

else was Black hugging their beers and cokes and sitting jam packed around small tables, the air growing thick and dim with smoke, the scene scintillating large brimmed hats and long coats with buckles and buttons that shot beams in the dark. The male singer's voice was sweet and feminine.

"Just want you to know that

I'm so tired baby,

I'm so tired of being wrapped up in your dream,

It's so full of pain

The Irish friend leaned over the Black girl, "I know how

you must feel being a minority in America, like me in this room." They got up and danced on the floor. The crowd broke out in spontaneous and good humoured applause. Outside on the street we formed a chain and Zanele from Zululand tram-tramped the beat from Zorba the Greek and our feet moved fast, faster.

Black and White have never been as close as now in America. Yet they have never hated each other as much as now, but from that fire of hate a new resolution is being forged. We in South Africa have not even begun to talk. We repress our hate. How will we love? □

UNIQUELY RIGHT FOR ABOLITION

A review of "Migrant Labour" by Francis Wilson (S.A.C.C. and SPROCAS, 1972).

by Mike Murphy

In the Nqutu district in northern Natal people live on 5½ cents per day. In 1951 the area held 32 000 people, in 1970 the figure was 86 000 and by 1980 it will hold about 120 000. In recent years Nqutu has become the destination of thousands of Africans removed from "white" areas by the Government. In 1951 the Government appointed Tomlinson Commission stated that the Nqutu area could provide a living for only 13 000 people. The results of this grotesque disproportion between ideal and reality can be seen — 5½ cents a day, most of it earned by migrant labourers.

Migrant Labour by Francis Wilson, published this year by SPROCAS and the South African Council of Churches, is scholarly, rigorously documented, unemotional. Yet to my mind it is probably the most devastating analysis of South African society produced in the last twenty-five years.

Wilson, an economist at the University of Cape Town, concludes that the problem is that white South Africa wants to have its cake and eat it: "So long as South Africa pursues the twin goals of Separate Development and economic growth — so long will the system of migratory labour remain a central feature of the economy, far from withering away, it will continue to expand. And its maintenance will depend increasingly not on the balance of economic pressures but on the force of law."

We have become accustomed to numerous descriptions of the evils of migratory labour — breakup of family life,

degradation of men, venereal disease, drunkenness, etc. Wilson describes these evils too (incidentally displaying a masterly command of the numerous statistics involved) But the book is unique in its explanation of the *why* of migratory labour. Migration has become the harness of necessity for a whole people because their homelands, Bantustans, own areas, reserves call them what you will, exhibit "acute poverty, gross overpopulation, extensive subdivision of the land well below the size adequate for economic units, and a situation where none of the households make a living from farming."

Some of the figures that Wilson presents us with are astounding:

acute poverty: average per capita income in the homelands is 9½ cents per day. The Bantustans contribute only 2% to the Gross Domestic Product.

overpopulation: population density is three times the national average.

agricultural decline: In the Transkei, one of the more arable of the homelands, the annual income per household from farming declined (in real terms) from R34,50 in 1931 to R27,00 in 1951. Without remittances from migrants there would be mass starvation.

a higher death rate: in two areas surveyed in the Ciskei it was discovered that the men were dying at an increasingly early age. De Vos of the University of Fort Hare found that in the period 1936 to 1960 (during which there was a general population increase of 20,7% the number of old men *decreased* by 28% (compared with an increase in the number of old women of 26%. Surely in an age of modern medicine these statistics must be unique.

As a result African men have to seek work in the white owned economy. Wilson gives detailed figures on the number of migrants in Mining, Agriculture and Industry. In all these sectors migratory labourers form an increasing percentage of the work force. The extraction of men from the homelands continues apace. In the Transkei, theoretically independent since 1963, recruiting increased by 82% in the last ten years. Government Labour Bureaux recruitment went up and incredible 387% during this period. At present 53% of the Transkei's economically active males are working outside the Transkei.

The economic push away from the rural areas is equalled by the white owned economy's pull. The South African economy needs black workers at an ever increasing rate. The tragic contradictions result from white South Africa's desire for the labour but not the labourer, or perhaps more accurately, the labourer's wife and family. His labour no longer needed, the labourer must, according to the theory return to idyllic rural unemployment or retirement. But as the attraction of the rural slums grow less and less the inducements to return to the homelands must be artificially stimulated. Such stimulation is provided by the pass laws and influx control. Wilson sees no possibility of a withering away of the pass

system. On the contrary, it must become more and more strictly enforced. He dryly dismisses the plans for monorail and jet plane transport to whisk workers back to their own areas at regular intervals: "If South Africa is not yet wealthy enough to be able to pay its workers a wage that will raise them above the effective minimum level of living can one then argue that the economy is able to afford to turn its working class into a jet set."

Francis Wilson also provides a brilliant analysis of the arguments for and against migratory labour. This is undoubtedly something that all concerned South Africans should read.

The important question to intellectuals (Afrikaans and English) speaking, is what they are going to do about migratory labour. Personally, I think that Wilson's case is irrefutable. Those intellectuals who influence the corridors of power must either refute Wilson's book or urge the complete abandonment of migratory labour as a system. The author himself gives a programme for phasing out the system over a ten year period starting in 1975. Will his challenge be taken up?

Wilson is at present studying "migratory labour" in Europe. South Africans frequently indulge in the uninhibited paganism of considering a gross evil bearable as long as someone, somewhere, in the outer world, is also doing it. Perhaps South Africa might imitate the treatment of migratory labourers in the European Economic Community where, among other things the labourer needs no permit or pass, can stay as long as he likes once employed, can have his wife, children and dependent relatives with him, and has full trade union, tax, educational and social security benefits and rights. If he is incapacitated or dies his family still has permanent rights to stay in the country. Migratory labour, the South African way is unique, uniquely bad, inhuman, destructive and uniquely ripe for abolition. □



Africans in one of the countless queues in urban areas.