

On the Death of Nelson Mandela

On December 5, 2013, Nelson Mandela died at the age of 95. In the coming period, revcom.us/Revolution will have more reporting and analysis of the significance of the struggle against the brutal racist apartheid regime in South Africa with which Mandela was so closely associated, Mandela's role in that, and the nature of South Africa today. But at this moment, the following are five points of orientation:

1 The vicious system of apartheid—blatant, racist, brutal oppression and discrimination against black (and other non-white) peoples in South Africa, which Nelson Mandela struggled against—was part of a legacy of *centuries* of the most horrific plunder of Africa as a whole by the capitalist world. In South Africa after World War 2, apartheid further institutionalized and *intensified* that vicious oppression. Black (and other non-white) South Africans were locked down in prison-like “Bantustans,” without the most basic necessities of life (like clean water or decent shelter). They were treated as non-humans, subject to fascist “pass laws” that governed their every movement. On the backs of their labor, white settlers lived the lifestyles of northern Europe and global capitalism-imperialism accumulated massive profits.

2 Nelson Mandela emerged as an opponent of the apartheid system in the 1950s. He joined the rising tide of courageous, widespread struggle among many different sections of people in South Africa that went up against the whips, clubs, guns and torture chambers of the regime. For this he was sentenced to a life of hard labor in prison, and he never backed down in his opposition to apartheid. The struggle against apartheid became a cause that inspired people around the world. Many people gave their lives in this struggle. And Nelson Mandela became the most prominent symbol of that struggle.

3 But the powers-that-be are *not* praising Mandela because of his role as an opponent of apartheid, but because he conciliated with the forces of the old order, and played a key role in dismantling apartheid in a way that didn't excavate, but in the main *reinforced* the historic and horrific oppression of the black and

other non-white peoples of South Africa. Whatever Mandela's intent, his outlook of “embrace the enemy” which is being so extolled by the powers-that-be in their eulogies, went directly *against* the need to uproot all the political, structural, economic, social and cultural relations that formed the foundation for that system.

4 We have to have the honesty to confront the reality of the path Nelson Mandela charted. It did not lead to freedom for the oppressed people of South Africa. The vast majority of people in South Africa continue to suffer in the grip of global capitalism-imperialism. Today, two decades after Mandela became the first black president of South Africa, the situation for the masses of black people in South Africa remains horrendous. South Africa is one of the world's most unequal societies. Over half the population of South Africa lives in extreme poverty. The only source of water for *1.4 million children* is dirty, disease-ridden streams. Immigrant workers from poorer countries in Africa are subjected to violent attacks. Conditions for women, who played such a heroic role in the battle against apartheid, are abysmal—South Africa has the highest rate of rape in the world. And, perhaps the most heartbreaking consequence of all, people have been left demoralized—seeing all this as more proof that fundamental change in society is not possible. That is *not* the case.

5 But it *is* the case that nothing short of uprooting exploitation and oppression can free the people of South Africa or anywhere else. The “wretched of the earth” have made revolution and started on the road to communism—a society free of all oppression—first in Russia and then in China. They achieved great things before these revolutions were turned back. And not only has this been done before, it can be done again, and even better this time. We urge everyone reading this to get their hands on the special issue of *revcom / Revolution* “You Don't Know What You Think You ‘Know’ About... The Communist Revolution and the REAL Path to Emancipation: Its History and Our Future,” and get into the work of Bob Avakian at revcom.us.

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