

## **Platinum Politics:**

**The Rise, and Rise, of the Association of Mineworkers and  
Construction Union (AMCU)**

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***Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts by Research in the Department of Sociology, University of  
the Witwatersrand, March 2017***

## **Abstract**

The massacre of 34 workers in Marikana in August 2012 represented a turning point in labour relations in South Africa. The killings, and the show of force that accompanied it, had a direct impact on trade unionism in the platinum belt, where the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) has enjoyed remarkable growth, compared to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The events of 2012 helped catapult AMCU to lead a historic five-month long strike in 2014 that brought the platinum industry to its knees. The 2014 strike indelibly altered labour relations in the sector.

This dissertation aims to understand the character of AMCU on the platinum belt in the aftermath of the Marikana massacre. Tracing AMCU's rise on the platinum mines from 2012 to 2014, the dissertation concludes with three features that emerge from AMCU's organising style. These are its insistence on a non-partisan, independent trade union movement, its return to a democratic, workplace-centred struggle and a call for wage-led economic growth.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the requirements of the Degree of Masters of Arts by Research in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for a degree or examination at any other university.

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Naadira Munshi

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of the men who died at Marikana, in August 2012.

Andries Ntsenyeho

Anele Mdizeni

Babalo Mtshazi

Bongani Mdze

Bongani Nqongophele

Bonginkosi Yona

Cebisile Yawa

Fezile David Saphendu

Frans Mabelane

Hassan Fundi

Hendrick Monene

Henry Mvuyisi Pato

Isaiah Twala

Jackson Lehupa

Julius Langa

Khanare Elias Monesa

Mafolisi Mabiya

Makhosandile Mkonjwa

Mgcineni Noki

Michael Ngweyi

Modisaotsile Van Wyk Sagalala

Molefi Osiel Ntsoele

Mongezeleli Ntenetya

Mphangeli Tukuza

Mphumzeni Ngxande

Mzukisi Sompeta

Nkosiyabo Xalabile

Ntandazo Nokamba

Patric Akhona Jijase

Pumzile Sokanyile

Raphael Janeveke Liau

Sello Lepaaku

Semi Jokanisi

Stelega Meric Gadlela

Telang Mohai

Tembelakhe Mati

Thabiso Johannes Mosebetsane

Thabiso Johannes Thelejane

Thapelo Eric Mabebe

Thembinkosi Gwelani

Thobile Mpumza

Thobisile Zibambebe

John Kutlwano Ledingoane

Tokoti Mangcotywa

## Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to my supervisors, Shireen Ally and Noor Nieftagodien for their guidance, patience, and support through the completion of this dissertation. I could not have asked for more caring comrades who stood by me through many delays, and what has been a difficult journey. I owe much of my personal and academic development to both of you.

I am indebted to the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI) for trusting me to be a part of their legal team at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, from which this research arose. In addition, SERI funded my study and were a constant source of support and encouragement. Special mention goes to Stuart Wilson, Teboho Mosikili, Khuselwa Dyantyi, Nomzamo Zondo, Sanele Garane, Mami Molefe, Jackie Dugard and Princess Makopane. Many thanks goes to Jim Nichol and Julian Brown. I am grateful for the academic support provided by the NRF Chair in Local Histories, Present Realities; and to Thabiso Mareletsa for his assistance in translation and transcription.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the mineworkers who I interviewed, who assisted in facilitating interviews, and who trusted me with their stories. Joseph Mathunjwa, Jeff Mphahlele and Jimmy Gama from the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) opened the door for me, provided valuable insights and were always patient with my never-ending questions. The friendship of Ester Mabena and Gift Antonio made every AMCU event memorable.

I owe my insights into the platinum mining industry to the mineworkers and Marikana community members with whom I interacted and developed close ties at the Commission. I am particularly grateful for the support and love of the families of the mineworkers killed at Marikana in 2012, represented by SERI. They gave me courage when I found writing difficult.

I learned a lot from comrades in the Marikana Support Campaign and I am grateful for their companionship, and that of Tehillah and Thapelo who kept my spirits high. Much love goes to my friends Fatima, Nurina, Mbuyiseni, Dasantha, Shir'a, Minhaj,

Riyaad, Kea, Tazz and many more I have not named. I sincerely appreciate the time and effort Faeza, Bhavna and Natasha took to edit this dissertation.

Finally, my gratitude goes to my family. My sisters Razina (who also edited), Shehnaz, Sameera and Fatima are my greatest strength and source of comfort. To my loving parents and my biggest supporters, Shamim and Ismail Munshi, who have always provided guidance and pushed me to complete this work, this is as much yours, as it is mine.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On 23 January 2014, about 70 000 platinum mineworkers' downed tools in a struggle for a living wage of R12 500 a month. Over five months, South Africa witnessed what became the longest labour strike in the mining sector. The strike was led by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) and its roots lay in the labour unrest that rocked the platinum belt in 2012.

Independent, worker-led<sup>1</sup>, unprotected labour strikes for higher wages on the platinum belt in the North West Province began at a mine owned by Impala Platinum Holdings Limited (Implats) in January 2012, before spreading to mines owned by Lonmin Plc in August and then to Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) mines in October of that year. As the unprotected strike spread from mine to mine, the demand for a living wage of R12 500 became its rallying call. The murder of 34 mineworkers at Lonmin's Marikana mine in August 2012 captured the world's attention. It set the stage for the strike wave to alter the face of labour relations in South Africa's platinum belt, the site of the world's largest platinum deposits.

### *AMCU Rising*

What has come to be referred to as the "Marikana Massacre" has begun to symbolise economic inequality and the continued exploitation of workers in post-apartheid South Africa. At the same time, it shone light on the inability of the previously dominant National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to maintain the loyalty of its membership in the platinum sector. The momentous rise of the relatively unknown union, AMCU, to advance workers collective interests in the platinum industry, was one of the most unexpected consequences of the 2012 strike wave. Emerging as the dominant union out of the independent, unprotected strike wave of 2012, AMCU embraced the workers' demand for a R12 500 wage and led the five-month protected strike from 23 January to 24 June 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> These strikes were led by workers and were independent of any trade union leadership

AMCU has been accused of being an opportunistic and violent union by NUM and the ruling tripartite alliance: the African National Congress (ANC)-South African Communist Party (SACP)-Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).<sup>2</sup> This dissertation argues that these labels are simplistic and do not help explain the willingness of 70 000 workers to down tools in a strike led by AMCU. Nor does it explain the earlier vote of no confidence in NUM leaders on the platinum belt.

The face of AMCU is its president, Joseph Mathunjwa, and for five years, it has continued to grow in the mining and construction sector. Unlike the ANC-aligned NUM, AMCU has refused to formally align itself with a political party, and generally confines itself to workplace politics.

### *Glittering Platinum, Dulling Wages*

In South Africa, the discovery of the first platinum nuggets dates to 1924.<sup>3</sup> South Africa's platinum reserves are located in what is known as the Bushveld Igneous Complex (BIC). This geological structure is located in Gauteng, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. The platinum industry has been tied to complicated sets of land and mineral rights since the apartheid era. Unionisation by NUM in the industry dates to the late 1980s. Before that, complex and rigid anti-union laws governed the old platinum-rich Bantustans.<sup>4</sup> After 1994, the platinum industry grew significantly, peaking between 2000 and 2008. The industry's growth did not yield increased wages for workers that were commensurate with the rapid expansion and high profitability of the platinum sector.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Unions at each other's throats at Lonmin mine', *SABC News*, 16 August 2012, URL: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/ba35c1004c5d5ecca71aa7e0eede81ca/Unions-at-each-others-throats-at-Lonmin-mine-20120816>; and SAPA, 'Role of AMCU 'must be probed'', 19 August 2012, *Fin24*, URL: <http://www.fin24.com/Economy/Role-of-AMCU-must-be-probed-20120819>

<sup>3</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume II, Yorkshire: The Moor Press, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Bantustans or homelands, were designated territories set aside by the apartheid government for black people to reside in. See Capps G, 'Victim of its own success? The platinum mining industry and the apartheid mineral property system in South Africa's political transition', *Review of African Political Economy*, 39:131, 2012; and Allen, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume II

<sup>5</sup> Bowman A & Isaacs G, *Demanding the Impossible: Platinum Mining Profits and Wage Demands in Context*, Research on Money and Finance, Occasional Policy Paper 11, June 2014

The 2008 global financial crisis led to plummeting demand for commodities which resulted in a dramatic loss in the value of platinum.<sup>6</sup> In that environment, a strong, energised and vocal trade union threatened to further decrease profits for the mining companies. Their reluctant recognition of AMCU is somewhat understandable, in this context.

The advent of democracy in 1994 promised to bring greater equality and access to the economy and the state for black people.<sup>7</sup> Yet in 2017, South Africa is witnessing rising unemployment, low wages and precarious job security with the growth of casualisation of workers in the economy.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, inequality has widened dramatically: 95% of the wealth of the economy is concentrated in the hands of just 10% of the population.<sup>9</sup> Trade unions have become considerably weakened as they struggle to oppose the state and maintain their membership numbers under these challenges. This is exacerbated by internal conflict within COSATU, South Africa's largest union federation and an ally of the ANC, through the tripartite alliance.

AMCU, for its part, appeared to have gripped the imagination of militant workers who, in an unprecedented and bold action, had forced the platinum mining houses into collective wage negotiations in 2014 when it held a simultaneous strike at all three platinum producing companies. The five-month long strike displayed the disruptive power of labour through a determined fight against capital and the state. Whether this form of radical action is sustainable, is yet to be seen.

This dissertation aims to understand the character of AMCU on the platinum belt that was shaped by a particular set of events between 2012 and 2014. It looks at the organising challenges that trade unions faced, and continue to face, on the platinum

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<sup>6</sup> Chaskalson R, 'The Road to Marikana: Transformations in South Africa's Platinum Industry, 1994–2012', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:5, 2016, and Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III, Yorkshire: The Moor Press, 2003

<sup>7</sup> ANC, 'The Reconstruction and Development Programme', *African National Congress*, 1994; and ANC 'A people's contract to create work and fight poverty', 2004 election manifesto, *African National Congress*, 2004

<sup>8</sup> Hart G, *Disabling Globalisation: Places of power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002; and Hart G, *Rethinking the South African Crises: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony*, UKZN Press, 2013

<sup>9</sup> Gordhan P; '2017 Budget Speech' delivered to South Africa Parliament, *The South African Government*, 22 February 2017, URL: <http://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-pravin-gordhan-2017-budget-speech-22-feb-2017-0000>

mines, to gain and maintain the trust of the workers they try to represent. Chapter one looks at the methodology used in the course of this research. Chapter two provides an overview of the history and complexities that have faced black trade unions in South Africa, from the 1970s to the present. It locates this study in the platinum mining industry and unionism on the platinum belt. The chapter concludes by looking at what became known as the Marikana Massacre, where 34 mineworkers were killed in August 2012 by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

Chapter three of this dissertation presents a brief history of AMCU and how it entered the platinum mines. It then traces the 2012 strike wave, and tries to explain the emergence of AMCU as the majority union on the platinum mines in the Rustenburg region. This was achieved largely through winning over the leadership of the independent workers' committees who were looking for an alternative union to represent black mineworkers' interests. Chapter four goes through the various stages of the 2013 wage negotiations which culminated in the five-month long platinum strike in 2014. It describes the challenges and complexities facing AMCU during the strike, and how the success of the strike consolidated its support on the platinum belt. Chapter five assesses three features of AMCU that emerge from its rise on the platinum mines in South Africa – its non-partisan independent trade unionism, its focus on workplace politics, and its push for a wage-led economy – to better understand the union, and the shaping of its character.

## **1.1 Methodology**

I was introduced to the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) through the Socio Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI). SERI is a registered NGO and works with communities, social movements and individuals to challenge inequality and realise socio-economic rights, with a focus on access to housing, electricity and water. SERI represented AMCU and the families of 36 mineworkers killed by the police at Lonmin Plc in Marikana, at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry ('the Commission'). I was employed by SERI in October 2012 to assist the legal teams with research at the Commission. The Commission lasted three years and during that time I established working relationships with AMCU

officials, the family representatives from the 36 families, some of the mineworkers who were at the forefront of the 2012 strike, Sikhala Sonke women's group in Marikana, and the broader community of lawyers and activists who were trying to support the community of Marikana.

As a member of SERI's legal team, I was witness to the evidence put before the Commission, and the impact of the Commission on members of the broader Marikana community. I have witnessed the way in which the killings at Marikana was reported and constructed in the public imagination. Furthermore, I acknowledged how evidence from the Commission continues to shape and change public perception of the events that took place in August 2012 at Marikana in particular, and of AMCU as a militant trade union.

This dissertation is based on qualitative research collected primarily during the three years I spent at the Commission. A large part of the dissertation is based on ethnography and participant observation. Ethnography involves direct and personal observation by the ethnographer of the research participants and surroundings over a period of time.<sup>10</sup> Participant observation has been described as:

A way to collect data in a naturalistic setting by ethnographers who observe/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation zooms in on Lonmin Plc's Karee branch, Impala Platinum Holdings Limited's South branch at shaft number 8, and Anglo American Platinum's Khuseleka branch, subsequently known as Thembelani branch, all based in the Rustenburg region of the North West Province. Amplats' Khuseleka mine and Thembelani mine were restructured by Amplats in 2014 to constitute one mine known as Thembelani, as a cost-saving measure. For purposes of this research I continue to use the name Khuseleka mine because it was used during the time frame of this study. The three branches where I conducted my field work were chosen because they were the central sites of the 2012 strike as well as a key locations in the rise of AMCU since

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<sup>10</sup> Friedman R & McDaniel D, In the Eye of the Beholder: Ethnography in the Study of Work, in Whitefield K & Strauss G (eds.), *Researching the World of Work: Strategies and Methods of Studying Industrial relations*, Cornell University Press, 1998

<sup>11</sup> DeWalt KM and DeWalt BR, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, Rowman Altamira, 2002

then. Owing to both of these factors, I had established contacts at the three branches. I was able to speak to key members of leadership at all three mines who were participants of the workers' committees and who went on to become officials of AMCU when the union was given formal recognition by the mining companies.

Interviews were conducted with AMCU officials from various levels of the trade union: underground shaft stewards, full time shaft stewards, branch officials, regional officials, and the National Executive Committee of AMCU. I conducted 26 in-depth formal interviews using both purposive sampling and snowball sampling<sup>12</sup> to gain access to research participants. I interviewed only elected AMCU officials and I was dependent on members of the branch committee for access to other branch members and to underground shaft stewards.

At Amplats and Implats I interviewed AMCU officials who were available on the days that I visited the mines. I also interviewed officials who had completed their underground shifts, and happened to pass by AMCU's offices before returning home. Branch officials at Lonmin's Karee mine requested the number of people I wished to interview from each level of the leadership structure. The branch then requested Lonmin management to release the officials from work for the day. The officials were chosen in consultation with the various shaft committees so as to cause minimal disruption to their work.

My fieldwork involved attending mass meetings before, during and after the strike. I was fortunate to have accompanied AMCU's national leadership to mass meetings during the 2014 platinum strike. My time at the Commission meant I was surrounded by men and women who were participants of the strike, or community members of Marikana who were directly affected by the strike. While I was privy to internal AMCU conversations and meetings with AMCU's leadership which have informed my understanding of the organisation, a balance which respected both the professional and research relationship I have with AMCU and mineworkers I interacted with at the Commission needed to be maintained.

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<sup>12</sup> Purposive sampling identifies possible research participants based on research criteria, while snowballing relies on research participants identifying other participants.

This research is a study of how an organisation's character has been shaped by a set of events between 2012 and 2014. Research participants were elected union officials at three specific mines and union branches, and that information was made available to AMCU's NEC. As stated, I was dependent on the branch leaders for access to the shaft committees and underground shaft stewards. I could only give my participants a guarantee that their interviews would at all times be treated with the strictest confidence and will not be shared with anyone within AMCU.

Perhaps my greatest contribution has been my decision to focus on the unstudied, yet major player in the platinum industry, AMCU. This decision was made in an attempt to understand the development of AMCU as a trade union, thus using my limited resources to focus on the union. Importantly, the decision to focus on AMCU was due to the tense and easily compromising political relations within the platinum belt. My interviews were primarily conducted soon after the 2014 strike, and immediately after the Commission had concluded its hearings. AMCU had been recognised as the majority union for approximately a year, of which five months were spent in an extraordinary strike. There were moments, throughout the course of my research, of heightened tension between workers, trade unions, mining companies and the state. I was cautious of being associated with NUM for fear of jeopardising my relationship with AMCU. Whilst I am confident my presence at the mines did not put my interviewees at harm or risk, I took a calculated risk to rely on existing literature on NUM, as well as media reports. My entry point to AMCU has been through its leadership. Ironically, this may also be my limitation as I try to balance the voices of members, and officials at all levels of the union's structure.

## **1.2 Ethical considerations**

Ethics in research is vital to the integrity of the researcher and the quality of research produced. I acknowledge that researchers are not value free or objective in their research.<sup>13</sup> When the opportunity to work for SERI's legal teams at the Marikana Commission arose, my decision to do so was motivated by my interest in labour and working class politics.

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<sup>13</sup> See Burawoy, M. The Extended Case Method. *Sociological Theory*, 16:1, 4-33, 1998

My position at the Marikana Commission meant that I took a particular view of the killings at Marikana, as being the primary responsibility of the state and mining companies. My interest and my relationship with AMCU however, does not mean that I have adopted an anti-NUM position. I have a profound respect for NUM's proud history of struggle to improve the lives of black mineworkers. This research is motivated by an interest in labour organising and strengthening working class organisations in South Africa.

The decision to study AMCU was difficult one to make. Putting black bodies and black organisations under the microscope, without resorting to a "colonial gaze" requires constant vigilance. This is especially important given the substantial research interest in the platinum belt following the Marikana Massacre. Further, unrest and violence in the platinum belt has not subsided. At least two members of AMCU and NUM who have testified, or were intending to testify, at the Commission have been murdered; and two men who were injured and arrested on the 16 August 2012 have committed suicide. There were also tense moments during the 2014 strike, such as the creation of a rival union to AMCU and the killing of an AMCU shop steward. In January 2017, community activists in Marikana were arrested on murder charges. The delay of their bail application has been a source of tension. Political contestations over space between trade unions and political parties continue. These tensions are fuelled by the everyday violence of low wages, poverty and inequality maintained by the mining companies and the state. Despite these challenges, I believe that this dissertation makes a positive contribution to the growing body of literature on the platinum belt, and more broadly to the trade union movement in democratic South Africa.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Black trade unions in South Africa from the 1970s

Trade unions can be simply defined as an “organisation formed by workers in the workplace to advance their collective interests in an environment dominated by employers.”<sup>14</sup> The role of trade unions at the most basic level, is to struggle for better wages and improved working conditions for workers. However, trade unions have the ability to engage in more radical struggle when they attempt to alter the balance of power in favour of workers.

Black trade unionism in South Africa dates to the early 1900s. From the 1920s to the 1960s, black trade unions faced many challenges due to the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, which excluded black African workers from the legal definition of ‘employee’.<sup>15</sup> White workers could organise, strike and engage in collective action, while black workers could not. The Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) was perhaps the most successful of these attempts to organise.<sup>16</sup> The formation of the Council of Non-European Trade Unions in the 1940s and the South African Congress of Trade Unions in the 1950s represented further attempts to unite black workers into national federations. The violent suppression of the 1946 miners’ strike, led by the African Mineworkers’ Union, was indicative of the difficulties experienced by black workers. Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, it became even more difficult to unionise black workers. After the 1948 election, and the introduction of apartheid, black workers became increasingly politically excluded and marginalised by the state. The frustration of black workers was demonstrated by the Durban-Pinetown strikes of 1973 by 100 000 unorganised black workers, and which led to

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<sup>14</sup> Webster E, Buhlungu S & Bezuidenhout A, *Work and Organisations*, Oxford University Press, Southern Africa, 2001, p 40

<sup>15</sup> Bezuidenhout A, ‘Towards Global Social Movement Unionism? Trade union responses to globalisation in South Africa’, *International Labour Organisation*, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 2000

<sup>16</sup> Bonner P, ‘The Decline and Fall of the ICU: A Case in Self-Destruction’ in Webster E (ed.), *Essays in South African Labour History*, Raven Press, 1978

the emergence of new trade unions.<sup>17</sup> While these unions were not legally recognised by the state, they began to organise workers, and where possible operated by signing individual negotiation agreements with employers. The state responded to the unrest and changing labour environment by setting up the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry in 1977. On its recommendation, the government passed the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act in 1979, which legally recognised African workers as employees and gave limited recognition to black trade unions.

### *Broadening the political agenda*

In 1979, a number of independent unions – three registered and nine unregistered unions organising 45 000 workers – established the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). FOSATU was an umbrella body for industrial unions at a national level. For six years, FOSATU organised and claimed a membership of 120 000 workers with 11 affiliated unions.<sup>18</sup> FOSATU saw the necessity of maintaining an independent trade union federation that could focus on building strong working-class solidarity while maintaining strong democratic leadership practices on the shop floor.

As the national struggle against apartheid developed, trade unions began to forge and develop relations with community struggles, social movements and political parties, to push for greater political rights and recognition. Within the trade union movement, there was also a push towards greater unity. Some of the debates by Martin Plaut, Karl von Holdt, Edwin Ritchken, Devan Pillay and others was that of the “workerist” vs “populist” debate.<sup>19</sup> “Workerists”, it was argued, pushed for strong independent unions leading working class struggles, emphasising democratic shop floor practices, and organisational practices. “Populists” argued that a nationalist

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<sup>17</sup> Bezuidenhout A, ‘Towards Global Social Movement Unionism? Trade union responses to globalisation in South Africa’, 2000. For a brief description of these union and their affiliations, see: Friedman M, *The Future is in the Hands of the Workers: A History of FOSATU*, Wits University Press, 2011

<sup>18</sup> Friedman M, *The Future is in the Hands of the Workers: A History of FOSATU*

<sup>19</sup> Von Holdt K, ‘The Political Significance of COSATU: A Response to Plaut’, *Transformation* 5, 1987; Plaut M, ‘The Political Significance of COSATU’, *Transformation* 2, 1986; Ritchken E, ‘Towards a Working Alliance? Trade Unions and Community Organisations’, *Transformation* 10, 1989; Pillay D, ‘The End of a Dream? Social Movements and the New South Africa’, *Wits History Workshop: Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practice and Culture*, July 1994; and Pillay D, Between Social Movement and Political Unionism: COSATU and Democratic Politics in South Africa, *Rethinking Development and Inequality*, Vol. 2, Special Issue, 2013

struggle against apartheid needed to be waged, by building alliances that included political parties and recognised that workers' roles went beyond the work place. Ritchken argues that the debates of the 1980s were about how and when unions should fight for political rights and alliances with community organisations "without sacrificing internal democracy and working class leadership."<sup>20</sup>

COSATU was founded in 1985 by 33 unions, which included unaffiliated unions as well as those that belonged to FOSATU, with a total paid-up membership of about 460 000.<sup>21</sup> The founding of COSATU brought together unions from different sectors under one umbrella, with the aim of challenging the apartheid state, and a politics of non-racialism. COSATU's unions, like those in FOSATU, joined campaigns of the United Democratic Front, which was formed in 1983 as a coalition of nation-wide, anti-apartheid organisations.

The Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) was formed in 1980 and was influenced by the Black Consciousness (BC) tradition that was largely suspicious of the politics of non-racialism pushed by the ANC.<sup>22</sup> NUM was originally affiliated to CUSA but decided to join the new federation, COSATU, and became one of its most influential affiliates, which was reflected among other things in the election of Elijah Barayi, a miner worker, as COSATU's first president.

Pillay, Peter Waterman, Gay Seidman and Franco Barchiesi argue that the model of trade unionism displayed by COSATU in the 1980s to be that of Social Movement Trade Unionism (SMU).<sup>23</sup> In contrast with economic or political trade unionism, SMU is "an effort to raise the living standard of the working class a whole, rather than to protect individually defined interests of union members".<sup>24</sup> Seidman argues that there are three approaches to understanding the emergence of militant and politicised

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<sup>20</sup> Ritchken E, 'Towards a Working Alliance? Trade Unions and Community Organisations'

<sup>21</sup> Friedman M, *The Future is in the Hands of the Workers': A History of FOSATU*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Pillay D, 'The End of a Dream? Social Movements and the New South Africa'; Waterman P, Social-Movement Unionism: A New Union Model for a New World Order? *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 16: 3, 1993; Seidman G, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*, University of California Press, 1994; and Barchiesi F, Privatization and the Historical Trajectory of "Social Movement Unionism": A Case Study of Municipal Workers in Johannesburg, South Africa, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 71:1, 2007

<sup>24</sup> Seidman G, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*

union movements. The first is that authoritarianism disempowered workers by the denial of the franchise. In this context, political rights were sought by labour movements “as a critical first step towards gaining the legal power to bargain with employers”.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, industrialisation brought with it an increasingly industrial, urbanised working class, which were better able to insist on greater access to the state and to economic wealth. Unions began to make political demands as the state allowed for direct collective bargaining. In particular, Kally Forrest argues, the laws promulgated following the Wiehahn Commission reforms, which granted African trade union’s rights including the admission to industrial councils, and the right to strike, were a catalyst in the emergence of SMU.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, Seidman argues that unions were influenced by the institutional framework in which they emerge and their past political alliances. In South Africa, there were no legal rights or recognition for black workers. Therefore the focus on resistance to apartheid was for the attainment of political rights for the non-white majority.<sup>27</sup>

For Seidman, this propelled unions in South Africa to move from being predominantly shop floor organisations to articulating broader working class demands, and building alliances within communities.<sup>28</sup> In this context we can understand the rise of the independent trade union movement and the development of FOSATU and its successor, COSATU.

As COSATU’s activism helped propel South Africa’s transition to democracy, it was hoped that the COSATU would be able to influence and shape post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>29</sup> This was more so when COSATU entered into the tripartite alliance with the ANC and SACP in 1990. But with democracy, came new challenges.

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<sup>25</sup> Seidman G, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*

<sup>26</sup> Forrest K, *The metal that will not bend: National union of Metal workers of South Arica, 1980-1995*, Wits University Press, 2011, p 33

<sup>27</sup> Seidman G, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Adler G & Webster E (eds.), *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa, 1985-1997*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000

## 2.2 Post-apartheid trade unionism in South Africa

The scholarship on trade unions written in the post-apartheid era by Sakhela Buhlungu, Andries Bezuidenhout and Franco Barchiesi, presents diverse views on labour organising. This scholarship largely focuses on the changes that have taken place within the union movement in the democratic era, the new challenges facing unions as a result of these changes and the effectiveness of the tripartite alliance in advancing working class struggles.

Tracing South Africa's labour federations, COSATU, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), Buhlungu analyses the effects of the post-1994 democratic state on trade unions. He argues that during apartheid trade unions followed a model of militant trade unionism and were outspoken and actively advocated for change. The transition to democracy and the formation of the tripartite alliance changed the nature of the trade unions' response to capital and the state.

From the early to mid-1990s COSATU held influence and power within the alliance and thus won significant gains for workers. This is evident in the 1995 Labour Relations Act and in structures such as the National Economic Development Labour Council (NEDLAC).<sup>30</sup> Buhlungu argues that unions are now acting in partnership with the state and government, resulting in a change in the discourse of trade unions from one of smashing capitalism to "reconstruction and social partnerships" with business.<sup>31</sup> COSATU now responds to crises through the language of negotiation and compromise. This has led to the decline in militant SMUs. The greater legitimisation of black trade unions in collective bargaining has given rise to unexpected challenges. In particular the upward mobility of trade union shop stewards has resulted in the rise of 'corporatist trade unionism'. Buhlungu argues this has undermined their effectiveness and though COSATU remains a largely powerful body, it has to increasingly fight for attention from the ANC which dominates the alliance. Buhlungu concludes that the alliance is no longer effective for COSATU. Yet

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<sup>30</sup> There is contestation on the extent to which the LRA was a victory for workers.

<sup>31</sup> Buhlungu S, 'The state of trade unionism in post-apartheid South Africa', in J. Daniel, A. Habib, R. Southall, *State of the Nation: South Africa, 2003-2004*, HSRC Press, 2003

if COSATU is no longer a part of the alliance, then it risks losing all influence over state policies and weakening its position<sup>32</sup>

In a study of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), Barchiesi argues that SMU which was effective under apartheid, can no longer be an effective model of trade unionism in a democratic South Africa.<sup>33</sup> In 1999 SAMWU started campaigning to stop the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council's privatisation plans, but failed to do so despite forging alliances with civil society organisations. Barchiesi argues that the possibility of addressing workers' concerns and defending jobs through legal and institutional methods undermine community struggles. Yet, the alliance between COSATU and the ANC constrains unions because they struggle to wage an effective campaign against the state, as SAMWU failed to do against local government. Casualisation of labour is detrimental to union members who face retrenchments and lower pay. Workers in post-apartheid South Africa face new struggles, which place them in a very different position to the one they occupied during the apartheid era. Thus, the failure of SAMWU to organise workers highlights the difficulties unions face and the ineffectiveness of SMU in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Analysing the 2008 COSATU workers survey, Buhlungu and Malehoko Tshoaedi identify numerous challenges facing COSATU. They show how South Africa's labour force is changing.<sup>35</sup> The declining formally-employed labour force, increasing casualisation and the flexible international labour market challenge the ability of unions to organise workers. While the migrant labour system persists, the composition of migrant workers has changed with the increased participation of female and foreign workers.

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<sup>32</sup> Buhlungu S, 'The state of trade unionism in post-apartheid South Africa'

<sup>33</sup> Barchiesi F, 'Privatisation and the Historical Trajectory of "Social Movement Unionism"'. Also see Masiya T, 'Social Movement Trade Unionism: Case of the Congress of South African Trade Unions', *Politikon*, 41:3, 2014

<sup>34</sup> Barchiesi F, 'Privatisation and the Historical Trajectory of "Social Movement Unionism"'; see Barchiesi F and Kenny B, 'Precarious Collaborations. Working-Class Subjectivities, Community Activism, and the Problem with "Social Movement Unionism" in Late-Apartheid East Rand (South Africa)', Paper submitted for the *8th North Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa (NEWSA)*, Burlington (VT), Bishop Booth Conference Center, October 17-19, 2008

<sup>35</sup> Buhlungu S & Tshoaedi M, *COSATU'S Contested Legacy: South African trade unions in the second decade of democracy*, HSRC Press, 2012

By contrast, Roger Southall and Eddie Webster<sup>36</sup> present a more positive view of the tripartite alliance. They argue that COSATU is best placed within the alliance to wield influence over the state and to extend its influence despite the many challenges it faces. For Southall and Webster, the challenge is for COSATU to maximise its influence through state institutions, civil society and the workplace in order to move beyond traditional sources of power at the workplace to incorporate wider national and international networks.

Against this backdrop on models of effective trade unionism and the alliance, Tom Bramble and Barchiesi<sup>37</sup> argue that:

Wage labour in South Africa has traditionally been accompanied by coercive institutions of the racist state, such as the migrant labour system, which were aimed at enforcing unstable and precarious occupations and denying citizenship rights to the urban working class. Far from constituting fixed and mutually exclusive identities, 'race' and 'class' have interacted, both in providing meanings to a situation of socio-economic oppression and as markers of complex patterns of construction of worker subjectivity.<sup>38</sup>

For Bramble and Barchiesi, social scientists place unions in a framework of the market economy when they study labour movements in South Africa. This is most evident in the post-1994 literature on trade unionism, and this kind of understanding is limited because it keeps unions trapped in a neo-liberal framework of reformism since they no longer seek to radically challenge and transform the idea of wage labour. Rather, they have accepted it as an unquestioned foundation of South Africa's system of labour relations.

Leisel Orr brings a gendered perspective to the debate on trade unionism, drawing attention to the ways in which patriarchy maintains and is reproduced by capitalism.

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<sup>36</sup> Southall R and Webster E, 'Unions and parties in South Africa: Cosatu and the ANC in the wake of Polokwane', in Beckman B, Buhlungu S & Sachikonye L (eds.), *Trade Unions and Party Politics: Labour movements in Africa*, HSRC Press, 2010

<sup>37</sup> Barchiesi F & Bramble T (eds.), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, Aldershot Ashgate, 2003

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 1

She argues that by delaying the struggle against gender, trade unions and their structures are left wanting.<sup>39</sup> Vulnerable workers, particularly female workers, have borne the brunt of conservative economic policies, privatisation and casualisation. Trade unions urgently need to address gender politics with their organisations, and structurally change their methods of organising to facilitate full female participation. This dissertation is located in this broader debate on trade unionism.

## **2.3 Labour organising on the mines and the National Union of Mineworkers**

The mining industry in South Africa has a long and dark history of racialised exploitation of labour. Vic Allen's three-volume book series titled *The history of black mine workers in South Africa*<sup>40</sup> provides a detailed account of the development of mining companies and institutions, their attitudes and policies towards labour and labour organising, the development of labour organising and the formation of NUM; as well as the political, social and economic impact of mining on labour. The books expose the harsh system of racial oppression and exploitation facing South Africa's black labour force in the creation and enforcement of the capitalist economy as early as the 1870s and 1880s.

The migrant labour system has been the backbone of the mining industry. It is through this system that mining companies were able to exert enormous control on the lives of black labourers. Requiring a constant supply of cheap labour, the Chamber of Mines established the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association in 1900<sup>41</sup>. In order to maintain the racialised social order, the African labour force could not permanently settle in the mining towns and cities and thus the compound system for male workers was developed. Assisted by state interventions, the proletarianisation of African workers, whose lives were dependent on waged labour,

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<sup>39</sup> Orr L, Dealing with 'This thing called gender', in Barchiesi F & Bramble T (eds.), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*, Aldershot Ashgate, 2003

<sup>40</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume I; Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume II; Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III

<sup>41</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume I, p 157

many men were forced to seek employment on the mines because they lacked alternative means of acquiring money. Migrant labour and compound life not only ensured that mines avoided responsibility for workers' families, but destroyed and disrupted the social and familial relations of black migrant workers who spent long periods of time away from home.<sup>42</sup> Mine owners had high levels of control over workers' lives because they were housed in mining hostels under constant surveillance. This was facilitated by the institutionalised racism and exploitation of workers.

#### *A union for mineworkers*

Allen's third volume is dedicated to the history of NUM. By the end of the 1970s, the state and a minority of mining companies (most notably Anglo American) were reluctantly sympathetic to the formation of black unions. On the recommendation of the Wiehahn Commission of 1977 the government subsequently legislated for such recognition in the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979.<sup>43</sup>

It was in this context that the National Congress CUSA, influenced by BC ideas and founded in response to, and in rejection of, white leadership in FOSATU, tasked a lawyer, Cyril Ramaphosa, with the founding of a union of mineworkers in 1982.<sup>44</sup> Taking up the challenge, NUM was inaugurated in Klerksdorp in December 1982. Unionisation for workers meant that their conditions of service were no longer determined arbitrarily by the Chamber of Mines, but were now negotiated.<sup>45</sup> Within six months of its founding in 1983, NUM and the Chamber of Mines signed their first recognition agreement.<sup>46</sup>

The leadership of NUM played a central role in the formation and development of COSATU, and increasingly in the activities of the African National Congress. NUM

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<sup>42</sup> Wolpe H, 'Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1:4, 1972

<sup>43</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III, p 83

<sup>44</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III, p 87 and 98, and Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume II, p 426

<sup>45</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal: African Labour in South Africa's Gold Industry, 1970-1990*, Indiana University Press, 1992, p 92

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p 97

organised workers on labour issues, but its organising extended beyond the boundaries of the mine compounds into community struggles.<sup>47</sup>

Organising workers was extremely difficult under apartheid and under the direct control that mine owners wielded over the lives of mine workers. The hostel-style housing gave mine owners virtually full control of the lives of workers and they regimented workers' lives from the time they woke in the morning, to the food they ate, when they ate, and where they socialised.<sup>48</sup> Although legislation allowed for the formation of trade unions, the state and capital colluded against the development of trade unions and consistently attempted to undermine its power. Despite these challenges, NUM grew to become one of the largest black trade unions in South Africa.

Wilmot James provides three reasons for NUM's success in organising workers. The first is the desire of mineworkers to improve their conditions of work; the second is the stabilisation of the mining industry workforce and in particular the growth of the domestic workforce; and the third is the willingness of Anglo American to have a union presence at its mines. In its eagerness to accommodate the union, Anglo American adopted a "non-obstructionist stance" towards NUM by allowing it access to its mines and providing NUM with office space as well as the required resources to function at mine-level.<sup>49</sup> Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout show how NUM was able to use its Black Conscious tradition to build a common black identity on the mines, which enabled it to overcome regional, ethnic and linguistic differences.<sup>50</sup> By 1988, its membership had reached 360 000.<sup>51</sup>

As a new union, NUM lacked resources and faced constant suppression by the state and mining companies. It was constantly distracted by large legal battles. These became a financial strain on the union, which was primarily dependent on overseas funding. Without enough human resources, the rapid growth of the union was difficult for the already over-burdened officials. This often resulted in the national office not

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<sup>47</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal*; and Buhlungu S & Bezuidenhout A, 'Union Solidarity under Stress: The Case of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa', *Labour Journal Studies*, 33: 3, 2008

<sup>48</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III,

<sup>49</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal*, p 97

<sup>50</sup> Buhlungu S & Bezuidenhout A, 'Union Solidarity under Stress'

<sup>51</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal*

always being aware, or in control, of its members' activities.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges the union faced was the onslaught on its members, particularly union officials, by the mining companies. NUM officials were often targeted and fired from the mine and where entire branch committees were fired, the union had to rebuild itself. This required resources and individuals who were willing to sacrifice their livelihoods to the struggle for better working and living conditions.<sup>53</sup>

These challenges were complicated by the high levels of control that mining companies held at the hostels or compounds where mineworkers lived. The hostels allowed the companies to control workers' diets, waking and working hours, and infrastructural conditions at the hostel and workplace. Dunbar Moodie looks at the lives of black mine workers on the gold fields in South Africa prior to 1994.<sup>54</sup> He argues that despite the high level of control exerted by the mining companies and the poor living and working conditions on the mines, mine workers have always fought for and maintained their integrity, which was central to surviving life in the mining compounds. This struggle for integrity is expressed in the various ways in which mine workers attempted to control and exercise their limited options on the mines. Moodie argues that workers were not docile, and consistently fought against repressive control. Mine workers introduced their own cultural systems and traditions within the mines.<sup>55</sup> Unionism was one of the means open to mine workers, after the Wiehahn Commission, to attempt to gain more control over life on the mines.

### *Difficult democracy*

Since 1994, the unions have faced many new and unexpected challenges. This has been demonstrated above by Buhlungu who studied the impact of democracy, corporatism and globalisation on trade unionism. In two papers, Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu<sup>56</sup> identify various challenges confronting NUM in the post-apartheid era under the democratic dispensation, where workers were given significant freedom to

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<sup>52</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Moodie D, *Going for Gold*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1994

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Bezuidenhout A & Buhlungu S, 'Old Victories, New Struggles: The State of the National Union of Mineworkers', in Buhlungu S, Daniel J, Southall R & Lutchman J (eds.), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2007*, Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC Press, 2007; and Buhlungu S & Bezuidenhout A, 'Union Solidarity under Stress'

exercise control over their lives. Mine workers no longer live solely in the compounds, with many choosing to live in areas surrounding the mines. This makes it harder for unions to organise workers. With the lifting of the colour bar, increased competition for jobs and better-paid positions has resulted in what they argue is a situation of “workers competing with one another along ethnic and national lines”<sup>57</sup>.

This competition is enhanced by what Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu termed “occupational mobility” where elected union officials earn better wages which cannot be reduced if the official is not re-elected to office.<sup>58</sup> Upward mobility further alienates union officials from the workforce, which is demonstrated in the declining democratic practices in NUM’s structures. The unequal power relations are evident in corrupt practices such as ‘buying jobs’ from NUM officials in the form bribes. In this way, union officials act as gate-keepers and recruitment agents, and increasingly fulfil a Human Resource management function for the mine.<sup>59</sup> Subcontracting by the mines, coupled with a declining workforce employed in the mining industry, has affected NUM’s membership base. These are some of the challenges that confront NUM and may assist in understanding why workers began to organise independently of NUM during the 2012 strike wave.

However, Alexander Beresford importantly points out that the relationship formed by years of collective struggle between workers, the trade union movement and the ANC maintains an emotional connection between workers and the ANC. While the expectations of the elected ANC-led government may not have yielded the expected results, the ANC has made significant progress that workers point to, such as the social welfare system and the provision of housing and sanitation. Workers’ relationship to the ANC, he argues, is one of “ambivalence” and to understand it better we need to also consider the impact of social and cultural transformation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bezuidenhout A & Buhlungu S, ‘Old Victories, New Struggles’, p 260

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Buhlungu S & Bezuidenhout A, ‘Union Solidarity under Stress’, p 274

<sup>60</sup> Beresford A, ‘The Politics of Regenerative Nationalism in South Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:4, 2012

Twenty years into democracy, the destructive colonial and apartheid legacy still leaves its mark on South Africa. The migrant labour system continues to exist and the same companies that monopolised the diamond mining industry for most of the twentieth century, continue to monopolise South Africa's mining sector. The founding of NUM assisted mineworkers to gain significant freedoms and improvements to their working and living conditions. This explains workers' allegiance and loyalty to NUM for over thirty years.

## 2.4 Unionising the platinum mining industry

South Africa's platinum reserves are located in what is known as the Bushveld Igneous Complex (BIC). This geological structure is located in Gauteng, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, covering an area of 66 000km<sup>2</sup>. The BIC contains what is estimated to be 87% of the world's platinum group minerals (PMS). In 2009, South Africa accounted for 76% of the world's platinum production.<sup>61</sup>

In a seminal piece, Capps looks at the political economy surrounding the Minerals Energy Complex, which refers:

both to the core set of heavy industries and institutions that have evolved in and around minerals extraction and processing, and to their interaction as a distinctive system of accumulation, whose linkages and dynamics have determined South Africa's unique industrialisation path.<sup>62</sup>

Platinum deposits were discovered in South Africa in 1924, yet there was so little demand that dividends were only paid out by the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company (JCI)<sup>63</sup> 18 years after they first started mining platinum. Following the Second World War the demand for platinum grew as new uses for the mineral were discovered, such as the production of nitric and sulphuric acids. Lonhro (now Lonmin) opened its mine at Western Platinum at Marikana, North West in 1963,

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<sup>61</sup> Capps G, 'Victim of its own success?'; and Ashman A & Fine B, 'South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana', *Think Africa Press*, 14 December 2012, accessed on 15 January 2014, URL: <http://thinkafricapress.com/south-africa/state-mining-industry-run-mangaung-marikana>

<sup>62</sup> Capps G, 'Victim of its own success?', p 64

<sup>63</sup> JCI subsidiary is the Rustenburg Platinum Mines (RPM)

while Union Corporation's Impala Platinum opened four mines in Bophuthatswana in 1950.<sup>64</sup> However, platinum mining production was monopolised by Rustenburg Platinum Mines of the JCI, owned by the Anglo American Corporation. Today, Impala Platinum Holding Limited (Implats), Lonmin Plc and Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) maintain an oligopoly in platinum production.

Their dominance in the sector was facilitated by the scarcity of PGM deposits, the large amounts of capital, expertise and technological capacity required to mine platinum, and the volatility of demand for platinum. In efforts to cut costs and control production to their advantage, platinum producers gained an unusually high degree of control over mineralised land during the apartheid era, particularly under the Bophuthatswana government.<sup>65</sup>

In post-apartheid South Africa, the power of mining houses has not diminished, with the combined investment plans of the platinum subsector in 2001 standing at R30 billion over seven years.<sup>66</sup> These conglomerates have domestically restructured their companies and relocated to the world's leading financial centres, which was made possible by the "reduction of apartheid era capital and exchange controls"<sup>67</sup>. As the most dynamic platinum subsector, the BIC has witnessed the fastest regional economic growth in South Africa.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the success of the platinum industry and the MEC has resulted in its being the prime target of the ANC-led government's minerals reform policy, which allowed mining companies to retain control over platinum mining in the BIC by entering into joint ventures with emerging black capitalists.<sup>69</sup>

The strike wave that shook the platinum belt in 2012 was led primarily by Rock Drill Operators (RDOs). Paul Stewart traces the history of RDOs in the mining industry to 1907, when a mechanised hand-held rock drill was introduced to the mines.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume II

<sup>65</sup> Capps G, 'Victim of its own success'

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p 77

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p 76

<sup>68</sup> Ashman A & Fine B, 'South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana'

<sup>69</sup> Capps G, 'Victim of its own success?'; and Ashman A & Fine B, 'South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana'

<sup>70</sup> Stewart P, 'Kings of the Mine: Rock Drill Operators and the 2012 Strike Wave on South African Mines', *South African Review of Sociology*, 44:3, 2013

Stewart argues that “essentially the same rock drill dominates the underground mining labour process to this day”.<sup>71</sup> Rock drilling is central to the mine labour process and this hand-held machine leaves the RDOs in control of work efficiency. For Stewart, this is the basis of the RDOs’ social power.

Many RDOs are migrant workers. Forrest draws attention to the changing patterns of labour recruitment on the mines and its impact on workers. She argues that there has been a continuation of the migrant labour system, which is demonstrated by the 240 000 South African migrants recruited in 2013, of whom 35% were recruited from the Eastern Cape by the recruitment agency for mineworkers The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA)<sup>72</sup>. But while recruitment continues, the overall number of migrant labourers has declined, particularly from rural areas. Platinum mining companies, in particular Implats, generally employs fewer migrant workers due to higher levels of local employee recruitment.<sup>73</sup> Forrest further argues that the growth of labour brokers on the mines has also affected recruitment strategies, because labour brokers offer a comprehensive service to mines, which included payroll and supervision services of recruited workers.<sup>74</sup> The Benchmarks Foundation reports that in 2013, 30% of the workforce in the platinum mines were contract labourers.<sup>75</sup>

Added to the burden of migration, is the issue of low wages and companies’ claims that higher wages are unaffordable. Research published on 14 June 2014 by Andrew Bowman and Gilad Isaacs, questions platinum mining companies claims that they could not afford a R12 500 basic wage. The report begins by highlighting the lost opportunity between 2000 and 2008 by platinum mining companies to address the differential pay gap between management and mineworkers. It argues that a platinum boom during this period led to high profits “fuelled by increased global

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p 49; and see Stewart P, ‘The 2012 Strike Wave, Marikana and the History of Rock Drillers in South African Mines’, *Global Labour Column*, No. 124, January 2013

<sup>72</sup> The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (1906), was later renamed The Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA). They have offices in Southern Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and South Africa.

<sup>73</sup> Forrest K, ‘Rustenburg’s Fractured Recruitment Regime: Who Benefits?’, *African Studies*, 73:2, 2014; and Forrest K, ‘Migrant labour: discarded but not discontinued’, *Ruth First Memorial Lecture and Fellowship*, University of the Witwatersrand, 2013

<sup>74</sup> Forrest K, ‘Rustenburg’s Fractured Recruitment Regime’

<sup>75</sup> *Policy Gap 7: Coping with Unsustainability, Lonmin 2003-2007*, Benchmarks Foundation, October 2013

demand and a soaring platinum price, which grew six-fold”.<sup>76</sup> However, shareholders’ returns were prioritised “at the cost of both labour and long-term investment strategies”.<sup>77</sup>

The report disputed the mining companies’ claim to have made generous wage offers in the negotiations. It also argues that redirecting less than half of the shareholders’ returns would meet AMCU’s demand for a R12 500 in four years.<sup>78</sup> While the report does not argue that the mining companies could afford R12 500, it criticises the mining companies for not prioritising higher wages and for neglecting long-term strategies that could address wage inequality. These arguments are supported by research from the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) which examines Lonmin’s financials to argue that the affordability of living wages is a matter of choice for mining companies.<sup>79</sup>

### *Unionising the platinum belt*

Raphael Chaskalson provides an important historical study of trade unionism on the platinum belt. Unionism was constricted under the Bophuthatswana Bantustan leadership of Lucas Mangope. Mangope created the subservient Bophuthatswana National Union of Mineworkers (BONUME) to challenge the NUM.<sup>80</sup> The new union, and the borders in which they operated, created practical difficulties for the NUM’s ability to recruit membership. For example, Chaskalson’s research reveals that NUM found it easier to organise those sections of Lonmin Mine which fell under apartheid South Africa, than the Lonmin’s Eastern Platinum Mine which was located on Bophuthatswana land.

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<sup>76</sup> Bowmen A & Isaacs G, *Demanding the Impossible: Platinum Mining Profits and Wage Demands in Context*, p 3

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p 8

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Dick Forslund, *The Bermuda Connection: Profit shifting, inequality and unaffordability at Lonmin 1999-2012*, Alternative Information and Development Centre, 2015

<sup>80</sup> Chaskalson R, ‘The Road to Marikana’, and Allen VL, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, Volume III

As Stewart, Chaskalson and Chinguno note, the platinum belt has a history of RDO uprisings.<sup>81</sup> Stewart argues that RDOs social power has resulted in them securing direct engagements with mine companies from as early as 1985.<sup>82</sup> This became a feature of RDO organising and despite NUM gaining a foothold in the platinum mines, management engaged RDOs directly in 1988, 1992, 1993, and 1995.<sup>83</sup>

Of interest is the 1996 Amplats RDO uprising which led to the formation of the Mouthpiece Workers Union. The uprising is linked to the unbundling of Anglo American Corporation and its perceived impact on the workers' provident fund.<sup>84</sup> The NUM failed to address the issue adequately and mineworkers independently organised themselves under the leadership of the Five Madoda or five men. Moodie traces the origins of the Five Madoda to Union Mine in 1994, where workers were disgruntled about the uneven pay out of the Bophuthatswana National Provident Fund.<sup>85</sup> The mine management refused to negotiate with all the workers present, and therefore they elected five representatives from among themselves who became known at the Five Madoda to negotiate with management. A key feature of the Amadoda was its rural migrant worker composition and traditional style of leadership.<sup>86</sup> In 1996, the Five Madoda led Amplats mineworkers on strike, resulting in the dismissal of over 28 000 workers. While the majority of the workers were re-employed, the new contracts meant they had to once again sign-up for union membership.<sup>87</sup> Recognising this opportunity, Mouthpiece was formed in 1997 under the leadership of the Five Madoda, and began to recruit workers. However, by 1999 the union began to decline. It became discredited for high levels of violence and its association with the "People's Assurance Brokers," which sold insurance policies to

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<sup>81</sup> Chaskalson R, 'The Road to Marikana', Stewart P, 'Kings of the Mine', and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence: A case study of Impala Platinum, Rustenburg (1982-2012)*, University of the Witwatersrand (PHD Thesis) 2015

<sup>82</sup> Stewart P, 'Kings of the Mine'

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Chaskalson R, 'The Road to Marikana'

<sup>85</sup> Moodie D, 'Making Mincemeat out of Mutton-Eaters: Social Origins of the NUM Decline on Platinum', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:5, 2016

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Bruce D, *The Operation of the Criminal Justice System in Dealing with the Violence at Amplats*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, April 2001

workers and took advantage of workers' grievances.<sup>88</sup> The significance of Mouthpiece is that it used an opportunity to organise and recruit workers, when they felt inadequately represented by the NUM. It is thus an early instance of independent worker organisation.

Where the leadership of the Five Madoda emerged on the mines, they refused to allow the NUM to intervene. Moodie terms this the RDOs "ambiguous" relationship with trade unions.<sup>89</sup> Chaskalson demonstrates that the NUM's key challenges on the platinum mines post-1994 included its corporatist approach, the increased outsourcing of workers on the platinum belt, changing patterns in migration, the housing crisis, a growing social distance between full time shop stewards and NUM members, and the policies of the South African government including the impact of BEE.<sup>90</sup>

Moodie argues that there were three structural causes of the decline of the NUM. This includes the decision by platinum mining companies not to engage in centralised bargaining, which assisted mining companies in their growing use of contract labour. Secondly, the changing role of TEBA meant that, at Amplats mines in particular, workers who engaged in informal bargaining had direct access to management, who were in turn given high degrees of autonomy to negotiate with workers. Thirdly, informal communal orders in Rustenburg were directly linked to mining.<sup>91</sup> Moodie uses three incidents on the Platinum Belt – the formation of Mouthpiece, the attempt by NUM leader Archie Palane to renew the union in the 2000s, and Impala's strategic use of health and safety regulations by miners in 2011 – to argue that:

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<sup>88</sup> Webster E, 'Trade unions and the challenge of the informalisation of work', in Buhlungu S (ed.), *Trade unions and democracy: COSATU workers' political attitudes in South Africa*, HSRC Press, 2006, and Bruce D, *The Operation of the Criminal Justice System in Dealing with the Violence at Amplats*

<sup>89</sup> Stewart P, 'Intensified Exploitation: Rock Drill Operators' Post-strike Productivity Deal in a South African Platinum Mine, Labour', *Capital and Society* 45:2, 2002

<sup>90</sup> Chaskalson R, 'The Road to Marikana

<sup>91</sup> Moodie D, 'Making Mincemeat out of Mutton-Eaters', p 841-843

workers' 'associative power' is never automatically represented by the establishment of a trade union. Union power necessarily rests upon consent and collective support from its members.<sup>92</sup>

This is demonstrated by the long history of independent organising by workers on the platinum belt. NUM was aware that workers in its most remunerative region, the Rustenburg region, felt the most dissatisfied with the union. Moodie, concludes – in agreement with Luke Sinwell and Simphiwe Mbatha – that NUM did not lose mineworkers to AMCU, but rather to the migrant worker committees, who invited AMCU to represent them.<sup>93</sup>

Sinwell and Mbatha explain the basis for new forms of organisation to emerge which took the form of worker committees created outside the formal institutions and strictures at the workplace. They argue that NUM's close ties to the ANC and mining companies, led to its failure to respond to workers' concerns, which became its "Achilles' heel". Coupled with rising inequality, wage disparity, indebtedness of workers, and a declining economy among others, the worker committees presented an alternative expression of mineworkers' power that brought a "new radical political culture to the mines".<sup>94</sup> The worker committees had an "insurgent character" that "created the political space, or at least the possibility, for the flourishing of an insurgent union (AMCU)... The new politics now created an open space to engage around what workers thought they needed in order to live decently."<sup>95</sup> This was a living wage of R12 500.

Sinwell and Mbatha, whose work is based on a deep ethnographic study, argue that mineworkers felt, in agreement with the mine management, that they needed a new union to represent them. They suggest that AMCU is riding on the wave the insurgent fervour of workers and have managed to embody the platinum mineworkers' struggle. They argue that insurgency allows workers to drive the union

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p854-846

<sup>93</sup> Moodie D, 'Making Mincemeat out of Mutton-Eaters'

<sup>94</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana: The Rise of Insurgent Trade Unionism in South Africa*, Wits University Press, 2016, p2. For more on insurgent politics in South Africa, see Brown J, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics*, Jacana Media, 2015

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p 10

from below, in a struggle that remains contested both within the union, and with mine management.<sup>96</sup>

Sinwell and Mbatha's research to understand the intricacies of the worker committees, provides an important basis from which to understand the platinum belt strike wave from 2012 to 2014. Their research presents the first account of the 2012 to 2014 platinum mine workers' struggles from the perspective of workers. In many respects, this dissertation is an attempt to understand another important player in this story – AMCU. Against this backdrop, we turn to the events of 9 to 16 August 2012 in Marikana from which AMCU rose to prominence.

## 2.5 The massacre at Marikana

The killing of 34 mineworkers by the police on 16 August 2012 at Marikana shook the nation. The killings, known as the Marikana Massacre, were the first state-sponsored killing of workers engaged in industrial action in post-apartheid South Africa. A growing body of literature has tried to understand the massacre and locate the crisis of the labour movement within the broader socio-economic context of South Africa. Some of this literature was presented in two colloquiums hosted by the Society, Work and Development Institute in September 2013 and the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa and the History Workshop in May 2015.<sup>97</sup> The Marikana Commission of Inquiry also hosted a seminar series in 2014 looking at violence in industrial relations, mining and bargaining arrangements in platinum.<sup>98</sup>

Crispen Chinguno, who was the first to provide a narrative of events that took place in the week of the 9 to 16 Augusts 2012, provides a useful entry point into this discussion by drawing on a rich body of literature on the platinum mining industry.<sup>99</sup> He argues that the post-apartheid state is characterised by fragmented and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p 10-13

<sup>97</sup> *The meaning of Marikana colloquium: Rise of the South African Platinum Mining Industry and the Nature of the Post-apartheid Order*, hosted by SWOP on the 11-12 September 2013, University of the Witwatersrand; and *Commissioning the Present: Marikana and its Aftermath*, hosted by SERI and the History Workshop, 7-9 May 2015, University of the Witwatersrand

<sup>98</sup> Marikana Commission Phase 2 Seminar series: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>99</sup> Chinguno C, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, Society, Work and Development Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, April 2013

precarious work, and precarious living.<sup>100</sup> He argues that the effect of the fragmentation of labour, casualisation and the declining economy has been to allow employers greater control over the pace of production and the discipline of workers at the expense of worker mobilisation and solidarity. Chinguno argues that violence by workers was a response to this fragmentation of labour along “ethnicity, settlement, skill, gender and others”, to force a sense of solidarity among workers.<sup>101</sup> Further, the changing geography at the mine (the growth of informal settlements, the decline of the hostel system, and the persistence of traditional villages) led to a “weakness or absence of local structures” and allowed for new systems to emerge. For mineworkers, this situation is worsened by the changing nature of trade unionism and the increasing class divisions among workers. Thus, the strike violence in 2012 points to the pre-existing lack of solidarity among workers, as well as the forging of workers’ collective solidarity.<sup>102</sup>

Asanda Benya urges us to look at the role of women in mining. She argues that “women’s work in the home is not supplementary, but rather central and crucial not only for the accumulation of capital, but also for resisting it, including through sustained strike action.”<sup>103</sup> She shows that the reproductive work done by women is integral to the maintenance of productivity at the mine and that the home environment is often adjusted to cater to the demands of the workplace. Thus “workers’ ability to perform at their best and hence maximise the production of surplus value relies heavily on the unpaid work of the women.”<sup>104</sup> Benya further demonstrates that at Impala Platinum mine, unions are defined around masculinity and fail to fully incorporate women, so neglecting their issues.<sup>105</sup> Benya’s work is central in showing how capital sustains itself in all spheres of society and that working class politics is not confined the workplace. This raises important questions

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<sup>100</sup> Chinguno C, *Unpacking the Marikana Massacre*, Global labour Column, No. 124, February 2013

<sup>101</sup> Chinguno C, ‘Marikana: fragmentation, precariousness, strike, and solidarity,’ *Review of African Political Economy*, 40:138, December 2013, p 641-642

<sup>102</sup> Chinguno C, *Marikana and the post-apartheid workplace order*, p 33

<sup>103</sup> Benya A, ‘The invisible hands: women in Marikana’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 42:146, 2015

<sup>104</sup> Benya A, *Women in Mining: A Challenge to Occupational Culture in Mines*, University of the Witwatersrand (MA Thesis), 2009

<sup>105</sup> Benya A, ‘The invisible hands: women in Marikana’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 42:146, 2015

for how unions understand gender politics and struggle, and how this translates into organising methods.

Sam Ashman and Ben Fine have drawn attention to the power that platinum mining houses built during apartheid and maintained with the negotiated transition to a democratic state.<sup>106</sup> They point to the continuing legacy of migrant labour as a cheap labour source for the mines, the increased mechanisation of production, the widening inequality and increased indebtedness of workers as factors that lie at the heart of the Marikana Massacre. For Ashman and Fine, Marikana “epitomises the MEC of today, reflecting both the economic and social failings of post-apartheid development”.<sup>107</sup>

Gavin Hartford’s influential piece traces the roots of the massacre to the socio-economic conditions of mine workers and the migrant labour system.<sup>108</sup> Hartford criticises the collective bargaining structures, arguing that the “majority plus one” union representation system has failed workers. This system, heavily dependent on majority unionism, has resulted in a co-dependence between mines and union officials.<sup>109</sup> Frankel argues that in a context where profit-driven mining bosses are far removed from the actual production process and thus from workers, the current labour practices in South Africa are unsustainable.<sup>110</sup>

In August 2013, former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel also reflected on the causes of the Marikana ‘Tragedy’ and related it to the ANC’s National Development Plan. Manuel argues “what is at the heart of the problem we need to discuss is what systems of equity and fairness are, and perceived to be”.<sup>111</sup> In addition to the point raised by Ashman & Fine and Hartford, Manuel highlights the impact of a lack of infrastructure, resources and social facilities in mining communities that are vital to restoring people’s dignity after centuries of exploitation. He points to the estimated 38

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<sup>106</sup> Ashman A & Fine B, South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana

<sup>107</sup> Ashman A & Fine B, South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana

<sup>108</sup> Hartford G, ‘The Mining Industry Strike Wave: What are the Causes and what are the Solutions?’, *The Essop Shop*, October 2012; also see Ashman A & Fine B, South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana

<sup>109</sup> Hartford identifies the failures of NUM mentioned above by Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu in Bezuidenhout A & Buhlungu S, ‘Old Victories, New Struggles’

<sup>110</sup> Frankel P, *Between the Rainbows and the Rain*, Privately Published, 2013

<sup>111</sup> Manuel T, ‘12 Months On: Marikana and it’s meaning for the NDP’, *The Ruth First memorial Lecture* at Wits University, 29 August 2013

informal settlements in the platinum belt around Rustenburg, adding that “Census 2011 indicates 40% of households in the Marikana ward live in informal dwellings, including backyard shacks.”<sup>112</sup>

The Marikana Commission’s final report focused on the events of the 9 to 16 August 2012.<sup>113</sup> The only socio-economic issue it addresses in detail is the failure of Lonmin to comply with its Social and Labour Plans in terms of the provision of housing.<sup>114</sup> The report scathingly notes:

In terms of this SLP they [Lonmin] committed themselves to phasing out all existing single sex hostel accommodation, converting most existing hostels into bachelor or family units and building an additional 5 500 houses for their migrant employees...

It is common cause that WLP (*Western Platinum Limited*) and ELP (*Eastern Platinum Limited*) built three of the 5 500 houses which should have been built.

It is also common cause that large numbers of Lonmin workers live in squalid informal settlements surrounding the Lonmin mine shafts. The living conditions in these settlements are very poor and the people living there lack basic social services.<sup>115</sup>

Bringing together the role of Lonmin, the police and NUM at Marikana, Peter Alexander et al argues that they form a “triangle of torment”, which is central to maintaining the labour relations regime and ensures the current class interests and

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry: Report on Matters of Public, National and International Concern Arising Out of the Tragic Incidents at the Lonmin Mine in Marikana, In the North West Province*, Marikana Commission of Inquiry, 25 June 2017 For a review of the Commission see Forrest K, *Marikana Commission: Unearthing the truth, or burying it?* Society, Work & Development Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, November 2015; and Alexander P, ‘Marikana Commission of Inquiry: From Narratives towards History’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42:5. Pp 815-839, 8 October 2016

<sup>114</sup> For more research on the socioeconomic condition in the platinum mining industry see: *Policy Gap 7: Coping with Unsustainability: Lonmin 2003-2007*, and *Policy Gap 6: A Review of Platinum Mining in the Bojanala District of the North West Province*, Benchmarks Foundation, August 2012

<sup>115</sup> Mr Seedat was a director Lonmin at the time. See Final Report of the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, 25 June 2015, p 526- 528

balance of forces are maintained.<sup>116</sup> They caution that with the continuation of this triangle, South Africa is going to face more labour unrest as the failures of the 1994 compromise becomes more evident. It was this failure that resulted in the revolt by RDOs.

Alexander further argues that the events at Marikana represented a turning point in South African history.<sup>117</sup> He argues that following the massacre, there has been a change in the “mood” of workers which is evident in the nature of their demands. He adds that labour relations have changed with the rise of AMCU and the divisions within COSATU, and that this trend has also contributed to the emergence of a young and radical political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters. These shifts are indeed important as they signal a change and a willingness by mineworkers to push for change.

Prishani Naidoo somewhat agrees when she argues that Marikana has come to symbolise both the willingness of the state to use brute force to protect the interest of capital and the “uncompromising spirit of resistance... to the imposition of such power.”<sup>118</sup> For Noor Nieftagodien, that spirit of resistance is not limited to the platinum belt. He argues that a space has been opened following the Marikana massacre for the reconfiguration of a left politics in South Africa. The fracturing of the alliance and the expulsion of NUMSA creates the possibility for that space to be outside and independent of the alliance. He further argues that:

the current realignment of unions marks an important step forward in trade union rejuvenation, but needs to be accompanied by critical engagement with the

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<sup>116</sup> Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*, Jacana, 2012, p 182. For more accounts of the Marikana massarce see Marinovich G, *Murder at Small Koppie: The Real Story of the Marikana Massacre*, Penguin Random House, 2016; and Jika T et al, *We are Going to Kill Each Other Today: The Marikana Story*, Tafelberg Publishers, 2013

<sup>117</sup> Alexander P, ‘Marikana, Turning Point’ in *South African History Review of African Political Economy*, 40:138, 2013

<sup>118</sup> Naidoo P, ‘Political Reconfigurations in the Wake of Marikana’, in Khadiagala K, Naidoo P, Pillay D and Southall R, *New South African Review 5: Beyond Marikana*, Wits University Press, 2015

bureaucratisation of the unions and its adverse effects on the principles of worker's democracy and control<sup>119</sup>

Nieftagodien criticises AMCU for the subordination of worker committees and silencing dissent. AMCU's role at Marikana in 2012 remains highly contested, despite the Marikana Commission of Inquiry's final report. AMCU has emerged relatively victorious from a five-month long platinum strike<sup>120</sup>, but this has not been without a fair number of challenges. In a brief analysis of AMCU's emergence at Implats, Chinguno argues that AMCU is displaying worrying signs of business unionism, which:

some may view it as restarting the working class struggles. The model ignores that union success in shop floor issues such as collective bargaining is intimately tied to the broader macro-economic and the social context and industrial relations of the country, which is also connected to the broader political economy.<sup>121</sup>

The labour movement in South Africa has been radically challenged since Marikana. The rise of AMCU and the impact of the massacre on working class consciousness are yet to be understood. The version of trade unionism that has traditionally been advanced by COSATU's unions is being challenged. While COSATU has been split by its own internal battles, AMCU continues to grow. To understand the changing labour environment, we first need to be familiar with AMCU and its method of organising. We can then determine what model of trade unionism AMCU is advocating.

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<sup>119</sup> Nieftagodien N, 'Reconstituting and re-imagining the left after Marikana', in Khadiagala K, Naidoo P, Pillay D and Southall R, *New South African Review 5: Beyond Marikana*, Wits University Press, 2015

<sup>120</sup> Alexander P, AMCU victory is more than just about the figures, *Daily Maverick*, 29 June 2014, accessed on 1 July 2014, URL: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-29-op-ed-amcu-victory-is-more-than-just-about-the-figures/#.U7o9bpSSyo1>

<sup>121</sup> Chinguno C, 'Impala Platinum strike: lessons and implications', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 36:2, August 2012, and see Chinguno C, 'Battle for Impala', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 36:3, August 2012

## Chapter 3: AMCU gains recognition on the platinum belt

### 3.1 Introduction

Trade unions of the 1980s displayed the power of organised working class movements through their mobilisation against apartheid and within the workplace. The founding of NUM was central to the betterment of living and working conditions of black mineworkers in South Africa and this was achieved through the struggle and sacrifice of both mineworkers and the unions' leadership. NUM was once the largest trade union in South Africa, and played a central role in the leadership structures of the ANC.<sup>122</sup> It is therefore important that we understand how NUM lost almost 100 000 members to a relatively unknown union, AMCU, between 2012 and 2014.

There have been a number of attempts to analyse and explain the 2012 strike wave, and the killing of 34 striking mineworkers at Marikana. In particular, this literature has focused on the broader structural crisis that has plagued the mining industry.<sup>123</sup> Chinguno, and Sinwell & Mbatha provide a narrative of events of what transpired at the platinum mines.<sup>124</sup> Chinguno's analysis focuses on the question of violence at the Implats mine, while Sinwell and Mbatha focus on the creation and demise of the 2012 independent worker committees particularly at Lonmin and Amplats mines. This chapter presents a narrative based on my interviews with AMCU officials who were participants and leaders of the 2012 platinum strikes. The narrative is supplemented by the available literature and attempts to explain the relationship between workers and their trade unions. It specifically focuses on the decision of thousands of workers to leave their existing trade union, NUM, to independently and successfully organise

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<sup>122</sup> Former NUM leaders, Cyril Ramaphosa, Gwede Mantashe, and Kgalema Motlanthe are three examples of NUM leadership who have led or who continue to lead in the ANC.

<sup>123</sup> See among others: Ashman A & Fine B, 'South Africa: The Meaning of Marikana'; Hartford G, 'The Mining Industry Strike Wave'; Frankel P, *Between the Rainbows and the Rain*; Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*; Alexander P, 'Marikana, turning point in South African history'; and Marinovich G, *Murder at Small Koppie*

<sup>124</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*. Also see Ntswana N, *The politics of workers control in South Africa's platinum mines: Do workers' committees in the platinum mining industry represent a practice of renewing worker control?* University of the Witwatersrand (PHD Thesis) 2014

for higher wages, and then to join a new trade union, AMCU, that eventually signed recognition agreements as the majority union. This chapter hopes to provide a basis on which we can understand why and how AMCU emerged on the platinum belt.

The chapter begins by providing a brief introduction to AMCU and its key leaders.<sup>125</sup> It is important to do so based on the limited available history of AMCU. The chapter then attempts to provide a chronological account of the rise of AMCU between 2011 and 2012. This dissertation focuses on the events at Lonmin's Karee Mine, Implats' Thembelani Branch and Implats' South branch at shaft number 8. It pays particular attention to why workers went on strike, their relationship to NUM, and how and why AMCU emerged as a dominant union at the respective mines. It briefly looks at the period following the 2012 strike wave and how AMCU emerged as the recognised majority union at the mines. It quickly becomes evident that the method of organising that NUM gradually adopted resulted in workers losing their confidence in, and loyalty to, the union. This loss of confidence created an opportunity for the rise of an alternative organisation to NUM in the platinum industry. Using the opportunity, AMCU began to mobilise workers, and following the Marikana Massacre became the majority trade union in the platinum industry.

### **3.2 A brief history of AMCU: from coal to platinum**

AMCU was registered as a trade union with the Department of Labour in 2001, and Joseph Mathunjwa was its first elected president. Mathunjwa was born in 1965 in KwaZulu-Natal. He came from a poor home, and lived with his parents, who were Ministers in the church.<sup>126</sup> In 1985, after a very brief period of employment at Tweefontein Colliery, Mathunjwa was employed at Van Dyks Drift Douglas Colliery, in Witbank. He was first employed in the laboratory and later in the materials department.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> More research is required to look into AMCU's early recruitment strategies on the mine in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>127</sup> Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and A Case to Answer*

Mathunjwa recalls life as a mineworker in the 1980s as follows:

In the early 1980s mines hadn't changed much in terms of conditions of employment or benefits for workers. You still had separate amenities and a white baas. Majority of the workers didn't have proper transport [and were] living in the hostel. There were eight of us in a room, and you had a communal shower and long communal toilets that are just open.<sup>128</sup>

During the time of his employment, Mathunjwa became known as a "troublemaker" and found himself embroiled in battles with the mine that had him dismissed four times.<sup>129</sup> He waged both individual and collective battles against the mining company. For example, in protest against the lack of transport for black mineworkers who lived in the township, he began boarding the racialised whites-only bus provided by the company for white workers.<sup>130</sup> In response, the mining company made a special transport arrangement for Mathunjwa to be fetched by his mine manager. As he continued to fight for access to transport, Mathunjwa was eventually tasked with compiling a list of all workers that required transport.<sup>131</sup> Transport was then made available for black mineworkers at Douglas Colliery.

Mathunjwa joined NUM as an ordinary member in 1986. Due to the nature of the issues he wanted to address at the mine - housing, transport and workers' benefits - he decided that he would need to join a union.<sup>132</sup> He recalls:

I was this person that knew what was right. I never relied on the union. I know what was wrong [at the mine] and I spoke my mind. I would go straight to management and [say] "these things are not right". This continued until such time when I was told that these issues are addressed by the union. So I had to go to the structures of the union. I had to join to be a member in order to raise those issues through the union.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017. Quotations have been edited for readability.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017; and Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and A Case to Answer*

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

Mathunjwa, who was elected as an NUM shaft steward, began to experience trouble with NUM when a death occurred at the mine.<sup>134</sup> The deceased was a migrant worker from Maputo. Union officials were asked by the company to sign a document provided by the company's attorney, which covered up any fault on the part of the mine. Refusing to sign the document, Mathunjwa said that he was reprimanded by management and started to be side-lined by his fellow NUM officials and mines management. He the difficulties he faced:

My very same comrades! When there was a meeting, I was not called in. I would hear from different people that there was a meeting and I would try to sneak and go to that meeting. Subsequently they transferred me to a very remote place where I think they were trying to traumatise me... [It was] like in a Robben Island kind of set up.<sup>135</sup>

Tensions increased between the mine management and Mathunjwa when the questions of workers' bonuses surfaced. According to Mathunjwa, surface (above ground) workers would receive a bonus from the mine, while underground workers were not given any bonus. He successfully raised the issues with management and workers were paid "a reimbursement at Van Dyks Drift for underground working".<sup>136</sup> These struggles won him support from mineworkers, but did not make him popular in with NUM because union politics at the mine were complicated by workers' lack of trust in union leaders.

In 1999, Mathunjwa was elected chairman of the NUM branch committee – composed of full time elected union officials at the mine – a position he occupied following a vote of no confidence in NUM's previous leaders. After his election, managers at Douglas Colliery brought charges against Mathunjwa and he was dismissed. He alleges this was done to sabotage him and his leadership because of the issues he had been raising over the years.<sup>137</sup> His dismissal triggered a ten-day

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017; and Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and A Case to Answer*

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017; and Alexander P et al, *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and A Case to Answer*

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

underground strike by almost 3 000 mineworkers.<sup>138</sup> The mine had no choice but to reinstate Mathunjwa. During the course of his dismissal, Mathunjwa asked his friend, Jeff Mphahlele then a school principal in Pimville, Soweto and a member of the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), to assist him.

As a result of the strike, NUM brought charges against Mathunjwa.<sup>139</sup> NUM instituted an investigation into Mathunjwa's conduct at Douglas Colliery. However, Mathunjwa did not trust the chair of his hearing, the then regional official of NUM Gwede Mantashe, who is now Secretary General of the ANC. The reason for his distrust is that Mathunjwa felt Mantashe's involvement in the matter up to that point had been biased towards the company, as the company had been in direct communication with Mantashe.<sup>140</sup> When Mantashe refused to recuse himself from the hearing, Mathunjwa decided not to attend the hearing. Mathunjwa says he was informed by the mine that his NUM membership had been terminated. Following his termination from the union, he says:

I called a meeting and addressed the workers. Then the workers said "we resign today" [from NUM]... But there are so many issues in-between that led to the resignation of members from NUM to follow me. [It was] because of my leadership, how I was doing things, how I changed the workplace... There were many unions, but I made sure that at Douglas Colliery there was one union – NUM.<sup>141</sup>

When workers from Douglas Colliery resigned from NUM, Mathunjwa, with the assistance of Mphahlele, tried to find an alternative union for workers to join. However, they felt that the unions they had contacted were more interested in mineworkers' subscription money than addressing labour issues at the mine. This frustration led to the founding of AMCU.<sup>142</sup> Mphahlele, who would become the

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<sup>138</sup> de Lange J, 'The rise and rise of AMCU', *City Press*, 19 August 2012 at 10:00, accessed on 18 February 2014, URL: <http://www.citypress.co.za/SouthAfrica/Features/The-rise-and-rise-of-Amcu-20120818>

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017, and de Lange J, 'The rise and rise of AMCU', *City Press*, 19 August 2012 at 10:00, accessed on 18 February 2014, URL: <http://www.citypress.co.za/SouthAfrica/Features/The-rise-and-rise-of-Amcu-20120818>

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017; and Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

General Secretary of AMCU, recalls drafting AMCU's constitution over 21 days in April 2000.<sup>143</sup>

In 2001, two years after his dispute with NUM, AMCU was registered, with Joseph Mathunjwa elected as AMCU's first president. The timing of the registration of the AMCU was important as Douglas Colliery's management became increasingly uncomfortable with the internal dispute between NUM and their former members.<sup>144</sup> Worried about the company's plans to retrench workers, Mathunjwa quickly recruited its workers and AMCU became the majority union at Douglas Colliery. This awarded AMCU bargaining power over NUM.

Mathunjwa explains:

AMCU was officially registered, and we started with recruiting from contracting companies. It was difficult we had no office, I used my personal finances... The first baptism [of fire] was Douglas trying to destroy AMCU by pushing retrenchment... We fought the case, we won that case and workers were paid.<sup>145</sup>

#### *AMCU enters the platinum belt*

AMCU's founding years were difficult. Its union officials began recruiting members from contracting companies and housing construction companies in the smaller mining areas around KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga. For the most part, AMCU's membership was on the periphery of the mines, as contract workers were temporary, not permanent union membership. In 2005, AMCU's capacity was increased with the recruitment of Jimmy Gama who rose to become AMCU's treasurer. Gama was born in KwaZulu-Natal and was also a former NUM member.<sup>146</sup>

Between 2005 and 2008, AMCU entered the North West Province and began recruiting in the mining companies around Brits, including Samancor's Chrome mines and some of the surrounding smelters.<sup>147</sup> Towards the end of that period, the union employed Dumisani Nkalitshana as an organiser. In 2008, Jeff Mphahlele joined

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

AMCU on a full-time basis to assist the union, and was elected to the position of General Secretary.<sup>148</sup> These appointments were important as they strengthened the unions' capacity and experience in trade union organising.

In 2008, mineworkers who were employed as shaft-sinkers at Lonmin's smaller platinum mine near Brits were entangled in a dispute with NUM. Shaft-sinkers are regarded as non-core work, and employed on a contractual basis at the mine. Having left NUM, shaft sinkers started looking for a new union. Mathunjwa and Mphahlele recall that a former Douglas Colliery worker who found work in Brits, put the shaft-sinkers in touch with AMCU. Soon afterwards, Mphahlele, Gama and Nkalitshana visited the mine to meet with the mineworkers. This successful meeting became AMCU's entry point into the platinum mines, and they grew to organise about 1 000 contract workers in the Brits region by 2012. AMCU membership figures in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal was approximately at 5 000 to 8 000.<sup>149</sup> Ongoing recruitment drives, where stop orders by the mine were collected but not processed, would have increased the figure to approximately 10 000 members.

AMCU would soon learn that the political environment on the platinum mine in Rustenburg region was fraught. Mphahlele, reflecting on the recruitment strategy of AMCU, recalls that Nkalitshana was instrumental in recruiting platinum mineworkers to join AMCU because he knew people at the different mines.<sup>150</sup> Once a contact had been established at a mine, it became easier to recruit members as the contact would assist AMCU with the recruitment process. However, this created conflict with NUM officials to the extent that some AMCU recruiters felt intimidated and feared for their safety.<sup>151</sup> Mine managers were also displeased at the arrival of a new union.

### *Gaining recognition*

The unhappiness of the mine managers would be evident when AMCU began recruiting workers at the main Lonmin mine in Marikana in 2011. Lonmin Plc is situated along what is known as the "Platinum Highway" and it is South Africa's third

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

<sup>149</sup> This figure is of paid membership, and not of general recruitment where stop order by them mine were collected but had not been processed.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

<sup>151</sup> Interview 11 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

largest platinum producer. Lonmin has three mines in Marikana: Western Platinum, Karee and Eastern Platinum.<sup>152</sup> In 2011 NUM held a 50+1 majority at the three mines, entitling it to full organisational rights at the mines.<sup>153</sup> Unions such as UASA, Solidarity and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa organised particular sections of mineworkers at Lonmin and based on the size of their membership, some also held offices at the mine.

Again, problems at NUM's branch at Karee Mine worked in AMCU's favour. The leader at the time, Mawethu Steven Khulukile popularly known as 'Steve', was liked and trusted among NUM members.<sup>154</sup> Born in the Eastern Cape, Khulukile gained a reputation as a successful union leader due to his transparency and readiness to fight for worker rights. A mineworker narrates a story where an issue emerged at Lonmin over the method of payment of money, which Khulukile successfully convinced the company to pay in an accountable manner.<sup>155</sup> Khulukile has a reputation for being unafraid to hold both the mine accountable and his union accountable. Though he enjoyed the support of mineworkers at Karee, Khulukile's relationship with NUM's regional office was strained and they accused him of being a dictator.<sup>156</sup> The tension reached a turning point during a branch election at the mine in 2011.

Khulukile wanted to bypass the 2011 election and he informed the NUM regional office that his branch committee would remain in office at Karee mine. The regional

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<sup>152</sup> Lonmin has two principal operating companies at Marikana. Eastern Platinum mine falls under the company Eastern Platinum Limited, while Western Platinum mine and Karee mine fall under the company Western Platinum Limited. The two companies' combined make up Lonplats.

<sup>153</sup> The Labour Relations Act (LRA), Act 66 of 1995 governs employment relations in the platinum mine industry. The signing of an Organisational Rights Agreement (recognition agreement) between a trade union and mine management is important. It gives a union formal recognition as a representative body of mineworkers entitled to rights in order to fulfil its mandate. It is allowed to recruit members, to arrange meetings and hold votes. Smaller unions with low membership – as a percentage of the total workforce – generally sign a limited organisational rights agreement, which allows it the right to access a workplace, gives it an office on the property, and the ability to hold mass meetings on the premises. Union officials are also given recognition. However, smaller unions are excluded from bargaining rights which is the right only of the majority union who holds fifty one percent signed membership, referred to as a 50+1 majority. Recognised unions are able to refer disputes to the Commission of Conciliation and Arbitration (the CCMA), a recognised body under the LRA, which governs collective agreements in the workplace.

<sup>154</sup> Steve was killed in 2013 and was scheduled to testify at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry.

<sup>155</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>156</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

office forced Khulukile to hold branch elections, in keeping with the NUM constitution. It is alleged that when a mineworker tried to challenge Khulukile for the position of chairman during the nomination process, Khulukile grew angry and the mineworker was stoned to death that night.<sup>157</sup> Khulukile, supported by workers, insisted that voting be done by a show of hands, instead of the secret ballot system of voting that was preferred by NUM's regional office.<sup>158</sup> A mineworker explains that workers feared that voting through secret ballot would allow for corruption in the voting process.<sup>159</sup> As a result, NUM suspended the Karee branch committee. When mineworkers demanded an explanation for the suspension of the branch committee, the NUM regional office refused to address mineworkers, creating the impression that they feared their response.<sup>160</sup>

Frans Baleni, the General Secretary of NUM, said the leadership of NUM Karee branch was "corrupt, had solicited bribes from members and they had sold jobs".<sup>161</sup> NUM further accused Karee branch leaders of using violence to intimidate workers to go on strike. According to a former strike leader, Zwelinzima Vavi, the General Secretary of COSATU was requested to attend to the matter, but could not intervene because it was a branch-level matter.<sup>162</sup> There is a clear disjuncture between the point of view of NUM's regional office who saw Khulukile as an undemocratic leader and NUM's membership at Karee mine who felt that he was trustworthy and supported his leadership style.

As a result of Khulukile's suspension, approximately 9 000 mineworkers at Karee mine embarked on a strike on the 18 May 2011, demanding an explanation and the reinstatement of their elected union branch leadership. Lonmin retaliated by dismissing all the striking workers. About 7 000 workers were later re-employed, and

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<sup>157</sup> Marinovich G & Lekgowa T, 'Marikana: Fear and terror at the unions' battlefield', *Daily Maverick*, 14 May 2013, accessed on 25 August 2013, URL: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/20130514marikanafearandterrorattheunionsbattlefield/#.VTuxPdKqgkq>

<sup>158</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Interview 1 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>161</sup> Matomela D, 'Lonmin rehires 6 000 workers', *Business Report*, Dated: May 30 2011 at 06:00am, accessed on 6 January 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business/lonmin-rehires-6-000-workers-1.1075493#.VKsNGdKUewg>

<sup>162</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

they began working under new contracts, which required them to re-apply for union membership that had been automatically cancelled when their old contracts ended. Workers said that they were negatively affected by the re-application process because they forfeited benefits they had acquired from years of service at Lonmin.<sup>163</sup> The need to re-apply for union membership was not explained to many workers, most of whom were members of NUM. They were surprised to find that no union membership fee had been deducted from their pay slips. A worker recalls that “we don’t know who cancelled our union, we were just shocked”<sup>164</sup>.

During the process of Lonmin’s re-employment of its workforce, an unhappy NUM spokesperson Lesiba Seshoka said “we will assist some workers to re-apply for their jobs, but that will not include disruptive workers”.<sup>165</sup> Almost 2 000 workers remained jobless in the aftermath of the strike, among them Khulukile, who mineworkers turned to for assistance.

When Khulukile was dismissed by Lonmin, he returned home to the Eastern Cape. He learned that a new union called AMCU that was organising workers in opposition to NUM. Khulukile established contact with AMCU’s organiser, Dumisani Nkalitshana, and returned to the North West to meet with Nkalitshana. By this time, Nkalitshana had already heard about the dismissals at Karee mine. During subsequent meetings with mineworkers, some of those employed at Karee began to join AMCU, especially when Nkalitshana agreed to assist the dismissed mineworkers and launch an unfair application with the CCMA.<sup>166</sup> Almost two years later, AMCU secured the reinstatement of the majority of the dismissed workers.<sup>167</sup> An AMCU official working at Karee mine says of Khulukile:

[Lonmin mineworkers] told Steve “It doesn’t matter if you form a new union we will join it”. So there was no one who wanted to go back to NUM. I am going to say if Steve was not dismissed at that time [in 2011], there would be no AMCU here, and AMCU came because of Steve. Even all of us believed in Steve. When

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<sup>163</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>164</sup> Interview 1 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>165</sup> Naidoo B, ‘Lonmin starts dismissing striking NUM workers’, *Mining Weekly*, Dated: 20th May 2011, accessed on: 06/01/2014 URL: <http://www.miningweekly.com/article/unprotected-num-strike-disrupts-output-at-lonmins-karee-mine-2011-05-20>

<sup>166</sup> Interview 3 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>167</sup> Field notes, October 2014

AMCU came here there was no branch, and the employees asked AMCU to please employ Steve. Steve was an organiser of AMCU, you know about that?<sup>168</sup>

AMCU's recruitment of mineworkers at Karee mine grew and the union sought organisational rights from Lonmin mine. On 30 August 2011, AMCU lodged a dispute with the CCMA when Lonmin failed to respond to their request for recognition at the mine. On 10 November 2011, the CCMA granted AMCU a certificate with the right to strike if the matter remained unresolved. AMCU and Lonmin Karee Mine entered into a Limited Organisational Rights Agreement on 15 December 2011, which gave AMCU access to the workplace and to stop order facilities only.<sup>169</sup>

AMCU began to consolidate its union structure at the mine and an interim branch committee was elected by mineworkers.<sup>170</sup> Despite this, AMCU continued to face challenges with the slow processing of stop orders, and its recognition status at the mine. It was in March 2012 that AMCU strategically hired Khulukile as a regional organiser in the Rustenburg region and he primarily organised mineworkers within Marikana.

On 5 May 2012, almost nine months after AMCU first sought organisational rights at Lonmin, an addendum to the Limited Organisational Rights was signed between AMCU and Lonmin's Karee mine.<sup>171</sup> The addendum gave AMCU the right to have four shop steward offices at Karee and to hold two meetings a month to communicate with members. AMCU was also represented on Lonmin's Employment Equity Committee, Skills Development Forum, Health and Safety Committee and Karee Mine Consultative Forum. According to Karee mine branch officials, they were first elected as Karee mine shaft stewards on 25 May 2012. In July, AMCU convened a shop steward council meeting to elect union officials for Karee mine's Branch Executive Committee.<sup>172</sup> Throughout and following these processes AMCU had to

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<sup>168</sup> Interview 3 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>169</sup> Statement of Joseph Mathunjwa, 'Exhibit NN', Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>170</sup> Interview 11 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>171</sup> Addendum to the Limited Organisational Rights Agreement between Western Platinum Limited and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, 'Exhibit OO12', Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>172</sup> Interview 11 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

continually pressure Lonmin to comply with the organisational rights agreement, such as providing the union with office space.

The recognition of AMCU at Lonmin's Karee mine, with just under 2 000 members, was a significant event because it was AMCU's first major agreement with one of the top three platinum mining companies, which employs thousands of workers on a permanent basis. Following its limited recognition agreement at Karee mine, mineworkers from other platinum mines began to hear of AMCU. More particularly, in moments of crisis, AMCU presented an alternative black mineworkers' union to NUM and recognised such crisis as opportunities to attract membership and grow.

While AMCU was establishing itself at Karee mine, Rock Drill Operators at Implats were beginning to organise themselves following a wage dispute. Their dispute with Implats' mine management and NUM would mark the beginning of the 2012 strike wave on Rustenburg's platinum mines for a living wage, and provide an opening for AMCU to recruit workers at a second major platinum mining company.

### **3.3 Implats RDOs strike for higher wages**

Impala Platinum Mine Holdings is situated about 20 minutes from the centre of Rustenburg and is surrounded by burgeoning informal settlements. Implats is divided into two main branches, North and South, each with its own hostel. The strike at Implats has its roots in an October 2011 three-year wage agreement signed between mine management and NUM, which gave mineworkers an eight to ten percent wage increase.<sup>173</sup> Though workers were unhappy with the increase, NUM leadership convinced them that the mine could not afford to pay a higher increase.

Platinum mining companies use the hierarchical Patterson job grading system to determine wages. Mineworkers fall under categories 4 to 9 and this includes 'miners' – a term used to describe a category of mineworker doing work at a supervisory level – and RDOs.<sup>174</sup> The system grades workers according to their level of 'skill'. RDOs

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<sup>173</sup> Chinguno C, 'Impala Platinum strike: lessons and implications' and Chinguno C, 'Battle for Impala'

<sup>174</sup> To avoid confusion, I use inverted commas when referring to the category of 'miners' under the Patterson Grading System. See Filen C, 'Insight into Implats Platinum's 18% wage increases', *Mine*

usually fall under A-grade which is the lowest grade, giving them the lowest wage. 'Miners' fall under B or C-grade, and earn higher wages. Mine management falls under the D, E and F grades.

While wage negotiations were being concluded in 2011, Implats' management felt they were unable to retain 'miners' because they paid 'miners' a wage below the market standard. In December 2011, two months after concluding the wage agreement with NUM, Implats' management awarded an 18 percent retention allowance to 'miners' who fall under the C-grade in the Paterson system, to ensure that they pay workers in line with the market standard.<sup>175</sup> The entire workforce came to learn about the retention allowance awarded to 'miners' in January 2012 when they returned from the December Christmas break. In particular, Rock Drill Operators were angered and felt aggrieved by Implats' decision to award the retention allowance to 'miners' only. RDOs are central to the production process and fulfil a difficult and dangerous function in the extraction process. They generally work an eight-hour long underground shift in sweltering and cramped conditions using a using heavy hand-held drilling machine.<sup>176</sup> RDOs felt aggrieved by NUM for its attempts to convince mineworkers that the mine did not have enough money to pay workers higher wages. Resentful at being excluded, RDOs began to organise themselves independently of NUM as they believed that the 18 percent retention allowance had been awarded with the approval of NUM. Some mineworkers believe NUM blocked management from awarding RDOs a retention increase,<sup>177</sup> as their focus was on ensuring 'miners' were awarded the retention allowance because most union officials held the position of 'miner'. A mineworker who was a NUM member at the time explains:

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Web, published on: 8 March 2012, accessed on 6 May 2015, URL:

<http://www.mineweb.com/archive/insight-into-Implats-platinums-18-wage-increases/>, and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*, p 190-193

<sup>175</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>176</sup> P Stewart, 'Kings of the Mine'; and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>177</sup> Implats Platinum said they had informed NUM of the decision to give a retention to 'miners'. This was denied by NUM. However, workers felt NUM was complicit in the decision to award the increase. This is not the first time that workers at Implats Platinum organised themselves independently. See Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

The leadership forgot their mandate, they forgot who they are representing. They seemed to forget that the people are the ones who chose them and they must represent the workers. But instead, they are representing themselves.<sup>178</sup>

The feeling that NUM had betrayed workers was not new. In interviews, workers raised a number of other concerns and failings of NUM leadership, independent of the immediate concern of the RDOs.

A former NUM shaft steward said he joined NUM because it was “the union of Nelson Mandela” and therefore, he had hopes that it would help him. However, he was disappointed to find that the branch officials were close to the mine management, a relationship that made it difficult for shaft committees to assist workers with day to day issues at the mine. As a union official, he tried to solve cases at the shaft level and avoided escalating an issue to branch level where mineworkers would be berated by NUM branch officials and often dismissed from the mine.<sup>179</sup>

Another mineworker felt NUM was unable to address the issues of workers. When mineworkers reported unsafe working conditions at a shaft to the branch officials, the union’s response would be slow and ineffective. In addition, workers felt NUM would sympathise with mine management, instead of giving attention to their legitimate concern of safety.<sup>180</sup> Other workers accused NUM of making many promises that were not realised. During wage negotiations, workers felt that NUM’s claim to have negotiated a significant increase in their wages was an exaggeration because there was no substantial difference in their wages before and after negotiations.<sup>181</sup>

Workers raised the issue of ethnicity, which they said dominated the union leadership and left many mineworkers of a different ethnicity to the union leadership feeling excluded and divided<sup>182</sup> Transparency, openness, and a willingness to engage with

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<sup>178</sup> Interview 4 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>179</sup> Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015

<sup>180</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>181</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>182</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014; Interview 3 at Implats mine 24 October 2014, Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015

mineworkers were missing from NUM. They were of the opinion that workers joined NUM because it was the only union representing black mineworkers.<sup>183</sup>

Ian Macun suggests that member dissatisfaction with trade unions has a number of causes.<sup>184</sup> This includes a growing distance between members and leaders, trade union rivalry and weakness within the unions. These factors are compounded by the size of the industry or sector organised. In the case of Implats, workers decided that NUM was no longer a viable option to represent their needs in relation to their current struggle for higher wages.

The issues eventually boiled over. RDOs at Implats North branch began a wildcat strike<sup>185</sup> on 12 January 2012 and raised their unhappiness with mine management, refusing to speak to NUM officials.<sup>186</sup> Given that the RDOs were not large in number, their strike was small and they struggled to maintain the momentum of the strike which did not last. Nonetheless, RDOs continued to mobilise underground and a meeting was organised between mineworkers from Implats' North and South branches. The meeting was held at the local stadium by Implats South hostel. A worker who became a leading figure in the strike, recalls that at the meeting mineworkers from Implats North encouraged those from Implats South to organise and to fight against the unfair retention allowance.<sup>187</sup>

On the morning of 17 January 2012, RDOs at Implats South shaft 14 met at the mine surface and approached their shaft manager to demand a retention allowance for RDOs. They also firmly rejected management's attempt to allow NUM to intervene in the negotiation, arguing that mine management and NUM were one and the same.<sup>188</sup> A compromise was reached when mine management promised to respond to their demands in three days. Mineworkers returned to work after choosing five

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<sup>183</sup> Interviews 1 to 6 at Implats mine, between 22 and 27 October 2014

<sup>184</sup> Macun I, 'Workers bypassing unions: how to respond?', presented at Panel 2: Bargaining arrangements in platinum, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*, University of Witwatersrand, 31 March 2014, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>185</sup> A wildcat strike is when unionised members embark on strike action without union approval, support or knowledge.

<sup>186</sup> Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015 and Implats News Release, 'Refutation of Allegations made by the Num/Cosatu', 3 February 2012

<sup>187</sup> Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015

<sup>188</sup> Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015 and Implats News Release, 'Refutation of Allegations made by the Num/Cosatu', 3 February 2012

representatives to engage with management. These men became known as the Five Madoda.<sup>189</sup>

Implats' management were not happy with the exclusion of NUM in the RDO wage dispute. They claimed that they had reached an agreement with NUM and because of the existence of bargaining council structures, NUM had to be involved in all the discussions about wages. When Implats' management failed to respond to mineworkers' demands within the stipulated three days, about 3 000 RDOs embarked on an unprotected strike on Friday, 20 January 2012.<sup>190</sup> The strike halted production at the mine. Workers say the mobilisation of RDOs was led by workers organising underground independently of any union structure. This independent mobilisation led to the creation of underground worker committees and each shaft involved in the strike action elected their own interim committee to coordinate the mobilisation of the striking mineworkers at different shafts.<sup>191</sup>

As the RDOs method of organising and their leadership through the worker committees or Five Madoda improved, so did the development of their list of demands. Most notably, they began to demand a R9 000 basic wage that was to be negotiated with the mine in numbers (Rand's) and not percentages. This was due to high rates of illiteracy at the mine, as well as confusion over percentage increases. The demand seems to have emanated from a mass meeting of workers.<sup>192</sup>

Worried about the production losses and the anti-union stance of striking mineworkers, on Tuesday 24 January Implats successfully applied for a court order against mineworkers who engaged in the unprotected strike. Despite the court order, Implats was unable to stop the strike and it dismissed the 3 000 RDOs on 26 January 2012. By 29 January 2012, the majority of the Implats workforce joined the strike in support of the dismissed RDOs. Implats' management, seeking a court order against the strike, blamed AMCU for organising the secondary strike claiming that AMCU hoped to gain recognition at the mine.<sup>193</sup> On 2 February, Implats mine announced

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<sup>189</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>190</sup> An unprotected strike is a labour strike undertaken by workers without an official strike certificate from the CCMA, resulting in no protection for workers who embark strike action.

<sup>191</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>192</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>193</sup> Implats News Release, 'Work stoppage and Impala Rustenburg', 30 January 2012

that it had dismissed a total of 17 200 employers on strike. Implats began locking workers out of the hostels where mineworkers lived, claiming that the dismissed workers were not entitled to mine accommodation as they were no longer employed by the mine.<sup>194</sup>

As the strike developed, mineworkers said they retreated to open spaces in order to hold mass meetings. One such space was known as the “pipes”, an open, uneven field with thick white pipes between Freedom Park and the road leading to the mine, near Implats South.<sup>195</sup>

NUM’s branch leadership tried and failed to gain control of the situation. Workers consistently refused to speak to and engage with them. Chinguno’s research reveals that the regional office of NUM admitted at the time that they were unaware of how serious the gap between the branch leadership and members had become. They were also ignorant of the extent of the tension at the mine.<sup>196</sup>

On 21 February then General Secretary of COSATU, Zwelinzima Vavi, addressed workers at the mine. He was one of the only trade union leaders from COSATU who mineworkers were prepared to listen to.<sup>197</sup> Vavi appealed to Implats’ mineworkers to denounce violence and called on workers to give NUM a chance to negotiate. They refused. At the same meeting, mineworkers refused to allow NUM President Senzeni Zokwana to address them.

On 26 February expelled ANC Youth League (ANCYL) leader, Julius Malema, arrived at Implats mine with then North West Premier, Thandi Modise. Malema had been called by workers to intervene in the strike, and to seek a solution between workers and mine management. Contact with Malema was made through mineworkers who were ANCYL members. They agreed with his call for the nationalisation of the mines.<sup>198</sup> However, Malema’s efforts to end the strike, like

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<sup>194</sup> Interview 7 at Implats mine, 17 and 25 February 2015

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*, p 197

<sup>197</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*, p 240-242

<sup>198</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014 and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

those of Vavi, were not heeded. Without denouncing NUM, Malema was heavily critical of its absence in the strike, saying that it should have been on-the-ground with the mineworkers instead of sitting in their offices.<sup>199</sup> Malema gave some legitimacy to the mineworkers' struggle for higher wages and he called on them to remain militant and to continue to fight for a R9 000 wage.

The timing of Malema's address was important. Malema had just been dismissed by the ANCYL and (in part, because of that) workers felt that he "spoke the truth" about the ANC and NUM and that he helped them to open their eyes.<sup>200</sup> A worker leader alleges that when Malema intervened to negotiate an end to the strike by calling Premier Modise, NUM, Implats' management and mineworkers to the same room, NUM refused to negotiate.<sup>201</sup>

Tensions escalated further when NUM retreated from the mine after an incident in which a NUM Operational Health and Safety officer was shot and hospitalised. This occurred when striking mineworkers violently removed NUM officials from their offices because they said they no longer represented the mineworkers at Implats mine.<sup>202</sup> As one mineworker said, "maximum force was used".<sup>203</sup> Strike violence escalated as the strike progressed and workers were threatened, injured and killed if they broke the strike.<sup>204</sup> Implats again blamed AMCU, claiming AMCU's emergence resulted in workers' rejection of NUM and the rise of criminal attacks.<sup>205</sup>

### *Invited recruitment*

Implats, according to mineworker's testimonies, had overstated the role of AMCU in the strike. One of the Implats strike leaders said he had learned of the existence of AMCU from fellow mineworker named Michael, who was an ex-employee of Implats and then went to work for Lonmin where he began recruiting for AMCU following the strike at Karee mine in 2011. Michael was central to facilitating a meeting between

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<sup>199</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>200</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>201</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014; and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>202</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>203</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014; and Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*, p 211

<sup>204</sup> Chinguno C, *The shifting dynamics of the relations between institutionalisation and strike violence*

<sup>205</sup> Implats News Release, 'Update on work stoppage and Implats Rustenburg', 20 February 2012

Implats strike leaders and AMCU's Nkalitshana.<sup>206</sup> Following the meeting between AMCU and the Five Madoda, a mass meeting was called at Implats South, number 8.<sup>207</sup> Nkalitshana addressed the mineworkers about the history of AMCU. He also discussed what AMCU was able to offer the mineworkers. By this time, AMCU was aware that NUM's failure had created an opening for it to recruit and grow its membership. Nkalitshana had previously known workers in the region and used old and new networks to assist with recruitment.<sup>208</sup> He is also skilled at being able to assess the mood of workers and respond appropriately. Having secured the support of the leadership of the strike committees, AMCU had a sense of legitimacy at the mass meeting which created an environment that was favourable for recruitment.

Still, AMCU's rise was not an easy one. Implats' management's suggestion that the emergence of AMCU was to blame for workers' rejection of NUM remains unsubstantiated. Mineworkers say the first time contact was made with AMCU was soon after Malema's visit to Implats and that they were initially sceptical of AMCU.

A worker recalls the difficulties of recruiting for AMCU amid the tensions that existed due to the ongoing struggle for higher wages:

After the meeting and after we heard about AMCU and how they can help us. Then we immediately said to them they should give us the stop orders. But because there was still a battle, they did not give them out publicly. We got them from certain people and I was one of those people that had the forms in my house. When there is a meeting at the stadium I took it and people filled it out

And when we gave workers the forms, we will make them fill them in [straightaway]. After they are done, I take the forms immediately without allowing anyone to go away with them, but I told them if they need me they will meet me at my house.

And my reason for doing that was that I was scared that there are people who did not want this new union, and I was afraid. Even when workers came to my house,

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<sup>206</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>207</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

I will make sure that they were people who wanted to join. [I would let them leave] without giving the forms to them because they might take it to NUM.<sup>209</sup>

As explained above, not wanting to alert Implats management of the talks with AMCU at that stage, the interim committee leaders took membership forms and begun recruiting for AMCU underground under tense conditions, while independently attempting to resolve the dispute at the mine.<sup>210</sup> Mphahlele recalls that he would wait for hours at Implats mine to collect completed AMCU membership forms. These were at times delivered to him in a plastic packet, as AMCU organisers at Implats were too scared to be seen in the open with AMCU forms or identified as organisers for AMCU.<sup>211</sup>

Implats mine management repeatedly appealed to workers to return to work and began a process of rehiring mineworkers. Yet it was only on 29 February 2012, after five long weeks, that an agreement was reached and the Implats strike formally ended. RDOs were promoted from category A4 to category B1, resulting in an increase in their salaries. Their basic wages increased from R6 540 to R9 991 from 1 April 2012.<sup>212</sup>

The RDOs felt victorious as they had been able to secure a wage of R9 000. However, Implats claimed to have lost R2.8 billion in revenue over that period.<sup>213</sup> Implats only rehired 15 000 of the 17 500 dismissed workers.

### *Striving for recognition*

Mineworkers at Implats demonstrated that insurgent strike action led by an organised leadership from below could bring the country's second largest platinum mine to a standstill. The strike was a culmination of frustration and discontent. While recruitment for AMCU began during the strike, it was only after the strike had been resolved, that mineworkers began to openly identify themselves as members and

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<sup>209</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>210</sup> Interview 1 and 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Jeff Mphahlele, Johannesburg, 16 January 2016

<sup>212</sup>“ Implats Management brief N0 11.12 re “salary adjustments”, ‘Exhibit XX2.4’, Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>213</sup> Implats Press statement, ‘An extremely challenging year for Implats’, 23 August 2012

organisers of AMCU. With tensions at the mine easing in the months after the strike, recruitment for AMCU became easier.

NUM was one of the biggest losers of the strike. NUM's recognition rights allowed it to hold offices at the mines and its leaders gained a number of benefits. But as the benefits increased – including higher wages of elected officials – their relationship with workers was compromised. Many were accused of being co-opted by mine management. Their allegiances appeared to lie elsewhere and they frequently sided with mine management. NUM lost the ability to solve day to day labour disputes, and its ability to make members – female workers, and workers from non-dominant ethnicities – feel ably represented.

The mine management – driven by profit – capitalised on these tensions as it attempted to control worker militancy. After the Implats strike, recruitment for AMCU continued in earnest and AMCU became a serious contender to NUM. Implats was unable to stop workers from joining the union they blamed for being behind the January 2012 strike. In July 2013, almost a year and a half after the strike by Implats workers, Implats mine management recognised AMCU as the majority union at the mine.

The elected officials felt that there was an easy transition from independent worker committees to AMCU's branch leadership structure. This was largely because the Five Madoda were elected into the union's leadership structure:

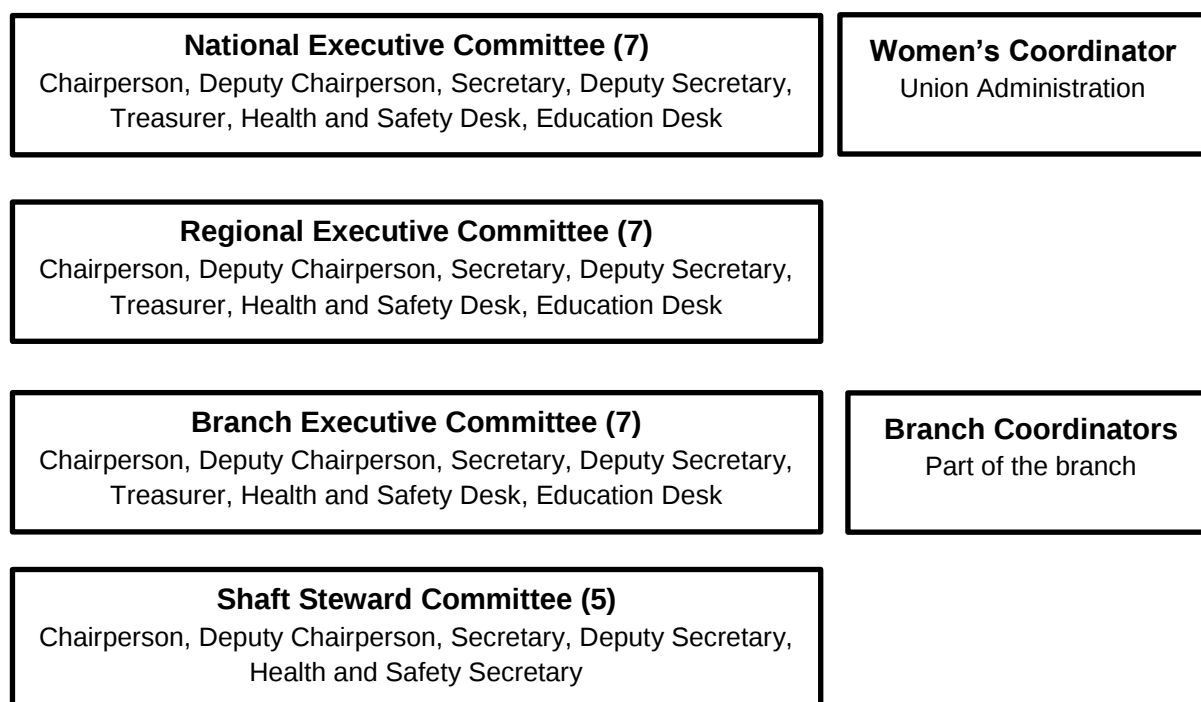
AMCU has its top seven which controls the South branch, but at the shaft level there is five [elected leaders]. Like here at number 1 shaft, it is Five Madoda but all of them are under AMCU it is just that people got used to Five Madoda before AMCU came in, but those people are AMCU.<sup>214</sup>

In 2012, AMCU's constitution which allowed for the union to recruit workers employed in the mining, energy, construction, transport, security and allied industries, recognised four layers of leadership.

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<sup>214</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

The basic structure of the union in 2012 was as follows:<sup>215</sup>



AMCU members at each mine shaft, elect a shaft steward committee to represent them at the underground shaft level. The shaft stewards committee is the first point of contact for members. Where possible, all complaints or disciplinary process are attended to at shaft level. The shaft committee reports to the branch committee, and escalates any issue that it is unable to deal with at the shaft to the branch committee. The branch committees attend to union membership and recruitment at the mine, and ensure that workers are properly represented. The branch officials form part of the union's wage negotiating team.

If a mine has more than two branches, the union may feel it necessary to have a branch coordinator, who facilitates all the union's branches at the mine level, and acts as a mediator between the branches and the regional office. Lonmin, Implats

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<sup>215</sup> AMCU Constitution

and Amplats all have provisions in their recognition agreements for a branch coordinator. This is not a constitutional stricture of the union. The branches and coordinators report to the regional office, which manages and supports all the branches in a region. They also have a responsibility to recruit members. Regional officials are elected from the branches officials. AMCU's Rustenburg Regional Congress to elect the regional leadership only took place in October 2014. This is due to the speed at which AMCU grew, and the 2013 wage negotiations which resulted in the five-month long strike. The regional office reports to the national office, which manages the union's finances and overall functioning of the union.

The women coordinator, like the branch coordinator, is a non-constitutional structure and aims to provide support to the female mineworkers. It was a relatively new structure for the union, and operates from shaft to national level.

At Implats South branch, the union offices were located at the hostel. This allowed members to easily access the branch, and to engage with officials outside of the shaft level. The union had about four different offices in the same building from which to conduct its affairs.

The next section looks at the strike, led by RDOs at Lonmin mine in August 2012, and the rise of AMCU following the Marikana Massacre.

### **3.4 The Lonmin RDO strike and the Marikana Massacre**

Mineworkers at Lonmin mine had followed the developments of the five-week Implats strike for a wage increase. RDOs at Lonmin's Karee mine were aggrieved because they worked underground under difficult conditions and without RDO assistants to help them in their work. Lonmin's Eastern and Western Platinum mines employed RDO assistants.<sup>216</sup> In response, RDOs at Karee mine began to organise themselves as a group of mineworkers employed to do a particular set of skilled work at the mine. They consciously rejected organising themselves as members of any trade union in an effort to be inclusive of all RDOs irrespective of whether a RDO was

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<sup>216</sup> Interview 4 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

unionised or not.<sup>217</sup> Karee mine's RDOs met on 21 June 2012 and after the meeting, a group of 300 RDOs marched to their mine management offices to present their demand for basic wage of R12 500 per month. Sinwell and Mbatha traced the demand for R12 500 to a key leader in the strike, Alfonse Ramaola Mofokeng, who used the figure as the maximum limit from which workers could negotiate their salary.<sup>218</sup>

The Vice President of Karee Mine Operations, Mike Da Costa, had been warned by Lonmin security that workers would be marching to his office after their meeting on 21 June 2012. At the time Lonmin's management were aware that they were paying RDOs below market standard and were following developments at Amplats, where mine management had begun to engage its workforce about their wages.<sup>219</sup> Da Costa met with two representatives of the mineworkers and they informed him that they wanted to be fairly compensated for the work they do. The mineworkers requested a basic salary of R12 500 for RDOs. As in the case of Implats, the figure seems to have been formulated on what workers considered to be fair and as a benchmark from which they could negotiate with the mine. The RDO representatives also informed Da Costa that they do not want any union to be involved as this was strictly an RDO issue and not a general mine issue. Da Costa promised to speak to Lonmin's Executive Committee, while also informing workers that their demand was too high. Following about two further meetings with representatives of the RDOs, Lonmin management recognised that there was a problem, and decided to give a top-up allowance to RDOs as a way of increasing their salary. On the 31 July 2012, Lonmin formally announced the RDO allowance and RDOs, assisted RDOs and RDO assistants were given an increase of R750, R500 and R250 respectively.<sup>220</sup>

Unhappy that Lonmin made no attempt to seriously engage with workers' demand for R12 500, RDOs at Karee realised that they needed more support and began to engage RDOs from Lonmin's Eastern and Western Platinum mines.<sup>221</sup> A number of

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<sup>217</sup> See Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana* for how worker committees were elected and operated at the mine.

<sup>218</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>219</sup> Statement of Mike Da Costa, 'Exhibit 0017', Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>, p 3

<sup>220</sup> Statement of Mike Da Costa, 'Exhibit 0017', p 16

<sup>221</sup> Interview 4 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

meetings were organised with workers from Lonmin's Eastern Platinum, Western Platinum and Karee mines as well as between RDOs and mine management.<sup>222</sup> These meetings were coordinated once again by independent worker committees. A mass meeting was held on the 9 August 2012 to provide feedback and to determine a way forward. RDOs decided to march the following day to Lonmin Platinum Division (LPD), the head office of Lonmin Mine. They intended to present their wage demand to Lonmin and begin a negotiation process.

Lonmin security had been monitoring the developments at the mine and informed the mine management of the mineworkers' intention to march to LPD. In response, Lonmin management issued a communique warning mineworkers that management would not hesitate to dismiss mineworkers engaging in unprotected industrial action.<sup>223</sup>

On the morning of 10 August 2012, approximately 3 000 RDOs gathered at the Wonderkop stadium and marched to the LPD. They were met by Lonmin's head of security, Graeme Sinclair, who informed them that there were existing labour relations structures at the mine and that the mine would only negotiate with mineworkers through those structures. He reiterated that mineworkers needed to go through NUM to raise their concerns with management.<sup>224</sup>

The next day, 11 August 2012, RDOs marched to the NUM branch offices to present their demands for the union to take forward.<sup>225</sup> RDOs marched from the stadium, past the Wonderkop hostel, toward NUM offices. Lonmin Security, on the basis of information from an "informer", advised NUM officials to leave their offices as RDOs intended to attack the union's office.<sup>226</sup> Believing that they were under attack, NUM officials armed themselves and waited by the hostels for the group of striking workers to approach. As the strikers passed the hostel, NUM branch officials opened fire on the workers. Two men were seriously injured and at the time, were incorrectly

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<sup>222</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, p 38 - 41

<sup>223</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

<sup>224</sup> Video footage of 10 August, 'Exhibit W1 – Exhibit W5' before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>225</sup> Statement of Simphiwe Booi, 'Exhibit BBB3', Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>, and Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>226</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

<sup>226</sup> Video footage of 10 August, 'Exhibit W1 – Exhibit W5'

thought to have died. At the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, NUM President Senzeni Zokwana was asked if NUM would condone the firing of shots by NUM branch officials against workers, he said:

NUM would not encourage any sort of that. But NUM would understand if its people believed that their lives are under threat and our offices are under threat; that they will at the spur of the moment decide to take a stand. As the NUM we believe that those people [NUM branch officials] found themselves in that circumstances and we don't condemn what they did.<sup>227</sup>

Thus, the official position of NUM was that the union did not condemn the shooting of its own membership at Lonmin mine. Zokwana's testimony, and the actions of NUM branch officials exposed the distance between NUM officials and NUM membership. One worker who was injured in the shooting said that there was a misunderstanding between workers and NUM, and that NUM did not understand that while workers had organised independently, it was not because they thought NUM was the enemy. Concerning the march to NUM on 11 August 2012, he says:

Yes it was all of us. So there was no one who you could say is an AMCU member or NUM member marching. Some people were wearing green t-shirts, some were wearing red t-shirts. So we were mixed and there was no anger amongst us, we all wanted money. So we did not see NUM people as our enemies, we just felt that there is a lot confusion here.<sup>228</sup>

He felt confused knowing that he was a member of NUM, yet they chose to shoot him instead of engage with him. Another worker says NUM officials wrongly assumed that the strikers were mainly from AMCU's stronghold at Karee mine and therefore were wary of the intentions of the strikers without taking the time to listen to the strikers.<sup>229</sup> It remains unclear why NUM felt the need to defend themselves in the manner in which they did.

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<sup>227</sup> Senzeni Zokwana testimony at Marikana Commission of Inquiry, day 42, 1 February 2013, p. 4551, Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>228</sup> Interview 2 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>229</sup> Interview 6 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

## *The Marikana Massacre*

As the strike continued, people began to lose their lives. Two Lonmin security guards and two mineworkers were murdered on 12 August and in the early hours of 13 August 2012. That same night, eight cars were torched. During the day on 13 August, three days before the Marikana massacre, the tension among workers, security personnel and mine management was palpable. Upon hearing that Karee mine's K3 shaft was operational, a group of mineworkers went to the shaft and assess the situation. That decision proved to be fatal.

On arrival it was clear that the mine was not operational and the workers decided to return to where rest of the mineworkers were gathered on a small hill, known as a "*koppie*". However, they found themselves ambushed by a contingent of police who were waiting for them along the route, which was alongside a railway line. A negotiation ensued when the police demanded that the mineworkers hand over their weapons such as pangas, sticks and spears before joining the rest of the workers on the *koppie*. Reaching a stalemate in the negotiation, the mineworkers left the railway line in the direction of the *koppie*, leaving the police to follow them if they wished.

At this point, with no warning, members of the police fired teargas, stun grenades and rubber bullets at the mineworkers, forcing them to scatter. In the chaos two policemen and three mineworkers were killed.<sup>230</sup> The NUM released a press statement calling for the SAPS Special Operations Unit, the Special Task Force, to intervene.<sup>231</sup>

On 14 August 2012 a NUM shop steward, Isiah Twala, was identified on the *koppie* and accused of being a spy. He was confronted by mineworkers about his presence there, and was later found dead on the side of the *koppie*. He had been shot, hacked and an animal skull was placed on his body.<sup>232</sup>

The death toll had escalated to 10 people. NUM General Secretary Frans Baleni accused Lonmin of not learning lessons from the strike at Implats mine "that led to

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<sup>230</sup>To this day, no policeman has admitted to giving the order to fire stun grenades at the group of workers. Many of the policemen were angry at General Mpembe who led the negotiation and was in charge of the operation, believing him to be the one who gave an order that places their lives at risk.

<sup>231</sup> NUM Press Statement, *NUM calls for a Special Task Force in the mines*, 13 August 2012

<sup>232</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*, p 169 - 175

opportunists mobilising other sections of workers, telling them that they do not receive the same salaries.”<sup>233</sup> He criticised the mining industry for failing to comply with “transformation targets, the Mining Charter and social labour plans” which created space for “opportunists and criminals”.

On the evening of the 15 August, NUM’s president Senzeni Zokwana and AMCU president Joseph Mathunjwa went to the *koppie* to address the mineworkers and find a resolution to the strike. Zokwana tried to address them but they insisted that he first disembark from the police vehicle he was seated in and address the mineworkers in person. Because he refused, the workers did not give him a hearing. Instead, they sang anti-NUM songs. When Mathunjwa spoke, he began by explaining to workers that the police would not allow him to disembark from the police vehicle and he requested that the workers tell him their demands.<sup>234</sup> The workers responded that they wanted a R12 500 basic salary, and they wanted Lonmin mine management to address them. Mathunjwa promised to take their demands to Lonmin and return the next day to report back to workers.

The police Major General on duty and Mathunjwa left the meeting feeling hopeful that there could be a break-through in the strike negotiations. However, that same night of 15 August 2012, an extra-ordinary session of the SAPS held a high level meeting of its top leadership, known as the National Management Forum (NMF).<sup>235</sup> At the meeting, North West Provincial Commissioner General Mbombo requested additional police resources to end the strike the following day. SAPS officials agreed to provide the requested assistance without going over the details of how General Mbombo intended to use the resources.<sup>236</sup>

The transcript of a meeting on the 14 August 2012 between General Mbombo and Lonmin’s Executive Vice President for Human Capital and External Affairs, Bernard Mokwena, reflects that General Mbombo raised several reasons for wanting to end

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<sup>233</sup> Van Wyngaardt M, ‘Lonmin failed to learn lessons from Implats saga – Baleni’, *Mining Weekly*, 16 August 2012, accessed on 19 November 2012, URL: [http://www.miningweekly.com/article/lonmin-failed-to-learn-lessons-from-Implats-saga-baleni-2012-08-16/rep\\_id:3650](http://www.miningweekly.com/article/lonmin-failed-to-learn-lessons-from-Implats-saga-baleni-2012-08-16/rep_id:3650)

<sup>234</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

<sup>235</sup> The NMF is a high level meeting of SAPS leadership. NMF meeting are attended by the National Commission and Provincial Commissioners, Operational Response services and Crime Intelligence.

<sup>236</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*, p 183 - 189

the strike.<sup>237</sup> These include her discomfort that mineworkers felt as if they were “in control” of the strike; that there was an attempt to replace NUM and that the police could not assist Lonmin if Lonmin was “colluding” with AMCU. She added that the Minister of Police was being pressured by ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa, who was a shareholder in Lonmin, to end the strike; that the ongoing strike would create an opportunity for former ANCYL president Julius Malema to visit Marikana to address workers as he had done at Implats mine, and that Malema would talk about nationalisation of the mines. Finally Mbombo was concerned about the resources and money she was spending as a result of the deployment of other SAPS members to her province.<sup>238</sup> These concerns betrayed the SAPS political bias against workers in relation to the strike.

On the morning of 16 August, Mathunjwa said he was unable to find anyone from Lonmin or the SAPS to discuss the undertaking by mineworkers to return to work if Lonmin’s management engaged the mineworkers. The SAPS presence at the mine had increased and it became clear that the SAPS were not interested in negotiations. Mathunjwa went to the *koppie* where he reported to workers that no one from the mine was willing to address them directly.<sup>239</sup> He requested that they go back to work and give AMCU an opportunity to take their matter to the CCMA. Mathunjwa, frustrated and realising that there was nothing he could do to get Lonmin to negotiate, returned to the *koppie* later that afternoon, to plead with workers to leave the *koppie* and in doing so, save their lives. He was afraid of the tense and heavily armed police presence.<sup>240</sup>

Minutes after Mathunjwa left the *koppie*, members of the SAPS began to roll out barbed wire in a manner that would trap workers on the *koppie*. As the workers tried to flee the *koppie*, police opened fire killing 17 people at what became known as Scene One. A few meters away, the SAPS fired at and arrested workers at what

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<sup>237</sup> Transcript of meeting between provincial commissioner General Mbombo and representatives of Lonmin on the afternoon of Tuesday, 14 August 2012, ‘Exhibit JJJ192’, Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>238</sup> Transcript of meeting between provincial commissioner General Mbombo and representatives of Lonmin on the afternoon of Tuesday, 14 August 2012, ‘Exhibit JJJ192’,

<sup>239</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

<sup>240</sup> Statement of Joseph Mathunjwa, ‘Exhibit NN’; and Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

became known as Scene Two. A further 17 people were killed at Scene Two.<sup>241</sup> In less than one hour, a total of 34 workers engaged in a labour dispute over wages were killed by the police in what has been described as post-apartheid South Africa's first state-led massacre.

### *After the Massacre*

The Lonmin strike and the massacre that followed had a huge impact on AMCU. AMCU released a statement the following day, 17 August 2012, committing itself to meet and assist the families of the deceased workers with funeral arrangements.<sup>242</sup> That day, the Presidency announced its intention to establish a Commission of Inquiry offering condolences to the families of the mineworkers who had been killed.

The strike continued for a further three weeks, during which mineworkers remained organised and more determined to fight. Two weeks after the massacre, a march was organised by a group of women from the community of Marikana to protest the continued police harassment and presence in Marikana. The women organised themselves into a community organisation known as Sikhala Sonke<sup>243</sup>

Following the massacre, Lonmin focused its energy on trying to end the strike. In the week after the massacre, Lonmin issued an ultimatum for mineworkers to return to work or face dismissal. AMCU pleaded for Lonmin to reconsider its position. The negotiations to end the strike continued amid a mounting police presence. Lonmin offered to make a once-off payment – the amount equivalent to five days' work basic pay – as well as to continued negotiations on condition that workers return to work and commit themselves to a Peace Accord. The Peace Accord was shunned by the workers' committee, with whom Lonmin began to directly engage, and who felt Lonmin's offer was an insult to their struggle for a living wage in which lives had been lost.<sup>244</sup> AMCU also refused to sign the accord for three reasons: firstly, the Peace Accord only committed Lonmin to continuing a process of engagement, as opposed to committing to seriously engaging workers' demands for R12 500 basic wage. Secondly, AMCU would not sign an agreement without a mandate from workers.

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<sup>241</sup> Farlam I, Hemraj PD & Tokota BR, *Marikana Commission of Inquiry*

<sup>242</sup> AMCU Press statement, '*Media release statement: Lonmin Massacre*', 17 August 2012

<sup>243</sup> Benya A, 'The invisible hands: women in Marikana'

<sup>244</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, p 64-84

Thirdly AMCU felt aggrieved that Lonmin wanted to sign a Peace Accord yet it had shunned AMCU's attempt to negotiate on the 16 August 2012.<sup>245</sup> AMCU had aligned itself to the workers, and it too began to engage the workers' committees in the negotiations, supporting and incorporating their demands into the union's demands.

On 18 September 2012, an agreement was reached between workers and Lonmin, and the strike was concluded. General workers received an 18 percent increase, winch/loco operators received an 11 percent increase, RDOs received a 22 percent increase, and production team leaders received a 10 percent increase.<sup>246</sup> Over the course of the strike, Lonmin lost approximately 110 000 ounces of platinum production.<sup>247</sup>

Following the Marikana massacre, AMCU and NUM became locked in a membership battle and in the fight for recognition at Lonmin. On 9 May 2013, Lonmin announced that AMCU was the majority union representing 70 percent of mineworkers in category 4 to 9 of its employees. NUM represented 20 percent of workers in the same category. However, the Limited Organisation Rights agreement signed between AMCU and Lonmin's Karee mine was still in place and following the delays in finalising a new agreement, AMCU referred the matter to the CCMA on 21 May 2013. On the 23 May 2013, Lonmin referred the matter for arbitration when no resolution had been reached.<sup>248</sup>

Meanwhile NUM took Lonmin to court when the company tried to expedite the process of removing NUM's majority organisational rights after it was evident they had lost majority status to AMCU. The court found that NUM was entitled to its full organisational rights until 16 July 2013 as per the signed agreement between NUM and Lonmin. NUM further took Lonmin and AMCU to court, in an attempt to delay losing its majority recognition, and disputed the handling of membership forms. NUM lost its application and on 14 August 2013, a year after the massacre, Lonmin and

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<sup>245</sup> Media release statement: Lonmin Massacre Peace Accord, Press statement issued by AMCU on 7 September 2012

<sup>246</sup> 'Lonmin wage agreement', Press release issued by Lonmin on 18 September 2012

<sup>247</sup> Lonmin Plc Regulatory release, '*Fourth Quarter 2012 Production Report and Update on Lonmin's Future Strategy*', 30 October 2012

<sup>248</sup> Lonmin Plc Regulatory release, '*Further update on Union Recognition Discussions*', 14 August 2013

AMCU reached an organisational rights agreement with AMCU recognised as the majority union at Lonmin.<sup>249</sup>

Karee mine had an existing elected branch leadership structure. At Lonmin's Eastern and Western Platinum mines, the loosely formed worker committees - where they existed - were incorporated into the union structures.

### **3.5 Amplats, The largest platinum mine goes on strike**

Anglo American Platinum is South Africa's largest platinum producer. Its operations extended from the North West to Limpopo Province. Amplats Khuseleka mine is situated approximately 15 minutes from central Rustenburg and is in close proximity to the Implats mine. Two mine workers, Zukile Christopher Mbobo and SK Makhanya at Khuseleka mine began to question Amplats' method of paying workers.<sup>250</sup> The workers noticed that RDOs at Khuseleka were doing the same work, but were being paid different salaries based on their years of service at the mine. Between March and April 2012, Mbobo and Makhanya held a series of meetings with their underground team over the wage disparity and their organisation quickly became more structured as other teams were brought into the conversation. Khuseleka shafts K1 and K2 were the first to be organised. A memorandum was handed to the underground General Manager demanding a set wage of R10 000.

Fearing unrest, Amplats agreed to give RDOs a R1 000 monthly increase between April and May 2012.<sup>251</sup> The proximity of Implats South mine and Amplats' Khuseleka mine made it easy for workers from the two mines to interact with one another. Learning that there was a new union recruiting at Implats, Mbobo contacted an AMCU organiser working at Implats. It was not long after they met that Mbobo and Makhanya began to recruit workers to join AMCU under difficult conditions.<sup>252</sup> Mbobo

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<sup>249</sup> Lonmin Plc Regulatory release, 'Employee Recognition Agreement Signed with AMCU', 23 May 2013

<sup>250</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014 and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, pp 70-83

<sup>251</sup> Workers received an immediate R750, and with the R250 increase to be given in January 2013. Interview 3 at Anglo mine, 28 October 2014; Interview 5 at Anglo mine, 28 October 2014; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, pp 70-112

<sup>252</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

described to Sinwell and Mbatha how NUM had sent the police to his house to confiscate signed AMCU stop orders he had collected.<sup>253</sup>

Mineworkers at Amplats, like those at Implats and Lonmin, expressed their frustration with NUM. Officials of NUM dismissed workers attempts to fight for higher wages, saying they will not succeed.<sup>254</sup> Reflecting on his experience, a mineworker recounted that when he joined NUM in 1983 while working on the gold mines, it was the only black mineworkers union but was able to effectively represent workers and prevent workers from being unfairly dismissed.<sup>255</sup> Things changed after 1995 and he was adamant that these changes took place because NUM had become too close to the mine management.

For example if we wanted our increase to be eight percent or ten percent, NUM was no longer able to give that to us and they just took decisions on our behalf. Because if the company says they are giving us five percent, the NUM agrees while we as members did not agree to five percent.

Extensive interviews with workers at the mine revealed that the perception that NUM leaders took decisions on behalf of workers was widespread.<sup>256</sup>

Meanwhile, winch operators and other underground workers were unhappy when they learnt of the RDOs R1 000 increase. Khuseleka workers – including Mbobo and Makhanya - began to organise workers to fight for a wage increase. When workers sympathetic to NUM tried to approach NUM with their concerns, they were turned away.<sup>257</sup> Unlike the situation at Implats and Lonmin, it was not the RDOs who led the Khuseleka strike and workers first attempted to resolve their dispute by taking their demands through the CCMA's dispute resolution process.<sup>258</sup> The CCMA set a hearing for 25 September 2012, a month after the workers lodged their dispute. Unhappy with waiting that long, workers chose to strike. Khuseleka mineworkers called a meeting at the Jabula hostel on 8 September in an attempt to mobilise workers at other Amplats shafts.

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<sup>253</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, p 78

<sup>254</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>255</sup> Interview 3 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>256</sup> Interview 2 at Amplats Mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>257</sup> Interview 3 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>258</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

Amplats mine shafts are scattered around the platinum belt in the North West and Limpopo provinces. A coordinated strike that would include all of Amplats' plants required planning, resources and proper organisation. A key influence in the Amplats strike was the presence of organisations willing to support Amplats mineworkers. These organisations included the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) and the Democratic Left Front (DLF).<sup>259</sup> DLF assisted workers to organise mine workers at Thembelani, Siphumelele, Bathophele and Khomanani shafts, which all belonged to Amplats.<sup>260</sup> Sinwell and Mbatha document how mineworkers in the various Amplats shafts had developed into coordinated worker committees, which over time began to negotiate with mine management.<sup>261</sup>

On 12 September, Amplats workers went on strike. Amplats issued a statement saying it had halted mine operations in Rustenburg to protect workers' safety following the tense and volatile situation where employees had been threatened on their way to work.<sup>262</sup> Amplats' statement did not mention that some of its employees had embarked on an unprotected strike. On 13 September about 4 000 workers gathered at Bleskop stadium demanding a R16 000 wage package that included a R12 500 basic salary.<sup>263</sup>

Negotiations with Amplats mine began prior to the Lonmin strike, but September when the strike began, workers had adopted the wage demand of R12 500 in response to the Marikana massacre.<sup>264</sup> This demand proved to be a driving factor that galvanised workers in the entire platinum industry. By 15 September, seven workers had been arrested for illegally gathering.

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<sup>259</sup> Interview 1 at Amplats Mine, 27 October 2014; and Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>260</sup> Interview 1 at Amplats Mine, 27 October 2014; Interview 6 with AMCU official at Amplats Northam Mine, Johannesburg, 3 March 2014; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>261</sup> Interview 1 at Amplats Mine, 27 October 2014 and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>262</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement, 'Anglo American Platinum announces suspension of Rustenburg operations to protect safety of its employees', 12 September 2012

<sup>263</sup> Hlongwane S, 'Strike fever hits Anglo American Platinum's Bleskop mine', *Daily Maverick*, 14 September 2012, accessed in November 2012, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-09-14-strike-fever-hits-anglo-platinums-bleskop-mine/#.WGkNHFV96po>

<sup>264</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014; Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*, pp 70-93

On 18 September 2012, Amplats issued a statement calling for workers to return to work. It said “appropriate employee relations procedures” and legal action would be taken for those workers who did not return to work as they were partaking in illegal industrial action.<sup>265</sup> That call went unheeded.

With 80% of its work force – almost 21 000 workers – on strike, Amplats announced that disciplinary action would be taken against all striking employees on 27 September. By 5 October, 12 000 workers were dismissed in their absence after failing to attend disciplinary hearings or make representations stating their case.<sup>266</sup> Amplats also announced that the unrest had spread to its Union mine and both Ditshaba and Thumela mines at Amandelbult in Limpopo. Workers from these Limpopo mines travelled to Rustenburg with the assistance of the DLF and DSM to strike alongside Amplats employees in Rustenburg.<sup>267</sup> Worker committees at Amplats were in constant communication in an effort to coordinate the strike and keep abreast of occurrences at each plant.

Strike intimidation and strike violence continued throughout the five-week strike. On 11 October, an Amplats employee was murdered while on his way to work.<sup>268</sup> Other employees reported being threatened, assaulted and injured by striking employees. Amplats commenced disciplinary hearings against employees at its Limpopo mines on 12 October, but stalled the process as it began to engage in negotiations with worker leaders on 18 October 2012.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Update – Rustenburg Operation resumed*’, 18 September 2012; Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Update*’, 19 September 2012; and Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Update*’, 21 September 2012

<sup>266</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Update*’, 5 October 2012; Neville S, Anglo American Platinum sacks 12 000 striking South African miners, *The Guardian*, 5 October 2012, Accessed on 13 July 2014, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/05/anglo-american-sacks-south-african-miners>

<sup>267</sup> Interviews 2 and 5 at Amplats Mine, on 27 and 28 October 2014; Interview 6 with AMCU official at Amplats Northam mines, Johannesburg, 3 March 2014. For more on the DLF and DSM relation to Amplats strike committee, see Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>268</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Regrets the death of one of its employees*’, 11 October 2012

<sup>269</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘*Anglo American Platinum Update*’, 18 October 2012

On 15 November, eight weeks after the strike began, Amplats and its employees reached an agreement to end the strike. It stated that all dismissed workers would be re-employed, Amplats would pay mineworkers a once-off allowance of R4 500 as well as a monthly allowance of R400 on top of their salaries. Wage negotiations would also begin earlier than usual to enable an agreement to be implemented in July 2013 in order to maintain the existing wage cycle. Amplats said it lost “191,359 ounces of platinum production which equates to R3.4 billion of lost revenue”<sup>270</sup>

#### *Worker Committees become unionised*

Despite leaders like Mbobo and Makhanya recruiting membership for AMCU, Amplats workers debated among themselves about which union to join. There were various options considered including joining NUMSA, which was a COSATU affiliate at the time. A worker notes that the primary concern with AMCU, was that it was a new union on the platinum mines, and therefore workers were not sure who the union was.<sup>271</sup> Worker committees at Amplats had developed much stronger structures than those at Lonmin and Implats. With time, the Amplats workforce joined AMCU.

Amplats workers decided to join AMCU for a number of reasons. Some joined because they saw that many other workers at Amplats and other mines were joining AMCU. Others recognised that AMCU presented an alternative organisation to NUM and they needed a union that would “advance their concerns”; and some mineworkers joined because they appreciated AMCU’s support for workers after the Marikana massacre.<sup>272</sup> AMCU signed a formal recognition agreement with Amplats on the 3 March 2013. This was an important milestone, as it was the first instance in which AMCU became the majority union in the platinum industry at a major mining company. It was also telling that Amplats recognised AMCU as the majority union despite being the last mine to go on strike.

Jimmy Gama, reflecting on the worker committees says AMCU’s experience with the worker committees differed. At Lonmin, because AMCU had already established

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<sup>270</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement ‘Anglo American Platinum’s staff return to work’, 15 November 2012

<sup>271</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>272</sup> Interviews 2, 3 and 4 at Amplats Mine, between 27 - 28 October 2014

itself at Karee Mine, they did not experience much resistance with the worker committees who were elected as AMCU's branch and shaft stewards. At Implats, AMCU entry point to the mine was through the support of the worker committees and thus again, they did not experience much resistance from the independent worker committees.<sup>273</sup> However at Amplats mines workers took their time to join AMCU as they considered various alternative possibilities. He attributed this to the higher levels of organisation among workers, and the greater influence of organisations like the DLF.<sup>274</sup>

But Amplats' troubles were not over and it announced it would be retrenching approximately 6 000 workers in September 2013. AMCU embarked on a protected strike from 27 September to 10 October with less than 20 percent of Amplats workforce reporting for work.<sup>275</sup> The retrenchment process went ahead, but fewer workers were made redundant than Amplats had initially planned.<sup>276</sup> For AMCU this was another victory.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As a founding member of AMCU, Joseph Mathunjwa is intricately tied to AMCU's growth and development. During the Impala strike of 2012, AMCU garnered some attention in the media as an emerging competitor to NUM.<sup>277</sup> However, it was during the Lonmin strike in August 2012 that AMCU gained national prominence. Mathunjwa, as the President of AMCU, came under pressure to account for the violence associated with AMCU. This eventually prompted AMCU to hold a press

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017, and Ntswana N, *The politics of workers control in South Africa's platinum mines*

<sup>274</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017. For a closer look at the worker committees see Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>275</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement, 'Anglo American Platinum strike update', 27 September 2013

<sup>276</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>277</sup> Nicolson G, 'Impala strike: Welcome to the age of retail unionism', *Daily maverick*, 22 February 2012, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-02-22-impala-strike-welcome-to-the-age-of-retail-unionism/#.WLSmflV96po>

conference to distance itself from the accusation of violence.<sup>278</sup> Despite his many attempts to show that AMCU was not involved or behind the 2012 strike at Lonmin, it was Mathunjwa's testimony at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry that assisted in clarifying the role that he and AMCU played in August 2012. Yet the allegations of violence and opportunism would follow the union.

As a new emerging union, AMCU needed to demonstrate their firm support for workers' struggles on the platinum belt to gain the favour of mineworkers. At the Lonmin mine following the Marikana Massacre, the manner in which AMCU followed workers' lead during critical moments in their negotiations such as the Lonmin Peace Accord, won over the support of the worker committees' leadership and that of mineworkers in general.

Sinwell and Mbatha criticise Mathunjwa for his direct involvement in the dissolution of the worker committees. They argue that his heavy-handed and direct intervention, betrayed a sense of fear of independently organised groupings of mineworkers who could pose a threat to AMCU, in a similar way that they challenged NUM.<sup>279</sup> Mathunjwa's counter-argument is that there is no sense in having parallel structures when AMCU is incorporated into the recognised constitutional labour relations framework under the LRA. He further argues that such forms of organisations by workers are vulnerable to manipulation by external organisations.<sup>280</sup> He refers to organisations like the Workers Socialist Party (WASP), DSM and DLF, which had somewhat fallen out of favour with AMCU, and with which worker committees at Lonmin and Amplats mines in particular had a relationship.<sup>281</sup>

The story of the 2012 platinum strike wave is a complex one to tell. Many aspects emerge from the narrative, including the low wages and continuing exploitation of workers. NUM had failed to listen to workers and to inspire confidence in their membership on the platinum mines in the Rustenburg region. The distance created between union officials and their members was stark, and the union gradually

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<sup>278</sup> Odendaal N, 'AMCU blames Lonmin management for mine unrest', *Mining Weekly*, 14 August 2012, URL: [http://www.miningweekly.com/article/amcu-blames-lonmin-management-for-mine-unrest-2012-08-14/rep\\_id:3650](http://www.miningweekly.com/article/amcu-blames-lonmin-management-for-mine-unrest-2012-08-14/rep_id:3650)

<sup>279</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>280</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>281</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

became complicit with mine management in attempting to manage workers, as opposed to representing them. Mineworkers felt disempowered and NUM found itself caught in internal disputes as this chapter describes. Zokwana's response to the NUM branch shooting at Lonmin, cemented the alienation mineworkers felt from NUM.

What becomes clear in this narrative is that workers' refusal to allow NUM's involvement in their immediate struggles for higher wages in 2012, meant that a struggle had to be fought and won through the temporary refusal of trade unions and established labour relations structures. This led to the creation of independent worker committees at the different mines, with varied degrees of organisation. Despite successfully achieving a wage increase, workers at Lonmin, Implats and Amplats resumed the use of formal structures when they joined AMCU. This is a result of the way in which labour relations are structured; where a trade union presence is a necessary pre-requisite for workers to access the full benefits detailed by the LRA.

AMCU did not rise in the platinum belt because it presented a new way of organising. Its means were largely the same as unions that preceded it. Rather, workers' initial impetus to join AMCU was based on pragmatism as AMCU presented an alternative at a time when workers were willing to leave their union with over twenty years of organising in the platinum mines. As a new union, AMCU needed to prove itself to workers. It had to show, at the outset, that it was different to NUM. AMCU claimed to be a non-partisan, independent union that listens and provides leadership, and fights for workers. Whether AMCU was the union it claimed to be, would be tested as it embarked on the longest post-apartheid strike in the mining industry.

## **Chapter 4: The disruptive power of labour**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The 2014 platinum strike was the longest mining strike in post-apartheid South Africa. Over 70 000 platinum mineworkers downed their tools for five long months. Led by AMCU, the strike was an extraordinary demonstration of labour power, whose consequences have yet to be fully understood.

In 2013, AMCU consolidated itself as the majority union at Lonmin, Implats, and at Amplats' Rustenburg, and Limpopo's Union and Amandelbult mines. AMCU also signed full Organisational Rights Agreements with the mining companies, as well as established organisational structures of the union such as underground shaft steward committees and branch committees. The mining company's timeous recognition of AMCU as the majority trade union meant AMCU had the bargaining rights to lead the 2013 platinum wage negotiations, following the termination of the two-year wage agreement signed in 2011 between NUM and the mining companies. The 2013 wage negotiations presented AMCU with an opportunity to consolidate its presence on the platinum mines.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the great 1987 gold mineworkers' strike and the role played by NUM during the strike. This provides a historical lens by which to assess the 2014 strike, in particular the relationship between mineworkers and their trade unions, and the ways in which solidarity among workers is forged through industrial action. The chapter then follows the various stages in the 2013 wage negotiations, including the strike. It explores the relationship between the mining companies and AMCU, the tensions that existed and the political message put forward by AMCU, which directly addressed the continued legacy of exploitation of workers in the mining industry. This provides a basis for the next section of the chapter, which looks at the internal and external challenges facing the union during the strike. These include the internal contestations of power and methods of organising during the strike, the sacrifices of the mineworkers and their families in

maintaining the strike, and the increasingly hostile public opinion. The chapter concludes with a reflection on AMCU and the figure of Joseph Mathunjwa.

## **4.2 A brief overview of the 1987 gold miners' strike**

In 1987, 300 000 gold mineworkers, predominantly from Anglo American's gold mines, embarked on a three-week long protected strike for higher wages.<sup>282</sup> The strike was led by the then five-year old NUM, who organised black mineworkers conditions in which mining companies held extraordinary power over the lives of workers. At the time, mineworkers lived in compounds or hostel accommodation provided for by the mining companies which allowed them immense control over mineworkers' lives. The compounds were an important site of contestation and struggle.

Organising workers under apartheid was not easy, and many strikes were short lived. In 1987, NUM put in place a number of strategies to assist workers to sustain their strike. This included the creation of a special strike committee in the first week of the strike to "co-ordinate activities between the compounds and the various levels of union leadership during the strike"<sup>283</sup>. These committees worked with the union officials at the mine and became the primary means through which NUM was able to engage its membership and maintain the strike.<sup>284</sup>

The control of mining compounds allowed the union to sustain the strike, strengthen the unity of workers and avert violence.<sup>285</sup> Wilmot James identified three ways in which NUM achieved this. Firstly, he says NUM prevented management from using the public address system which was the means of communication at the hostels, by guarding entry and exit to the system. This limited the ability of mine to communicate with workers and convince them to return to work. Secondly, NUM effectively used mass meetings to mobilise workers in support of the strike. The meeting would be

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<sup>282</sup> Moodie D, 'Managing the 1987 Mine Workers' Strike', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35:1, March 2009

<sup>283</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal*

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Moodie D, *Managing the 1987 Mine Workers' Strike*, p 45

preceded by a march through the hostels in order to increase attendance and support. Thirdly, James argues that NUM employed mechanisms to police the strike in order to regulate the behaviour of their members. These mechanisms included controlling access to the compounds. All ‘outsiders’ at the mine were screened and escorted onto the premises, and sometimes the number of entry points to the mine was limited.<sup>286</sup>

However, the union strong faced resistance by the mining companies and the state. NUM’s President James Motlatsi and COSATU’s President Elijah Barayi, were brutally beaten by the South African Police who was manning a roadblock at Goldfields mine. The beating of NUM leadership came amidst numerous other incidents of arrest and intimidation meted out by the police on NUM officials at the national and local levels.<sup>287</sup>

Unfortunately the strike was defeated when mining companies began legally dismissing striking employees, forcing NUM to accept the company’s original wage offer with a few small changes made to the benefits workers received. Selective re-hiring of workers by mining companies led to massive job losses. Despite the defeat, the strike was an important moment for NUM, given the number of workers who participated in the strike and the changes that followed, which improved workers’ living conditions at the compounds.<sup>288</sup> This was because of NUM’s willingness to challenge the mining companies, in spite of heavy repression were able to consolidate workers’ support for the union. NUM continued to mobilise and represent black mineworkers in the mining industry and enjoy majority recognition in various sectors, such as gold, diamonds, and platinum.

The 1987 gold strike and the 2014 platinum strike took place in vastly different contexts. However there are parallels between the two, in terms of how the strikes were able to consolidate workers’ support for the respective unions.

### 4.3 Negotiating the 2014 strike

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<sup>286</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal*

<sup>287</sup> Moodie D, ‘Managing the 1987 Mine Workers’ Strike’

<sup>288</sup> James WG, *Our Precious Metal* and Moodie D, ‘Managing the 1987 Mine Workers’ Strike’

The 2013 wage negotiations took place in the context of the Marikana Massacre, as well as many features intrinsic to the mining industry such as the continued exploitation of poorly paid black mineworkers, many of whom are migrant labourers working in dangerous conditions doing labour-intensive work.

Following the 2012 strike, the majority of platinum mineworkers left NUM to join AMCU. AMCU used its history as a splinter union from NUM to address the failures of NUM and position itself in opposition to NUM. AMCU claimed to be a politically independent, democratic and caring union; a union that is not distracted by the tripartite alliance politics; and a union that is focused on labour issues. It was able to make this reference because of NUM's affiliation to COSATU. COSATU's unions were seen to be distracted by being embroiled in the factional politics of the ANC, and pursuing a political strategy based on their proximity to power.<sup>289</sup>

The 2013 wage negotiations provided an opportunity for AMCU to prove itself firstly, by bringing positive changes to workers' lives in the form of higher wages and secondly, by demonstrating its internal democratic process. The 2013 wage negotiations were delayed by disputes over recognition of the union at the various mines in the first half of 2013. Implats and Lonmin mines had displayed a favouritism towards NUM, in their delay in processing stop orders and signing of the recognition agreements. These contestations also displayed workers' determination to join AMCU as their chosen majority union.

While fighting for official recognition, AMCU simultaneously began preparing for the 2013 wage negotiation by holding a number of meetings with its membership and with union officials. These meetings were both procedural, as well as extraordinary. Many of AMCU's elected union officials in 2013 were first time union officials who lacked experience. AMCU had to balance this inexperience with workers' demands for higher wages.

Branch committees held mass meetings at their respective mines to get workers mandate for their wage demands, which were then submitted to the national office of AMCU. Between April and June 2013, AMCU held a platinum wage bargaining

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<sup>289</sup> Buhlungu S & Tshoaedi M, *COSATU'S Contested Legacy*

conference with its branch committees.<sup>290</sup> At the conference, the national leadership stressed the need to consolidate the branches' wage demands into a single demand across all mining companies. This, they argued, would ensure unity across the mines, build a sense of solidarity among the three mines and create fairness in standardising wages across the sector.<sup>291</sup> The conference agreed that AMCU's wage demand would be a R12 500 basic salary per month, although there was some disagreement about how the strike should proceed. The NEC pushed for one big strike at all three mines, while some branch leaders wanted to strike individually at their respective mine as soon as they had received a strike certificate. After much debate, the NEC won the argument.<sup>292</sup> In addition to a unified demand for R12 500, AMCU would present their wage demand as an amount, and not in terms of percentages. This was a demand that was first put forward by workers in 2012, which was then incorporated into the AMCU's demands. Following the standardised wage demand, mass meetings were held at each of the mines to confirm the decision. In July 2013, AMCU submitted its wage demands to the three respective mining companies.<sup>293</sup>

The demand of R12 500 represented more than just a figure that mineworkers thought was fair and reasonable. It came to symbolise the struggle for a living wage for which 37 mineworkers lost their lives.<sup>294</sup> Mineworkers felt they had to continue the fight for R12 500, to do justice to the struggle of their comrades who were killed in 2012. AMCU, which grew rapidly out of the 2012 strike wave, made this demand their own and used the symbolic figure of R12 500 and the Marikana Massacre as a means of uniting mineworkers during the historic five-month long strike.

### *The 2014 strike commences*

When the wage negotiations began at Amplats, Implats and Lonmin mines, it quickly became clear that the wage offer put forward by the mining companies was far below the wage demand of AMCU. The mining companies had made a wage offer for an

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<sup>290</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>291</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, January 2017; and Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>294</sup> Interview 1 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

increase of between 7.5 percent and 9 percent, which in real terms amounted to a wage of between R5 500 and R7 500. The offer meant that it would take over ten years for mineworkers to earn a basic salary of R12 500.<sup>295</sup> The mining companies and AMCU stood firmly behind their respective positions and could not reach an agreement

A sense of panic from the mining companies, business and investors, and politicians arose as a platinum strike looked imminent after AMCU was awarded strike certificates from the CCMA.<sup>296</sup> The Minister of Finance at the time, Pravin Gordhan, appealed to the mining companies and AMCU to negotiate and find a way to resolve the wage dispute before resorting to a strike. He said that South Africa “can least afford another round of strikes that will act as a destabilisation to the platinum sector, which has had increasing difficulties over the last 18 months.”<sup>297</sup>

By mid-January 2014, negotiations remained unresolved and the CCMA awarded AMCU with strike certificates<sup>298</sup> for Amplats and Implats mines. Between 14 and 20 January, AMCU held three mass meetings with its membership at Implats, Lonmin and Amplats to conduct a vote to determine whether to strike. All of the meetings voted to strike. It was only when AMCU was awarded a strike certificate for Lonmin mine, did it issue each mine a 48-hour notice of its intention to strike. AMCU chose to wait for strike certificates to be issued for all three mining companies before commencing the strike.<sup>299</sup> For the first time, a strike would simultaneously take place at the three major platinum producing mining companies with a single wage demand bringing the platinum belt to a near standstill, and forcing the companies to

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<sup>295</sup> Petition to the Chief Executive Officer of Anglo American Platinum, 18 March 2014, AMCU

<sup>296</sup> It should be noted that AMCU had hoped to hold a simultaneous strike in the Gold and Platinum mining industries. It was unable to do so after a court order ruled against AMCU in the gold sector, on the grounds that it was not the majority union.

<sup>297</sup> Dolan D, South Africa minister warns on economy as mines face strike threat, *Reuters*, 20 January 2014, accessed 14 January 2016, URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-strikes-implats-idUSBREA0J0KG20140120>

<sup>298</sup> In order for a strike to be a protected strike under the Labour Relations Act, the CCMA must award the trade union with a strike certificate, which usually means that negotiations remain unresolved. Trade unions who wish to strike once being awarded with the certificate must give employees 48 hours' notice of intention to strike.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017 and Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

collectively negotiate the wage demand with the majority trade union. In a joint statement on 21 January 2014 the mining companies argued that:

AMCU's current wage increases are unaffordable and unrealistic. It is of great concern to the platinum companies that employees are being made promises by AMCU that cannot be delivered upon. Strike action will not only hurt the platinum industry but will be to the detriment of employees and their families, to communities, and to the country as a whole.

In 2012 and 2013, our companies lost a combined 879 400 ounces of production as a result of strike action. This translates into revenue losses of around R12.54 billion... Furthermore the platinum price has plunged by 19% over the past three years, while costs continue to rise. Unfortunately these factors led to a reduction in the combined industry workforce from more than 145 000 to less than 134 000 in the two years from December 2011 to December 2013. This is a time when the industry can ill afford further losses of production and jobs due to strike action.<sup>300</sup>

Northam Platinum's Zondereinde mine and NUM, where NUM still held majority membership and bargaining rights, concluded a settlement which led to a 9.5 percent increase for core workers and 8.5 percent for non-core workers for category 2-8 employees.<sup>301</sup> This agreement was similar to the wage offer the mining companies made to AMCU and increased the pressure on AMCU to settle.

When the strike commenced on 23 January 2014, the CCMA offered to mediate the wage negotiations at the request of the Minister of Labour, Mildred Oliphant. During the CCMA negotiations AMCU made a number of concessions to its wage demand, recognising that its demand was a significant wage increase for the mining companies to make immediately. It shifted the demand for a R12 500 wage to be realised in one year and extended it to two years. AMCU then further extended the timeframe, to reach a wage of R12 500 over a period of three years. Despite this, the mining companies remained steadfast in their initial wage offer stating that the wage demand, which almost doubled workers' basic pay, was unaffordable.

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<sup>300</sup> Lonmin Plc Regulatory release '*Joint statement from Platinum Chief Executives*', 21 January 2014

<sup>301</sup> Core work relates to the mining operations that are essential to production such as drilling and blasting. Non-core work refers to support services that are not directly involved in mining.

While the negotiations were ongoing, tensions increased when AMCU accused the Department of Labour of attempting to disband the union over a letter it had sent the union. AMCU said the Department was trying to intervene in the strike, and weaken AMCU because AMCU was a competitor to NUM. The allegations were denied by the Department on 14 February 2014, which claimed to have sent AMCU a routine letter asking questions in relation to the union's compliance with its legal obligations and its Constitution.<sup>302</sup> On 15 February 2014, Amplats announced that it intended to sue AMCU for R591 million for "damage to property, increased security costs and production losses caused by non-striking employees being prevented from going to work".<sup>303</sup> Amplats further asked that Mathunjwa be arrested for contempt of court for breaking picketing rules. Mathunjwa accused the Minister of Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, of encouraging Amplats to pursue legal action against the union.<sup>304</sup> AMCU perceived the interventions made by government officials to be politically motivated because they posing a real threat to NUM's hegemony on the platinum mines, and to the existing relations between NUM, the mining companies and the state. Workers agreed with AMCU's perception and felt that the reason the ANC government was against AMCU, is because NUM is an affiliate to the tripartite alliance member COSATU. In addition, they say NUM has shares in the mines, which COSATU needed to protect, and therefore the ANC was actively protecting the interests of the companies and NUM at the expense of workers.<sup>305</sup> For workers, this explained why only one Minister of all those who intervened – Minister Ngoako Ramathlodi –displayed fairness towards AMCU.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Ramutloa L, *Department rejects claims by Amcu that it plans to deregister the union*, Department of Labour, 13 February 2014, URL: <http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/media-desk/media-statements/2014/departments-rejects-claims-by-amcu-that-it-plans-to-deregister-the-union>

<sup>303</sup> 'Amplats sues striking union over damage', *Business Report in IOL*, 15 February 2014, accessed on 17 July 2014 URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/amplats-sues-striking-union-over-damage-1647662>

<sup>304</sup> It was alleged at the time that Shabangu had advised mining companies to find legal avenues to pursue against AMCU in an effort to end the strike. Shabangu denied involvement in the case. See Kolver L, Shabangu denies encouraging Amplats to sue AMCU, 21 February 2014, *Mining Weekly*, URL: [http://www.miningweekly.com/article/shabangu-denies-encouraging-amplats-to-sue-amcu-2014-02-21/rep\\_id:3650](http://www.miningweekly.com/article/shabangu-denies-encouraging-amplats-to-sue-amcu-2014-02-21/rep_id:3650)

<sup>305</sup> Interview 3 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014; Interview 3 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014; Interview 8 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014; Interview 9 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014; and Interview 3 at Amplats mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>306</sup> Interview 4 at Amplats mine, 28 October 2014

In a final effort to the CCMA-led negotiation process, AMCU proposed on 18 February 2014 to shift their demand to an amount of R12 500 that would be reached over a period of four years. By this time, they had also shifted their demand from a R12 500 basic wage to a R12 500 full package inclusive of benefits.<sup>307</sup> This was a significant compromise on the part of workers. The CCMA met with the mining companies, who then issued a statement on the 5 March 2014 rejecting the proposal on the grounds that the wage demand was unaffordable and announced that the CCMA mediation was suspended indefinitely.<sup>308</sup> The mining companies stated that they were committed to the negotiation process, but the declining economy had to be considered when negotiating for higher wages. In a statement issued by Amplats, the company's CEO, Chris Griffith, said they were "discouraged" by the CCMA outcome and that Amplats hopes "AMCU will come to recognise and appreciate the realities of the company's position and will work towards a solution that will benefit its members."<sup>309</sup> The companies focused attention on the continued losses caused by the ongoing strike.<sup>310</sup> AMCU's general secretary bemoaned the fact that despite AMCU's compromises, the mining companies continued to "cry foul".<sup>311</sup>

Following the suspension of the CCMA mediation, the Chamber of Mines' Chief negotiator, Elize Strydom, expressed frustration with the CCMA. She accused CCMA mediators of lacking mediation and facilitating skills, as well as knowledge of the mining industry.<sup>312</sup> She further claimed that AMCU's negotiators lacked experience. Strydom, who was acting as an advisor to the mining companies, said that should it become necessary, she would advise mining companies to take their wage proposals directly to mineworkers. In response, the CCMA accused Strydom of jeopardising the

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<sup>307</sup> This is for RDO workers in particular. This dissertation uses the wage salary of RDO's as a benchmark from which to assess the strike.

<sup>308</sup> Anglo American Platinum press statement '*CCMA mediation process suspended indefinitely*', 5 March 2014

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> 'Lonmin Plc Regulatory release, '*Update on protected strike action*', 5 March 201; and Anglo American Platinum press statement '*CCMA mediation process suspended indefinitely*' 5 March 2014

<sup>311</sup> Njanji S, 'Talks to end Amcu miners' strike collapse', *Mail and Guardian online*, 05 Mar 2014, accessed on 6 March 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-03-05-talks-to-end-amcu-miners-strike-collapse>

<sup>312</sup> Barron C, 'CCMA bungles mine wage talks', *Sunday Times*, 9 March 2014, URL: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/2014/03/09/CCMA-bungles-mine-wage-talks>

negotiations with her comments.<sup>313</sup> AMCU further accused Strydom of convincing the platinum producers to revert to their original position when they had displayed a willingness to negotiate.<sup>314</sup>

### *Time to march*

In response to the breakdown in negotiations, AMCU held a series of marches. The first march was to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 6 March 2014 to hand over a memorandum to the Presidency. Thousands of workers were bussed in from the platinum belt and they marched from Marabastad to the Union buildings. Mathunjwa wasted no time in hitting hard at the state. According to Mathunjwa:

The march to the Union Buildings and the petition to Honourable President is the epitome of the struggle and marks the zenith of our frustration in the manner AMCU has been unfairly treated by various government departments in collusion with the mine houses; and the unprecedented interference with the bilateral workplace processes by senior officials in government.<sup>315</sup>

In AMCU's memorandum, Mathunjwa complained of the "abuse of state power". He gave an example of the Minister of Higher Education and General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, Blade Nzimande referring to AMCU as a "vigilante union". He called for the immediate resignation of the Minister of Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, for making irresponsible statements. Mathunjwa alleged that Shabangu viewed "the growth of AMCU as an attack on the ANC and recently advised mining companies to take liberal action against AMCU and dismiss their workers."<sup>316</sup> Mathunjwa again accused the Department of Labour of threatening to

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<sup>313</sup> van Vuuren J, 'Chamber of Mines has jeopardised wage talks, says CCMA', *Mail and Guardian Online*, 10 Mar 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-03-10-chamber-of-mines-has-jeopardised-wage-talks-says-ccma>

<sup>314</sup> Faku D, 'AMCU twists the knife amid tension', *Business Report in IOL*, 15 February 2014, accessed on 15 June 2015, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/amcu-twists-the-knife-amid-tension-1659771>

<sup>315</sup> The excerpt and those below are taken from the author's transcription of Mathunjwa's address at the union buildings on 6 March 2014.

<sup>316</sup> It was alleged at the time that Shabangu had advised mining companies to find legal avenues to pursue against AMCU in an effort to end the strike. Shabangu denied involvement in the case. See Kolver L, 'Shabangu denies encouraging Amplats to sue AMCU', 21 February 2014, *Mining Weekly*, URL: [http://www.miningweekly.com/article/shabangu-denies-encouraging-amplats-to-sue-amcu-2014-02-21/rep\\_id:3650](http://www.miningweekly.com/article/shabangu-denies-encouraging-amplats-to-sue-amcu-2014-02-21/rep_id:3650)

disband the union, while simultaneously trying to mediate the current strike. He accused the SAPS of setting up a Community Policing Forum in Rustenburg, which he said targeted AMCU officials through unlawful arrests and intimidation. Mathunjwa petitioned Zuma to stop government officials from making irresponsible statements and using state resources and platforms to attack AMCU. He said the impression created is that government was anti-AMCU and that independent worker movements were under threat.

In his speech, Mathunjwa described how AMCU was created by "frustrated workers, who were isolated from union decisions and violations of the generic principle of worker control". He accused NUM of no longer being vocal in their support for worker struggles, saying it had been distracted by being too closely aligned to the ANC and having to protect ANC interests over workers' interests. Mathunjwa reiterated that a founding principle of AMCU was its independence from party politics, which does not mean that AMCU did not hold political views.

Mathunjwa went on to express frustration at mining houses who continued to benefit from "super exploitation", and at the "arrogance of illegitimate power [created] by centuries of colonisation and apartheid rule".<sup>317</sup> According to Mathunjwa, South Africa is a sovereign nation that should protect "its own people against all forms of domination, exploitation and oppression." However, in South Africa, mine workers remain exploited by continuing to earn low wages, live in poverty and with low levels of education; whilst foreign owned mining companies make exorbitant profits in collusion with the state. Mathunjwa appealed to the President to intervene in the negotiations in support of the working class and to protect AMCU's constitutional rights.

Following the march to the Union Buildings, the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) held a meeting with mineworkers in Rustenburg to try to convince mineworkers to return to work. Contralesa – whose President served as a former ANC Member of Parliament - argued that the strike not only affected

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<sup>317</sup> Excerpt from the author's transcription of Mathunjwa's address at the union buildings on 6 March 2014.

employees, but also their families and local businesses.<sup>318</sup> The meeting was poorly attended and Contralesa accused AMCU officials of stopping workers from attending the meeting by claiming that Contralesa was interfering in the wage negotiations.<sup>319</sup>

As the impasse in the negotiations continued, AMCU held marches to the head offices of Amplats, Implats and Lonmin on the 18 March, 27 March and 3 April 2014 respectively. AMCU was joined by its federation, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). NACTU, while remaining largely on the fringes of the strike, accompanied AMCU on the marches and expressed its solidarity with AMCU. NACTU also promised to hold a solidarity "day of action" in support of the strike, which never materialised. During the marches to the mining companies head offices, AMCU's primary message was to implore the companies to consider the "historical legacy of colonialism and apartheid" when determining the wages of its employees. It invited the companies to "partner with us in a difficult but necessary journey to untangle this complex web of economic injustices against the working class".<sup>320</sup>

In its memorandum to the companies, AMCU argued that "mining had been characterised by labour intensive production processes underpinned by cheap labour from labour reserves that were used as cannon fodder to supply African men to work in these mines". For AMCU,

amongst a myriad of problems bedevilling this sector, there are those that stick out like a sore finger, such as;

- i. The exploitative slave wages historically paid to mine workers, even to date.

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<sup>318</sup> 'Contralesa fails to end Amcu strike', *SABC News*, 16 March 2014, URL: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/aee635004349d53a9a02ff0bfd5d3b76/Contralesa-fails-to-end-Amcu-strike--20140316>; and 'Contralesa questions Amcu's intentions as strike drags on', *SABC News*, 19 March 2014 URL:

<http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/65a21e80435317a99bb2ff0bfd5d3b76/Contralesa-questions-Amcus-intentions-as-strike-drags-on-20141903>

<sup>319</sup> 'Contralesa fails to end Amcu strike', *SABC News*, 16 March 2014, URL: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/aee635004349d53a9a02ff0bfd5d3b76/Contralesa-fails-to-end-Amcu-strike--20140316>

<sup>320</sup> Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Impala Platinum, 7 March 2014; Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Anglo American Platinum, 18 March 2014; and Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Lonmin Platinum, 1 April 2014

- ii. The appalling squalid living conditions for mine workers over generations in the form of hostels and squatter camps.
- iii. Hazardous working conditions and numerous fatalities in underground mining
- iv. Capital flights and price collusion (South Africa has a monopoly in Platinum with over 75% known reserves of the precious metal, but the platinum price is set by the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) in the United States of America)
- v. Poor transformation where the top leadership in the mines remains predominately remains white and foreign.
- vi. Lagging Social and Labour Plans where communities have not benefited anything from mines extracting resources in their areas.<sup>321</sup>

AMCU's memorandum argued that the wage disparity between workers who are placed under different grades in the Patterson Job Grading system used at mines, was exploitative and characteristic of the apartheid grading system.<sup>322</sup> It created a situation where the CEO's of Implats, Lonmin and Amplats earned salaries that were 109, 209 and 326 times higher than the wage of an entry level worker respectively.<sup>323</sup> This staggering inequality in wages alone undermined the company's argument that wages are unaffordable. In addition, the low wages did not adequately compensate workers for poor and unsafe working conditions, which sometimes resulted in death or injury, and that have led to high levels of debt amongst workers.<sup>324</sup> AMCU acknowledged that while it was its constitutional right to strike, striking was a last resort and it hoped for more meaningful engagement with mining companies.

AMCU's memorandum bemoaned the influence of the Chamber of Mines and called for mining companies to act independently of the Chamber. It referred to the history of the Chamber of Mines in facilitating labour reserves, the migrant labour system and the notorious hostel system, stating that the chamber is "bent on maintaining the

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<sup>321</sup> Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Impala Platinum, 7 March 2014

<sup>322</sup> AMCU petitioned the mining companies to do away with the existing grading system, in particular with the A4 - B3 grades to bridge the wage inequality gap. They also petitioned the companies to reduce the gap between the C5 and D1 categories.

<sup>323</sup> Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Impala Platinum, 7 March 2014; Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Anglo American Platinum, 18 March 2014; and Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Lonmin Platinum, 1 April 2014

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

status quo and the interests of its allies". AMCU further implored the companies to respect union representation and to stop communicating its wage offer directly with its employees. It accused all mining companies of fuelling tensions by relaying the latest wage offer using direct SMS communication with workers.<sup>325</sup> AMCU claimed that such "underhanded" methods were divisive, increased already existing tensions, and undermined workers' right to strike. In particular, AMCU accused Lonmin of embarking on an "abortive campaign", which used traditional leadership to persuade workers to return to work. AMCU said Lonmin should have learnt from the Marikana Massacre not to engage inappropriate channels to end a strike.

Finally AMCU appealed to the mining companies to adopt the International Labour Organisations (ILO) definition of decent work. The memorandum reads

The ILO defined decent work as productive work for both men and women where fundamental rights are observed; there is social protection and social security, income opportunism with industrial relations underpinned by social dialogue and collaboration. The AMCU demands are underscored by the principles of decent work. We have submitted a demand in line with the broader call by organised labour to ban labour brokering. This triangular form of employment has led to precarious work and left workers vulnerable and worse off.<sup>326</sup>

AMCU appealed for career progression and skills development for workers, and for Mine Pension Funds to stop compromising the rights of workers and ensure the protection of workers' social security.

Acknowledging receipt of the memorandum, Lonmin's CEO Ben Magara said

The industry cannot afford to meet AMCU's demands. But, if it did, by choosing expedience above all other considerations, this would spell the demise of many operations across the industry, it would drastically reduce jobs, and decimate our communities. Who really stands to gain? And is this what our employees really want? I truly believe it is not. Every day this strike means R67 million is not spent directly on goods and services by the miners themselves.... I wish to extend a

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Impala Platinum, 7 March 2014; Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Anglo American Platinum, 18 March 2014; and Petition from AMCU to the Chief Executive Officer of Lonmin Platinum, 1 April 2014

hand to AMCU and say, we remain committed to negotiating within our settlement zone in good faith.<sup>327</sup>

All three mining companies responded to AMCU and accepted that there was an unjust legacy of apartheid, however they disagreed with AMCU about how best to address that legacy. Implats suggested that the change AMCU sought required a long term strategy to be developed and implemented with a number of stakeholders, including government.<sup>328</sup> Lonmin confined its response to the immediate issue of the wage negotiations but accused AMCU of not always engaging in platforms open to the union. While the companies defended the Patterson job grading system, Lonmin said it was willing to set up a task team to review the grading system.<sup>329</sup>

The mining companies, in particular Implats, used the opportunity to reiterate that the wage demand put forward by AMCU for R12 500 to be realised in one year or four years remained unaffordable.<sup>330</sup> The companies drew attention to the production and wages lost due to the current strike. The companies used their response to demonstrate how their existing social policies, including health, housing and education programmes continue to benefit mineworkers.<sup>331</sup>

By April 2014 the strike entered its third month. Panic on all sides had grown as a result of the deadlock in the negotiation process. Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant tried to intervene.<sup>332</sup> A new wage offer was put on the table by platinum producers that would see mineworkers earn an inclusive package of R12 500 by July 2017. This offer was rejected by AMCU as it remained lower than the amount they had been prepared to accept, which was a yearly increase of R1 000 to reach an

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<sup>327</sup> Lonmin Plc Media release, 'Lonmin receives Memorandum from AMCU', 1 April 2014

<sup>328</sup> Letter (by email) from Impala Platinum CEO Terance Goodlace to Joseph Mathunjwa, 4 April 2014

<sup>329</sup> Letter (by email) from Lonmin Plc CEO Ben Magara to Joseph Mathunjwa titled 'Response to Petition Accepted on 3 April 2014', 9 April 2014

<sup>330</sup> Letter (by email) from Anglo American Platinum CEO Chris Griffith to Joseph Mathunjwa, 25 March 2014

<sup>331</sup> Letter (by email) from Impala Platinum CEO Terance Goodlace to Joseph Mathunjwa, 4 April 2014; Letter (by email) from Lonmin Plc CEO Ben Magara to Joseph Mathunjwa titled 'Response to Petition Accepted on 3 April 2014', 9 April 2014; and Letter (by email) from Anglo American Platinum CEO Chris Griffith to Joseph Mathunjwa, 25 March 2014

<sup>332</sup> 'End in sight for costly platinum strike', *Fin24*, 18 April 2014, URL: <http://www.fin24.com/Economy/End-in-sight-for-costly-platinum-strike-20140418>

inclusive package of R12 500 by July 2016.<sup>333</sup> On the 24 April 2014, the mining companies announced that they would take the new wage offer directly to employees through SMS, after accusing AMCU of not communicating the offer to workers. The mining companies said the strike cost employees “R6.4 billion in lost income and the producers around R14.5 billion in lost revenue.”<sup>334</sup> Despite this claim, AMCU conducted a series of strike meetings to gauge worker sentiment. AMCU’s report back to Limpopo’s Union and Amandelbult mines took place on the 30 April 2014.<sup>335</sup> Mineworkers were resolute in their commitment to continue the strike.



AMCU Mass meeting with mineworkers at Amandelbult, 30 April 2014  
Photo credit: Naadira Munshi

On 1 May 2014, South Africa celebrated Workers Day. NACTU held its annual commemorative celebration in Witbank, Mpumalanga where AMCU’s head office is based. The NACTU May Day rally was attended by NACTU-affiliated unions and their membership; as well as sympathetic political parties including the Pan African Congress (PAC), the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and the newly formed Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Mathunjwa, who delivered the main speech of

<sup>333</sup> AIDC Press statement, ‘AIDC: “Back to the negotiating table now! Stop wage evasion!”’, April 2014

<sup>334</sup> ‘Lonmin Plc Regulatory Release, ‘Update on Protected strike actions’, 24 April 2014

<sup>335</sup> Field notes, Limpopo Union and Amandelbult mines 30 April 2014

the day, used the opportunity to talk about the history of Workers Day. He argued that South Africa should be commemorating its own labour struggles and called for Workers Day to be moved from 1 May to 16 August, in commemoration of the Marikana Massacre. Even though political parties attended the May Day rally, Mathunjwa stressed that AMCU was an independent union that was not affiliated to any party and was therefore free to express itself openly.<sup>336</sup>

Political parties pledged their support for AMCU and the strikers' demand for a living wage. The UDM and EFF both criticised the ANC, which they said should take some responsibility for the Marikana Massacre, and for failing workers. The ANC meanwhile attended a COSATU May Day rally in Polokwane where President Jacob Zuma acknowledged that employers needed to pay higher wages, but cautioned trade unions against strike action because it was bad for the economy.<sup>337</sup> At the same rally, NUM called for all platinum mineworkers to return to work.



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<sup>336</sup> Field notes, Emalahleni, 1 May 2014

<sup>337</sup> 'Go back to work, miners told on May Day', *The Star*, 2 May 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/go-back-to-work-miners-told-on-may-day-1682555>

EFF leader, Julius Malema, greets Joseph Mathunjwa at AMCU's May Day rally in 2014  
Photo credit: Naadira Munshi

Angered that the mining companies had begun to text workers directly, AMCU sought an urgent interdict on 13 May 2014 to prevent the use of SMS and other forms of direct communication with employees about the wage negotiations. On 20 May, the date of the court hearing, Judge Hillary Rabkin-Naicker who was set to hear the argument, surprised AMCU and the mining companies by proposing to mediate the wage negotiations and temporarily suspend the court process. Welcoming the opportunity, AMCU and the mining companies agreed to the Court's offer to mediate talks. A three-day private mediation process began, yet once again the parties failed to reach an agreement. On 2 June, the Labour Court dismissed AMCU's application for an interdict against Amplats and Implats mines for lack of urgency.<sup>338</sup> Lonmin and AMCU had reached an out-of-court agreement prior to 2 June, in which Lonmin agreed to halt SMS communication to its employees. The agreement between the two followed SMS communication by Lonmin with their employees in which they set a provisional date of 14 May 2014, by which workers should return to work. The SMS communication fuelled tensions at Lonmin and two employees were killed on 12 May 2014 when they reported for work<sup>339</sup>

### *Money, power and the third force*

On 14 May 2014, Amplats CEO Chris Griffith came under fire for comments he made to a newspaper on the wage negotiations. He was quoted as saying:

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<sup>338</sup> Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union v Lonmin Platinum and Others, Case No. J1134/14, Judgment in the Labour Court of South Africa, 2 June 2014

<sup>339</sup> Fletcher N, Lonmin hit by South African platinum strike as two workers reportedly killed, 12 May 2014, URL:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/marketforceslive/2014/may/12/lonmin-strike-miners-killed-profits-fall>

Am I getting paid on a fair basis for what I'm having to deal with in this company?  
Must I run this company and deal with all this nonsense for nothing? I'm at work.  
I'm not on strike. I'm not demanding to be paid what I'm not worth.<sup>340</sup>

Griffith's comments were made around the time that the announcement that a R25.3-million bonus-share scheme had been awarded to the executive and top management of the Amplats. His comments and the announcement of the bonus only served to further demonstrate the wage disparity and inequality between management and workers, as well as the lack of will on the part of mining companies to fairly compensate mineworkers.

On the 7 May 2014, South Africa held a national election in which the ANC once again won the majority vote. Following the election, President Jacob Zuma appointed a new Minister to the Department of Mineral Resources, Ngoako Ramathlodi. After the failed court process, Ramathlodi attempted to mediate, since the strike had by then entered its fourth month. He set up a task team to lead the negotiations. AMCU appointed Bishop Johannes Seoka and Advocate Dali Mpofu to assist them as mediators on the task team.<sup>341</sup> The task team was successful in assisting both parties to make compromises and progress in reaching an agreement.<sup>342</sup> However, the task team was abruptly suspended by Ramathlodi on 9 June 2014. Ramathlodi claimed that his intervention had achieved enough to allow the parties to reach an agreement.<sup>343</sup> He put forward a solution that required quick government intervention to deliver housing, to platinum mineworkers allowing for the housing allowance given to mineworkers by the mine to be diverted to workers basic wage. But it became clear that Ramathlodi had been influenced by the ANC lekgotla (meeting) that took place from 7 to 8 June, which "cautioned" him against getting involved in labour

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<sup>340</sup> Raborife M, Amplats' Griffith apologises for fair pay comments, 17 May 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-05-17-amplatss-griffiths-apologises-for-fair-pay-comments>

<sup>341</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017. Bishop Seoka and Adv. Mpofu were both vocal in their support of mineworkers following the Marikana Massacre. Adv. Mpofu SC was the legal representative of the injured and arrested mineworkers at the Marikana Commission of inquiry.

<sup>342</sup> Nicolson G, 'Platinum strike: Ramathlodi out - no end in sight - what's next?', *Daily Maverick*, 9 June 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-09-platinum-strike-ramathlodi-out-no-end-in-sight-whats-next/#.WHqawIV96po>

<sup>343</sup> Nicolson G, Platinum strike: Ramathlodi out - no end in sight - what's next?, *Daily Maverick*, 9 June 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-09-platinum-strike-ramathlodi-out-no-end-in-sight-whats-next/#.WHqawIV96po>

disputes that seemed to be politically motivated.<sup>344</sup> The ANC claimed the involvement of “white foreign nationals” and the EFF in the ongoing platinum strike was part of a deliberate attempt to destabilise South Africa’s economy”.<sup>345</sup> Mantashe was referring to WASP member, Liv Shange.

On 14 June 2014, Bowman and Isaacs published their report which went a long way to support the arguments made by AMCU, with the assistance of the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC). The AIDC generated the research that allowed AMCU to effectively challenge the mines’ claims of unaffordability. In a press statement issued by the AIDC in April 2014, they argued that mining companies are able to afford their proposed wages, but have engaged in a form of “wage evasion”. This is through means such as transfer pricing and tax evasion.<sup>346</sup>

Following the disappointment of the suspension of Ramathlodi’s task team, AMCU and the platinum mining companies met with the intervention of Bishop Seoka and Adv. Mpofu. The companies put forward a new wage offer. On 12 June 2014, the companies claimed that AMCU agreed to take the offer to its membership for consideration. However, on 18 June 2014, the companies said that despite accepting the offer, AMCU put forward “new and additional demands”. It took another week for the parties to reach an agreement. On 23 June 2014, AMCU held a mass meeting in Rustenburg with mineworkers bussed in from the three mining companies. AMCU put forward the proposal that the union’s leadership deemed acceptable. By this stage, mineworkers were anxious to end the strike with an agreement that would do

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<sup>344</sup> ‘How politics nearly ruined deal to end South Africa’s longest strike’, *Reuters*, 7 July 2014, URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-platinum-insight-idUSKBN0FC10R20140707> ; and Munusamy R, ‘Platinum strike: Wages, politics and the ANC’s false bogeymen’, *Daily Maverick*, 11 June 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-11-platinum-strike-wages-politics-and-the-ancs-false-boogeymen/#.WHqd71V96po>

<sup>345</sup> Gifford G, ‘White foreigners, EFF fuelling platinum strike: Mantashe’, *eNews Channel Africa*, Monday 9 June 2014, URL: <https://www.enca.com/white-foreign-nationals-and-eff-fueling-platinum-strike>

<sup>346</sup> AIDC Press statement, ‘AIDC: “Back to the negotiating table now! Stop wage evasion!”’, April 2014. See additional research by AIDC arising out of its assistance to the Evidence leaders at the Marikana Commission of Inquiry: Forslund D, *The Bermuda Connection*

justice to their sacrifice of five months of wages.<sup>347</sup> They voted to accept the revised wage offer.

On the 24 June 2014, the five-month long historic strike came to an end with a three-year wage agreement signed between AMCU and the mining companies. The agreement was signed at Lonmin's offices in Melrose Arch, Johannesburg. On average, mineworkers would receive an annual increase of approximately R1 000 a month to their basic pay. RDOs and underground workers would receive an increase of approximately R1 000 to their salary each year, taking them from an approximate R5 000 basic wage in 2012 to an approximate R9 000 basic wage in 2016. Their full wage package, including benefits, reached R12 500. Surface workers would reach a basic wage of approximately R8 000 in 2016. The wage agreement remained a victory for workers because they received an increase significantly above inflation.

For mineworkers and AMCU the strike was difficult and long, and came with much sacrifice.

#### **4.4 The politics of the 2014 strike**

The 2014 strike took place in a highly contentious and politically charged environment. This section provides details about the union's internal dynamics as the strike progressed. These included internal disputes within the union, the difficulties facing workers and their families, and the negative public perception of the strike. This section will also provide insight into the structure and organisation of AMCU's negotiating team.

By 2013 AMCU had consolidated itself on the platinum mines, and established the union's structures there. As mentioned above, the majority of the leadership of AMCU were first-time elected union officials and many had been worker leaders during the 2012 strike. AMCU's wage negotiation team was determined on the basis

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<sup>347</sup> Simelane BC, Lekgowa T & Nicolson G, 'Platinum strike no more: After losing R10.6 billion in wages, miners claim victory', *Daily Maverick*, 23 June 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-23-platinum-strike-no-more-after-losing-r10.6-billion-in-wages-miners-claim-victory/#.WK2qVFV96po>

of the recognition agreements signed with the individual mining companies.<sup>348</sup> The elected branch leadership were therefore part of the negotiating team. The team was led by Jimmy Gama, the treasurer of AMCU.

*‘Malibelinye, Masiye’; ‘In one voice, we go’*

Throughout 2013, it was clear that the mining companies and AMCU were far from reaching a wage agreement. AMCU began to prepare its members for a strike, calling for unity, discipline and solidarity across the mines. In January 2014, AMCU held three mass meetings to get a mandate from workers on whether the union should embark on a strike or not. The first meeting was held on 13 January at Implats mine shaft number 6. However, tensions between the former leaders of the independent worker committees at the mine and AMCU were brewing. A previous leader of the Implats workers committee, Vuyo Maqanda, now formed part of a group of disgruntled mineworkers who accused Mathunjwa of corruption and favouritism.<sup>349</sup> He claimed that AMCU stole mineworkers’ money and that there was no democracy within the union. Instead, mineworkers were elected to AMCU committees if they won the favour of Mathunjwa.<sup>350</sup> Maqanda wanted workers to return to the structures of the independent worker committees which he argued were more democratic, and under the direct control of mineworkers. Maqanda further alleged that mineworkers at Implats were unhappy to go on strike.<sup>351</sup> Maqanda’s allegations came amid similar claims by Thebe Maswabi from Amplats Platinum’s Thembelani Mine.<sup>352</sup>

There was a mix of tension and excitement among Implats mineworkers at the mass meeting of 13 January 2014. Mathunjwa used the opportunity to dismiss the claims of corruption as an attempt to break AMCU.<sup>353</sup> He appealed to workers to remain

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<sup>348</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>349</sup> Interview with Vuyo Maqanda, Rustenburg, 13 January 2014; and Biyase L, AMCU president under fire from union members, *Sunday Times*, 12 January 2014.

<sup>350</sup> Interview with Vuyo Maqanda, Rustenburg, 13 January 2014; and Lekgowa T, ‘Platinum politics: Under pressure to deliver, AMCU shifts to damage control’, *Daily Maverick*, 14 August 2014, accessed on 20 February 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-01-14-platinum-politics-under-pressure-to-deliver-amcu-shifts-to-damage-control/#.WHfnOVV96pp>

<sup>351</sup> Interview with Vuyo Maqanda, Rustenburg, 13 January 2014

<sup>352</sup> ‘Maswabi, the kingmaker who turned arch enemy’, *Business Report*, 13 January 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/economy/maswabi-the-kingmaker-who-turned-arch-enemy-1630828>

<sup>353</sup> Field notes, Implats mine at shaft number 6, 13 January 2016

united saying that there were people who were unhappy that AMCU was now the majority union in the platinum sector, leading the wage negotiations. He asked workers to vote in favour of, or against a strike, and received a definitive call to strike by a show of hands. After the vote, an AMCU official tried to address the crowd but was heckled by the crowd. Mathunjwa took the podium and addressed a calm but rapidly dwindling crowd before leaving hurriedly, with at least two bodyguards.<sup>354</sup>



By contrast, mineworkers at Lonmin mine happily welcomed AMCU's leadership, which included Mathunjwa and Nkalitshana, on 16 January 2014 at the Wonderkop

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<sup>354</sup> Field notes, Implats mine at shaft number 6, 13 January 2016

stadium in Marikana.<sup>355</sup> Lonmin's mine became a stronghold of AMCU supporters following its support of mineworkers after the Marikana massacre. The Marikana Commission of Inquiry into the August 2012 strike had pulled the injured and arrested striking mineworkers, the families of workers killed by the police and AMCU into a long and difficult legal process. The events leading up to and including the 16 August were scrutinised for three years, during which time, the relationship between AMCU, the mineworkers and affected families developed and strengthened.

At Wonderkop, Mathunjwa opened his speech with a song to commemorate Mgcineni Noki, known as 'the man in the green blanket'. Noki was a strike leader killed by the police on the 16 August 2012.<sup>356</sup> *"Nith asxole kanjani amapolisa a bulala uMambush, Ayangcangcazela amapolisa a bulala uMambush"* translated as *"How can we be at peace, when the police killed Mambush? They are shivering (scared), the police who killed Mambush"*. Referencing the workers who were killed in 2012 in Marikana, Mathunjwa called on mineworkers to continue to fight for a living wage. He also spoke about the arrogance of mining companies and their low wage offer to workers. When the time came to vote, Lonmin mineworkers voted unanimously to strike.<sup>357</sup>



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<sup>355</sup> Field notes, Wonderkop stadium at Lonmin mine, 16 January 2016

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Field notes, Wonderkop stadium at Lonmin mine, 16 January 2016

Lonmin platinum mineworkers raise their hands to vote to strike, 16 January 2014  
Photo credit: Naadira Munshi

AMCU held the largest mass meeting with Amplats' mineworkers at Olympia stadium in Rustenburg on 19 January 2014. Mineworkers from Amplats' mines in the North West Rustenburg regions, as well as Limpopo's Union mine and Amandelbult were bussed to the stadium where they were joined by delegations from Implats and Lonmin mines.

The atmosphere was electric. Workers arrived with song, determination and praise for AMCU and for Joseph Mathunjwa in particular.<sup>358</sup> These songs were couched in a context of the continued hardship and violence suffered by mineworkers. A tent was set up at the centre of the stadium, where journalists and ACMU officials at the various mines gathered to wait for the national leadership of AMCU to arrive.

About two hours late, Mathunjwa and the AMCU NEC arrived to a hero's welcome. Entering the stadium to loud cheers, they walked around the stadium greeting union members and people from the local community. Cameras captured the moment, which has come to be recognised as the moment that Mathunjwa was celebrated as a hero of platinum mineworkers.



<sup>358</sup> Field notes, Olympia stadium at Lonmin mine, 19 January 2016

Mineworkers meet at Olympia stadium, 19 January 2014  
Photo credit: Naadira Munshi

Mathunjwa used the moment to reflect on the history of exploitation of mine workers in South Africa under apartheid.<sup>359</sup> He argued that the post-1994 period did not bring the change that was expected. Instead the legacy of apartheid continues. He once again directed much of his anger at the platinum mining companies who continued to exploit mineworkers by keeping wages so low that workers were unable to afford basic necessities such as bread.<sup>360</sup> Mathunjwa expressed frustration and anger at NUM for its failure to represent workers and for becoming too close to mine management.<sup>361</sup> He also called on mineworkers to remember what happened at Marikana, when he said the “government killed mineworkers” because they were fighting for a living wage.

Mathunjwa cautioned against the use of violence and called for a peaceful strike. He said those who wanted to destroy AMCU would try to create tension and use violence towards this end.<sup>362</sup> Mathunjwa said it had been brought to his attention that AMCU shop stewards, who he then named, were plotting to destroy the union by meeting with the President Jacob Zuma.<sup>363</sup> At the end of his speech, the gathering at Olympia stadium culminated in a vote to strike by a show of hands.

A number of important events took place at the meeting. Firstly, AMCU refused to allow the President of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), Andrew Chirwa, to speak at the event. At the time, NUMSA had officially announced that it would no longer support the ANC and became embroiled in a bitter ideological struggle with its federation COSATU. NUMSA also began to speak out against NUM and its role in Marikana. The reluctance of AMCU to engage in active solidarity with other trade unions would persist, as solidarity actions in support of the strike took place around the country without the direct involvement of the union.

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<sup>359</sup> Field notes, Olympia stadium at Lonmin mine, 19 January 2016

<sup>360</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

<sup>361</sup> Field notes, Olympia stadium at Lonmin mine, 19 January 2016

<sup>362</sup> Field notes, Olympia stadium at Lonmin mine, 19 January 2016

<sup>363</sup> Field notes, Olympia stadium at Lonmin mine, 19 January 2016; and Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

Secondly, despite stressing unity among mineworkers, Mathunjwa publicly named the leaders he accused of being detractors of AMCU at the Rustenburg meeting. In response, the WASP, who had been working with mineworkers in the Rustenburg region, called a press conference with the affected leaders, Gaddafi Mdoda, Vuyo Maqanda, Julius Mralathi, George Tyobeka, and Lovers Mkhwa.<sup>364</sup> Concerned by Mathunjwa's comments, WASP's Mametlwe Sebei said they amounted to defamation, and could lead to incitement of violence against the named workers. The workers reiterated that they were concerned about Mathunjwa's leadership style, the union's questionable internal democracy and allegations of corruption. Further, WASP accused Mathunjwa of playing into the hands of the ANC by going on strike too soon, at a time when mineworkers were not prepared to strike.

Yet worker leaders confirmed Mathunjwa's allegations. According to a union branch leader, some of AMCU's leaders at the branch level were called to a meeting and lobbied to join a new union, which would be called Workers Association Union. While the branch official refused to attend the meeting, the meeting had been brought to the attention of AMCU's leadership.<sup>365</sup> As rumours spread that a new union would be formed there was some disgruntlement among workers and the supporters of the strike viewed the new union as divisive at a time when solidarity was urgently needed.<sup>366</sup> The press conference hosted by WASP increased their tension and mutual distrust with AMCU.

### *Unwarranted interference*

The rumours proved to be true when a new union, the Workers Association Union (WAU) was launched on 1 March 2014. At its launch, WAU said it was against the strike and it announced that it would assist workers to return to work safely. WAU's impact is hard to assess. For AMCU, a new union formed against the strike meant that its officials had to reiterate the importance of striking, and manage workers expectations. Some AMCU officials, who were former leaders in the worker committees together with the founders of WAU, felt that AMCU needed to be given a

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<sup>364</sup> Sosibo K, 'New strikes set to be Amcu's biggest test yet', *Mail and Guardian Online*, 21 January 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-21-new-strikes-set-to-be-amcus-biggest-test-yet>

<sup>365</sup> Interview 5 at Amplats Mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>366</sup> Field notes, January and February 2014

fair chance to lead, but were concerned about the way in which AMCU had handled the situation by naming the leaders publicly.<sup>367</sup> WAU's leadership and those workers who were accused of detracting but did not join WAU, had become unpopular at the mines.

WAU failed to attract membership on the ground, and allegations of ANC funding and NUM involvement in WAU were rife and may have tarnished its reputation.<sup>368</sup>

One mineworker said:

I think it was on the first of March, I saw WAU members were in town going around giving people some papers; saying that they are a new union and are going to take people back to work. But I just said to myself "Ah it is a passing thing, this thing is just passing". Because to me they were taking chances you see, because most of the WAU people they were from NUM.<sup>369</sup>

Another worker at Amplats had this to say:

We don't know what kind of agenda they are pushing. Where are they right now? What are they trying to do? Sometimes you will just see them here [at the mine], the next week they are not here. We hold some meetings and they will arrive late. And once they see what the agenda is, then they leave. So we don't know exactly what they were trying to do.<sup>370</sup>

Two years later, in April 2016, Thebe Maswabi, a former AMCU branch chairperson at Thembelani mine, launched a civil claim of R120 million against President Jacob Zuma, alleging "Zuma told him to form the new union, but then government stopped funding him, leaving him in serious debt."<sup>371</sup> Maswabi also cited the involvement of State Security Minister David Mahlobo, two other national ministers and the acting police commissioner in his civil claim. An investigative report revealed that Lonmin's

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<sup>367</sup> Interview 6 with AMCU official at Amplats Northam, Johannesburg, 3 March 2014

<sup>368</sup> Subramany D, 'Amcu strike playing into ANC's hands, says Wasp', *Mail and Guardian Online*, 22 January 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-22-00-amcu-strike-playing-into-ancs-hands-says-wasp>; also Interview 2 at Anglo mine, 27 October 2014, and Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>369</sup> Interview 3 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>370</sup> Interview 1 at Anglo mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>371</sup> Myburgh PL & Tau P, Zuma, spooks and the bogus union, 8 May 2016, URL: <http://citypress.news24.com/News/zuma-spooks-and-the-bogus-union-20160508>

former Head of Human Resources, Bernard Mokwena, was a State Security Agent in 2012. In 2013, Mokwena founded a company called Kazol Resources. One of the three directors of Kazol Resources, Peter Silenga, is known to have been directly involved in the creation of WAU, and to have assisted Maswabi.<sup>372</sup> The allegations point to a direct abuse of power and state resources, which include the intelligence services, in an attempt to undermine the strike and AMCU.

In addition, AMCU's memorandum, which it handed over to the Presidency on 6 March 2014 at the Union Buildings, complained of the bias against AMCU by senior government officials.<sup>373</sup> AMCU officials said this put them under pressure, and as one official explained "we thought that we will only be talking to the company only [during the strike]. So we found that there was the company, the capitalists, politicians and all those and we also realised that the world was against us."<sup>374</sup> AMCU officials also felt that NUM's affiliation to COSATU, ensured NUM received support from the ANC, and implied ANC's opposition to the activity of AMCU.<sup>375</sup> It felt the ANC-led government defended NUM at the expense of AMCU-affiliated mineworkers.

AMCU officials also felt that NUM's affiliation to COSATU, ensured NUM received support from the ANC, and implied the ANC's opposition to the activity of AMCU.<sup>376</sup> Workers felt the ANC-led government defended NUM at the expense of AMCU-affiliated mineworkers.

The role that the media played in the creation of perceptions about AMCU is worth analysing as it added to AMCU's concerns. News reports rarely reported on the impact of low wages paid by mining companies to workers. Instead, they highlighted the negative impact of the strike on poor mineworkers, the prevailing poverty in mining communities and hardships of the strike. A news report accused Mathunjwa

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<sup>372</sup> Myburgh PL, Lonmin boss was a 'spy', 29 May 2016, URL: <http://city-press.news24.com/News/lonmin-boss-was-a-spy-20160528-2>

<sup>373</sup> Interview 8 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

<sup>374</sup> Interview 8 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

<sup>375</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014; Interview 4 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014; Interview 7 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

<sup>376</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014; Interview 4 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014; Interview 7 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

of living a life of luxury saying he owned three cars worth about R900 000, multiple properties and was a businessman raising questions about the way that Mathunjwa made his money.<sup>377</sup> In response, Mathunjwa said he earned his money through hard work and felt aggrieved that he was being publicly targeted based on unfounded speculations. He accused the media of shifting the conversation from the mining companies' exploitation of workers, to a conversation about his personal wealth. AMCU's officials also dismissed the allegations.<sup>378</sup>

One of the ways in which officials of AMCU responded to the public and political pressure, was to turn inwards and close itself to the public. Ordinary members, shaft stewards and branch leadership became cautious of the media and of outsiders' presence at the mines. Branch committees were aware of workers' anxieties and responded by introducing anyone who accompanied them to meetings with workers at the very beginning of the meeting.<sup>379</sup> This was a response to the external pressures the union faced during the strike and a means of protecting itself. It was also a way in which the leadership of the union was able to maintain control.

AMCU had been a small trade union in 2012 that grew rapidly without having the opportunity to build its internal capacity simultaneously. Its machinery to deal with the media was limited to press statements, media conferences and direct communication with leaders and members of the union. Learning from its experience in 2012, AMCU's decision that Mathunjwa be the face of the union was an attempt to control the message and narrative from the union concerning the strike. The mining companies, by contrast, had posted regular updates on their respective websites, and were more sophisticated in their media engagement. They also set up a joint website: <http://www.platinumwagenegotiations.co.za/>, as a resource for the public and media.

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<sup>377</sup> Serrao A & Seale L, 'Amcu leader's life of luxury', *Independent Online* 19 May 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/amcu-leaders-life-of-luxury-1690081>

<sup>378</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>379</sup> Field notes, Impala and Amandelbult mines, between April and June 2014

The most challenging public perception that AMCU had to face, was that it was a violent union that it had come to prominence in 2012 through force and intimidation. Certain testimonies in the media and at the Marikana Commission sought to create the perception that AMCU was behind the 2012 strike and that it encouraged the violence and killings. Amidst the panic of another platinum strike 2014 strike, news reports continued to fuel this perception. The mining companies and NUM would consistently claim that employees were being intimidated to remain on strike.<sup>380</sup> The release of a documentary titled *Miners Shot Down* by Uhuru productions in February 2014, presented the story of Marikana from the perspective of Lonmin workers.<sup>381</sup> The documentary played an important role in countering the perception that violence had been perpetrated at Marikana by workers and AMCU. The Marikana Support Campaign (MSC) – founded by activists after the massacre to provide support to mineworkers and Marikana community members – travelled the country with Lonmin workers during the strike to show the film and garner support for the strike. However, AMCU remained wary of any involvement by the MSC and DLF, and AMCU did not play any part in promoting the film.

Reinforcing the claims of violence, clashes occurred between AMCU and the police resulting in the death of AMCU shop steward, Khayaletu Shado Ncedani on 7 February 2014. AMCU blamed Implats for calling the police when workers were exercising their right to protest. In May, two NUM-affiliated mineworkers at Lonmin were killed while on their way to work.<sup>382</sup> Another NUM member was killed at his home, with his wife. It remains unclear if these deaths were related to the strike.

### *Modes of organising*

AMCU was forced to respond to the allegations of violence. It felt the allegations were an easy way to dismiss the legitimacy of the union and the strike. One of the primary ways for the union to counter the allegation was to ensure the 2014 strike remained peaceful. This was achieved through an oft-repeated call for peace, calm

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<sup>380</sup> Interview 1 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>381</sup> Desai R, *Miners Shot Down*, Uhuru Productions, February 2014

<sup>382</sup> Fletcher N, Lonmin hit by South African platinum strike as two workers reportedly killed, 12 May 2014, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/marketforceslive/2014/may/12/lonmin-strike-miners-killed-profits-fall>

and unity by its national leadership, branch and shaft stewards. As the strike progressed, AMCU branch officials and shop stewards were roughly divided into two groups: those involved in the negotiation process and those who were not. The latter group remained on the ground with workers. Every week, mineworkers would gather and would be met by AMCU officials who would lead a prayer, song and keep mineworkers updated on the strike. The length and time of these meetings would vary as the strike progressed, but the constant interaction of union officials with their members became an important connection for the union. It helped to keep the strike under control, maintain unity and allowed the union to address other issues or conflicts that arose. In order to provide feedback to workers, the union officials at each mine were in constant communication with their respected representatives involved in the wage negotiations. Therefore, the absorption of the worker committees and the (re)formalisation of labour organising at the platinum mines in 2013, allowed AMCU to contain and control the levels of violence witnessed in the 2012 strike.

One official explained that his role at the mine:

was to guide the workers and let them know that our national office is with us on R12 500... We stopped violence because even though some people were acting crazy, we were able to show them the importance of staying on strike. We also showed them the power of our national office, and how serious they are about no violence. So they should not worry about the violence and hunger, but what really helped us most is that we put God first.<sup>383</sup>

Putting God first reflected the thread of Christianity that runs through the union. Mathunjwa, Gama and Mphahlele are all very religious. Virtually every meeting of AMCU is opened and closed with a prayer. Mineworkers and elected officials vary in their religiosity, but the discipline and sacrifice displayed by AMCU's top leadership was attributed to their strong belief in God.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>384</sup> Interview 10 at Lonmin, October 2014

The regular report backs from union leadership helped workers persist with the strike.<sup>385</sup> One worker leader says “we were strong from our side [at the mine], and our union was strong. So we were all covered, and the union [leadership] would come now and then to motivate us”.<sup>386</sup>

Another mineworker says of Mathunjwa:

the thing that motivated me is Mr Mathunjwa... I don't know what to say. I have a strong bond to that man because when he talks he gives you power, he gives you energy and you have that belief. The way he spoke, the way he motivates people, the way he was fighting for us; Mathunjwa was fighting for us and we had that belief that he is going to change our lives.<sup>387</sup>

In addition, workers derived their motivation from a sense of control. Comparing NUM to AMCU, union officials remarked that when striking under the banner of NUM, “we only knew that the strike will take two or three weeks”. With AMCU, in addition to the report back meetings, there was no predetermined date for the end of the strike. Mineworkers said they “just knew that the strike will end when the management gave us R12 500”<sup>388</sup>, and that the “(strike) certificate is not expiring”<sup>389</sup> as it did under NUM's leadership. Importantly, workers felt included in the decision-making processes of the mines. During mass meetings, AMCU's national leadership reported to mineworkers on the wage offers put forward by the mining companies and the elected branch officials of the union were given an immediate chance to respond to the proposed offer. They were also given time after the meeting to engage workers on the proposal and report back to the union.<sup>390</sup>

The Marikana Massacre had an important role to play in the psyche of mineworkers, even those who worked at mines other than Lonmin. The demand for R12 500 grew out of a struggle that saw workers lose their lives, and many mineworkers struggled to talk about the massacre.

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<sup>385</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>386</sup> Interview 3 at Anglo mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>387</sup> Interview 3 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>388</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>389</sup> Interview 7 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

<sup>390</sup> Field notes, Lonmin mine, 14 May 2014

A mineworker spoke about the common struggles and solidarity:

[The shootings at Marikana] affected the [2014] strike... because those people who died there, some of them we know them and we used to talk to them. Some of them heard what I was fighting for here at Impala, and they were supporting me and we were supporting each other.<sup>391</sup>

Another mineworker spoke about the pain of the massacre:

Marikana, I saw it on my TV. When it happened I was watching TV. I was alone at that time. I just cried. I don't want to talk about it, it was very, very bad...It affected workers mentally and even we wanted to strike here at Impala for that because it was not nice. It took us a long time to get over it...They [Lonmin workers] are feeling that pain. I am telling you every day they cannot forget Marikana. It will take time, a long time.<sup>392</sup>

As the strike progressed, it had a direct impact on mineworkers' families and communities including local businesses. No one had imagined that the strike would last longer than two months and all provisions saved for the strike were quickly depleted. Local businesses began to close and many migrant workers returned home for the duration of the strike. On 15 April 2014 the strike entered its third month.<sup>393</sup> It was only then that AMCU – displaying its own inexperience - announced it had set up a strike fund that prioritised assisting workers to fulfil social responsibilities, such as funeral costs. This was coordinated by the branch leadership at the mines. Mineworkers would report to the branch committees, who in turn would liaise with the national office administration.

The greatest sacrifice for many workers was the inability to cover basic necessities such as food, toiletries, school fees and transport costs. Hunger took a toll, and by April it had reached dire levels.<sup>394</sup> Some workers faced resistance from their families who may have understood the importance of the strike, but struggled to survive. The strike seemed to have no end in sight. Sikhala Sonke, a women-led organisation that

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<sup>391</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

<sup>392</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>393</sup> 'Amcu asks public for funds to sustain strike', *Business Report*, 15 April 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/amcu-asks-public-for-funds-to-sustain-strike-1676465>

<sup>394</sup> Magome M, 'The strike is bad, people are hungry', *Business Report*, 18 May 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/the-strike-is-bad-people-are-hungry-1689932>

formed after the Marikana Massacre, was one of the organisations that tried to provide support to affected communities.<sup>395</sup> Their support for the women and mineworkers struggles had been consistent since 2012, and they regularly attended the Marikana Commission hearings with, and in support of, the affected mineworkers.

Sikhala Sonke were outspoken about the difficulties facing women mineworkers, particularly women working underground. They spoke about life in mining communities with no, or limited, access to basic sanitation, water and electricity. The strike heavily impacted the elderly, women, and children, and Sikhala Sonke took it upon themselves to actively encourage the community to continue and support the strike.<sup>396</sup> They called on mining companies – in particular Lonmin – to pay workers higher wages to improve the livelihoods of the mining community, which remain dependent on mineworkers salaries. Sikhala Sonke also joined some of the public screenings of *Miners Shot Down*.<sup>397</sup>

Assistance to support the ongoing strike was sought through the form of donations from the public and relief agencies. Through the intervention of the DLF, in May of 2014, the relief agency Gift of the Givers began to provide food and toiletries to the strike affected mining communities. Working with AMCU officials, Gift of the Givers rotated the areas of distribution, trying to reach as many people as possible<sup>398</sup>. However, Gift of the Givers was accused of only assisting mineworkers, which many felt was unfair as the impact of the strike was felt beyond just employees of the mines and their families.

Majority of mineworkers in South Africa support dependents beyond their nuclear families. Migrant workers often maintain two households. In order to cover daily and monthly costs of school fees, car payments and stop orders, many mineworkers were forced to loan money in an already cash-strapped and crippling debt economy.<sup>399</sup> The strike would have long-term costs for indebted mineworkers. In

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<sup>395</sup> Field notes, March to June 2014

<sup>396</sup> Field notes, March 2014

<sup>397</sup> Field notes, April 2014

<sup>398</sup> Interview 5 at Anglo mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>399</sup> Magome M, 'The strike is bad, people are hungry', *Business Report*, 18 May 2014, URL: <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/the-strike-is-bad-people-are-hungry-1689932>

response, some mineworkers were forced to make the difficult decision to return to work, while others made the equally difficult decision to remain on strike until the very end as they had nothing left to sacrifice. At the end of May 2014, an AMCU official estimated that approximately 1 000 workers had returned to work, predominantly from Amplats mine.<sup>400</sup>

For AMCU officials, the strike would at times feel like a heavy burden to carry. An official says

When people saw me, they would say things like “Here is another one that is making people starve”... I responded by saying there is nothing you can change when the people who started it didn’t want to change it. It is the workers I was representing here at the mine that kept me strong.<sup>401</sup>

Many mineworkers say they recognised that their sacrifice during the 2014 strike would benefit future generations of mineworkers.

The things that we were striking for, we are not doing it for us. We are doing it for other employees who have been shot and killed two years ago. And again we were doing this for our own generation that is coming... The next generation, they will find everything in good manner; like everything is going to be in a good place.<sup>402</sup>

Finally, AMCU’s negotiation team led by its National Treasurer, Jimmy Gama, was an important area of development for the union. As mentioned, many of its officials, particularly shaft and branch officials, were first time union officials, and were learning the methods, processes, strategies and tactics of negotiating during the strike. AMCU had to prepare their branch officials. Mathunjwa explains:

We spent a lot of money consulting them, taking them through the strike... because they have never been exposed to such magnitude [of] strikes that is within the law... So we took them through the process. I remember we had meetings in Pretoria of almost 200 shop stewards, 300 shop stewards... So that is why our strike was so well behaved because we took them through it and said

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<sup>400</sup> Interview 5 at Anglo mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>401</sup> Interview 8 at Lonmin mine, 30 October 2014

<sup>402</sup> Interview 1 at Anglo mine, 27 October 2014

this is what you must expect and this is what will happen. So it was kind of a capacity building for leaders. What they must do, what they must not do.<sup>403</sup>

Many officials found the negotiations challenging, educational but also exciting. Union officials who were part of the negotiation team would often be called to spend a period of between two days to two weeks at a hotel in Johannesburg or Pretoria when the negotiations were underway.<sup>404</sup> The negotiating team would spend hours just waiting anxiously to be called back into the negotiation room. Many nights were spent debating proposals and pouring over the numbers, trying to understand how the various wage offers would affect workers.<sup>405</sup> This experience was a learning opportunity for AMCU officials. It was also an opportunity to spend time with the national leadership of the union and with the branch leadership from other platinum mining companies. Further, it was an opportunity to establish identities and relationships within the union and these would become important in the union's future leadership battles. For example, the Regional Congresses that were held for the Rustenburg and Northam regions on 10 October 2014 and 6 November 2014 respectively were contested spaces.<sup>406</sup> In the Rustenburg region in particular, Lonmin and Implats branches banded together and were successful in electing their chosen candidates to the regional office.

For AMCU's NEC, the challenge was to find a balance between the inexperience of its officials and the demands of the strike. One of the methods of doing so was to constantly keep open lines of communication with the negotiating team.<sup>407</sup> A second means of maintaining control was for the NEC to not exclusively rely on its officials to report back to its members. Rather, the NEC travelled long distances to hold mass meetings and provide a report back on the strike. This not only ensured that a consistent message was communicated at all mines, but also allowed members to feel fully represented by the presence of its leadership on the ground.<sup>408</sup> Yet, this

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<sup>403</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, 20 January 2017

<sup>404</sup> Field notes as wage negotiations drew to an end, Johannesburg, June 2014

<sup>405</sup> Interview 6 with AMCU official at Implats Northam, Johannesburg, 3 March 2014

<sup>406</sup> Field notes from the Rustenburg Regional Congress held in Midrand, on 10 October 2014; and Field notes the Northam Regional Congress held in Pretoria on 6 November 2014

<sup>407</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

<sup>408</sup> Interview with Jimmy Gama, Johannesburg, 22 February 2017

also had the effect of centralising the strike, and ensuring that at all points, the NEC was able to maintain control over tensions that may have arisen within the union.

For the negotiating team, the last two weeks of the strike was intense as they spent hours in hotel rooms and conference facilities – with the AIDC's assistance – going over the proposed wage agreement. Officials of AMCU were confident that this was a victory for workers. And while workers may not have achieved what they set out to, they achieved more than the previous wage negotiations under NUM. More specifically, workers found a union that was willing to fight alongside them, and this won AMCU the support of mineworkers.

The weeks immediately following the strike brought much relief within the mining sector. Male and female mineworkers returned to work and production resumed. Local businesses began to open, and with it activity was restored to many mining towns that had felt empty and lifeless.<sup>409</sup> Families slowly began to recover as they were able to purchase basic food and toiletries. School attendance increased. For some, the end of the strike meant that old and new debts could be serviced.

For many workers in and beyond the platinum mining industry, the strike was recognised as a necessary show of workers' power and courage to challenge the continued inequalities that the post-apartheid state had failed to address. This was done by workers who chose to withhold their labour power, directly affecting capital. The strike also showed that change could successfully be achieved by an independent trade union, challenging the dominance of the leading politically-affiliated COSATU.

AMCU's officials were proud of the role they had played and for contributing to the practical and positive improvement brought by the R1 000 wage increase per year. The lives of workers were made easier as they were better able to feed their families, to send their children to school, and to lessen the burden of the cost of living.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> Simelane BC, Lekgowa T & Nicolson G, Platinum strike no more: After losing R10.6 billion in wages, miners claim victory, *Daily Maverick*, 23 June 2014, URL: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-06-23-platinum-strike-no-more-after-losing-r10.6-billion-in-wages-miners-claim-victory/#.WK2qVFV96po>

<sup>410</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

Officials spoke proudly about their role in the strike, which gained them recognition by the mining community as heroes.<sup>411</sup> As one worker notes:

And you must understand, AMCU is in North West for only three years, but we can't say it is a useless organisation. The other organisation [NUM] took thirty years, and it has done nothing. The one that came for three years did a very big job. For that AMCU must get credit.<sup>412</sup>

Another worker says of trade unions:

A union is not just something that comes from nowhere, a union is selected by workers and the union has to work for the needs of workers, not its own need. [If the union] bosses are satisfied without workers being satisfied, that will mean you are killing the union totally.<sup>413</sup>

He said unions need to remain respectful and truthful. For him:

What makes me proud is that I love AMCU and it is now in my blood. And it is in my blood because it has done a lot for me as a worker and that is what makes me proud. Even when I get home I show them the t-shirt and tell them "This is what is feeding you".

At the shaft level, workers felt empowered by AMCU's presence at the mine. They felt that AMCU took the time to explain their rights as mine workers to them. When workers reported a complaint, the issues was dealt with in a satisfactory manner. For example, workers felt empowered to report unsafe working conditions because the union officials were receptive and supportive. No mining would take place in the affected area until it had been inspected.<sup>414</sup> Workers also spoke about how – following the mode of operation of the worker committees – ethnicity did not dominate the union in a negative way.<sup>415</sup>

Female mineworkers at the shaft felt AMCU gave them a platform through the women's underground structures, to raise concerns that affected them. This includes

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<sup>411</sup> Interview 1 at Anglo mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>412</sup> Interview 4 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>413</sup> Interview 5 at Lonmin mine, 23 October 2014

<sup>414</sup> Interview 4 at Amplats mine, 28 October 2014; Interview 2 at Amplats mine, 27 October 2014

<sup>415</sup> Interview 4 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

treatment of female workers by male workers.<sup>416</sup> One female worker spoke about a meeting that was to be scheduled with the NEC of AMCU addressing their concerns relating to pregnant workers being sent home from work.<sup>417</sup> In comparison to NUM, they felt the meetings called by the women coordinators were productive and worth attending. In general, workers seemed positive and enthusiastic about the changes brought by AMCU's leadership style at the shaft level. However they did highlight the need for AMCU officials to be suitably trained so that they could effectively represent workers, and warned that AMCU officials should not get too comfortable with mine management.<sup>418</sup>

For these same reasons, AMCU and Joseph Mathunjwa in particular had become a hero on the platinum belt.<sup>419</sup> In interviews, workers expressed hope that the principles of honesty and transparency that was displayed by AMCU remain.<sup>420</sup> By the end of 2014, AMCU's paid membership on the platinum mines hiked up to approximately 110 000 members.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The 2014 five-month strike was the longest strike to have occurred in the post-apartheid era in the mining industry, with over 70 000 mineworkers downing tools, demanding a R12 500 basic wage. The strike required great sacrifices from mineworkers, their families, and communities to sustain the strike. It saw the world's attention focus on South Africa's platinum mining economy and the slow pace of transformation in the sector. Closer attention and research was paid to the socio-economic status of poor black mineworkers.

The 2014 strike consolidated AMCU's position as the majority union on the platinum belt. AMCU was a "new" militant union, who took on the mining companies and emerged relatively victorious. Before the strike began, nothing was known about AMCU except that it was a union that started on the coal mines as a splinter union

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<sup>416</sup> Interview 3 at Impala mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>417</sup> Interview 4 at Implats mine, 28 October 2014

<sup>418</sup> Interview 5 at Implats mine, 27 October 2014; Interview 5 at Amplats mine, 28 October 2014; and Ntswana N, *The politics of workers control in South Africa's platinum mines*

<sup>419</sup> Interview 3 at Implats mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>420</sup> Interview 2 at Implats mine, 22 October 2014

from NUM. AMCU emerged from the 2012 strike as a serious contender to NUM's majority status and eventually won.

The face of AMCU was Joseph Mathunjwa. He conducted the majority of the union's media interviews and public speeches during the strike. Through this communication, as well as press statements, AMCU highlighted the problems plaguing the mining industry. It argued that there is a continuing legacy of apartheid in the form of slave wages paid to mineworkers, the migrant labour system, and the poor living and working conditions of black mineworkers. AMCU criticised the tripartite alliance, and said COSATU's relationship with the ANC government compromised the federation and its affiliates' ability to act independently. AMCU derived its legitimacy from being a non-partisan union able to represent mineworkers.

AMCU was supported in the strike by organisations such as the Marikana Support Campaign, the AIDC and Gift of the Givers. These organisations attempted to hold solidarity actions with the union. Often these actions would proceed in AMCU's absence, as the union closed itself off from engaging with other organisations. On the one hand, this may be understood in the context of the speed at which AMCU rose to become one of the biggest trade unions in the country. This growth occurred in a politically charged and tense environment, where the loss of members' lives was a legitimate fear. In addition, many organisations had come forth with various intentions and ideas – albeit expressing solidarity – and AMCU chose to focus its energy on the strike. On the other hand, Mathunjwa, has been described as a man who enjoys control and holds on to power. He is thought to have personally ensured that the independent worker committees were absorbed into the union structures, to eliminate potentially opposing voices. Mathunjwa is further criticised for being a deeply religious man who understands himself to be a saviour of mineworkers, and thus his power rests on his leadership within the union.

Four years after the Marikana Massacre, AMCU is continually growing in various sectors in the mining industry. During the 2015/6 collective bargaining process that took place in the gold sector, a strike by AMCU was just barely averted. In 2016, the 2013 platinum wage agreement had ended and was renegotiated. AMCU and the mining companies reached an agreement fairly quickly, because all parties were averse to another strike in the platinum industry. The negotiations again yielded

yearly increases of R1 000 for the next three years – similar to the agreement reached in 2014. By 2017, RDOs in the platinum mining industry should be earning a basic wage of R12 500. It may have taken five years since 2012 to achieve their demand, but in the context of a dominant mining companies and unequal power relations, this achievement would not have been won without mineworkers and AMCU's collective determination to achieve higher wages. AMCU continues to grow steadily, and by the end of 2016, it had a total membership of about 160 000 workers.

In an effort to understand these developments, the next chapter takes a look at the changing political economy of labour in South Africa and tries to understand the emergence of AMCU in this context.

## Chapter 5: The key features of AMCU

The rise of AMCU on the platinum belt was unexpected and the speed at which it grew quite remarkable. There is limited information on AMCU, which was a relatively small union organising contract mine and construction workers prior to its entry on the platinum mine. This dissertation has thus far provided an account of AMCU's rise at the three biggest platinum producing mining companies in South Africa between 2012 and 2014. This chapter examines the character of AMCU.

There are three important features of AMCU that emerged in the period between 2011 and 2014. Firstly, AMCU has consistently defined itself as a non-partisan independent trade union. Despite its affiliation to NACTU, which has a tradition of support for Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanist politics, AMCU does not align itself to a political party. Secondly, AMCU has focused its attention on workplace struggles. Thirdly, AMCU advocates for a wage-led economy. The union argues that paying workers higher wages will lead to increased spending and stimulate demand within the economy thereby creating more job opportunities. This chapter assesses these three features, and aims to understand the character and dynamics that shape AMCU.

The chapter begins by tracing some aspects of the trade union debates and dynamics from the time of FOSATU to the democratic era. It then looks at the three features of AMCU that emerge from its rise on the platinum mines to better understand its character.

### 5.1 Trade unions debates since the 1970s

Founded in 1979, FOSATU was the largest trade union federation since the revival of independent unions in the 1970s that organised mostly black workers.<sup>421</sup> FOSATU had established itself as “a tight federation of non-racial, national, industrial unions,

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<sup>421</sup> Barchiesi F, 'Privatization and the Historical Trajectory of "Social Movement Unionism"'; and Friedman M, *'The Future is in the Hands of the Workers': A History of FOSATU*

based on shop floor strength.”<sup>422</sup> In so doing, its affiliated unions largely focused on developing educational programmes and maintained its independence from both party political bodies and international trade union organisations.

During FOSATU’s Congress meeting in April 1982 Joe Foster, the General Secretary of FOSATU reflected, on the state of the working class in South Africa. Foster said:

“It is... essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters.”<sup>423</sup>

According to Foster, apartheid and capital were intertwined. He said there was a “growing gap between popular politics and the power of capital and as a result the potential power of workers”.<sup>424</sup> Foster, representing the dominant view among FOSATU leaders, argued for the necessity of independent working class organisations, both as trade unions and political formations. He warned against the danger of subsuming worker organisations under the ideological banner of a nationalist movement such as the ANC.

As the anti-apartheid struggle grew, so did the rise of movements and alliances to fight against apartheid. The founding of the UDF in 1983 was important in bringing together different social movements and community organisations around the broad aim of defeating apartheid. As the struggle against apartheid gained momentum and workplace struggles reached new heights from the early 1980s, the calls for greater unity among unions also grew louder. FOSATU, NUM and several smaller unions engaged in protracted unity talks that culminated in the formation of COSATU in

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<sup>422</sup> Foster J, "The Workers' Struggle-Where Does COSATU Stand?," *Power!: Black Workers, Their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* in MacShane D, Plaut M, Ward D, *Power!: Black Workers, Their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, Nottingham: Spokesman Books, p. 142 and 143

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

1985.<sup>425</sup> COSATU's founding principles included worker control, non-racialism, the slogan "one union one industry", and paid membership.

Even before the launch of the new federation, black trade unions, including FOSATU, began to forge alliances with community organisations. Most notably, FOSATU and COSAS jointly organised the historic November 1986 regional strike in support of students' demands. COSATU actively transcended workplace politics, to make broader demands for social change. Seidman points out that for trade unions engaged in broader political struggles, citizenship as a goal meant not only participation in political decisions, but also access to social and economic resources.<sup>426</sup> In their struggle against apartheid, unions continually encountered the apartheid government's brutal repression of dissent.<sup>427</sup>

In 1990, South Africa's political landscape suddenly experienced rapid and profound changes. The unbanning of political parties saw the ANC, SACP and COSATU enter into what Buhlungu terms a 'strategic compromise', or what Adler and Webster term 'radical reform', through the form of a tripartite alliance.<sup>428</sup> Adler and Webster argue that the African labour movement was central in shaping and legitimising the transition process. Adopting a positive view of what became known as transition theory, they argued that African labour movements emerged out of the transition to apartheid as an independent force with the potential to shape post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>429</sup> Adler and Webster state:

We have referred to this as radical reform, where by virtue of its independent power base labour is able to mobilise outside state structures, yet through its alliance with the ANC it is able to influence state policy. By being both "inside" and "outside" the state, labour does not inevitably become captured by capital

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<sup>425</sup> Friedman M, *'The Future is in the Hands of the Workers': A History of FOSATU*; and Forrest K, *The metal that will not bend*

<sup>426</sup> Seidman G, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*, University of California Press, 1994

<sup>427</sup> Friedman M, *'The Future is in the Hands of the Workers': A History of FOSATU*; and Forrest K, *The metal that will not bend*

<sup>428</sup> Buhlungu S (ed.), *Trade Unions and Democracy: Cosatu workers' political attitudes in South Africa*, Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2006

<sup>429</sup> Adler G, Webster E (eds.) *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*

and the state, but has the potential to transform the direction of the transition process in more radical directions<sup>430</sup>

But for COSATU, it was a significant compromise. It compromised its militancy and radicalism – amid continuing internal contestation among its affiliates - in the hope that the alliance would provide the trade union movement with access to political institutions and involve it in the decision-making processes of the state. COSATU also expected that participatory democracy would allow the union movement to push its agenda on various fronts. By accepting the democratic state as legitimate and partaking in state institutions and processes, it felt the federation could make concrete gains in advancing the interest of workers.<sup>431</sup>

There were internal debates within COSATU about the way forward for the labour movement, particularly the SACP's two stage National Democratic Revolution (NDR), as the "road to socialism". Blade Nzimande explains:

The NDR has historically been understood as a revolution led by progressive motive forces (mainly oppressed and exploited) to defeat repressive and colonial regimes and build people's democracies, as both an objective in itself, but in circumstances also where, due to domestic or global balance of forces, such a revolution is unable to immediately proceed to socialism. This could be because the motive forces are either not strong or conscious enough to drive the revolution towards socialism or other objective factors pose a limitation to a transition to socialism.<sup>432</sup>

Amid these debates, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), emerged from the labour movement as a means to bind the new ANC to pro-poor and union-friendly policies. The RDP pushed for economic reforms to overcome the legacy of apartheid, and drew its inspiration from the Freedom Charter. However there was mounting pressure for South Africa to conform to free market neoliberal orthodoxy, which pushed export-orientated, market-led economic growth.<sup>433</sup> In 1996, the ANC adopted the much-contested neoliberal economic policy known as Growth,

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<sup>430</sup> Adler G, Webster E (eds.), *Trade Unions and Democratisation in South Africa*, p 9

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Nzimande B, 'What is the National Democratic Revolution?', *Umsebenzi Online*, Vol 5, No. 66, 18 October 2006, URL: See more at: <http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=1850#art1>

<sup>433</sup> Hart G, *Disabling Globalisation: Places of power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*

Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR). GEAR cemented the direction that South Africa would take and saw a retreat from the “promises of redistributive social change”.<sup>434</sup> Hart argues that the adoption of GEAR represented both a macro-economic strategy and shift in the balance of power within the alliance.<sup>435</sup>

Bramble and Barchiesi present a useful critique of the tripartite alliance. They show how the gains made by the trade union movement – the Constitution, the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, and access to state institutions such as NEDLAC and the CCMA – came at a great cost which, in the long term, undermined working class movements and weakened COSATU. By agreeing to enter into an alliance with the ANC, COSATU compromised its militancy to push for systemic change, and agreed to work within a capitalist economy:

Dominant in COSATU thinking since the election of the ANC Government, however, has been the need to engage in the processes that have accompanied trade liberalisation and associated economic restructuring. This engagement has been shaped by the need both to assist in the competitiveness of South African capital on the world stage, while at the same time pressing for the protection of worker rights and living standards.<sup>436</sup>

South Africa has been a democracy for over twenty years, but democracy and increasing globalisation have brought new challenges for unions. COSATU's limitations rendered it unwilling to mount an effective challenge to privatisation and downsizing as well as casualisation and the outsourcing of workers. Since the end of apartheid, these processes have led to massive retrenchments, job insecurity, increased unemployment, informality and lower wages, which have ushered in new forms of vulnerability and inequality.<sup>437</sup>

These forms of vulnerability, inequality and exploitation have their roots in the compromises made by the ANC during the transition period. Black empowerment policies have failed to produce the outcomes intended through the redistribution of wealth, thus the control of resources and land remains inaccessible for the vast

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<sup>434</sup> Hart G, *Disabling Globalisation: Places of power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, p 7

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, p 19

<sup>436</sup> Barchiesi F & Bramble T (eds.), *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the 'New South Africa'*

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, p 2

majority of the population. COSATU adopted a policy of cadre deployment where key trade union officials were placed in strategic political posts within the state with the hope of influencing state strategy. The deployment of union officials to political positions has failed to achieve the intended outcomes, and has distanced these officials from their trade unions, resulting in a loss of human resource capacity. More recently, a declining economy and rising unemployment have worsened the position of unions, who are unable to lobby the state to escalate pro-poor solutions to the growing crisis. These difficulties have affected trade unions and their ability to organise and confront the new challenges of the post-democratic era.<sup>438</sup>

Chinguno considers the effects of institutionalisation of unions' after 1994 and argues that it "rationalises contestation by creating a system that allows a measure of mutual decision making". While unions have engaged in this process, there remains an unequal balance of power between mining companies, the state and labour. Documenting the process of institutionalisation of NUM at Impala Platinum from 1992 to 2012, he demonstrates how institutionalisation at Implats created a paradox. On the one hand, NUM became the centre of power within the industrial relations system. On the other hand, it was incorporated into Implats' bureaucratic system. This process made it difficult for NUM to maintain internal union democracy and this has alienated the union's leadership from workers at the shop floor.

Against this backdrop of the challenges faced by unions, this chapter turns its focus to AMCU, and tries to understand its character.

## **5.2. The character of AMCU**

AMCU was founded as a splinter union from NUM at a coal mine in Mpumalanga. This is important because as a splinter union, AMCU not only understood the mode of organising and the culture of the NUM in that region, but it was also able to develop a critique of NUM and COSATU's ability to represent the interest of workers.

In a press statement issued in May 2014, AMCU says:

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<sup>438</sup> Buhlungu S & Tshoaedi M, *COSATU'S Contested Legacy*

The advent of democracy brought with it numerous expectations and hopes for a better future for all South Africans. Since 1994 we have only gained universal suffrage to go and vote into power a Government that continues to shun away from discussing difficult issues and fails to take bold decisions in the interests of the majority.

Our people are worse off today than they were prior to 1994. The share of wages was higher than the share of profits prior to our freedom. In recent years the share of profits have expanded compared to the contracting share of profits, as the South African economy increasingly became profit led. Mining workers were left worse off as they remain comparatively paid lower wages to other sectors in South Africa, and their counterparts in other Countries such as Australia (wage-led).<sup>439</sup>

AMCU accuses the ANC of becoming corrupt and failing to address issues affecting poor black mineworkers. Criticising the ANC's economic policies, Mathunjwa, argues:

We need sober leaders who don't have a double agenda and whose conscience is in the right place. Workers are vulnerable, very vulnerable. Hence we have a state that is so committed to capitalism that the economy is not growing. [South Africa] has got all the resources that we can self-sustain the country, but [the government] opts to import each and every piece of useless material... Why did we allow the manufacturers of steel to close down? Do we prefer to get our steel from China?

How does South Africa enter into trade deals that affect our core employment? The source of our employment? You can have trade deals, but you have to secure certain areas [of the economy and industry].

[If we look at] climate change. We have got platinum, so why don't we produce our own solar system in the country? Why do we import? Why don't we move to manufacture it here? So if we want to sustain platinum in this dying price, why

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<sup>439</sup> AMCU Press statement, '*Media Release: Update on wages platinum* ', May 2014, URL: <http://www.amcu.co.za/media-release/>

don't we say all government cars must be diesel? These are the kind of things that if we don't have proper leaders [we cannot achieve]."<sup>440</sup>

Mathunjwa describes capitalism as "a few who control and pay workers as minimum as possible, not even to meet their daily needs." He believes that the state should actively protect workers and create employment by building new industries. AMCU, like COSATU, argues that higher wages for workers encourages economic growth in the country as a whole. According to Mathunjwa,

when we say wage-led, living wage, we are talking about something that is constantly above inflation... [The money you put into workers] has a positive knock on effect on a wage-led economy, because the more the money you put to people, the higher their spending is. And then it touched on issues of manufacturing. You know. So it does have a serious positive knock on effect moving forward. But if the money is just in a few hands it suffocates the economy so there cannot be growth. There will not be demand. But if you have a wage-led economy, it creates demand. So if after you pay your bills in your account would you sit at your home when you have got a mall next to you? You go and spend. It creates employment.

Not only will a wage-led economy put more money into workers hands, it will also allow workers to advance and be able to live with dignity and access opportunities historically denied to black workers. For Mathunjwa, the 2015 #FeesMustFall student uprising was an example of low wages of parents who are unable to afford education, and build an independent generation.<sup>441</sup>

It has been argued that wage-led growth requires greater state intervention in the economy:

There is an alternative to neoliberalism. A wage-led growth strategy is a viable option and the most likely strategy to succeed if coordinated internationally. A wage-led growth strategy would combine pro-labour distributional social and labour market policies, along with a proper regulation of the financial sector.

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<sup>440</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, January 2017

<sup>441</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, January 2017

Distributional policies that are likely to increase the wage share and reduce wage dispersion include increasing or establishing minimum wages, strengthening social security systems, improving union legislation and increasing the reach of collective bargaining agreements.<sup>442</sup>

Recognising that this approach presents a counter argument to neo-liberalism, but not to the foundations of capitalism, Mathunjwa tends to suggest that one has to work within the limits of what is possible and immediate. AMCU's approach suggests that it is more pragmatic than visionary.

Central to its form of trade union organising, is AMCU's independence from political parties. In spite of the support it has received from the EFF and the UDM, and even though political parties are regularly present at the annual 16 August Commemoration of the Marikana Massacre, it has maintained its independence. AMCU has used these platforms to thank parties for their support, while insisting that it is non-partisan.

AMCU is cautiously aware of the manner in which personality politics have affected trade unions' alliances. Mathunjwa argues that trade unions, who were once part of COSATU, have not always left the federation for ideological reasons. Instead, differences between high-ranking personalities have caused rifts and resignation. In addition, he criticises NUM for becoming too close to mine management. Reference can be made to the tensions between Mathunjwa and Mantashe in 1999. Mathunjwa had numerous disputes with the Douglas Colliery mine, and viewed Mantashe as siding with the employer against him, and against the workers' struggle at the time.

Worker leaders at the mines, in interviews conducted just after the 2014 strike, also hold this view, and point particularly to the relationship that COSATU has with both the state and business. One of the worker leaders said the following.

You know, a political party will remain a political party. You will lose your focus actually because politically parties' talks about things that are affecting the whole community... everyone will push his side.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Lavoie M & Stockhammer E, *Wage-led Growth: An Equitable Strategy for Economic Recovery*, Palgrave Macmillan and The International Labour Office, 2013

<sup>443</sup> Interview 5 at Impala mine, 27 October 2014

COSATU also it doesn't understand what it is doing. It wasn't supposed to be aligned to organisation like ANC.... Because now they can't represent the workers because they must listen to the president of the country... There is no COSATU. COSATU is ANC. COSATU is government.<sup>444</sup>

Government's relationship with AMCU is not okay. All I can say was NUM was the government. Since AMCU came to the mining sector it is like the government has a problem because they know that most of their top guys were... having shares here at NUM. So there cannot be a good relationship between the government and AMCU.<sup>445</sup>

This trend is best epitomised in the figure of Cyril Ramaphosa, deputy president of the ANC and of the country. Ramaphosa was a founder and former General Secretary of NUM in 1982. However, after 1994 he became a prominent businessman and joined the board of directors of Lonmin in 2010.<sup>446</sup> He was also a member of the National Executive Council of the ANC at the time of the Marikana Massacre in 2012. Ramaphosa, a prominent beneficiary of BEE came under criticism for his role at Marikana when he called on the state to take "concomitant action" against the striking mineworkers.<sup>447</sup>

One of the primary means by which AMCU claims to be accountable and responsible to its members, is by maintaining democracy within the union. AMCU acknowledges that trade unions are able to operate because they receive monthly fees from their members. Therefore members, unsurprisingly, have expectations of shop stewards that need to be met and elected leaders should be held to account as "workers are the owners of the organisation".<sup>448</sup> During the 2014 strike, this accountability took the form of numerous mass meetings, as well increased communication with elected officials who in turn regularly reported to workers.

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<sup>444</sup> Interview 4 at Impala mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>445</sup> Interview 3 at Impala mine, 24 October 2014

<sup>446</sup> Ramaphosa's Shanduka Group acquired a 50.03% controlling stake in Incwala which owns 18% of Lonmin's South African subsidiaries Western Platinum and Eastern Platinum. See McKune C & Makinana A, 'Cyril Ramaphosa's Lonmin tax-dodge headache', Mail and Guardian, 19 Sep 2014, URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-09-18-cyril-ramaphosas-lonmin-tax-dodge-headache>

<sup>447</sup> Bundle of emails exchanged amongst leadership of Lonmin, 'Exhibit BB4 1-7', Evidence presented before the Marikana Commission of Inquiry, URL: <http://www.marikanacomm.org.za>

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, January 2017

AMCU's leadership constantly cautioned its officials against forming close and trusting relationships with mine management. Mathunjwa argues that when officials are drawn into management at a company, it inhibits – if not paralyses – its ability to act in the interest of workers. He states:

Capital will absorb you, and then after they will make your position redundant... That is a trend. This is how capitalism work, it destroy potential leaders by positions. And it is to meddle with the affairs of the union. That is how capitalism works. That is how it survives.

And also capitalism survives through violence. So they do such a thing. They co-opt anything, they got money. That why they make money to be a scarce resource to workers, in order to fulfil their evil desires<sup>449</sup>

This warning was repeated to AMCU elected branch officials at its Regional Congresses for Rustenburg and Northam regions on 10 October 2014 and 6 November 2014 respectively.<sup>450</sup>

In spite of these warnings, AMCU's democratic nature has been called into question. In 2014, a group of mineworkers from Impala mine defected from AMCU to create the Workers Association Union. Sinwell argues that Mathunjwa's direct influence in dismantling the worker committees, and in undermining the workers' leaders who challenged him, points to a worrying trend within AMCU to centralise power, and minimise the risk of continuing worker mobilisation independent of the union.<sup>451</sup> As mentioned earlier, Mathunjwa's response to the criticism is that independent worker committees were no longer needed in 2012 when workers joined AMCU, and that the worker committees would simply act as a parallel structure to the union, so creating confusion. He argues that discipline is central to building a workers movement that is able to challenge power and should not be confused with a desire for control.

### 5.3 Conclusion

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<sup>449</sup> Interview with Joseph Mathunjwa, Johannesburg, January 2017

<sup>450</sup> Field notes from the Rustenburg Regional Congress held in Midrand, on 10 October 2014; and Field notes from the Northam Regional Congress held in Pretoria on 6 November 2014

<sup>451</sup> Sinwell L & Mbatha S, *The Spirit of Marikana*

Trade union history in South Africa is far too complex to cover in one chapter. This chapter has attempted to provide some of the debates and strategies employed by trade unions from the time of FOSATU to the transition to democracy. In doing so, it provides a broad context within which we can locate AMCU's emergence on Rustenburg's platinum mines.

The strike of 2012 and the Marikana Massacre was an important political moment in post-apartheid South Africa. Out of this moment, AMCU rose to become the predominant union on the platinum belt. With just under 2 000 members based at Lonmin's Karee mine in 2012, AMCU's membership grew to approximately 110 000 platinum mine workers at the end of 2014. Drawing on the previous chapters, which document the rise of AMCU, this chapter, details three key features of AMCU that have emerged from the narrative: AMCU's instance on non-partisan independent unionism, its focus on workplace struggles, and its call for a wage-led economy. These features provide a basis from which we can begin to understand AMCU's character and the labour dynamics of the platinum mines in South Africa.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The history of trade unionism in South Africa is one of struggle. The methods trade unions have used to wage this struggle have changed over time in relation to the particular political contexts in which they have operated. The Marikana Massacre was an important political moment in post-apartheid South Africa, and the events that followed have greatly affected trade unionism at the platinum mines in Rustenburg, South Africa. This is demonstrated in the rapid decline of NUM and the rise of AMCU between 2012 and 2014.

Founded in the 1980s, NUM grew to be the largest black mineworker's trade union, and the largest union in South Africa. NUM has over thirty years of experience in organising and representing mineworkers. Its founding had a positive impact on thousands of mineworkers' lives as NUM struggled for better living and working conditions for black mineworkers in South Africa. The decline of NUM in the platinum industry twenty years into democracy has been understood by some scholars as symptomatic of the political compromise of 1994, and the shift towards the reformist politics of trade unions.

Yet on the platinum mines, studies have shown that NUM had to contend with a history of workers independently organising at moments of crises. As this dissertation has demonstrated, in 2012 workers again collectively organised and refused to include NUM into their immediate struggle. AMCU's timeous, yet limited, recognition at Lonmin's Karee mine created an opening for AMCU to grow out of the independent struggles waged by platinum workers. AMCU's success in 2012 largely rested on its ability to win the favour of the worker committees and present itself as an alternative black mineworkers union to NUM. It was not always easy, as demonstrated by the Amplats worker committees, where some mineworkers wanted to retain their independent structures and mechanisms of accountability.

At Lonmin's mine, the murder of 37 mineworkers at Marikana represented the ultimate sacrifice by workers, as well as a rupture in the loyalty of mineworkers to the tripartite alliance. Not only did NUM officials shoot at mineworkers, many of whom

were their own members, but the NUM also subsequently dissociated itself from workers and portrayed them negatively with the support of its partners in the tripartite alliance. This further alienated the workers from NUM. AMCU, which had begun organising workers on the platinum mines, used the moment to throw its weight behind workers and took up what became a symbolic demand for R12 500 basic wage per month.

AMCU also presented an alternative narrative to the NUM about the political compromise of 1994, linking it to the democratic state's inability to redistribute resources to the poor and working class. Democracy has brought its own challenges, especially as the ANC attempts to redress apartheid's racial legacy. For thousands of platinum mineworkers, political freedom has not been accompanied by economic independence. As poverty increases so do Rustenburg's informal settlements, without the provision of basic services. This narrative of the political compromise of 1994, coupled with AMCU's commitment to non-partisan politics, signals an important shift in South African labour relations. Whilst organisations have operated independently from the tripartite alliance, the formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters and the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU have given impetus to a new kind of post-apartheid politics.

AMCU won majority rights at the Rustenburg platinum mines in 2013, but it was not clear that it would live up to workers' expectations of legitimate representation. The 2013 wage negotiations were a test for AMCU. Strategically, AMCU used this moment to push for a collective strike at Lonmin, Implats and Amplats' mines, forcing the platinum industry to an almost complete standstill and into wage negotiations. While each mine still held separate wage agreements with AMCU, the strike led to the standardisation of wage rates in the industry. This was an important shift in the bargaining process because platinum mining companies have thus far resisted collective bargaining.

Yet the strike was not without difficulties. AMCU faced the united front put up by the mining companies who remained firm in their view that the wage demand of R12 500 per month was unaffordable. AMCU also had to contend with a new trade union, WAU, who actively campaigned against the strike, and the ANC-led government that demonstrated its bias against AMCU.

Both the determination of mineworkers and AMCU's organising strategy kept workers on strike despite their sacrifice of five months of wages. It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for the mineworkers' determination. In part, this is explained by the haunting memory of the sacrifice of those who lost their lives in Marikana while fighting for a living wage. This was followed by the rupture in workers' relationship with NUM and the tripartite alliance. They found in AMCU a union that took up their demand of R12 500 and a charismatic leader who was able to articulate their frustrations. Importantly, AMCU insisted that they will strike alongside workers until they get a wage agreement that workers found acceptable.

AMCU's strength lay in its ability to maintain communication channels with workers. Its branch leaders gave weekly updates and held regular mass meetings with the national leadership. The communication channels of the union, both internally and externally, were controlled and centralised around the NEC and Joseph Mathunjwa in particular. This is characteristic of the leadership style of the union. However, in the context of the strike, it allowed the union to contain and maintain control of the strike, especially strike violence.

Workers did compromise in their demand for R12 500 basic wage per month during the 2013 wage negotiations, but achieved a wage increase significantly above inflation and more than NUM had in previous years. In addition, the strike saw the mining companies also compromise on their wage offer despite their insistence that the wage demand was unaffordable.

Despite their eventual achievement of the R12 500 basic wage in the 2016 wage negotiations, AMCU has dissolved the independent strike committees. This has been criticised by observers and by workers themselves, some of whom have accused AMCU's leaders of displaying dictatorial tendencies and of forcing consensus among workers. While these are salient criticisms, they should not detract from the fact that much of AMCU's activities on the platinum mines were undertaken with the consent of the branch leadership, who were predominantly former leaders of the independent strike committees.

The rise of AMCU on the platinum mines was due to a conjuncture of forces. Firstly, AMCU won the approval of the worker committees which paved the way for the union to recruit members on the platinum mines. Secondly AMCU supported mine workers

after the Marikana Massacre, and incorporated workers' demand for R12 500 into the union. Thirdly, the signing of majority recognition agreements between AMCU and the major platinum producers in 2013 was a major breakthrough for AMCU because workers gave the union an opportunity to represent them. Fourthly, the popularity of its President Joseph Mathunjwa, and fifthly its victory in leading a five-month long strike until it emerged with a wage agreement that its membership found acceptable. This explains AMCU's dominance on the platinum belt.

AMCU's real victory was its ability to consolidate itself as the chosen trade union, to which workers have now pledged their allegiance. AMCU demonstrated the successful mobilisation of workers' collective power in post-apartheid South Africa, outside of the tripartite alliance.

Workers' perception of trade unions had been coloured by their experience with NUM, which was considered too close to the ANC-led government and to mining capital. Union officials were thought to be concerned with self-enrichment at the expense of worker interests. By the time of the Marikana massacre, this perception among workers was near-impossible to shake. AMCU's appeal thus lay in its proven distance from the organs of state and insistence that it drew its mandate from the workers. It is also important to recognise that AMCU was at the time an incipient union that lacked the organisational sophistication of a long-standing union such as NUM. As AMCU's organisation grows in complexity, it remains to be seen whether or not it will be able to maintain its distance from the political parties, from the tentacles of big capital and its own emerging bureaucratic tendencies

This dissertation has attempted to provide insight into the now dominant trade union in the platinum mines. It has provided an account of the events between 2012 and 2014 and that shape AMCU's character and style. These features include its insistence on a non-partisan, independent trade union movement, its return to a democratic, workplace-centred struggle and its call for wage-led economic growth.

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