

WORKING AT THE OUTPOSTS

the paymaster as well as the soldier guards who accompany the pay-out combi. This occasion was to be no different. The pensioners were receiving their back pay, ie the difference in the pension rate between South Africa and Ciskei. The pensioners had been paid at the Ciskei rate when the administration of the area was illegally taken over by Ciskei in 1981. Administration reverted to South Africa in 1985 and those pensioners who qualified were owed quite large sums of money.

To ensure that the pensioners, most of whom are illiterate, received the amount indicated on their pay-out card, we devised a system whereby the pensioner would bring her/his card to us, and the amount on the card would be written in pencil in the back of their ID books. When they received their money they would return to us to have the amount checked against the entry. Amounts paid varied between R600 and R900, depending on the length of time that the person has been receiving a pension.

I started the usual procedure, taking the first pensioner's pay-out card, when I was stopped by a shout of rage from the pay-master in the combi. He would pay no pension, he said, unless I desisted from interfering in his work and handling government property. I was completely baffled, as to my knowledge I had not touched government property. The soldiers took their cue from the pay-master, rushed up to me and threatened to arrest me for touching government property. 'What government property?' I asked.

'The cards, the cards!' came the reply. I promised faithfully to desist from handling government property and the pensioners were quick to take their cue. They would come to us holding the 'government property' aloft like a banner, and we would only handle private property, their ID books. Pension monitors beware, you might be handling government property unwittingly, and ignorance is no defence!

Zola Nozewu's funeral

The plight of the people of Potsdam in the Ciskei is one that has moved us greatly. In February this year, they fled from their homes in the face of ongoing assaults and harassment by the Ciskei police. About 2 500 people squatted at a roadside on the South African side of the border, pleading with the South African authorities to be given a place to stay in South Africa. Instead, they were forcibly trucked back into the Ciskei, to face even worse harassment. Most recently, a community leader, Zola Nozewu, was murdered by the vigilantes. Nora Squires and Sue Power describe what happened at his funeral, which they attended:

Sunday 9 August was the date set for the funeral of Zola Nozewu, a leader from the Potsdam community. We had got to know and respect him during the period when the community camped alongside a South African road, after their unsuccessful attempt to escape from Ciskei.

Nozewu had been the victim of endless harassment from police and vigilantes since his return to Potsdam, culminating in his murder by a vigilante in July.

His mother was terrified that there would be trouble at the funeral and her fears proved to be tragically correct.

Four Black Sash members from East London attended the funeral. We were stopped twice on the road leading to Potsdam by police road-blocks. On the first occasion we were questioned and the car was searched. We told them where we were going and they allowed us to proceed.

About 100 yards from the funeral service we were stopped again by a casspir and several police cars. This time they gave us a thorough going over, to the extent of running their fingers through one of the men's hair. Sue's bag was searched, private letters, diary and purse were checked before they finally allowed us to join the service.

The people had been warned by the police that the service should be

non-political with no freedom songs, raised fists or toi-toi. A most restrained and dignified service was held at the home of Zola's mother, Nellie Nozewu. The burial ground was situated some 1.5 km away on the side of a steep hill running down to a river.

A hearse, followed by a combi carrying Zola's mother and other close relatives and friends, led the procession. The rest of the mourners followed on foot in a very orderly manner.

After we had walked about half the distance, a casspir, police van and several police cars approached from the left.

We were near the back of the procession and could not see what happened but suddenly crowds of people came rushing back towards us saying that the police had attacked the combi with tear gas and that as the terrified mourners tried to get out of the combi they were sjambokked and shots fired.

We continued walking forward and found the deserted combi and saw that people had run down into the valley to escape from the teargas, the smell of which was still heavy in the air.

The hearse now stood alone at the grave, with the police lined up on the road above.

A man in the crowd suggested that we should walk right up to the police and ask them if we might

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proceed to the grave side and continue the burial. This we did. The police did not respond and as they had expressed no objection to our plan we proceeded to the grave site.

As the priest began to pray the police fired five shots of teargas directly at the grave. There was no warning and the crowd was not asked to disperse.

Overcome by the fumes, the group ran. We saw elderly relatives weeping and choking on the gas as they tripped over other graves in their efforts to escape the unprovoked violence of the police.

The deserted coffin was left at the grave site as we looked anxiously on from the hill up which we had scrambled.

The police did not move and when the gas had cleared a small group of us returned to the grave which the men hurriedly took turns to fill. There was no time for prayers to be said.

What had been a dignified service had been reduced to a chaotic shambles.

Zola's mother had wandered off up the road in a state of shock, unable even to bury her son in peace. After the burial was complete we approached the police and asked them for their names. They refused to give us their names, threatened the man who had asked, and told us to get out of the Ciskei.

Later at the home of Zola's mother we looked at the sjambok wounds on five people and understood fully for the first time why the roadside people had been prepared to leave their homes and live under plastic on the side of the road, rather than face the vicious unprovoked attacks of the police and vigilantes at Potsdam.

We later discovered that 80 people had been arrested before the funeral and locked up for the day to prevent them from attending the funeral — they were not charged. Many others were turned away from the funeral at roadblocks where they were asked for Ciskei tax receipts — and prevented from proceeding if they could not produce them. □

Taking 'deepest exception' to greenflies

Another issue we have had to deal with extensively is the large number of alleged assaults by the Duncan Village municipal police against residents of that township. Many assault charges have been laid by township residents with the help of the Black Sash, and we have helped to publicise the matter. Recently, we received our first response from the Gompo Town Committee, under whose authority the force falls. (Gompo Town is the new official name for Duncan Village.)

The response took the form of a lawyer's letter, in which they informed us they took the 'deepest exception' to our calling the police 'greenflies' — the name township residents have given these men in green uniforms, with little knowledge of the law they are supposed to serve. Apparently, the Gompo Town Committee first noticed that their municipal police were being called greenflies when the name appeared in a report in the Daily Dispatch which quoted the Black Sash. We were amazed, as we hadn't coined the phrase and weren't responsible for their behaviour, which has led to so many complaints of brutality. Perhaps the Black Sash was simply an easy target. Be that as it may, the Gompo Town Committee regarded the term as 'a direct insult' and advised us that 'their rights are reserved'.

We felt this letter was probably the only way for the committee to respond to the deluge of complaints laid against the greenflies, sorry, municipal police. Black Sash members helped Duncan Village residents to lay complaints. Often,

people were prepared to lay complaints only if a Black Sash member was present, for fear of further assault or victimisation at the police station. As a result of publicity nationally — although not locally — Helen Suzman asked a question in Parliament. Minister of Law and Order, Adriaan Vlok, said 63 complaints had been laid against the Duncan Village municipal police. There were 195 complaints in the whole of the Cape, and none in any of the other provinces. Of the 63 Duncan Village complaints, one had led to an arrest on a murder charge. Three other policemen were awaiting trial on charges of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, and one was being charged with pointing a firearm.

The SAP had not approached the Gompo Town committee about the complaints, but discussions had been held on several occasions with the commander of the force, 'who conducts lectures for members of the municipal police on a regular basis to restrain them from committing offences'.

While there was a huge number of cases reported to us in June, we had only two fresh reports of assaults in July — an indication that the municipal police have been reined in to some extent. We think that the Black Sash's work, assisting people to lay charges and generating publicity, helped to improve the situation. However, in other areas in the Eastern Cape residents are cut off from legal and other support. There assaults are still occurring regularly — and the name 'greenflies' remains apt indeed! □