

CHIEF ALBERT JOHN LUTULI 1898-1967

CHIEF ALBERT JOHN LUTULI, President-General of the African National Congress of South Africa, died at 2.30 in the afternoon of Friday, July 21st, 1967. At about 10 o'clock that morning the Chief took a short-cut by walking on a railway bridge across the Umvoti River near his home. A fast-moving goods train hit him from behind barely sixteen paces from the end of the bridge and safety. He was rushed to Stanger Hospital where he died. In so tragic a manner South Africa lost one of her greatest sons.

The death of Chief Lutuli has been officially called an accident. Perhaps so. But it was an accident that could only befall a man whose sight and hearing were impaired. In fact Chief Lutuli's sight had troubled him for some time. Medical assistance was not available on the tribal farm reserve to which he was confined by order of the South African government. Urgent applications to the authorities for permission to enable him to leave the reserve to undergo an operation in Durban forty miles away, were ignored for months. When finally permission was given four months later too much time had been lost. He was truly a victim of the fascist apartheid regime.

All over the world the memory of Chief Lutuli was mourned. In the United Republic of Tanzania flags were flown at half-mast on July 24th and the Kenya National Assembly observed two minutes' silence during its session. A memorial service was held at the Arnautoglo Hall, Dar-es-Salaam conducted by the Bishop of Masai, the Rt. Rev. Trevor Huddleston (who shared with the late Chief Lutuli and Dr. Y. M. Dadoo the distinction of Isitwalandwe, conferred on all three at the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955). Government and TANU leaders, members of the diplomatic corps, leaders and members of liberation movements and hundreds of Tanzanian



citizens attended this service. It was followed by a meeting addressed among others by Mr. A. Masha of TANU, Dr. Eduardo Mondlane of FRELIMO and Mr. Moses Kotane the Treasurer-General of the A.N.C.

In London a memorial service conducted by the Dean and by Canon L. J. Collins was held at St. Paul's Cathedral. The following evening, August 1st, saw a memorial meeting presided over by Mr. Robert Resha of the A.N.C. executive. The speakers included the Minister of Transport, Mrs. Barbara Castle, formerly president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, who assured those present that there would not be 'another South Africa' in Rhodesia. Others who spoke there were the Zambian High Commissioner, Mr. A. M. Simbule, Lord Collison of the T.U.C., Isitwalandwe Dadoo, and Idris Cox, a

leading member of the British Communist Party, well known for his interest in and dedication to African freedom.

From heads of state and representatives of African and Socialist countries, from individuals and political leaders throughout the world messages of condolence poured into the offices of the African National Congress.

MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Until the last Chief Lutuli was a true man of the people. Ever modest and disliking any sort of pomposity or pretentiousness, Chief liked best to move with the common people. Before arbitrary government bans confined him to his home at Groutville, it was a familiar and moving sight to see this great man walk to the bus stop outside Durban railway station and board the segregated bus packed with African workers bound for Stanger.

Though the late Chief Lutuli will always be remembered primarily as a statesman, and the leader of his people in the great struggle against apartheid, he was in fact associated with an extraordinarily wide range of activities.

As a peasant-farmer he founded the co-operative of sugar-cane growers at his home which grew until it united all African sugar growers in Natal. An enthusiastic sports lover, he played a leading role in the work of the Natal African Football Association. It was perhaps in that organisation that the Chief developed his remarkable capacity to remain vital and alert throughout an all-night meeting, a faculty at which exhausted colleagues at meetings of the liberation movements were often to marvel at in later years.

In the Natal African Teachers' Association, the South African Christian Council and cultural and traditional organisations, Chief Lutuli played an important part.

POLITICIAN AND LEADER

Chief Lutuli first attracted attention as a national leader during the struggle for a militant policy within the Natal Provincial A.N.C. Chief Lutuli sided with the workers and the youth who were demanding changes in policy and strategy. In 1951 he was elected Provincial President of the A.N.C. in Natal, and as head of the Natal delegation attended the National Conference of the A.N.C. at Bloemfontein that year. This was the conference that considered and adopted the report of the Joint Planning Council of the A.N.C. and the South African Indian Congress which called for the organisation of the Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws. Chief Lutuli presided at the conference session which considered the report. The debate was a memorable one whose outcome was to set the tone of South African politics

for the next decade. The National Conference held the following year elected Chief Lutuli President-General of the A.N.C.

THE LUTULI ERA

It is not easy to assess the part played by one man of Lutuli's stature in a movement led by many talented and able men. He was not the type of leader who walked alone, making his own decisions, communing only with himself, carried along on a wave of personal adulation. He was, par excellence, the self-effacing leader, a believer in collective wisdom and democracy, who led without self-dramatisation, by sheer force of personality and ability within a committee of many talented colleagues.

Since the jubilee of the A.N.C. in 1937 the organisation had steadily gained in strength and definition of policy. The process of building a single nation out of the different African peoples begun in 1912 was more or less completed in 1943 when the federal structure of the A.N.C. was replaced by the highly centralised Xuma constitution. From then on the question of alliances with other national groups and revolutionary forces came more and more to the fore.

Inspired by the events of the Second World War, especially the defeat of fascism by the Soviet Union, demands arose on all sides for the adoption of militant methods of struggle. It was also apparent that the international climate after the Second World War was highly favourable for peoples struggling against imperialism for freedom and independence.

The Lutuli era was one of great ferment in mass action, ideas and organisation. The Coloured People's Congress and the Congress of Democrats emerged and a new militant non-racial trade union centre—the South African Congress of Trade Unions—was born. The most powerful women's movement in our history made its appearance. The Congress Alliance led by the African National Congress was formed.

Stern battles were fought against oppression. National strikes involving hundreds of thousands of workers; economic boycotts; giant demonstrations; civil disobedience campaigns; big rural revolts made this the stormiest period in the long history of the national liberation movement.

The clash of ideas was no less fierce. Debates raged on such matters as the forces of the united front; nationalism and internationalism; socialism and capitalism; strategy and tactics of the struggle; the role of Communists within the national liberation movement; methods of struggle. The uniquely organised Congress of the People which adopted the Freedom Charter was itself a nation-wide campaign of discussion in which the mass of the people participated.

Chief Lutuli in countless speeches and writings made his position clear on the whole range of problems that agitated the country. And always that position was one of principle.

It was during the Lutuli years too, that the massive international solidarity movement in support of freedom in South Africa was built. Today, as we survey the international scene it is difficult to realise that there was a time when South Africa and its racist policy was considered 'respectable'. The struggles waged under the leadership of Chief Lutuli attracted world-wide attention and led to the formation of anti-apartheid organisations in many countries. The United Nations General Assembly and Afro-Asian conferences resolved to quarantine the apartheid regime by economic, diplomatic and other boycotts. Even the British Commonwealth could no longer tolerate the South African regime as a member.

Thus, by the end of the 'fifties the foundations were laid to a firm revolutionary united front of all oppressed national groups and classes. There was a common programme—the Freedom Charter. There was an organisational machinery which was vast, complex and effective. There was comradeship born of common struggles and battles won and lost. There was enormous international goodwill and support for the struggle of the people against apartheid.

Up to 1961 literally millions of people had participated in militant mass actions against oppression in one way or another. Until then the policy of the African National Congress did not extend to the use of military methods of struggle. This was a matter of declared policy arising from an assessment of the situation in South Africa. Chief Lutuli as the leader and spokesman of the organisation expressed this policy. It was not his policy—it was that of the A.N.C. In 1958 at the first conference of the All-African People's Conference held in Accra the A.N.C. expounded its policy on this question of methods of struggle in some detail. The A.N.C. there opposed the idea of non-violence being treated as a rigid 'principle' and put forward the view that whether the struggle was to be violent or non-violent was a matter of policy to be decided from time to time by the leadership in each country.

The reaction of the White rulers of South Africa to the struggle became more and more violent. In the rest of Africa the independence movement swept forward to the banks of the Zambesi and Limpopo Rivers. In the light of these changes the leadership of the A.N.C. unanimously came to the conclusion that the time had come for armed resistance to be added to the methods previously employed. Thus was created Umkhonto WeSizwe in 1961 as military support of the A.N.C. Today, as units of Umkhonto WeSizwe and those of Z.A.P.U. jointly

face the armed forces of White supremacy, the greatest contribution of the Lutuli era—the foundation of a liberation army—begins to make its impact.

MISTAKEN TRIBUTES

In addition to the many generous and warm tributes to our late Chief which appeared on the occasion of his passing away, were some, particularly in the West, who tried to depict him as a sort of pacifist or 'moderate' in contradiction to his more revolutionary colleagues. This was a grave injustice to the man who was chosen time and again as the unchallenged leader of the African National Congress in the most militant period of its history precisely because of his own uncompromising patriotism and firm revolutionary spirit. Such distortions were well answered by Idris Cox speaking at the above-mentioned London Memorial Meeting. 'Chief Lutuli had long been convinced that every possible means should be used in the struggle against apartheid, whether by peaceful or by violent means' and he continued to cite some of the words of Chief's lecture at Oslo University in December 1961 on the occasion of the award to him—the only African ever to be thus honoured—of the Nobel Peace Prize:

Ours is a continent in revolution against oppression. And peace and revolution make uneasy bedfellows. There can be no peace until the forces of oppression are overthrown . . .

This goal, pursued by millions of our people with revolutionary zeal, by means of books, representations, demonstrations, and in some places armed force provoked by the adamancy of White rule, carries the only promise of peace in Africa. Whatever means have been used, the efforts have gone to end alien rule and race oppression.

We South Africans equally understand that much as others might do for us, our freedom cannot come as a gift from abroad. All honest freedom-loving people have dedicated themselves to that task. What we need is the courage that rises with danger. . . .

Whatever may be the future of our freedom efforts, our cause is the cause of the liberation of people who are denied freedom. . . . To us all, free or not free, the call of the hour is to redeem the name and honour of Mother Africa.

LUTULI AND COMMUNISM

Some 'obituary' statements were made not in good faith, but with malice, slanderously carrying even to the grave the vendetta against the Chief, which he had suffered from reaction throughout his life. The lowest point was reached by the fascist head of the security police, Brigadier van den Bergh. He told the South African press that ' . . . had ex-Chief Lutuli been a younger or a healthier man he would have denounced communism . . . He was on the verge of publicly disowning communism . . . He accepted the government's sincerity of purpose'.

How low they have fallen, these White supremacist hyenas! They

failed with all their persecution and pressures to force Lutuli from his principled stand. And now they manufacture lies with which to slander him in his grave.

Chief Lutuli's attitude towards Communism and the Communists in the national liberation movement has long been a matter of public record, and would have continued to be so had he not been prohibited by law from any public utterance throughout the last years of his life. Whilst he had his own philosophical and other beliefs which did not always agree with those of the communists, he was adamant on defending their right to serve in that united front of all freedom-loving people which constitutes the African National Congress and the Congress Alliance. And he maintained this stand with the utmost firmness despite the most extreme pressures both from the enemy and within his own organisation.

Like all the other Congressites our late Chief withstood the powerful pressures exerted by the state on all the accused to 'disown' or 'denounce' Communism throughout the long years of the Treason Trial.

Likewise, he recognised the unique contribution Communists had made in the A.N.C. and other sections of the alliance as well as in the liberation press, and respected them for it. He was attacked for this by elements within the A.N.C. and outside it, and gave a forceful reply on many occasions, including the celebrated articles written for the Natal journal *Indian Opinion*. He wrote:

People seem to be alarmed that there may be a so-called right wing, centre and left wing in the Congress. To me it is a healthy sign . . .

No slanders or belittlement can ever efface the tremendous contribution of this great and good man whose memory will always live in the hearts of our people.

His loss is a heavy one and will be sorely felt, for as the South African Communist Party wrote in its message of condolence to the A.N.C.:

It is a tragedy for our people that he did not live to occupy the position, for which he was so eminently qualified, as the first Head of State of free South Africa.

But in a deeper sense, Chief Lutuli can never be lost to us. His spirit, his ideas and his achievements live on. They are in the minds and the hearts of our heroic freedom fighters as they engage the enemy, today in Zimbabwe, tomorrow within the Republic itself. They will be with us after victory when our people commence to build the fair edifice of free South Africa of which Albert John Lutuli dreamed and for which he lived and died.

The greatest monument to his memory will be to hasten the winning of that victory and the building of that edifice. To that the nation must re-dedicate itself.