

CHAPTER FIVE

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

5.1 The period 1838-1902

Participation by the inhabitants of the Gatsrand in the political developments of the Overvaal area prior to 1902 was so closely knit with that of Potchefstroom and the rest of the ZAR that it is not always possible to exempt the Gatsrand folks' part in the developments.

Development can be traced back to November 1838 when the Trekker community was governed by a Krygsraad (Council of War). In collaboration with the Natal *Volksraad*, a subcouncil was established. It was composed of members of the *Volksraad* that lived in the Mooi River and Sand River districts.¹ FG Wolmarans, who settled on the farm Boschhoek in the Gatsrand in 1846, was the chairperson of this council in 1842.²

The annexation of Natal by Britain in July 1842 caused the sub-council of the Republic to reject Natalia's subjection to Britain. A *Volksraad* was established in 1844 and thirty-three articles were drawn up whereby the Oosvaal area would be governed.³

In 1851, the *Volksraad* appointed a three-man commission to negotiate with the British officials with regard to the acknowledgment of the independence of the trekkers to the north of the Vaal River. FG Wolmarans was a member of the commission.⁴ On 17 January 1852, the negotiations resulted in the signing of the Sand River Convention. The independence of the trekkers was thus acknowledged. From among the trekkers, FG Wolmarans and FPR Schutte of Gatsrand were co-signatories of the convention.⁵

As the community expanded, the Thirty-three Articles of the Oorvaal Area soon proved to be inadequate. Consequently, the government decided in 1855 to draft a proper constitution. In December 1858, a draft constitution was accepted according to which the new state would

¹ F.A.F. Wichmann, "Die wordingsgeskiedenis van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1838-1860", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 4(2), 1941, p.37.

² N. Dreyer, *Die rol van die Wolmarans-familie in kerk en staat...*, pp.7, 20.

³ F.A.F. Wichmann, "Die wordingsgeskiedenis van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek...", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 4(2), 1941, p.38.

⁴ N. Dreyer, *Die rol van die Wolmarans-familie in kerk en staat...*, p.55.

⁵ G.D. Scholtz, *Die ondertekening van die Sandrivier-konvensie herdenk, 1852-1952*, p.34.

be known by its new name, viz. the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR).⁶ At that stage, PJW Schutte, Field Cornet G Engelbrecht, FG Wolmarans and FGA Wolmarans of the Gatsrand were elected as members of the *Volksraad*.⁷ All white male burghers older than 21 elected members for the *Volksraad* for a term of two years in a free election.⁸ In 1860, Commandant TP Pretorius of Gatsrand was sworn in as a member of the *Volksraad*.⁹

As head of government of the ZAR, MW Pretorius and the *Volksraad* did not enjoy the full cooperation of all the burghers. Their experiences with the autocratic conduct of the governors of the Cape Colony caused an exaggerated democratic mindset with some of the burghers.¹⁰ After MW Pretorius had also accepted the presidency of the Free State in 1860, JH Grobler was appointed as acting president. As a result of these events, Commandant-General S Schoeman and his supporters decided at a meeting at Potchefstroom in October 1860 that they could no longer put their trust in the *Volksraad*, that Pretorius should remain the president of the ZAR and that Schoeman should be the acting president.¹¹

A time of confusion followed after Pretorius, when he remained in the Free State, requested a longer time than the leave originally granted to him. In January 1861 Schoeman held meetings to test people's feelings regarding Pretorius's decision to remain in the Free State for longer. At a meeting of the *Volksraad* at Potchefstroom, it was decided to grant Pretorius one year's leave and to have Schoeman fill the vacancy and that the *Volksraad* should make way for another one. However, these decisions were unconstitutional.¹²

On the other hand, Commandant Paul Kruger and his supporters held a meeting in September. The ZAR was declared to be without a government. Kruger decided to send notices to the field cornets in which the inhabitants of the wards were requested to sign these if they wished for the old *Volksraad* to reassemble.¹³ Field Cornet G Engelbrecht of the Gatsrand arranged several meetings for the inhabitants of the area in order to discuss this

⁶ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, pp.61, 68.

⁷ *Staats Courant der ZAR*, nr. 1, 25.9.1857, p.3.

⁸ J.S. du Plessis, "Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp van staatspresident in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1858-1902". *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 18(1), 1955, p.123.

⁹ *Staats Courant der ZAR*, nr. 20. 10.8.1860, p.1.

¹⁰ J.S. du Plessis, "Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp van staatspresident in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1858-1902", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 18(1), 1955, p.130.

¹¹ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, p.70.

¹² W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, p.71.

¹³ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, p.72.

matter. On 13 January 1862, a statement was submitted to the magistrate, JC Steyn of Potchefstroom with a motion of no confidence by the inhabitants in the *Volksraad* owing to its decisions that were in conflict with the constitution of the ZAR.¹⁴ Even though the resolutions were not mentioned in the motion, it can be assumed that the inhabitants were dissatisfied with the appointment of Grobler as acting president. As senior member of the *Volksraad* and in compliance with the constitution, Schoeman should have filled the position.¹⁵ This would then also clarify the support that Schoeman got from the Potchefstroom district (Gatsrand included).¹⁶

At the time of the meetings of the field cornets in the various wards of every district concerning the *Volksraad* issue, a commission of six persons from the commandos of Potchefstroom, Marthinus Wesselstroom and Rustenburg attended the meeting between Kruger and Schoeman in Pretoria in November 1861. Prior to the meeting, Schoeman asked the field cornets of the various districts to see to it that the burghers were armed on arrival in Pretoria.¹⁷ From the Gatsrand ward, 74 burghers responded positively to the call, while 29 did not comply with the request.¹⁸

In order to solve the tense situation in Pretoria peacefully, it was decided to elect a new *Volksraad* and to retain Schoeman as acting president until the newly elected *Volksraad* would meet in April 1862. The newly elected *Volksraad* dismissed Schoeman on 17 April due to neglect of duty and his attempt at starting a rebellion. WC Jansen van Rensburg was elected as acting president.¹⁹ The field cornets of the various wards acted as pollsters during the election.²⁰

Schoeman enjoyed major support in the district of Potchefstroom – especially in the town itself. They did not acknowledge Van Rensburg as new acting president. They even barred him from visiting the town. Schoeman's refusal to step down as acting president brought the

¹⁴ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 2: G. Engelbrecht/Landdros, 13.1.1862.

¹⁵ J.S. du Plessis, "Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp van staatspresident in die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek, 1858-1902", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 18(4), 1955, p.125.

¹⁶ D.W. Krüger (red.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, p.263.

¹⁷ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom 1838-1938*, p.72.

¹⁸ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 2: G. Engelbrecht/Landdros, 9.12.1861.

¹⁹ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis an Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, p.72.

²⁰ J.S. du Plessis, "Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die amp van staatspresident in die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek, 1859-1902", *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis* 18(4), 1955, p.125

tension to a climax in October 1862.²¹ The friction between the people's army (discontented persons) and the national army was terminated only in January 1864 when MW Pretorius intervened. FG Wolmarans was one of the mediators during the negotiations.²²

In May 1864, MW Pretorius was re-elected president of the ZAR and the following inhabitants of Gatsrand were elected as members of the *Volksraad*: FGA Wolmarans, JJ Hoffman and TFJ Steyn.²³ In 1865, the Council of War of the ZAR acted against persons who had made themselves guilty of rebellion during the civil war.²⁴ Despite Field Cornet G Engelbrecht's denial of having urged the burghers of his ward to accompany him to Pretoria while bearing arms,²⁵ he was found guilty and forced to pay a fine of £333. He could not pay the amount immediately and his farm Hartbeesfontein in the ward Vaal River had to serve as security until he had fully paid.²⁶

In 1872, Pretorius was succeeded by Burgers. The latter's popularity waned in the course of time owing to issues such as his education act of 1874 and the problems he experienced with dealing with the war against Sekhukhune. Member of the *Volksraad* Hoffman, Commandant TP Pretorius and 114 burghers of the Gatsrand nevertheless reconfirmed their confidence in Burgers and requested him to make himself available in the next elections.²⁷

However, British annexation of the ZAR on 12 April 1877 terminated Burgers's term and events in the political arena subsequent to the annexation date until 3 August 1881 revolved around one matter only, namely reclaiming their lost independence.²⁸ While the majority of the burghers initially did not fully comprehend the consequences of the annexation of the ZAR by Sir Theophilus Shepstone,²⁹ there were a few people who resisted actively – and that even before the annexation – when it became known that Sir Theophilus Shepstone had paid a visit to Pretoria. FGA Wolmarans of Welverdiend in the Gatsrand (known as Frikkie Stompoor)³⁰ went to the government's offices in Pretoria as early as 6 February 1877 with

²¹ W.J. Badenhorst, "Die geskiedenis van Potchefstroom" in A.J.H. van der Walt (red.), *Potchefstroom, 1838-1938*, pp.73-74.

²² N. Dreyer, *Die rol van die Wolmarans-familie in kerk en staat...*, p.145.

²³ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 3: J.J. Hoffman/Landdros, Mei 1864. Vergelyk ook *Staats Courant der ZAR* nr. 165, 4.9.1866, p.3.

²⁴ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 3: H.T.F. Muller (Balju)/Landdros, 24.11.1865.

²⁵ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 3: G. Engelbrecht/Landdros, 15.12.1865.

²⁶ Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 3: H.T.F. Muller (Balju)/Landdros, 24.11.1865.

²⁷ P.A.C. Wieringa, *De oudste Boeren republieken in Zuid-Afrika: Graaff-Reinet en Zwellendam van 1775 tot 1806*, pp.111-112.

²⁸ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Die ontwaking van die Afrikaanse nasionale bewussyn, 1868-1881*, p.121.

²⁹ M.C. van Zyl, *Die protesbeweging van die Transvaalse Afrikaners, 1877-1880*, p.16.

³⁰ Wolmarans het op die plaas Welverdiend in wyk Boven-Moorivier gewoon maar ook die plaas *Stompoorfontein* in die Gatsrandwyk besit- vandaar sy bynaam.

about 300 armed horsemen to go and chase Shepstone and the English away.³¹ It was already feared at that stage that Shepstone could possibly annex the ZAR. However, President Burgers assured them that Shepstone was a well-intentioned commissioner who had visited to negotiate in a friendly way. They returned home after this assurance.³²

After the annexation a deputation (delegation) left for Europe on 9 May 1877 in order to negotiate the reinstatement of the independence of the ZAR. However, they failed in their mission. On 28 January 1878, the report of the delegation was read out loud at Naauwpoort (Boven Mooi River ward) and the *volksvergadering* (public meeting), like the burghers in Pretoria, decided to appoint a commission of 15 members.

This commission, in collaboration with the commission from Pretoria, decided what to do about the deputation's report.³³ Persons resident in the Gatsrand who served in the Potchefstroom commission, were H Wolvaardt and FGA Wolmarans.³⁴

The first task of the commission, subsequently better known as the *Volkskomitee* (People's committee), was in April 1878 when they had to organise a referendum and let the public sign a petition to show that the majority was opposed to annexation. On 12 March 1878, a meeting was held on the farm Doornfontein in the Gatsrand to discuss, inter alia, this issue.³⁵ Meetings were prohibited by a proclamation of Shepstone, yet not even the admonition of magistrate Goetz of Potchefstroom directed at the owner of the farm Doornfontein, W Kock, could prevent this meeting from taking place.³⁶

At Doornfontein it was decided to send a second deputation to London with a petition signed by 6 591 eligible voters (burghers) in an attempt to have the independence of the Republic restored in an amicable way. However, the deputation (Dr E Bok, SJP Kruger and P Joubert) returned to the ZAR on 24 October without having achieved their goal.³⁷

It was decided that the deputation would give feedback on the farm Wonderfontein on 10 and 11 January 1879. About 1 500 burghers from all over negotiated the muddy roads to

³¹ *De Volkstem*, 11.3.1879, p.3.

³² F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.7.

³³ F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.7.

³⁴ M.C. van Zyl, *Die protesbeweging van die Transvaalse Afrikaners, 1877-1880*, p.38.

³⁵ F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.21.

³⁶ M.C. van Zyl, *Die protesbeweging van die Transvaalse Afrikaners, 1877-1880*, p.38.

³⁷ F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, pp.32-34.

Wonderfontein after two days' heavy rains.³⁸ Apparently, the reception organised for Kruger, Joubert and Bok was spectacular.

A number of horsemen, followed by 34 carriages and 544 more horsemen accompanied the deputation to the assembly. Subsequently, the large public meeting was addressed.³⁹ On 11 January, the deputation reported to the *Volkskomitee*⁴⁰ at the government's place for outspanning on the farm Rietvlei (the farm of J Prinsloo).⁴¹ The assembly decided this time to send a deputation to the British High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere in Natal in order to discuss with him their aspirations to regain independence.⁴² This, however, was also doomed to failure.⁴³

From March 1897, the *Volkskomitee* organised meetings to discuss the reinstatement of the ZAR. On 7 June, a seven-man commission met at Stompoorfontein with FGA Wolmarans as secretary. Rumours that the chairperson of the *Volkskomitee*, MW Pretorius, had been sworn in as a British burgher was discussed by the commission. However, SJP Kruger's report regarding the issue reassured them and the meeting was adjourned.⁴⁴

The arrival of Sir Garnet Wolseley as new governor and high commissioner of the ZAR in September 1879, as well as his attempt to suppress the burghers' resistance, once again served to add oil to the fire. This gave rise to the planning of a second *Volksvergadering* (large public meeting) at Wonderfontein.⁴⁵

The *Volksvergadering* of 11 December 1879 at Wonderfontein also attracted travelling salesmen. They regarded this as an opportunity to sell, inter alia, fodder, roll tobacco, matches, brandy, biltong and eggs.⁴⁶ About 4 000 burghers assembled here to listen to the report of the *Volkskomitee*. On the days following, Bok, Kruger and Joubert shared their view

³⁸ M.C. van Zyl, *Die protesbeweging van die Transvaalse Afrikaners, 1877-1880*, p.95.

³⁹ *De Volkstem* 18.1.1879, bylae: Verslag van de Vergadering op Wonderfontein. Daar is blykbaar besluit dat die volksvergadering op Wonderfontein bymekaar moes kom aangesien dit "een gezonde paardenplaats" was en perdesiekte op daardie stadium oral 'n probleem was. Kyk H.C. Bredell en P. Grobler (reds.), *Gedenkskrifte van Paul Kruger*, p.71.

⁴⁰ Die plaas Rietvlei (Rietvley), is in 1859 aan J.G. Schoonbee toegeken op voorwaarde dat hy 'n publieke uitspanning toelaat. In 1871 is dit as deel van die poskoetsroete in gebruik geneem. Die plaas Wonderfontein grens aan die oostelike sy van Rietvlei. Kyk Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 3: Uitvoerende Raad/J.G. Schoonbee, 23.9.1859. Vergelyk ook *Staats Courant der ZAR* nr. 366, 21.2.1871, p.203.

⁴¹ P. Joubert (TAB), verw. 25 nr. A14: Verslag van die tweede deputasie op Wonderfontein, 10-11.1.1879.

⁴² P.J. Joubert (TAB), verw. 25 nr. A14: Verslag van die tweede deputasie op Wonderfontein, 10-11.1.1879.

⁴³ F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.37.

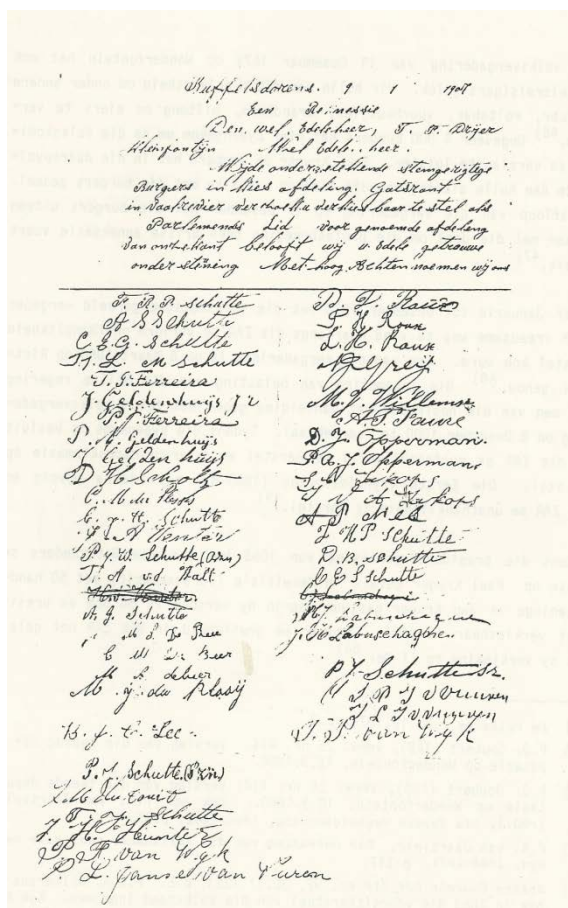
⁴⁴ F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.62.

⁴⁵ M.C. van Zyl, *Die protesbeweging van die Transvaalse Afrikaners, 1877-1880*, p.127.

⁴⁶ *De Volkstem*, 23.12.1879, p.2.

of the state of affairs with the burghers. On completion of the meeting on 17 December, the burghers parted for the purpose of continuing with the protest movement against British annexation.⁴⁷

From January to December 1880, the *Volkskomitee* met regularly in an ongoing attempt to find a peaceful way to restore the lost independence of the ZAR. One such meeting was held at Rietvlei on 8 March 1880.⁴⁸ The collection of tax for the British government was one of the main reasons for a *volksvergadering* (or large public meeting) at Paardekraal on 8 December 1880. During the meeting, it was decided to restore the independence of the ZAR and to draw up a proclamation of freedom. The First War of Independence (1880-81) followed and the independence of the ZAR was restored.⁴⁹ During the presidential election of 1883, Paul Kruger was supported by some of the Gatsranders. A petition with 50 signatures in which he was asked to be eligible as president was presented to Kruger. Kruger's popularity in the ZAR gave rise to his election on 11 May 1883.⁵⁰



EXAMPLE OF A PETITION IN FAVOUR OF
TFJ DREYER, 1907
Document: TF Dreyer Jr (Parys)

⁴⁷ P.J. Joubert (TAB), verw. 25 nr. A14. Verslag van die tweede deputasie op Wonder= fontein, 18.3.1880.

⁴⁸ P.J. Joubert (TAB), verw. 25 nr. A14: Verslag van die tweede deputasie op Wonder= fontein, 18.3.1880. Kyk ook F.A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog, 1880-1881*, p.93.

⁴⁹ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Die ontwaking van die Afrikaanse nasionale bewussyn, 1868-1881*, p.147.

⁵⁰ *Staats Courant der ZAR* nr. 92, 30.11.1883, p.6. F.G.A. Wolmarans het in 1883 die voor= sitterstoel van die Volksraad ingeneem. Kyk N. Dreyer, *Die rol van die Wolmarans-familie in kerk en staat...*, p.203.

Gold was discovered on the Reef in the eighties. Many immigrants came to settle in the ZAR and tried to get equal say in the government. It was common knowledge among the burghers that Joubert had a more liberal view regarding the immigrants and that he also disagreed with Kruger with regard to the concession policy and the appointment of Dutch as head officials of the ZAR administration.⁵¹ As a consequence, the immigrants supported Joubert in the 1893 elections. However, the burghers of the ZAR, including those of the Gatsrand, re-elected Kruger as president while electing Joubert as commandant-general.⁵²

The establishment (already in 1890) of a Second *Volksraad* for the *Uitlanders* (outlanders or foreigners) gave rise to the original *Volksraad* to be known hence as the First *Volksraad*. FPR Schutte of Buffelsdoorn was sworn in as member of the First *Volksraad* in 1898. However, his term of service was brief owing to the British takeover of the ZAR during the (Second) Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).⁵³

5.2 The period 1902-1948

Generals L Botha and JH De la Rey, CF Beyers, JC Smuts and ex-senator ADW Wolmarans assumed the leadership in the political upliftment of the Afrikaner in the Transvaal after the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902. In 1905, the first post-war Afrikaner party namely "Het Volk" was established.⁵⁴ In 1906, Gatsrand got a branch of "Het Volk" with GP Brits (subsequently member of the House of Assembly) was one of the founders.⁵⁵



COMMANDANT TFJ DREYER
Photo: TF Dreyer Jr (Parys)

⁵¹ J.S. du Plessis, "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek" in C.F.J. Muller (red.), *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, pp.254, 259.

⁵² Potchefstroom Landdros (TAB), verw. 20: J.T. Martins/Landdros, Mei 1893.

⁵³ Staatsekretaris (TAB), verw. R4257: F.R.P. Schutte/Staatsekretaris, 24.1.1900. Vergelyk ook Carletonville versameling (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Onderhoud C. en T. Schutte, 27.10.1986.

⁵⁴ F.V. van Engelenburg, *Generaal Louis Botha*, p.312.

⁵⁵ *Dagbreek en sondagnuus*, 19.7.1937, p.3.

In 1906, Britain conferred responsible government to the Transvaal. The former republic was divided into constituencies and Gatsrand was part of Losberg. General elections were declared for February 1907.⁵⁶ With a view to the elections of 1907, Commandant Theunie Dreyer received 20 petitions with about 600 signatures from the inhabitants of the Gatsrand and the Vaal River wards asking him to make himself available for election.⁵⁷ Dreyer's popularity, apparently owing to his part as commandant in the Anglo-Boer War, caused him to be elected unopposed as the "Het Volk" candidate for the Losberg constituency.⁵⁸

During the first Union elections in 1910, the "Het Volk" Party (Transvaal) and the South African Party (Cape), as well as the Oranje-Unie (Orange Union) entered into an alliance known as the Verbonde Party (Allied Party). Dreyer was once again elected unopposed. His party leader, Louis Botha, however, was not as fortunate and had to surrender his constituency in Pretoria West to the Unionist, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick.⁵⁹ With the permission of the electorate, Dreyer surrendered the constituency of the Losberg to Botha on 4 October 1910.⁶⁰ Thus it is clear that, at that stage, Losberg was a very safe stronghold for Botha's party (known from November 1911 as the South African Party, or SAP for short)⁶¹.



GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA
Photo: Potchefstroom Museum

⁵⁶ A. Mawby, *The political behaviour of the British population of the Transvaal, 1902-1907*, p.60.

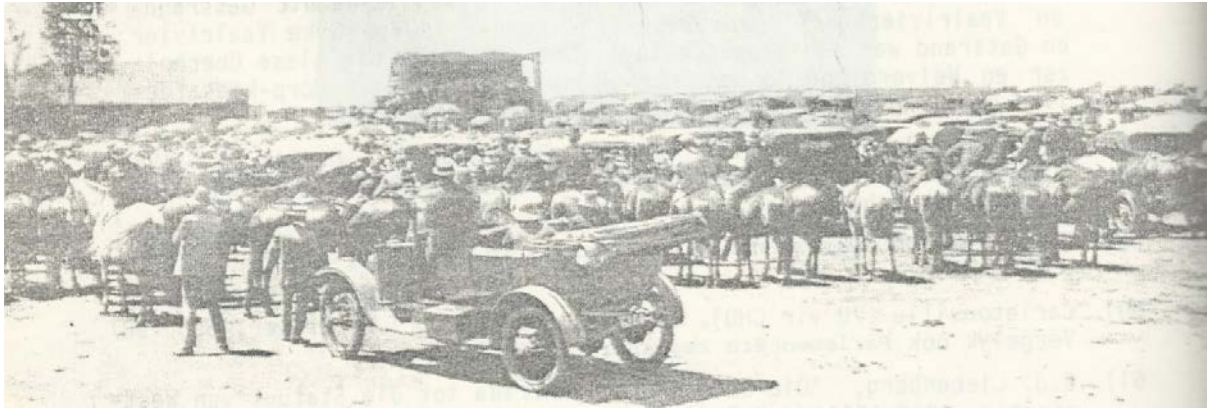
⁵⁷ Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 4: Rekvisies uit Gatsrand- en Vaalrivierwyk/T.F.J. Dreyer, Januarie 1907. Wyke Vaalrivier en Gatsrand was een kiesafdeling. Dit sluit nie die plase Oberholzer en Welverdiend in wat aanvanklik in die Ventersdorp-kiesafdeling geval het nie.

⁵⁸ Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Onderhoud T.F. Dreyer, 6.5.1987. Kommandant Dreyer se aandeel in die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog word in hoofstuk 6 bespreek.

⁵⁹ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.27.

⁶⁰ Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Onderhoud T.F. Dreyer, 6.5.1987. Vergelyk ook *Parlementêre register, 1910-1961*, p.84.

⁶¹ B.J. Liebenberg, "Die Unie van Suid-Afrika tot die Statuut van Westminster, 1910-1931" in C.F.J. Muller (red), *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, pp.347-349.



VOLKSVERGADERING (large public meeting) AT BANK STATION, 1914
Photo: *Brandwag*, 1914

General Hertzog was dissatisfied with the reconciliation policy of Botha and consequently established the National Party (NP) in 1914. Many of the Losberg constituency supported him in this venture.⁶² The start of the First World War in August 1914 and the decision of the Union to support Britain sparked off wide reaction in South Africa. Some were dissatisfied with Botha's decision to conquer South-West Africa for Britain. This dissatisfaction gave rise to General Botha's decision to personally address his constituency regarding the issue. On 28 September 1914, he addressed about 5 000 interested persons at Bank Station. Among those interested were burghers of various districts' rifle clubs, as well as a few politicians.⁶³

In his speech, Botha pointed out to the people that the Union, as part of the British Empire, could not remain neutral in the fighting. He proceeded by asking who supported the proposal, namely that the Union should protect some of the harbours in South-West Africa against the Germans. The people were divided over the issue and the occasion degenerated into fighting between the supporters of Botha and Hertzog.⁶⁴ GP Brits, a passionate supporter of Hertzog in the Gatsrand, was also involved in the fighting.⁶⁵ After the incident at Bank, the Hertzog supporters in the Losberg constituency under the leadership of Brits and JB Wolmarans formed a National Party branch.⁶⁶ However, the precise date is not known.

⁶² Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Onderhoud T.F. Dreyer, 6.5.1987.

⁶³ Goewerneur-Generaal (SAB), verw. 599, nr. 9/59/20: Prime Ministers address to his constituents in Losberg division at Bank station, 28.9.1914. Vergelyk ook *Rand Daily Mail*, 29.9.1914, p.1.

⁶⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, 29.9.1914, p.1. Vergelyk ook *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 18.8.1914, p.2.

⁶⁵ *Die Vaderland*, 10.7.1959, p.9.

⁶⁶ *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, 19.7.1937, p.3. Vergelyk ook Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Onderhoud T.F. Dreyer, 6.5.1987.

With a view to the elections in October 1915, there was a nomination court for the Losberg constituency at Welperdiend. Commandant Dreyer (SAP) proposed Botha and PJ Schutte proposed Advocate AS van Hees (NP).⁶⁷ At this stage, the branches of the parties were already well prepared for the elections. The recently established NP had less time for preparations than the SAP branches at Welperdiend (with MJ Wolmarans as chairperson) and Losberg (also known as the Rondavel branch with HM du Preez as chairperson).⁶⁸

The elections of 1915 were to be the first in the history of the Gatsrand in which an opposition party featured. The candidates of both parties addressed meetings prior to the elections. However, the meeting of Van Hees at Bank Station was disrupted by SAP supporters. They also proposed a motion of no confidence in him.⁶⁹

Owing to the sprawling nature of the constituency, provision was made for eight polling stations, namely Kaalplaats, Welperdiend, Rooipoort, Elandsfontein number 289 and the police posts at Kraalkop and Frederikstad. The latter was located just outside the western boundary of the Gatsrand ward), as well as two farms in the Vaal River ward.⁷⁰ Botha's victory of 1 451 votes versus the 780 of Van Hees⁷¹ showed that the majority of the local voters still put their trust in him.

After Botha's sudden and unforeseen death on 27 August 1919, Commandant Dreyer who, at that stage, worked in Botha's shadow, was asked to make himself available as SAP candidate for the general elections of March 1920.⁷² General Smuts, the new prime minister, did not enjoy Botha's personal standing. However, he was forced to provide guidance to and lead a party whose support had waned owing to the Union's participation in World War One.⁷³ The SAP nevertheless won the Losberg constituency with a majority vote of 424. Dreyer received 1 292 votes compared to the 868 of the NP's JJ Pienaar.⁷⁴ Although the support of the NP increased in these elections in Losberg, it would seem at that stage that Losberg remained a safe seat for the SAP.

⁶⁷ *De Westelike Stem*, 30.8.1915, p.3.

⁶⁸ *De Westelike Stem*, 2.9.1915, p.5.

⁶⁹ *De Westelike Stem*, 7.10.1915, p.5.

⁷⁰ *De Westelike Stem*, 26.8.1915, p.4.

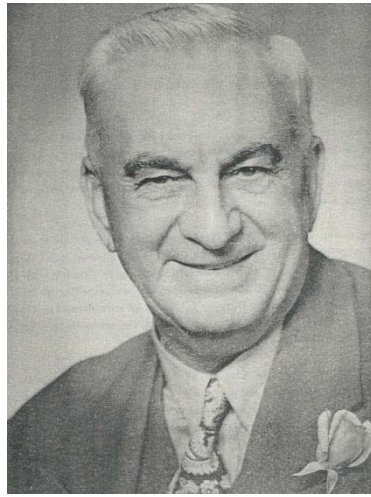
⁷¹ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.58.

⁷² *De Westelike Stem*, 1.1.1920, p.5.

⁷³ B.J. Liebenberg, "Die Unie van Suid-Afrika..." in C.F.J. Muller (red.), *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, p.358.

⁷⁴ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.87.

GP BRITS
Photo: WJA Wessels (Fochville)



Smuts had already, on his return from Europe, proposed the amalgamation of these two parties, yet this was never realised. There were, however, burghers such as, inter alia, PJ Schutte of the Losberg constituency, who also strove to effect unity. By means of a Potchefstroom newspaper, Schutte appealed to the SAP and the NP to make overtures to each other.⁷⁵

In spite of his effort, most NP supporters paid no heed to Smuts's appeal – especially not when the latter decided to approach the Unionists to join the SAP. In order to put the newly-formed unity to the test, Smuts decided to call for elections in February 1921. Though the SAP retained the Losberg constituency, support for them decreased even more. This time Dreyer won by a mere 315 votes (1 239 as against 924) against JB Wolmarans of the NP.⁷⁶

The period following the 1921 elections was one that created much confusion among the Losberg voters. General Smuts's inability to solve the post-war economic problems and his handling of the 1922 strike on the Rand caused SAP supporters to cross over to the NP. By contrast, the election pact in 1923 (with a view to cooperation in the 1924 elections) of the NP's General Hertzog with Colonel FHP Creswell (Labour Party) served to put off the NP supporters in the Losberg constituency.⁷⁷

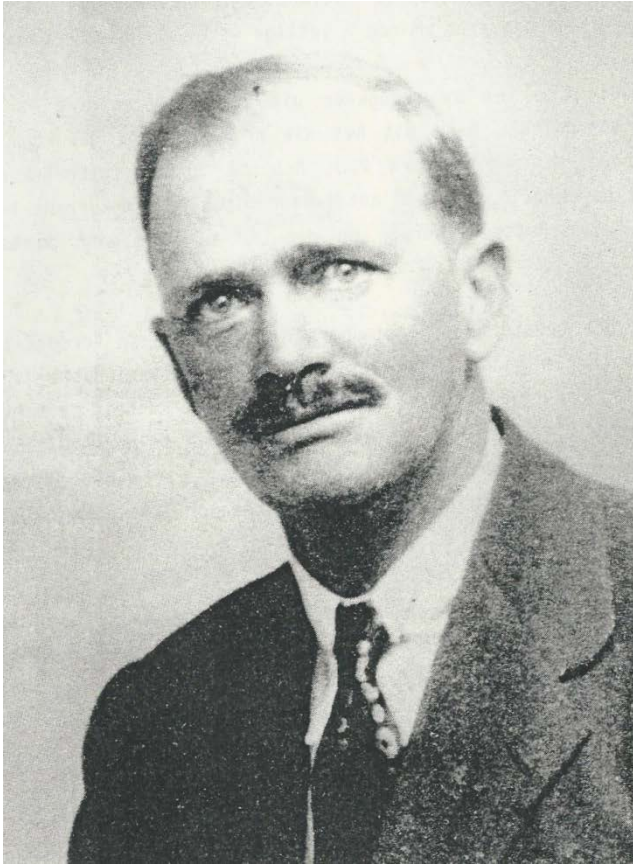
JB Wolmarans (NP candidate for Losberg) referred to Hertzog's election pact as deplorable. At the election campaign meetings in the area, he clearly showed his disgust by stating that the principles of the NP had been bartered and that the election pact would lead to a red-flag government and socialist legislation. His subsequent resignation as member of the NP caused a stir and eleven NP supporters immediately followed suit.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *De Westelike Stem*, 25.3.1920, p.5. Kyk ook B.J. Liebenberg, "Die Unie van Suid-Afrika..." in C.F.J. Muller (red.), *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, p.358.

⁷⁶ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.116.

⁷⁷ *De Westelike Stem*, 9.4.1924, p.2.

⁷⁸ *De Westelike Stem*, 10.6.1924, p.8. Vergelyk ook Carletonville (PU vir CHO), verw. 3: Bandopname J.M.F. Terburg, 30.9.1987.



JB WOLMARANS
Photo: JMF Terburg (Florida)

However, GP Brits, cofounder of the NP branch Losberg, remained in the NP and was nominated as candidate for the elections of 1924. Brits was fully aware of the dissatisfaction of many voters with the actions of the NP. He asked Hertzog to have the NP leader in Transvaal, Tielman Roos, address the Losberg inhabitants at a pre-election meeting. Apparently, Hertzog informed Brits that Roos would not find the time to address voters in a lost constituency.⁷⁹ Hertzog was proved to have been wrong about the 1924 elections when Brits won by a narrow margin of 56 votes (1 206 as against 1 150) against TFJ Dreyer (SAP).⁸⁰ After

an extremely difficult election campaign and much opposition, this was a personal triumph for Brits.⁸¹

Hertzog was surprised by the NP victory in Losberg. He probably could still recall his negative response to Brits's request prior to the 1924 elections when, with a view to the 1929 elections, he paid a visit to the Losberg constituency on 15 May 1929. Hertzog addressed a meeting of approximately 3 000 people at Fochville. Some of the SAP supporters also turned up at the meeting and asked the NP chair, L Blignaut, whether they too might appoint a chair to take the initiative at the meeting. However, this was refused and the meeting degenerated into a fist fight. Once order had been restored and after the departure of the SAP supporters, Hertzog addressed the meeting.⁸²

JB Wolmarans, however, could not be reconciled with the NP and accepted the nomination as SAP candidate for the 1929 elections. The two former political allies, Brits and Wolmarans, now went on the warpath. Brits won narrowly by 38 votes (1 156 as against 1 118).⁸³

⁷⁹ *Die Vaderland*, 10.9.1959, p.9.

⁸⁰ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.136.

⁸¹ *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, 19.7.1937, p.3.

⁸² *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 17.5.1929, p.5.

⁸³ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.165.

However, people like JB Wolmarans, PJ Vermaas, AC Oosthuizen, PJ Schutte and FPR Schutte were still in favour of amalgamation between the NP and the SAP. This idea was advocated in speeches made in the area and in letters to a local newspaper.⁸⁴

The depression of the early thirties and the blunders of General Hertzog, such as, inter alia, the refusal to abandon/drop the gold standard had an effect on the politics and the amalgamation process of the NP and SAP was sped up. On 15 February 1933, a coalition was formed and the United Party (UP) was established. In the Losberg constituency, Brits was elected unopposed.⁸⁵

The NP leader of the Cape Province, Doctor DF Malan, was not in favour of the amalgamation and he and his followers endeavoured to keep the NP pure. During the 1938 elections, three candidates were nominated in the Losberg constituency, namely UP, NP and an independent. A considerable number of English speakers, who settled in the Gatsrand after the opening of the Blyvooruitzicht mine in 1937, supported the UP, as it is clear from the results of the elections. GP Brits (UP) beat JIF Brits (NP) by a majority of 1 351 votes – a landslide victory of 2 787 as against 1 436, while JJ le Grange (independent) collected only 314 votes and thus was no factor at all.⁸⁶

The *Ossewa-Brandwag* (OB), which was established in 1939 as a consequence of the centenary celebration of the Groot Trek in 1938, made its political debut with numerous Nationalists as supporters. Even in the Losberg constituency, people joined the OB. As a result of Smuts's banning of the organisation and the fact that Malan had distanced himself from it in 1949, some of the OB supporters decided to continue with underground activities by joining the *Stormjaers* or storm troopers (an elite paramilitary wing of the *Ossewa-Brandwag*).⁸⁷ The principal of the school at Wonderfontein, KJ Kerling, played a leading role in the activities of the movement. Apart from a few incidents of sabotage in the Gatsrand (such as the cutting of telephone lines and theft of petrol), supporters of the OB were much more active at other places such as Vryburg. In order to participate in the organisation,

⁸⁴ *De Westelike Stem*, 17.5.1929, p.2. en 1.7.1930, p.3.

⁸⁵ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.185

⁸⁶ W. Hagan-Watson, "Down memory lane...", p.43. Kyk ook B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.226

⁸⁷ *Ossewa-Brandwagargief* (PU vir CHO), verw. 94: W. Mclouglin/K.J. Kerling, 18.8.1944. Vergelyk ook L.M. Fourie, *Die Ossewa-Brandwag en Afrikanereenheid, 1938-1942*, (D.Litt-proefskrif, 1987), pp.7, 33.

Kerling and a few others from Gatsrand had to go to Vryburg every Saturday since the OB did not have a branch in the area.⁸⁸

Participation by the Union in World War Two (1939-1945) also resulted in divisions in the Losberg constituency. A one-time minister of defence, O Pirow, visited the constituency at Fochville on 3 November 1939 to defend the Union's taking part in the war. GP Brits, who also addressed the meetings, sided with those who opposed Smuts's participation in the war.⁸⁹ He consequently was not available for the 1943 elections.⁹⁰

JB Wolmarans was nominated as candidate for the UP, while JP Barnard of the Reunited National Party (RNP), which was founded in 1940, represented it. The results were in favour of Wolmarans with a majority of 949 votes (3 186 as against 2 437)⁹¹ and it was thus that the Losberg constituency indicated that Smuts should be given another chance.

Unlike his predecessors, Wolmarans was a man who could easily make his point at meetings of the *Volksraad*. In April 1944, during the debate concerning the continuation of the Union's participation in the war, he said that the Union should spend money on the war expenses and should not withdraw.⁹² On occasion he also attacked Malan about the language issue and held the opinion that hatred between Boer and Brit (Afrikaners and Englishmen) would not benefit the Union. According to him, there would not be any more freedom under an NP government, since the Union already enjoyed a large degree of freedom under British rule.⁹³

By the end of World War Two in 1945, the influx of mineworkers to the mines at Blyvooruitzicht, West Driefontein and Doornfontein increased the number of voters in the constituency.⁹⁴ Smuts's Asiatic Land Tenure Act and representation by Indians caused dissatisfaction with the opposition in parliament, as well as division among the voters.

⁸⁸ Ossewa-Brandwagargief (PU vir CHO), verw. 94: Bandopname - transkripsie K.J. Kerling, 2.5.1974. Die OB was teen die einde van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog as 'n organisasie (1945) gebreek.

⁸⁹ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 3.11.1939, p.3.

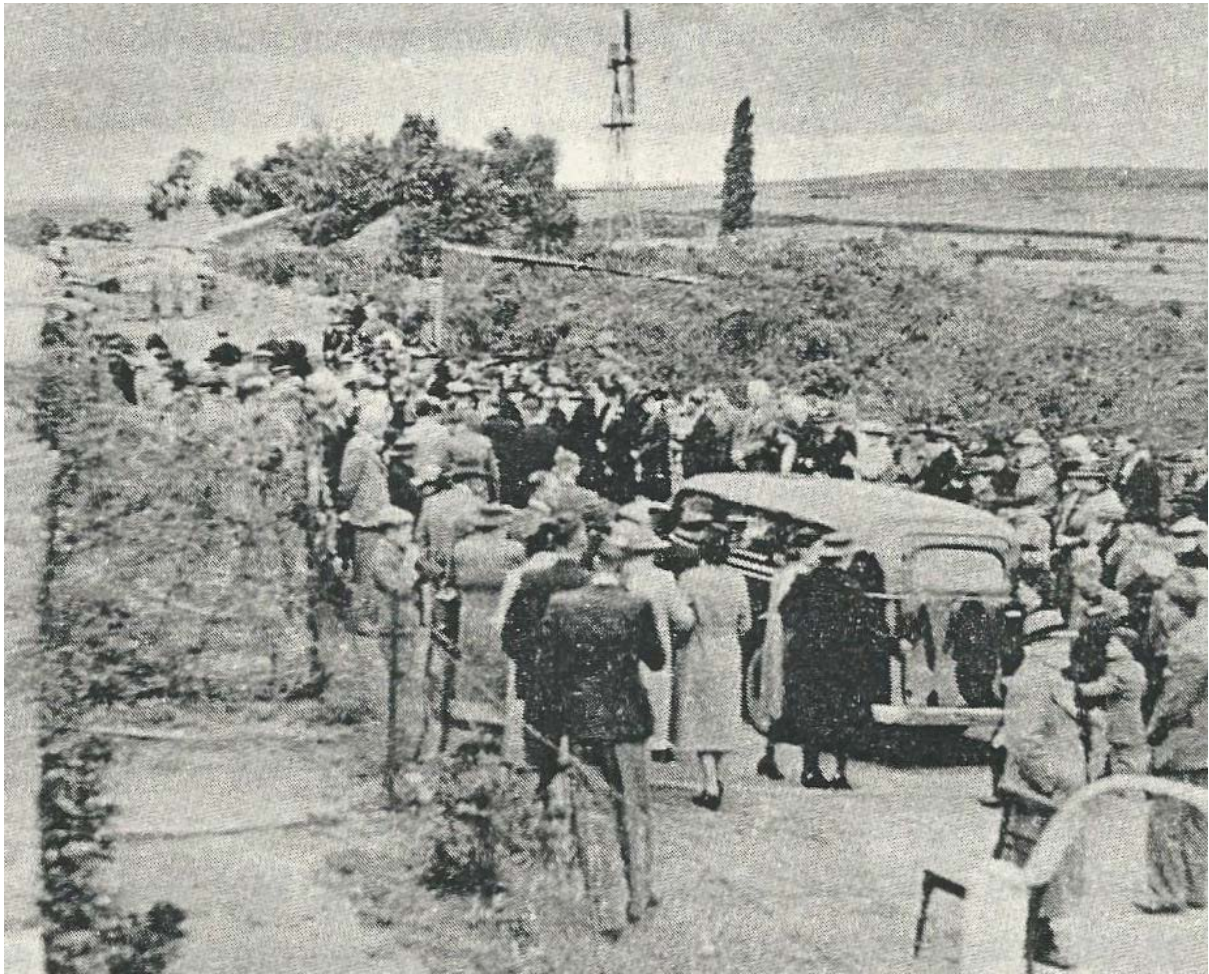
⁹⁰ *Potchefstroom Herald en Western Gazette*, 6.8.1943, p.4.

⁹¹ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.260.

⁹² *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 21.4.1944, p.2.

⁹³ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 26.4.1944, p.7.

⁹⁴ W. Hagan-Watson, "Down memory lane...", p.53.



WOLMARANS'S FUNERAL 1948
Photo: BJJ Vermaas (Jr) (Fochville)

The Indians were not yet appeased and, in addition, the representative council of the blacks, which was introduced in 1936, refused to cooperate with government any longer. This resulted in mounting racial tension.⁹⁵ In the Losberg constituency, the situation became worse when, in 1947, Wolmarans openly announced his opposition to the colour policy of the UP and decided to resign as member of the party.⁹⁶ Contrary to expectations, yet possibly having in mind the upcoming 1948 elections, the divisional management of the UP proposed an unopposed vote of confidence in Wolmarans and asked him to still represent the constituency so that there would not have to be a by-election.⁹⁷

Wolmarans's resignation as member of the UP resulted in a broad public response. On the whole, NP supporters welcomed his utterances countrywide and he made them believe that

⁹⁵ B.J. Liebenberg, "Van die statuut van Westminster tot die Republiek van Suid-Afrika..." in C.F.J. Muller (red.), *500 jaar Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis*, p.387.

⁹⁶ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 3.6.1947, p.9.

⁹⁷ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 27.6.1947, p.3.

white civilisation in South Africa was being threatened while there was overspending on black education. However, the UP supporters at Losberg did not find Wolmarans's utterances acceptable while he was still representing their constituency. Guided by G Davidtz, member of the district committee of the UP, Wolmarans was requested to resign as member of the *Volksraad* of the constituency. Wolmarans, however, turned down this request and continued to criticise UP policy.⁹⁸

Owing to his colour policy, the Minister of Finance, JH Hofmeyr, was also subjected to Wolmarans's criticism. In reaction to the criticism, Hofmeyr wanted to address a meeting at Fochville in order to clarify his view of the colour policy. However, the meeting of 12 September 1947 was disrupted by Wolmarans, students and local NP supporters and the chairperson, Colonel Rood (Member of the *Volksraad*, Vereeniging) was forced to close the meeting.⁹⁹

In 1948, the demarcation commission, with a view to the elections in May, took stock of the size of the constituency. It was decided to take the voting districts numbers 289, 459 and 457 (2 928 voters) away from the expanding Losberg constituency and to add them to some of the constituencies on the Reef.¹⁰⁰

In Wolmarans's stead, the jurist B Bekker, son of the former administrator of the Transvaal, S Bekker, was nominated as candidate for the UP.¹⁰¹ Wolmarans and GP Brits, who had re-entered politics, were nominated as RNP candidates. The majority of voters opted for Brits. Wolmarans probably lost votes/support in the light of the Hofmeyr incident at Fochville.¹⁰² The controversial and active political career of JB Wolmarans was ended a short while after Brits's nomination by the former's death on 22 April.¹⁰³

Although Bekker was regarded as a popular choice for the UP,¹⁰⁴ the post-war political situation and increasing criticism of the colour policy caused Brits to win the election in May 1948 by a majority of 971 votes (4 212 as against 3 751).¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 4.8.1947, p.9. Die koerant verwys byvoor= beeld na die dekking wat sy toespraak in etlike ander koerante gekry het.

⁹⁹ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 19.9.1947, p.9.

¹⁰⁰ *Report of the Transvaal constituencies Delimitation Commission, 1947*, p.62. Vergelyk ook *Staatskoerant van die Unie van Suid-Afrika* nr. 3931, 13.2.1948, p.2.

¹⁰¹ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 26.3.1948, p.6.

¹⁰² *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 2.4.1948, p.5.

¹⁰³ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 23.4.1948, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ *Potchefstroom Herald and Western Gazette*, 26.3.1948, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976*, p.291.

The elections of 1948 brought a dramatic turn in South Africa's political history. Smuts was forced to resign after the victory of the RNP and Doctor DF Malan, leader of the RNP, was requested to form a new cabinet.

With this, a new era dawned for the Union of South Africa. It would seem that, by 1948, the political thought pattern in the Gatsrand was predominantly that of the NP, which would subsequently implement the apartheid policy after South Africa's having become a republic.