

## ANC Prepares for Upcoming Elections in South Africa

Minimum wage law, the land question and the economics of imperialism to shape the character of the coming period

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*In a matter of a few months the ruling African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) will test its political support through national elections.*

It has been a quarter-century since the national liberation movement turned political party won a substantial majority in the first non-racial democratic poll during April 1994 which overturned the apartheid system setting the stage for the implementation of an inclusive constitutional dispensation that recognized the rights of the majority African population.

Over the course of the last twenty five years, the ANC has been able to stave off challenges from the now-defunct National Party and the contemporary leading opposition grouping, the Democratic Alliance (DA). The emergent Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have secured a small fraction of the National Assembly and can only serve as an irritant to the ruling party's platforms and policies.

Earlier in 2018, **former President Jacob Zuma** was forced to step down as the head-of-state due to a lack of confidence in his leadership of the government on the part of the-then recently-elected ANC party officials. Current **President Cyril Ramaphosa** has inherited a politically volatile situation largely prompted by the continuing economic crisis which is manifested through a recession declared several months ago.



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Foreign Minister Lindiwe Sisulu at AfCFTA in Kigali, Rwanda, March 20-21, 2018

Widespread unemployment and poverty remain as vestiges of the racist apartheid system which enriched the white minority settler-class at the expense of the African majority, mixed-race communities and the Asian population. The gap between the ruling class and the working poor is one of the largest in the world therefore compelling the ANC government to put forward corrective policy initiatives in an effort to convince the electorate that the party is still representative of the interests of the people.

One such legislative approach is the passage of a National Minimum Wage Act which was signed into law on November 26 by President Ramaphosa. This law sets the hourly minimum wage at 20 rand (\$1.45) resulting in a 3,500 rand per month salary.

The law was scheduled to go into effect at a future date determined by the president. Although many have praised the National Minimum Wage Act as a measure which will enhance the standard of living of the poor, others claim the law can serve as a disincentive for business owners to remain open, saying they cannot afford to pay the increased salaries.

These arguments against the raising of wages are prevalent within the capitalist world including the United States where a national movement has sprung up over the last few years among organized labor and employees advocacy organizations calling for a \$15 per hour minimum wage along with union representation. In South Africa, where joblessness has been rising, such arguments against minimum wage hikes have appeal to the conservative DA opposition which is supported by the capitalist class.

Official unemployment in South Africa stands at over 27%. President Ramaphosa recognizing the ongoing crisis of job losses held a two-day summit in early October designed to stimulate employment growth.

A numerical goal of 275,000 new jobs annually was discussed while much of the focus of the gathering dealt with the need to tackle corruption and to wage a campaign for increasing consumer demand for South African produced commodities. Ramaphosa said at the conclusion of the summit that: "We, as a country and as a government and as social partners united in this effort, have been putting the building blocks in place for the recovery of our economy and we have been coming up with a number of enabling measures. This jobs summit is one of those enabling measures that [are] definitely going to contribute to the recovery of our economy."

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a close ally of the ANC, welcomed the Jobs Summit. However, **General Secretary Bheki Ntshalintshali** addressed the summit on October 5 saying:

"We wanted a summit to engage on the problems we are facing-in a manner constituencies appreciated the problems faced by workers and the unemployed and provided solutions. [We] wanted a moratorium on retrenchments across all sectors of our economy, and the filling of critical vacancies in the public sector." (see [this](#))

## The Land Question and Electoral Politics

Another major lingering issue is the imperative of radical land redistribution in South Africa where the European agricultural sector and mining interests continue to dominate. Under the ANC there have been several efforts to encourage land reform including the “willing seller, willing buyer” project. In addition, the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) program has been in existence for well over a decade yet the results leave much to be desired. (see [this](#))

A resolution to develop a comprehensive program for land reform was passed by the National Assembly in April with the combined votes of both the ANC and the EFF. Later in December, the legislative body endorsed a report stating that land seizure without compensation is one of the avenues which can be utilized to address the disparate ownership rates in South Africa.

The support for the policy by the National Assembly was mirrored in similar actions taken by the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) where only the DA-dominated Western Cape expressed objections to land reform, threatening court action. An article published by Brookings on August 27 by Witney Schneidman and Larry Signe noted:

“Today in South Africa, 72 percent of farms and agricultural holdings are owned by whites, who make up 8.2 percent of the population. Black South Africans, who comprise 80.2 percent of the population, own 4 percent of the land.” (see [this](#))

Land redistribution is not only a major concern in the rural areas. Seizures and occupations of land are taking place in urban locations at an increasing rate. South African Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, **Maite Nkoana-Mashabane**, articulated the policy of the ANC Government emphasizing:

“An effective response to land grabs therefore requires collaboration with local government, organized agriculture, traditional leadership, and law enforcement agencies. The department of rural development and land reform has already commenced with bilateral discussions with each of the above-mentioned sectors with a view to develop prevention mechanisms, as well as develop a monitoring system for land grabs, land invasions and land-related criminal acts.” (see [this](#))

### **South Africa, the African Continent and World Imperialism**

Nonetheless, irrespective of the methodology adopted by the ANC Government, the U.S. administration under **President Donald Trump** has already expressed its displeasure with the existing debate by distorting the actual situation inside South Africa. Trump tweeted in August that European farmers were being systematically killed in an organized movement to take land from them.



Such a view completely ignores the historical legacy of settler-colonialism and imperialism in Southern Africa. Through force of arms and later minority legislation passed in 1913 and 1936, the European rulers in South Africa took control of indigenous land in an effort to facilitate the racist state dominance of the African majority.

The ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party in 1980 passed legislation mandating land redistribution to the original owners. In response, the U.S., the former colonial power of Britain and the European Union (EU) enacted draconian sanctions which remain in place nearly two decades later. This same posture could also be leveled at South Africa and neighboring Namibia, where a similar debate is taking place.

Consequently, the ANC and other progressive forces in South Africa must be prepared to defend the interests of the majority up to the point of anticipating a military intervention by the imperialist states. At stake in this situation are the political and economic futures of African people in South Africa and other regions of the continent.

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