

Lonmin: Crossed the bounds of negotiation into anarchy and war

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#)

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Just imagine if I walked into my boss's office at the end of the year, armed with a machete and a shotgun, and demand that he or she triple my salary from R4 000 a month to R12 500 a month. And then get uptight and aggressive because my boss called security, marched me off the premises and refused to have anything to do with me at all until, at least, I had laid down my arms.

Somewhere I was taught that it's bad manners to negotiate with anyone when you're holding a weapon in your hand. It's even more ill-mannered to collect a hoard of your mates around you, arm them too and then ask, politely or otherwise, to be paid three times more a month than you are worth or than you earn.

Let me add that as far as I know, it's terribly bad form to actually have a spiritual sangoma give you traditional muti to prevent you from being hurt or injured if things get out of hand and you have to resort to violence.

I was taught that these three events would prejudice me in any negotiations (other than an outright battle) with my employers.

Common sense told me that it was plain, damned stupid.

But unlike striking workers at Lonmin, I was blessed with common sense.

Rival unions at loggerheads

Two rival unions, the National Union of Mineworkers and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) have been at loggerheads at mining sites around the country for months and the factionalism is thought to be part of the reason for the violent outbreaks that precipitated the police action.

Mining strikes in different parts of the country have seen extensive damage to property, deaths and violence being perpetrated on supporters of one or other union.

For me the major point remains (and it's not one that the media seem too concerned about right now either) is that you don't settle down to negotiate with mine management, other unions or anyone else for that matter when you are carrying a machete, a panga, a shotgun, spear or knobkerrie.

What caused the police to turn their weapons onto the crowd of striking workers will probably come out when the different

investigations are completed and all representatives have been allowed to have their say but initial reports seem to indicate that the police switched to live rounds when the striking workers opened fire on them.

There's bound to be a denial from the unions who are just as likely to claim that the violence was brought on by agitators rather than their own 'peace-loving members'. The same 'peace-loving members' who had been given muti to protect them?

What no one seems capable of answering right now is:

- Why were the workers armed?
- Why were the workers receiving a blessing and muti from an Eastern Cape sangoma?
- Why were the union leaders incapable of controlling their members?
- Why did the striking workers not disperse when ordered to do so by a clearly edgy police contingent who had seen two of their own members murdered the previous day?

The reality for me is that all strikes in South Africa have an element of intimidation and violence simmering underneath the surface of whatever protest action is taken. That tells me that there simply is no respect for the laws of this country.

If workers cannot get what they want they are prepared to resort to violence in retaliation. And the violence never supports their case and never softens management's attitude or the attitude of anyone else either.

Violence begets violence and when you have a premeditated arming of the striking workforce then that workforce has crossed the bounds of negotiation and entered into the territory of anarchy and war.

Worst of all, mine management has so far asserted that there is an existing wage agreement in place that was negotiated with union representatives and agreed to on behalf of their members so why should they now renegotiate an agreement that was reached during the previous round of negotiations.

An agreement exists for a fixed time. It is not an agreement that suits only one party or another. That's tyranny.

And most importantly, Marikana's management are quite correctly not prepared to speak to machetes, pangas or shotguns used to represent the workers.

Guess what, I wouldn't speak to them either.

ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.

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