

# Controversy frustrates 'Philadelphia plan'

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PHILADELPHIA — The controversial Philadelphia plan for employing more racial minorities in building trades brings to mind a venerable vaudeville joke once told about this city — "I like the way the town is laid out. How long has it been dead?"

If not entirely dead, the Philadelphia plan at best seems moribund. Federal agencies responsible for its enforcement have hurriedly assembled a team to try to breathe new life into it, an effort that may be doomed to failure in the face of implacable opposition from labor unions and contractors.

The troubled Philadelphia plan had its inception in a policy directive issued by the Johnson administration, altho it was not put into effect until July, 1969.

The Labor Department, citing a "deplorably low rate of employment" among minority groups in skilled building crafts, ordered Philadelphia contractors bidding on federally assisted projects worth \$500,000 or more to submit "affirmative action" plans setting specific goals for employing more members of minority groups.

An ultimate goal of 19 per cent minority employment was set for 1973, altho at the outset contractors had only to prove "good will" attempts to hire more minority workers.

When the plan was instituted labor union sources in Philadelphia estimated that less than 2 per cent of skilled building trades jobs were held by blacks or other minorities. Trades involved in the plan are iron workers, steam fitters, sheet metal workers, elevator constructors, plumbers and pipe fitters.

"It (the plan) is a sham," sneered one spokesman for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), echoing the all but unanimous opinion among Philadelphia's restive minorities. "Not a handful of blacks have been put to work."

As a result of chronic criticism of the plan a five-man team from the Labor Department's office of federal contract compliance has just completed a hurried survey of its effectiveness.

Of 20 building projects surveyed, the team reports it found 36 minority employes out of 147 men employed in the affected crafts. Altho

Labor Department sources say this indicates minority hiring has increased from 2 per cent to 24 per cent, they concede the claim is based on "some very small subcontracts" and that they as yet have no figure for the total number of men employed in the six crafts in Philadelphia.

One reason effectiveness of the plan is difficult to measure is what contractors here privately call "motorcycle compliance." This means black workmen are moved from jobs not covered by the plan to jobs that are covered until inspectors leave.

"The plan was doomed to failure in the first place," said Robert Johnson, labor director of the metropolitan council of the NAACP.

"It is not supported by the unions. They think it is an infringement on their rights. Everything we try to do (to implement the plan) is blocked by the building trade unions. In reality no progress has been made. The contractors are afraid to try to make it work. They're afraid the union men will slow down and not get the work done. They (the unions) are trying to sabotage it. Only a handful of new jobs have been created."

A spokesman for the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Council conceded that "nothing at all" had happened as a result of the plan. "The quota system (under the plan) will ruin our apprentice system," he added.

"Lack of effective compliance agency action," is one reason cited for complaints by an official associated with the plan.

Prior to the investigation by the five-man federal inspection team, only one contractor had been cited for violation of the plan. That one, Edgley Air Products Co. Inc., of Levittown, Pa., requested a hearing on the charge but one has not been scheduled.

Edgley, however, is a small contractor doing a minuscule percentage of federally funded construction work in the Philadelphia area. Actually under way in this city are 25 projects worth some \$88.6 million. Fourteen others worth about \$90 million have been advertised for bids.

A total of eight contractors have been found in doubtful compliance in addition to Edgley, but since these have agreed to meet the plan's requirements no further enforcement action has been taken.