

Frame: The tycoon who couldn't take it with him

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By G R NAIDOO

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WHEN textile tycoon Phillip Frame was told by a friend that he should spend more money on himself because he couldn't take it with him, he joked: "Then I am not going."

He died in Durban this week of a heart attack, aged 74.

Mr Frame headed the world's biggest blanket manufacturing business — the Frame Group of Companies.

A Lithuanian, born in Russia and trained as a textiles engineer in Dresden, he moved to South Africa and became one of the country's most successful and controversial businessmen.

Frame, it was once said, had grown rich literally on the backs of blacks. "If you doubt this, stop any blanket-clad tribesmen between Blantyre and Cape Town, push back one corner of his ngubu and have a look at the label.

Loom tuner

"The chances are it bears a Frame group brand name," said one writer several years ago.

Mr Frame, who served on the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council for many years before resigning last year, was an expert in the textiles industry.

He knew every nut and bolt in his weaving and spinning machines and when he opened his first factory in Durban, at the age of 21, he was the principal loom tuner.

Some of those who worked night and day at his factory used to say that he never left the factory in case something went wrong with his machines.

He slept on the premises and was on call whenever there was a breakdown. He shared the curry and rice meals with his Indian workers, but when they retired after many years of faithful service, there was often not even a handshake, let alone a golden handshake.

R200-m empire

From the beginning Mr Frame realised the potential of blacks both as customers and as a labour force. He once said that he chose Durban as a base for his textiles empire because of its proximity to the Transvaal and the Free State with their large black populations.

Through hard work and an unceasing will to become a rich man, Mr Frame built a R200-million empire employing about 30 000 people.

When he first started the blanket industry in Durban, he enticed poor whites from Europe to work in his mills at low wages. Once these workers became more familiar with their surroundings and realised that they could earn higher wages elsewhere, they began leaving him.

Mr Frame then built up a large Indian work force. When, however, he was met with demands for

higher wages, spearheaded by the powerful Textile Workers' Industrial Union of South Africa, he gradually began replacing them with black workers.

The black workers were not protected under the Industrial Conciliation Act at the time and the Textile Workers' Industrial Union could not represent them.

The situation remained unchanged until the National Union of Textile Workers was formed to protect black workers who were by now the principal labour force in the industry.

The first taste Mr Frame had of the power of the new trade union was in 1973 and 1974 when some of his factories were hit by strikes.

The strikes were caused, said the acting secretary of the union at the time, because blacks had no say in the wage-fixing process.

Articulate

"Wages were fixed by the employers and the Government and I could have predicted the result," he said.

After the strikes had ended, Mr Frame, realising that the black labour force was becoming more articulate in its demands, said:

"There will be changes." And there were changes. The group improved the wages of its black workers considerably.

If it is true that Mr Frame grew rich on the

backs of blacks, their feet have also contributed to his wealth. As early as 1930, he was on record as saying:

"It was obvious that the non-Europeans of the country were becoming increasingly Westernised in their habits in clothing and general outlook.

"From a survey I made, I found that there was a growing demand for canvas shoes," he said.

Objected

At the time, Japan and other Eastern countries were exporting five-million pairs of canvas shoes to South Africa every year.

Mr Frame decided to enter the market and soon his factory was producing 8 000 pairs of canvas shoes a day.

Today the Frame group of factories operate throughout South Africa, Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. Its factories would cover 300 blocks of central Johannesburg.

Mr Frame was a staunch supporter of the National Party and, it is believed, made substantial contributions to party funds. He also made donations to Jewish charities.

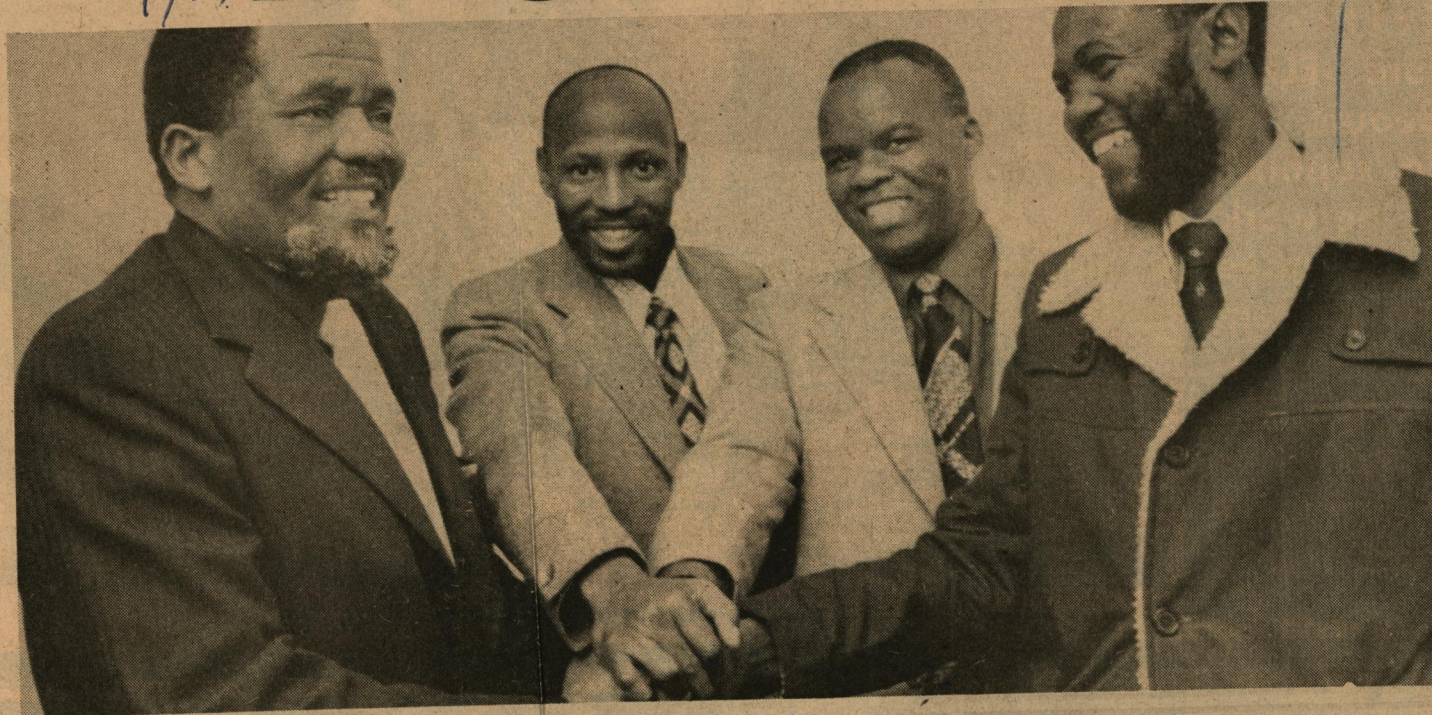
One of the crowning moments of his life was the proposed renaming of New Germany, the home of several of his factories, to Phillip Frame Park. Many local residents, however, objected to the change of name and Mr Frame graciously withdrew his nomination for the name change.

● See Business Times

PAC EXILES REUNITED

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Joe Mkwanazi (left) greets former cellmates Pitika Ntuli, Joe Moabi (second right) and Martin Mabiletsa (right).

FOUR PAC men, freed from their death-cell prison in Swaziland have been reunited in Birmingham and there are four more, at present in Greece, on the way.

First to arrive in Britain after being freed by the Swazi government three months ago was Joe Mkwanazi. He and his wife and five children are now settled in a council house in Birmingham.

The three cell-mates he was able to welcome to Britain were Martin Mabiletsa, the Johannesburg advocate, Pitika Ntuli, the sculptor, and Joe Moabi.

The four others who are at present in Greece are Dan Mdluli, the author who wrote the book "Robben Island" under the pen-name of "uZwelonke", Richman Dlomo, Gilbert Sifuba and Sidwell Mkhonza.

Dan Mdluli is accompanied by his Swazi bride Phyllis. They married in November while in prison — Pitika Ntuli was best-man — after they were given special permission by the prison authorities. Gilbert Sefuba has his wife and three children with him and Sidwell Mkhonza has his wife and four children.

Pitika Ntuli's fiancée and child are still in Swaziland and are to follow him to Britain. He recalled how frustrated his artistic urges were while he was imprisoned.

"I used to carve figures out of soap and even out of compressed bread," he said.

Pitika Ntuli, originally from Witbank, fled to Swaziland in 1963 as a schoolchild, and taught there since 1965.

Ntuli spoke bitterly of his arrest last April with 14 other

PAC men. He said they all felt that it was directly due to a speech made at a meeting on April 7 at the government house at Siteki. Joe Mkwanazi

and Joe Moabi were also present. They were all accused of plotting against the Swazi Government. Mkwanazi and Moabi were immediately arrested after

Mkwanazi had replied to PAC leader Pitika Leballo and called him a liar.

Ntuli was arrested later at the home of Dan Mdluli and reports

how every time he asked any of his captors why he had been arrested they "just seemed embarrassed and said it was due to orders from above.

"When the three of us left on December 5, the airport was full of people to see us off.

"It was ironic that only two months before my arrest as a subversive against Swaziland the Times of Swaziland carried an article describing my art show as giving the people 'pride in being Swazi'."

Joe Mkwanazi joined in the attack against Leballo when he and Ntuli called on the London office of SUNDAY POST.

"As far as the movement is concerned we still regard ourselves as PAC men following the principles expounded by Robert Sobukwe. We do not recognise Leballo as the true leader of the PAC.

"He has made many blunders, dating back to 1963 when he was responsible for thousands of our people losing their liberty."

Ntuli said: "Whenever PAC forces were poised for a major revolutionary move he blundered. In 1968 infiltration through Mozambique was given away by his Press statements. He has now done it again."

SUNDAY POST is unable to print anything that Leballo may have said about Ntuli's statements. Leballo is banned.