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## **Solidarity with Mine Workers at Marikana Platinum**

Abahlali baseMjondolo Press statement (<http://abahlali.org/node/9032>)

Abahlali baseMjondolo are deeply shocked by the murderous cruelty of the South African police, and those that give the police their orders, at the Marikana Platinum Mine in the North West. The killing of more than 40 mine workers yesterday by the SAPS is immoral and brings great disgrace on our country. There were other ways and much better ways to handle the situation. Yesterday will always be remembered as a dark day in the long history of oppression in South Africa. We wish to express our solidarity to all the families of the workers that have been killed and injured. We share your sorrow. You are not alone. We carry our pain together. Your children may not grow knowing their fathers but they will not grow alone. We have to care for each other and stand together as we struggle for a world that puts human beings first and treats all human beings equally. We wish to express our solidarity to all struggling workers. We face the same system that makes some people rich and others poor. We face the same government that refuses to recognise our humanity, which tries to force us to the margins of society and which represses us when we resist.

The ANC have shown no regard for the people of this country. They are putting us in transit camps and trying to keep us in bantustans. They are leaving us to burn in our shacks every winter. They are beating us in the police stations. They are shooting us in the streets. Millions of us cannot find work. A government that kills its citizens is immoral and must be opposed by everyone. A government that kills its citizens has lost all moral right to govern. What happened yesterday is no different from the killings of the apartheid government. This is no different to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 which claimed 69 lives. It is no different to the Boipotong massacre in 1992 which claimed 45 lives.

Millions of people have suffered in their shacks and millions have suffered with work and without work year after year. Some shack dwellers are also workers and sometimes shack dwellers are too poor to be workers. But we have all suffered enough at the hands of the police, at the hands of politicians and at the hands of the rich. It has always been our call that real freedom and democracy are still a dream for the poor and the working class. All we see is politicians enriching themselves by stealing public funds that are meant to better people's lives. All we see is that the new government keeps on with many of the worst policies of the old government. All we see is that our struggles are criminalised and repressed. The progressive middle classes are struggling to defend the freedom and democracy that they received in 1994. We are still struggling for freedom and democracy to come.

More than twenty five people have been killed by the police during protests since 2000. Tebogo Mkhonza in Harrismith, Monica Ngcobo in Umlazi and Andries Tatane in Ficksburg are just three of the people that have been murdered in the streets by the police. Activists have been tortured and assassinated. Our movement, like the Landless People's Movement and the Unemployed People's Movement, has been attacked in the night by armed men representing the ruling party. For months after our movement was attacked in the Kennedy Road settlement in Durban in 2009 the homes of our leading members were openly destroyed every weekend while the police refused to intervene. Last year Nigel Gumede, the Head of Housing in eThekweni, publicly said that the ANC was at war with our movement and threatened to kill S'bu Zikode. Senior people in the ANC have set a clear tone for the rest to follow. Poor people have been encouraged to attack and kill each other in the name of ethnicity and nationality. It is time to say enough. It is time to say no more. It is high time that all progressive forces join hands to curb this carnage. It is high time that all progressive forces join hands in a struggle for real justice and real democracy.

We have to recognise that there is a war against the poor in this country. We did not want this war but it has come to us. Today no one can deny that a war is being fought against the poor. The red ants and the police are not here to serve the people. They are here to drive the poor out of the cities, contain us in the human dumping grounds and repress our struggles. We have to stop pretending that the politicians are our comrades when they have chosen to make themselves our enemies. We have to fight the war that has come to us. And we have to fight it in a way that puts human dignity and the equality of all people at the start of our struggle and at the heart of our struggle.

We are aware of the dangers of the South African politic when struggling citizens demand real freedom and democracy. Activists are living under serious threats all over the country. We are aware of the time bomb that the shack dwellers in this country are sitting on. We have always warned, from the time when we first started to organise, that the anger of the poor can go in many directions. The dangers that we face can come from how people respond to oppression as well as from oppression itself.

There is more protest in South Africa than in anywhere in the world. But the government takes no notice of the people. It responds by militarising the police. It responds by talking about third forces. The local party structures send out armed men in the night. The government wants to make the anger of the people criminal and treasonous. It works behind the scenes to support the armed men that invade our homes and threaten us and our families. We have to accept that this government does not care about us. We do not count to it. When we ask to be heard we are treated as criminals and traitors.

Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape will march to the National parliament in Cape Town at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon together with comrades from other organisations. In Durban we will hold conversations with different structures of our movement and our comrades in other organisations, as well as the churches, to plan a way forward. Global Peace and Justice Auckland in New Zealand will be marching to the South African embassy in Auckland at 1 Kimberly Road at 2pm today. Our comrades in Cape Town and New Zealand march with our solidarity.

We all have to stand together. A war has come to us and we must fight it in a way that makes sure that we never turn into our enemies. We must fight this war in a way that puts humanity against brutality and never in a way that puts one brutality against another. Once your struggle starts to make you like your enemies everything is lost. A politic of war has come to us. We have no choice but to resist. But we must resist with our own politic which is a militant people's politic that starts and ends by honouring the dignity of all people.

## **Marikana Massacre Memorial Service**

Bishop Rubin Phillip, 24th August 2012, Emmanuel Cathedral.

And so, again, the truth of our country is in dead black bodies littering the ground. Once again, the truth of our time is that people asserting their rights and dignity against systemic injustice have been brought down in a hail of bullets. Has nothing changed in our place, when its truth remains that the armed might of the state acts for the elite of powerful and wealthy, and against our people? No self-righteous declarations of 'tragedy'; no insisting on 'complexity'; no obfuscatory 'commissions of enquiry'; are enough to hide that truth. The truth is plain to masses of the people of South Africa, it is an affront to God.

We are very angry indeed. We have been instructed that this is not the time to point fingers, but that would be a grave and sinful mistake friends. We have reached this new low, 18 years into our democracy, precisely because of all those who have closed their eyes to the truth that has been there all along; because of all those too timid to point fingers and expose evil; because of all those who have not and will not stand, with God, on the side of the struggles of the least of our brothers and sisters.

The coverage of the massacre that we saw on our TV screens was traumatic and shocking but, in too many ways, it has also been a long time coming. The sheer number of dead as well as the clinical execution of the police' task team surely marks a terrible escalation, but the underlying violence is nothing new to the many poor and oppressed across the country who have often faced the contemptuous indifference of our politicians and the iron fist of our police when they organise to protest the injustices that still scar our society. That scandalously small number of us from more privileged classes who have stood with the people in their actions, and have visited them in prison after their marches, and have learned the truth of our situation in their discussions - we have also known and warned it would come to this. So far, all our collective warnings seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Perhaps Marikana will open more eyes and ears before things get even worse.

And things do seem to be getting worse! In the name of 'economic growth', post-apartheid South Africa is being steered to secure benefits for a few while inequality reaches new and unprecedented levels. In the name of the defense of a 'democratic order', post-apartheid policing has been re-militarised in ways not seen since height of apartheid's repressive war against people's power. The truth that is emerging from independent research and eye-witness accounts strongly suggests that Marikana was no 'tragedy', no unfortunate aberration. In the wake of Marikana, too many people have rightly called for reconciliation and harmony but why at the expense of decisive solidarity on the side of the people?; too many too easily plead for 'better trained' police when what is necessary is to end the monopoly of state-violence that the rich and powerful can deploy against the masses of the people.

**In the name of God, will all good people join me in this small declaration today?**

**To the powerful in the state, in business, and in the armed forces, we declare:**

- **the police will no longer shoot, hurt, silence or intimidate our brothers and sisters when they struggle for justice;**
- **we no longer accept an economy that creates obscene wealth for a few on the backs of exploited and abused workers.**

**To the poor and the workers we declare:**

- **do not stop struggling for justice, we are with you;**
- **carry on defending the fundamental humanity and dignity of every single human being.**

Bishop Rubin Phillip,  
Anglican Bishop of Natal (Kwa Zulu Natal),  
24th August 2012.

## **The Marikana Mine Worker's Massacre – a Massive Escalation in the War on the Poor**

Ayanda Kota, Unemployed Peoples Movement (<http://abahlali.org/node/9035>)

It's now two days after the brutal, heartless and merciless cold blood bath of 45 Marikana mine workers by the South African Police Services. This was a massacre!

South Africa is the most unequal country in the world. The amount of poverty is excessive. In every township there are shacks with no sanitation and electricity. Unemployment is hovering around 40%. Economic inequality is matched with political inequality. Everywhere activists are facing serious repression from the police and from local party structures. Mining has been central to the history of repression in South Africa. Mining made Sandton to be Sandton and the Bantustans of the Eastern Cape to be the desolate places that they still are. Mining in South Africa also made the elites in England rich by exploiting workers in South Africa. You cannot understand why the rural Eastern Cape is poor without understanding why Sandton and the City of London are rich. Mining has been in the news in South Africa recently. Malema, a corrupt and authoritarian demagogue who represents a faction of the BEE elite, has been demanding nationalisation. Progressive forces inside and outside of the alliance oppose Malema because he represents the most predatory faction of the elite and is looking for a massive bail out for his friends who own unprofitable mines. What we stand for is the socialisation, under workers' control, of the mines. We also stand for reparations for the hundred years of exploitation.

Things are starting to change but not for the better. Khulubuse Zuma, the president's nephew and Zondwa Mandela, the former president's grandchild, and many others with close family ties to politicians have become mining tycoons overnight. China has joined the bandwagon as well, plundering our resources.

Frans Baleni, the General of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) earns R105 000 a month. NUM has become a route into high office in government and even to places on the boards of the mining companies. The union is rapidly losing all credibility on the mines. It is clear that it is now co-opted into the system and is part of the structures of control. It is the police that take NUM to address the workers. Baleni's betrayal of the workers has made him a very rich man – a rich man who condemns and tries to suppress the struggles of the poor. It is no surprise that workers are rejecting NUM, trying to build an alternative union or acting on their own without any union representing them. The workers are right to chase the NUM leaders away from their strikes.

The Marikana Mine is the richest platinum mine in the world and yet its workers live in shacks. Most of the slain workers are rock drillers, the most difficult and dangerous work in the mine. They do the most dangerous work in the mine and yet they earn only R4 000 a month. Through the blood and sweat in the mines they do not only produce wealth that is alienated from them, they also produce the fat cats, which wine and dine on naked bodies and call that sushi.

The workers who occupied the hill came from many places including Swaziland and Mozambique. But most of them came from the rural Eastern Cape, from the former Bantustans where people live their lives as a living death under the chiefs, without work, without land and without hope. Every Rand that they win back from the capitalists is another Rand coming to the poorest part of the country. The part of the country that has been most devastated by the mines over the last century. We celebrate every Rand that the workers have taken back from the capitalists and fully support their demand of a salary of R12 500 a month. Will Baleni or Nzimande or Zuma accept R4 000 a month? If not why should anyone else?

The strikers see the NUM leaders as traitors. They delinked from the NUM because they saw that they needed to delink from the alliance of capitalists and tendepreners that run the ANC. The decision to delink was very courageous! We will have to delink in every sector if we are going to build a real movement for change. Workers under the tripartite alliance are being sundered from socialism; they are only being encouraged to vote for the ruling party. Nothing is being done to fuse social consciousness in their struggle. They are encouraged to participate in sensational politics, the politics of who should lead and who should be removed. They are encouraged to see communities and workers that organise independently as their enemies.

It is easy to decide not to decide. It is much harder to make a decision pregnant with risk and promise. For miners to delink from the likes of Baleni and tripartite alliance was a courageous decision. They understand that courage is an important element of all struggles. They understand that there is no quick fix in the struggle for a just society, a society that will respect and uphold the rights of workers and nature, a society that will be ruled on the principle of each according to his needs. This society is based on each according to his political connections with the elite that has captured the ANC and its alliance partners. If the strikers were protesting under the banner of the tripartite alliance they wouldn't have been slaughtered. COSATU strikes have often been violent but their members are not shot like animals. In fact the campaigns to support Zuma in his rape and corruption trials were full of threats of violence and yet Zuma supporters were not gunned down.

Before the miners occupied the hill they made a vow that no bullet will deter them. They were willing to fight and die to get a fair share of the wealth of this mine for themselves and their families. What this demonstrates is that these were people who were aware of the risks that their decisions entailed, who thought about such risks carefully, guided by their conscience and concluded that they were willing to face the consequences that could arise. Hellen Keller's words ring true "There is no such thing as a complete security, and if there was what fun would life be. Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success". She adds "To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate and adversity is strength undefeatable."

The immense courage of the miners that gathered on Nkaneng hill was tremendous. They were prepared to take a real stand. They were prepared to face real risks. We do not see this courage amongst the left. In fact most of the left has abandoned real struggle in real communities for meetings and conferences and emails. The left has become something that NGOs run. It is about bussing poor black people into meetings that they have no control over and that are very far removed from the realities of our real struggles. It is about educating the poor and not about fighting with the poor. When real struggles happen in places like the shack settlements of Zakheleni, eTwatwa or Kennedy Road most of the left is not there. But when there is a big conference they are all there.

The ANC government has killed workers for demanding a salary increment from a notoriously exploitative and very, very rich company. The workers earn only R4000 per month doing the most dangerous work. The ANC president and cabinet ministers earn not less that R2 million per year. And on top of that there is corruption everywhere. Our politicians are part of the global elite. The lowest ANC deployee earns not less than R20 000 excluding benefits. The Marikana mine workers lived in shacks with their families. The president of the ANC has recently built a mansion in his homestead, a mansion that cost tax payers not less than R200 million. It is the ANC government that shoots and kills protesters when they are fighting for the assertion of their humanity. They recently killed Andries Tatane. They have killed at least 25 others on protests since 2000. If you are poor and black your life counts for nothing to the ANC.

What lesson can be learnt from the Marikana mine workers' massacre? The ruthlessness of this government does not diminish but on contrary increases with the number of workers and unemployed who starve. They are criminalising our struggles and militarising their police. It is clear that anyone who organises outside of the ANC, in communities or in the workplace, will face serious and violent repression from the party and the police. The NUM and the SACP have made it very clear which side that they are on. By supporting the massacre and calling for further repression against the workers they have made it quite clear that they are on the side of the ruthless alliance between capital and the politicians. They have declared, very clearly, that they support the war on the poor. Their reactions to the massacre are a total disgrace. No credible left formation in South Africa or anywhere in the world can work with the NUM or SACP again. The decision of the miners at Marikana to delink from the corrupt and ruthless politics of the alliance has been vindicated.

Things will not get better but will get worse. When the elite's power is threatened they will respond with more and more violence. War has been declared on the poor and on anyone organising outside of the control of the ANC. We are our own liberators. We must organise and continue to build outside the ANC. We must face the realities of the situation that we confront clearly and courageously. Many more of us will be jailed and killed in the years to come. What they have done can never be forgotten nor forgiven.

### **African lives cheap as ever**

Sowetan Editorial

<http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/columnists/2012/08/17/african-lives-cheap-as-ever>

WERE South Africa the normal country that our Constitution envisages - where the right to life is paramount - a calamity of the proportions of Marikana would have led to drastic measures being taken by the government. Failure to do so would lead to the resignation of the government. But this is an abnormal country in which all the fancy laws are enacted and the Constitution is hailed as the best on earth. All the right noises are made and yet the value of human life, especially that of the African, continues to be meaningless.

That's what Marikana means. It has raised this unmitigated crudeness as if to awaken us to the reality of the time bomb that has stopped ticking - it has exploded! Indeed, the life of an African is expendable. We are trying to expose the full extent of the tragedy - with the hope that it will arouse enough outrage to stop such mayhem - by publishing an image of this nature on the front page, but we wonder whether there isn't a numbness that comes with the death of an African.

It has happened in other parts of the world where wars reduced human beings to nothing more than physical particles. It has happened in this country before where the apartheid regime treated black people like objects. It is continuing in a different guise now. Africans are pitted against each other over who is the rightful representative of workers. They are also fighting for a bigger slice of the mineral wealth of their own country. In the end the war claims the very poor African – again. The economic problems do require a war. But, a different kind of war - a war of ideas. Not a war that dispenses with human life in as cheaply a manner as we have seen in Marikana.

It also calls into question the capacity of those who run the country. Something drastic must be done - lest we see a snowball effect of this massacre.

## Senzeni Na?

Chris Rodrigues, 20 August 2012. (<http://www.rollingstone.co.za/opinion/item/1351-senzeni-na>)

By the time you read these words, the miners of Marikana will have long crossed the river Styx. Contemplate dear reader: These men with dirt in their pockets, their ears ringing with the noise of exploding lead, the holes through their bodies. Imagine some nocturnal body of water. And a boat, with such passengers, steered by a ferryman with a sure stroke. In this version, Charon, as the Greeks knew him, doesn't require silver coins. And even if he did, he wouldn't ask anything of these rock-drill operators who, long before they were mown down, had already begun sacrificing limbs and lungs.

Perhaps this river guide, as he places a blanket over their shoulders, quotes passages from Bertolt Brecht:

"You who will emerge from the flood/ In which we have gone under/ Remember/ When you speak of our failings/ The dark time too/ Which you have escaped".

"And yet we know: Hatred, even of meanness/ Contorts the features./ Anger, even against injustice/ Makes the voice hoarse. Oh, we/ Who wanted to prepare the ground for friendliness/ Could not ourselves be friendly".

These men are aware that they trouble so many more people now than when living with asbestos and bilharzia – they were faceless and unregarded. They are informed that the same company that point-blank refused to meet them has since offered - via one its shareholders – to pay for their funerals. When they were alive they knew that a sweetheart union had sent them up shit creek and at this moment in time - travelling down another wretched river - they couldn't care less about future promises.

In this expanse these illiterate subterranean figures are, in the phraseology of Abahlali baseMjondolo, "professors of their own suffering". They can draft PhD's on the political economy of death. They can riff better than any broker about the price of platinum. They can wax like lawyers about police statements. But what still embitters them is their understanding that they would have to be reincarnated many times over to earn what the CEO of Lonmin did in one single year. Comparing their salary of R48 000 per annum with Ian Farmer's (2011) earnings of R20, 358, 620 amounts to an, approximately, 424 years discrepancy. Taking a recent estimate of average male life expectancy in South Africa (49.81) and deducting just 18 childhood years from that would mean even if they worked every day of their adult life - they would have to do so over 13 unlucky lifetimes! Such is the normalisation of this capitalist metaphysics that the rival union has been universally rebuked for wanting to reduce it to a ratio of 1 year: 4.26 life spans. No wonder these strikers then entrusted the magic realism of a sangoma, for nothing today needs to be more urgently remedied than "reality".

In the old myth, Charon takes our souls to the kingdom of Hades where we appear before three tribunes who decide whether we are worthy of entry into the Elysian Fields – an altogether middle-class sounding quietus. Instead, picture a black-sooted boatman accompanying these men to a hill on which is gathered – from across time - hundreds of thousands of spectres just like them - an infernal rabble. They are mostly young because the poor die first. Amongst them are French peasants and Haitian slaves. There are Russians with pitchforks and Spaniards with rifles. There are Naxalites and whole generations of South Africans. Yes, some with knobkerries, machetes and spears!

They are all reciting Brecht's words in the hope that they reach the ears of the living:

"But you, when the time comes at last/ And man is a helper to man/ Think of us/ With forbearance".

## Umshini Wam

Chris McMichael, August 21 2012. (<http://www.mahala.co.za/reality/umshini-wam/>)

RSA 2012

“There’ll be civil war, said Johnny. Civil fucking war, that’s what there’ll be. I said, What you think we got now? Not a fucking picture is it?” - *GB84*, David Peace’s harrowing novel of the 1984-1985 UK Miners’ Strike depicts how the Thatcher government threw the weight of the security state (millions of pounds spent on riot police, intimidation and illegal surveillance) against the National Union of Coal Miners. But as violent as the Iron Lady’s year long campaign against organised labour was, this pales in comparison with the massacre of Marikana on Thursday. In one week the Lonmin strike went from an (admittedly violent) industrial dispute to one of the worst recorded mass killings in South African history with at least 34 miners dead and scores injured. 34.... In the next few days, weeks, months there will be much discussion about the ‘complexities’ of the situation and on whom or what to apportion blame, but it can’t change the brute fact of that number. In ostensibly peacetime, ostensibly democratic South Africa, the state attempted to ‘disperse’ a volatile gathering by killing 34 of its citizens. This is a figure which wouldn’t be out of place in Syria, a number that would make the old apartheid ministers smile nostalgically.

Any self-respecting modern war pays attention to PR and psychological operations, and the government has already embarked on a massive campaign of rationalisation, dissemination and perception management, which to a large degree has simply been echoed by the media. As Jon Soske [points out](#) there has been a great deal of earnest handwringing about ‘complexity’ (inter-union conflicts, rumors of outside agitators), attempts to pathologise the miners (evidence of magic rituals, discussions about the apparently violent culture of rock drillers) and efforts to explain the police actions as the result of either fear or bad training.

All these combine to de-politicise the events, to treat “the miners strike and police repression” as if they were “natural disasters” or “vengeful acts of some incomprehensible god” and to evade simple facts: “the police were there to break a strike; the miners refused to disperse and appear to have tried to defend themselves when attacked; the police killed them with government approval”.

The state’s efforts to turn the shooting into a legitimate case of self-defense has been aided by the circumstances surrounding the strike. Because 10 people had already been killed by Thursday afternoon, including two policeman and two security guards, it has been relatively easy to present the officers as being outnumbered by hordes of deranged miners. And because the police were allegedly fired upon first (the comprehensive evidence of which has yet to be presented), the current narrative holds that they had no choice but to defend themselves in extreme circumstances. Under this moral calculus, the state is apparently synonymous with public safety and even the threat of violence against its security apparatus renders lives forfeit. But despite mawkish sentiment about our ‘men and women in blue’, the police at the site were not simply ordinary officers faced by a malign army waving traditional weapons. Instead they were made up of elite units, including the paramilitary Tactical Response Teams from various precincts around the country and immediately recognisable by their distinctive berets. What the police may have lacked in numbers was certainly made up for in the arsenal at their disposal: armoured personal carriers, horses, helicopters (which according to [one report](#) may have sprayed offensive chemical agents), body armour, water cannons, barbed wire barricades, rubber bullets, teargas, R5 Rifles. And there is little indication that police management were interested in finding a resolution to the strike that did not involve a violent clampdown.

Before the shootings, national police spokesperson Dennis Adriaio claimed that Thursday was “unfortunately D-Day” and that the strike would be broken up by force, while Police Commissioner Phiyega has been candid in acknowledging that officers were allowed to use “maximum force” in “self-defense”. Ominously, on Wednesday it appeared that the police had declared the area as a [“security zone”](#). It is unclear exactly what the official definition of this zone is, but it appears to bear a distinct resemblance to the declaration of “unrest areas” during apartheid era States of Emergency, which gave the police and military carte blanche to restore ‘order’.

As terrible, as unnecessary as the police response to the strike has been, the ferocity of the state’s actions is not completely unexpected. The armed units and equipment marshaled at Marikana were at the cutting edge of the SAPS experiments with re-militarisation: hyper masculine war-talk, new SWAT-type units, “shoot to kill”, “chest out stomach in”. This high-intensity policing has amounted to [a war on the poor](#), from increasingly brutal evictions to the killing of protesters. Moreover, the sheer ruthlessness of the shootings seems to be the logical conclusion of the authoritarian drift of the Zuma years. From the increased power of state intelligence to the SANDF dusting off counter-insurgency tactics from the 1980’s as a guide to handling community protests in the present, it’s clear that there is little the current ANC will not do to ensure its grip on power. Rather than an aberration, this massacre was merely a borderline waiting to be crossed. High intensity policing for a low-intensity democracy.

However, focusing exclusively on the state-centered dimensions of what happened ignores which interests the bullets of the police were defending: Lonmin Plc itself. A company so venal, that in response to the massacre it issued [a self-congratulatory press release](#) noting all of its good works in the community. A company so callous that it issues ultimatums demanding that drill operators return to work regardless of what just happened and implies that as the strike was “illegal”, the dead had it coming. A company much like other mining operations throughout the country, and the continent, which extract vast profits from the dangerous jobs of [their wage slaves](#), which wreck environments and communities, which sponsor cheap ‘upliftment’ projects to salve executive consciences, which cower behind the shield of the state [when things explode](#). And this is further buffered by the expediency of corporatist unions like the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), who in a bid to score points over their AMCU rivals, issued a vague statement of regret and hopes that “the perpetrators will be brought to book”. As a responsible member of the mining world, NUM has a tough task having to negotiate between token sentiments for the dead and protecting its shares and investments in various mining houses. And after the mayhem of Thursday now comes the push for a return to normalcy: commissions will reconcile and exonerate, further disorder will be stopped, investor confidence will be restored. But what is more normal, more quintessentially South African than the tooled up security state racking up a body count for the mineral-energy complex? The 1922 Rand Revolt: aerial bombing and artillery shells in the East Rand. The 1946 miners’ strike: workers forced back into the pits at gunpoint. The general brutality of the compound system created by the colonial and apartheid authorities. 2012: embedded journalists watch the SAPS war party at work in Marikana. The government is now calling for a national week of mourning and memorial services to “promote a violence free society”. Flags at half-mast will join the ritualistic legal spectacle of inquiries and the attempts by political and business leaders to find evidence of a ‘third force’ and other malignant powers. As if a system where men risk their lives in stygian darkness for resources they can never hope to afford is not violent by nature. Where blood and bones in Marikana are the price for jewelry and record turnovers in Johannesburg, London and Beijing. As if a country in which the ostentation of the middle class and the rich is overlaid on the more consistent reality of millions freezing, sweating and starving in townships, informal settlements and transit camps. There is no mystery that building a paradise for some on the back of purgatory and hell for others is always on the verge of atrocity, and that it brutalizes and cheapens the lives of both its victims and its managers. And as the events of the last week have shown, it is no mystery that assassination and terror are sometimes needed to maintain this fine state of affairs.

## Marikana and the New Politics of Grief

Jon Soske (<http://historymatters.co.za/marikana-and-the-new-politics-of-grief-by-jon-soske/>)

In July 1981, 1,700 workers at the Penge asbestos mine in the Northwestern Transvaal struck after a bitter, two year struggle for recognition by the Black Allied Mine and Construction Workers Union. After four days, the mine owners fired all of the workers, who then responded by occupying the living compounds attached to the mine. The company brought in scabs and petitioned the South African supreme court to evict the mineworkers: since the strike was technically illegal, the company claimed that the workers had quit their jobs, and therefore had no right to remain in its quarters. Predictably, the Pretoria court ruled in the mine owner's favor; the company offered to reemploy 1,000 of the striking workers at reduced wages. The strikers refused. Given the absence of ventilation and other basic safety measures, most of the workers faced a slow and excruciating death from silicosis if they returned to work. One trade unionist later explained: "We don't envisage a situation where we would choose to die in order to earn very little. We'd rather starve than sell our lives."

I thought of this 31-year-old statement when reading Joseph Mathunjwa's description of begging the Lomnin mineworkers to abandon their occupation a few days before 34 miners were killed by police gunfire. "I pleaded with them," the *Mail & Guardian* quotes, "I said leave this place, they're going to kill you." Government press conferences, mining executives, and newspaper articles have now spent several days wringing hands over the "senseless" and "regrettable" and "preventable" loss of life, counseling that we should await the cataloguing of facts before rushing to judgment. Witness the new politics of grief. In the aftermath of state violence, it has become routine for those in power to greet such events with somber invocation of "tragedy" and sympathy for the families of the dead—rather than, of course, solidarity with the assassinated. Counterfeit mourning serves to deflect the demands for justice and accountability, as if a miners strike and police repression were natural disasters or vengeful acts of some incomprehensible god. It attempts to rob these deaths of any political meaning.

Take, for example, the admission by national Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega that she authorized the police to "execute the task they needed to do." Needed? Explaining that this is a time for "mourning" not "blaming," she insisted that the police *had* to use force to protect themselves. Since the police were present to break the strike by disarming the workers and ending the occupation, it was necessary to defend themselves in the process of breaking the strike. And since all this is treated as a given, she can describe the heavily armed cops who boxed in the workers and bombarded them with tear gas as "adjacent" to the miners and fearful of attack, potential victims in a sequence of events that somehow spiraled out of control. Nothing else merits discussion. Connections between leading ANC figures and the mining house? Conspiracy theory. The hostility of the ANC-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to strikers who had rejected their leadership? Irrelevant. The miners' demands? Illegal and unrealistic in any case. The only relevant fact is that the police were in danger. Events then followed their inevitable, but all-too-tragic, course.

This self-absolving rhetoric is buttressed by the resurrection of apartheid-era stereotypes in much of the press. Consider the article by Greg Marnovioch entitled "Beyond the chaos at Marikana: The search for the real issues" in the *Daily Maverick*. (I have picked out Marnovioch's piece precisely because he has produced some of the most valuable and informative coverage sympathetic to the miners). Following a discussion which emphasizes the rural backgrounds and bellicose character of the strikers (rather than, say, the business practices of the company), the article uncritically quotes a NUM official who alleges that uneducated strikers from the Eastern Cape and Lesotho have been

manipulated by “scam artists” posing as unionists and peddling the fantastic promise of 12,500.00 a month salary. So much for the real issues. Exactly why this salary should be unrealizable is left unexplained—although it does, by chance, happen to approximate the median income of a white South African. Other media sources have been even more gratuitous in splashing about the decontextualized images of the tribal innocent: pangas and blankets, sangomas carrying out rituals with naked men, bullet-proof medicine. Scarcely a word about the significance of these symbols to the miners, or the long history of marshal culture on the mines, or the meaning of the occupation site. Apparently, Jim hasn’t even made it to Jo’burg.

The other theme that reporters have lifted from the Nat’s press kit is “complexity.” It’s all too familiar: the obsession with rival organizations, the swirling rumors of factional warfare (more “black-on-black violence”!), unattributed suggestions that outside political forces had a hand in events. Why has report after report suggested that a union rivalry—and not the workers’ clearly articulated demands—was the underlying cause of the strike and the police violence? It’s almost as if some people have forgotten that the fight against apartheid was characterized by multiple, competing tendencies. Or the ways that the apartheid press used internecine political violence in an attempt to delegitimize the liberation struggle. Or the insinuations that black South Africans were being misled by agitators who ultimately did not have the “natives” best interest at heart. Perhaps the anodyne and self-serving history promoted by the ANC has led some people to forget that every political struggle of importance is “complex,” multifaceted, and replete with errors, divisions, and truly unnecessary casualties. Remember that old liberal game of waiting for the pristine and unsullied movement, the true cause with a monopoly on virtue, the perfect leader accompanied by angles belting out arias from the rafters?

The way in which one views a situation is a *political choice*, and in the case of the Lomnin miners, the issue is not terribly ambiguous. Do a group of workers who do some of the most dangerous labour in the country have a right to demand the wages of a middle-class, white South African from the international mining companies (and their BEE skills) that still have enormous control over the country’s economy? The answer of the ANC government is a resounding no. The failure of COSATU to show solidarity with the struggles of fellow workers shouts a resounding no. The silence by former union leaders and Communists now turned ministers and parvenu waterboys for global capital screams a resounding no. And every prefab expression of regret over these deaths by someone in power, every promise by COSATU that they could have kept these workers in check like a good little corporatist union does, every last goddamn liberal evocation of untrained police who thought they were in danger (because, of course, they had encircled and were attempting to remove the miners), and every lazy media “revelation” about the situation’s many and imponderable nuances only serves to obfuscate what happened. The police were there to break a strike; the miners refused to disperse and appear to have tried to defend themselves when attacked; the police killed them with government approval.

I have no doubt that a thorough and responsible commission of inquiry will find substantive evidence to show that mistakes were made on all sides, that a “climate of violence” had developed on the mines, that the government should have intervened sooner, that the unions failed to something-or-other, that the companies could have been more humane [or insert other abstract and gaseous quality], that the workers shared responsibility for their own mass murder, that blah-blah-blah. A showpiece exercise will find a way to distribute the blame, bemoaning what each and every party *failed* to do, and maybe scapegoating some conveniently marginal figure to take the symbolic fall in a sorry piece of overwritten daytime television. Maybe the commission will even quote Alan Paton and Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela and the constitution and sententiously intone that this “tragedy” affected all South Africans. Unlike mining wealth, grief and guilt can be nationalized.

## The truth behind the Marikana massacre

21 Aug 2012 (<http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=29404>)

The world was shocked by TV images last week of striking South African miners being mowed down by police gunfire. But the truth behind the massacre is even more shocking. The slaughter was not a tragic error of judgement. It was deliberate. The state forces were not protecting themselves from armed workers. They were executing a premeditated plan. And the striking miners were not charging at the police when they were shot down. They had already been surrounded and were running away from police firing behind them. This is the picture that emerges from eyewitness testimony and examinations of the site by a team of Johannesburg-based researchers.

One of the strike leaders said, “We were being shot at as if we were criminals. But we never stole from anyone. All we wanted was our right to a better life and better working conditions.” Another strike leader describes a meeting with police before the massacre took place. “In our discussions they said they were sent by the government and had been given full rights to kill.” Peter Alexander and the rest of the research team have written exclusively for Socialist Worker. The evidence they present has not yet appeared in the mainstream media. Peter said the team’s investigation shows “that strikers were surrounded by heavily armed police and soldiers, and were killed while fleeing from gunfire”...

Strikers were surrounded by heavily armed police and soldiers, and killed while fleeing from gunfire. The state forces were not “protecting themselves”. They participated in well-organised, premeditated slaughter. We interviewed surviving miners and looked at physical evidence on the site of the massacre. What we found is even more shocking than the story presented in the media, even here in South Africa.

**1:** On the day of the killing about 3,000 striking miners were gathered on and just below the “mountain” (actually a small hill). Joseph Mathunjwa, president of their union, the AMCU, came and pleaded with them to leave to avoid a police attack. The miners refused.

**2:** Within 15 minutes of Mathunjwa leaving, the police and army laid razor wire, separating the strikers from the Enkanini informal settlement, where many of them live. Casspirs (armoured cars), horses and water cannon moved up to encircle the workers.

**3:** Some workers walked down to the razor wire to see if they could still get out through a gap. Witnesses say police near the “small koppie” (hillock) opened fire on them, probably with rubber bullets.

Some workers fled through a five metre gap in the razor wire. They were met with a barrage of live fire from the police and many died. Images of this shooting were broadcast around the world.

**4:** Terrified strikers scattered in all directions, with a large number heading for cover by a koppie about 300 metres in the opposite direction from the wire. This “killing koppie” is where the largest number of strikers died.

No cameras recorded this slaughter. But evidence remained on Monday, four days after the massacre. There are remnants of pools of blood. Police markers show where corpses were removed. We found markers labelled with letters up to ‘J’.

**5-8:** Other strikers were killed as they fled across the fields. Some examples are marked on the map. Shots were fired from helicopters and some workers, heading for hillock, were crushed by Casspirs. By Monday the whole area had been swept clean of rubber bullets, bullet casings and tear-gas canisters. We also saw patches of burned grass, which local workers claim are the remains of police fires used to obscure evidence of deaths.

## Facing Reality

Richard Pithouse, 27 August 2012.

<http://www.sacsis.org.za/site/article/1404>

The African National Congress has been captured by a predatory elite that is cynical, corrupt, ruthless and reckless. It is actively reinscribing unbridgeable inequalities into the deep structures of our society. The transit camps and new townships in the cities, the enduring ways in which the former Bantustans remain separate and unequal zones in the countryside, the state of public education and the growth of unemployment and precarious work all mark out this out with undeniable clarity. Workers live in shacks while their bosses gather unimaginable wealth. There is an abundance of land for game farms and golf courses but from Johannesburg to Cape Town the state sends out its men with guns to illegally and violently dispossess people that seize just enough land, often wasteland, to erect a one room shack.

Attempts to find some ground for basic survival in an inhuman society are treated as criminal and consequent to sinister conspiracies. The ANC is violently intolerant of independent thought and organisation amongst the grassroots constituency in whose name it assumes a natural and permanent right to speak and act. It arrests, beats and tortures its grassroots critics. It fabricates criminal cases against them, drives them out of their homes and openly threatens to kill them.

Neither the fact that there are and have been many governments far worse than the ANC nor the reality that progress, sometimes profound progress, has been made in many areas since the end of apartheid are sufficient to redeem the party. After all it itself has, in its better moments, invited us to judge it on the basis of the Freedom Charter, the Constitution and, most of all, the aspirations of our people for dignified lives. The increasing frequency of the suggestion that distance from apartheid rather than proximity to some positive aspiration is the proper metric with which to take the measure of our progress is simply another mark of defeat.

Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema, both evidently corrupt and authoritarian men, present us with deeply masculinised, and at times even militarised, images of a mode of personal power that seeks to ground itself in the symbolic economy of violence rather than democratic organisation and debate and to legitimate and express itself outside of both liberal democratic institutions and popular democratic practices. Of course its true that the ANC retains the supports of progressives, liberals and technocrats of various sorts. But while there are prospects for progress in some areas, like health care, the reality is that in most instances bringing these people into various projects within the party is a mode of legitimation and containment rather than sincere engagement.

Different people will, on the basis of both their principles and experiences, call the precise moment at which the ANC became indefensible differently. But now that the very public massacre in Marikana has followed the very public murder of Andries Tatane - and now that the grotesque authoritarianism within the police, the union movement and the Communist Party has been openly laid out in our public sphere - only the wilfully naïve and the cynical can sustain their professions of faith in the democratic aspirations of the ANC.

Neither the fact that some among the striking miners had killed nor the fact that as a group they had prepared themselves for battle justifies their slaughter. The strikers were certainly not killed to defend the sanctity of life or to contain political engagement in liberal democratic institutions. The ANC, from Zuma to the trade unions, routinely acts outside of those institutions. And when people have been killed in xenophobic attacks, or in the midst of COSATU strikes, the state does not respond with mass slaughter. A trade union federation aligned to the ANC can destroy property,

intimidate people and beat people up in public without a violent response from the state. Yet a poor people's movement that organises independently of the ANC and engages in protest action that results in no harm to any person, makes no threats of harm against any person and does no damage to property is quite likely to be subject to serious police violence. This reality is at the heart of the matter. The ANC's support is fracturing amongst both organised workers and communities and its response is typically characterised by recourse to conspiracy theory and then slander and violence rather than self-reflection and dialogue.

There is no doubt that this massacre marks a historic turning point. But while it is essential that we take full and collective measure of the ANC's failures it is equally essential that we do not take the easy option of only ascribing the distance between our faltering aspirations for a democratic and just society and the altogether more bleak and brutal realities of South African life to the ANC.

Party politics is a farce in which different factions of the elite pretend to represent the people as a whole. There is no party that seriously speaks to, let alone for, the aspirations of the majority. And civil society also has a lot to account for. The arrogance that undergirds its habitual conflation of NGO power with popular power and the routine and often racialised paternalism with which it frequently engages or presumes to speak for poor people is predicated on a simple contempt for the equal humanity of people who are poor. Its widespread reliance on technocratic and legal solutions to deeply political problems has proven to be both culpably naïve and complicit with the professionalisation of certain modes of political engagement that has entrenched the expulsion of ordinary people from our public sphere.

The media, with its systemic disregard for the equal humanity of poor people, also shares some of the responsibility for bringing us to this point. The academy, in which the elitism and personal ambition that undergirds much of the attraction to the constituted power of international institutions, the state, donors and NGOs rather than attempts to develop solidarity with the oppressed, and especially solidarity that can contribute to the constitution of nodes of popular and democratic counter-power, is also culpable. Religious leaders have often preferred to share the stage with politicians rather than to be present amidst the day to day suffering and struggles of their congregations.

The left has often been far more committed to building a base on the NGO and donor terrain than to building solidarity with actually existing popular struggles. When it has engaged popular struggles it has often done so in a manner that is profoundly patronising and, in some cases, more about legitimating its own donor backed projects rather than building real solidarity. It has also failed to mark a clear distance from the real authoritarianism and, in some cases outright thuggery, that it has long sheltered and sometimes even celebrated.

Business, which has been corrupt at the highest levels and which is often ruthlessly predatory, is deeply implicated in the morass into which we have descended. Middle class South Africa likes to think of itself as virtuous, hard-working and untainted by the excesses and corruption of the really powerful people in our society. But when the fear of the poor and contempt for the poor that often swirls just beneath the surface is masked that mask is seldom firmly fixed.

This massacre is no tragedy. It is an outrage that will leave a permanent stain on our society. It is also an outrage that was perpetrated by an increasingly predatory and repressive regime. But while it is essential to face up to the reality of what the ANC has become it is equally essential to acknowledge that the ANC is not solely responsible for the situation in which we find ourselves. It is time for a collective facing up to the broader realities of our society and a collective rethinking of a way forward.

## **Marikana Massacre: DO NOT BLAME THE VICTIMS**

By Ronnie Kasrils

First it was our new National Police Commissioner who told the nation in the wake of the Marikana shooting: “This is not the time to point fingers.” Our President reiterated the call, word for word, soon thereafter: “This is not the time to point fingers.” He announced, as is the case in such events, that an independent judicial enquiry would be appointed to investigate the causes of the disaster. Minister in the Presidency, presiding over an inter-ministerial committee despatched to the scene of carnage, with messages of sympathy and funeral funds, repeated the refrain “we must not point fingers.” It seems that the National Police Commissioner has set the politician’s agenda.

Actually we have heard much from numerous quarters about a militant, break-away union, said to have instigated the climate of anarchy. Perhaps they bear some element of responsibility but is that not finger pointing?

We have heard much about the illegality of the strike and the panga-wielding strikers who it is alleged brought the disaster on themselves; a clear-cut case of blaming the victims. Victims mark you who are amongst the most exploited of our workforce and who labour under the most dangerous and dreadful conditions – truly the wretched of the earth. It is said that some carried firearms and in fact pistols were discovered amongst the dead. Does that not also constitute finger pointing?

The government does not silence such voices. In fact the President hints that there is much that lies behind this incident. Sounds like the stuff of plots and conspiracy. Of course much lies behind the catastrophe which the judicial enquiry must examine. Chiefly the exploitative mine owners and the horrendous conditions under which our country allows the mineworkers to toil. Add to the mix the trade union rivalry, elements of demagoguery, threats, intimidation, murders and reprisals; the games of the mine management, disputes about pay and conditions, empty promises, divide and rule, victimisation and dismissals.

Whatever manner of exacerbating cause and effect that may be discerned in the toxic mix there is no escaping where the finger needs to point in the first instance. And that is right at the point of the trigger-fingers that slaughtered 34 human beings and brutally wounded nearly eighty more.

Let us not do what the forces of apartheid automatically did in the past and hide the truth about state violence. Let us not create a fog of war around this massacre and declare that fingers must not be pointed. Because in effect what that implies is that we shall not point to where responsibility lies in the first place.

We shall not point to those who fired the weapons; to those who gave the orders; to those who have encouraged the police to maintain a bellicose culture of “shoot to kill”; to those who failed to train them in acceptable methods of crowd control; to those who decided that the time for reckoning with striking mine workers had arrived. They will be exonerated.

Do not point fingers so that the heads of those politicians on high who bear executive authority shall not roll. Put our faith in a judicial commission and let the dust settle. Nice and sober talk.

But in a democracy which has sworn to make such state massacres a thing of the past we need to call a spade a spade and cry out in the name of humanity and justice. An order was given to deploy almost 500 police armed with automatic weapons, reinforced by armoured vehicles, horsemen and helicopters and to advance on a desolate hill occupied by 3,000 striking miners.

That denotes an order from on high with a determination to carry out a dangerous and dubious operation to clear an isolated, stony outcrop of desperate strikers. They were hardly occupying some strategic point, some vital highway, a key city square. They were not holding hostages. They were not even occupying mining property or ground. Why risk such a manoeuvre other than to drive the strikers back to work at all costs on behalf of the bosses who were desperate to resume profit-making operations?

Note how with the blood still warm on the veld and the dead unburied the Lonmin management have callously threatened with instant dismissal those who do not return to work forthwith. If by occupying that hill the strikers constituted a threat to other workers, officials or rival unionists then a feasible solution could only be through reasonable, patient negotiations and remedies no matter the time-line - not a deployment of state force that could only end in the dreadful manner witnessed. Indisputably the mine owners and managers are guilty as we are all guilty for allowing this extreme exploitation of our working people to persist into the eighteenth year of freedom. But if by default we fail to hold our police system accountable for its brutality we run massive risks to the lives of our people and detrimental to our very security and democratic freedoms. A judicial enquiry must run its course sooner than later and hopefully provide the truths we desperately need.

Yet a national crisis like this requires frank comment as one sees it. There well might be other factors besides the smoking gun. That is required.

However let us as citizens act fearlessly where the killers have been seen in the light of day. We will have our say.

Above all our history reverberates with the words: Do not blame the victims! And we have seen it all before from Sharpeville to Bisho. If you fail to point to the cause of the gunfire the fingers will be pointed at the victims as they lie dead in the fields or the streets. And the shootings will continue.

The Marikana Massacre is undoubtedly a turning point in our history. If we fail to act decisively we do so at our peril. If as a young democracy we are to emerge stronger and better we need the truth and we need to spare nobody's position or reputation. Above all we need a new deal for our mineworkers and we need a system based on economic justice for the poor of our land.

## 'Autopsies show miners were fleeing'

Baldwin Ndaba, 27 August 2012.

<http://www.iol.co.za/business/business-news/autopsies-show-miners-were-fleeing>

Post-mortem reports on miners shot by police at Marikana show that most of the men were hit from behind – an indication that they were shot while fleeing. According to sources close to the investigation, national police commissioner General Riah Phiyega and her senior police officers in the SAPS were misled about events that led up to the Lonmin mine shooting at Marikana in North West.

A day after the massacre, Phiyega told the nation that she stood by the police and had issued an order to use live ammunition against the striking workers at the mine on August 16 because she had been told that the police had come under attack. At least 34 people died and at least 86 were injured.

Insiders in the investigations into the shooting said post-mortem reports did not favour the police version of events - that they opened fired after being fired upon. Instead, “the post-mortem reports indicate that most of the people were fleeing from the police when they got killed.

“A lot of them were shot in the back and the bullets exited through their chests.

“Only a few people were found to be shot from the front,” said one of several sources, who cannot be named as they are not allowed to speak to the media.

Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) spokesman Moses Dlamini would neither confirm nor deny the contents of the post-mortem reports. He said they would hold a briefing in Rustenburg on Monday.

Meanwhile, the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) led by the Minister in the Presidency Collins Chabane has confirmed that all the post mortems were complete. IMC spokesman Harold Maloka said the post-mortems were conducted by state pathologists and verified by independent private pathologists.

The Star has also established that striking workers in police custody since August 16 have opened more than 150 cases of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm against the police. The IPID is investigating these.

Sources said the miners gave graphic details of assaults while in custody. The men are in Phokeng, Mogwase near Sun City, Bethanie in Brits and Jericho police cells. Insiders told of jailed miners being booked out of their police cells and taken to rooms in the stations. There they were allegedly subjected to torture and questioning about the circumstances which led to the deaths of two police officers who were hacked to death.

“These police officers who killed people in Marikana are desperate to find the killers of the police officers. They are so desperate that they do everything to justify the killing of 34 people.

“They even go to the hospital and arrest every patient linked to the Marikana massacre for questioning.

“The discharged patients would then be arrested and taken in for questioning.

“In most cases, some of these miners would be severely assaulted by the police wanting them to implicate themselves in the murders of the two officers,” another source said.

## **Liberation betrayed by bloodshed**

Njabulo S Ndebele, 26 August 2012.

Ndebele is the author of *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, and *Fine Lines From the Box*

*The tragedy at Marikana reflects the loss of the vision of liberation and the onset of repression by default, argues Njabulo S Ndebele*

On the evening of Thursday, August 16, in Johannesburg, I returned to my hotel for a well-deserved rest.

I would turn on the TV, watch the news and then settle back to enjoy yet another episode of Isidingo.

But the evening I imagined was not to be. As the TV flickered to life, a newsreader introduced a breaking news item, and I knew immediately what was being replayed before me.

Police officers opened fire, and dust rose as people in the line of fire collapsed.

I will never forget the rapid cacophony of firing weapons sounding like popping corn, but decidedly deadlier.

As the running commentary confirmed my initial impression of an escalating labour dispute that had been in the public eye for some time, I felt tears welling up in my eyes and I prepared to weep.

Had it come to this?

But my tears stopped short, even though I had not prevented them.

They simply stopped at the point where they would have exited to blind my eyes.

The brief intensity of firing was ended by the bark of a commanding officer: "Cease fire! Cease fire! Cease fire!"

When the smoke cleared, inert bodies on the ground emerged into view.

I had just seen shooting, killing, and death, as had millions of other South Africans.

But my mind was surprisingly clear and calm as it recorded my feelings.

I was not stunned. Neither was I outraged, nor angry, nor pained.

What did I feel?

What had got my tears going, yet also held them back?

Some 20 hours later, as I began to speak at the last segment of the Ruth First memorial colloquium at Wits, sharing the platform with Jacklyn Cock and Eusebius McKaiser, I still had no answer.

In the coming days, there would be several camera angles from which to piece together, from different news channels, some tentative narrative of an event the newspapers had begun to call "a massacre".

One channel's camera angle showed less smoke at the shooting.

The picture of a crowd of men charging at the police was clear.

It may have been the same footage as the one I first saw, they may just have been showing an earlier segment of it.

The sight of men collapsing in a cloud of dust as bullets tore into them was clearer.

At the end of the shooting, one wounded man in a red garment struggled to rise, accentuating the dead around him.

It did seem like a massacre, but it wasn't.

Those killed had been armed, charging assailants.

From yet another angle, the police were seen stepping backwards as they discharged their weapons, even while some of their colleagues were ahead of them, out of the line of fire.

It seemed a dangerous moment of indiscretion.

They could have tripped and shot their own.

One more camera angle showed crowds of men fleeing in panic with police vehicles in pursuit.

They looked like a stampede of gazelles with lions in pursuit.

What could have been in their minds?

It dawned on me that no camera angle presented a view of the entire event or even just parts of it from the perspective of the striking miners.

Many days later, it is clearer how I felt on the evening of the shootings: sad.

But it was sadness without pain, outrage, anger or even horror.

It expressed the clarity of a detached mind, free of judgement, scanning for insight.

On the afternoon of Friday, August 17, the radio announced that national police commissioner Riah Mangwashi Phiyega accepted responsibility for the previous day's shooting.

I confess to having felt relief at this announcement.

I even felt a tinge of admiration.

A definitive leadership statement had been made.

Whether I agreed with it or not did not matter.

More important was a clear statement of responsibility for a complex and difficult situation by a senior leader of the ANC.

Later, I sought to ascertain exactly what the commissioner had said: "As commissioner, I gave the police responsibility to execute the task they needed to do."

The statement was less definitive than what the radio had reported.

Indeed, the headline "I gave the order" in quotes by news.iafrica.com now seemed inaccurate. for

The commissioner's statement was more guarded, stopping short of admitting an actual order.

I was a little disappointed. I yearned for conviction and clarity of leadership.

What was at stake here?

Consider the commissioner's words, as reported in the Mail & Guardian two days after the shooting: "Safety of the public is not negotiable," she said at the funeral of warrant officer Sello Ronnie Lepaku, who was allegedly killed by protesting Lonmin miners on Monday, August 13.

"Don't be sorry about what happened," Phiyega counselled her colleagues.

They needed to hear that. They had lost many colleagues at the hands of criminals.

She was telling them to distinguish between inner personal turbulence and impersonal professional necessity.

Her directness was particularly refreshing considering that the safety of the public has not always been "not negotiable".

The South African public has become used to the yearly show of public violence and the trashing of towns and cities, in particular by ANC- and Cosatu-aligned trade unions.

The official reaction to such lawlessness has generally lacked conviction and commitment, succeeding in placing the political needs of the tripartite alliance above public law and order.

Cosatu and some of its unions are so used to dominating the space of public demonstrations that they could not tolerate it being occupied by a DA that wanted to deliver, in a demonstration, a memorandum to the emperor of all unions.

They would teach the DA a lesson in violence.

Cosatu's followers attacked the DA demonstrators with rocks and stones, drawing much blood.

President Jacob Zuma was compelled to condemn them: "It is ... not acceptable that you become violent when people have a different view from yourself," he said, adding: "You can't produce a solution by fighting people who disagree with you."

Refreshing!

I am hoping that the president and his police commissioner are setting a new trend in making unambiguous statements of leadership.

We need clarity and conviction in leadership if we are to derive lasting lessons from the tragic shootings and deaths at Marikana.

The trend they may be setting could have enormous positive implications for the Constitution, law and order, the strength and integrity of public institutions, and appropriate political conduct in the shaping of South Africa's democracy.

But their statements must stand the test of a fundamental question: given that they seemed triggered by crisis, how grounded were they in principle and rigorous assessment?

Were they founded on conviction or were they the outcomes of desperate spins in crisis management?

What if Cosatu's rock throwers against the DA had been carrying knobkerries, pangas, knives, and pistols?

Indeed, what if the striking miners at Marikana were members of the Cosatu-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)?

Would maximum force have been used against them?

Would the police commissioner have accepted, with the appearance of conviction, the responsibility for issuing the order to shoot down members of a tripartite-alliance union?

These speculative questions are more than academic, they are meant to lay the ground for the thoughts that follow.

It pays to remember that the striking miners who attacked the police at Marikana and got shot were members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu).

Such a relatively new union still stands on the periphery of mainstream tripartite-alliance unionism. The point here is that the greatest test of principle and conviction is for the ANC government to assert the rule of law even against those closest to it.

By the same token, the greatest test of fairness in law is in the defence of the rights of the perpetrator.

Friends can't just expect leniency for wrongdoing and perpetrators can't just expect harshness.

For friends to receive fair and corrective punishment and for perpetrators to receive fair consideration in a legal process that might lead to their punishment is to affirm the primacy of the rule of law and the integrity of the institutions that dispense justice.

That is why Justice Malala is correct in saying that Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu should have ensured Amcu was invited to the meeting of stakeholders she convened on the Saturday following the tragedy.

That would have been the first significant, if reconciliatory step, toward what her colleague, Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa, said should "not happen again".

When the tripartite alliance seeks to engage in robust debate, they like to say "there will be no holy cows".

In reality, though, cows tend to remain holy and ANC leaders cosy up to the "holy cows".

In the matter at hand, the NUM may remain a holy cow guaranteed never to be shot at.

Sadtu will continue to do whatever it likes with schools, despite official unhappiness with the state of education in the country.

In this regard, Amcu may represent a historic notification.

They may very well be a nascent movement against a once-progressive liberation movement that has now gone mainstream and morphed into orthodoxy, despite its best intentions.

The shack-dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo, whose leader, as far as I can remember, is still in hiding in our democracy, may be an organisational precursor to formations such as Amcu.

Disillusioned by a liberation movement from which they expected radical sympathy, Abahlali eventually took the ANC to court over illegal evictions and won.

What led a movement of 100 years of struggle to misinterpret the actions of the poorest of its followers and turn them into enemies?

Widespread "service delivery protests" may soon take on an organisational character that will start off as discrete formations and then coalesce into a full-blown movement.

Such a movement, perhaps the source of new energy for civil society, will owe little to the ANC and the tripartite alliance.

And that is the nub of it.

The Marikana tragedy may be read as a warning sign.

Could it be that when the crunch comes, dissident movements could be shot at by a political culture buttressed by accumulative wealth and conspicuous consumption; one which, having lost legitimacy, can only rule by force?

Could such a culture respect an electoral outcome that does not favour it?

Could the Marikana tragedy represent the onset of creeping repression by default?  
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It does not have to.

If the statements of Zuma and Phiyega, as quoted earlier, are founded on genuine conviction and principle, and that they signal a radical intention by the state to base a transformative activism on the Constitution of the republic.

The historic resonance of our first national development plan (NDP) could not be clearer in this context.

Recently presented to Parliament and supported by all parties, it calls for a new politics; fresh commitment to orderly, intelligent, disciplined governance; and a cohesive nation built on a foundation of constitutional allegiance, impersonal in its universal intent but caring in its effects. Although all parties that spoke about the plan supported it, they were, without exception, sceptical of the commitment and capability of the ANC government to implement it.

Such scepticism is not confined to Parliament.

It is broad based in civil society.

I wished the president's response would inspire with resolve and conviction.

It fell short.

How, then, will South Africa transition from its current precipitous politics?

How do we move towards a restorative politics that will draw nourishment from the immense creative possibilities of the NDP, that will save the plan from being another unachievable promise, and that will recognise the antidote to self-complacent and corrupted orthodoxy is radical fairness whose source of activism is the Constitution?

Another unachievable, monumental promise will surely lend further fuel to the combusive restlessness of our poor millions.

We should all not allow that to happen, but to do so we must find the answer to those final questions.

One thing should be clear: there would be no room for the politics of bad faith in which a governing party commits to rendering another part of the country ungovernable simply because they did not win an electoral mandate there.

This can only be the actions of a party that lacks confidence in its own legitimacy and power, despite having won eight out of nine provinces.

This is an example of what constitutes a fundamental threat to the NDP. It does not take much to spot more such threats in the current political climate.

We learnt that some of the striking miners were medicinally fortified by a sangoma with the assurance that bullets would not harm them.

A tragic delusion!

But their delusion may not be substantively different from the delusions of the beneficiaries of intoxicating greed in the new orthodoxy who believe that with the power of government behind them they are invincible and undiscoverable, and thus beyond accountability.

Having abandoned the visionary drive of the liberation struggle, even as it is embodied in the Constitution they once made, they compromise the integrity, sustainability and security of the republic.

Strangely, the miners of Marikana, armed and fortified with belief, lived and died with their honour, while their adversaries must pray that they have not lost theirs.

If they have, they will have to commit to work to restore it through a radical renewal of South African politics and public life.