

Jock Leyden



THERE are few today who could claim to be at the top of their field after 66 years. Jock Leyden — political cartoonist for the *Daily News* and a Natal institution as closely followed as his beloved horse racing — can.

Leyden, 85 and still drawing, has a panoramic view of Greyville racecourse from his small office at Natal Newspapers. He surveys it now, no doubt replaying in his mind the events of Saturday's meeting.

"I matriculated in 1926 in Stirlingshire, Scotland, and it was soon afterwards that I came to South Africa. Had a choice between art school or a trip on a mail ship. Well, I had to take the ship!"

He disembarked at Durban and, when finances necessitated a job, swapped the beaches for a lithographic artistry office. It was there that the first lines of a career in cartooning were sketched.

"One of my colleagues had a big laughing mouth and I just couldn't resist drawing him. After that I went around the works sketching the journeymen, and it soon caught on. Everybody loves caricatures."

His cartoons soon led to a job at the *Natal Advertiser* in 1927 and his great love of motorcycling soon made his cartoons distinctive. He did some drawings at a race meeting at Clairwood and passed them on to his magazine editor Harold Watson. He

loved them and Jock continued sketching motorcycles regularly until 1933 when he finally caught that mail ship back to England. It was whilst touring Britain on an Ariel Red Hunter motorcycle that Jock met Leslie Grimes, a political cartoonist in London and the man who influenced him to take up political cartooning. They became great friends and Grimes tried to persuade him to take a job as cartoonist on the *News Chronicle*, even offering to introduce him to the editor. Leyden refused, went for a walk, ate, thought and finally asked himself: "Jock, you're 27. When you're 57 will you still be mad about bikes?"

The answer was no, so he returned to South Africa in 1936 intending to try his hand at political cartooning for a year and, if he enjoyed it, to return to England. Once back, however, he met his wife Annabel. Then the editor of the *Sunday Tribune*, EB Dawson, came to him and said: "Jock, don't tell anyone but we're going to start a daily paper. Do you want to join us?"

Thus it was that when the *Daily Tribune* was founded in 1938, Jock was there to help kickstart it. The paper folded a year later and he joined the *Daily News*. And, although nobody has thought to count, a 54-year career with a single newspaper must be a South African journalism record. Those years were to bring readers such

characters as Goofy and Wilbur as well as a host of political cartoons, many aimed at alerting readers to the evils of Apartheid.

"I've always been anti-Apartheid. When the National Party came to power in 1948, the letters that I received attacking my work were incredibly vicious. I just couldn't believe that people could write such things.

"Press restrictions never really affected me. Obviously the Suppression of Communism Act was something that you had to look out for, editors were terrified of it, but you soon learnt where you could and could not overstep the mark. Saying that, I would never work for a newspaper the editorial policy of which I didn't agree with...it's something that I just wouldn't, morally, be able to do."

With a horse race meeting named after him, civic honours bestowed in 1989 and international recognition in the form of a special award at the "Cartoon 80" festival in West Berlin in 1980, the man is modest almost to a fault. After all, he's drawn virtually every major sporting, theatre and political figure to visit this country since 1936. He mentions in passing the requests for his work from Harry Truman, Winston Churchill and the Duke of Edinburgh. Despite the recognition, he tells you, he does not regard himself as a good cartoonist.



TWO INTO ONE WON'T GO (1941)

"I'm of the old school. I believe in good drawing. Nowadays some people get away with rubbish."

You wonder if you've heard that correctly. "I would never intentionally hurt anyone. I'm not a hater and therefore not a good political cartoonist. As a good cartoonist you shouldn't worry about other people's feelings, but I do." Generally complimentary of his contemporaries, he believes present day situations are more complicated and difficult to put into cartoon form. But having said that, he'll not lower his standards.

"I'm of the old school. I believe in good drawing. Nowadays some people get away with rubbish." Jock doesn't draw so many cartoons these days.

"I enjoy my work," he says. "When you work to deadlines you can't always produce the best. And whatever I've done I've always tried my best. I hope that people at least remember me for that."

♦ Benedict Said is a journalism student at Natal Technikon.

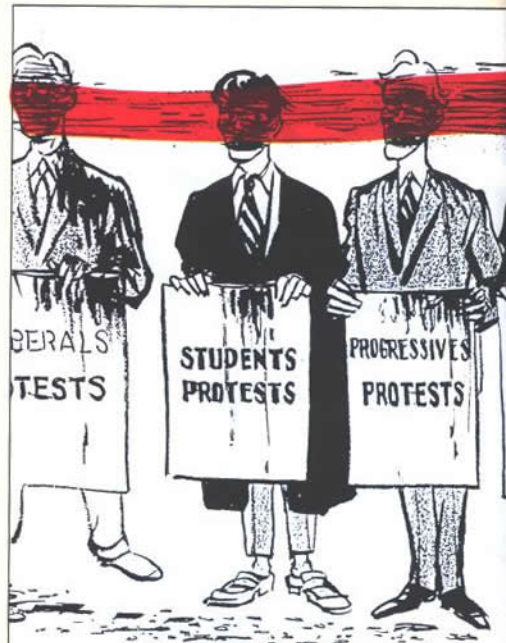


A FINE TIME THIS IS TO FIND THAT OUT! (1959)



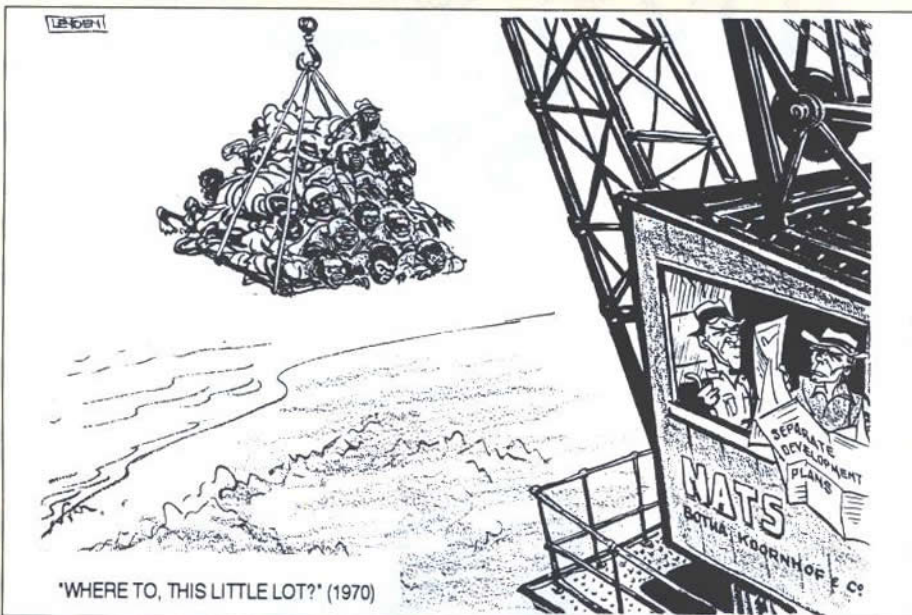
THE BIG PUSH (1987)

PEN SKETCHES



LEIBEN 1968 THE BRUSH-OFF (1968)

"I'm not a hater and therefore not a good political cartoonist. As a good cartoonist you shouldn't worry about other people's feelings, but I do."



"WHERE TO, THIS LITTLE LOT?" (1970)



"THERE'S NONE SO BLIND..." (1949)



"WELL, NOW YOU KNOW WHERE WE STAND." (1987)



'COME ON, UP YOU GO' (1973)



DRIVER MALAN: "... and don't forget, I've only guaranteed to drive you there. I'm not responsible for you after that!" (1939)

"I've always been anti-Apartheid. When the National Party came to power in 1948, the letters I received attacking my work were incredibly vicious."



"... AND THE SOONER THIS GOVERNMENT KNOWS WE DEMAND TO BE GOVERNED BY CIVILISED WHITES THE BETTER!"



'MIND THE STEPPE, ADOLPH.' (1941)