

BOOKS

Let My People Go!

THE LIFE OF LUTULI

PRESS...

Continued

bers made it clear that all they hoped to do through the Code was buy a few more years, or even months, of untrammelled existence for their interests.

Another factor betrayed the political depth of the N.P.U. move soon afterwards.

The Minister of the Interior, Senator de Klerk, announced that members of the N.P.U. would not be subjected to the provisions of the Undesirable Publications Bill when it became law BECAUSE THEY HAD ALREADY AGREED TO CONTROL THEMSELVES.

This Bill makes it an offence for publications to print anything which is "prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or peace and good order."

There can be no doubt that the Undesirable Publications Bill, while to some extent controlling pornography and general obscenity to a commendable extent, is aimed at also imposing Government censorship on a political level. The N.P.U. members had managed to dodge this by applying their own, for Dr. Verwoerd, thereby sparing him the embarrassment of fighting a major battle to muzzle his opponents.

That, too, is why there has been so little comment in the newspapers on the Undesirable Publications Bill. The newspaper bosses had avoided its application by a little horse-trading and were then quite content to see it applied to anybody else.

It WILL apply, of course, to some publications whose owners do not belong to the N.P.U. "New Age" is an example. But the rest of the South African Press has side-stepped the issue and will now take the attitude of "I'm all right, Jack . . ."

But are they all right?

I say they are not. Far from it. Some editors have already indicated that they will not sign the Code of Conduct. The Society of Journalists obviously expects its members not to. At a very conservative estimate, at least 40 per cent of journalists are dead against it.

The Board of Reference will not have an easy time. Its proceedings are not privileged, which means that what is said by it and before it may result in actions for defamation — this time tested in the ordinary courts of the land, not by any arbitrary body.

The newspaper owners have conceded that, in their view, Press control in some form is needed in South Africa. And if their own "self-discipline" doesn't work, how weak will be their position when the Government steps in and says: "You say you need it, but it's clear that you can't do it for yourself. So let big brother take over and do it for you."

As far as the N.P.U. is concerned, the battle for the free Press of South Africa is over. It has been lost without being fought.

It is a pity, I feel, that LET MY PEOPLE GO is described as an autobiography of Chief Lutuli, for it is not this. It is a narrative of the events of his life as told by him to the Reverend Charles Hooper and Mrs. Sheila Hooper. In this form, it is the outline for either a biography or an autobiography.

While talking, Chief Lutuli understressed his own role, while the Hoopers did not wish to elaborate on what he said. In a biography they would have enlarged, expounded and assessed. Had Chief Lutuli written his own life story we would have had a more intimate picture of the man. The many thousands upon thousands of people who love and honour him in South Africa and abroad are hungry for all details of his life. They want to know everything they possibly can about 'Chief' — the peasant-farmer, the tribal dignitary, the teacher, the Christian who is truly Christian and the statesman whose breadth of vision is so exhilarating and inspiring.

But Chief Lutuli is too involved in the struggle of his people to spare the time for the intimate portrait we want. This book, tantalisingly brief and 'external' though it is, tells us in a compressed and summarised form the story of the rape of our land and the determined attempts of all white supremacists to achieve the complete degradation of its millions of non-white people. It is also the story of those millions who refuse to be crushed though they may be physically broken and mentally deprived.

Chief Lutuli is of and from these same people. There is nothing which they have suffered which he has not suffered. He knows a broken family life for while he taught at Adams College for eight years, his wife clung to their tiny plot at Groutville — a story that is repeated a million-fold in South Africa. He has been arrested, jailed, tried for High Treason, assaulted, banned and isolated yet he emerges compassionate, unbroken, confident and unassailable. In him is epitomised the dignity, the courage and endurance of the people whom he leads.

The book is a terrifying compilation of the facts of oppression. As each new measure fails, sterner, harsher and more inhuman measures follow. But writes Chief Lutuli: "By intensifying our experience of serfdom they have given us a deeper thirst for freedom."

All those who have heard Chief Lutuli speak know the simplicity of his language which makes the complex issue clear. LET MY PEOPLE GO is shot through and illumined with these phrases which go straight to the heart of any subject he discusses. Who could analyse the true position of non-white South Africans as he does when he says: "We have no safeguards whatever. There is nothing which our white owners cannot do to us simply by agreeing with each other to do it." One wonders how our Minister of Information with his costly propaganda machine could reply to this assessment.

Of Bantu Education, probably the most evil of all the Acts passed by this Government, he writes: "They are requiring our teachers to help enslave the hearts and the minds of our children." His retort to that oft-repeated cry that Africans are spoilt by learning Western ways, is: "If I am spoilt, it is because I am made in the image of God." Let our Government ponder well these words; these men who claim a God-given right to despoil and pervert.

Perhaps there is no better statement of the frustration of the non-white people of South Africa than that made by Chief Lutuli at the time he was dismissed from his position as Chief by the Government in November, 1952, when he refused to resign as the President-General of the now-banned African National Congress. This statement was issued jointly by the African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress.

"In so far as gaining citizenship rights and opportunities for the unfettered development of the African, who will deny that thirty years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly at a closed and barred door?"

When the choice was presented to him, Chief Lutuli had no hesitation about throwing himself into the real struggle of his people, though he knew that by remaining President-General of the African National Congress he was inviting the most savage attacks upon himself from the Government.

He deals with the emergence and rise of the African National Congress and traces the policy developments which lead to one of the greatest non-violent campaigns ever witnessed in South Africa, the Defiance Campaign of 1952. He also deals with the great Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955. How sad and tragic it is that white South Africa has never understood nor seen the significance of these campaigns — that in a most disciplined way the oppressed non-whites have constantly offered co-operation on the basis of equity and equality.

It has never been the policy of Chief Lutuli nor the Congress Alliance to pretend that they seek concessions. There are no concessions when one is asking for the right to live as a human being. Chief Lutuli made this clear to Mr. Harry Oppenheimer when the latter tried to persuade him that the 'extremism' of the demands of the Congress Alliance made it difficult for liberal minded white South Africans to support them.