

Former South African police boss exploits footballer's murder in comeback bid

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Disgraced former South African Police Commissioner Bheki Cele has mounted publicity stunts calculated to boost his popularity with a public grieving over the shooting death of national soccer team captain Senzo Meyiwa on October 26.

Meyiwa died shortly after being shot by robbers in the home of his girlfriend's mother, in Vosloorus township in Ekurhuleni, east of Johannesburg.

Police have questioned 13 people. One, Zanokuhle Mbatha, was remanded in custody and was to appear in court on November 11 on murder and robbery charges despite his corroborated alibi. He was released for lack of evidence.

At Meyiwa's memorial service, Cele entered Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium to loud cheers. "South Africa has lost a son and lost a captain," he intoned. "I think South Africans as a whole, not only the state agencies, but everybody, must rise against this criminality and say 'enough is enough'."

On November 4, Cele was again met by cheering supporters on arrival at the Vosloorus Civic Centre for a meeting "to discuss crime", according to *City Press*. In the company of Ekurhuleni Mayor Mondli Gungubele, African National Congress (ANC) Ekurhuleni Chairperson Mzwandile Masina and Gauteng ANC Youth League Chairperson Matome Chiloane, Cele said criminals should have no peace. "Criminals should fear communities," he stressed. "We cannot have cats fearing mice. Criminals are mice and the communities are the cats."

In President Jacob Zuma's first administration, Cele served as police commissioner from 2009 to 2011. The appointment was his reward for having joined forces with the anti-Thabo Mbeki, bloc which saw Zuma capture the ANC presidency in 2007.

Under Cele, the ranks of the South African Police

Service (SAPS) were again militarised, as they had been during the white supremacist Apartheid regime. Superintendents again became warrant officers, while the commissioner styled himself a general.

Cele called for greater use of force by police members at a time of escalating crime. He said that Section 49 of the Criminal Procedure Act should be changed, allowing police to "shoot to kill."

The act already allowed police officers and citizens to use deadly force if there were reasonable grounds for it. However, Cele claimed that police members spent more time weighing up whether a situation called for deadly force or not, when they should rather "shoot first" and "aim for the head."

He subsequently denied having said this, claiming to have advocated use of deadly force by police only under specific circumstances. Still, he had by then won the adulation of some of the most reactionary elements of society.

Cele originally disseminated his philosophy of policing while serving as KwaZulu-Natal provincial cabinet member for community safety. In the 2008-09 fiscal year, KwaZulu-Natal had 258 deaths in police custody. This was more than any other province and an increase of 83 over the previous 12-month period. "In response to these figures," the *Weekend Argus* reported, "Cele ... wanted to know whether this included suicides, natural deaths and people collected by police after being assaulted."

Among the more harrowing tales is that of Mido Macia. Taxi driver Macia got into an altercation with members of the SAPS in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni for having stopped in a no-parking zone. Police handcuffed him to the back of their van, dragged him along the road to the police station and threw him into the holding cells where he died.

During an April 13, 2011 march on the Setsoto municipal offices in Ficksburg, Orange Free State, teacher and journalist Andries Tatane tried to block a police water cannon. A policeman grabbed him around the arm. Tatane pulled his arm away and then approached the officer, at which point the policeman assaulted him with a baton. Four or five other officers joined in the attack, kicking and beating Tatane with batons. He was shot twice in the chest and died on the scene 20 minutes later.

The Marikana massacre of August 16, 2012, came only months after Cele was fired for corruption from the leadership of the police. This was the most lethal use of force by police against civilians since the Sharpeville killings of 1960.

Many victims—striking miners from Lonmin’s Karee mine—were shot in the back. Of the 34 deaths in total, some fatalities occurred far from police lines. This indicates that the security forces had conducted a “search and destroy” operation after they fired on the main body of strikers. Police sought out and executed civilians who had fled the initial attack, concealed themselves and posed no threat whatsoever.

The Marikana Commission of Inquiry set up by Zuma is at the end of its evidence-gathering and must submit a report by March. George Bizos, SC, for the Legal Resources Centre, has warned that it must not be used to exonerate police, like so many other commissions of inquiry during Afrikaner minority rule. “It would be completely unacceptable to the people of South Africa ... if the police are said [to be] not to blame for anything,” Bizos said.

Yet there are already signs the commission is a whitewash. The two commissioners besides retired judge Ian Farlam, Pingla Devi Hemraj, SC, and Bantubonke Tokota, SC, according to the *Daily Maverick*, have asked questions of witnesses that seek to deflect blame from the SAPS.

The growing militarisation of the police starkly exposes the class nature of the ANC government. If it once again looks like the police have become a legally-protected tool for the repression of citizens, this is because, though apartheid has ended, capitalist rule is alive and well, courtesy of the ANC government.

The ANC’s bourgeois and petty bourgeois leadership never had any intention of challenging the economic system underpinning apartheid, above all the

concentration of enormous ill-gotten wealth in the hands of white capitalists. They merely wanted to share in the fruits of the exploitation of the working class. Such brutality as the police perpetrate today is a way of terrorising the poor, the usual victims of bourgeois state-sanctioned violence.

For the ANC and its partners, the masses must be coerced into accepting their exploitation. The economic immiseration of workers has in fact been worsened under the ANC government. Indeed, having left white wealth untouched, the ANC elite that joined the ranks of the previously all-white exploiters needed its own source of funds secured from the rest of the black majority.

Cele plays his own small role in all this historical drama of contending social forces. He is complicit in all the innocent blood shed by police since the ANC took power.

Cele is no friend of the ordinary South Africans squeezed by high crime rates on one hand and police brutality on the other. He is a self-promoter and a misanthrope. For him, the only significance of the tragic loss of Senzo Meyiwa is an opportunity to boost his career in the realignment of ANC factions now underway.



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