

# Police murder in South Africa

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South Africa is an “angry nation” teetering “on the precipice of something very dangerous with the potential of not being able to stop the fall,” warned Graca Machel, the wife of Nelson Mandela. “We have to be more cautious about how we deal with a society that is bleeding and breathing pain.”

Machel was speaking at the memorial service for Mido Macia, the 27-year-old Mozambican taxi driver who died after being dragged at speed down the road by a South African police van. He was then, according to fellow detainees, beaten in police custody. His crime was to argue with the police over having parked on the wrong side of the road.

Macia’s death has sparked mass outrage. Nine officers have been charged with murder. Outside the court Friday, one protester carried a placard asking, “What have we done to die like dogs?”

As a representative of South Africa’s political elite, Machel has much to fear. She claimed that widespread anger springs from “unaddressed” issues from the country’s apartheid past. The truth is its springs from South Africa’s post-apartheid present. And it is increasingly directed against the African National Congress (ANC) government and its allies, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Nineteen years after the fall of apartheid, workers are still targeted for police killings—but now by black police officers under a majority-black government. Moreover, the brutality meted out is hardly a unique event: last year, 720 people died in police custody or because of police action.

Most important of all has been the turn to brutal police repression against strikes and social protests.

In 2011, there was the beating to death of Andries Tatane during a service delivery protest that led to the arrest of six police officers, with two charged with murder. This was dwarfed by the massacre of 34

striking platinum miners at Marikana last year that sparked a strike wave that developed as a rebellion against the National Union of Mineworkers, the main union in COSATU.

Top ANC figures, such as President Jacob Zuma’s newly appointed deputy Cyril Ramaphosa were politically implicated in the murder. How could it be otherwise, given that the ANC has acted as the favoured party of the bourgeoisie for close to two decades?

Ramaphosa, the multimillionaire director of Marikana’s owner, Lonmin, typifies the social layer represented by the ANC. It has enriched itself through the policies of “Black Economic Empowerment,” while the bulk of the black working class languished in poverty.

The media and the political elite worry about the threat posed to South Africa’s social cohesion, even its survival. Today, South Africa still ranks among the most unequal nations in the world. The richest 10 percent of the population earn just over 51 percent of the country’s total income, while the poorest 20 percent receive less than 1.5 percent. *Business Report* notes that these figures exclude earnings on capital gains, which would increase the gap. It warns that income inequality “has the potential to unravel society at the seams.”

In a similar vein, the *Mail and Guardian* denounced President Jacob Zuma for the “grotesque construction [of his multi-million dollar ranch] at Nkandla and hundreds of millions spent on the rest of his Cabinet,” before turning fire on the “corporate sector” for “flaunting their world-class remuneration packages” and causing “resentment among the workers.” These commentators recognise that South Africa has reached a political watershed.

The ANC has ensured that South Africa remained a lucrative investment location for transnational

corporations and a playground for the national bourgeoisie. In tandem, they have continued to plunder its fabulous natural resources and control its economy—for the small price of handing the aspirant class of black capitalists a slice of the cake.

The ANC did so by trading on its role in the struggle against Apartheid, and in particular thanks to the political services provided by its partners, COSATU and the Stalinist SACP. They played the key role in subordinating the working class to the ANC, portraying it as a vehicle not only of emancipation for the black majority but the eventual socialist transformation of society.

Today, the promises of the ANC Freedom Charter that “The people shall govern” and “The people shall share in the country’s wealth” stand as an indictment of both the ANC and SACP. Instead, a relentless assault on the working class has begun that will throw society into reverse—carried out to meet the demands of the bourgeoisie internationally to offset the global crisis of capitalism through savage austerity measures. That is why, in arguing for personal restraint by the business and political elite, the *Mail and Guardian* declares, “We are approaching a stage where workers might have to agree to 0% wage increases to save jobs and improve competitiveness...”

A fundamental political reality is reasserting itself in South Africa. The basic division in society is not race, but class.

The end of apartheid did not end the oppression of the masses, but revealed its true character. It instituted formal legal equality but preserved real and growing social inequality. The apartheid regime proved to be only one form of the dictatorship of capital.

In the next period the working class must strike out on a new path in its struggle for emancipation. Today, nothing is left of the claim that the democratic and social needs of the working class and oppressed masses can be met under the leadership of the bourgeois nationalist ANC, and without overturning the profit system and challenging imperialist oppression.

A new leadership must be built to mobilise the working class to take state power, expropriate the vast wealth of the bourgeoisie and implement socialist policies based on planned production to provide decent jobs, housing, health care, welfare and education for all. This fight must be waged against global corporations

and banks, and the imperialist powers themselves, demanding that South Africa’s working class reach out to its brothers and sisters the world over through the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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