

URGENT

THE BLACK SASH
JOHANNESBURG ADVICE OFFICE

EMERGENCY REPORT - NOVEMBER 1979..

On the 8th November the Prime Minister said that a reckless or careless Government could turn South Africa into a powder keg within a matter of days.

In the Advice Office we are now watching the fuse to that powder keg burn shorter by the day.

Never in the sixteen years since this office was opened have we experienced such anger expressed by Black people or such a sense of impending catastrophe. Never have we felt more urgently the need to try to communicate to white South Africans the realities of what is happening.

The pass laws have always been one of the main causes of Black alienation but if historians who in the future write of our times are able to isolate the final straw which precipitated disaster it may well prove to be this year's legislation introducing the fine of R500 which can now be imposed on the employer of an unregistered worker.

The significance of this legislation has been obscured by the three month moratorium and by the general delusion that the Riekert report was to be welcomed as a tremendous step forward. The fine is a direct result of Dr. Riekert's recommendations and goes hand in hand with the implementation of another of his recommendations that "Labour Bureaux should exercise strict control over the admission of contract workers....."

Up to now the only saving factor for the people controlled by the pass laws has been the total inefficiency of the system. All the vast, ponderous and expensive structure of influx control and efflux enforcement has not been able to prevent people from moving to places where they could find work. They have been impelled by the necessity of earning a living for themselves and for the survival of their children, and illegal jobs have been readily available.

The Financial Mail of 12th October, 1979 published a table prepared by Dr. Jan Lange of UNISA showing how workers benefit from urban work even if they have to go to prison as a consequence. There is a 702,7% improvement in living standards for a worker from Ciskei who works illegally in Pietermaritzburg for nine months and spends three months in prison, a 170% improvement for someone from Lehowa who works six months in Johannesburg and spends six months in prison, and a 28,5% improvement for a person from Bophuthatswana who works only three months in Pretoria and spends nine months in prison. Someone from Ciskei who works illegally in Pietermaritzburg for three months and spends nine months in prison improves his living standards by 234,2%

As far as we know Pietermaritzburg has never been shown to be a city where employers pay exceptionally high wages. Such vast percentage increases in living standards, won at such high cost, can only mean that living standards in the Ciskei are standards of such abysmal poverty that "living" is probably the wrong word to use about them. The Ciskei seems to be the most poverty stricken of all the homelands because of the extent of the dumping of "superfluous" Black people from so-called White South Africa which has taken place there but the other homelands are not far behind in the poverty stakes in all those many areas where large scale resettlement has taken place.

The new fine means that /---

The new fine means that there will now be no more illegal work available. Approximately 50 000 people have been registered on one year contracts in terms of the moratorium. Many of them will probably not be in the same job at the end of the contract period and so will not be able to register again. Some have already lost their jobs and have been endorsed out. Thousands did not fulfill the necessary conditions or did not find a job or lawful accommodation in time to be registered. To these must be added the thousands of new homeland job seekers who will be precipitated into the labour market at the end of this school year. There will also be the many labour tenants who are currently being removed from land in Natal where they have been able to grow crops and keep cattle into closer settlements where they only have a suburban sized garden with no readily available water and where no livestock is allowed. They are thus being rendered entirely dependent on jobs which they are not allowed to take. They will swell the great army of jobless, hopeless, poverty stricken people in rural areas.

Over and over again during the last few weeks men and women have said to us: "But my children have no food". "My children are hungry". "What will my children eat?". Poverty, hunger and the diseases of malnutrition have been a way of life for thousands of South African families for many years. Workseekers in the homelands are not allowed to move to the cities to seek for work and, if they do so, are not allowed to register in jobs they have found. The only way in which they can obtain legal employment is if they are recruited or requisitioned from the labour bureau in their home area. Such recruitment is now being strictly controlled and cut back.

Until this year people have been able to find illegal work and so have survived. Now, for the first time in all our experience, we have no hope and no comfort to offer to the unregistered and the endorsed out. Always before we, and they have known that they would be able to go on somehow even if it meant arrest and imprisonment from time to time. All hope has now been removed and when you take hope away all that is left is rage and anger, bitterness and hatred.

This anger is not going to be confined to the homelands. People are not going to go and sit to watch their sons and daughters die of hunger. They will remain in town and, as they are hounded from their places of illegal accommodation, (another of Dr. Riekert's recommendations) their rage will be fuelled to fuel again the rage of those who are legally in town and to whom so many promises have been made but not fulfilled.

Dr. Koornhof has said that Dr. Riekert's recommendation that Section 10 qualified urban people can move from one town to another provided they have a job and accommodation is already in operation. The West Rand Board is endorsing them out. (Does the bureaucracy deliberately misinterpret or obstruct ministerial promises?)

Dr. Koornhof has said that if a man buys a house his wife can come to town to live with him. Neither the East Rand nor the West Rand Administration Board has initiated any schemes for low cost housing. WRAB'S cheapest house for purchase costs R6,600. We have been told that ERAB tells people who apply to buy that the cheapest house requires an immediate deposit of R1 600. Neither Board will accept a man on to the waiting list to rent a house unless his wife has a permit to be in the area and she cannot get that permit until he has a house. In any event the waiting list for a rented house in Soweto is nine years long. People who have been on the list since 1970 are told that they will never get a house unless they buy one and most do not earn enough to make that even a remote possibility. They are presently watching with bitterness the wealthy who can afford to buy jumping the queue.

Only the few who can afford to pay for their privileges or who work for very large companies are experiencing any benefits from the changes which have been so much talked about.

Apart from all questions of justice and morality could anything be more dangerous? The present visible alliance between Government and big business in the "total strategy" which is seen to be causing immediate personal disaster to thousands of individuals can only result in the Black/White political conflict becoming irrevocably identified with the Marxist/Capitalist economic conflict. Any so-called free enterprise system which totally denies all freedom to the majority of the people cannot possibly survive. Those who believe that the benefits of capitalism and free enterprise can be spread through the whole population and can bring about justice must prove it and must do so now. Tomorrow will be too late.

The following cases are not just a few hoj or stories selected for their shock value from months of work. They all presented themselves during the last ten days. They are all typical of many others. They are all people who are suffering, entirely hopeless, and very very angry.

MR. Z. was endorsed out on 8th November. He has a wife and three children at Nqutu where he lives in a closer settlement. He used to have 3 cows and the use of land to grow crops but was resettled in 1972 and forced to sell the cattle. Now he has nothing. His last contract expired in October 1978 and he has remained working illegally in Johannesburg since because he has no alternative. Now he can no longer find illegal work and is refused registration in his present job.

MRS. S. is a widow. She came to Johannesburg from Groblersdal in 1965 and was previously registered in employment to 20th March 1978. She then worked illegally but on 1st October 1979 began working for a new employer who tried to register her. She was endorsed out - ordered to leave Johannesburg within 72 hours - on 6th November. She did not comply with the terms of the moratorium because she had been registered for some of the time during the previous three years and it only applied to those who had been illegally employed. Her employer tried to register her too late but it would have made no difference had they been in time. She has one child, two others have died, a blind father and two blind siblings to support.

MR. M. was endorsed out on 2nd November. He belongs nowhere at all having been born on the farms at Heilbron, worked in Vereeniging from 1940 to 1963 and in Johannesburg since then, sometimes registered and sometimes not. His wife is a Johannesburg person who has been living legally in the emergency family accommodation provided by WRAB in the Meadowlands Hostel since the Kliptown floods of 1977. For this sordid accommodation she has to pay R45.60 a month because the family occupies eight so-called beds. They have four minor children and also support two minor children of her deceased mother. The moratorium could not help MR. M because his three years previous employment was legal.

MRS. H was endorsed out on 6th November. She has been in her present job which she must now leave, for over 15 months but her employer didn't bother to try to register until it was too late, in spite of the impassioned appeals of MRS.H'S husband who is a qualified Johannesburg person. They have two small children.

MR. M. was ordered to leave on 6th November. His last contract expired in December 1976 but he remained unregistered with the same employer until 30th September 1979. He found a new job and on 31st October went to register. He was given a temporary permit to 31st January 1980 and was told to report back with proof of accommodation. He reported with proof that he is the legal occupant of a bed in the Diepkloof hostel and was promptly endorsed out - presumably because 6 months of the previous 3 years employment had been legal.

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MR. N is a married man with seven children, the eldest of whom is 17 years old. He comes from the Greytown district where he has a small piece of ground on a hillside. He says it is too steep to grow anything and there is no water. He has no cattle. He has a job in Johannesburg but was refused registration in terms of the moratorium, because he had been unemployed for the previous two years. He was discharged from the job because he could not register.

He began working in Johannesburg in 1952 but has not been registered since the one year contract system was introduced in 1968.

MR. S. is in his early twenties. He came to Johannesburg from the Escourt district last year to look for his first job. He has been working for a firm since September 1978. When they tried to register him WRAB demanded payment of back registration fees amounting to R36.45 and when it had been paid, endorsed him out. He did not comply with the moratorium because his employment with this company did not amount to one full year prior to 31st July. He has been discharged because he could not register.

MR. M. comes from Tsolo in Transkei. He was working on contract in Alberton but the last contract was not renewed and he was retrenched. He has a job and accommodation in Johannesburg. He has been refused registration and told to go back to Tsolo. His wife is legally resident in Johannesburg and their two children aged 3 years and 6 months respectively were born here. His chances of recruitment from Tsolo are remote. His choice is to go there as is legally required of him and accept total separation from his family (if his wife goes with him they will all be hungry whereas she can at least work in Johannesburg if she stays) Or he can remain illegal" and unemployed in Johannesburg looking after the babies while his wife works. He left the office threatening to "make big noises".

3 Women one of them very young and in tears, who were registered as domestic workers in terms of the moratorium came to complain that as soon as they were registered, their employers reduced their wages and began deducting from the reduced pay the registration fees charged by WRAB for the previous periods of illegal employment.

One of them found a new job immediately and applied to be allowed to work out the period of her contract with the new employer. She was endorsed out. These employers evidently took the attitude that, as the registration was only valid as long as the women remained in their employ, they could unmercifully exploit them.

MISS. K. is eighteen years old. She was orphaned and came to Johannesburg in 1976 when she was fifteen to live with her uncle who is her only male guardian. He owns his house in Soweto. She found a job and went to register on 30th October. Endorsed out.

MR. N. comes from Mapumulo where he has a wife and two children. He lives with another woman in Johannesburg by whom he has one child. (A frequent consequence of the migrant labour system). He has been working legally in Johannesburg since 1963 but was prevented from acquiring urban rights by the introduction of the one year contract system in 1968. His last contract ended on 20th June and was not renewed because his employer replaced all men with women workers. He found a new job and has lawful accommodation in a hostel. Endorsed out on 26th September 1979. He has no land at home - just a small garden.

MR. N is on contract to WRAB to 20th January 1980. He has been told that his contract is not to be renewed and says that he was told they don't want to employ contract workers anymore. He will have to return to Mount Frere and wait hopelessly for a new recruitment. His wife and five children, all under seven years of age are legal qualified residents of Johannesburg.

MRS. T.N. also comes from the Transkei. She was endorsed out of the East Rand last year. Her husband qualifies in terms of Section 10(1)(b) and was told she could have a permit if he bought a house. He was told he would have to pay a deposit of R1600. He earns R136.45 p.m as a telephone operator for one of the East Rand municipalities.

MR. P.M qualifies in Port Elizabeth as 10(1)(b) and this was stamped in his Reference Book in September this year. He has a job with a big company in Johannesburg and accommodation in his cousin's house. Endorsed out.

MR. S. M. comes from Tseki near Witsieshoek in Qwa Qwa. He has a wife and two children aged 8 and 6 years. He has a garden about the size of two Johannesburg northern suburbs drawing rooms but nothing grows in it because there is no water. Every pailful has to be carried a considerable distance. He has trained as a carpenter and never once in the last three years since he completed his training has he been offered any kind of job at all through the tribal labour bureau. He has seen houses being built at Witsieshoek and has tried many times to get work there but there are never any vacancies. He has been working at piece jobs illegally in Johannesburg since last year. Found regular employment. Endorsed out. Lost the job.

MRS. C. M. comes from Mokokong near Potgietersrus. She began working in Johannesburg in 1963 but has never been registered and went back to Mokokong last year for some months. She had a job and was endorsed out on 18th October. Her husband has been in his present job for sixteen years but cannot obtain any Section 10 rights because his employers did not register him until 1971. He will qualify as 10(1)(b) in 1981 if he stays in the job. If he loses it he will be refused new registration and will fall under the one year contract system losing all hope of ever qualifying in the future. They have two children. Her husband was furiously angry when we explained to him that the law does not permit his wife to live with him. He gathered up his seemingly meaningless marriage certificate and all the other documents and marched his wife out of the office.

She came back two hours later to confront us. She said White people were always talking about Black people getting an education and what was the point of her having studied for her matric when she is not allowed to work. She said "WHY DON'T YOU WHITES DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS. YOU MAKE THESE LAWS AND IS THERE NOTHING FOR US?"

SHEENA DUNCAN
ADVICE OFFICE DIRECTOR.

10th November, 1979.