

News

SACP mulls Ramaphosa-led party

An alternative alliance is on the cards if Dlamini-Zuma wins the ANC presidency

Dineo Bendile, Matuma Letsoalo & Given Sigauqwe

Leaders of the South African Communist Party, trade unions, civil society and ANC veterans have started an informal discussion about establishing an alternative movement that will contest elections in 2019.

The *Mail & Guardian* has spoken to several delegates on the sidelines of the SACP's 14th national congress, who say the alternative movement should be led by deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, who would be the face of the alternative party if he loses the ANC election in December against Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

An SACP delegate who spoke to the *M&G* on condition of anonymity said the ANC needed to ensure Ramaphosa became its next president if the party wanted to avoid a split that could cripple it.

"You will see a lot of changes. If Ramaphosa does not emerge victorious in the conference in December, there are huge chances that we will be out of the ANC and he might be leading that political party," he said.

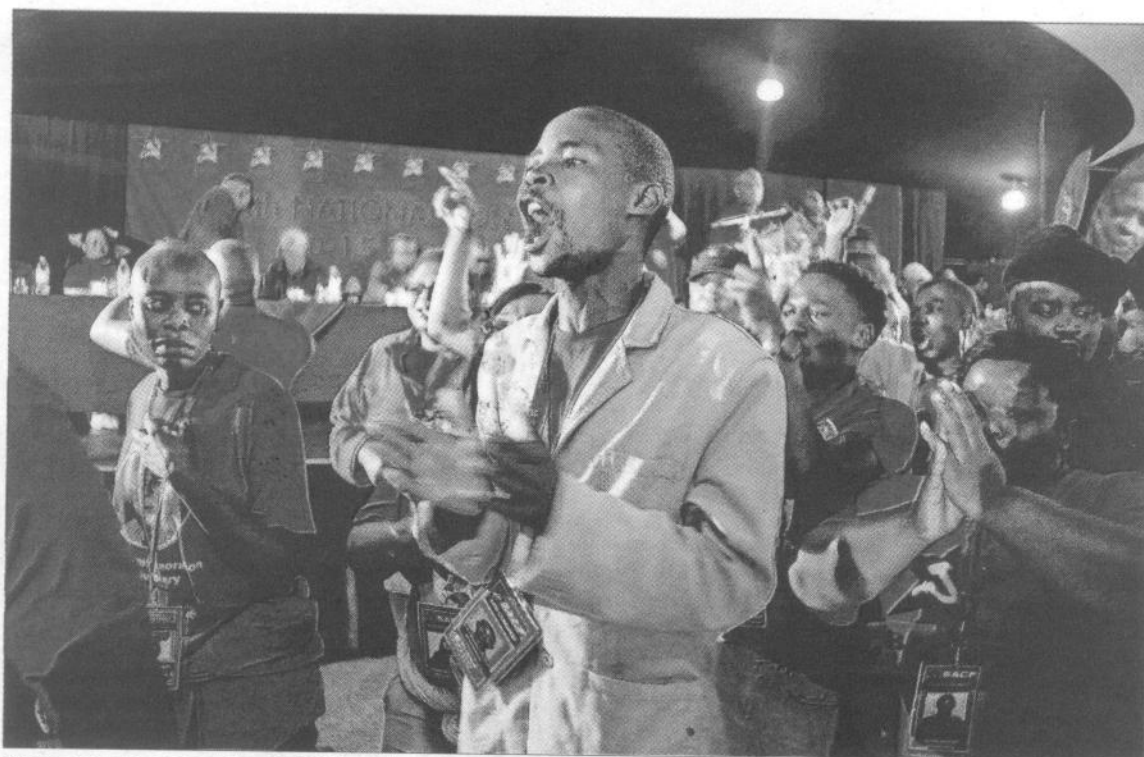
"All indications are that he [Ramaphosa] is going to emerge victorious. But you know how the ANC operates; they might do mischievous things. If they do that, then we're out. It's not even negotiable. If they do that, we're out."

"Remember, we've been with them — so, if we're out of the ANC, chances are we're going to defeat them. Our policies speak volumes, especially to poor people and the working class."

The congress is expected to take a resolution on whether or not the SACP will contest the 2019 elections independently of the ANC, something it began considering in 2007.

First deputy general secretary Solly Mapaila confirmed that efforts were under way to work with civil society movements and party veterans to find solutions to immediate challenges facing the country.

"We cannot only rebuild the party based on what will happen in the



Changes: Delegates at the SACP's national congress sang of wanting state power, sending a message that they'll quit the ANC-led alliance if Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma wins the ANC presidential race. Photo: Oupa Nkosi

ANC. That's why we have taken our own initiative to organise a wide range of social and progressive forces together and to work with them," he said.

"At the imbizo we convened in April, a lot of people ... indicated that we can work together against corporate capture of the state — that is one of the most immediate threats [to] our revolution. So, we've agreed to work with them on that. We're not necessarily waiting for December to start doing something we have already begun, so this must continue," Mapaila said.

SACP central committee member Mugwena Maluleke said forming an alternative structure may be necessary if the ANC is not able to renew itself. "I believe in the unity of our alliance. However, unity must not be at all costs. If there are signs that we may not rescue the ANC, clearly then that particular left front which is progressive, uniting our people, may be a necessity," he said.

At the congress, delegates sang a recurring tune with the lyrics "Siyas'funa istate power" (We want state power), a clear message to the leaders of the SACP and the ANC.

However, SACP chairperson

Senzeni Zokwana gave a measured view on these calls and displayed optimism that the ANC-led alliance would repair itself and emerge united from the December elective conference.

"I think the sentiments that are raised by some of our members are broadly reflective of the broad disappointment. The daily exposé that people are not denying really creates a problem. But we are hoping that from now till December we find each other as an alliance since we are speaking of a reconfigured alliance," Zokwana said.

Those who are pushing for the SACP to contest elections have opposed Zokwana's view and believe any remaining hope to reconfigure the alliance is wishful thinking.

In a presentation delivered to delegates, former first general secretary Jeremy Cronin said the alliance was "reconfiguring by decomposition and the primary reason is the leadership paralysis in the ANC".

Cronin called on SACP delegates to carefully consider whether or not to contest elections, to ensure that the party would not be left on the back foot by the outcome of the ANC's December elective conference.

"On the elections front, do we want to box ourselves to a decision here in July 2017 all the way forwards to 2019? What happens if the 'premier league' slate wins? What happens if there is a split in the ANC? And perhaps it's going to be very hard for some of us to remain in ANC positions under a gangster leadership," he said.

He called for extra caution, warning that it was not clear if the elective conference would take place — due to the threat of "forces in high positions" in the ANC who he said would be prepared to collapse the conference if they didn't get their way.

Taking a swipe at President Jacob Zuma, Cronin said: "Remember, some of them might be facing 783 criminal charges, plus I don't know how many thousands others since the last count was done. So we need to understand [what] we are facing as an alliance."

SACP deputy national chairperson Thulas Nxesi echoed the belief that the ANC's elective conference would be a make-or-break moment for the alliance, which would deteriorate further if leaders were unable to deal with factions.

Nxesi was confident that delegates would debate the full scope of the decision when they discussed the issue of contesting state power in their commissions.

"I am not going to rule out anything, but we have not broken the alliance. We are going to debate and after that we can take a particular position," Nxesi said.

"It is not a warning; it is not a threat — it is a reality that if certain issues are not addressed, they will alienate the constituency base of the ANC. All provinces are complaining about the issue of gatekeeping."

As key figures in the plan to find a solution to the decaying state of the alliance, veterans of the movement were also given an opportunity to express themselves at the SACP congress.

The SACP's former provincial chairperson in Gauteng, Trevor Fowler, said the ANC national executive committee (NEC) should allow members to use their conscience during the upcoming motion of no confidence against Zuma.

"It is not a choice between the ANC and the country. It is a choice between the president and the country," he said.

"The chief justice laid out that members of Parliament take an oath to the Constitution and the people of South Africa..."

"The evidence says that there have been two constitutional court decisions: one on Nkandla and one on Sassa [the South African Social Security Agency], where it had to go to the Constitutional Court to ensure that 17 million get grants."

"Those judgments said the president and those members of Cabinet who were involved did not uphold their constitutional duties," said Fowler.

"We heard about the extent of looting. How does the NEC put members [of Parliament] in that position? It can't be correct. We know that people who are committed to democracy will have a difficult decision to make."

He said that "acts of intimidation against a member of Parliament, the honorable [Makhosi] Khoza, who says her family has been threatened, those issues must be taken out."

"It should not be happening in a county where we committed to having peace and security."