

An interview with Mr Flip Jooste (known as Oom Flip) illustrates some points made about the tot system



Philip van Ryneveld

Oom Flip was born on a farm in Calvinia in 1931 and has spent most of his life as an agricultural worker in various parts of the Western Cape. He now lives in Montagu where he makes a living by doing odd jobs and growing vegetables on unused plots around the town. The following are extracts from a discussion one evening between Oom Flip, Philip van Ryneveld of Black Sash and Dawie Bosch and Lala Steyn of the Montagu and Ashton Gemeenskapsdiens (known as MAG)

• **Oom Flip describes the working day . . .**

'When the bell rings on the farm then you must get up. The second ring means "Come!" When the second bell rings then you must be at the cellars. When you get there the men have already drunk their dop. If you're perhaps five minutes late then you don't get that dop. That's the inval-dop — the dop when you fall in in the morning. 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock. Farm time is 6 o'clock. That's the proper fall-in time — winter or summer. Then you get dop. You know how big a condensed milk tin is? One of those nicely cut open — that's a farm dop. You get the tin-full. Right. That's fall-in. Now, breakfast-dop — before you go and eat. You're going to eat so you go down to the cellar. 8 o'clock. Now the baas is there. then he gives you a dop — another one. All right. After breakfast, you fall in. 11 o'clock, he pours dop — another one. Then you carry on working. 12 o'clock, when you go and eat. The farmers all break at 12 o'clock. Here and there you get a farmer who breaks at 1 o'clock. Right, another dop before you go and eat. 4 o'clock — dop. In the evening another dop. That's 6 dop. Sometimes the men ask him for another dop. Then he'll give if he's in a good mood. If he's not in a good mood then they leave it. They know him, they know when he's in a good mood . . .

Yes. The one who hasn't worked properly, or so on — he doesn't get a dop. The farmer holds that dop back. Sometimes he takes off the whole week's wine. Then that man doesn't drink for the whole week. He says he must come every evening and stand in front of the men. He says, "Stand there so you can see how the men drink." Then he gives out the wine — the people drink . . .

Philip Van Ryneveld: Most of the farmers around here — do they give their workers 'mos'? ('mos' is the name for the reject wine used in the tot-system)

Oom Flip: Yes, they do. They all do. The thing is — why they all give it — if they didn't give mos then they

wouldn't get workers on the farms.

Philip: So they must give mos? If they want to get workers then they must give mos?

Oom Flip: Yes. When someone comes looking for work he doesn't ask how much the baas pays. He asks how much mos the baas gives. That's why we can't come right.

Dawie Bosch: How do you mean, Oom Flip?

Oom Flip: I'll tell you how I mean. You know baas Pierre where I worked. Well, one day, I went to him. I said to him, 'Baas, I don't think I can carry on working for you.' He wants to know why not. So I told him, 'Well, baas, look. I work well at everything. There aren't any problems with the work. But the only thing is I can't accept the salary you give me for the work that I do. (He was getting R2 a day). 'Okay', he says, 'I'll go and hear what the other workers have to say.' And he gets onto his motorbike and drives away. All right. I carry on with the work.

The next day we're there in the vineyard. We're weeding in the vineyard — weeding the vineyard clean. So I ask him, 'Baas, now what about the thing I spoke about yesterday?' so he calls the people there. 'Come! All of you come here! Look here! This guy says he wants more money. He says he can't come by on the money I pay him. And what do you say? Do you also want more?'. The baas says, 'Look then, I'll give you R4 a day.' He says, 'I'll give you R20 a week — but then I'll stop the wine.'

Alle magtig! Toe maak hulle darem 'n lawaai! Then they really began to complain! It's war! and some of them want to leave! And the baas says, 'Look, you see there. Yesterday you came to me and now some of them want to leave because of the wine.'

So I said, 'No, baas, Give them their wine, but give me money. It's got nothing to do with me. I'll buy my wine in the town.' I told him, 'But don't deduct the wine from my wages. I know that you deduct from my wages for the wine — that's why it comes out as so little.'

But the baas said, 'No'. He says he'll pay R4 a day, but then everyone must stop drinking.

So I left . . .

Towards the end of the evening one of us noted how critical we had been all evening of the farmers. Surely there were good farmers?

'Ek sal vir jou sê,' said Oom Flip, choosing his words with great care. 'n Goeie boer is 'n boer wat meer betaal.' And after a long pause he added, 'En hulle betaal almal dieselde.'