

South Africa: Unite Against Corruption marches seek to exploit working-class anger at ANC

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Last Wednesday, thousands of South Africans participated in marches in Pretoria and Cape Town in protest against corruption, under the aegis of Unite Against Corruption (UAC). Marchers also gathered in Grahamstown, Bloemfontein, Polokwane and Durban.

In Pretoria, the organisers handed over a list of demands calling “for a commitment by both government and big business to prioritise combating the corruption that impacts so negatively on every aspect of our lives, and to commit to bringing the guilty to justice.”

The post-march statement continued, “The demands were received by the Office of the President of South Africa and we demand a response within two months, with a report back on progress before then.”

The UAC handed over its demands to Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe, whose address to the protest was inaudible thanks to sustained booing by marchers.

Radebe, the ruling African National Congress’s (ANC) head of policy, serves in an administration which has done everything in its power to shield President Jacob Zuma from suffering any consequences for the misappropriation of some US\$22 million in public funds—money that was poured into extensions and renovations at Zuma’s family compound at Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema addressed the marchers. “Jeff,” he said in response to Radebe’s remarks, “in 2019, you will see [the Union Buildings, seat of government] from your television. You will be at home. You do not belong here.”

Opposition United Democratic Movement (UDM) President Bantu Holomisa also took to the stage.

Holomisa formed the UDM as a breakaway from the ANC in 1997. “Unfortunately, I am no longer in charge of the military,” he said, “or I would long ago have shown [the ANC] the door.”

These remarks, which amount to the threat of a coup against an elected government, drew nary a protest from the mainstream media. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, Holomisa was previously the military leader of the Transkei Bantustan. After overthrowing the government of Stella Sigcau in December 1987, Holomisa became head of the Transkei government from 1987 to 1994, when the territory was reintegrated into a unitary South Africa.

It speaks to the reactionary character of South African politics in general, and of the ANC in particular, that both Holomisa and Sigcau then found a home in the party. Holomisa served as the Deputy Minister of the Environment and Tourism in the Cabinet of Nelson Mandela, while Sigcau was employed as Mandela’s minister of public enterprises.

Also in attendance at the marches were expelled Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, and National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) General Secretary Irvin Jim. In a fluid and ongoing drama, NUMSA was kicked out of COSATU for supporting Vavi, when a faction of the federation led by COSATU President S’dumo Dlamini targeted and ousted him for his criticism of Zuma, despite the shallowness of such criticism.

NUMSA’s Jim then floated the idea of a “leftist” United Front, with a view to contesting elections as a “workers’ party” at some indeterminate date. The hope of the forces coalescing around the UAC and the

United Front is that a person with some profile among workers, such as Vavi, will join the leadership of the proposed party.

None of this amounts to any genuine working class challenge to the centres of power. Together with NUMSA, the EFF and the UDM also present at the marches were members of the Congress of the People (another ANC rump), the Workers and Socialist Party, The Long Walk To Freedom From Corruption, the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance, Bikers Against e-tolls, as well as individuals attending in their religious capacity.

This is a coalition of petty bourgeois groups, whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of the working class. The intention of the UAC and other formations like it is not to put forward a socialist alternative to ANC rule. Rather, the purpose is to throttle such a development by corralling workers into movements led by people including privileged union bureaucrats like Vavi and Jim who are always ready with leftist rhetoric to disguise their role in subordinating workers to the rule of capital.

One of the main promoters of the marches is Mark Heywood, of NGO Section 27. In an opinion piece in the online *Daily Maverick*, Heywood ranted against “people who bitch but don’t participate in collective efforts (like the march against corruption).” Such people, he suggested, “should have another drink and tone down...”

With Paula Ensor, Dave Hemson and Martin Legassick, Heywood founded the Marxist Workers’ Tendency, affiliated to the Committee for a Workers International—whose most prominent section was the UK Militant Tendency at the time. Like its parent, the MWT operated as an entry group based upon the claim that the ANC could be “transformed” into a revolutionary socialist party. Their fellow travellers included trade unionist and Stalinist Nimrod Sejake, activist Zackie Achmat and others who had helped neuter the militant 1973 labour movement in Durban. Instead, Heywood, as part of what was cynically dubbed “the Gang of Four”, was driven out of the ANC in 1985.

The bankrupt perspective of the MWT is continued today by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), with which Heywood is still associated. But due to the ANC’s long record as a bourgeois party of big business

and its discrediting in the eyes of many workers, the SACP and EFF are now advanced as the potential leadership of a new “workers’ party”—this time of a “mass reformist” character and for the most part without employing pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric.

The workers and youth of South Africa have not been persuaded by the likes of Heywood. As *Business Day* reported, “Although the organisers had said they wanted upwards of 100,000 people to form part of the protest action, only an estimated 5,000 showed up for demonstrations in Cape Town and Pretoria.”



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