

BOKLAAGTE GOES TO THE POLLS

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It all started because Oom Koos van Vuuren, who is a big man in the local Nation Party, has the loudest voice of anyone around Boklaagte. We were sitting on the stoep of the Railway Hotel drinking beer and talking politics. This young city fellow in the raincoat was paying for the beer and keeping the talk on the political line and he said well, the Nation Party's local candidate, Japie de Wet, seemed to be the best man they could have chosen. Well, he shouldn't of said that, but then these foreigners don't know how things are on the Platteland, and, of course, he didn't know that Japie had beaten Oom Koos in the nomination and had voted against him when they were handing out the Senatorships, and that they were having a big argument about the jackal-proof fence between their farms.

So Oom Koos just spat over the rail into the street and said: "That bastard," he said. "I wouldn't vote for him, not if he was standing against a kaffer," he said. "I'd rather vote for a kaffer than for that vermin."

Well, the upshot of it was that the young city fellow turned out to be a political correspondent or something—that was why he was paying for all the beer and insisted on talking politics—and the next thing we knew there was a long piece in the newspaper about Boklaagte and the Emerging Spirit of Liberalism Thrusting Aside Race Prejudice on the Platteland. That wasn't the real trouble, though, the real trouble was, this young city fellow went and spoke about his conversation with Oom Koos to the organizing people of the Unity Party.

And he told them Oom Koos said he wouldn't vote for Japie because he said Japie was a bastard. Well it just goes to show these city people are out of touch with the Platteland, because when Oom Koos said bastard, this fellow thought he meant bastard, but everybody knows when we call a man a bastard it just means he's liable to let his cows get into your wheat, or try an entice the kaffers off your farm by offering them meat as well as mealie-meal when he's short of labour at harvest time. That's a *real* bastard thing to do, and I don't like Japie myself overmuch, but I know he wouldn't sink as low as that.

Anyway, this set the party boys humming, because the way the story reached them was that there was widespread discontent down in Boklaagte because the Party was putting up a candidate with Coloured blood in his veins.

The Brain men in the Unity Party saw this was a thing they couldn't allow to happen, even if the candidate was in the enemy camp, and they decided to put their finest people onto it right away. That's why they sent Hester van Huysen to speak down in Boklaagte, and with her they sent one of their senior Brain men, Lieutenant-General Montagu Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.).

Hester van Huysen is regarded by the Unity Party as one of their best Platteland fighters. "She knows how to talk to the farmers," they said. "If anyone can make the best of this situation, she can. She comes from good farming stock herself, and she knows all about kaffers and hottentots and coolies and other matters of moment to the agricultural community." Lieutenant-General Montagu Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.) is a party expert in the economic field, which is to say he is a city man who speaks to the city voters about economic matters such as the Africans, the Coloured community and Our Indian Friends.

Well, Tant Hester spent the whole of her first day in Boklaagte preparing her first speech. She really put her heart and soul into it. I heard her ask Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.): "What's a synonym for kaffer?"

"Swartgoed," he said, promptly. "Black trash, nigger. . . ." Man! that man is educated, he has a wonderful vocabulary. I suppose he must do a lot of reading. But that didn't satisfy Tant Hester. "No," she said. "I've got all those and I do not want to repeat myself. After all, this is something fresh and new in our political arena, and it deserves a fresh approach. We must get away from the old hackneyed slogans. Here we have a new, throbbing, vital concept—the intrusion of a question of colour into a White election. We must not let our viewpoint become obscured by prejudice."

"I quite see your point," said Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.). "How about a gentler approach—talking about, say, racial bastardization, the Black Menace, jeopardizing the untainted heritage of generations yet unborn. . . ."

"That's the line!" said Tant Hester. "I like the bit about the Black Menace. On the other hand, these are an uncomplicated, simple people. We mustn't confuse them with abstrac-

tions and racial philosophies. We must talk to them about the things which form the realities of their everyday life, the things they know and understand. Not political theories and catchwords, but *facts, facts, facts!*"

"Ah," said Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.). "Now I see exactly what you mean. And you're quite right, of course. How about something like lazy, ignorant, good-for-nothing, cheeky Kaffers. . . .?"

"That's it!" cried Tant Hester. "That is exactly right. Not only is it concise and to the point, but it introduces a new principle into our political thinking, a shining light of truth to stab through the fog of misconception which bedevils our National Life! It gets down to first principles and it is something which these simple, honest souls can understand."

"That's right," said Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.). "But we mustn't be *too* positive. Truth can only be taken in small doses, you know."

"These are my people," Tant Hester flared at once, "I know them to the innermost depths of their upright souls. There is no person alive who can give them too much truth."

"Quite, quite," Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.) hastened to agree. "I only meant that one should not be entirely constructive. One should introduce a slight, subtle note of criticism of the backwardness of the Nation Party and its Government. . . ."

"Of course!" Tant Hester snapped at him impatiently. "I've thought of that. I shall point out that they are Nigger-lovers, that things have come to such a pass in this once-free country of ours that a man can no longer give his own kaffer a hiding on his own farm. Is that the freedom for which our forefathers spilt their blood? . . ."

I couldn't listen anymore because I could hear somebody coming down the passage, but I was right on the spot when the next development took place. I was talking to Oom Koos when Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.) came up to him and shook his hand and said he'd heard that Oom Koos had said he would rather vote for a kaffer than for Japie de Wet, and he thought that showed a fine spirit of tolerance and was a sign that the country was coming to its senses and would reject the racist, fear-ridden policies of the Nation Party.

"Tolerance," he said. "That is the new watchword for our glorious South Africa. Tolerance between Boer and Briton, between Briton and Boer and between . . . er . . . Boer and

Briton. Tolerance for the viewpoints of all in our march towards our brilliant destiny. We must give one another the hand of friendship and co-operation and together solve the problems which beset our land."

Then he came to the point, which was that he wanted to talk Oom Koos into standing as the candidate for the Unity Party, and Oom Koos was so embarrassed he didn't finish his beer, but walked off muttering about the 'verdomde Englishmen' who tried to stir up trouble on the Platteland.

The result was that Oom Koos and young Japie patched up their quarrel, and Oom Koos it was who threw the boot at Tant Hester's meeting that night which hit Tant Hester on the mouth.

Mind you, she was a wonderful speaker. I can't deny that. I'm a liberal myself and I can't stand people who try to tell me how I should handle my kaffers, but I must hand it to her, she had all the answers.

Japie put her a very clever question. "Would you like your daughter," he asked, "to marry a kaffer?"

She didn't hesitate. "The trouble with you Nation Party people," she said, "is that you're a lot of kaffer-boeties—nigger-lovers. You want the kaffers for your brother." She paused dramatically. "But you don't want him for your brother-in-law," she said.

It flummoxed Japie. But it didn't get Oom Koos down. He had the answer all right. He let her have it with the boot. Right in the teeth.

"That's the only argument *her* sort understands!" he shouted. And he was right. Tant Hester didn't say another word. I was right close to the platform and I would have been able to hear her, even above the sound of the breaking chairs. She just shut up there and then, and she and Wharrington-Pyke (Retd.) went home.

And Oom Koos was elected candidate in place of Japie. It was tough on Japie, but Oom Koos deserved it, he showed he is a man of action. He's the type of man we need to solve the Native question in this country, not like those Unity Party people, who just talk about it all the time.