



ANC: Business as usual, but fresh forces assemble to its left

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The seizure of the infamously wealthy and corrupt Gupta brothers' assets is another nail in President Jacob Zuma's coffin. Closely associated with the Guptas for so long, their names are regularly joined as the 'Zuptas', a euphemism for cronyism, now it seems like they're all going down together.

The ANC has already dropped Zuma like a hot brick but it is unclear whether this will be enough to keep them in power for long.

A new ANC?

Cyril Ramaphosa has become the latest African liberation struggle veteran to emerge as the self-proclaimed anti-corruption reformer and pose as the saviour of his embattled party and, by extension, the nation. But, like neighbouring Zimbabwe's Emmerson Mnangagwa, the recently elected leader of Zanu-PF, Ramaphosa, whose net worth is estimated at more than \$450 million, is hardly likely to prove a scourge of corruption or to address the issues of chronic unemployment, poverty and inequality, which have plagued post-apartheid South Africa since birth.

How a leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) under Apartheid, and a self-declared socialist too, became a millionaire might surprise the unwary but like many ANC leaders, Black Economic Empowerment, BEE, meant his own enrichment. Meanwhile, the poor of the townships and the workers in the factories or on the land saw little empowerment or enrichment.

Like Mnangagwa in Zanu-PF, Ramaphosa used his 8 January speech, celebrating the ruling ANC's 106th anniversary, to call for party unity: 'We must rid ourselves of factionalism. We do not want a divided African National Congress? One of the things Comrade Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said was: 'divided we fall, united we stand'. That has a great deal of meaning.'

By naming his narrowly defeated (by 51 per cent to 49 per cent) opponent in the ANC's presidential election of 18 December 2017, Ramaphosa was trying to placate the anxieties of the powerful wing of the party, who have benefited, and continue to benefit, from the backhanders, government contracts and illicit financial manoeuvres that have characterised President Jacob Zuma's reign. 'You have nothing to fear from me? so long as we need to unite to defeat the Democratic Alliance (the former ruling National Party) in the 2019 election.'

But Dlamini-Zuma, aka NDZ, is widely despised among community, trade union and student activists. Backed by her former husband in any deal to replace him as interim president before 2019, NDZ heads an ANC faction that still controls key posts within the party, and which took the policy of BEE both literally and personally.

This, as Sipho Pityana explained to the Financial Times, is how the huge and lucrative web of corruption known as 'state capture' works:

'The essence of this is that you compromise the head of state, that you have the head of state in your pocket? You disable all the law enforcement institutions and you enable unfettered access to people who owe their positions in office to the pleasure of the president. You have virtual, unfettered right to appoint and fire very senior people in government, including cabinet ministers, intelligence officers, state-owned enterprise people and all key strategic appointments that

you think would obstruct or enable your way into the state coffers. It is a single-minded penetration of state resources.?

Jacob Zuma has belatedly launched an inquiry into state capture but this is a cynical bid to delay his inevitable ousting. Having been snubbed by Ramaphosa in her bid to be named interim president, NDZ and her fellow cronies, the ?Zuptas?, want to weaken Ramaphosa?s candidate, so they can stop him becoming the ANC?s 2019 presidential choice.

Who is Ramaphosa?

Ramaphosa says he wants to ?reduce concentration of ownership and control in the economy and to open the market to new black-owned companies?; despite a nod towards workers? co-ops and representation on boards, no real break from BEE. He wants to create jobs in manufacturing, hinting at protectionism, quotas or tax breaks; but is silent on poverty pay and trade union rights.

Most attention though has focused on his commitment to nationalise all of South Africa?s land ?without compensation?. However, this is not a socialist act in any way, shape or form.

Ramaphosa made sure it was interpreted as a pro-market act. He said the ?expropriation of land will be implemented, taking into account all the things that are important, such as the growth of our economy, agricultural production as well as food security?. This is code for telling the white agribusinesses and farmers that they will be left to lease back the land at peppercorn rents since they are the ones who know how to run capitalist farms.

Ramaphosa has called for a ?non-racial South Africa? and is supported by the so-called White Monopoly Capital faction of the ANC. But it is only what the South African black working class has come to expect from this traitor and accomplice to murder.

Despite forming the South African NUM in 1980 and leading many courageous strikes against apartheid, Ramaphosa?s rightward journey is well documented and widely known.

In 1987 he led, and then sold out, the revolutionary miners? strike, which had the old Apartheid regime on the ropes. For his services, Ramaphosa was a few years later recruited by the ANC?s leadership to head negotiations to end Apartheid in a reformist way that secured the future of White Monopoly Capital via the Sunset Clause agreement.

On being made the chief of the state central bank, and being put on the board of Lonmin, the notorious mining company, Ramaphosa ?retired? from politics to make his millions, leaving the miners he once led far behind.

Marikana massacre

In 2012, 44 striking miners, many members of the NUM and armed only with ceremonial spears, were shot dead by the police. Two years later it emerged that Cyril Ramaphosa played a direct role in the massacre. He sent an email, calling the strike ?not a labour dispute but a criminal act?, urging the Cabinet and President Thabo Mbeki to ?get the Minister of Police Nathi Mthetwa to act in a more pointed way? Let?s just keep the pressure on them to act correctly! He went on to call the miners ?plainly dastardly criminal? and with ?this characterisation there needs to be concomitant action?.

Exactly 24 hours later, on the 16 August 2012, Mthetwa did what he was told. Forty-four miners were mowed down. Their blood is on Ramaphosa?s hands; he has never apologised.

Despite pledges to bring land reform without compensation, a promise he never intends to fulfil, Ramaphosa would continue to rule over a neoliberal economy that has made him so rich. He must be opposed by the working class ? socially, economically and most of all politically.

The Democratic Alliance, formerly the Democratic Party and before that the old Apartheid-ruling National Party, is the biggest threat to the ANC. It has a charismatic, young black leader, Mmusi Maimane, a former Mayor of Cape Town, where the party is strongest. While reinventing itself as a non-racial or multi-racial party, however, it promotes the same White Monopoly Capital policies that have so failed the black working class since Apartheid.

The post-Apartheid popular front Alliance of the ANC, SACP (Communist Party) and the Cosatu trade union federation for many years supported the neoliberal agenda. But since Marikana, that support has been fractured, perhaps fatally. The metalworkers' union NUMSA was expelled from the ANC for calling for an end to the Alliance.

Last April, it set up the South African Federation of Trade Unions as a revolutionary alternative to Cosatu. It has around 700,000 members.

Unfortunately, unity with another left federation, Nactu, which contains the breakaway miners' union Amcu, which blossomed and overtook the NUM after Marikana, has not joined in. Worse, Saftu leader Zwelinzima Vavi recently called for miners to join NUMSA after Amcu rejected his calls for unity. While it was necessary to break from Cosatu, a plethora of small 'rank & file' or even 'revolutionary' trade unions, as can be seen in Italy for example, cannot lead the working class to great victories alone.

The workers' parties

As with the trade unions, so with the workers' parties in South Africa. The SACP has been so long embroiled in the anti-working class policies of the ANC government, that it is widely hated among socialists, militants, community and student activists. In 2013, Julius Malema, the expelled firebrand leader of the ANC Youth League, founded the Economic Freedom Fighters, EFF, who gained 25 MPs with 6.35 per cent and over a million votes in the May 2014 general election.

Malema has adopted the iconography of the US Black Panthers, with a self-styled 'Marxist-Leninist' ideology, military-style berets and himself installed as 'Commander-in-Chief'. The EFF's manifesto calls for the nationalisation of the land without compensation, and of the mines, industry and banks. The EFF are distinctive in the streets and the parliament with their red berets and red t-shirts. Up to 40,000 attend EFF rallies. However, Malema also stands accused of harassing journalists, money laundering, tax evasion and accepting kickbacks from state tenders in Limpopo province. He supported disgraced Zimbabwe ex-president Mugabe.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, NUMSA, the country's largest union, has recently made an important declaration calling for a clean break from the ANC. This is a long-standing aim of the metalworkers' union, dating back to the days of Moses Mayekiso in the 1980s and revived by NUMSA leader Irvin Jim when the union was being expelled from Cosatu in 2014.

The statement announced by Jim in January states;

'We call on you to help us build a Workers' Party which will fight in the interests of the working class and the poor. Its vision is subordinate to the working class and the poor of our country. The struggle for socialism is not an end in itself, it is a struggle for a communist classless society which Karl Marx correctly described as: 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'.

The call also stigmatized Zuma and Ramaphosa alike.

NUMSA shares SAFTU's view that 'Cyril Ramaphosa is a deeply compromised capitalist billionaire, with hands stained with the blood of the 34 victims of Marikana who were shot in cold blood by the state to shield White Monopoly Capital in general and Lonmin in particular'. Furthermore, it is naïve to believe that the cronyism and corruption which are hallmarks of the ANC will disappear. The very same people who stood by quietly whilst the state was actively looted by various factions of capital, including the Gupta and Rupert families, are the ones who make up the top leadership structures of the ANC, and this includes Ramaphosa himself. They cannot extricate themselves from the corrupt tendencies of the party. Furthermore, the ANC has been enabled in its corruption by the leadership of the South African Communist Party, SACP, and trade union federation Cosatu who actively continue to mislead members of the working class into supporting their worst butchers, for their own selfish narrow political agenda.

The initial demands in the statement include:

For a living wage of R12,500 (£740) a month

Against the proposed anti-union law and for the right to strike

Nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy

Workers' representation on the boards of state enterprises

Full workers' rights for casualised and precarious labour, down with the gangmasters.

It also highlights free education and land nationalisation and redistribution, two of the most recent popular demands of the movement. This is a major advance, providing this time the talk is followed by action.

NUMSA's call for a new workers' party should be followed up by building active branches in every township, city and village, above all in every factory and mine. Then, and only then, will a real breakaway from the tutelage of the ANC materialise.

An urgent task is for a democratic conference involving the breakaway unions, community organisations, student unions and the semi-revolutionary (centrist) socialist groups and electoral alliances, which could forge a real opposition to the ANC and DA rooted in the mass organisations of the working class.

A real democratic debate on programme needs to take place and a political break made with the Stalinist method of the South African Communist Party, specifically its popular front strategy of collaborating with non-working class political forces. Instead, its axis must be the permanent revolution where the workers lead the struggle against the massive remnants of white economic supremacy and imperialism to the creation of a workers' government, which can expropriate the entire capitalist class, black as well as white. A major focus for building a new working class party will be the 2019 elections.

The struggles before and after could bring the kind of fighting opposition to South Africa that hasn't been seen since the last days of Apartheid.

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