

U.S. Decrees New Plan for Hiring Blacks

Bid Specifications To Include Quotas; Negotiations Barred

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The U. S. Department of Labor today announced a new "Philadelphia Plan" for increasing the number of Negroes to be hired as skilled craftsmen on federally financed construction jobs.

The department ordered a nonnegotiable standard for use of black manpower in the five-county Philadelphia area.

The new order, which goes into effect July 18, was signed at a public ceremony at the First Bank of the United States, 3d st. near Chestnut.

Near the end of the meeting, Joseph F. Burke, president of Sheetmetal Workers Local 19 stood up and asked for "special privilege" to talk on the plan.

'Protest Strongly'

"I protest strongly what's being done," Burke said. "We're going to have to work with it, but the employers and the unions weren't even contacted to get their thoughts on the plan."

"I protest and I protest strongly. I beg you not to put the plan into effect until both the contractors and the unions sit with the people involved and see if we can be helpful."

Charles Bowser, head of the city's Urban Coalition, answered "it's been postponed for 300 years."

Burke walked out, telling reporters that his protest was not made against the plan itself, only the way it was formulated.

"Because of the deplorably low rate among members of minority groups in these attractive trades across the nation, we plan in the immediate future to set up similar plans in other major cities," said Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Fletcher, who announced the hiring plan.

The Labor Department official said that in Philadelphia fewer than two percent of the skilled work force is composed of black members "despite the city's substantial minority population."

Fletcher pointed out the new plan differs from the old Philadelphia plan, in effect last year, because standards for Negro participation will be determined on federally funded projects prior to the acceptance of bids.

The old Philadelphia plan was suspended by the U. S. Comptroller General last November on grounds that it was not compatible with competitive bidding requirements of the various federal departments.

Quota Negotiated

The old plan required that low bidders hire a "representative" number of minority group members in the skilled trades, with the number being set through negotiations between the Labor Department and the contractor.

The plan was suspended before its success could be measured, according to department officials. However, contractors had committed themselves to employ 250 nonwhite tradesmen out of the 1,000 who were needed on last year's jobs.

Overall commitments were made to place 1,400 nonwhite workers on construction sites, which employed 3,400 workers.

Under the new plan, federal agencies will fix quotas for the trades before any bidding is accepted on a contract. There-

fore, these quotas would become part of the bid and would not be negotiable.

Officials said the new plan will not provide set number of minority group members to be hired, but will set "ranges."

"For instance, we might say that the range will be from four to eight minority group members out of the 20 tradesmen needed in a specific trade or a different range, depending on the factors," one official said.

Predetermined Factor

Fletcher said that the new quota, or standard, would set a range of Negro employment for specific trades based on a set of predetermined factors. He said these factors would include the extent of black participation in a specific trade, the availability of Negroes for employment in the trade, and the need for training programs.

The trades affected, he said, will be ironworkers, plumbers and pipefitters, steamfitters, sheet metal workers, electrical workers, roofers, waterproofer and elevator construction workers.

Fletcher said the trades were singled out for special emphasis because, in the past they have not been operating with a significant Negro participation.

"Failure to meet an established standard will result in the bid being rejected," Fletcher said. "In no case will there be any negotiation over provisions of the specific goals submitted by a bidder after opening of bids and prior to award of the contract."

Exemptions for 'Security'

The only exemptions, he said, will be in instances where the government determines that a contract must be awarded for "national security reasons," despite the fact that it doesn't meet the hiring requirement.

"It might better, admittedly," he said, "if specific goals were

not required — certainly the black people of America understand taboos—but it is imperative that we face facts and dedicate ourselves to ending discrimination in employment in this country."

Attending the ceremony were about 100 civic, business, government and union officials.

Comment by Farmer

Clarence Farmer, executive director of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, said:

"This is a great victory for people who believe in equality and fair play and the right of every citizen to enjoy decent employment opportunities." This is so because the Philadelphia Plan alone can provide good jobs in large numbers, speedily and effectively, for blacks and other minority people. The effect should be dramatic in opening doors traditionally closed to minority workers wanting employment in all of the skilled trades and crafts of the building industry.

The Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations said it was gratified because it provided "counsel and encouragement" for the local Federal Executive Board in making the initial decision to institute a Philadelphia Plan. The commission said it will cooperate fully in helping determine that companies are complying with the plan.