

Mandela

– heroically leading ANC to power

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As admirers the world over are engaged in an unprecedented vigil awaiting the last breath of Nelson Mandela, Izwi labasebenzi looks at his and the ANC's legacy – how has his self-sacrificing commitment come to be followed by the unashamed self-enrichment of the current ANC leaders?

Integrity and commitment

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is rightly revered worldwide as a statesman ranking along great figures of history like Mohatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King. He is recognised for his role in the defeat of one of the most reviled regimes on the planet and one the most odious systems of oppression and exploitation in history. He has acquired the status of universal hero not least because of his demonstration in practice of his commitment to self-sacrifice for a noble cause – the national liberation of the black majority. This is captured by his declaration, during the Treason Trial, that non-racialism was a principle that he was prepared, 'if needs be', to die for.

His willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the cause is borne out by the fact that he personally undertook the task of establishing the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), secretly paying visits to countries like Algeria to seek support for the armed struggle leading him to be installed as MK's first commander-in-chief. His steadfast refusal to accept any kind of compromise from the apartheid regime in exchange for his freedom, choosing instead to endure twenty-seven years of incarceration, reinforced his stature as a man of principle and integrity committed to the service of his people in sharp contrast to today's unprincipled, corrupt political elite that is seen by many as trampling on the legacy he entrusted to them.

The current ANC leadership falsely portrays the defeat of apartheid as the more or less inevitable culmination of the

continent's oldest liberation movement's hundred-year long march to victory. There can be little doubt, however, that, in terms of commitment, political and ideological outlook, strategy and tactics the ANC that endeared itself to the masses is the one of Mandela, of the second half of its centenary rather than its first.

Mandela transforms ANC

As part of a new generation of young leaders in the 1940s, inspired by the colonial revolution that shook imperialism at the end of the second world war, Mandela and his comrades, principally, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, shook up an ANC leadership whose character until then was determined by the road along which they had sought salvation for the oppressed – begging the Queen of England to release the black oppressed from bondage while pledging, as subjects, their undying loyalty to her and the British empire.

From an organisation whose methods consisted of pleas and petitions, Mandela and his comrades, having taken control of the ANC Youth League and adopting the 1949 Programme of Action, converted the ANC for the first time into an organisation committed to achieving its objectives by mass action – defiance campaigns, bus boycotts, anti-pass law protests and stay-aways.

From this followed the adoption of the Freedom Charter, whose radical demands reflected the extent to which the working class masses had come to influence the outlook of the ANC, in contrast to the pre-Mandela leadership's hostile distance corresponding to their class separation. From that point onwards up to liberation in 1994, it was possible for the antagonistic class aspirations of the working masses and those of the middle class – the aspirant black capitalist class – held in common subjugation by the white minority regime, to co-exist in the same organisation under the same programme in mutual commitment to overthrow white minority rule. It would not matter... until it mattered. Until, that is, the time came to implement the Freedom Charter.

The next elections will be taking place twenty years since the end of apartheid. The historic 1994 elections symbolised the triumph of the national liberation struggle – the lifting of the yoke of racial oppression and the opening of the doors to a society in which black people, now a head taller, could stand side-by-side with their white counterparts as equals. Assured by the promises of a better life for all and the strength of their numbers, the black majority embraced the generosity Mandela championed towards the white minority. Mandela's leadership, it was believed, had averted a racial civil war thought unavoidable.

With a leadership that demonstrated an apparently single-minded determination to lead its people to freedom, there was no reason to doubt the promise of a better life for all to come. Through Mandela's leadership, a new democratic dispensation based on what has been described as the most progressive constitution in the world had been ushered in. On its foundations there would arise a new, 'rainbow nation', from which racial oppression and its companions – poverty, illiteracy, disease, homelessness – would be banished 'never again', in Mandela's words, to return. In this new SA there would be equality of opportunity for all in a nation 'united in its diversity'.

Reality looks different

As SA completes the second decade of democracy, reality looks rather different from the promise that came out of the negotiated political settlement worked out in the early 1990s. Although the racist FW De Klerk government duly vacated the seat of political power for the ANC, and the ANC has been regularly returned with large majorities, for the overwhelming majority little has changed.

A striking feature of the eulogising of Mandela as the country and the world awaits his passing, is the conflicting class interests converging around what appears to be a common public manifestation of a nation united in its mourning.

The 'nation' that Mandela has bequeathed is as unreconstructed today as it was before the end of apartheid, disaggregated into its two main social forces – the working class on the one side and the capitalist class on the other. SA is reputed to be the most unequal society on Earth. As many as 8 million are unemployed, 12 million go to bed hungry, mil-



Children in a squatter camp twenty years into 'freedom'.

lions are excluded from decent education, health and housing.

The ruling ANC elite is exhibiting the same characteristics as the one which it replaced – corrupt, inept and with an insatiable appetite for self-enrichment and power. Even worse, whilst condemning apartheid order policies as a crime against humanity, the representatives of the new elite are displaying a growing infatuation with similar methods of rule as their predecessors, taking shelter behind repressive legislation such as the Secrecy Act, the National Key Points Act and the Traditional Courts Bill to secure their grip on power, and to keep the nation in the same sort of dark secrecy and repression as the apartheid regime.

Instead of the fulfilment of the dreams of equality and prosperity the masses had been led to believe lay in store for them under democracy, its benefits have accrued to only a tiny minority. Far from the promised 'Rainbow Nation' of equals, SA today resembles, as ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe has himself admitted, 'an Irish Coffee' – black at the bottom, on top a thin layer of white cream sprinkled with chocolate.

A common theme running through the overwhelming majority of evaluations of Mandela's life is that the conduct of his successors in the ANC leadership and his squabbling family represent not just a departure from everything that Mandela stood for, but constitute the desecration of his legacy. Does this assessment stand the test of close scrutiny?

Capitalist commentators would have us believe that SA would have been if not the country of our dreams then at least a better place had Mandela's successors continued to walk in his footsteps. The truth, however, is that this is precisely what they did, at

least in respect of all the fundamental questions of policy on which the ANC's near twenty-year rule has been based.

Mandela and Gear

Mandela played the decisive role in the abandonment of the Freedom Charter and everything the ANC was believed to have held sacred until then. The decisive break was the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) programme in 1996. Gear was to bring the ANC government incrementally into open collision with the working class – in the workplace, townships and squatter camps and tertiary education institutions and introduced the first serious strains in the Tripartite Alliance. The difference between Mandela's reign and that of all his successors is more in style than substance.

Somewhat unfairly, for instance, Mbeki, who proudly proclaimed himself a Thatcherite, has come to be personally associated with Gear. Yet Gear was adopted under Mandela's presidency. In spite of the fact that Mbeki spearheaded the adoption of Gear, he did so with Mandela's (and that of the rest of the ANC leadership including the SACP's) full blessing.

Within the period between his release in 1990 and the ANC's accession to power four years later, Mandela's position swung from an unswerving commitment to the Freedom Charter and a reaffirmation of its nationalisation clauses at its heart as fundamental to ANC policy, to a declaration, well before the ANC entered parliament that privatisation – at the heart of Gear's original strategic objectives – was now the ANC's fundamental policy. It was Mandela that led the ANC to power with the promise of jobs for all, and the same Mandela who declared in parliament after Gear had been adopted that the ANC government was 'not a job-creating agency'.



Strikers on the march in Durban 1973.



atives 's legacy

out struggle tragically into dead end



In performing this heart transplant, Dr Mandela did not consult the patient. Whereas the adoption of the Freedom Charter was the culmination of the most democratic process in the ANC's history, the adoption of Gear was profoundly undemocratic. The Freedom Charter was the summation of the inputs of thousands of workers in urban and rural areas and of people of all walks of life across the country whose proposals were written on pieces of paper and forwarded to the Congress of the People there to be incorporated.

Gear on the other hand was developed behind the backs not just of the membership, but of the majority of even the ANC cabinet itself. It was adopted and implemented in 1996, and presented to the membership at the ANC's Mafikeng conference in 1997 as an accomplished fact after it had already been approved by big business.

As former MK leader, SACP Central Committee member and Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils confirms, in an admission astonishing for its honesty, under Mandela's leadership, the ANC betrayed the 'poorest of the poor' to domestic capital and imperialism in the Codesa negotiations.

Business pacts with Mandela

Quoting Stellenbosch University's Sampie Terreblanche, Kasrils writes: '...by late 1993 big business strategies – hatched in 1991 at the mining mogul Harry Oppenheimer's Johannesburg residence – were crystallizing in secret late-night discussions at the Development Bank of South Africa. Present were South Africa's mineral and energy leaders, the bosses of US and British companies with a presence in South Africa...'

What transpired out of these 'late-night discussions'? Kasrils reveals: 'Nationalisation of the mines and [the commanding] heights of the economy as envisaged by the Freedom Charter was abandoned.'

Kasrils describes how the ANC leadership prostrated itself before domestic capital and imperialism: 'The ANC accepted responsibility for a vast apartheid-era debt... a wealth tax on the super-rich to fund developmental projects was set aside, and domestic and international corporations, enriched by apartheid, were excused from any financial reparations. Extremely tight budgetary obligations were instituted that would tie the hands of any future governments; obligations to implement a free trade policy and abolish all forms of tariff protection in keeping with neoliberal free trade fundamentals were accepted. Big corporations were allowed to shift their main listings abroad.'

The roots of the ANC leadership's latter-day disenchantment with the constitution, and their growing exasperation with the parliamentary democracy itself, are to be found in the trampling of their own internal democracy.

Contrary to the propaganda of the old regime, the ANC leadership, despite its embrace of the SACP, was never infected by the 'disease' of communism. Mbeki, whose ideological outlook has falsely been portrayed as fundamentally at variance with that of Mandela's, in stating such was merely echoing within earshot of the working class what Mandela had made crystal clear already back in 1956, within a year of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, and later at the Treason Trial in 1964.

He did not want the Freedom Charter to be confused with socialism. The Freedom Charter, he explained '...is by no means a blue-print for a socialist state. It calls for the redistribution, but not nationalisation, of land; it provides for nationalisation of mines, banks, and monopoly industry, because big monopolies are owned by one race only, and without such nationalisation racial domination would be

perpetuated despite the spread of political power.

As we have pointed out before, the ANC's support for nationalisation has never been as a step towards the abolition of capitalism, but to use the state to accelerate the development of a black capitalist class in much the same way as the Nats did for the development of an Afrikaner bourgeoisie. As Mandela explained in the Treason Trial: 'The ANC's [nationalisation] policy corresponds with the old policy of the present Nationalist Party which, for many years, had as part of its programme the nationalisation of the gold mines which, at that time, were controlled by foreign capital.'

Mandela before elections

The ANC finds itself at this point in history, not because it has been derailed from the historical path it plotted for itself, but because this is where, given its history, social character and historical purpose, it has always been headed.

The ANC's surrender of the mandate of the Congress of the People at Codesa was no deviation from this path. In fact it was the fulfilment of the ANC's historical mission. It was signalled in Mandela's Treason Trial speech where he made clear the leadership's preparedness to compromise even on the fundamental principle of majority rule based on one-person-one-vote by offering to negotiate for a limited number of seats for blacks for a fixed period to be followed by a gradual increase after a fixed period. He signalled this further by engaging in secret negotiations with representatives of the apartheid regime's intelligence services and big business as early as 1985 for which he had no mandate from his own organisation.

The 'talks about talks' that followed in the form of more high level engagements with the regime were preceded by talks with members of the political establishment in 1987 in Dakar Senegal. The abandonment of the armed struggle without any consultations with the MK cadres or even Chris Hani, proved that the armed struggle had always been nothing more than a propaganda of the deed tactic to force the regime to the negotiating table. Codesa was the logical sequel.

The Nobel Peace prize was conferred on Mandela and De Klerk to perpetuate the myth that the negotiated settlement was the fortuitous confluence of the conversion on the road to Damascus of an Afrikaner-

led capitalist establishment and a Mandela-led ANC leadership magnanimous in its victory. But as even Mandela felt obliged to point out, the country was liberated not by him or the ANC leadership but the working masses themselves.

If imperialism and the capitalist establishment in SA exerted pressure on the apartheid regime to negotiate with the ANC it was because they understood that the struggles of the masses – from the 1973 strikes in Natal to the 1976 uprising of the youth to the insurrectionary movement of the 1980s spurred by the establishment of the UDF and in particular the socialist consciousness of the workers of Cosatu – posed a mortal threat to their system. Had white minority rule be overthrown by an insurrection of the masses, the future of capitalism itself would have been threatened. The behind-the-scenes negotiations with Mandela had convinced the more far-sighted strategists of capital that Mandela was a man they could do business with. Mandela had never contemplated the abolition of capitalism. His problem was not capitalism *per se*, but a capitalism that favoured one race against the other. For this the ruling class is forever grateful to Mandela.

The ANC leadership was never committed to thoroughgoing transformation of SA society. Far from desiring the overthrow of capitalism, it sought accommodation within it. With capitalism now in the throes of its worst crisis since the 1930s, the incapacity of this capitalist government to fulfil the expectations of the people has become more and acute. The crisis of capitalism is reflected now in the ANC itself.

New workers' party

Almost as if conspiring to effect a symmetry in the life cycle of the party he led so heroically and that of Mandela himself, history appears to have determined that the imminence of Mandela's demise should coincide with the implosion of the ANC.

There is little doubt that the ANC's fast eroding cohesion will accelerate after Mandela's passing. With him will be buried the last rays of its halo as a liberation organisation.

Th u s , whilst the capitalist class mourns the imminent

lapse of its Codesa salvation, the working class has awoken to the sounds of the guns of Marikana – the party they believed for so long to be their own is in fact the party of the bosses. What happened in reality was an exchange of political captains of capitalism; the racist white government was replaced by a 'non-racist' democratically elected government based on the black majority.

The establishment of the Workers and Socialist Party represents an historic step forward: the reclamation by the proletariat of its class and political independence, its liberation from the ideological and political prison camp of the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance in which it was incarcerated for nearly two decades. The march towards a socialist SA, from which the working class had been diverted since 1994, has now resumed.

The capitalists and their spokespersons are justified to be worried about the possible death of Mandela. Even if some of them are shedding crocodile tears, the point is that he gave SA capitalism a new lease on life. It is almost twenty years now since his ANC came to power. These twenty years have consistently revealed the brutality of capitalism – poverty, unemployment and inequality to which his ANC leaders refer as triple challenges. Under capitalism they cannot do away with them. Only under socialism will the workers rid society of these capitalist evils. It remains for the workers and youth of today to follow what is the best example set by Mandela – selfless and determined struggle – but also to learn that in the struggle we are fighting a compromise with a class enemy is impermissible, because they inevitably lead to betrayals of the masses as capitalism cannot meet their aspirations. More importantly, they must learn that the working class should only rely on its independent political leadership, organisations and programme to transform society in its own interests and those of the poor, for a socialist South Africa and a socialist world.

