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An unfulfilled life

WHEN HE was killed last week, the victim of a passing train, Albert Luthuli already seemed distant from contemporary Southafrica. For outsiders he was a figure to be visited and praised, for Southafricans someone whom events had somehow passed by. In truth, his most staying, and possibly endearing characteristic, was that of being old-fashioned, a man in whom a certain distinctive and old-world rightness was to be seen. It was both his strength and his weakness, this rectitude. He quickly became a symbol in the post-war upsurge of black nationalism in Southafrica; a symbol he was destined to remain to both friend and enemy. He was, the government considered, too dangerous to be allowed freedom; but his ideas about political action were too old-fashioned to hold the unswerving loyalty of his followers.

Reluctant leader. Albert Luthuli was one of a dying generation, those early Christian elite figures among tribal society who first led the stirring resentments of black nationalism. Born in 1898 of a missionary father, he rose to become a prominent teacher, and a chief by request of elders. In 1952, having taken part in politics for several years, he was elected President of the African National Congress. For all the battering the organisation and its allies received from the Nationalist government, it was a heady time. The Congress Alliance scented power, there was a feeling that nothing could hold out in the long run against the "masses". In 1959 and 1960 Congress power was tested, it was shown to be in fact an almost feeble thing. The ANC, along with the Pan African Congress, was banned. In the next few years militant ANC followers indulged in pathetic violence, Communist participation became ever more obvious, and an unhappy Luthuli was left sitting at his home in Groutville, Natal, to where he had been restricted by the Southafrican government. He had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961, and Ghandian non-violence had been a life-long principle. His role in the subsequent violence of 1962/1964 was never fixed. He never condemned that violence outright,

ALBERT LUTHULI
Past zenith

though he was reported to have considered dissociating himself from the ANC.

Other figures. Luthuli's importance as image and symbol of urban black Southafrica was underlined by the dearth of other leaders. Only over the last few years has a new pattern of leadership and power been emerging, and new leaders such as Matanzima, Jonathan and Khama came forward to be the spokesmen of hitherto unrepresented people. These leaders, implicitly, are part of a new order, one in which the idea of separate development, not a multi-racial unified state, is dominant. It is much less than Luthuli fought for, and it leaves the problem of the urban Africans unresolved, but such men as Matanzima are nonetheless leaders, wielding power that seemed inconceivable ten years ago.

Possibly, had Luthuli ever been near power, he would have been shouldered aside by more ambitious and cleverer young men. Neither he nor the Congress ever threw up much in the way of ideas. Their programme was a sort of diluted socialism, and their steam came from the grievances and volatility of the township inhabitants. Even their multi-racialism was weakening, and was never able to contain the thrust that Robert Sobukwe and his PAC followers provided. Luthuli never had the opportunity to prove himself a great man; instead events made him into a lonely figure revered as a political martyr outside the country, in the end a forgotten voice.

WAGE CLAIMS

The long queue

At this time of the year, the voice o the trade unions is traditionally hear in the land, asking for more. This yea has been no exception. To date, claim for more pay have been put forwar by unions representing some 500,00 white workers: if the men's familie are counted, almost half the country' entire white population will be bette off than it was before. If all the claim are met, that is.

Gold and coal miners started th rush last year, and are already receiv ing 11% more than they were pai formerly. Others to whom increase have already been given are worke in the clothing and chemical industrie the Railways, commercial banks an Iscor. In the queue at present are civ servants, municipal employees, teac ers, journalists, printers, shop assis ants, office workers, and 250,0 workers in the giant iron, steel an metallurgical industries. In all, priva industry alone is faced with a wa bill increase amounting to close R200m a year.

Spoiler of the fun. Not everybody happy about the increases. Dr Albert Jacobs, Deputy Economic Adviser the PM, warns that wage claims bas on the cost of living and not on pr ductivity can only serve to prolo inflation. Most negotiations have fact been based on productivity b gaining; employees of the Durban C poration, for instance, agreed to wo 3½ hours longer each week for th 16% increase. But some discussio have reached a deadlock over this v issue, noticeably that between St and Engineering Industries Federat of Southafrica and the engineer unions. "The offers of the employ simply do not measure up to our mands," reported one negotiat somewhat grumpily.

There is little doubt that Sou africa's skilled labour force is expl ing the country's chronic shortage labour; unemployment among wh is down to a record 0.4%. The co lary of this, however, is that mana ments will be put in an increasin stronger position regarding the use non-white labour. A straw in the w is a recent call by Railways Gen Manager Johannes Hugo to "recog and accommodate the non-white a permanent part of the economic st ture in the white areas". Trade un ists jumping the queue for more well find themselves headed off b black Roland for their Oliver.