

The Transvaal Advice Office

By BARBARA BROCK

THE BLACK SASH ADVICE OFFICE in Johannesburg has been in existence for just over three months, and already the women who have been staffing the office have found themselves caught up in the problems of their "clients", sharing their disappointment or joy according to the outcome of each case.

In this short article, Mrs. Barbara Brock, who is at present in overall charge of the office, outlines a few typical cases, and gives her impressions of the problems involved.

AFRICAN women have not yet accustomed themselves to the new regulations under which they are obliged to carry reference books and register for employment. Without identifying documents the provisions of influx control were rather difficult to carry out, and ordinary people were apt to think that the restrictions of which they had heard could scarcely apply to themselves personally.

Mrs. A., young and unsophisticated, was living quietly with her much older husband and their young children when she got into difficulties with influx control. She had been issued with a reference book which said that at the time of issue she ordinarily resided in Alexandra, and which gave her husband's name and address there. Various rubber stamps and other entries had been added at a later date, and she had not questioned these because she did not understand them. When she was told that one of these stamps meant that she had been issued with a "visiting permit" which had now lapsed, she was frankly unbelieving. Visiting was not in her mind at all — she was living with her husband.

But she was pretty much accustomed to being pushed around, not understanding what she was supposed to do or not to do. When we told her through an interpreter that the slight extension of her permit was final, that no further could be expected and when it lapsed she must leave the urban area, her expression became only a little more blankly sad, and she said, "All right", which appeared to be her whole English vocabulary.

The Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development is quoted as saying in Parliament that homes are not being broken up, but moved as units. I am sure he has cases to prove his statement. When we protested on one occasion

that these people do not know what is expected of them, we were told that a great deal of painstaking publicity had been given to each phase of the regulations. Indeed, there have been many announcements in the Press, but the laws themselves are so confusing and complicated that officials of different departments sometimes find themselves applying regulations in a manner not identical with that of an equivalent official elsewhere.

Mrs. B., a widow, and the sole support of 5 young children living with relatives in the Northern Transvaal, was without documentary proof of residence. She was employed at an institution whose head, a conscientious but extremely busy woman, had tried to unravel her troubles for her, but had had to give up through sheer lack of time.

Mrs. B. painstakingly searched her memory for names and addresses of former employers. One had died two years ago. We traced a son of the family to Maritzburg, but he had not been living at home during Mrs. B.'s employment. Eventually we found some of the persons concerned, who gave her references which bit by bit established that fact that she had indeed been in the area long enough to qualify for continued residence. She was able to register and resume her employment.

Mrs. C., also supporting her family in the rural areas, had worked for 11 years for the same employer, who had, however, left to live in Durban before the days of reference books. Since then Mrs. C. had moved from one job to another — it is not always easy to settle to a new permanency when an accepted one dissolves. She was in employment, but had no documentary proof of residence.

With a little guidance, she dug back into her memory and managed to produce names and addresses. We telephoned her various ex-employers, she called upon them and gradually compiled sufficient references to establish her *bona fides*, and was able to register her employment.

(Continued Overleaf)

THE TRANSVAAL ADVICE OFFICE (Continued)

Women who have worked in the urban areas for many years, sending their wages back to support their families, suddenly realize that they have to prove length of residence before an employer may legally register them. It is not always easy for them to obtain this proof without assistance.

Evidence is a skilled matter. Not many people could, unaided, account for their movements over the past few years. You ask, "Have you been away from the area in such and such a time?"—and "No!" comes the answer. In the course of conversation it appears that the woman in question was married in Pietersburg two years ago, or had a baby in Swaziland 18 months ago! Again you yourself perhaps spent several months in the Cape two years ago, but you were on a visit and did not think of it as a break in residence, and you quite confidently assert that you have lived here all the time.

It is very easy to be entrapped in one's own statements, afraid to open one's mouth, and to give the impression of being shifty and unreliable.

If you were struggling against an incomprehensible outside force that seemed to be trying to separate you from your husband, or prevent you from supporting your children, would the standards of absolute truth appear to you as important as the welfare of your family? This is a personal decision which many uneducated Africans are having to make with very little help, depending only on themselves.

There have inevitably been repercussions of the serious drought which appears to be becoming almost endemic in some parts of the country. Africans, particularly young men, are making their way to the cities to support themselves, relieving their families of that burden and hoping to be able to contribute to the family welfare themselves. The natural trek to the cities must increase when there is famine in the country places, and numbers of young men are making the dreary round of chasing after city jobs. Some can establish a legal right to remain in the urban area and some cannot, and a few of them find their way to the Advice Office, where we may or may not be able to help them.

S.A. INDIANS — ANOTHER GOVERNMENT PROMISE BROKEN

Transvaal Black Sash Press Statement

THERE is on record a Cabinet promise made by Mr. P. W. Botha, the Minister of Community Development, on August 23rd, 1962, to the effect that the Group Areas Act would not be used to deprive the present generation of Indian traders of their livelihood. Since then the Department of Indian Affairs has been created to look after the interests of the South Africa Indians and this promise must be considered as binding on Mr. Maree (the Minister in charge) as he now functions specifically as the guardian of the interests of the Indian people.

How does the Government reconcile such a promise with the recent Group Areas Proclamation of Pageview as a White area?

Pageview is an Indian area occupied by them for many years and used both for residential and business purposes. A great deal of money has been invested in buildings, shops and houses. It appears that the Group Areas Board and the Municipality will pay compensation for the buildings. The business goodwill cannot be paid for and the choice for the displaced traders will be to remove either to the Asiatic Bazaar in Fordsburg or to Lenasia. There is a limit to the number of traders who can make a living in the bazaar, and at Lenasia, 21 miles outside the city, there are no customers and trading is virtually impossible. Another group of Indian traders is to be reduced to penury. Although there is a provision in the Group Areas Act for displaced traders to apply for permits to trade anywhere else in South Africa, in practice such permits are not granted.

What of the Government promise? No more effective way could be found of depriving the present generation of traders of their livelihood.

What of the homes that have to be abandoned? We all know what our homes mean to us and the heartbreak that is attached to the loss of a well-loved home built up over the years.

This act is further evidence of the application of Apartheid — this neat pigeon-holing of people without regard for the ruin and misery of thousands. The Indian people will land up in their tidy group at Lenasia. Apartheid will be appeased. But what of the individual men, women and children? They must start a new life in a remote place with the added difficulties and expense of living out of town. What of the traders? Must they now stave off destitution by finding other employment in the limited fields open to them?

It is a sad reflection on human nature that when people think of other people as a group, they lose the sense of their being human individuals with human feelings and aspirations. One of the results of Apartheid is that White South Africans are losing their humanity, and feel little or nothing for sufferings of groups other than their own.

We, the Black Sash, wish to make the most strenuous protest against this new assault by the Government on our Indian fellow citizens. We base our protest on the grounds of its dreadful inhumanity and the faithlessness of the Government in breaking their promise given to the Indian people.