

Child dies amid far-right anti-immigrant campaign cultivated by South Africa's ANC

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The xenophobic atmosphere fostered by South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) is being utilised by far-right parties. They have begun preventing foreign workers from accessing public hospitals, forced the closure of shops run by foreigners, attacked employers for hiring immigrants, and are threatening to prevent the children of foreigners from attending public schools next year.

A one-year-old baby died in late July as a direct result of actions by far-right thugs. Grace Manda, a 21-year-old mother from Malawi who was living in South Africa without legal documents, rushed her son to Masakhane Clinic in Alexandra, a working-class township in Johannesburg. Her baby was suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting, but members of Operation Dudula—a far-right vigilante group—blocked their access to the clinic, demanding proof of citizenship and intimidating staff and patients.

Turned away, Manda carried her son to another clinic, where staff, fearing reprisals from Dudula members, also refused to treat him. Desperate, she took a taxi to yet another clinic, only to encounter the same hostility. Finally, she found a private doctor who examined the child and sent them home. By the following morning, he was unresponsive and was later declared dead. Terrified of exposure and deportation, she kept silent until the story was reported in the media months later.

Manda, in tears, told *News24*, "I told them I was from Malawi and only had a passport. They [Operation Dudula] advised me to consult a private doctor or hospital. I pleaded with them to help my son, but they flatly refused".

Operation Dudula, from the Zulu word for "push back," emerged in 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, initially in Johannesburg's Soweto townships. From the start, Dudula targeted African and Asian migrants, organising marches, raids on informal traders, and door-to-door intimidation campaigns to drive immigrants out of communities and workplaces. It has spread to other urban centres across South Africa, drawing support from sections of unemployed youth.

For the 2024 elections, Dudula transformed itself into a political party. Despite wall-to-wall media coverage it won only 3,855 votes, underscoring its lack of mass support. That it has nonetheless been able to launch violent campaigns against immigrants, handed a national platform by the capitalist media, is above all due to the ANC, whose scapegoating of foreigners has created the political basis for such reactionary forces to thrive.

Over the past 11 months, the ANC has imposed a blockade in Stilfontein where 90 miners, mostly undocumented immigrants, died after being prevented from accessing food and water. In Barberton, 1,000 migrant gold miners were arrested for working without permits. These two operations were part of the ANC's violent anti-immigrant Operation Vala Umgodi (Plug the Hole), whose stated aim is to stop unlicensed miners from operating in the country.

The operation is led by former National Chairperson of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and current Minister of Petroleum and

Mineral Resources, Gwede Mantashe, who described arrested miners in Stilfontein as "foreign nationals raping our economy".

This rhetoric has been repeated at other party levels. At an ANC youth conference last month, ANC Youth League (ANCYL) President Collen Malatji said, "The issue of crime and violence in this country is huge. Our towns are taken over by criminals, mainly illegal foreigners". In a separate meeting, ANC's Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana said, "Whether legal or illegal, it [immigration] is a problem". He proceeded to attack the constitutional principle that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it", which he called "a grave mistake".

In parliament, Health Portfolio Committee Chair Dr. Sibongiseni Dhlomo said, "The country should provide emergency services to all—that is binding in terms of the UN rules. Comprehensive health care is for South Africans." In other words, foreigners must be excluded.

Dhlomo confirmed that plans are underway within the Home Affairs Department to review and possibly repeal the South African Citizenship Act, Refugees Act, Identification Act and the Immigration Act. "Some of these acts are wide and encompassing. Maybe they should have limitations", Dhlomo stated.

Dudula's campaign has been escalated by the ANC's ally in government, the far-right Patriotic Alliance (PA), which won 677,719 votes in 2024. It is a member of the ANC-led Government of National Unity with the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Founded in 2013 by businessman, former bank robber and convicted criminal Gayton McKenzie, the PA presents itself as a defender of "South Africans first," mimicking Donald Trump's rhetoric with a programme built on virulent anti-immigrant chauvinism, law-and-order demagogic, and appeals to South African nationalism. McKenzie now serves as Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture in the ANC-led Government of National Unity.

The party's central slogan, *abahambe* ("they must leave"), is chanted by vigilante mobs against immigrants. McKenzie popularised the phrase during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he declared, "If there is a South African, Zimbabwean or Mozambican patient on oxygen, and I see a South African patient, born and bred in South Africa, I will turn the oxygen off, so that the South African can live."

In June, just weeks before the toddler's death, the PA openly joined Dudula's campaign. In videos documenting their actions, PA members march into hospitals demanding that patients produce IDs to prove they are South African citizens. They have stormed informal shops owned by foreign nationals and forced their closure, taking Dudula's vigilante tactics into the political mainstream.

Two months ago, anti-black remarks by McKenzie resurfaced on X, in which he, a "Coloured" man, hurled the slur "kaffir". Originally meaning "infidel" in Arabic but under colonialism and the apartheid white supremacist regime (1948–1994) the word turned into one of the most degrading terms used to dehumanise black South Africans. In South Africa, "Coloured" was another racist term under apartheid to classify

people of mixed ancestry, including descendants of enslaved Africans and Asians, indigenous Khoisan peoples, and Europeans. Although Coloured South Africans were oppressed under apartheid, they were placed in the racial hierarchy above black Africans but below whites.

That McKenzie, who openly recycles the language of white supremacist rule, was personally invited by President Cyril Ramaphosa to serve in his cabinet is a damning indictment of the ANC and the entire post-apartheid order. Confronted with South Africa's deepening capitalist crisis, the ANC has systematically worked to deflect mounting anger away from its own corrupt elite and onto the most vulnerable. By scapegoating immigrants, it has cultivated the poisonous climate that is now claiming lives.

The attack on migrants takes place amid a jobs slaughter under the ANC-led government. In the year to June, South Africa has shed 229,000 jobs. Since then, the jobs cull has continued to spread, with ArcelorMittal South Africa cutting 4,000 jobs. The Africa Growth and Opportunity Act—a US trade scheme granting duty-free access to key exports like cars and agricultural products—is approaching expiration, with Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminium already battering the local industry. Together, these measures threaten to collapse entire sectors, including automotive manufacturing, leading to tens of thousands of job cuts.

Unemployment stands at 33 percent, 8.2 million people. Including discouraged job seekers, unemployment sits at 43 percent. Youth unemployment stands at 46 percent among those aged 15 - 34. Fully 55 percent of the population lives below the upper poverty line of R1,634 (\$95), while 25 percent live below the food poverty line of R796 (\$47) per month.

Workers continue to suffer from inadequate access to essential necessities such as water and electricity. This has resulted in tremendous anger within the working class, which has erupted in protests like those recently seen in Westbury, Johannesburg.

The ANC fears a similar eruption of class struggle to that which has swept the continent in countries such as Madagascar, Morocco, Angola, Mozambique, and Kenya, against inequality, corruption, and austerity. It is inciting racism and nationalism to redirect social anger produced by capitalism and imperialism, against immigrants, to protect the domination of South Africa's ruling class.

Amid public outrage over the death of Manda's son, the bourgeois populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are attempting to posture as opponents of the xenophobic campaign. The EFF has filed a murder charge against Dudula, and its leader Julius Malema declared on X, "Operation Dudula is a group of thugs and must be subjected to the political killing task team."

Malema for years spoke in favour of African unity and even called for the abolition of borders across the continent. However, as the capitalist crisis intensified, he too has joined in the anti-migrant campaign. In May 2025, *TimesLIVE* quoted Malema stating, "We don't want to know if you're a relative, we don't want to know which language you speak. If you're South African and qualified, get the job... We have no problem hiring people from outside but start with locals."

African Insider published a speech where Malema said, "South Africans should receive first preference amid high unemployment." At a rally this August, he told his supporters, "We don't disagree that Zimbabweans should be given jobs, but they should be given jobs in their municipalities in Harare and other areas, so we have opportunities to get jobs in our municipalities."

The uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) Party, founded by former ANC president Jacob Zuma, is firmly on board. In Durban, MK Party's "Labour Desk" organised Dudula-style marches and a "business blitz" targeting employers and workers it labelled "illegal foreigners," including on-street checkpoints and factory inspections. Local roads were blocked during the action.

The ANC once promised equality for all, proclaiming in the Freedom Charter that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it." Once it came to power, the ANC claimed, the end of the white supremacist Apartheid regime would open the doors to black majority rule under capitalism and resolve the fundamental democratic aspirations of the black masses: freedom, equality, and social advancement.

Three decades in power have shown the opposite: its historic role was to safeguard the interests of global finance capital and enrich a thin stratum of black elites, while most workers, above all black workers, have been driven into ever-deeper poverty.

Its campaign of scapegoating immigrants, often targeting citizens of countries that once gave their blood and resources to support the ANC's armed struggle—providing bases, headquarters, and shelter while bearing the brunt of apartheid's military raids and economic blockades—demonstrates the complete degeneration of this pro-capitalist, nationalist project.

Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution is confirmed in South Africa. As Trotsky explained, in countries of belated capitalist development the genuine resolution of democratic and national tasks can only be carried out by the working-class taking power and leading the rural masses, as part of the struggle for world socialism. Under capitalism, whether under white supremacist minority rule or black majority rule, oppression, inequality, and exploitation persist. Today, the racist filth that was the bread and butter of apartheid is being revived by the ANC.

The only way forward for completing the unfinished democratic and social tasks is through a socialist revolution. All major banks, mines, industrial conglomerates, and the sectors essential to social life, such as land, agriculture, education, healthcare, telecommunications, energy, and transport, must be placed under public ownership and democratic control.

This requires the unconditional political independence of the working class from all capitalist parties, including the ANC, DA, PA, EFF, and MK. The urgent task is to forge a new revolutionary leadership based on an internationalist and socialist perspective. This means the construction of a South African section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to unite workers across national borders in the fight for the United Socialist States of Africa as part of the struggle for world socialism.



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