

Blacks and the General Lockout

By WILLIAM B. GOULD

DETROIT—Both the collapse of the Chicago Plan for Equal Opportunity and the Department of Labor's announced intention to impose an arrangement in its place are bound to make the debate about "hometown plans"—of which Chicago is the most prominent example—grow louder. The hometown approach, predicated upon the ability of a minority group coalition, unions and contractors to negotiate a voluntary agreement, has the blessing of the Nixon Administration as a vehicle to discharge its responsibility to achieve equal employment opportunity in the construction industry. But if the Chicago experience means anything, it is that the hometown plans will not work. Indeed, it makes the Philadelphia Plan, widely criticized for its apparent inability to produce minority union journeymen, look like a relatively successful enterprise.

To be sure, the new approach provides another "delivery system" as an alternative to apprenticeship for entry to the trades — on-the-job training for those who do not meet apprenticeship standards. And the Nixon Administration has been persuasive in stressing the hometown approach because its own Federal agencies are woefully understaffed, and could not

In Spite of the Various Plans Put Forward in The Trades, Minorities Are Still Blocked

possibly take the responsibility for imposing or policing agreements.

Nineteen sixty-nine heralded a partial break with past failures—the Revised Philadelphia Plan. This established "goals" or "ranges" for the employment of minorities within a specific period of time. The unions and contractors, who had previously lamented the ambiguity of the Executive order against discrimination, now let up a great howl of anguish in protest against what they said were illegal quotas. But recently the Third Circuit Court of Appeals said that the Philadelphia Plan is a permissible means to bring minorities into the trades. Meanwhile, the uproar encouraged some to believe that voluntary negotiation plans rather than Government coercion was the answer.

But voluntarism failed miserably. In Chicago, which was the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s highly vaunted answer to Philadelphia, the plan's promise was to recruit 3,000 minority journeymen, apprentices and on-the-job trainees. Few workers have been placed to date. Similarly, press announcements pro-

claimed the Los Angeles Plan last July—but it is still just talk.

The A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s response to all of this is that no plan can perform while the economy is down. Accordingly, even though there is a continued need to keep a large number of apprentices and trainees in the pipeline, craft union insistence upon the preservation of restrictively low journeyman-apprentice ratios makes it unlikely that large groups of new employees—black or white—will come into construction in a period of unemployment. The A.F.L.-C.I.O. leadership assumes that black workers are destined to be the marginal employees who work during full employment.

In construction, attrition and turnover, coupled with an absence of training during the slump, will produce another shortage of skilled labor when the next boom arises. The result will be an excessive ~~boom~~ with inflation as well as pressure for meeting such a shortage through the "back door," i.e., recruiting workers through routes outside any formalized system. While approximately 70 per cent of

craftsmen have obtained journeyman status in this manner, blacks have not done so well inasmuch as the back door for job placement encourages favoritism for friends and relatives of white members.

The hometown experience stands in marked contrast to Seattle where issuance of a sweeping court decree granted at the request of the U.S. Attorney General has brought employment for black apprentices in a city which is often described as an economic disaster area. The court's contempt power dealt adequately with union and contractor reluctance to bring 90 black apprentices into the crafts. The court said that they had 10 days to do so—or else!

The failure of the Supreme Court's discarded "with all deliberate speed" education formula indicates the shortsightedness of placing confidence and trust in the hands of wrongdoers. Yet the hometown solution does just that. If the enforcement of employment rights is dealt with through such gradualist and slipshod methods, the opportunity to realize racial equality promptly will be lost in the same maze of litigation that has afflicted desegregation in education these last 17 years.

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