



# 4 struggles

## Defend the platinum strike gains

### Fight for nationalisation of the mines under democratic working class control

by Liv Shange

The five-month-long strike in the platinum mines ended in an important, though partial, victory for the workers. The increases of R1000 in year one and R950 in year two and three are higher than any received during the NUM era. They were through the steely determination of the workers and their families to break with the poverty wage regime which the mining industry has always rested on. These hard-won, limited gains are now under threat from the mining bosses out both to restructure for maximum profitability and to score political points by blaming job losses on the workers' struggle.

When the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) called the Lonmin, Amplats and Impala workers out on strike in January this year, it was resuming the battle that had been suspended in 2012, when the strike wave was led by the workers' independent strike committees. The Lonmin strikers were killed by the police for raising the demand for a R12 500 living wage as well as for insisting on leading their own struggle, independent of the 'National Union of Management' as the NUM had become known. It was the legacy of Marikana that saw workers ensure they kept control of this year's strike

through countless mass meetings and hold out the five months before agreeing to settle at the end of June. Another gain of this strike is therefore that workers' control within AMCU has been strengthened.

Shortly after the strike, Amplats announced its plans to sell its Rustenburg and Union mines, which could in the end mean big job losses. Last year, the Amplats workforce was cut by over 6000 workers as it began its restructuring. Lonmin also announced plans to 'restructure' after the strike. This is rumoured to mean the cut of 5700 jobs.

#### The jobs-or-pay lie

While the bosses now admit that the strike is not the cause for these attacks on jobs, they did not spare any effort during the strike to establish this false link. Job losses would be the inevitable outcome of the workers' audacity to hold out for 'unrealistic' demands – this was hammered home not only by the platinum bosses and the bourgeois media, but also by the ANC-government. The jobs-or-pay-lie is aimed not only at AMCU or the mineworkers, but at all workers struggling for better wages and conditions as well as at the millions of unemployed.

In reality, the platinum giants' plans are part of a global trend. With global demand for minerals slowing down, the mining multinationals are seeing over their houses. For example, the world's largest mining company, BHP Billiton, is 'spinning off' its coal, nickel and manganese mines as well as its South African coal mines and other businesses seen as more risky

as the economic climate gets harsher. AngloGold is taking similar steps. The reshuffling of mining assets is also seeing big sharks sniff around for the spoils, like Glencore-Xstrata and Sibanye Gold. Ultimately, the mining bosses are all looking to safeguard profits in the face of a stagnant capitalist economy, at the expense of workers and working class communities.

destitution, as well as the creation of work for all who need it, the allocation of resources to satisfy the needs in education, housing, health care etc.

The battle for real living wages and jobs will not be won without also taking up the fight for nationalisation under workers' control. This means organising for the socialist transformation of society. This lesson, which many mineworkers learnt in 2012, have again been underlined by this year's strike and the renewed efforts by the bosses to undermine the workers' gains.

#### Fight for nationalisation

Just as the strike's long stand-off showed the need to raise the stakes of the battle, the bleak perspectives for the continued rule of capital in the mining industry poses the need to fight for the nationalisation of the mines. Izwi labasebenzi stands for the 100% nationalisation of the mines, as well as the banks and other big business, under the democratic control of the organised workers and communities. Only by taking ownership of this massive wealth can the basis be laid for ending the contradictions between jobs, real living wages, production, social development and protection of the environment. A democratically planned economy – the basis for a socialist society – would allow restructuring of an industry without the threat of throwing workers into



#### IZWI SAYS:

- Zero-tolerance for job losses – unite mineworkers across different unions for joint action
- Immediate nationalisation of mines that threaten job cuts under workers and community control
- Strengthen AMCU through expanding democratic structures on shaft, branch, regional and provincial level
- Campaign for AMCU to use the platinum victory as basis for taking the lead in a united, nationwide campaign for a living wage

## Metalworkers determined after strike



by a NUMSA shop steward

NUMSA is united and the biggest trade union in South Africa. Its members are responsible and disciplined. All the nine regions are united and our unity is what makes us able to achieve victories. NUMSA believes in a socialist country.

South Africans are suffering from unemployment, poverty and inequalities because of the racist colonial economic base of South Africa which depends on and feasts upon cheap black and African labour. It has not been

transformed from 1994 which is twenty years now.

The working class has sustained vicious attack by the 'mighty' capitalist bosses of all colour – the Democratic Alliance and the parasitic African capitalist elites in the ANC and SACP.

They claim that the working class is destroying the South African economy because of our excessive wage demands. They say we are preventing the bosses from sharing the small share of

the pie we get with the millions of unemployed black workers.

Contrary to the lies and slander from the black and white capitalist camp, it is not the working class that or who is destroying the so-called "South African economy". They are the ones who are doing that. When they exploit the working class they see no wrong as they destroy us by their selfish greedy colonial and racist wage strategy.

We went on strike for the

following reasons: (1) better and improved wages, (2) improved benefits, (3) to press for better working conditions. For the duration of the strike we suffered without an income, compounding the double effects of esiting inferior earnings; we already send our children to poor institutions and stay in shacks because of our low wage.

It is the internal democratic control and mobilisation of the NUMSA members which makes our union unique. Our leaders

always come to the members to be mandated and workers will resist all attempts to roll back the gains that we have fought for and won.

During the strike NUMSA has received the massive global support from countries like Kenya, Spain, Sweden, Brazil, Zimbabwe. You can name them.

**Amandla abasebenzi – not yet broken**

**Viva NUMSA viva!**

Starting on 1st July 2014 and lasting over five weeks, 220,000 workers in the metal industry took strike action for improved wages, benefits and working conditions. Coming just one week after the conclusion of the five month long platinum strike, the bosses, their media and the pro-capitalist ANC and SACP, were determined to defeat the strike. During that time it was impossible to turn on the TV or radio without hearing how the metalworkers were responsible for all the problems of South Africa.

But the determination of the strikers and the overwhelming support of the working class not only prevented the defeat of the strike but won important concessions from the employers. That these gains were significant victories was demonstrated by the outrage of one of the employer bodies who called on their members not to honour the settlement and to organise a lock-out to try and wreck the deal. This demonstrated conclusively who the real saboteurs of the economy are – the bosses and their profit system.

A Gauteng shop-steward for NUMSA, the major union involved in the strike, wrote the article below, explaining why she took part in the strike and why metalworkers responded with such determination and solidarity.