

Orange County Politics

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Goetha Whitmore, a leader in the Mebane-Oaks Road Negro community, said roughly the same thing, somewhat less flatly.

"We need a man who'll give us justice. Lake might be a good man, but you know, a lot of people will talk one way to get in, and then change. I'd vote for Sanford if he could run again."

SCOTT COUNTRY

Western Orange is on the northeastern edge of Kerr Scott country.

"Maybe Kerr Scott's son will run. He's a nice fella. We've had a lot of dealings with him. Or Jordan. We've had a lot of dealings with him. He's a nice fella."

"But I think we'd like to have a candidate come down here to the First Baptist Church and tell us how he feels, what he thinks, what our needs are. We

need some more information. Otherwise we'll just be like Mut and Jeff: one says he's gonna vote Democratic, the other says he's gonna vote Republican, both of 'em might just as well stay home."

LAKE VS. BENNETT

On 15-501 to Pittsboro, south of Chapel Hill, one grocery store-filling station proprietor said he wouldn't be quoted and didn't want his name used.

But he said that at the moment the political talk he heard pitted Lake and Bennett against each other in the next gubernatorial election, and nobody else had been mentioned.

He admitted that Jonas had a good reputation, and added that if the Democrats didn't give a better political performance soon, the Republicans would gain control. He expressed his own part in this potential shifting of political tides with great circumspection: he had always voted for Democrats, but that didn't necessarily mean he couldn't change.

The State needs a progressive man, he said, "but not somebody who'll go overboard on education. I'm all for education, but there are jobs you don't need a degree for. You don't need a degree to run a filling station, though there are people who have degrees who run filling stations. We need education, but in balance. We also need balance in finances. We don't want to get in the same shape Michigan was in a few years ago. North Carolina is in good financial shape now. We have a surplus, and we want to keep it that way."

Generally, he said, the State needs a more conservative government.

YOUTH SPEAKS

At Vickers Grocery and Service Station on the Pittsboro Highway, three young men sat around passing the hot afternoon beer. At first they disclaimed any knowledge of politics, any knowledge of local political talk, and any particular concern about State political affairs.

Finally they opened up and said they couldn't stand Governor Sanford, couldn't stand the Kennedys, couldn't stand the slow climb of the minimum wage, disliked the sales tax, and thought the whole country was going to pot. They didn't know anything about Jonas. They thought a Winston-Salem fella named "Barnett" might run. They thought Lake might be a good man to have, but they weren't sure.

Political conversation at Vickers ran steadily downhill and ended in a bog of complaint about food surpluses, wasted foreign aid, and government price supports.

VIEWERS AT EBEN'S

Eben Merritt runs a grocery store and service station on the south side of Chapel Hill. Merritt's service station is the commercial center of the Purefoy Road-Pittsboro Road area. You can get just about anything there, in quantity, including political talk. In fact, there is evidently so much political talk that Mr. Merritt finds it best to capsule it all in one statement: "You hear all kinds."

"All kinds" include discussion of Jordan, Jonas, Lake, Bennett, and the Sanford administration, as well as dimmer political lights.

Mr. Merritt himself has the political situation sized up in a nutshell: "I feel this way. It's either Lake or Jonas, and I'd vote for either one of them—right now, that is. It may change. I'd vote Republican, sure. I think people are tired of voting for the party."

Mr. Merritt, one of Chapel Hill's leading outdoorsmen, sidetracked into a castigation of the effect the political spoils system has on hunting season regulations. "They appoint people to these commissions who don't know anything about hunting."

When steered back into politics, Mr. Merritt repeated his prediction that the next gubernatorial election would be a toss-up between Lake and Jonas, and added: "But if I'm busy making some money at the time, I don't think I'll bother with either of them."

LAKE AGAIN

Jack Kirk, who manages a general store and garage in Calvander, summed up a number of views. Standing behind his soft-drink boxes, he hesitated for a moment before the prospect of talking to a notebook.

"I try not to think about it too much—it's a mess. The Kennedy boys have been trying to shove something down people's throats before they're ready for it. And Governor Sanford is just like a little boy who wants to go along with everything they do.

"Of course there wasn't too much he could do about this race

problem, but I don't think he tried to do anything about it."

Mr. Kirk had given some thought to what he would do with his ballot in 1964. "I believe Dr. Lake will run, and I feel like he'll give it a good fight. I'd rather see him as Governor than any man I know. He's the best qualified—but any man who gets it has his work cut out for him."

"I don't know this fellow Bennett well enough to say much about him, but the fact he's hooked up with Sanford is enough for me right here. I would vote Republican if Bennett is nominated on the Democratic ticket. My neighbors would vote straight Republican before they'd go along with Bennett—not just state but national. I haven't heard too much about Goldwater, but I think he's probably a segregationist just like myself. If he runs he'll do all right down here."

Mr. Kirk also faulted the Supreme Court decisions on integration for creating a good amount of local discontent. "If the Supreme Court makes a decision there's nothing the Governor or anybody else can do about it. But I do feel that somebody needs to work against it, and begin now. I don't think people should have to go along with these demonstrations by teenagers. They're building up hatred against the colored people, and we've never had hatred for them in the South before. As long as the Negro wasn't shoved on him, the white man had no hatred. This is the big question, National and State."

How did he regard the Republican Party, its positions and chances in 1964? "Republicans? Well they're probably running along about the same way as these Northern Democrats. Oh you mean the North Carolina Republicans. I guess they'll run about the same as the North Carolina Democrats. I don't know anything about this fellow Jonas. When I think about something, I do it on the spur of the moment and then do it and forget it. I vote for the man more than the party."

The economic picture troubles him too, not particularly taxes, but jobs. Three years ago he was a full-time farmer, raising 120,000 chickens a year. In 1960 the chicken business went under. "Somebody ought to do something for the farmer. If the farmer goes down, the Nation goes down with him to a certain extent. I went broke with chickens in 1960, and I know a lot of other people who did the same thing. Now I just sort of run this store. Came here with the idea of buying it eventually. It's a good business, but it isn't exactly what I wanted. It's hard for a man to find the work he wants these days.

"Yes, my neighbors and customers seem to feel about the same way I do. I haven't heard much to the contrary."

Frank Pierce squinted over a

catalogue behind a parts counter in an Elford farm implement agency. "I don't have too much information about that sort of thing, but Jim ought to be back here in half an hour. You talk to him. Lake? (pointing a large, blunt finger for emphasis) That's my man. If he runs, that's who I'll vote for. Did the last time, too. Bennett? Don't know the man. Republicans? No comment. Segregation? No comment."

With that, Mr. Pierce turned back to discussion of a loading tripod for a silo.

Mrs. Manley Snipes manages her husband's store in Orange Grove. It is an adjunct to their large dairy farm, and also the precinct polling place for the neighborhood. "I just haven't heard anything down here. I don't hear much. Now my husband, he's the politician. You ought to talk to him. He's in Hillsboro right now, though. He talks politics all the time."

Orange Grove in general seemed to reflect Mrs. Snipes's sunny view of things. It is dairy country, with large, prosperous and well-maintained farms scattered over the countryside, most of them bearing old Orange names—Lloyd, Ray, Snipes. Many of the farmers in the area were personal friends of fellow dairyman W. Kerr Scott. Mr. Scott, an informant said, spent much time in the area hunting rabbits with friends. When Mr. Scott died, many of them shifted their allegiance to Gov. Terry Sanford, and they are expected to support State Party Chairman Bert Bennett without too many reservations.

An old gentleman in the Buckhorn community who chose to remain anonymous, re-asserted the general pattern. "Lake was my man, and he's going to be again. We couldn't afford any more of this fellow Sanford until we can get back on our feet from the last one. Been moving down the hog for three years now and I'm working my way around to the hind teat."

THE COURTHOUSE CROWD Hillsboro's Court House loungers, whenever they would comment at all, stayed carefully away from criticism of the present State administration. Almost unanimously they swore allegiance to Dr. I. Beverly Lake as the man to be Governor, and eternal antagonism to the Kennedys. "We need a change, that's for sure. Right now the Republicans could just as well run a fellow named Jones as

Jonas and walk all over Bert Bennett," one said.

One Courthouse regular, an elective official very active in County Democratic politics, talked freely but anonymously or off-the-record.

"Politics up here are in shaky condition," he said. "Bert (Bennett) is in trouble. You've got a three-way split going, and one influential group you'd normally expect to support Bert is going for (Dr. Henry) Jordan. Of course half the merchants in Hillsboro are Republicans anyway. And you wander up and down this little street you'd probably find that almost every merchant in Town would vote for Charles R. Jonas."

"This segregation business hasn't helped. The Negroes demand here in Hillsboro have forced a lot of people who would n't have taken a stand one way or another into being segregationists. Bert of course is tied up with Sanford, and that's hurting him almost more than anything else. People here are very antagonistic to Sanford, and Bert is caught there. It's one of those cases of damned if you do, damned if you don't. He can't simply cut Terry off, simply throw away three years of work. It wouldn't work for one thing, and it would make the Governor's supporters just that much madder. It's going to be a rough one."

MORE REPUBLICANS

Hillsboro beyond the Courthouse pretty well bore out the official's assessment. Like the Courthouse crowds, Hillsboro residents tended to decline comment, to remain anonymous or to wander off the record and never quite get back on.

The proprietor of one combination grocery-dry goods store rang up a sale, wiped his hands across the front of his apron, then scratched his head doubtfully.

"Yes, I'm a Republican, always been a Republican, and so has my family. But I'll tell you right now, over the years I've probably voted for just as many Democrats as Republicans. I don't believe in voting the party line. I just mind my own business and figure I have my hands full right there."

Madison Cates, who with his brother Chandler operates a service station on Hillsboro's main street, was more explicit. At one time Mr. Cates and his brother were Republicans. Their father was Orange County Republican chairman, but the fam-

ily became disaffected and are now registered Democrats.

"You don't want to talk to me," Mr. Cates said. "I'll tell you right out, and I don't care if he knows it, I don't like (State Rep.) Jim Phipps. People around here are glad he's somewhere other than where he was. (Mr. Phipps resigned from the General Assembly to become Commander of the N. C. American Legion. He is also County Democratic chairman.)"

"Sanford? You want to know what I think of him? You know they're tearing down the Statue of Liberty. They are. And they're going to put up one of Aunt Jemima in its place.

"Lake? He would suit me just fine."

NOBODY'S TALKING

The dim recesses of a large general store in Cedar Grove yielded up a small, amiable little man with white hair. He accepted a handshake and introduction, but didn't figure his own name was much to talk about. No, he hadn't heard a thing about politics around there. "Folks just haven't said a thing. I don't have much information. I tell you, son, we grow a lot of tobacco up here, and we need rain."

Virtually the same scene was repeated a few miles further on, in McDade. A solidly built man stood protectively by the door of his store, the only human in sight. "We haven't had enough rain to run in the rows up here since March the first. No, I don't study much about politics. Farming is what most of us do. I just manage this store while the fellow who owns it farms. Then he comes in here during the evening. It ain't much, but it's a living. The people around here don't have time to stay around and talk politics. I guess they do it in the evening with the owner."

"Me? Well, I don't know that I'd want this going all over everywhere, but I voted for Lake the last time, and I'm going to vote for him again, if he runs. He stands for my thinking on this segregation business. Sanford's been rootin' up every garden in the State until folks just don't have nothin'."

AND STILL MORE LAKE

Three old gentlemen sat on the porch of a battered service-station store near the northern boundary of the County. Their conversation was punctured by the blast of an automobile pass-

ing on the nearby highway now and then. Across the road three log tobacco barns stood half-ready to receive the crop of tobacco that stood wilting nearby.

One of them looked up and replied, "Oh sure they're talking politics up here all over the place but they ain't got to the doing stage yet. Everybody up here seems to like Mr. Lake a whole lot, and they don't think much of Terry or Jack. The big thing right now is tobacco."

And that's the way it went—in Glenn Station, Eno Station, at Pleasant Green, Murphy and Mt. Hermon, wherever a service station or general store provided a place to gather and talk. It's still going on.

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