

REPORT FOR BLACK SASH ON SOCIAL PENSIONS IN THE HILLCREST AREA

The Hillcrest Advice Bureau which provides the greater part of this information, gives examples of the difficulties encountered by people living in rural areas of Kwa Zulu.

Hillcrest is a White, dormitory area bordering on a large Black Reserve going down to the Umgeni River. When Kwa Zulu came into existence in 1973, this Black area was placed in the Magisterial District of Ndwedwe which is only about 30 km direct from the area, but there is no public transport prepared to risk the hazards of the direct route - a very steep, un-tarred, rough road down to the river where the causeway is frequently under water in summer. Some people needing to visit the Bantu Commissioner must catch a series of buses through Hillcrest, Pinetown, Durban to Ndwedwe - a distance of about 100 km. each way and a return fare of R3,00. Frequently the Chief has to accompany would-be pensioners and they pay him R2,00 each. Visitors to Ndwedwe are advised to phone before they go, to make sure the officials are not out paying pensions, but there are only 2 phones in the area and it is difficult to get through to country places like Ndwedwe, and it costs money too. Letters are frequently not answered.

So that queries at the Bantu Commissioner's office are extremely difficult. Apart from cost and time, many would-be pensioners are too old to undertake such a bus trip. The Director of Justice, Kwa Zulu, has answered our pleas for help by asking the Ndwedwe Bantu Commissioner to send his officers to our area once a year to take applications for pensions. This is a help, though the officers are not District Surgeons and their decisions on ages are sometimes very strange, and up till now they have not been allowed to take finger-prints, making visits to Ndwedwe still necessary.

Problems in our area include:

- Confusion between Old Age Pensions and Disability Grants
- Apparently arbitrary decrease or stoppage of payments of Old Age Pensions
- Wrong declaration of age in Reference Book
- Mistaken guessing of age by officers
- Losses of papers and payment vouchers
- Total inability to pay costs of bus fares
- Increasing number of grannies who support grand-children

Some actual examples are :

MR. W.V. is an old man who has been applying for an Old Age Pension since February 1974. He has been to Ndwedwe five times

and has come back each time without having been finger-printed which is the very first step towards a pension. And nobody tells him if his application is being accepted or not, though once they did tell him he was too young - they said he was only 21. We are still awaiting replies to our letters of October and November, 1975, querying his case.

MRS. S.K. is about 90 and blind and has received an Old Age Pension for years, and her daughter was paid an attendance allowance until the end of 1972 when she was told she could not receive two pensions and this allowance was stopped. In 1974 Mrs. S.K. received six pensions of R19,00 each, but in 1975 she was paid five payments of only R8,00 each and one of R10,00. In January 1976 she received nothing. We await replies to our letters of October and November 1975 asking for explanations of reduced pension followed by no pension at all.

MR. G. received three Old Age Pensions and then payments stopped in March 1973. Kwa Zulu took over in April 1973, and we spent next year phoning, visiting and writing letters to Pinetown and Ndwedwe, Pinetown having been our former Bantu Commissioner's office. Success and jubilation in May 1974 when we were visiting Pinetown with Mr. G. and his pension vouchers were found except for two. We were told that back payments were no longer made.

Pinetown welfare workers experience similar problems, though at least their Bantu Commissioner is easily accessible. They report that pensions there take between six weeks and six months to come through and that they seem to be having more success now that they are beginning to know some of the pension officers.

Mrs. Ardington in Zululand reports that she has found that Old Age Pensioners are no longer paid at 65 but only at 70! "Out here the main problem as I see it is distance, added to the rigmarole of getting any pension. Anyone qualifying for a pension is presumably destitute and therefore does not have the necessary busfare. We live 38 miles from the Magistrate and no doubt thousands live further away. How is one meant to get to the Magistrate, and having got there, where is one meant to stay, for the necessary procedures take too long and the buses are too few to enable one to finish in the day. I am sure if one slept outside the Magistrate's Court one would be had up for loitering."

Mrs. Ardington suggests that Post Offices and Police Stations keep forms for pensioners and others. At present, both District Surgeons in Gingindhlovu (for Mtunzini) and Pinetown do not keep forms, so that a visit first has to be made to the Bantu Commissioner to collect forms. One wonders why the District Surgeon himself cannot have forms.

From the Tugela Ferry area we have confirmation of all we in Hillcrest area experience. Huge difficulties face a would-be pensioner from the point of view of cost and of distance. Wheel barrows with iron wheels are used to transport the very frail - imagine the agony of a journey on steel wheels. In winter the B.A.C. office is not too far as the river can be crossed, but for three months in summer a journey of 20 miles each way has to be undertaken to see the B.A.C.

In this area, the Induna has to fill in a form for the would-be pensioner relating to his financial status. Both then go to the Tribal Authority to get it signed, and then they visit the Magistrate. Magistrates say that only about 10% of applicants for pensions are likely to receive them; and we can see that a large number of old people in the rural areas never even get as far as applying for pensions as they have no money for fares and are often too unfit and too old to undertake the necessary journeys. In Hillcrest area quite a few old grand-mothers are left with grand-children to support - we have one granny who looks after one child in a wheel chair and another who is an epileptic - all on one meagre Old Age Pension! We are trying to find a home for the crippled one.

One cannot but feel that all is done to discourage Africans from applying for pensions, and all is done to slow down and reduce payments. Queries to officials take weeks to be answered and often are not answered at all. This is partly due of course, to the acute lack of trained staff and to the frequent changes in staff. An African lawyer said last week that a Bantu Commissioner friend of his had had to be transferred for otherwise he would have had a heart attack, because he was so over-worked. This particular one was very efficient and had to work late every night. It seems that the Kwa Zulu Civil Service suffers greatly from competition for the more ambitious and intelligent young men by industry and commerce. One imagines that employing young women would help overcome the shortage but this would be against African custom. The problems of alcoholism and "khanyisa" or "light up the problem" are further adding to inefficiency, and the "khanyisa" system often takes money from those who can least afford it. We do not actually have evidence of this, but Africans themselves talk about it. They also talk of the poor example set by some Whites who do very little work and who do not bother to train those who are taking over from them. We know that Chief Buthelezi is very concerned about all these difficulties, and we hope that he will be helped to solve them by everyone in the Service, both Black and White,

and especially we hope that pensioners will find it easier to apply for, and receive, what the law entitles them to have.

The latest development in Kwa Zulu is the move of all offices from Pietermaritzburg to Ulundi where, at first, there were not even telephones. One hates to think how many more papers will get mis-laid and wrongly filed.