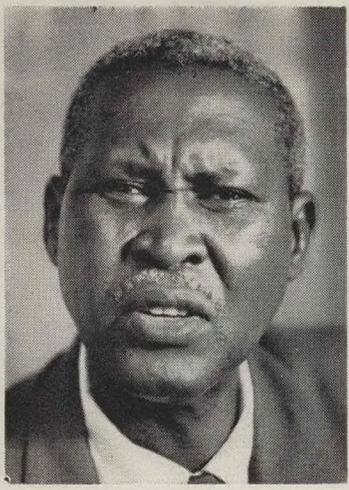


RONALD SEGAL



# Profile of a Chief

**A**LBERT JOHN LUTULI, President-General of the banned African National Congress of South Africa and 1960 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, was born in 1898 near Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia. The son of a Congregationalist mission interpreter and nephew of the elected reigning Chief of the Abasemakholweni Zulu tribe, he grew up in the Vryheid district of Northern Natal and then in the Groutville Reserve, where he attended mission school. Proceeding to Adam's college, the well-known American Mission secondary school, he qualified as a teacher and joined the staff to take classes in Zulu history and literature. The quiet academic life, largely insulated from the interminable despairs of African subjection elsewhere in the country contented him, but fifteen years after his appointment the Abasemakholweni found themselves without a Chief and the elders of the tribe petitioned him to fill the vacancy. For two years he hesitated, reluctant to return to the taut tribal world of petty litigation, Sunday preaching, and the hopeless unending struggle with the long exhausted earth. But his Christianity prodded him, and the duty that he felt he owed his people persuaded him at last to accept.

For seventeen years he governed in Groutville, presiding at the tribal councils and beer drinks, bringing order into the sugar fields and increasing their yield, settling disputes, extracting fines and enforcing laws. All the while patiently succouring the spirit of his shattered tribe, he strengthened his connection with organised Christianity, travelling to India in 1938 as a delegate from the Christian Council of South Africa

to the International Missionary Council, visiting the United States in 1948 to attend the North American Missionary Conference, and serving in South Africa itself as Chairman of the Congregationalist Churches of the American Board, as President of the Natal Mission Conference, and as an Executive Member of the Christian Council.

The resistance of the African people to their subjugation, however, was to submerge even the small tribal world of the Abasemakholweni. For a few years Lutuli served on various race relations' committees, and in 1946 he joined the Native Representative Council. But the race relations' committees proved a poor protection against the assaults of white supremacy, and in the same year that Lutuli became a member, the Native Representative Council adjourned indefinitely in protest at its political impotence. Lutuli took the step from petition to resistance and joined the African National Congress, which had been founded in 1912 to work for the recognition of Africans as equal citizens with whites. He rose rapidly in the leadership, to President of the Natal Provincial Division, and while maintaining the radical character of the organisation under his control, brought to it the support of the rural conservatives previously distrustful of the young urban intelligentsia.

In 1952 the A.N.C. launched, together with the South African Indian Congress, the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign, in which 8,500 men and women—mainly Africans and Indians, but with a scattering of Coloureds and mutinous whites—went to jail for having peacefully and publicly

broken the segregation laws. Lutuli himself did not break any law, but he gave open support to the campaign and encouraged his own people to participate in it. A passionate apostle of non-violent passive resistance, he believed and declared that Christians should not obey laws which assaulted their essential dignity and should go to jail submissively rather than meet violence with violence. In October, 1952, he was summoned to Pretoria and ordered by the government to resign from the A.N.C. or from the Chieftaincy. He refused to do either.

"Who will deny," he replied, "that thirty years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately, and modestly at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of moderation? The past thirty years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all. It is with this background and with a full sense of responsibility that, under the auspices of the African National Congress, I have joined my people in the new spirit that moves them today, the spirit that revolts openly and boldly against injustice and expresses itself in a determined and non-violent manner.

"What the future has in store for me I do not know. It might be ridicule, imprisonment, concentration camp, flogging, banishment, and even death. I only pray to the Almighty to strengthen my resolve so that none of these grim possibilities may deter me from striving, for the sake of the good name of our beloved country, the Union of South Africa, to make it a true democracy and a true union, in form and spirit, of all the communities in the land."

In November he was deposed by the government from the Chieftaincy, despite the strong protests of the Abasemakholweni, and in December was elected to succeed Dr. Moroka as President-General of the A.N.C. The government struck again, and confined him to his village for a period of two years. But from his village he continued to lead the A.N.C., keeping the urban youth and tribal elders, trade unionists and clergymen, dockers and peasants together in a community of resistance. In 1954, as soon as his confinement order lapsed, he flew to Johannesburg to lead the Congress protest against the Western Areas Removal Scheme, by which Africans lost their few remaining freehold rights in Johannesburg and were forced to move themselves to the new government location at Meadowlands.

He was, however, prevented from speaking and served with a further two-year ban. Again he returned to his village, and again his leadership survived. On 26 June, 1955, on the bare veld outside the village of Kliptown near Johannesburg, some 3,000 delegates met in a parliament of the people

and adopted the Freedom Charter, a declaration of aims for the new Congress Alliance of the A.N.C., the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Organisation, the white Congress of Democrats, and the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions. The Charter proclaimed:

"We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know—

"That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;

"That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

"That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

"That only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex, or belief;

"And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together—equals, countrymen and brothers—adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing nothing of our strength and courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won."

### THREAT TO RACIAL RULE

The democratic changes demanded in the Charter—"The People Shall Govern", "The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth", "The Land Shall Be Shared Among Those Who Work It", "All Shall Be Equal Before the Law", "There Shall Be Work and Security"—were, in the main, no more than the accomplishments of any social welfare state. But the government rightly saw them as a threat to the whole structure of racial rule and in December, 1956, arrested 156 Congress leaders of all races on a charge of high treason. Amongst the accused, inevitably, was Albert John Lutuli, now known by all his followers simply as "The Chief".

The Crown case rested ultimately on evidence of violence and, after more than four years of deliberate delay and shifting indictments, collapsed altogether. Lutuli himself was acquitted with 64 others after only one year, and in May, 1959, undertook a speaking tour of the Western Cape, during which he addressed mass meetings attended by unprecedentedly large numbers of whites. It was a triumph, and the government

reacted in the only way it knew how—it banished him to his village again and banned him from all gatherings, this time for a period of five years, under the Suppression of Communism Act.

On March 21st, 1960, police killed 67 Africans during a peaceful demonstration against the pass laws at Sharpeville in the Transvaal. On March 26th, while legally visiting Johannesburg to give evidence at the Treason Trial, Lutuli publicly burnt his pass book and called for a national stay-at-home, in mourning for the Sharpeville dead, on the 28th. Two days later the government declared a state of emergency and detained several hundred Congress leaders including—of course—“The Chief,” who was assaulted by a policeman while he was being charged.

### THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

At the beginning of February, 1961, Social Democrat members of the Swedish parliament nominated Lutuli for the Nobel Peace Prize, and on October 23rd the Nobel Peace Committee announced that it had awarded him the prize for 1960. *Die Transvaler*, mouthpiece of the Transvaal Nationalists, called the award “an inexplicable, pathological phenomenon”, while *Die Burger*, the Cape Nationalist daily, considered it a “remarkably immature, poorly considered, and essentially un-Western decision”. The government, for once stirred by international opinion, permitted him to travel only to Oslo, and for a short time. He received the prize there on December 10th.\*

The government’s rigid repression of non-violent African resistance was producing its effect. To petition and protest and peaceful demonstration, the government had only replied with violence, and mounting numbers of the young Congress leaders began to argue that violence was the most effective answer to violence. Their argument was further fortified by the government itself, which in April, 1960, outlawed the A.N.C. altogether. With all legal activities now barred to it, Congress and its supporters would have to work underground or not at all. And how could mass campaigns of civil disobedience be effectively launched in secret against a ruthless and intransigent antagonist?

On December 16th, 1961—a public holiday to commemorate the victory of the Voortrekkers over the Zulu army of Dingaan at the Battle of Blood River in 1838—four bombs were exploded in Johannesburg, and five in Port Elizabeth. On the same day, handbills in English and Zulu appeared in the streets of Johannesburg, announcing the

existence of a new organisation—Umkonto we Sizwe or “Spear of the Nation”—and proclaiming the organisation’s responsibility for the acts of sabotage. The language and tone of the statement both clearly marked the new movement of violence as A.N.C. in alignment.

“Umkonto we Sizwe is a new independent body formed by Africans. It includes in its ranks South Africans of all races. Umkonto we Sizwe will carry on the struggle for freedom and democracy by new methods, which are necessary to complement the actions of the established national liberation organisations. Umkonto we Sizwe fully supports the national liberation movement, and our members, jointly and individually, place themselves under the overall political guidance of that movement.

“It is, however, well known that the main national liberation organisations in this country have consistently followed a policy of non-violence. . . . But the people’s patience is not endless. . . .

“We are striking out along a new road for the liberation of the people of this country. The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance only! The choice is not ours; it has been made by the Nationalist government, which has rejected every peaceable demand by the people for rights and freedom and answered every such demand with force and yet more force!”

Since December 16th, 1961, over 100 acts of sabotage have been committed in South Africa, and despite new savage legislation, which permits indefinite detention without trial and extends the death penalty to a multitude of offences labelled sabotage, the number is likely to grow at a much faster rate with each new act of government repression. The strategy of “The Chief” has been discarded, and there are now new leaders of a new policy. But “The Chief” himself, confined and gagged in his village, remains “The Chief”. It is his ideal of a non-racial democracy that still animates the mass support of Congress, as it is still his image which presides over the South African struggle for humanity. Like Gandhi—whom in many ways he resembles—he is followed in his person even when his policy is rejected. He remains in many ways the spiritual leader of his people, the symbol of their suffering. He might have remained, too, their guide to a peaceful accomplishment of political reason in South Africa. That he has not done so is white South Africa’s tragic decision. In discarding the alternative that he represented, the government chose the resolution of violence. It was not only “The Chief” that the Nationalists confined to the isolated village in Natal; it was all prospect of peaceful change.

\* But they recently rejected a request for him to travel to Glasgow to receive the Rectorship of the University.

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