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Platinum politics: the rise, and rise, of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU)

Munshi, Naadira

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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.