

Role of Three Doctors' Pact in Freedom Struggle of South Africa

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Abstract

This article is trying to investigate the role of Three Doctors' Pact in the South African freedom struggle within its historical context. Alfred Bitini Xuma was elected president of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1940. It was also under his leadership that the ANC forged closer relationships with the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress, and when the leaders of the three organizations signed what became known as the Doctors' Pact or the Dadoo-Xuma-Naicker Pact. This pact stood for a united front between Indian and African people. The three doctors precipitated a series of non-racial antigovernment campaigns around the country which sought to bring together Africans and Indians in the freedom struggle.

Keyword: Doctors' Pact, Freedom Struggle, Apartheid, ANC, TIC, NIC, Indian, African, White imperialism.

Introduction

In South Africa, the racial regime had both legacy and corollary of white imperialism. It was based on hatred of other races and presupposed false superiority of the ruling race. Till the early 1990s, South Africa presented the most glaring case of practicing racialism. On May 31, 1910, Louis Botha, a former General in the Republican military forces, become the Union of South Africa's first prime minister, eight years to the day after surrendering to the British. Afrikaners now held political power not just in the former republics, but over the entire country. Although South Africa was nominally a British dominion, British influence had been significantly reduced. Black South Africans were left with no political power and were subject to racist discrimination and economic exploitation by a privileged white minority.¹

However, the policy of ‘segregate and rule’ was followed by success five white regimes, the English and the Dutch, both separately and jointly. The word ‘apartheid’ was first used in 1948 by Paul Sauer, the Chairman of the National Party (Dutch) when he drew up the political programme for the general election that year. It was based on three general principles: (1) the principal of differentiation corresponding to the differences of race and color or level of civilization, as opposed to assimilation; (2) that of maintenance and perpetuation of individuality of color groups of which the population is composed; and (3) that of separate development of these groups in accordance with their individual nature, tradition and capabilities, as opposed to integration. The policy of apartheid sought to realize permanent and complete separation of the two major racial groups at all levels. Whites had all the rights- social, political, economic and non-whites none.² However, on the 9 March 1947 Dr. Alfred Bitini Xuma President of the African National Congress (ANC), Dr. Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo President of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and Dr. Gangathura Mohambry Naicker President of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) signed a Joint declaration of co-operation.³ The doctors laid a foundation for the future cooperation of Africans Indians.

Formation of ANC, TIC and NIC

The African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 8th January 1912⁴ to unite the African people against white minority ruling. Their aim has always been to create a non-racial and democratic South Africa. However, the Transvaal Indian congress (TIC) was first called the Transvaal British Indian Association (TBIA) which was founded in 1903. The organization was later named the Transvaal Indian congress (TIC) when India was no longer under British control.⁵ The Natal Indian Congress (NIC) was the first of the Indian Congresses to be formed. It was established in 1894 by Mahatma Gandhi to fight discrimination against Indian traders in Natal.⁶

Manifesto of the three Doctors' Pact

The three doctors (Dr. A. B. Xuma, Dr. Y. M. Dadoo and Dr. G. M. Naicker) who made Pact in South Africa in the freedom movement. The role of three doctors Pact in South African freedom struggle with the support of historical evidence. In 1947 the joint declaration of cooperation known as “Three Doctors’ Pact” was signed by three doctors. The Doctors’ Pact between the representatives of African National Congress (ANC), Transvaal Indian Congresses (TIC) and Natal Indian congress (NIC) having fully realized the urgency of cooperation between the Non-European peoples and other democratic forces for the attainment of basic human rights and full citizenship for all sections of the South African people.

However, joint meeting under the leadership of Dr. A. B. Xuma, Dr. Y. M. Dadoo and Dr. G. M. Naicker declares its sincerest conviction that for the future progress, goodwill, good race relations, and for the building of a united, greater and free South Africa, full franchise rights must be extended to all sections people of South Africa, and to this end this Joint Meeting pledges the fullest cooperation between the African and Indian peoples and appeals to all democratic and freedom loving citizens of South Africa to support fully and cooperate in this struggle for:-

- Full franchise.
- Equal economic and industrial rights and opportunities and the recognition of African trade unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act.
- The removal of ail land restrictions against Non-Europeans and the provision of adequate housing facilities for all Non-Europeans.
- The extension of free and compulsory education to Non-Europeans.
- Guaranteeing freedom of movement and the abolition of Pass Laws against the African people and the Provincial barriers against Indians.
- And the removal of all discriminatory and oppressive legislations from the Union's statute book.⁷ Therefore, the role of three doctors was different from other freedom struggle leaders. The apartheid relation changed under the leadership of three doctors.

Apartheid era in South Africa

The Apartheid in Afrikaans means “apartness” or “separateness”. It refers to the system of racial discrimination and white political domination adopted by the National Party while it was in power from 1948 to 1994. Apartheid officials legislated the quality and nature of life for every white, African, Colored, and Indian South African from cradle to grave. A distinction is often made between “petty” apartheid and “grand” apartheid. Petty apartheid refers to the racist laws affecting one’s daily routine, beginning with birth in a racially segregated cemetery⁸ In between, South Africans lived, worked, and played out their lives at racially segregated offices, businesses, schools, colleges, beaches, restrooms, park benches, restaurants, theaters, and sports fields. Grand apartheid relates to land and political rights.

The roots of apartheid are much disputed by South African historians. Liberals writing in the early and mid-twentieth century placed emphasis on the irrational frontier prejudices of nineteenth-century Afrikaners: prejudices which came to override liberal non-racialism and were resurrected by the National Party’s policy of 1948. Such a view has become widespread amongst English-speaking South Africans and outside the country. But it has obvious flaws. Notably it ignores the racial discrimination of British settlers and officials. And segregation developed before the triumph of Afrikaner political power in 1948.⁹ However, an alternative view developed in the 1970s is that segregation was the product of the Mineral Revolution, particularly in response to the needs of the mining industry, and that apartheid was build on these foundations.

Principles of Apartheid

The apartheid system rested on four basic principles:-

- First, there were four official “racial groups” identified as White, African, Colored, and Asian.
- Second, whites were regarded as the only “civilized” race and the therefore exercised absolute political powers over the other racial groups.
- Third, white interests always came before black interests.
- Fourth, all whites no matter what their European origins, were simply considered white.

However, the government refused to recognize the common Bantu-speaking origins of most Africans and classified them into nine separate African subgroups: Xhosa, Tswana, Zulu, North Sotho, South Sotho, Venda, Swazi, Tsonga, and Ndebele. Asians were considered aliens in South Africa.¹⁰

Implementation of apartheid

The implementation of apartheid which dominated political action and race relation after 1948 was directed to the control of social change:- (1) in the interests of white domination, by monopoly of the constitutional means of change; (2) the equating of the attempt to bring about change by illegal means with communism, under heavy penal sanctions; (3) the eradication, again under penal sanction of many interracial relationship on the basis of equality, and the general reduction of interracial contacts, thought not in industry and commerce; (4) the fragmentation of Africans by policies designed to strengthen tribal organization and solidarity; (5) the raising of barriers to association between Africans, Coloreds, and Indians; (6) indoctrination in the ideology of apartheid; (7) and the perfecting of the instruments of repression.¹¹

During the first decade of National Party government, a barrage of legislation codified and extended racial discrimination. The apartheid government’s initial legislation sought to define racial classifications and guarantee racial “purity”. The Prohibition of ‘Mixed Marriages Act’ (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) extended the existing ban on sex between whites and Africans outside marriage to prohibit all sexual contact between whites and other South Africans,

including Indians and coloreds. Racial division in the future was the goal. And the Population Registration Act of the same years enforced the classification of people into four racial categories: white, colored, 'Asiatic' (Indian) and 'Native' (later 'Bantu' or African).¹²

However, residential segregation had existed in some parts of the country since the earlier part of the century, but the Group Areas Act (1950) extended the principle of separate racial residential areas on a comprehensive and compulsory basis. Its application was particularly felt in the cities, where forced removals were often justified by policies of slum clearance and coincided with modernist theories of town planning that involved massive urban restructuring. With such justifications, Indian residents were moved out of the centre of Pretoria and Durban. Many colored inhabitants of Cape Town suburbs were relocated in segregated areas on the fringes of the city: plans for the demolition of the central District Six area had in fact been formulated before the Second World War. In 1954 the Natives Resettlement Act gave the state the power to override local municipalities and forcibly remove Africans to separate townships. Some of the first casualties were the African freehold areas of western Johannesburg such as Sophiatown, whose inhabitants were relocated to the new township at Soweto in 1955.

The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953) enforced social segregation in all public amenities, such as transport, cinemas, restaurants and sports facilities. And education apartheid was enforced in schools (1953), technical colleges (1955) and universities (1959). African schooling was still neither free nor compulsory, as it was for whites. Certainly, education provision for Africans before this period had been unequal and most government schools separated white and African pupils. However, the Bantu Education Act (1953) brought all African schools under the control of the Department of Native Affairs, thus phasing out the independent missionary institutions which had previously led the field in African education and were viewed as breeding grounds for African independent thinking and protest. The Act imposed a uniform curriculum which stressed separate 'Bantu culture' and deliberately prepared students for little more than manual labor. Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, commented that

many previous educators of Africans ‘misled them by showing them the green pastures of European society in which they are not allowed to graze.’¹³

Collective role of the Doctors

The collective role of the three doctors Pact against the white supremacy in South Africa in the freedom movement. The apartheid had been defined over many years. It promised total separation not only between white and non-white but between the various non-white groups, and prohibited marriage or sexual relations between races. ‘Natives’ (soon to be called ‘Bantu’) in the urban areas would be regarded as ‘visitors’ required only for their labor and allowed no political or social right in the 87% of the country reserved for whites¹⁴ However, apartheid demonstrated white fear not only of the physical challenge of rising black strength but of Africans’ economic and intellectual competition.

However, Xuma, Dadoo and Naicker had already made a ‘Doctors’ Pact’ in 1947 for ANC and South African Indian Congress (SAIC) to work for full franchise rights. And when Dr. Xuma had taken the Africans’ case to the United Nations at the end of 1946 while he concentrated on presenting the case of the South –West African tribes against incorporation by the South African Government, he joined Dr. Dadoo, the SAIC representative, in lobbying delegates. However, Indian gained obvious advantages from closer co-operation with Africans. Not only had the riot revealed their vulnerability, but the Nationalist government was planning to segregate all commercial and residential areas by race. If Indians worked with the African majority they would gain significantly in influence. And Africans could gain from the organizational experience of Indians, and from their ability to raise funds. Indians, after campaign in which they had demonstrated the technique for passive resistance, had also shown they could rally diplomatic support at the UN.¹⁵ However, indeed, the ‘Doctors’ Pact’ had aroused great enthusiasm. This was expressed in a huge demonstration of Africans and Indians in Johannesburg.

Reaction of the Government

The African miners' strike heralded a new round of sharp confrontations between the ruling classes, on the one hand and the oppressed people and their organizations on the other. In year 1947 saw the winding up of the "Xuma – Dadoo – Naicker" pact and also known as "Three Doctors' Pact" for the united struggle of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) – the cornerstone of the famous "Congress Alliance" which was to emerge in the fifties as the most difficult opposition to fascism and the only basis for a real resistance and challenge to White supremacy in South Africa. The democratic majority of South Africans was deeply shocked by the election victory in 1948, of the alliance of Malan's and Hertzog's Afrikaner Nationalist Parties (later to fuse into one) over Smuts's the United Party. The Communist Party courageously rallied the workers and democratic forces.

On 1 May 1950 the vast industrial complex of the Witwatersrand came to a halt in response to a call for a general strike, for freedom of speech, movement and organization, issued jointly by the African and Indian Congress, the African People's Organization, the Council of Non-European's Trade Unions and the Communist Party . The government's reaction was to ban all demonstrations and police opened fire on a number of young Africans in the streets of Alexander Township.

It was against this background of growing unity and mass militancy that the Nationalist Minister of Justice, Swart, introduced into Parliament his Unlawful Organization Bill – subsequently named the Suppression of Communism Act. The terms of this legislation were such that anyone who had ever been a member or supporter of the Party, even though he had done nothing illegal at the time, was automatically placed upon a special list, making him automatically placed upon a special list, making him automatically subject to penalties and restrictions by Ministerial decree, without any right of appeal to the courts.

Unfortunately this legislation was brought in at a time which found the Central Executive of the Party unprepared, either practically or psychologically, to face the complexities and rigors of

underground work. For a decade its energies had been concentrated on establishing, through mass work in the name of the Party, protracted court proceedings and participation in the various public elections open to it, the right of the Communist Party to function as a public political organization, the only nonracial Party in the country. Among the leadership were some who doubted the possibility, others even the necessity for it to maintain its vanguard role even under conditions of illegality.

The reaction of the Central Committee to the Bill – at a specially convened meeting in June 1950 – was to decide, by majority vote – to dissolve the Party. There are still some, notably Professor Simons, himself a leading Central Committee member at the time, who have attempted to justify this decision on the grounds of expediency. Dealing with this the question the 1962 Programme of the South African Communist Party declares that “legalistic errors” had penetrated the ranks of the Party which was “unprepared and unwilling to work underground. These errors culminated in the dissolution of the Party.”

The Communists, despite innumerable restrictions and bans placed upon them by the government, continued to work valiantly in the national liberation and trade union movements for those immediate aims common to all their members. Communists set an outstanding example of loyal and devoted work in all the great united campaigns of the Congress movement in the fifties. Immediately the terms of the “Unlawful Organizations Bill” became known, the African National Congress summoned an emergency conference in Johannesburg, to which were invited the Indian Congress, the A.P.O., the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (all of whom accepted), the Trades and Labor Council and the Labor Party (who did not). In the light of the Bill, the May Day shootings and numerous other repressive acts of the government it was decided to call a one-day general strike all over the country on 26 June 1950 – the origin of what has become South Africa’s *Freedom Day*.

However, the Fighting Fifties were a memorable decade in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa, marked by repeated national general strikes the famous Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws (1952), the great drive of mass education and activity that preceded and

accompanied the Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter (1955). In all of these campaigns the names of South African Communists such as J. B. Marks, Moses Kotane, Dr. Dadoo, Bram Fischer, Govan Mbeki, Brian Bunting and many another were ever prominent, side by side with those of great leaders like Chief Lutuli, Walter Sisulu, Dr. Naicker and Nelson Mandela.¹⁶

Circumstances of South African State

The circumstances of South African state in the late 1970s a number of factors led to a change in the policy of the South African state: - First, highly capitalized manufacturing industry now dominated the economy, using complex technology and requiring semi-skilled permanent workers rather than unskilled migrant laborers. In these circumstances, segregation and apartheid, so crucial to the earlier development and growth of industry, were no longer appropriate to the needs of South African capitalism. Economic change also affected the class base of support for the National Party. Afrikaner business interests were now fully integrated into the monopolistic structure of South African industry, while full-scale mechanization of white agriculture produced 'cheque book farmers' linked to business interests rather than struggling producers competing for a limited labor force with urban employers.

The cross-class Afrikaner nationalist alliance of the 1940s and 1950s was fracturing: many English-speaking middle-class voters now supported the National Part, while Afrikaner workers and small-scale traders and farmers were marginalized. After Vorster's resignation in 1978, following major government financial scandals, the new Prime Minister, P.W. Botha, introduced changes favoring business interests and widened the divisions in the traditional support base of the National Party. The split came with the formation of the right-wing Conservative Party under Andries Treurnicht in 1982, which drew many while working-class and blue-collar supporters away from the government. In these circumstances, Botha was obliged to forge a new kind of strategy.

Thirdly, the labor and urban resistance of 1973-7 had caught the government unprepared. It became apparent after Soweto that repression was not enough. Attempts were made to recapture the initiative through reform, particularly by encouraging the development of a black middle class and attempting to win over township residents from African nationalist or radical sympathies. A final factor explaining the reform was the unfavorable international response and the threat of sanctions in the aftermath of Soweto, as well as the change of governments in states bordering South Africa, from allied interests to potentially hostile opponents: Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, with a similar threat in Namibia as conflict grew between South African forces and guerrilla troops of the South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO). In these circumstances the South African state needed to reassess its public image and its policy strategies.¹⁷ The outcome was a series of development between 1979 and 1984 which collectively formulated the policy known as 'total strategy'¹⁸

The decline and Fall of Apartheid

The decline and fall of Apartheid under the leadership three doctors who made Pact in freedom struggle of South Africa. Also the three doctors parlayed a collective role to protect rights of non white people in South Africa. In the late 1970s and 1980s the rigid Verwoerdian model developed. However, during the heyday of apartheid began to break down. The National Party government experimented with a number of reforms designed to adjust apartheid to changing economic and social circumstances, while still retaining a monopoly of political power. But the spiral of resistance and repression intensified. By the mid-1980s virtual civil war existed in many parts of the country, with the army occupying Black Township and surrogate vigilante groups adding to the conflict. The state retained control with military power, detentions and increased repression; but the vast majority of South Africa's population was alienated from the state to an unprecedented degree. Meanwhile, international condemnation grew and economic sanctions began to bite. The impasse was broken only when the exiled ANC and Pan African Congress (PAC) were unbanned in 1990 and the new State President, F.W. de Klerk, made a qualified commitment to meaningful change.¹⁹

However, negotiations between the state and the newly unbanned movements, although accompanied by violent conflict and widespread suspicion of state intentions, finally led to the creation of a new democratic constitution, and the election of an ANC-led government in 1994. The collapse of apartheid and the avoidance of a prolonged racial bloodbath was one of the major success stories of the late twentieth century, although economic and social problems remained overwhelming in magnitude.

Conclusion

On the basis of above comprehensive discussion, it may be concluded that three doctors had played important role to eradicate racial discrimination in freedom struggle of South Africa. They always tried to develop the idea of bringing together among various sections of the South African society. In 1947 Dr. Alfred Bitini Xuma President of the African National Congress, Dr. Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo President of the Transvaal Indian Congress and Dr. Gangathura Mohambry Naicker President of the Natal Indian Congress signed a Joint declaration of co-operation known as “Three Doctors’ Pact”. They were spurred on to work even harder for mutual understanding between their people. However, the year 1947 saw the conclusion of the “Xuma – Dadoo – Naicker” pact for the united struggle of the A.N.C. and the S.A.I.C. (South African Indian Congress) – the cornerstone of the famous “Congress Alliance” which was to emerge in the fifties as the most formidable opposition to fascism and the only basis for a real resistance and challenge to White supremacy in South Africa.

However, the National Party government experimented with a number of reforms designed to adjust apartheid to changing economic and social circumstances. The strategy was intended to defuse protest outbreaks of the kind that had occurred in the 1970s, and to bring economic and political stability to South Africa. Although, the three doctors precipitated a series of non-racial antigovernment campaigns around the country which sought to bring together Africans and Indians in the freedom struggle. The apartheid policy of white minority government was abolished in 1990. However, three doctors parlayed a collective role to fight against racial discrimination and to protect rights of non white people in South Africa. Significance of 1947 is

that the three Doctors' Pact was signed while in 1994 apartheid regime was replaced with democratic majority rule in South Africa. Major transformation in freedom struggle occurred after this pact. The aspiration of freedom for majority of people of South Africa achieved in 1994. The election of 1994 resulted in a change in government with the African National Congress (ANC) coming to power. The historical regime change happened in 1994 from apartheid to majority rule.

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