

The inauguration of Ramaphosa and the degeneration of the ANC

Chris Marsden
17 February 2018

Cyril Ramaphosa took office as president of South Africa yesterday, as the chosen representative of the African National Congress (ANC), and with the enthusiastic support of the major imperialist powers and global corporations.

His elevation to the highest office of state epitomises not only the political bankruptcy of the perspective of bourgeois nationalism, but the transformation of the old nationalist movements, which once professed anti-imperialist and even socialist goals, into direct instruments of imperialist rule. Moreover, workers in every country will recognise in Ramaphosa a particularly venal expression of the role of trade union bureaucrats everywhere as loyal servants of the state and the employers.

Two things recommend Ramaphosa to the world's bourgeoisie—his fabulous wealth and the fact that he earned it through a readiness to deal ruthlessly with the working class, whose struggles first brought the ANC to power 24 years ago.

In yesterday's State of the Nation address, Ramaphosa pledged to continue "the long walk" to freedom, in which "all may share in the wealth of our land and have a better life" and to realise Nelson Mandela's "vision of a democratic, just and equitable society." But Ramaphosa's promise to end the era of corruption and "state capture" by the multi-billionaire Gupta family, which characterised the rule of Jacob Zuma, is based on pro-business policies that can only worsen the desperate situation facing workers and youth.

Ramaphosa will act on behalf of corporations who bridle against the clientism and nepotism of the ANC government because it acts as an impediment to their ability to fully exploit South Africa's rich resources of diamonds, precious metals and minerals. Anglo American SA deputy chairman Norman Mbazima declared: "It's very helpful if the president of the country understands

your industry."

The *Financial Times* wrote of the need for "a pact between the state, business and labour in the interest of South African competitiveness." When Britain's premier business newspaper speaks of "labour," it means the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) bureaucracy—the key prop of the ANC in the Tripartite Alliance with the Stalinist South African Communist Party in imposing its attacks on jobs, wages and social conditions.

The crusade against corruption is to be waged by a man who is far-and-away the most corrupt individual in South Africa!

Ramaphosa led the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) during the struggle against the apartheid regime. From this vantage point, he played a key role in tying the working class to the pro-capitalist perspective of the ANC's Freedom Charter—which separated the struggle against white supremacy and for formal legal equality for black South Africans from opposition to the capitalist system.

He went on to become the archetypal representative of the self-enrichment of a newly-created layer of black capitalists that was the essential function of the ANC's policy of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). In 1996, the ANC selected Ramaphosa to front its penetration of the private sector. Through the National Empowerment Consortium, he utilised trade union pension funds, together with his ability to secure government contracts, to win positions on the boards of some of the country's largest firms.

Each deal struck brought generous share options, so that, by 2017, he had become the ultimate "tenderpreneur"—with a personal fortune valued at over \$500 million. Ramaphosa is South Africa's second-richest black person after Patrice Motsepe, his brother-in-law and the country's only black dollar billionaire.

Ramaphosa is above all trusted to become president because of his role as the butcher of Marikana.

No single event so brutally demonstrates the transformation of the trade union bureaucracy into a police force over the working class on behalf of capital as does the August 2012 massacre of 34 miners at Lonmin's platinum mine.

The miners, striking for a living wage, were in open rebellion against the NUM. Ramaphosa's company was Lonmin's BEE partner, holding a 9 percent stake. In that capacity, on August 12, he contacted then Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa, lobbying him to send more officers to Marikana. On August 15, Ramaphosa wrote to the mineral resources minister that the Marikana miners were not engaged in a labour dispute but a "dastardly criminal" act.

Under Ramaphosa's prompting, the ANC sent in the police to shoot, kill and maim striking workers and arrest 270 on charges of murder and attempted murder under apartheid-era "common purpose" laws.

Less than six months later, Ramaphosa was selected as deputy leader of the ANC, alongside Zuma, signalling the government's loyalty to the major corporations. As Marikana activist Napoleon Webster said last year: "We know the business community loves Cyril... Cyril is still the same monster who caused the Lonmin massacre."

Speaking before parliament Wednesday, Ramaphosa declared of Zuma's removal: "This is not yet *uhuru* (freedom)... We are going to seek to improve the lives of our people on an ongoing basis, and since 1994, we have done precisely that." Nothing could be further from the truth. The ANC came to power in April-May 1994 at the head of a mass revolutionary movement of the working class—against not only apartheid rule, but also the immense deprivations inflicted on millions.

However, the ANC's Freedom Charter was based on the Stalinist perspective of a "two stage revolution." Establishing democracy was to be the primary goal, to which the socialist aspirations of the working class must be subordinated—by the COSATU union apparatus—until an unspecified future date.

In power ever since, the Tripartite Alliance government has ruthlessly imposed the dictates of global capital and the South African bourgeoisie—enriching a thin layer of black businessmen, politicians and managers, while never undertaking a single measure to genuinely benefit working people.

The bitter reality is that the social position of the working class is worse than it was under apartheid.

Income inequality is extraordinarily high—around 60 percent of the population earns less than \$7,000 a year, while 2.2 percent of the population earns more than \$50,000. Wealth ownership is even more starkly polarised, with 10 percent of the population owning at least 90–95 percent of all assets.

More than half the population officially lives in poverty, earning below \$43 per month, while 13.8 million are in extreme poverty. Unemployment officially stands at 28 percent, and 36 percent unofficially. It is a staggering 68 percent among young people.

None of the essential democratic and social needs of the working class and oppressed masses can be met under the rule of the national bourgeoisie, which is organically tied to imperialism and whose own privileges depend on the brutal exploitation of workers and poor farmers.

The advanced workers, above all the younger generation whose lives have been blighted by the ANC's defence of capitalism and the imperialist world order, must now undertake to build a new revolutionary leadership. Its perspective has to be to take state power and form a workers' government to implement socialist policies to take over the banks, mining and other major corporations and run them to meet social need, not private profit.

In a globalised economy, facing the domination of the entire world by imperialist powers and giant transnational corporations and banks, this struggle can be successfully waged only based on the strategy outlined by Leon Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution and elaborated today by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

South Africa's working class must adopt its own international socialist strategy, consciously seeking to unify its fight against the ANC, COSATU and their corporate and imperialist backers with that waged by their brothers and sisters throughout Africa and the entire world. This means beginning the construction of a section of the ICFI, the world party of socialist revolution.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact