

HE USED TO SAY . . .

He used to say – but of course the law says I cannot tell you what he used to say – although he has been gone from us these five years – so I shall tell you what he used to believe. He believed that this country – this country of South Africa – not Kwazulu or the Transkei or Vandaland – belonged to him, just as much as he believed that it belonged to you and me. Many of us remember that in 1959 when his restrictions were lifted, he went all over the country, and his leadership was accepted by many white people. So powerful was his voice, that he had to be silenced again. One thing is sure, that the day is coming when that voice will be heard again, and the voices of those who silenced him will be forgotten.

COMING TO AN END

I have one last thing to say. We are living in grave times. The rule of white supremacy is coming to its end. But it is often when the rule of rulers is coming to an end that they are most cruel to those they rule. We must be prepared for that. We all know that there are South Africans who have either left their country or intend to leave it. They want

the air of freedom, they want freedom for their children. Some of them have suffered, and they do not feel able to suffer any more. It is not for me to pass any judgement on them. But my closing words must be for those who cannot leave, who will not leave, who have duties to do here that they feel they must perform.

In our late Chief we have an example to follow. He was not allowed to use his great gifts in the service of his country. He was not allowed to use his great voice to speak the words of truth and honour. He was punished for his vision of a country that would be the one home of us all. Yet he persisted. And the way in which we can best honour his memory, is not to come here and make speeches and listen to speeches, but to carry on his work with the same courage and devotion.

Lutuli was a Christian, and one of the best-known sayings of Jesus is “knock and it shall be opened unto you.” How, when, not one of us knows. But of one thing we may be certain, that time is coming.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika.□

CALM, OBJECTIVE — AND UNNERVING

(A review of “Labour in the South African Gold Mines : 1911-1960”, by Francis Wilson, C.U. Press)

by Mike Murphy.

Dr. Wilson clearly outlines the purpose of his new book on the first page of the preface:

“In this book I have focused on *one* sector of a complex and fascinating economy in the hope that, from the depths of a detailed case study some useful insights may emerge which would enable us to *understand* this particular society a little better than before.” (Emphasis added.)

He goes on to add that

“... the development of the gold mines has probably done more than any other industry to shape the structure of the whole South African labour market into the form in which it exists today.”

and on page 13:

“Indeed, for their labour policy in all sectors of the economy, the Architects of Apartheid have taken the gold mining industry as their model.”

Dr. Wilson does not attempt in his book to make moral judgement on the economic facts which he has researched, collected and systematically organised. His intention is to present the facts as clearly and objectively as possible and allow the reader to judge the morals of the situation for himself. The tone of the book is consequently very “cool”. His reaction, for instance, to the tables and calculations which he presents to demonstrate that Black miners’ wages have probably *dropped* in real terms over the period 1911-1969, is not to denounce the Chamber of Mines but to enquire what the economic and sociological forces are that have brought about this situation.

“Labour in the Gold Mines” is not a long book – the last chapter concludes on page 155 – but it is well structured and logically developed, jargon has been almost completely avoided and the style used is straightforward so that a wealth of information has been gathered into a very small space. The average person who is interested enough to commence reading the book should be able to read and understand everything except the very occasional stray phrase of jargon, though some patience is demanded of those who have little or no knowledge of statistics in unravelling a number of the graphic illustrations. 40 odd pages of tabular information are appended to the book. Dr. Wilson has thus avoided cramming the text with somewhat esoteric data and yet succeeded in providing added depth for the more specialised reader.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 1 gives the historical background of labour control in South Africa. Wilson points out that Nationalist accession in 1948 and the subsequent laws must be seen as an intensification of traditional controls, rather than a sudden change of policy. He demonstrates also the power of the mining financiers to make laws suiting their interests. Cecil Rhodes’ introduction of the Glen Grey Bill to Parliament in 1897 is an instance of this – Rhodes was Prime Minister at the time as well as chief mining magnate:

“You will remove them (The Natives) from that life of sloth and laziness, you will teach them the dignity of labour and make them contribute to the prosperity of the State, and make them give some return for our wise and good government.”

Cape of Good Hope, Hansard, 1899, page 362.)

The second major factor in labour control, the power of the white mine-workers, was demonstrated in the crisis of 1921. The riots and bloodshed of the Rand white mineworkers’ revolt after the Chamber of Mines had cut wages because of the drop in the gold price is crucial to an understanding of the enormous pressure exerted subsequently by the White miners’ trade unions. As Wilson stresses, the White mine workers lost the strike but won the war. The threat of violence became a constant in the Chamber of Mines’ negotiations with white mineworkers, to the detriment of black mine workers’ interests. The failure of the strike called by the African Mineworkers Union in 1946, which was ruthlessly suppressed (in some instances Blacks were forced back to work at bayonet point) brought about the collapse of all Union activity among Black miners. The Chamber of Mines in an official statement refused to recognise organised bargaining rights for Blacks:

“... the Gold Mining Industry considers that trade unionism as practised by Europeans is still beyond the understanding of tribal Native . . .”

**“Tribal Natives and Trade Unionism”
(Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Johannesburg, 1946)**

Prime Minister Smut’s comment at the time was, “The Native Strike was not caused by legitimate grievances, but by agitators.” Since 1946 the attitude of the Industry and the Government has not changed in respect of this.

PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL

Dr. Wilson devotes quite a long chapter to an explanation of the physical and financial aspects of Gold Mining. He describes various operations that take place underground,

both from the point of view of the miners drilling at the stope face as well as from the point of view of the planners who have to solve intricate problems of layout in developing a mine. It is made quite clear that gold mining is something of a gamble, depending for its success on the skill and precision of planners and miners. The battle against rising costs and the threat of falling profit margins is elucidated in sections on the organisation of the industry, showing how power is concentrated in a system of interlocking directorships, how the mining finance houses relate to each other in size, how the government calculates its tax requisitions and so on.

After this extensive background which the author has provided, the reader is in an excellent position to benefit to the utmost from the next five chapters, which are the core of the book.

The chapter entitled “Earnings” details the structure of black and white wages and how the ratio has changed over the years (from e.g. a white-black ratio of 11, 7:1 in 1911 to the 20, 1:1 ratio in 1969.) Dr. Wilson, then examines the Mining Houses’ claims regarding payment of wages in kind. Through his scrupulously fair and meticulous analysis, it becomes evident that the Whites’ earnings in kind are in no way inferior to those of the Blacks. Calculating with white cash earnings and black cash earnings, the 1969 white/black earnings gap is still 17, 9:1.

In analysing the supply of labour available, the author shows how the sources of labour have changed over the years, and explains in economic terms why the mines have found it profitable to recruit far afield to avoid having to compete with manufacturing industry for the local labour supply. **One of the most revealing graphical illustrations in the book shows how demand for labour is controlled by the colour bar (so jealously guarded by the White-mineworkers.) In terms of the power of the white trade unions and the need to cut costs the Chamber of Mines is “obliged” to introduce mechanization to replace the cheap black labour rather than the expensive white labour. Job reservation on the mines (together with the traditional black/white worker ratio, as rigorously defended by whites) has tended to create an artificial shortage of skilled workers which has forced white salaries up and held black wages down.**

Dr. Wilson suggests that it is only really during the 60’s that interest has been shown in the black worker as an individual who can be trained to greater efficiency. Aptitude tests and in-service training have been greatly expanded as a result. The main obstacle to the effective utilisation of “human capital” is the migratory labour system. Obviously, one does not train a man who is going to disappear after a year more than is absolutely necessary. However, Dr. Wilson offers some extremely relevant comparisons with other countries, notably Zambia, where the transition from a migratory labour force to a permanently-domiciled worker body has immensely benefitted both the mining industry and the workers involved.

There is no *one* reason why labourers are willing to leave their homes and sell their labour in some far off place. For Blacks from Mozambique and “the tropics” the main motive would appear to be an attempt to *improve* a standard of living which is above the local P.D.L. already, for in these areas the living off the land is still an adequate form of sustenance. South African blacks, however, would appear to be *obliged* to seek work in the mines or watch

their families starve in the grossly overcrowded "homelands" where the living off the land can supply only about 50% of a family's needs.

IMPORTANCE OF MIGRANTS

The importance of migratory labour for the mines is amply demonstrated in the chapter "Interaction of Forces" perhaps the most fascinating and illuminating of all. Before the 1930's the collusion between the mining finance houses to keep down black wages started because the mining houses were competing with each other for the limited supply of labour available. A company could raise wages and obtain extra labour at the expense of other companies, but this would create an atmosphere of escalating costs as each company strove to outbid the others. **Instead of doing this, the companies colluded against black labour so that wages tended to settle at a uniform low level. Some under-the-table bargaining went on in that some mines would try to attract labour from other mines by "secretly" offering various payments in kind, but this was more or less condoned by the companies because it was a much slower and less dangerous process than open competition in wages.**

After the 1930's, expansion of manufacturing industries posed a serious problem as regards the labour supply. In normal market circumstances collusion would have broken down at this juncture, but various *legislations* enabled the mines to isolate their labour from the competing sector. Both the pass laws and passport control favoured the mines at the expense of the manufacturing sector. The influx laws whereby the government "repatriated" unemployed blacks in towns, either inside or outside of the Union, was tacitly admitted as being an important factor in the sharp increase in labour supply by the "Mining Journal" in 1959. The Journal added, most significantly,

"Once repatriated, it is possible for the natives to apply for work on the mines."

The graphs presented by the author to elucidate the collusion are particularly informative, and the supporting textual comment throws much light on recent developments, such as Anglo-American's pressure against the collusion after 1967.

In the concluding chapter, entitled "Implications", Dr. Wilson emphasizes that to solve the problem of poverty in South Africa it is not enough to increase the size of the national cake. The evidence presented by a study of the gold mines indicates that unless the question of equitable distribution is satisfactorily answered, the gap between rich and poor will simply increase, no matter how large the national cake becomes. Dr. Wilson comes out strongly in favour of effective bargaining organisations for blacks:

"The existence of trade unions would, I submit, ease the process of historical change which if it continues to be bottled up can surely do nothing but explode." (page 151)

1967 AGREEMENT

The June 1967 agreement whereby the white miners gain the lion's share of the benefit from increased productivity resulting, not from the white miners' harder work, but from the employment of blacks in jobs formerly denied them simply points to the power of the white Trade Unions. Neither the government nor the Chamber of Mines has the power to increase black wages at the expense of white increases. Only a recognised Black Trade Union could effectively oppose White Trade Unions and stand for the interests of Black Miners.



Drilling at stope face

The author discusses the pros and cons of a minimum wage legislation and comes out in its support, though he emphasizes that such a legislation would only be part of the solution to the problem. Economic problems have their roots in the various structures of society and Dr. Wilson concludes his list of proposals by suggesting that South Africa's educational structure must be altered so that it does not discriminate against those who are not white.

"Labour in the Goldmines" quite definitely succeeds in doing what it was intended to do, namely increase the reader's understanding of the situation. The dispassionate way in which the facts are presented provides the text

with an eloquence from which the use of rhetoric, however justified, could only have detracted. **In the final analysis, the picture presented is indeed a bleak one. Black Labour is being grossly exploited on the gold mines, and there is precious little that can be done about it in terms of the relative powerlessness of both Government and Chamber of Mines when confronted by organised white labour. In the present political situation, given the prejudices and short-sightedness of white interest blocs, none of Dr. Wilson's proposals is at all likely to be acceptable. It is quite unnerving to find such a calm, objective analysis leading one to the conclusion that the only way out of the impasse appears to be an increasing black/white polarization followed by confrontation and, probably, widespread violence.**□

AFRICAN HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Andy Manson

The serious study of the history of the pre-literate peoples of Southern Africa began after the Second World War with the foundation of new Universities in many of the Colonial territories and with the beginnings of an increased flow of students from Africa to the Universities of Europe and North America. These developments in the words of Professor Roland Oliver, placed University teachers of history, particularly those taking up posts in the new African Universities "under pressure to develop a kind of historical education relevant to the needs of African students".¹

From these beginnings there developed what Oliver called "a career pattern". Young history graduates in the Universities of Europe and America turned to specialisation in African history, seeing in such specialisation a path to academic posts in African Universities, from which in turn they might return to work in American or European Universities.

In South Africa, this pressure to develop a historical education relevant to the needs of African students was needless to say, not experienced. University education remained geared to the needs and interests of a white-dominated society. The establishment of ethnic universities — in themselves an expression of an albo-centric society — did nothing to change established thinking. Because the syllabi at S.A. Universities remained the conventional ones — Ancient, Medieval and Modern European history plus a little S.A. history and English history — young graduates gave no thought to the emerging schools of African history; instead they followed the conventional path of specialisation in European and British history.

PLAYED NO PART

Thus the country with the most sophisticated traditions of historical scholarship in Africa failed to play any part in the creation of the new African historiography. So the African historians were caught up in a self-perpetuating tradition of scholarship that left them largely oblivious of the transforming developments that were occurring elsewhere. What could be the reasons for this failure? .

Undoubtedly a significant reason is found in the historiographical traditions of this country. Until recently the central argument of Afrikaner historiography was anglophobic, and woven into this negrophobic, in content. That the attack was negrophobic as well was completely incidental; it was not because White English-speaking historians shared a pro-African bias. Indeed the early English writers (G.M. Theal and G. Cory) were just as reluctant to regard the coloured races as worthy of sympathetic consideration as the Afrikaners were. More recently, however, the line of Afrikaner historiography has moved into a more direct attack on Africans. **This is**