

South Africa's ANC votes to remove President Jacob Zuma

Eddie Haywood
14 February 2018

The African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party in South Africa founded by Nelson Mandela, and currently led by multi-millionaire former union boss Cyril Ramaphosa, have targeted President Jacob Zuma for removal, amid dimming prospects for the ANC ahead of elections to be held in April 2019. The party's National Executive Committee (NEC) convened for a 13-hour meeting on Monday that lasted into the early morning hours on Tuesday and reached a unanimous decision to seek Zuma's immediate removal.

Just before midnight on Monday Ramaphosa and ANC General Secretary Ace Magashule traveled to Zuma's home to request the president's resignation within 48 hours. Zuma refused, reportedly telling the two that he could not do so under such short notice. However, the president agreed to step down, and told the two he would do so in three to six months.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) party have attempted to seize political advantage of the reversing fortunes of the Zuma government and the ANC as the ruling party has suffered a sharp fall in popularity. The ANC-dominated Parliament had scheduled a 'no confidence' vote on February 22 regarding President Zuma, but various members have indicated that they wish to move the vote forward to this week.

Magashule dismissed notions that the party was influenced by growing corruption charges and inquiries against Zuma, and instead attempted to portray the measures undertaken to remove him as without malice or any political consideration.

Taking power in 2009, the Zuma government has been characterized by corruption and nepotism while presiding over a sharp decline in the nation's economy, conditions which have made international capitalists nervous about investing in South Africa. The ANC is seeking to undo any further damage by Zuma by

overseeing his immediate removal and replacement with Ramphosa.

However, the convention of the NEC by the party's leadership to seek the removal of a sitting president is a measure of the protracted crisis seizing not only the ANC, but the entire South African bourgeoisie.

A palpable fear of a social explosion is on the minds of the South African ruling elite and is prompting them to act. This fear is fueled by increasing worker unrest manifested by the sharp increase in strike activity across the country, the rise in unemployment and increase in poverty, and recently, the severe water shortage wracking Cape Town.

Magashule underlined the measure of crisis gripping the ruling party, telling the media that the NEC was unanimous in its agreement that Zuma's removal is to be "treated with urgency." Ominously, he added, "When we recall our deployee, we expect our deployee to do as asked."

Telling reporters the ANC's plans for Ramaphosa to replace Zuma, whom the ANC elected as party leader in December, Magashule said, "The NEC has noted South Africa is going through a period of uncertainty and anxiety as a result of unresolved matter of transition. It is obvious we want Comrade Ramaphosa to come in as the president of South Africa."

The ruling elite is nervous that the party of Nelson Mandela, who fought and defeated the racist regime of apartheid, has lost legitimacy in the eyes of the South African population. These fears are not without foundation: Since coming to power in 1994, the ANC cemented a relationship with the white South African capitalist elite to continue capitalist relations. In return, this wealthy class agreed on the creation of a wealthy black elite, a political arrangement significantly benefitting Zuma and Ramaphosa. Since coming to

power, the political elite of the ANC have amassed great fortunes at the expense of the South African population.

The ANC from the outset was an anti-working class organization, the fact made clear by Mandela in 1956, speaking of the ANC's aims to promote "black capitalism": "For the first time in the history of this country, the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."

This tiny wealthy layer of black elites has presided over an increasing social decline among the working class, and the ANC, once looked upon as a progressive political organization by the black population, is now widely despised. Since the ANC took power, South Africa has become one of the most socially polarized countries in the world, with an unemployment rate of 28 percent.

The ruling elite have expressed concern over the series of corruption scandals that have beset the Zuma government, the latest of which occurred in 2016 and involved Zuma using \$23 million in public funds to renovate his private home.

Previously, during Zuma's term as deputy president, his financial adviser, Schabir Shaik, was convicted in 1999 of bribery and fraud for a \$30 billion weapons deal with various European companies the two brokered on behalf of South Africa. In 2007, Zuma was charged for his role in the affair, but prosecutors later dropped the charges. Then President Thabo Mbeki dismissed Zuma as deputy president.

The election in December of Ramaphosa to lead the ANC was an attempt to give a facelift to the party's flagging fortunes. After years of the corrupt Zuma regime, the South African economy has taken a dive. With the selection of Ramaphosa, the ruling class cynically expects that the election of a union leader will be greeted by the population with enthusiasm.

As leader of South Africa's largest union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), he sought to tie black South African workers behind the ANC's aims of "black economic empowerment." In 1991 he was elected General Secretary of the ANC and played a significant role in the multiparty negotiations that led to the end of apartheid by assuring that capitalist relations would remain intact.

Adding to the ANC's anti-working-class character was Ramaphosa's role as a member of the board of directors of Lonmin during the 2012 Marikana massacre, in which striking mineworkers were shot to death. Ramaphosa utilised his position in the ANC to pressure authorities to take action against the "plainly dastardly criminal acts" of the strikers. Taking his cue, the security forces then shot and killed 34 striking workers, and wounded dozens of others.

As the WSWS reported, the history and political odyssey of the ANC serves as a devastating indictment against "black economic empowerment" and its programme of pro-capitalist and anti-working class politics. This makes clear that the economic interests represented by the ANC are diametrically opposed to those of the South African working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact