

African National Congress anoints the butchers of Marikana

Chris Marsden
24 December 2012

The 53rd elective conference of the African National Congress (ANC) last week re-elected Jacob Zuma as president. He won 75 percent of conference delegates' votes, while his allies won all five top party posts and most of the 80 seats on the National Executive Committee. Cyril Ramaphosa, former leader of the National Union of Mineworkers and now a rand billionaire, was voted as deputy president.

The congress comes just four months after the massacre of 34 striking Lonmin platinum miners and the wounding of dozens more at Marikana. This sparked a strike wave that hit South Africa's platinum, gold, diamond and coal industries. The strike unfolded in a political and organisational rebellion against the NUM, the COSATU trade union federation and an ANC government that presides over grotesque levels of inequality and exploitation.

The election of Zuma and Ramaphosa is an endorsement by the ANC of the massacre and of the ensuing brutal assault on the miners that involved hundreds of arrests, beatings, mass sackings and then trumped-up murder charges. It is a pledge that the ANC will do whatever is necessary in order to suppress social and political opposition to the demands of the global corporations and South African business.

Ramaphosa sits on Lonmin's board of directors, owns 9 percent of Marikana, a controlling stake in Lonmin's Black Economic Empowerment partner, Inwala Resources, and pockets about US\$18 million a year. It was he who sent emails to Lonmin executives calling for "concomitant action" against protests he described as "plainly dastardly criminal acts" just prior to the massacre. *Business Day* editorialised that Ramaphosa's "re-entry into party politics represents a victory for those dealing and negotiating in the real world, rather than in the world of ideological illusion."

The congress also saw a direct intervention by Zuma to remove a commitment to "strategic nationalisation" from the ANC's official policy. The formula was adopted in response to criticism by Zuma's opponents within the ANC Youth League. The youth movement's expelled leader, Julius Malema, has utilised the demand for nationalisation to secure support among miners and other workers, in order to bolster his own faction within the ANC.

In order to reassure the mining corporations, the pro-forma reference to nationalisations was replaced with the vaguer term "strategic state ownership"—to be secured through buying shares in private companies where deemed appropriate "on the balance of evidence". Ramaphosa commented, "If there ever was a lack of clarity, people should be absolutely clear now of where the ANC stands as far as its policies are concerned." For its part the Chamber of Mines welcomed "the ANC resolution that wholesale nationalisation is not a reasonable or sustainable option".

The trade union federation COSATU moved swiftly to lend its imprimatur to the abandonment of a policy it has long formally advocated (nationalisation) and to pledge loyalty to the new ANC leadership and the governmental alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party.

"The alliance is safe," COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi said in his year-end address. He "vehemently" refuted a statement in the ANC's organisational report that COSATU "from time to time sees the democratic government as worse or the same as the apartheid regime," adding, "COSATU has never made any such comment and never will."

In the aftermath of Marikana, the unions have attempted to project a left face. They lent nominal

backing to bitter and militant wildcat strikes by farmworkers in the Western Cape Province, where only 5 percent of the workforce is unionised. But this swiftly proved to be a transparent ruse, with COSATU intervening to channel and suppress discontent among workers, who were instructed to go back to work in December despite none of their demands being met.

COSATU's end of year statement now proclaims that if "we" fail to win the fight "against unemployment, poverty and inequality in South Africa, the workers involved in this year's waves of spontaneous strikes are giving us a clear warning of the serious consequences for the country. Millions of the poor and marginalised are losing patience and have begun their own militant fight against poverty, unemployment and inequality and for economic transformation."

This is a stark warning to the ruling elite that the threat of a social revolution against its rule is growing as a direct result of the hatred workers now feel towards the ANC and the trade unions alike.

The ANC has ruled South Africa uninterruptedly since it negotiated the end of apartheid in 1994. It came to power as a result of mass revolutionary opposition in the working class. But it has held onto its privileged status with the backing of the imperialist powers and the global corporations thanks to its commitment to the preservation of capitalist property relations—in the process enriching a layer of black businessmen and government "tenderpreneurs."

A measure of the ANC's role can be gauged by contrasting the fate of the nouveau riche elements such as Ramaphosa, estimated to be worth \$675 million, and that of the working class and poor peasants. After 18 years of "black majority rule"—a formulation that concealed the actual rule of the bourgeoisie—the top 10 percent of earners still take away 101 times the earnings of the bottom 10 percent of the population; white South Africans on average take home six times more pay than blacks; unemployment officially stands at 25 percent and two thirds of the country's youth live in poor households with a per capita income of less than 650 rand a month (around \$75).

The political situation and history of South Africa demonstrate that the basic democratic and social needs of the working class and oppressed masses cannot be met under the rule of the national bourgeoisie, even when, as with the ANC, its pro-capitalist policies are

accompanied by occasional ritual invocations of "revolution" and "socialism".

The ANC and its allies in the trade unions that are largely dominated by the Communist Party stand revealed once more as bitter enemies of the working class. They cannot be pressured to the left or reformed. They must be overthrown.

The working class must build a new revolutionary leadership, take state power and implement socialist policies that place the banks, major corporations and the strategic mining industries under the ownership and democratic control of their own government. This struggle must be based on the internationalist and socialist strategy elaborated in Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution and led by a South African section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)