

I HAVE been keeping a close eye on the Farlam Commission, currently conducting the hearing into events that led to the killing of mine-workers at Marikana, in the North West, last year.

The commission was set up by President Jacob Zuma after 34 mineworkers at Marikana were gunned down by the police.

At the centre of the commission's enquiries is the question whether members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) broke the law when they decided to shoot at the striking mineworkers.

The SAPS is therefore expected to respond to questions regarding their operational plans that fateful week and who might have given orders for the police on the ground to use live ammunition against mineworkers.

So far, the missing link in providing an explanation as to what happened within the SAPS in relation to the event seems to be the police commissioner, Riah Phiyega.

Phiyega was appointed some months ago after the previous police commissioner, Bheki Cele, lost his job.

THE first question to emerge among South Africans, after Phiyega was appointed, was whether she was the right person for the job, given her zero experience in police matters.

In her response to criticism that she did not know much about the SAPS, Phiyega pointed to the managerial experience she had acquired in the private sector.

Evidence at the commission thus far has revealed two possible problems about Phiyega. In the first place, she seems to have no interest in answering questions put to her at the commission and she is not even pretending to care about helping the commission to uncover the truth about the Marikana killings.

The only reason for Phiyega avoiding to answer any question would be to protect the minister of police.

If Phiyega comes out in the open and tells the commission that she was informed about specific decisions that resulted in the police being allowed to use live ammunition at Marikana, she would then be asked if she had shared that information with Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa.

This could result in the minister having to answer questions as to whether he authorised or supported the conduct of the police on that fateful day. In order to protect the minis-

ter, Phiyega has not answered any specific questions that could implicate her knowledge of what was going on at Marikana just before the shooting.

In some instances, Phiyega has agreed before the commission that she signed a document without first reading it.

She argued that she thought the document she was signing was similar to the draft that had been brought to her earlier.

When Phiyega was asked any direct question, she answered it in such a way that there would be no follow-up question.

She has made herself appear like someone who knows-

anything in the world as long as it has nothing to do with SAPS.

The only thing she has confirmed at the commission so far is that she is the police commissioner. She just happens not to know anything about what the SAPS has been up to in the time leading up to the Marikana commission.

The way she has answered questions, everyone above her is perfectly protected from taking any responsibility about what may have happened at Marikana.

Perhaps Phiyega is telling the truth when she says she doesn't know any details relating to operational information within

the SAPS in the time leading up to Marikana. After all, she only sees her role as one of political leadership and as someone who doesn't have to get involved in operational matters.

Police, however, are all about operations and the commissioner has to make efforts to familiarise herself with operational matters.

FORMER police commissioner Bheki Cele was often seen at police roadblocks because he was a hands-on commissioner who had an interest in operational matters.

Some would say Cele was too hands-on, eventually getting his hands on the controversial police building lease deal that resulted in him being investigated by a commission and ultimately losing his job.

If the Farlam Commission had happened during Cele's time, he would have made an effort to answer questions put to him.

You can criticise him as much as you want, but Cele knew something about policing and had some respect for people who were asking questions of him.

Phiyega, on the other hand, seems to have no interest in anything that has to do with policing. She passes almost all questions to her juniors within the SAPS.

She is either an unashamed liar who is protecting her political bosses, or a very uninterested commissioner of police.

TAKE IT FROM ME WITH RALPH MATHEKGA

Just who is Phiyega protecting at hearing?