

South Africa: Commission whitewashes ANC role in Marikana massacre

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The report of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry into the Marikana massacre in North West province in August 2012 has cleared Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa and other political leaders of any responsibility for the 44 fatalities.

The report, a shameless cover-up, was finally released by President Jacob Zuma last Thursday evening, three months after the commission delivered the report to the presidency. The president stated in a live television broadcast of the summary that “the accusations against [Ramaphosa] are groundless.”

The massacred workers were employed at Lonmin’s Karee mine in Marikana. As many as 41 miners were killed by the police, and others were fired upon by their own union officials in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Miners marched to the local NUM office on August 11, 2012 to demand official support for strike action, which had overwhelming support among the workers, but they were met with gunfire from NUM leaders.

Lonmin CEO Ben Magara cynically insisted that his company has gone a long way in supporting the families of murdered breadwinners. “We’ve worked very hard to ensure every school-going-age kid is able to go to school... We also offered every family of the deceased employees [jobs] and some of [the relatives] took the jobs and some [the widows] chose for themselves that they would rather come and work for us,” Magara claimed.

The NUM welcomed the findings of the inquiry, including Ramaphosa being cleared of any wrongdoing. “It’s not correct to only focus on him as a director... because there are a number of directors who were running that company at that time and their role is not mentioned,” NUM President Piet Matosa cynically declared.

The Farlam commission was convened by Zuma and first sat on October 1, 2012. It was from the start a deliberate attempt to conceal the political accountability of senior African National Congress members like Ramaphosa, Susan Shabangu and Nathi Mthethwa, who at the time were respectively Lonmin director, mineral resources minister and police minister.

Instead, the report seeks to lay exclusive blame on former North West Provincial Police Commissioner Lt-Gen. Zukiswa Mbombo, together with national Police Commissioner Gen. Riah Phiyega and other members of the police forces.

On August 14, 2012, Mbombo met Lonmin executive vice president of human relations and external affairs, Barnard Mokoena. They discussed the striking miners who were refusing to come off the hillock overlooking the Karee mine until management agreed to hold wage talks with them. In a recording of the conversation, Mbombo can be heard warning that the workers are heading for a showdown with police: “Tomorrow when we go there for the second time, now that we were there today and they did not surrender, then it is blood.”

Mbombo was controversially allowed to resign when she turned 60 earlier this year, following the delivery of the inquiry’s report to Zuma. There is no doubt that she and Phiyega are complicit in and abetted the bloodletting at Marikana, but that does not exonerate Ramaphosa, Shabangu, Mthethwa and company. Unlike Mbombo, thus far Phiyega seems determined to defend herself and her underlings, and reportedly insists that Zuma fire her as she will not resign of her own accord.

Phiyega’s refusal to take the blame is a spanner in the works of the ANC elite as they scramble to clear

themselves of wrongdoing and cover up their role as local taskmasters of imperialism. The report is part of their efforts to convince the world that there was no political pressure on the police high command to employ violence, which is the opposite of the truth. A publicly acknowledged email dated August 15 from Ramaphosa calls for “concomitant action” against what he described as workers’ criminality in striking for a living wage. Ramaphosa also confronted Shabangu over what the international investment community regarded as her ineffectual response to the miners’ wildcat strike.

Advocate Dali Mpofu, on behalf of the families of slain Lonmin mineworkers, confirmed he will be pursuing legal action. “Judge Farlam may have found that [Ramaphosa] was not the cause of the massacre, but maybe another judge might find that he was,” said Mpofu.

The Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which capitalised on the unpopularity of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to grow its membership on the platinum-mining belt around Marikana, criticized the report. “It’s part of the disappointment of the commission that there were no recommendations against Lonmin in terms of compensation,” AMCU President Joseph Mathunjwa added.

The report, in an effort to defend the police and the NUM, blamed AMCU officials for not exercising “effective control” over their members and for singing “provocative songs” and making “inflammatory remarks.” It did praise Mathunjwa for doing his best “before the shootings to persuade the strikers to lay down their arms and leave the koppie [hill].”

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema, former president of the African National Congress Youth League from 2008 to 2012, said he was “flabbergasted” by the Marikana commission report. “I hold the strong view that Cyril must be prosecuted and we will ensure that he is brought to book because he is at the centre of the massacring of our people.”

Ramaphosa was at the centre of the ANC internal disciplinary committee which expelled Malema from the party in April 2012. For all its radical posturing, the EFF is essentially a continuation of conflicts within the ANC.

All the trade unions, including NUM but also the entire Congress of South African Trade Unions, are so integrated into the structure of capitalist rule after two decades in government that their officials think nothing of firing live ammunition at the members they supposedly represent.

The report of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry into the massacre at Marikana is an important experience in the struggles of South African workers. Proving once again the impossibility of securing social and political justice within the post-apartheid state framework established in 1994, it will deepen the chasm between the working class and rural poor, on the one hand, and the political defenders of the major corporations and banks on the other. The central lesson of Marikana is that to defend their jobs and livelihoods—and to hold the criminals responsible for the massacre accountable—the working class must break with the ANC and other pro-capitalist formations and build an independent movement of the working class based on a revolutionary socialist program.

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