

GRAHAMSTOWN ADVICE OFFICE

(under the auspices of the Black Sash and the
S.A. Institute of Race Relations)

Report for the period of 1st October 1976 to 28th February 1977.

Office Hours: Saturday 8.30a.m. to 12.30p.m.

Attendance Record

	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
Old Cases	62	35	15	17	27
New Cases	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>
Total Interviews	71	44	23	23	39

The office was closed from the 11th December 1976 to 29th January 1977.

Analysis of Problems

	Total	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
<u>Labour</u>	<u>52</u>					
Dismissals	15		4	5		2
Retrenchment	9		4	1		
Gratuity/Pension	19	12	3	2	1	1
Holiday Pay	8		1	1	2	4
Other	1					1
<u>Pensions</u>	<u>16</u>					
OAP	<u>4</u>	1	1			2
Disability Grant	8	3		2	1	2
Mother/Foster Care	4	2	2			
UIF	52	11	11	5	7	18
Poor Relief	4			1	1	2
Domestic Workers	11	7	3	1		
Hire Purchase	2				1	1
Marital Non-Support	12	7	1		3	1
Workmens Compensation	14	5	6			3
Housing	25	6	6	2	2	9
Legal	6	1	3	2		
Identity Documents	3					3
Education	4			1	1	2
Damages - support for illegitimate child	5	3	1	1		
Divorce	7	4	2	1		
Medical	2		2			
Other	17	4	5	3	1	4

The situation in Grahamstown remains the same with its chronic housing shortage and vast numbers of unemployed. For these reasons the kind of work done

by our office has not changed significantly since we opened in 1973.

Housing

There are 4,500 families who have placed their names on the official waiting list; but there are many others who have not done so because they do not believe that there is any hope of getting a house. They are probably right as only 100 new houses have been built in Grahamstown since 1962. Employers who are willing to help house their employees are unable to do so as all new developments have been frozen in this area. In addition Grahamstown is excluded from the 30 year lease dispensation.

Unemployment

Unemployment has always been a problem in Grahamstown but it is growing worse as the economic situation in the country deteriorates.

Women who are the main bread-winners in the Grahamstown black community are hardest hit. The majority of women who work are employed as domestics with an average income of R21p.m. As the economic pinch is felt, white households that used to employ two domestics have cut back to one - usually without much warning - leaving some families without any source of income whatsoever. Because of the large number of women seeking work, employers can and do often dismiss their employees for coming late or for not wanting to work on their afternoon off; they know that they have an almost unlimited supply of labour on their doorstep. The large number of unemployed also make it possible for employers to pay very low wages - in some cases as low as R12p.m. for a full-time domestic.

Firms are reducing staff, and some are dismissing long service employees who command a 'high' salary for trivial reasons and taking on new staff on a temporary basis and lower rate of pay.

Up until about October last year work seekers in Grahamstown were free to seek employment in the Port Elizabeth area. Because of the recession this was stopped. BAAB officials in Grahamstown report that this is no longer the case and folk from Grahamstown can again seek work in Port Elizabeth.

Men who went to work on the gold mines because of the unemployment situation in Grahamstown will no longer be able to do so as the Mine Labour Organisation has stopped recruiting workers from this area.

The following figures obtained from the BAAB in Grahamstown gives some idea of the extent of the unemployment problem.

Men

Total registered and eligible for employment	6860
Total employed in Grahamstown	4114
	<u>2746</u>
Total employed in greater BAAB area	<u>1493</u>
Total unemployed	1253

Women

Total registered and eligible for employment	10851
Total employed in Grahamstown	4463
	<u>6388</u>
Total employed in greater BAAB area	<u>441</u>
Total unemployed	5947

Figure at 28 February 1977.

These figures are not absolutely accurate because of the following reasons: i) unknown number of non registered, eligible workers; ii) unknown number of unregistered employed; iii) number of women registered and eligible but not necessarily wanting or seeking work; and iv) not all deaths etc. are reported to the BAAB and are therefore not subtracted from the 'eligible for' total.

The unemployment situation in the rural area is even more depressing. In June 1976 there were a total of 1973 families employed and a total of 1953 families unemployed.

Unemployment Insurance

In our last report we indicated that we had asked the Labour Department to take action against the inefficient handling of the unemployment register by the Revenue Office staff. When the Labour Department visited Grahamstown to investigate our complaint we were invited to meet them and substantiate our complaint. We were able to present them with detailed case studies; and in the light of this they decided that the register would be administered by the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's office. They also agreed not to penalize workers who had been prevented from signing the register.

Since the BAC's office started administering the register there have been no complaints of the kind we received before. Grievances are now centred around the length of time it takes for benefits to be paid; the six week penalty clause which seems to be applied indiscriminately; employers negligence in registering their workers and obtaining UIF cards for them; and, for some, disappointment at the amount received.

In our discussion with the Labour Department officials we raised the problem of employers who did not register their employees. Again full details were supplied and we have since heard that two of the three firms investigated have been fined and have had to pay back-dated assessments for their employees. The third firm is still being investigated and we hope the same action will be taken against them.

Social Worker

Mr. Bill Deacon (IUP MP for Albany) has pursued our request for a second social worker or welfare worker in the Eastern Cape with the appropriate minister. We have just heard from Mr. Deacon that the request is being considered; and we hope that the worker will soon be appointed.

Inquest

In July 1976 we were asked to help the family of a man who had died in police custody.

Mr. N. had been arrested on Sunday 25 July 1976 at about 10p.m. for being drunk. He was put into a cell with several other men who had been arrested for the same reason. When the men were released at about 4a.m. on the 26th - this is the usual practise - Mr. N. did not wake up, inspite of having cold water poured over and so he was left. At 6.30a.m. he was still 'asleep'. At 12 noon the District Surgeon was called and on his instruction Mr. N. was taken to hospital. He never recovered consciousness and died on the 27th. Cause of death was diagnosed as cerebral contusion.

There was no question of assault but it did seem as though the police were negligent in leaving a man without any attention for about 8-10 hours before calling a doctor. The assumption on the part of the police that the man was drunk and therefore unable to wake even after having poured cold water on him in the middle of winter is mind boggling. The District Surgeon, in his evidence said that it was 'not unreasonable' for a layman to leave a man unconscious for 8-10 hours before calling a doctor! He went on to add

that in his opinion, Mr. N. would have died even if he had been taken to hospital immediately he was arrested.

The Magistrate made no finding in this case and said a full record of the proceedings would be sent to the Attorney General.

Case Studies

Mr. T. M. was employed by a government school for 25 years. Last year he was given a month's notice because he was too old to do his work. His son approached our office in the hope that we would be able to persuade the school to give his father a gratuity. The headmaster of the school didn't even acknowledge our letters. We then wrote to the Department of Education who told us that as Mr. M. had been employed 'additional to the authorised establishment' and was therefore paid out of school funds it wasn't the Department of Education's problem.

Mr. M. died in January and was buried on the 27th of the month. We have written to the chairman of the School Committee (and sent a copy of the letter to the chairman of the School Board) informing them of Mr. M.'s death. We have also asked the School Committee and School Board to seriously consider making provision for a gratuity; or to consider contributing to a pension scheme for employees who are employed 'additional to the authorised establishment'.

Miss M.

Miss M. was granted the care of two nephews whose parents had died in a fire in 1973. A foster care grant was applied for and approved. She received a payment of R49,62 on the 11.3.75. (During 1974 when the initial payment of R77.94 was due she, with many other folk, lost money because of irregularities in the BAC's office. A clerk was subsequently prosecuted and found guilty of embezzling pension monies.)

After this Miss M. received the foster grant regularly until April 1976 when it stopped. Approaches from the new BAC met with the standard response of 'the matter is being investigated' or 'the matter is receiving attention'. We then took up the matter with the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions and although our letter has never been acknowledged her foster care grant has been renewed and paid retrospectively to April 1976. The result of an accumulation of letters?

Workshops

No further workshops have taken place since the one on UIF and HP problems in October 1976 but we hope to organise several of these during 1977.

Shirley Moulder