

‘Marikana and the MEC’

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The Marikana massacre of 16th August 2012, and the strike wave of which it was part, starkly revealed the key economic and social issues in South Africa today. It highlighted how many features of the apartheid system have not so much been preserved, as actively reproduced. In particular Marikana reveals the nature of South Africa’s extractive economy, highlighted by the notion of the Minerals-Energy Complex (MEC), and how the century old migrant labour system continues to sustain the MEC, despite nearly two decades of reform of the apartheid labour market system. Marikana also exposed the lack of adequate and coordinated planning of the development of a large and important part of South Africa; the platinum belt. The platinum industry itself exhibits the central features of South Africa’s political economy – monopolistic industry structures, tight corporate control and the co-option of emerging black capitalist interests. Platinum extraction also reflects the continuing emphasis of post-apartheid economy on exporting minerals over local beneficiation, the diversification of the economy, and greater employment generation. In addition, Marikana also shone the spotlight on the informal financial sector and growing levels of unsecured debt amongst mineworkers. In sum, Marikana reflects the economic and social failings of post-apartheid development for the majority, the continuing power and determining role of the MEC and white monopoly capital, as well as the virtually unconditional support given to it by the ANC and its newly enriched black elite.