



"A Typical Terrorist Organisation": What they said about Mandela and why he was despised by the neoliberals

In the wake of Nelson Mandela's passing, a great many people will come forward to offer their reflections on a man who suffered for decades in order to help black South Africans defeat Apartheid. Let's not forget, there once was a time when mainstream political notables had no qualms about slurring Mandela and the African National Congress as well as whitewashing the crimes of Apartheid South Africa.

He was, of course, a great leader, an activist, a former president, a peacekeeper and an icon for today's generation. However, less than ten years ago he had a very different title; at least in some circles. Until 2008, Nelson Mandela was on the US terrorism watch list.

Here is what some leading neoliberals had to say:

Margaret Thatcher: Thatcher preferred "constructive engagement" with the racist Apartheid regime to issuing tough sanctions. In 1987, she said this: "The ANC is a typical terrorist organisation ... Anyone who thinks it is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud-cuckoo land." One of her allies and supporters, Member of Parliament Teddy Taylor, said Mandela "should be shot." When Thatcher died earlier this year, former ANC executive Pallo Jordan said "good riddance": She was a staunch supporter of the apartheid regime.

She was part of the right-wing alliance with Ronald Reagan that led to a lot of avoidable deaths."

President Ronald Reagan: In 1981, Reagan asked "Can we abandon a country that has stood beside us in every war we've ever fought, a country that strategically is essential to the free world in its production of minerals we all must have and so forth? I just feel that, myself, that here, if we're going to sit down at a table and negotiate with the Russians, surely we can keep the door open and continue to negotiate with a friendly nation like South Africa."

He later went on to condemn, in 1986, the "calculated terror by elements of the African National Congress: the mining of roads, the bombings of public places, designed to bring about further repression." This same year, Reagan fought tooth and nail to block lawmakers eager to put sanctions on Apartheid South Africa, which he considered a valuable ally in the fight against communism. He vetoed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, though his veto was overridden by Congress. He also had the ANC and Mandela placed on America's terrorist watch list.

Dick Cheney who, while serving as Wyoming's Republican congressman back in 1986, found it simply beyond his capacity to distinguish between a freedom fighter committed to ending South Africa's brutal system of apartheid—one of the most evil political systems ever to scar the planet—and a terrorist. In the mind of Dick Cheney, Nelson Mandela and those whom he led in the African National Congress, were, indeed, terrorists.

As recently as the year 2000, while campaigning as the nominee of the Republican Party to become our Vice President, Cheney showed up on ABC's "This Week" programme to defend his vote, stating that "the ANC was then viewed as a terrorist organization." As a result, said Cheney, "I don't have any problems at all with the vote I cast 20 years ago."

Cheney is still a leading right wing torch bearer for the Tea Party, the ultra-free market republicans, who are no friends of the organised labour in the USA.

The Heritage Foundation, a US neoliberal think tank, says Mandela is no “freedom fighter.” “Americans nevertheless have reasons to be sceptical of Mandela,” the foundation warned as he planned to visit the United States in 1990. “First, Nelson Mandela is not a freedom fighter. He repeatedly has supported terrorism. Since Mandela’s release from prison and his subsequent refusal to renounce violence, the Marxist-dominated ANC has launched terrorism and violence against civilians, claiming several hundred lives.”

This Conservative think tank links Mandela to communists. “When Mandela made his first visit to the United States in 1990, following his release from prison, the IFF placed advertisements in local papers designed to dampen public enthusiasm for Mandela,” *Newsday* reported. One ad in the *Miami Herald* portrayed Mandela as an ally and defender of Cuba’s Fidel Castro. The city’s large Cuban community was so agitated that a ceremony to present Mandela with keys to the city was scrapped.

Four reasons why many on the neoliberal right could never accept Mandela.

1. Mandela blasted the Iraq War and American imperialism. Mandela called Bush “a president who has no foresight, who cannot think properly,” and accused him of “wanting to plunge the world into a holocaust” by going to war in Iraq. “All that (Mr. Bush) wants is Iraqi oil,” he said. Mandela even speculated that then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan was being undermined in the process because he was black. “They never did that when secretary-generals were white,” he said. He saw the Iraq War as a greater problem of American imperialism around the world. “If there is a country that has committed unspeakable atrocities in the world, it is the United States of America. They don’t care,” he said.

2. Mandela called freedom from poverty a “fundamental human right.” Mandela considered poverty one of the greatest evils in the world and spoke out against inequality everywhere. “Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times – times in which the world boasts breath taking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation – that they have to rank

alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils,” he said. He considered ending poverty a basic human duty: “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life,” he said. “While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.”

3. Mandela called out racism in America. On a trip to New York City in 1990, Mandela made a point of visiting Harlem and praising African Americans’ struggles against “the injustices of racist discrimination and economic equality.”

He reminded a larger crowd at Yankee Stadium that racism was not exclusively a South African phenomenon. “As we enter the last decade of the 20th century, it is intolerable, unacceptable, that the cancer of racism is still eating away at the fabric of societies in different parts of our planet,” he said. “All of us, black and white, should spare no effort in our struggle against all forms and manifestations of racism, wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.”

4. Mandela was a die-hard supporter of trade unions. Mandela visited the Detroit auto workers union when touring the U.S., immediately claiming kinship with them. “Sisters and brothers, friends and comrades, the man who is speaking is not a stranger here,” he said. “The man who is speaking is a member of the UAW. I am your flesh and blood.”

Steve Jennings MCIPD

Senior Organiser/Political Officer

