

South Africa's Multiple Resource Curses, the Metalworkers' Break and Community Uprisings

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The African National Congress (ANC), led during the 1990s by the late Nelson Mandela, is projected to be reelected in South Africa's May 7, 2014 national election by a wide margin, probably with between 50 and 60 percent of the vote. But underneath the ruling party's apparent popularity, the society is seething with fury, partly at the mismanagement of vast mineral wealth. The political and economic rulers' increasingly venal policies and practices are so bad that not only did ANC elites play a direct role in massacring striking mineworkers in August 2012, but corporate South Africa was soon rated by PriceWaterhouseCoopers as "world leader in money-laundering, bribery and corruption, procurement fraud, asset misappropriation and cybercrime," with internal management responsible for more than three quarters of what was termed "mind-boggling" levels of theft.¹

With such degeneration from above, the country's impotent socialist left was pleasantly surprised last December when the largest union in Africa, the 342,000-strong National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa ("Numsa") split away from the ANC. Numsa pledged to organize mineworkers and any other disgruntled workers, and to steadily reconstruct a new South African left from below, including radical social movements once derided as "ultraleft" (because from the early 2000s they had already broken with the ANC). The "Numsa Moment"—which I think can be contrasted to some local trade unionists' "Lula Moment" advocacy, akin to Brazilian labor corporatism—is of enormous importance, especially if it leads to a "united front approach" and the "movement towards socialism" as promised in Numsa's "Breaking New Ground" congress of 1,300 shop

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stewards, just a week after Mandela's death.² However, up against such a strong and prestigious national liberation movement, whose most famous leader stayed in the ANC until the end of his life, Numsa and its new allies are not yet contesting power in the next election. They must work hard on local alliance-building and the underlying socioeconomic conditions must continue to deteriorate, if Numsa is to rekindle the confidence of older revolutionaries and create a new generation of activists.

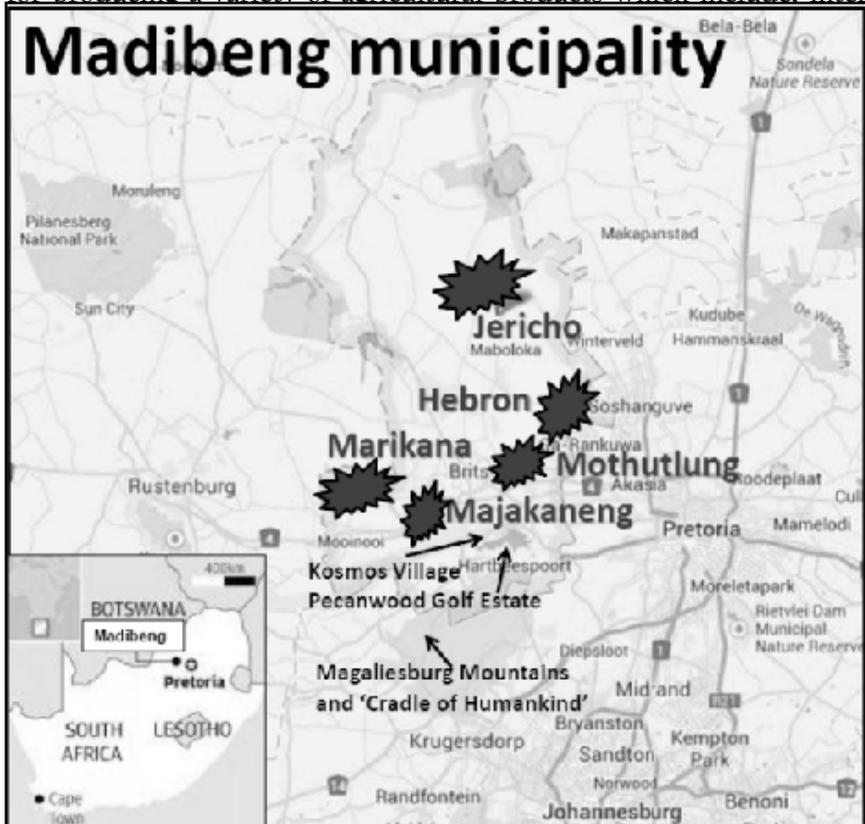
But that is exactly what is happening, twenty years after the country's first democratic election on April 27, 1994. As 2014 began, state murder of activists occurred periodically, nine at the time of writing in late February. One incident of police brutality in a northern citrus zone drew a crowd of 2,000 angry residents to demonstrate at a police station in early February. They torched the building, leaving three officers in critical condition—while a hail of live police ammunition left two protesters dead. East of the capital Pretoria, a similar protest included a copycat burn of a police station in the wake of electricity disconnections. In East London, a port city of 750,000, municipal workers stormed city hall in early February, petrol bombing a council chamber. Similar eruptions were felt in townships across the country but in 2014, the intensity seemed to increase. Expectations were that 2014 would beat the prior year's record: a daily average of five "violent protests" recorded by police, usually met with extreme force.

Mining Wealth and Worker Poverty

The country's most tense place was probably the large rural mining district just west of Pretoria, where everything seemed to fall apart at once: Madibeng, home to half a million people. Its name in the local Setswana language, "place of water," was chosen as a result of four major dams built during the apartheid era to service local white farmers and mining houses. One of the thirstiest— and angriest—sites within Madibeng is the township of Hebron, where community protests exploded in January because household water was disconnected for weeks at a time, although it is only 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) northwest from President Jacob Zuma's main Union Buildings office. About 10 kilometers further west is Mothutlung, site of intense demonstrations where police responded by shooting four people dead. Due west another 30 kilometers is Majakaneng, where water protests in February compelled the provincial governor to not only drill new boreholes and take over municipal administration, but—tellingly—redirect water

from a large mine to the community. About 60 kilometers north is Jericho, also without water for weeks, also engulfed in violent protest. If instead you travel 20 kilometers west, you arrive at Marikana, Africa's most notorious dig, where thirty-four striking platinum mineworkers were massacred by police gunfire on August 16, 2012.

This area could, under different local and national state management, become one of Africa's most prosperous. At least 80 percent of the Earth's known platinum reserves are in South Africa, starting in an arc that cuts through Madibeng, where 1.1 million ounces were extracted in 2007 at the peak of the minerals boom. The municipal website brags that "some of the world's richest platinum deposits and the largest chromate reserves are found in Madibeng. Other mining products include ferrochrome, stone and granite quarries, silica sand and vanadium pentoxide."³ In 2011, the nine main mining firms operating mainly in this region recorded \$4.5 billion in profits. There are also wealthy plantations, the website continues: "Due to the available water resources, pleasant climate and fertile soil types, the area is suitable for producing a variety of agricultural products which include. inter



alias, vegetables, fruits, flowers, field crops, poultry, beef and dairy.” White-owned agribusinesses enjoy excellent facilities developed over more than a century and a half, including irrigation. Copious watering also greens the Pecanwood Golf Estate, a Jack Nicklaus signature course on the Hartbeespoort Dam, just across the water from some of the country’s richest neighborhoods. For example, Kosmos Village is a “gated community” whose service workers live in a shack settlement a short stone’s throw away, in one of South Africa’s most extreme back-to-back wealth/poverty sites.

There are probably a million such shacks within a 200 kilometer radius of this mining ridge, the Witwatersrand. They first sprung up after 1884 when gold was found in Johannesburg, a city still today at the core of Africa’s main industrial megalopolis. But most shacks in this megalopolis of 10 million residents were constructed after the 1986 demise of Apartheid’s Pass Laws and the 1991 cancellation of the segregationist Group Areas Act. Faster rural-urban migration resulted, but the vast majority of shack-building occurred on land without formal water, sanitation and electricity systems. So defecation is common in unserviced latrines or even in the bare veld. Especially after rains, therefore, the excrement run-off into the Crocodile, Jukskei, and Hennops Rivers which feed Hartbeespoort Dam causes dangerous surges in E.coli counts. By 2010, these reached such high levels that the country’s main elite department store warned it would cease purchasing agricultural produce from fertile Madibeng farms irrigated from the dam’s extensive canal system.

Hartbeespoort Dam, famous for water sports, now often stinks. This is due to excessive toxic algae, cyanobacteria, and water hyacinth that destroy both the water’s health and the site’s immediate aesthetic value. The color of the water is often an eerie-looking bright green. Yet from afar, the smell and poison are invisible; a pristine view of the dam is witnessed from dozens of Magaliesberg Mountain resorts. Each weekend the mansions and game reserves south of the dam still host fancy weddings for (mainly still white) wealthy couples from Johannesburg and Pretoria. The Magaliesberg Mountains also host the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, where the best-kept skull of *Australopithecus africanus*—humankind’s common ancestor, approximately 2.1 million years old—was nicknamed Mrs. Ples. During a 1950s construction boom, the skull was found when cement companies dug for lime, where these bones were well-preserved.

On the other side of the Hartbeespoort Dam wall, the Crocodile River flowing downhill quickly becomes re-polluted thanks to mining leachate, agricultural pesticide and fertilizer run-off, plus untreated human waste from the shack settlements. For example, near the Barplats Crocodile River Mine, not far from Madibeng's municipal headquarters in the small city of Brits, the river's stench became overwhelming in late 2012. "We convened a meeting with the Madibeng municipality, the Crocodile River mine and the Water Affairs Department at the canal to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation," said Hartbeespoort Irrigation Board member Nic Fourie. "Of course a lot of promises were made by all of the role players but nothing has been done." Rebutted mine spokeswoman Zelda le Roux, "The informal settlement is situated on land owned by Mr J. Goosen. Barplats does not promote informal tenure practices. Tenants of this settlement are employed by various farmers, contractors and businesses around the area."⁴

Still unresolved today, this particular local dispute reveals how municipal planning in Madibeng utterly fails to incorporate the longer-term interests of the area's elites, whether in mining, agribusiness, or the service sector. These firms need—and get—extremely cheap labor. But in their relentless strategy to lower wage levels, they *soil their own nest*. They remain unwilling to finance the social and ecological infrastructure that will ensure their sustained profitability. Class reproduction itself thus comes into question, and in January the increasingly violent Madibeng uprisings finally required a visit from national water minister Edna Molewa—ironically, herself a Madibeng resident of a rich suburb near Hartbeespoort—and she instructed that national authorities do municipal pipe and pump repairs.

The social and ecological contradictions in this part of South Africa are as extreme as any in the world. Yet Madibeng's elites had many opportunities to share the municipality's wealth over the last two decades. One way would have been through imposing a high price for high-volume water consumption, sufficient to provide basic-needs services to the poorest residents as well as to improve pipe and pumping maintenance, and to expand the water grid as the area's minerals were dug up, and as tens of thousands of new jobs were created on Madibeng mines during the 2000s commodity super-cycle boom. Instead, there were multiple sociopolitical explosions in January, culminating in the massive strike of platinum mineworkers.

Then in Mothutlung on January 13, what began as a peaceful protest against the lack of water for thousands of households due to a failed

pump attracted some of the same police commanders and shooters who had massacred Marikana mineworkers seventeen months earlier. They killed four people using shotgun ammunition that had supposedly been banned eight years earlier. One victim was a sixty-five-year-old freelance photographer. Furious, residents across Madibeng engaged in water protests the following week, starting in nearby Hebron and then up in Jericho, where municipal water had not been provided in months.

Fixing these problems is made harder because more than 340 Madibeng municipal bureaucrats were found, in just one investigation, to be illegally running businesses which had dealings with government between 2005–2010.⁵ This problem is scornfully termed “tenderpreneurship,” meaning the granting, via a corrupting tender process, of small contracts to fledgling African entrepreneurs. That ploy was devised by the ruling party and big business during the late 1990s as their profit-friendly strategy for deracializing Apartheid. “Public-private partnerships” in pilfering are well advanced in Madibeng and it was widely reported that the pump breakdown in Mothutlung was a result of sabotage by a private contractor who wanted the job of fixing the same facility.

With this extent of degeneracy, it was no surprise that class struggle burst into the open regularly. In early 2012 the largest of the three huge platinum firms, Implats, suffered a debilitating strike and in early 2013, the second largest, Anglo American Platinum, announced the closure of shafts and the firing of 13,000 workers, though it retracted the most extreme threats and only a few thousand were laid-off. In late January this year, the three largest platinum firms were struck by 80,000 members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, whose workers insisted on a 100 percent wage increase with a minimum of \$1160 per month. Most mining houses offered a raise rate one-twelfth as high and as a minimum salary, just 40 percent of what was demanded. By the time this article went to press in late February, the mine owners held firm with an offer below 9 percent (with inflation for low-income people running at 7 percent).

The workers were desperate, as their salaries were being docked regularly by a usurious “garnishee” (salary stop-order) system put in place by ubiquitous microfinance creditors and their lawyers. These were mostly the same white male Afrikaners who in earlier generations simply occupied state bureaucracy to oppress black workers. Today the financial and legal system reproduces the same class-race power.

This household-scale debt crisis affects more than 13 percent of all mineworkers across South Africa and 9 percent of the general workforce. Fully half the country's borrowers have become formally "credit impaired," having missed debt repayments. If you wander the main street of Marikana, more than a dozen "pay-day lender" and "mashonisa" microfinance offices dominate a hodge-podge of low-level consumer-goods outlets.⁶

Continue a kilometer to the east and you soon stumble across the infamous "mountain"—a rocky hillock known as a "kopje"—where mineworkers gathered prior to the massacre. Close by is a shack settlement, Nkaneng, which in the Sotho and Xhosa languages means "taking away something by force." Nkaneng's tin shacks are graced by no apparent state services and only a few trivial Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects. Migrant labor prevails, replicating many of the harshest aspects of apartheid's underlying political economy. And this within spitting distance of one of the world's richest mineral deposits and of mines belonging to the three largest platinum mining houses: AngloPlats, Implats and Lonmin. The World Bank even judged Lonmin to be one of the greatest success stories of CSR outsourced investment, and its International Finance Corporation subsidiary authorized a \$150 million investment to support Lonmin CSR in Marikana in 2007, with allegedly "best case" practices ranging from economic development to racially progressive procurement and community involvement to gender work relations. These proved farcical.⁷

Lonmin also justified mining on stolen land, by ignoring the long historic context of pre-1913 land dispossession. It downplayed the relegation of the platinum-rich area just west of Marikana to "Bantustan" status: it was known as the tyrannical "Bophuthatswana" dictatorship from 1961 until 1994. Another important and related bit of historical context, ignored in all World Bank literature promoting Lonmin, is the company's roots—from 1909 until 1999—as "Lonrho," the London and Rhodesian Mining and Land Company Limited. Lonrho gained a very poor reputation for its role in Africa, especially in the years 1962-1993 when it was managed by Tiny Rowland. As journalist Brian Cloughly explained, the Britian's then-prime minister Edward Heath called Lonmin "the unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism. The description was fitting because Rowland was a perambulating piece of filth who had indulged in bribery, tax-dodging, and the general range of

ingenious whizz-kid schemes designed to make viciously unscrupulous people rich and keep them that way.”⁸

On August 16, 2012, Marikana was the site of a premeditated massacre as became clear during testimony to the state-appointed Farlam Commission. Led by former senior judge Ian Farlam, the Commission learned that members of the South African Police Service planted evidence (putting weapons on the bodies of corpses to pretend the killing was in self-defense), hid crucial video records, laughed heartily at the scene, and indeed had earlier planned much of the massacre.⁹ The intensity of police involvement can partly be traced to two of their members’ deaths at the alleged hands (and knives) of mineworkers a few days before, but also to the urgent requests for help made to the police minister by the main South African owner of Lonmin. Reflecting his inordinate influence, that man—whose Shanduka corporation held 9 percent of the shares—was soon elected the ANC deputy president at a December 2012 party convention: Cyril Ramaphosa.

ANC Crony Capitalism

Ramaphosa was himself once a militant mineworker leader (he led a pathbreaking 1987 industry-wide strike) and early-1990s ANC secretary general, as well as the main drafter of the 1996 South African Constitution. But having accumulated more than \$1 billion in personal wealth over the subsequent sixteen years in business, his August 15, 2012 emails were extremely incriminating. He declared Lonmin’s labor dispute “dastardly criminal” and called in his allies in government, including the police and mining ministers. A day later, mass murder ensued.

Ramaphosa is quite a complicated character, and there are bitter-end liberal supporters of the ANC who believe he will revive the ruling party. For example, influential commentator and University of Cape Town law professor Richard Calland calls Ramaphosa “a moderate, one-nation leader comfortable in his own skin, and with such an extraordinary curriculum vitae, supremely talented,” a man trying “to rebuild the center ground within the ANC, the ‘sensible left.’” Optimistically, Calland wills that Ramaphosa’s “now-extensive knowledge of the corporate boardrooms of South Africa is deployed to put real pressure on big business, to ensure that it plays its part in creating jobs and being open to the changes necessary to build a labor-intensive, low-carbon economy that is fit for global competitive purpose and, moreover, that treats its workers fairly and decently.”¹⁰

Such Ramaphosa-boosterism, especially common in the business press, requires overlooking contrary career evidence since 1994. “Put real pressure on big business”? From the outset, Ramaphosa ran a Constitution-making process whose Bill of Rights uniquely granted mega-corporations—termed “juristic persons”—the same human rights we mortals enjoy; this means profits trump public interest.¹¹ Next, Ramaphosa publicly advocated the relaxation of exchange controls, a policy which contributed to South Africa becoming the world’s most risky emerging market by the time of the 2008–2009 crash, according to *The Economist*.¹² Vast sums of rich white people’s loot, not to mention the financial headquarters of South Africa’s largest companies, soon vanished offshore. In 2007, the capital flight reached a previously unscaled height of 23 percent of GDP.¹³ This is one reason the foreign debt at nearly \$150 billion is now six times larger than in 1994, which puts far more “real pressure” on the social democratic project than on big business.

A “labor-intensive economy” that “treats its workers fairly”? As National Development Plan deputy chair, Ramaphosa’s advocacy of at least \$100 billion worth of new infrastructure leans heavily towards subsidizing more *capital*-intensive mining and transport investments. Much of this will be privatized, such as the largest component of a proposed \$25 billion port-petrochemical complex in Durban at the site of Africa’s largest harbor, a project strongly opposed by local community activists.¹⁴ As for treating workers fairly, Marikana unveiled the real Ramaphosa under stress.

A “low-carbon economy”? In another case of collusion, in November 2012 an investigative team from the *Mail&Guardian* quoted a respected government source revealing how Molewa feared she would lose her job as water minister in the event Ramaphosa was prosecuted for operating high-carbon coal mines without a water license. Molewa apparently arranged an out-of-court settlement which, experts fear, will hasten the degradation of the critical catchments feeding agriculture, communities, the world-famous Kruger Park and then Mozambique when rivers cross the border.¹⁵

Throughout, Ramaphosa’s own dubious wealth accumulation was linked to the economic destruction of two major black-owned businesses (Sam Molohe Bakery and Johnnic) and then to a \$1 billion personal fortune made mainly via his firm Shanduka, spreading right across the South African economy: heavy manufacturing (Macsteel and Scaw Metals), mining (Lonmin, Kangra Coal, Lace Diamonds, Pan African Resources),

finance (Standard Bank, Alexander Forbes, Investment Solutions, and Liberty Group), junk food (McDonald's and Coca-Cola), and transport (Bidvest). Ramaphosa also held the chairs of the Mondi paper group and MTN cellphones, and was on the board of SABMiller beer (the world's second largest brewery today), which he formerly chaired. He rejoined ANC leadership as the party's second-in-command in December 2012, thus setting himself up to be South Africa's deputy president after the 2014 elections. (As a result, he gradually put some shareholdings in blind-trust and divested others to avoid obvious conflict of interest charges.)

But the most critical inflection point was the way Ramaphosa brought in the police to serve white-dominated multinational capital by killing dozens of black workers so as to end a brief strike. Beyond just the obvious human-rights and labor-relations travesties, the incident offered the potential for a deep political rethink, unveiling extreme depths of ruling-class desperation represented by the fusion of Ramaphosa's black capitalism, Lonmin's collaboration (through Ramaphosa) with the mining and police ministers, the brutality of state prosecutors who charged the victims with the crime, the alleged "sweetheart unionism" of the increasingly unpopular National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and the fragility of a Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) split between Zuma/Ramaphosa loyalists and those with worker interests at heart led by Numsa.

That split was already well underway in 2012, in part because the 2007 ouster of Thabo Mbeki as president of the ANC was led by labor and communists partly on grounds that Mbeki's neoliberalism had far too generously rewarded white business interests. Yet one of Ramaphosa's emails on August 15 reflected the power relations that Lonmin gained in its association with the former mineworker leader: "The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labor dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterized as such. There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation." Ramaphosa wrote to Lonmin's Albert Jamieson: "You are absolutely correct in insisting that the Minister, and indeed all government officials, need to understand that we are essentially dealing with a criminal act. I have said as much to the Minister of Safety and Security. I will stress that Minister [Susan] Shabangu should have a discussion with Roger [Phillimore, Lonmin chairman]."¹⁶ Revealing these emails, the lawyer for the 270 arrested mineworkers, Dali Mpofu, explained to the Farlam Commission,

It's a long line of emails under, in the same vein, effectively encouraging so-called concomitant action to deal with these criminals, whose only

crime was that they were seeking a wage increase.... At the heart of this was the toxic collusion between the SA Police Services and Lonmin at a direct level. At a much broader level it can be called a collusion between the State and capital and that this phenomenon is at the centre of what has occurred here.

This collusion between state and capital has happened in many instances in this country's history [including]... a massive strike by the white mineworkers in 1922, which was dealt with by the Smuts government by bringing in the air force, and about 200 people were killed. In 1946, under the leadership of the African Mineworkers Union, 70,000 African workers also went on a massive strike and the government sent 16,000 policemen and arrested, like they did to the people we represent, some of the miners under an act called the War Measures Act.

So this has happened, this collusion between capital and the State has happened in systematic patterns in the history of, sordid history of the mining industry in this country. Part of that history included the collaboration of so-called tribal chiefs who were corrupt and were used by those oppressive governments to turn the self-sufficient black African farmers into slave labor workers. Today we have a situation where those chiefs have been replaced by so-called BEE partners of these mines and carrying on that torch of collusion.¹⁷

Ramaphosa's collaboration with white elites was also reflected in his attempt a few months earlier to purchase a prize buffalo at a game auction for \$2.3 million. The cozy relations epitomized by Ramaphosa-Lonmin incensed the mineworkers, raising their staying power to such high levels. For example, Lonmin's successful public relations onslaught and tight connections to the ruling party probably gave its executives confidence that longstanding abuse of low-paid migrant labor could continue—with NUM itself having become so co-opted that shop stewards were reportedly paid three times more than ordinary workers. NUM general secretary Frans Baleni earned \$160,000 per year at that stage, and gained notoriety when he had advised Lonmin to fire 9,000 of the same Marikana mineworkers at its Karee mine in late 2011 because they went on a wildcat strike. Of the fired workers, 7,000 were rehired, but they quit NUM and joined the rival upstart Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). One result, at nearby Implats, was that of the 28,000 workers, 70 percent had been NUM members in late 2011, but by September 2012 the ratio was down to 13 percent, with AMCU taking over worker representation.

The crony relations reached deep into the state, with provincial and municipal governments in the mining belt apparently rife with corruption. Emblematic was the 2009 assassination of a well-known ANC whistleblower, Moss Phakoe, which a judge found was arranged by

the mayor of Rustenburg, the municipal district just west of Madibeng. Again, in this context, Lonmin and the other big mining houses in the platinum belt might have considered South Africa just one more third world country worthy of the designation “Resource Cursed”—a phrase usually applied to sites where dictatorial and familial patronage relations allow multinational capital in the extractive industries to, literally, get away with murder. Around two dozen anti-corruption whistleblowers like Phakoe were killed in the first few years of Zuma’s rule.¹⁸

At the national level, too, family enterprise suited the Zumas, who had a reported 220 businesses. It was not surprising to learn, for example, that along with the Gupta family—generous sponsors of Zuma’s patronage system—son Duduzane was co-owner of JIC, the platinum belt region’s largest firm specializing in short-term worker outsourcing (sometimes called “labor broking,” though JIC denies this, and NUM has a recognition agreement with the firm). Nor was it a secret that the president’s nephew Khulubuse Zuma played a destructive role in nearby gold-mining territory as co-owner of the soon-to-be-bankrupted Aurora mining house (formerly Harmony Mines), along with Zuma’s lawyer and Mandela’s grandson Zondwa. Indeed, that particular mining house had perhaps the single most extreme record of ecological destructiveness and labor conflict in the post-apartheid era, reflecting how white-owned mining houses sold used-up mines with vast Acid Mine Drainage liabilities to new black owners who were ill equipped to deal with the inevitable ecological, social, and labor crises.¹⁹

The society thus learned a great deal about itself because of the massacre and a growing realization about the socioeconomic, political, and ecological context. The stage was set, immediately after Marikana, for renewed debates over whether the Tripartite Alliance was now a progressive or regressive political arrangement, especially between the center-left unionists and Communists who are close to official power and thus defensive of the political *status quo*, on the one hand; and on the other, critical, independent progressives convinced that South African politics could become more acutely polarized. Overlaying the crisis and these debates was the internal ANC split between pro- and anti-Zuma forces, which spilled over into Cosatu prior to its September 2012 congress before, at the Mangaung electoral conference of the ruling party, Zuma squashed his only opponent in the race for ANC president (then deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe) with three quarters of the vote. It was this political battle that initially paralyzed labor leadership, given

the danger Cosatu would unleash centrifugal forces that its popular general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi could not control.

Metalworkers Break Cosatu Chains

The political maneuvering left Cosatu mostly silenced about Marikana, as NUM's weight (it was then the largest member) and the parallel subversion of other union leaders made it too difficult for the federation to visibly back the upstart platinum, gold, and other mineworkers. In any case, what these wildcat strikers were doing might, more conservative unionists believed, even throw institutions of centralized bargaining into chaos. The demand for higher wages was both extreme—thus opposed by NUM—and ultimately partially successful in the case of Marikana's courageous workers. The reported 22 percent raise that workers won from Lonmin after a month of striking was remarkable. It was driven in part by severe desperation, since the mashonisas' garnishee orders demanding debt repayment had so greatly driven down take-home pay. And the rudderless Lonmin was certainly on the back foot, with its massively overpaid (white, British) chief executive hospitalized with a terminal illness, never to return. (He was replaced by an extremely capable black Zimbabwean, at a much smaller salary, but with a greater capacity to convince both the media that the company could recover after the massacre, and investors to continue funding the firm.)

The strike inspired the country's labor force to look askance at their own pay packets. A worker revolt continued from after the massacre well into 2013, inspiring many to begin wildcat strikes, demanding far more than their trade unions had won in negotiations just months earlier. Truck drivers received an above-inflation settlement in October 2012 after resorting to sometimes intensely violent methods to deter scab drivers, in the process creating shortages of petrol and retail goods in various parts of the country. With Durban's Toyota workforce (Numsa members), municipal employees and then the farm workers of the Western Cape all also engaged in wildcat strikes, it was no surprise that in September 2012, the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report* placed South Africa in the number one position for adverse employee-employer relations (in a survey done even prior to Marikana). Using the same measure of class struggle, in 2011 the South African workforce ranked only seventh out of the 144 countries surveyed. By February 2013, the farmworkers had won a 52 percent wage increase after ongoing strikes threatened the vineyards' viability and reputation. Again in September 2013 the South African workers

won the label of most militant proletariat in 148 countries surveyed by the World Economic Forum, far ahead of second-place Venezuela.²⁰

Partly as a result of labor militancy, major ratings agencies began downgrading the country's bond rating, for example, to BBB level by Standard & Poor's. The resulting higher interest rates on the country's prolific foreign borrowings created yet more fiscal pressures as well as household and corporate repayment stress. Given Europe's crisis and South Africa's vulnerability, there were much lower GDP growth rates in 2013 and, as projected, into the future. And instead of countering that prospect with an expected interest rate cut by the South African Reserve Bank in late 2012, the country's shaky financial standing put countervailing upward pressure on rates. By early 2014 they were raised another half percent as the central bank reacted to a currency crash that had wiped nearly a third off the rand's value in the prior fifteen months.

The opportunity to translate this turmoil into working-class gains was palpable. Yet by failing to issue immediate statements about Marikana, much less mobilize workers for solidarity against the joint onslaught of multinational capital and the state, Cosatu was simply unable in late 2012 to intervene when so many cried out for a shift from the proverbial "War of Position" to a "War of Movement." Cosatu's longing gaze to Zuma for a genuine relationship reminded many of its support for him during the darkest 2005–2007 days of his double criminal trials, on corruption and rape charges. (Legal technicalities allowed Zuma to escape both.) Yet it was now, in the wake of Marikana, even more apparent that Cosatu's conservatism was the principal barrier to social progress.

By mid-2013, the most important contradiction within labor appeared to be the split between the pro-Zuma president, Sidumo Dlamini, and the majority of Cosatu affiliates on the one hand, and Vavi plus Numsa and eight smaller unions on the other. Vavi made a serious error by having a brief affair with a junior officemate, whose allegations of rape (later withdrawn) and demand for a \$200,000 blackmail payoff (publicly refused) allowed Dlamini to suspend him. "I handed my enemies a loaded gun," said Vavi. But the suspension fostered extreme tensions, especially when late in 2013 Dlamini postponed action on a petition by the requisite nine member unions who demanded a special congress of several thousand Cosatu members to decide matters. The Vavi-Numsa strategy was to win back Cosatu. But in early 2014 after issuing a charge sheet against Vavi for various other alleged personal ethical violations—said by Vavi to be merely trumped up claims—Dlamini and his allies formally refused any congress and it appeared a split would necessarily follow.

Matters had sharpened so much because in mid-December 2013, the week after Mandela's death, Numsa's own special congress decided unanimously to cut ties with Zuma's ANC, effectively declaring a political war. The drive leftwards was organic, not simply a manifestation of Numsa's openly socialist leadership. The union's much more cautious president, Cedric Gina, had resigned just before the special congress, as it became apparent that secretary general Irvin Jim and his deputy Karl Cloete had stronger momentum behind their devastating critique of Zuma and Dlamini. Other top leaders—the young Pretoria auto-worker Andrew Chirwa who took over from Gina, and his new deputy Christine Olivier, as well as national headquarters stalwarts Mphumzi Maqungo, Dinga Sikwebu, Norma Craven, and Woody Aroun (to name just a few)—represent the most talented socialist cadre in any union on the continent, all able to keep the project going if Jim is sidelined by his growing list of enemies. But the delegates supported a shift even further leftwards than Jim and other leaders anticipated, and much further still than Vavi called for when he gave the Numsa congress a keynote speech, as was apparent in several unanimous decisions:

- First, the break with the ANC included a retraction of the usual \$200,000 gift for electoral support (as well as personnel and office assistance), a demand that Zuma resign the presidency in part because of irregular state funding of his \$19 million rural mansion, and condemnation of ANC policies including the neoliberal National Development Plan, pro-corporate macroeconomic management, commercialized highways, and especially a youth wage subsidy anticipated to create a secondary labor market and undermine established workers.
- Second, workers authorized a showdown and likely divorce with Cosatu over Vavi's ongoing suspension, as well as open violation of Cosatu rules regarding single-sector recruitment, given that Numsa desired new members from workplaces not limited to heavy manufacturing but across the value chain, including mining.
- Third, they agreed that a united front approach and a movement towards socialism would be established in conjunction with the diverse, disgruntled social movements and community organizations which since the late 1990s have been growing restless about shortcomings of ANC neoliberal nationalism.²¹

The latter move included Numsa's hosting of a "struggle expo" at the union's impressive Marxist political school in Johannesburg in late

January, just as the upsurge of local protests gained momentum. Nearly every militant force in civil society (including the oft-stigmatized LGBTI community) arrived to meet the leading Numsa shop stewards. Numsa has even welcomed the infamous “feces flingers” of Cape Town: several former ANC local leaders expelled from the party in mid-2013 because their tactic of tossing raw excrement into the atriums of the city’s airport and provincial parliament, as well as along the main highway and even at the provincial governor’s Mercedes Benz, had proven effective in the country’s sole province not run by the ANC. The national ruling party’s leaders realized, given how quickly Cape Town city officials responded to this tactic by improving sanitation services in Khayelitsha township, that there was no small likelihood that poo-pelting the one percenters might also prove attractive in ANC-controlled towns.

Left Party Pretenders, Populists, and Possibilities

In the meantime, two other parties ostensibly to the ANC’s left continued to maneuver. One, the South African Communist Party (SACP), had since the 1930s operated deep inside the ruling party, and yet repeatedly played a conservatizing role. Genuine radical activists were alienated by SACP opposition to the rising demand for minerals nationalization and by the SACP leadership’s curious accusation that Lonmin miners were “counter-revolutionaries.”²² The same men spent much of late 2013 hurling invective against Numsa, which was replied to in kind. To illustrate the divergent approaches, somewhat meager struggles led by the SACP included a move to erase bad credit ratings for millions of blacklisted borrowers, yet without dropping the actual debt repayment obligations—thus confirming a palliative approach. While the SACP had been severely marginalized during the reign of Mbeki (a born-again-neoliberal having once been a Moscow-trained communist leader), several leading party members (e.g., Blade Nzimande, Thulas Nxesi, Jeremy Cronin, Yunus Carrim, and Rob Davies) were given cabinet or deputy minister posts in 2009 and were thus apparently co-opted to the Zuma project.

In contrast, the newest left-wing party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), entered political life with far more energy and initiative because of its extremely charismatic leader Julius Malema, even if its dubious roots deterred support by many socialists and other progressives. Along with Vavi, former ANC Youth League president Malema was amongst Zuma’s strongest supporters in the 2005-08 battle to toss out Mbeki (even defending Zuma during rape charges with what was judged to be “hate speech” against women—for which he was forced to

apologize and pay a hefty fine). His thuggish approach ensured enduring notoriety, but also an enthusiastic populist following amongst the vast alienated masses. With Zuma's elevation to president in 2009, the young firebrand grew overconfident. He reacted to the worsening economic crisis by demanding widespread nationalization, and in the process, he and other Youth League leaders went far beyond the bounds of ANC discourse. They very vocally fell out with the vast majority of ANC apparatchiks, including NUM and SACP elites, and used the experience of marginalization to foster yet more radical politics.

But Malema's own personal tenderpreneurship—a middle-man deal-making role in the northern-most province—reportedly led to a \$5 million looting of state coffers with no value added, so his enemies, soon to include Zuma, ensured that the tax man and national prosecutor swept in and confiscated his farm, mansions, and savings accounts. Malema's richest allies received similar treatment, and so quickly dropped their public support for him. During 2011–2012, Ramaphosa led an ANC disciplinary committee that ultimately expelled Malema, in the process wrenching away control of his power base in the ANC Youth League, and routing all his allies there too. The Youth League soon went into financial receivership because of millions of dollars in unpaid debt.

Yet the genius of the man disparaged as “Juju”—to emphasize his childishness—is to take such hits in stride, and with political jujitsu become stronger as a martyr. Aside from Ramaphosa, his primary political enemy for the next five years remains Zuma, whom he repeatedly calls “the shower man” in reference to the president's rape-case defense that after unprotected sex, which Zuma claims was consensual, with a young woman he knew to be HIV-positive in 2005, Zuma took a hot shower as protection. (Tragically, sex and money continue to play as outsized a role in South African politics as in less class-conscious countries such as the United States, Britain, and France.)

Malema's formal fraud trial begins in September and will probably lead to a conviction, but there is no question he and his closest allies have the potential to rally millions of impatient youth for years to come, even if their coffers are bare compared to the heydays of ANC Youth League dominance. In late 2012, just as Ramaphosa was anointed Zuma's deputy, Malema made his last-gasp appeal to rejoin the ANC and avoid banishment, but Zuma turned him down, with Ramaphosa influential as an uncompromising ANC disciplinary committee member. Malema had spent the prior months in the Marikana region and rallied tens of thousands of angry workers, community activists, and youth at several of his appearances.

At one point, a few weeks after the massacre, the entire national security apparatus was on “high alert” because he addressed a few angry dissident former ANC guerrillas who were not properly integrated into the army.

It transpired, indeed, that mass murder at Marikana was itself partly a function of key Zuma allies’ paranoia about Malema. This was revealed in a transcript of an August 14, 2012 meeting between Lonmin executives and the provincial police commissioner, Zukiswa Mbombo, who was clarifying the state’s willingness to clamp down with force:

When I was speaking to Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa, he mentioned to me a name that is also calling him, that is pressurizing him, unfortunately it is a politically high. Cyril Ramaphosa. Yes. When I was talking to national commissioner (Riah Phiyega) last night she said to me: “Who are the shareholders here?” and I said I do not know the shareholders, but I know that the minister mentioned Cyril. And then she said: “Now I got it.” You know why she says she got it? Remember, Cyril was in the appeals committee of Malema, remember?²³

Appearing before the Farlam Commission in February 2014, Mbombo was asked about that meeting, because the minutes recorded her own knowledge of “Malema’s view on nationalization...so it has got serious political connotation that we need to take into account but which we need to find a way of defusing...hence I just told these guys that we need to act as such that we kill this thing” (*sic*). As Farlam himself observed, it was obvious that Mbombo did not want Malema to march in and defuse the situation, as would have been feasible given his stature. She then elaborated to Farlam: “I had to find out if Lonmin didn’t think that nationalization would have been one of the reasons there was this situation. The nationalization issue was already being mentioned in the political circles.”²⁴ To interpret, the potential that Malema would get mileage from a new power base amongst mineworkers, had he successfully intervened in the August 2012 strike given the leadership vacuum, was apparently a sufficient incentive to the provincial police that a pre-meditated massacre became the preferable option. Mbombo understood what was at stake, *economically*, if Malema’s popularity continued to rise.

The Marikana massacre was planned by the authorities (including Mbombo) in various ways: seeding police anger at two prior murders of constables by the same mineworkers—allegedly in self-defense—a few days before (.jpg shots of mutilated faces were sent out on ubiquitous smart phones widely seventy-two hours beforehand); providing the by-now-crazed police with live ammo, instead of just rubber bullets and teargas; rolling out barbed wire fencing just as non-lethal firepower forced miners

from the kopje, and thus corralling mineworkers into the area where many were shot; and having multiple body bags and hearses at the ready.

On this terrain of extreme class struggle and police proto-fascism, not surprisingly Malema was quickly rewarded with overwhelming support from Marikana miners on two occasions, including a memorial ceremony he arranged for the thirty-four dead at which he kicked out several of Zuma's cabinet ministers who had come to pay respects. But, on his third visit, police denied him his constitutional rights to address another huge crowd. Malema thus became, briefly, a morally unstoppable force across the mining belt in North West and Limpopo Provinces, calling for radical redistribution of wealth. The frisson from his appearances faded over time, but his adoption of a Che-style red beret and the formation of the EFF in 2013 revived his prospects. He will continue, long into the foreseeable future, as a left-populist firebrand, with thousands of hardcore followers convinced he is being illegitimately persecuted by the state.

The reaction to this drama by Numsa leadership and most forces within the independent left, as well as many community protesters, was surprisingly but perhaps maturely blasé. While Malema attracted the rump of the neo-'BC' (Black Consciousness) movement—activists who aspired to the uncompromising principles of Steve Biko (a brilliant organizer, visionary, orator, and writer murdered by apartheid police in 1977)—the community-based radicals who were organized as formal socialists mostly observed with hostile caution. This was no surprise, what with the prior role Malema played in enforcing dogmatic ANC nationalism. The small leftist groups made overtures, the most prominent being the Democratic Left Front and the Workers and Socialist Party, but at this writing, had established no formal links. By describing EFF ideology as “Marxist-Leninist-Fanonist,” Malema and intellectual allies like Floyd Shivambu and Andile Mngxitama have added flair. Their manifesto and analyses are sound, and their prospects for getting between 5 and 10 percent of the vote on May 7, 2014—and perhaps a dozen or more seats in Parliament—are impressive. They have support in the proletarian and lumpen-proletarian classes, as well as amongst the black radical petit-bourgeoisie (perhaps EFF's natural base).

This is not yet the source of a synthesis with the leading elements of the socialist trade unions. Numsa's own “Marxist-Leninist” approach has much richer traditions, and its exceptional new institute-recruited radical scholar-activists (such as David Masondo and Chris Malikane, with doctorates in sociology and economics from New York University and the New School, respectively) to join longstanding “Friends of

Numsa” independent-left allies.²⁵ Yet since the 2005–2014 decade has witnessed the most abrupt U-turns amongst nationalists—especially the wild swings of once-loyal ANC cadres from supporting Mbeki to Zuma, and then from supporting Zuma to Malema, or from supporting Zuma to Vavi—there is no denying the old saw that “no permanent friends or enemies in politics,” especially not in the world’s most unequal major society.

Conclusion: Exhausted Neoliberal Nationalism

What has been definitive, though, is the waning of any remaining illusions that the forces of “liberation” led by the ANC would take South Africa to genuine freedom and a new society. Even before the twentieth anniversary of democracy in April 2014, the Marikana massacre of August 2012 had that effect, permanently, and Ramaphosa’s ascendance does nothing to restore faith in the ruling party—just the opposite. In coming months and years, protesters will keep dodging police bullets and moving the socioeconomic and political-ecological questions to center stage, from where ANC neoliberal nationalism can either arrange a properly fascist backlash or, more likely under Zuma’s ongoing misrule until 2019, continue shrinking in confusion with regular doses of necessary humility.

For our broader purposes of understanding turmoil in contemporary Africa, the Marikana massacre and all the follow-up chaos in Madibeng together exemplify the society’s more general Resource Curse. When a ruling party in any African country sinks to the depths of allowing its police force to serve white-dominated multinational capital by killing dozens of black workers so as to end a brief strike, it represents a profound turn. Beyond just the obvious human-rights and labor-relations travesties, Marikana revealed the extreme depths of ruling-class desperation represented by the fusion of Ramaphosa’s black capitalism, the London mining house Lonmin’s collaboration (via Ramaphosa) with the mining and police ministers, the alleged “sweetheart unionism” of the increasingly unpopular NUM, the brutality of state prosecutors who charged 270 massacre survivors with the crime of murder, and the fragility of Cosatu. In 2014, Madibeng’s water protests and all the other demonstrations against elite misrule confirm the limits of a transition that is so thoroughly compromised by neoliberal policy and crony-capitalist practice.

The cutting-edge wedge, today, between the Zuma/Ramaphosa project and the left is stark, given Numsa’s promise of a united front approach to building a movement towards socialism. That, in turn, is the basis for hope for a different South Africa, one not ruled by multinationals, not

ecologically destructive, not reliant on unpaid labor of women to cheapen migrant men's labor, alongside prolific male violence against women, not politically corrupt. But that struggle has, in 2014, just begun—and by the looks of desperation on the faces of both sides within the borders of Madibeng, it will be a long one indeed.

Notes

1. Graeme Hosken, "World Fraud Champs," *Times*, February 19, 2014, <http://timeslive.co.za>.
2. Phraseology and concepts are important. As one of the leading experts on Brazil's experience, Alfredo Saad-Filho, explained following a February 2014 book launch about the Lula Moment in Johannesburg, "The attempt to build a 'Numsa moment' in South Africa will face much greater difficulties than those that confronted the Workers Party (PT) and trade unions (CUT) in Brazil, back in the early 1980s. South Africa has *already* gone through the transitions to democracy and to neoliberalism, while the PT and CUT emerged before these two transitions. Political democracy and neoliberalism have had very adverse implications for the composition, organic unity and capacity of mobilization of the working class almost everywhere. So the challenge is now greater, but the working class movement and the left in South Africa are also much stronger than they ever were in Brazil. The point, then, is to build a political left with working class hegemony, rather than under the intellectual leadership of sections of the middle class, or the economic hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie, as was the case in the 'Lula Moment' in Brazil" (personal communication, February 21, 2014).
3. The "united front approach" of Numsa signifies two processes: first, formerly pro-ANC activists harking back to the 1983-1991 United Democratic Front that brought together in a coherent alliance most of the radical and left-liberal civil society formations. It is usually cited as facilitating sufficient internal uprisings and external sanctions that, alongside ANC diplomatic deal-making and a (minor) military threat, apartheid became excessively unprofitable for capitalism to maintain and defend by the late 1980s. However, the ANC's social movement demobilization during the early 1990s included the UDF's formal closure, in spite of fears that ANC nationalism would turn neoliberal, as happened across Africa. Second, however, the word "approach" used by Numsa is important insofar as there is no attempt to parachute the Front notion onto existing social movements and community organizations, but instead the project is best considered a bottom-up reconfiguration of leftist forces.
4. Madibeng Municipality, Municipal Website, <http://madibengweb.co.za>.
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6. *Politicsweb*, "Willie Hofmeyer, SIU Uncovers Rampant Corruption in North West Municipalities - Premier," October 10, 2010, <http://politicsweb.co.za>.
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8. Patrick Bond, "Marikana's Meaning for Crisis Management: An Instance of South Africa's Resource Curse," forthcoming in U. Schuerkens, ed., *Global Management, Local Resistances: Theoretical Discussion and Empirical Case Studies* (London: Routledge, 2014).
9. Brian Clougley, "The Unacceptable Face of Capitalism," *Counterpunch*, October 3-5, 2008, <http://counterpunch.org>.
10. Greg Nicolson, "Marikana Massacre: More Disturbing Questions About Police Planning and Objectives," *Daily Maverick*, October 23, 2013, <http://dailymaverick.co.za>.
11. Richard Calland, "ANC: The Battle for Power Is About to Begin," *Mail&Guardian*, January 18, 2013, <http://mg.co.za>.
12. Patrick Bond, "FIFA Forbids Free Speech at World Cup," *Counterpunch*, July 9, 2010, <http://counterpunch.org>.
13. *The Economist*, "The End of the Affair," June 15, 2013, <http://economist.com>.
14. Rex Mckenzie and Nicolas Pons-Vignon, *Volatile Capital Flows and a Route to Financial Crisis in South Africa*, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Augur Working Paper 2, February 2012, <http://augurproject.eu>.
15. South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, "Petrochemical Expansion Threatens South Durban - A \$25 Billion Mega-Project Mistake," November 2013, <http://climateconnections.org>.
16. Nelly Shamase and Matuma Letsoalo, "Saving Cyril," *Mail&Guardian*, November 9, 2012, <http://mg.co.za>.
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18. Farlam Commission, "Transcription of the Commission of Inquiry: Marikana - Days 1 to 7, 1 to 31 October 2012," Pretoria, <http://seri-sa.org>.
19. David Bruce, "Political Killings in South Africa: A Provincial Concern?," *SA Crime Quarterly*, 45, September 30, 2013, <http://issafrica.org>.
20. Yolandi Groenewald, "Aurora Mine's Toxic Water Crisis," June 11, 2010, <http://mg.co.za>.
21. World Economic Forum, *Global Competitiveness Report 2013-14*, September 2013, <http://weforum.org>.
22. Resolutions adopted at Numsa Special National Congress, Ekurhuleni, December 16-20, 2013, <http://numsa.org.za>.
23. See, e.g., Blade Nzimande, "The Class Struggle Is the Battle of Ideas: Opening Address to the SACP Commissars' Conference," *Umsebenzi Online*, October 25, 2012, <http://sacp.org.za>, 11, 39.
24. SA Press Association, "Ramaphosa Raised at Marikana Inquiry," *News24*, January 30, 2014, <http://news24.com>.
25. Athandiwe Saba, "Marikana: Did Julius Malema Impact Top Cop's Decisions?," *CityPress*, February 4, 2014, <http://citypress.co.za>.
26. By way of disclosure, this author is an occasional, often critical, volunteer within Friends of Numsa.