

## **REVIEW OF WIKIPEDIA ARTICLE**

**Reviewer:** Steven Friedman

**Affiliation:** Centre for the Study of Democracy, Rhodes University/University of Johannesburg

**Title of article:** Nelson Mandela

The article is extremely long which means that it is obviously not concise. However, this may not be a problem as there is almost certainly a demand for detail on Mandela and his life; readers should be able to dip in to the area and issues which meet their needs. The article is reasonably coherent and it does touch all the relevant bases so there is no need for a thorough overhaul and rewrite. However, there are aspects which need attention.

The first is the presence of numerous factual inaccuracies. The article states as a fact that Mandela served on the central committee of the SA Communist Party – this is a claim rather than a fact. He did not invite other parties to join his government: the constitution required this. He did not promulgate a new constitution – the constitution was the work of Parliament. Gaur Redebe, mentioned in section 1.3, is in fact Gaur Radebe. AB Xuma was not removed from the ANC Presidency by a vote of no confidence – he was defeated in an election for ANC president. The ANC in 1949 did not have a Cabinet – it had an executive. It is not strictly correct to say that Mandela ‘embraced dialectical materialism’ – he recalled that he found it useful but it is clear from the context that he also used other tools to analyse society. The M Plan was not revealed in a speech in 1953 read out by Andrew Kunene. The Freedom Charter was not solely drafted by Rusty Bernstein. The Charter was not ‘a key part of Mandela’s ideology’ – it was the policy of the ANC.

I can find no reference anywhere to the person ‘Noengland’ who Mandela is said to have visited in September 1955. Oswald Pirow was not a judge at the Treason Trial, he was a prosecutor. It is not an established fact that the apartheid government secretly funded Inkatha to attack the ANC – it is a claim. FW de Klerk did not release all ANC prisoners except Mandela – he released a select few before Mandela’s release. Most estimates put the attendance at Mandela’s 1990 Soccer City rally above 100 000 although no precise figure is available. Mandela did not unilaterally resume negotiations in September 1992 – he and de Klerk agreed to do this. The constitutional assembly which sat after 1994 did not give the National Party continuing influence. Thabo Mbeki was not a ‘young ANC leader’ at the time – he was a senior figure in the movement. Mandela and de Klerk did not convince Buthelezi to bring Inkatha into the election in 1994. That 750 000 whites emigrated in the 1990s is an estimate, not a fact. Winnie Mandela was not asked to stand down from the ANC national executive for misappropriating funds. De Klerk did not withdraw from the government of national unity because the constitution was not being observed but because he felt his party was not being treated as an equal. Mandela did not ‘admit’ that Mbeki was de facto president – it was his idea that he should play this role. The claim that Mandela rejected capitalism is contradicted by articles he wrote at the time. Mandela did not order troops into Lesotho – Buthelezi was acting president at the time and he was responsible. The claim that his administration was ‘mired in scandal’ is odd given only one scandal attracted attention during his term of office.

The second is that, while the article does relate Mandela’s life in logical sequence, at times it confuses readers by failing to provide linking information and assuming that readers know important information which is not supplied to them. Thus, in the section on his arrest and

trial, readers are not told who the Cecil Williams with whom he was arrested what or what Lilliesleaf Farm was and why it was important. Nor are readers told who the PAC and the Yu Chin Chan club were with whom Mandela forged links while in prison. It cites Castro's 'History will absolve me speech' without saying what it was.

Third, the article at times seems to rely on gossip and speculation, which it treats as fact. A prime example is its treatment of Mandela's membership of the SA Communist Party which at times contradicts itself. We are told that Mandela was a central committee member, yet we are also told that he argued against Marxism to Govan Mbeki and Harry Gwala. While it is true that Mandela was claimed as a member of the SACP, and it is possible that he was one, his own writings and his political activities give little or no evidence to confirm the claim that he was a Marxist (it was common at the time for ANC activists to join the SACP not because they were Marxists but because it was seen as a militant opponent of white rule). Another is that it reports, without qualification, the claim of author David Smith that Mandela had affairs with several women but fails to mention that this is an unconfirmed claim. It claims that Mandela was more at ease with Jacob Zuma than Thabo Mbeki but cites no evidence in support of this claim. It is obviously important that rumour be separated from fact.

Fourth, it sometimes focusses on rather unimportant individuals or incidents and gives them an importance they do not deserve. Stanley Greenberg, the American academic and pollster hired by the ANC in 1994, is discussed as if he was a major strategist rather than a person hired for a particular task. As in the article on apartheid, white opposition politician Harry Schwarz is given pride of place as an 'anti-apartheid campaigner' despite the fact that his role in fighting the system was extremely minor and that, for much of his political career, he represented the conservative end of white anti-apartheid thinking in Parliament.

Fifth and finally, the article makes a major error of judgement by ignoring the role of international campaigns in support of Mandela during his imprisonment and the extent to which the ANC was able to rally support internationally and within the country by calling for his release. This was a major factor in strengthening the fight against apartheid and turning Mandela into an international icon. But, while there is a reference to the concerts held in his honour and musicians who composed songs about him, this aspect is ignored. The treatment of economic policy during Mandela's government takes a highly contentious analysis which would be accepted by some but rejected by others and presents it as fact.

On references, the current section needs some work since sources such as Smith's book and Anthony Sampson's authorised biography are repeatedly cited but no primary citation is offered. But there is no need to suggest additional sources since those which have been used seem adequate to the task.