

# Agang offers no alternative for South African working class to ANC

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The arrival of prominent businesswoman and former anti-apartheid activist Mamphela Ramphele's new political formation, Agang, comes at a time of acute political crisis in South Africa.

The African National Congress (ANC) government is not merely suffering from internal decay and charges of corruption and government mismanagement, but has, since the beginning of its rule in 1994, presided over untrammelled exploitation of the working class, while its personnel have enriched themselves.

Recent events—such as the mass murder of 34 striking miners and injuring of 78 others at Marikana in the single most lethal use of force by South African security forces since 1960, service delivery failures, and incidents of shocking police brutality such as the murder of taxi driver Mido Macia—have aroused the hatred and contempt of growing numbers of workers and convinced many that the ANC is unfit to continue its political domination in post-apartheid South Africa.

Moreover, the Democratic Alliance, the major opposition party, has seemingly come to grips with the fact that it will never attract the support of a black majority that is simply unwilling to vote for a “white liberal” party.

Speaking at a press conference held on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, Ramphele stated that growing dissatisfaction with the current political arrangements in the country was the principal reason for her decision to launch her own political platform. “Our consultations and conversations across the lengths and breadths of our country have confirmed a hunger for a new beginning,” she said.

It is not clear at this point who is working with her on this new venture, but *City Press* reports that businessman and political analyst Moeletsi Mbeki is the principal driver behind the initiative.

Agang, which means “to build” in Sesotho, will be ready to contest the general elections in 2014. It is shrouded in demagoguery and rhetoric rather than actual policies. In the words of Ramphele, it will supposedly work towards building “the country of our dreams” and “declare war on corruption.” The hope for a new, prosperous, inclusive and multicultural nation post-1994 had “faded for the many living in poverty and destitution,” she said.

Ramphele is trading on her personal history in an attempt to gather public support. During the apartheid regime, she stood alongside Steve Biko as one of the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement and was his lover. She and her backers hope that her status as an anti-apartheid activist will enhance her political appeal, with a majority desperate for the realization of the ideals of the Freedom Charter and the lofty promises made by the ANC during the liberation movement.

However, Ramphele is a trusted representative of the South African bourgeoisie, with close ties to US imperialism. The alternative she offers to the ANC is for them alone.

Since 1994, she has served as one of four managing directors at the World Bank and currently sits on the board of the Anglo-American Corporation, the world's largest producer of platinum. Just before the announcement of Agang's formation, she resigned as the chairperson of Gold Fields, one of the world's largest gold mining corporations.

Agang will enter into and reinforce what is essentially a homogenous political climate. The Democratic Alliance and the ANC, for all the latter's high-sounding socialist rhetoric, represent identical ideological dispositions and class interests. Both parties remain committed to a neo-liberal economic

programme, arguing that economic growth is the panacea to the country's socio-economic problems.

Economic policy in South Africa since 1994 has unabashedly embraced free market principles, and, as a result, has done nothing to fundamentally alter the brutal levels of exploitation suffered by black workers under apartheid.

Agang will urge more of the same. In Ramphela's remarks delivered on Constitution Hill, she rehashed well known socio-economic and political concerns. She commented on improvements needed in governance, skills development, the fight against corruption, and so on. These issues are superficial. Even ANC President Jacob Zuma, one of the most corrupt of political figures, happily spent a considerable time discussing these issues in his recent State of the Nation address.

When Ramphela speaks of eliminating corruption, it is as one who wants to curb the levy that must be paid by the major corporations to the black bourgeois layers around and within the ANC, in the name of "Black Economic Empowerment."

Naturally, she remains silent on the issues of land reform, reparations for apartheid, and, above all, the redistribution of wealth to the working class. Reports that Ramphela, prior to the decision to form Agang, was being courted as a possible leader of the Democratic Alliance provide yet another indication that she represents little more than a black face to champion running the country more efficiently for the capitalist class, while urging workers to patiently wait for the "trickle down" to reach those struggling in poverty.

Ramphela, for all her talk about the need to alleviate the stain of poverty and inequality in the country, does not wish to alter the fundamental features of the South African economy. Her party will remain committed to the continuation of private ownership and control of South Africa's natural endowments and means of production, consolidating the country's status as a capitalist, neo-colonial economy where the lion's share of its wealth lines the pockets of the national capitalist class and the CEOs of the multinational corporations.

The bravery Ramphela showed in her youth during the struggle against apartheid does not distinguish her from other political figures such as Zuma and his deputy, Cyril Ramaphosa. She too must be judged without a trace of sentimentality, according to her present actions and the political interests she

articulates. She is a bourgeois political opportunist seeking to trade on the dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the South African electorate, when a genuine political alternative to the ANC and its allies in the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party is so desperately needed.

Such an alternative must be a party advancing a socialist programme for the formation of a workers' government in opposition to all the contending political representatives of big business.



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