

# Marikana (South Africa): “We live with death every day”

Monday 27 May 2013, by [BUHLUNGU Sakhele](#), [THEPA Madala](#) (Date first published: 19 May 2013).

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## Marikana simmers

**ANC deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa and Cosatu president Sdumo Dlamini have hit back at Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) president Joseph Mathunjwa who this week levelled a series of accusations against them.**

Addressing Amcu members at Wonderkop Stadium next to Nkaneng informal settlement this week, Mathunjwa accused Ramaphosa of condoning and encouraging violence in the platinum mining district.

“On May Day in Olympia Stadium Cyril Ramaphosa was stoking the fires when he told the crowd gathered there that Rustenburg belongs to NUM and that the platinum belt belongs to NUM. My question is how do you claim people? Are you God?” said Mathunjwa to much applause.

In response, Ramaphosa, who is a shareholder at Lonmin mine, said: “My remarks at the May Day rally had nothing to do with stoking any fires. I was calling on NUM to recruit members so that it could be in a position to be strong again and service its members in the platinum belt.” It is no different to saying the ANC in the Western Cape should recruit members and regain its position of governance in the Western Cape. “On Cosatu leadership, Mathunjwa said: “President of Cosatu was quoted as saying they will need the skills of Umkhonto weSizwe to deal with Amcu. Comrades, don’t allow NUM to be the stone on the road to our Canaan. All they want is to see blood spilled again. They are using this narrow yellow politics on us.” Asked about his views on Mathunjwa’s comments, Dlamini says: “On May Day I was in Kimberley addressing the workers and I never spoke about Amcu. I think Mr Mathunjwa is desperate and gradually he is seeing that his supporters are realising that he is a liar. He must check his facts correctly before he makes utterances about people.” Mathunjwa also alleged that an attempt was made on his life during the Easter weekend and claims that police did nothing after he made them aware of the threats. “It’s because Senzeni Zokwana (NUM president) is in the SAPS bureau. He is in with the police. That is why it’s only Amcu members who are being arrested.

“I was supposed to die and I reported this incident to the police and nothing has been done. I’m here for a purpose.” God has placed me here to represent you. So my purpose was designed by God before the Earth was formed. My journey will be determined by Jesus. They can kill the flesh but my spirit will live on.”

The crowd went wild.

But NUM spokesman Lesiba Seshoka says Mathunjwa is a liar.

About the much-disputed office space at Lonmin mine, Seshoka says in terms of the notice they are supposed to vacate the offices by July.

“But the notice also says if we have not recouped our members by then, we must vacate. We will not vacate because we are confident we will recoup our members. You must remember that Amcu forced people to sign their membership forms.”

Lonmin spokesman Sue Vey says this week’s illegal strike had put them on the back foot.

### **Steven murdered for knowing too much, says Mathunjwa**

THOUSANDS of mine workers gathered at Karee mine sports grounds on Thursday afternoon to pay their last respects to Amcu’s North West regional chairman Mawethu Steven.

Traditional and working songs, which have become a permanent feature when the miners down their tools, dominated the memorial service.

Speaker after speaker paid tribute to Steven’s commitment to the workers’ struggle.

The Marikana Commission adjourned early on the day to allow families of the deceased striking miners to attend the memorial service.

Lawyers representing the 34 miners who were killed in a clash with the police in August last year were also present.

Steven was gunned down in Photsaneng village outside Rustenburg on Saturday.

His friend Stanford Tugele spoke about Steven glowingly. He said Steven was a dedicated and humble man.

“He was selfless and was against corruption. On the day he was killed, I had told him not to go to public places by himself.” But he went alone. He was not supposed to have been alone on the day he died,” Tugele said.

Advocate Dumisani Ntsebeza, who represents the strikers at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, said from what he had heard, Steven was a man of integrity.

“He was a hero amongst the people. Unlike many people who wake up, eat, sleep and eventually die without having done anything, he chose to help the people.”

Amcu president Joseph Mathunjwa said: “Comrade Steven was killed because he knew too much. He knew the secrets of Karee mine and people were afraid that he would expose the truth. He was a disciplined cadre.

I have not met anyone like him, who was dedicated to his work and his people.

“They tried to bribe him to backtrack on fighting for the workers and failed. So the solution was to kill him.”

### **We live with death every day**

IT’S a hard life in Marikana. The unprotected strikes that continue to rock the North West platinum

belt do not only hurt the workers, but other people too, in the communities of Nkaneng informal settlement and Wonderkop.

Wanton strikes and violence seem normal. Nobody gets shocked anymore to hear that someone they know is killed. Nobody is disturbed that people go for days without food.

"It's the Nkaneng way of life. We share what we have, that is how we survive. We see violence everyday. That too is part of life in Nkaneng," said a young Mozambican guy who only wanted to identify himself as Paulos.

"The crime rate is high. People no longer mind. It's a way of life. You have to go with what is happening. A friend got his car taken in his yard. They knocked on his window and asked him to give them the car keys." He calmly woke up and handed them the keys. If he did not it would have been the last breath he took . This is normal here."

Julius Mkinu, a general worker at Lonmin Eastern mine, is just another face in the crowd until he talks about his troubles. Mkinu is hungry. That is the first word he utters.

He travelled from Klerksdorp to Marikana to attend the strike on Tuesday, hoping that the leadership of Amcu would finally address their issue with the contractors, Mvelo Platinum Group. He says Mvelo has not paid them since December last year and has since disappeared from the mine.

About 91 of his co-workers left the packed Wonderkop Stadium disappointed that nothing was said about their problems. He gathered his co-workers, about 20 of them, to speak to Sunday World.

"The leadership of Amcu knows about our problems. They have since given up. We don't know where to turn to. We go for days without food." Lonmin does not want to hear our grievances. We are slaves of this mine . My stuff at home is going to be repossessed because I failed to pay my instalments. We can't apply for jobs because we appear as employed in the Lonmin system. The owner of the company, Daantjie, has vanished with our money.

"The funny part is that we still get payslips but the money does not get through to us."

*Sunday World* tried to contact Sarrel Daantjie but his phone was off. Lonmin spokesperson Sue Vey said they have nothing to say on this issue and that the disgruntled workers should contact Mvelo Platinum Group.

## **MINE KILLINGS AND SUICIDES**

THE sangoma who allegedly performed rituals on the miners ahead of last year's massacre, Alton Jojo, was gunned down at his Eastern Cape homestead in March.

NUM branch secretary, Dalivuyo Bongo, was shot and killed in October last year.

Amcu's North West organiser Mawethu Steven was shot dead at a Rustenburg tavern last Saturday.

Two brothers were shot by men draped in blankets and wearing balaclavas in Nkaneng informal settlement the same day .

Seven miners have committed suicide since the August 16 massacre.

Lungani Mubatyani, who took his life last week, was due to appear before the commission of inquiry.

**MADALA THEPA**, May 19, 2013

## **Why Marikana is on a knife-edge**

LAST May colleagues went to Rustenburg to gain insight into the Impala strike and to assess the organisational and political ramifications of the fallout between the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and its rank and file.

One of the people we met was a member of the independent workers' committee known as the Five Madoda. Comrade Bob\* was a militant who, with thousands of other Impala workers, had decided to break with NUM and join the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu). Bob told us that most workers no longer wanted anything to do with the ANC and the SACP.

Their next strategy was to eject NUM shaft stewards from their offices on mine premises and to install their own leaders operating under Amcu.

It's a year since the visit and much has happened. NUM has continued to lose members. But it's the fateful events at Lonmin's Marikana mine in August that have dominated news.

The wildcat strike by Amcu-affiliated Lonmin workers this week is a reminder that issues at the mine, in the platinum belt and the mining industry as a whole, are far from resolved. To be sure, there are layers to the Marikana story and it would be simplistic to attribute all the trials and tribulations of the industry and its workers to a single factor.

But at the core of that conflict is the collapse of organisational and political monopolies NUM represents. The union has enjoyed unrivalled power as the largest union for workers in its bargaining unit. It has used this monopoly to entrench itself in various ways - agency shop fees for non-members, rent-free offices on mine premises, control of mine compounds and full-time shaft stewards with perks.

No less important is the reliable revenue in the form of percentage-based membership dues.

Of relevance to the current contestation at Lonmin is the fact that this monopoly was underwritten by management, particularly in a context where personal relationships had developed between managers and union leaders. In some instances, there was a blurring of roles between full-time shaft stewards and human resources managers. For many companies, NUM had become predictable and therefore "safe" for management.

The emergence of Amcu has caused this organisational monopoly to unravel. One implication of this is that NUM has to share power with the new kid on the block. But the reality is that NUM has been dislodged and humiliated by its rival.

This is a bitter pill to swallow for a union used to the undisputed status of "the largest in the history of the country". What makes the humiliation more galling is the fact that Amcu is an "upstart" formed by "malcontents" ejected from NUM just over a decade ago for refusing to toe the national leadership line.

The strike at Lonmin also represents a threat to the political monopoly NUM represents. In 1987,

NUM, then five years old, nailed its colours to the mast of the “charterist/congress” alliance by being the first Cosatu union to adopt the Freedom Charter. Since then it has become the union standard bearer of the tripartite alliance.

Since 1991 all the ANC’s secretaries-general have come from NUM. The current general secretary of Cosatu also comes from the union. This is serious political capital for the union. In addition, the tripartite alliance is the only political current that has legitimacy within NUM.

Thus, the growth of Amcu, a union that claims to be “apolitical”, represents a serious threat to the tripartite alliance. That is why alliance organisations have pulled out all the stops to arrest the NUM decline in the Rustenburg area.

Since last year, Marikana has become the focal point of the struggle between those seeking to restore the erstwhile hegemony of NUM and the tripartite alliance, on the one hand, and those fighting to demolish such hegemony.

On the larger canvas of national politics, Marikana has earned its place among the symbols of resistance against the ruling political alliance.

Lonmin management have come out of the dispute looking biased against Amcu.

Its decision to refuse offices and infrastructure, even though it knows Amcu represents the majority, is suspect.

One would have expected management to negotiate a transitional arrangement whereby Amcu would also be provided with offices while the recognition agreement was being negotiated.

It’s hard to say whether this poor judgement by Lonmin is due to inexperience, incompetence or malice. But in the meantime, its actions (or inactions) continue to contribute to the climate of instability.

Amcu has a legitimate grievance. The majoritarian principle of union representivity is one of the bedrocks of the labour dispensation. NUM is a beneficiary of this principle and where it has majority representation, it has applied it to keep competitors, including Amcu, at bay.

However, Amcu is going to have to be careful about how it uses worker militancy. The union has become adept at playing political games with collective action. In private, the union seems happy with inciting the militant actions of workers, but in public, it pleads ignorance about the origins of these actions. This tactic may hold while the union remains an underdog in the mining sector, but it will not convince anyone in the long term. Amcu president Joseph Mathunjwa should know that leadership is about taking full responsibility for the actions of members.

That said, NUM, the tripartite alliance and management don’t seem to have tried to convince militants such as Comrade Bob to remain members. If anything, refusal to derecognise a minority NUM will continue to fuel suspicion the union is acting in cahoots with management.

NUM general secretary Frans Baleni has drawn my attention to what he says are factual errors in the way the Lonmin story has been told. He says Amcu has offices and shaft stewards at all Lonmin operations and NUM has been urging management to finalise a recognition agreement.

The implication of his argument is that there is a wider conspiracy at play which is motivated by broader political considerations.

While I note Baleni's comments, I do not subscribe to the conspiracy theory. In the case of Marikana, "facts" have become highly contested. My argument stands.

**Sakhele Buhlungu**

\* Not his real name

\* Buhlungu is professor of sociology at the University of Pretoria. His latest book, Cosatu's Contested Legacy, was published last year by HSRC Press

\* Sunday Independent, May 19 2013 at 11:58am:

<http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/why-marikana-is-on-a-knife-edge-1.1518121#.UaO0oJUpCX0>

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