

DURBAN ADVICE OFFICE

(Under the auspices of the Garment Workers' Union in the James Bolton Hall)

Report to National Conference, October 1973.

Covering the period from February 20th, 1973 to September 25th, 1973.

Figures for February to September 1973

Working Days: 56
There were 757 new cases.

No record is kept of the continuing cases, enquiries or average number of interviews per month.

ANALYSIS

<u>PROBLEM</u>	<u>NEW CASES</u>
Ordered to leave the Area	61
Issue of Reference Books	14
Housing Problems	60
Foreigners	2
Work Permits	569
Residential Permits	16
Section 10 Qualifications	15
Ex-prisoners	2
Contract Problems	3
Miscellaneous	<u>15</u>
	<u>TOTAL</u> <u>727</u>

INTRODUCTION

The present Natal Coastal Black Sash Advice Office opened on the 20th February this year, following a request by the Garment Workers' Union in the James Bolton Hall in Gale Street, for our assistance in dealing with the many problems peculiar to Africans, which arose when they started a Benefit Fund for African people.

The Garment Workers' Union have made available to us free of charge, the full use of their facilities viz. telephones, an interpreter, photostating, legal aid and refreshments, for which we are extremely grateful.

For the first two and a half months we operated on Tuesday mornings only, and after some Press coverage we got a better response, and increased our time to twice a week.

In July we were suddenly inundated with new cases and found it necessary to open the Office 3 mornings a week from 8am-12pm and we have continued to function in this way.

/At first

At first we were treated very warily when dealing with Officials at Influx Control and the Bantu Administration Affairs Department. Our main dealings are with the Labour Bureau at Ordnance Road, and we seem to have been allocated one official in particular. We have met with little hostility and on a number of occasions some co-operation and assistance with certain cases. Naturally we are readily made aware of our mistakes but are frequently able to point out theirs - so generally communication is kept fairly amicable. To quote from one official, "You ladies certainly keep us on our toes, and have a habit of 'digging up' any mistakes we may have made."

The Westville Bantu Administration Office rejected us outright, or rather would have nothing whatsoever to do with anyone who had come from the Advice Office. We felt that because the Official-in-charge was violently opposed to the Black Sash, to quote "As a political organization and one among many that give this sort of advice for money" it was necessary to approach him as the chances of any African getting assistance from him were jeopardized because of us or our "official" correspondence. Once he was informed of the exact function of the Advice Office we were "commended" on the good work we were doing and even offered assistance if at all possible for Contract Workers from the Ndwedwe and Mapumulo Homelands.

We went through a period when it seemed that people were being "Endorsed Out" indiscriminately and it seemed especially so if they had been to this Office. So three of our members went to see an Official in the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's Office. This interview was of little value.

WORK PERMITS

The majority of people coming into the Advice Office are wanting Work Permits - "Specials" for the Durban area. The general opinion is that there is plenty of work available but the difficulty is getting a Permit to do so.

Only people qualifying under Section 10 1(a) or (b) have this privilege and also 10 1(d) workers providing they have permanent accomodation. No one can get a Work Permit without proof of legal accomodation, and no one can get registered as a lodger or in a Hostel without proof of employment, so it is a vicious circle and the result is that there are probably thousands of illegal residents in Durban, and an equal number either unemployed or working illegally. What alternative has the Black man? As a Contract Worker he must go back to his Homeland e.g. Mapumulo, Ndwedwe, Impendhle, Nqutu, to name but a few, where any means of earning a living is non-existent. In Nqutu alone there are 85,000 people unemployed, with conditions so unbearable that not even individual farming is possible. When the African man returns to his Homeland, he must register with the Local Tribal Labour Bureau and await the recruiting officer to come and requisition for his services as an attested Contract Worker. He can wait for anything up to 5 years, in fact except for Mining recruitment available in some areas, no other form of recruiting ever takes place, and all these Tribal Labour Bureaus tell the people is to simply return to the towns and seek work!

/Contract Workers....

Contract Workers coming into the prescribed area of Durban have a choice of only 3 means of employment, viz. Domestic Workers (men), Flat Workers, or Builders' Labourers, and once they have been channeled into one or other of these categories they may never change throughout their working lives!

In an article which appeared in the "Natal Mercury" in March this year, Mr. M.C. Botha, Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, stated that there are nearly 20,000 Africans registered as "Work Seekers" or "Unemployed" in the Transkei and 90,000 in other parts of the country! Africans from the Transkei, especially from the areas which are right on Natal's borders, seem to find it absolutely impossible to get Work Permits for any form of work. Many come into the Advice Office not knowing what to do or how to go about earning some sort of a living and we find we just cannot help them. The authorities are relentless, yet this is a ridiculous situation, because surely all the surrounding areas of the Transkei should take in a percentage of labour to alleviate some of the appalling poverty there. This is something Sash will have to go into more thoroughly as the plight of these people seems so hopeless.

Therefore, as one can gather, there is very little we can do to help Contract Workers in their quest for permits and this is the major problem facing us at the Advice Office.

HOUSING

The Housing situation in Durban for Africans is absolutely critical, likewise for Indians and Coloureds. Accommodation is at a premium and the waiting lists are anything up to 4 years or more. Only people qualifying under Section 10 1(a) or (b) may apply and only married men. Hostel accommodation is considered "temporary" and therefore no guarantee for getting a Work Permit.

Umlazi Township is a Homeland and falls under the Kwa Zulu Government, though Influx Control refuses to give Work Permits, Section 10 Qualifications, Reference Books etc. to people living illegally in Umlazi and yet in another way will use the fact that it is a Homeland, and therefore not in the prescribed area, as an excuse for some other detrimental action levelled against someone.

Kwa Mashu is due to become a Homeland in August 1974. The majority of people coming into the Office live illegally somewhere with no other alternative but to carry on doing so.

Clermont Township is the largest one right in Pinetown, but accommodation there is not considered legal and is certainly no guarantee for a Work Permit. This is outrageous considering that Pinetown in the last few years has been the fastest growing industrial centre in the Republic. Apparently accommodation is now being built by the Municipality, but the backlog must be devastating.

BANTU ADMINISTRATION BOARDS

The new Bantu Administration Boards for Natal came into effect on August 1st, 1973. Natal is divided into 3 main areas, viz. Northern Natal, the Drakensberg, and Port Natal, which is the area

/concerning us

concerning us. Port Natal stretches from Port Alfred in the South to the lower Tugela in the North, and inland as far as Camperdown - and excludes all the Homelands in between. We do not visualize any changes whatsoever under these Boards, although all sorts of promises etc. have been made publicly by the Chairman and his Deputy.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Should we require it, one of the legal advisors to the Garment Workers' Union will deal with the case, free of charge.

PRESS

We initially had interviews with "The Daily News", the "Natal Mercury" and the "Ilanga" newspapers. The first article in the "Ilanga" caused such a sensation that we simply were not able to cope with the numbers pouring into the Office! The general impression was that we could do anything! However, we went to see the Editor and gave a statement explaining the exact function of the Advice Office, and also a general outline of the Rights for Urban Africans, as regards Work Permits, Housing, Section 10 Qualifications, Orders to leave the Area, etc.

The Natal University Student Newspaper "Dome" printed an article on the Advice Office to encourage students to come into the Office and be made more aware of the problems affecting Africans. We had an enthusiastic response from the students who had been working on the Wages Commission, however, this soon dwindled out.

The "Natal Mercury" periodically prints cases of interest and extracts from our monthly reports.

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

We have employed a full time interpreter, Miss Regina Mbongwa and we are more than grateful for her assistance. We have approximately 3 workers and Miss Mbongwa per morning, and now that the Office has become known, and in particular our capabilities as far as any assistance is concerned, we seem to maintain a steady though not overwhelming response from people in need of advice.

CONCLUSION

The Advice Office has now been open for just over 7 months, and although we don't seem to have had many successes, the few we have achieved certainly make it all very much worthwhile. Not even the Africans themselves are under any illusions as to what can be done to overcome their innumerable problems.

SOLVEIG PIPER.

Advice Office Supervisor