

VICTOR RIESEL

Government Puts Pressure On for Negro Workers

WASHINGTON — From Hollywood to Harlem the government is using trip-hammer pressure on unions, contractors, city and state officials — on anyone who hires manpower — to throw open the gates to Negro workers.



RIESEL

Pressure techniques are unique, extraordinary and imaginative depending on the "home town."

In the vanguard are the so-to-voice Labor Secretary George Shultz; Atty. Gen. John Mitchell's Civil Rights Division, and the administration's most angry man, big Art Fletcher, assistant secretary of labor for wage and labor standards.

Fletcher is black and frank in his fury over what he considers discrimination against black workers by the nation's — indeed, the world's — highest paying industry, building and construction.

Movie Leaders Summoned

Of course the pay's good in Hollywood too. So virtually unnoticed, the Justice Department summoned leaders of the movie industry, television networks and craft unions to Washington on Oct. 27. The dialogue ran as it was never written in the studio think tanks.

Justice Department's Civil Rights officials did most of the talking. They told the screen and tube people that there was

discriminatory hiring on both sides of the camera — meaning the craft unions which control the movie labor market and the producers who fund America's canned entertainment.

That dialogue's still on. So is the pressure.

Protest Angers Fletcher

In Seattle, the government also got tough at the demand of Fletcher. He had been angered by demonstrations of white skilled craftsmen. He was furious over their massed protest to Gov. Dan Evans over new black apprentice plans and by the walkout of white building and construction unionists when black trainees showed up on the job sites.

Fletcher then called on the Justice Department to probe the craft unions — "not all" — but certainly the plumbers and pipefitters, ironworkers, electricians, sheet metal men and operating engineers.

Fletcher told the Justice Department that his own Office of Federal Contract Compliance was helpless to do more than dialogue and pressure. The Labor Department now is not even certain that Comptroller General Elmer B. Staats will pay contractors for work done under any agreement which brings in black workers unless the final contract meets the low bid and federal contract standards.

'Justice' Moves In

So Fletcher asked "Justice" to move in. It did. This threw it all into the courts under Title Seven of the Civil Rights Act. The Justice Department filed suit against the unions in the western district of Washington seeking an injunction

against alleged discriminatory practices. It could result in contempt of court action.

It could cost the unions some of their treasuries or even nonrecognition. That's drastic. But that's what such black leaders as John Morsell, NAACP's assistant executive director, is demanding if tens of thousands of black workers are not absorbed by building and construction unions across the country.

Restless Truce Exists

Meanwhile there's a restless truce in the other two crisis sectors — Pittsburgh and Chicago.

On Oct. 29, Assistant Secretary of Labor William Usery Jr. called Pittsburgh craft union leaders and contractors' executives to Washington to ask them what they're planning. They came, loaded with manpower training plans. They're still talking, albeit long distance.

In Chicago a seven man black and white, labor and management operations committee, with Mayor Richard Daley as the seventh man, is cooling it and developing hiring plans. The committee believes it has the answer — but Secretary Shultz is not quite certain.

Neither is George Romney's

Department of Housing and Urban Development. One of his assistant secretaries, not too long ago, wanted to hit some 17 contractors with tough economic sanctions — meaning shifting the work from them to other companies.

Of course, there is deep resentment in AFL-CIO ranks. President George Meany believes that the building and construction trades unions are being made "whipping boys" by the administration.

Craft union chiefs bitterly report government disdain for their efforts. They point to the hiring of tens of thousands of new black workers — and to efforts to train young hard-core applicants. They are angered by what they charge is

national ignorance of the actual availability of young black men who want to go into construction. But most of all they talk of the injustice of charges of discrimination.

Behind all this is fear of being disemployed because of black newcomers.

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