

The 16th of August 2012, has inscribed a never to be forgotten 'moment' in the history of post-apartheid South Africa when the South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on striking Lonmin (Plc) mine workers, killing 34 and injuring 78 in Marikana, North West Province. The workers were part of an unprecedented strike wave on the platinum belt, which had begun at Impala Platinum Holdings (Implats) at the beginning of 2012, spread to Lonmin that August and to Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) in September. At the heart of the strikes was the demand for a 'living wage'- a clarion call that would be taken up by workers at other platinum mines, the gold, coal, transport and agriculture sectors and for a short while left the country in political and economic turmoil. This platinum belt strike wave was not led by the unions but by workers themselves. Workers emphatically refused to be represented by their unions and opted to form alternative structures of representation called the independent workers committees.

This thesis examines these structures and the deadly contestation over representation that developed. It analyses the driving forces behind these committees, why they were formed, how they were formed and how they managed to self-organise, mobilise the mine workers, and engage directly in negotiations with management. This thesis argues, that a close examination of the workers committees is seminal to understanding the current nature of the South African working class and whether it is reasserting democratic control over trade union organisation, and whether the workers' committees represent a challenge to the corporatist arrangements that have underpinned the post-apartheid 'social contract' between labour and capital mediated through the state, since 1994.