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THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF MIGRATORY LABOUR ON THE URBAN AFRICAN

By ELLEN HELLMANN

MIGRATORY LABOUR, in the sense of the movement of workers for limited and often recurrent periods of varying length between their places of permanent residence and of temporary employment, occurs over the whole face of the world. But in no country except South Africa, as far as I am aware, is migratory labour regarded as a desirable system on either economic or social grounds.

The circulation of labour is one of the consequences of uneven rates of economic development, both industrial and agricultural, of differences in the rates of population growth, of conditions in a "plural" society where people, certainly during the initial phases of culture contact and economic development, continue to live in the two worlds of tribal and of western society. *This tide of workers flows back and forth across international boundaries and within the same country; from Mexico to the orchards and vineyards of California, from Italy to the factories of Switzerland, from Gambia and Senegal into Ghana, from what was Ruanda Urundi into Uganda; and internally it flows from southern to northern Italy, from north to south in Ghana. Inter-territorial migrancy seldom takes place on a family basis. Internally, the practice varies. In some areas it is chiefly individuals who circulate, in others there are migrant families. Many of us will remember the exposure of the conditions under which family migrancy took place in certain areas of the U.S.A. in Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath".*

Obviously enough, in view of its developed mining, industrial and agricultural activities, South Africa has acted as a magnet, drawing migrant labourers from outside its borders, and within the country both permanent townward migration of all racial groups and migrancy of Africans has increased with economic development.

A major phenomenon of our times

Population movement is a major phenomenon of our times, partly in the form of migration from

country to country, but chiefly in the form of internal migration from rural areas to the ever-growing towns developing throughout the world. Apart from the direction of labour practised in communist countries, and labour conscription introduced in communist and non-communist countries during wars, both temporary migrancy and permanent transfers within one country are usually a matter of individual decision, prompted by a variety of "push and pull" factors. Both migrant labour and permanent immigration across national boundaries are regulated by the host country. **The denial of freedom of movement within the country of citizenship is widely regarded in the west as a denial of a basic human right; the practice of selective immigration is not.**

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MIGRATORY LABOUR AND THE URBAN AFRICAN (Cont.)

The position in South Africa is that all Africans outside the Bantu Reserves are regarded as though they were citizens of a foreign country and entitled to no greater freedom of movement and of residence than aliens elsewhere in the western world. In point of fact, official policy explicitly repudiates any claim by Africans to rights of citizenship outside the Bantu areas. The ideological basis on which this repudiation rests is not at present under discussion. **But it is, I believe, relevant to point out that Africans are precluded by present laws from exercising many of the rights accorded to foreign visitors and immigrants.** Furthermore, there is for the African in South Africa no equivalent of naturalization, whereby an alien, provided he fulfills certain conditions, can acquire full rights of citizenship. **There are Africans in the towns of the Republic who have no permanent right of residence in that town or any right to live anywhere else.**

No accurate figures

There are no accurate figures of the number of migrants in this country. The Tomlinson Commission estimated that there were 503,000 men and 66,000 women temporarily absent from the Bantu areas in 1951. The men constituted just on 14% of the *de facto* population of the Reserves, and over 40% of the men between 15 and 64 years of age. Two-thirds of them were between 20 and 39 years of age. If the proportion of temporary absentees remained the same, the number of male migrants would have been some 565,111 in 1960. As Professor Hobart Houghton points out, this is the number absent at any one time, but they represent a total pool of more than twice this size. How many of these men are migrants to the town we do not know. Nor do we know how many of them are migrants because they are not permitted to remain permanently in the town and bring their families to join them. Research has made it clear that among the migrants is an appreciable proportion who come to town only to work and to earn, remain rurally-orientated and do not want to settle permanently in the town with their families. Professor Mayer says that in East London they probably constitute between 1/3 and 1/2 of the total male working population there. It seems clear that migrants of this nature are found in all urban areas. I believe, however, that their proportion varies, and that it is probably much higher in coastal towns such as Port Elizabeth and particu-

larly Durban, which are comparatively near to Bantu areas, than in inland areas like Johannesburg and Kimberley.

This system of migratory labour dates back to the opening of the diamond and gold mines. At that time, when land was sufficient and wants limited, this system appears to have been the only way in which labour could be induced to offer itself. The sugar-cane growers of Natal, only some years earlier, had resorted to indenturing workers from India for lack of availability of Zulu labourers. And so it remained for a long time. At the turn of the century, when Johannesburg's African population was just on 60,000, the ratio of men to women was 12 to one. In 1911, with an African population of 100,000, men still outnumbered women by 10 to one. The wage structure was based on the needs of a single man, the assumption being that a man came to town to supplement his livelihood from the land. Today, when the reverse position frequently prevails, many urban families subsidizing rural relatives, the wage structure has still not emancipated itself from its origins.

Changing pattern

It was only in the thirties and the forties, after the stimulus given to manufacturing first by the departure from the gold standard and then by the war, that the pattern started changing.

By 1946, when the total urban African population was 1.8 million, there were .64m women, i.e. 36% as compared with 1921, when women formed 19% of the urban African population. In Johannesburg by 1946 the rates of men to women had fallen to just over 2:1. The pattern in towns was visibly changing from an almost exclusively migrant and predominantly male population to one in which growing numbers of migrants were becoming permanent urban-dwellers, living under conditions of family life. It was becoming increasingly common, in Johannesburg, to find that a man, after several spells of temporary work and contracting a marriage in a Reserve, brought his wife to Johannesburg and became a townsman. To many of us, observing the situation at that time, internal migration trends seemed to be becoming similar to immigration trends into the United States at the end of last century: first the man came to establish himself and the family followed later. We talked of "our immigrants".

You may ask, knowing that the Natives Urban Areas Act is of venerable age, how this could come about. It must be remembered that pass

laws did not then apply to African women and that while the powers to exercise a considerable degree of control existed (though obviously by no means as cast-iron a system as today) these were at no stage fully imposed.

Encouragement

The point I want to stress is that the stage was at that time set for the deliberate encouragement of permanent urban settlement. Pressure of population in the Reserves, the growth and diversification of employment opportunities in the towns, the requirement of industry for a more skilled and hence stable labour force, as also the preparedness of a substantial section of Africans both to make the town their permanent residence and to adopt western patterns of life, all combined to support this as the direction of policy for the future.

The White population, then as now, was divided. The Fagan Commission was appointed to go into the question, to investigate the operation of the Urban Areas Act, the pass laws and migratory labour. You will remember that it accepted the inevitability of the townward migration of Africans as a normal economic phenomenon and urban Africans as an integral part of the urban population. It recommended easing the pass laws in a number of ways: for instance, extending exemptions from their operation. It expressed itself clearly on the desirability of limiting the migratory system to specific categories of people, to young unmarried men, for limited periods, and to those cases where the place of work was near enough for a man to live in a Reserve bordering a town, as in the Durban of yesterday which is the border industry area of today. The Fagan Commission did not, it stated, "find one single argument for maintaining the migratory system in respect of Natives who no longer have a home in the Reserves". (para 60).

Reversal of policy

Although the government that then came to power followed a policy which is the reverse of what the Commission recommended, townward migration has continued because the developing economy of this country required it. And if the *number of women is any indication of permanent urbanization*, then this, too, has increased. In 1960, women constituted 41% of the urban African population of 3.4 million.

But this took place in the teeth of official policy, and repeated efforts, culminating in this Session's Bantu Laws Amendment Bill, to tighten the laws so as to define the status of Africans in towns more precisely. What this status is, the

Deputy Minister for Bantu Administration and Development made clear in the House. He said:

"Our policy for a long time has been that Bantu may be present in the urban areas and are justified in being there for the labour they perform there. That is a guarantee to the Bantu. That is one of the securities he has, and in that respect he is properly protected in this legislation. *Large numbers of these workers qualify in terms of Section 10(1) (a) and (b) and (c); in other words, those Bantu have been born in that particular urban area, they have worked there for a long time for one employer or for different employers. All these Bantu are not affected at all as long as they are not there illegally, as long as they are not work-shy, as long as they are not undesirable and as long as they are not superfluous.*" (Hansard 6/1964, Col. 1862.)

What meaning "guarantee", "security", "protection", can have when qualified in this way escapes me entirely.

Three categories

There are, accordingly, three major categories of Africans in the towns. There are Africans who are migrants by choice and do not wish to settle permanently in the towns. Chiefly, I believe, they are to be found on the mines, working on brick-fields and timberyards, as cleaners and domestic servants. But they are also present, though I do not think in large numbers, in industrial occupations.

Then there are the migrants by compulsion, that large category of workers who have obtained the requisite permission to seek work in town and, once work has been found, to be registered, as well as those allowed into town on conditional employment, that is, permitted to remain in the town only as long as employed by a specified employer. They have no right to bring their wives with them. After they have been in employment for two years, visits by wives may be paid if the necessary permission is given by the official of the labour bureau. It seems unlikely that, under present rigorous administrative conditions, many of these migrants will qualify for permanent residence. They are likely, as many have families in the country, to break the continuity of residence required to qualify. The implication is, if strict influx control continues to be imposed, that recruitment to the "permanent" group of townsmen will diminish. What the actual proportions of the different groups are, is not known; nor their marital status. An investigation of African workers
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undertaken in Capetown showed that 2/3 of the 650 men in the sample were married, and of these less than one third had their wives with them. How many would have brought wife and dependants with them had the choice been theirs is not known. The information from the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, where married quarters are provided and mineworkers have a free choice, suggests that the proportion might be high. At Luanshya, 64% of the men had wives with them; only 15% were married men who had left their wives at their rural homes.

Finally, there is the third category, that consisting of Africans who qualify to remain in the towns, provided, of course, that they are not "work-shy, undesirable or superfluous". In Johannesburg, a couple of years ago, it was roughly estimated that 175,000 out of a total of 225,000 registered African men belonged to this section. In the coastal towns, the proportion will most assuredly be lower.

These Africans are not migrants but equally they are not free urban residents. They cannot move to another town without forfeiting such rights of domicile as they have won. The Minister this Session again rejected the request to regard the Witwatersrand as one labour area. Theoretically the man who owns a house in Dube and works for an employer who has moved his factory to Alberton has no right to remain in Dube. In practice, the tyranny of the law is tempered in its administration.

I suggest that any consideration of migratory labour must include all three categories, because they are all affected by the network of laws designed to prevent Africans from acquiring permanent rights of domicile in the so-called "White areas". The most an African can acquire is a conditional right of domicile, conditional upon the requirements of the Whites.

Divided families

The main immediate effect of a migratory labour system — apart from its undesirable repercussions on the economy — is clearly enough on the family. Migrant labour means divided families. It means husband parted from wife for lengthy periods frequently during early manhood. It means children deprived of the presence of the father. In the towns the presence of a disproportionately

large number of men creates precisely those conditions characteristic of any large seaport, where the population composition is similar. The larger the unattached number of men, the more women are attracted to meet the sexual and domestic needs of these "single" men. Sexual promiscuity proliferates, the spread of venereal disease is facilitated. Many of the men form temporary alliances at the termination of which they frequently abandon the woman, leaving her to provide on her own for the children of the union.

Not a stable community

This situation would be one of grave concern if the urban African community as a whole were an established one with a reasonably stable foundation of family life. It would be analogous, as Professor Monica Wilson has pointed out, to the conditions that developed in European cities with army camps on their fringes during the last war. But the urban African community is by no means yet a stable one. The elementary family, which has become the prevalent social unit in the towns — as contrasted with the extended family which constituted the tribal homestead — is under strain in this period of adjustment to a new environment. *Family relationships are brittle, marital relationships unstable, the youth undisciplined.* Former sanctions have lost their force, new ones are only in the process of formation. It is a situation — as many observers have pointed out — comparable to that obtaining in England during the industrial revolution. For this population to be constantly subjected to the impact of new waves of migrants accentuates difficulties. "In Langa," says Professor Wilson, "the percentage of single men has increased very rapidly in the last eight years, as men who were living scattered round the Peninsula have been compelled to move into new single quarters, and it is no accident that, as the proportion of single men has increased, the insecurity of life and racial antagonism have increased enormously. In 1954 residents in Langa were already commenting on the increasing insecurity created by the numbers of single men, . . . and the contrast in atmosphere between 1954 and 1962 is painfully obvious. In that period the proportion of men to women has risen from 477 men to 100 women to 866 men to 100 women. A vernacular newspaper, commenting on POQO, asserted that there is no POQO anywhere where married Africans live with their families and go to work daily, and suggested that single quarters should be turned into museums".

No security

For townsmen themselves there is no security. Even though they live in an urban world, they are not accorded the right to be of it. Geographically and psychologically, they are on its fringes.

Even the right to marry a woman not entitled in her own right to be in the town is uncertain and questionable. It depends on the availability of approved accommodation and that particular local authority's interpretation of the ambiguous phrase setting out that the wife of a qualified African is exempt from the 72-hour rule "if after lawful entry she normally resides with that African". Mr. van den Berg M.P. stated very explicitly what the purpose of the legislation is: "African family life in the industrial areas like the Witwatersrand should be limited to the minimum" was what he said in the House in 1963.

No freehold property rights

Freehold rights in land are denied African townsmen. Such freehold rights as were acquired before the 1937 legislation was passed have either been extinguished or are in the process of extinction. If, instead of the elimination of freehold title, there had been an extension of freehold rights, the building societies would have entered the field of African housing, and have given an impetus to African home ownership comparable to that given to the White community. Land ownership is important to Africans as, indeed, it is to other groups. I believe that making it possible for Africans to acquire this stake in the towns would have had an important effect in promoting stability not only of residence but of social relationships. The response there has been even to the present form of qualified home-ownership on the 30-year leasehold basis now available, and the indications of the greater "rootedness" that is developing, seem to confirm this supposition.

Disincentives multiply

But incentives towards permanent settlement were precisely what official policy did not propose to provide. Instead of incentives to permanent settlement, disincentives multiplied. Pass laws and influx control were applied more effectively and strictly. Between 1956 and 1963, a minimum of 464,719 Africans were endorsed out of the 23 main urban centres of the Republic. (Hansard 10/1964, Col 3541) I have no breakdown of the number of endorsements out per year. I believe that is increasing as the machinery of super-

It becomes necessary to grant arbitrary powers to officials to control the lives of people. Who can doubt that there are occasions when those powers are wrongly exercised?

Mr. E. P. Bradlow.

vision becomes more effective. In Johannesburg alone 19,650 Africans were endorsed out last year.

Successful traders who were showing initiative and enterprise in extending their businesses in the Townships, were told that they should look to the Bantustans for further expansion now that they had acquired the necessary experience, that no further garages, filling stations and dry-cleaning establishments could be started in the townships, that traders would in future be limited to one trading stand, that they would no longer be permitted to erect their own premises but must rent them.

Double-rootedness

I believe that this policy of impeding the normal process of permanent urban settlement has left its imprint on the individual and on the community. It has perpetuated among even the most urbanized Africans, physically settled in the town and culturally committed to its western way of life, a double-rootedness born not of attachment to the country but of urban insecurity. A large number of Africans who have no intention of voluntarily leaving the town in which they have lived a lifetime retain a toehold in the country in the form of rights to arable land or to a residential plot. What they are doing is keeping open an escape route in the event of illness, unemployment or some other circumstances threatening their always precarious rights of urban domicile.

The law falls into disrepute

It is my belief, too, that the fluctuating nature of a large section of the urban population and the insecurity of so many apparently fully urbanized Africans has delayed the development of the new patterns of social life and the new communal institutions appropriate to urban living. Two factors, taken in conjunction, have, I suggest, hindered the emergence of generally accepted forms of behaviour, supported by the sanction of public opinion, without which an ordered community cannot come into being. The one factor is the

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