

IF I'D BEEN BLACK

By JEAN SINCLAIR

I AM A WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN. I belong to the privileged minority because my skin is fair. I am married and I have lived happily with my husband for well over 30 years.

We have brought up and educated five children in the manner we chose. They had their primary education in Johannesburg where they were born. The boys went to boarding school outside Johannesburg and all the children received either graduate or post-graduate education overseas.

None of them has had any difficulty in obtaining a passport and they were all free to come home and to find jobs in South Africa when and where they chose to do so.

Had I been a Black South African things would have been very different.

In the first place my husband was born in Britain and is therefore a foreigner. All foreigners, if they are Black, must be in possession of a "Section 12" permit. This allows them to remain in South Africa temporarily. It has to be renewed every six months.

The chances are that it will be renewed on application, provided that the applicant continues to work for the same employer. As my husband is self-employed it is most unlikely that he would have been able to obtain the six-monthly renewals of his permit. He would have had to go back to where he came from, with or without me and the children.

As he is a foreigner, not only would we not have been able to choose where we wanted to live, we would also never have been allowed to rent or own a home of our own. We should have had to live as lodgers in someone else's house.

We sent our sons to school outside Johannesburg. By doing so we would have forfeited their right to come back to Johannesburg to live at home, and our right to have them with us, once they became liable for general tax at the age of 18.

If they were given the opportunity of attending an overseas university (as many Black South Africans have), their chances of being granted a passport would be slight. They would almost certainly have been given an exit permit which would have allowed them to go but not come back.

Our daughters, who, as well as the boys, had part of their education overseas, thus breaking their domicile here, would have been allowed to come home to live.

An unmarried daughter may live with her parents in a prescribed area if the parents qualify

to be there, but the girls would have to prove that they entered the area lawfully.

As no African woman, today, can obtain permission to enter a prescribed area, they could not enter lawfully and thus would not be allowed to live at home.

Nor would they be allowed to stay in an area where they were at school as they do not belong there and have no ties or connections in that place either. So, in fact, they would be rootless.

The following are real-life stories in which the foregoing hypothetical miseries actually occur:

Mrs. Mogetle is an elderly woman who came to Johannesburg about 1915. She was married to a foreigner, who deserted her. She has been in employment for years, but from 1960 to 1965 she was ill and was able to do only casual work (a day's washing every now and again).

Despite the fact that during those years she was living in her mother's home in Soweto and was registered on her mother's housing permit, and despite the fact that there was proof from her church that she was in Johannesburg during the years when she was ill, and that she is now again in full employment, she has been told that she is not permitted to remain in Johannesburg.

Then there is Mrs. Tsamo. As a single woman she was working in Johannesburg from 1959 until 1965 when she married a man who qualifies by means of his long residence here, to remain in Johannesburg. He has a house and they have been living happily together for a year.

Suddenly, one day recently, Mrs. Tsamo was told that she would have to leave Johannesburg and her husband, and go back to the country. She is handicapped by the fact that she was born in a country district. Had she been born in another prescribed area there is a chance that she would have been granted permission to live with her husband where he works.

This policy is an offence against civilised standards. It is the cause of the deepest misery and hardship; it causes instability and insecurity; it induces the conditions where young men, in their desperation and frustration, are tempted to resort to crime and it instils in them a disrespect for the law.

Reprinted from "The Star."