

LIFE ON THE HILLSIDE

A Black Sash Investigation

BONTRUG location is five miles outside the village of Kirkwood, on a barren, stony hillside where only the jointed cactus thrives. Here upward of 2,000 people exist in primitive conditions. There are no streets. Human and animal excrement lies in the open, a breeding ground for flies and disease, and the stench is appalling.

The older part of the location, consisting of some twenty houses, was established a number of years ago; the newer section, comprising the bulk of the location, was established more recently when families were moved there from a location nearer Kirkwood. The move was undertaken by the Kirkwood Municipality. Families were taken to the new site and dumped. No shelter was provided by the authorities, although at the time of the move it was raining heavily.

No municipal housing has yet been provided. A monthly rental of R1 is paid by each householder to the Kirkwood Municipality. The ground from which these people were moved is now being rented to farmers by the municipality as grazing for goats. The municipality has put a White superintendent in charge of the location. It has also provided drinking water, which is piped from a borehole and stored

In 1959 members of the Addo Branch of the Black Sash fought against the removal of Africans from settled locations in Kirkwood to Bontrug, a bare hillside far from the town. They were successful in halting the removals. A report of their activities appeared in the August, 1959, issue of "The Black Sash". Later the Municipality again dumped Africans on the bare hillside. This time, however, Kirkwood residents and the Press joined the Sash in battle with the local Native Affairs Department, a report of which appeared in the February, 1960, issue of "The Black Sash."

An account of subsequent efforts to help the unfortunate inhabitants of Bontrug appeared in the December, 1960/February, 1961, issue of "The Black Sash." The survey published here was undertaken by members of the Port Elizabeth, Addo and Kirkwood branches of the Black Sash in February, 1961.

Report by

ALISON PIRIE

in an uncovered cement reservoir. The reservoir is situated about two miles from the farthest house in the location. It has been fenced in with barbed wire and has been built high to prevent contamination. Water is obtained through a tap at the side of the reservoir wall. Although brak, the water contains no impurities according to an analysis which we have done.

This water is for the use of the people only. No animals are allowed to be watered here. The nearest water supply for the inhabitants' stock is the river five or six miles from the location.

A T.B. clinic is operating in the location and does some sterling work among the people. We did find, however, that many people who needed treatment were not receiving it because, for some reason or other, they do not attend the clinic.

Stock and Food

Firewood must be gathered from five miles away. The municipality permits the hawking of firewood in the location, but most of the inhabitants cannot afford to buy it, and must therefore gather their own. This entails a long walk and practically a whole day's labour.

The walls of the huts are made of mud, with roofs of twigs, thatch and in some cases flattened petrol tins. Most of them leak.

The average hut measures 2 ft. x 15 ft. and comprises two rooms. With a few notable exceptions, the homes contain little or no furniture. Many homes were found to have nothing but a few cooking pots and blankets.

Attempts have been made by some householders to plant gardens, but in almost every case these have had to be abandoned through lack of water and the poorness of the soil.

Most of the stock owned by the people has had to be destroyed, or has died through lack of food and water. Some householders own a few fowls and pigs, but these are in the minority. The few donkeys and dogs in the location are obviously in very poor condition.

Of the families investigated a large proportion subsist solely on mealies and dried beans. A few

others supplement their diet with coffee and home-made unleavened bread. There appears to be a total absence of meat, milk, fat or vegetables of any kind in the diet. During the season, unsaleable oranges and prickly pears are eaten.

Most of the children appeared to be suffering from malnutrition. They looked uncared for, dirty and ill-fed. Many adults also were suffering from malnutrition, and mothers complained that they were not able to breast-feed their babies.

Health and Incomes

The 220 families we investigated comprised 579 adults and 806 children. Of this total of 1,385 persons, 161 were known to be suffering from T.B. Another 145 persons were found to be suffering from various other diseases, mainly gastro-enteritis, traucoma and chest complaints. Persons suffering from malnutrition, rickets, scurvy and worms are not included in the foregoing figures.

Excluding persons obtaining old age or disability pensions, the average monthly income is just over R3. In many cases this is the sole income on which a family consisting of three adults and five to seven children exists. Of the persons investigated, 69 are receiving old age pensions of R4.75 paid every two months; 10 persons receive the disability pension, also paid every two months, and varying from R4.75 down to less than R1, according to the degree of disability. Ten persons were found entitled to pensions but not receiving them. Among the latter is a man who claims to be 100 years old, and does not receive a pension as he is too old and weak to go into the village to apply for it.

The majority of the people belong to the Ethiopian Church (103 families). The rest are of the Methodist Congregational, and independent faiths. No effort is apparently being made by any of these churches to aid the people.

Lack of Employment

Of the families investigated, more than half the total number of adults (inclusive of women) are unemployed, and find it impossible to obtain employment. Severe drought has obliged the farmers in the district to reduce their labour force. A milk factory in the village has had to close down, rendering a number of people jobless. The village of Kirkwood is small and cannot absorb the large number of unemployed from the farms.

Much of the work obtainable is seasonal (orange picking and packing) so for many months these workers are idle and have to rely on casual labour in the village, which is almost non-existent.

Of the unemployed, many refuse to register at the

READER TAKES US TO TASK

From Miss Jennifer Mouat, 10 Woodlands Highstead Road, Rondebosch, C.P.

ON reading *The Black Sash* for March, 1961, it occurred to me that it might not be desirable to refer to Mr. and Mrs. Kleinbooï Sikade as "Kleinbooï" and "Pauline". In particular, this reference is used in the captions to the two photographs.

I am not at all sure whether my criticism is correct or not, but I thought you might be interested to know my impression on reading the article. I was a little taken aback that our magazine, of all magazines, should use Christian names only in referring to the Sikades.

Perhaps I am over-sensitive to this topic, but I have experienced the improvement in mutual respect between people of different racial groups when "Mr." and "Mrs." are used in referring to comparative strangers.

[Our correspondent is quite right. To some extent we are all the victims of custom. In this case Mr. and Mrs. Sikade, with whom Sash members have long been associated, have always been known, by common consent, by their first names.

—EDITOR.]

local labour bureau as they fear being sent away from their homes and families.

We found many families who have no income at all and rely on the goodwill of their neighbours (who are not in a very much better position) for food.

One family consisting of three adults and five children lives on an old age pension of R4.75 paid every two months. The head of this family has only one leg—the other was amputated in 1945 and the stump is still red and suppurating and causes him considerable pain all the time. His wife is chronically ill and all five children have T.B. His aged mother, on whose pension they live, is senile and almost blind. This, unhappily, is not an exceptional case.

It is little short of a miracle that, with the extremely unhygienic conditions prevailing, the lack of food and the general debility of the people, a major epidemic of some kind has not broken out in this location. With the winter months approaching the plight of these people will be terrible. It is most urgent that something be done immediately to help them.

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If you will not hear reason she will surely rap your knuckles.—B. Franklin.