

10 obituary

A Warrior Queen

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's passing occurred as SA's political crisis had plunged new depths. Barely three months earlier, a debilitating factional civil war had brought the ANC close to the brink of a split at a conference that narrowly avoided collapse. The political crisis in the ANC is in reality rooted in a growing questioning of the post-apartheid dispensation that has not only failed to solve the problems of poverty, mass unemployment and inequality, but has deeply aggravated them.

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Executive Committee

Both ANC factions sought to use Winnie's death to portray themselves as united in grief and committed to her wish for the ANC's renewal. It is to the credit of Winnie's daughters that they took the opportunity both to remind the masses of the role she played in the liberation struggle, but also the ANC leadership's crimes against her. It is therefore unsurprising that all the controversies that surrounded Winnie whilst she was alive, would be resurrected after it ended.

In sharp contrast to the reverence for Mandela, the capitalist media, especially internationally, exhibited their loathing. Obituaries ranged from naked hatred to more subtle reminders of her alleged "dark side." The right-wing British *Daily Mail's* headline read: "Winnie the Blood Soaked Bully Who Shamed the Name Mandela". *Reuters* ran with: "Mother then Mugger of the New South Africa, Dead at 81".

Obituaries by the likes of City Press editor Mondli Makhanya and columnist Palesa Murodu are merely pitiful regurgitations of the narrative planted in the media by the apartheid regime's most successful Stratcom "Black Ops". Whilst they might argue they could not see the facts hidden in plain sight, former president Thabo Mbeki's bitter spiteful comments fall into a different category entirely – that of conscious treachery. He alleged Winnie lacked discipline and was prone to drawing attention to herself. He condemned her 1989 statement that "with our matches and our necklaces we will liberate ourselves" as reckless.

Yet Mbeki showed extraordinary generosity towards the apartheid oppressor and its collaborators attending the funeral of US president Ronald Reagan, infamous for

his neo-liberal attack on the US and world working class who defended the apartheid regime in "constructive engagement." Mbeki praised Transkei leader Kaiser Matanzima, whose collaboration with the regime lost Winnie her mother, as "exemplary". Most disgracefully Mbeki granted PW Botha a state funeral in 2006. In his 3 November 2006, weekly ANC newsletter, Mbeki said "PW Botha and OR Tambo were partners in bringing peace to South Africa though, tragically, they never met; they were partners in the creation of the peace of the brave".

Botha presided over a police state, the occupation of black townships, the detention, torture and killings of thousands during the mid-80s states of emergency. He ordered bombing raids of ANC bases in neighbouring states and the instigation of ethnic fueled "black-on-black" violence.

Why the campaign of vilification?

The ANC's accession to power was prepared by resurgence of mass resistance, starting with the 1973 Durban strike, followed by the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the highly successful 1983 Tricameral Parliament boycott, the 1984 September Vaal general strike and the 1985 launch of Cosatu. That Cosatu was born in the middle of the first state of emergency demonstrated that the regime could not hold out against a movement that was soon to assume insurrectionary proportions.

Far more than the ANC's armed actions, it was the organised working class whose vanguard in Cosatu had concluded that apartheid and capitalism were two sides of the same bloody coin that compelled the strategists of capital into a radical rethink. Fearing that not only apartheid, but capitalism itself was threatened, secret talks were initiated. The ANC leaders were willing accomplices in devising a negotiated settlement based on adorning the economic dictatorship of the capitalist class with the mask of parliamentary democracy – to introduce bourgeois reforms from the top to stop socialist revolution from below.

This is the context in which the slander unleashed against Winnie must be understood. With ties to the masses that the jailed and exiled leadership lacked, Winnie was considered a threat. Winnie, like Chris Hani, was rightly suspicious both of the motives of the regime and the willingness of the leadership to accommodate themselves to its demands and that of its capitalist backers. She made it clear she would watch the negotiations closely and



would be the first one to pick up her gun should they go wrong.

Her necklace statement – a warning that despite the regime's armed might, the masses would liberate themselves with whatever means at their disposal – was interpreted as a potential obstruction of the type of settlement the regime wanted. Winnie, far more than any other ANC leader, was the real barometer of the revolutionary temper of the masses.

Following the assassinations of Victoria and Griffiths Mxenge, youth activists established the Mandela United Football Club, to protect her. As the award winning documentary "Winnie" reconfirmed, the regime infiltrated it. Jerry Richardson, her personal bodyguard was a police agent. It was self-evident in the regime's interests that the club should carry out arson attacks, assaults, kidnappings and the murders of Stompie, Sono, Dr Asvat and others. Winnie, sensing the hand of the regime in the violence, appealed in vain for the team to desist. "Black-on-black" violence and discrediting Winnie, portraying her as a bloodthirsty opponent of peace and the negotiated settlement the ANC leadership was committed to, were part of the same strategy. The facts revealed by the Winnie documentary were not so much new as a coherent knitting together of all the threads of the regime's operations. The regime's assassination of Hani and Winnie's character served the same purpose – to decapitate a possible rebellion against the Codesa settlement.

The experience of nearly a quarter of a century of ANC rule has vindicated Winnie's pre-settlement skepticism. Unfortunately the problem with Winnie's radical nationalism was that it was not consciously anti-capitalist. Nationalism, however radical, seeks a solution within the framework of capitalism. The ending of white-minority rule could only have raised the living standards of the working class black majority if apartheid's capitalist economic foundations were simultaneously overthrown and the path towards the socialist transformation of society embarked upon.