

Two years on, Marikana massacre continues to radicalise South African workers

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On Saturday, South African politicians flooded the media with platitudes to mark the second anniversary of the police massacre of 34 striking miners at Lonmin's Karee mine at Marikana on August 16, 2012.

In a statement reeking with hypocrisy, President Jacob Zuma noted the “need to recommit ourselves to ensuring that violence is never again used to solve problems of any kind in our country.”

This year and in 2013, Zuma and other members of the executive did not attend the rally at the koppie (hillock) in Marikana from which workers in 2012 refused to descend until Lonmin managers came to hear them out.

In another statement, North West Province Premier Supra Mahumapelo paid “respects to the women of Marikana and all areas who continue to carry the burden of raising and supporting their households without the support of their departed partners.”

Regarding the premier's absence at the commemoration, Mahumapelo's spokesman, Sam Mokaila, explained, “Had we received an invite, we would have attended it.”

In fact, the likes of Zuma and Mahumapelo were this year advised, as last year, that their presence might well have provoked an explosion of outrage from the people of Marikana, because the African National Congress (ANC) is directly responsible for the massacre.

At the rally, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema maintained his pose as a defender of the poor. He told the crowd of some 12,000 that his party would build houses for the widows of slain miners. “We are going to deliver,” he proclaimed. “We are a caring organisation.”

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) President Joseph Mathunjwa claimed at Saturday's rally, “We will fight fire with fire to protect

the rights of our members within the law.” His declaration was framed as part of a demand that Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) sell its mines to its workforce—or, less ambiguously, that it sell its mines to the union.

Amplats announced its intention to sell several mining operations following a five-month strike by 70,000 workers earlier this year. The mass action ended when AMCU settled at the end of June for increases of R1,000 (US\$94) in monthly pay in each of the first two years of the agreement, followed by a R950 per month increase in the third year. This is in contrast to the R12,500 per month basic wage that workers originally demanded. Mathunjwa said that the widows of miners would receive this amount from the AMCU—but only as a one-off payment.

Mmusi Maimane, parliamentary leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), said there had been no change in the two years since the mass killing. Without naming him, he gave Cyril Ramaphosa, Zuma's deputy and a prominent beneficiary of the ruling ANC's policy of Black Economic Empowerment, a slap on the wrist. “Politicians have shares in mines,” Maimane said, “and as such fail to hold them accountable.”

At the time of the bloodbath, Ramaphosa was a Lonmin director. He notoriously used his position as a high-ranking ANC member to send a series of emails pressuring then-Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa and then-Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu to take a hard line approach against striking miners. Characterising the miners' actions as “dastardly criminal,” he called for a “concomitant response.” In so doing, Ramaphosa was merely discharging his duty as a bourgeois nationalist defender of the imperialist interests on which his own multi-million-dollar fortune

depends.

The deputy president appeared last week before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry set up by Zuma to whitewash the mass murder. It was only then that Ramaphosa came closest to offering an apology for his nefarious role in the crime.

Under cross-examination by EFF leader Advocate Dali Mpofu, who wants him tried for murder, Ramaphosa shed crocodile tears, saying, “I deeply regret, deeply regret the deaths of all the people who died in Marikana.”

“Buffalo head!” a heckler called out. “Eighteen million rand buffalo! People are hungry in Venda! Bastard!”

The allusion was to a bid, which, according to *Farmers’ Weekly*, Ramaphosa, a game breeder, placed at an auction in April 2012 for a buffalo cow named Tanzania. Venda was a Bantustan now incorporated into Limpopo province, where the deputy president attended high school.

The heckling of Ramaphosa indicates that workers’ resolve is hardening, even as the unions manoeuvre for paltry wage increases while the ANC, DA and EFF play political games with miners’ lives.

The *Daily Maverick* reports several artistic expressions of this militancy, including that of a graffiti collective called Tokolos Stencils. The group’s message, “Remember Marikana,” is stencilled on walls and buildings around Cape Town in blood-red paint. “Beneath it,” writes the *Daily Maverick*, “a stencil of the ‘man in the green blanket’: miners’ leader Mgcineni [‘Mambush’] Noki, who was among those who died at Marikana.”

In May, Tokolos Stencils defaced a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, the colonialist founder of Rhodesia, on the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus just before a debate on whether it should be retained at its central location. In response, UCT media liaison Patricia Lewis said the university would take legal steps against Tokolos Stencils’ behaviour. She added, “Cecil John Rhodes is remembered at UCT for donating the property for our campuses. As much as he may have been a controversial figure, UCT is here because of his generosity.”

The virulently racist Rhodes dreamt of incorporating under the British Empire the entire African land mass “from Cape to Cairo.” Following a land grab in aid of

this project, he lent his name to Rhodesia, a territory that included both present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Under conditions where credit bureau Experian reported that South African businesses were hoarding R500 billion cash at the end of May, there is no new investment in productive capacity. Big capital is not encouraged by persistently weak demand and anaemic economic growth, including a 0.6 percent contraction in the first quarter of 2014.

As a result of central banks’ easy money policies for the benefit of finance capital, the next major shock to the global financial system is already in the offing. When it strikes, the bosses expect to gouge their profits from the intensified exploitation of workers through its political agents in the ANC, EFF, DA and the trade union bureaucracy.

But they do so under conditions in which more and more young people are linking the state-sponsored violence of the ANC with the broader continuum of imperialist brutality—an indication of explosive social struggles and major political shifts to come.



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