

# The Ramaphosa Presidency

## Can CR save the ANC in 2019?

**The ANC has admitted that they could lose their majority in next year's national elections. A leaked internal report says the possibility that the ANC will only remain in power in a coalition with other parties is "high". It does not rule-out being forced out of power and into opposition. The report complains that the number of "loyal" ANC supporters shrinks at every election. Pointing-out what WASP has highlighted before, and the 2016 local elections confirmed, it says, "We [the ANC] face the possibility of losing majority support in most large cities and in much of the economic heartland of South Africa."**

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The ANC have been in power for a generation. After 24 years this is the situation facing the poor and the working class: 9.5 million people (36.7% of working-age population) are unemployed; 3.3 million under 24-year olds are not in employment, education or training; 30.4 million people live in poverty on R992 or less per month; the richest 1% of the population owns 71% of wealth and the poorest 60% only 7%. These statistics are a sanitised description for suffering, brutalised lives and the unfulfilled potential of millions.

### 'Ramaphoria'

After Zuma's forced resignation there was a big effort in the media to paint Ramaphosa as SA's saviour. This was part of a conscious strategy by the ruling class. They wanted to reassure the imperialist countries that the corruption of the Zuma years would not threaten their investments through its damage to public finances. They also hoped to defuse some of the burning anger and frustration amongst poor, working class and even middle class people by channelling feelings of relief into the idea that "things will be better now". But better for who?

The class character of Ramaphosa's government is already beyond doubt – it is a bosses' government through to its bone marrow. Ramaphosa's first budget ensured that the poor and the working class will pay the main price for capitalism's failures made worse by the disasters of the Zuma years. Government spending, including on school infrastructure, informal settlement upgrades and road development, will be cut by R85.7 billion over the next three years. But corporate tax on the profits of big business was left unchanged. Instead Value Added Tax (VAT – a 'sales tax' on every purchase made in SA) is being increased by 1%. This and other increases, such as on the fuel levy, will hit the pockets of the poor hardest.

But more revealing than anything else of the continuity in character of Ramaphosa's government are the amendments to labour laws. Proposed under Zuma's presidency and set to become law under Ramaphosa's, these amendments will increase the powers of the capitalist state over trade unions and make it harder for workers to defend themselves by going on strike (see editorial). There is no greater proof of "whose side" Ramaphosa is on than his willingness to disarm workers and empower their class enemy – the bosses.

Plans to introduce a National Minimum Wage, masterminded by Ramaphosa when still deputy-president, should have been a pass book designating him as a 'champion of the poor'. But the campaign by the Saftu federation has upset this. It forced Ramaphosa to admit that the new minimum wage is not a living wage.

### Anti-corruption

Even so, many will be watching Ramaphosa's 'clean-up' of the state-owned companies – PRASA, Eskom, and Transnet etc. – with some enthusiasm. It is satisfying to see the Guptas on the run and entire boards of Zuma's cronies dismissed. The ANC government itself estimates that Zuma-era corruption looted R100 billion from the 'public purse' via these companies.

But even if corruption is completely ended the parastatals will still not benefit the poor and working class in the main. Gordhan admitted this recently in a speech in parliament. He said their role was "reducing the cost structure in the economy so that other economic players become more efficient and competitive." This can only mean the big businesses and multinationals.

Ramaphosa's policies are in complete continuity with the ANC's commitment to neo-liberal capitalist policies introduced decisively from 1996. If neo-liberal policies could not fix unemployment, poverty and inequality over the past 24 years, why would they do so now? The working class can expect nothing different under the Ramaphosa presidency.

### Factional struggle

Ramaphosa was able to move against Zuma fairly quickly. But as early as his post-Zuma cabinet reshuffle it became clear that he did not have unlimited room for manoeuvre. Whilst some of Zuma's worst cabinet cronies were moved to different departments – for example Malusi Gigaba and Bathabile Dlamini – they still remained ministers.

But it has been the explosive developments in the North West from mid-April that have most sharply revealed the depth of the rot in the ANC. Government administration under Gupta-linked premier, Supra Mahumapelo, had virtually collapsed because of widespread corruption and out-of-control looting. This led to Ramaphosa's unprecedented step of placing the entire province under the administration of national government.

The North West is not an isolated example. At local level 87 municipalities across the country (31% of the total) are classified as "dysfunctional" or "distressed". Only 7% are classified as "well-functioning"! Corruption is the major driver of local government break-down. In KZN, the continuation of ANC political murders (24 since the start of 2016) is another extreme symptom of the rot. All of this raises a serious question about the viability of the ANC across whole swathes of the country as anything more than a looting machine for politically connected gangsters.

Mahumapelo eventually resigned. But he remains ANC chairperson. The very fact that Ramaphosa had to use his position as state president to force the issue by suspending the North West government indicates a growing deadlock between the factions within the ANC.

The Zuma-clique has been pushed onto the defensive, but they are not defeated. They need to consolidate a stronghold from which to defend themselves and launch a counter-attack to, in Ace Magashule's words, "get our ANC back in five years". The outcome of the tightly controlled Free State conference in May (though contested) seems to have been a step in the right direction for them. The struggle for factional dominance will continue to play out throughout the ANC. The threat of orchestrated violence will remain a very real threat as events in the North West have shown.

Mahumapelo's defiant game of resigning, 'un-resigning' and then 'retiring' was a sign of desperation. It almost certainly represents the new mind-set of the whole Zuma-clique. Holding on to whatever machinery of government they can whilst avoiding court and prison is the narrow self-interest driving them. They do not care if the ANC is stamped into the dust in the 2019 elections as a result. This takes the factional struggle into increasingly unpredictable and unstable territory.

### 2019

The course of the factional struggle will have an important effect on the ANC's 2019 performance. It is already taking its toll. The inability of Ramaphosa to deal a decisive knock-out blow to the pro-Zuma faction has prevented him from taking advantage of 'Ramaphoria' and the disarray in the DA by calling an early election as some commentators speculated he might. To do so now could strengthen his factional enemies through their control, especially in the provinces, of nominations for ANC candidate lists.

The DA's suicidal behaviour around the 'sacking' of Cape Town mayor Patricia De Lille and the internal backlash against Maimane's Freedom Day speech mentioning 'white privilege' will have confirmed in the eyes of many black voters that the party is an 'old white boys club'. There could be a certain swing back towards the ANC from a section of the black middle class which flirted with the DA under Zuma.

Likewise, a section of the white middle class could be persuaded to vote for a 'Ramaphosa ANC'. They would be voting for the man and not his party in the hope that his presidency can guarantee the economic stability they crave. Reflecting this, former apartheid-president De Klerk has endorsed Ramaphosa, saying he, "understands business, he understands the economy, and he is committed to achieving economic growth". However, if Ramaphosa is unable to deliver at least a convincing appearance of victory in the ANC's internal factional struggle his attractiveness to the middle class – both black and white – will be greatly reduced.

High levels of voter abstention among the poor, young people and the working class skews election after election and will likely do so again in 2019. Around 16 million people did not vote in the 2014 elections. In that sense the ANC lost its majority long ago – they 'won' with the votes of 35% of the eligible population. Given all of this, it is possible that the ANC could scrape the 50% + 1 needed to remain in government after 2019. This would not be a sign of the ANC's strength but the opposite. Another 'victory' on a further reduced social base will only sharpen class contradictions and further prepare the ground for social explosions.

### Coalition

But if the ANC does fall below 50% the EFF leadership stands ready to assist. They have positioned themselves as a future ANC coalition partner. At Malema's request there have been talks so that the two parties can "find each other". With Zuma gone and the ANC formally backing land expropriation without compensation, Malema claims that the conditions for forming a coalition, such as after the 2016 elections, have mostly been met.

This just shows how superficial the EFF's conditions were.

Under Ramaphosa nothing has changed on the ground for millions of poor and working class people and nor will it. But for the EFF leadership the ANC is now sufficiently 'different' for them to change their attitude. This is entirely consistent with the analysis that WASP has made of the EFF since they entered parliament – theirs is not a struggle against capitalism, of which Ramaphosa is a near-perfect representative, but a struggle for control of the capitalist state.

Even so, in the run-up to 2019 the EFF will have to blow hot one day, and cold the next, on the ANC. They need to ensure the ANC falls below 50% and maximise their own votes to strengthen their bargaining position. At the same time they must be careful to leave themselves room to manoeuvre so that their embrace of the ANC the day after the election is not too obviously hypocritical and opportunistic as it was when they installed the DA in power in Tshwane, Joburg and Nelson Mandela Bay.

### Vacuum

All of this underlines the huge political vacuum that exists. All of the parties in parliament support capitalism. Imagine the impact that a party with a bold socialist programme for a struggle to fundamentally transform society could have. Ending the cynical 'window dressing' measures of the capitalist politicians could inspire the 16 million 'abstainers'; it could give another option to those still voting ANC because there is no convincing alternative; it could provide a genuinely radical programme to those willing to give the EFF's rhetoric the benefit of the doubt.

The success of Saftu's 25 April strike gave a small taste of what is possible. The turnout clearly scared the leaders of the ANC. If it were not for Saftu's action, both the LRA and amendments and the minimum wage would have become law without a whisper of protest. The Workers and Socialist Party played an important role within Saftu in ensuring the action went ahead. Imagine if this was repeated on every issue. We could expose all the lies of the bosses and their politicians, linked to a mass movement fighting for a clear socialist alternative. This possibility should make Saftu leaders' and members' mouths water.

The capitalist class is carefully examining the different scenarios that could arise from 2019 and what they would need to do in each one to stabilise their control of society.

Let our class answer this with our own preparations. Our class needs a socialist mass workers party. As a step toward its creation we call on Saftu to take the lead in convening an assembly for working class unity. This could bring together representatives of workers, trade unions, working class communities, young people and students to unite the vast number of struggles into a united political movement to challenge the bosses for control of society.

