

GRAHAMSTOWN

ADVICE OFFICE

REPORT FOR 1975

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The kind of work being done here has not changed significantly since the office was opened, nearly three years ago, but the volume is much greater. It trebled during 1975, with August as a peak month (75 attendances). We are still only open on Saturday mornings, but for longer hours.

Grahamstown and its problems:

A look at some figures from the case register (see end of report) will show that we have hardly any of the pass-law cases which are staple in Cape Town or Johannesburg. Ours are a mixed assortment with the emphasis mainly on employment - or perhaps more correctly, unemployment - and on welfare matters like pensions and grants.

This is not to say that the residence laws and the migratory labour system don't hit Grahamstown hard. They do, but mainly with the other end of the stick so to speak.

Grahamstown is a poor area, from any but the White point of view. Over 90% of the officially recorded black population are 'qualified residents' in Section 10 terms, including a solid core of third-generation or even older families. But they have to chase far too few jobs, incomes, homes, facilities and amenities of every kind. You name it - we don't have it, or nothing like enough. The effect of the residence laws is to prevent workers and more especially families from moving away in search of better living standards. Although Grahamstown workers may now take jobs in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage under certain conditions, they are not allowed to have their families with them because of housing shortages in those places.

On top of its captive workforce Grahamstown also has an unknown number of what are sadly and ominously called 'illegal' residents. They come in from the rural hinterland because life there tends to be even poorer and less secure from their point of view. A farm worker may be getting just R8 and one bag of mealies per month, to support a dozen old and young kin. Where do his children go as they grow up? Where do the whole family go if he loses his job?

A threatened removal to Committees Drift (40 km.) has now hung for years over the whole black population of Grahamstown, both 'legal' and 'illegal'. Among other things it has served as a reason or excuse for not extending facilities even where the need is desperate and on the most basic level, as with housing, water and sanitation.

Grahamstown is also underprovided with official agencies. The understaffed and overworked Magistrates Court has to serve as a general outlet. Then there is a shortage of social workers. The B.A.A.B. were without one during the year under review; there are no medical social workers at the hospital; the Child Welfare social worker carries an outside load.

What can the Advice Office do in all this? We try to keep flexible; to ease individual problems in any way we can (remembering our terms of reference as a referral agency), and especially to help with bureaucratic tangles. And sometimes we can do something to humanise a little corner in the system, by more general representations to official or other agencies. We are helped by the humane and co-operative attitudes of many local officials, including notably those at the Bantu Affairs Commission and B.A.A.B., and at the Labour Department in Port Elizabeth.

Employment and unemployment:

There are about eight thousand black people in registered jobs in Grahamstown. Nearly half of them are women in domestic work, and even the men are practically all in unskilled jobs. The black population has been estimated at from 35 to 55 thousand (depending on the number of 'illegals'). So one worker per 5 people is an optimistic guess.

But at local wage levels two jobs would be needed to support a family of 5 at the poverty datum line. It seems to follow that for every family at or above the PDL there must be another practically destitute or subsisting on remittances or relief. ('Informal economics' is no real answer, since it does not inject but only recirculates money within the black community.)

The official figures of registered unemployed workseekers on Jan. 31st this year were 1,748 men and 5,345 women. But some unemployed, especially 'illegals' don't register, so we might almost say there is one unemployed for every employed worker. These facts and figures speak for themselves. With this 'shadow army' in the background employers will inevitably be tempted to pay low and fire easily. To make things worse hardly any local jobs are under the jurisdiction of the Labour Department or subject to wage determinations. (Those not under its jurisdiction include domestic, agricultural, university, schools, hotels, provincial, municipal, Escom. This does not leave much!)

Many of our cases are about dismissal. (Often a story of incredibly low wages will emerge at the same time, e.g. less than R10 a month for a fulltime domestic worker.) We sometimes succeed in getting notice pay, and occasionally holiday pay, though the amounts are liable to be small like the wages. We have also made some representations about quick firing, notably in a case where a public body planning retrenchment suddenly turned off numbers of men with up to 15 years of blameless service, giving them just a few days' notice.

Gratuities are another sore point. In the rare cases where a retirement gratuity scheme operates, it sometimes looks as if the worker is being turned off just before he would qualify, in order to save money. In one case a man had served for 32 years and had been kept on past retiring age when he was suddenly sacked on an unproved accusation of theft, and his gratuity withheld accordingly. Legal advice is being sought.

Unemployment Insurance cases come our way, either because the employer has not handed over the card on dismissal, or because the unemployed person cannot discover what money he should be getting, if any. Payment is at the Magistrates Court but authorisation and funds come from the Labour Department in Port Elizabeth, and writing to them is the only effective way to sort these problems out.

Pensions and Grants:

Again, plagued by lack of communication due to understaffing at the pay offices. The milling crowds at these offices from early to late on payout day would daunt the stoutest, let alone the old and infirm. Few pensioners know for sure whether they are getting all they should or could.

For a while people could not even apply for mother's maintenance grants, since nobody seemed able or willing to sign the official endorsement to the application. The Bantu Affairs Commissioner then stepped in and put one of his staff in charge of these and other pension/grant queries - a most welcome arrangement.

Low as pensions are in relation to living costs, sometimes whole families seem to be living off them. It is easy to condemn the pensioner's "lazy" grown-up children but one must also remember the difficulty of breaking into the labour market in this place of massive unemployment.

We often have to refer clients to 'charitable' welfare organisations, notably GADRA who give emergency help with rations or rent. (Their 'means test' is a significant pointer to local conditions - not more than 5c per head per day after rent has been paid.) We have not been able to make much use of the official scheme for 'pauper rations', because of organisational difficulties, which we intend exploring.

Housing:

Housing cases are among the hardest. The townships are bursting at the seams. Public provision of housing was never adequate but it has virtually dried up on account of the Committees removal threat. 100 new houses were authorised, just once, when 1000 had been requested and 3000 were needed. Private or self-help building is severely limited by regulation. The main site where people have been allowed to build cottages is a graveyard, bulldozed for the purpose.

A house in the 'private' areas often has a warren of lean-to's or outbuildings tucked away behind. The main house will usually be made into a seemly and pleasant home, in spite of some crowding. But a single out-room may be serving up to 10 or more people, for all purposes: eating, cooking, bathing, sleeping, making love, feeding the baby, doing laundry or school homework Densities of 75 to an erf have been reported.

Problems that reach us are eviction, being cheated by the landlord, or just desperately needing more space. The B.A.A.B. are sympathetic, but with a waiting list of over 3000 for houses what can they or anyone do?

Family and marital:

These cases are mostly about non-support of children. We normally refer the mother to the B A C to seek a court order, garnishee order, or some less formal arrangement. Some mothers, especially the unmarried, prefer a private lawyer on the grounds that "the magistrate's court always favour the man."

Cases from the register: 1 May 1975 - 5 March 1976:

<u>Nature of Problem</u>	<u>First Interviews</u>	<u>Subsequent Interviews</u>
1. Employment and Unemployment	57	90
2. State relief (Pensions, Grants)	29	60
3. Local Relief	18	23
4. Legal	11	35
5. Marital and support	8	16
6. Educational	8	2
7. Housing	8	7
8. Regulations (Lost identity paper etc.)	4	1
Not classified	<u>1</u>	<u>25</u>
	144	259

These are more than the actual numbers of interviews as some interviews cover more than one problem.

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Case Statistics:

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