

South African miners speak on Marikana massacre

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11 September 2012

More than three weeks after the Marikana massacre, families are still searching for their missing siblings and husbands in hospitals and jails across the North West province, unable to locate their loved ones.

Amidst widespread public outrage, by Thursday, 264 arrested mineworkers had been released. The murder and attempted murder charges, laid on the basis of the “common purpose” apartheid laws were withdrawn. Nonetheless, the mineworkers still face criminal charges of having illegally gathered with dangerous weapons.

No charges have been laid against the police, armed with machine guns, who massacred 34 mine workers who had sticks and machetes. The released Marikana mineworkers are due back in court on 12 February 2013 in a fight to avoid being imprisoned.

The story of Malusi King Danga, the arrested 27-year-old general worker at Lonmin’s Marikana mine, is typical of the plight of exploited migrant mineworkers.

After the death of his parents in the impoverished Eastern Cape, he became the family’s main breadwinner and headed to the platinum mines near Johannesburg to support his three orphaned younger brothers. He is paid slave wages. After deductions and levies, Danga takes home a mere R3000 (\$360) per month for labouring deep underground in appalling conditions.

Determined to educate his siblings, he pays for one of his brothers to attend university. Unable to support his two younger brothers, he relocated them to Marikana to stay with him. After paying his bills, Danga is left with only R200 (\$35) at the end of the month.

After spending the past three weeks in prison, Danga was released and testified to what happened during the massacre of 16 August, and subsequently during his incarceration. The harrowing account of the massacre and his imprisonment shed light on the lengths to which the ANC government has gone to suppress strike action.

The police’s claim that they only fired on workers in

self-defence has been exposed as a lie. While television cameras recorded the execution of nearly a dozen mine workers, much of the carnage occurred away from cameras.

Danga recalled, “It was my first day on the hill. I was expecting the employer to address us. I was there for about five minutes and police started putting up the razor wire. People starting running and police fired a shot. I was running away to the informal settlement in the opposite direction and police chased me and said ‘Go back to where you came from.’ I ran back towards a second hill, a small hill. I was so desperate. I didn’t know where to go. Police circled the boulders. I ran up and down trying to escape, to take another route. We were trapped. I crouched and hid myself under one of the rocks. Then I heard the police. I heard a gunshot. An old man was hiding near me. His foot was exposed. I heard another gunshot and I heard him say ‘I am finished’. I asked him, ‘Why do you say you are finished, Madala [grandfather]?’ Then I saw his boots were full of blood. The old man was shot.”

Danga went on to explain what happened to mine workers fleeing the police assault. “I heard a gunshot. It seemed like he [a mine worker] was running away. I heard a gunshot and I saw him fall face down. A third man raised his arms to surrender and police shot his hand and then his foot and he lost his balance. After the third guy was shot, I waited and I heard the policeman say ‘All of those on the ground, come out’. He said: ‘You with the shorts and striped t-shirt—get out.’ As I was coming up they kicked me in my teeth and one of the gold fillings fell out”.

After the massacre, police arrested 270 miners. While in custody, the miners were subjected to repeated beatings and tortured at the hands of the police. Nearly 200 of the detained strikers filed claims with the Independent Police Investigative Directorate stating that they had been

assaulted and tortured by police officers while in detention.

Recounting the assaults and torture, Danga continued, “they beat us and they beat us. They said they were looking for a nail in the cell. We did not have one. While they were searching they found a cell phone on one of the guys. They klapped [slapped] him. They kicked him. They stepped on him. We were all there. They did this in front of us. What about his dignity? While they were hitting him, other police were laughing at him.”

The police systematically humiliated miners while in detention. Danga continued, “Another guy washed his blood-stained clothes. He wrapped himself in a blanket. The police pulled the blanket off him. He was naked and they laughed at him.”

On Thursday, Lonmin Plc signed a “peace accord” with the NUM trade union, Solidarity, and UASA (United Association of South Africa), even though Solidarity and UASA do not represent the Marikana mineworkers.

At current platinum prices, Lonmin is losing about \$4 million every day production is stopped at Marikana. Nonetheless, Lonmin has refused to give in to the workers’ demands, claiming that wage increases will add an additional \$30 million to its costs, wiping out its profits.

Lonmin is desperate to break the strike. The mine remains shut, with less than 7 percent of workers returning to work. Lonmin reported that it is ready to negotiate on Monday with the “peace accord” signatories. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), a dispute resolution body established by the Labour Relations Act, confirmed that it will start facilitating the negotiations.

The breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) has refused to join the other unions in signing the “peace accord”. Representative Zolisa Bodlwana said the miners he represented had formed their own committees to represent them at the negotiations and would not be party to the peace accord until their demands for a decent wage were met.

“We don’t want to hear anything about a peace accord. We want R12,500 and the closing down of that shaft,” said another worker representative, Xolani Nzuzi.

On Wednesday, miners marched to the Lonmin Karee mine shaft despite a heavy police presence and hovering helicopters. In a show of community support, residents of the Karee West informal settlement cheered the miners; men whistled, women ululated as they shouted: “Viva R12,500. Viva.”

Galvanised by the heroic struggle of the Marikana mineworkers, Impala Platinum mineworkers have also embarked on a wildcat strike, demanding wage increases. Forming their own rank-and-file workers committees, they put forward their demands.

A senior AMCU official said the demand was coming from the rank and file and not from the national office: “If workers are doing that, they are doing that on their own”.

A week after the massacre at Marikana, sensing the opportunity to gain political mileage, expelled ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema addressed workers of the Aurora’s Grootvlei gold mine. Malema said, “The democratic government has turned on its people. Our leaders have lost their way and have been co-opted by mine owners and fed profits. They don’t care about you.”

He chanted “phansi, Zuma, phansi [down with Zuma]”. The miners responded enthusiastically, expressing their anger with the government and the ruling ANC.

Julius Malema’s appearance at the mines calling for Zuma’s resignation and for the mine workers to continue their struggle, and their break with the NUM, is nothing more than the “left” face of the ANC and of the aspiring black bourgeoisie. Malema has repeatedly said in his speeches that the struggle in Marikana is a struggle against the whites.

He is attempting to divert the working class away from an independent struggle for socialism and back into the fold of bourgeois nationalism.



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