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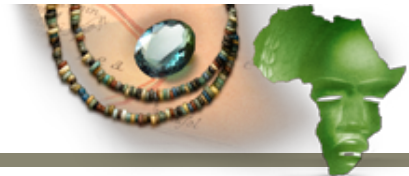
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# South Africa's miners Difficult questions

Aug 21st 2012, 11:47 by J.D. | JOHANNESBURG

THE bodies have been cleared away but families are still



identifying the dead after police killed 34 miners at the Lonmin mine at Marikana in South Africa's North West province last Thursday. Over 200 mineworkers remain in police custody, arrested after the deadly crackdown. On Monday Lonmin, a London-based platinum producer, issued an ultimatum to miners still on strike to report for work by 7am on Tuesday or face dismissal. Following talks with trade unions, the deadline has been extended for another week.

But there is no sign that the situation at Marikana will be resolved any time soon. Speaking to a gathering of several thousand mineworkers at the weekend, Julius Malema, the expelled leader of the Youth League of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and one-time ally of President Jacob Zuma, called for Mr Zuma's resignation and that of the police minister, Nathi Mthethwa, over the affair. Mr Malema also told miners to continue with their strike until they get the pay rise they are demanding. "You must never retreat, even in the face of death," he told them, not far from the site of the shootings. "Many people will die as we struggle for economic freedom," he continued.

The killings have stirred up memories of the worst atrocities of the apartheid era, at Sharpeville, Shell House, Boipatong and Bisho. But Pierre de Vos, a South African constitutional law scholar, bristles at such comparisons, arguing that they are intellectually lazy and unhelpful. South Africa today is a democracy, however flawed.

*“ No matter how wrong-headed and opportunistic our leaders appear to be and no matter how bloody-minded and uncontrollably violent our police have acted, they remain part of a democratic state whose government can easily be voted out of office at the next election if us voters decide that we do not like what the government party has become and what it is doing and saying (or not doing and saying). ”*

Nonetheless, people are watching carefully to see how the government deals with Marikana, and who will be held to account. Mr Zuma has ordered an official inquiry. An inter-ministerial task team has been set up. But he stressed that now was not the time for blame. Riah Phiyega, the police commissioner, also insisted "this is no time for finger-pointing." It is, she said, "a time for us to mourn the sad and dark moment we experienced as a country." The police insist that they were acting in self-defence, that they responded to protect their own lives after being viciously attacked by the miners.

But someone to blame is exactly what many in South Africa are seeking. The killings have raised hard questions about not only the state of policing in South Africa—were the officers trained to deal with such incidents? How effective is the command structure?—but also about the role of the police more generally. Who are they there to protect? South Africa's powerful unions are also coming under scrutiny. What role did the conflict between the long-established National Union of Mineworkers

and the newer Association of Mine Workers and Construction Union play in the violence? And the biggest question of all, one with which South Africa must constantly grapple: how to address the crippling inequality that plagues the country and feeds the anger and frustration of so many of its citizens?

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