

NATAL MIDLANDS REGION - BLACK SASH ADVICE OFFICE  
REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1st JULY - 14th DECEMBER, 1976

OPERATING HOURS: Mondays to Saturdays, excluding Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

- PERSONNEL:
1. Mrs V. Nyide, interpreter employed by the Black Sash.
  2. Voluntary workers, who write up cases in the day book and advise workers.
  3. Sheila Hindson took over the running of the office from Brenda Bell in December.
  4. Brenda Bell continues to administer the financial affairs of the office, pays PAYE, UIF, and the monthly registration fee and salary of the interpreter.
  5. Professional advice and legal assistance is given to the office by two lawyers.

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REPORT

In Pietermaritzburg workers are facing the effects of the economic recession as much as in other areas. The press has continuously reported large-scale retrenchment in local industries. November was a particularly bad month in this respect, as our records reflect. It is disturbing to think that the Advice Office deals with a less than a minute proportion of the total number of people affected by retrenchment and unemployment in this area.

Many of our cases are sent to us by the unregistered African trade unions. The main problems are to do with dismissals and pay disputes arising therefrom: notice pay, leave pay, long service pay. We have a high proportion of UIF problems: we find many employers are tardy in applying for employees cards and lax about filling in details properly. This involves workers in interminable problems and delays; sometimes they might have to wait for up to four months or more for benefits. Some employers contravene the 1966 Act entirely; sometimes this is due to ignorance, but some try to evade paying workers contributions altogether by employing unregistered workers. As Solveig Piper of the Durban Advice Office has suggested, penalties for contravention of the Act are not being imposed stringently enough by the authorities. A recent article has shown that where disbursements are made from the UIF, they hardly meet social security needs. Only a fifth to a third of all those in employment are covered by the fund, while only a very small percentage of those unemployed are likely to receive any benefits.

Other problems we deal with are to do with pensions, workman's compensation and work disputes. We find that in many cases, the major problem is lack of communication between employer and employee. Though management may be sympathetic they have personnel problems at the supervisory level, where racialistic attitudes dominate labour relations.

In an attempt to bring some of the more obvious problems, such as UIF, unclear payslips, leave pay, notice pay, workman's compensation, to the notice of employers, we wrote a letter in November to big scale employers and members of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In this letter we outlined the major problems of black workers and suggested that a written contract, outlining conditions of service, would obviate some of them. So far we have had little response to the 300 letters circulated; what response we have had has been entirely negative.

However, not all our dealings with employers have been fruitless. Some employers are particularly courteous and helpful, and are concerned to clear up problems faced by their employees. Some of these employers also have effective liaison committees, or where they are not functioning properly, employers are trying to introduce changes where they will become more effective.

Number of cases 1st July - 14th December 1976

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>Working days</u>	<u>Old cases</u>	<u>New Cases</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Averages per day</u>
July	22	92	49	141	6.4
August	22	91	33	124	5.6
September	20	70	17	87	4.4
October	22	102	39	141	6.4
November	22	111	36	147	6.6
December	10	51	19	70	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>6.1</b>

Analysis of New Cases (some cases have more than one problem)

<u>TYPES OF CASES</u>	<u>JULY</u>	<u>AUGUST</u>	<u>SEPTEMBER</u>	<u>OCTOBER</u>	<u>NOVEMBER</u>	<u>DECEMBER</u>	<u>TOTAL OVER PERIOD</u>
Pay Disputes - notice & leave pay	15	14	8	21	15	19	92
Pensions.	7	4	-	3	4	-	18
Work Disputes - incl. dismissal, working conditns, victimisationetc.	11	8	6	5	2	3	35
UIF = incl. sick benefits & applications	8	7	7	6	3	3	34
Workman's Comp.	5	5	2	3	3	-	18
Dismissal after illness	5	4	1	2	4	2	18
Redundantment	6	3	3	4	15	2	33
Work Permits	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
Domestic	2	1	6	1	-	1	5
Miscellaneous	4	4	-	3	4	-	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>270</b>