

UNEMPLOYMENT and APARTHEID

Below we publish extracts from the Black Sash Johannesburg Advice Office Interim Report (February to August 1978):

"The unemployment crisis has brought hundreds of people to the Advice Office during the past months. One aspect of unemployment which has not been properly considered is the extent of the crisis in rural areas and in the homelands. People who live in the prescribed areas are at last becoming aware of how urban black people are affected but influx control and the Labour Regulations ensure that the extent and effects of national unemployment remain hidden and of no concern to white South Africans.

Recruitment of labour from the homelands is now severely restricted and people who have no Section 10 rights have little hope of being allowed to register in jobs they have found. Those borderline cases where people have been in the area for many years in unregistered employment and might previously have been registered after special application to the Regional Labour Commissioner are now impossible of resolution. Such applications are now generally refused on the grounds that 'there are too many people who were born here in town'. This exposes the whole underlying fraudulent nature of the influx control policy. It enables the South African Government to shed all responsibility for unemployed people who are not in 'white' urban areas by pretending that they do not exist and are not part of the South African population.

Unemployed people who live in homelands and in impoverished rural areas are in a far worse condition than those in urban areas. They have little hope of earning a livelihood in the informal sector because the communities in which they live have no purchasing power. Increasing numbers live in closer settlements in the homelands where they have no land and are not allowed to keep livestock. Unemployment Insurance Fund benefits, pensions and welfare assistance are almost impossible to obtain and many complain of unsympathetic and obstructive treatment meted out to them by Commissioners of the Plural Relations Department. They are not allowed to leave the area where they live to look for work and if they do so illegally and find a job they cannot be registered. With the greatly increased penalties imposed on employers for employing unregistered workers and the fact that such employers must go to Court if charged and can no longer pay Admission of Guilt fines. People without permits are finding it impossible to obtain any kind of work at all.

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CASE

Mr NM comes from Nqutu in Natal where he has a wife and two children. He was employed in a factory in Johannesburg for five years on annual contracts. He was retrenched when his last contract expired in November 1977. His employers did not give him his Unemployment Insurance Contributor's Record Card, and so, he could not receive benefits. By law he had to return to Nqutu when he was discharged but he found that no recruiting was being done there. In desperation he came back to Johannesburg and found himself a job but was refused registration.

Mr DM has lost his job and his house and all hope. His Reference Book is stamped that he may do farm labour only. He was registered in his employment on a chicken farm just

CASE outside Vereeniging. He was paid R10 per week. His employer provided a house for him at Sebokeng but he had to pay the monthly rental of R13,75. He asked his employer for more money and was immediately discharged, and had to leave the house. His wife, children, aged father and himself had nowhere to live and, as he is only allowed to work on the farms, has no prospects for security for his family. He is Xhosa and through independence of Transkei is now an alien in South Africa. The only place he can legally expect to have a house is in Transkei but his family have been in the Transvaal for at least three generations and utterly reject this as a solution.

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Pensions: The poverty caused by unemployment has greatly increased the number of people trying desperately to find some source of financial support. Old people who have never applied for pensions before because they could not cope with the delays and obstructions entailed in making application and because their families were supporting them are now making applications because the family breadwinner is unemployed. They come to us because of the enormous difficulties they experience. We have the impression that the Department of Plural Relations tries to avoid paying pensions wherever possible and to delay applications in order to reduce costs.

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 CASE Mr KJM was in receipt of a pension in Johannesburg but decided to retire to Lebowa because his relatives did not want him to remain with them. His pension was cancelled and he was told to reapply in Lebowa. Through bureaucratic bungling and administrative delays he was not paid any pension for a full twelve months. When the pension was eventually reinstated he was not given any back payments for the period during which he received nothing.