessman, shareholder and member of the board of Lonmin, the platinum producer quoted on the London stock market whose mine in Marikana became famous for the shooting massacre on 16 August 2012, when the cops killed 34 strikers.

This bloody drama was the catalyst for the strikes. Mostly unofficial, but sometimes organised by local NUM officials, they followed one after another from August to October 2012, without the situation being pacified¹. Notably they stopped the activity of the platinum mines which, for geological and economic reasons, were not very mechanised and employed tens of thousands of workers concentrated in certain regions. A few big mining companies conceded important wage rises, after having agreed to negotiate, either with representatives of the strikers or with AMCU delegates. For this they were criticised by the leadership of the NUM, the ministers of Labour and Mines and the leaders of the state and the ANC. If the slaughter at Marikana had left 34 dead and hundreds injured, the other confrontations were mostly between NUM activists and strikers.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRIKES ON THE MINES IN 2012-2013

January-March 2012

From January to March, the workers of Implats Holdings Limited ("Implats") – the second biggest producer of platinum in the world – went on an unprotected strike (without being illegal, it was not recognised by the union and the strikers could be replaced or sacked) for six weeks. This strike had started a month after the signing of a collective agreement by the NUM which allowed for a wage increase of between 9% and 10% for all miners. The Implats management had suggested giving a bigger pay rise to the face workers who had the most difficult work – and occupy a central place in the process of mineral extraction – but the NUM had refused in the name of wage egalitarianism.

The mining company had also taken account of the fact that after the signing of the agreement a certain number of miners had left the company to go and work for its competitors. In possession of the famous blasting certificate, generally more skilled than the other workers and having a higher level of technical knowledge, they were in a strong contractual bargaining position. Their work in the platinum mines is particularly hard. The veins from which the mineral is extracted are less than a metre in height, preventing the use of machinery.

The face workers are therefore obliged to work in a difficult position, half lying down with a heavy hammer and in intense heat. In the underground rock of the Rustenburg region, the main place where platinum is extracted, the temperature reaches around 40°C.

¹ According to the Standard Bank of South Africa, 3.5 million days of work were "lost" to strikes in 2012, 81% in the mining sector alone. In 2011, the figure was 6.2 million days lost, in 2010, 14.6 million days, of which 12 million were in the public sector, and in 2009 2.9 million. Wages rose by 7.6% on average, but 10% on the mines.



Most of the NUM delegates are miners working underground for Implats. Their confidence in the union leadership, already very low, evaporated after the signing of the wage agreement. A new union, the AMCU, profited from the situation and gained ground. Practically unknown in 2011, it had recruited 11,000 members at the end of the strike, of which more than half worked at Implats. At the end of the six weeks on strike, the face workers got a new increase of 25%, bringing their basic pay to R9,900 (Rands) per month. Another conflict on a site of Aquarius Platinum ended in three deaths and twenty injured.



10 August 2012

The conflict between the NUM and the AMCU started up again and took a turn for the worse with the launching of another unprotected strike in the Marikana mine, 80 kilometres west of Pretoria and belonging to the third biggest platinum producer, Lonmin². As at Implats, it was the face workers who stopped work. There were 3,000 of them and they demanded a minimum monthly wage of R12,500. From the beginning the strike was marked by violence. There were already ten deaths on the first day: two guards, two cops and six miners, several of whom were NUM delegates or activists. The two cops were killed with machetes by protesting workers. Three of the latter had been shot dead by the police who had also injured several people. Eight vehicles were burnt.

COSATU, which the NUM belongs to, called on the authorities to send in the army to re-establish calm in the area. This demand was supported by the management of Lonmin, who said that the mine could only work very slowly because so many miners were afraid to go back to work.

16 August 2012

The deaths of the two cops could not go unanswered. A demonstration of strikers made a good target for the police. At least 34 protesters, mostly strikers, were slaughtered by being shot in the back or run over by the armoured cars used by the cops. Heavily armed cops fired on around 3,000 protesters armed with clubs, machetes and iron bars. The ANC government contented itself with saying, via its police ministry: *"The minister is of the view that given the volatility of the situation, police did their best"*.

The management of Lonmin, who threatened to sack those who didn't turn up for work, said in a press statement: *"The South African Police Service (SAPS) have been in charge of public order and safety on the ground since the violence between competing labour factions erupted over the weekend, claiming the lives of eight of our employees and two police officers"*, putting the accent on the view that the conflict was *"clearly a public order rather than labour relations associated matter"*. Frans Baleni, the general secretary of the NUM, also defended the action of the police: *"The police were patient, but these people were extremely armed with dangerous weapons."* *"We believe there is enough space in our democratic order for any dispute to be resolved through dialogue without any breaches of the law or violence"*, said the president of the republic Jacob Zuma, condemning the violence, but without blaming the police.

19 August 2012

The provisional balance of the confrontations at Marikana was 44 dead, 78 wounded and 279 arrests. A week of national mourning was declared by president Zuma. Lonmin ordered the strikers to return to work or be sacked, but the majority of gold miners had already rejected the ultimatum and carried on with the movement. *"Nobody will be asked to report for duty if the police consider them in danger of reprisals"* from the strikers, said Simon Scott, a Lonmin manager, in a company statement. In the same statement, Lonmin confirmed that they had *"asked 3,000 illegally striking employees to return to work on Monday (August 20th), or face possible dismissal"*³. This ultimatum applied to the drill operators, but not to the 25,000 direct employees nor to the 10,000 sub-contracted workers who were not on strike. The latter went to work under police protection.

Despite the threats, it risked being difficult to make skilled miners who were conscious of their importance in the labour process return to work. All the more so as the question of wage rises demanded by the strikers had not been addressed. *"Are they going to sack those who are in the hospital and the morgue too?"*, said a miner asked about the continuation of the strike by AFP. The miners, who earned on average R4,000 (400 euros) per month, wanted R12,500 (1,250 euros). The NUM no longer controlled the miners, its representatives refused to leave the police vehicles in which they'd come to Marikana to talk to the strikers.

22 August 2012

The strike was still hardening at Marikana, despite the repeated ultimatums from Lonmin. The mining company said that only 22% of its 28,000 employees turned up for work on 22 August, against 33% the day before and 28% on 20 August. The government put pressure on Lonmin not to carry out the sacking of strikers who hadn't returned to work. But it didn't seem credible that Lonmin would sack 3,000 face workers, whose work was hard and skilled, making them difficult to replace. By not going back to work, the face workers rendered useless any attempt to normalise production.

A group comprised of several ministers went to Marikana to negotiate with the strikers. The reception was rather cold, the representatives of the strikers stated that they wanted to see the police chief, Riah Phiyega, come and explain himself. They demanded that the police keep their distance from the meeting, saying that they *"don't feel safe close to the police"*. They also said that they were opposed to any ceremony taking place when the strikers in prison were not there to witness it. Finally their representatives accused the president Jacob Zuma of having abandoned them, recalling that he had preferred to meet the management of Lonmin rather than the workers.

23 August 2012

The demand for a wage of R12,500 put forward by the face workers of Marikana was taken up at other

² The Marikana complex produced 698,149 ounces of platinum in 2011.

³ Lonmin company statements available here: https://www.lonmin.com/media_centre/2012.aspx .

sites. A strike by more than 500 workers in the Rasimone mine, belonging to a second rank mining company controlled by black interests, Royal Bafokeng Platinum, paralysed more than half the production. A thousand miners had already collectively resigned from the NUM, judging it too close to the bosses.

The number one platinum producer, Angloplats, a subsidiary of Anglo American, received demands for a wage increase directly from a group of miners, not via union delegates. Workers on the night shift on the Thembelani site stopped work to support these demands. On 21 August another, middle-sized, company, Northam Platinum, announced that the AMCU had started a membership drive on its Zondereinde site. The number four in the sector, Aquarius, closed its Everest mine following growing conflicts.

After expressing his condolences and calling on all parties to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, the vice-president of the Chamber of Mines, Mark Cutifani – also executive director of Anglo Gold Ashanti – admitted that a dialogue should have taken place before the tragedy – “I think that we all agree that we've missed something in that process and we are trying to make that good”. The Chamber of Mines met the AMCU. However, there is no centralised mechanism for negotiation in the platinum industry like there is in coal or gold. Negotiations take place on each site, a process more difficult to control, for the unions as much as for the mining companies.

The visit by Jacob Zuma, surrounded by a swarm of bodyguards, did nothing to counteract the scepticism of the workers. Their representatives told him that work wouldn't resume without the satisfaction of their demands.

29 August 2012

Mildred Oliphant, the Minister of Labour, organised tripartite negotiations to resolve the Lonmin conflict. The 50 or so participants included, apart from the recognised unions, the management of Lonmin and representatives of the state, the AMCU and a group of delegates directly elected by the strikers. The staff of Lonmin had provisionally decided to cut all links with the unions. One of their leaders, the face worker Zenzile Nxenyane, explained: *“We have elected a group to negotiate directly with the management around our demand for a wage of R12,500. When the management agrees, we'll call the unions. We don't want to be represented by the NUM. Our union membership dues are deducted every month, but they betray us.”* This tendency to organise themselves and to negotiate without going through the union was also at work in a small Amplats mine. Confronted with a work stoppage, the mine management agreed to negotiate with six miners' representatives.

The negotiations, which took place in the civic centre of Rustenburg, were prepared by the Council of Churches, who acted as mediators. The Lonmin management said that they did not want to talk about wage increases until work had resumed. At the same time, 260 miners and others, arrested as a result of the massacre, appeared in court, accused of murder, while not one police officer had been injured on that fateful day.

The number of workers at work continued to fall, declining to 7% on 27 August against 13% on 20 August and around a third on 13 August. The conductors on the busses which transported workers to the mine were threatened, but the police in their armoured vehicles, along with the armed guards, were out in force around the mine.

5 September 2012

The representatives of the non-union strikers and the AMCU refused to cooperate with an agreement between the Lonmin management and the main unions. This “peace” agreement, signed by the representative of the Minister of Labour, envisaged a return to work from 10 September and, only after that, the opening of negotiations on wages. The representative of COSATU said that he was confident that the agreement would be accepted by the miners on strike.

The day before, from 3,000 to 5,000 miners demonstrated in the streets of the town near the mine, opposing the agreement which did not include a wage increase. This was the most important demonstration since 16 August. The police came in force with armoured vehicles, content to just control the crowd. The Implats management said that they had received a demand for a wage increase from the AMCU.

The NUM leadership had, at the same time, resolved the issue which had led to one strike, on 29 August, of 12,000 workers at a gold extraction site of Gold Fields, at Kloof and Driefontein.

9 September 2012

The management of the Gold Fields Company only had a few days to celebrate the end of the conflict which had paralysed the eastern part of the KDC mine. The 15,000 workers of the western part – 12,000 worked in the east – launched an unprotected strike on the evening of 9 September. The Gold Fields management, who said that they didn't really know what the conflict was about, had to negotiate on the spot with the unions and the strikers.

At Marikana, after four weeks on strike, scarcely more than 6% of the 12,000 workers were at work on 10 September. The AMCU and the strikers' delegates refused to call for a return to work as long as their demands were not satisfied. Around 5,000 strikers faced the police, equipped with armoured cars, in front of the main entrance to the mining complex.

13 September 2012

The management of Amplats stated on 12 September that they were halting their operations in the Rustenburg zone where they have five mines. According to Chris Griffin, the director general, it was dangerous for the 26,000 workers of the group to go to work because of "*intimidation by people outside the company*". This decision led to the stopping of more than a quarter of the company's production, and the company produces 45% of the world's platinum.

Thousands of mine workers formed pickets in front of the main Amplats production sites. Strikers from Lonmin joined them. Despite the threat of being sacked, fewer than 2% of the 28,000 Lonmin workers were at work. Representatives of the Amplats miners put forward the same demand as their Lonmin comrades, a minimum wage of R12,500. The management agreed to reopen wage negotiations.

The movement didn't stop with platinum, since the strike starting on 9 September in the KDC gold mine of Gold Fields continued. While the leaders of the local NUM branch tried to reason with the strikers, the strikers announced that they would march on the hostels where the miners lived to persuade non-strikers to join the movement.

The leaders of the AMCU said that it was up to Jacob Zuma, the president of SA, to organise an "*indaba*" (conference) with all the interested parties. This conference should cover all the following subjects: minimum wage, conditions of work, housing, training, as well as the creation of a fund for the victims. At the same time, ANC Members of Parliament, members of the Commission on Mineral Resources, refused to set foot in the Rustenburg region, arguing that the situation was too dangerous. It's difficult to play the role of impartial arbiter when ANC leaders have direct financial interests in the mining companies!

19 September 2012

An agreement was finally reached between the representatives of the workers on strike and the Lonmin management. Work had to resume on 20 September. The management had conceded wage increases of between 11% and 22%, applicable on 1 October. A representative of the strikers, Zolisa Bodlani, had set out the increases: the face workers would receive a gross monthly wage of R11,078 (1,353 US dollars), the wage of a team leader would be R13,022 and that of the least well paid miners would be R9,611. A return to work bonus of R2,000 (\$244) would be given to everyone. The strikers had accepted a compromise under the pressure of threats of being sacked and also threats from the state, which had organised the occupation of the Rustenburg region by the police.

Simon Scott, who runs Lonmin, stressed that a rise in wages corresponding to the strikers' demands would lead to numerous redundancies. A massive rise in the cost of labour must be accompanied by a parallel increase in productivity, leading to accelerated mechanisation and therefore to a strong reduction in the number of workers employed. The mine, not very automated, directly employs 25,000 staff.

Amplats immediately announced that work would restart in the five mines stopped for "reasons of security". A spokesman for the group recognised that many workers were still on strike.

At Gold Fields, it was not a question of restarting negotiations. The 15,000 workers wanted R12,500. The movement had also affected Aquarius Platinum and a ferrochrome complex at Steelpoort, in the province of Limpopo, belonging to the Swiss group Xstrata.

26 September 2012

While the 25,000 Lonmin workers had got increases, nothing had been offered to the 10,000 subcontracted workers. The mining sector was still at boiling point. At Amplats, in the four mines close to Rustenburg, despite the repeated threats of sacking, fewer than 20% of the 26,000 workers had returned to work after the stoppage of activity decided by the bosses. Arguing that Anglo American, the diversified mining company which controls Amplats, was doing very well financially, the strikers demanded a minimum wage of R16,070 (\$1,950).

The demand movement first of all extended to the gold mines, the sector where conditions of exploitation were the most similar: deep mines, hard work and relatively low wages. Gold Fields, which was the first to be affected, obtained a court order against the strikers, clearly without effect since the movement spread on 21 September to the western part of the Beatrix mine – which produces 900 ounces of the yellow metal every day, while the western KDC mine extracts 1,200 ounces. Then on 24 September it spread to the whole complex, with 9,000 workers on strike. Their demand was aligned to that of Amplats, R16,000.

Already on 20 September 5,000 workers at the Kopanang mine, belonging to the country's biggest gold company (and number three in the world), AngloGold Ashanti, stopped work, followed on 25 September by those of West Wits, close to Carletonville, along with those of Vaal River, close to Orkney. Here again, the demand from the rank and file, supported by most of the 35,000 workers of AngloGold, was a minimum wage of R12,500.

In coal mining as well the workers went on strike for their demands. The NUM launched a strike on the Mooiplaats Colliery site, close to Ermelo, in the province of Mpumalanga. The Coal of Africa mining company proposed a general wage increase of 22% which was refused by the workers. The company employed 368 workers of which 176 belonged to the NUM.

The NUM, through its president Senzeni Zokwana, demanded that the mining companies should not tolerate unofficial strikes. By accepting a pay rise following an illegal strike, Lonmin had created a dangerous

precedent, said Zwelinzima Vavi, the president of COSATU. *"If the workers have forced the hand of the company in this manner, by an unprotected strike, what is to prevent [the workers of] Driefontein [the old name of KDC] from doing the same?"*, stressed Vavi before rushing to the gold mine to try to resolve the conflict, without result. Taking up the statements by the mining companies, Frans Baleni, the general secretary of the NUM, said that 10,000 jobs could be lost in the sector as a result of the strikes.

Rejecting the NUM, and mistrustful towards the AMCU, which was very active at Marikana, the Amplats miners wanted to create a new union – their initiative was violently denounced by COSATU. In the gold sector, bosses and unions were afraid that dispersed strikes would break down the system of wage negotiations by branch.

27 September 2012

If wages in the gold sector are higher than those in platinum – the restructuration begun a decade ago has noticeably increased productivity –, the working conditions there are also hard. Overall, 40% of the gold producing capacity of South Africa was on strike.

At Gold Fields the wage demand was for R16,000 (R12,500 net), but the strikers also demanded the dismissal of a mine director. The management refused to open negotiations, arguing that the two-year agreement ran until 30 June 2013.

The same position was taken by AngloGold, which recalled that negotiations for the whole sector had existed since the mid-1980s. Mark Cutifani, its executive director, had recently explained in an interview with the *Financial Times*, that important wage rises in the mining industry would affect the whole South African economy because *"the mining industry is the sector with the best paid workforce"*.

Faced with the strikes, the companies took a harder line. Following the example of Amplats, Gold Fields openly considered sacking the strikers. However, Amplats knew that these threats were useless because less than 20% of workers had turned up to work in the Rustenburg mines, despite a police presence which was supposed to dissuade violence towards non-strikers. A massive police action was in effect necessary to make effective the court decisions obtained against the strikers by the companies.

2 October 2012

Amplats continues to threaten to sack strikers who don't present themselves for work, but the struggle extends to a new mine, Union Mine, in the province of Limpopo. The workers refuse to go down into the mine and present a list of wage demands described by Amplats as *"irrational, and outside any recognised process of negotiations"*. AngloGold Ashanti was obliged to stop all its activity because more than 24,000 of its 35,000 staff were on strike. Gold Fields asked the courts for a ruling that it could evict 5,500 of its staff who live in housing which it owns.

A strike also hit the Petra Diamonds diamond mine in Kimberley. The strikers demanded a wage of R21,500. The average starting salary for the 574 workers in this mine is R6,000.

3 October 2012

A guard was killed during the unprotected strike at Somkhele, a coal mine belonging to Petmin. The 345 strikers, who worked for the subcontractor Sandton Plant Hire for a wage of R4,000 to R6,000, wanted a minimum wage of R10,000 to R15,000.

4 October 2012

An Amplats miner was killed by a rubber bullet when the police were dispersing a gathering of more than 2,000 strikers. In the fighting the police used tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets against the miners who set up barricades and responded with hails of stones. The level of violence moved up a notch when the strikers began to receive notices of dismissal by text message. Later in the week some strikers burned an Amplats training centre and two mineral conveyor belts.

5 October 2012

At Petra Diamonds the NUM announced the end of the strike at the Kimberley mine. Meanwhile, some miners had stopped work on another site, near Koffiefontein, in Orange province.

Amplats announced the dismissal of 12,000 workers who were on strike. The company said that it had already lost 39,000 ounces of platinum, which translates into a loss of R700 million.

At Samancor, the management refused to negotiate directly with the representatives of the strikers, wanting to go through the union channel of the NUM. The strikers, who were demanding a wage of R12,500 and who had symbolically burned their red NUM t-shirts, refused to be represented by the union.

There was the first meeting between the managers of Kumba Iron and the representatives of 300 miners on strike, who had stopped the giant mine of Sisheer. They demanded a minimum wage of R15,000. A two-year agreement had been signed with the unions foreseeing annual pay rises of between 9% and 12%, significantly below the rate of inflation. Above all, 6,209 staff having more than five years' service had participated in earning the company R2.7 billion, that's R570,000 each.

To try to pacify the situation, a first meeting was organised by a commission composed of the bosses of the mining companies, the unions – NUM and AMCU – and representatives of the government. This forum, intended to find solutions to channel and to absorb the present strike movement which threatened to escape any structure of control, was, naturally, going to be confidential.

After having washed their dirty linen in private – the bosses accused the unions of not knowing how to keep their troops in order, and were themselves accused of encouraging wildcat strikes by giving in to the workers who were on unprotected strike – five themes had to be tackled: the creation of a platinum industry viable in the long term, the centralisation of collective negotiations – today decentralised –, the resolution of on-going conflicts, the return to stability and the housing question.

Saying that the present strikes were going on outside the normal processes of negotiations between employers and unions, The Minister of Labour, Oliphant, proposed finding a means of consulting the workers themselves. The monopoly of representation of the workers granted to the union which could recruit half plus one of the workers in a company had to be called into question. The general secretary of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe, stressed that it was necessary to improve the conditions of life of the miners. Referring to the AMCU, he stressed that the workers must be able to be represented by the union of their choice, without the intervention of the companies.

All parties agreed that violence must not happen in the workplace, or in social life in general. The police must play their role in maintaining law and order, they all said together, underlining that it is necessary to act against the perpetration of illegal actions. *“Having another union represented in the workplace is not necessarily bad”*, stressed Graham Briggs, the director of Harmony Gold.

6 October 2012

400 workers in the Brits platinum mine, belonging to Xstrata, went on strike for a basic wage of R16,000 and the sacking of a manager accused of racism. They also protested against changes in their conditions of work. The strike extended to the other mines of Amplats, Union and Amandelbult.

“It’s the beginning of the war”, said a strikers’ leader at a rally. Several Xstrata vehicles were burnt during the previous night and 2,000 strikers confronted the police near the Inkaneng shantytown. 100,000 mineworkers were on strike, 28,000 at Amplats.

7 October 2012

Despite the threats, fewer than 20% of the 21,000 employees of Amplats in Rustenburg turned up to work. More than 50,000 workers at the gold producers Gold Fields and AngloGold were also on strike. The NUM told the strikers that there is no point in getting big wage increases if they don’t have jobs to go to afterwards.

9 October 2012

As was widely expected, Gold One laid off 1,400 strikers; the platinum producer Atlaso sacked 2,161.

11 October 2012

One man was burned to death, another shot dead near an Amplats mine. The car of a COSATU official was stoned by strikers. A group of miners went to the NUM headquarters in Rustenburg to resign from the union.

16 October 2012

The police arrested 40 strikers who had taken some equipment from the site of the iron mine at Sishen. 26 other strikers were arrested at Samancor Chrome. Gold Fields gave an ultimatum for 15,000 strikers to return to work.

The NUM spent a million rands of its own funds on a campaign against the wildcat strikes.

18 October 2012

Work started again completely in the Beatrix mines and at 90% in KDC West of Gold Fields. 4,000 workers stopped work at Lonmin to protest against the arrests of several former strikers.

A significant part of the 10,000 subcontracted Lonmin workers began to stop work.

Jacob Zuma urged all the mineworkers involved in unrecognised strikes to immediately return to work with the aim of organising a return to normal in mining production.

20 October 2012

After four days on strike, the movement at Petra Diamond is officially over. The NUM and the management signed an agreement. There will be no reprisals, wage negotiations will start later.

The Samancor Chrome workers returned to work with wage increases. A small platinum producer, Sylvania Platinum, signed an agreement with the NUM after negotiations which took place without a strike.

23 October 2012

The tide began to turn. It was the turn of the Kopanang and Great Noligwa mines, both belonging to Anglo Gold Ashanti, to begin to produce again. Gold Fields put its threats into practice. 8,500 strikers of KDC East refused the conditions and were laid off. At Sishen, less than half the workers went to work.

26 October 2012

Almost all the 5,400 workers of the Kusasaletu mine returned to work. The three big gold companies signed an agreement with the NUM to improve wage conditions after three weeks of negotiations. The increases ranged from 1.5% to 10.8%, depending on category.

COSATU, the NUM, the Communist Party and the ANC ministers organised a rally in the Rustenburg stadium to launch a *“take back Lonmin”* campaign. When they arrived, a thousand miners occupied their places and began to hassle the union and political bosses. They could only receive their greeting from the crowd thanks to police protection. Strangely, these organisations which have such a huge number of activists are incapable of running their own security service.

29 October 2012

Amplats said that they had reached an agreement with the unions and striker representatives for putting an end to the strike. They agreed to take back the 12,000 sacked strikers. The agreement foresaw the return to work on the morning of 30 October, under the same conditions as before the strike, and therefore without any increase in wages. In place of being sacked, they would receive a final warning before being sacked. A bonus of R2,000 was granted to every striker to help with their financial difficulties. They could also borrow R2,500 from the company to be paid back over six months. The non-strikers received a loyalty bonus of R2,000. But the representatives of the strikers had not had the time to consult the workers before the management sent out text messages saying that the strike was over. Consulted, the strikers angrily rejected the agreement.

The company prepared to close four mines on strike in the Rustenburg region, considered as the ones that yielded little or no profit. Frans Baleni, of the NUM, denounced the actions of the strikers as leading to pit closures and job losses, provoking violent confrontations between NUM activists and Amplats strikers.

31 October 2012

The Amplats strikers refused the compromise signed by the NUM. After a meeting, 2,000 of them left as a demonstration and burned an electric sub-station and then clashed with the police, who dispersed them with rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades. 13 protesters were arrested for the attempted murder of a security guard.

Lonmin, which had reduced its investments, threatened to go ahead with restructuring and job losses. Gold One signed an agreement with the NUM involving wage increases of between 8% and 10%.

6 November 2012

The strike at KDC East in Carletonville ended. The three Gold Fields mines resumed work. The company had sacked 8,100 strikers on 23 October. Most of them were rehired after an agreement with the NUM.

The strikers at Amplats always refused the management proposals, countersigned by the NUM, despite a meeting between the strike committee and the management.

Work began again in the Anglo Gold mines of Mponeng (100 strikers) and Taua Tona (200), on unofficial strike for several days. On a recognised strike since 24 October, the coalminers of Umlau, of South African Coal Mining, returned to work, but the 2,000 sacked miners of Bokoni refused to go back.

The Forbes and Manhattan Coal coal mines stopped operations after a strike of 750 workers, peaceful for four weeks, became violent. Two strikers were killed by guards when they tried to get into a building where arms were stored.

Xstrata sacked 400 strikers in its Kroondal chromium mine.

8 November 2012

The gold miners of Village Main Reef in Buffelsfontein returned to work. To prevent the conflict from spreading to their coal mines, the companies in this sector agreed to wage rises of 7% for the least well paid newly hired workers – earning between R5,700 and R7,000 per month. The Chamber of Mines negotiated this increase with the unions, including the NUM. The wave of strikes only affected the small coal mines, sparing the giant companies who supply almost all the power stations. Exxaro slightly raised its wages, while the others gave a one-off bonus of R2,000.

10 November 2012

According to a representative of the workers of Rustenburg, the workers of various companies are preparing a unified strike in the North-West for 2013. *“Our weak point is going on strike one after the other”*, he said during a gathering of Amplats strikers which had more than a thousand participants.

Four miners who returned to work were roughed up by a thousand strikers in front of a foundry in Waterval, belonging to Amplats.

12 November 2012

Although Amplats had given today as the deadline for 12,000 workers to return to work or be sacked, the strikers held a meeting and decided to continue the action started eight weeks earlier. The NUM denounced violence against people who wanted to stop the strike.

The wage demands of the strikers were impossible to satisfy, said Chris Griffin, the executive director of Amplats. He proposed a return to work bonus of R4,500 made up of R2,000 for loyalty for those who didn't go on strike, or assistance to strikers for their financial difficulties, plus R2,500 for everybody, given two weeks later, if work has restarted without problems. The deadline was finally pushed back by two days.

14 November 2012

The mineworkers of Mponeng, belonging to AngloGold Ashanti, returned to work after a strike of eight days marked by vandalism and occupations. All the mines in the group started up again. They proposed a vote to decide on the continuation of the movement.

16 November 2012

Village Main Reef announced a massive restructuring and its intention to lose 960 staff from the Blyvooruitzicht gold mine. The mine, stopped by a three week strike in October, “is no longer profitable”.

After two months of agitation, thousands of workers returned to work in the Amplats mines. The company had lost 200,000 ounces of platinum, around R2.4 billion. It was the last big mining company on strike.

Over all, more than 140,000 mineworkers had participated in the movement. Finally, the Amplats workers had obtained a bonus of R4,500 and progress in wage negotiations. They also got a monthly housing grant of R600 or a wage increase of R400.

Workers on strike at Atlatsa Resources, in the Bokoni mine, demanded the freeing of protesters imprisoned after a demonstration, including a leader of their strike committee, as well as a wage increase.

The police had arrested 37 workers after firing rubber bullets at a group of protesters who had set up a barricade on the road leading to a chromium mine at Kroondal belonging to Xstrata.

19 November 2012

Interviewed by the *Financial Times*, on the occasion of a meeting in London with some investors, the leaders of the NUM, Frans Baleni and Senzeni Zokwana, said that they could not guarantee an immediate return to calm in the mines. *"Our experience shows that as far as pay and conditions of work are concerned, satisfaction does not last longer than 90 days"*, they warned. Recognising the financial difficulties of the mining companies in gold and platinum, they suggested that a stabilised situation would allow higher wages thanks to raised productivity. They insisted that miners who do hard physical labour, like the face workers, should be better paid.

26 November 2012

Gold Fields, which had lost 200,000 ounces of gold because of strikes in 2012 and suffered from raised costs of production, stated that the *status quo* was impossible and that it would begin a large-scale restructuring.

28 November 2012

The management of the Kumba iron mine decided to grant an amnesty to workers who had participated in the wildcat strike in October. 125 strikers were excluded from this measure. They had seized equipment and occupied the mine, threatening to start destroying things.

7 December 2012

Coal of Africa announced that they had sacked 178 workers who had been on wildcat strike at the Mooiplaats mine - that was 48% of the workers.

Anglo American committed itself to construct 23,000 housing units for its staff, mostly by transforming its residences into individual dwellings. *"We cannot be proud of the system of habitation put in place for the mineworkers"* said Cynthia Carroll, the executive director of Anglo American.

An unofficial strike broke out in the Blyvooruitzicht gold mine belonging to Village Main Reef. According to the management, a conflict between the NUM and the AMCU was the original cause of the stoppage.

11 December 2012

The workers at the Dishaba mine in Limpopo organised a go-slow to demand the closure of the local NUM office. The management accepted; work resumed normally.

14 December 2012

The Amplats mines at Rustenburg were only working at 80% of their capacity, according to the management. The new Chinese owners of Pamodzi Gold's Orkney mine are going to give a bonus of R16,000 to the employees. The former bosses of the mine, including a nephew of Zuma and a grandson of Mandela, had made good use of it.

According to official statistics, the mining sector lost 15,000 jobs in the third quarter of 2012.

17 December 2012

Implats intends to construct 4,500 houses for its workers, in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

19 December 2012

A new threat of a strike at Lonmin. The workers felt they hadn't got the increases promised by the company. Some thought that the announced increase, 22%, applied to all employees while the increases ranged from 11% to 22%. The company wanted to launch an education campaign to help staff to read their payslips.

Cyril Ramaphosa was elected vice-president of the ANC during the 53rd national conference of the party.

21 December 2012

The 1,700 miners who had occupied the Harmony Gold mine at Kusasalethu agreed to return to the surface. They demanded the rehiring of 578 of their comrades, some working for subcontractors, who had participated in a wildcat strike. The occupiers remained without food or drink for two days. A dozen or so workers had been injured in fights with the mine guards.

7 January 2013

Thousands of workers at Harmony Gold Kusasalethu returned from neighbouring countries or far-away regions of South Africa to find not only the mine closed, but also the residences where they live. They found themselves without a roof, without food and with company offices guarded by a private police force. The management had decided to close the mine until July, when it would be run *"securely and profitably"*. After the confrontations and strikes of October, the management of Harmony had chosen strong-arm methods to definitively subdue the workers, preferring to close a potentially profitable mine to discipline the workers who were rebellious and had carried out numerous unofficial stoppages. The majority of workers on the site, 62%, described themselves as represented by the AMCU while the NUM only represented 28% of them.

13 January 2013

The AMCU became the representative of the majority at Implats but the NUM demanded an audit and refused to give up its offices.

15 January 2013

Amplats announces the result of its study on the viability of its assets. The group decided to close four shafts of its unprofitable mines and to sell another key mine with the loss of 14,000 jobs. The government and the unions denounce this decision. To compensate for these measures, the company will supposedly create 12,000 jobs. Around 15,000 workers reply with an unofficial 24-hour strike.

Harmony Gold gave 60 days' work to the 6,000 workers of the Kusasaletu mine so as to respect the law, but otherwise the mine was closed for good.

28 January 2013

Amplats agreed to push back the date for getting rid of 14,000 jobs after negotiations with the Ministry of Mines and the unions. Amplats said that the government, the ANC, and even COSATU, hadn't turned a hair when three mines had been closed with the loss of 25,000 jobs between 2008 and 2010. These measures had however been negotiated as much with the political leaders as with the union officials.

6 February 2013

Mineworkers must not make wage demands which are unexpected or which put their jobs at risk, said the NUM once again during a preparatory conference for the 2013 wage negotiations. The NUM must find a compromise between the public expectations of its members and the investors.

At the same time, its leaders stressed the difficulties of Amplats, which had suffered its first ever losses in 2012, and implored its employees not to stop work this year. The cost of labour represents 46% of its costs of production.

16 February 2013

The tough policy of Harmony Gold seems to have been effective. The 6,000 staff at Kusasaletu, who had been locked out since 20 December, for the first time agreed to individually sign an agreement to respect the rules of the mine, that is to say to renounce any illegal actions.

20 February 2013

The Rustenburg Amplats mines returned to work. After a rally in a stadium, the strikers decided to interrupt a strike begun on 18 February.

There was a confrontation between a thousand workers from the Siphumelele mine, in the Rustenburg region, and NUM delegates. The workers, under the guidance of a workers' committee close to the AMCU, wanted to retake possession of a union office. The Amplats guards fired on the demonstration with rubber bullets, causing 9 injuries, one serious. Four guards were injured. The workers' committee contested the legitimacy of the NUM in occupying the union office when Amplats recounted the number of members of the various union organisations.

25 February 2013

After a series of meetings between unions, representatives of the government and the Chamber of Mines, a pact of peace and stability was finally signed to reduce illegal strike movements and violence. This pact had to stabilise the situation in the mining industry and favour its growth, explained the Minister of Mines. The signatories called on the workers to no longer have recourse to violence and intimidation as well as illegal meetings and strikes. The AMCU had repeatedly refused to commit itself, demanding a general amnesty for strikers before any agreement. It ended up accepting under pressure from the minister.

3 March 2013

Amplats officially signed an agreement with the AMCU, recognising its dominant position with 40% of the staff, (the majority of the miners). The union could therefore nominate the shop-stewards. Denouncing the closure of its offices in some of the Amplats mines, the NUM and COSATU said that the platinum mining companies are in an alliance with the AMCU to eliminate the NUM and attack the ANC.

6 March 2013

There is a return to work in the Lonmin, Saffy and Newman mines, after a stoppage on 5 March. More than 6,000 Lonmin workers took advantage of a visit to the site by a group of journalists from various countries – the management wanted to show that the situation was peaceful at Marikana – to demonstrate in force. They also demanded the closure of the NUM offices. Without violence, the strikers gathered in a nearby stadium. The return to normal that Lonmin wanted was still far away, absenteeism was always high, said a miner who added that the multiple demands of the workers had not always been satisfied.

Lonmin stated that the AMCU represented more than 60% of the employees in its mines and the NUM less than 30%. The management of the mining company nevertheless tried to obtain a compromise between the two unions. Contrary to the previous situation, majority and minority unions were invited to participate in collective negotiations.

12 March 2013

Hit by the strikes, the coal producer Exxaro Resources appealed to the national leadership of the NUM. Since 5 March, more than 3,000 workers had been on illegal strike. The movement progressively shut down the

shafts of Arnot and Matla, then Grootegeluk, on 8 March, and finally Leeuwpan and Inyanda. These coal mines provide more than 10% of the supplies of Eskom, the national electricity producer. A lack of coal could lead to electricity blackouts.

The strike was not led by the national leadership but by regional officials, and was discarded by an NUM spokesman. The strikers called for the equalisation of their conditions of work above all else, in particular the equality of bonuses. The objectives of production had not been achieved, explained the union spokesman.

13 March 2013

An unofficial stoppage began the night before in the Anglo American coal mine at Kleinkopje, and was already over. Work in one of the six Exxaro mines that were on strike also started again, but the coal was not delivered to the power stations. *Solidarity*, the technicians union, had not joined the strike but had asked its members to refuse to do the work of the strikers.

18 March 2013

There was fighting between 2,000 strikers and the police on the site of the Grootegeluk mine belonging to Exxaro. 15 strikers were injured and 9 arrested. The strikers used dumper trucks to block a road.

250 miners from Shanduka Coal, a subsidiary (in association with the trader Glencore) of the Shanduka group, controlled by Cyril Ramaphosa, stopped work to demand payment of bonuses. The management of the group refused to pay because the production quotas had not been met.

The Graspan mine at Mpumalanga produces coal for Eskom's electricity. There was an illegal strike – not called by the union, according to an NUM spokesman.

19 March 2013

Confrontation at Graspan between strikers, who'd seized mining equipment, and the police. Two demonstrators were injured by bullets, a few more by rubber bullets and 9 were arrested. Exxaro obtained an injunction against the strikers.

21 March 2013

A wildcat strike which lasted a week in the copper mine of Palabora belonging to Rio Tinto went to an end. A hundred or so miners stayed underground to demand a wage increase. The strikers demanded a danger bonus of R5,000. The NUM, who hadn't organised the struggle, negotiated its end. Apart from those who occupied the site, a hundred workers out of 700 were on strike.

24 March 2013

After having threatened to sack the 3,200 strikers, Exxaro negotiated an agreement with the NUM. The strike ended with a payment of a bonus of R2,800 although the strikers had demanded R15,000. The company had previously proposed a bonus of R2,000. On the basis of no work no pay, Exxaro shared it out over several months.

27 March 2013

Carrying on with negotiations, Amplats pushed back its decision on 14,000 redundancies to the end of April.

30 March 2013

Ramaphosa intervened so that the 250 strikers of Shanduka Coal would be rehired. He said that massive lay-offs were not a solution and he called for negotiations and discussions. He founded the Shanduka holding in 2001, and seems to have progressively disengaged from responsible posts in big South African companies since his election as vice-president of the ANC.

A MINING GIANT WITH FEET OF CLAY

The mining industry makes up two thirds of exports from South Africa, according to the national statistics body, which also says that mining production has declined in seven of the last ten years. Unlike other big mining countries – Canada, Australia, Chile –, South Africa has not profited from the exceptional rise in prices of raw materials. It's a weakness denounced by two bosses of South African origin, Ivan Glasenberg, the executive director of Anglo-Swiss Glencore, and Marius Kloppers, his opposite number at the Anglo-American BHP Billiton, who said: *"South Africa has attracted less investments and resources than it needs over the last ten years"*.

Apart from this, the country went on to suffer the consequences of the wave of strikes paralysing its mineral deposits. From mid-August 2012, President Jacob Zuma saw the movements affecting the platinum and gold mines since the beginning of the year lead to a loss of production valued at R4.5 billion (\$548 million).

Yet the extraction of precious metals remains central for the South African economy. In 2011 sales of platinum totalled R82 billion and those of gold R66 billion, respectively 10 and 8 billion dollars.

Mineral extraction still directly represents 8.6% of GDP, with a turnover of R230.4 billion (\$31.5 billion).

If we include related activities the mining industry represents practically 19% of GDP. Despite an increase of 5.8% per year in 2010 – after the falls of 5.6% in 2008 and 4.2% in 2009 –, it is still below its level before the fiscal crisis. It represented 12.1% of investments in the economy of the country during 2010. The mines are also a vital component of the Johannesburg Securities Exchange, representing more than 40% of the capital of listed companies.

The total exports of primary minerals have grown in one year by 26.8%, climbing to R224.2 billion (\$27 billion), which is, for the fiscal year 2010, 35.9% of the commodity exports of South Africa. If you count minerals in their transformed state – steel, catalytic converters, ferrous alloys etc. – mines and metals make up around half the exports of the country.

The mining industry directly employs 498,141, 6.5% of the formal employment of the country. With respectively 181,969 and 157,019 staff, the platinum-group metals and gold are the two most important employers of the sector.

On the world minerals market South Africa still occupies a major place, but it lost ground, particularly where gold is concerned. It remains the primary producer of platinum, ferrochrome and vanadium and the second biggest producer of manganese and titanium. Although it's fallen into fifth place in gold production, nevertheless it still has the biggest reserves of the yellow metal, along with platinum-group metals, manganese and chromium. It possesses the second largest deposits of vanadium and titanium.

DISASTROUS CONDITIONS OF LIFE

The end of apartheid did not translate into a radical improvement in the conditions of life for workers. Despite the increase in social security measures, which strongly decreased the number of people living below the level of absolute poverty, inequalities increased. According to government figures, the Gini coefficient, which measures the spread of incomes between rich and poor, increased from 0.64 to 0.67 between 1995 and 2009. Rapid urbanisation has not been accompanied by sufficient construction to provide affordable housing. The policy of the unions and the mining companies has been to close workers' hostels, which only leads to the massive development of shantytowns.

The housing allowance, which for many has replaced company housing, has been received as an additional wage for the workers. In the absence of decent quality affordable housing, the mine workers have built shantytowns near the mines. Nkaneng, where most of the Marikana workers live, has no roads, electricity, sanitation or rubbish collection. This catastrophe is the result of the disengagement of the mining companies and the failure of the political authorities. To assure their upkeep, many mine workers living in new camps take a second wife, creating a second family. Despite the wage increases, their average income hasn't grown as much as their needs.

The wages of a deep miner

According to the AMCU, the face workers only earn R4,000 per month (\$500). This sum, the same one strikers tell journalists, has been contested by an official of the Solidarity union, Gideon du Plessis, who's said that their net wage reaches R10,500. Two journalists from the *Daily Maverick* have stated, supported by wage slips, a wage of R4,365, which rises to R8,125 if you incorporate the housing allowance of R1,850 and various bonuses. After taking away taxes and national insurance, the monthly wage goes back down to R5,000. Interviewed by *Politicsweb*, Mark Munroe, a manager of Lonmin, claimed that if you include bonuses the wage reaches R11,000, without however specifying the sum of contributions.

The strikers of Marikana demanded a wage of R12,500. Similar demands were formulated on two other sites: the BRPM mine belonging to Royal Bafokeng and that of Thembalani, controlled by the biggest platinum producer, Amplats. If it was the NUM which relayed the demand to BRPM, it was the workers who directly placed the demand on Amplats, and not the union representatives.

Platinum workers come from all over South Africa, and neighbouring countries, although the proportion of foreigners has decreased over 20 years, from 80% to 20%. They all send a large part of their pay to their families.

From a paper⁴ by industrial sociologist Gavin Hartford, former national organiser of NUMSA, the metalworkers' union:

"He [the face worker] is probably 45 to 55 years of age, and he has probably 25 to 35 years of service. He is part of the 80 per cent of migrant workers who come from Pondoland, primarily from Lusikisiki or Flagstaff. His father was a rock drill operator and so was his grandfather. He or his father helped found NUM and faced the Bophuthatswana police's bullets in the early 1980s when NUM sought recognition. At home in Pondoland, he sits on the hills with the rock drill operators of the entire mining industry in South Africa. He doesn't care much who he works for, whether it is Goldfields or AngloGold or AngloPlat. He thinks of himself as a rock drill operator like the others.

As a rock-driller, you'll typically start your day at about 4 or 5am. You'll have a piece of bread and poloni, catch two taxis, and pay for all that yourself. Then you get to the shaft by 6am, go 1.5km underground, though

⁴ "Marikana and the future of South Africa's labour market", March 2013, Centre for Development and Enterprise (a thinktank funded by the UK government), <http://www.cde.org.za/>. Hartford also develops similar ideas in the paper "The mining industry strike wave: What are the causes and what are the solutions?"

deep-level mining can go up to 3km. You'll walk another 1-3km underground to get to the rock panel. If you're lucky your tools are there at the same time ... to get the employee and the tool on site at the same time is still not always being achieved. You will then start drilling and you will drill into a rock panel.

In the mines, productivity is a very simple calculation: it's a function of the number of blasts and the advance per blast. The mines talk about a perfect advance with a blast of 1.2m into the rock. Interestingly, since the living out allowance came in, the national figure of tonnage extracted is going down. The advance per blast and the number of blasts is going down — today we're running at about 550 to 650mm advance into the rock per blast. This is precisely because of the poor living and social conditions ... Absenteeism is shooting up, with massive costs to the mines. If it rains you just stay at home ...

Rock drill operators' service conditions 18 years into the democracy look like this: at one point the NUM negotiated a housing allowance and a living out allowance and he realised that he could get somewhere between R1 200 and R2 200 a month extra if he left the hostel. So he left the hostel with many of his comrades. Today, in some mines, 90 per cent of the employees live in shacks to secure the living-out allowance. The first thing you do when you live in a shack is to get a so-called *dinyatsi* (a second wife) to manage the domestic affairs of the shack and cook your meals. In effect the introduction of the living-out allowance resulted in the emergence of a second family housed in the shacklands, with all the associated food, transport, domestic furniture, appliances and transport costs.

With the emergence of the *dinyatsi*, you get something else, too. If you look at the strikes, you'll see that the *dinyatsi* — who are the first beneficiaries of the wage increase — are the women who populate much of the industrial action."

THE WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL

In 2008, South Africa recorded 18,148 murders, a rate of 36.8 per 100,000 inhabitants⁵. Only Honduras rivals the "rainbow nation" in the race for first place, with a rate of 61.

In comparison with other countries with a violent reputation, Brazil has an average of 22.8 murders against 12.7 for Mexico and 6.4 for the USA. In France, the figures for the same year in absolute terms were 839 murders (1.4), in Belgium 200 (1.9) and in the Czech Republic 202 (1.9). In the same period, China reported 14,811 (1.1) and India 40,939 (3.4).

However, we should stress that in South Africa the figures have constantly fallen since the middle of 1995, being 15,940 for 2010 against 26,877 (64.9) in 1995.

Violence against women, children and men

In 2008, reported incidents of sexual violence against women and children reached 50,265 (20,141 complaints of abuse of children generally aged between 12 and 17, 15% less than 12)⁶. These figures are a lot less than reality, given that most violence is not reported (it's reckoned that only one woman in 35 makes an official complaint) or not counted by the authorities. More than one in three children has been a victim of sexual abuse by an adult.

Based on all these figures, each year between 500,000 and a million rapes are committed. In 2009, the South African Medical Research Council published a study which revealed that the rate of homicide of women committed by male partners was five times higher than the world average. According to a study by the *Medical Research Council*, one man in three admits to having committed a rape on at least one occasion. Half of them confess to having done it more than once. Three quarters of them have committed their first offence in adolescence. Again according to this study, one man out of 20 admits to having committed a rape in the previous year and 3% admit to having forced a man or an under-age boy into non-consensual sex. One man in 30 (3.5%) reports being raped.

"Corrective" rape consists in raping lesbians so as to set them on the path to "normality". But sometimes they are just killed.

And cops...

A police force which is brutal, corrupt and involved in business with organised crime⁷ hardly engenders trust within the population. At the end of the '90s, it was estimated that law enforcement officers were on average three times more likely to be involved in crime than the rest of the population of South Africa⁸.

In 2011, just in the province of Gauteng, 630 police officers were arrested for fraud and corruption. Some of them were accused of murders and rapes. Of the 157,000 police staff, several hundred are presently on trial for these same kind of offences.

⁵ Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

⁶ Source: Statistical service of the South African Police.

⁷ The figures for organised crime are not kept by the SAPS and are difficult to evaluate. In 2011, 87 officers from the Western Cape were arrested for having provided information to gangs involved in drugs and armed robbery.

⁸ *The Star*, 5 August 1998.

THE UNIONS...

NUM (National Union of Mineworkers)

"The NUM has abandoned us", a miner told the New York Times, at the beginning of the Marikana strike. "It works with the whites and gets money. It has forgotten the workers", he stressed. These comments express the defiance of part of the workers towards the union because of its closeness to the present government. Instead of organising the miners and defending their interests, as at its origin, the NUM is concentrated on political and economic gains. Its emblematic leader during the struggle against apartheid – twenty five years ago he led a strike which ended with the deaths of 11 miners – Cyril Ramaphosa, has become a respected businessman who sits on the board of Lonmin. Created in 1982 and linked to the ANC, the NUM participated in the struggle against apartheid which caused the fall of the government and the coming to power of Nelson Mandela and the ANC.

Weakened by the internal conflicts in the ANC, before the strikes it only represented 49% of the Lonmin workers, against 66% previously, remarked Justice Malala, a political commentator on the *Mail & Guardian*. Its proximity to the management of the mining companies is obvious. Its general secretary, Frans Baleni, showed himself even more virulently opposed to nationalisation of the sector than the Chamber of Mines. More seriously, for years he accepted derisory wage increases, while his own monthly remuneration reached R105,000, after a rise of 40% last year. This is 26 times that of a miner – without counting the annual R400,000 for being on the board of a bank. Since 1987, the mining companies themselves have paid substantial salaries to union leaders. The president of the NUM, Senzeni Zokwana (also president of the CP and member of the ANC leadership), is paid by Anglo Gold Ashanti. Numerous delegates have become full-time, paid by the company, and don't have to return to work in the depths of the mine.

Amplifying the fears expressed by the mining companies, Baleni said that 10,000 jobs could be lost because of the strikes. The position of the NUM in relation to strikes started outside the unions is clear. Its president Senzeni Zokwana has demanded that the mining companies shouldn't tolerate uncontrollable wildcat strikes.

According to the NUM leadership, the union has lost 15,000 members following the strikes at Implats and 5,000 more after those at Lonmin. Complaining about the lack of support from COSATU in the turf wars with other unions, also COSATU members, the NUM has threatened to stop paying its monthly contribution of \$90,000.

COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions)

Between 2000 and 2012, the rate of union membership in South Africa grew from 26% to 29%. The most unionised sector is no longer mining and construction (34%) but municipal, social and public services (47%), belonging massively to the public sector. Three quarters of unionised workers are in unions belonging to COSATU which has often lost members to the new small unions like the AMCU in the mines.

Between 2011 and 2012, COSATU unions officially lost 20,736 members. The most affected were the *Democratic Teachers Union* (5,297 resignations), the *National Health and Allied Workers Union* (5,283), the *Democratic Nursing Organisation* (5,160), the *Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union* (3,625) and the *Finance Union* (1,371). According to the Ministry of Labour, in July 2012 there were 193 unions officially registered, of which 117 were independent of COSATU.

A study commissioned by COSATU showed that less than 30% of workers interviewed thought that the unions were corrupt while 60% were unhappy with wage rises obtained by the union, even if they were above inflation.

In the mines, full time delegates are happy in their offices. What's more they can receive advantages from the companies to obtain contracts, for example in catering. Like their opposite numbers in the NUM, the COSATU leaders don't hesitate to denounce workers who go on strike outside the legal framework. They also denounce the companies who negotiate with them. In giving a wage increase following an illegal strike, Lonmin created a dangerous precedent, said COSATU president Zwelinzima Vavi.

The alternative unions

As a new union, which wanted to be at once "apolitical" but more active in defending miners' interests, the AMCU appeared in 1998. The former NUM militants who founded it criticised the NUM for its collusion with the bosses. It was in the Implats mines that it gained acceptance. At the end of the big strike starting in 2012, it represented 70% of the mineworkers at Implats, against no more than 10% for the NUM. In the same way it became the majority in the Amplats mines in the Rustenburg region. It had more or less equal place in the other Amplats mines and a net majority at Lonmin.

In the gold mines, if the NUM kept a few strongholds – Driefontein, Kloof, and the Orange province mines – elsewhere the AMCU grew in strength. It was a new reality that the mining companies began to accept.

...AND THE GOVERNMENT

If the material conditions of life of the miners, or those of other categories of proletarians – whether Black, Coloured, Indian or even White – with or without official jobs, have scarcely improved since the end of apartheid, this is not the case for a minority of blacks, often coming out of politics or the unions, who have integrated themselves into the ranks of the ruling class.

The latest list of the twenty richest people in South Africa, published by the South African weekly, the *Sunday Times*, shows that their combined wealth – R134 billion (\$16.18 billion) – has increased by 8% over a year. The list has been drawn up using the courts of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange - fortunes therefore don't include rent, cash and other non-quoted investments.

The bosses of the mines and the metalworking industry are the best placed. Number one for the second year in a row is Patrice Motsepe, the boss of the mining company African Rainbow Minerals, who suffered a loss of 13% over a year of his estimated fortune to R20.07 billion. The value of 38% of Arcelor Mittal (South Africa) held by Lakshmi Mittal, number three in the list, fell by 38% to R13 billion. In fourth place is the inheritor of the famous mining family, Nicky Oppenheimer, who saw the 2.3% which he holds in Anglo American depreciate by 19% to R9 billion. However, thanks to the 40% of De Beers which he sold to Anglo American, he will be in possession of a fortune of R57.7 billion, estimates Forbes magazine, which will in fact make him the richest South African. Another inheritor, Desmond Sacco, is a major shareholder in the Assore mining group.

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the policy of economic emancipation of the black elite led by the South African government, has allowed a few of them into the closed circle of huge fortunes. Besides Patrice Motsepe, Cyril Ramaphosa, the former leader of the NUM has seen the value of his investments – Assore, Bidvest, Mondi, MTN, SABMiller and Standard Bank – grow by 39% to R3.1 billion. And that's without counting what he holds through his investment fund Shanduka – shareholdings in the platinum producer Lonmin and in McDonald's – as well as a co-holding in coal with the trader Glencore. A South African deep miner would have to work no less than 20,667 years to earn the R3.1 billion which he amassed in a few years.

It's also a mining group Exxaro, which has made the fortunes of Siphon Nkosi and Zweli Mntambo, to something like R2 billion for each of them. Before becoming Minister of Housing and putting his wealth in a "blind trust", Tokyo Sixwale was a shareholder in diamonds, platinum mines and oil. His fortune of 2 billion would have placed him 23rd on the list.

The gold producer Gold Fields said that it did not have a choice about the beneficiaries of its BEE programme: the lawyer who defended Jacob Zuma in a rape case, a daughter of Mandela, a member of parliament, a former NUM president, the widow of a CP leader, and various members of the families of political and union leaders.

The ANC government

"There is no justification for the recent wave of strikes which have not followed legal procedures" declared the Minister of Labour, Mildred Oliphant, on 26 September. *"There is no excuse for illegal movements"*, she said, stressing that with a law offering space to protected strikes, strikes and pickets must be peaceful.

At that point the situation had escaped so far from any control on the part of the ANC members of parliament, officials of a mining commission, that they didn't dare to go to Marikana. Similarly, the leaders of the NUM were only able to speak to the strikers from a police armoured car.

CONFINING THE WORKERS' REVOLT

In the mines, the collective negotiations which had been going on for two years included, apart from the management of the mining company, the majority unions which represented each category of workers. The NUM used its monopoly to ensure its domination. By excluding the minority unions this situation fuelled hostility between the unions, as was later recognised by the bosses of the mining companies.

To try to pacify the situation they organised a meeting with the minister concerned, and invited all the representatives of all the categories of workers in the mines.

The objective was to promote "peace, tolerance and freedom of association". For the bosses of the sector there was no question of abandoning the NUM, which had become a minority in the majority of platinum and gold mines. Now they pleaded for a representation which included all shades of opinion, with the aim that the NUM not be excluded. The AMCU leaders finally accepted the new arrangement, but attempts by the miners to eject the NUM officials from their local offices showed that the measure didn't go down well with the workers, now mostly hostile to the NUM. When the minority unions had the majority, as in the Mpumalanga mine, belonging to BHP Billiton, the NUM tried every means to prevent their recognition.

The mining companies identified the lack of centralisation of collective negotiations as something favourable to the launching of localised struggles. The NUM agreed with them on this point, as did the ministers of Labour and Mines, and wanted a central system of negotiation, as the gold mines had had for two years. During the negotiations at the beginning of March, the AMCU – recognised as a majority union in the three big

producers of platinum – opposed the setting up of centralised negotiations in 2013. It said that it didn't have a mandate from its members and that it didn't see any advantage in them. It was afraid that it was an NUM manoeuvre for maintaining a significant representation, and demanded a renewal of the previous system into 2013.

Unions, companies and state officials equally rejected any responsibility for maintaining order in the mining regions. The NUM had thus accused Implats of having opened the floodgates to generalised wildcat strikes by giving in to the demands of the miners involved in a non-legal struggle not represented by the official unions. It was an accusation regularly repeated by the leadership of COSATU and the Minister of Mines. *"Companies have disciplinary procedures"*, explained Shabangu in March, after a brief wildcat strike at Lonmin.

If workers have freedom of association, it is the responsibility of company managers to prevent illegal actions. *"Shareholders must hold the management responsible"*, stressed the minister.

Worried about a strike in the construction yards of the Medupi power station, the Minister of Public Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba, intervened so that the strikers would get a productivity bonus. This intervention was condemned by the NUM, accusing the minister of recognising illegal strikes. What was the good of going through the union, if you could launch a wildcat strike and get support from the union? Franz Stehring, an official of UASA, a managers' union, cited the example of the management of Harmony Gold who had refused to negotiate with the miners who were on an illegal strike and sacked them.

ADAPTATION OF THE COMPANIES

Improving productivity was imperative for the mining companies

To improve the productivity of its mines, Lonmin had to win the workers over to its production imperatives. The group was ready to negotiate at various levels and to buy social peace with production bonuses, profit-sharing and, above all, an improvement in housing conditions. It was hoping for a complete year of work, in place of the present 264 days. A better utilisation of equipment would reinforce productivity and would therefore provide the possibility for paying higher wages, said the management.

However, any improvement in productivity collides with geology. The veins in platinum mines are narrow and difficult to get to. The technique used to extract the mineral is archaic: a miner's hammer and explosives. The use of explosives forces the miners to evacuate the mine, reducing real working time and thus production.

Mechanising extraction improves security, reducing costs and helping to resolve social problems associated with migrations of tens of thousands of workers living in rural areas to the regions where metals are extracted.

Problems caused by attempts at mechanisation are significant and numerous. Mining machinery is too bulky, not appropriate for the type of deposit where you find platinum. Or the volumes that the machinery must extract for a given quantity of metal are too great for the operation to be profitable.

Lonmin set out on a process of automation in 2004. But the investments required were too large and, four years later, the programme was stopped and its manager dismissed. Lonmin has since spent R1.2 billion to go back to one of the two mines, supposedly to revolutionise the extraction of platinum.

The mining giant Anglo American, doesn't envisage a programme of automation in a study which it's done on its perspectives for change. It's going to concentrate its efforts on the most profitable mines and close or sell the others. But mechanisation is still possible for new deposits with bigger tunnels. Amplats is studying the possibility of using tunnelling machines, like the ones in public works but on a smaller scale.

A new model of mining exploitation

While the wave of strikes hit new mining sectors, and the strike at Gold Fields turned ugly with expulsions of strikers from their residences, the NUM signed an agreement with the gold producers aimed at increased productivity in the South Deep mine. For Chris Holland, the CEO of Gold Fields, this agreement showed that there was a place for constructive collaboration in South Africa in labour relations.

This agreement allowed for the creation of 400 new jobs. The miners in categories A4 to C5 would work 12-hour shifts. They would alternately work for 4 days, followed by 4 days of rest, then 4 days of night shifts, then 4 days off. There will be a break of one hour for food and drink in the middle of the shift.

This system would allow the mining machines to work 5 hours more per day, a gain of 25%. Gold Fields intends to run this mine for 50 years with an annual production of 700,000 ounces of gold. The number of days worked by the miners per year will fall by 50, but the mine will run 7 days more.

The company is committed to improving the housing conditions of the miners, their health monitoring, their welfare and to create a more effective underground transport system. A new bonus system, linked to improvements in productivity will be put in place. Staff who surpasses their objectives will be better paid than at present.

The mining companies and the state paid dearly for the end of the miners' strike

Summoned, along with the union leaders, by the parliamentary committee on mineral resources, the managers of the South African platinum mines have been unanimous in pointing out the difficulties of their sector. *"The platinum sector has been the most affected by the global economic crisis"*, said Roger Baxter, in charge of the economy and strategy for the Chamber of Mines. Demand has fallen strongly, and *"shareholders are putting money in and not getting it out, and that will still be the case for two or three years"*, insisted Chris Griffith. For three years the companies have had to turn to their shareholders to bail them out. AngloPlatinum raised R12.5 billion (\$1.4 billion) in 2010, Lonmin 7.2 billion (\$0.8 billion) in 2012 and Impala asked its shareholders for 4.5 billion (\$0.5 billion) in February 2013.

The costs of mining production rose twice as fast as inflation. According to Roger Baxter, between 2006 and 2011, the price of steel, electricity prices and wages jumped by an average of 200%. In five years, the increasing price of electricity added R5 billion to the costs of Amplats and the newly announced increases will add another R3 billion in the course of the next three years. In the manufacture of catalysts, the use of palladium is growing, to the detriment of platinum. The strikes of 2012 caused a loss of production of 600,000 ounces and two thirds of sites are losing money. In three years, the indebtedness of Amplats has grown from 3 to 11 billion rands (\$1.2 billion).

In its 2013 budget, the South African Treasury claimed that the strikes in the mines in 2012 had cost it R15.3 billion. After falling by 16.7% between July and October, mining production recovered a little bit during the last two months of the year. Nevertheless, overall it fell 3.1% relative to 2011. Production of gold and platinum group metals fell by 14.5% and 12% respectively. At the same time, that of iron ore increased by 15.7%. In 2012, the mining industry represented 17% of taxes paid by businesses and 5.9% of GDP. If we include its indirect effects, it reaches 18.7%. The strikes played a role in slowing down the growth of the country, which fell to 2.5% against 3.5% in 2011. The current account deficit grew from 3.4% of GDP in 2011 to 6.3% in 2012.

MEANWHILE, IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

The struggles undertaken by the miners since January 2012 had an echo in various other sectors, notably transport and agriculture. In the transport sector, this echo, without reaching the intensity of the struggles in the mines, was clearly felt in the strike wave that swept South Africa for almost a year. Here we present a brief account of strikes in the transport industry⁹.

Starting in June there were wage negotiations between the *Road Freight Employer's Association* (RFEA) and the majority unions in transport. The unions asked for a wage increase of 12% per year (more than double the rate of inflation) for the three years to come for all transport sectors. The bosses proposed 8%. The unions involved were the *South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union* (SATAWU, 82,000 members including 28,000 truck drivers), the *Professional Transport and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa* (PTAWU, 12,000 members when founded in 1980, around 20,000 today), the *Transport and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa* (TAWUSA) and the *Motor Transport Workers' Union* (MTWU, around 9,500 members).

Faced with the impasse in negotiations, the unions called a strike for 24 September. Between 20,000 and 30,000 freight and cash-in-transit drivers (principally truckers) went on "indefinite" strike. Very quickly, the unions revised their demands downwards (9% in place of 12%), and the bosses proposed 8%. From then on the negotiations were about that remaining 1%.

Incidents of intimidation and violence towards non-striking lorry drivers were reported in a few places, notably in the Johannesburg region. Some non-strikers' lorries were burned or stoned.

The unions called on their members to intensify the strike and called on members of maritime and air transport sectors to participate. These appeals didn't have any effect right up until the end of the strike, and these workers did not join the movement in any significant numbers. By 28 September, more than 45 lorry drivers had been arrested for illegal demonstrations and public disorder. The strike by cash transporters began to affect ATMs, while service stations and other convenience stores began to feel the impact of the truckers' strike. Trade with Namibia fell noticeably.

On 29 September, an agreement was signed with the cash transporters. This agreement was sharply criticised by the unions, because it was concluded without them. In effect, union sections and/or numerous workers had decided to go outside the orders of the unions, working out that the discussions on the 1% increase would take them two and a half years to recover the cost of the strike (basic wage: R8,000). SATAWU denounced the agreement as a "drunkards" deal. In terms of the deal the workers received an increase of 9% starting from 1 March 2013, and the same again on 1 March 2014. If the deliberations of the Negotiating Council lead to a greater increase, then the agreement between the bosses and the workers would be adjusted in line with it. Thus the die was cast. The strike movement lasted until 12 October, when the four unions signed the wage agreement – identical to that signed by the cash transporters.

⁹ For a more detailed chronology of conflict in transport, see our site www.mouvement-communiste.com .

Finally, the workers got a wage increase of 10% starting in March 2013, 8% the following year and 9% the year after. According to the police, 23 lorries had been burned since the beginning of the strike. The conflict had caused two deaths amongst the non-strikers.

“My calculations suggest that the strike cost the economy R15 billion (around \$1.7 billion)” said Loane Sharp, director of Prophet Analytics. *“This could not be compensated at the end of the strike because supply contracts were cancelled”.*

What remains of this strike?

This strike was part of the wave of struggles which swept South Africa from the beginning of 2012 into 2013, affecting various sectors, first of all the mines, then agriculture and transport. The strike, initiated and channelled by the four majority unions among the truckers and cash transporters, found a large echo amongst the latter.

We can say that retail trade, supermarkets, medicine distribution, service stations, banknote distribution etc., were all severely affected by the strike, but industrial sectors far less. If close to 80% of freight transport is by road, an important part of the transport of coal, minerals, cars etc. is by rail. This explains why these sectors were less affected. The same goes for Eskom, principal supplier of electricity (there were no power cuts because of the strike).

This strike was not affected by struggles between various unions, as we could see for the mines, even if there was a certain fuzziness on the ground, as when certain unions announced a return to work while others denied it and when numerically important groups of strikers decided to continue the strike.

We could not detect any traces of attempts at politically independent organisation of the working class in the course of this struggle. The unions succeeded all along in containing most of the strikers and keeping the objectives of the struggle restricted to the question of pay and working conditions. There was no attempt to link up with the strikes of the miners when they were going on at the same time. The strikers also failed to mobilise in a substantial way the rail and port workers, which would have given a whole new dimension to their action.

On the contrary, we can see that when it became obvious to the union company sections and the workers that the negotiations had stalled over the 1% increase after three weeks, divisions appeared. The union front did not collapse, but on the ground the union sections and/or the workers directly negotiated with their employers, deciding that the 1% increase would not cover the losses caused by the strike. According to the unions, who immediately disavowed all agreements concluded outside their jurisdiction, this was a consequence of the Marikana strike. What's more, the limits of union control were visible on the level of controlling the violence against the scabs. The union leaders were not mistaken in denouncing the wage negotiations which escaped their control. They understood very well that they had lost part of their power when the management of the mining companies were obliged to negotiate with workers' committees or an alternative union, AMCU, outside the usual process of collective agreement.

While the territorial and productive enclosure of the sites of the miners' strike represented an objective limit to its enlargement, in the transport sector struggle, it was rather the opposite problem. Apart from a few big companies, it is a sector which is divided up into a myriad of small and medium sized companies without any links between them. This only increased the isolation of the strikers who had not managed to use their central position in the transportation of commodities to lead an autonomous struggle, and to put forward demands going beyond just the framework of a struggle for wages and better working conditions.

PARTIAL REEMERGENCE OF WORKERS AUTONOMY

Almost 20 years after the radical struggle which had chased a racist ruling class out of power, the workers of South Africa understood that the improvement of their condition was very limited. The end of apartheid had benefited only a minority of political, trade union and military cadres who had integrated themselves into the old ruling class. The methods used by the forces of repression had not changed. The Marikana massacre was perpetrated by a police force headed by a black woman who wasted no time in saying that the police had acted in legitimate self-defence, before conceding that the event was “regrettable”.

The law which governs the representation of workers at the place of work as well as collective agreements, the LRA (*Labour Relations Act*), was drafted under the control of COSATU. It's not surprising that it gave to a union with a majority (50% plus 1), as the NUM has in the mines, the power of negotiation and the monopoly of representation of the workers. To be considered as representative, a union must represent at least 30% of the staff on a site. It then has the right to recruit members and to communicate with those at the place of work. Contributions are then directly taken from wages by the employer.

It is therefore logical that in a system where the companies have delegated to the unions the immediate tasks of supervision of the workers, the workers will violently clash with “their representatives” when they enter into struggle.

In Poland in 1980, we already saw the speed with which the organisation that workers gave themselves became the best manager of capital. In South Africa, the coming to power of the triple alliance – ANC, CP, COSATU – allowed the leaders of these organisations to integrate themselves into the executive of the state or to become part of the management of the biggest companies in the country. What is remarkable is how little time it took the

workers, particularly in the mines, to understand the new situation and to organise themselves against it.

Less than ten years after the change in government and the end of apartheid, the local officials and rank-and-file militants of the NUM, disagreeing with the integration of their union into the state, created the AMCU, a small base union, more radical in its demands and, above all, not integrated into the state apparatus. This new union is better perceived by the workers because it doesn't make so many compromises with the companies in which it operates. A dozen years later, militants of the AMCU and other worker militants not claiming to be from any union have organised strikes of face workers which went on to spread across the whole of the mining industry.

To this struggle are joined the "second wives" of the mineworkers, sharing their lives in the shanties, and directly dependent on their wages. The question of the liberation of women thus makes its appearance at the heart of the class struggle. It must pose the problem of relations between men and women including, first of all, amongst workers. If these workers succeeded in organising their struggle outside and against the official union, the NUM, we know very little about the participation of women in the struggle. This is a sign of the persistent backwardness of the class struggle on such a crucial terrain in a country where women suffer an extreme oppression marked by violence and explicit submission to males. A working class which proves to be incapable of integrating half its members (women in this case) into its fight will never be able to claim its emancipation from capital.

This aspect is not the only one worthy of criticism. The independent workers' movement which is expressed by these strikes and which continues to smoulder under the embers did not succeed in going beyond its framework of demands, channelling it and reiterating the path of workers' reformism and class unionism. It's a path which, in the historical conditions of the real domination of capital and the full flowering of social democracy, leads ineluctably to rapid integration into the state and/or to the equally rapid destruction of the movement and its independent organisation by the state. The incapacity of the struggle to transform itself into a practical conscious critique of capital and the state closely depends on three principal inhibiting factors: the territorial and productive enclosure of the sites of the strike; the conflictual dynamic which often leads to confrontation between unions; finally, the generally ineffective exercise of workers' force against the forces of repression. The localisation of the struggle in a remote region far from the nerve centres of the country together with it being rooted in a sector of relatively marginal mining activity has highlighted the problematic of the enlargement of struggle on a more directly political terrain of centralised organisation. Beyond a certain point, the message of the strikers cannot be transmitted by simple proximity.

From the start there needed to be a committed workers' minority capable of re-elaboration of the struggle for it to take on an emblematic character. Yet re-elaboration of experience imposes a degree of conscious political organisation that neither the movement, nor its most determined elements, achieved, even at the peak of its strength. The task of spreading the lessons of Marikana was taken on by default by the AMCU which made of it a vehicle for the separated reinforcement of its organisation. The high political potential of the fight was reduced to defensive reality by the AMCU, a reality never really surpassed by the movement. The truth is that its political quality of rupture with social democracy and workplace command was not clarified in words and deeds by the radical workers' minority. This is what leads to the incapacity of the emergence, throughout the confrontation, of the embryo of a political organisation of this active minority. Workers' radicality was essentially expressed in the violent duels against the collaborationist union, the NUM, and its accomplices in the mines. The meticulous and obstinate destruction of this structure of command in the workplace is probably the most durable positive result of the strike. On the other hand, the classic mining management seems to have resisted the workers' assault better than the NUM.

On its side, the NUM, forged in the harsh class combat of twenty years ago, has never admitted defeat without fighting with weapons in hand against the struggle of the miners. It's a behaviour which did not allow the NUM to protect its place in the organisation of workplace command but which did cause workers' struggle to be tied even more strongly to this level of confrontation and to wear out most of its energy. The calculation made by the state union leadership in COSATU and the NUM was that of politicising the strike from the point of view of the defence of the system. The state unions never stopped denouncing the potential for the miners' strike to subvert the existing order and imposed themselves on the ground as the first line of defence for the state and the big companies. It's a strategy which has made the most conscious elements of the movement pose the practical question of the political dimension of the confrontation. It wasn't because of the arguments put forward by the AMCU in favour of its basic demand: the recognition of trade union pluralism in workplaces. In conformance with its nature as a union and with its political objectives inspired by social democracy, the AMCU has deliberately acted as the principal brake on the expression of the political potential of the struggle. However, for their part, the organs of coordination of struggles which emerged did not tackle the problematic of power in the mines, and even less in the country.

The last factor which prevented the political surpassing of the demand framework was the repression which imprisoned the numerous attempts of the movement to physically leave the mines in a long series of street fights with the police. These fights, unlike those which took place in the pits with the representatives of the NUM, were invariably lost by the strikers. The absence of a political organisation of the miners in struggle,

capable of practically taking on the tasks required by using methods of combat adequate to the level of confrontation imposed by the forces of repression, was fatal. The articulation between mass defensive actions and separate actions and initiatives by small mobile groups was hardly carried out at all, with damage and losses on the side of the strikers that we all know¹⁰.

Beyond these serious limits of the movement, it nevertheless remains an episode of the utmost importance in the long and necessarily discontinuous process of reconstitution of workers' autonomy as an independent political force of the working class. The rejection of the state union, the autonomisation of the struggle from the reasons for constraint defined by the normal development of exploitation – even the survival of companies hit by the strikes – remain the strong points of the struggle. The miners didn't care about the often fragile conditions of reproduction of capital in the South African platinum metals sector.

Another very promising aspect is the proven capacity throughout the conflict by the minority which started it off to draw into struggle growing segments of workers in the mines and other sectors situated in productive zones far from the epicentre of the struggle. Most of the time, the conflict spread without leadership and without coordination, which was quite an achievement in the present situation. The demand for the greatest participation in the confrontation and in decision making was also powerfully affirmed, sweeping away any attempt by the AMCU to get itself recognised by the bosses and their state as the stable and institutional representation of the movement. The constitution of elected organs of coordination of the struggle by unionised and non-unionised workers prevented that.

Finally, for a good number of workers in struggle repeated confrontations with the forces of repression have swept away any illusions in the nature of the state and the regime which came out of the victory over apartheid. These characteristics of the struggle are not an illusion: workers' autonomy is once more on the march in South Africa. A long and uneven path awaits it. It's a path with must progress, as anywhere else, by the development of the political potential for rupture with the capitalist system in its entirety, expressed in the high point of the recent struggle of the South African miners. It's a path whose success to come will be measured, here as elsewhere, by the intensity and the extent of the independent political organisation that the most clear and determined proletarians can provide for themselves as the movement starts up again.

MC/KpK, 10 May 2013

For all correspondence, please write, without adding anything else to the address, to:

BP 1666, Centre Monnaie 1000, Bruxelles 1, Belgium

Also, see the websites: www.mouvement-communiste.com and <http://protikapitalu.org/>

¹⁰ A more detailed analysis of this point is in Letter #36, "*Workers' violence doesn't always mean workers' autonomy*".