

Mandela Led Fight Against Apartheid, But Not Against Extreme Inequality

By [Prof. Patrick Bond](#)

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“Mandela deserves great credit for ending racial apartheid in South Africa, but his legacy includes the continuation of mass poverty

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Transcript

J AISAL NOOR, TRNN PRODUCER: Nelson Mandela has passed away. The larger-than-life anti-apartheid figure is leaving behind the legacy of being South Africa’s first black president. Here to give us his perspective on his life is Patrick Bond. Patrick is the director of the center for civil society and a professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Thank you for joining us, Patrick.

BOND: Jaisal, the mood here in South Africa is terribly somber. This was the day that everyone knew would come. And in the last few months Mandela’s been in hospital four times. But it’s hard to come to grips with the loss of someone who has ruled in a moral and spiritual way just as much as in a political way in his first five years as the president of the Democratic South Africa in 1994 to ‘99. Prior to that, Mandela prepared the country for democracy.

He was released in February 1990 after 27 years in jail, and he skillfully maneuvered the negotiations so that at least political democracy, one person, one vote in the unitary state was one, whereas the prior rulers, the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, had tried all manner of

gimmicks–Jim Crow laws and property-based voting–and had done their best to weaken ANC, also through slaughtering thousands of ANC activists in the period between 1990 and '94. Mandela drove through negotiations, occasionally breaking them off, and showed the stature of someone who could forgive on a personal level, arrange the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and also inspired the nation to do an extraordinary job of transiting from racial apartheid to a more normal democracy, albeit one with worsening inequality, worsening unemployment, worsening ecological conditions. And these too will be part of Mandela's legacy.

NOOR: And, Patrick, can you talk more about this economic legacy that the African National Congress has left behind?

BOND: Yes. Well, the African National Congress will probably rule, thanks to how strong Mandela put together the coalition in 1994, for many years. It may be that in 2019 they face their first electoral challenge, and that will come because of policies that were adopted during Mandela's time. I happened to work in his office twice, '94 and '96, and saw these policies being pushed on Mandela by international finance and domestic business and a neoliberal conservative faction within his own party. And that faction's been outed when former minister of intelligence and minister of water Ronnie Kasrils, probably the country's greatest white revolutionary ever, has made a major confession in a new edition of his autobiography, *Armed and dangerous*, in which he says, we were absolutely incapable of dealing with the period of 1990 to '95, '96, in which the left agenda, and possibly a socialist current that had been strong when the Soviet Union was a major benefactor–and when in 1990 the Soviet Union fell away, it looked like, as Ronnie Kasrils has put it, the confidence of the left within ANC had completely collapsed. And that meant that many concessions were made that if one looks back at them perhaps needn't have been done. And that's why Kasril's statement does leave a shadow on Mandela's government. He basically says that as a ruler Mandela gave in way too much to rich people. So he replaced racial apartheid with class apartheid.

NOOR: Patrick, can you tell us more about some of the details that Ronnie Kasrils has revealed in this writing?

BOND: Yes, indeed. It was really about this critical period just before the 1994 elections, and it included an International Monetary Fund loan to the incoming government that was arranged as the outgoing one had a transitional executive committee. And that loan called for the standard structural adjustment conditions at just about the same time, late 1993, the final constitution was agreed upon that gives property rights extraordinary dominance and also gave the central bank, the South African Reserve Bank, insulation from democracy–in addition, an agreement to prepay the apartheid debt, which Mandela for so many years, in the spirit of sanctions, indeed hand-in-hand with Martin Luther King, calling in the early 1960s for the United Nations and big international corporations to pull out of South Africa. And yet, unfortunately, Mandela felt the need to repay the loans–\$25 billion worth–that were coming due as he became president in 1994. He later bitterly remarked about those loans having set back the cause of delivering desperately needed services. And in all of that time, one saw the distinction between the radical Mandela, who had endorsed Marxism back in the 1950s, as particularly the Freedom Charter of 1955 called for the expropriation of the mines and banks and monopoly capital and their sharing for the people as a whole–. When Mandela came out of prison in 1990, he said, that is the policy of the ANC and a change in that policy is inconceivable. But it was only a few months later before–I certainly witnessed

that in Johannesburg in that transition period, 1990 to '94—major compromises were made with big business. And big business basically said, we will get out of our relationship with the Afrikaner rulers if you let us keep, basically, our wealth intact and indeed to take the wealth abroad. And so exchange controls were relaxed very soon after Mandela took over. And just as he left office in 1999, big businesses said, we now want to take our money out of here forever. So they relisted from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange to London, New York, and Australia. So this is the great tragedy of capital flight. Big business never really believed in Mandela, never truly invested in the country. And there were more symbolic victories, like the Rugby World Cup that was won with Mandela promoting especially the Afrikaans-dominated team. And that was to great symbolic effect, but didn't do much for delivering services and redistributing wealth. Our wealth redistribution was the second worst of major countries after Brazil, and now is much, much, much worse, is the worst major country in the world. A GINI coefficient that fell from about 0.56 to 0.67, meaning very, very extreme inequality, got much worse during Mandela's government.

NOOR: And talk more about this inequality. It's quite remarkable that a people breaking the bonds of apartheid are now facing greater inequality than they faced during apartheid.

BOND: Well, that's right. And in a book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein describes this quite well. I think she in a sense describes the shock and awe of winning a victory and many people believing that these great leaders like Mandela, many of his colleagues were not only as sophisticated in getting the democracy—one person, one vote—that was always demanded, but also that they would deliver the Reconstruction and Development Programme—the promise is about 150 pages.

Soon thereafter, one of the other competing politicians, Gatsha Buthelezi, renamed this RDP—rumors, dreams, and promises. And, unfortunately, if you go through it, as I've done on commission from the African National Congress and audited that RDP, it was really only the more conservative elements that Mandela allowed to push through. His first major interview, for example, he said nationalization is not in the RDP. In fact, it is there on page 80. So this was one of the small indications that Mandela didn't really have the agenda of redistribution. He wanted to manage a very tumultuous society where white Afrikaners, especially the generals in the army, did pose a major threat and where white business seemed to be, in the conditions of neoliberalism of the 1990s (with no other opposing force on the left in the world to work with), quite dominant, and pleasing big business was really the order of the day.

NOOR: Now, what are South Africans doing today to challenge the corporate grip on their government, on their economic policies? And what proposals are being discussed to decrease this continuing inequality?

BOND: Well, I've been spending a little bit of time with the trade unions in Johannesburg. Their leaders, like [zwE.l@n.zi.m@.vA.vi], considered the most powerful left leader in the country, have not been in the least intimidated by the African National Congress's continuing neoliberal policies, and they continue to oppose them very vocally.

In addition, the protests that continue at the grassroots level at probably about the highest rate per person in the world have typically demanded access to services—water and electricity, decent housing, and clinics for better medical care, and better schools, recreational facilities, waste removal. And these protests, they often pop up, and they fall back down. But you do get a sense being in this country for even a short amount of time

that whether it was Nelson Mandela encouraging people to exercise their democratic muscles or just that pent-up demand that during the 1980s, when widespread resistance to apartheid intensified and a honeymoon of a small degree with Mandela nevertheless leading to widespread discontent at this state of affairs, where public policy is much more pro-banker than pro-people. And I suspect these will continue.

And maybe without Mandela's overarching symbolic power and the glue that he represented in keeping this very diverse alliance within the African National Congress together, with that era now passed it may not be too long before the long-predicted split between the different factions of the ANC occurs, with somewhat corrupt and nationalist and Zulu ethnic faction currently in power continuing and more left-wing trade unions dropping out. In 2008, a similar split occurred when those close to Thabo Mbeki dropped out, and they got about 9 percent of the vote in the next year's election. And it may well be that not in the 2014 but in the 2019 election, whoever is Jacob Zuma's successor will face quite a challenge and the aura of claiming Mandela's mantle will continue. That mantle, by the way, has been even claimed by the center-right party, the Democratic Alliance.

And I think everyone is mourning. There's no question that this is a great tragedy, the death of a founder of a nation. And yet I think South Africans do a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiations as to what kind of new power bloc might emerge, and even a new party from Steve Biko's former partner, Mamphele Ramphele, called Agang, has just come up. And these are the sorts of things that make the situation fluid even though the African National Congress still commands about 60 percent of the popular support. NOOR: Patrick Bond, thank you for joining us. BOND: Thank you.

NOOR: And thank you for joining us on The Real News Network.

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