

11. Mrs Leah Tutu, President, Domestic Workers and Employers Project (p 80, Aug 75)

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TUTU: I don't know if I will be able to help you much because I am really concerned with domestic workers mainly, and I didn't quite what you meant by my involvement with you people, because the only people I am involved with are the women in domestic service. Of course, there are a lot of Ciskeians!

GPQ: Both in Ciskei and Ciskeians up here?

TUTU: Yes, fortunately.

GPQ: So we hope that you will be able to give us information on the position of upgrading of their work, the furthering of their education. We know that you have many centres where you teach.

TUTU: As the people I work with are mainly domestic servants, what we find, they come from homes that are quite different from the homes that they work in, and I am sure that I need not tell you this but you find a lot of housewives complaining about the inefficiency, but you cannot be efficient with a machine which(?) when it simply starts to work, and the lack of knowledge of using the gadgets that they find in the houses, and of course they have never handled these, people who are trained even in ordinary household gadgets and when they come to work as a domestic worker they come as a professional domestic worker, and this would increase their bargaining power. The exploitation comes because people say "Well, you can't even use the washing machine, etc", therefore I think if you could have training in this sort of work, it would be helpful and would help the people who come to do that work, as professionals.

Page 61 RIR: I wonder if Mrs Tutu is about the domestic workers' survey in the Eastern Cape?

TUTU: I ..

RIR: Maybe you can tell us what the results if that survey were?

TUTU: Miss Cock's? Well, the general results were that they are terribly, terribly underpaid. They are not treated as human beings. The employer would say that she is one of the family, and the domestic worker herself does not regard herself as one of the family, for she is not treated like one of the family. Some of them have been in the same employment for 10-15 years, and the employer regards them as one of the family, they trust them, they know their possessions are in good hands, but they still don't treat them as one of the family. They don't pay them well enough for someone in such a position of trust, and where they bring up their children.

RIR: The average wage ...?

TUTU: The average wage in the Eastern Cape is appalling. The worst one is only beaten by the worst one in Natal, where you get people working for something like R18 a month. The domestic workers in the Eastern Cape on the whole are paid R25-R30 per month.

RIR: Is there a suggested minimum figure as there is for Johannesburg?

TUTU: Well, I don't think that that really makes a great difference, because the cost of living in Johannesburg and the Eastern Cape doesn't vary that much. In Johannesburg people buy in the little shops around the corner which is far more expensive than places like Pick-and-Pay. That is why don't see any reason why people in the Eastern Cape should be paid less than people in Johannesburg, if anything they should get more.

RIR: And the suggested minimum in Johannesburg is R70 (?)?

TUTU: For a live-in domestic worker. But someone who has to commute to work ..?

GPQ: Do you think it is that some of the employers feel that they buy everything, food, accommodation, clothing, medical expenses, etc. - I am not saying that that is sufficient in itself, but that might be one of the reasons why their salaries are lower?

TUTU: Actually, a very limited number provide medical services. If they do, they take it off the salary again. If perhaps, your domestic servant got ill in the course of the month and she had to be attended to and pay some money and didn't have any money, she would borrow it rather than still give them that (?). But there are a few who do provide medical services. But as for clothing, really, I think to pay somebody less and give them your cast-offs, morally I find it appalling.

GPQ: We didn't mean cast-offs.

TUTU: But they really do provide them with the cast-offs. What the children outgrow they give to the servants children, which is a good thing, it helps, but that can't really be counted towards the income that the domestic worker gets.

RPS: So R65 is in fact in the best circumstances, with all those fringe benefits, you would like to see that as the minimum?

TUTU: Certainly.

RPS: And where there are fewer of those fringe benefits than the cash salary should be higher?

TUTU: Certainly.

RIR: Are there actual figures available for the number of domestic workers in the Eastern Cape, and particularly in the Border and Ciskei areas?

TUTU: No, we haven't made that kind of survey.

CHTL: Which areas did this survey (presumably Jackie Cock's) touch?

TUTU: That is only the cities, of course - East London and Durban and King William's Town.

CHTL: You didn't go to places like Sada, Dimbaza?

TUTU: No. I mean, have you had any people working in domestic service in Dimbaza?

CHTL: Oh yes, there is a Greatermans ... oh, I am sorry I thought you were including ...

TUTU: No, no, no - I am talking about domestic workers, that is my particular line.

AS: Mrs Tutu, we are interested, of course, in this question of independence. Since the Transkei and Bophuthatswana became independent have you noticed any difficulties that female domestic Transkeians or Bophuthatswanas are having with the authorities here, or is there no change worth speaking of?

TUTU: Yes, we have. It is much more difficult for Transkeians to register now as domestic workers than it was before in Johannesburg. Only yesterday we had the case of someone with a Transkeian passport, and of course an employer can't just employ her like that, she has to have a Johannesburg passport to work in Johannesburg, and therefore if she is taken to (?) she has to go back home and get a letter that she is allowed to come here and look for work, and then only go back to Polley(?) Street and be given a temporary workseeker's permit, and of course when she gets this permit by that time it is really highly unlikely, because there are so many people around Johannesburg itself, and they tell them this at the pass offices. So it is not as easy for Transkeians as it used to be before.

RIR: On the same question, Mrs Tutu, the same general question of independence .. what is your impression of the opinion of urban people with whom you work and so on, concerning the question of independence - your colleagues?

TUTU: Well I can only talk about my colleagues. They think it is an appalling thing, particularly for people who are in the urban areas. Perhaps it is all right for people who live in the Ciskei and have lived there all along, but for people who are suddenly told that they are not in Johannesburg any longer .. take my own case, for example, I was born and brought up in a township near Krugersdorp, and to be suddenly told that I am no longer a South African, I am a Ciskeian, because the Ciskei became independent or Transkei became independent two years, therefore in order for me to get a passport to go to Umtata which I don't even know, to find a permit which says that now I can come and work here. It is appalling that people should be made, forced, into an independence that is actually fake.

Page 83 RIR: What happens in shanties with husbands and wives from different nominal homeland areas?

TUTU: A Xhosa woman who has married a Motswana applied for a passport to go overseas to study. And they said you are independent you must get a Transkeian passport. She said: "How can I go and get a Transkeian passport when my husband is Tswana?" and they said "Well, if your husband is Tswana, then you have to go and take your husband's citizenship", and she said "Well, husband is not even a citizen yet, because he was born and brought up in Sophiatown". So they suggested that she should declare herself stateless until she gets her husband's state. I mean, how do you suddenly become stateless? You must come out of a state, and if the state you come from has dispossessed you, as is the case with us, the urban blacks, it is difficult to choose a state. I mean, you choose a state because you want to belong to a state. People give up their citizenship because they want to belong to another country, and why should it be different with anybody else - it is different now with black South Africans.

RIR: Is there any - would it be possible in the case you mentioned for the woman to have decided on her own to become a citizen of Qwa-Qwa, which she has not connection with either? In order to stay within the South African system as long as possible?

TUTU: Yes. You are forced to do that - it is no decision. You are forced to take a citizenship hoping that ..

GPQ: As an educated woman, what do you see of the future ...?

TUTU: I see one South Africa for all - that is what I see in the future.

GPQ: Are there any distinctions of Ciskei, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda - why do you think many, actually, only two so far, , why do you think they want to take independence? Do you think they are most ill-advised?

TUTU: Well, it is actually in the hands of very few people, who will benefit from independence, but the bulk of the population will not benefit from independence. The few who will benefit will get government cars, they will get big houses they wouldn't have built themselves, they will be on top - and they will tell their people that it pays to be independent. But they will struggle to keep their people fed and in jobs.

AS: Mrs Tutu, have you got any idea of what sort of proportion of the domestic servants working here in Johannesburg would have section 10 rights?

TUTU: No, not really. Do you have the impression that it is few, or many, or what is what?

TUTU: Well, few. You know, a lot of the people who are live-in domestic servants are not people from the urban areas.

AS: I wanted to find this out! If they are living where they work in a white area in Houghton, does that qualify them for obtaining Section 10 rights?

TUTU: No, it doesn't.

AS: I see. They have got to live in Soweto before they can get Section 10 rights but if they are living ^{with} their employers that automatically rules out any chance of obtaining Section 10 rights?

TUTU: That is right.

AS: I never understood that. I'm sorry .. I'm glad....I thought you understood that Bob!

RIR: Yes.

AS: so if the person works for the same employer for 10-15 years, it doesn't help at all for them to acquire any permanent rights?

TUTU: No, it just gives them the right to work in Johannesburg.

AS: I see.

CHTL: There is this registration of workers illegally employed. How fast is it happening?

TUTU: Very fast, because there are a lot of people who heard that they would be arrested or sent back to wherever they came from. They can be registered now, provided they work^{ed} for the same employer for a year or more.

CHTL: I know cases where the people have experienced some problems.

TUTU: Yes, those who have not been with the same employer for a whole year, even if they can show that they have been in Johannesburg for 6 or 7 years, and they have been moving from one employer to the other, and no one employer can say that that person has been with her for a whole year ...

RIR: Previous legal workers who are employed and then unemployed can't register , apparently.

TUTU: Those who are unemployed?

RIR: No, those who were legal, but who have worked less than a year.

TUTU: Yes, they can be .

RIR: Even though they have worked less than a year?

TUTU: No, only for a year and more.

CHTL: Have you noticed any difference in the treatment of workers from Lesotha, Botswana and those from the Transkei?

TUTU: Not really in the domestic service. They are all treated the same, I think, by their employers.

CHTL: Even by the pass offices?

TUTU: Yes, certainly, I mean nobody can look at your face and see that you come from Lesotho and not from Soweto!

CHTL: Even if you produce a reference book or a passport from Lesotho?

TUTU: Well, it is in the same way as a pass .. I mean, if you produce your pass and they are able to see that you have the right to be there, and if you produce your passport and they see that you have the right to be here, they are no different from any ..

RIR: Have you been the recommendations on urban employers? The Riekert recommendations?

TUTU: I have not seen them. I haven't even had the chance of looking at the Wiehahn commission. (Mrs Tutu had just returned from overseas after a lengthy trip)

age 85 RIR: I know that you were in the States ..

TUTU: What was the suggestion there?

RIR: I am unclear that it why I wanted to know from you.

RPS: Mrs Tutu, since DWEP is one of your big things, could you tell us a little about how it is possible to organise 200 of these centres? Are they organised centrally, or

TUTU: They are all really organised individually, and DWEP is the coordinator of the work that is going on in the different centres. The centres themselves belong to the different churches where they take place. It really is a church thing, and it is all run on a voluntary basis. A lot of the women who teach there, who help to teach, or whatever they do, it is all on a voluntary basis.

RPS: So it isn't just literacy training, you are teaching practical skills?

TUTU: Yes. Literacy, sewing, cooking, household sort of jobs.

RPS: And typical sizes of the various centres?

TUTU: They vary so much. There is a centre with five people and there is one with 160 people. I would say that the average would be about 50 people.

RPS: And people go there in the evenings or just from Thursdays?

TUTU: Mainly on Thursdays, but there are centres now that do have people coming in the evenings, because many ^{men} are coming to help and they work and teach things like carpentry to other men.

RPS: It is presumably one of the few social outlets for domestic servants?

TUTU: It is. Particularly for living-in domestic servants. Some go there just to meet for a cup of coffee, not to learn any particular thing.

RPS: If 200 centres is just the start, what are your ambitions?

TUTU: To help every domestic worker in every church in South Africa!

AS: Are most of the domestic workers the wives of men with families in Soweto?

TUTU: Actually most of them are women with either husbands in the hostels or with no husband at all, but have children to bring up. Either they have been married before or they have never married, and the grandparents look after the children.

AS: Back home?

TUTU: Yes, back in the homeland.

AS: So, the typical case is not whether a woman has got a husband ..

TUTU: No, the typical case is actually a woman without a husband.

EJM: But they are really in a terrible position.

TUTU: They are, to be quite frank.

EJM: Is there no social support system for them?

TUTU: No, there isn't.

CHTL: is there any branch of your organisation that deals with the education of these children?

TUTU: They have, but not particularly for domestic workers' children, the South African Council of Churches has scholarships, grants, for the education of children,

and if a domestic worker applies, and there are always about 200 applications, Page 86 there are only sufficient funds for five. The Institute of Race Relations also has funds for helping school children.

AS: Has the Urban Foundation done anything to help at all in this field?

TUTU: No, not in this field. The Foundation has helped much more in the purchasing of homes and improvement of homes for the urban blacks. That is where their main assistance has been.

EJM: In the Eastern Province area they are doing quite a lot for the education side?

TUTU: Are they?

EJM: In fact, they have been building a technical school.

PK : Do you have a big difference in the way domestic servants are treated in urban settings and on farms?

TUTU: We haven't really made a survey of this, but where the whites speak of the domestic workers as one of the family, I think the whites on the farms are more justified in describing them as such, but the wrong thing about this is ...that they care more for them and know them much more intimately than the ordinary employer in Johannesburg knows her domestic worker.

PK: But is the pay much lower on the farms?

TUTU: Yes, much lower.

CHTL: In the Eastern Cape there is a habit of farmers ...throwing the workers out and dumping them at the nearest road to fend for themselves. Do you find the same thing around here?

TUTU: You couldn't have that in the towns. But we haven't had any experience of that around here on the farms. What is interesting is that the farmers' wives help in the centres. There is one near Potgietersrus who has a centre in her own home - she teaches all the women whose husbands ^{work} on the farm how to cook and how to look after their children.

RPS: Mrs Tutu, you talked about live-in domestic workers in the urban areas. The main problem to me seems to be transport for those who don't live in the urban areas, and without any trade union organisation, what is the mechanics of getting better bus services, negotiating with people who have bus services? Is there any coordination work that you know of that has been done, or is it just that the individual has to put up with the service that is there?

TUTU: At the moment they are just putting up with it. There is no organisation that has tried to get Putco or the Railways. Nothing has been done, really. Some people have to get up at four to be at work at eight.

RPS: With so many people wanting so few jobs I found that some servants even suppress from their employers how much they have to pay to get to work. Do you think that employers generally know what huge proportion of the wages transport costs, and do they cover it?

TUTU: I don't think they know, and there are some who are prepared to cover it, others don't. We do say in our recommendations booklet that employers should

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pay for travelling expenses for those who live far out. (She hands over a copy of the booklet)

End of Mrs Tutu.