

After breakfast, on 6th. April, I went out of the back door to find two Africans sitting under a tree, patiently waiting to see me. Like others they did not knock on the door, they just waited until someone noticed them. One was an African woman of about 45, straight from the Transkei, and wearing a typical long blue printed cotton skirt. Her manner was quiet and dignified. She spoke very little English or Afrikaans so she had brought a friend with her to interpret.

"Madam," said the interpreter, "Gladys has no more permission to stay in Wellington. They say at the office that she must be gone by Sunday." (This meant that after Sunday she could expect to be arrested if she had not left Sakkieskamp, the small African shanty-town on the outskirts of Wellington.)

"Why does she want to stay?" I asked, after learning that she had a home and children in the Transkei.

"She wants only that you find her permission to stay until July 1st. Then she can go home."

In a long and difficult conversation I learned that Gladys's husband, who had been employed by the Railways in Wellington, had recently died. She had received a lump sum of R30 from the Railways after his death. Now she had come to Wellington to settle his affairs and sell his belongings.

I asked why she needed three months to do this, knowing that it would be virtually impossible to persuade the local official to allow her to remain so long in Wellington. We Europeans always imagine that because an African possesses so little, it should take correspondingly little time to settle his affairs. In practice it may well take longer without a telephone or car to speed up the business.

"She must wait until the people can pay her the money for the furniture and other things," the interpreter explained.

"She must also wait for her husband's sister to bring the tomb from Capetown."

"Are there no relations here who could sell the things for her?" I asked.



" Yes, and that is another trouble," said the interpreter, and he started to tell me about Judar.

Judar Futwa was Gladys's late husband's brother. The two brothers had apparently shared the same house while, in accordance with Government policy, their wives and families had lived 600 miles away in the Transkei. The house was a home-made shack of flattened paraffin tins nailed to strong wooden uprights. It was erected on Municipal land for which they paid R1 a month. This amount also covered the few amenities provided.

I learned that Judar was in gaol serving a four-week sentence.

" He was arrested because Gladys had no pass," the interpreter explained.

I found it hard to believe that a man could receive so severe a sentence merely because his sister had not complied with the very complicated pass laws and obtained the necessary stamp in her book allowing her to visit Wellington for a special purpose. She had almost certainly been ignorant of the procedure which she should have followed. I decided to telephone the public prosecutor to find out the facts.

The prosecutor, after looking up the case, explained that Judar had actually been charged on two counts. He had been found guilty of illegally bringing his sister into a proclaimed area and also of harbouring her when she had no permit. My suggestion that a fine of R20 or four weeks was excessive merely caused laughter. He could have been fined R100 or six months on the latter count alone!

There was a third problem. While Judar was in prison the local Bantu Affairs official had arranged for Judar's house to be sold to some unknown African, and the money, which Gladys had been told she must accept, had been given to Gladys in full. It was R52, which was what the house had previously been considered to be worth.

All things considered, Judar seemed to be in a far worse plight than Gladys. He would come out of prison to find that the house where he had lived for 28 years had been sold over his head; his job could well have been given to someone else, and without a job he would probably be ordered to leave Wellington.



The interpreter explained that Gladys had already agreed to sell her late husband's house to Judar and that Judar had already paid R26 towards it. The R52 which she had since received she had wisely deposited with a lawyer to whom she had gone for advice over the house. I telephoned the attorney to find out what the position was regarding this matter. He explained that the authorities had the final say as to whom an African could sell his house. There was nothing he could do to help Judar to keep the house. Gladys should accept the R52 and return R26 to Judar.

The attorney knew nothing about the reason for Judwa's arrest, so I told him what the Prosecutor had told me. "It looks as though the authorities are having it both ways," I pointed out. "They arrested Judar for harbouring someone in his house, then they sell that house and maintain that it was not his house. They can't be right both times."

The attorney agreed that this was inconsistent and promised to speak to the authorities about it.

Later when I telephoned the official concerned, the whole matter had been straightened out. Judar was to be allowed to retain the house which the official admitted had in fact been occupied in Judar's name. Also Gladys was to be allowed a pass for two weeks in order to deal with her late husband's affairs.

My next job was to call at the factory where Judar had been working to explain to them why he was in prison, and to make sure that his job would be waiting for him when he was released. Finally I was able to give Gladys R11 to pay what remained to be paid of Judar's fine, so that he could be released from prison immediately. This seemed to be an exceptional case which merited assistance in paying the fine.

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While loopholes in old laws affecting Africans are being closed and more and more laws are being made, making their lives ever more difficult, so it becomes well-nigh impossible to help Africans in need except by appealing to the better nature of the officials or, occasionally, by finding them to have been in the wrong as in the above story. To have had the money available to have Judar released from prison was very heart-warming. Thankyou. A. Pearce