

Ex-president Zuma's son, Duduzane, auditions in front of South African big business

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Last month, newly appointed First Deputy President of the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP), Duduzane Zuma, auditioned before South Africa's ruling class at the BizNews Conference.

Duduzane is the son of former president Jacob Zuma, who was forced to resign in 2018 after the African National Congress (ANC) recalled him amid mounting corruption scandals. In December 2023, Zuma founded the MKP and remains its dominant leader.

The MKP's base is found primarily in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), which is mostly Zulu. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), KZN accounts for approximately one in four of the country's poor, with many still living in rural areas.

While the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was historically associated with Zulu nationalism, it also has a history of collaborating with the National Party (NP) against the ANC during apartheid, participating in bloody shootouts and assassinations. This left an opening for the MKP to assert itself as the new Zulu nationalist party without carrying that baggage.

The party's manifesto calls for land expropriation without compensation, state ownership of natural resources, nationalisation of strategic mining firms, and greater state control over the economy. It combines this left demagoguery with cultural symbolism that is heavily Zulu inflected, including deference to traditional authorities like the monarchy of King Misuzulu, which partly explains its mixed success in finding support in other provinces where it has fielded non-Zulu candidates.

The MKP has also exploited massive social hardship, with over 27 percent of KZN's population living below the international poverty line in 2023, well above Gauteng at 10.5 percent and the Western Cape at 7.8 percent.

As a result, the party surged to become South Africa's third largest in the 2024 election, drawing significant support from workers and youth angered by decades of austerity, privatisation and deepening inequality under successive ANC-led governments.

The attendance of Duduzane at the BizNews Conference blows a hole in MKP's leftist rhetoric and reveals it as a

vehicle for corrupt multimillionaires like Zuma senior and his son, in no way different to the ANC. Duduzane was there to audition in front of corporate executives, investors, political figures and commentators for a future role in government.

Among those attending this year were: retail billionaire Christo Wiese, the Shoprite and Pepkor magnate whose fortune Forbes puts at about \$1.9 billion; Johnny Copelyn, CEO of the roughly \$880 million investment conglomerate HCI, whose interests span casinos, hotels, media, transport, mining and property; and Simon Baloyi, CEO of energy and chemicals giant Sasol, which generated about \$17.1 billion in turnover in its latest financial year.

Also on the programme was Andries van Heerden, CEO of Afrimat, a roughly \$630 million mining and construction-materials group, alongside wealthy investors and fund managers such as Rob Hersov, Piet Viljoen, Magnus Heystek and Peter Major.

Duduzane is no stranger to this crowd. BizNews itself described him as "filthy rich himself with the kind of yacht and Dubai lifestyle behind his back that ordinary mortals might only dream of". His wealth and business career have long been entangled with the scandals of his father's presidency. Duduzane was a central figure in the state-capture saga in which private business interests, above all the Gupta family with whom he had extensive business ties, were accused of using their proximity to political power to influence state appointments, contracts and public enterprises for private enrichment.

During his keynote address Zuma junior sought to reassure his peers that he and his party are pillars of capitalist stability. He told his audience, "I'm here as well now a leader of the MKP to say we have an older generation of leadership in our party. I'm part of the younger generation. I'm 44 years old now. I've been a businessman. I've worn a businessman's cap, entrepreneur.

"I've been all over the show. I've done business in South Africa, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Far East, Asia, and I understand the plight of the business person. I've been there. I've been on the opposing end of discussions with unions

within the mining space, within the manufacturing space.”

He made clear that the MKP’s populist rhetoric would not prevent it from imposing austerity on the working class. Turning to the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant received by impoverished South Africans, he insisted that “there has to be a cutoff point.”

The SRD grant is currently just \$23 a month and reaches roughly eight million people. This miserable sum is less than half South Africa’s official food poverty line, but it is relied on by millions, with official unemployment reaching 33.6 percent in the second quarter of 2026, or 8.5 million people, while youth unemployment stood at 47.4 percent. The ANC-led government is preparing to slash it after March 2027.

Zuma also added his voice to those justifying the vicious xenophobic pogrom-style attacks on illegal migrants that have led to deaths and forced tens of thousands to leave South Africa. “South Africa is for everybody, who’s got the right to be here, anyone that’s documented,” he declared.

Zuma then invoked his father’s historical credentials. “He’s held back a lot of revolt in this country pre-94, post-94 but especially where we find ourselves now.” Millions had looked to the former president for leadership and Jacob Zuma had repeatedly “held people back” by assuring them, “We’ll get through this.”

This is a tacit admission of the role played by the ANC leadership. During the revolutionary upsurge of the mid-1980s, mass strikes and township revolts shook apartheid rule. Local government structures disintegrated in numerous areas and workers, youth and township residents established street committees and people’s committees. The South African Communist Party (SACP) acknowledged at the time that such structures had emerged where the institutions of the apartheid state had been “destroyed or severely weakened.”

But the ANC, in alliance with the SACP, subordinated the independent struggles of the working class to its programme of a “national democratic revolution.” The SACP explicitly rejected the perspective of a struggle for socialist power in favour of a separate national-democratic stage that meant maintaining capitalism and rule by the bourgeoisie under the new political leadership of the ANC.

The eventual negotiated settlement dismantled apartheid’s legal edifice and established universal suffrage, but preserved capitalist property relations, private ownership of the mines, banks and major corporations and the immense concentration of wealth in private hands. It was to this wealthy elite that Zuma appealed when he declared, “We need to join hands.”

South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The richest 10 percent own around 86 percent of household wealth, while the richest 1 percent alone controls more than half. Although a Black capitalist and upper-middle-class layer has emerged since 1994, accumulated wealth remains sharply racialised, with White households possessing vastly greater wealth on average than Black households and the

heights of the economy under control of the same apartheid-era corporations.

Zuma’s intervention among a mostly White audience was directed against the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, which combines its own nationalist and pro-capitalist programme with efforts to win popular support through threats to seize white-owned land and big business. Such measures are a means of transferring a greater share of wealth and economic power to the Black bourgeoisie and privileged sections of the middle class.

Duduzane Zuma’s boast that his father repeatedly “held back” revolt amounted to a personal political pledge. He was assuring his audience that, should the MKP enter government, he could perform the same function.

During the question-and-answer session, he reassured his audience, “I am not a communist at heart. I’m a businessman. It makes me a capitalist 100%. Not a greedy one, but a capitalist at heart.” Referring to the *Communist Manifesto*, he warned that it “speaks about the proletariat overrunning the bourgeoisie,” before warning: “If we don’t watch where we’re going, the majority of this country that are downtrodden are going to overrun everybody.”

Zuma junior was warning South Africa’s wealthy elite that explosive levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality threaten to produce an eruption of the working class against the existing social order. His message to the assembled capitalists was that the MKP’s radical rhetoric should not frighten them. On the contrary, he was presenting himself—and the political authority associated with the Zuma name—as an instrument for containing that opposition and defending capitalist rule.

His remarks have again exposed the political fraud of the SACP. Only months ago, the MKP participated in the SACP’s “Conference of the Left”, where it posed as a defender of the working class. For workers and youth attracted to the MKP because of their hatred of the ANC and the intolerable conditions it has produced, the BizNews conference is proof that an alternative cannot be another faction of the capitalist political establishment and its political hangers on such as the SACP.

The decisive question is the building of an independent political movement of the working class, uniting South African and immigrant workers across ethnic and national divisions and fighting for socialist policies, led by a new party affiliated to the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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