The midnight cabinet reshuffle of 31 March represents an important turning point in the ANC’s factional civil war – the point at which Zuma’s pursuit of his personal interests has taken precedence over the fate of the ANC, hastening its demise. The scale, brutality and manner of execution of the 31 March cabinet purge was calculated to send a message that Zuma and his faction are still – despite numerous setbacks experienced at the hands of the judiciary – fully in control of the ANC and of the country.

Weizmann Hamilton
Executive Committee

The political and economic impact of the reshuffle

The effect of the reshuffle has been to take the ANC’s internal conflict out of its party in the streets sparking unprecedented protests. The 100,000+ countrywide and in Tshwane respectively on the 7 and 12 April 2017 were the biggest explicitly anti-government protests since those against apartheid in the early 1990s.

The middle class who predominate in the protests are driven by fears that the credit downgrade will drive them into the same destitution that blights the lives of the working class majority – of mass unemployment, poverty and inequality. In a cynical attempt to present their plans to make looming official state as in the interests of the masses, the Zuma faction has dressed themselves up in the pink ideological costumes of “radical economic transformation” stolen from the EFF’s wardrobe of revolutionary pretensions. The falsehood underpinning this position is that it implies that Pravin, like all his predecessors as finance minister, implemented anything other than the neo-liberal capitalist policies the ANC leadership, under the Mandela presidency, adopted in 1996 and imposed on the ANC and the country without debate.

Yet new Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba made it his first priority to assure rating agencies and US international investors that there will be no departure from Pravin’s fiscal consolidation strategy. Malusi has even made it a priority of publicly distancing the Finance Ministry from his new economic policy advisor, Professor Chris Malikane’s proposals to nationalise the mines, Reserve Bank, commercial banks, insurance companies and mines.

With only the debt held in foreign currency downgraded, there is worse to come. As economist Nazma Moolaa points out, “If both S&P and Moody’s … move to downgrade the Zuma faction’s ANC will have no choice but to fight back against the coming offensive. As Trotsky pointed out, the bending of the tops of the tree are the signs of coming storms – that is the movement of the middle class signifies.

It is clear from the EFF’s tactical positioning, especially since the local government elections, that it is preparing to enter into a pro-government pact with Zuma. This growing capacity of the EFF to provoke and lever more and more of the ANC’s internal anti-Zuma opposition, whose most pronounced characteristic is its cowardice and disorganisation, so toxic, the ANC’s internal anti-Zuma opposition, whose most pronounced characteristic is its cowardice and disorganisation, result in forced selling of South African bonds of about R120–sub-investment grade in the next 6-9 months, that would then “If both S&P and Moody’s … move the local currency rating to sub-investment grade in the next 6-9 months, that would then result in forced selling of South African bonds of about R120–trillion. In short, that would have catastrophic consequences.”

The Constitutional Court would be very wary of ordering a secret ballot as it would be vulnerable to the accusation that the judiciary is a leading player in the ludicrous conspiracy theory that it is an agent of foreign governments in an attempt to bring about “regime change” in SA. It is therefore likely to cite the doctrine of the separation of powers and refrain from making such an order.

Zuma succession strategy

The Zuma succession strategy entails Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma replacing him as ANC president and giving him amnesty as the country’s president. But Zuma’s factionalism has inflicted such damage on the ANC as a whole that it has lost all credibility within the ANC itself. Both Speaker of Parliament, Baleka Mbete, and Human Settlements Minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, have refused to rule themselves out of the succession contest. This could split the ‘women’s vote’ dealing a potentially fatal blow to Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma’s prospects.

Worse, it could bring the ANC to its knees. Ramaphosa has succeeded him at the ANC’s December 2017 elective conference. In the circumstances, Zuma’s worst nightmare, that Ramaphosa will throw him to the wolves of the justice system, may become reality.

As the ANC’s electoral stocks decline with each successive scandal, and the fear of losing its parliament’s majority in 2019 mounting, Dlamini-Zuma’s supporters could demand that Zuma step down not only as the ANC president but of the country if the ANC is to stand any chance of winning the 2019 elections.

A mass socialist workers party needed

The working class has no choice but to fight back against the coming offensive. As Trotsky pointed out, the bending of the tops of the tree are the signs of coming storms – that is the movement of the middle class signifies.

There is no solution within the framework of capitalism. We call upon Saffu, Namus, all workers, youth and communities to join forces in calling an Assembly for Working Class Unity to work out a road map towards forming a mass socialist workers party.