

From the film, "Miners Shot Down," Uhuru Productions



Lonmin mineworkers continue the living-wage strike after the Marikana massacre.

The Marikana Massacre: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in South Africa

New Labor Forum
2016, Vol. 25(2) 62–70
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1095796016639296
nlf.sagepub.com

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Keywords

neoliberalism, capitalism, working class, labor, racism

The Lonmin-owned platinum mine, sixty-two miles northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa had been at the center of a violent pay dispute for over a year, starting in May 2011, when the company sacked nine thousand workers after what it described as “unprotected industrial action.” On August 16, 2012, a contingent of the police five hundred strong surrounded a *koppie* (hillock) outside the informal settlement of Nkaneng to quell a wildcat strike. During the preceding days, several thousand workers on the *koppie* had been involved in violent disturbances that had resulted in ten deaths (six workers who did not heed the call to strike, two policemen, and two security guards). On August 16, the striking workers, daubed with traditional medicine believed to make them invincible, were chanting and armed with *knobkieries* (short clubs with a knobbed end), *pangas* (broad, heavy knives), sticks, and iron rods. The strike was initiated mainly by the rock drillers who drive heavy pneumatic drills deep into the quartzite rock that encases the platinum. Paid \$260 a month, they were demanding \$833 per month, equivalent to what Lonmin pays rock drillers in the company’s Australian mine. The strikers pelted the police with stones and refused to disperse. The police opened fire with R5 automatic rifles and killed thirty-four miners; seventy-eight were wounded, and 259 were arrested.

the countries of Mozambique and Lesotho. The men lived in single-sex hostels. The anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s put pressure on the mining companies to replace the hostel system. To escape the costs of providing housing for the workers, companies offered miners a “living out allowance” of about \$120 a month and many accepted this opportunity to supplement their wages with the equivalent of about one third of their salary. The unintended consequence was that in the 1980s, thousands moved into informal settlements surrounding the mines without basic amenities. In contrast, housing for white mineworkers at Lonmin are in Mooi-nooi and Brits, areas that are serviced with road networks, sanitation, schools, and health facilities. In post-apartheid South Africa, the squalor of black miners’ living conditions and the disparate conditions of white mineworkers have not changed.

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Most miners visit their families once a year. Many start second families around the mines, a normal feature of the system of migrant labor.

The Miners’ Struggle

Historically, miners were mostly recruited from South Africa’s Eastern Cape, as well as from

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Hence, their salaries are split between two families and the massacre has resulted in two sets of widows, contributing to disputes between the two families for the right to compensation. Providing for two families on a low salary also results in wretched living conditions, high debts, and vulnerability to loan sharks. The migrant system is deeply entrenched in South Africa and has been a critical source of jobs for rural communities. The Eastern Cape is the main source for labor as it has no industries, high rates of poverty and illiteracy, and a single miner is on average the breadwinner for ten people. When a breadwinner is lost, schoolboys often abandon the classroom to take his place.

These conditions contributed to the strikers' view that their extreme exploitation by Lonmin is integral to the company's strategy to reduce labor costs and maximize profit. Rock drillers are expected to perform quickly and efficiently, while at the same time having to accept the lowest of wages. They also work long hours to earn production bonuses at great expense to their safety and health. Mineworkers die on the job regularly. Most of the lowest paid miners are not unionized as they are migrant seasonal workers employed for short periods during the year.

Union Rivalry

The conditions leading to the massacre of the strikers had been exacerbated by a rivalry between the two trade unions at Lonmin, with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), a new group, seeking to challenge the dominance of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The NUM is seen as having close ties to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), and the two groups were allies in the fight to end white minority rule, although relations between the ANC and the unions have worsened in recent years. NUM's membership declined from 66 percent of workers to 49 percent at Lonmin and lost its organizational rights and exclusive bargaining power allocated to the majority union. Miners accuse NUM of abandoning their grassroots concerns, focusing instead on politics. So the miners turned to an alternative union to fight in their corner. But—as

so often happens in South Africa—this dispute turned violent.

Lonmin management considered the AMCU-led strike of about three thousand workers to be illegal as procedures had not been followed by AMCU, and NUM was against the strike as well. The build-up to the massacre was marked by reports of intimidation and assault among the members of the two unions and evidence at the commission of inquiry noted that an NUM official gathered thirty union members in his office and gave them long knives and at least one gun. NUM enjoyed a cozy relationship with management and union officials were rewarded for their loyalty—shop stewards were taken out of the mine and given pay raises, cars, and cellphones—and they stopped speaking up for the people who had elected them. NUM wrongly advised rock drill operators that no negotiations with Lonmin were possible until the end of the two-year wage agreement, did not take the initiative to persuade and enable Lonmin to speak to the workers, and failed to exercise effective control over its membership in ensuring that their conduct was lawful and did not endanger the lives of others. On the contrary, NUM encouraged and assisted non-striking workers to go to the shafts under circumstances where there was a real danger that they would be killed or injured by armed strikers.

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The striking miners had chosen a hill as their gathering point and were discussing a truce with police officers. These discussions collapsed when mineworkers refused to disarm. Joseph Mathunjwa, the AMCU leader, dropped to his knees and pleaded with the strikers just before the police opened fire:

Comrades, the life of a black person in Africa is so cheap. . . . They will kill us, they will finish us and then they will

replace us and continue to pay wages that cannot change black people's lives. That would mean we were defeated and that the capitalists will win. But we have another way. We urge you—brothers, sisters, men—I am kneeling down, coming to you as nothing. Let us stop this bloodshed that the NUM allowed this employer to let flow. We do not want bloodshed!

Mathunjwa did his best before the shootings to persuade the strikers to lay down their arms and leave the *koppie*.

[T]he AMCU leader addressed the strikers: “Comrades, the life of a black person in Africa is so cheap. . . . They will kill us, . . . and then they will replace us. . . .”

By contrast, Cyril Ramaphosa, the former NUM leader, anti-apartheid hero, and current Lonmin boss, would have been in perhaps the best position to ease the mounting tensions. Yet Ramaphosa's days as a labor advocate were far behind him. By August 2012, Ramaphosa, through his company, Shanduka, was worth some \$700 million, with shares and directorships in numerous companies, including Lonmin. Ramaphosa's company owned 9 percent of Lonmin's shares, and he sat on its board as a non-executive director. Under Ramaphosa's leadership in the 1980s, NUM had become the biggest affiliate to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the powerful trade union federation that currently forms a vital part of the tripartite alliance with the ruling ANC. Instead of advocating for the strikers—as a chain of emails released to the Farlam inquiry disclosed—he argued for the police to move in. In a message to fellow directors, he wrote,

The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labor dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterized as such. . . . There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation.

British-Owned Lonmin

The relationship between NUM and Lonmin, between a major union and multinational employer, is unnaturally cordial and the fact that Ramaphosa, a Lonmin boss, was once an NUM leader could be a reason for the intimacy. It was during the boom time preceding the Marikana massacre that labor was best positioned to fight for meaningful wage increases, but for the most part NUM adopted a compliant approach to relations with management. Although the mines have said the \$833 demand would mean a 40 percent annual increase, research shows that the average increase would be around 15 percent. Had the wage increases occurred during the era of high profits, they would have constituted a fraction of the average annual distribution to shareholders. The ANC's 2012 “State Intervention in the Mining Sector” discussion document includes resource rent taxes, but has been abandoned to benefit mining executives and shareholders at Lonmin.

Lonmin is one of the world's largest primary producers of Platinum Group Metals (PGMs). These metals are essential for many industrial applications, especially catalytic converters for internal combustion engine emissions, as well as their widespread use in jewelry. South Africa hosts nearly 80 percent of global PGM resources. Lonmin was granted a New Order Mining License by the South African government for core operations, which runs to 2037 and is renewable in 2067. Lonmin earned an average of \$6 million a day in 2012. In 2007, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank's private investment arm, invested \$50 million in Lonmin; \$15 million of that was specifically earmarked to improve the lot of communities around the mine. Lonmin's then CEO, Brad Mills, said that with the support of the IFC funds, Lonmin would ensure those living near the mine were made “comfortably middleclass” and would be assured of a prosperous life long after the platinum has been depleted. None of the funds were used for community development.

The last annual report before the Marikana massacre noted that Lonmin had resources of 175 million troy ounces of PGMs and 43 million

ounces of reserves, had delivered a solid operational and financial performance for 2011, and net earnings attributable to equity shareholders grew from \$112 million to \$273 million. Of the current eight directors of Lonmin, five hold British citizenship, two are South African, and one Zimbabwean. It is significant that two decades after apartheid, Lonmin is still foreign-owned by shareholders. Questions remain unanswered around the relationship between Lonmin and the government.

Lonmin maintained that the demand for an \$833 “living wage” by the strikers was not affordable. A research paper by the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Manchester contradicts this claim, indicating that huge profits in the past decade were given to investors while workers benefited little. These enormous investor profits would have covered the pay increases sought by workers concomitant with an appropriate return to shareholders. In 1999, platinum cost \$350 an ounce. A decade later, it was \$2,710 an ounce. The South African regulatory system allowed Lonmin to capture the lion’s share of the benefits, extracting enormous resource rents, which were distributed to shareholders. Apart from mining taxes, it is not possible to ascertain Lonmin’s contribution to the ANC coffers.

On the night before the massacre, Albert Jamieson, the chief commercial officer of Lonmin, wrote to the minister of mines, Susan Shabangu, urging her to “bring the full might of the state to bear on the situation.” Notoriously, and a chilling parallel with Marikana, in April 2008, Shabangu—then deputy minister of safety and security—had addressed a meeting of police officers with advice about dealing with offenders: “You must kill the bastards if they threaten you or your community. You must not worry about the regulations. That is my responsibility.” The militarization of the police became official ANC policy and resonates with South African President Zuma’s war-song at rallies with his supporters: “*Umshini wami*” (Bring me my machine gun).

It was possible for Lonmin to close the mine to protect its workers, but it elected not to do so. It also did not respond appropriately to the threat of, and the outbreak of violence. Lonmin also failed to take sufficient measures to ensure

the safety of its employees and insisted that its employees who were not striking should come to work, despite the fact that it was not in a position to protect them from attacks by strikers. Lonmin’s record of social development of its workforce is dismal. It failed to comply with the housing obligations under the social and labor plans. The labor plans refer to the deal made when Nelson Mandela’s ANC won the country’s first non-racial, democratic elections in 1994 and stipulated that mines commit to improving the lot of their workers and the surrounding communities in exchange for maintaining the mining rights they had enjoyed under the apartheid regime.

The Role of the Police

Marikana is an emotional reminder that police brutality is still happening in post-apartheid South Africa. The police, instead of protecting the miners, have been implicated in the massacre. They circled the strikers with barbed wire without offering them an escape route, making it easier to trap the strikers and shoot to kill them. Although attempts were made by the strikers to negotiate with the police—for example, Mgcineni Noki (“the man in the green blanket” that became a symbol of the massacre and made famous by the documentary *Miners Shot Down*)—the police were not amenable to negotiations. They promised Noki that they would not shoot him, but he was one of the first miners killed.

The decision to attack the miners was not taken by the tactical commanders on the ground, but by an extraordinary session of the police National Management Forum in a venue owned by Lonmin (further implicating Lonmin, the police, and the state). The minutes of this forum, the recording, and transcript are now missing. The Farlam Commission revealed that those at the meeting ordered four thousand rounds of live ammunition and requested mortuary vans with berths for sixteen bodies for the attack on the miners the following day.

The behavior and attitude of the police toward the workers is significant. The police treated the workers like the enemy in a war zone. It is difficult to understand why the majority of police, who were black, viewed the

strikers with such high levels of antagonism. At the critical point of the first attack (Scene 1 in *Miners Shot Down*), the police very quickly decimated the strikers through devastating firepower. From that point, it was apparent that the strikers presented no real danger to the police, were fleeing, and that the weapons some of the strikers had were no match for those of the police. However, the police continued shooting and moved to the *koppie* for the second scene of the massacre.

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The audio recording from Captain Ryland's cellphone footage, the only piece of "real-time" evidence of the mood of police, supports the idea that some of the killings were carried out in a mood of amusement. In the words of the lawyers for the families of the deceased miners, "the SAPS [South African Police Service] members who killed [the mineworker] Mpumza can be heard celebrating and bragging about having killed him." Two police officers, Warrant-Officer Mamabolo and Colonel Gaffley, testified that police continued to fire after they shouted at them to cease fire when there was no sign that the strikers were shooting at them. The deployment of police armed with high-velocity R5 assault rifles, was itself a recipe for grossly excessive force to be used against any threat, real or perceived.

The police did not provide medical assistance to the strikers injured at the scene; hence, some of the miners could have survived if paramedics were present. In spite of the recommendation for a full investigation of the criminal liability of the police, the video footage identifying policemen who shot at the miners, and the testimony of senior officers like Colonel Naidoo that he killed miners with an automatic weapon, not a single policeman has been prosecuted. Instead, they were praised by Riah Phiyega, the National Police Commissioner, who immediately after Marikana commended the police: "You guys did very well; you behaved as you should."

The Economic Freedom Front versus the African National Congress

The rapid and unprecedented rise of AMCU, now the largest union in the platinum sector, has great political significance. AMCU threatens the three-decade dominance of NUM, with ramifications for the ANC. With the ANC losing support at each election, the COSATU-aligned unions play a pivotal role in mobilizing support for the ANC.

The police management wanted to prevent Julius Malema, the leader of the Economic Freedom Front, expelled member of the ANC and Zuma's arch-enemy, from intervening at Marikana. Malema intervened successfully at Impala Platinum earlier that year. The miners have great respect for Malema and he has courageously taken up the cudgels of protesters and strikers against the state. He has repeatedly called for the nationalization of mines as he seeks to tap into frustration among black voters at the slow pace of economic transformation. Complicating this politics is the fact that Malema was the leader of the ANC youth wing and vociferous in his support of Zuma.

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The recording of North West provincial commissioner Zukiswa Mbombo's meeting with Lonmin on August 14, 2012, indicates Malema is an important concern. At the meeting, Mbombo emphasized that intervention by Malema would boost his credibility and that of the cause of nationalization of the mines that he represents. This meant that the situation "has a very serious political connotation . . . which we need to find a way of defusing." Using words that came to be seen as sinister but primarily express her sense of urgency, she then said, "Hence . . . we need to act such that we kill this thing." Even bolder, the transcript shows that Mbombo stepped outside the conventional role

of a police chief, encouraging Lonmin to take a hard line against the mineworkers.

Hence, preventing Malema from addressing the miners was a key factor in the decision to open fire on the miners, a decision authorized at a politically senior level in the ANC. Ramaphosa's loyalty lies with NUM; the act of rebellion by AMCU spat in the face of the ANC, and Ramaphosa is likely to have been concerned that the strikers did not recognize NUM's authority. Also, a few months before the Marikana massacre, Ramaphosa had chaired the committee that suspended Malema from the ANC. Ramaphosa remained concerned about Malema's increasing popularity and wanted to prevent him from capitalizing on Marikana. Malema evoked enormous fear in the ANC that he might out-manuever the Party by playing the populist card and Marikana might position him as a champion of workers' rights in the platinum belt, a vital sector of the economy. Hence, the subject of how to neutralize him is likely to have been a primary preoccupation of the ANC elite at that time.

The Farlam Commission

The Marikana Commission of Inquiry (chaired by retired judge, Ian Farlam) was appointed by President Zuma eleven days after the incident to investigate the massacre. The only positive finding noted by the Farlam Commission is that AMCU's leader, Mathunjwa did his best to persuade the strikers to lay down their arms and leave the *koppie*. The version claimed by the police is that they had been under attack by a group of miners forcing them to open fire with automatic weapons in self-defense into the crowd a few meters away. The Commission ruled that the overall response of the police was completely disproportionate; the conduct of the commanders was wrongful, negligent, and contrary to the law and policies. The police decision to shoot the miners breached the McCann principle (to minimize the risk that lethal force will be used), and was unreasonable, unjustifiable, and illegal.

The Commission noted that the evidence from the provincial police chiefs was a "disgrace" for being so slight. It was a damning criticism of the lack of transparency running through the national police hierarchy. Both Phiyega and Mbombo

constructed a series of lies to be submitted to the Commission as the "truthful" version of events. Lies and obstruction characterized the police's approach to evidence disclosure at the Commission. The Commission sent a list of questions to the provincial commissioners, enquiring whether the possibility of bloodshed during the operation was adequately explored at the forum. Phiyega told the Commission that she was not able to remember and "give those pedantic details."

What Happens Now?

The strike at Marikana cannot be separated from the mass demonstrations and protests by the working class across the country. People's level of discontent has risen around the government's poor service delivery of houses, water, electricity, land, and public infrastructure, and low wages and poor working conditions at workplaces. There has been considerable repression of popular protests by the police who have not been held accountable for excesses and failures in public order policing during protests. Two of the famous cases are the death at police hands of Anna Nokele in a demonstration in 2010 and the death of Andries Tatane in a service-delivery protest in 2011.

Dennis Brutus, a political activist and poet best known for his campaign to have apartheid South Africa banned from the Olympic Games, noted at the 2001 International Anti-Racism Conference in Durban,

It is pure hypocrisy for this government to parade around as if it is the champion of the anti-racist struggle. It is hypocrisy because its very own economic policies continue to hurt black people, in the most callous fashion. And what's more, the stance of the people with whom I broke stones on Robben Island or waved placards in exile, on international forums, is just as disgraceful. They make common cause with naked imperialism and oppose policies that could free the South from global apartheid.

Brutus's insight into the nature and consequences of ANC policy are accurate. The new

government abandoned a focus on the plight of the millions of victims of racism to concentrate their attention on financial profits and the creation of a black middle class.

It is the gravest irony that the police should be reshaped as the means of oppression against the working class by the ANC government. Never since the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 had such brutal gratuitous force been used by the police against citizens. What made the Marikana massacre so depressing was that it was black capitalists who designed the police operation on black workers. The government also colluded openly with Lonmin and the police to end the strike.

Frantz Fanon's caution regarding decolonization and the struggle for a just post-liberation society is relevant to Marikana. The euphoria of freedom led South Africans to throw caution to the wind. The tripartite alliance formed by the ANC embodies a liberation movement that has sacrificed the people's struggle for personal gain and raises serious questions around the complicit role of COSATU in the killing of workers. It is this state of affairs that has contributed to the impending formation of a new trade union federation in South Africa led by former COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, the National Union of Metal Workers in South Africa that was expelled from COSATU and several allies.

The workers still live in shacks in spite of Lonmin's agreement to provide housing for the community in return for mining rights...

Ramaphosa and Lonmin represent capitalist power. The ANC has sold out the people and has not only militarized the police force but used the police to brazenly kill workers, similar to the massacres of the Afrikaner regime. In November 2015, the ANC voted against a motion by the Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF) for the adoption of a living wage. In the same debate, Ramaphosa refused to provide answers with regard to compensation to the families of Marikana, stating that the matter is under consideration. The Marikana massacre

has not enabled mineworkers to realize a living wage. The workers still live in shacks in spite of Lonmin's agreement to provide housing for the community in return for mining rights from Mandela in 1994 and funding from the World Bank for this purpose. The continued silence on reparations for the miners' families is cause for concern and enables the mining industry to abdicate its responsibility to workers. The powerful elite has neither heard nor reacted to the widows' request: "Go ask Zuma and Lonmin who will feed our children?"

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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