

Alex Lichtenstein on *Marikana: A View From the Mountain and a Case to Answer*

Posted on January 15, 2013 by Rosemary Feurer

In the September 1 edition of *LARB*, historian Alex Lichtenstein examined the background of the massacre of striking miners at Marikana, looking closely at the dismal record of South Africa's platinum industry. Here, in a review of the first full-length study of the events of August 2012, he brings the story up to date.

Less than five months after South African police shot down 34 striking miners at Marikana, North West Province, on August 16, 2012, life goes on in South Africa, although perhaps it would be an overstatement to say that things have returned to normal. As Peter Alexander and his colleagues note in their stunning and timely postmortem investigation of the massacre, in South Africa "one has to go back to the Soweto Uprising of 1976 to find an example of government security forces murdering more protestors than at Marikana."

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The Marikana Miners' Strike

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The Marikana miners have been striking for five weeks, demanding better pay. Source: BBC via the AFP.

The Marikana miners' strike or Lonmin strike was a wildcat strike at a mine owned by Lonmin in the Marikana area, close to Rustenburg, South Africa in 2012. The event garnered international attention following a series of violent incidents between the South African Police Service, Lonmin security, the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and strikers themselves which has resulted in the deaths of approximately 47 people, the majority of whom were striking mineworkers killed on the 16th of August. At least 78 additional workers were also injured on the 16th of August. The total number of injuries during the strike remains unknown. In addition to the Lonmin strikers, there has been a wave of wildcat strikes across the South African mining sector.

The first incidents of violence is reported to have started on the 11th of August after NUM leaders opened fire on NUM members who were on strike. Reports indicate that two strikers died that day followed by another eight strikers, police and security personnel who were killed in the next three days.

The shooting incident on 16 August that the press dubbed the Marikana massacre was the single most lethal use of force by South African security forces against civilians since 1960, and the end of the apartheid era. The shootings have been described as a massacre in the South African media and have been compared to Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The incident also took place on the 25-year anniversary of a nationwide South African miners' strike.

Controversy emerged after it was discovered that most of the victims were shot in the back and many victims were shot far from police lines. On 18 September a mediator announced a resolution to the conflict, stating the striking miners had accepted a 22% pay rise, a one-off payment of 2,000 rand and would return to work 20 September.

The Strike is considered a seminal event in modern South African history, and was

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followed by similar strikes at other mines across South Africa, events which have collectively made 2012 the most protest filled year in the country since the end of apartheid.

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