Angola’s MPLA regime kills 22 anti-austerity protestors, arrests 1,200

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At least 22 people have been killed, hundreds injured, and more than 1,200 arrested in some of the largest protests Angola has seen since the end of its civil war in 2002.

The protests erupted in response to austerity measures imposed by the long-ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The immediate trigger was the decision to cut fuel subsidies, raising diesel prices from 300 to 400 kwanzas ($0.33 to $0.44) per litre. This sent transport and food costs soaring in a country mired in poverty and inequality. In early July, small-scale protests began following the announcement. But the movement escalated into mass demonstrations on Monday when *candongueiro* drivers, who operate the blue and white minibus taxis that transport much of Angola’s working class, launched a three-day strike.

Tens of thousands joined the strike nationally. In Luanda’s Cazenga district, police shot at protestors and people storming shops to get food and supplies. Shops and businesses shut down as armed security forces patrolled the streets. Clashes were reported in Rocha Pinto and Prenda, while protests spread to Huambo, Lubango, and Benguela. In Lubango, a police officer shot and killed a 16-year-old who was part of a group attempting to enter MPLA offices.

“Why do you make us suffer like this? How will we feed our children? The prices have to go down,” one woman told TV Nzinga. “People are fed up. Hunger is everywhere, and the poor are becoming miserable,” another told the BBC. “The government ignores its people,” Luanda teacher Daniel Pedro told AFP. “They say youth are the future, yet today we are unemployed. I feel deeply insecure.”

Fuel subsidies have served as a lifeline in Angola, helping the population afford basic goods. But under IMF demands, the government is phasing them out. This follows subsidy cuts initiated in 2023 and April 2024, which raised gasoline prices by about 87 percent in June 2023 and diesel prices by 48 percent in April 2024. The Finance Ministry aims to eliminate all fuel subsidies by the end of 2025 to reduce the budget deficit and meet debt obligations, which stand at approximately $58 billion, accounting for 63 percent of the country’s GDP.

At a press briefing in March 2024, the IMF stated: “The removal of subsidies is very important to ensure fiscal consolidation.” The IMF cynically emphasised the critical need for “good strategic communication and mitigation measures aimed at the poorest sections of the population.”

Angola’s deepening crisis is rooted in the collapse of global oil prices since 2015 and declining domestic production. Although it remains sub-Saharan Africa’s second-largest oil producer, the vast revenues generated have enriched only a narrow elite in the MPLA and their foreign backers. Over half the population lives below the poverty line, unemployment stands at nearly 30 percent, youth unemployment surpasses 50 percent in some areas, and inflation neared 20 percent in June. Public services are in ruins.

What began as a protest against subsidy withdrawals has now become an uprising against decades of social misery.

The massacre of demonstrators by the MPLA regime exposes the rotten character of bourgeois nationalism. Nearly 50 years ago, MPLA leader Agostinho Neto declared, “Concretely realizing the aspirations of the great masses of our people, the People’s Republic of Angola will, under the guidance of MPLA, gradually advance toward a people’s democratic state. With the alliance of the workers and the peasants as its nucleus, all patriotic sectors will be united against imperialism and its agents in the struggle for the construction of a society without exploiters and without exploited.”

That promise was made in the aftermath of a heroic 13-year guerrilla war against the fascist Portuguese dictatorship, which ended with the Carnation Revolution in April 1974. But soon after independence in 1975, Angola was plunged into a 27-year civil war, stoked by the US and South Africa, which backed the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) to crush the Soviet Union/Cuban backed MPLA. Up to a million people died, and millions more were displaced.

Following the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, the MPLA—like its counterparts FRELIMO in Mozambique and the African National Congress in South Africa—abandoned any nominal reference to socialism, rebranding themselves as pro-business parties and imposing IMF market reforms, austerity and privatisations.

Today, Angola is being dragged into the maelstrom of

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imperialist war amid the new scramble for Africa. Angola has now become one of the most pro-US regimes on the continent. The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) is deepening military cooperation with the MPLA regime under the guise of "preventative security assistance."

In a statement during a recent visit to Angola and Namibia amid the anti-austerity protests, AFRICOM's Deputy Commander Lt. Gen. John Brennan cited bogus claims of threats of ISIS/Islamic State in southern Africa and "emerging Mexican drug cartels" to justify expanded US-Angolan military exercises and maritime surveillance support. AFRICOM's aim was to "keep Namibia and Angola free of those threats as well as to prepare them for any future threats" through training and equipment.

This amounts to the militarisation of Angola's strategic coastline and its integration into the US's global war machine, as Washington accelerates preparations for conflict with China.

Angola is a key component of the Lobito Corridor, which the previous Biden administration and now Trump have aggressively promoted as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The corridor links the copper and cobalt-rich Democratic Republic of Congo to the Atlantic Ocean via Angolan rail and port infrastructure. US officials openly describe how "security is leveraging economic development and vice versa."

The military drill Obangame Express in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Guinea last May, that stretched from Cabo Verde to Angola, is one of three African regional "Express" military exercises organised by AFRICOM and facilitated by the US Sixth Fleet. They are being conducted alongside naval upgrades to protect these strategic trade routes, with AFRICOM helping Angola track and intercept vessels off its coast.

The plunder of Angola's and Central Africa's vast natural resources—oil, gas, copper, and rare earth minerals—is driven by the logic of war. The same imperialist powers enforcing IMF austerity, backing the genocide in Gaza, waging war against Russia in Ukraine, and preparing for conflict with China in the Pacific, are embedding their military forces across the African continent under the guise of "capacity-building." They are transforming African territory, airspace, and infrastructure into a forward base for war, positioning for a confrontation between US imperialism and China.

China has played a central role in shaping Angola's post-war economy. Since the early 2000s, Beijing has become Angola's largest bilateral creditor, extending tens of billions of dollars in oil-backed loans to finance infrastructure projects—roads, railways, hospitals, and housing developments—constructed largely by Chinese state-owned firms. These deals, dubbed the "Angola Model," tying credit to guaranteed oil exports have allowed the MPLA elite to maintain liquidity. But like other African regimes, Angola's ruling elite is being forced to choose sides in an escalating conflict.

The masses in Angola have no allies in any faction of the Angolan bourgeoisie. A way forward is to be found in the rising struggles of workers and youth across Africa and the world.

The collapse of the old anti-colonial nationalist movements is accelerating across the continent.

In Namibia, SWAPO has seen its support collapse under the weight of mass unemployment, inequality, and corruption. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), which has ruled since the fall of apartheid, lost its parliamentary majority last year for the first time in 30 years. In Botswana, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), in power since independence in 1966, suffered a historic defeat last December.

In Mozambique, the ruling FRELIMO regime declared itself the winner of last October's elections amid widespread accusations of fraud. The contested results unleashed mass protests, fuelled by poverty and corruption, and led to the deaths of over 300 people in the largest opposition mobilisation in post-independence history. In Nigeria, President Bola Tinubu's elimination of fuel subsidies in 2023 provoked mass protests and rampant inflation. In Kenya, President William Ruto's IMF-backed tax hikes have sparked an ongoing nationwide protests that has left hundreds dead, disappeared, and tortured.

These experiences confirm the organic incapacity of Africa's bourgeois nationalist parties to fulfil the aspirations of the masses for democracy, social equality, and liberation from foreign domination. Having abandoned all pretence of national liberation, they now function as local enforcers for global finance capital.

These protests are part of a growing international movement of the working class. Across Europe and North America, workers are seeking ways to oppose austerity and wage cuts to pay for ramped-up military spending. What must be done is to unite the working class across borders in a revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society based on planned production to meet human need, not private profit.

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