

THE BLACK SASH

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1985

GRAHAMSTOWN ADVICE OFFICE REPORT.

JANUARY 1984 to DECEMBER 1985.

NEW CASES 433

OLD CASES 618

CASES SEEN 1051

We dealt with considerably less than the 1234 cases recorded for 1983.

This decline no doubt reflects the cut-back in the number of sessions, which had to be cancelled because of the unrest in the townships which began a few days before the tricameral parliamentary elections when students called a boycott of classes at the Ntsika Junior Secondary School, Nombulelo and Nathaniel Nyaluza High Schools. Community and student issues such as rent increases, collaborator town councils, the pupil demands for scholar representation, the imposition of school age limits amongst others all part of the more general revolt against apartheid, were the focus of joint meetings called by the U.D.F., inspired Civic Association G.R.A.C.A. and the student organizations C.O.S.A.S. and Asusm.

Clashes with the police increased and in the first week of October, after the stoning of vehicles in Raglan Road, the police in the township were joined by troops from the military base in Grahamstown. The S.R.C. constitution proposed by the Minister of Education and Training was rejected and students continued with their stay-a-ways. They were later joined by the primary and lower primary schools. Education came to a standstill as violence multiplied. Grahamstown was described as "the worst-hit town in the whole Cape with a total stay away by pupils." (Grocott's Mail 2 November 1984). Conflict peaked on the eve of Patrick Mdyogolo's Funeral. This 15 year old boy was the first rubber-bullet victim of the unrest. Throughout the night great street Fires were fed with tyres while the army search lights beamed on the townships from Gunfire Hill.

The day of the funeral was symbolically turned into a stay away. The White centre of Grahamstown fell dormant as no Africans went to work in the town.

Shortly after the funeral, the returning crowds were dispersed when the police arrived. Several youngsters were sjambokked by the police who used teargas and rubber bullets liberally. Some youths stoned cars in Raglan Road. Others fired the beerhall in Fingo Village. Early in the morning some of Fikizole Lower Primary was destroyed by fire.

This was the context which led to our decision to cancel a number of sessions during October and November. We also agreed to remove our files from the G.A.D.R.A. offices during the unrest.

The cases we have dealt with continue as in the past to focus on Unemployment Insurance Fund Benefits, Labour and Workmen's Compensations, and State Pensions, disability grants and maintenance grants.

Officials of the Department of Manpower informed that a comparison of U.I.F. benefits in the area under their jurisdiction for December 1983 and December 1984 revealed an increase of under 1,000 applications for December 1983 to just over 6,000 for December 1984.

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However, very few of the applications for December 1984 were from the Albany District. Furthermore, retrenched workers in the building industry had in this area almost exhausted their benefits, according to one official.

In the last report it was mentioned that we had taken a resolution at the beginning of the year to encourage self-help amongst our clients - an attitude strongly fostered by the Grahamstown Civic Association (G.R.A.C.A) who throughout the year have acted as interpreters at our sessions. At monthly meetings attention focussed on ways of promoting self-help.

Both on the part of clients and A.O. workers we experienced problems in this regard - and given a disruptive year - it is difficult to evaluate the efficacy of this new emphasis.

TRAINING OF NEW WORKERS.

In January several new members joined our work force. In fact we have never in the past experienced such an influx of new workers. Training sessions were arranged for new workers in February and August after new workers had observed and participated in a number of sessions to ensure adequate levels of standardization.

The removal of our files from G.A.D.R.A. offices to the house of one of our A.O. workers towards the end of the year, meant that cases filed in boxes had to be collected on Saturday mornings. Under these conditions we experienced considerable difficulties in maintaining our usual standards of efficiency.

INFLUX CONTROL.

During the first half of the year, we observed an increase in the number of cases who came to us because they had been endorsed out of Grahamstown's prescribed area. We felt that this might be a continuing trend and in order to inform our workers and workers elsewhere we held a workshop on influx control and Section 10 in September. As we are keen to reach the maximum number of people who have rights to come into or to remain in Grahamstown it is important to spread the expertise. With this objective in mind we have decided to have regular workshops on this topic.

PENSIONS.

A very successful pensions Workshops was held in October. Sheena Duncan explained peoples' rights in law and the regulations over a two day period.

Representatives from the E.L. Corridor, Glenmore, Port Alfred etc., attended the workshop. These representatives requested our Advice Office to provide a venue for a second workshop to be held in 1985, at which representative will report back on progress made in their respective communities.

At our December meeting the operation of a mobile workshop was mooted.

Priscilla Hall informed the meeting of the difficulties of opening a workshop in the Ciskei. She had been asked to go to Mpokweni to a meeting convened at the request of the Headman. But he had not arrived and sent two Councillors in his place. At this point all the people who had asked questions walked out - there was obviously a degree of official manipulation and intimidation. The tapes done of the workshop were however being used at Mqwali, Wartburg and Glenmore.

At Port Alfred a Pensioners' Association has been formed.

Two coastal workshops were projected, one in February in Port Alfred, and one for Fort Beaufort and Adelaide. Addo is another area that needs attention, also Grahamstown itself.

ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS/---

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Anne Burroughs agreed to take over the Chairmanship, assisted by Marianne Roux and Nancy Charton. The position of Minutes Secretary will rotate.

On the first of January 1985 we lost our Advice Office premises in a fire which destroyed the Post Office, rents office community council office, beer hall and the building which housed the G.A.D.R.A. offices. There is some opinion that the burning of the GADRA office was accidental the flames having spread from the adjoining buildings.

On the same day the building rented by the Grahamstown Youth Movement ; housing their offices, as well as those of the Rural Resettlement Committee the local branch of South African Allied Workers Union and L.R.C. were gutted.

We have lost one stationery cupboard and all of its contents i.e. 3,000 new letter heads, all old letter books plus six new ones, the Rikhotso case booklets, affidavits and case history forms, envelopes, file covers, also two filing cabinets too badly damaged to salvage and six chairs.

Adrienne Whisson reported that G.A.D.R.A has been searching and found three rooms behind the Market building which might serve both our organisations as a temporary measure. We agreed that the Advice Office and G.A.D.R.A would share the rent and as there seems no alternative, we have decided to use these offices for the time being until something more permanent can be found.

Sheena's summing up. - Help

① Find someone with secretarial skills to relieve workers in Ad. J. - pay them less than paid case-worker !!

② Work out Budget for 1986 by end of May 1985 to send to Sheena so she can

③ Make people as independent as possible - teaching them how to solve their own problems — pointing out law, but let them choose whether they will go or stay illegally.