

Editorial



FROM THE EDITOR

The release of the Farlam Commission of Inquiry into the Marikana massacre has seen a flurry of media coverage, as one would expect from a report of its size and magnitude, and also from the importance of the matter for South African labour relations. The report explains how the events leading up to the massacre evolved and how it could have been averted. Criticism of the report has been that it stops short of making strong recommendations after providing all the necessary evidence. The report has also provided a basis upon which further action can be taken against the South African Police Service and Lonmin by the families of the killed workers. The Marikana Support Campaign says the report blames workers for the massacre instead of Lonmin which wanted to break the strike at all costs instead of listening to the workers' grievances. There is also the other negative portrayal of the strikers, especially their decision to strike outside of the established collective bargaining processes. The failure of unions to reign in their members and to effectively engage with the employer, Lonmin, is also highlighted.

The central demand for workers at Marikana was a living wage of R12,500. By looking at previous Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) worker surveys Chere Monaisa argues that the central demand for workers has

been for better wages so as to correct the apartheid low-wage regime and to reduce poverty and inequality.

The Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (Sactwu) says load-shedding is emptying workers' pockets as shifts are shortened and workers asked to go home. There is also idle time of up to two hours when the workers warm up machines.

After the farm workers' strike in the Western Cape farmers have adopted tactics that are vindictive on labour. These include retrenchments, reduced working days and charging workers for farm housing and utilities, writes Jerry Mmanoko Mathekga.

Women continue to be a small fraction of the South African workforce and are restricted to low-paying jobs. African women are at the lowest rung, write Liesl Orr and Tanya van Meelis.

The South African economy is no longer dominated by white monopoly capital. The state is also a key player and the same applies to foreign ownership of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The black ruling class also has stakes in the economy, writes Lucien van der Walt.

Myths continue to be brought forward about the post-apartheid political economy including that the economy is not growing because of strong unions, that the labour market is rigid and that high wages cause unemployment, writes Khwezi Mabasa.

Struggles for land ownership and accessing revenue from platinum mining companies continue in the Bagatla traditional authority. The villagers of Lesethleng and Mothlabe are challenging the Bagatla ba Kgafela traditional authority on ownership of the land, and even amongst the villagers themselves there is no agreement on who should benefit. The struggle is informed by identity as well as economic issues such as youth unemployment.

Sometimes history is told through the lives of individual workers as seen in the book *Standing Together: The Story of Bonakele Wilson Fundani* by Ray Lazarus. The book traces his early working life during the apartheid period and as shop steward in the meat industry when he was on the Cape Slaughter Workers Committee.

A lot can be learnt from worker education in SA write, Salim Vally, Mphutlane Wa Bofelo and John Treat. Workers' education is about struggle and conscientisation of the working class. It is also about the struggle for a socialist society, and by trying to box it into the National Qualifications Framework is to make it a commodity of the capitalist market. They argue that worker education should not be depoliticised. ■

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