

The bogus African National Congress-derived political credentials of Andrew Feinstein—Part 2

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The accommodation between the African National Congress (ANC) and F.W. de Klerk's government was facilitated by the turn by the Stalinist bureaucracy under President Mikhail Gorbachev towards capitalist restoration and the reintegration of the Soviet Union into the structures of world imperialism.

Not long after Gorbachev came to power, he realised the Soviet Union could no longer afford to back the liberation movements in Africa that had been a feature of the Soviet Cold War policy. In October 1986 at the Reykjavik summit, he told US President Ronald Reagan he wanted to retreat from regional conflicts and called for détente and disengagement.

The ANC, as horrified as the white bourgeoisie by the militant protests and strikes of workers and youth in the townships that had erupted outside their control, demobilised the mass movement. It diverted it behind a negotiated programme of “democratic reforms” that preserved the wealth and property of the international corporations and the country's white capitalist rulers, ditching all pledges to take the banks, mines and major industries into public ownership and signing secret agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to implement free market policies and open up South Africa to international capital. In the process many of its leaders became very rich, transforming from freedom fighters to government officials determining the awarding of contracts and Black Economic Empowerment “partners” of the major corporations.

Like its counterparts throughout Africa and the Middle East, the ANC could provide no solutions to the social and economic problems confronting the working class and peasantry within the framework of capitalism. Its only response to steeply escalating social tensions is repression, arrests and the lethal crushing of protests and strikes by the police.

Today, multimillionaire President Cyril Ramaphosa, once leader of the National Union of Mineworkers and now the infamous “butcher of Marikana” miners, presides over a country mired in poverty and crime. At one pole the top 0.01 percent of people, just 3,500 individuals, own about 15 percent of all the wealth and the top 0.1 percent own 25 percent of the wealth. At the other poverty was estimated by the World Bank at 62 percent in 2023, with 47 percent of South Africans relying on state welfare to survive. According to official statistics, about 32 percent are unemployed, while many eke out an existence as casual day labourers in the shadow economy.

Feinstein and the ANC

This is the party and the pro-capitalist perspective Andrew Feinstein supported.

An invaluable asset in making a political appraisal of Feinstein is his own self-aggrandising account of his time in the ANC, *After the Party* (Verso, London, 2009)—leading up to his removal as chair of a subcommittee of the parliamentary Public Accounts Committee in July 2001—his resignation and then quitting South Africa for the UK.

After studying overseas, Feinstein returned to South Africa after Mandela's release from prison in 1990. He had earlier set up a Public Affairs business, providing “political and corporate social responsibility advice to companies and NGOs.” He became part of the Secretariat under the auspices of the Consultative Business Movement, funded by business, that drew up “South Africa's admirable constitution,” a capitalist framework for the post-apartheid regime. He points to business's “unique role in the lead-up to the transition, with a number of senior businesspeople acting as go-betweens.”

He was involved in setting up the Economic and Development Forum in what is now Gauteng province, South Africa's economic powerhouse, bringing together ANC regional leaders and business. He was at pains to stress that while supporting the ANC, he was not a member, a position that enabled him to “act neutrally” and “beholden to his own beliefs.”

Amid the explosive conditions in the run up to the elections, he recounts how Tokyo Sexwale, an ANC leader in Gauteng province he later worked for, played a key role in demobilising the working class. Mass riots and protests erupted across the country after the assassination of Chris Hani, head of the Communist Party of South Africa and the ANC's armed wing, MK, by a racist anti-Communist in April 1993. This threatened the new post-apartheid arrangements that would bring the ANC to power. Sexwale intervened to quell the riots, “driving the reconciliation agenda of his mentor, Mandela.” He “shouted ceasefire, ceasefire, reacting more quickly and purposefully than many of his more senior colleagues.” It was “his evocative, statesmanlike response to the assassination” that brought him to prominence.

When the elections came in 1994, Feinstein saw himself down “at number 64” on the ANC's Gauteng provincial list, becoming a provincial legislator as others above him dropped out; and chairing an Economic Affairs Committee that “worked well together” with members of the hated apartheid-era National and Democratic Parties. Its hearings were “dominated by the voice of business, labour and other organised interest groups, with very few individuals or small community groups.” He worked as an advisor to and speechwriter for Sexwale, accompanying him on trips to the World Economic Forum at Davos.

This pro-business agenda was replicated in the national parliament where the first ANC government under Mandela's leadership ruled in a coalition with the National Party. Despite inheriting enormous poverty, it

soon abandoned its modest programme of social reforms in favour of its Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme that became the mechanism by which the major white-owned corporations, to preserve their own wealth, transferred a small proportion to leading ANC members. Mandela's successors, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and now Ramaphosa, are widely seen by South African workers as the corrupt representatives of a wealthy ruling establishment they once claimed to oppose.

Becoming frustrated with the limitation of working in the provincial parliament, Feinstein sought a place in the national parliament, an ambition achieved in January 1997 after discussions with Sexwale. He boasts of being instrumental in smoothing the passage of the government's "orthodox economic framework" with the ANC's partners in the trade unions and the SACP, arguing that the government had no choice but to implement the requirements of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He explains that the ANC's "historic language of revolution was used to make palatable an ostensibly neo-liberal approach to the economy," admitting later that it failed to alleviate the endemic poverty enforced by the brutal apartheid regime.

Feinstein, corruption and the arms trade

Feinstein's main claim to fame is his fight against corruption and the global arms trade. As a member and ANC spokesperson for the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and chair of one of its sub-committees, he sought an extensive and judge-led investigation into a corrupt, multi-billion arms deal initiated under President Mandela—following a report by the Auditor General (AG) in September 2000 critical of ministers' "irregularities" in the procurement. As the political crisis surrounding the scandal grew, amid his failing economic policies and refusal to undertake any measures against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, President Thabo Mbeki intervened to reject such an investigation.

In January 2001, when Feinstein refused to back down, the ANC whips removed him from his position, stopped him from having any contact with the AG's office and, weeks later, closed the discussions into the AG's report. In June 2001, following his abstention on an ANC resolution concerning the Speaker's conduct of the corruption inquiry—his first stance against the ANC in his seven-and-a-half-year parliamentary career—the Whip's Office announced this was a disciplinary matter. Without any fight whatsoever, Feinstein threw in the towel and resigned, claiming his position was "untenable." He then moved to Britain, abandoning the South African working class to its fate.

Summing up his feelings, he wrote, "I was immensely proud to have been part of ANC during the critical phase in the building of democracy in South Africa. I was devastated that my role had come to an end."

Despite the manifest failure of the ANC to achieve its own objectives in South Africa, Feinstein makes no attempt to explain in his campaigning over Gaza what kind of Palestinian state he envisages or the political agency that will achieve and rule it.

As the ANC stepped in to prevent the revolutionary expropriation of the bourgeoisie's wealth, PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who had led a courageous fight against the Zionist state, was confronted with the Intifada or spontaneous uprising of the Palestinian people against Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It had erupted at the end of 1987 entirely outside the PLO's control. Arafat responded with a rapid political retreat, acknowledging Israel's right to exist, renouncing the armed struggle and seeking a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict embodied in the 1993 Oslo Accords. The uprising shook not only the PLO, but also the Israelis, the Arab bourgeoisie and US imperialism, who feared the revolutionary movement would escalate out of control and have

a radicalising impact throughout the Middle East.

The "peace process" initiated by Oslo was a fraud. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA)—now headed by President Mahmoud Abbas—were effectively put in charge of policing and suppressing the popular opposition of the Palestinian masses to Israel's occupation on behalf of the Zionist state.

As in South Africa, the agreement that was supposed to usher in Palestinian rule has brought wealth for a few billionaires and increasing poverty and repression for the majority, along with repeated military incursions, and vigilante attacks by far-right Israeli settlers intent on driving Palestinians out of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The PA, similarly to the ANC, is widely reviled for its corruption and subservience to Israel.

Feinstein's refusal to make an appraisal of the perspective and programme of the ANC, which he played a part in drafting and implementing, makes him the ideal representative of those political forces neither capable nor interested in explaining the basis for the degeneration of the Labour Party that many, including Feinstein, were until recently members of. For all his denunciations of Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party's failure to oppose genocide and the market reforms that have all but eradicated Britain's public services and social infrastructure, he is oriented to the trade unions bureaucracies that have failed to defend the working class, that back Labour and oppose the socialist reorganisation of society.

Feinstein's politically useless "liberal" opposition to Starmer is based on his rejection of the class basis of society in favour of an appeal for a more moral government, "people power" and a nation based on "human values". It is directed, as was the case with the ANC, at blocking the independent revolutionary political mobilisation of workers and youth for socialism. That is what distinguished his campaign in Holborn and St Pancras from that of the Socialist Equality Party and its candidate, Tom Scripps, fighting for a socialist alternative to Starmer's Labour Party and the mobilisation of the working class against the Gaza genocide and advanced preparations for a direct NATO war with Russia.

Concluded



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