

Ramaphosa installed as South African president

By Nick Beams
16 February 2018

Former trade union boss Cyril Ramaphosa has been sworn in as president of South Africa following an intense battle within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) which led to the ousting of Jacob Zuma who had held the presidency since 2009.

The move against Zuma was set in motion last December when Ramaphosa won a closely fought struggle within the ANC to become its leader, narrowly defeating the candidate favoured by Zuma.

The campaign against Zuma, waged on the basis of “corruption”, has now seen the elevation of one of the richest men in South Africa to the top position. It is the incarnation of “black economic empowerment,” installed after the dismantling of apartheid, which has benefited a thin layer of black businessman, enriched at the expense of the South African masses who are experiencing worsening social conditions.

The campaign to remove Zuma, which has enjoyed the backing of major international financial and business interests, has been motivated by two concerns.

The first is that the activities of a network of Zuma cronies has impacted adversely on other business interests, both domestic and international. During the course of his campaign, Ramaphosa emphasised that corruption was a barrier to international capital investment in the country.

The second is the growing concern that under Zuma, the ANC, which has played the key role in maintaining the stability of capitalist rule in post-apartheid South Africa, is losing support in the face of growing hostility and discontent in the working class and oppressed masses.

In local elections held last August, it lost control of Johannesburg, the commercial centre, in the capital Pretoria, and most significantly in Port Elizabeth, which is an industrial city, with its vote falling to close

to 50 percent for the first time since it came to power in 1994.

Financial markets welcomed the new regime. The Johannesburg stock market surged more than 3 percent on the news, and the rand hit a three-year high against the US dollar on the basis of “hopes” as the *Financial Times* put it, that “Mr Ramaphosa would now begin the work of reviving the broken economy.” In other words, that his elevation to the presidency would create a more favourable environment for the business and financial interests for which this newspaper speaks.

Ramaphosa’s campaign was laced with references to the need to tackle unemployment and poverty in an attempt to curry favour with the masses, but he will act in the interests of the forces he has always represented.

Pointing to some of the conflicts which led to Zuma’s ouster, he cited corruption and questions concerning “how we can straighten out our state-owned enterprises” and deal with “state capture”, that is, influence peddling.

Ramaphosa is set to deliver a state of the nation address this evening in which he will set out the agenda of the government before bringing down a budget next week. He is also likely to move against ministers appointed by Zuma. On the day of his accession a so-called anti-corruption unit raided the Johannesburg home of the Gupta family which has been accused of using its relationship with Zuma to influence government affairs.

The anti-corruption campaign has nothing to do with improving the conditions of the working population but is being waged on behalf of one section of the ruling elites, along with their international allies, who have been disadvantaged by others because of their close ties with Zuma.

In the installation of Ramaphosa, the South African

bourgeoisie is placing in power a tried and trusted pair of hands.

Ramaphosa began his political career as the head of South Africa's largest trade union, the National Union of Mineworkers, and was elected general secretary of the ANC in 1991.

This was a period of sharp transition. Key sections of South African and international capital recognised that the apartheid regime and its system of regulations was no longer viable under conditions of economic globalisation and that changes were necessary.

Moreover, there was a growing fear that under conditions of a rising movement of the working class, which threatened to explode into a revolutionary struggle, the very stability of capitalist rule was under direct threat. Hence it was necessary to carry out a change from above in order to head off an explosion from below.

The decision was taken to organise regime change and bring the ANC to power, while ensuring the enrichment of a tiny upper layer of a black capitalist class.

This program was implemented above all through the leadership of the ANC under Nelson Mandela with the crucial support of the Stalinist South African Communist Party which threw its full support behind "black economic empowerment."

The role played by the ANC represented the consummation of its program, explicitly based on the Stalinist two-stage theory, renouncing the introduction of socialism and maintaining that a non-European black bourgeoisie had to come to power.

Within the ANC, Ramaphosa played a central role in this political operation and has been richly rewarded for his services, becoming one of the wealthiest men in post-apartheid South Africa with a net worth estimated at \$675 million. He is a former chairman of the South African telecom giant MTN and has interests in corporations and banks in the country and internationally.

The class role of Ramaphosa, as well as the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the National Mineworkers, was written in blood in August 2012 when he played a direct part in the events that led to the massacre of striking mineworkers at the Lonmin mines in Marikana.

At the time, Ramaphosa held a 9 percent share in

Marikana and demanded that the authorities take action against what he called the "plainly dastardly criminal acts" of the strikers—a call that was carried out when security forces gunned down the strikers, killing 34 and wounding 78 others.

A whitewash inquiry, the Farlam Commission, organised under president Zuma, cleared Ramaphosa and other political leaders of any responsibility for the killings.

The elevation to the presidency of Ramaphosa, the consummate representative of "black economic empowerment" and its backers in international finance capital, further underscores the necessity of the South African working class breaking completely from the ANC and its capitalist program and undertaking the task of constructing a revolutionary socialist party if it is to achieve its emancipation.

To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>