

The Festival of Joy and Death

With the oppressed people in South Africa, we mourn the death of the 177 miners at the Kinross Gold Mine. And with them also, we condemn those responsible for their deaths i.e. the MINE OWNERS.

This disaster struck amidst the feverish preparations by the ruling class (the mine owners, in particular) for the celebration of one hundred years of the discovery of gold and the founding of Johannesburg. **THE COINCIDENCE IS HIGHLY DRAMATIC!!**

GOLD, which brought undreamt of wealth to the oppressors, is a great devourer of human beings. Since 1910, over 50 000 miners (mostly Africans) were killed in the gold mines. Hundreds of thousands more have been maimed, crippled and afflicted with fatal lung diseases. The glitter and riches of Johannesburg is drenched in the blood of the African miner.

In itself, gold is an almost useless metal, which, according to Lenin, was fit to adorn lavatories. Yet in the mad quest for gold, the African mine-worker was sacrificed at the altar of greed and profit.

For the mine owner, the industrialist, the white mine worker and the government, the 100th year of the discovery of gold is truly an occasion for great celebration. The mine owners amassed vast fortunes; the capitalists were able to purchase their machinery and equipment through the export of gold; the government received a large slice by way of taxation and the white mine worker, who has been and still is a dead loss to the mining industry received a wage far in excess to his contribution to the profit. Indeed, gold and Johannesburg was **GOOD** to them.

For the African miner who was compelled to seek work in the gold mines, initially to earn cash to pay the numerous taxes, and presently, because of starvation, the gold industry was and is a dreaded source of death, misery and untold suffering. Until recently, his wages were about **TWENTY** times less than that of the white miner.

That great contradiction in our society – between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed – is powerfully demonstrated by the attitude of the two segments towards the Johannesburg Festival. Though they live in the same country and work in the same industry the one segment regards the festival as an occasion for joy and gratitude. For the other, that same occasion is a **FESTIVAL OF DEATH**.

For the African miners the Kinross Disaster is a grim reminder to them of the real meaning of the gold mining industry in Johannesburg.