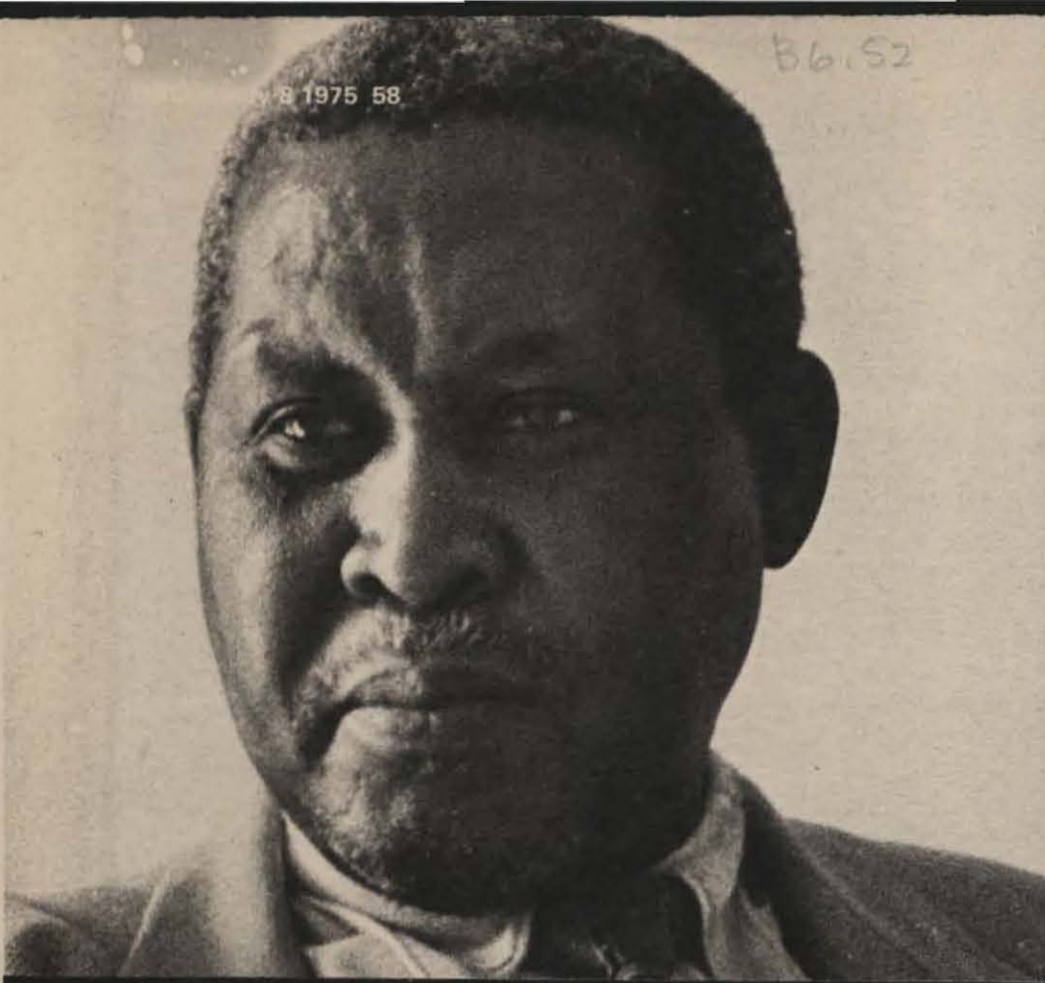
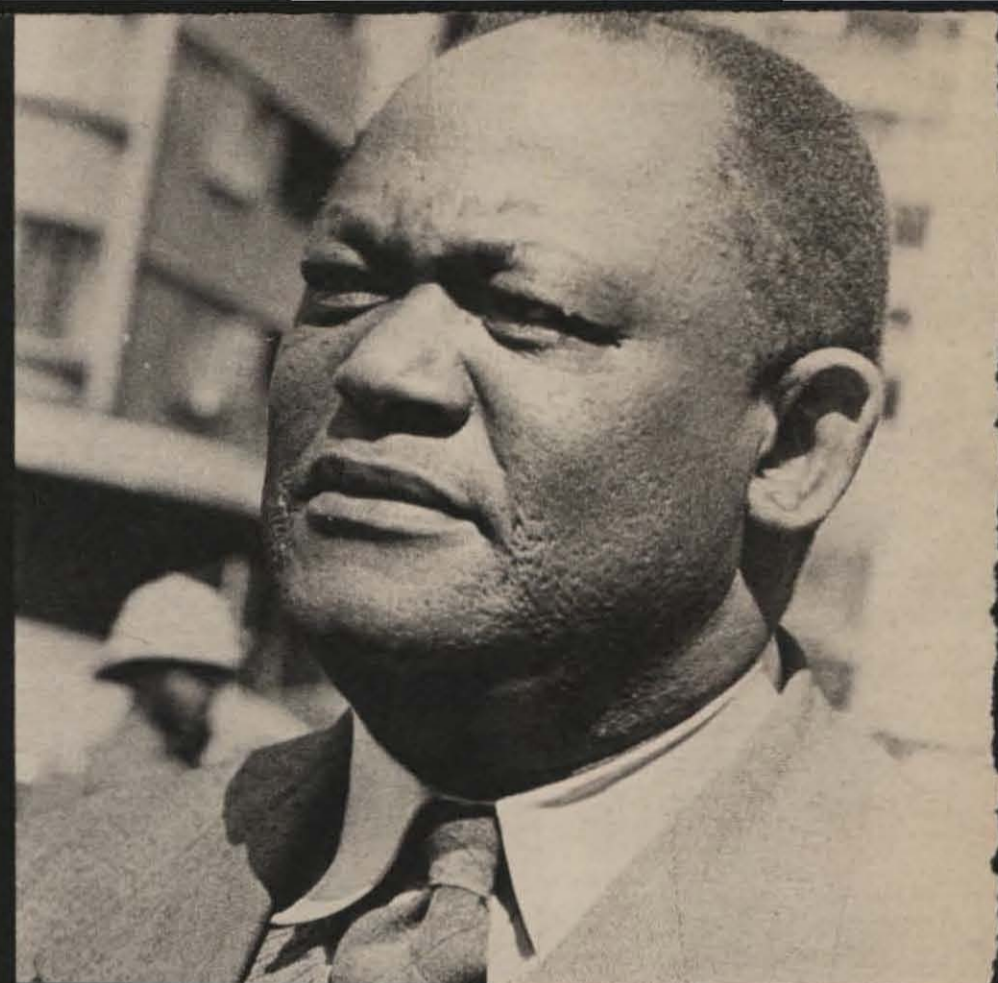


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CHIEF ALBERT LUTULI



PROFESSOR Z.K. MATTHEWS

TWENTY YEARS AGO

JUNE 26 is the 20th anniversary of the Congress of the People, at which the Freedom Charter was adopted. In this climate of detente and the opening of a few doors long closed to Blacks, DRUM felt it would not be inappropriate to take a look back into the politically tumultuous days of the early 'fifties', during which the Congress of the People was held.

In 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act came into being, outlawing the South African Communist Party. Also introduced in Parliament was the Population Registration Act, aimed at the classification of all people into racial categories and so preventing any crossing of colour lines.

1951 saw the commencement of a constitutional struggle to remove the Cape Coloured voters from the common roll, a move which finally succeeded in 1956.

In 1952 the Defiance Campaign was launched. A joint venture planned by the now banned African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, the campaign was one of passive resistance against laws such as the Group Areas Act, the pass and curfew laws.

In 1953 there was a general election, with the Nationalists returned to power with an increased majority. The Bantu Education, Criminal Law Amendment and Public Safety Acts came into force. This was also the year when the Liberal Party and the Congress of Democrats was born.

1954 was marked by the retirement of Dr Malan, with Mr Strijdom becoming Prime Minister after him. On the Witwatersrand there was strike of African school children in protest against the Bantu Education Act.

In 1955 came the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter. This Congress was planned during 1954, by the now banned African National Congress (ANC); the South African Indian Congress (SAIC); the S.A. Coloured Peoples' Organisation (SACPO) and the Congress of Democrats (COD) — the four organisations together forming what was called the Congress Alliance (CA). The S.A. Federation of Women and the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) — now defunct — also played a big part in the Congress of the People (COP).

In the months preceding the COP, invitations were widely

distributed to organisations and workers. The CA asked people to form committees and discuss their ideas about how South Africa should be governed; to state their grievances and to formulate suggestions and demands. These were to be sent to the CA's central committee by a set date, and people were asked to elect delegates to represent them at the COP. The Freedom Charter was drafted by the central committee from resolutions sent in by the people, and the date and place — June 26, Kliptown, was decided on.

And, so it was that 3 000 people of all races and from many different parts of the country gathered at Kliptown on June 25/26 to discuss the draft charter. About 200 policemen, Black and White, raided the meeting. They produced a search warrant stating that they were investigating a charge of treason and were looking for inflammatory or subversive literature.

While the police went about their business of searching everybody, taking names and addresses and relieving speakers of their notes and other papers, the meeting continued, with every clause of the charter being debated. When the final draft of the charter had been adopted, the people sang "Mayibuye Africa", and continued singing while the police completed their search.

The Congress of the People was to have a sequel: in September of the same year, the Special Branch of the police raided the homes and premises of 400 people and organisations on suspicion of "treasonable activity". These raids in turn had their sequel when 156 people of all races, men and women, from many parts of the country were arrested in December 1956.

These 156 people, including respected leaders such as Chief Albert Lutuli and Prof. Z.K. Matthews, were to face charges in the famous Treason Trial, a long drawn-out event which finally ended in March 1961. The majority of the accused were discharged after a preliminary examination lasting more than a year. But the remaining 30 stood trial right up to the final moment when Mr Justice Rumpff, with Mr Justice Bekker and Mr Justice Kennedy concurring, acquitted them on all the charges.