

YUSUF DADOO – HERO OF ALL SOUTH AFRICANS

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1. Allow me to start this talk with some personal recollections. My first contact with Dadoo was at a party for young people in Cape Town. His reputation had preceded him as a formidable leader of the movement who had already been imprisoned six times so I expected a powerful personality. Instead a kindly looking gentleman entered the house, he was smoking a crooked pipe which never left his mouth, and he never ceased cracking jokes to all around him. He was clearly in a very happy mood to be with the youth and was open to chat with all.
2. My second encounter was more serious. The leadership of the underground Communist Party held a secret conference in a factory in Johannesburg some time around 1954 and I was part of the delegation of four from Cape Town. Dadoo was then Chairperson of the Party and chaired the meeting. He was asked to lead off with a presentation on the international situation, which he did, but without much enthusiasm. It soon became clear that he made no claim to an intellectual role and played his leadership role in his own unique style. He was warm and friendly to all, he was extremely patient in discussion, he was slow to anger, though it burnt fiercely when aroused, and he hated sectarianism and dogma. He handled the difficult meeting with assurance and confidence; as a result, everything went smoothly, without recriminations or serious divisions.
3. Dadoo was one of the first to be banned from attending meetings, so since I was only banned much later, I had little contact with him for some time. For instance he was not present at the Congress of the People, nor was he arrested in the Treason Trial, much to his disappointment.
4. However, when I became the National Secretary of the Congress of Democrats, and Secretary of the Secretariat of the Congress Alliance, I found that Dadoo was the representative of the S A Indian Congress. We then met frequently often over a curry at his house. I found that he was not a person who micromanaged. He would listen carefully, comment briefly, take a position quickly, and leave the implementation to others, often Walter Sisulu. Yet, despite his generally arms length posture, whenever a difficulty cropped up, people turned to Dadoo to solve it. He was clearly highly respected by the top leadership of the ANC, and could be relied upon to deal with any problem diplomatically. In addition his standing in the Indian and Coloured community was of the highest and he was able to bring people together and get their cooperation as few others.
5. Although I was a member of the District Committee of the Communist Party in Johannesburg, I had little contact with Dadoo at Party level. We operated a cut-out system to maintain security. But I was always aware of the dedication and leadership role of Dadoo in the Party and he was certainly one of its most influential personalities.
6. It must be remembered that the movement had a unique structure in the 1950's. The original alliance between the ANC and the Indian Congress was reinforced by the creation of the Coloured People's Congress, the Congress of Democrats and the S A Congress of Trade Unions which

together constituted the Congress Alliance. The Communist Party was not part of the Alliance even though some of the top leaders of the constituent organizations were members of the Communist Party. One thinks of people like Moses Kotane, J B Marks, Michael Harmel, Rusty Bernstein, Reg September, Leon Levy and many others. The reason for the absence of the Party was partly that it was banned in 1950 and reconstituted in great secrecy underground while the Congresses were all legal. But it was also due to certain reservations about communism among some ANC leaders that made relations with the Party uncomfortable.

7. Yet the Party was highly influential. It included in its small membership some of the best theoreticians in the country and Party members exercised theoretical and political leadership in the public domain through the weekly paper *Advance*, the *Monthly Fighting Talk* and *Liberation*. While Dadoo has not left a corpus of his own writing that we can draw on in this respect, he was very influential in the actual formulation of policy and especially strategy and tactics.

8. But Dadoo's most outstanding contribution was to ensure that the liberation movement promoted mutual respect between the different racial groups making up the liberation movement, and to ensure that the ANC, which was then exclusively African, appreciated the importance of uniting all races in a common struggle. Perhaps it was Dadoo who played one of the most important roles in creating the Congress Alliance of the 1950's and thereby preparing the way for the non-racialism in the ANC which began in exile and which exists today.

9. My next contact with Dadoo was in exile. I had escaped from house arrest in Johannesburg and made my way to Nairobi. Dadoo came to see me in 1966 to talk over the events of the previous period of severe clamp down in South Africa and conditions in exile. As he had been sent abroad in 1960, I briefed him on various events and on what I had learned from comrades from M K who had joined me in prison. I found him as optimistic as ever. In due course I was to meet him in Dar es Salaam, Lusaka and London. He continued with his work throughout this period and so it was with indescribable sadness that I last looked upon his face as he lay in his coffin at his burial in London.

10. What lessons can we learn from his life?

- * That, political leaders can behave like decent, kind human beings. Just because the struggle requires toughness and supreme resilience, does not mean that relations between comrades and people generally need be lacking in generosity.
- * That South Africa is a multi-racial country with huge diversity. If this is forgotten and non-racialism is not promoted vigorously, there will be serious consequences in the long run. All citizens are equal in our country, and affirmative action needs to be implemented in an appropriate manner, which cannot be spelled out here. The projection of leadership in the movement and in government should be such as to reflect the racial make up of the country.
- * The collapse of the Soviet Union and the serious weakening of Communist Parties throughout the world, and the associated hegemony of capitalist ideology, has left a huge gap in the armory of Left forces throughout the world. Dadoo would have wished that Left intellectuals pulled themselves together, did some hard thinking, and proceeded to produce an alternative path for the world. This has not happened anywhere. Perhaps South Africa could make a start. I can see Dadoo smile with pleasure at such a prospect.