

## WORKING AT THE OUTPOSTS

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! □