

U.S. Aide Calls Phila. Plan Just 'A Beginning'

Says Labor Dept. Will Institute Project Despite Problems

Not only will the controversial Philadelphia Plan of minority hiring be adopted, a U. S. Department of Labor spokesman said here today, "it is only a beginning."

"The Philadelphia Plan will be instituted despite any legal problems that could ultimately hang it up," said Arthur Fletcher, assistant secretary of labor for wage and labor standards, at the conclusion of three days of hearings on the proposal in the Federal Building, 1421 Cherry st.

The hearings were being conducted by a panel headed by Fletcher to fix the proportion of minority workers to be employed in seven building trades on federal projects.

"As far as I'm concerned," Fletcher said, "the Philadelphia Plan is only a beginning."

Warns of 'Playing Games'

"If people play games with us, and frustrate the effort, black or white, we're in for very, very hard times indeed."

Fletcher said he wants concrete physical results on employment of minority groups in Philadelphia.

He said Department of Labor numerical ranges will be determined in the next several days.

For the long run, he stressed the importance of employers working with unions and community groups to establish area-wide training programs to produce a greater number of qualified minority workers.

Will Set Specific Goals

The Labor Department, Fletcher said, is going to work to establish specific goals and timetables against which it can judge the community's compliance to the goals of the Philadelphia Plan.

If Congress is going to respond to this urgent social problem, he said, it has to receive concrete evidence of the Philadelphia Plan's achievement.

Of the testimony at the hearings, he said he was disappointed that he did not receive more specifics on the numbers of qualified blacks available for hiring by contractors.

Must Develop Own Plan

The Labor Department's central effort, he said, will be to establish a "performance environment" in Philadelphia, after which it will be up to the community, contractors, union members and minority groups alike, to develop their own plan for their own area.

Before the hearing ended, a witness urged joint ventures between black and white contractors as a move toward solving the problem.

Short-Term Solution

The joint venture proposal was made in testimony by Emerson Ray Allen, business manager for the General and Specialty Contractors Association of Philadelphia, an association of 110 minority-group contractors.

Allen, who said he has been an electrical contractor for 25 years, offered the proposal as a short-term solution to the problem.

He said black contractors would gain much knowledge and training in a cooperative effort with more knowledgeable white contractors.

"Joint ventures," he said, "are the best way to implement the Philadelphia Plan with the greatest benefit to the black community."

33% Participation Sought

As a long-term solution, he said "the Philadelphia black community has a right to expect 33 percent participation in all phases of construction" within four years.

Allen said one-third of the population of Philadelphia was composed of minority-group members and that, therefore, one-third of all building trades workers should also be minority-group workers.

Testimony also was given by Robert G. Owens, chief coordinator for the Philadelphia Action Construction Team, a group of some 40 members of the business and financial community concerned with providing assistance to black contractors.

'Token' Percentage

Owens said that blacks now in the seven building trades constituted a "token" percentage—less than five percent here.

Melvin Johnson, public relations director for the National Afro-American Builders Corp., supported the Philadelphia Plan but urged that it be expanded to increasing the number of black contractors as well as black workers.

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Sees Shift by Contractors

William D. Walker, Penn-Del-Jersey chapter manager for the National Electrical Contractors Association, told the panel:

"If the agencies (of the Federal Government) expect the employer to employ nonqualified persons in the electrical industry, then I am quite sure the firms will continue to move away from publicly financed work."