

BLACK SASH - BORDER REGION

ADVICE OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT - 1976/77

Present Address: 159 Oxford Street, East London
New Address (March): The Window Theatre, 32 Argyle Street,
East London
Day of Operation: Thursday 9.00 - 12.00 a.m.
Personnel: 7 women
1 regular interpreter
2 lawyers
No. of cases interviewed: 282

Analysis of cases:

Hire Purchase	11
Pensions	43
Housing	28
U.I. Fund	13
Insurance claim	15
Workmen's Compensation	4
Welfare	11
Mental Health	7
Disability	5
Marital and divorce	30
Reference books	9
Work permit	1
Marriage, birth and death certificates	7
Wage disputes and unemployment	52
Passport and citizenship	2
Maintenance	13
Miscellaneous	31

In recent months our most serious and obvious problem has been unemployment, whether because of retrenchment or some other cause. This problem is not restricted to men only, but to women as well - who in many instances are the sole breadwinners of the family. The unemployment problem is not only their problem, but ours too because we share their despair and frustration. Many Blacks do not understand why, after many years of loyal service, they are suddenly told to leave their jobs, because few employers explain their reasons for retrenchment. We can assist them in some small way by checking that their last wage slip was in order, and that they are in possession of their U.I.F. card and explain how to apply for U.I. benefits. Generally speaking, we in the Border Region are fortunate in that in most cases the employers do ensure that their employees are registered and furnished with their U.I.F. cards. But it is with growing trepidation that we listen to this long queue of angry, frustrated voices. Up until now we have not kept a strict record of cases when all that was needed was a sympathetic ear, but we intend paying more attention to this particular problem in view of the present economic situation.

We feel there is a need to establish some sort of employment agency, but more accumulation of details and feasibility would be necessary before embarking on such a project.

We have not found any short paths to success when it comes to pension problems. It still remains a long drawn out process of writing letters and awaiting replies from official departments, who do not seem to view the matter with as much urgency as we do. However we do experience some success in this regard since 20% of our pension cases have been successful in the past year.

Another distressing problem is the increasing illegitimacy rate amongst the younger women, and especially teenage girls. This in turn leads to associated problems such as interruption, or more likely, termination of schooling; unemployment; rejection; depression and worst of all, malnutrition. Although nearly all those cases we interviewed are now attending a Family Planning Clinic, it is obvious that these facilities are not reaching those most in need of them, especially in the rural areas. We have, with the assistance of the social workers of the B.A.D. in East London and Mdantsane, had some small degree of success in obtaining maintenance.

As so often happens with confused people, they frequently leave their problem until it passes the stage when a satisfactory solution can be found. They approach the Advice Office with their problems too late for us to be of any real assistance to them. The following are typical examples :-

Mrs. R. purchased R12-00 worth of groceries in 1968. The firm moved to new premises so she did not pay her account. Eventually she was traced and threatened to settle her debt. She has paid to date R46-00 but she was confused by the ever-increasing outstanding amounts which now stand at R35-77. After various enquiries we were able to ascertain and explain to Mrs. R. that the following fees had been added over the years, e.g. collector's commission, summons, messenger's fees, default judgement, warrant of arrest, section 65, garnishee order, notice to show cause, tracing fee. We advised her to pay the outstanding amount immediately. She was grateful for the explanation and said that had she known what was happening, she would not have ignored the accounts.

Mr. D. complained that his furniture was damaged while being moved by the Council from Duncan Village to Mdantsane in June, 1975. The following day he complained to the Municipality who referred his claim to their insurers. Two months later Mr. D. received a letter from the insurers denouncing his claim. Mr. D. is not convinced that he has no claim.

People do not always return to the Advice Office to inform us of the result of our advice or investigation. Thus we are not always able to record cases which have been successful or are pending. But when some people do return, the success is always received with great jubilation. It makes it all worthwhile.

In March we are moving to our new premises in the Window Theatre, which is more central and spacious. If it is the only freedom we have, it will be the freedom of fresh air.

J. RONALDSON