

South Africa: ANC retains power despite left challenge

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In the end it was a comfortable victory for Cyril Ramaphosa's ANC and its allies, the trade union federation COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP). With 57.5 per cent of the vote on a historically low turnout of 66 per cent, they kept the swing against them to less than 5 per cent, maintaining an outright majority in the parliament.

However, this owed more to the support the ANC gains through having led the anti-Apartheid struggle than it did to enthusiasm for the party's record in government for the past 25 years. The ANC also profited from disunity both in the neoliberal opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, and within the workers' movement.

What can we expect from the ANC?

During the campaign Ramaphosa again demonstrated that he is willing to stoop into the gutter to retain power. He launched his campaign with a speech in Durban, scapegoating migrants from neighbouring countries and promising to crack down on undocumented workers. Two months later, rioters killed three migrants and attacked foreign owned businesses in the bloodiest racist violence in four years.

Here we should not forget it was Ramaphosa who emailed the chief of police urging him to treat striking miners at Marikana as 'dastardly criminals'. The next day the cops mowed down 34 unarmed pickets.

In a country where unemployment stands at 35 per cent, i.e. 9 million, with little or no state benefits, the ANC chose to campaign on creating 275,000 jobs a year, though even this inadequate measure is predicated on attracting R1.2 trillion (?65 billion) of private investment. And this is far from likely to emerge, considering South Africa's stagnant economy.

South Africa is the world's most unequal country, with 65 per cent of the population subsisting below the 'upper bound poverty line' of US\$3.33 an hour. Not that this means much to President Ramaphosa, reckoned by Forbes magazine to be worth \$450 million. The breakaway union federation, SAFTU, launched a general strike last year against the pitiful minimum wage of \$0.75-\$1.33 an hour, though Cosatu dutifully applauded it.

But South Africa also holds another, far more hopeful record; according to the World Economic Forum its trade unionists have been the most confrontational for seven years running. And it is they who are in the ANC's sights. More attacks, following on from last year's anti-union legislation, which imposed postal votes before a legal strike, are likely.

Its land reform programme sounds more promising in ending Apartheid-era inequality in the countryside. The ANC promises to change the constitution to allow land to be expropriated from the rich white farmers.

But it also promises to crackdown on illegal squatters and the landless movement's seizures of property. Moreover, Business Day reassured its readers that "the land debate is largely a political tactic to neutralise the EFF and radical elements in the ANC".

Likewise with Ramaphosa's anti-corruption programme: the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into "state capture", by ex-president Jacob Zuma's cronies the Gupta brothers, was appointed by the ANC government. Few have any confidence it will bring many to justice, given Zuma supporters' continued strength in the party.

Opposition and the EFF

Despite scoring some points on all these issues, as well as over the blackouts widely blamed on the mismanagement of state-owned electricity supplier ESCOM, the Democratic Alliance, DA, and Economic Freedom Fighters, EFF, could not overhaul the ANC's lead in the polls. In fact, the DA lost five seats after the defection of its Cape Town Mayor and her deputy, and as a result of the unpopular austerity programme it unleashed in the municipalities it runs, many in coalition with the EFF.

The EFF, on the other hand, emerged as the election's real winner, gaining 1.9 million votes and 19 new seats, taking its total number of MPs to 44 compared to the DA on 84 and the ANC's 230. Its manifesto could point to its support for important social movements, like the #FeesMustFall student campaign and the movement for land redistribution, including important reforms it has forced out of the ANC on both issues and a plethora of minor ones.

Its iconic and identical red berets and uniforms have now established themselves as ever-present on marches and in rallies. Compared to the ANC's reliance on the past and older South Africans, the EFF looks young and points to the future: *The Coming Revolution*, as Julius Malema's biography (in fact hagiography) is called.

The EFF's manifesto *Our Land and Jobs NOW!* Runs to 168 pages and is subtitled "A People's Manifesto and Plan of Action". It is deeply flawed. Not only is it a totally reformist programme, it is neither consistently anticapitalist nor anti-imperialist. Despite headline demands to nationalise the National Reserve Bank and the mines.

Worryingly it makes almost no reference to the trade unions, the social movements in the townships, the landless workers' movement or solidarity with migrants. Do a word search on "strike" and you'll find it doesn't appear. This is a manifesto to be delivered from on high, not an action programme as Marxists understand it. Student reforms and the student movement are mentioned, in contrast and in depth. And good they are too. But place this in the context of the EFF's record of abstaining from wider social movements that it cannot control or at least influence, and the seeds of Stalinist sectarianism begin to emerge.

The important issue of land redistribution highlights the authoritarian methodology of the EFF. Though land is to be nationalised without compensation, distributed, for free, and women and youth will be given half the land, there is no mention of squatters' rights and it is silent on the question of land seizures, which are presently cruelly suppressed. Indeed the EFF promises to massively increase the size of the murderous police force. Instead, a People's Land Council will redistribute the land and an EFF government pledges it "will not abolish the rights of traditional leaders in the allocation and redistribution of land".

Again a significant raise in the minimum wage and millions of new jobs are promised. But they come at a huge price "for the poor. For the rich, special economic zones, including all the most important townships, will offer zero taxation, so long as they create 2,000 new jobs. Trade union rights are notoriously

abandoned in SEZs.

The BRIC countries, especially, are targeted for inward investment, while South Africa seeks to develop the African market for itself. For all the well-aimed invective against Western imperialism, Malema is a pushover for Oligarchs and Chinese mega-corporations.

The EFF does couple this with the 'protection and localisation of industries which produce basic and daily used goods through import substitution mechanisms' covering items ranging from spoons and soap to light bulbs and processed food. These might save a few jobs at the expense of South Africa's neighbours, but it won't worry China's steel industry.

Democratic 'reforms' are envisaged which will centralise the state by abolishing provincial government and making local councils answerable directly to the government. In international relations the EFF would align South Africa with Russia and China, which is held up as a model to follow.

Where was the SWRP?

The biggest disappointment of the election was the disastrously poor showing of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party. The SRWP was only launched a month before the election. However, despite the backing of the NUMSA metalworkers' union, it garnered just 24,439 votes. To put this into context, NUMSA has 339,000 members. As the Daily Maverick sardonically asks, 'How did the 339,000 members translate into 24,439 voters, a loss of 93 percent?'

The new party was launched on 4-8 April 2019, though it was a long time coming, having first been declared for in 2014, at the same time Numsa and Cosatu General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi was expelled from Cosatu. The militant metalworkers' union called for 'a Movement for Socialism, as the working class needs a political organisation committed in its policies and actions to the establishment of a socialist South Africa'.

But such a movement was never built. Numsa leader Irving Jim had seemingly alienated so many people en route that even Vavi, who is now leading the new union federation Saftu, of which Numsa is a member, told SABC News on May Day that Saftu had yet to discuss the new party, and Numsa's support 'doesn't mean that SAFTU therefore suddenly support the SRWP without a discussion internally'.

The CWI section, WASP, also criticised the formation of SRWP for its disengagement with the Workers' Summit, which Numsa itself called only last July, the packing of leadership positions by Numsa loyalists and the lack of transparency over where all the money came from for the launch. The party's manifesto, Equality, Work, Land does not shy away from making revolutionary declarations. The preamble to the programme states that the party, 'guided by Marxism-Leninism', aims to guide the working class 'in their historic mission to defeat imperialism and capitalism and to establish a Socialist South Africa, Africa and World, as a prelude to advancing to a truly free and classless society: to a Communist South Africa, Africa and Communist World'.

It continues: 'The SRWP shall nationalise all strategic industries, particularly the mines, the land and commercial farms, the banks, the big factories and the big businesses' [and] integrate all nationalised industry into a democratic socialist plan of production for human need and not profit.'

But presenting a cut and dried Marxist programme before there has been any serious attempt to win the militant unions to it was a big mistake. A much better method would be to fight to win the mass organisations, in the workplaces and communities, to forming a workers', or labour party as set out by Leon Trotsky in his writings to his followers in the USA. In founding the SRWP there was no prior discussion, engagement of other forces or trade union leaders. As a result the party looks stillborn.

Rank and file Numsa members, along with the participants of the Workers' Summit and other radical working class forces, like the AMCU miners' union, need to discuss the need for political unity on a fighting programme. Not a parliamentary 'plan of action', like the EFF leadership's, designed to be a bargaining chip in coalition talks with the class enemy. We've seen that before. We don't need an ANC Mark 2.

In addition, no new party can go round the EFF's young workers and students, who are undoubtedly an important part of the vanguard of the class right now. If revolutionaries can find ways of struggling alongside them, placing demands on their leaders and winning them to revolutionary Marxism and the programme of permanent revolution, then a new workers' party in South Africa can be formed.

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