



“Conservatives,” Mandela, and the Founders: Do Conservatives Really Believe in Liberty?

In the wake of Nelson Mandela’s death, National Review Online published accolades from several self-avowed “conservatives.”

John Boehner, for example, alluded to Mandela’s “long walk to freedom” while praising him as “a champion of peace and racial harmony.” Marco Rubio went even further. Lamenting that “the world has lost one of history’s most important figures,” Rubio reassured us that just as “men and women striving for justice and fairness around the world have drawn inspiration from Nelson Mandela,” so his “example will live on for generations to come.”

Tim Scott lauded Mandela for being a “transformational figure, a man who truly changed the world.” Mandela, he continued, “walked a long road to freedom and embraced the fundamental human belief in equality.” Scott insisted that “all freedom-loving people mourn his passing.”

Tea Party idol Ted Cruz said of Mandela that he “will live in history as an inspiration for defenders of liberty around the globe,” for he was a man who “stood firm for decades on the principle that until all South Africans enjoyed equal liberties he would not leave prison himself. Because of his epic fight against injustice,” Cruz concluded, “an entire nation is now free.”

These judgments on the part of conservatives of a man who was an avowed “democratic socialist” and communist sympathizer, a man who was on America’s list of terrorists until as recently as 2008, reflect, at best, the height of moral confusion. At worst, they reveal gross intellectual dishonesty.

To cut to the chase, American “conservatives” claim to prize the Constitution and the “limited government” that it enshrines. But the vision of liberty for which the Constitution’s Framers seceded from England, a vision for which they pledged all, is antithetical to that of Mandela.

Though few people, and even fewer public figures — regardless of their politics — will say it, the liberty bequeathed to Americans by their ancestors is seen as a species of bondage by those on the Left. That is, constitutional liberty as it was conceived by the patriots of the 18th century can only be thought of as an obstacle to be surmounted by those who think of “liberty” in terms of a material condition that government must bring about for its citizens.

To put it even more simply, constitutional liberty must be anathema to “democratic socialists” and other communist sympathizers, for liberty, as the residents of the Anglo world once conceived it, consists in a



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decentralization of authority and power — a government with many voices, so to speak, severely limited in scope. This form of government in turn entails a robust system of private property, for only under such a system is power diffused far and wide.

Now, Mandela was a “democratic socialist.” He was also a communist, or at minimum, a communist sympathizer. Translation: The man whom our “conservatives” are now extolling as a great apostle of liberty *disdained* private property, or what, in good socialist fashion, he derisively referred to as “capitalism.” Mandela was an adamant advocate of redistribution who thought that “capitalism” was the vehicle by which whites in his country provided privilege to their own racial and class interests.

To those self-described “conservatives” who acknowledge Mandela’s violent past while attempting to dismiss it on the grounds that he matured while in prison, there are two responses coming.

First, two years *after* he was released from prison, Mandela was captured on video — a video that can be found on YouTube — singing along with the members of his African National Congress and the South African Communist Party his organization’s anthem. The anthem affirms the need for all members to “*kill the whites.*”

Second, as Ilana Mercer notes in her excellent study of the plight of her former homeland, *Into the Cannibal’s Pot: Lessons for America from Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Mandela’s presidency launched his country on a trajectory that has resulted in making the new South Africa a place in which “more people are murdered in one week under African rule than died under the detention of the Afrikaner government over the course of roughly four decades.”

None of this, of course, is to justify or even sympathize with apartheid. Mercer’s family, for example, led by her father, a rabbi, was anti-apartheid long before it became fashionable to be so. Nor is it to detract from the fact that Mandela was indeed a man with conviction who was willing to sacrifice all for what he believed was right.

The point here is that so-called conservatives contradict their own cause when they recognize in an avowed socialist — a communist sympathizer — a champion of liberty. To see that this is so, Cruz and company should ask themselves two questions:

Is Barack Obama a great champion of liberty?

Would the Framers of the Constitution have regarded Mandela as a great inspiration of liberty?

Editor’s note: In the time since this article was written, the South African Communist Party has acknowledged that Nelson Mandela was a senior member of the party. See article at <http://thenewamerican.com/world-news/africa/item/17128-south-african-communist-party-admits-mandela-s-leadership-role>



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