

# South Africa: Economic Freedom Fighters target voters fed up with African National Congress

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In the latest publicity stunt designed to win disillusioned voters from South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the upcoming general election, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema has threatened to forcibly remove the city manager of the Madibeng municipality—if the city does not do so by January 31.

The Madibeng municipality near Brits in North West province covers Mothutlung, a black community that has been the scene of protests over water shortages amid what the *eNCA* news site describes as the district's worst drought in 80 years.

Residents of Mothutlung first staged service delivery protests on January 12. Two people were confirmed dead during demonstrations the following day. The *Beeld* newspaper named the two as Marikana mineworker Osia Rahube, 28, and photographer Michael Tshele. Police allegedly shot the two while they were en route to the Madibeng municipality with other residents to demand water, though residents say Rahube was on his way to work. Another two residents have since died, including Lerato Seema, who was reportedly thrown off a moving police vehicle.

On the Tuesday following the violence, Malema and several ANC government ministers on a pre-election damage control mission descended separately on Mothutlung. Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa said residents of the township would have running water before the weekend. The area had been supplied by water tankers for the past three months after three pumps broke down simultaneously.

*The New Age* reported, “[Molewa] said [this] was a ‘very strange problem.’ According to Molewa, under normal circumstances, when one of the pumps failed

the remaining two were supposed to keep operating. The same problem had been seen in three other areas.”

The minister blamed sabotage. South African National Defence Force water tanks had to be brought in to distribute water after residents rejected the municipal contractors engaged for the task.

Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa urged residents with information on police violence to help the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) with its investigations. Accompanied by national police commissioner, General Riah Phiyega, Mthethwa told Rahube's family that people should not die for services. The minister was booed as he left the Rahube home. Malema, who had been earlier refused entry to the area, then visited the Rahubes, promising that he would donate a head of cattle to each of the families of the deceased.

Last Friday Mthethwa announced that six police officers had been suspended and a further eight, including some who were present at the mass killing at Marikana in August 2012, would be suspended amid the ongoing IPID investigation. According to the minister, the “SSG” 12-gauge rounds used by police in Mothutlung, which contain pellets, were officially discontinued by the South African Police Service (SAPS) in 2006 and were “not supposed to be used.” Mthethwa added, unconvincingly, that there was no culture of impunity in the SAPS.

The financially embattled local government of Madibeng was among eight North West municipalities placed under administration in 2009 and 2010. Auditor-General Terence Nombembe found that Madibeng could not account for nearly US\$100 million worth of expenditures last year. Ahead of the 2009 local

government elections, the district was already a hotbed of protest.

A report in *Business Day* notes, “Last year’s intervention by then local government minister Richard Baloyi has also come to naught. A watered down version of Mr Baloyi’s report was adopted in council, with the names of the municipal officials suspected of misconduct removed. The report recommended criminal charges against three officials at the centre of the financial mismanagement.”

Only after the most recent upheavals did ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe visit North West. In a move that shows the alarm in the ANC executive over their election prospects in North West, three ANC councillors then resigned their posts following a January 21 council meeting: Mayor Poppy Magongwa, Council Speaker Buti Makhongela and the ANC’s chief whip in Madibeng, Solly Malete. Councillor Tshidi Mangoathe is now acting mayor. Councillor Douglas Maimane, who was hit in the face with a water bottle during a funeral service for the deceased protesters, was appointed speaker, while Simon Klaas took the position of chief whip.

All this is grist to Malema’s mill. Last Tuesday, he officially kicked off the EFF’s election campaign at Umjindi township near the mining town of Barberton by labelling ANC Mpumalanga Premier David Mabuza a “mafia.” The EFF is making inroads with deserters from the ANC in the province. These include former ANC chief whip in the Thaba Chweu municipality (Mashishing) Paul Mogotsenyana, who defected to the EFF after complaining of too much corruption; ANC veteran Joe Nkuna; former ANC chief in the Mbombela council, Mfana Nkosi; former ANC Youth League (ANCYL) secretary Sonnyboy Maphanga and former ANCYL treasurer Godrich Gardee.

This recruitment of ex-ANCYL members will further weaken the ANC. Before Malema’s expulsion, ANCYL members were traditionally the foot soldiers that the ANC deployed for electioneering, together with union officials and members from Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) affiliates. Since the powerful National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) withdrew its electoral and financial support for the ANC, ANC executives have been scrambling to minimise further electoral fallout.

In this environment, Malema has capitalised on such

scandals as the US\$20 million of state resources spent on the private Nkandla compound of President Jacob Zuma in KwaZulu-Natal province. There, the EFF financed the building of a home for a neighbour of the Zumas, S’thandiwe Hlongwane. During the handover of the completed house, just 300 metres from the perimeter fence of Zuma’s homestead, Malema and his supporters were pelted with rocks. The police intervened with truncheons, a water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets. With the media circus over, Hlongwane is now reported to be living in fear in the ANC stronghold.

The South African working class has nothing to gain from the handouts and the fake-left rhetoric of Malema and his EFF, which defends capitalist property relations and only seeks a larger share of an existing pie for itself. Many are increasingly aware that only in a fundamental reorganisation of society can all their needs be met. As a resident of Madibeng, Maria Maluleka, said, “Before [December] we had no water for months. [But] I want more than water. I want a job for my child [who has passed Grade 12], I want cleaner streets—and no more corrupt officials.”



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