MARIKANA AND BEYOND

PREAMBLE

The date of 16 August 2012 will remain indelibly etched on South Africa’s historical consciousness; the day of the Marikana Massacre. Marikana has taken its place in South Africa’s history and will undoubtedly often be referred to in years to come.

It all started on 10 August 2012, when rock drillers at a mine owned by Lonmin (formerly Lonrho) in the Marikana area of Nkaneng near Rustenburg in South Africa initiated a wildcat strike in pursuit of a monthly pay raise from approximately R4000 to R12 500. Much has been said and published about what happened in the days leading up to the shooting six days later. Suffice here to mention that on 23 August President Jacob Zuma instituted a Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Marikana Tragedy headed by former Supreme Court of Appeals Judge, Ian Gordon Farlam. The terms of reference for the Commission, as well as its composition, have been heavily criticised as was the wave of intimidation experienced by miners who wanted to give testimony, including the killing of some NUM officials before they could testify. The commission began its work on 1 October and is expected to present its final report probably in June 2013.

In the meantime, on 18 September 2012 an agreement was reached between the miners and Lonmin following conflict mediation by Bishop Jo Seoka of the South African Council of Churches. The striking miners accepted a 22% pay raise plus a once-off payment of R2 000 and undertook to return to work on 20 September.

In support of, and in addition to the Lonmin strike, a wave of wildcat strikes spread across the South African mining sector. In early October analysts estimated that approximately 100,000 miners were involved in mostly unprotected strikes at various gold and platinum mines and companies across South Africa. In the interim, inspired by events in the mining sector, militant struggles spread to farms in the Western Cape (starting in the De Doorns area) where farm workers demanded remuneration of R150 per day, a virtual doubling of their previous wages. After strikes were suspended on 5 December to allow for discussions and negotiations, they resumed action on 9 January 2013 after the various parties failed to reach an agreement.
On 05 December 2012, at the launch of the book “Marikana, a view from the mountain and a case to answer” by Peter Alexander, Professor Adam Habib, University of Johannesburg’s vice-chancellor for research posed the fundamental question: “Basically Marikana puts the whole post-apartheid political project in question. It asks the question 18 years after 1994: who have been the true beneficiaries of South Africa’s democracy and who are its victims? We have spoken so much about transformation but has that happened?”

In 2013 we will reflect on some of the wider issues surrounding Marikana, the mining and farming sector and the state of the workers and the labour movement in South Africa in general. We start with an interview with Denis Goldberg which took place in September 2012 not long after 16 August. This is followed by an interview with Gavin Capps (courtesy Amandla! Issue No.26/27 September 2012) that gives a broader insight into the platinum mining sector. Samantha Hargreaves looks at mining from a gendered perspective and shows us how women have been and continue to be inserted in very particular ways into the mining industry’s accumulation (profit) process, but always at the absolute bottom. Lastly is an interview we had in December 2012 with Peter Alexander, co-author of the first book on Marikana, entitled “Marikana, a view from the mountain and a case to answer.” In the months immediately after the massacre Peter and his research team extensively interviewed the miners and the community around Marikana. The book gives an account of the events as they were experienced and perceived by the Lonmin workers. In the coming months we will continue with interviews and articles regarding the mining unions, the findings of the Farlam Commission and developments in the agricultural sector.

For further reading we recommend the following:

- Amandla Issue No. 26/27; September 2012; Mining: Our Wealth, our poison. www.amandla.org.za
- Rustenburg Community Report 2011; supported by the Bench Marks Foundation; 23 January 2011. www.bench-marks.org.za
How do you feel on 16 August 2012 when you heard about the massacre in Marikana in which 34 miners were brutally shot by police?

DG: I was extremely saddened. But when we talk about Marikana, we must keep two things in mind. Firstly, the strike by workers for higher wages and better living conditions is legitimate. But a situation in which workers fire on workers is a tragedy, because the unity of the workforce is its greatest strength. The murdered police officers, security forces and trade unionists are workers too; they are also poorly paid and have families who are grieving their deaths.

Secondly, the rule of policing is to use minimal force to effect safety. Here police used maximum force. It’s a terrible tragedy. In my opinion, the police panicked. Marikana is like other tragedies you witness whenever capitalism is in crisis.

How do you explain the wave of strikes that has swept over the country?

DG: The causes of the strike in Marikana and elsewhere in the mining industry go back to the history of colonialism and apartheid in the country. Apartheid was nothing more than a cheap labour system underpinned by racial segregation. Particularly in the mining sector wages for the mass of black workers were low. Under apartheid well-trained workers were predominantly white and better paid. The poorly trained workers were black and badly paid. In 1922 when white mine workers went on strike, black workers wanted to support them but this was not welcomed by white miners and they were forced back to work. We inherited a divided workforce from apartheid. In Europe, for example, with well organised labour the wage gap between lower- and higher skilled workers is narrower. Because of our racist past here in South Africa, the difference is still extreme. What worries me is the fact that we seem to have only just realised that this situation has not changed. How is it possible that the "new capitalists", many of whom are former trade unionists, freedom fighters and communists, have done nothing to raise the low wages in the mining industry? Political freedom and equality is insufficient, we also need greater social equality.

These days within South Africa the transition from 1994 is increasingly criticised. For many, the Mandela generation, to which you also belong, made too many concessions to the white apartheid regime. Do you share this criticism in retrospect?

DG: The 1994 transition to democracy was a negotiated one. At that time we could not just impose all our conditions. The old regime, especially the old bureaucracy, was still there. It was not always loyal to the new government. I experienced that myself when I was later
appointed as an adviser to the government. We could not change all social relations and we apparently even became accustomed to some of them. Marikana is evidence of these old social relations. Many of the workers are migrant labourers from as far as the Eastern Cape. They need the money they earn to send to their families. That's why they opt to receive a housing benefit as opposed to lodging at the accommodation provided by the mines so that they can then send more money home; at the same time, they build shacks on the perimeters of the mines and continue living as they did during the apartheid era. This cannot continue; we have to build an economy for all.

RLS: What do you say to those who are critical about the wage demands of the workers?

DG: When workers get higher wages, there is of course the threat of job losses when higher operational costs impact the country’s competitiveness within the international market, or when labour is replaced by mechanisation. Both would be a tragedy. We therefore need to close the deep divide between low income groups and top earners. As an investor and manager in platinum mining, how can the CEO responsible to the Chairman of a mining company, Tokyo Sexwale, a member of the ANC Executive and Minister of Human Settlements, earn a thousand times more than an ordinary worker? The same Sexwale who cried when Chris Hani, General Secretary of the Communist Party was killed 1993. How could we so easily forget our principles after rising to power? As a humanist, you have a choice - a moral choice.

RLS: What do you see as the role of government in the transformation of the economy and society in South Africa?

DG: We need more leadership in the country. We celebrate Mandela, but we do not follow his example of action to bring about change. The way in which we pay homage to Mandela is, in a way, demoralising. We idolise him as if he personally gave us freedom as a gift and are now waiting for a new “messiah”. Mandela himself has always said he was a leader among other great leaders. Everyone should now show leadership in their respective professions from the teachers to the workers’ trade unions and the president. These days we wait for someone else to make the sacrifices that are needed.

RLS: What do you concretely expect from Jacob Zuma?

DG: Zuma, as President, must lead the way. He must fight for a wage freeze for all high income earners. Throughout the economy all players should implement a wage pause for well-paid jobs. Inflation and concurrent higher wage increases for low-paid jobs would then reduce the wage gap. All ANC capitalists, all investors and mining tycoons with party membership must now say: I don’t need more for myself, I’m rich enough. It is no longer just about me, in the interest of capitalism I now need to strive for greater equality. This is idealistic, I know, but English history shows, for example, that there were some enlightened capitalists who stopped child labour. We have to start small, from socio-democratic reform towards an even greater transformation of society. The Socialist International, of which the
ANC is a member, recently held a meeting in Cape Town where I live. But within the ANC we do not talk socialism least of all social democracy. This has to change.

We have to close the gap between well-paid skilled workers and obscenely highly paid managers on the one side and the mass of low-paid workers on the other, or face increasing strikes and violence and disruption of our society. We have to make it possible for ordinary workers to have decent jobs with adequate wages and expand our economy to increase the levels of full-time employment.
THE PLATINUM INDUSTRY

Interview with Gavin Capps (GC) on Platinum; courtesy Amandla! Issue No.26/27 September 2012

AI: Is platinum the new gold for the South African economy and how has the global crisis impacted on the industry?

GC: Platinum has historically been a relatively marginal metal in the world economy. South Africa has 88 percent of the world’s known reserves but until the 1990s there was comparatively little demand for it. Since the late 1990s there has been an incredible turnaround in the global platinum market due to the use of platinum in catalytic converters for car exhaust emission systems. Increased demand resulted from good marketing by the major producers in the white metal jewellery market, in a number of manufacturing applications, and it could explode if fuel-cell electricity technology becomes viable.

From the 1990s until the financial crisis of 2008, there was a massive surge in platinum’s price. Consequently, in South Africa there was a huge expansion of the industry in the North West and Limpopo provinces. Platinum overtook gold as the biggest employer of mine labour and as mining’s biggest component, also year-on-year in sales value. It has emerged as the most dynamic element of SA’s post-apartheid minerals energy complex. In that sense, platinum has become absolutely the new ‘gold’.

What this is leading to is that the ANC, after taking some time to develop its mineral policy, set in motion a process of opening the industry to BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) players, especially the platinum sector. The key measure was the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) of 2002, which essentially nationalised all privately-held mineral rights. This gave it considerable leverage to propel black mining entrepreneurs into platinum. It is largely through this process that Tokyo Sexwale, Patrice Motsepe and Cyril Ramaphosa established themselves in the industry. With the Zuma administration’s turn towards a minerals-led industrialization strategy, platinum was recognised as central to our mining future. It is also in this context that discussions of a resources’ rent tax have emerged. Part of this strategy focuses on downstream industrialisation or beneficiation as a means of enhancing the economy. Government wishes to see more local manufacturing of catalytic converters and a technological push to develop fuel-cell technology. If it takes off in the automobile industry to the point where it replaces the internal combustion engine, it is no exaggeration to say platinum could be to SA what oil is to the Middle East. All of this points to the critical strategic importance of platinum to the state’s future economic calculations, especially since it may become central to future energy production. This is an important aspect of the backdrop to Marikana.
The second element is the platinum sector’s short-term crisis. The impact of the global economic crisis on the car market, especially in Europe where demand is very low, pushed the platinum price downwards, placing a tight profit squeeze on the industry. In this situation of over-supply, platinum producers have attempted to slow down production. Some of the smaller ones have even shut down. Others wait for prices to increase to resume their projects. This means that workers are paying for the current crisis: when mines are shut down, workers are laid off. In the depth of the financial crisis Angloplats laid off 19 800 workers. We should also understand that new foreign players have entered the industry. China has come in through a partnership with Sizwe in the North West Province, Canadian and Australian companies are also moving in. So there is a lot of jockeying for position. This creates even more pressure in an industry facing profitability and cost squeezes.

**AI:** While it is one thing to recognise the strategic importance of platinum to the economy, is it fair to say that the government is in bed with the platinum mine owners?

**GC:** This is a complex question: in some ways they are and in others they’re not. When the ANC introduced the MRPDA as a means of sourcing BEE players, there was an almighty fight with the mining houses, which were terrified of losing their monopoly rights. The tension was resolved through compromises and back-room deals that allowed producers to retain their position while letting in new players, particularly those aligned to the ANC. There are differences within the ANC on how to relate to the platinum industry. The Departments of Mineral Resources (DMR) and Economic Development (DED) have different approaches. The DED supports the State Intervention in the Mineral Sector (SIMS), which focuses on large-scale beneficiation and means that more of the manufacturing should take place in South Africa. The DMR is close to the mining houses and will do as little as possible to undermine their profitability. For example, Minister Susan Shabangu is opposed to the resources rent tax, which is supported by others at a ministerial level. It is not monolithic. Essentially, the government works its best to create spaces for junior partners and to use the industry as a catalyst for other parts of the economy.

**AI:** Why have we seen militant worker struggles in an industry that is experiencing a slow-down?

**GC:** There have been various worker struggles in the platinum field since 1994, with wild-cat strikes developing outside of the National Union of Mineworker’s (NUM’s) control. These were unprotected strikes led by workers themselves, leaving NUM to catch up. NUM has had to reassert itself as the main bargaining power between labour and capital. The current struggles haven’t come out of nowhere. To understand the present it is necessary to look back historically at worker organisation in the platinum industry. One of the biggest recognition struggles fought by NUM was at Impala’s platinum mines in 1992/3, which was important because it showed the strength of worker initiative and the tradition of rank-and-file organisation. Impala operated in the Bophuthatswana Bantustan, where any attempt to
organize mineworkers was ruthlessly crushed. Incredible state violence was used. (As an aside, this is why the North West is so well geared up to crushing strikes: it has the institutional capacity and knowledge to do so.) Worker leaders from that period explained that before the Implats strikes, which involved stoppages by 40 000 workers, they had patiently built up rank-and-file organisation clandestinely. As a result of these massive stoppages and processes of self-organisation, Implats, desperate to restore stability, signed a recognition agreement with NUM. So we should take account of this strong history of worker initiative on the mines. It is extraordinary that struggles have developed outside the NUM apparatus again, only a couple of years following this battle. The bureaucratisation of NUM on the one hand and its loss of control over the workforce on the other, are truly surprising. One reason could be miners’ incredibly harsh working conditions. It is no surprise to see a concentration of rock drill operators in the militant actions because their work conditions are simply appalling and the pay is very poor. Even though wage levels have increased incrementally since 1994, compared with the rate of the expansion of the industry and the profits being made these increases are comparatively small.

**AI:** What has happened with NUM? It seems workers have rejected NUM to strike independently and join the rival union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

**GC:** When I did field research in the industry in 2000/01 in the Bafokeng area, I was struck by the degree of alienation of ordinary workers. In a relatively short time they had started feeling that NUM no longer represented them effectively. This could be attributed to three factors:

- After NUM’s recognition struggles, the bosses employed various strategies to develop closer relations with the local union leadership. They realized that union incorporation was better with a force like NUM rather than facing autonomous worker action with which one cannot negotiate and reach compromises. For example, at Impala, the union office is right next to the manager’s office. Management fostered strategies of socializing with NUM leaders (both organisers and senior shop stewards) and this generated a feeling among workers that grievances were not being taken up.
- NUM’s structures were not built from the bottom up. NUM would often arrive after the outbreak of a struggle, organise big rallies and hand out membership forms.
- NUM’s immense role in the tripartite alliance and at NEDLAC shows that it wholly embraced corporatism and the social contract model. NUM accepts that capital, state and labour are equal stakeholders in the industry and that arrangements can be obtained around the table. However, once agreed to, these arrangements have to be enforced by all parties, including NUM. It would be wrong to say that NUM is part of the problem because of these reasons. NUM’s importance for mineworkers is undeniable and one would want NUM workers to take on these contradictions and find common cause with other unions to defend worker interests.
We have seen the formation of AMCU from disgruntled NUM members. What is AMCU’s history?

GC: AMCU was established on the coal mines in Witbank, formed by shop-stewards who would not accept a particular NUM deal. There was a very militant struggle at that colliery, including underground occupations. NUM then disciplined these workers, even though its own investigation found no members had broken union rules. Direct intervention by Gwede Mantashe, who was NUM General Secretary at the time, saw this group of members being expelled.

I don’t believe that AMCU is an opportunist operation in the way that others have been. Precisely because of the distrust between the rank and file and the leadership, workers have been relatively open to other union formations that seem like they will represent their grievances more effectively.

There have been a number of opportunistic initiatives to take advantage of the distrust between workers and the NUM leadership. One was an outfit called Workers’ Mouthpiece, whose intervention in a strike led to a number of workers being killed. It transpired that Workers’ Mouthpiece was a scam run by whites wanting to get their hands on union dues. There have been several of these opportunistic interventions. They happen frequently to exploit that gap between workers and the leadership. In general, AMCU appears to be a lot closer to workers on the ground. However, this is not sufficient to cheer AMCU from the sidelines. I understand AMCU as the expression of the extreme bureaucratisation of NUM, on the one hand, and the extreme exploitation of the workforce, on the other. It grew because of its stronger grassroots orientation and relative success. At Impala, for example, workers won a substantial pay rise after six weeks of struggle at the end of 2011, where 17,200 workers were sacked then rehired. It is necessary to spend more time on the ground to be able to understand how far AMCU is moving in and able to exploit worker grievances, and how far it is growing more organically. To put it into perspective, we should remember this is how NUM itself grew.

The problem with AMCU/NUM rivalry is that it allows management to develop divide and rule tactics. The great historic achievement of NUM was that it unified the workforce behind one union. And you could take the position that AMCU is having the effect that hard-won union recognition agreements (and they were hard won, costing many workers lives) are beginning to be ripped up. So, for example, the CCMA (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration) has come in at Impala to adjudicate NUM and AMCU’s percentages of trade union membership. If NUM’s membership falls below 51 percent, then all its existing recognition agreements will be torn up. One could argue, if you saw this in isolation that it’s an incredible step backwards, threatening important rights and gains achieved in the mining sector. And it’s certainly not in workers’ interests to be involved in turf wars over membership. So this is a serious dilemma, but one that is explained by the problems around NUM.
AMCU does reflect a new kind of militancy and, if it is giving that an organised expression, another argument could be that AMCU’s emergence is a positive development. It will be incredibly complex and difficult to work out the best way forward from here. In the abstract, we would argue for worker unity but there’s no guarantee that this will happen. What we also see in Marikana and elsewhere is worker initiatives happening outside of both NUM and AMCU. This makes things even more complex.

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WOMEN AND MINING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Report based on a background paper and an Amandla article (courtesy Amandla! Issue No.26/27 September 2012) by Samantha Hargreaves

Large-scale industrial mining is tearing through the countryside in SA and to a greater extent the rest of the region, sucking up land, natural resources and exploiting cheap labour at a scale unprecedented in any of our histories. This production model, which stands in opposition to other forms of mining that are small-scale, artisanal and traditional in nature, typically creates few benefits for local communities, indeed even the wider citizenry, oriented as it is to maximum exploitation of land, natural resources and labour in the interests of profit by transnational and national corporations.

WEAK LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In many countries, the legal and regulatory framework applying to the minerals sector is weak or non-existent as are related policies and laws associated with land rights and natural resources, the combined effect of which is that communities, and women who have less power within these communities, are left extremely vulnerable. This state of affairs may, cynically perhaps, be supported and sustained by governments of the region, who in their competition for the elixir of foreign investment, may collude with powerful corporations to limit the safeguards and protections that could undercut corporate profits. Where protective laws and policies are in place, these may be flouted by corporations, especially where the monitoring, regulatory and enforcement policies and capacity are not in place or weak, and possibly subject to corruption. The weaker the state (those in civil war, emergent from war etc.) the easier it is for corporates to override even those laws and regulations that may exist. Corporations are not self-motivated to adhere to human rights frameworks – these present them with costs (of compensating communities, of investing in community development, of cleaning up environmental damages etc.), that draw from their profits - and in the absence of strong law, monitoring, enforcement and penalties we cannot expect that corporations will do much voluntarily, unless civil society is organised, watching closely and corporations may confront problems of reputational risk.

WOMEN CARRY THE GREATEST BURDEN

In this picture, poor rural and urban women are undoubtedly the most negatively impacted – socially and economically – as their lands are taken, as forests are destroyed, as water supplies are diverted, polluted and exhausted, and as local controls over seeds and traditional forms of production are eroded by mining activities. This is because women are the primary producers and processors of food and their livelihoods and those of their dependents are therefore deeply impacted when communities are displaced from their farming lands and
when male labour is absorbed into the mines leading to greater labour burdens on women and children.

When mining occurs, poor rural women are likely to obtain the most marginal and lowest paid jobs on industrial mines\(^1\), and are displaced from the productive role they may play (albeit still exploitative) when artisanal, small scale mines are taken over by industrial interests. Research shows how women experience multiple exploitations in their role as workers on the mines – firstly, they are subject to the same working conditions (which may be exploitative in so far as working conditions and pay may be concerned) as their male compatriots; secondly, they may be subject to sexual harassment and gender based violence of male supervisors and workers; and finally, they may experience social pressure from their families and communities for their participation in ‘non-traditional’ work and for ‘displacing’ more deserving male workers.

Poor women carry the greatest burden of impact because of their weak structural position in their families, communities and society as a whole. They carry multiple oppressions – as women, as rural people or the most marginal urban residents (such as squatters), and as the poor. These all compound one another and leave women with little power and few resources to influence decision-making, resist development activities where they may undermine their interests, and compromise their ability to adapt to negative social and environmental impacts of mining.

**WOMEN’S INFLUENCE IN DECISION MAKING**

One of the significant challenges when looking at mining from a ‘gendered’ perspective is the problematic of women being able to influence decision-making about whether mining proceeds at all and if so, under what conditions, limitations and with which community benefits. Because of their specific structural location, poor women’s interests are different to their male counterparts, and most certainly very different to the interests of male (and female) elites in their communities. While a critical requirement (and international standard) for free prior and informed consent is largely absent in national legislations applying to corporate (including mining) activity in the region, even the weak and inadequate ‘consultation’ processes provided for in legislation fail to provide platforms for women’s interests and perspectives in the proposed mining process to be heard. These processes are typically hijacked by local vested interests (often with direct collusion and manipulation by the corporation) leaving women silenced and subject to the agendas of others.

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\(^1\) In SA, for example, there are now legal quotas for women in mining employment, and women are starting to enter employment at all levels in greater numbers. In other countries, such as Zambia, the law states that women may not work underground. Women have been employed in ‘traditional’ feminine roles on the mines (cleaning, reception and administration for example) and in SA, greater numbers of women in the past decades have entered the professional ranks of the industry.
Women have been and continue to be inserted in very particular ways into the mining industry’s accumulation (profit) process. As rural dwellers in SA and the frontline states, their communities have been sending labour to the industrialised mines, while they typically remain in the rural areas producing subsistence crops and reproducing the next generation of workers. When the men become ill on the mines, or retire with poor health, it is the women, as the main caregivers, that lift the burden off the state and the corporations by nursing the men back to health or to their graves.

In the communities in which mines are active, women continue to produce subsistence crops (where they are able to) thereby ‘subsidising’ the exploitative wages of the local miners. They take care of children and dependents that fall ill due to poisoned water and air pollution, as well as sexually transmitted diseases. Through their transactional relations with male miners, they reproduce (cook, clean, wash, provide sexual services) a system that generates labour at low wage rates to the mines. The long-standing and now socially-explosive character of regional immigrant labour puts additional pressures on women, for cross-national family or romantic relationships are especially difficult in an era of open xenophobia by the South African working class.

One additional and very particular gender impact of the industrialisation of rural life through mining is the trend of women, and increasingly also young women, entering into what may be termed ‘transactional’ sexual relations with male miners. These may take different forms, ranging from sexual servicing, to the performance of ‘wifely duties’, to live-in arrangements. The relationship is transactional and unequal as the one actor (the male) has some economic power, and the woman ‘gives up’ her labour, her body, her time in exchange for some economic benefit. In a context of high poverty levels and few alternatives for women (especially as mining may itself erode existing local land-based livelihoods) there is little real freedom of choice being exercised here, and this practice leaves women vulnerable to STDs, HIV/Aids and gender based violence.

Marikana

Marikana is the story of women living in the very many thousands of informal settlements and mining-affected communities across South Africa. The majority of Wonderkop women are in-migrants (settlers). They do not appear to identify with Marikana as ‘home’, a position no doubt aided by the terrible inhospitality of this place. Poverty is severe, with an estimated 67 percent of households, many headed by women, earning R1 600 per month or less. People are here for work and survival reasons only – the men to work or have a chance to labour on the mines, and the women either having followed their men, or having come there to work on the mines or to benefit from the presence of male workers, some of them alone and distant from their families. The men need goods and services, including sex and affection, which the women, in the absence of real livelihood alternatives, can and do
provide. However, not all women are there out of choice with the Bench Marks’ Foundation Report citing disturbing examples of women being ‘imported’ from Mozambique for the purpose of sex slavery. The Benchmarks report highlights the abuse of another highly invisible group – working class women who work on the mines – both at the point of recruitment, when they are expected to trade sex for jobs, and on the job, when they are subject to sexual harassment and abuse by male bosses and peers. According to the women of Wonderkop, the trading of sex for cash or other forms of support from men is common – both on the mines themselves and in the informal settlements that surround the mines. One woman from Wonderkop said: ‘People point fingers at us saying we sell sex, but what option we have? The only way we can survive is by selling our bodies.’ Some of the women spoke passionately of the need for livelihood options, specifically for support for working the land.
MARIKANA, A VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAIN AND A CASE TO ANSWER

On 05 December 2012 RLS-Programme Manager Jos Martens spoke with Professor Peter Alexander, the South African Chair in Social Change at the University of Johannesburg, who with his team did extensive research at Marikana in the months immediately after the massacre and published their findings on 6 December 2012 in a book with the above title. The book gives an account of the events as they were experienced and perceived by the Lonmin workers. The findings of the Farlam Commission are expected to be announced within a few months.

**RLS:** Who are you reaching out to with the book and what do you want to achieve?

**PA:** First and foremost we want the workers’ voices to be heard. These are the people who suffered as a result of the massacre yet they are rarely quoted in the media and during the enquiry they haven’t been listened to at all as yet. So the people who are the victims of the massacre need to be heard. These are real people who suffered real hardship and trauma. During their strike, which started before the massacre and continued thereafter, they suffered from hunger, their leadership was tortured and we needed to set the record straight. So we interviewed many of them on the mountain where they were staying before the massacre, and where they continued to meet afterwards.

Yesterday at the enquiry the workers were fighting to get copies of the book. Some workers read English and will be able to translate it for their comrades. Some will keep the book for their children no doubt. A book is a way of publically communicating a longer argument than featured in a newspaper or magazine. Opinion pieces in newspapers tend to lack the depth of a book, where it is possible for workers to explain their positions at some length. We could also offer some social scientific analysis and add some analysis and conclusions regarding the significance of the massacre.

Most people in South Africa and abroad with whom I have spoken are sympathetic to the workers, but they still do not understand why the massacre occurred, the background, why people would stay on this mountain and be prepared to die? What was their cause? These are the kind of things we explained in the book - through the eyes of the workers.

**RLS:** Why indeed were the miners prepared to die for their cause? What happened to push them that far?

**PA:** I don’t have the full answer to that question yet but if one traces the background of the struggle you gain some insight.

People feel they have been dealt with unjustly. Not only have they been paid badly but they do a job that is extremely tiring, working not just 8 but 9, 10, 12, 13 or even 15 hours a day in order to meet targets to claim wages available to them. It is also very dangerous work; their backs are scarred from rock falls. So their basic conditions of employment are appalling, as are their living conditions, their pay and so on. Rock drillers who were at the centre of the
strike, particularly felt that they should be paid more as their work is at the centre of production.

When the miners went on strike they wanted to talk directly to their employer, but the employer said they had to go through their union. When they then went to their NUM office, leaders of the NUM local branch shot at them. These leaders claimed to be acting in self-defence, but even this would indicate a massive gulf between them and their members. The workers thought that two of their number had been killed and ran away from this violence to the so-called ‘mountain’, a large koppie (hill) - it’s not very far from the NUM offices - and camped there. They ran there partly because from the elevation they could see any possible problems arising. Also there were not very many other places for them to go. It was only at that point that they began to arm themselves with traditional weapons, which they wanted in order to defend themselves. The way they explained it to us was that they wanted to defend themselves from NUM, not at that stage, from the police.

The following day they returned to the NUM offices; it was then that two security guards were killed, perhaps by some of the workers, and on the following Monday there was a conflict in which the police killed three workers or their supporters and two police were also killed. So there was a build-up of violence and I think that this also strengthened the solidarity amongst the workers. But there are other solidarities that are fairly obviously present. One of them is that many workers come from the same area; they are Pondo speakers from the Transkei. There is workplace solidarity - people doing similar kinds of jobs under similar conditions. Then there is solidarity with friends. So under these conditions it becomes quite difficult for individuals to leave their friends, their families and their comrades. The comradeship they built up during the nights on the mountain was very important to them. The singing of songs was also significant. I don’t think the issue of muti (herbal medicine) and the sangoma (traditional healer) were at all important - it’s not something the workers spoke to us about - but it is a key part of the police’s case. The police argument is that the sangoma convinced the workers that they were invincible - by supplying them appropriate muti – and persuaded them to confront the police.

So one can begin to see why they did not want to be moved from the mountain. They felt completely justified and felt that, if necessary, they would die for their cause. You see it’s a kind of combination of factors, solidarities and the immediate history.

If you look at the photographs and explanation in the book you can see how peaceful the workers were two hours before the event occurred. Joseph Mathunjwa, the president of AMCU, explained to them the danger they were in, as he was well aware that there was a massive police build-up and that management was refusing to discuss matters. The workers refused to leave the mountain, something he wanted them to do. After Mathunjwa left there was a rapid movement of armed police into the area, and the police rolled out barbed wire in front of them, so it looked as if they were being hemmed in with the possibility that they would then be slaughtered. Workers saw that they were being treated like cattle, like rats,
and they began to run northwards towards Nkaneng, the informal settlement where many of them live. They were running away.

**RLS:** You wrote that it was decided to deploy ‘maximum force’ against the workers. **Why was this decision taken and who, in your opinion, took this decision?** Do you think the police acted brutally because of having received improper training for situations such as this?

**PA:** I think the ‘who’ is very clear: it was the Chief Commissioner of Police, Riah Phiega. It seems likely that she would have checked first with her Minister (Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa) as she was new in the job and it was a very big decision. But she was also acting against the rules that he had set down only months before. He had said that even rubber bullets should not be used in public protests. A deviation from this directive must have been cleared with him.

Whether the Minister checked with Zuma or not I don’t know; I have my suspicions that he would have done so, as it would be foolhardy to take such a far-reaching decision without consulting him. Also the decision had direct implications for two other ministers – those responsible for Mineral Resources and Labour. So there is a good chance that Zuma knew something about matters in advance. The government is certainly implicated, also at other levels. We know, for example, from e-mails that will be presented to the Farlam Inquiry that there was a great deal of pressure on Susan Shabangu, the Minister of Mineral Resources, so there were high level discussions about how to handle this problem.

A major issue for the Judicial Commission is to establish whether the police were justified in this specific situation to use such force and whether they were being attacked. Their argument is that their intention was that they had to protect the public; that these were armed people on the mountain and they wanted to disperse them. But then there is a contradiction, because they also wanted to arrest people, and therein lies the problem, because you then have to box them in and shoot people when they resist, which was recognised in advance with the deployment of automatic weapons.

I have spoken to public order police and they say that if they had been handling the situation, it wouldn’t have been the same problem. What we had at Marikana were policemen accustomed to using force and machine guns for use against criminals involved in security vehicle heists. But in such situations there are generally small numbers of people. At Marikana there was a large number, roughly 3,000 and you can’t deal with that situation in the same way. If this was handled as a public order problem maybe it would have been one or two people killed. Workers would have been dispersed and later they could have been disarmed. But that’s not the approach that was adopted. The public order police were the ones trained to deal with this kind of situation, but they were kept in reserve, they were not leading the action, so this is an issue of objectives, not inadequate training. The view put forward by Ronnie Kasrils, former Minister of Intelligence, was that the manoeuvre was meant to intimidate the workers, to get back to work. The implication is that the police action
could also have damaged the morale of people involved in strikes and community protests elsewhere.

As for Lonmin’s involvement, they provided a helicopter for the police, busses and accommodation, and we know that they provided space to detain people who were arrested. They also provided a hospital for people who were injured. So, at a very practical level they were very much involved in what happened. They were obviously involved in the planning, and knew beforehand what was going to happen. What is also significant is that they refused to speak with the workers on the mountain when those workers just wanted to talk to their employer. The argument put forward by Bishop Jo Seoka, who was present in some of these discussions, is that this is what caused the massacre. Had the employer gone to their workers, there wouldn’t have been a massacre.

**RLS: Doesn’t the involvement of, for example Cyril Ramaphosa, a businessman with good government contacts, show that government was in it with capital?**

**PA:** You can’t simplify matters like that. The South African government exists in a capitalist society, it maintains capitalism and it wants to make South Africa secure for foreign investment. But that does not simply mean that it is under the thumb of big capital. Although on this occasion they were clearly in cahoots, this does not mean to say that they have exactly the same interests.

The Marikana tragedy shows that the government, the police and the trade unions are prepared to work together against independent worker action. One of the disturbing things for me is that within COSATU there has been no attempt to distance itself from the NUM-leadership in this matter. And the NUM-leadership has been hostile to its own members who were involved in the action. Ten of the people killed on the mountain were NUM-members, but NUM hasn’t yet once condemned the action of the police killing its members. COSATU has also not distinguished itself from NUM in any way.

So we have a union leadership that hasn’t set itself aside from the police or government, and clearly there are political reasons for that. The leadership of the unions feels itself to be part of an alliance with government and, more specifically, at the moment is identifying itself with the President. So politically the union is tied up, and then there are obviously links at the individual level involving people like Ramaphosa.

But I think there is something more fundamental, and that is the defence of the existing labour relations regime, institutionalised through the Labour Relations Act, which has its origin in the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924. That legislation, in some ways, provides space for unions to continue to exist, but on the basis of encouraging the development of a trade union bureaucracy. It achieves this partly through providing a ‘check off’ system for collecting union subscriptions so that unions have a guaranteed income. It is done partly through restrictions on strike action and encouragement of peaceful resolution of disputes, typically through industrial conciliation. A key feature is what is termed majoritarianism (as in majority-arianism) which means that in a particular bargaining unit the employer negotiates only with
the union representing the majority of the workers. This advantages the dominant union. Another factor, for me and a number of other social scientists, is the way the massacre reflects continuities from the apartheid days, and you see that in all sorts of different ways: the continuation of inequality, the continuation of a migrant labour system at Lonmin; and the continuation of public order policing as a method of repressing people who protest. However, most apparent is the continuation of apartheid labour relations.

RLS: Doesn’t this show the major shortcomings of SA’s trade union system with huge membership, but mired in bureaucracy and alienated from its base, the workers?

PA: People who think that the unions will cease to exist are wrong. There are three mines at Marikana, one of them is called Karee and this one was the main centre for militants from AMCU. One of the issues behind the strike is that last year, on 11 May, there was a dispute where strikers went on strike in support of a particular popular leader. He was a NUM-leader, but he was popular with the workers unlike other NUM-people, so we were told, because he reported back on all his discussions, which, they said, made him unpopular with the NUM-leadership. He was sacked by Lonmin with the tacit support of the union, according to some workers we interviewed. When the workers went on strike, the union allegedly advised management to sack all of them, which they duly did. Later most were reinstated. Understandably this led to a situation in which they would not want to join NUM, they wanted to resign from NUM. They subsequently did so but it took some 6 months before they established AMCU as their new union. NUM challenges parts of this account, but that’s not what matters here. The point is that, as one of the workers explained, the intermediate period, between NUM and AMCU, was one of the worst times. Having no union at all was even worse than having NUM as a union, because now the management was free to do anything they wanted to do to the workers.

So, one has to grasp the contradictory nature of unions even a union such as NUM. In many ways they are corrupt, more so in the case of NUM. We know this from research conducted by COSATU. Also the leadership at local and national levels benefit from the role they play in the negotiations. But that doesn’t mean to say there aren’t pressures from below, from their members, to try and fight for higher wages, which can – from time to time – push them into conflict with the employers. So it’s not a straightforward business where they are simply an extension of the owners. Similarly we know with COSATU and the government that sometimes there are conflicts. These are limited conflicts and one can be disappointed with the outcome of those conflicts, and we can say, rightly, that the COSATU leadership is not revolutionary, but we cannot pretend that they do not come into conflict with government from time to time.

RLS: But are all these wild cat strikes not a sign that workers have lost their trust in the established unions?

PA: We know that workers have lost confidence in NUM because membership has been haemorrhaging. Many people have been joining AMCU. I hear that at Angloplats most
workers have signed up with AMCU. A similar thing happened at Lonmin and Implats, and to some extent at gold mines as well. We don’t know the numbers yet, but I wouldn’t be surprised if AMCU emerges with 100,000 members, maybe 150,000. But that could still leave NUM with well over 200,000. So NUM is not going to disappear. It’s still seen as a representative body in parts of mining. Elsewhere in the unions there are no signs yet of massive haemorrhaging of members. So there is a variation between the unions; it’s not a simple issue. For example, NUMSA representing metalworkers seems to have a lot of loyalty amongst its members. At Angloplats some of the workers at the mines where trying to join NUMSA which organises in the refinery. Of course NUMSA is not the appropriate union as it is not a mineworkers’ union, but nevertheless it seems to have some solid support in the refinery, partly because some are former, disillusioned, NUM members. So we shouldn’t write off the established unions.

There is of course another problem with the COSATU affiliated unions, which is that they see themselves as part of an alliance with the ANC government.

One similarity with Zimbabwe is that in 1996 you saw a big wave of strikes driven mainly from below, and in 1997, in response, trade union leaderships began leading strike action themselves. I think something similar is still going to happen in South Africa. It is necessary for the unions in the mining sector and elsewhere, and for its leadership, to be seen to deliver on behalf of the workers. So they are going to push wage demands, threaten to strike and maybe on some occasions strike.

RLS: COSATU is also trying to put itself at the fore with the farm workers strike in the Western Cape.

PA: Yes, exactly. We see some contradictions existing there. It’s the same militancy but the outcome is that the farm workers join unions; maybe for the first time, possibly existing unions. In part this is because of the pressure to go through unions in order to negotiate.

In response to the question of what is likely to happen in the future, nationalisation is one of the key demands that arose during the strikes. So, that’s popular among the mine workers. How does one take that forward? I don’t think it can be progressed simply on the basis of union negotiations. Unions can’t negotiate for nationalisation; they have to become involved in political action. The unions that are in favour of nationalisation have to win a wider base of support.

So disengaging from politics is, in my view, the wrong response in the present situation. People who think you can have solutions to problems that are simply based on struggle and not on political mobilisation, are wrong. Workers have lost trust in established unions, they organise wildcat strikes based on their own solidarity as we have seen, but they also join unions as we have seen in the platinum industry with AMCU, because they see the value of a union for negotiations.
RLS: Until AMCU maybe also develops problems like an overbearing bureaucracy...

PA: Possibly; that may begin to happen. It may appear cyclical but it also moves forward. AMCU is inclined to adopt similar forms of organisation to NUM. Senior shop stewards are taken off the job and they are paid as if they are personnel officers of the employers. They get paid as much as three times as when they were workers; they exist in offices and they have a lot of freedom to attend meetings; and so on. As far as I know, AMCU does not want to break with that tradition, so there is a likelihood of bureaucratisation within AMCU, as there has been in NUM. It is possible, partially because of the lessons of Marikana, that AMCU at least initially, will encourage democratic participation, thereby limiting the possibilities for corruption. But I agree that there is likely to be continuity at that level.

Where there will be a discontinuity is in politics. NUM is wrapped up with government through the alliance and because many of its leadership are members of the SACP, but that doesn’t exist for AMCU. They see themselves as apolitical. So, while NUM has two pressures on it from above, one from the government and one from the employers, AMCU has just one, from the employer. So this creates a different situation.

RLS: A difficult question: Is it possible to draw a clear line between genuine support for the mineworkers (and these days the farmworkers) and self-interest? Where does genuine support for the mineworkers stop and self-interest start? Think of opportunists like the former ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, but also of the unions and maybe even parts of civic society?

PA: Let me first disagree with attacking Malema as an opportunist. I don’t think the Left should be joining in, echoing such attacks. It is exactly what the Democratic Alliance and the ANC-leadership does. You are using the same terminology. It’s not very helpful, simply describing him as an opportunist and ridiculing him. It’s important to understand why there is such widespread sentiment, why there is opposition to capitalism as it exists in South Africa. His position is to argue for nationalisation, his argument is about economic liberation, including improving the lot of the poor. Now you can say there are elements of corruption in the way he operates. If you want you can say there are elements of opportunism in him organising support for the workers. But nevertheless he does organise support for the workers. The DA isn’t doing this, the ANC leadership isn’t doing this and the COSATU leadership hasn’t done this around Marikana. As a consequence there is support for him... to some degree. You should not focus on opportunism. Zuma, Zille and to some extent Vavi, to mention a few, are also opportunists for that matter. Focusing on opportunism leads us into a dead alley as it doesn’t say anything about the dynamics involved. Look at it from the workers’ perspective. The workers are not simply ciphers who are manipulated. We held an interesting discussion with a worker about Malema. We asked him, would Malema be supporting you if he were still leader of the ANC Youth League? Answer: No. Question: So don’t you think he is an opportunist? Answer: Yes. Question: So why do you support him, why do you let him use you? Answer: Because we are using him as well. A mutual relationship can very well exist between workers and Malema which, on the one hand, is
sceptical about him, but on the other hand recognises his abilities to mobilise. A very large, well-attended meeting was held on the 18th - the massacre was on the 16th – and its size can partly be attributed to his attendance as a speaker; and he spoke, to be honest, superbly. I can’t think of any socialist who would have spoken better. He was not holding anything back, he really attacked the government, he attacked the media, and he sympathised with the workers completely. And he bolstered worker confidence at a very difficult moment in their struggle. He spoke elsewhere too and similarly drew large crowds where workers, because of the size of the meetings, gained some confidence.

I wouldn’t trust Malema at all, but I recognise that he is mobilising an important constituency (although often for his own reasons), which socialists need to be aware of. For instance, around the issue of economic liberation he organised a march to the stock exchange in Johannesburg and then went on to Pretoria. It was a very large march: ten, twenty thousand people. It was very disciplined. He has an organisation and it was mostly young and working class. We should look at such issues and not just superficially follow what the media say.

RLS: How could all these protests, including services delivery protests, unite in a common struggle?

PA: Workers are not central to the struggles in the townships and informal settlements. They do involve workers to some degree, in particular municipal workers, but often in a very limited, basic form of solidarity, e.g. by not clearing the barricades away quickly. From COSATU’s research we know now that there are numerous workers involved in service delivery protests. It makes sense. When a labour strike is successful workers have more money to spend on family members, or to buy small items in the townships where they live that benefit wider groups of people in the township communities. When youth engage in community protests and they are successful then improvements in terms of electricity provision, more housing, improved roads and so on are of benefit to workers as well. So, although there is a separation in the kind of space of struggle, there are, nevertheless, commonalities in terms of class interests and workers seem to acknowledge this in practice.

But, community protests occur by and large separately from each other and separate from workers’ struggles.

RLS: The Marikana story depicts it once again: South Africa experiences high levels of violence: by the police, by the state, by workers amongst themselves (think, for example, of violence against women in the mines), the structural violence of working and living conditions which are no better than 50 years ago, the firing of 12,000 strikers, etc. Could we see this as a SA-specific culture of violence or, to paraphrase Rosa Luxemburg, are we witnessing barbarism in the absence of socialism?

PA: Violence exists in all capitalist societies, so in a sense it is part of the culture of capitalism. But there is more violence in South Africa than in other countries, that is, violence in terms of poverty, crime and police action. So there is something else that has to be
explained. Some of it derives from apartheid, but some emanates from the failure to deal with the problems of apartheid. In particular, inequalities are at a higher level now than under apartheid; unemployment is higher than it was under apartheid, so you have immediate problems that people have to resolve in their livelihoods that result in some people turning to crime. But even then we must realise that only a minority of people engage in crime, not the majority. So, in order to understand the problem we have to turn it around. Rather than asking why people engage in crime we should ask why they do not engage in crime. There are all sorts of social pressures on people to not engage in criminal activity. There are all types of cultural reasons for non-violence as well as cultural reasons for the existence of violence.

As for Marikana: workers started carrying weapons to protect themselves. Without them workers fall prey to the power of the capitalist state and of violence such as from NUM. In Marikana, I haven’t yet come across workers who thought they had done the wrong thing. Thirty four people were killed in the massacre itself, others died before that. But in the end the workers were victorious. Had they not put up a fight they would still be suffering the same wretched conditions (although awful conditions persist). There was also a knock-on effect for workers in other industries.

RLS: What will the future bring? With unions jumping onto the bandwagon, will workers be getting higher wages and better working conditions?

PA: It’s a tough time. What I have suggested at the end of the book is that we will see localised repression combined with successful resistance. I can’t see how an ANC government that will remain in power for some time would engage in general repression of the working class. This would necessarily produce a backlash from the main organisations of the working class, COSATU and so on. COSATU could stand on the side lines in the case of Marikana for specific reasons, but it can’t stand aside if workers or organisations are more broadly broken by physical force. Its response could be weak and unsatisfactory, but in the medium-term it’s unlikely that the government will try to destroy the trade unions. Weaken them certainly, but not destroy them. The base of the ANC-government depends on mass mobilisation by unions. At the same time the government’s hegemonic position has rapidly withered. The level of ideas is not what it was. People are becoming increasingly dissatisfied. Even within the ANC they are no longer convinced by the arguments of the leadership. Corruption has undermined the credibility of the leadership. There is no indication of Zuma having any clear direction (or for that matter Motlanthe) that is any different from what currently exists.

So the problem is that the confrontations are likely to continue and at the same time, the disillusionment which exists now is going to become more widespread. We have a difficult time ahead in the sense that there are going to be many instances of repression with tightening of control by the state.
EPILOGUE

At the launch of the book “Marikana, a view from the mountain and a case to answer”, Peter Alexander read out the final page as a sign of hope for the future; it shows the courage of common people to stand up against all odds.

A final word: The Marikana Massacre was ghastly. In other settings, events of this kind have led to the defeat of a movement, or at least its abeyance. But that is not what happened here. On the contrary, the strike got stronger. Workers faced trauma, the tribulations of burying their dead in far-away places, threatened sackings, lack of money for food, and attacks from unions and politicians. But, by 7 September the company was reporting that attendance at work was down to two per cent, and after that it gave up providing statistics. There was an undeclared state of emergency and a community leader was killed, but still the workers fought on, until, on 18 September, they agreed to a settlement that secured them victory. Had the strike collapsed people across the country fighting poverty and injustice would have been cowed. The opposite happened and, from the perspective of the state and the bosses, the killings were an appalling miscalculation, an enormous setback. Somehow, despite 34 colleagues being killed and with many more injured or detained, workers found the strength to pull themselves together and determine that the strike would continue. This was one of the most remarkable acts of courage in labour history, anywhere and at any time.