

results from our polling booth would declare our solidarity to the world.

Now whatever my political views might have been, I had long before decided that it certainly would not do to have one Black vote sully the result sheet of our polling booth. I should do the right thing, secret ballot or no.

Came the day. Things were quiet: very quiet considering the number of kegs which had been imported to celebrate White's victory. Bluey voted first. The others came in in dribs and drabs, all loud in their praise of White, all louder in their condemnation of Black (until I drew their attention to the large notice chalked on the blackboard **VOTERS MUST NOT DISCUSS POLITICS IN THE BOOTH**, whereupon one old chap roared with unanswerable logic, "We're not discussing politics, we're just cussing that blank blank Black").

Just before the poll closed, consternation reigned. Someone found that five of the boys had become so immersed in their early celebration of White's victory that they had forgotten to vote. Their friends got them into the booth on the tick of closing time, and honour was saved.

I locked the door and turned to counting the votes. Dave, the poll clerk (who also helped run the cookhouse), suggested that to save time we should not bother to count the voting papers. "Fifty-three people voted," he said. "That's 53 for White and 53 for Continuance." I had read the instruction book, especially the bits which outlined the penalties. We counted up.

With monotonous regularity we unfolded the papers and reverently placed them on the White pile, the only pile needed. Then it happened. Amongst the others there was a vote for Mr Black. One solitary Black vote.

And when we began the licensing poll, it was even worse. Amongst the votes for Continuance and State Control, there was one vote for Prohibition.

Dave looked at me, more in pity than in anger. "You're going to cop it for this," he said.

Dave was good to me. He offered to ring the results through on the company's line, and tack up the results notice on the school door. I signed the sheet and handed it over. By the time that Dave had purposely fumbled through the job of affixing it to the door, I had dodged through the group of men outside, and was running down the tramline to my hut.

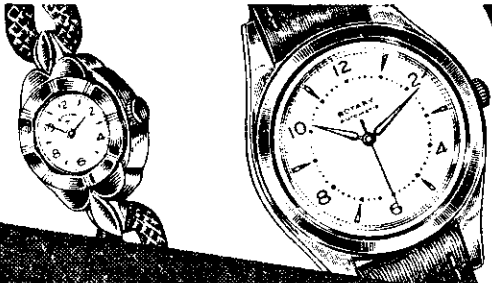
Fortune smiled on me. The bush boss and his wife were already in my hut listening to the results over my radio. I had invited them in for the evening as the battery of their set was flat. I had just time to stammer out my tale before we heard the tumult coming nearer down the tramline.

"Where's that so-and-so schoolteacher? We'll teach him to vote for Black and Prohibition. Chuck him in the river!"

The bush boss commanded an immense amount of respect, which was just as well for me. He carried the day and assured the men that I had voted the right way. There was an earnest conference to decide who was the traitor in their midst. Then someone suggested Bluey, and off they went.

But the river was not polluted with a Black supporter that night. Bluey had gone on a fishing trip. A queer chap, Bluey. Some said he even read poetry.

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 22, 1957.



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