

MARIKANA AS A WAKE-UP CALL FOR DEEP STRUCTURAL REFORM THAT IS LONG OVERDUE

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My new book, *Lost in Transformation*, was launched on the 2nd of August. The Marikana massacre took place two weeks later on the 16th of August. Marikana revealed that much more was lost in the transformation than I could have anticipated. It also revealed the superficiality and the shallowness of the "deals" that were struck during the negotiations in the mid-1990s to create the "new" South Africa.

What became apparent at Marikana is that the apartheid system and the migrant labour system are not dead, but absolutely alive and kicking – much to the embarrassment of the Zuma government, the local and global corporate sectors and the trade union movement.

The Marikana massacre is comparable to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the Soweto unrest of 1976. There are remarkable similarities between these three anti-systemic protest movements. It is quite possible that the ramifications of the Marikana massacre could turn out to be the most radical of these three anti-systemic movements.

The Sharpeville massacre was one consequence of an early protest movement of Africans against the authority of the apartheid regime. The massacre seriously harmed South Africa's image as an attractive investment destination for foreign direct investment (FDI). The most important consequence of Sharpeville was that it prompted the apartheid regime to turn South Africa into a much more repressive political state.

The Soweto unrest of 1976 was a spontaneous protest movement of African children against the poor education system available to them. The protest movement was the spark that ignited the liberation struggle that ultimately brought down the system of white political dominance.

The Marikana massacre represents an important anti-systemic revolt against the post-apartheid establishment that encompasses the ANC government, the corporate sector (especially the mineral energy complex (MEC), the trade union movement and the system of collective bargaining.

Over the past 18 years protest movements against poor service delivery by the ANC's bureaucracy became a defining feature of post-apartheid South Africa. But what has been happening since the Marikana massacre is something fundamentally different. What is occurring since Marikana is an anti-systemic revolt against the malpractices of the post-apartheid establishment. Marikana represents a questioning of the legitimacy of the Zuma government, of the mineral energy complex including the trade union movement, and of South Africa's status as a postcolonial satellite of neoliberal globalization.

The Marikana massacre and the unprotected strikes have put COSATU in a rather uncomfortable position. Leonard Gentle, Sacsis, 24 Sept 2012, alleges that *"the problem is not that COSATU has been too political. The problem is that COSATU has not been political enough. COSATU has abandoned political leadership to the ANC and suffers the*

consequences of being the lap dog of the ruling party's neoliberal policies. But we also need other explanations for the decline of COSATU. There are at least two. One relates to the changing composition of the working class brought about by 20 years of neoliberal capitalism and the other relates to COSATU's involvement in the coup that brought Jacob Zuma to power".

From a broader perspective we can regard what happened at Marikana as a symptom of the serious malfunctioning of the politico-economic system that was agreed upon by the ANC and the business sector in the mid-1990s. But it is mainly during the five years since Polokwane that the faultlines in our new politico-economic system have become much more visible.

The election of Jacob Zuma by a haphazardly constructed majority at Polokwane has created all kinds of contradictions and conflict within the ANC. It led to a spectacular escalation of demands for all kinds of favouritism by those factions which claim that they "delivered" the presidency to Zuma. Demands for favouritism were also made during the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies. But the demands have become much bigger and are expressed much more aggressively. Polokwane opened a Pandora's box that made it obligatory for the Zuma government to expand the scope of the favouritism it dispensed to make it available to more groups and more individuals than was the case during the Mandela and the Mbeki presidencies.

The favouritism, the corruption and the inefficiency of the Zuma presidency have escalated to such levels that they stretch the Zuma government's fiscal capacity to the point of breakdown. The fact that Mangaung will take place in December increases the tension not only within the ANC but also among the broader elite establishment.

Mangaung is not only about the election of an ANC president; it is also about which groups within the broader politico-economic system will be in a stronger bargaining position after Mangaung.

As the tension within the South African elite establishment escalates *en route* to Mangaung and as the Zuma government continues with its pampering of factions within the elite establishment, while excluding those "outside" the elite circle, it was inevitable that something would "trip". This "tripping" occurred at Marikana, with a clear dividing line between the Zuma "insiders" in the ANC, in the trade unions and sections of the local and the global corporate sector, on the one hand, and the growing anti-Zuma elite and a large part of the disgruntled labour force and poor people, on the other.

Eighteen years after the transformation of 1994 South Africa has become a typical two-nation nation. The top 20% receive 75% of total income and the poorest 50% less than 8%. At Marikana the trust between the "haves" and "haves-not" broke down in a spectacular way. I hope the elite establishment will regard Marikana as a final wake-up call to implement the desperately needed structural reforms to rectify the deeply ingrained structural inequalities in the distribution of power, property and opportunities between the top 20% and the impoverished 50%. If we experience another anti-systemic revolt such as Marikana in the near future, it can easily become derailed into a revolution.

Let us not forget what Benjamin Disraeli wrote in 1845 about the "two nations" in Britain:

"Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets. The rich and the poor."

The "gap" between the rich and the poor in South Africa is apparently as big as it was in Britain in the mid-19th century – and it was also to handicap economic growth in Britain from 1817 onwards.