

NATAL MIDLANDS REGION - BLACK SASH ADVICE OFFICE.

ANNUAL REPORT 1977

OPERATING HOURS: The Office is open Monday to Saturday, excluding Wednesday, 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

PERSONNEL: The office is manned by an interpreter, Victoria Nyide, paid by the Black Sash, and by a number of voluntary workers. They write the cases in the day book, deal with the correspondence and, with the help of Mrs Nyide, generally plan the strategy for each case. The organisation of the office was the responsibility of Sheila Hindson, until it was taken over by Cara Pretorius in July. All financial matters are administered by Mary Park Ross, who pays the interpreters salary, PAYE, UIF etc and also the rent of the office. Finally we have the invaluable help of two lawyers, to whom we go for legal advice and who also take over many cases pro deo.

Number of cases dealt with:
See annexure 1.

Analysis of new cases:
See annexure 2.

REPORT:

This year the Black Sash Advice Office has given 1178 interviews to Black workers who sought help with various type of problem, some of them concerning the worker's employment. Pay disputes, unfair dismissals, problems with UIF and pensions, are by far the most common issues we have to deal with. We also have a few people who come in with legal problems such as divorce and maintenance, and hire purchase problems, and these are usually sent to see a lawyer.

As can be seen from the analysis of new cases (annexure 2), most of the cases dealt with concern problems that workers have with their pay. These pay disputes arise usually on an employee's dismissal; employers are not always scrupulous about making sure that all monies owing to the worker are paid. Leave pay, notice pay and pension refunds are often not included in the final pay packet and the Advice Office and the worker are then involved in a sometimes lengthy correspondence to claim all money due. This is often a matter of a few rand, a paltry sum to the employer, but of great importance to the worker. Also under this heading are included the cases where the worker does not understand his pay packet and comes to us to have it checked to see whether he has been fairly treated. Employers could save themselves and their workers trouble and bitterness by making sure that employees understand deductions on their pay packets. Further problems arise from unsympathetic and unscrupulous pay clerks who neglect to see that workers get their due.

The Unemployment Insurance Fund was high-lighted in the Press this year, but it does not seem to have made employers any more aware of their responsibilities in this regard. We still find a large number of employers who make UIF deductions from their workers' pay, but only apply for their UIF cards on termination of employment, if at all. Sometimes the card arrives after 18 weeks from termination of employment, when it is too late to apply for benefits. It seems that it is about time more prosecutions were made against employers neglecting their responsibilities towards UIF.

On the whole the cases dealt with this year show a depressing picture. It has been a very hard year for the black worker; recession has brought retrenchment and large-scale unemployment to the black community with skilled and semi-skilled workers bearing the brunt of this trend. Unfortunately, employers do not take into account the extremely difficult conditions and restrictive laws that their workers have to contend with - a forgotten pass may mean a night in jail or a late bus a lost job. The loss of income may mean that a man's family may be completely dependent on the charity of friends and relatives until he finds a new job.

Compared with the Advice Offices in the larger industrial centres the problems we contend with may seem tame. However, we feel that we do succeed in helping many workers and in some cases we show the employers their responsibilities in certain directions, thus we may be helping to establish better employer-worker relations in the future.

CARA PRETORIUS.
28th December 1977.

ANNEXURE 1.

NUMBER OF CASES

MONTH	Working days	New Cases	Old Cases	Total in-Interviews	Average new cases/day	Average visits/day
January	9	36	50	86	4	9.5
February	19	37	96	133	1.9	7
March	21	15	64	79	0.7	3.7
April	19	26	46	72	1.3	3.8
May	19	27	61	88	1.8	4.6
June	21	23	75	98	1.1	4.7
July	22	34	79	113	1.6	5.1
August	22	52	93	145	1.4	6.6
September	22	41	66	107	1.9	4.9
October	22	29	59	88	1.3	4
November	21	34	82	116	1.6	4.1
December	11	16	37	53	1.5	4.8
ANNUAL REPORT	228	370	808	1178	1.6	5.01

ANNEXURE 2.

ANALYSIS OF NEW CASES (some cases have more than one problem)

1977

	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	TOTAL
Pay disputes-notice pay, leave pay, check- ing of pay slips ,etc.	23	12	3	9	4	5	12	25	16	7.	12	6	134
Pensions	-	2	1	1	5	3	2	5	3	3	4	1	30
Work disputes, unfair dismissals, working conditions, victimisa- tion etc	4	13	4	8	8	6	7	10	6	7	8	5	86
UIF-sick benefits,& Applications, obtain- ing of cards.	3	1	3	3	2	4	7	15	7	5	10	2	62
Workmen's Compensa- tion.	2	3	1	2	4	4	2	4	3	2	-	3	30
Dismissal after ill- ness	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	-	2	-	-	7
Retrenchment	-	-	-	-	1	-	4	2	3	-	-	-	10
Work permits	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Domestic.	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	4
Miscellaneous	4	6	2	-	2	1	5	1	5	3	4	4	37