

## “Mandela and Just People”

By [J. B. Gerald](#)

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[Night's Lantern](#)

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*Mandela didn't always wear suits and smile a lot. He rose to power promising revolutionary justice and left some unpaid debts behind to those who provided the backbone of his political strength. Among these are a South African diaspora of those who had to flee apartheid in the days the U.S. considered the African National Congress “terrorist”.*

And there are all those who fought South Africa's apartheid in other countries. Payment in social justice is owed by wealthy South Africans, foreign corporations at work in South Africa, each of the Euro-American leaders flocking to South Africa with their final respects. The un-stated portion of their respect is that the independence Mandela won spared South African whites and foreign business interests, a terrible slaughter, earned by the cruelest forms of colonialism, capitalism, oppression. The new South Africa continues to prove very expensive for the South African people who remain largely immersed in poverty.



The most eloquent tribute to Mandela at his death that I know of is made by [Tom Manning](#), the U.S. political prisoner. Manning serves sentences longer than most men's lives for his participation in United Freedom Front actions in the 1970's. What I remember from old accounts is that the UFF attacked and bombed apartheid corporations, among other propaganda targets, carefully not to kill people, until finally in self defense Manning shot a police officer who was provably intent on killing him.

When they finally arrested Manning in 1985 the police picked him up in handcuffs and dropped him, until his shoulder was broken. He's a big man, maybe more manageable in prison, crippled. Almost thirty years later he's waiting for an operation so he can lift his

hand, while the prison medical board says he doesn't need it. The United Freedom Front (aka Samuel Melville Jonathan Jackson Brigade, aka the Ohio 7) whose anti-apartheid members supported Amandla and Mandela long before Mandela's release from prison to accomplish South Africa's Independence, were working class Americans (three were Vietnam veterans). At one point they counselled prisoners and ran a bookstore out of Portland Maine that was targeted by a local police death squad. That sounds extreme for Maine but it was in the local papers when the police were caught. Within an historical perspective the United Freedom Front presents a moment of decency for America while the middle class and corporate rich plunged ahead with acceptance of apartheid and its profits.

[Jaan Laaman](#) and Tom Manning were never released from prison. [Richard Williams](#) died in a Massachusetts prison after questionable medical mistreatment (this is not a safe area to discuss). [Luc Levasseur](#) who beat the government's additional charges of seditious conspiracy with the honesty of his own defence at trial and the foundations of international law, was after long stretches of solitary confinement paroled back home to Maine in 2004, isolated and under watch for the rest of his life. What happened to these men's families (the wives were made to serve time for sheltering their husbands), their children, within communities where people earn a living to survive - this is all North American unimportance swept behind the stove as presidents and former presidents and prime ministers past and present fly thousands of miles away to pay their respects to Mandela.

There's a tribute to Mandela which I think really is Tom Manning's, appearing on several political prisoner and anarchist blogs, marked "for wide distribution. "It reads: Mandela. He gave his life and we accept his gift with sadness and determination to stay focused on the principles and promise of a world worthy of Amandla! Power of the people! It has been, and continues to be a long walk to freedom. The struggle continues! With love and rage, Tom Manning Ohio 7/United Freedom Front 12/5/2013, Thomas Manning #10373-016, FMC Butner, P.O. Box 1600, Butner, NC 27509. "With love and rage..." about says it.

But the most eloquent tribute Manning made was without words, made with his life, his chances, his fierce commitment that wouldn't make a deal. He and Jaan Laaman, and [David Gilbert](#), [Marilyn Buck](#) who died for lack of fast medical treatment, were white people who could see beyond their own race. And the hundreds on thousands of American Blacks you never heard of, with a few surviving Black Panthers and Black Liberation Army members holding the longest stretches, some always in solitary, all across America. The Americans with vision when a country closed its eyes to the poor and wanted to keep them shut forever: [Mumia Abu-Jamal](#), [Sundiata Acoli](#), [Imam Jamil Abdullah al-Amin](#), [Albert Woodfox](#) (Herman Wallace died in October), [Russell Maroon Shoates](#), and the lawyer [Lynne Stewart](#) dying of cancer whom they refuse to free under a "compassionate release" - it's just the beginning of a list of decent people, and why aren't they free.

*By John Bart Gerald*  
*Drawing by Julie Maas*

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