

The Rall Conversations

A Natal politician's story, as told to W.H. Bizley

(Ex-Senator Gerhardus 'Horace' Rall was born in Greytown in 1916, attended school there, joined the Department of Justice in 1934, saw war service in the SAAF, was a relief magistrate until 1949 when he took permanent posts in Stanger and Kranskop, was appointed to the Senate in 1960, then was MEC in Natal from 1970 to 1974 before he finally settled to full-time farming on his farm *Gracelands*, near Muden. It was there that I recorded the conversations with Senator Rall that make up the following story. W.H.B.)

Greytown was a wonderful place to grow up in. As a youngster I roamed all these hills, and fished these rivers. I've always had a great love of birds, and a friend and I collected what must have been one of the finest egg collections in the country. The Curator of the Natal Museum used to help us identify the eggs, and he reckoned he hadn't seen better. In Umvoti County and its environs we collected 304 varieties of eggs.

At school I belonged to a notorious 'gang of six'. Come the weekend, and I used to throw down my books and we'd be off. We often used to explore the Thukela valley, which has now rather deteriorated with erosion. Once we took a donkey cart all the way down to the hot springs on the Thukela, where there were partridges and guinea fowl for the hunting. As regards sport we were rebels at school; we played soccer as well as ruggie. While we were down on the river, we got a message; the Maritzburg Football Club couldn't postpone the semi-finals any longer, and without us Greytown couldn't raise a team. So my pal Freddy Inglis and I started off at 4 a.m. walking up the steep hill to Kranskop, to make our way to Greytown. Walking up the hill we found a mule-cart outspanned, and a gentleman hailed us and said 'Wouldn't you like a cup of coffee?' and of course we said we'd love it. In conversation he asked us where we were going, and we told him the story. He said 'By Jove, walking to Greytown', and he took a snapshot of us. A fortnight later, in the *Natal Mercury*, a big article appeared with our photographs. We were the heroes who had walked 40 miles to save the game. Durban scholars got a telling-off for their lack of dedication. The mule-cart man was a *Mercury* correspondent!

My home language was Afrikaans. When I started school I could speak Afrikaans and Zulu, but very little English. But I was the product there of a remarkable experiment undertaken by the headmaster, Dr McConkey. In

future years as MEC in charge of education I would try and introduce this system in our rural areas. In Greytown it worked so well that we could eventually answer any paper in either language — in fact, in standard eight, I got the prize for English. Speaking at the school centenary I could say that there were, in the early seventies, three Greytown School products in local government — the Administrator, Ben Havemann, the Director of Education, Philip Nel, and myself, Member of the Provincial Council. By the time I reached Matric, McConkey had left, but it says a lot for his influence that, of the six in his experimental group, four got firsts, and the other two seconds.

Those were the years of the Depression, and we had striking evidence of the sort of world we were going to enter. There was *mieliepap* for breakfast and there was *mieliepap* for supper. We saw Free State farmers who had come walking all the way to Greytown looking for work. They built the Muden–Greytown road with pick and shovel at five shillings a day. My father emptied our stables, sent the horses up the Greytown hill, and put up eight of these farmers. Each day they had to walk to Deadman’s Corner, eight miles, until they earned enough money to put a tent over their heads.

I wanted to be a judge. That was my ambition, but, being a product of the Depression, there was no money, and only first class matriculants were given provincial bursaries. Well, the results were published: I got my First Class, but on the same day a messenger came saying that the magistrate wanted to see me. I wondered which misdemeanour this was for. He said, ‘I’ve got a job for you in Weenen, especially because you’re fluent in Zulu.’ Now I wanted to go to university with my bursary, but my father said, ‘Even with your bursary, I can’t afford to send you away. My advice is, take the job.’ So that was my first post, under Mr Rawlinson. I quickly got stuck into studying for the civil service law exams, which I passed in eighteen months, and then started an LLB by correspondence.

For me, the years in which South Africa recovered from the Depression were ‘the golden years’. In 1933, Smuts ate humble pie and formed the United Party under Hertzog, and these years seemed to confirm the broad South Africanism of my Greytown education. That was why I eventually went into politics: I wanted to try and bring back that ‘coming together’, as we did it in ’33. It was an era of outstanding initiative and legislation — the CSIR, the Land Bank Act, the Farmers Assistance Act, the Water Act — the country really got going. What a pity the experiment was sabotaged by the war.

I won’t spend too long on the war; it takes us away from Natal. The Department of Justice was so short-staffed that at first I wasn’t permitted to go north with my unit, Umvoti Mounted Rifles. Eventually I was released for service and I decided, with five others, to transfer to the SAAF. Of the six of us, I was the only one who survived the war. First stop was Abyssinia. You know, it isn’t often admitted that, in terms of the sheer transformation of a country, the Italians did first-rate work in Abyssinia. I often felt it unfair that they were called villains for doing the same pioneering work as we had done forty years earlier in South Africa. In fact it was the excellent infrastructure they developed, roads and so on, that made it easy for us to beat them. If Mussolini hadn’t gone in with Hitler, he might be remembered today as a colonizer.

The war gradually came to a close in North Africa, but I certainly had no itch to get home. I wanted to see more of the world, so I kept on in my Dakota

Transport Squadron. We were stationed in Algiers, from where we helped with the invasion of France, flying supplies to Corsica, Italy, and so on. Besides this, we had one or two very strange tasks. Churchill was obsessed with the superstition that, if the apes died out on the famous 'Rock', Gibraltar would fall to the enemy. So one of our assignments was to fly replacement apes to Gibraltar! We got them from Fez, in North Africa.

We South Africans found ourselves immensely popular with the French, who were still bitterly anti-British — the British were never forgiven for sinking the French fleet at Oran. We flew de Gaulle to review his troops in Italy, and after the liberation of Paris he singled us out to take him back home with his government-in-exile. Five of our aircraft went over: I had number three, and I had all the mistresses! What a load! It was a foul day, but de Gaulle couldn't wait. By the time we reached Marseilles, to fly low up the Rhone valley, my passengers were all sick as dogs. As for the runway outside Paris, it was all muddy and churned up by military aircraft. From touchdown, my Dakota had to be pulled up in 75 yards. Then my passengers all got out, and what a sight! — they scooped up mud, they kissed it with tears in their eyes. I thought, what a bunch of hypocrites!

After the war, I was one of many who were completely taken by surprise by the defeat of Smuts. As acting magistrate in Bredasdorp I had my first stint as electoral officer. One of the nominees was of course Peter van der Bijl, Smuts's right-hand man. On nomination day itself Van der Bijl arrived with a huge entourage, and his speech to his supporters included the memorable statement: 'When Bredasdorp tires of Piet van der Bijl, Piet van der Bijl will tire of politics'. He obviously chose not to remember this when, after losing the seat, Smuts hastily put him in as Member for Greenpoint. Mind you, his Nationalist opponent had given him every reason for confidence — he had arrived at the nomination with only four supporters, and produced his deposit as an afterthought, taking a roll of notes from his top pocket.

Smuts trusted too much in 'my boys' from 'up North' you know — in fact, his government gave them great cause for dissatisfaction. There was too much delay in bringing the troops home. A lot of agitation started in the camps at Helwan and so on. Ex-servicemen have the image of conservatism: you wouldn't believe all the radical, even communistic, talk at the time, much of which filtered into the Springbok Legion. Of course, this wasn't only a South African phenomenon; servicemen everywhere were expecting to come home to Utopia, while in fact there was deep post-war depression in almost every country. Every wartime leader lost out — in Britain Churchill, McKenzie King in Canada, Menzies in Australia — Roosevelt had died, and in a way Smuts was the last to go. He should have been forewarned that there was bad feeling. When I came back to South Africa, for instance, I found I had to pay a substantial amount of income tax for the time I was out of the country. Also, we were paid out not in South African or British pounds, but in francs or lira, occupation money, which meant in effect that we were underpaid.

After five years on relief staff, working in various parts of the country, I took up, in 1949, a permanent post as assistant magistrate and native commissioner at Stanger. In that role, I got thrust into the spotlight. It was my job to warn, and eventually to serve the deposition order on, Albert Luthuli. I used to get on very well with Luthuli; we had long conversations. I said to him, 'You know, Luthuli, a chief is supposed to be part of the government, and, eventually, you'll have to choose between being ANC and against the

government, and being chief.' And he said, 'Well, I must choose the ANC, because, give us ten more years of Nationalist rule, and we will take over this country.' That was in 1952. And of course the time came when I had to serve the order deposing him as chief (he was an American Board Mission chief, you know, not an hereditary chief). Now I respected the fact that, as a disciple of Gandhi, he believed in passive resistance, and had refused to go over to aggression. When the deposition order came through, the Deputy Commissioner came up from Durban. It was a time of rioting; some nurses had been killed in East London. He said 'I understand you are delegated to deliver this order of deposition. Would you like police protection?' I said 'I go there alone, unarmed, or I don't go at all.'

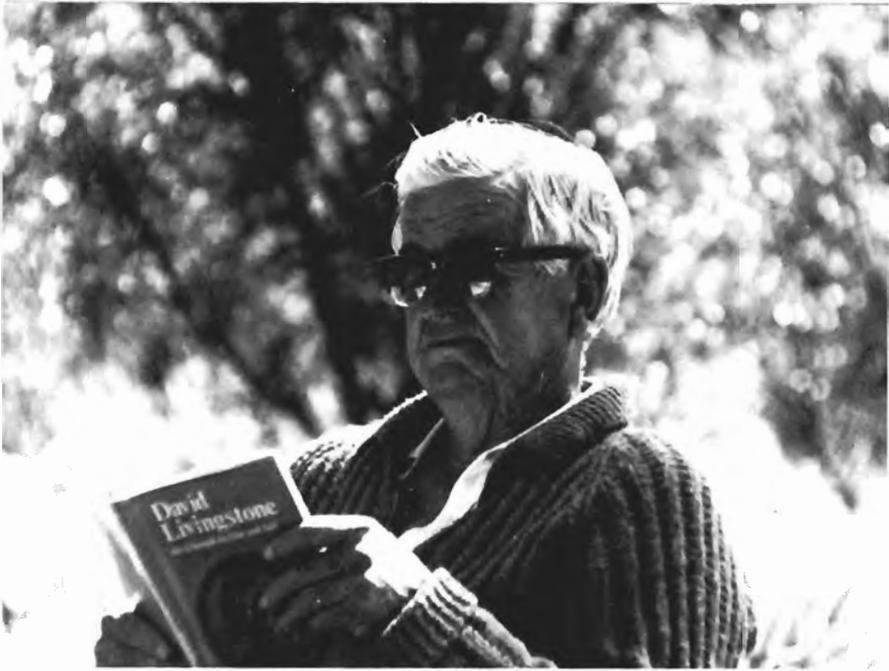
I knew, from my discussions with him, that Luthuli could carry on conversations far above my level. Now I am one who doesn't reject the idea of being ruled by a black government, but I do worry about the business capacity of blacks. I had the same ambivalent feeling about Luthuli. When he went on a lecture tour of America, he came back with \$800 that had been donated to his small tribe, to help them with their agriculture. So he came to me and he said that the Indians charged them \$3 an acre for ploughing, and that they believed that, if they formed a co-op, they could do it for much less. Could I use my good influence with Donellan and Perry of Stanger to supply their co-op with a full range of implements on hire purchase. I said, 'Fine, Luthuli', and I got busy, and the firm duly delivered the implements. I might mention also that Luthuli was chairman of a black canegrowers association, and that Melville Mill put a penny per ton on the cane they delivered into a fund to help them maintain their roads. But after six months, the canegrowers came to me to complain. They said, Luthuli is too much taken up with affairs, we haven't had a meeting, we aren't ready for the new season, the trading-store is mismanaged, we need a new chairman. I reported this to Luthuli, and he said, 'Well, I think it might be a good thing.' So I asked for the co-op books, and it turned out that there were no books, and only \$10 left in the kitty. Soon Donellan and Perry had to repossess their implements and sell them to get their money. So the co-op came to an end. I was still getting deputations from the shareholders after I had left the Department and had become a private farmer.

Another episode during my term in Stanger was the notorious Knox affair, involving Advocate A.S. Knox, who was up for the possession of housebreaking implements and unlicensed firearms. My superior, Mr MacClear, was almost permanently on sick leave and he said to me, 'Rall, I don't feel up to this one. Please take it over.' Now Knox was a very good golfer; he often used to come up to Stanger, and of course golf was my life. He was a three handicap and I was a five, and we used to play a lot of golf together. So I said to my superior, 'But sir, this is my friend', but he said, 'I'm sure you'll see justice is done.' Of course, being a lawyer, Knox knew every trick of the trade, and he had one of the leading advocates from Pietermaritzburg to defend him. The result was that the case dragged on for weeks. Eventually I stipulated: 'This case finishes today.' And yet, at 7.30, we were still at it, and we had to adjourn for dinner. The advocate had quite a bit to drink. So when, after dinner, I sentenced Knox to jail without the option, this advocate nearly hit the roof. Really, he made such an outcry I nearly had to put him inside for contempt of court. Whereas Knox was his ever-charming self, bowed, and said, 'As your worship pleases.' They appealed, of course,

but in Bloemfontein the appellate court complimented me on my verdict and said that, if anything, I was too lenient. Some while later, when I was farming, I had a letter from Knox saying that he had served his sentence to humanity, and that he was now applying for re-instatement as an advocate. Would I put in a good word for him. So I wrote a sympathetic letter to the Judge President. Back came the reply: if you knew what has happened since his release, you wouldn't bother with your letter. What a Jekyll and Hyde; he was back to his old tricks again, eventually to be charged with defrauding the Standard Bank of over a million.

This case put me very much in the eye of the Department, and I was offered promotion to Johannesburg. But I couldn't bear the thought of life in a big city, so I risked future promotion by taking up the magistracy at Kranskop. It covered the area right down to the banks of the Thukela River, the area I had known so well as a schoolboy. Now it was policy at this time that, in order to prevent soil erosion, the kraals on the upper slopes of the Thukela valley should move down onto the river plain, and I was supposed to sell the idea to the local chiefs. So I called these chiefs together and I said, 'You know, you have all these lovely streams flowing down from the escarpment; you should do vegetable gardening, beans and tomatoes and so on, down next to the river.' One of the chiefs was Chief Memezi, whose tribal lands are right under the Kop itself. He said: 'You talk about growing beans and tomatoes. We are not Indians, we don't grow those things. You talk about streams. These streams dry up, why? Because you whites have planted trees up at the top!' He knew what plantations do to the environment. Today, specialists have only reluctantly admitted that trees affect water levels. And then he took my breath away. He said, 'You know, these days, there isn't even enough water in the streams for our dagga plants!'

Whilst at Stanger I had married my wife Lillian, who had come out from England in 1948 on a three-year nursing contract. We were both 'late starters', and children now came with such rapidity that I knew it was time to put down roots. At Kranskop I discovered that the farm *Gracelands* was up for sale in the Muden Valley, and I pushed my very small fortune into buying it. We moved here in 1955, and we were ravaged by hail for three successive years, and only just managed to hold on. Fortunately it was the last major hail we've had here in 35 years. I attended local United Party meetings, came up through the ranks, and was eventually asked to fight the election in Newcastle against my cousin, Hannes Rall. So it was Rall versus Rall. I reduced the National Party majority to 600 votes, and afterwards Douglas Mitchell decided I should represent Natal in the Senate, in charge of the Vryheid division. The Nationalists had weakened the Senate of course by their notorious packing of it to get a two-thirds majority, and we were 16 UP senators to 44 Nationalists. Anyhow, the United Party leadership still believed that we should maintain a presence there. You must remember that from 1948 to 1958 the UP still had the majority of voters in the country, and we were hopeful of making a comeback. But the world had changed considerably since 1948. Governments are seldom ousted when the economy is buoyant. The Bretton Woods agreement had come to pass, the Marshall Plan was now in action, and — here in South Africa — the Free State mines were now in production. More than that, many white voters were now feeding out of the government's hand. Railway workers, who had once lived in tin shacks along the line, and had gone to work carrying a billy of tea and a packet of sandwiches, were by 1953



Senator 'Horace' Rall on his farm *Gracelands* near Muden.

driving to work in motor cars. So it was well-nigh impossible to dislodge the Nationalists.

I was often pressed to join the Nationalist party. I had excellent credentials: my father was jailed for high treason in the Anglo-Boer War, as a Natalian who had fought for the Boers. But I always said to them, No, and for three good reasons: First, because I believed in South Africanism, not Nationalism. Second, because I didn't believe in the apartheid-bantustan policy. Apartheid only exists while it is a natural phenomenon and then it should fade out naturally. Thirdly, I don't accept the Teutonic idea that the individual is subordinate to the state: the state should serve the individual. It was their philosophy of state that enabled them to grab a black man and put him into the Limehills, or whatever, and I wouldn't go along with it.

One's first speech in Senate is supposed to be non-controversial. But in my first session we suddenly found ourselves turfed into a no-confidence debate. So, at the age of 44, and as the 'baby' of the Senate, I went onto the attack in my very first speech. I had studied the speeches of General Smuts, and was very impressed with one of the last, where he warned the Nationalists:

My friends, we in South Africa have had apartheid for 150 years [he was one of the first to use that word] and we can only survive provided that, as good Christian men, we try and solve this black and white problem as it develops . . . But I warn you if you turn this problem into a political football, South Africa will rue the day.

In my first speech I said that to legalise racial separation was to ask for world condemnation, and that it was impossible that 'apartheid' would ever have

world acceptance. I was howled down at the time, but I have little reason to believe that I was wrong.

But really, Senate life had become something of a farce; in no way could you exert political influence through the Senate. I often used to say, you talk to four walls; no one takes any interest in what you say except Hansard, and nobody reads Hansard! It was a complete frustration to sit in Cape Town thinking ‘Dammit! what’s happening at the farm.’ Back home my wife was coming out tops, learning Zulu and holding things together. I was fluent in Afrikaans, English and Zulu, but I very much believed that our five children should be brought up in their mother’s tongue. That English became our family language was easy enough for me; my original name Gerhardus had long since become ‘Hardus’, and that was always anglicized to ‘Horace’. Being away in Senate for ten years, six months at a time each session, I used to fear for her safety, but in all those years she never even locked the house — she would say, ‘We don’t lock when you’re at home. How could I explain it to the children?’

In 1969 I said to Douglas Mitchell and de Villiers Graaf, ‘Well, I’ve done ten years in the Senate, my farm is calling, in fact it is now in the red.’ But Mitchell said ‘Oh no, I’ve got a job for you. We need you on Exco. Exco is so unilingual that they have to have instantaneous translation, and it’s not doing the United Party any good. More than that, I want you to take on the chairmanship of the Parks Board, because there is trouble looming.’ He assured me that I would only spend three or four days a week in Maritzburg — as it turned out, I was there seven and a half days a week! At that time Natal was in effect administered by five persons, so I carried a number of portfolios: Education (the most important), the Parks Board, the Sharks Board, Museum Services, even Dogs and Vermin!

In education, Natal was still recovering from the Stander affair. The Nationalists had tried to impose their own man on the Department of Education, and we feared that they were trying to get at the minds of our children. There was a great deal of suspicion — even Philip Nel, my Director, was thought to be a Broederbond. I certainly had no evidence of that and I found him a most co-operative man. Now the Nationalists had the idea of mother-tongue education in separate schools, and on Exco we believed that the best answer to this was parallel-medium schools. Two motives weighed with me here — my fear that, if country children were increasingly sent to single-medium boarding schools, the country schools would become unviable, and, secondly, my old ideal of the South Africanism I had learned at Greytown High School — I was the product of a dual-medium experiment. But times had changed. With the coming of Nationalist rule, the English in Natal were in retreat into the cities, and, paradoxically, they were as avid as the Nationalists for single-medium schools. So the dual-medium policy never made headway — it was resisted hotly down at Port Shepstone and on the Bluff.

The achievement I could be proud of was the introduction of differential education, that is streaming. In some ways, this was the outcome of the parallel-medium failure: we realised that Natal people were clinging to their schools and were frightened to let go of them, so that any idea of providing alternative technical education — desperately needed though it was — would meet the same resistance. We had another motive — every time the government tried to initiate streaming in black schools, a cry of ‘unequal

education' went up. Now this was not entirely unjust, given the ulterior motives of apartheid. And yet there really was a need for technical training for blacks. We felt that if we could show that streaming worked within white schools, then blacks would see that it was not a matter of unequal education, but vitally necessary education.

Anyhow, Philip Nel and Gerald Hosking came to me with a memorandum that set out their ideas. They said that we must frankly recognize that parents were wedded to certain schools, and they suggested a scheme for differential education within the school, and not in alternative schools. I thought it was an excellent idea; I got it through Exco, and Exco duly sent it off to Pretoria. The result was that the Minister was beside himself with glee and announced it over the radio as if it came from the government. So an unacknowledged Natal idea soon became national policy.

But it was my portfolio as chairman of the Parks Board that most brought me into the public eye. In my opinion, the Natal Parks Board was a target for opposition because it was such a success. That's why the attack came from such different quarters — from the farmers on the right, the conservationists on the left, and the National Parks Board in the middle. Let's consider the farmers. There had been a long history of opposition from stockfarmers, stretching right back to the days of nagana, which the farmers said was carried by game. They were unsympathetic to the Zululand reserves and that, of course, meant the whole project of saving the rhino. During the war years DDT sorted nagana out, but then there loomed foot-and-mouth disease and 'corridor' disease, which is spread by buffalo (named after the stretch of land between Hluhluwe and Umfolozi reserves, the area which it threatens). It seems unbelievable now, but in the early 'forties even a United Party MPC was all for having the game shot out of Zululand. He was heard to claim that if any buffalo got in amongst his cattle, the first bastard born would be called 'Douglas Mitchell'. So the farmers were a hostile lobby — mostly Nationalists, and having the ear of a government who had no love at all for Douglas Mitchell's special 'baby'. (He actually founded the Board in 1948.)

As for National Parks, when the Natal Parks Board started hitting world conservation headlines with their rhino projects and so on, National Parks didn't like it. They were dead keen on having a foothold in all the provinces. I subsequently had access to some of Theo Gerdener's files, and certainly as Administrator, he was very sympathetic to the idea of National Parks taking over the Natal Parks Board. Not, however, Ben Havemann who was Administrator during my term, and who showed himself a real patriot (in the UP we reckoned we had converted him!). The simple fact was that the Natal Parks Board was streets ahead of anyone else in its thinking, and in general public esteem. At the 1972 Administrators' Conference in Bloemfontein, where other provinces were complaining about the shortage of Parks' staff, I could say that, in Natal, the half-dozen posts we had just advertised had attracted over a hundred applications. But the Nationalists were gunning for the NPB, saying that it was much too political, with its independent board structure, its MEC as chairman, and so on.

Which makes it all the more tragic that the same argument was led from the other side by the conservationists, the group based mainly in Zululand, some of whom were on the Parks Board payroll. You know, I think the Board was still too small to filter its men up through a sub-managerial ladder. They never got an over-view. You'd have remarkable individual rangers: someone would

be based at Giant's Castle for years and years, and do outstanding work, but if you promoted him and moved him elsewhere, he'd be like a fish out of water. So there was a great deal of room for personality clashes, and I think that's what happened. Anyhow, in 1970 I arrived on the scene. Douglas Mitchell was keen that I get an 'eyeview' of my domain, and he took me personally on a jeep ride from Loteni across to Giant's Castle, right under the mountains. He also took me to Zululand. Mitchell was a man who both gave loyalty and demanded loyalty; he was something of a stickler for form. Just outside Mapelane, we drove past a deep pond with some water lilies in the middle. Mitchell lighted up: he was developing a pond on his estate down the South Coast, and water lilies would be a desirable addition. Being to some extent his appointee, I felt I was the junior party, and offered to strip and jump in. But he said 'No, no, we can't possibly have the chairman of the Parks Board doing that,' stripped and jumped in himself.

The situation I walked into was that the Board had appointed as director John Geddes-Page, who had made a name for himself at the Jonkershoek Fisheries down in the Cape, and had come to Natal where he had run our own Fisheries section very efficiently. But the appointment was deeply resented in certain quarters, and especially in the game side of conservation, which of course meant Zululand. Ian Player had had almost as much experience, and would also have made a very good director, but it proved impossible to persuade him to accept a *fait accompli*. Coming from the outside, I thought I had a chance of getting through to Ian by accompanying him on a two-week tour of some parks in the USA. At place after place he was introduced as the saviour of the white rhino, and — much as I admire what he had done for conservation — I still don't think this was fair. Colonel Vincent had started the rhino programme, and the Swiss-based World Wildlife Society had given him the medal. (This was Prince Philip's IUCN; Vincent actually served it as Director for a couple of years.) Anyhow, we were well received in America, and generously treated. But my attempt at breaking through to Player was not successful (just as, later, I had no success with O'Malley, the editor of the *Daily News*, with whom I spent some hours.)

By the way, a policy decision had its birth on that American trip. On the last morning I had left San Diego game park to drive up to Los Angeles airport (I was rushing back to Natal for the next session of Council) when my driver said, 'We have a few hours in hand, I'll take you to the new drive-in Zoo south of Los Angeles.' What a place, with its overhead cableway, and — interesting for us — its entrance built like a Zulu kraal. Well, we got there, and the curator was amazed to meet me. He said 'What a coincidence. In ten minutes, I expect a consignment of rhino from Natal.' Sure enough, in ten minutes, the huge crates started to arrive. You should have seen the Natal ranger's face when he saw me there! But as it turned out, it was not a happy coincidence. The rhino had been despatched to the port of St Louis on the Mississippi, and when they arrived there a dock strike kept them on board for a further ten days, and their supply of staple food had run out. So you can imagine, when they came out of their crates in California, they were a terrible sight. One after the other they just tottered out. One of them we thought would die within the hour. It was a fiasco, and as a result we made a decision that we would only export rhino by airfreight. There were too many risks with the journey by sea. (Incidentally, the San Diego game park later claimed to produce the first zoo-born white rhinos in the world. They *didn't* say how careful the Natal Parks

Board had been to supply them with pregnant cows!)

Back home, the conservationist group was ranged with the *Daily News*, the Wild Life Society, the South African Council for Conservation, and so on. Within Exco there was a personal pressure on me because the man earmarked by Gerdener's Executive Council for the chairmanship of the Board had been Teddy Wilks. But Douglas Mitchell felt that, with the situation that had arisen, someone coming in from the outside would stand up better to the onslaught. And, in those days — unlike today — we followed Westminster procedure: the party leader, not the Administrator, decided on portfolios.

A huge docket of complaints was drawn up, mostly deriving from the *Daily News*, and several MPCs felt it was a sufficient basis for a commission of enquiry. Now I would have none of that. I felt that an enquiry would concede in principle the claim that the Parks Board was misconstituted, and that its structure was in itself antipathetic to conservation. Also I felt that the complaints were all pitched at such a trifling level that the dignity of an enquiry should not be conceded. I remember for instance how the poor ranger on the eastern shores of St Lucia, who had done sterling work digging the channel for water when the lake was running dry, was blamed for using Parks Board materials to build his house. I was accused of being pressured by Chapman Friend to buy his farm for the new Itala Reserve, and of taking my wife for visits there, when in fact she had never even been to the place. So I rejected the notion of any enquiry, but I was prepared to concede a special session of Council given over to a debate, where the complaints could be aired in public. I said that if anything substantial came out of the debate, I'd be the first to agree to an enquiry. Well, nothing specific came to light; there was only the usual stuff about 'too many politicians', in other words, about the nature of the constitution of the Parks Board itself.

As far as criminal accusations were concerned — maladministration, corruption, and so on — I conceded right from the start that the whole petition would be handed over to the Attorney-General. This was now done, and there was a rigorous investigation that lasted six months. At the end of it, a report came back that found not one charge to be substantiated. But it was a sad triumph — a great deal of damage had been done. We lost some excellent men, Player, for instance (who soon left the position we created for him at Queen Elizabeth Park), and Jan Oelofse, who perfected the art of game-capturing. I became very close to Douglas Mitchell through all this. He was philosophical, but the Parks Board was his special baby, and the affair, I know, hurt him grievously.

You know, one of the complaints made from the 'conservationist' side was that the Board was giving attention to recreation at the expense of conservation. Now actually I think we were ahead of the times here. Our development of recreation followed from a unified overall philosophy. We took the view that, with the population pressures building up in Natal, we couldn't allow people to overrun our small reserves, and that the best way to compensate them was to provide recreation parks. Believe me, it wasn't long before Natal was being praised for what it was doing around the state dams — Midmar, Chelmsford, Albert Falls and so on — far ahead of the other provinces.

On the other two flanks, the pressure was also gradually whittled away. The farmers were beginning to see the advantages of running game on their farms, and they were beginning to benefit from our policy of providing extension

officers. In fact Natal started the conservancy idea — there are now over 100 in Natal, where farmers control hunting and so on. You will see the road signs outside Greytown. Here again, the other provinces have followed our lead. And as for the National Parks Board, what helped us here was that the other provinces, too, started to dig in their heels, and to resist any idea of a take-over by National Parks.

And despite the disappointments, there were achievements during my term. Douglas Mitchell consolidated the Umtamvuna Nature Reserve, and he got permission from the Minister of Agriculture to take over the state experimental farm outside Weenen. The minister laid on a helicopter, and we inspected the farm *in situ*. I got Weenen Municipality to donate an additional acreage to make a viable reserve, and so we got the Weenen Nature Reserve.

In fact, in order to consolidate new reserves, I had to cause laws to be bent on our behalf! We were selling rhino and a lot of game, and yet all profits were going into the Treasury. So I said ‘Why can’t we have a separate fund for this money, in order to expand Itala, and for other projects?’ But we were up against the law; no subordinate organization is entitled to own land, and all such land belongs to the state, and any revenue derived from it must go to state coffers. So Havemann approached the Minister, and he and I went up to Pretoria, and it was agreed to bend the Finance Act. This gave us leverage to buy more land. My next big purchase was the Berg farms leading into Giants Castle. And then there was a triumph for Professor Coles, who served on the Board at this time. He achieved what we had all given up on — he persuaded Reynolds Brothers to give the additional land needed to consolidate the Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve.

The next gain was Njasuti, then called Solitude Resort. I had a problem there. Harries owned it, and he reckoned we were bulldozing him, and that we wanted to expropriate. Now, as chairman, my policy was totally against expropriation. We would only acquire through purchase, though of course we could only purchase on the basis of State valuation. So when Harries came to me one day and said that his health was getting dicky and that he wanted to sell, it was all I wanted. But I had to insist we would only buy on valuation. So there was a possibility, for a while, that he would sell privately. Fortunately for us, that never came to anything, and eventually the valuers moved in. But the process dragged on for a couple of years, and he eventually got an even higher price than the one he originally asked for.

Not much known in conservation circles is the way Douglas Mitchell got the eastern shores of St Lucia. Ministers and government servants used the area from here up to Mkuze for private shooting parties and so on. And of course, government officials never want to see their empires reduced. Mitchell battled with minister after minister, and eventually we took Minister S.P. Botha to the scene — the best Nationalist minister I ever had contact with. We looked at the view from Cape Vidal, and the minister’s secretary said, ‘Do you really expect, Mr Mitchell, that we will hand you all this land with all this timber?’ And Mitchell said, ‘No — we’ll look after your timber for you, and in fact, we’ll even plant more for you. But what we want is what is not under timber.’ The minister went straight back to Pretoria and wrote out the letter of permission.

And as for Itala — well, that’s my real ‘baby’, the one I’m most proud of. Chapman Friend inherited a farm west of Louwsburg, and he said to me ‘I have this lovely farm, it would make a lovely game reserve.’ And I said, ‘Well,

when I'm up there again, we'll go and have a look at it.' And you know, I took one look from the top of the Louwsburg Hill and said 'This is it.' I got to work on it, and we started valuations. It was a time when the *Sunday Tribune* was suggesting that I accepted bribes, so I made absolutely certain that the Provincial Secretary appointed independent valuers. The Friend farm wasn't big enough on its own for a reserve, so we had to add other farms to the east. I remember the owners of 'Breda', the Christophers of Ladysmith, were very loyal to their tenants. We had to agree to re-locate them, and they actually contributed R20 000 of the purchase price to rehabilitate those tenants. We had to promise all the neighbouring farmers that we wouldn't bring in buffalo or wildebeest, because of 'corridor' disease and *snotsiekte*. In fact, wildebeest have since been declared disease-free, and are doing well there. But, now, how was I going to get the Louwsburg Hill?! I knew the Reserve would be nothing without the hill. But I also knew that Louwsburg was motivating for a water supply, and that Exco had delayed on the issue for some time. So I promised Louwsburg that I would talk Exco into giving them their water supply provided they handed over their hill. And so the consolidation took place.

Well, I had now had some 15 years in politics, and I was not getting any the richer. You know in those days we had to give one salary cheque per year to the Party, and I took it upon myself to pay every cent of travel on party business from my own pocket. I informed my superiors that I would step down, and I must say that my farm only became profitable from the moment I gave up politics and went back to it full-time. In the next ten years I was able to send four of my five children to university, to take two trips to the United States, and to take my wife and our children to see her family back in England.

