

The bogus African National Congress-derived political credentials of Andrew Feinstein—Part 1

Jean Shaoul
3 July 2024

Andrew Feinstein is a former African National Congress (ANC) MP, a campaigner against corruption and the author of a critically acclaimed book on the arms trade.

While he is standing in the UK General Election as an Independent, he is a supporter of the Collective group formed by him and other supporters of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn was suspended from the party in 2020 and later expelled from the parliamentary party by leader Sir Keir Starmer for claiming that antisemitism in the party was being exaggerated.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has made clear its political opposition to Feinstein's minimal programme of reforms and his insistence that he will supposedly represent "the people" of Camden, not parties telling "people" what to do. The WSWWS has made clear that this provides nothing more than registering a protest vote against Starmer over Gaza and offers no way forward for either the millions of people seeking an end to genocide of the besieged Palestinians.

Despite his recent aversion to parties, Feinstein's political credentials stand or fall firstly on his membership of the African National Congress during the struggle against apartheid, and secondly on his role as a crusader against corruption that began with him opposing an ANC arms deal involving high level government corruption—the political basis for which he offers no explanation. He never explains his continued support for the ANC, and certainly not his joining Tony Blair's Labour Party.

What he stresses instead is that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and opposition to the arms trade makes him uniquely qualified to stand with the Palestinians and support their fight against the apartheid Israeli state.

The best answer to Feinstein's boasts, his endless declarations of being the pupil of Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is to explain the actual historical role of the ANC and its leaders in suppressing the escalating revolutionary struggle by the black working class and ensuring the survival of capitalism and imperialist interests in South Africa.

This will clarify why, 30 years later, South Africa, based on the political perspective Feinstein backed to the hilt as a young but influential figure, is still the most socially unequal society on the planet. Why the working class is still brutally oppressed, while the same oligarchs and conglomerates that ruled under apartheid continue to rule today, abetted by a government representing the multimillionaire black capitalists created through political corruption and nepotism under the programme of Black Economic Empowerment. And why this experience, echoed already in the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority's rule over the West Bank, must not be repeated.

The historic role and class character of the ANC

The ANC is Africa's oldest independence movement and its perspective and programme—including that of seeking independence via armed

struggle while courting the support of one or other of the major powers during the Cold War era—had a major impact on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Founded in 1912, it faced a white ruling class, based in mining, manufacturing and finance, that set up a system of rule based on the brutal repression of the black working class and rural poor.

In response to the growth of independence movements in all the colonial countries, the National Party government of 1948 introduced the apartheid system as a conscious attempt to prevent the emergence of a mass revolutionary movement in South Africa, warning against the "black peril" and the "red menace." Granted dictatorial powers in 1953 to oppose black and Indian anti-apartheid movements, it enforced apartheid and racial segregation with ever stricter legislation and brutal policing. Minister of Native Affairs Hendrik Verwoerd, later to become prime minister in 1958, prepared the much more ambitious programme of "grand apartheid" that set in motion the security forces' brutal policies of provoking "black on black violence" to divide and rule.

Sir Evelyn Baring, Britain's High Commissioner for Southern Africa (1944-51), warned London that prime minister D.F. Malan's government (1948-54) was akin to Nazism. But Britain's Labour government, dependent on South Africa for its uranium supplies, turned a blind eye.

The ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter, drafted by the South African Communist Party (SACP), did not seek the expropriation of the country's financial and mining monopolies, but the expansion of free enterprise. In 1956, ANC leader Nelson Mandela, a covert SACP member, when asked to correct any idea that this was a socialist charter said, "The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country, the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."

This document, which retained the racial categories of apartheid, split the nationalist movement, with the more militant "Africanist" leadership of the ANC Youth League rejecting the Charter's "multi-racialism" and adopting a programme of national liberation for the black majority.

Mandela and the ANC founded uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) as its paramilitary wing, in the wake of the police murder of 69 people protesting the pass laws at Sharpeville in March 1960. But while the ANC and SACP embraced the rhetoric of armed struggle and class struggle and thousands of ANC members, including Mandela were imprisoned for "fomenting violent revolution," Mandela's perspective of creating a black bourgeoisie remained central to the ANC's programme. He fought for it during fierce ideological debates with fellow prisoners on Robben Island in the late 1970s, saying the purpose of the Charter was to establish a bourgeois democracy and maintain the capitalist system.

He declared that “under socialism, the workers hold state power. They and the peasants hold the means of production, the land, the factories and the mills... The Charter does not contemplate such profound economic and political changes.”

During the Treason Trial in 1960, Mandela insisted that the terms of the Freedom Charter, apart from breaking up the mining monopolies, would leave capitalism “absolutely intact.” Its declaration, “The People Shall Govern!” visualises “the transfer of power not to a single social class, but to all the people of this country, be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty bourgeoisie... The non-European traders and businessmen are potential allies, for in hardly any country in the world has the ruling class made conditions so extremely difficult for the rise of a non-European middle class.”

The Charter’s insistence on the creation of a black capitalist class flowed from the Stalinist Comintern’s two-stage theory of revolution, which insisted that it was first necessary to achieve bourgeois democracy before beginning the next stage of fighting to achieve socialism—a stage that in South Africa and elsewhere never even begins.

The SACP played a key role in tying the working class to the capitalist system through the social medium of “alliances” with the middle class, the churches and the liberals. This was a complete break with Lenin who, in the *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, had opposed any “attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries” and “should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.”

The resolution insisted:

From the principles set forth it follows that the whole policy of the Communist International on the national and colonial question must be based mainly on the union of the workers and toiling masses of all nations and countries in the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landlords and of the bourgeoisie. For only such a union can secure victory over capitalism, without which the destruction of national oppression and inequality is impossible.

Trotsky outlined the revolutionary tasks of the young South African proletariat and insisted on its vanguard resolving the national question through its own methods of socialist revolution. He wrote in 1933:

The historical weapon of national liberation can only be the class struggle. The Comintern, beginning in 1924, transformed the programme of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction which is elevated above the reality of class relations. In the struggle against national oppression different classes liberate themselves (temporarily) from material interests and become simple “anti-imperialist” forces.

In order that the spiritual “forces” bravely fulfil the task assigned to them by the Comintern, they are promised as a reward a spiritual “national democratic” state—with unavoidable reference to Lenin’s formula: “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.”

The thesis [draft thesis of the Workers’ Party of South Africa] points out that in 1917 Lenin openly and once and for all discarded the slogan of “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” as if it were a necessary condition for the solution of the agrarian question. This is entirely correct.

Trotsky, L. *Letter to South African Revolutionaries*, April 1933

The fall of the apartheid regime

In the 1950s and 60s, the ANC was banned and its leaders and those of other organisations imprisoned or driven into exile. But in the following years, South Africa’s working class grew into a powerful force, repeatedly rebelling against their social and economic conditions and posing the necessity for independent political mobilisation in a revolutionary struggle for power.

As globally integrated production became more developed in the 1980s, the isolated nature of the South African economy, protected by high tariff barriers from international competition, became increasingly problematic. GDP rose after the mid-1960s, but failed to keep up with the growth in population which has risen from around 18.6 million in 1964 to 61 million today. Business complained about the high cost of supporting a large civil service, a vast police force to suppress the majority black population and a substantial army to fight the MK in neighbouring states. Starting in 1984 it was also confronted with mass strikes and protests and faced international sanctions that were crippling trade and investment. By 1985, the authorities were losing control over the black, working-class townships and the country was teetering on the brink of civil war, prompting a state of emergency.

South African businessmen began to call on the government to reach a settlement with the ANC and release its leaders, including Mandela. Gavin Relly, head of the largest mining conglomerate Anglo-American flew to Lusaka, the Zambian capital that hosted the ANC headquarters, with other representatives of big business.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu played a key role—acting as imperialism’s interlocutor in negotiations between the ANC, the ruling National Party and the security services for a transition to majority rule—and later as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was used to prevent the South African working class from making a reckoning with their political oppressors.

It took another four years of behind-the-scenes negotiations amid mass strikes and protests before incoming President F.W de Klerk announced in January 1990 the end of the apartheid regime, the lifting of the 30-year ban on the ANC, the release of Mandela and other prisoners and elections based on universal suffrage that brought the ANC to power in the 1994 elections. His aim was to preserve South African capitalism and prevent its collapse, which would have set off a chain reaction throughout the former colonies of the imperialist powers.

To be continued



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